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Jane

By Julia Markut

“‘Jane Gallagher. Jesus.’ I couldn't get her off my mind. I really couldn't. ‘I oughta go down and say hello to her, at least.’ ‘Why the hell *don't*cha, instead of keep saying it?’ Stradlater said. I walked over to my window, but you couldn't see out of it, it was so steamy from all the heat in the can. ‘I'm not in the mood right now,’ I said. I wasn't either. You have to be in the mood for those things” (Salinger 37-38)

It's seldom that we don't look up when we are writing. Despite the fact that it may seem as if our purpose in the Writing Center is limited to that of only tutoring, the time that we do not dedicate to producing “better writers” is oftentimes linked to that of fulfilling our assigned jobs or annotating the academic articles characterized by advice that we then incorporate into the sessions we undertake. In other words, when we are not applying our services to that of increasing our ability to recognize the faces of writers within Lane Tech's stream of unfamiliarity, we, too, join in on the pursuit of strengthening our writerhood. As I convince myself that my brain can function just as well as it (hopefully) does before 10 a.m., I attempt to conquer an assigned reading with annotations or fill the Google doc titled [blank] review for the blog as quickly and efficiently as possible. And I must admit, I'm the biggest hypocrite of us all. While I preach and preach about writing for the sake of writing, each week, my pilgrimage down the document page causes me to feel that salvation can only be achieved via the production of a compelling and, as much as I hate to say it, perfect blog post. As I make my stops from one holy site to another, I tend to look up from the bright white light of the blank canvas, and seek something beyond the sentence I had just stumbled upon. That pause, whether it's a five-second-long scan of the Writing Center or the momentary walk to my kitchen to refill a water bottle still half-way full, tends to represent an attention disorder some of us only gain when writing to gain, instead of writing for the world's gain.

Type type type *pause*. I'm scared of that pause. I've been scared of the possibility that an idea can pay us a momentary visit and then cling on to another host since I read a book in seventh grade that warned readers to make the most of the thoughts they can't stop thinking about or else they will expire. There are few books in my life that I've picked up and then put down before reaching a triple digit; among *The Brothers of Auschwitz* which 12-year-old me decided to rightfully spare herself from, is the very index of ideas, itself. The idea that I could be on the verge of some revolutionary thought that a *pause* will stab or choke to death frames this act of looking up or breaking off from a sudden stream of internal dialogue as a consequence of one's

own momentary contemplation. If I focus too much on a synonym, did I lose birthright to an idea that has now died a premature death? If I look up to meet the eyes of another fellow contemplator and we play the game of who will look away first, does my childish attitude now take away from the academic tone that could have clothed an idea that was just set free from its umbilical cord?

The overwhelming multiverse of the possibilities that could stem from our rhetorical process ultimately shapes mood as a crucial accompaniment to the writing process. A common characteristic regarding the blog posts that I have thus produced is that I have never written one of these reviews in a single day; rather, I stretch the writing process out. I often feel that I am not completely good enough to write a whole analysis in one day, but nonetheless, I should flush out whatever thoughts presently occupy my mind and wait for tomorrow's reload. Hence the momentary pauses and instances of looking up- I am not good enough to write at a given moment but a quick look around may do the very opposite of what I'm scared of; maybe I'll come face to face with an idea, and welcome it home.

The idea that we are more prone to being successful at given interactions or actions when we exhibit a better "mood" today than yesterday strengthens our dependency on such states of being. I can't lie and say that this paragraph existed yesterday as I felt that having too much on my mind and not a concrete idea in sight for this post, I would produce "better" writing if I wrote tomorrow. Tomorrow is now and still I feel the burden of a mood I must be in to write a blog post I'll feel satisfied with upon completion. I have inserted myself into the very pursuit of perfection that I have criticized over the past few weeks. I continue to feel that as with that expiration date on ideas, there is a limited timeframe within a day for "good writing." Maybe I should take advantage of the momentary rush of caffeine I get at the start of fourth period and constrain my writing of blog posts to that time. But still, I feel that I will not produce "good writing" if my instances of looking up and the pauses outnumber the click click click of the chromebook keys. Those instances seem to only accompany a writer who is not in the "mood" and thus, constitute the necessity to search for glowing ideas that linger around a particular space.

Consequently, I've framed my routine around increasing the minutes where I don't feel the need to look up in search for ideas, but rather, am in "mood enough" to feel that I am producing satisfactory writing. I go to the bathroom during advisory so that I don't feel the need to pee during third period so that I can spend more time contemplating ideas that will then make sense during fourth period when I'm in the mood because peeing earlier means more time to write and more time to write perfect writing. This obsessive means of bringing myself closer to writing in a context where I assume I'll be in that "mood" is a plain example of self-consciousness; self-consciousness that stems from feeling that what we produce, even when that production is nothing more than a blog post, must satisfy the scale of perfection that the pursuit of the perfect paper has instilled in us. During the years that we face an emphasis on following a model, we

begin to form our differing perceptions of what it means to fulfill that structure. In other words, we attach perfection to a paper that could have been nothing more than a proposed framework as we enter a competition with no one other than ourselves.

We begin to fear the inevitable writing that will take place when we're "not in the mood." We refuse to produce any binding piece that, in our eyes, will take away from the other "perfect papers" we have written. We put the idea of reputation on the line. We spend years building it up, yet the perception that one imperfect paper can diminish our other pieces of "good" writing strengthens the amount of times we direct our attention away from writing. We look up from our piece to seek an escape, to command the lingering, glowing ideas to direct some of that bioluminescence to our own papers. We wish to ceaselessly glow in a world where we are only as perfect as we tell ourselves we are. That act of "telling" stems from the individual desire to write the perfect paper, book, or blog post. So for this reason, I, too, continue to look up in classroom spaces. I look up now and see the illuminated lights of the Halloween decorations we have yet to take down in the Writing Center. As I write DBQs in APUSH, I look up and meet Mona Lisa's eyes, wondering why no one talks about those eyes?

Despite the fact that we write according to a personalized definition of perfection, the idea that perfection is limited to our ability to perceive *when* we are particularly perfect is what evokes a level of anger within us. We become frustrated and discouraged when we feel that we're unable to obtain this individual wishlist of ours. We are no longer children who compose wishlists to be met by an external actor as Santa. We are now the mechanisms that ensure we attain the level of perfection that we so desperately seek. We have access to a model, to a starting point, but those rhetorical processes, and overall ability to individualize the paper doesn't just convince us that the act of writing is appealing (we all want to learn something about who we are!). We're afraid to learn that this model of self-constructed perfection will not be attained each time we take on the role of writer. We are so very afraid of the backspace key that will be hit hundreds of times and the scrapped papers will begin to accompany one's sides. We dedicate ourselves and our routines to getting into a mood that is supposedly meant to bring us closer to the production of perfection. When we feel that our writing only pushes us three steps backwards, we begin to curse out the field of writing. The idea, time, and mood no longer appear to be effective if we can't write even with the blessing of this holy trinity. So how do we write the perfect paper then? How do we write when the whole world appears to be against the act of writing?

First, I think that we must eliminate the concept of mood. If we place a limit on when and where and how and why we should write then there are simply too many factors that frame writing as something sacred, an act that can only be undertaken by the least sinful and most morally prepared. If we feel that there's truth to something if it's believed in hard enough, then we can write without that previous intake of awakening caffeine. We can still write during the school day even if it's during the time we have left at the end of sixth period, rather than only during

fourth. We constrain ourselves to writing when we feel that we are in the right position to write but we tend to miss out on so many instances of “good” writing that would have filled up our page if only we shifted away from the concept of mood, and decided to write in the face of the voice screaming out “write tomorrow, write tomorrow!”

The worst thing is that tomorrow always comes around. We always have that excuse to write at a different place and time. We direct our search of ideas to the classrooms and spaces we travel to and fro, rather than acknowledging that an authentic idea will expire when it’s neglected. I think seventh grade me with that imagination of hers took the concept of fleeting and hopping ideas a bit too literally. The idea will never truly flee its creator, yet that doesn’t mean that just as a neglected flower, the idea won’t begin to shrivel and ultimately decompose. The blooms of ideas postponed for tomorrow are oftentimes neglected at the prospect that a glowing bulb will ceaselessly appear if only we look up from our screen or paper. The bloom will no longer produce hearths of fruits and flowers; but rather, its neglected state will serve as the reason why writing a perfect piece feels ever the more unattainable. Our overemphasis on the pursuit of perfection, even if it is personal perfection, prevents the ideas and thoughts that would have borne most fruit from getting past that blooming stage. We put off their watering for tomorrow.

My act of delaying ideas for tomorrow has spilled over to more than just the writing aspect of my life. And while this shouldn’t take away from the fact that I am student first and foremost, and thus, I also heavily structure the majority of my life around completing classwork and studying for exams, the time I dedicated to tutoring outside school has become overshadowed by ceaseless attempts to find that diamond in the rough, or in more modern terms, the pink starburst in an abyss of less superior flavors. I’ve grown to feel that I can just nail that idea down and therefore, compose the perfect blog post if I ensure that I’m in the right mood. In my eyes, the right mood has always meant gaining a greater disposition to being enlightened by the right idea; thus, increasing chances for the production of a perfect paper. Consequently, I’ve minimized my time reading *The Catcher in the Rye* as the book I selected in an attempt to teach a writer about voice and narration. After almost a month of failing to visit that house on the corner of the street, I finally returned a few days ago. We got right back to projecting Holden’s complaints to the invisible world around us as a means of filling up the hour-long time slot I’m getting paid for.

When I was a freshman and working through *The Great Gatsby*, we initially watched a short documentary explaining the factors of Fitzgerald’s life that seeped into the book he continued editing despite its publication. I remember learning that prior to his early death, Fitzgerald had been working on *The Last Tycoon*, which he never finished. For this reason, the piece was published in an unfinished form. I haven’t yet read the novel but this idea of incompleteness at the face of death, or in our case, due to the overemphasis of mood, is made evident in so many aspects of our lives. When I ventured through the streets of Kraków the first time I visited Poland, I heard a hymn being played by a trumpet from St. Mary’s Basilica, or as I’ve grown to

know it during the countless years I've spent in Polish school, the Kościół mariacki. The hymn pauses abruptly, an homage to the actual pause that occurred as a trumpet player was shot in the throat with an arrow by a Tatar during the invasion of Kraków by the Mongol army.

The Hejnał is the song we sing, and notes we give voice to as we protect our own definitions of perfectionism. We write to protect the idea that writing should serve as a place we are able to give light to our competing definitions of perfectionism. We protect the universal experience of being human but before we know it, *PAUSE* and the willingness to write is killed. The reminder that writing is defined by mood kills all possibilities for the development of an opera prior to its climax. We never make it to the end of a paper. We never pick at the petals of an idea until all that is left is its pistol because we oftentimes feel that the world, itself, is without end; that it is continuously changing and with those changes come opportunities for new ideas. But then reality hits and we feel the consequences of the pause. The pause doesn't necessarily have to be as consequential as death but, nonetheless, it kills the sense of humanity that should come with writing; the uncertainty, the fear, and acceptance that we will not always be right.

I had read *The Catcher in the Rye* before. So I know that Holden never does end up calling Jane. He was never made recipient of the necessary mood to call her. His own sense of contemplation, Holden's personal sense of pause continuously prevented him from dialing her number. I'm not suggesting that Holden would have had the perfect phone call or conversation with Jane if he had simply called, yet he still would have talked to her. He would have asked her if her kings were still in the back row. He could have just called. Maybe that's what Jane needed. It's hard to know who our writing will touch. So, I too, make it my purpose to simply write. The pauses don't go away easily but even that pause is an indication that I am incessantly writing.