



UMass Lowell

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May 5, 2011
My Wonderful Students
Essay Writing for English Majors
UMass, Lowell
One University Ave
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Dear Class,

Inasmuch as I have referred to our particular class as “Correspondences,” I thought it entirely appropriate to end our time together with a personal letter of sorts. I must say that I have really enjoyed working with all of you this semester, as your openness to “essay” ideas in and through some pretty unorthodox methods has been truly wonderful. You should all have a lot of confidence in your own powers of imagination and creativity.

The last image that I left you with this semester, was that of a man leaving his son behind with the child’s mother, and then driving off into the the night. This is a fitting image for us to end with, as it represents a breakthrough of sorts for its creator Wim Wenders, the director of the film *Paris, Texas*. Up until this point in his filmmaking career, Wenders had focused on the power of images, as he did not trust language as a means of getting to the truth of things. However, even though he had relied heavily on images in his earlier work, he never quite seemed to trust them entirely either. Here however, he attempted to give both images and words their due, which is a far cry from the original idea he had for the film, which was to represent the alienation of postmodern life by presenting a story “constructed around the image of a man leaving the freeway and walking straight into the desert.” As we well know, the final image of Travis that Wenders leaves us with is one with a profound accompanying narrative.

I too feel that images can be deceptive at times, yet I also have experienced moments of personal insight through their intimate powers of revelation. I also know the limits of language, yet I have felt the healing power of a kind word, and indeed the despair that can accompany its absence when dearly sought. The full range of these experiences has been of great benefit to my essay writing, as together they have left me with a deep appreciation of my need for both intimacy and universality in my various methods of self-expression and exploration.

For your final assignment, I ask that you write a letter of sorts to me as well. In this letter, I would like you to share your personal impressions of the various encounters and breakthroughs that you have had while engaging the power of both words and images this semester. In other words, I would like you to share your current appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of both images and language, making references to some of the works that we have addressed, and with all that you have written and thought about this semester in mind. I have provided you with some interesting words and images from *Paris, Texas* on the wiki. I believe that the juxtaposition of the home movie scene with the poem by Mary Jo Slater might provide you with some interesting ideas for your letter., as will the mirror scene which brings the film’s narrative to its most cathartic moment. Your letter can be as long as you feel is necessary, and as original in its form as you would like, as you have earned this artistic and personal freedom.

All the best, Tom

The letter is due on Thursday - May 12th - at 8:00 A.M. - in Dugan 207