

THE MYTH OF THE STUDENT HERO AND THE “DREADED LIT REVIEW”

By Dean Scheibel

Loyola Marymount University | 2018

Adapted from the original Scalar version <http://hyperbooks.library.lmu.build/dreadedlitreview>

Table of Contents

Book Creators	3
Introduction	4
Acknowledgments	6
Simple Path	8
Sympathy for the Devil.....	8
“The Call”	9
The Battle	10
Finding a Topic	10
The Library.....	11
Deciphering Academic Writing.....	12
Paraphrasing	13
The Supernatural.....	14
Procrastination	15
“The Creature”	16
Perfectionism	17
Ego.....	18
Redemption.....	19
The Superhero	19
The Journey's End.....	20
Complex Path	22
In the Garden of Knowledge	22
The Myth And The Title Page	23
“Dread” in the Garden: The Literature Review	29
Departure From The Real World: The Hero’s Journey Begins.....	31
“The Call To Adventure” On The First Day Of Class.....	32
Day One and the Comic Begins	33
“The Refusal Of The Call To Adventure”	34
The Crossing Of The First Threshold: Finding A Topic	37
The Belly Of The Whale	42
The Divinity of Academic Writing.....	44
Paraphrasing	47
The Road Of Trials: Academic Writing and Assignments	47
APA (aka American Psychological Association's style manual)	50
Paper Trials: Preliminary Assignments	51
The Lit(erature) Review As Shadow	54
“The Supernatural Aid”	58
Student Atonement With Their God	64
“The Supreme Ordeal”: Procrastination	68
“The Supreme Ordeal”: Mandalas	72
Apotheosis: Becoming a God	74
The Return From The “Kingdom Of Dread”	79
Conclusion	83
Endnotes	84
References.....	86

Book Creators

Dean Scheibel, Ph.D., Professor of Communication Studies

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Dean decided in 2014 to have students in his sections of Introduction to Research Methods create a comic reflecting on the process of writing a “standard academic paper,” and more specifically, a “literature review.” An initial version of this digital book was presented at panel on the use of comics in the classroom at the National Communication Association’s annual convention in Dallas, Texas, in 2017.

Susan Gardner Archambault, Head of Reference and Instruction

William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

Susan wrote “librarian commentary” annotations for the “Simple Path.” As the Communication Studies liaison, Susan gave information literacy instruction to Dean's students and was enthusiastic about the “comic” assignment as a technique for encouraging student reflection on the research process.

Melanie Hubbard, Digital Scholarship Librarian

William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

Melanie designed and created the [Scalar version of this book](#). As LMU's digital scholarship librarian, she leads the Library's digital pedagogy support services and facilitates larger digital projects on which she partners with faculty.

Introduction

Comics and graphic novels are on the rise, expanding beyond the realms of *Superman* and *Wonder Woman* beyond *Archie*. Graphic novels about war and racism and crime are common. And one genre of comics, “memoirs,” offers more personal stories about such topics as alienation, cancer, sexual orientation, depression, epilepsy, and alcoholism; such stories are increasingly being created, read, and studied.

Furthermore, the creation of easy-to-use computer technology that can alter photographs with a wild variety of effects, have generated a new aesthetic that makes it possible for students to create “fumetti” or “photo-comics,” to tell their own stories using words and images.

Comics are now used in a variety of educational settings. They are used to help younger students develop an interest in reading and support a wide range of educational purposes. And colleges and universities across the country offer courses on comics and graphic novels.

Comics and graphics have become objects of research; academic journals devoted to the study of comics and graphic novels now publish that research. Scholarly study of gender and sexuality, wars, crime, occupation, and disease are common. But rarely have academics examined comics that take a critical look at the academic life from the perspective of undergraduate students. It is not difficult to see why. Such comics might be critical of education, of the university, of the teacher, and the work assigned by the teacher.

A few years ago, I was approached to teach a class on graphic novels after an administrator learned I was working on my own graphic novel. While teaching that course, I asked the students to create their own comics. I discovered how much students enjoyed making them and how easy it was for students to make comics using computers. A few years after that, I found out about “Comic Life” and easy-to-use computer software used to create comics.

My first efforts using comics in the classroom were concerned with using comics to have students *reflect* on the course’s “term paper.” ([See the assignment.](#)) I thought that having students write about the process of writing a “literature review” might give them more of an appreciation for the work they were doing. As scholars have noted, we learn not only by experiencing things but by *reflecting* on those experiences.

Only later did I realize that students’ ability to use technology to tell a story in words and images would serve them very well after college. The skills of organizing a story, the manipulation of space and time, the attention to detail, proofreading, all of these things—and more—are skills useful in the world.

This book uses images from 27 student comics from roughly 125 comics created in my course, “Introduction to Communication Inquiry,” over a three-year period. Most of them were created in a couple of weeks, which was the time remaining in a semester after the students had

completed a traditional academic paper called a “literature review.” I wanted students to reflect on the process of writing a literature review by telling a story about it. I wanted them to tell the story in the form of a comic. I thought I would get a deeper and better reflection if the process was more creative, something that used images as well as words, and that required a bit of planning and organizing.

This book you are reading is guided by several theories, each of which concerns the human tendency to tell narratives and stories, from which “myths” arise. Much of what I read in students’ comics seemed to resemble the form of a heroic myth based on Joseph Campbell’s influential work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In the hero’s mythic journey, the hero leaves home, experiences much, and returns with something that is given to the hero’s tribe, culture, or world.

Into Campbell’s three-part framework, I integrate Helena Bassil-Morozow’s work on the “trickster” and the “shadow,” which are images that appear in myths (cf. Bassil-Morozow, 2015; Hynes & Doty, 1993). Both the trickster and the shadow are expressed in students’ comics. The shadow recalls students’ fear and shame about the process of writing a literature review; the comics show students’ narratives about acknowledging and transforming that shame, and fighting against the established order of classroom assignments, even while acknowledging that such assignments may have some value.

Finally, I am guided by Kenneth Burke’s writings on myth (1966, pp. 380-409; see also Coupe, 2005). This viewpoint finds the literature review to be an enemy of “divine origin,” a *nemesis*. Thus, a battle of equals is set. Burke’s ideas blend with students’ struggles and shame over their shortcomings, providing the reasons for students’ wanting to get rid of guilt, by purifying and achieving redemption.

Acknowledgments

I am much indebted to Susan Gardner Archambault and Melanie Hubbard of the William H. Hannon Library for their support and many contributions, both in terms of the creation of this book and sending it into the cosmos. Also, thanks to others affiliated with the William H. Hannon Library, including Library Dean Kris Brancolini, and librarians Jenn Masunaga and Rhonda Rosen.

Thanks to the many students who created comics in my courses. I thank them for their willingness to try their hand at comics and for letting their comics be displayed and published. In particular, I thank the students whose images grace this book, including Carina Adra, Nouf AlMarzook, Sean Baker, Jade Byrd, Lauren Delisle, Claire Dobyngs, Valente Dolcini, Justice Domingo, Alexandra Fiore, Nicole Franko, Christina Gallo, Quinn Heinrich, Madeleine Jones, Qinglan Li, Liat Lieberman, Amanda Martinez, Kateri Milanese, Emily Moore, Leah Morris, Maria Nelson, Jordan Philips, Madelyn Ryan, Renee Samuelson, Scarlett Sanchez, Juliet Sivori, Willow Wittliff, and Chandler Wright.

Many thanks to Keith Tucker, who has influenced my interest in images and graphic storytelling through our collaborative partnership on a graphic novel.

Thanks to Professor Holli Levitsky, who invited me to co-teach a course, Jewish Graphic Novels, which led to my decision to have students create comics.

Thanks to Julie Patterson and Loyola Marymount University's Institutional Research Board, who helped me with the process of developing research proposals that allowed me to conduct research on students' comics.

Thanks to Professor Michele Hammers and Lisa Lugo, who have supported and scheduled me to teach courses about comics and graphic novels.

Thanks to Professor Judy Battaglia, who sends me links to online comics.

Thanks to CFA Dean Bryant Keith Alexander and Associate Dean Judy Scalin for supporting my scholarship, and creative work. And Rachel Van Houten, for giving me articles and books on comics and graphic novels.

Thanks to Professor Jane Brucker for her support of the Student Comix Show, which presented 40 of my students' comics, which was hosted by the Thomas P. Kelly, Jr. Student Art Gallery. And to Professor Molly Corey and her class for curating the show. And to Professor Gino Brancolini for creating the video about the show.

Special thanks to Professor Susie McDaniel, my wonderful life partner, and spouse, for our numerous conversations, her editing, her ideas about this project, and her support of my

interest in comics. And to our dogs Brigit and Molly, who may someday be characters in their own comic.

Special thanks to my dad and mom, Bob and Barbara Scheibel, and my brother Ian Scheibel, and my sister, K.C. Fox, for their support of my research and interest in comics and graphic novels.

Simple Path

What you are about to read is my analysis of students' comics on how they wrote their literature reviews.¹ There are two different versions of the story, the "complex path" and the "simple path." This path, "simple path," is more straightforward and only has a bit of theory. This path also features commentary from Susan Gardner Archambault, Head of Reference and Instruction at Loyola Marymount's William H. Hannon Library.



Lauren Delisle

this includes tasks such as finding and reading and taking notes on other research studies that are super-hard to understand.

The "literature review" is a big, scary assignment that each student will work on for three months. It will push the student to her limits. It will scare her and shame her, and bring her to tears, before turning it into me to be graded. "Muahahaha!" says the Devil. And after that, the

Sympathy for the Devil

I guess I should be pleased to introduce myself. I'm the Devil. At least that's how I'm being portrayed by Lauren Delisle, who was one of my students. The image above is taken from Lauren's comic, which tells her story of how she was "commanded" by me to write something called a "lit review." The "lit review" or "literature review" is a "dreaded" assignment. "Dread." Rhymes with "dead." It could kill you. Which is the reason Lauren imagines me as the Devil who appears to her in a nightmare as she sleeps.

The story you are about to read is made up from a bunch of my students' comics,² which were all written after they had completed writing the "lit review," which is an assignment in my first-year course in "research methods," which attempts to teach students how to do research;

¹ **Librarian Commentary:** There is recognized the educational value in assignments such as learning logs or diaries where students reflect on their progress as learners. See [Gray \(2007\)](#) and [Friesner & Hart \(2005\)](#).

² **Librarian Commentary:** The assignment that produced all of the comics in this book was shared in [CORA \(Community of Online Research Assignments\)](#), an open educational resource for faculty and librarians. Other instructors can freely comment on the assignment or adapt it for their own re-use.

student will have to create a story—in the form of a comic book—that tells how she wrote the literature review. The comic’s story is how the students deal with their feelings of shame.³



“The Call”

As students begin their journey in my class, they may refuse my call to begin the literature review assignment. But this is common at the beginning of the semester. Students are coming back from vacation, and even though they know that they have a lot to do, they often don’t want to start doing the work.⁴

Thus, in Justice Domingo’s comic, with her arms folded across her chest, head down on her desk, she has convinced herself that she has “nothing to write” about, will “fail this class,” and even questions whether she even “really need[s] to go to college.” Her attitude toward the lit review is represented as one of defeat. She is powerless against the assignment and the devil professor who assigned her the lit review. The word

Justice Domingo

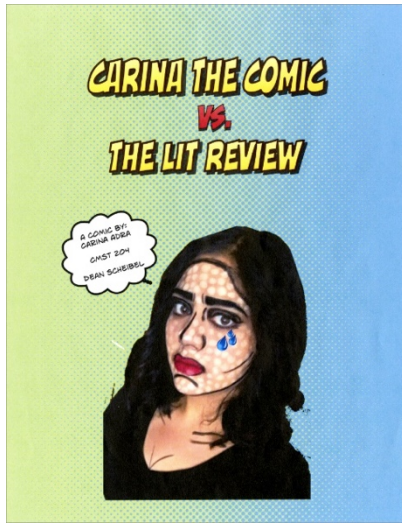
“fuck” is profanity⁵ and that which is profane shows disrespect for sacred things. If we wanted to think about the “literature review” as something sacred, awesome, and dreaded, Justice’s profanity might be interpreted to mean that she believes she will be “fucked” if she has to write the lit review.

³ **Librarian Commentary:** [Project Information Literacy \(PIL\)](#), a nonprofit research institute that conducts studies on how college students find and use information, found that 10 out of the 12 adjectives students used to describe how they feel about research assignments were negative. The negative adjectives used were fear, angst, tired, dread, anxious, annoyed, stressed, disgusted, confused, and overwhelmed.

⁴ **Librarian Commentary:** 84% of the students surveyed in a [Project Information Literacy study](#) said the most difficult step of the research process is getting started.

⁵ **Librarian Commentary:** The library decided not to censor the comics in any way when they featured them in exhibits or repositories because these authentic expressions of frustration are an essential part of the learning process.

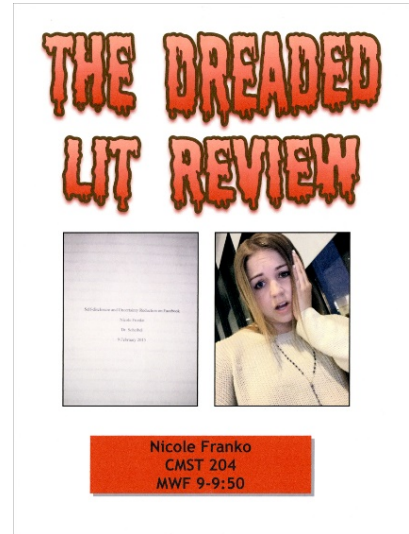
The Battle



Carina Adra

The cover of Carina’s comic pits Carina against the “lit review” (or more, properly, the “literature review”). The tears on her face suggest that the battle between her and the “lit review” was hard-won and that she experienced pain and difficulty. Most importantly, in calling herself “Carina the Comic,” she is identifying herself with the comic rather than with the “lit review.” The title page recognizes the often combative relationship between the student and the “lit review. (For students, it seems, the “lit review” is not merely an assignment, it is a battle and the enemy.⁶)

The title page from Nicole Franko’s comic is dripping blood. And the “lit review” is shown as something that fills students with “dread.” Nicole has created an



Nicole Franko

image of the “lit review” as something dreadful, something that oozes blood; and that which bleeds also

lives. The students create an image of the assignment as something to be feared, something that might, in fact, defeat them. But in creating a fearful adversary, they are making it possible to become a hero. Because to be a student hero requires that you defeat something that could also defeat you.



Seanna Duong

Finding a Topic

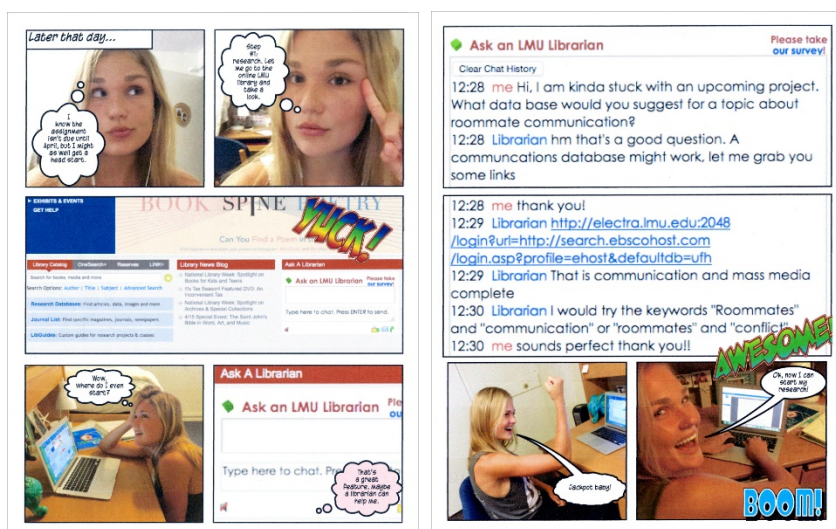
The first step on the literature review road is finding a topic. The topic is something that has already been studied. And students need to find these published research studies. These studies—each of which contains its own literature review—will help guide

⁶ **Librarian Commentary:** One positive learning disposition mentioned in the new [Association of College & Research Libraries \(ACRL\) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](#) is grit- students must learn persistence in the face of failed searches or a shifting research topic and come to terms with the fact that research is iterative, not linear.

students through the process of developing their own literature reviews. However, finding a topic is not an easy thing to do.

Seanna Duong's⁷ comic represents her search for a topic to fishing, which she suggests includes an element of luck. However, this strategy turns out to be a bad idea. After a week, Seanna presents herself in the form of a skeleton, a metaphor for death. The skeleton humorously suggests death from old age. Fortunately, Seanna was able to find a topic that worked for her.

Sometimes students are able to find a topic by themselves. However, students often require help.⁸ As the teacher, I try to help them and to lead them to a topic that they might find interesting. I invite them to my office. We talk about what they find interesting, probing for possible topics. Maybe tattoos, or graffiti, or gossip, or romantic jealousy.



Emily Moore

direction to help students, as is shown in Emily Moore's comic. Notice that the words "jackpot" and "boom" both express Emily's belief that she has won something of unexpected and great value.¹⁰

The Library

The sources that students need are all accessed through the William H. Hannon Library are places of mystery⁹ to students. On the one hand, students fear them, because students don't know how to find what they need; they become lost in a sea of electronic databases and online journals. However, the library also provides aid and

⁷ **Librarian Commentary:** The library displayed Seanna's fabulous hand-drawn comic "The Lit Review & Me" in its entirety [as an exhibit](#). We continued featuring student comics in the library and wrote about them on the [library news blog](#).

⁸ **Librarian Commentary:** Another positive learning disposition mentioned in [ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](#) is the critical self-reflection required to spend time exploring a topic with curiosity and an open mind. One of the biggest challenges for students is to choose a manageable topic that is not too narrow or too broad. Feedback from the professor on this front ensures that the student chooses a topic with the appropriate scope.

⁹ **Librarian Commentary:** In [another PIL study](#), the average college library had 19 times as many online library databases and 9 times as many books and journals as the average high school library!

important in the academic text. And yet, she is still not able to “understand” what the words mean. Moreover, Qinglan recognizes that she can’t “paraphrase” what she can’t understand.

Paraphrasing



Willow Wittliff

looks for divine guidance (“Oh dear lord... APA”) while feeling shamed by her lack of knowledge about how to do APA, and thus heaps profanities on herself (“shit” and “crap”).

Similarly, Claire Doby’s comic acknowledges the difficulty of writing APA citations, which she represents as “kicking [her] ass.” The idea that both APA and the “lit review” are entities with whom the student battles is very clear (“This lit review is shitting on you right now when it should be the other way around”). In representing the battle between the “lit review” and herself, Claire faces herself in her mirror, pointing an accusing finger at herself, knowing she needs to motivate herself. The metaphor of being “shit on” expresses ideas about power relationships. Who is shitting on whom?

Nowhere is the student more clearly confronted with their own limitations than when faced with the task of paraphrasing, or, “rewording,” academic writing into their own words. Often the task of paraphrasing includes the use of a particular set of rules for how to “cite” the academic texts. In my class, students use the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines. As the following representations suggest, the use of APA is a problem for students.¹²

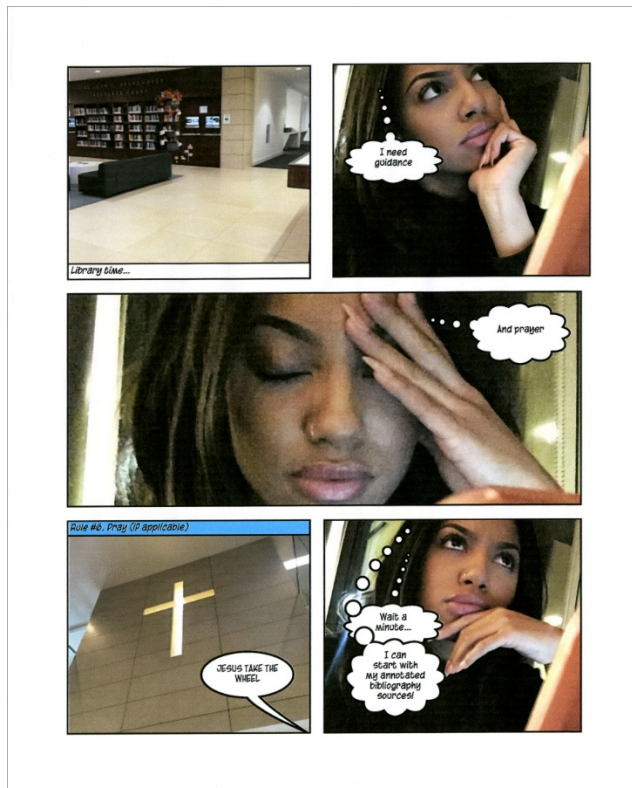
In Willow Wittliff’s comic, the use of “the dreaded APA format” is frustrating, raising additional questions about how the student should handle academic texts. The labeling of APA as “dreaded” raises the idea that this type of writing somehow possesses its own sinister divinity, at once awesome and awful. Thus, Willow



Claire Doby's

¹² **Librarian Commentary:** APA format is difficult, but it’s an important first step on the road to demonstrating a sense of responsibility to the academic community. By citing sources correctly in APA style, students are giving proper attribution and beginning to contribute to the scholarly conversation within Communication Studies.

The Supernatural



Jade Byrd

In myths, the hero is typically accompanied and helped by some sort of “supernatural aid” (Campbell, p. 69). In students’ comics, the supernatural aid is represented by a wide range of characters,¹³ some of which are familiar to many.

In Jade Smith’s comic, the student seeks “guidance” through “prayer,” appealing to “Jesus” to “take the wheel.” Of particular interest is the merging of the supernatural with the institutional. That is, the image of the crucifix is enacted through the architecture of the library; and the light shining through the crucifix image furthers the idea that the library is a god-like source of light of knowledge. The library and its many resources are the “supernatural aid,” providing most of the resources and help that the student needs in order to do the literature review.

While supernatural aids are common, so are other types of aids including literary figures, movie and television characters, fairies, and comic book superheroes.

¹³ **Librarian Commentary:** [Carr & Claxton \(2002\)](#) believe that playfulness is a positive learning disposition. This involves being able to construct variations on learning situations and generate alternative inner fantasies.



Lauren Delisle

Procrastination

Supernatural aids are not necessarily always helpful. Rather, they can be “tricksters” who may both help and hinder the student hero (see Bassil-Morozow, 2015). For example, in Lauren Delisle’s comic, SpongeBob SquarePants both aids Lauren and leads her astray.

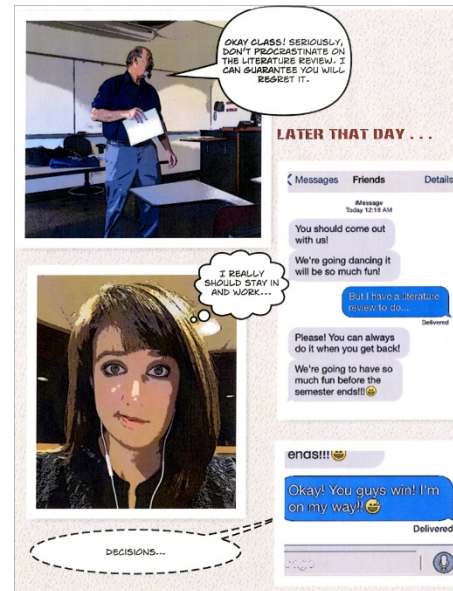
In her comic, the idea that the student has plenty of time to do the literature review may serve as a reason or motive for procrastination, for not doing the “productive” work needed to complete the literature review (e.g., “Productivity is for suckers! Turn up the Bob Marley, man”¹⁴).

Students’ comics often portray procrastination as the “supreme ordeal” with which students must grapple. The supreme ordeal is an “expansion of consciousness and

therefore of being” (Campbell, p. 246). This is where the student may come to realize that the real battle is not with the literature review; rather, the battle is internal, something within the student.

The idea of procrastination, from the perspective of the student, may simply be a well-deserved break from their labors. This may take the form of a nap, a meal, an afternoon of shopping for clothes, or an evening out with friends.

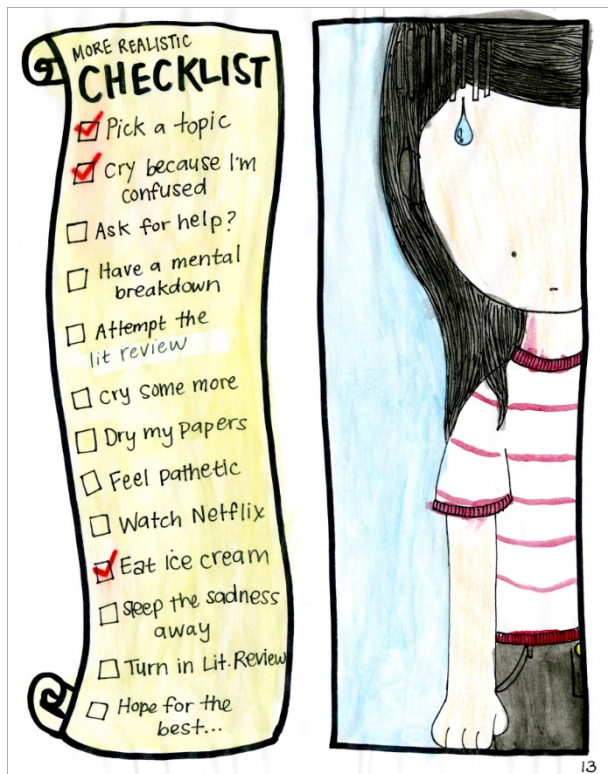
In Jordan Phillips’ comic, the student recognizes that she “should stay in and work” on her literature review. The idea is that a student “should” do certain things (e.g., “stay in and work”) in order to live up to the traditional expectations of being a good/serious student. Jordan’s decision to not do what she “should” do suggests her recognition that she is “perfectly” imperfect and willing to give in to her inner trickster.



Jordan Phillips

¹⁴ **Librarian Commentary:** Procrastination is a common theme in almost all the comics. I think it goes back again to students not understanding research is nonlinear. They expect to find, read, and incorporate their sources the night before the assignment is due, whereas more experienced researchers know to leave time for failure and eventual serendipity. One way for faculty to help with this problem is through scaffolding or breaking the assignment into smaller portions and giving feedback on each portion.

Ego



Seanna Duong

In Seanna Duong's comic, Seanna first shows herself with a sparkle in her eye and an egocentric sense of self and infallibility; this is represented through the rational logic of lists. Seanna thinks that she is superior to the task and superior to her fellow students. Seanna seeks "victory," "eternal glory and honor," where she "get[s] an A in the class," and "laughs at others." However, after faltering on initial assignments, Seanna realizes that she "would have to re-think [her] checklist." In the new, "more realistic checklist," Seanna acknowledges her limitations. In one sense, the second checklist is a critique of the false logic of her own out-of-control ego.¹⁵

In this image, Seanna's drawing of herself shows herself as something of a prisoner to her own ego. The series of vertical bars on her head suggests she is a prisoner to her own consciousness; similarly, the horizontal lines on

her shirt suggest the uniform of a jailed convict. Her downturned face and the sweat dripping from her brow all suggest the student as a pitiable mess. And this is exactly as Seanna shows herself: dirty, grungy, surrounded by trash as flies buzz around her. She feels helpless and clueless.

¹⁵ **Librarian Commentary:** [Carr & Claxton \(2002\)](#) believe resilience is a positive learning disposition required for lifelong learning. Indicators of resilience include sticking with a difficult learning task even when the outcome is uncertain and recovering from setbacks relatively quickly.

the student wears an Olympian golden wreath and is bathed in golden light, suggesting the image of a god.

Some comics even draw on superheroes and super-villains to frame the student myth of doing the literature review. In Nouf AlMarzook's comic, the student's writing of the literature review is framed as necessary to save the human race from annihilation. And when Nouf's comic alter-ego, Zoookk, successfully writes the literature review and defeats the "Villains of the Lit," she is invited by a league of superheroes ("The League of Scheibels") to join them, a god-like superhero.

The Journey's End

The hero's journey begins with the hero leaving the everyday world and traveling to a new world, where the hero faces a series of trials and obstacles. At the end of the journey, the hero returns to her world as a changed person and brings with her the knowledge that can help her community, her culture, her tribe, her world. In the student's journey, this knowledge is imparted through the narrative represented in the form of a comic.¹⁶

While each student completes their own literature review, it is merely an academic paper that the student struggles to complete, and then turns in. If the paper has been turned in at the end of the semester, often the student will not even bother to pick up the paper at the beginning of the following semester. It is a not uncommon sight to see boxes of unclaimed papers in cardboard boxes outside of faculty offices.

In contrast, students' comics dramatize the students' academic efforts, creating a myth that valorizes the hero's journey, where students may face monsters and be aided by supernatural entities. As a form of creative writing, the creation of these comics¹⁷ offers a new way for students to understand their academic endeavors (Bartholomae, 1995; Elbow, 1991).

What should we make of students' self-mythologizing stories? At the very least, asking students to create comics offers them a way to creatively assess what the doing of the work is actually like. It is a way for students to acknowledge and select various moments of fear and shame, and a way for students to play with, to reflect and deflect those moments. By treating that which is shameful with some humor, students find a way to rewrite those shameful experiences, and perhaps to transcend the shame.

¹⁶ **Librarian Commentary:** This assignment illustrates the power of visual narrative as a technique for encouraging student reflection and meta-cognition about the research process. Some of the comics capture students coming to terms with their failures and expressing them in a creative way.

¹⁷ **Librarian Commentary:** Students frequently addressed struggles with topic selection, seeking help and guidance, time management skills, citations, and the search process in their comics. I would like to see more on how they organized the information, took notes, synthesized, and constructed a research-based argument addressed in future comics.

Universities are tribes made up of other tribes, including tribes of students and tribes of professors. The tribes meet under various circumstances, including the classroom. Perhaps students' comics are offering up a counter-ideology to that of just doing the work that they were assigned to do. Let's remember that I assigned the literature review, and while they had a few choices, those choices were limited. "Do the work" I said, and so they did.

In students' comics, one part of the business of the university is examined—the comics question and critique the lit review. We rarely see this. Rarer still is that the comics offer up their critique playfully, in a style that is fun to read and easy on the eyes. Academic research could possibly learn something from comics.¹⁸

¹⁸ **Librarian Commentary:** The library selects [the best student comics](#) and preserves them for future readers by digitizing them and placing them in [LMU's open-access institutional repository](#).

Complex Path

What you are about to read is my analysis of students' comics on how they wrote their literature reviews. There are two different versions of the story, the "complex path" and the "simple path." This one, the "complex path," includes ideas about myth and ideology, the trickster and the shadow, and shame, guilt, and redemption. (And a lot more pictures from my students' comics.) The "simple path" only has a bit of "theory" and features commentary from Susan Gardner Archambault, Head of Reference and Instruction at Loyola Marymount University's [William H. Hannon Library](#).

In the Garden of Knowledge

In the beginning, before college students existed, there was Adam and Eve. They are thought—by many people—to be the original humans, expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating fruit from the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." Back then, knowledge belonged only to God, and Adam and Eve's gaining of that knowledge was named "original sin." Adam and Eve had *sinned* and were kicked out of the Garden of Eden. This story is a narrative and is a defining myth of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. You can look it up.

But times have changed. Sort of. Today, knowledge is considered a good thing, a useful thing. If you want evidence, watch the beginning of the movie *Animal House*. The scene is also in a garden, one located in a college. The camera focuses on a statue of the college's founder, moves down to the statue's base, and closes in on a plaque that reads "Knowledge is Good." Or, maybe this image is mocking us, a snarky *critique* of our educational system. *Animal House* mocks much about university life, so maybe we shouldn't take it as "The Truth" on matters of knowledge. What can I tell you...watch the movie.

From the third-floor window in my classroom, students look down into Loyola Marymount University's Sunken Garden, which has a few palm trees. This is Southern California, a mile from the beach. The Sunken Garden is so-named because the floor of the wide circular garden is about four feet *lower* than the *higher* edge, where life persists. This *highness and lowness* is a metaphor for the tensions surrounding knowledge and people. I'm up, you're down. Or maybe it's the other way around.

The word "sunken" also means depressed, even gloomy. This might be a problem, particularly if we associate "knowledge" with the *process of learning*. In that case, knowledge might not be a good thing. Perhaps you know students who get depressed when they have to write term papers. You know the kind. Citing sources, combining sources, making arguments, and creating a *synthesis*. Perhaps you *are* such a person. Perhaps for you, having to write such a paper—even if it is in the "pursuit of knowledge"—is a hard thing, a bad thing.

LMU's William H. Hannon Library, like the Garden of Eden, is a Garden of Knowledge. And trees. The library is filled with books. Where do books come from? Trees. And if you look up the word "book" in a dictionary, it says it comes from a Latin word for a type of tree: a beech tree. Why is this? Because early writing was done on wooden tablets made from these trees. In fact, the word "library" comes from a word for the inner bark or rind of a tree, upon which words were written. And for early "pagans"—think of people minus formal religious institutions—trees, like knowledge, were sacred. Spirits. God.

The story in *this* book is made up of students' stories about how they write a term paper—a "literature review"—in my class on research methods. I use their stories, which are created as comics, or "comix" (a "mix" of words and images), to show how students' comix portray their pursuit of knowledge as a heroic narrative, a myth of combat and conquest, a myth of becoming.

Myths, such as the one about Adam and Eve, have their roots in *images*: the ancient images of the universe as chaos and cosmos; the images of our human instincts toward love (*eros*) and death (*thanatos*). And by "myth," I don't mean a story that is not true. By myth, I mean a story that connects humans to the cosmos, connects people to the cosmic order of the universe, and connects students to the cosmic order of the university. And these myths show relationships of power, which we call "ideology."

Comics have been considered *sinful* by violating traditional ways of doing things. That's because comics, or, "comix," are viewed as an affront to the idea of "purity." Comics *mix* "words" and "images." But traditionalists argue that each art should seek its own perfection. Literature reviews should be only words; photographs only images. Therefore, the *mixing* of "words" and "images" is considered *sinful* (cf. Groensteen, 2009). But this mixing is also *synthesis*. As students mix parts together—both within literature reviews and within comix, and make arguments for new research, they learn how knowledge evolves. And knowledge—and our myths of knowledge—transforms, moves forward, from "original sin" to "original synthesis."

The Myth And The Title Page

Let's look at the "title page" of some students' comics about their experiences writing the literature review. The idea is that the title of a work serves as a "summary" of the comic's story; but the title also expresses the students' attitude toward the literature review. The attitude is often continued within students' comics, as the students tell their stories about writing the literature review.

Examples of titles from student comics:

"Trials and Tribulations of Writing a Lit Review: My Own Personal Hell"

"The Odyssey of Impossibility"

"Playmaker's Lit Review Conquest"

"Four Months in 204: A Research Communications Class of Epic Proportions"

“Weeks of Hard Work: The Process of Making a Lit Review”
“What the Lit?!?!?!?: Post Lit Review”
“League of Scheibels”
“The Dreadful Literature Review”
“How to Make Your Review Lit”
“The Story of the Dreaded Lit Review”
“How to Survive a Lit Review: A Rule Book to Success”
“My Worst Nightmare”
“A Journey Through the Semester: How I Created My Lit Review”
“The Seven Stages of Grief in Writing a Literature Review”
“The Journey of Writing a Lit Review”
“CMST 204: The Deadly Literature Review”
“Carina the Comic vs. The Lit Review”
“The Literature Review of Death”

Students’ comics were created after the students finished writing the literature review. However, what is clear is that these titles suggest that students’ attitude toward the “literature review” is that of a fearsome challenge. The “literature review” is an object often viewed as a dangerous opponent. The “literature review” is their *nemesis*, their enemy. And the process is...a quest.

The title pages often suggest a combat myth (Burke, 1966). In doing so, the titles raise the image of the student to that of a hero. This is done, in part, by the students’ creating an image of the literature review to that of a fearsome challenge. The writing of the literature review is put forward as the battling of opposing gods, the student and the literature review. If the literature review is the students’ nemesis, understand that the word “nemesis” is rooted in the name of a Greek goddess, one who inflicts vengeance and justice (Guralnik, p. 830). In the course of the battle, the student-hero discovers her divinity. Thus, the titles forecast an “epic” battle, a mythic journey. The student is valorized, becomes a hero, even god-like.

The words in the titles suggest the idea of myth (cf. Burke, 1966; Campbell, 1973). And the titles of the comics—all written after completing the literature review—suggest the difficulty linked to the assignment, but more than that, reveal students’ attitude toward their work, and their *desire to retell their individual stories of writing the literature review terms that seem—to me—mythic*.

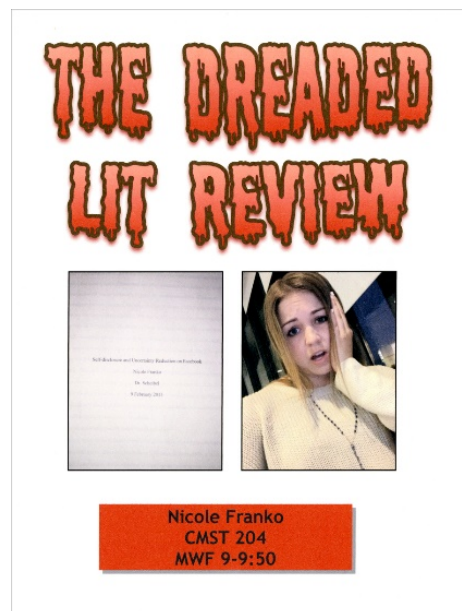
The titles of students’ comics are represented in mythic and ideological terms. For now, let’s consider “ideology” to represent ideas concerning *issues of social power*. Consider the words: Death, Odyssey, Hell, Epic, Dread, Journey, Trials, Conquest, and “vs.” (short for “versus,” which suggests a contest between opposing parties or ideas). These titles try to sum up students’ experiences with writing the “literature review.” In creating the title of the comic, the student

performs a symbolic act that “dances an attitude” about the student’s relationship with the literature review that the title expresses (Burke, 1973, p. 9; see also Heath, 1986, chap. 4).

These titles suggest power relationships that are barely hidden by the titles. The literature review is an example of “academic writing” that academic disciplines such as Communication Studies, and universities and professors want students to learn. In my class *the* “literature review” is a synthesis of published research studies that serve as an argument that justifies the asking of a research question (e.g., How do same-sex siblings express their jealousy?). Students don’t want to write literature reviews. But I want them to. And so, does my academic department. And my university. Thus, the “literature review” is a form of the “dominant values” that the comics may either support or question and critique (McAllister, Sewell, & Gordon, 2001, p. 2; see also, Duncan, Smith & Levitz, 2015, pp. 339-346).

Let’s take a closer look at the words and images of two title pages; the images below reveal much about the mythic nature of the literature review assignment. We’ll be looking at the content in terms of myth and considering the word “dread,” since both Nicole Franko’s and Alexandra Fiore’s title pages feature variations of the word (“dreadful” and “dreaded”).

According to the *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, the word “dread” suggests intense fear as well as “reverence” and “awe.” While “reverence” is often used in reference to things that are sacred or holy, the word “awe” swings both ways. And the word “awe” is associated with things that are “awful” (e.g., hate, death) as well as things that are “awesome” (e.g., love, god). So, we can be awed by both these things: love (also called *eros*) and death (also called *thanatos*). We can understand how the ideas of love and death fit together in terms of students’ *desire, which is a kind of love*, to complete a hard task—like writing of the “literature review”—and *the completion or gratification of that desire*, which we can understand as the *death of that desire*. In this sense, “love” and “death” reflect the purpose of the myth (Burke, 1966).



Nicole Franko

Nicole Franko’s title page shows her facial expression, suggesting a sense of awe or apprehension, directed outward toward the reader. The words “The Dreaded Lit Review” is colored red, with the image of blood dripping from the letters. Although blood sometimes suggests death, it also suggests life. The “Dreaded Lit Review” *bleeds*, just like Nicole. Thus, she and “The Dreaded Lit Review” have something in common; they share the *substance of blood*. And the sharing of substance provides for a means for Nicole to *identify with the literature review*. They both *live*. This is significant because the “*awesome properties*’ of blood” create the possibility of various types of interactions between the student and the literature review (Makarius, 1993, p. 71; emphasis added; see also Durkheim, 1897, cited in Makarius).



Alexandra Fiore

Alexandra Fiore's title page's photo shows Alexandra looking up at the title ("The Dreadful Literature Review"), as if she is pleading or seeking intervention from a divine power ("Can this be over yet?") to deliver her from an evil task, which inspires her sense of awe. In both titles, the images of student's hands and facial expressions support the idea that the literature review is something that is both feared, and awed. However, Alexandra's title, with its rainbow coloring, suggests something hopeful, something mythically unifying and divine.

The myth summarized in these images is that of the student in the middle of a battle. In the battle, the student's nemesis is the literature review. Importantly, the titles suggest that the literature review is a worthy adversary, a match for the student. The outcome of the

battle—victory for one, and the defeat of the other—is still to be determined, although in reality, by the time the students have created the comic, they have completed "the dreaded literature review." Thus, the comics' titles suggest a dangerous enemy, making the student's conquest of that enemy heroic.

In having students create comics about doing the literature review, I am opening a door that allows students to create a narrative or a story that can reflect on the process of doing traditional academic writing (i.e., logic, argumentative reasoning in support of a thesis, and citing academic sources as evidence to support their argument). I am also asking the students to place themselves at the center of the story. In contrast, traditional academic writing asks the author to disappear behind the argument being made. So, my assignment—the comic—asks the students to place their own experiences of writing front and center, to tell the story in the first-person (i.e., "I," "me," "my"), and to use images as well as words.

Nicole's title drips blood, suggesting the transformation of the literature review from a bloodless, non-living "assignment" into a living, bleeding thing, marking the literature review's metamorphosis into a "trickster." The trickster is a mythic figure, and Nicole's title reflects shape-shifting abilities. Other characteristics of tricksters are as creators of chaos; tricksters may uphold or disrupt existing social orders or hierarchies while making fun of them, breaking boundaries; tricksters may lose control or gets others to lose control; they may be obsessed with sex and swear a lot; and they tend to disappear or dissolve when the story is over (Basil-Morozow, 2015; Hynes & Doty, 1993).

If the student is the hero, the literature review represents both the shadow and trickster sides of the hero. *As a "shadow" image, the literature review is shown as an extension of a student's shame, fear, and lack of control.* But in the image of the "trickster" such fear and shame are

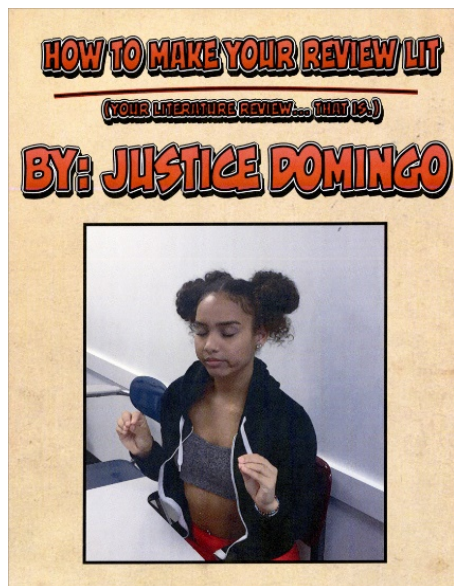
acknowledged and may show the student's reactions to the literature review assignment. Thus, within the comic the trickster may serve to highlight the existing social orders. Nicole's bleeding title brings the literature to life, but the shedding of blood also suggests the literature review's vulnerability; it can be conquered by the student.

In looking at the titles of the comics, the "literature review" (and its abbreviation, "lit review") is often mentioned, although the term "trickster" is not. However, the idea that the literature review has been transformed into a tricky adversary, the student's nemesis, is a start to understanding the literature review as a "trickster."

Many of the students' comics' titles reflect students' choices to name or rename the "literature review" as the "lit review." What to make of this? This is not merely a shortening, an abbreviation of a word. No. "Lit" is a change in the substance and meaning of a word. Students are symbol-users, word-creators and the creation of the "lit review" reflects and selects meanings somehow related to students' experiences of writing the "literature review."

Consider the title page of Justice Domingo. "Lit" pushes "literature" aside as "lit" takes the spotlight. The word "literature" refers to written research reports; the word is class-based and high-brow; it is a word used by academics, by professors. In contrast, "lit" is more than mere abbreviation; rather, "lit" is current student slang, suggesting brightness, excitement, action, even sexuality, and alcohol and drugs (e.g., "lit up") (see Mish, p. 726). The trickster connotations of "lit" are understood as cool and crazy, manic, and even out-of-control. "Lit" brings it closer to the student.

In this sense, the "lit review" is breaking the boundaries of what a "literature review" is supposed to be; it is not the proper name for a term paper; rather, it seeks a different shape, a different name, one that suggests that it may be out-of-control, given its "lit" potential in terms



Justice Domingo

of sex and alcohol. All these ideas or themes or motifs are the sign of the trickster (see Bassil-Morozow, pp. 12-31). And the renaming the "lit" review also suggests an empowerment of the students by mocking the high-brow origins ("literature"), taking it down a peg, making an ideological challenge to the dominant values of academia.

The change from "literature" to "lit" reflects the students' myth-making abilities, and attests to students' ability to establish their own ideological foundations, their own shaping of schoolyard power relations. So, let's accept the possibility that the term "literature review" and its "lit" alter-ego might possess complexity and mystery that might be revealed in the telling of the myth.

WHAT THE LIT?!?!?!?

LIAT LIEBERMAN DATE: APRIL 25, 2016

COMM 204



Liat Lieberman

Review,” which suggests the word “posthumous,” meaning “after death” (Guralnik, p. 1113). The associations between sex and death are many, mythic, and need not be recounted here.

Consider Liat Lieberman’s title page, which reflects ideas associated with both shadow and trickster. “What the Lit?!?!?!?” substitutes “lit” for “fuck” (as in “What the fuck?!?!?!?”), which suggests the student’s shock and outrage at having to do the “literature review.” It suggests a rebelling against the structured world assigned to the student; and this rebellion is the student’s strategic projection of the student’s loss of control, an idea common to the trickster. Finally, the student’s use of the term “lit” as a substitute for “fuck” might be linked to the trickster’s potential for boundary-breaking and sexual obsession (see Bassil-Morozow, Chap. 1). The image of the “grinning skull” suggests that the student has survived a near-death experience, while successfully defeating the literature review. This works well with the comic’s subtitle, “Post Lit

Finally, consider Carina Adra’s title page. The term “versus” commonly is used to suggest a contest, in which the outcome is uncertain. However, the title suggests a bit more. On the one hand, “Carina the Comic” suggests a merging of the person, Carina, with the comic that Carina has created. Her manipulation of the photograph of herself, to which lines, spots, and tears are added, creates a character that seems not completely human; in short, Carina resembles a character one might see in a comic book. And if we consider Carina to *be* the comic, then the title suggests *a contest between two different ways of writing, the comic versus the literature review*. Carina is moving beyond saying that students should experience both types of writing; rather, she is suggesting that these different types of writing are locked in combat. And as the



Carina Adra

battle begins, it is the narrative within the comic that controls the story, the myth. Traditional logic and reason are the enemy. And as a form of writing, the comic has mythic potential, which is a staple in the universe of comic superheroes (see Duncan, et al.).

Carina’s title suggests that the idea of a trickster is NOT limited to being a character in a story, but that the telling of the story in the form of a comic might be considered a form of trickster discourse in its own right. That is, the “sinful” nature of comic discourse—the combined use of both words and images—represents an ideology in opposition to the accepted and dominant patterns of academic discourse (see Bartholomae, 1995; Doueihy, 1993; Elbow, 1991). The comic—as an enactment of the trickster—breaks the

structural boundaries of existence, pushing itself to combine with the student hero.

In sum, the student-hero myth and the ideological power relations are reflected in both the *words* of the titles and the *images* shown in students' comics' title pages. The analysis of the comic titles previews the student journey, a mythic confrontation between students and the "dreaded lit review." The literature review is represented as both the "shadow," a projection of the shame and fear of the students, and as the expression of the student as "trickster," in the transformed "lit" review.

Although "lit" is an abbreviation for "literature," it also refers to being drunk. But it also refers to light. Thus, the comic shines light on the literature review, shines light on the shadow, and acknowledges the shame of the shadow. Thus, the "lit" review, portrayed in the comic, reveals the student's trickster sensibilities.

"Dread" in the Garden: The Literature Review

You are a student. You expect to do the "assignments" I assign you. And you have always done assignments, homework, *papers*. As a student, your progress is marked by finishing papers. And now you're in college. Student, meet your new term paper: the "literature review."

This book that you are now reading follows Joseph Campbell's ideas about the journey of the mythic hero. In the journey, the individual leaves the everyday world behind and is "swallowed" into a new world, where she finds support, encounters numerous obstacles, a "road of trials." But she returns to her tribe, society, culture, or world, bringing back something of great value to her people.

Within the myth of the student hero are two opposing forces: scholars call them "the shadow" and "the trickster." As you read my interpretation of the students' comics, I will refer to these two archetypes again and again. The students' comics *do not* use these terms—"shadow" and "trickster"—but many of the things that the students talk about reflect the ideas of these archetypes. You could say that the shadow and the trickster are images, processes, feelings, that are going on within the students, and get expressed in students' comics about doing the literature review.

As a place to start, let's consider the "literature review" as an academic paper the students write. And let's—at least tentatively—consider students' "comix" as a story about how students produce the "literature review."

The "literature review" is a shadow image in the sense that academic writing is disliked, feared, and loathed by many, even those in academia. Academic writing is often considered a point of "shame," not only by students, but by professors and other academics (see Bartholomae, p. 63). But particularly by students, who feel a "sense of shame" because they often don't know what they are doing when they are asked to produce "academic writing." Academic writing is

structured, repressive, rigid, restrictive, and has established rules that are the norms to which students must adhere (see Bassil-Morozow, pp. 56-57).

In contrast, the “comic” provides an image that comments on and criticizes the literature review as something that students both accept and resist. When students are assigned to write the literature review, the students are forced to accept the structure and the requirements that I impose upon them. But when students create the comic the students’ stories may resist the social order my power creates by transforming it. These two impulses are, respectively, the “shadow” and the “trickster.” In some ways, the “trickster” opposes the “shadow.” The shadow represents prescribed norms, boundaries, structure, and shame; in opposing the shadow, the trickster represents freedom, creativity, originality, shape-shifting (see Bassil-Morozow, pp. 56-57).

When we look at the students’ comics, we are, in some ways, looking at how the *trickster comic* looks at the *shadow literature review*. However, this is too simple. What we shall find is that the “trickster” and the “shadow” are both parts of the same thing: the student, who is trying to tell a story about the work they did in order to complete, get through, pass, my class. In so doing, students are being creative about how they accomplished the literature review, while simultaneously acknowledging the shame, the difficulties they grappled with.

And I am a partner in all this. I am the “instructor” or the “professor.” I am a large part of the context in which both the literature review and the comic are created. I’m the person who tells the student that their literature review needs to cite thirty academic sources; perhaps students link me to the shadow! But I’m also the “wise old professor” who may help them, and who tells the students on the first day of class to take out their phones and to start taking pictures. And then I give the class the finger, that widely-recognized “fuck you” gesture, and by doing so, I suggest that sketchy behavior is acceptable, and students can also be creatively bad-ass and irreverent. So perhaps I’m also a trickster!



Madeleine Jones

Departure From The Real World: The Hero's Journey Begins

A student's mythic journey is summed as follows: the hero leaves the everyday world and encounters and is engulfed by a strange new world. In the new world, the hero undergoes an assortment of trials or tests and is divinely transformed by new knowledge. The hero then returns to the everyday world with some sort of gift which is given to others to benefit the tribe, culture, and world (Campbell, pp. 36-37).

Students' "journey" begins even before the start of the class and the assignment of the literature review. The students arrive at school from a different world, a world without school; this is the world of "summer vacation," an idyllic place

beyond schoolwork. Maybe it is a world of the beach or mountains. Or maybe it is a world filled with hardship and difficulty. Maybe the student is the first in her family to attend college and feels pride but also intense expectations. Maybe the student has to get a job to help cover tuition. Maybe the student is returning to school after having been in military service. Perhaps the student deals with issues of physical or mental health. Here comes a student, ready to start the semester:

Madeleine Jones' comic shows her leaving one world and returning to another. School is shown in positive terms: sunshine, palm trees. For first-year students, there are new people to meet. They need to locate classrooms and offices. For returning students, there are friendships to rekindle. They may look forward to the excitement of a yet-to-be-experienced-semester. The students arrive at LMU, perched on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean and Los Angeles. The students know that there are classes to attend to and work to be done. Bells ring. Class begins.

“The Call To Adventure” On The First Day Of Class



Seanna Duong

Students have ideas about what the “first day of class” might ideally involve. And students come to class with expectations about teachers. Maybe they’ve read something on “Rate Your Prof.” Is the prof cool? Or does he or she suck?

It is taken-for-granted that a course “syllabus” will be given to students on the first day of class. The syllabus outlines the content of a course as well as represents the logic of a course with lists: lists of objectives and assignments, lists of “do’s” and “don’ts,” lists of grades and points, a tentative schedule of the semester.

The syllabus represents a professor’s power to control and structure what and how students do during the semester. It is a legal document that represents the ideology of the professor, the department, and the university. The syllabus states what students will be expected to know, do, and value. The syllabus is meant to be

informative and helpful for the student. It is that. And more. It is power.

And from the university’s perspective, I am also creating order. I sequence the assignments that students have to do, and as the “giver of grades,” I create an administrative order, giving grades: A, B, C, D, and F. Later, students’ grades will be combined into a number which is called the “grade point average” or “GPA.” The GPA is the university’s math to determine who receives “awards” and who is kicked out of the university, who gets financial aid and who doesn’t, and which student gets put on “probation” before being temporarily sent down to the purgatory of junior college until she gets her numerical act together, as indicated by an “acceptable” GPA.

Here we go! I breeze into class. Students are chatting about whatever they are chatting about: weekend glories, or what they’ve heard about the class and the prof. There is an expectation that the first day be light on work, with little more than being greeted by the friendly professor, who distributes the course syllabus—this is “an easy ‘syllabus day’”—in which nothing much happens, and the class session ends quickly, so that the students can leave in order to “meet up with friends.”

I go over the syllabus and watch as students’ brows furrow and faces frown. Students will leave class this first day, knowing that I intend to work them and work them hard. They will be assigned a series of papers that become increasingly difficult. The students will have to turn in

hard-copies of pages of published research articles, marked up with their scribbled margin notes where they have identified arguments made by the author or authors. They will need to turn in a rough draft of the “dreaded literature review.” I will expect students to learn how to write using APA style guidelines. And that the end-of-the-semester “literature review” can kick their ass so hard that they don’t pass the class, which means they have to retake it the following semester. This is the “literature review” as shadow, students’ projections of their own tensions, guilt, fear, and shame, between students and the assignment. And we’re only ten minutes into the first day of class. Fear is in the air. I tell them to think about topics for papers; a topic that is interesting; a topic that will make doing the paper tolerable. So that it sucks less.

I talk to the students briefly about my own research: fake IDs, surfing, sorority rush, graffiti, women’s roller derby, and repairing guitars in the rock 'n' roll world. I know how to do research. They don’t.

Day One and the Comic Begins

About 10 minutes before the first class ends, I tell students that they will also be creating a 15-page comic about the process of writing the literature review. I don’t give them much information beyond that. I tell them to download a software program, Comic Life. I tell them their first two-page comic is due at the end of the week. Today is Monday; the comic is due on Friday. Two pages minimum, single-sided, in color. Then I tell the students to take out their cellphones and to start shooting photographs. Students take selfies of themselves, of themselves with their classmates, and photographs with me.

And at the time these initial photographs are taken, the images are without words. There are no “talk bubbles” or “thought bubbles” attached. However, by the time the students turn in their first two-page comic, the students’ will have created a story of some sort. Because we are *homo narrans*, people who tell stories. The students will have learned how to drag-and-drop photos into panels within pages of various comic book templates.

In order to get students into the creative spirit of the comic, I snarl, I growl, I throw up my hands in the shape of claws. I give them “the finger.” I explain to them “panels,” “talk balloons,” and “thought balloons,” and I draw examples on the whiteboard at the front of the class. On Friday morning I lay their comics on a table and they gather to look. No surprises here: some are good; others suck.



Juliet Sivori

with a Herculean task: the writing of a paper unlike any other they have ever attempted. And then I have announced that they will be creating a comic about the writing of this very difficult paper. And to accentuate this point, I have told them to create a short two-page comic by the end of the first week.

“The Refusal Of The Call To Adventure”



Madelyn Ryan

Why comics? Maybe because we live in a visual world, and that being able to tell a story using words and images will be a valuable skill for students after college. Maybe because I want students to have some fun in the course. Maybe because comics might improve my teacher evaluations. Maybe because students need something to offset the pain and drudgery of doing academic writing. So, I let the students know I’m game, and that I’m okay with their use of profanity in the comic. *What the fuck!?* I mean, they’re creating comics! Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, I am bringing something into the students’ world—“the dreaded literature review”—that will throw them into chaos (George & George, p. 263). And I’m also bringing comics.

The class ends in confusion, pandemonium. On the one hand, I have announced that the class is faced with a Herculean task: the writing of a paper unlike any other they have ever attempted. And then I have announced that they will be creating a comic about the writing of this very difficult paper. And to accentuate this point, I have told them to create a short two-page comic by the end of the first week.

But the students resist me! They do not want to start the process of writing the literature review! They have never created a comic! “No!” they say. “Nooo!!” I interpret this as a “refusal of the call to adventure,” which is often how the hero’s journey begins (Campbell, p. 59).

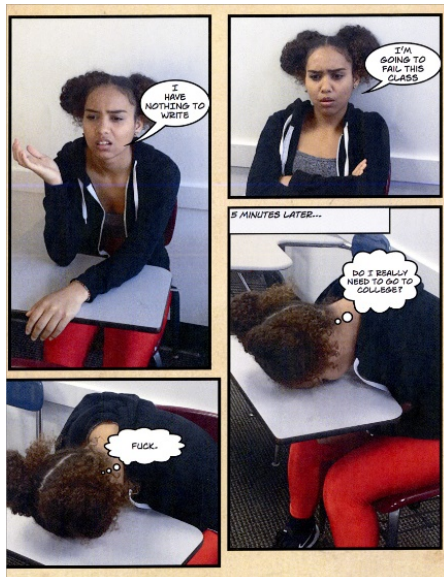
The prospect of grappling with a semester-long academic beast—the “dreaded” literature review—promotes no joy in the student-hero. And amidst the too-cool-for-school college social scene, it is easy for the student-hero to “turn the ear to other interests” (Campbell, p. 59). But—as the Borg says to the members of the Starship Enterprise—“resistance is futile.” And so, the students begin to take photographs, photographs that will document their resistance to the call to adventure, even as they are being shoved into that adventure.

Madelyn Ryan’s comic is organized by the “stages of grief,” referring to Kubler-Ross’ book, *On Death & Dying* (1969). Her flat refusal of the call to adventure (“No”) follows quickly on the student’s response to having to give up the easy life of vacation and the world they have left behind.

In Kubler-Ross’ scheme, anger follows denial, which is represented in Seanna Duong’s hand-drawn comic. Seanna’s pulling out of her hair is self-punishment, which suggests “mortification,” a means of purifying herself from her tension, her guilt. Why does Seanna feel guilty? Perhaps fear. Perhaps because she has to do something she does not want to do, and she assumes she has few choices. But she recovers and accepts the existing power relations: student versus teacher.



Seanna Duong



Justice Domingo

In Justice Domingo’s comic, the refusal is glimpsed in Justice’s repeated images of negation and defeat: head bent in defeat, she has “nothing to write,” and questions whether she really even “need[s] to go to college.”

These are images of “refusal of the call to adventure.” Maybe the images are an exaggeration, maybe not. There is sincerity because stress and fear are both part of what students experience. Justice represents herself as shamed and alone, her shadow-self subject to the demands of the literature review. On the other hand, Justice tells us of her fear and plays with it within the comic. If there is real fear of the task at hand, by the time she has finished the lit review and creates the comic, Justice’s inner trickster knows that she can now control how her situation is represented in the comic.

Consider Lauren Delisle’s first-week comic, titled “The Prophecy,” in which “prophecy” suggests the “influence of divine guidance” (Guralnik, p. 1139), a theme that will be evidenced in many comics. Note the “refusal of the call to adventure,” as Lauren awakes from a nightmare. From the perspective of the student, being told on the first day of class that the semester will end with the completion of a devilishly difficult assignment is not what students want to hear. Thus, Lauren’s waking from the dream screaming “Nooooooo!!” is similar to Madelyn Ryan’s comic. A refusal to engage.

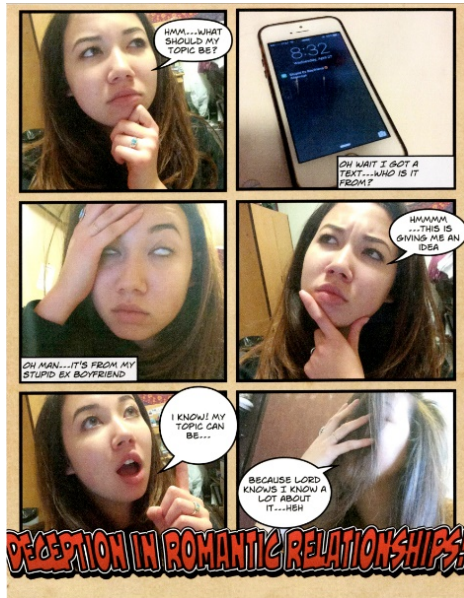
Additionally, the comic extends the problem of doing the literature review. The problem is spread throughout students' existence, including not only her conscious life, but also the realm of the unconscious, where mythic images may gather before springing to life in the pages of a comic. Students dream about it, have nightmares about it. The assignment is associated with the professor, who is represented within the dream as the devil, and who is scapegoated as evil. However, the evil emerges from the divine "prophecy," which provides the student with some sort of guidance. In a sense, the professor is a stand-in for the literature review. And let's remember that the devil is a stand-in for the serpent, who represents knowledge (see George & George, Chap.7). The depiction of the "dark side" is not limited to devil images. Thus, sometimes the dark side is shown through words, particularly "Muahahahaha," which represents evil laughter, and is often used in comic books by the villain.



Lauren Delisle

The shadow is the trickster's opposite and is dark where the trickster is light, or "lit" (Basil-Morozow, p. 53). The shadow is rigid, controlling, and structured. That sounds a bit like the syllabus for my course. "Muahahahaha" indeed. The key thing, at this point, is to recognize that in students' comics establish by images of light and dark, the trickster and the shadow, as characters in their stories. And that these "characters" are projections of the student. They represent internal conflicts that the student does not want to initially face or acknowledge (George & George, pp. 290-291).

The Crossing Of The First Threshold: Finding A Topic



Claire Dobyns

jealousy in families.

Even though students may not know what a “literature review” is, I have impressed on them the idea that they need to “find a topic” to write about. This is the “crossing of the first threshold,” the place where the hero finds “darkness, the unknown, and danger” (Campbell, p. 77).

I encourage students to find something that interests them, something in which they are involved. The “interest” is typically a context, often an organization or activity in which the student is involved: a sorority, a sports team, a romantic relationship, or the student’s family. But with a condition: a student’s literature review needs to focus on a specific communication phenomenon. For example: *social support* in sororities; *verbal aggressiveness* in sports teams; *deception or flirting or complaining* in romantic relationships; *sibling*

Often, students draw on their own experiences to locate a topic. And students’ comics often present a narrative about how they found the topic for their literature review. Some topics are the result of students’ past struggles. Students use technology, particularly cell phones, to set up their stories. Unlike other forms of technology (e.g., computers and databases), which may be problematic for students, the cell phone is not represented as a problem, although the messages may be disturbing.

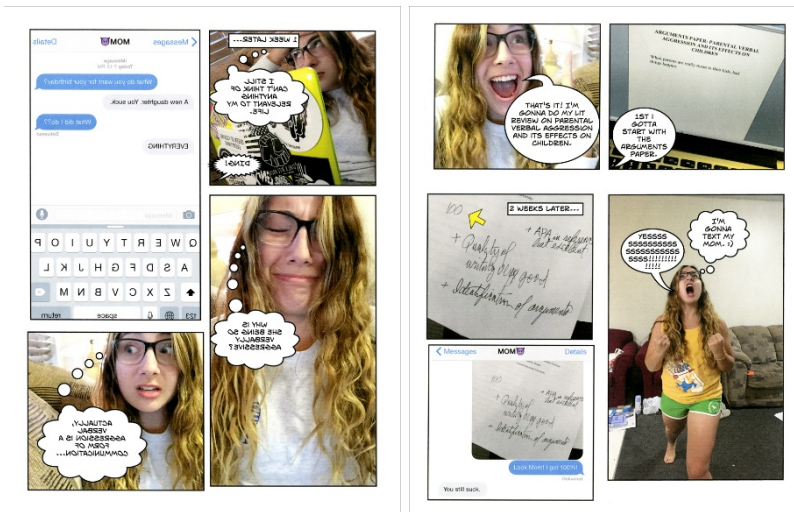
In Claire Dobyn’s comic, the phone message from her “ex-boyfriend” elicits the image of Claire’s eyes rolling backward into her head, symbolically suggesting unconsciousness, even death. This image is quickly followed by a moment of divine redemption, which is captured in images of Claire’s upward-seeing eyes, and the invocation of the divine (“Lord knows”). However, Claire’s covering her face with her hair, suggests her own shadow of shame; she is mortified, and acknowledges her embarrassment concerning her topic (“Deception in Romantic Relationships!”).



Claire Dobyns

Claire’s inner trickster is also at work. She makes fun of herself, suggesting that her APA manual “should be [her] new boyfriend.” Moreover, when she looks at her Facebook and finds that “[her] ex has a new girlfriend” she admits her own anger, ironically states that “now I can really

talk about deception in romantic relationships,” and she symbolically humiliates her former boyfriend, lowering him to being less than human (“that pig”).

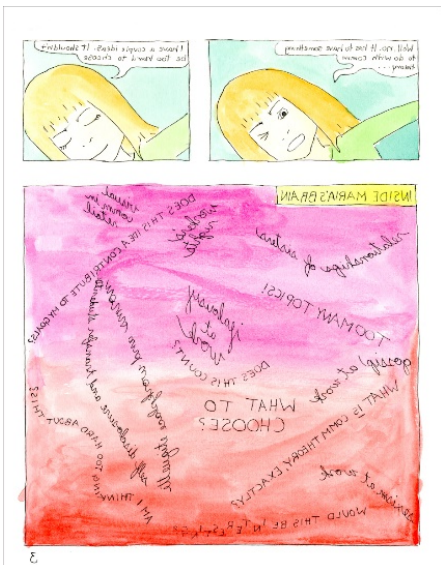


Chandler Wright

Similarly, Chandler Wright’s discovery of her topic is also realized through the cell phone and her relationship with her mother. In this case, she has programmed her phone to show an “emoji” of a grinning devil when her mother calls. The grinning devil is Chandler’s interpretation of her mother as a trickster, someone who can challenge Chandler’s own perceptions of her self-worth (“you suck”). Beyond that, the

image shows Chandler’s perception of her mother’s unfulfilled expectations, that she is not the “perfect” daughter. The idea that Chandler “sucks,” is shameful and mortifying to her; thus, we understand that her act of choosing to display the emoji is another challenge that she encounters, one in which she symbolically speaks truth to power, making light of the criticism.

The problem is solved when Chandler realizes her mother’s verbal aggressiveness can be turned into a research project. Chandler’s clenched fists, victory cry (“Yessssssssssssss!!!!”), and upturned face, signify her redemption, even as her comic recognizes the irony of the situation (“I’m gonna text my mom”).



Maria Nelson

Both Claire’s and Chandler’s comics show shadow images, suggesting some shame associated with the topics they have selected and the lack of love from significant others. In both cases, the topic for the literature review is connected to something that is a problem for the student. This is a common theme for shadow images. In both cases, there is a sense of loss, in the sense that the “love” of previous relationships is a remembered “loss” to the student (Bassill-Morozow, pp. 56-57). And yet, there is some lightness and a trickster attitude that allows the student some control, humorously mocking herself, thereby dragging their shadow-shame into the light.

In Maria Nelson’s comic, she represents the selection of a topic as an inner confusion, with a variety of topics being

considered that are related to academic or career goals, and other interests.

The depiction of the topics in a floating, jumbled, random fashion “inside [her] brain” suggests a lack of clarity as a result of too many options. The image of the topics suspended in a jello-like substance, neither completely liquid nor solid, also suggests a vague and undetermined state. The near-liquid state—the substance in which the topics are *floating*—suggests the image of an ocean or a sea.

The imagery in Maria’s comic is similar to that in Seanna Duong’s comic, where the search for a potential topic is located in an ocean, where the metaphor of a “sea of trouble” has been renamed a “sea of topics.” Nonetheless, the association of “topics” with “trouble” seems significant.

The image of the sea has long been important to writers and poets as a mythic metaphor. The sea is a place of chaos, immersion, and purification, and is a place that contains “the moments of eternal choice, of temptation, fall, and redemption” (Auden, 1950, p. 14; see also Osborn, 1977; Scheibel, 1995). Thus, the sea provides a mythic context for Seanna’s journey.

Seanna’s representation of finding a topic begins with a comparison: “picking a topic is like fishing,” suggesting a degree of luck, which doesn’t work well for Seanna. What begins as being “easy enough” becomes images of embarrassing death because she can’t find a topic. In a trio of images, Seanna ends as a skeleton—an image of death—and wondering “Why is this so difficult?” Seanna then enters the sea, “jump[ing] in,” but



Seanna Duong

quickly finding that she is in trouble (“this was not a good idea...”) as she is surrounded by dangerous-looking fish, labeled with topics (“Gender” and “self-disclosure”). The image of Seanna, engulfed in water, suggests a shadowy darkness, a projection of her fears.



Seanna Duong

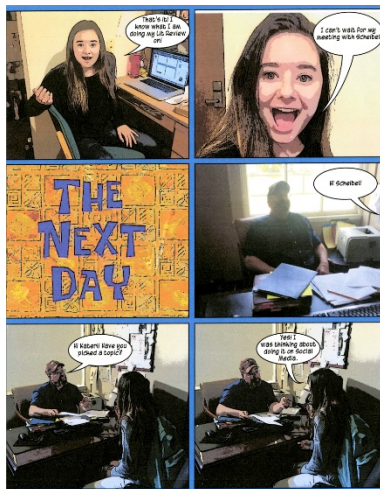


The next page represents the process of Seanna trying to remember the advice given by the wise old professor (“Gosh, what did Scheibel say in class again?”). Seanna remembers as she is bitten by one of the fish, labeled “Asian Americans.” The fish dies—symbolized by the “x” on the fish’s eyes—while gratifying Seanna’s desire to secure a topic. The image recognizes some mortifying pain inflicted

on Seanna—the fish takes a bite out of Seanna’s backside and is dead—suggests the idea that “every creature lives on the death of another” (Campbell, p. 238). The scene also links the mythic themes of death and love, the latter expressed in her gratitude toward the divine upon discovering a topic (“OMG!”).

In both Maria’s and Seanna’s comics there is a sense of the shadow. The students’ inability to choose among potential topics might be viewed as a source of interior shame, where topics are suspended in dark liquid and water, which are images of shame that have been associated with Sigmund Freud’s ideas on narcissism, or self-love (Bassill-Morozow, pp. 54-55). The liquid and dark reference to doomed self-love has roots in the Greek myth of Narcissus and Echo.

Seanna Duong’s depiction of finding a topic also promotes the mythic image of the old professor—that’s me, folks—who may also be a source of wisdom. Thus, we turn to the theme of “mentors,” which are part of the hero’s mythic journey. Although sometimes depicted as a devilish figure, the student’s image of the professor also transforms over the course of the semester, projected as both shadow and trickster.



Kateri Milanesa

In Kateri Milanesa's comic, I am represented as a more traditional mentor, one who may be a resource for a student as she works on her literature review and comic. Some myths “develop the role in the great figure of the guide, the teacher” (Campbell, p. 72). And some students recreate this mentoring relationship for their comics.

In Kateri’s comic, which she created after she finished the literature review, Kateri asked to shoot pictures of me in my office, a fairly common request made by students. In this instance, Kateri represents the situation as one in which she had already come up with an idea for her comic and just wanted

confirmation that the topic was appropriate. However, in other instances, students may seek out the mentor when they are struggling to find a topic, as was the case with Carina.

In Carina Adra’s comic, she comes to my office, embarrassed and ashamed and having feelings of guilt because she didn’t have a topic and is therefore not living up to the standards of being a competent student. Carina’s mortification is expressed in images and words: the “palms up” image and the admission “I’ve got nothing,” evoke the idea that the student *should* have a topic



Carina Adra

and should not show up for an appointment empty-handed. However, her shame is also expressed in her use of the word “Shit,” which is a colloquial expression used to express the lack of something (e.g., “I don’t have shit”). Thus, the load of the assignment cannot be unburdened from the student, a point of embarrassment or shame.

During a conversation after

class, I had noticed that Carina had tattoos on her arms, and I suggested tattoos as a topic because “you should write about what interests you,” a common sense idea which runs counter to Carina’s assumption that “research [is] supposed to be boring.” And something that is boring brings on an association with death (e.g., “bored to death”).

The image of the professor as offering sage advice is advanced as Carina thinks about tattoo’s and links them to a viable communication topic (“self-disclosure and tattoos”).



Carina Adra

Carina, hands-folded under her chin, upward-gaze, and loving (two hearts) realization that she’s “actually getting excited!” Thus, we see the expression of the mythic tension between death and love.

In Seanna’s, Kateri’s, and Carina’s comics, the teacher supplies “the advice the hero will require” (Campbell, p. 72). The mentor or teacher may be viewed as helpful and

may be something of a “protective figure,” although the figure may take a variety of forms. Campbell notes that this figure may take the form of “a little old crone or old man” (p. 69). That’s me, the old man.

The Belly Of The Whale

In our myth, the “worldwide womb image” might be likened to a “worldwide web” image, in which the digital resources of the library are accessed through students’ computers. Thus, the “belly of the whale” may be viewed as a new world, a new universe of discourse, a new world of information and technology, and the multiple ways that students have to access, organize,



Scarlett Sanchez

and use that information in the creation of the literature review. However, the new world is a place of conflicting emotion, as suggested by the panels from Scarlett Sanchez’s comic.

Eventually, students settle on a topic, and this threshold marks the passage into the mythic “sphere of rebirth.” In myths, this is “symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale” (Campbell, p. 90). On a physical level, the sphere of rebirth is the university’s William H. Hannon Library. It is a large round building, several stories high, and perched on a bluff, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, as if it had risen from the sea.

Although Scarlett labels the library a “COOL” place (suggesting a trendy-good-hip thing), she stands before the library looking up, and the panel’s text suggests that she

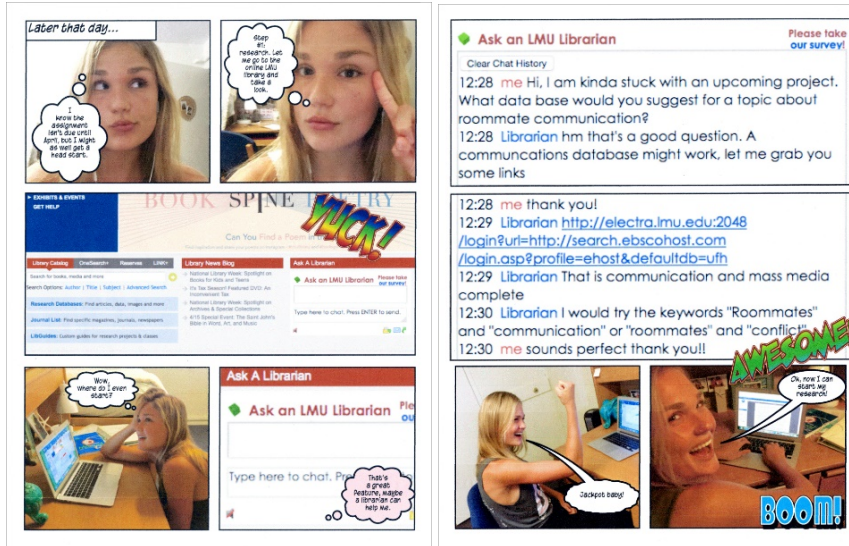
has resigned herself to the fact that she “will be spending most of [her] time in the library.” Moreover, the following panel shows Scarlett looking down, her head in her hand. Thus, there is also a “coolness,” suggesting a lack of enthusiasm. Spending of time in the library is not something she wants to do.

Having been symbolically engulfed or “swallowed” by the library, the student must fight against their own feelings of inadequacy and shame. Libraries are “secretive, mysterious, and anxiety-producing places” (Grassian & Kaplowitz, p. 90; see also Fitzpatrick, 1992). Students feel overwhelmed, maybe even pathetic: they don’t know how to access databases, how to cite journals, how to read research, and how to write about what they have read. It is within the belly of the library’s universe of discourse that students must cease to exist and be symbolically “born again,” with the acquiring of new knowledge (Grassian & Kaplowitz, pp. 91-92). Thus, initially, forms of technology that are new and unfamiliar to students are feared and are projections of the shadow (cf. Rushing & Frentz, 1989).

In the myth, “the belly of the whale” may be interpreted as an overarching scene, a place where students travel the “road of trials” (Campbell, p. 97). These “trials” may be viewed as

class assignments, each building upon the last, which finally end with the students' attempting to write the "literature review."

In doing these assignments, students fight against their anxieties, even as they attempt to build the skills and competencies that will aid them as they battle toward the literature review. Librarians and libraries play an important part in the students' travel on the road of trials; they are the guides on the road of trials, providing instruction on "information literacy," which provides the "gateway to knowledge" (Grassian & Kaplowitz, p. 89). Librarians become mentors to students who provide guidance to them. Far from only being physically present at "reference



desks" to help students, librarians also interact with students through computers. These sessions provide technological "amulets," charms of knowledge that may provide the power needed to protect the students from injury and evil.

Emily's initial disgust ("Yuck!") and confusion ("Wow, where do I even start?") is reduced when

Emily Moore

she finds help by communicating with a librarian via computer ("Ask a librarian"). The information produces an abundance of useful information. The words "jackpot" and "boom!" both suggest sudden rapid growth, an "upsurge in activity" (Guralnik, p. 142). Both words also suggest the metaphor of gambling. And Emily wins. In this case, "awesome" refers to that which is venerated, held "in wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime" (p. 86). Emily's comic reflects the "crooked lanes of [her] own spiritual labyrinth" as she finds some guidance from librarians which is channeled through the technological trial encountered (Campbell, p. 101).

Like all libraries, the Hannon Library has many aisles of books. However, much of the work students do in creating the literature review does not involve books, but rather, *academic journals*, which are found in computer “databases” that are organized around “disciplines” (e.g., sociology, dance, psychology, art history). Students’ confusion about locating databases and finding sources suggests the metaphor of an *electronic maze or labyrinth*, one far more difficult to navigate than finding books, and which creates shame and anxiety (see Grassian & Kaplowitz). And the electronic labyrinth has its birth in mythology, in which Ariadne gives Theseus a skein of linen thread so that he will be able to find his way out of the maze. Thus,



Christina Gallo

librarians play the role of Ariadne, laying out the string, for the student’s Theseus. In this mythic scene, the literature review becomes the Minotaur, a divine monster which lives in the maze, and which must be slain by Theseus.

Even after a topic has been settled on, and appropriate databases located, students are faced with facts that produce fears. There are many journal articles on most topics. Students often find themselves confronted by the extreme *volume* of information with which she must grapple. It is an interesting coincidence that the academic articles are collected in “volumes”; the word volume refers to a series of issues within a periodical (e.g., an academic journal), as well as “considerable quantity” (Guralnik, p. 1402). In a sense, the plunge into a published volume is an echo of Seanna’s plunge into an ocean, where a student

first finds herself drowning in a sea of topics, now she is a more condensed version: a sea of research articles, a sea of words.

Students are thus plunged into a universe of discourse that leaves them awed, fearful. Christina’s comic represents her experience by the expression of awe—in this case, dread—that is prompted by what confronts her on the computer screen. And beyond the sheer number of sources students face, students need to select which sources—*the right sources*—to use. Students need to narrow their topic. For example, the topic of “jealousy” might be narrowed to “sibling jealousy” (as opposed to “romantic jealousy”), which might be narrowed to “same-sex sibling jealousy.” Adding to the difficulty of narrowing the topic is that students discover that *reading academic writing is really difficult*.

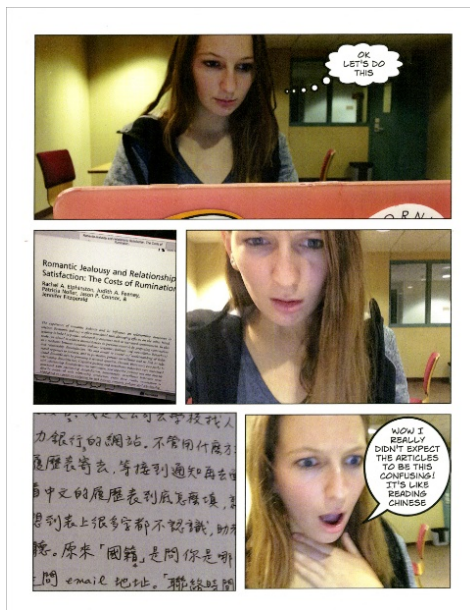
The Divinity of Academic Writing

The “divine origins” of the literature review are found in the scholarly articles published in “academic journals,” which are part of a vast pyramid of knowledge and which are believed to be of supreme importance in academic circles. Students come to class oblivious to this fact and are usually unprepared to confront journal articles. In many college classes, students are assigned “textbooks,” which have greater “readability,” often summarizing the original research

found in journal articles. In fact, such writing—typically devoid of reference to humans—is termed the “god-voice” by those who object to its characteristics.

A literature review gives reasons why a particular research project is being proposed. The reasons are often *a justification or a persuasive argument that synthesizes previous research*. This type of writing—“academic writing”—is the real business of universities. And my literature review assignment is exactly that. I want students’ literature reviews to mirror, to approximate, the writing in academic journals; I want them to be able to write the “god-voice.” This presents a huge problem to the student: academic writing is jargon-filled, impossible to understand, clunky, devoid of beauty, and has no room for the student to tell their own story (Bartholomae, 1995; Elbow, 1991).

Most important: *the “divine” writing is the “enemy.”* And the divinity makes the enemy—the literature review—a worthy adversary for the student. This is what instills in the student the desire to show in their comic creation the conquest of the literature review worth framing in mythic terms (see Burke, 1966, pp. 380-409).



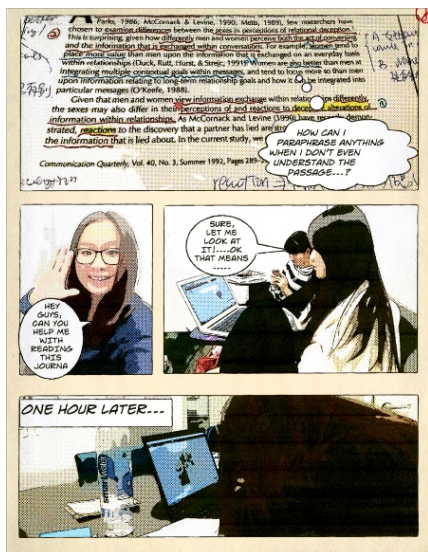
Christina Gallo

Christina Gallo’s comic expresses a common attitude of students toward much academic writing. Despite the student’s good intentions (“Okay, let’s do this”), upon looking at the academic writing, Christina’s expression registers shock and awe. She “didn’t expect” to be confronted with writing so difficult to understand. The student’s encounter with academic discourse is thus compared to being confronted with a foreign language that she does not understand (“It’s like reading Chinese”). Christina’s confusion may be taken as embarrassment or guilt. In some ways, comparing academic writing to a foreign language reduces her shame at her inability to read the article. No one would expect her to be able to read a foreign language that she does not know. Thus, her shame at being unable to interpret shadow-writing, in which the student is forced to confront a threshold

marking her own limitations, is made humorous by a tricksterish joke, as she not only names the writing as “Chinese,” but also shows the characters of the foreign language on what the reader would interpret to be her computer screen.

I ask students to dissect and take apart the journal articles—densely written slabs of confusion—looking for logical arguments, justifications and reasons, that students can use when making their own arguments, which end up justifying the asking of a research question. These tasks are not things students have been asked to do. In asking them to do these things, I am “imposing the ideology of a privileged [professor] class upon under[graduate] classes”

(Rushing, 1990, p. 143). This is the real work of the academy. Student, *write like us*.



Qinglan Li

The student must learn to read and interpret the academic writing. Then the writing must be transformed into the student’s own “voice,” one that is also “academic” in style. Easier said than done. Academic writing style is specific to academic disciplines. So, what counts for scholarly writing in my discipline—Communication Studies—may be different than the academic discourse in the disciplines of English or History (Elbow, 1991).

In the top panel, the academic discourse is shown marked up with comments in the article’s margins; it is underlined and highlighted in red, yellow, and blue by the student. And yet, despite the student’s effort to isolate what she hopes is the

journal article’s important content, the student is still unable to do what she needs to do. As the reader, you can hear Qinglan’s exasperation at not being able to “*even understand the passage*,” making it impossible to “*paraphrase anything*.” Pure shadow; more shame.

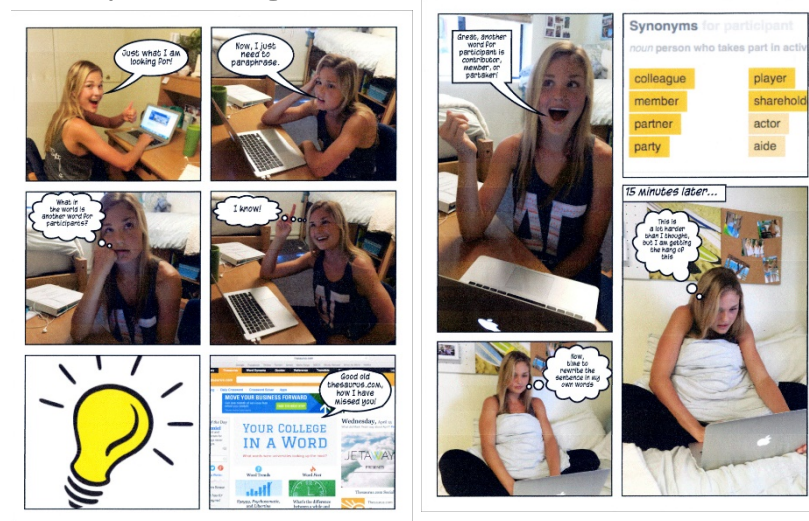
Notice that the marked-up text has been placed in the comic panel’s foreground, serving to impress the reader with Qinglan’s efforts. Her thought is given to the reader, although she is not present in the panel. However, her sense of frustration, even terror, is highlighted. It is thus sadly ironic that the conventions of academic discourse include “impersonality and detachment” when the student is personally and painfully shamed (Elbow, p. 141).

The impersonal and detached conventions of academic writing are confronted by the comic’s presentation of the student’s voice. In this panel, it is the discourse of the comic’s author that uses the first-person pronoun “I,” which is often considered a violation of academic discourse. And in so doing, the author is mortified, embarrassed that she cannot do the assignment. The scene ends with the student seeking help from the Academic Resource Center, a campus office specifically designed to help students with their writing.

As we have seen in other panels, Qinglan Li’s raised and open hand is raised to a higher power, seeking help. The Academic Resource Center, like the professor and the library, serves as a mentoring aid, a guiding light in the darkness of academic writing. Often times, students who realize they are struggling or are lacking in some particular area, make a point of signing up for regular appointments. It is worth noting that the A.R.C. is typically referred to as “the arc.”

There is divinity in this; “arc” originally referred to “the part of the circle that is the apparent path of a heavenly body above and below the horizon” (Mish, 1980, p. 70).

Paraphrasing



Emily Moore

Paraphrasing refers to taking a bit of text and then saying something “in other words.” In Emily Moore’s comic, she touches on some of the technological resources available to the student.

Emily’s comic suggests the essentially solitary nature of many of the research activities and touches on a few aspects involved in the process. The comic shows the technological

resources available (e.g., “thesaurus.com”). And even with such devices and some understanding of the task, Emily comes to realize that it is “harder than [she] thought.” Paraphrasing is a painfully difficult task; and the prefix “para” includes meanings such as “amiss,” “to ward off,” and “protection against” (Mish, 1980, p. 1028), all of which suggest something *sinister* beyond the difficult calculations of wordsmithing. Decisions about what and how to paraphrase and quote the words and ideas of another’s academic writing is hard, hard, hard. And you do it alone, massaging and editing words into clauses, moving them around within the sentence, hopefully keeping the idea you are trying to “put into your own words.” And you do it sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. It takes forever. And it sucks. And after the Herculean job of paraphrasing the content, writing must conform to a particular style of in-text citation and referencing the sources where the student found the information.

The Road Of Trials: Academic Writing and Assignments

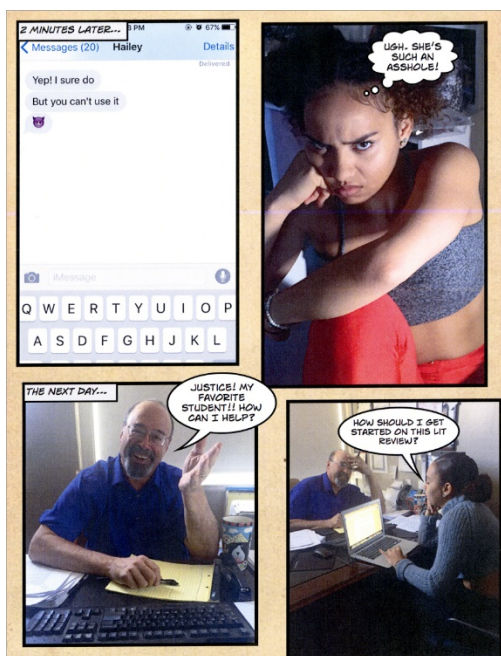
The hero’s journey is typically an individual undertaking in which the hero faces a series of mounting challenges. We can view “the road of trials” as the various tasks—academic assignments of various sorts—that a student undertakes on the way to complete her individual literature review. However, although students do individual papers, the “road of trials” is a road collectively traveled. The students are a “class,” working on the same assignment, the literature review.

Often students within a particular course turn to one another for support, for clarification about an assignment, and to vent or bitch about the assignment. In looking at the “road of trials” as represented in the comics, we, as readers, are confronted with stories that represent

these various tasks and assignments. Additionally, the stories include representations of power relations between various people, including students, teachers, and others.

A student may seek assistance from her peers, and *expects* help, sympathy, and even pity, when faced with difficulties or unpleasant tasks. Consider the following story-within-a-story from Justice Domingo’s comic, where a real-life friendship with another student, Hailey Transue, is dramatized as a battle between the two students and becomes—within the context of the comic—a “trial” in itself:

The initial request by Justice to borrow Hailey’s *APA* manual is refused (“Yep! I sure do but you can’t use it”) is accompanied by a smiling devil emoji. Thus, Justice has been shamed by having Hailey reject her request to use Hailey’s *APA* book. This is a source of tension and guilt for Justice.



Justice Domingo

We might view Justice’s representation of Hailey in terms of the “woman as the ‘temptress,’” in which a situation is created where Justice does not cope well; her pouting grimace and response (“Ugh. She’s such an asshole!”) suggests her “restriction of consciousness” (Campbell, p. 120). Soon after, she confronts Hailey in the library, where her comment upon seeing Hailey—“Well, well, well...look who it is!”--suggests she knows that redemption is near. This, in turn, leads to revenge, where Justice gives Hailey “the finger,” a culturally understood hand gesture taken to mean “fuck you,” which provides a small moment of redemptive justice for Justice, who symbolically scapegoats Hailey. The symbolic killing of Hailey is not the best path for the student-hero, as “temper tantrums are the makeshifts of ignorance” (p. 120).

Justice uses scatological references (“she’s such an asshole”) as a way to relieve guilt, be



Justice Domingo

purified, and thus redeemed. Additionally, she uses a sexual reference, which is also an expression of a bodily metaphor (Burke, 1966), which is another way to purify guilt, and achieve redemption. In both instances, Justice scapegoats Hailey because Hailey has violated the belief that students should help other students. In this sense, Justice’s “fuck you” hand-gesture shows Justice as unashamed, making her own rules; the comic shows Justice’s own trickster-inspired comfort with representing herself as “perfectly imperfect” (Bassil-Morozow, p. 57).

And these power relations include you! The images in the comics are meant to persuade you. As you read the pages of students’ comics represented in this book, do you accept the photographs as some version of “truth”? Does seeing a photograph of the student suggest that the story “really happened?” Does the fact

that photographs are often used to tell stories give the stories a sense of being “authentic”? Do you understand that the images represented in the comic were taken after the images the photographs depict actually occurred? Thus, we are not talking about “authenticity” as being factually “real,” but rather, the extent to which the images project authenticity through the author’s *sincerity* (El Refaie, pp. 158-165). Enough said.

APA (aka American Psychological Association's style manual)

Not only must students try to understand the dense and impenetrable writing in academic



Seanna Duong

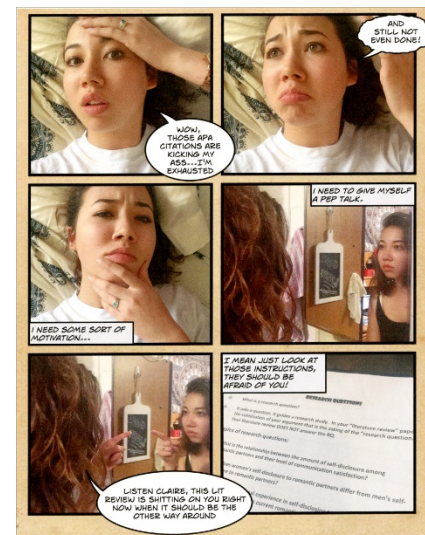
journals. Students must learn to rewrite academic discourse and to cite it correctly, using the *American Psychological Association Style Manual* (aka APA). Even if students type fast and well, APA will slow them down to a crawl, requiring them to refer to journal articles to get information (authors, title of article, year published, journal in which the article is published, volume and issue of that journal, page numbers). And then, students need to follow the form. What is capitalized, and what is not? What is italicized? How many spaces are needed between the various parts of the citation? And that's just for the list of "References" at the end of the student's literature review.

Even more difficult is how to cite sources within the body of the paper. "Should I cite the source at the beginning of the end of the sentence?" "Can I cite a source in the middle of a

sentence?" "How do I cite more than one source within parentheses?" "Is the date needed each time the author is cited?" "How do I cite a source cited within another source?" Students have *hundreds* of questions. Moreover, the student may have anger or "hate" about having to use APA, particularly if they have already mastered a different form of citation (e.g., "MLA").

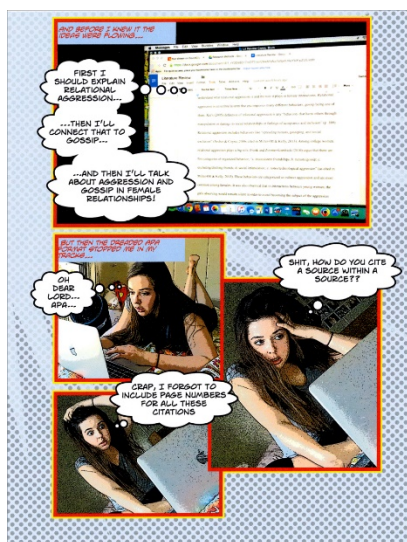
In Claire Doby's comic, she admits to herself that the "APA citations are kicking my ass." In this sense, APA is the enemy that is symbolically scapegoating and dominating Claire because Claire lacks knowledge about how to use APA. And Claire's acknowledgment that the "lit review is shitting on [her]" is mortifying, and Claire uses this mortification to motivate herself. The shadow presence of fear and Claire's lack of control over the situation mark her representation of shame. She points to her mirror image and tells herself that "those instructions should be afraid of you!"

Claire is confronting a version of herself in the mirror where she lives. Mirrors are prominent in autobiographical comics, and "can form a potent visual metaphor for the ambiguity involved in seeing something that is and is not 'me'" (El Refaie, 2012, p. 66). As the narrator, Claire is sharing a version of herself with her character and the reader. In using the mirror, Claire is communicating with herself, showing herself, "which entails revealing and uncovering the shameful



Claire Doby's

contents, recognizing and accepting one's shame, dragging it out to the conscious surface, and sublimating or transforming it into humor" (Bassil-Morozow, p. 46). The shadow is lessened when confronted and acknowledged by Claire's trickster.



Willow Wittliff

Willow Wittliff's comic also uses scatological references to address her fears, confronting them, and sharing them with us. Consider the imagery. In the narrative box, APA is characterized as "dreaded," which brings the plea for divine help ("DEAR LORD"). The profane ("SHIT" and "CRAP") are linked to the student's own shortcomings of knowledge.

How to interpret the comics' use of scatological references? In order for guilt (e.g., not knowing APA) to be purified, Burke requires the use of body analogies for redemption to be complete. Thus, references to "shit" and "crap" are ways for the trickster to be expressed to redeem Claire's shamed shadow. Students' first experiences trying to learn APA are often filled with error and low grades, and some initial shame over the lack of knowledge of how to correctly do APA.

However, as represented in the comic, the use of *shit* and *crap* "describe learning through mistakes—a civilizing process" (Bassil-Morozow, p. 28). The bodily analogies of defecation are mortifying, but once expressed, are the path to the student's redemption (Burke, 1966). Thus, the comic may be understood as an act of tricksterish freedom and creativity that allows the students to transcend shame.

Paper Trials: Preliminary Assignments

Thus far, you have witnessed students grapple with technology and research articles. You have been shown students' fear and shame as they find and then try to read academic writing and stumble through writing in APA format. All of this is in preparation for doing the preliminary assignments before they attempt to write the "literature review."

The first of the preliminary assignments is the "annotated bibliography." In this assignment, I ask students to find basic information from five different academic journal articles related to their topic. The students answer a series of questions: What is the article about? What are the central concepts discussed by the author? What types of arguments does the author make in the first paragraph? What evidence does the author use to support the argument? Then I ask students to write a short paragraph that cites all five sources. This is assigned to help students realize the importance of being able to combine or *synthesize* information from various academic sources.

In the next preliminary assignment, the "arguments paper," students go through one research study and identify and discuss arguments the author makes. Typically, this involves such things as identifying how the author of the academic source uses information from other sources the

author cites. This also includes identifying the “limitations” that those other authors discuss about the work they are using. This requires students to cite “sources within sources,” which ramps up students’ anxiety about citing academic sources using APA style guidelines. You can imagine how confusing it is for students to dig out this sort of information. In both assignments, a student has to find information from journal articles that is relevant to the literature review, the student will later write.



Scarlett Sanchez

Students’ comics represent the “road of trials” in different ways. Some stories show the student quickly handling the two assignments as non-problematic, while other comics show the assignments as more problematic. These differences in storytelling are shown in the following three comics.

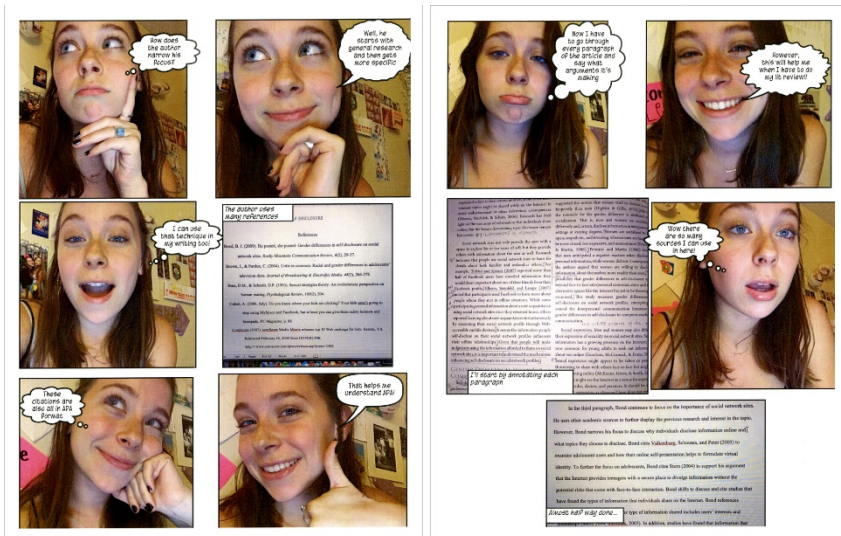
In Scarlett Sanchez’s comic, after deciding on a topic

(“OMG, I have an IDEA! I will study FLIRTING as the communication phenomenon for class”), she quickly addresses the two major preliminary assignments. She finds “scholarly sources” which she summarizes for the annotated bibliography, even as she realizes that the same sources “will help for the arguments paper too!”

In her comic, Scarlett nicely combines images of the source she locates and the work she is doing, the finished annotated bibliography. She pauses to instruct the reader about her topic (“So, WHY DO WE FLIRT???”), demonstrates a couple of reasons why people flirt (“for fun” and “sometimes to boost self-esteem”). Following this, Scarlett gets back to work, and she shows us a bit of the paper that she has written.

It is interesting to note that Scarlett’s use of large block letters (“WOW” and “NICE START!”) are similar in style to the “sound effects” that often accompany physical movement and violence in superhero comics and cartoons. Similarly, in Leah Morris’ comic, Leah congratulates herself, acknowledging her abilities to see what is necessary, and is able to see her knowing as a path through the road of trials with which she is confronted.

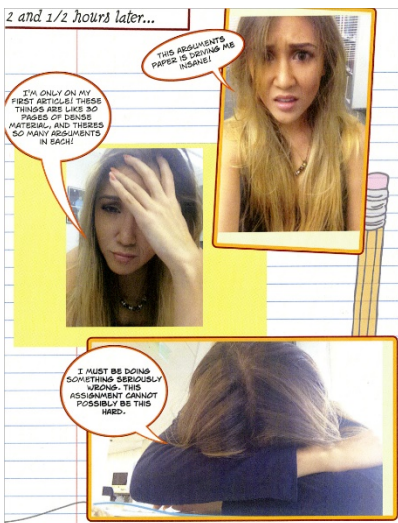
In both Scarlett’s and Leah’s comics, students are represented as being in control; each confronts the task and accomplishes what is necessary and without much difficulty. There is a sense of ease between the student and the journal articles; the student is represented as being able to penetrate academic discourse, such that the “agonies of the ordeal are readily borne” (Campbell, p. 148).



Leah Morris

(“Wow”) about the work she is doing. Similarly, Leah repeatedly shows her comfort in the research process, breaking through whatever initial fears she may have had. Rather than being trapped by the assignment, by the journal articles, Leah exploits them (“I can use...”) to her own advantage.

Of course, these are only the two students’ *representations* of the process given to us *after* the tasks have been completed. Maybe Scarlett and Leah created these images to impress the reader, me, and now, you. On the other hand, maybe Scarlett and Leah are accurately



Renee Samuelson

representing their experiences. In either case, both comics support the values and ideology of the academic enterprise and of the university. Students accomplish what we say they must do. And the comics suggest a degree of *pride* for having done so. In contrast, Renee Samuelson’s comic represents the “arguments paper” from a very different perspective. Renee’s comic recognizes the equation in which the time and energy needed to accomplish the academic task takes a terrifying toll on the student’s mental well-being. This is *supreme stress*, where the student’s fear, self-loathing, and shame reach dangerous proportions. Faced with the “dense material” and the numerous arguments is represented as having a bad effect on the student’s mental health (“this arguments paper is driving me insane!”). Ultimately, Renee assumes she is “doing something seriously wrong,” psyching herself out. Renee’s representation of her mental anguish represents the fear and shame and lack of control that is associated with the shadow image of doing academic work. And yet. Renee’s decision to show this in the comic allows Renee to take control. She faces and acknowledges her struggles, her imperfection. The trickster trumps the shadow.

There is no fear, no shame. In both Scarlett’s and Leah’s comics, both students show a dynamic playfulness in representing their work on the literature review. Scarlett’s playfulness is directed toward the reader, letting the readers see the obvious fun (“Woo”) she and her partner are having as they share the motivations for flirting, and letting the reader see her excitement

Thus far, the student-hero's journey has been represented as tasks on the "road of trials." These tasks have only been in preparation for more intense battles, in which the student hero will have to grapple with their internal struggles, which are projected outward as monsters and supernatural aids. However, the student may not even be aware of her connections to these gods and monsters and may not be aware of "that divine creative and redemptive image, which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life" (Campbell, p. 39). For the student hero, these projections are made real in their comics as representations of the literature review.

The Lit(erature) Review As Shadow

Students represent the literature review as taking on the characteristics of living things, such as the blood dripping from the title page of Nicole Franko's literature review. As a living thing, the literature review takes on human qualities related to personality, but also physical qualities. In doing so, students create images of a worthy adversary, one capable of defeating the student (Burke, 1966, p. 381). In myths, combat often takes place. Often this is internal but is projected outwards. In considering the literature review as an "enemy," students' comics often acknowledge the "extraordinary appearances and properties" of the enemy, the "distinctive habitation" of the enemy, and the enemy's "divine origin" (p. 383).

Early on the road of trials, while students are working on preliminary assignments, the literature review may be imagined as something frightening. At this point, there is no escape for the hero, for the enemy exists in the mind of the hero. The enemy represents an internal and imagined state of chaos and disorder.

Creating the "literature review" is based on students' understanding that it must be brought to exist into the world. It must go from an abstract "assignment" to becoming an actual paper, something that must be turned in, and something that will be "graded." The student's inner chaos must be confronted and externalized. It must be brought into existence; it must be disciplined and ordered. This is the mythic battle: the hero's moving from disorder to order. In creating the literature review, the student creates a written harmonic cosmos out of the chaos.

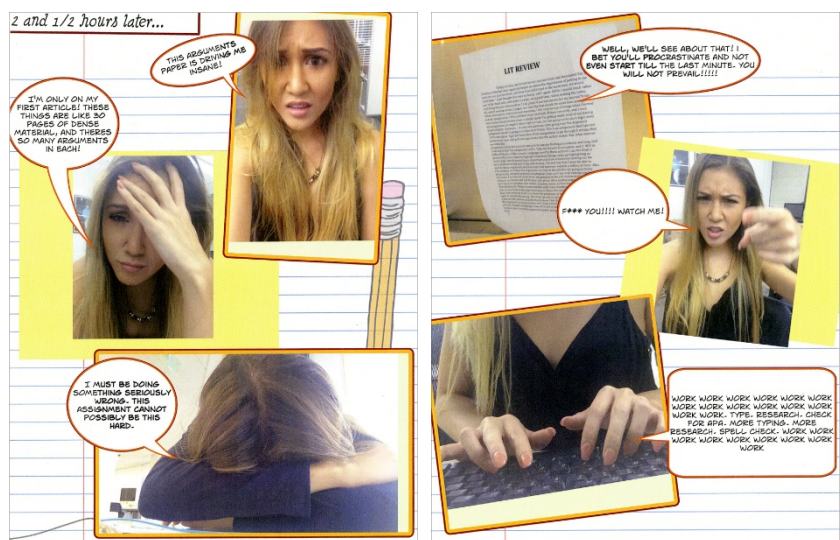


Juliet Sivori

In Juliet Sivori's comic, the literature review may be represented as an idea that resembles an actual physical object. Juliet's imagined "death" in the class as a result of the literature review, is represented only as a *black thought* within a thought balloon. The image and words are doubled: the image colored black and the words "death" and "die." The image of the black cloud brings with it fear and vulnerability and "thoughts of the grave" (Osborn, 1967, p. 117). The images

and ideology suggest a battle, in which Juliet loses, even though she acknowledges that it is “time to start now though!”

In Renee Samuelson’s comic, the literature review is given life but is still shown as a written paper. Renee makes the literature review a worthy enemy, infusing it with a combative attitude who taunts Renee about her lack of knowledge (“you don’t even know [APA]”). Although Renee mortifies herself by admitting her own limitations (“I may suck at APA”) she shows her own combative nature and provides reasons why she will triumph over the literature review (i.e., she is “perfectly capable” and has been “putting in 110% effort”). When the literature review taunts Renee again with the charge that Renee will “procrastinate” and will “not prevail,” Renee bests the literature review, using another body analogy (“F*** you!!!! Watch me!”) to victimize the literature review and redeem herself. The scene ends with Renee typing furiously. The conflict between Renee and the literature suggests Renee’s inner conflict and her discomfort with producing the literature review. However, within the context of the comic



Renee Samuelson

Renee’s inner trickster successfully combats the literature review. The action within the comic is contextualized by objects that position Renee as an industrious student: images of lined paper and a pencil.

Renee acknowledges her limitations. And her redemption is signaled through her own mortification (“I may suck at APA...”), which is transcended through her

ability to use technology; her “tools” include an online website. In contrast, the lit review is shamed by Renee’s accusing finger and her labeling the lit review in regard to sexual activity (“F*** you!”). The sexual references are her trickster.

In other comics, the literature review takes on a physical presence and is often depicted as having an “extraordinary appearance” (Burke, 1966, p. 383). Several comics represent the literature review as a “monster.”

In Seanna’s comic, she is actually grabbed by the “lit review,” who takes on a monstrous appearance, including bloodshot eyes, big teeth. And Seanna’s response (“Oops”) indicates that she has somehow miscalculated.



Seanna Duong

Depicting one's self as a monster is somewhat common in autobiographical memoirs, in which the narrator's body may be seen as "monstrous" (see El Refaie, pp. 68-70). As a metaphor, monsters may be linked to the idea of the "uncanny," which Freud (1919) characterized as something that "arouses dread" (cited in Schneider, 1999). Given the discussion of the "dreaded lit review," the presence of monsters is not too surprising. In contrast to Seanna's comic, other students confront the monster within dreams.



Sean Baker

In Sean's comic, like Seanna's, the "lit review monster" is an enemy of "extraordinary appearance" (Burke, p. 383), although it retains some aspects of human appearance, with eyes, nose, and mouth. However, the monster is terrifying to the student, suggesting a zombie that will cause the student's death ("its gunna kill me").

The metaphor of the literature review as a monster may be interpreted as a manifestation of the student's fears. But even here, a monster is a "divine portent of misfortune" (Guralnik, p. 922; emphasis added), a warning the student conjures for themselves.

In students' comics, the monster sometimes emerges while the student is asleep. In the mythic road of trials, "the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he [or she] must survive a succession of trials" (Campbell, p. 97). In a sense, the presence of the monster within Sean's dream suggests his own "spiritual labyrinth" (p. 101).

What to make of this, students' representations of the literature review as a monster that can terrify students in their dreams? The student—now existing in the belly of the whale—confronts demons reflecting his or her own inner turmoil; the student faces dangers and problems that must somehow be resolved.

In Jordan Phillips’s comic, the monster—again with ragged teeth and red eyes—appears within her “terrifying nightmare.” In this comic, the appearance of the monster is associated with the student’s avoidance or “procrastination.” The representation of “THE LITERATURE REVIEW” in reversed writing suggests something demonic—the literature review—that takes possession of the student’s body. This is perhaps a reference to the backward writing that appears on the skin of the character “Regan” in the movie *The Exorcist*, in which the devil takes possession of a child. However, in Jordan’s comic, the image of the monster is combined with a filing cabinet,



Jordan Phillips

an object found in a professor’s office. Thus, there is an association between the monster and the contents of the professor’s filing cabinet (e.g., journal articles), and by association, the professor (i.e., me). Unlike Sean Baker’s monster, however, Jordan’s monster speaks or “growls” at her (“You procrastinated doing meee!”).

Jordan’s images show the student as someone who should be pitied, which suggests the need of mortification, in order to achieve the “purification of the self” (Campbell, p. 101; Burke, 1966), which can be accomplished by doing what is needed (“I should really get started!”), rather than doing what Jordan wants.

Even in the guise of a “monster,” we may glimpse the literature review’s shadow and trickster characteristics. In Sean’s comic, the “literature review monster” suggests the student’s lack of control; it invades Sean’s sleep, suggesting the student’s powerlessness. However, Sean’s choice to represent the literature review as a monster suggests its shape-shifting abilities and its power, breaking through the structural boundaries of consciousness, entering the students’ comics as subconscious nightmares, suggesting the students’ desires to show themselves—with regard to having to write the “dreaded lit review”—as being out of control (Basil-Morozow, pp. 56-57).

In both Sean’s and Jordan’s comics, the presence of monsters within dreams draws on our understanding that events-of-the-day may invade our dreams. The idea that dreams may reflect “unconscious” processes or things that we might want to repress (e.g., a horribly difficult assignment) is part of understanding our relation to myth (see Burke, 1966, pp. 63-80; Campbell, pp. 63-64; 101-104). We might see the dream as a projection of the shadow, and the acknowledgment of the monster within the comic as a projection of the trickster, in which the student creates a monster they have brought forth, a monster that serves the creation of a myth.

As a metaphorical monster, the “lit review,” exists within a variety of contexts. Students have been exposed to monsters in numerous forms of popular culture, including comics, movies, and television. In such forms, the monsters are often “life-threatening.” And the fact that the monsters appear in *dreams* linking them with the lit review is interesting. For when the student

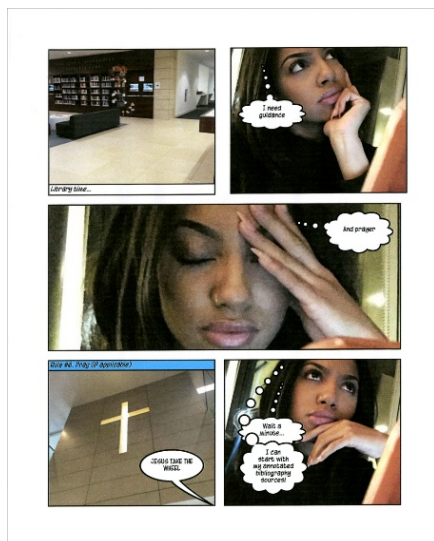
wakes up, the monster is gone; as is common with monsters, “the monster always escapes” (Cohen, 1996, p. 4; see also, Clark, 1996). But we might want to extend the metaphor of the monster and consider “the monstrous nature of language itself” (Cohen, p. x), and by extension, the act of academic writing, which is part of students’ fear and shame, seems particularly open to its depiction as a monster.

In sum, the comics present an image of the literature review as something dangerous, the student’s nemesis, able to dominate the student’s life. In other words, the literature review is given life by the hero-student and is shown to be a worthy adversary. And with its boundary-breaking and shape-shifting characteristics, the literature review also represents the image of the student’s tricksterish impulses. In this sense, “the monster stands at the threshold . . . of becoming” (Cohen, p. 20). While there are “trickster” elements in students’ comics’ portrait of the literature review, there is a stronger sense of the “shadow” elements, which support the idea that students’ conception of the literature review is typically guided by the student’s shame and fear, which is retrospectively transformed in the comic.

“The Supernatural Aid”

Often the hero meets a protective figure at the beginning of their journey. On the road of trials, it is common that student-heroes “discover for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him [or her] in his [or her] superhuman passage” (Campbell, p. 97). The “little old man” (i.e., me, well-meaning, helpful professor), the Academic Resource Center, and the William H. Hannon Library could all be considered protective figures. However, students’ comics provide a great diversity of other “supernatural aids” (see Campbell). Some supernatural aids are with the student at the beginning of the journey, while others show up to help the student later in the story.

This section examines students’ comics’ depiction of a variety of supernatural aids. Sometimes, students represent their desire for “divine intervention” in the form of conventional religious deities (e.g., “God,” “Jesus,” “The Lord”).



Jade Byrd

Jade’s upward gazing eyes mirror a need for “guidance” in the form of “prayer,” as she pleads for supernatural assistance (“Jesus take the wheel”). The image of the cross, carved into a library wall, also from Jade’s perspective from below, suggests the divine nature of the power that will help her.

The image of the cross in the William H. Hannon Library is evidence that the library itself is a supernatural aid, something that assists the hero, providing advice and resources from the beginning of the journey. That the very shape of the cross is defined by the absence of a physical

wall adds to the mystical and supernatural quality of its being.

In Christina Gallo’s comic, she is discouraged and confused. She looks upward with palms upward, asking for help. Christina first receives instruction from “the voice of God” who tells her to stop procrastinating and look for arguments. However, when Christina continues to complain, God instructs through tough love (“power through it, you wimp!”). This is the image of the supernatural aid prodding the hero to take action.

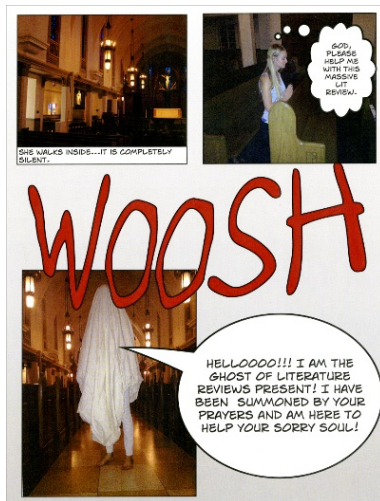
In both Jade’s and Christina’s comics, the student is helped by a supernatural aid. But even if the student reaches out to a more traditional deity, the student may be surprised. In the comic below, Madeline Jones asks for help from God in LMU’s Sacred Heart Chapel, but she receives help from Charles Dickens’ ghosts from *A Christmas Carol*, who will help her “sorry soul,” and offers instructions on how to approach reading the sources Maddy needs to use in her literature review.



Christina Gallo



Although Maddy is initially fearful of the ghosts, she continues to be aided by them. The ghosts provide her with “spiritual energy” and necessary information to guide her and to help her complete writing the literature review (Campbell, p. 71). Maddy’s encounter with the ghosts is shown in her dream, but the content of the dream is located in the real *physical* world of LMU; the photograph is created to suggest it was taken in the Sacred Heart Chapel, located on LMU’s campus.



Madeleine Jones

In Amanda Martinez’s comic, she wishes for and is visited by a supernatural figure, the “motivation fairy.” The image of the “motivation fairy” makes reference to literary figures, including Grimm’s *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale, as Amanda is sleeping when she enters the dream; the jeweled tiara suggests a fairy godmother, such as the one in *Cinderella*.

Despite these literary references, the “motivation fairy” represents the trickster’s “licentious” behavior (Bassil-Morozow, pp. 24-27). On the one hand, “mojo” is a pun on “more joe,” with “joe” being slang for coffee. But beyond that, the term “mojo” also signifies magical or sexual power, which suggests the presence of Amanda’s inner trickster. The motivation fairy’s pose on

the bed adds to the sexualized image of the supernatural aid; significantly, the image of the motivation fairy both flirts and mocks with the idea of heteronormativity. In this sense, the trickster pushes our boundaries about what constitutes a supernatural aid.

Students' comics may call up supernatural aids that are "local" to the scene. Thus, Chandler Wright's comic invokes a portrait of a university benefactor, Charles Von Der Ahe. The portrait is located in a building named for the same benefactor, who tells Chandler to "get your sh*t together."

Chandler's comic seems to make fun of, or at least to recognize the limited help of supernatural aids. "Mr. VDA" doesn't actually help Chandler but has only given her advice. Other objects are



Amanda Martinez

given life and speak, but none are helpful. "Enrollment Management" tells her she can "transfer" to another university. In an echo of *Alice in Wonderland*, a fire alarm says, "pull me!" which Chandler does not do. After receiving no help, Chandler screams, "Where do I turn!?" There is a sense that supernatural aids may be of limited help to the student.

Supernatural aids may also suggest dangerous aspects of the trickster. In Quinn Heinrich's comic, titled, "The Magical Dean,"



Chandler Wright

the professor—me, Dean Scheibel—appears in a miniature form ("I'm Mini Dean"), who offers help to the student who is unsure of her topic.

The professor may typically be viewed as someone who attempts to assist students, and the professor may be shown in a more-or-less "realistic" manner.

However, that does not exhaust students' comics' representation of

the professor. In Lauren Delisle's comic, I appeared as the devil. In a different vein, Quinn Heinrich's comic represented me as "Mini-Dean," a reference to a movie character who is a dwarf who functions as a jester-fool alter-ego for the movie's central villain. In linking the professor with villainy, power relations between student and professor are symbolically

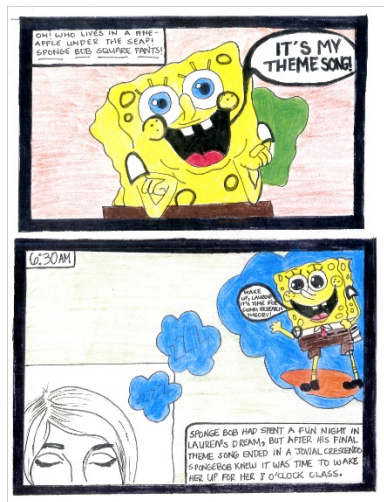
reversed; the student appears to have the upper hand. She is the student; I am the dwarf. But not completely. Supernatural aids may often be unusual in appearance. In this case, Mini-Dean appears as “some little fellow...to supply the...advice that the hero will require” (Campbell, p. 72). Further, in folkloric terms, a dwarf is “a little being, usually ugly or malformed, to whom magic powers are attributed” (Guralnik, p. 436). Linguistically, the term dwarf is associated with other terms meaning “to trick” (p. 436), and thus the dwarf seems to take on the magical aspects of the trickster.

Students’ comics represent the teacher in various ways: as a helpful mentor who may appear as a supernatural aid. However, the supernatural qualities of the teacher also show a trickster who may appear as the devil. In this sense the “dangerous aspect” of the supernatural is represented. Thus, there is a “mercurial” quality to the teacher’s mentoring, which may be quick-witted, volatile, changeable, fickle” (Guralnik, p. 888; see Campbell, p. 73). This is consistent with Campbell’s ideas depicting the “supernatural aid” as helpful, but also devilish, even sexual.



Quinn Heinrich

literature review, travels from innocence to knowledge.



Lauren Delisle



SpongeBob SquarePants’ initial appearance within Lauren’s dream serves as a path toward “fulfillment” and “higher potential health” (Campbell, 1971, p. xxii; see also Campbell, 1968, p. 82). In the first day of class, Lauren already feels stressed about having to write a literature review, thinks to herself, “only God can save me now.” However, SpongeBob now presents himself to Lauren, declaring that “I can save you...and I will!”

As a supernatural aid, SpongeBob is visible only to Lauren. As a result, Lauren repeatedly questions the “reality” of SpongeBob’s existence, which becomes an issue that divides them,



Lauren Delisles

appearing in the comics. As such, the images seem metaphoric. Again, the comics recognize the shadow aspects of the student experience, the lack of control. However, the comics also show the trickster side of students, in the creation of supernatural aids who take on mythic overtones and deal playfully with their own shadows.

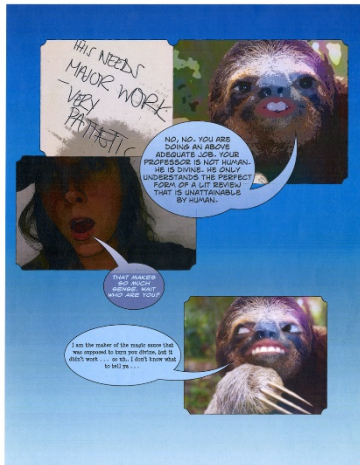
Previously, the “monsters” that showed up in Sean’s and Jordan’s dreams were interpreted as “shadow” parts of the students. However, in the following two examples, supernatural aids seek to help the student and interpret problematic situations that the student encounters.

SpongeBob SquarePants first appears in Lauren Delisle’s comic, where the character states that “he had spent a fun night in Lauren’s dream.” The phrasing suggests that SpongeBob functions independently from Lauren’s character, that he has a purpose of his own. It is clear that SpongeBob is a helpful supernatural aid and knows that “it is time to wake her up for her 8 o’clock class.” And even when Lauren shuns SpongeBob (“You’re not real...Go away!”), SpongeBob continues to help her.

despite the fact that SpongeBob repeatedly helps Lauren with the literature review. Lauren is unwilling to accept SpongeBob’s existence (“You’re not real! How can you be here right now? Go away!”). This may be viewed as a projection of Lauren’s shadow-self, her perception informed by her previous knowledge about reality. Further, Lauren’s recognition of this fact and her choice to play with this idea within her comic shows her trickster sensibilities; she drags her imposed limitations into the light of day and has fun with them within the context of her comic.

Monsters and “supernatural aids” seem to recognize the fears and hopes of students and appear in various forms. The supernatural aids are conjured by students for the purpose of

In Sabrina O'Mara's comic, she dreams that she meets her supernatural aid, a three-toed sloth. The sloth is a trickster, the animal version of "some little fellow of the wood" who lives in trees (Campbell, 1968, p. 72). Sabrina's sloth is a supernatural aid who offers her some protection after a draft of Sabrina's paper receives critical feedback from the professor ("This need major



Sabrina O'Mara

work. Very pathetic"). And the sloth helps Sabrina interpret the comment. "No, no. You are doing an above adequate job. Your professor is not human. He is divine. He only understands the perfect form of a lit review that is unattainable by human."

In this comment, we see the difference between professor (i.e., "divine") and student (i.e., "human"). More important, we see that the "lit review" is associated with "perfection," which is "unattainable" by the student. As will see in the next chapter, the issue of "perfection" is significant. In Sabrina's comic, the sloth's representation of a trickster juxtaposes the student's ability to become a god with the sloth's own limitations.

In myths, the supernatural aid supplies something that the hero will need on their journey (Campbell, 1968, p. 72). In this instance, the sloth had supplied the student with "magic sauce," which would have made the student "divine" and thus able to write the "perfect" lit review. The fact that the magic sauce "didn't work" is as it should be. The student may be aided by supernatural forces, but the transcendence from being human to becoming divine is something that the student must achieve on her own.

In the comics, students mostly show themselves awake, either working on the lit review or avoiding working on the lit review. In the comics, the students encounter images including religious deities, ghosts, a fairy, a dwarf, monsters, animals, and images of blood and water. Such images are universal "archetypes" that have become the symbolic inheritance of humanity, and part of our "collective unconscious" (see Campbell, 1971; Jung, 1971; Storr, 1983). These images, including those of the "trickster" and "shadow," are part of our mythic knowledge that are now commonly used terms in scholarly discussions of myth.

Students' comics also represent themselves as encountering tricksters and shadows in their dreams, which are "communications from the unconscious" (Storr, 1983, p. 17). Dreams might be considered as "fragmented myths" (Campbell, 1971, p. xxii). Dreams include compensations for things that the student may be avoiding in their conscious life.

Students are conscious when they are creating the dreams that appear in their comics. However, students may be drawing on their own dream experiences when they create the content of the comics. The images within the comics' dreams are related to the archetypes of the "trickster" and the "shadow." Thus, the monsters that appear in Sean's and Jordan's depictions of dreams in their comics allow for the expression of the emotion of fear. As such, the monsters might be thought of as compensation for the students, allowing them to express feelings within a real-life context where needing to perform intellectual activity in the creation

of the literature review). However, these same monsters also suggest the student's acknowledgment of a prospective future, where failure to complete the task would be linked to the symbolic death of the student (cf. Campbell, 1971; Jung, 1971; Storr, 1983).

The use of dreams within students' comics is important. Myths and dreams are profoundly connected, with "dream [being] the personalized myth [with] myth the depersonalized dream" (Campbell, p. 19). Students' comics, with the presence of ghosts, fairies, monsters, and comic figures, point to some sort of mythic connection. The fact that students populate their comics with characters who appear within the context of dreams all suggest that students use dreams rhetorically to recognize a mythic inheritance, even if the depiction of myth is done in a satirical, comic attitude.

Student Atonement With Their God

The hero nears the end of her journey. There is a sense of reconciliation or "atonement" between the student and the divinity of the literature review. The hero accepts the idea that the work must be done. The student becomes "at one with" the work she must do. The student lets go of her stubbornness and ego that made her want to resist doing the work (see Campbell, pp. 126-149).



Lauren Delisle

In Lauren's comic, the atonement between Lauren and the literature review is aided by SpongeBob and is accomplished through a blend of feelings and logic. SpongeBob's statement, "your wish is my command," is an allusion to another "supernatural aid," the magical "genie" who appears from a magical oil lamp. The genie's literary origins are in many stories, including *Aladdin and the Magical Lamp*, and has appeared in various cartoons and movies. In the top panel of Lauren's comic, the reconciliation is accompanied with little red hearts, symbolizing love.

Beyond the magic, wish-like suggestions, the word "genie" comes from the Latin word for "genius." Thus, the supernatural aid is a magical "spirit" but also possesses intelligence or "natural ability" or "genius" (Guralnik, p. 582).

Beyond the allusion to the genie, the middle panel also makes reference to a drunk driving commercial, which has now been used in a variety of other contexts ("friends don't let friends..."). The final two panels provide a wealth of details that illustrate the atonement between Lauren and Spongebob. They both wear reading glasses—a metaphor for intellectual activity—and they are synchronized in their efforts to defeat the literature review ("Let's do this."). In the final panel, in which their presence is dwarfed by a giant computer keyboard, their collaborative success is celebrated with a noisy ("POW") and a shared "high five."

Another example of the student's atonement comes at the end of Madeleine Jones' comic, where she is supported by the three ghosts, her supernatural aids. In the comic, Madeleine's initial fear of the ghosts quickly changed, and it was evident that the ghosts were there to help her and provided aid to her throughout the process of writing the literature review. Now Madeleine is at the "threshold" of her journey. The supernatural aids can help, but ultimately, it is Madeleine who must write the literature review:

The ghosts' use explicit words, which are emphasized as three one-word sentences: "GO. WRITE. WIN." Each word is related to mythic concerns. "Win" is linked to words including "endur[ance]," "struggle," "desire," and finally, in Latin, *venus*, or "love" (Guralnik, p. 1628). The student becomes god-like, for Madeleine knows that she must love her enemy but must defeat it. Madeleine's divine rebirth is based on the gratification of desire: That in death, there is love.

Second, the word "write" traces its origins to older languages and words that mean "scratch," "tear," and "wound," all of which suggest that the act of writing is physical and not entirely pleasant, that pain is involved (Guralnik, p. 1942). Thus, winning is a *contest* and is something that is difficult. In order to "win," Madeleine must "write."

Finally, the word "go" comes from an ancient word that means "to leave behind" (Guralnik, p. 597). As Madeleine begins her final push to finish the literature review, "the transcendental powers must remain behind" (Campbell, p. 246). In order to "win," Madeleine must "write" by herself, *without* the help of supernatural aids.

In Seanna Duong's comic, atonement is shown in Seanna's psychological transformation that comes with her "abandonment of [her] attachment to ego" (Campbell, pp. 130-131). That is, Seanna's sin is her pride, and her ego-driven expectations regarding the literature review.

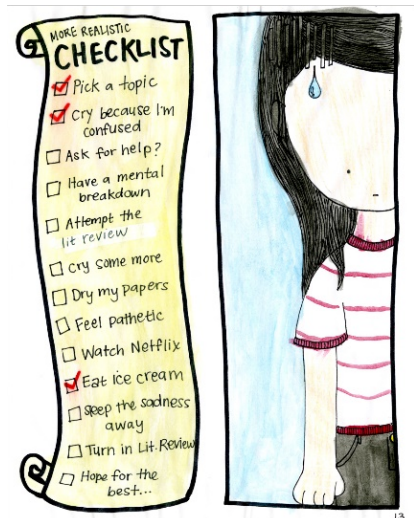
In Seanna's comic, her abandonment of her attachment to ego is enacted through Seanna's use of *lists*, which are their own form of logic. Each of the two lists suggests Seanna's orientation toward the literature review. And the symbolic death and abandonment of ego is demonstrated in the change of the *content* from the first list to the second list. Seanna's first "checklist" shows her unwarranted confidence, in which "writ[ing] the lit review" is merely a task on the way to her "victory dance," "eternal glory and honor," her "get[ing] an A in the class," and as a result, her being able to "laugh at others."



Madeleine Jones



The comic's images are the counterpart to the list. The images represent Seanna with a monstrous ego, full of pride, full of herself: the clenched fist, sure of her victory; the bright and shiny eye, her smile, which is doubled on her shirt. This is the student as self-generated ego-monster; the student who wrongly imagines herself to be godlike. The work that Seanna must complete is merely something on a "checklist," inconsequential tasks to be marked off. This representation suggests an ideology of infallibility and superiority, where the student is not only superior to the task at hand but superior to one's peers.



However, after Seanna's first list, Seanna's comic traces her progress on the literature review. Bad news: after some initial success, Seanna procrastinates and then struggles with various assignments, including APA citation and the argument paper. She shows herself crying, confused, and realizing that she "would have to re-think [her] checklist." Retrospectively, Seanna understands that she has bought into a false ideology; she is not powerful, not superior.

The difference between the ego-run-wild of the first list and the more modest and humbled series of items on her second, "more realistic checklist," represents Seanna as having let go of her false bravado. Her ego is reined in.

Seanna Duong

Seanna's second checklist implicates the lit review as a trickster; Seanna loses control of her body; she cries, has a "mental breakdown," and "feel[s] pathetic," and trapped. In contrast to the image of Seanna that accompanies the first list, the image of Seanna with the second list shows Seanna with a downturned face, a drip of sweat coming from her forehead. Additionally, we can see a series of dark bar-like rectangles superimposed in her head. The bars suggest a mental prison, which is doubled by the horizontal stripes on her shirt, suggesting the uniform of a convict.

If we consider the two lists together—the second list critiquing the faulty logic of the first list—we are left with a humbled image of the student, and the understanding that the student's previous logic represented a lack of humility and the sin of pride.

And note how the practice of procrastination is presented in the two lists. There is no sense of procrastination in the first list; Seanna presents herself as hard-charging, accomplishing everything. However, in the second list, Seanna indulges in pleasures such as eating ice cream and watching Netflix. Thus, the second list is a repair for Seanna's mental state; however, she still needs to complete the work, with which she continues to struggle.

Following the second list, Seanna's comic recalls the "dark time" of being unable to make progress on doing the literature review. The comic details her procrastination through her aversion to the task, her fear of failure. She ends up in a heap, surrounded by garbage and flies:



Seanna Duong

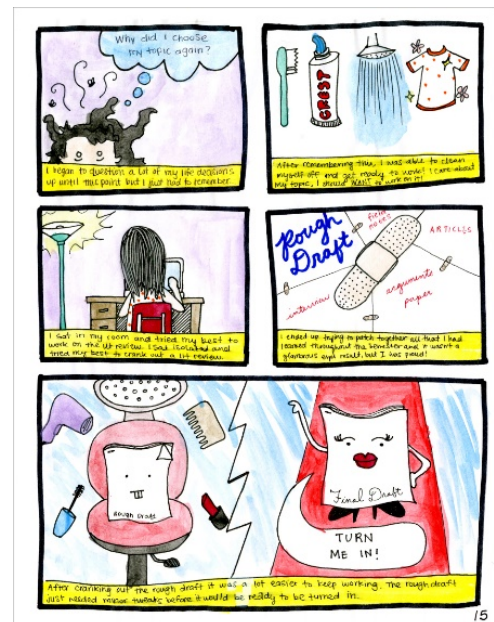
The image of the student, Seanna, in a pitiable state, wrapped up in a blanket, eating ice cream, and eventually surrounded by filth and flies is all identified as a metaphorical "dark time" in the student's life (see Osborn, 1967). These images create a narrative vision of the student in a way that the second list alone does not capture.

This is the ultimate challenge for Seanna. She must find it within herself to overcome her shame and guilt, which were the products of her ego. Seanna's redemption is shown in images in which her physical transformation is mirrored by the physical transformation of the literature review. This is the moment of atonement.

Seanna's redemption is played out through images of her body. Seanna first appears dirty (matted hair, buzzing

flies). However, she is transformed (brushed teeth, a shower, and clean clothes) and thus transcends her despair, and gets to work on the lit review. Thus, the comic shows a *symbolic cleansing*, not only of Seanna's body but of her attitude toward her work. Similarly, Seanna's former monster is "patched together" with what Seanna has "learned." In parallel fashion to the image of the cleaned-up Seanna, the literature review is also transformed from being pathetically dog-eared and buck-toothed to being beautiful (e.g., long eyelashes, red lips, high-heels, and standing on a red carpet).

The result is that Seanna's atonement with the literature review is based on her new humility, on her acquisition of knowledge ("all that I had learned throughout the semester"), which ends with the acknowledgment that "I was proud!"



Seanna Duong

In Seanna's comic, the difference in the content of the two lists may be taken as a sense of atonement. The monstrous ego of the first list, with its god-like sin of pride and perfectionism is



Seanna Duong

given up in the second list. Seanna’s “abandonment of the attachment to ego” is replaced with “hope for the best,” which is based on “patch[ing] all that I had learned throughout the semester.”

When students attempt to acquire knowledge, pride becomes something “both precarious and precious” (Lyman, p. 159). Seanna’s claim that “I went to class and turned in my paper while standing TALL,” evokes the heroic characteristics of the Western hero, being brave, having courage (Mish, 2003, p. 1275).

Seanna’s comic ends with her walking down the road toward the rising sun, flashing the peace sign. We might take this as the beginning of a new day, a new future, with the peace sign suggesting that that harmony is restored to her world.

“The Supreme Ordeal”: Procrastination

Comics address students’ urge to procrastinate throughout the semester, which may be a choice the student makes on a weekly, daily, even hourly, basis. Procrastination is “putting off for tomorrow what one *should* do today” (Milgram, Sroloff, & Rosenbaum, 1988, p. 197; my emphasis). In students’ comics, showing procrastination is something that typically happens after “the call to adventure,” and on “the road of trials,” once the student begins the various assignments.

The theme of procrastination is a constant in students’ comics and is sometimes put forward as the ultimate challenge that students face. In examining how students’ comics represent procrastination, we find the expression of ideas related to both shadow and trickster.

Keep in mind, however, that the word “procrastination” is ideologically biased. Even when students admit that they are procrastinating, the word is always used in reference to schoolwork or something that *someone else* thinks the student *should* be doing. What is procrastination to the professor is a day at the beach for the student.



Claire Dobyns

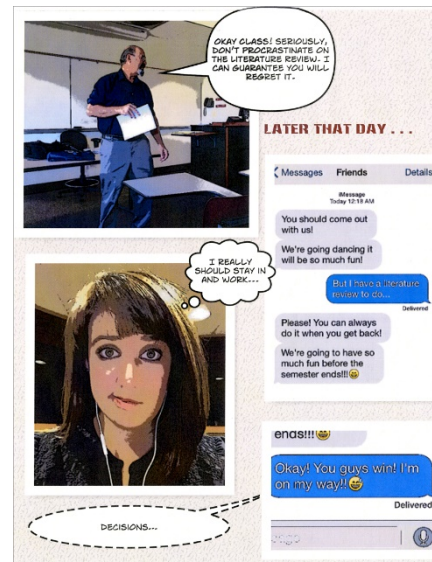
So, why do students procrastinate? For various reasons, including fear of failure, self-doubt, concerns with mistakes, lack of control, task aversion, high expectations for themselves, imposed standards of perfection by teachers, and criticism of others, including peers and parents (cf. Flett, Blankstein, Hewitt & Koledin, 1992; Milgram et al., 1988).

In comics, procrastination is shown in a variety of ways. In its most benign form, procrastination is depicted as a “reward” for work done, or merely taking a needed break in order to recharge for the work yet to come.

In Claire’s comic, procrastination is represented as taking a break from the work that she knows she must ultimately do. It’s just that there are other things she thinks she “may” do “first.” Thus, what may be judged as procrastination, in its most harmless representation, maybe just taking a joyous (“OOOOH AHHHH”) break from academic work. The consumption of food and sleeping are all understood as pleasures preferred to schoolwork. Claire’s depiction of procrastination is one of the few comics where procrastination is shown in a positive sense, and is perhaps not even procrastination, but merely a reward the student takes for previous diligence.

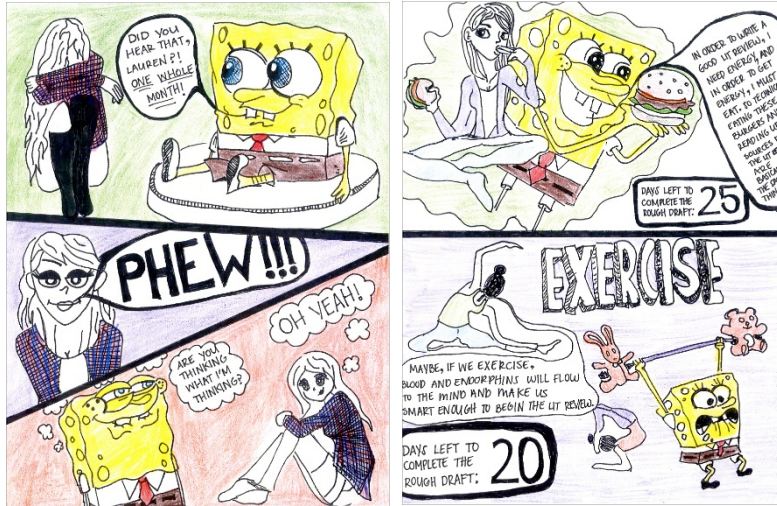
In contrast, Jordan Philip’s comic involves her choice about whether to join her friends or to continue working. In Jordan’s comic, she offers some resistance to her friends’ invitation to socialize (“You should come out with us! We’re going dancing it will be so much fun!”). Importantly, Jordan’s comic recognizes that she accepts the dominant ideology, and thus understands that she should *not* go out dancing, but rather, “should” continue to work on the assignments. On the other hand, the comic also supports Jordan’s trickster sensibilities: she is in control of her world, makes decisions for herself, and enacts freedom of choice.

Lauren’s trickster senses are further used in her comic when she and SpongeBob become accomplices in procrastination. Lauren’s claim that “productivity is for suckers!” offers the counter-values to a more traditional ideology that suggests that students should make productive use of time. Lauren’s comic says that people who adopt the dominant ideology are easily deceived “suckers.”



Jordan Phillips

However, on some level, the traditional values are expressed and accepted. Even when SpongeBob and Lauren are eating burgers and exercising, the activities are superficially legitimated and are linked to the accomplishment of the literature review. Eating the burger provides “energy,” which is needed and equated with working on the lit review. Similarly, exercise will provide “blood and endorphins” which will “make us smart enough to begin the lit



Lauren Delisle

review alone. This section of the comic is drawn without color, only in black and white. And when Lauren is asked to turn in a “rough draft” of the lit review, she is drawn as a skeleton, and announces to the professor that “I may be dead, but I have the rough draft.” Lauren’s symbolic death through the mortification of her own drawn body is an acknowledgment of her sin of procrastination. Again, the traditional ideology is acknowledged and affirmed in a humorous way.

In contrast, Renee Samuelson’s comic represents procrastination in terms of task aversion honed with a trickster’s sexual metaphor (“Kay screw this. I’ll do it later...”). However, the shadow is also represented with her guilt when her mother calls and tells Renee how “proud” they are of her “for always staying on top of your work and being such a good student! Keep it up!”).

review.” Within the comic, the relationship between the mind and body is used to play with the idea of productivity; thus, even procrastination may be justified. Moreover, the tyranny of time provides a backdrop, with the “days left to complete the rough draft” evaporating.

After SpongeBob suggests that Lauren should return to work, Lauren rejects SpongeBob, which leaves Lauren to work on the lit



Renee Samuelson

Parental pride works in opposition to Renee’s initial task aversion, creating the social pressures to be the perfect student (cf. Flett et al.). Note the use of spatial metaphor. The student who is “on top of [their] work” is a “good student” and who should “keep it up.” However, in Renee’s comic, her parents’ expectations only feed her insecurity about the argument paper. Ultimately, Renee grudgingly returns to work (“Ugh. Ok fine. Back to work I go”). The interaction takes place against a background of school imagery; the comic is set on lined paper and a stack of books.

Monsters also may serve to push students into action. Seanna Duong’s monster attempts to help her, urging her to stop procrastinating.

Seanna’s comic’s monster illustrates the theme of procrastination but also reflects back on the meaning of monsters. First, the monster arrives at a particular “cultural moment” (Cohen, 1996, p. 4). That is, the monster represents Seanna’s desire to avoid her “responsibilities” for working on the literature review. Additionally, Seanna constructs the monster in a way to contrast the monster’s growth with the ever-shrinking amount of time available for Seanna to complete the lit review. In this sense, the monster “always escapes” (p. 4) from the comic’s



Seanna Duong

panels, pushing into space in which Seanna is located. Finally, in contrast to other monsters, Seanna’s monster “refuses easy categorization” (p. 6). Seanna’s monster laughs (“Heeheehee”) even as she continues to evade the monster (“sneakwaysneakwaysneakaway”). And in turn, Seanna does not really fear the monster.

In Maria Nelson’s comic, the procrastination from her literature review begins with Maria’s cat, Harriet. Animals have long been used as images to represent idleness. The image of the lazy cat, “who wants to catch a fish but doesn’t want to get its feet wet,” is an icon of sloth (Wenzel, 1967, p. 105). And we might think that the cat’s sloth is a substitute for Maria’s own sloth. And sloth is linked to the shadow (Meyer, 2003). However, even when Maria takes a break, she does household tasks: rearranging her books, cleaning, organizing.

The idea that Maria is “perfect[ing]” her environment and is simultaneously not working on her literature review raises the idea that *perfectionism might be linked to procrastination*. And in fact, a number of research studies have pointed to this (e.g., Flett, Blankstein, Hewitt, & Koledin, 1992).

As the mythic journey plays out, heroes face a “supreme ordeal,” which may be an “expansion of consciousness and therefore of being” (Campbell, p. 246). In this sense, while students may view the literature review as “the enemy,” the real battle is something that is *internal*, *something within the student*.

I am the person whose assignments are the symbolic breadcrumbs that the student must follow in order to finally finish the literature review. And so, a student’s deviation from the path—her procrastination—is understood. My assignments contribute to students’ stress and “task aversion.” They anticipate my disapproval, fearing that they should meet what they take to be my imposed standards of perfection (Flett, et al., 1992). Students find the task difficult. They want to be perfect but anticipate that they will fall short. So, they procrastinate.

A final word on procrastination. For this book, I chose images that worked for my analysis. I also mostly selected from the comics I found to be witty and detailed, the best comics. In contrast, some students’ comics were profoundly lame, boring, and unimaginative. In such comics, the entire doing of the literature review was represented as one long episode of procrastination. Not surprisingly, many of the worst comics were created by students who also wrote half-assed literature reviews.



Maria Nelson

“The Supreme Ordeal”: Mandalas



Carina Adra

In Maria’s and Carina’s comics, the supreme ordeal is represented by the use of a spiraling circle on the eyes. The spirals are patterns that are similar in form and have the characteristics of a mandala, a Sanskrit word meaning “circle” or “magic circle” (Jung, 1972, p. 325). Mandalas “usually appear in situations of psychic confusion and disorientation” (Jung, 1983, p. 420), are “protective,” and serve as an “antidote for chaotic states of mind” (Jung, 1959, p. 10). Some of these characteristics may include being the image of the eye, being circular in shape, and rotating or spiraling (Jung, 1959, pp. 361-362). For Jung, the central point of the mandala is the “self” (p. 324). We may take the presence of the spiral/mandala to be a symbol for a transformation of the student’s “self.”

In both comics, the spiral appears on the eyes of students and appear at an intense point in the story. The image of the spiral is often taken to be to suggest that the person is in a trance or a hypnotic, zombie-like state, in which the student’s

mind has been taken over by a supernatural power (Guralnik, 1970, p. 1654). At first glance, the use of the spirals suggests the students' mortification by depicting a near-death experience. In this sense, the spirals might be interpreted as an expression of the students' shadow.

In Carina's case, the spiral appears when the student seems paralyzed, frozen, and unable to finish the lit review. In contrast, the spiral on Maria's eyes appears when she is completely engaged in doing the work necessary to complete the lit review. Thus, there is also a sense that in acknowledging their relative powerlessness, even making light of their hypnotized state, that the students, as the authors of their respective comics, are expressing the trickster aspect. However, there is something else going on.



Maria Nelson

The presence of the spiral within the context of the comics represents, in some manner, a transformation of consciousness. The spiral itself suggests a transformation suggesting of a new sense of self. Within the comic, the student is arguably not aware of the spiral, which is representative of unconscious transformation; however, given that the students have used the spiral/mandala within their respective comics, they are creating narratives that acknowledge their own transformation. Ultimately the transformation concerns the perfecting of the student through the completion of the literature review.

In Carina's comic the spiral is first titled "the infamous lit review" and is separate from her. However, the spiral then is superimposed on her eyes, "blurring her vision with stress" that results with her being out of control ("I can't do this"). She "snaps out of it," shakes the spirals from her eyes, and "defeats" the lit review. Significantly, Carina's own divinity is suggested when she sees her own literature review on the computer screen ("O.M.G." aka "oh my god"). The sense of divinity is duplicated through the positioning of her hands. In one panel, her hands are both raised up next to the computer screen; in the next panel, her fingers are intertwined in prayer or supplication.

In Maria's comic, the spiral is used to suggest her maximum engagement. In the panels leading up to the spiral, Maria has clarity, and the literature review is "working with" her. Similarly, in the panel immediately following the spiral, it is understood by Maria's roommate that Maria is in "the zone," a synonym for the idea of flow, where everything is coming together, and where her immersion in the process facilitates accomplishment. In Maria's case, she speaks in nonsensical fragments, and her body's drool signifies redemption (Burke, 1966). The body analogy suggests a trickster-like lack of control, but in a transformational way, suggesting "the interdependence of consciousness and the unconscious" (Basil-Morozow, p. 21).

In both instances, the spirals suggest that the student is not in control, although in different senses. In both cases, the spiral suggests near-death and self-victimage or mortification of the

self. However, in both instances, there is redemption; there is an expansion of consciousness, the creation of a new self that takes place in the context of the spiral as mandala. In both cases, there is a sense that the student has passed a “supreme ordeal.”

Apotheosis: Becoming a God

Apotheosis is the deification of the student hero, in which the student becomes a “godlike being,” entering a “divine state to which the human hero attains who has gone beyond the last errors of ignorance” (Campbell, pp. 150-151). Within students’ comics, this is a climactic moment, where the character is most joyful, where the oppressive burden of writing the literature review has been removed. Although most comics do not make specific references to god, some do.

Humility generally prohibits students—all of us for that matter—from announcing they—or we—are gods or even godlike. However, students are able to achieve the divine state by



Valente Dolcini

borrowing from the comic universe of “superheroes,” who serve as godlike stand-ins (e.g., Wonder Woman, Superman). Superheroes are often representations of the perfected beings whose “devotion to justice” suggests the analogy of “earthbound gods” (Reynolds, 1994; see Hatfield et al., 2013, p. 106). Variations of apotheosis or deification are represented in different ways. Some are modest, simply using the word “super.” An example of this would be Juliet Sivori’s title for her comic, “Super Student,” which suggests the comparison to a “superhero.” However, other students use images to identify with superheroes.

Wearing a wreath of golden leaves and bathed in golden light, Valente Dolcini’s comic suggests the metaphor of the Olympics, with Valente comparing himself to a “Greek God.” And the wearing of leaves in “pagan” times suggests the association between the tree-spirits and the divinity of the wearer (see Sir James Frazer’s *The*

Golden Bough for a discussion of tree-spirits).

Carina’s comic uses the victorious raised fist, which is simultaneously a punch, while delivering the onomatopoeic “POW!” which is set in an explosive typeface and enclosed in an energized and spiky balloon. This type of image is a staple in superhero comics, and most notably, used in a campy fashion in the *Batman* television series of the 1960s. In Carina’s comic, the word “POW!” expresses the symbolism to show her defeat of the enemy literature review.



Carina Adra

Similarly, in Claire Doby’s comic, Claire strikes what she labels the “Superman pose,” with her hands on her hips, which references a pose associated with Superman, and suggests Claire’s willingness to meet her challenge. When Claire strikes the pose of “Superman” she imagines herself with the power and strength she feels she needs to finish the lit review. By “mirroring” Superman, Claire gains “control over the environment,” and eliminates her shame (Bassil-Morozow, p. 60). This is the trickster striking a god-like “pose,” knowing that it *is* a pose, that she really *isn’t* Superman, but that the pose may still provide some sort of psychological help. Thus, the mirror serves as a “metaphor for the unsteadiness of self-perception” (El Refaie, p. 67).



Claire Doby's

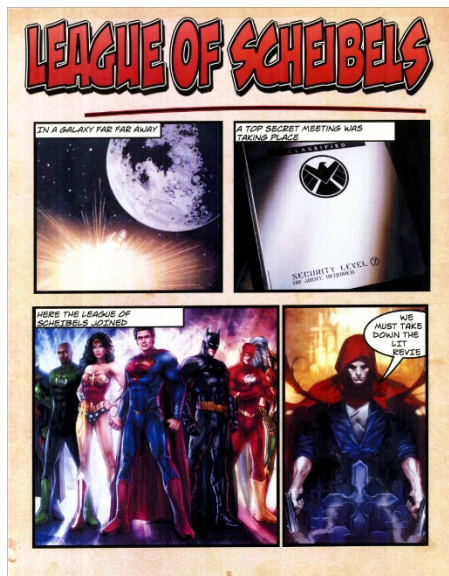
This also suggests of a sense of atonement with her god, in that she is modeling the strength of a classic superhero, Superman, to provide a psychological boost that will allow her to accomplish the task. This becoming “at one with” her god also suggests that Claire is combatting her earlier fears.

The final example of a student becoming god-like (aka “apotheosis”) is noteworthy because the student’s comic uses of the superhero genre of comics, which is often considered as modern mythology (see Duncan, Smith, & Levitz, 2015; Chap. 7; Hatfield, Heer, & Worchester, 2013). In the world of comic books, the “superhero” genre has been a near-constant presence, and “teams” of superheroes have been credited with re-energizing the superhero genre and developing a comic book “fan movement” (Duncan, Smith, &

Levitz, p. 305). Within this group, Detective Comics’ *Justice League of America (JLA)* was created first in 1960 (Duncan, Smith, & Levitz, 2015, p. 305), and includes such superheroes as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, and an assortment of guest superheroes.

Noof Al Marzook’s comic uses the process of doing the literature review as a key element for creating a mythic epic in which a group of superheroes battles a group of supervillains. And

Nouf’s approach marks the creativity and boundary-breaking of the student’s trickster, where “the raw energy of the new struggl[es] to break through the surface of old structures. It is a metaphor for change” (Bassil-Korozow, p. 31). That is, Nouf breaks free from the constraints of my assignment to create a comic by recreating a popular comic form.



Nouf Al Marzook

In Nouf’s comic the “League of Scheibels” is opposed by an equally powerful group, “The Villains of the Lit,” who seek world domination. Nouf’s choice to name the superheroes (“League of Scheibels”) and supervillains (“Villains of the Lit”) seem to suggest “shared common origins” and commonality of substance, both related to the actual class assignment, the literature review (Hatfield, p. 149). In some sense, the “Villains of the Lit,” is both the *nemesis* of the “League of Scheibels,” but is also a “distorted shadow” (Hatfield, 2013, p. 136; cited in Hatfield, Heer, & Worcester, 2013).

In Nouf’s story, the League of Scheibels is led by “The Scheibel,” who is embodied within another comic superhero, “Moon Knight.” In Nouf’s comic, my face is superimposed on Moon Knight’s massive, muscled body.

Moon Knight’s logo/image is that of a crescent moon. Nouf’s use of Moon Knight to lead the League of Scheibels creates identification between the student (Nouf) and the professor (me, aka “The Scheibel”). The image of the crescent has symbolic import in the Arabic culture, and Nouf is of that culture. Thus, by combining my image with that of the crescent, Nouf creates common substance between the two of us; beyond being student and teacher, Nouf and I share, in the comic, Arabic identity.

It is worth noting that Moon Knight is a rather severe anti-hero, one prone to extreme violence (e.g., carving a crescent into his enemies) and mental disorders, including schizophrenia. I am not sure what prompted Nouf’s decision to create my character in this manner. I have been told that I am sane. Really.



Nouf Al Marzook

The Arabic origins of Moon Knight’s fictional biography is intertwined with actual Ancient Egyptian theology, in which the god Khonshu is the “god of the moon.” In the fictional biography of Moon Knight, the human character, Marc Spector, becomes “Moon Knight,” who becomes Khonshu’s “avatar on Earth” (see [Wikipedia’s entrée for “Khonsu”](#)). The end result is



Nouf Al Marzook

that the professor (me) is raised to the status of “god,” although a violent one.

Like many superhero comics, Nouf’s comic adheres to various conventional themes. A community is being threatened and needs to be defended, while the heroes battle the villains. In Nouf’s superhero universe, the literature review is not merely a hard assignment. Rather, it has become a supreme form of punishment, one that will enslave Earth’s population for all eternity. This is appropriate; if the comic pits two opposing groups, superheroes and supervillains, then the stakes of the battle must be of supreme importance (cf. Burke, 1966).

In the comic, Zookk is the League of Scheibels’ “most trusted ally.” Allies are a common type of character in superhero

comics (Coogan, p. 87; cited in Heer & Worcester, 2009). At the beginning of Nouf’s comic, Zookk is not a superhero, but she is more than human. As an ally, Zookk has a liminal status, existing somewhere between human and superhero. In order to find out more about literature reviews, Zookk is sent by Moon Knight to “find out what you can about the lit review.” Visiting my classroom “she mingle[s] with Earthlings to find information.”

An initial battle between the League of Scheibels and the Villains of the Lit leads to more threats from the Villains of the Lit, and to Zookk’s ultimate test, that *she must write a literature review*. Consistent with the student experience of having to write the literature review, Zookk’s character is willingly undertaking a mortifying experience, one that imposes structure, a mark of shame and the shadow. In one sense, Zookk’s mortification at having to write the literature review is a symbolic death, which prepares her for rebirth.



Nouf Al Marzook

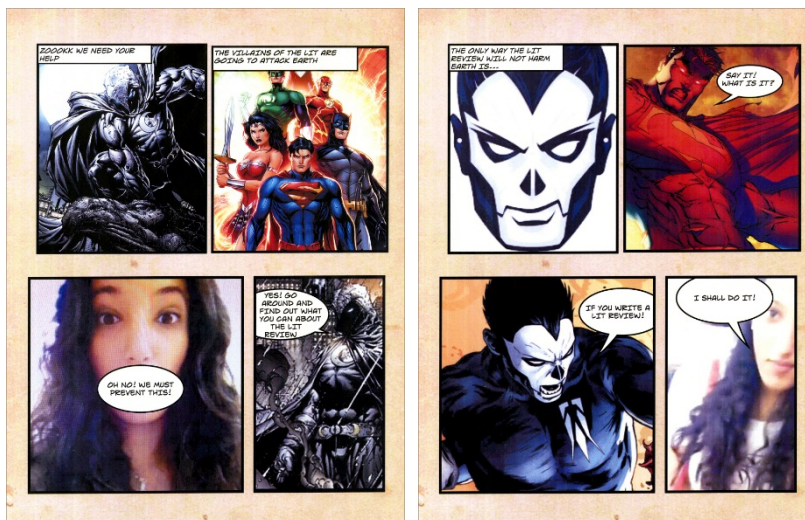
Zookk’s statement shows her strength of will and her sense of duty, both common themes of heroes (Duncan et al, pp. 206-207). The idea that writing the literature review will save the earth also presents an alternative to the “myth of redemptive violence”—a common way for order to triumph over chaos—Zookk’s victory is done by symbolic means—the writing of the literature review (see Duncan et al, p 201; see also, Wink).

Thus, Nouf’s comic poses a counter-value to violence, and that communication is an alternative to war (Burke).

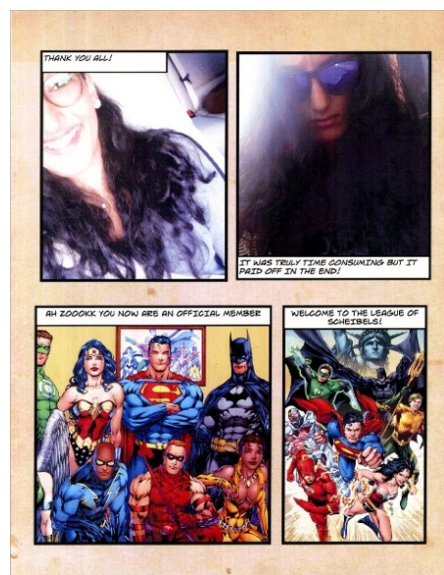
After successfully writing a literature review, peace is restored between the League of Scheibels and the Villains of the Lit. However, Nouf’s comic complicates the relationship between the two opposing forces. Rather than having

“good” defeating “evil,” the comic blurs the boundaries between the two groups. A final challenge is given to Zookk. In order to assure Earth’s survival, Zookk must humanize *her nemesis*, “The Lit Review.”

Metaphorically, the peaceful reconciliation between the warring groups of superheroes also signals the redemption of the literature review as an assignment. This seems to suggest that Nouf’s comic offers support for the dominant educational values. That is, Zookk not only completes the literature review, but she is able to persuade others that “the lit review is not



Nouf Al Marzook



Nouf Al Marzook

bad.” After all the pain and grief associated with the process of doing the literature review, Nouf, like many students, seems to acknowledge—at least in her comic—that something has been gained (“the literature review is not bad”).

Nouf’s comic transcends the genre of superheroes in some ways. One of the critiques of comics that pit groups of superheroes against supervillains is that the groups seemed “locked into their own feuds with little connection to or concern for the world of ordinary humans” (Duncan et al., p. 211). In contrast, Nouf’s comic merges the genre to the everyday life of students. Moreover, Nouf’s comic is consistent with Campbell’s journey: an ally who is human (Zookk), enters the world of divine beings, is sent back to Earth on a scouting mission to collect information, is

ultimately challenged to write a literature review in order to save humanity, is asked to persuade people that “the lit review is not bad,” and is ultimately invited to join the League of Scheibels. Thus, Nouf’s comic does not resort to the “myth of redemptive violence,” but rather, is victorious by symbolic means, specifically, writing the lit review. Enemies are reconciled; war is avoided.

The Return From The “Kingdom Of Dread”

The students have now finished both the literature review *and* the comic that told their stories about the process of doing the literature review. With the completion of these tasks the student hero “re-merges from the kingdom of dread” (Campbell, p. 246). Recall that our analysis began with the titles of students’ comics, focusing on the use of the term “dread” as a central feature of the hero’s attitude toward the literature review, and as an indication of a mythic journey.

The hero’s journey is over. Sort of. In Campbell’s theory of myth, the third and final part of the hero’s journey is “the return.” This is where the hero returns to her tribe, culture, society, world with “the ultimate boon”—a blessing or something that “restores the world” (p. 246).

Campbell says the two worlds are the “human” and the “divine,” which appear to be different from one another, but are, *within the hero, one*. It is in the coming together of the human and divine, in the “boon” of the hero’s journey, that the myth is told. In the telling of the story through the comic, the divine is recovered. In the comic the student confesses her shame-filled, shadow-filled shortcomings; it shows her in all her limitations as a budding writer of academic papers, of rational academic discourse. But this is also the creative writing that allows the student’s inner trickster to periodically explode in expletives (e.g., “Fuck!” and “Shit!”), to conjure up images of monsters and supernatural aids, and even acknowledge that something may have been learned in the process of writing the lit review. *The trickster howls!*

The literature review represents the “normal human destiny” of being an achieving student (Campbell, p. 234). That is, the student uses words that create sentences that become academic writing, that becomes a literature review. In contrast, comics—the mixture of images and words—allows humans to transcend their symbolic oppression to an ideology of academic discourse; the student becomes the *mythic student hero* (cf. Campbell, pp. 234-235). It is in this image that the student moves beyond the sins of pride, of procrastination and perfection, and revels in her or his rebirth, as a heroic figure, god-like.

Additionally, what is being presented in the comics is the bringing back of psychological self-knowledge, a blessing that is shared with others. This is “the ultimate boon” (Campbell, p. 172), in which the art of the comic allows for a new understanding: “the agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth” (p. 190).

But wait. Let's consider the literature review and the comic as "boon." *Are they really?* Clearly the hero's completion of the "literature review" may be considered a boon *to the student*. The student completes the literature review, turns it in, and maybe even recognizes that she has acquired some knowledge: how to find a topic, how to search databases, how to read academic texts, how to make arguments and in doing so, how to pose a research question. We may know that these may be important things to know within the context of a college education. And maybe these skills are useful in the world beyond. Maybe she walks away with a new appreciation of herself, an acknowledgment of her strengths and limitations.

And yet. Even when the student finishes the literature review, I mean, *so what?* When a student turns in an assignment, it "becomes quickly rationalized into nonentity" (Campbell, p. 218). The paper is done, finished, *dead*. At this point, the once-feared literature review may not mean *shit* to the student. Comics also express that students can't wait to be finished with the literature review (e.g., "Take this thing away from me!" or "I never want to see it again!"). If the paper is turned in at the very end of the semester, the student may not even bother to collect it the following semester. Walk the empty hallways past faculty offices, past cardboard boxes crammed with unclaimed papers. Thus, even "our little stories of achievement seem pitiful" (Campbell, p. 27).

Okay. But what about the student's comic, which tells the story about how the student-created literature review? Might not the comic be the "ultimate boon"? Let's consider that.

Students' comics are filled with images of monsters, psychological torment, and supernatural aids, all pointing to the telling of the story in mythic terms. The comics construct "the realm of the gods . . . and the exploration of that dimension . . . [this] is the whole sense of the deed of the hero" (Campbell, p. 217). Therefore, it becomes the task of the hero, through the comic, through words and images, to create the story of doing the literature review as a "soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment" (p. 218).

Students' comics often recall their experience of writing the literature review as a "call to adventure" and a "refusal of the call," that includes a "road of trials" in which they are assisted by mentors and "supernatural aids." The literature review is often shown as a shadow image, reflecting students' insecurities, fears, and shame. It is represented as the student's *nemesis*—godlike in its own way—but perceived initially as an enemy and a monster. However, as the "*lit* review," the same creation—but now contextualized within the students' comics—comes to resemble a "trickster." As such, the "*lit*" review includes representations of procrastination, which masks issues related to perfectionism. Such instances show the psychological battle that students face when dealing with situations where judgments about perfection—either their own or other people's—are in the balance. Recall Seanna's comic, in which the literature review alternately appears as a growing monster, a buck-toothed rough draft, and the polished draft in the image of a beauty queen strolling on a red carpet. This shape-shifting trickster is brought to

us through the student-hero, the creator of narrative, the creator of myth.

Students' comics might also be thought of as ideologically-infused "counter-myths" that dig beneath the surface-level acceptance of university values, beyond the myth of the "heroic teacher" (e.g., Steudeman, 2014). Clearly, the images of perfectionism and procrastination both call into question the idea that students are merely assigned academic work to do and that the work is completed in a non-problematic fashion. And that the power relations between student and professor might also be imagined in a variety of ways. Even the seemingly benign "title page" includes the title of the course, the name of the professor. And these facts adhere to the required forms of APA or MLA.

Not all of the students' comics conform to the myth as recalled here. Not all students view the literature review in terms of "dread." Not all of the comics view the literature review as the "enemy" or as a "monster." Not all comics have instances of procrastination. However, these themes are represented with *some* consistency. And the stories do seem to correspond to the theoretical ideas on myth. The "literature review" is an enemy whose academic divinity makes it a worthy opponent, one that allows for the student to be represented as heroic (Burke, 1966, pp. 383-385). The journey follows many stages of the "hero's journey" (Campbell, 1968). And the comic's retelling of that journey enacts the hero's shame and transforms it by acknowledging that shame and reinterpreting it in mythic terms; the shadow and trickster are found (Bassil-Morozow, 2015).

The literature review is dead. Long live the comic! The lit review's completion is also its symbolic death, which creates the birth of the comic. The idea here is that "every creature lives on the death of another" (Campbell, p. 238). This is mythic.

The comic tells a myth of becoming, not only of the literature review, but of the student. The comics do not, however, typically refer to the process of doing the comic. Only rarely does a comic end with some sort of comment like, "well, now it's time to start the comic." However, Kateri Milanesa's comic uses an iconic image, one that has been used by literally thousands of television cartoons and is related to students' lives beyond the academic course for which the literature and comic were assigned.

Kateri ends her comic with the completion of the literature review and by then referencing the beginning of her comic, which in turn, references the end of the comic (“That’s all Folks”). The



Kateri Milanesa

words and images of “That’s all Folks” refer to an image used to end the “Looney Tunes” cartoons that began in 1930 and continue today.

And we might consider “That’s all Folks!,” as the gratification of the reader’s desires. The story of the doing of the literature review has been told, as a comic, and now the comic is also done. And the gratification is the death of desire, which allows the student, and by extension, the reader to *move on*; it allows us “the freedom to live.”

In Kateri’s comic, the very word “folks” suggests older times, and has some resonance with things tribal, mythic. However, let’s move on and consider *the image in the background on which the words “That’s all, Folks!” rests*. Although the concentric rings might be taken at first glance to resemble a “target” or a

“bulls-eye,” a closer inspection reveals something else, something more, *something deeper, something beyond*. That is, the light-and-dark of the rings are shaded in a way that draws in the reader’s eye, and suggests *depth*, with the depth increasing with each inner ring. But then, when the rings end, there is a black hole—not a spot—but rather, an *opening*. An opening onto...what? The idea that there is some *place*—perhaps the great void—some *place* beyond the rings, which is confirmed when looking at examples of Looney Tunes cartoons’ endings. In those endings, a host of characters, including Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Yosemite Sam, and others appear in that *place beyond the rings*, and the characters lean forward, into the space in front of the innermost ring. And the opening, to me, seems an opening to the universe, the cosmos, the void, the totality, the “all.” Thus, the reader confronts one story that ends—the literature review, the comic, the cartoon—but the ending opens onto something else that may be just beginning; that is, the story may be over, but that is not “all” there is, folks. From a mythic perspective, the assertion of “That’s all, folks!” is clearly *not* the case. It isn’t “all,” at all, y’all.

Can we imagine that students may take this new knowledge of creating stories with words and images into the rest of their lives? Perhaps these skills have a place in their professional lives, where the marketplace may be interested in using the students’ new skills. I have seen comics used in human resource training. And when I was required to take an Institutional Research Board certification course as a requirement to do the research you are now reading, I recall the course using comics to tell stories about the research problems on which I was quizzed.

We may ask ourselves, “is the individual student’s comic the mythic ‘boon’ to which Campbell refers?” Similar to the literature review, the comic may be a boon to the student, who may take their comic-making skills into the workplace, the world. The creative ability to put together words and images may be useful in a wide variety of occupations and organizations. On the other hand, perhaps the myth within students’ comics might be limited to showing their peers, who may express envy (e.g., “Cool! I never get to say ‘fuck’ in my school papers!”), or concerned or even skeptical parents (e.g., “I’m paying \$50,000 a year so my daughter can use profanity in a comic? Wonderful.”).

However, it is in this final stage that the support of one of the “supernatural aids” that appeared in the comics, the William H. Hannon Library, takes on central importance. It has been the library that takes students’ mythic comics and makes them available to other educators and other students at the university and beyond. This is where the comics are flung across the worldwide web and into the bellies of other academic institutions. What is offered is something else, perhaps something in the service of some sort of cosmic faith, in which students’ representations of their education experiences are shown as a cultural boon, heroic, and mythic, and laying open the ideological divides between and among the educators (teachers and administrators and the educated (students)).

Even more than me asking my students to create comics about doing the literature review, it has been the William H. Hannon Library, which from the beginning, chose to not only display students’ comics on the walls of the library, but also to display comics ([see comics](#)) far beyond the physical confines of the library, onto websites that enter the orbits of other universities. The library chose to fling the myth across the academic universe, into the cosmos, disseminating the myth far and wide. As you have read this book, you have become part of that mythic journey.

Conclusion

Students and teachers alike enter the classroom with understandings of the existing power relations which represent opposing ideologies that typically guide class content and conduct. This is the college knowledge game. Likewise, both students and teachers carry mythic images and archetypes that guide their experiences in the classroom and their reflections on those academic experiences (e.g., comics about writing the literature review).

The previous analysis of students’ comics about the process of writing a literature review seem to resonate with Campbell’s stages of the hero’s mythic journey. Likewise, the presence of students’ archetypes within their comics (e.g., blood, the sea, gods, monsters, superheroes, tricksters, shadows, and mandalas) seem to affirm the idea that universal images of the “collective unconscious” are in play and at work (cf. Burke, 1966; Jung, 1971).

At the very least, students' comics offer up ideologies that question, critique, and support the ideologies that students encounter. Most profoundly, the comics acknowledge the contextual processes that surround the "encouragement of learning" by acknowledging that the learning is itself contextualized by the "education of the whole person," with that education being related to the individual student's growth; thus, students comics also reflected expressions of anxiety, boredom, fear, growth, and accomplishment. Finally, the comics also reflect personal statements regarding the "service of faith and the promotion of justice" (see Loyola Marymount University Mission Statement). For students' comics arguably demonstrate some sort of faith about the "human" and the "divine" while creating personal narratives about justice (see Campbell). Naturally, within the comics, the ideological positions, like the mythic narratives, are very particular to the context of my class. As we say in the academic game, "more research is needed."

Students' abilities to critique the work they do as students is very limited, and "Student Teaching Evaluations" have become increasingly suspect. Opportunities for more creative reflections—in the form of comics—may be of value.

Endnotes

The perspective used in this book is a combination of ideas related to myth and ideology. Drawn from various sources (works by Kenneth Burke, Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, and Helena Bassil-Morozow), the ideas sometimes clash with one another or are used in different ways by the various authors. It is beyond the scope of this monograph to offer a unified theoretical perspective. However, the basic framework is an integration of archetype and ideology. Useful discussions also include Laurence Coupe's *Kenneth Burke on Myth: An Introduction* (2005) and the rhetorical criticism of Rushing and Frenz (1989, 1991) and mythic analyses of comic book superheroes including Batman (Terrell 1993, 2000) and Spiderman (Koh, 2009). It is worth noting that the presence of myth in comics is mentioned in Carl Jung's *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959/1969), which cites an article by Alan McGlashan, "Daily Paper Pantheon: A New Fantasia of the Unconscious," which was published in *The Lancet* on Jan. 31, 1953. The article cites ideas that are common to both Carl Jung and Kenneth Burke.

My representation of "The Myth of the Student Hero and the Dreaded Lit Review," is also guided by Joseph Campbell's mythic perspective, where the hero leaves the world, goes into a strange new world, and then returns, with something of great value that will help the hero's culture, tribe, society, or world. Campbell is well-regarded in terms of his popularizing the idea of myth (cf. Ricketts, 1993; Segal, 1987).

The primary concern is the application of ideas about myth and ideology to the study of students' comics. The comics may be thought of as rhetorical responses that students create after having finished writing a "standard academic paper," specifically, a "literature review." While I view the assignment of the "literature review" as a "normal" assignment for college students, the literature review is often a source of shame by students. And the students' comics

serve as compensatory creative work that addresses that shame. My analysis of students' comics suggests the presence of a myth that is also an ideological resistance to, and affirmation of, the political power structures that guide student life within the context of my class and university life in general. Similar to Bassil-Morozow (2015), I view the "shadow" and the "trickster" as "two developmental stages of the same phenomenon--the drive to be an individual, to be a personality, to leave one's mark on the world" (p. 56). Students' feelings of guilt and shame are not revealed in the text of the "literature review." However, those feelings of guilt and shame, as well as triumph and accomplishment, are reflected in the students' comics.

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