

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

Vol 21 Issue 29 2013-08-09

Spiritual Survival

Behind the *Life of Pi*

Faking It

Ghost behind the grade

Carpe Diem

Moments

Plus:
Weird Canada
Gregor's Bed
and much more!



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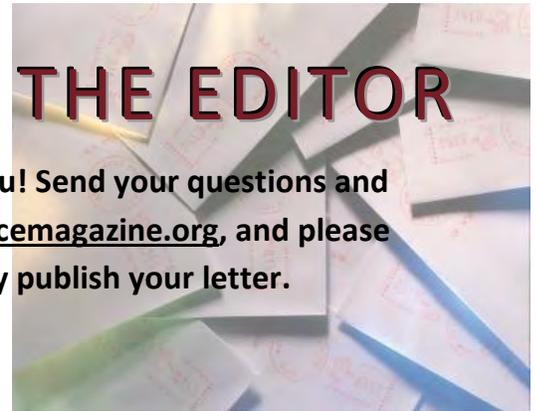
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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



EDITORIAL

Christina M. Frey



Ghostly Grades

Every few years there's an anonymously published letter written by a member of one of the most reviled, yet desperately sought after professions in all of academia: the professional essay writer.

And each time such a letter appears, there's a flurry of finger-pointing. What kind of unethical person takes a job like that? Who would hire an essay writer to complete assignments—and then happily walk across the stage with “hard-earned” diplomas? Who's responsible for such lazy, entitled behaviour? Kids?

Parents? Society? Profs? Or the educational system itself?

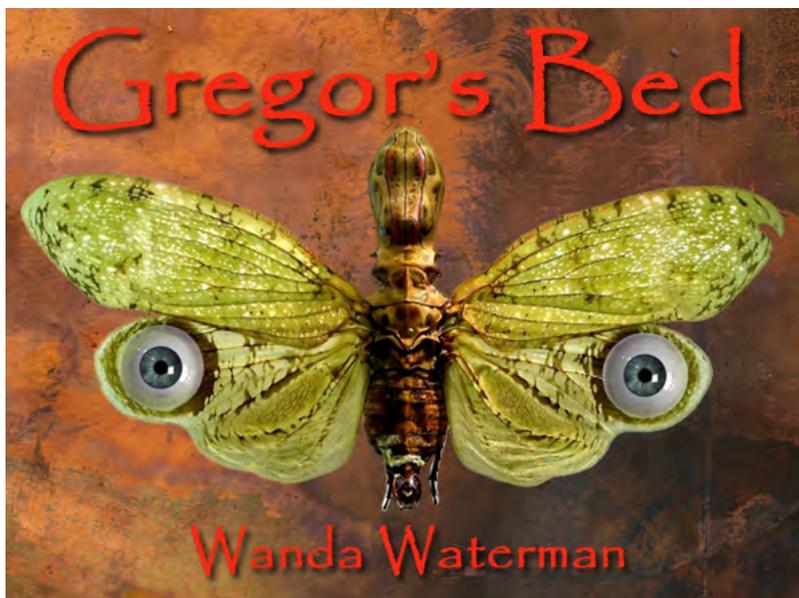
Plagiarism is heavily targeted by most academic honesty policies, but there's no question that a certain degree of tolerance exists for other forms of academic cheating, like hiring a ghostwriter to put together a paper. While academic institutions insist they take a hard line on cheaters, one study of post-secondary institutions revealed that over 40 per cent of “faculty of admitted to ignoring incidents of suspected academic dishonesty.” Worse, according to research from the Ad Council/Educational Testing Service, while 41 per cent of the general US public were concerned about the problem of academic cheating, only 35 per cent of faculty expressed the same concern.

The prevalence of technology on campus and greater access to mechanisms of cheating make it easier for students to get away with it. Overly large classes mean that students and professors don't develop a personal relationship, which in part allows cheaters to slip through the cracks. But I think the problem is deeper than just ease of access.

The real issue may be that the nature of post-secondary learning has become primarily outcome-based. You submit the paper; you get a paper saying you've got X degree. You use that paper to get a job, which has nothing to do with the education itself. Hopefully some learning came along the way, but if not, what of it? You checked the boxes, paid the dues, and now you've got your reward.

And that's the catch. Education is supposed to be its own reward. Learning is enriching. Practicing the synthesis of information both in an academic setting and out in the world allows us to engage on a level we'd be missing otherwise. A system that views the learning process as a checkbox is limiting both to our intellect and our human souls.

And as for the cheaters? The only people they're really cheating, in the long run, are themselves.



Recent Discoveries from the Realm of the Experimental and the Avant Garde

Album: Stefano Scodanibbio, *Reinventions*

Artists: Stefano Scodanibbio and Quartetto Prometeo: Giulio Rovighi (violin), Aldo Campagnari (violin), Massimo Piva (violin), Francesco Dillon (violoncello)

"Have you ever heard an overtone? The more you hear them, the more you hear them! They are a wonder of natural physics and the foundation of our musical world."

Joanne Oosterhoff

Overtones, Harmonics, and Extending the Capacity to Hear

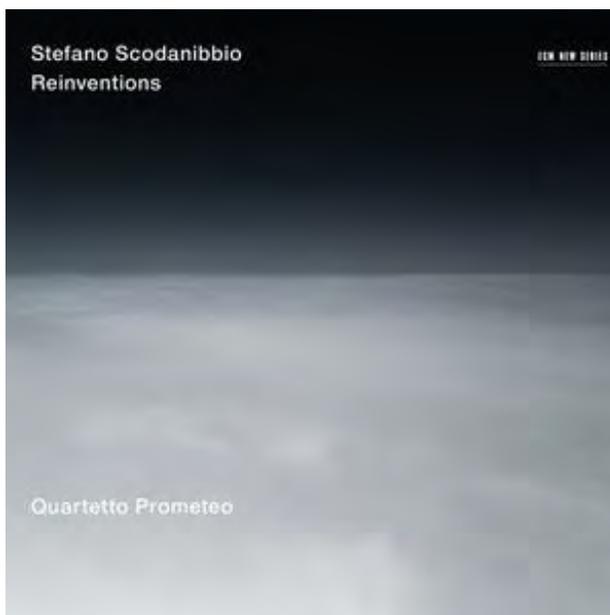
Italian composer, teacher, and contrabass maestro Stefano Scodanibbio passed away last year in Mexico at the age of 55. In 2011 he completed this recording, comprising his string quartet arrangements of three counterpoint pieces from Bach's *Art of the Fugue* as well as—perhaps incongruously, perhaps not—some Spanish guitar music and even a compelling interpretation of "Besame Mucho."

In the last three decades Scodanibbio made a name for himself by extending the boundaries of the contrabass (by means of experimental techniques, improvisation, and a renowned dexterity) and, in addition to his own prolific composing output, by attracting the attention of a number of composers who created works for him to perform. He also collaborated with notable musicians, poets, artists, playwrights, and even philosophers.

Scodanibbio's sound was ahead of its time not only because of its pioneering aesthetic but also due to the musical territory he chose to revisit and re-examine with the aid of new interpretive tools. The most salient of these are his methods of generating harmonics.

To grossly oversimplify, harmonics are the different resonances caused by sound waves that travel both up and down vibrating strings of a stringed instrument (or up and down the air columns of wind instruments) and away from the instrument, and the audible interactions (called overtones) of these sound waves.

I recently discovered that harmonics is not always an exact science, and that what makes the banjo, for example, so



brightly dissonant is the fact that its overtones are highly audible; although this contributes to the banjo's unique sound, it's for this reason that even slight anomalies in the instrument's structure can make it really grate on the ear.

For the present purposes, harmonics have lent *Reinventions* an incredible depth, creating the kind of music that frames each moment as if it were a historical event, music that makes you think you're in your own movie and that the story has just granted you that degree of nobility that redeems the flubs of the past.

The tracks move from familiar to unfamiliar ground, both in terms of the repertoire and of its interpretation, making it a wonderfully painless introduction for those who may previously have found avant garde music unpalatable.

DID YOU KNOW?

AU Press



Did you know that Athabasca University has its own scholarly press? AU Press has recently published its Fall 2013 catalogue of offerings, but many students don't know about the Press, its offerings, and its mission.

Like most university presses, AU Press publications are peer-reviewed; editors subject all submissions to heavy scrutiny and only publish "scholarship of the highest quality." Subject areas focus on geographical regions, including "Canada, the North American West, and the Circumpolar North." The Press seeks to publish "innovative and experimental works" while "[promoting] neglected forms such as diary, memoir, and oral history."

One unique facet of AU Press is that it is all about open access to scholarly material, via digital delivery and Creative Commons licensing where possible; AU Press is committed "to the dissemination of knowledge and research through open access digital journals and monographs, as well as through new electronic media." This means that all AU Press publications—including books and scholarly journals—can be accessed, free of charge, via the Internet.

In addition to print-type publications like books and journals, AU Press publishes scholarly websites in line with its geographical focus and academic standards.

For further information, including current offerings, videos of book launches, author readings, and more, visit the [AU Press site](#).

COMIC: WEIRD CANADA

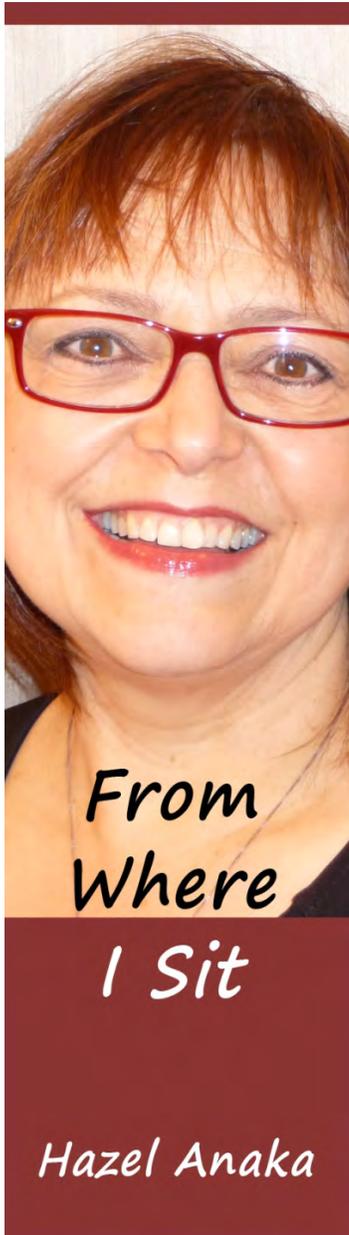
Wanda Waterman



---Testicle Festival---
Every year during the Calgary Stampede, Calgary's Buzzards Restaurant and the pub next door, Bottlescrew Bill's, hold a Testicle Festival. They serve prairie oyster fritters and bacon-wrapped "tendergroin." In 2011 they created a dish to commemorate the Royal Couple's visit: "The Crown Jewels."

I
DARE
YA!

WANDA WATERMAN



Carpe Diem

I spent the better part of holiday Monday working in the yard. This despite the fact that it's 18 days, 18 hours, and 53 minutes until the start of the festival that has consumed me since the idea I pitched was accepted January 9. The Babas and Borshch Ukrainian Festival has consumed my waking hours and crept like a thief into what should have been a respite when I sleep.

Lest you think I took the entire weekend off, dream on. I spent most of Saturday and Sunday doing creative work: making centrepieces, large florals, and other pieces for décor. These are the things I love doing and have missed since my flower shop closed over 10 years ago. Especially challenging has been decorating a large space on a small budget; what looks oversized in my kitchen will be woefully puny in a big venue.

I consider it a personal challenge to do it up right on a modest budget. Any nincompoop can do it if they throw enough money at the problem. Savvy shopping and using what is free (like pussy willows collected this spring, and the cattails I've yet to cut) stretch the money so much further.

I've also gotten smarter about asking for and accepting help. On Tuesday evening about half a dozen of us will gather in town for a work bee. We will hand-letter names, birthdates, and birthplaces into about 1,000 passports. We wanted people to assume a Ukrainian identity for the weekend, and what better way to do it than by "getting one's papers in order"?

But enough about that. What I saw outside on Monday was what I'd avoided for weeks. There were plants that needed deadheading, weeds that needed annihilation, and signs of overgrowth and neglect everywhere. I didn't really have time to dig up a mostly dead lilac, but if not now, when? Or divide up the lilies that are getting tinier each year because they are overcrowded. Or rescue and transplant a scabiosa that was growing under a peony. I worked like a woman possessed. I got filthy and scratched up.

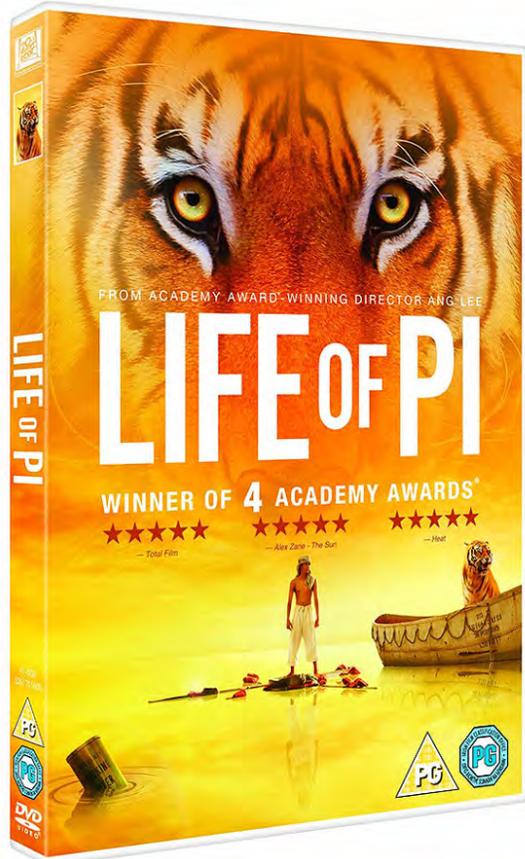
Since I was already dirty, it seemed the perfect time to wash the Honda. It was caked with filth as a result of the calcium that is spread on gravel to control dust near rural residences here. It's fine when it's dry, but it turns into a soupy mess that clings to vehicles after each rainfall. For about a year now we've had a Hotsy pressure washer that heats garden hose water into a high-pressured scouring machine. Add soap and some muscle, and you can get pretty good results.

So by sucking it up and just moving from one disagreeable job to another, I got some of the flowerbeds cleaned up and the CRV looking pretty snazzy. I didn't make a list or a plan or contemplate my navel. I just did it. Carpe diem, baby, from where I sit.

Hazel Anaka's first novel is Lucky Dog. Visit her [website](#) or follow her on Twitter @anakawrites.

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



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

Film: *Life of Pi*

Director: Ang Lee

Screenwriters: David Magee and Yann Martel (based on the novel by Yann Martel)

Cast: Suraj Sharma, Ayush Tandon, Adil Hussain, Irfan Khan, Tabu, Rafe Spall

Genre: Drama/Adventure

“And then Richard Parker, my fierce companion, the terrible one who’d kept me alive, disappeared forever from my life . . . Yet I know that there was something more staring back at me from his eyes than my own reflection.”

from *Life of Pi*

As a boy Pi is fascinated by Richard Parker, the tiger recently acquired by his family’s zoo. The tiger has a human name—a WASP name, no less—created by a clerical error that switched his name (“Thirsty”) with that of the great white hunter who found him drinking from a stream when he was just a cub.

Pi attributes a soul to the tiger and assumes a degree of affinity with him that should, he thinks, keep the tiger from devouring him. His father begs to differ, and to teach Pi the dangers of thinking of such beasts as potential friends, he tethers a young goat to the tiger’s cage and makes Pi watch as the tiger quickly tears it apart.

Later, Pi’s religious quest seems largely inspired by a compulsion to grapple with this grim face of nature, to put a more congenial face on necessity than what threatened his young consciousness. However, he finds only ever more mystery, and the nickname he gives himself is in itself a symbol of the unending random conundrum of existence.

Pi chooses the path of many paths, using his native Hinduism to branch into Christianity and Islam while also heeding his rationalist father’s advice to heed the dictates of science and his mother’s caveat that though science has helped us understand our exterior world, it’s limited in plumbing the interior. Tellingly, Jesus is the common point of all these religious paths, being part of the Hindu pantheon as well as an important prophet in Islam.

Life of Pi is very much about the existential position of the human being within an absurd universe, the lone hero pitted against a necessity that will not recognize humanity's specialness. But brute nature's weakness is entirely in the brute part; although it's the power to master nature that often corrupts human beings and turns them into exploitive oppressors, it's also this power that enables us to survive.

The brutishness of nature, from the human perspective, is best manifested in its indifference. The moral blindness of nature sometimes forces us to be immoral to survive, and the even more offensive indifference of other human beings brings out our own inherent evil. Yet it's this indifference that drives us to seek the face of what lies behind it, to find the meaning in the shocking strangeness of our suffering and alienation.

The film is filled with references to the great soup of life metaphor, which we often see in brilliant shots of the ocean and what lies just beneath the surface.

There is a side story related to forms of truth, a topic significant in a scientific age that largely rejects truth in the form of metaphor. There are two stories; in both stories the beginning and the outcome are the same, but God prefers the myth—the story rich in metaphor—the literal truth. If religious fundamentalists could appreciate this, the human race might have a chance of surviving the castaway state in which we currently find ourselves.

“Life of Pi is very much about the existential position of the human being within an absurd universe, the lone hero pitted against a necessity that will not recognize humanity's specialness.”

It's Pi's compassion—or perhaps his need for company—that keeps him from killing Richard Parker when he gets the chance. He and the predator share the same urgent inner directive, to kill or be killed, and the same need to share the planet in a way that's mutually beneficial. This locks them together while compelling them both to break their own rules of engagement.

In the end the tiger is Love itself. We're reminded of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: He's not a tame lion, but he is good.

Life of Pi manifests eight of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 3) it stimulates my mind; 4) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 5) it is about attainment of the true self; 6) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 7) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; and 8) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

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

AUSU UPDATE



Dear Members,

You may have recently seen information on the internet speculating about the future of Athabasca University. These reports suggest that the Alberta government may broker a merger between AU and University of Alberta, and that this may result in drastic changes to the services and programs offered to students AU students.

We want you to know that AUSU is aware of these rumours and is actively investigating the source – we will keep you informed as we know more.

We can tell you that AU is governed via a bicameral structure with two main governing bodies: the General Faculties Council (formerly Academic Council) and the Board of Governors (formerly Governing Council). AUSU has representatives on both of these governing bodies and we can confirm that there has been no formal discussion of a university merger among these groups. The AU president, Frits Pannekoek, has also assured the press that there is no truth to the rumour. On behalf of our members, we are seeking more information from the Board of Governors, the minister, and AU executives.

At this time we simply have no evidence that a merger is being seriously considered by AU, the U of A, or the Alberta government, and we note that among the many committees and working groups of AU, planning and development for the future continues as usual.

We know that our members are worried and want more information. We will update you as soon as we know more. At this time we do not feel there is any reason for students to worry or make changes to their study plans.

Do not hesitate to contact our office if you wish to talk about this or any other issue affecting AU students.

AUSU.

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

CLASSIFIEDS

Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact voice@voicemagazine.org for more information.

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