

## Michael G. Moran Awards for 2012-2013








Beginning in 2007, the First-year Composition Program began recognizing the excellent work being done in electronic portfolios for English 1101, 1102, and 1102M by presenting three portfolio awards. Named in honor of Michael G. Moran, a former director of FYC who did much to shape and improve the program, the awards consist of cash prizes and publication in the *First-year Composition Guide* required of all students registered in our courses and on the FYC site at: <http://www.english.uga.edu/newsite/fyc/moran.html>.

### English 1101

**Student: Kaj Hansen**

**Teacher: Marni Ludwig**

*A First-year Composition portfolio at the University of Georgia is more than an attractive folder for the two polished essays that were produced during the semester. Our ePortfolios not only showcase a student's best formal essays, but also his or her writing process. The other pieces of the portfolio—the Introductory Reflective Essay, Peer Review Exhibit, Revision Exhibit, and Wild Card—are designed to encourage reflection about the writing process and about writing's relationship to other aspects of the portfolio author's life. Kaj's ePortfolio is notable for its articulate description of the author's writing practices and their relationship to his general intellectual approach to life and schooling.*

Kaj Hansen's Portfolio		+ - X
 Searching for Enlightenment		Biography
 Discovering Passion		Introductory Reflective Essay
 Transcending Superficiality		Revised Essay 1
 War over the Chessboard		Revised Essay 2
 Revision Exhibit		Exhibit of Revision Process
 Peer Review Exhibit		Exhibit of Peer Review Process
 Digging in God's Sandbox		Wild Card

## Searching for Enlightenment



I find it silly that we pigeonhole ourselves into various groups, oftentimes just to “fit in” without a whole lot of introspection. We call ourselves Republicans, Democrats, atheists, Muslims, Christians, Protestants, Catholics, “left-brained” and “right-brained,” and countless other labels. But what do they really *mean*? Our world views define our opinions of right and wrong; they define how we should live our lives, and they define *who we are*. A mere label does not suffice.

I am neither particularly religious, nor am I an atheist in the traditional sense. To me, “God” is a metaphor for nature. God lies within us, around us, and is the very essence of the entire universe. Indeed, He underlies the very equations that govern all physical processes. As humans, it is the noblest of our endeavors to explore and revere nature and its phenomena. To some extent, we all do this. Some write poetry or compose music, and the more adventurous of us trail-blaze the unknown. For me, this means developing a deep understanding of mathematics and applying this understanding to the sciences.

From an early age, I’ve been fascinated with science. Coupled with my somewhat obsessive personality, my fascination evolved into a number of hobbies and, eventually, my career choice. In middle school, I joined the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers and studied weather patterns on Mars and Jupiter for several years. In high school, I completed two research projects over three years for which I won \$1,000 and a third-place prize in chemistry at the 2010 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair. Now, as a freshman at the University of Georgia, I am eager to pursue undergraduate degrees in mathematics and physics. For me, this four-year journey is much more than an obligatory ritual to obtain a well-paying job. It is an important, albeit small step on my path to enlightenment. It is a small step closer to God.

### Discovering Passion

For over a decade, I have been subjected to the most vapid and mundane writing prompts imaginable. My abject hatred for writing blossomed in the early grades and carried over into high school, where I struggled to write effectively about arcane topics that were, at best, loosely applicable to my own life. On rare occasions, I was granted a modicum of freedom to choose my own prompt, and those essays were by far my strongest. Why was this so? Passion. Passion is the single most important factor for success in any endeavor, and writing devoid of passion is cold and lifeless.

English 1101, for the first time in my life, gave me extraordinary freedom to write about whatever I desired. Although all three essays had a general theme to follow, the assignments for Professor Ludwig's class were far more unfettered than I had anticipated, and I very much enjoyed exploring my own topics. As someone with an affinity for proof-based mathematics and logic, I was already reasonably adept at formulating strong, compelling thesis statements and effectively supporting them. Indeed, the reasoning skills that are improved by studying mathematics can be applied to persuasive writing, and vice-versa. Combined with my passion for my chosen topics, I surprised myself with my new-found ability to write high-scoring papers.

As I discussed in my biography, my world view dictates that I live my life in a relentless pursuit of knowledge and understanding, and this sentiment served as inspiration for each piece included in my portfolio. Following philosopher René Descartes' example, reason alone is not enough to achieve enlightenment. We must cast a skeptical gaze upon all widely-held beliefs and cultural norms and start from the ground-up in order to construct a comprehensive world view. It is in this spirit that I tackled my first essay. In "Transcending Superficiality," I wrote a scathing critique of Christian pop-rock and the intellectual stagnation that I see as increasingly prevalent within the genre. The most difficult obstacle I encountered writing this essay was that I was raised in a secular household. However, by carefully selecting my peers during the revision process, I was able to get input from people with a wide range of perspectives. I thus strengthened my argument by addressing concerns that were, for me, self-evident given my background.

Though my final draft of "Transcending Superficiality" scored well, I took the opportunity to identify, for the first time, weaknesses that remained even in my strongest, most passionate writing. The majority of corrections Professor Ludwig made to this paper stemmed from my desperation to adequately express myself on paper, often to the point that my sentences came out awkward and pedantic. Correcting these problems further enhanced the clarity of my paper and allowed my ideas to flow seamlessly from one to the next. Professor Ludwig also helped me identify my propensity for expressing my observations and passion-fueled opinions as universal facts. Take, for instance, my claim that "... everyone who listens to this song walks away awestruck at the unrelenting intricacy of its rhyme scheme, meter, syntax, and diction." In retrospect, extrapolating from my personal experience in this manner was ridiculous! Something

that is true or self-evident for me is not necessarily so for someone else. Indeed, Professor Ludwig's feedback and my subsequent revisions have drastically improved my writing. I took my constructive criticism seriously and kept it in mind for each new essay. Over the course of the semester, I saw my unrevised final drafts improve from the low 90's in the beginning to a 97 on my third and final essay.

Conforming to my general theme, I decided to examine the game of chess for the other essay highlighted in my portfolio, "War over the Chessboard." I drew inspiration for my topic from the fact that, not only am I an avid chess player, but also that a great deal of mathematical and logical curiosities arise in the game. Certainly, knowing how to play chess is nearly a prerequisite in certain areas of mathematics, computer science, and artificial intelligence (all areas of interest for me). Moreover, I feel that playing chess avidly at an early age greatly contributed to my present-day world view and career choice. No doubt, it played an integral role in my early mental development, and I credit it, in part, for my strong ability to write persuasively. In a tribute of sorts, I described the history of the game up to the point where it played a pivotal role in Cold-War politics. Applying what I had learned over the course of the semester, I posit that chess "provided a fiercely competitive alternative to nuclear war in which both superpowers could vent nationalistic anxiety and come to respect each other's physical and intellectual merits."

Writing "War over the Chessboard" certainly gave me a new-found respect for the research process. Much effort went into this essay, and I scoured chapters of two books, a documentary, and several scholarly publications to gather supporting evidence for my thesis. Before English 1101, "research" simply entailed a few minutes on a search engine. Starkly opposed to the regurgitated prompt-writing of high school, I was now seamlessly integrating sourced information into a paper where I presented original and compelling ideas. For example, I used direct quotes from an interview given by Russian Grandmaster Garry Kasparov to help illustrate the unbelievable extent of the formidable Soviet chess machine. Knowing how to go about this sort of research and incorporate my findings into my papers will definitely be an essential skill for my future career as a scientist, and I appreciate the practice English 1101 has afforded me.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote that "A truly good book teaches me better than to read it. I must soon lay it down, and commence living on its hint. What I began by reading, I must finish by acting." I have similar sentiments about my own essays. I write not merely to go through the motions of freshman composition. I write for a greater understanding of myself.

Kaj Hansen

Dr. Ludwig

English 1101

6 September 2012

Transcending Superficiality

When we think of Christian music, we often think of overtly evangelical Christian pop-rock singles with clear-cut lyrics that are sung in church and overplayed on the radio. Their simple message becomes hackneyed and predictable to the point that we listen in the manner that we brush our teeth: without thinking. They don't make us think, nor do they seriously challenge our preconceived notions of the world around us. In a sense, Christian pop-rock is no different than modern secular pop music. We listeners get caught up in a catchy beat or slick guitar riff when the song itself has little substance. It's as if art students ignored the nineteenth-century impressionist masterpieces of Renoir or Monet in favor of cheap newspaper cartoons. Sure, such cartoons do play an important role, but they shouldn't wholly replace an art student's appreciation for classical art in the same way that catchy pop-rock has entirely replaced our taste for music of more complex rhythmic and lyrical structure. Indie rock band mewwithoutYou is by far the most notable exception to this trend.

With a sound very characteristic of post-hardcore music, mewwithoutYou released their debut album A→B Life in early 2001. As the band matured, they began to blend traditional post-hardcore with experimental and folk rock. What really makes this band memorable, however, are the vocals and lyrical content. From lead vocalist Aaron Weiss's passionate yelling in "Torches Together" to his delicate humming in "King Beetle on a Coconut Estate," mewwithoutYou frequently alludes to Biblical passages, stories from various religions, and tales

from Aesop and the Sufi mystic Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. It's one thing for a band to put passages and stories to song. It's entirely another for a band to do this well – to do it so subtly that it might take a while for a first-time listener to realize that he's even listening to Christian-themed music.

Take the opening lyrics from “In a Market Dimly Lit”:

*The bird that plucked the Olive Leaf  
has been circling like a record around the spindle of my mind  
where the needle's worn the grooves too deep,  
and scratched the wax that's blistered from the heat besides  
so from any movement in the room—  
if my cat walked by the arm skipped!  
but to my surprise, my interrupting cat improved  
a sound already so severely compromised.*

In these lines, the bird that plucked the olive leaf symbolizes Christian preaching, and when Aaron sings that it's been circling like a record in his mind, that is to say that he hears the same stuff again and again. The record's scratched and worn, just as the preaching has gotten old and stale for Aaron. However, a break in the routine – say a loved one dying (or a cat walking past and disturbing the record player's needle) – is all it takes to bring meaning to those old, tired words. To the casual listener, it is not obvious that the entire first stanza is a metaphor until one first listens to the song a couple times over with careful attention to the lyrics. This song is but one example. Each of their songs is riddled with underlying meaning and multiple interpretations, and this is precisely what makes mewwithoutYou not only the greatest of its genre, but also attractive to outside audiences.

That its religious themes are so subtle, as in the song above, is perhaps one of mewwithoutYou's greatest attributes as a Christian rock band. Mainstream Christian pop-rock frankly does a poor job at evangelizing, one of its primary objectives. Outsiders tend to dislike

this sort of pop-rock for the same reason that we hate Jehovah's Witnesses showing up at our doorstep. No one likes being proselytized, and so we naturally gravitate away from those who actively promote religious or political beliefs with which we disagree. This is true, no doubt, for pop-rock with explicitly evangelical lyrics, and so the bands simply end up preaching to the choir. On the other hand, *mewithoutYou* takes a distinctive approach to expressing Christian ideas without coming across as "preachy"; Aaron Weiss himself insists that they aren't evangelizing whatsoever, but rather describing his relationship with God (Fink). Thus, they are far more successful at attracting entire groups of people to their music by focusing instead on creating good music and leaving it up to their listeners to interpret it however they'd like. Most interestingly, I suspect the groups of people they attract are maybe even less religious than the average Joe on the street, let alone those who enjoy mainstream Christian pop-rock.

Perhaps the most profoundly beautiful song in all of religiously-themed music is "King Beetle on a Coconut Estate." The song relates a story by Bawa Muhaiyaddeen about anthropomorphic beetles living on a coconut plantation, who are time and again vexed by the mysterious fire the humans light to clear piles of dead leaves. The beetle king offers a hefty reward to anyone who can explain the fire, and Aaron Weiss's fraught shouting reflects the king beetle's frustration as his subjects fail to do so. In a sudden moment of clarity, the king beetle recognizes the fire as God himself, and "flies headlong into the blazing unknown." The song concludes with a mighty chorus repeating the phrase "Why not be utterly changed into fire?" This final line embodies the entire message of the song: there are things that we cannot explain, and we can only understand them when we become one with God.

Putting stories and fables to music is nothing extraordinary. Doing it well *is*. Nearly all my friends who've listened to this track walk away awestruck by the unrelenting intricacy of its

rhyme scheme, meter, syntax, and diction that spans a solid six minutes. Even as an atheist-pantheist, for me this single track has had a much more profound impact on my worldview than the numerous church services I was made to attend as a child. THIS is the very essence of Christian music. THIS is where mewithoutYou succeeds and better-known bands fail. They focus on writing and performing good music that simply expresses how they feel, and everything else falls into place. When most other bands make the mistake of focusing too much on the final product or on pleasing a specific audience, their music turns out mediocre. In short, they try too hard to evangelize. Analogous to Mr. Goldsworthy (from “Rivers and Tides”) trying not to micromanage his art, mewithoutYou produces an elegant and superior final product in the same way.

Like art and literature, music should play an important role in expressing abstract concepts where words fail, so it’s unfortunate that most bands produce superficial work that does little to challenge our perspectives and beliefs. Transcending the clichéd, it is certainly no stretch of the truth to say that mewithoutYou is the greatest religiously-themed band of all time.

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Selected tracks:

“King Beetle on a Coconut Estate”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTcrWUU-EeA>

“In a Market Dimly Lit”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keKBNK5Vox4>

“The Fox, the Crow, and the Cookie”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= ZEX6w3-KbE>



Kaj Hansen

ENGL 1101

Essay III

08 November 2012

War over the Chessboard

**"Chess holds its master in its own bonds, shackling the mind and brain so that the inner freedom of the very strongest must suffer."**

*~Albert Einstein*

On the first Christmas that I can remember – I was maybe five years old – my father bought me a chess set. It was a modest one-foot-square wooden board with tiny hinges in the center allowing it to fold in half; I still have it to this day. Before I could even write my name with any degree of proficiency, my father taught me how the tiny magnetic chessmen moved about and besieged each other on their checkered battleground of sixty-four black-and-white squares. I was fascinated.

Superficially, chess is simple and elegant. For one thing, its rules are much less complicated than, say, Risk or Monopoly. There are also fewer pieces. Whereas other board games have decks of all sorts of cards, hundreds of movable pieces, three or more players, sets of die, and a myriad of other trinkets, chess has a mere thirty-two pieces in total: sixteen pawns, two rooks, two knights, two bishops, and a king and queen for both players. Unlike most games, however, chess is a game of pure strategy, tact, and observation. If I lose, no blame falls upon an arbitrary roll of the die, or the cruel whim of a spinner, or an unfortunate draw of a card. No. If I lose, it is my fault. My own miscalculations or oversights are to blame.

Chess has a marvelously rich history that traces its roots back to India several centuries before the birth of Christ Himself, and certainly millennia before I learned to play. The earliest recorded mention of ancient chess is found in the *Ramayana*, an ancient Indian epic dating to ~750 B.C. which relates the story of a demon king inventing the game for his wife's entertainment (to his chagrin, she beats him). It was later described in the *Arthashastra*, a political treatise dating to the third century BC. During this time, this early chess prototype was known to the Indians as "chaturanga," roughly translating into "having four limbs." Each of the "four limbs" of Indian armies – war elephants, chariots, cavalry, and infantry – is represented by the various pieces. The rules, however, were significantly different from today, though exactly what they were is unclear (Anand).

Over time, the game spread westward into Persia and the Arab lands where it became known as Shatranj. Around the sixth century A.D., the Muslim Moors introduced Shatranj to Europe during their invasion of the Iberian Peninsula. It was here in Spain, after the fifteenth century Reconquista, where chess experienced several major changes and rules became universal and finalized. For one, the range of the bishops and queens were greatly extended. Furthermore, pawns could now advance two squares on their first move instead of just one. Lastly, particulars regarding drawn endgames became more explicit. As a result of the Moorish invasion of southern Europe, the earliest of chess theorists also came from those countries where chess was first introduced by the invading Muslims. During this time, the Spaniard Luis Ramirez de Lucena wrote the first book on chess theory, and Ruy Lopez de Segura, a Spanish bishop, was among the first to explore opening and endgame strategies (Anand).

In modern times, chess continues to torment even the most brilliant minds. What makes the game so enticing is its lack of randomness, yet its innate complexity. Consider, for example,

that there are 400 possible positions after the first two moves alone, and that number grows to roughly 169,518,829,100,544,000,000,000,000,000 possible positions by the tenth move (Johnson). Further, it is unknown whether the game is absolutely fair – that is, whether perfect play by both sides will lead to a draw (easily demonstrated with tic-tac-toe). Various problems that arise in chess are studied extensively by mathematicians and computer scientists in the realms of artificial intelligence, combinatorics, and game theory. For example, a quick search combining “chess” with “combinatorics” or “computer science” yields graduate-level mathematical papers with such titles as “The Computational Challenge of Enumerating High-Dimensional Rook Walks” and “A Linear Algorithm for Computing the Knight's Domination Number of a K-by-N Chessboard.” It therefore comes as no surprise that the ability to play chess well is a sign of noteworthy intelligence, spatial reasoning, and subtle ingenuity. Founded in 1924, FIDE, the Fédération Internationale des Échecs (World Chess Federation), even awards titles to the world’s strongest players, ranging from FIDE Master to Grandmaster.

The conclusion of World War II ushered in an era of antagonistic competition with the Soviet Union. The United States and the USSR were not only vying for strategic development of nuclear weapons around the world, but the two superpowers were also trying to outclass each other in every way possible, and intelligence was no exception. In 1948, Mikhail Botvinnik was crowned the world chess champion, which marked the first of twenty-four years of Soviet chess domination. Commenting on the aptly-named “Soviet chess machine,” former world champion Garry Kasparov explained that “for the communist regime, keeping the crown was very important ideologically. The communist state took over chess to use it as proof of its intellectual superiority over the decadent West.” The Kremlin poured seemingly unlimited amounts of money into their chess players, pumped out hundreds of grandmasters, dominated every

international chess Olympiad, and even declared chess its national sport. In stark contrast with the Soviet Union, the United States did not provide any support for its promising chess players. Not only were American chess players on their own, but it also became widely accepted that the Soviet chess machine was quite literally unstoppable (Garbus).

At age fourteen, American chess player Bobby Fischer became the youngest U.S. Chess Champion in history, a record that still stands today, and by fifteen, he was awarded the title of grandmaster. When Fischer was twenty-nine, it became clear that he could take on the Soviet chess machine as a viable contender for World Champion. At the 1970 “USSR vs. Rest of the World” match, sometimes referred to as the “Match of the Century,” Fischer beat former Soviet world champion Tigran Petrosian 3-1. Likewise, he outscored Soviet heavyweights Mikhail Tal, Vasily Smyslov, Viktor Korchnoi, and David Bronstein (Johnson). His domination then extended into the 1971 Candidates matches, that determined who would have the privilege of challenging the current world champion. In these matches, Fischer crushed his first two opponents with a phenomenal perfect score. After he defeated Soviet grandmaster Mark Taimanov 6-0, the Kremlin temporarily revoked his passport and cut off his pay for the embarrassment (McClain). Fischer eventually qualified to challenge the reigning world champion Boris Spassky at the 1972 World Chess Championship, which was held in Iceland.

Unfortunately, Bobby Fischer’s widely-publicized victories were a mixed blessing for him. Fischer was a reclusive person, and he greatly disliked his extreme popularity, avoiding reporters and paparazzi at all costs. However, the enthusiasm and anticipation for the upcoming Fischer vs. Spassky world championship match rivaled that of Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier’s Fight of the Century. As the world championship match drew close, this posed a major headache for the international chess community because Fischer refused to go to the airport to avoid being

swarmed with reporters. On one occasion, he even fled the airport upon being spotted by a photographer. The situation escalated to the point that the State Department got involved at the last minute, and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger finally convinced him over a personal phone call to go lest he jeopardize America's image on the global stage. Even after arriving, Fischer had numerous complaints regarding television and recording equipment due to his possible hyperacusis that causes oversensitivity to faint noise (Garbus).

Fischer had a disastrous start to his twenty-four game match against Boris Spassky. The first game approached a drawn endgame, but Fischer refused a draw agreement and made a serious elementary mistake, blundering a bishop and subsequently losing the first round. Regarding his complaints about recording equipment, Fischer was unable to come to agreement with the match organizers, and he thus did not show for the second round, forfeiting the game. Though he started the championship trailing 0-2, Fischer had made a miraculous comeback by the fifth game, tying the score with 2.5 points each. In the sixth game, he stunned the world by advancing his c-pawn two spaces on his first move, which results in vastly different strategy than his preferred move: advancing the e-pawn two spaces, which he played almost invariably. This game is one of the most studied in all of chess history, and Spassky himself applauded when Fischer decisively checkmated him after forty-one beautifully tactical and deliberate moves (Garbus).

When Spassky finally resigned his title to Fischer at the conclusion of the twenty-first game, it was clear that none of the Soviet grandmasters were impervious to their Western counterparts. Similar to the incredible American victory against their USSR archrivals in ice hockey at the 1980 Winter Olympics, Fischer's victory helped bring about a greater degree of mutual respect between the Soviet Union and the West. For one thing, the West could finally be taken seriously in the international chess community, especially considering that American players like Bobby Fischer did not receive the same financial support from Washington the way Soviet players did from the

Kremlin. More importantly, games like chess and ice hockey provided a safer, yet fiercely competitive alternative to nuclear war in which both superpowers could vent nationalistic anxiety and come to respect each other's physical and intellectual merits (Johnson).

Chess, unlike any other board game, has had a profound impact on the world and its people. To the ancient Indians millennia ago, "chaturang" was but a pastime. Little did they know, their innocent game would provide powerful insight into cutting-edge mathematical theory of the twenty-first century, nor did they know that chaturang would evolve into a game that baffles the most advanced artificial intelligence software and modern supercomputers. And who could've guessed even a century ago that a mere board game would play such a pivotal role in a major conflict between nuclear superpowers? One thing is certain: chess is a marvelously beautiful and timeless game that will likely continue to stimulate and confound the minds of its players for centuries to come.

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I approach writing much in the same way a brain surgeon performs surgery. I am precise, careful, and meticulous – almost apprehensive to put ink to paper. I was exposed to a decent amount of timed writing in my language and literature classes in high school, and in every such assessment, I was the last to begin writing, spending much of my time gathering and organizing my thoughts. Outside of class, writing becomes an even more drawn out and lengthy process as I spend copious amounts of time deliberating over mere paragraphs. Contrary to most people, only until a paragraph has been sufficiently outlined and fleshed out in my mind can I begin to bring it to life on paper. Long essays are worse, and I'll probably spend upwards of two hours staring intently at a blank word document. I do not, however, suffer from writer's block; rather, I have so many ideas swirling through my head at once that I struggle to express them in a logical and appealing fashion.

A direct consequence of my fastidious approach is that I do not conform to a traditional drafting process. As painfully unorthodox as it sounds, my essays are generally ready to submit for grading immediately after I have penned their final sentences. This is not to say that I am a perfect writer, or even a decent writer by any means. I simply do a great deal of "micro-drafting" in my own head as opposed to throwing my ideas rather haphazardly onto paper and drafting them later. As someone with a proclivity for logic and proof-based mathematics, I typically have no problem making an assertion and sufficiently supporting that claim. Coupled with my penchant for perfect spelling and grammar, I have done quite well on each of my papers this semester.

There are, however, minor drawbacks to my approach. First, I lose myself in thought to the point that my sentences can come out awkward and pedantic in my desperation to adequately express myself on paper. Because of this, clarity and cohesion of my ideas were often compromised. Secondly, I had a slight tendency to make unsupported assertions. That is, I choose topics about which I am so passionate that I occasionally express my unsupported opinions as if they are facts. English 1101's revision process has brought my attention to these problems more effectively than ever before, and as the semester progressed, I was better able to address them in each subsequent paper. Thus, I proudly walked away with a 97 on my final essay, "War over the Chessboard."

For the purposes of this revision exhibit, let us examine excerpts from my first essay, "Transcending Superficiality." Note that original drafts are highlighted in yellow, followed by commentary in italics, followed by revisions highlighted in green.

**Example 1:**

The fact that religious themes are so subtle like in the song above is perhaps one of mewithoutYou's greatest attributes as a Christian rock band. Mainstream Christian pop-rock frankly does a poor job at evangelizing, one of its primary objectives. Outsiders tend to dislike this sort of pop-rock for the same reason that we hate Jehovah's Witnesses showing up at our doorstep. No one likes being proselytized, and so we naturally gravitate away from those who actively promote religious or political beliefs that we disagree with. This is true, no doubt, for pop-rock with explicitly evangelical lyrics, and so the bands simply end up preaching to the choir. On the other hand, mewithoutYou takes a distinctive approach to expressing Christian ideas without coming across as "preachy"; Aaron Weiss himself insists that they aren't evangelizing whatsoever, but rather describing their relationship with God (Fink). Because of this, they are far more successful at attracting entire groups of people to their music by focusing instead on creating good music and leaving it up to their listeners to interpret it however they'd like. Most interestingly, the groups of people they attract I suspect are even less religious than the average Joe on the street, let alone those who enjoy mainstream Christian pop-rock.

*The sentence introducing this paragraph was intended to be a powerful statement, but its point was muddled by awkward structure and superfluous wording. The same can be said for the last sentence of the paragraph. The highlighted hanging preposition further adds to the paragraph's overall clumsiness. These three problems combine to greatly diminish the power of my assertions and interfere with the paragraph's overall cohesion.*

That its religious themes are so subtle, as in the above example, is perhaps one of mewithoutYou's greatest attributes as a Christian rock band. Mainstream Christian pop-rock frankly does a poor job at evangelizing, one of its primary objectives. Outsiders tend to dislike this sort of pop-rock for the same reason that we hate Jehovah's Witnesses showing up at our doorstep. No one likes being proselytized, and so we naturally gravitate away from those who actively promote religious or political beliefs with which we disagree. This is true, no doubt, for pop-rock with explicitly evangelical lyrics, and so the bands simply end up preaching to the choir. On the other hand, mewithoutYou takes a distinctive approach to expressing Christian ideas without coming across as "preachy"; Aaron Weiss himself insists that they aren't evangelizing whatsoever, but rather describing their relationship with God (Fink). Thus, they are far more successful at attracting entire groups of people to their music by focusing instead on creating good music and leaving it up to their listeners to interpret it however they'd like. Most interestingly, I suspect the groups of people they attract are less religious than the average Joe on the street, let alone those who enjoy mainstream Christian pop-rock.

*Simple revisions greatly increased the clarity of the paragraph.*



**Example 2:**

As the band matured, they began to blend traditional post-hardcore with experimental and folk rock. What really makes this band **so** memorable, however, is **most certainly** its vocals and lyrical content.

*The highlighted words make the sentence sound awkward and the idea less coherent. I simply deleted them.*

**Example 3:**

In these lines, the bird that plucked the olive leaf symbolizes Christian preaching, and when Aaron sings that it's been circling like a record in his mind, that is to say that he hears the same stuff again and again. **The record is scratched and worn, just like the preaching has gotten old and stale.** However, a break in the routine – say a loved one dying (or a cat walking past and disturbing the record player's needle) – is all it takes to bring meaning to those old, tired words.

*There are two problems with this sentence. Firstly, it doesn't convey its idea as well as it should, and including a simple "which" after "preaching" resolves this problem. Secondly, a question the reader might ask after reading this sentence is, "The preaching has gotten old and stale to whom?"*

In these lines, the bird that plucked the olive leaf symbolizes Christian preaching, and when Aaron sings that it's been circling like a record in his mind, that is to say that he hears the same stuff again and again. **The record is scratched and worn, just like the preaching which has gotten old and stale for Aaron.** However, a break in the routine – say a loved one dying (or a cat walking past and disturbing the record player's needle) – is all it takes to bring meaning to those old, tired words.

*Though this change looks minor, the revised sentence makes far more sense than its original.*

**Example 4:**

Putting stories and fables to music is nothing extraordinary. Doing it well *is*. Nearly everyone who listens to this track walks away awestruck at the unrelenting intricacy of its rhyme scheme, meter, syntax, and diction that spans a solid six minutes.

*As I discussed in the introduction to this revision exhibit, I have a tendency to express my opinions about a topic as universal fact. Who am I to know that everyone who listens to the track walks away awestruck? I only have my own empirical evidence and a couple of anecdotes, not some large-scale scientific study. Further, the sentence isn't as clear as it should be due to my poor choice of a preposition, highlighted in blue.*

Putting stories and fables to music is nothing extraordinary. Doing it well *is*. Nearly all my friends who've listened to this track walk away awestruck by the unrelenting intricacy of its rhyme scheme, meter, syntax, and diction that spans a solid six minutes.

*Throughout the semester, Angelina Faria and I worked together to improve our writing. I particularly enjoyed revising her personal essay not only because it directly helped her, but also because the simple act of revising Angelina's essay gave me ideas that drastically improved my own personal narrative. Trying to avoid nitpicking, instead I worked with Angelina to develop cohesive arguments that support her thesis in a seamless manner. Thus, I put emphasis on continuity, varied sentence structure, and the "big picture." In other words, it is certainly possible for an essay to be quite weak even if it is grammatically error-free.*

*Appropriately, I first spent a good deal of time on Angelina's introduction. She started out with an interesting "hook" to draw readers into her narrative, but it hadn't yet been exploited to its full potential. Comments in blue after some of the paragraphs are my own.*

When sharks smell blood, nothing can stop them from getting to their prey. They swim faster and faster, deeper and deeper, and ascend to attack. Jaws open. Teeth shoot out. Pearly pink gums appear. The eyes go black. Sometimes she is hungry and needs to survive. Other sharks kill because the seal is in their ocean.

**This is a compelling introduction; however it can be reorganized and rewritten to exploit its full potential. Refer to my comments, and remember that this paragraph serves as a "hook" to draw interest from your audience. First impressions are important, so this certainly needs to be one of the strongest and most polished paragraphs of the entire essay.**

I don't pick on the weak to make myself look strong. I challenge the strongest and the loudest to prove I'm not weak. I am not easy prey, even though I appear to be. These people turn me into something I don't want to be: a shark.

**This paragraph is a good transition into the rest of your paper. However, referring to my comments, it is important that you convey exactly what you mean. Remember that you are a stranger to your audience, so description is essential. For example, "strongest and loudest" could refer to physically strong and loud people, or mean-spirited people, or arrogant people. To make the distinction, you don't necessarily have to explicitly say "I challenge bullies," but rather provide the audience with more context clues to remove the ambiguity.**

**Comment [k1]:** "nothing stops them from grabbing their prey."

**Comment [k2]:** This isn't necessarily wrong, but it's fairly vague. You give the reader the impression that sharks descend and ascend at the same time when attacking.

**Comment [k3]:** Possible revision: "Their eyes turn black. As their jaws widen, teeth shoot out of their pearly pink gums."

**Comment [k4]:** Be consistent with your pronouns. At the beginning of this anecdote, there were multiple sharks, so-to-speak. "Sharks" and "them" has changed to "she."

**Comment [k5]:** Perhaps expand on this a bit more. Somehow convey what "weak" means to you. Also, who are the "strongest and loudest"? Again, expand on this to give the readers a clearer picture of your psychology.

**Comment [k6]:** Possible revision: "Regardless of my outward appearance, I am not easy prey. These people turn me into the very shark I despise."

I threw the third punch and froze. I was so angry. It was mostly words that had provoked me.

**Comment [k7]:** Possible revision: "I threw the third punch and froze, consumed with rage."

Boom. My world crashed. Lying there with his body over me, I remember choking. Not me, but

**Comment [k8]:** Short sentences like these are good, but after a while, you should vary the length. You use a number of short sentences like these back to back, and it feels awkward to read.

him. He held me down and asked me if I would stop. I screamed yes. Jab, jab I didn't stop

**Comment [k9]:** Jab! Jab! I didn't stop fighting.

fighting. He finally ran off the bus with me chasing behind. We ran into teachers who separated

**Comment [k10]:** following close behind

us. At the beginning I didn't realize I had even hit him. Afterward I just stood there until the full

**Comment [k11]:** A little nitpicking, but it's generally a good idea to avoid using the same word twice in a row. Perhaps there's a more descriptive verb other than "ran" – "encountered" perhaps.

blow came to me. I felt no pain. There was only a question of how did I end up on my back.

**Comment [k12]:** At first,

**Comment [k13]:** as

In justifying what I wanted to do so badly I thought of what my dad and uncle would do.

**Comment [k14]:** Sounds rather awkward. Perhaps, "I felt no pain, and I'm unsure how I landed on my back".

I have always been taught respect. I was hit twice in the back of the head. There wasn't enough

**Comment [k15]:** Possible revision: "Desperate to justify what I had done, I asked myself what my dad and uncle would do in the same situation".

force to hurt but it was the point. There was no respect. While asking who did it, I was slapped

**Comment [k16]:** Although there wasn't enough force to hurt... Also, "There was no respect" just sounds awkward.

with the words "shut up fucking little bitch you won't do shit." I was taught never to throw the

**Comment [k17]:** Demanding

first punch, but I figured this in combination with the two ½ jabs that hit me in the head was

**Comment [k18]:** Semicolon!

enough to justify what I wanted to do. He walked by me and BAM!

**Comment [k19]:** Possible revision: "Although I was taught never to throw the first punch, this in addition to the two half-jabs that hit me in the head was enough to justify my upcoming reaction."

I went to the mirror after getting off the bus. A teacher told me to clean up. Crying with

**Comment [k20]:** Chronological order?

rage, tears had smeared my make-up and I assumed that is what she was referring to. My eye was

swollen shut. What happened? Four days of out of school suspension. He went free. He wasn't

the one who originally hit me. I was 14. He was 17.

*I also focused quite a bit on the conclusion of her paper. In the final two paragraphs below, Angelina tied her writing together and spoke directly to her thesis stated earlier in the paper. Given their importance, I tried to help her strengthen them as much as possible.*

I know deep down that I need to put my big girl panties on and walk away. I never believed it but walking away from a fight is really hard. It is the hardest thing in the world for me, and it is something I have never been able to do. It attacks my pride and diminishes the respect I have for myself.

Is it ok to be the shark if I am trying to survive? I don't want to be a seal. I have always thought I was the shark, spiraling out of control. Now I realize I was the seal, a victim. Although my experiences have turned me into a shark, I don't want to harm people. It was a way of coping. I don't want to be the shark anymore, and I don't want to be the victim either. Who am I now?

**At this point, you'll want to broaden your essay and relate your experiences to humanity as a whole. Surely, we all feel as you do in some form or another. Transition into first-person plural and ponder the moral implications and relate them to your thesis. Don't be timid; you know how your experience relates to humanity better than anyone else. For inspiration, see the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph from the end in "Explicit Violence" or the last paragraph in "How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others." In these last paragraphs, I'd advise dropping the "shark" metaphor in favor of more concrete language. The metaphor was excellent as a hook to capture the reader's attention in the beginning; however, I think it weakens your conclusion.**

**Overall, focus first on coherence and the role each paragraph plays in the whole essay. Your work is anecdote-heavy, which isn't bad, but it's easy to get sidetracked. Also, focus on your transitions from one part of the essay to the next. At times, it is confusing for the reader because the parts are rather disjoint. I wish you Godspeed!**

**Comment [k21]:** Deep down, I know that I need to put on my big girl panties and walk away.

**Comment [k22]:** You can get away with deleting this sentence because you're repeating the same point in the next.

**Comment [k23]:** Do, for it diminishes my pride and self-respect.

**Comment [k24]:** Is it morally acceptable to be a shark...? "Survive" isn't the best word.

**Comment [k25]:** Although our experiences may turn us into sharks, deep down we don't want to harm others. Aggression is simply a way of coping.

### Digging in God's Sandbox

**Mortal as I am, I know that I am born for a day. But when I follow at my pleasure the serried multitude of the stars in their circular course, my feet no longer touch the earth.**

*~Ptolemy*

At some point during elementary school, perhaps in third grade, I received a modest telescope for Christmas. That frigid night, I vividly remember setting up my new scope in our backyard and, with the help of my father, finding Saturn peering through the cloudy sky. Though I didn't know it at the time, seeing the tiny, ringed ball of light through the eyepiece for the first time had a profound impact on the rest of my life.

Over the next few months, I spent countless hours outside glued to a small sky atlas, learning the names of the brightest stars and constellations. As I became more comfortable with the atlas, I began finding all sorts of interesting objects with my scope – the Andromeda Galaxy, the Orion Nebula, myriads of star clusters, and, of course, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Owing to my somewhat obsessive personality, I nurtured this mere childhood curiosity over the next few years into a nearly full-time hobby. Around 2005, I became a member of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers, a society of amateur astronomers dedicated to studying bodies within our Solar System. From here, I invested in a more powerful telescope and astrophotography equipment.



Armed with my new toys, I studied Martian dust storms, atmospheric patterns on Jupiter, and magnetic phenomena on the Sun. For my wildcard, I dug up some of my older astrophotography and created two short animations from a number of still shots. The first video below is a time-lapse of Io, Jupiter's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest moon, transiting the gas giant. That is, Io passes in front of Jupiter and casts a shadow onto its surface. My original intent was to use my observations of this event to approximate Io's orbital period around Jupiter, but unfortunately, I could only capture about half of the event before the sky clouded over.

The second video is another time-lapse, this time of Mars rotating. Because Mars' rotation is out of sync with Earth's by a mere 43 minutes, only a small sliver of new surface is revealed every night. Therefore, the images in this one were taken over a period of a couple weeks.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKY-ZufPX5U>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btdALd1nzkM>

### **Final Thoughts**

As I discussed in my biography, my goal in life is to apply math and science to the world around us in a quest for understanding and enlightenment. My astronomy is simply a manifestation of this desire.

Contrary to popular opinion, the sciences and humanities are not fundamentally different. At their most basic, they both strive for a greater understanding of nature. Whereas science derives understanding exclusively from empirical evidence, the humanities look to history, literature, philosophy, music, and so forth. However, this is not to say that science is devoid of emotion. An appreciative eye sees beauty not only in Beethoven's symphonies and Shakespeare's sonnets but also in the perfectly elliptical orbits of astronomical bodies and the breathtaking symmetry in mathematical structures.