

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 25

Number 2 *Once upon a time recently in...a land nearby*

Article 58

Spring 5-1-2005

Student: Wendy

Kathleen Ward
College of DuPage

R. Ryan Brandys
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr>

Recommended Citation

Ward, Kathleen and Brandys, R. Ryan (2005) "Student: Wendy," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 25 : No. 2 , Article 58.
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol25/iss2/58>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact orenick@cod.edu.

Student: Wendy

By Kathleen Ward & R. Ryan Brandys

Stupid philosophy. Stupid, stupid professor. A paper due tomorrow? I don't have a clue how to write this! Describe a connection he says. What damn connection?

Assignment: Describe the connection between mortality and religion as it relates to the philosophy of existentialism in culture.

Wendy tapped her pen on her desk and took another sip from her coffee mug. The mug was blue and Wendy stared at the white, acrylic snowflake painted on the side.

All right, so I'm avoiding this. Fine, I'll write my name on the paper. There we go. That's progress. Now what? Where do I even begin?

Since mortality was a lot more straightforward than religion, Wendy could start there. Clearly mortality meant death. But death was an abstract concept. Death did not really **exist**; it was just the absence of life. Life was something tangible; life came first. But tracing it back, it wasn't really human life that came first. It was the rest of nature.

I need more coffee.

Wendy found herself backed into a corner. Death was not simple once she thought about it. She sipped French Vanilla from her cup and thought it ironic that life was a requisite for death. The two were tied in a kind of cyclical war, a war that Wendy would have read about – had she bought the textbook for her philosophy class.

Why is it that human death is all about solemn ceremony but natural death is viewed as a continuous process? Is it because we're so much more important than nature? We have this 'holier than thou' attitude that humanity is separate from plants and animals, and that our human endeavors are superior to the rest of nature, because our lives carry with us this giant, benevolent purpose? Why is that?

She could only conclude that human life was the basis for all perception and all social invention. For that reason every individual human life had large, purposeful shoes to fill.

God, why didn't he just ask me to analyze, "To Be or Not To Be?" That might have been easier. Focus Wendy! What is the purpose of nature? Of course, this isn't about what I think, it's about the mindset of every other living creature. So then what is a tree's purpose? A tree doesn't sit there and think, 'I'm a tree, and these are my goals for today...'

But at the same time, trees do accomplish their goals. Plants provide food for the planet, with the help of the sun. They serve a purpose so crucial that all life depends on them, and they aren't even aware of it.

So what about a snail? A snail knows that it must do everything it can to stay alive, decompose as much biomaterial as it can, and then go hide under a rock. But Mr. Snail doesn't worry about what will happen after death, if he will or will not go to Snail Heaven. So for nature, the purpose of life...is simply to remain alive.

Wendy was pretty sure that wouldn't hold water as an intelligent thesis for her paper, but it helped her put things into perspective. The whole concept of humans being above nature was total crap. Nature served its purpose and it did not need a higher intelligence to do it. Yet humans took their intellect, analyzed their purpose to death, and concluded that it must be something grandiose.

So then what? I don't know. Wish I could be at a party right now...partying with Captain Morgan. Wasn't Mark supposed to have one at his apartment tonight? Damn it, I totally forgot about that. I should go, now. But even if I went I'd still have to leave early to finish this stupid damn paper. God, leaving early sucks so much. It's totally not fair and you miss out on everything that happens after you leave. Everyone gets to have a good time, and you don't. It's like when you die, the world goes on without you. Nothing stops, only you.

God, that's terrifying. When I die, I will be gone, nonexistent. I can't even understand that. It's like you're asleep, except you don't dream, you don't think, you're completely not there. You are absolutely nothing. Your humanity has been ripped from you because your ability to perceive the world is no longer there.

She glanced at the clock and frowned. It was already one in the morning. She moved her pen to her mouth and began chewing the end. Boy, was she tired. She closed her eyes but immediately found that wasn't such a good idea so she grabbed for her coffee mug.

*Get a grip Hun, and more caffeine. You've got to think faster. Okay, some people just can't swallow the idea of their own personal existences ever having an end. They want something else to be there when they die. It can be good; it can be bad. But it just **can't** be nothingness. It can't be **The End**. When you reach The End, your purpose is all used up. Your story is over. What a wholly depressing notion. There must be some way to bridge this gap between fear and purpose. For everyone's sanity, there must be something!*

The gap! That was it! Wendy shot up from her lazy slouch, grabbed her notebook and started jotting ideas frantically. It made sense now. It was all about the gap and the bridge humans built to get over it.

Oh, I've so got you, stupid little connection between two totally irreverent concepts! Hah! So generally speaking, humans think they have souls, and that everything else in nature does not.

The soul was another abstract concept, another human invention, this time specifically cooked up to give humans a supernatural entity, allowing the

possibility of an afterlife.

But souls only exist inside our own heads, and nowhere else, so without human perception, souls wouldn't exist!

Wendy wrote frantically with handwriting even she could barely read. She knew humans believed they had souls and the rest of nature didn't, because humans were of a higher intelligence. The rest of nature had no purpose beyond surviving, but of course, humans had to be different. The concept of the soul served as the means to curb the fear of lifelessness, and the beliefs, laws, and customs created by humans used the soul and the afterlife to bridge the fear gap, together forming religion. She wrote a quick, point driven conclusion to her paper:

"Therefore, there is no death without life. There is no life without nature. Nature's purpose is to live. The separation between humans and nature is that humans are intelligent, where as nature is not. Intellect breeds an inflation of purpose and a fear of death, which creates a gap. The concept of the afterlife fills that gap, allowing people to resume their lives and what they feel is their purpose. It's just one big circular flow that keeps the human as content with his purpose as the tree is with hers. Unfortunately, death is a by-product of the circle of life. Religion is a social means of solving that problem in the minds of frightened people. Religion bridges the gap."

Before science discovered logical and psychological explanations for all the gaps humans encounter in their daily lives, these gaps were often filled with religious explanations. The supernatural was always there to explain what could not be understood or what was difficult to accept. Religion has been the band aid of the human psyche. The uses of that band aid vary from person to person. Some people only use that band aid when they feel wounded, while others expect it to carry them through life. Some people need it to coerce them into being good people. Others need it to help them grasp hold of their fears of the unknown. Primarily, it was nonexistence that couldn't be grasped.

Humans can't handle mortality. That's why religions survive— because people don't.

Wendy ran the spell check, and then triumphantly clicked on the 'Print' Icon. "Yes!" she said aloud. "Done and done. How's that Mr. Stupid-Philosophy-Teacher-Who-Has-The-Balls-To-Give-A-College-Kid-A-Paper-To-Write-On-A-Good-Party-Night? It's *all* about the gap." She grabbed her course syllabus to find staple vs. paperclip instructions, then suddenly gave a shout.

It can't be! I'm reading this wrong! No way— there's no hope. It's not even possible. The library's closed. How could I miss this? How can it possibly say this?

Include with your essay three non-internet sources and site them within your work. In addition to the essay, provide a bibliography listing your three sources.

No sources, no credit.

Shit.