

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 20 Iss 34 2012-09-07

Five Stars

Reviewing the rackets

Slow Starter

The academic race

Love Languages

Failure to communicate

Plus:

*From Where I Sit
The Mindful Bard
and much more!*



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We love to hear from you! Send your questions and
comments to voice@voicemagazine.org, and please
indicate if we may publish your letter.



STUDY SPACE

Maxie van Roye



Slow and Steady

You've got your books. You've got your supplies. You've carved out time and finances and a space to work, and now you're ready to begin the school year.

Except that you're not, really.

You sit at your desk and stare at the schedule—and stare and stare. You have a headache. You're terrified. You want to be excited, you need to get a good start, and yet you're just not feeling it. What you *are* feeling is a little over your head.

We hear a lot about scheduling, and for good reason. Figuring out your study plan is crucial; and whether you use a daily schedule or set weekly goals, having some kind of plan is key to your educational success.

But sometimes, marrying yourself to your schedule—especially early in the semester—can hurt more than it helps.

Have you ever started out with plans to do a distance run, but got sidelined early in the race thanks to cramps or exhaustion? Maybe you didn't warm up enough. Maybe you started out too fast, with too great an intensity. Or maybe you threw yourself into it with no idea of the physical and emotional costs.

An educational journey is the same way. As soon as we get our course materials, we figure out goals, set up schedules, and commit ourselves to a rigorous plan of study and focus. We fear that if we fall behind at the beginning, we'll never catch up, so we push ourselves hard in the first few weeks.

But amidst all our good intentions, we're forgetting something vitally important: the semester isn't a sprint, it's a cross-country run. And overdoing it at the outset can often mean we get burned out more quickly later on, when it matters even more.

Some long-distance runners prefer to go at a moderate pace early in the run, and then amp it up midway through once they're warmed up and comfortable. Similarly, easing yourself into your new course load may give you the chance to prepare yourself emotionally, mentally, and, yes, physically, for the academic marathon you're about to take on.

If you've got a block, you're extremely stressed, or you think you've taken on more than you can handle, then start out at a gentler pace. You've made a schedule, but you don't have to stick to it the first week or two. Giving yourself time to get accustomed to your courses—or, if you're a new student, to university-level academics in general—may put you behind a few days, but you'll easily catch those up once you find yourself getting into the flow of the semester.

Starting out strong may sound good in theory, but in the end it's a steady pace and a strong, determined finish that will make or break your academic career. Slow but steady truly does win the race.

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman



Thought Beneath Film, Part II

Thought Beneath Film is a five-piece alternative rock band based in Hamilton, Ontario. The band has recently released its debut EP, Detours, and is now touring Canada's East Coast. Recently vocalist, lyricist, and guitarist Brent Wirth took the time to talk to Wanda Waterman about Carl Jung, feeding the muse, and managing writer's block. Read Part I of this interview [here](#).

A Testament to Pent-up Energy

Thought Beneath Film throws off energy vibes typical of the Ramones and OK Go. What is the source of this kind of hyperactive intensity?

"I can't speak on behalf of all of my band members," says Brent, "but I know that Brian and I have a long history of playing in very mellow bands. Don't get me wrong—I love slow, droning songs from time to time—but I got really tired of playing music that wasn't exciting to me. I think our songs' hyperactivity is a testament to all of that pent-up energy Brian and I had from over the years."

Jung Obsessions

The lyrics on the *Detours* album reflect a mind that loves to probe the psychology of motivations and relationships. Songs like "If I Could Fix You" and "False Skin" demonstrate a preoccupation with the inner workings of the human mind.

"I never formally studied psychology," Brent admits, "but I'm fascinated by the work of Carl Jung, particularly concepts like archetypes and the collective unconscious. I'm always left wondering how much of our artistic tastes and tendencies are inherent and predefined by our heritage."

Up Against the Wall

Brent is currently suffering from major writer's block, he says. "It all comes down to inspiration, and inspiration tends to stem from direct life experiences. Recently I've been so caught up with working and preparing for the release of the album and our upcoming tour that I haven't really been out 'living life,' so to speak. Once that happens again, I'm sure the creative itch will return."

But no worries; the *oeuvre* continues to unfold. "Thankfully, we have a huge catalogue of older material we're working through to keep us busy," he says.

Feeding the Muse

"A *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce continues to have a huge influence on my life since I first read it in high school. It deals with intellectual enlightenment and coming to terms with being an artist in an overly pragmatic society. It stimulated a great deal of introspection when I was younger, and has had a huge influence on my lyric writing ever since."

"It all comes down to inspiration, and inspiration tends to stem from direct life experiences. Recently I've been so caught up with working and preparing for the release of the album and our upcoming tour that I haven't really been out 'living life,' so to speak."

Brent Wirth

Rationalizing Life Choices

"To some extent my views on religion and politics affect my creative output," says Brent, "but I never centre my lyrics on them."

"With that said, my sociological views are always at the forefront of my lyric writing. Being in my mid-20s, I'm at a point where most of my friends are making radical life changes. It has inevitably forced me to question my own life path. This ongoing struggle to rationalize my decision to pursue art and music has served as the basis for most of my lyrics recently."

DID YOU KNOW?



Student ID Cards

Studying by distance? You can still get student discounts at the movies, bookstore, or train station! According to the [AU Student Calendar](#), every "active Athabasca University student" is eligible to request a photo student identification card.

To apply, you need to complete the [required form](#) and submit a photo. Acceptable photos are "taken by an Athabasca University staff member whenever possible." However, if circumstances require it the Registrar's Office will accept a digital photo together with a copy of your driver's license, or a passport photo. If not taken by AU staff, photos must be signed by a guarantor, someone "who can attest to your identity." Further instructions can be found [here](#).

Still have last year's ID card? Don't throw it away, as AU students are only eligible for one card during the course of their studies. To keep the card current from year to year, active students may "request a date sticker from the Office of the Registrar, AU Edmonton, or AU Calgary."

DYSFUNCTIONAL LOVE LANGUAGES

Wanda Waterman





Reader Beware

Dishonesty in book reviews is nothing new. As this *Atlantic* [article](#) points out, as far back as 1846 Edgar Allen Poe bemoaned the “tissue of flatteries” that misled readers. Still, consumers have relied on respected sources like *The New York Times* book reviews to get advice on buying—or avoiding—books.

Then came the populist revolution in which anyone could post a literary opinion, giving fellow readers an honest, grassroots picture of a book’s merits. At least, that was the theory.

The reality, though, is that today’s online review system is rife with corruption. Everyone, from successful mainstream authors to struggling indies to disgruntled fans, has played a part in rigging the system to the point that it’s becoming useless.

Take the case of R.J. Ellory, a highly successful British crime writer who has won several awards (including Crime Novel of the Year 2010). Still, it seems that wasn’t quite enough for him. As *The Telegraph* [reports](#), Ellory recently admitted that he’d created fake identities to give his books five-star reviews on Amazon. Even worse, he “gave his rivals bad reviews and low ratings using the same pseudonyms.” Ellory’s case is similar to the deception pulled by Orlando Figes, the award-winning historian who wrote [fake reviews](#) slamming other history writers’ books while praising his own.

But it’s not just ego that drives the fake reviews out there; at least one reviewer was in it for the money. As David Streitfeld [reports](#) in *The New York Times*, an enterprising marketer named Todd Rutherford hit on the idea of selling reviews to authors. In 2010 Rutherford started a website offering positive reviews. For \$99, he would write one review. For \$499, he’d provide 20. For a thousand dollars, he would write 50 online reviews.

His business was shut down, but in its short existence it supplied 4,531 reviews. Odds are, those enthusiastic reviews convinced at least a handful of honest readers to part with their cash.

Streitfeld also notes that Rutherford’s fake reviews are just the tip of the iceberg. Bing Liu, a data-mining expert at the University of Illinois, Chicago, “estimates that about one-third of all consumer reviews on the Internet are fake.”

Sometimes fake reviewers are motivated by spite; their loyalty to a favourite author drives them to post scathing (and false) comments about other authors’ books. Some people simply do it to trigger a reaction from other readers, and still other reviewers have altruistic reasons, raving about mediocre books by friends or family in an attempt to be supportive.

No matter what the motive, these misleading reviews undermine the entire system—including the authors that they’re supposed to help. If consumers see a book’s page loaded with five-star reviews, it

could make them suspicious that someone's gaming the system, and prompt them to spend their money elsewhere.

The good news is that the system is relatively new, and no doubt safeguards will evolve to minimize this kind of abuse. But until readers can trust that there's a basic, widespread level of integrity behind online reviews, it's a simple case of *lector caveat*: reader beware.

S.D. Livingston is the author of several books, including the new suspense novel Kings of Providence. Visit her [website](#) for information on her writing (and for more musings on the literary world!).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK

At Home: Time Online

Sometimes it seems as though we're addicted to our technology—so it should come as no surprise that media consumption has risen among Canadians.

As the CBC [reports](#), the “amount of time Canadians spent watching television, listening to the radio and online media use increased last year.” For example, compared with media consumption in 2010, the average Canadian watches a half hour more television per week; radio programming also saw an increase.

Most significantly, “the numbers showed a continued migration towards the internet”; the average Canadian consumed 2.8 hours of Internet television per week, compared with 2.4 hours in 2010.

Also on the rise: the amount spent on communications services, which now totals “about 4.1 per cent of total household spending and about equal to the amount households spend on health care.”

Around the World: Easy Rider

Move over, Nascar drivers; one Iowa woman's driving skills under pressure made headlines recently.

As *The Kansas City Star* [reports](#), Lauri Ulvestad was no speed demon—until recently. While she was driving on an interstate highway, something went terribly wrong and the car's accelerator became stuck.

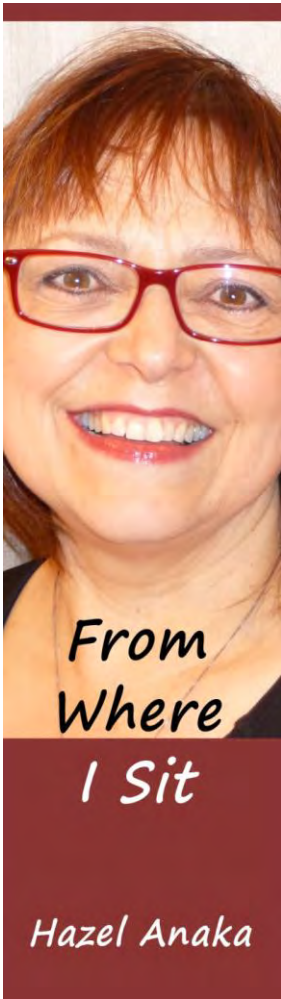
The vehicle rocketed up to 120 mph as Ulvestad frantically punched the brakes. That didn't slow down the car; “[the] gear shift wouldn't budge,” and because the vehicle was a push-button start Ulvestad “couldn't turn the key off.”

She dialed 9-1-1 while weaving in and out of traffic at dangerous speeds.

Ulvestad told reporters, “I thought I was going to die,” but she held onto the wheel and maneuvered around traffic like she'd done it all her life—driving onto the grassy median and back onto the road multiple times.

A police escort caught up with her and tried to clear the traffic to reduce the risk of casualties. Finally she was able to stop, although a trooper “had to disconnect the car's battery to get the [car] to finally die.”

State troopers “praised Ulvestad's driving prowess.”



Give Us the Numbers

Most lifestyle television programs have a regular health and nutrition segment with guest experts—dietitians, naturopaths, doctors, nutritionists, cookbook authors, and consumer advocates. Depending on their particular skill sets and biases, they try to bring us old information in a new way or even announce a new truth.

In this world full of noise and short attention spans, the presentations always seem to include visuals: charts, diagrams, graphics, animations, and objects. But never underestimate the effectiveness of shock value. Gasps from the host and audience drive the point home that this is important stuff, so pay attention, dammit!

For me, dramatic visuals work best since the picture in my mind lasts longer than with simple verbiage. So I was curious to see the latest installment of “Choose It and Lose It” on *Cityline*.

Health expert Rose Reisman tackled the summertime minefield of smoothies and shakes. She chose four retailers to focus on: Wendy’s, Coldstone Creamery, Second Cup, and Baskin Robbins. Not only did she compare two similar items from each restaurant’s menu, but she also provided visual proof of just how bad one of the choices in each set was.

In one example she compared a Wendy’s large Caramel Frosty Shake to their large Vanilla Frosty. The former had 1,000 calories and 155 grams of sugar (versus 507 calories and 81 grams of sugar in the latter). That doesn’t sound great to start with.

But just how much is 155 grams of sugar? Reisman whipped open a box holding a dozen Tim Horton’s donuts: the sugar equivalent of one shake.

And so the demonstration went. Scary-high numbers of calories and sugar, accompanied by visual cues for shock value comparisons. Is it any wonder so many of us are overweight? Especially dangerous is drinking our calories, because it takes no time at all to down the beverage. It would take a mite longer to eat the dozen donuts.

The encouraging bit of news is that there is usually a healthier choice right there on the menu. What drives me crazy is that it takes real work to get the information necessary to make the better decision. In some US restaurants the calorie count is right there in black and white on the menu or menu board.

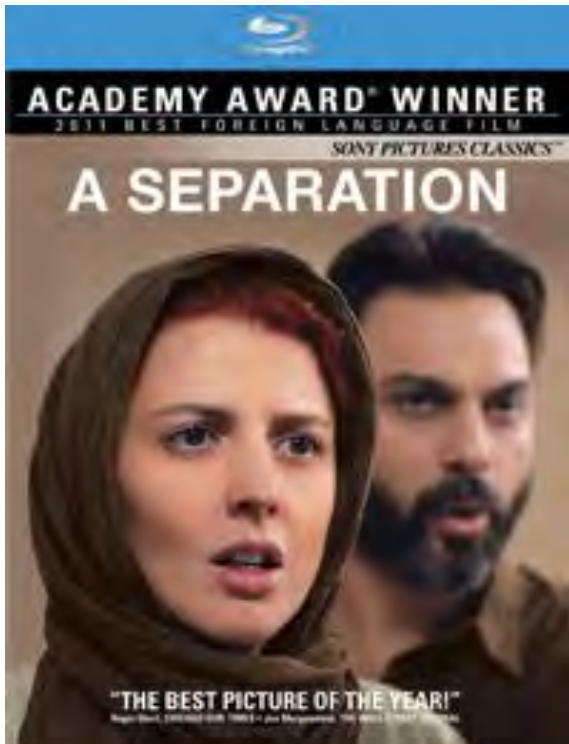
If regulators are insisting on all sorts of compliance with packaging, signage, ingredients, and inspections, then why not ask for this one more thing? Sure, I can (and do) look at the calorie count of my salad on the McDonald’s tray liner or the wall sign at Wendy’s, but how many others do? What about the numbers at the steak house or high-end restaurants?

Make it easier for us to do the right thing! Give us the numbers, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka’s first novel is *Lucky Dog*. Visit her [website](#) for more information or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

Film: **A Separation** (Sony Pictures Classics 2011)

Director/Producer/Screenwriter: Asghar Farhadi

Cast: Leila Hatami, Peyman Moaadi, Shahab Hosseini, Sareh Bayat, and Sarina Farhadi

"Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude."

William James

The Family as Nation in Turmoil

In an effort to escape a turbulent Tehran (we can assume the story's set in the wake of Iran's 2009-10 Green Revolution),

Simin and Nader have gone to a lot of trouble to acquire immigration visas for themselves and their 11-year-old daughter, Termeh. Now that the visas have arrived and will only be valid for a few months, however, Nader tells his wife he simply can't leave his father, who is now in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's. She argues that his father doesn't even know him, but Nader insists that he's his father nonetheless.

Certain that deep down Nader's love for her outweighs his sense of duty, Simin files for divorce. The judge refuses, saying she has no good reason to divorce her husband. As she leaves she throws the judge an accusing glance, as if assigning blame for the pending catastrophe.

Back home, her father-in-law knows something is wrong but is unable to name it; he grasps her arm and implores her by name ("Simeeeeeeeeeen!"). He's grown attached to her and senses her imminent departure. She's obviously touched, but remains determined to go.

Simin moves out, but she hasn't really left the country; their daughter has decided to stay with Nader, so Simin has moved in with her mother to wait for Nader and Termeh to change their minds. Nader knows his wife won't leave the country without her daughter, and he reassures Termeh that her mother's absence is just a momentary caprice.

Because she'll no longer be her father-in-law's caregiver, Simin gets her husband to hire Razieh, a gentle, refined woman married to a man whose personality disorder prevents him from providing a stable home for her and their young daughter. Even though she's pregnant, Razieh feels obliged to sneak out to work without her husband's knowledge; she needs to bring in some money to keep his creditors from dragging him off to jail every few days.

The plot presents us with a carefully constructed network of moral dilemmas. Simin is motivated by rather conventional desires: She wants a good future, especially for her daughter. Her brick wall is comprised of the distinctly nonpragmatic attitudes of those around her.

Razieh's deep religious piety, by contrast, is the ultimate deciding factor in all she does. However, her spirituality is composed more of fear and superstition than of the joy and tranquility that often settles on the deeply religious. Her unshakeable devotion to her husband exceeds that of Nader toward his father, and yet is superseded by her commitment to Muslim obedience.

The young Termeh is a jury that's perpetually out; she coolly judges the shenanigans of the adults in her life with a child's firm sense of values, all the while remaining loving and playful. Tragically, she's the major casualty in this crisis, torn between two warring value systems.

It's tempting to dislike Simin for placing desires for prosperity and stability ahead of her marriage, but the deep sensitivity of the face of actress Leila Hatami prevents us from reducing her to a shallow pragmatist. We feel Simin's sincere response to the pain around her even as we're annoyed with her tendency to avoid blame and heap it on others. We also feel for her when she realizes her husband doesn't love her enough to follow her to another country.

Because of the strange series of events that ensue, what Nader first describes as a whim of Simin's quickly becomes a permanent fissure. In the end, the marriage fails the test; Simin is embittered because her husband prefers duty to his father to love for his wife, and he's irreversibly disappointed in his wife because she's forced his to make such a difficult choice.

The realism and sincerity of the film aren't diminished by its allegorical nature. This is in fact the story of Iran and the extreme polarities of commitment (including religion, family, and material well-being) that wrench it apart despite a profound national desire for unity and peace.

"Powerful feelings expressed and retained in a volatile context can set off waves of hard feelings, vendettas, and moral compromises which in turn trigger further calamities."

It's interesting that in order to get this movie made, director Farhadi appears to have made a minor moral compromise similar to those shown in the film itself. Production was halted by the government of Iran and only restored after Farhadi publicly apologized for a speech he'd made calling for the return of certain exiled filmmakers.

Powerful feelings expressed and retained in a volatile context can set off waves of hard feelings, vendettas, and moral compromises which in turn trigger further calamities. Farhadi has succeeded in humanizing the crisis afflicting many Middle Eastern nations at this critical juncture in their histories.

A Separation manifests six of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it is about attainment of the true self; 3) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity

"When two people decide to get a divorce, it isn't a sign that they 'don't understand' one another, but a sign that they have, at last, begun to."

Helen Rowland

of creation; 4) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 5) it gives me tools of compassion, enabling me to respond with sensitivity and efficacy to the suffering around me; and 6) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

Wanda also penned the poems for the artist book They Tell My Tale to Children Now to Help Them to be Good, a collection of meditations on fairy tales, illustrated by artist Susan Malmstrom.

CLICK OF THE WRIST

School Days

September's here, so it's back to the blackboard, chalk, and workbooks. Or maybe not; over the past few years, teaching innovations in elementary, high schools, and even university and graduate programs are shifting the face of education to a multi-faceted one. Here are a few unique approaches to the three Rs:

Fresh Prep

Time to get down with history and civics—street style. Fresh Prep, an innovative approach to standardized test preparation, uses hip hop music to teach high school students history and civics as well as the vocabulary they'll need to take the tests. The *New York Times* has the details; you can also listen to a sampling on the [Fresh Prep site](#).

Doctoring Pictures

Think med school is all about science and technology? Think again. According to professors at medical schools like Harvard and Boston University, "Fluidity of thought and getting comfortable with ambiguity" are skills that med students will need when working in the medical field someday. As this Boston Public Radio story discusses, Harvard Medical School attempts to fill this gap by immersing med students in fine art in order to help them create a more integrated approach to diagnoses.

Lecture Hall

Lecture-style mega-classes at universities have been the butt of jokes, comedy sketches, and film plots for decades. Sitting in a giant hall while a professor drones on about core curriculum means the chance to text friends across the room or catch up on sleep. Not so at MIT, which a few years ago adopted a different model in some of the freshman classes. Instead of using a traditional style, professors organized the room into small groups of students and circulated the hall, teaching and guiding with the help of assistants and smart board technology.



AUSU UPDATE



AU Students urge candidates to improve university funding

AU students are concerned about the financial health of Athabasca University and the effect of recent news stories on the reputation of the AUSU membership.

A recent CBC report notes that in recent years the university has made a series of reserve draws to cover budget shortfalls, draining the once \$30-million reserve fund.

Tuition and fees at AU, meanwhile, continue to increase despite the concerns of AUSU that education is becoming increasingly unaffordable in Alberta.

“I’m very concerned about AU’s financial situation,” says AUSU President Bethany Tynes. “AU is increasing student fees, observing hiring freezes, denying sabbaticals, delaying projects, and downsizing their offices due to a lack of available funds. We don’t want to see the quality of our education diminish.”

“At the same time,” Tynes continues, “I am confused by AU Board Chair Barry Walker’s comment to the CBC that AU is ‘in a very sound financial position,’ as the concerns we’ve noted do not support the notion that we’re financially sound.”

Chronic underfunding of public post-secondary education is a factor in AU’s financial stress. AU students have lobbied Alberta in recent years to address the shortfall; our members call on the candidates in Alberta’s provincial election to make post-secondary funding a priority in their platforms and to ensure that all Alberta universities are funded equally and sufficiently. Public post-secondary institutions need a reliable, predictable funding model that provides sufficient base operating funds to support a world-class education.

Athabasca University Students' Union is the largest students' union in Alberta, representing nearly 40,000 undergraduates annually.

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This column is provided by AUSU to facilitate communication with its members. The Voice does not write or edit this section; all content has been exclusively and directly provided by AUSU, and any questions or comments about the material should be directed to ausu@ausu.org.

CLASSIFIEDS

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