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Written Rorschach

When a patient walks in to a therapist's office and sits down on the inviting chaise lounge, I presume that the patient is seeking help finding direction in life. Introspection has led her nowhere; she cannot make sense of the various cogitations surrounding her parents' divorce; her recent breakup; the death of her close friend; her brother's illness, etc. So, she has sought out professional help. Surely, a seasoned veteran can sort through her tangled neurons.

Therapy. Most are afraid to ask for help when they need it, whether it be from a licensed psychologist or simply a friend. I have become one of those people. While I used to take fears and concerns to friends and family, a notebook will now suffice for the purpose of getting all of my feelings out of my head and into the open. I write to self-reflect, to synthesize ideas, and to attempt to find some sense of direction. Throughout college I have witnessed my thoughts gradually evolving with experience and knowledge, yet I have begun to realize that to witness is not to make sense of. It has become evident this year, my junior year, after a series of personal events transpired, that finding who I am and who I hope to become is the first step I must take before making any more significant life choices. And I'm not talking about choices involving what to do or where to go after my time at the University of Michigan ends. Those choices are easy; I will move to Chicago and join the corporate world for two years, attend graduate school, and return to the corporate world. The significant life choices I am referring to include figuring out how much family time I am comfortable sacrificing in order to achieve my professional

goals; how I can be there for my worried mother, demanding father, and lonely brother; and what to do with my long-distance non-committer.

Regardless of the type of writing I am working with at different moments, whether it be an academic discourse, an argumentative essay, or creative prose, there are personal thoughts to sift through in order to reach a definitive conclusion by the end of the piece. Furthermore, each of those newly re-examined ideas then becomes part of a bigger picture of myself that I am slowly uncovering. Although my canvas still looks more like a Rorschach than a Rockwell, it is slowly taking shape with each new word that I commit to paper.

As a result of all of this self-reflection, the writing process becomes somewhat of a self-assessment. I normally begin by forming an outline of my piece, beginning with a thesis and ending with supporting details. The conclusion never takes shape until the full introduction and body are finished. Those steps alone are indicative of my affection for control and order. Following the completion of my outline, I commence each essay at the most natural, albeit not the most logical, place to start: the introduction. An anecdote, a quote, or maybe short history behind the topic I will explore always prefaces the body of the essay. In more freeform writing pieces, I also do not delve straight into the meat of the essay. This is my way of making small talk with my therapist before really cutting to the topic at hand. Once I have artfully skirted around the issue for an appropriate length, I delve into the subject of the piece. The messy emotions, if you will. I, of course, try and box those as neatly as possible into paragraphs with clean topic sentences and strong supporting details.

As in life, the conclusion is oftentimes the portion of each writing project that I grapple with the most. I have yet to write an academic essay on a topic in which I consider myself an

expert. When dealing with creative prose, I always question whether the arrangement of words I have chosen leaves the reader with the right impression. For me, summarizing my thoughts into one succinct conclusion is never a graceful task. I have never truly finished anything worth writing about, nor written about anything I could truly finish.

When I write, the paper becomes my chaise lounge and the pencil my own personal PhD taking notes on her notepad. An hour spent wrangling my notions into the confines of an eight-and-a-half by eleven piece of paper and then corralling those feelings into commas and periods is equivalent to an hour spend with a therapist. Paragraphs and punctuation harness all of the messiness that is real life, while neatly jotted-down notes fill the role of a therapist, directing me towards the right answers. Writing is the ultimate form of self-controlled therapy. I decide what to talk about. I decide when and what to explore. I make my own diagnosis.