Suyin So’s essay, “Grotesques,” relies heavily on two personal stories to develop her idea about accepting who you are. In her essay, the writer sets up a series of contrasts between what is and what is hoped for—between wishes and realities. She also uses description in developing her stories as evidence to explain her idea.

**SUYIN SO**

*Grotesques*

During childhood, all of us are equal. Innocent babes, we look upon each other with complete frankness and acceptance. For a brief time, it matters not whether your father drives a Mercedes, or that you have a different skin color than the others around you. What matters is how well your mom makes cherry Kool-Aid, how well you can play kickball. Eventually, though, this peaceful idyll is shattered. Prejudices are learned, barriers set, suspicions aroused. Innocence vanishes. Flashback: A dingy cafeteria, inside a parochial elementary school, where mothers attempt to shelter their children from the unwholesome elements in public.
schools. A class of first graders furtively devours mashed potatoes and white bread, painfully aware of its lowly first-grade status. A class of older students traipses in: third grade? Fourth grade? It doesn’t matter; to the first graders, big kids are big kids. As the older class lines up in front of the younger, one of them catches sight of the Asian-American girl sitting with her classmates. He begins to pick on her, bowing deeply at the waist with his hands clasped together as if in prayer. He is singsonging, “Ah-so, Ah-so.” An expression of sheer pleasure illuminates his face, and a smile spreads across his mouth. He continues his revelry until he gets his food and sits down in a different area.

And what of the girl? What becomes of her?

She is digesting what she will later recognize as the first racial slur she has ever experienced. Presently she doesn’t know this. She doesn’t think, “Ah, here is an uncouth youngster assaulting my racial heritage and demeaning my cultural identity.” There is no such startling realization. Instead, she is bewildered, hurt. Perhaps subconsciously, though, there is the knowledge that he is insulting some inherent quality, some intangible “thing” about her. Something she cannot erase or hide. She is also realizing that this quality instantly sets her apart and makes her different than the others around her.

The girl, of course, was me, and the boy someone named Allen, I think. Eleven years later, I can’t remember much of my first grade year other than this important moment. The experience remained in the front of my mind for quite some time, occasionally reminding me of itself when I was in danger of forgetting about it. Similar incidents, like when my classmates would screw up the corners of their eyes and scream with laughter, brought more attention to what I eventually wanted desperately to hide: the fact that I am Asian-American. I attempted to whitewash myself.

I pondered the malevolence of fate that had rendered me different from my friends, my name difficult for teachers to pronounce and impossible to find on personalized sets of stationery and keychains. Even though I never wrote letters nor carried keys, these mundane objects held a special attraction for me, perhaps because I knew I would not find a “Suyin” keychain nestled between “Sue” and “Suzanne.” I longed for a different name, one
that my teachers would not stumble over, one I could find on pink paper with red hearts scattered around it. A nice, bland, “normal” name.

Once I asked my father whether he thought, if we weren’t what we were, we would be black or white. He looked at me in profound astonishment and with a hint of irritation. “Suyin,” he told me, “we are Asian.” Unsatisfied, I pressed him for a more specific answer. He repeated himself. “We are Asians. We cannot change what we are.”

Yet I actually wanted, sometimes, to be able to change what I am. I wanted to believe that my family was like the families of my friends, with turkey and stuffing on Thanksgiving and grandparents just a block away. But we usually had chicken or duck—if we celebrated Thanksgiving at all—and my grandparents were half a world away.

This feeling passed, luckily, as other youthful follies probably do. I went to summer school in New Hampshire, realized that there were other teenagers with similar backgrounds, equally unusual names. I was overwhelmed at the sheer volume of Asian-Americans. It was a reassuring feeling. Suddenly, rather than being some oddity that people in my town stared and pointed at, I was simply another face in a sea of Asians, a homogeneous crowd. It seems strange that one should want to be lost in a crowd, identified immediately as a part of a whole. Yet it is not so surprising considering the former lack of sense of belonging.

This story does not end here, though. Pride replaces shame, acceptance rejection. Something else is now present—a different sense of belonging.

Flashback II: Seven years old now, I am in Indonesia, that torturously hot country where my parents were born. We sit in a rickety old blue pickup truck, the pride of my uncle, traveling through the dusty, crowded streets of Surabaya, perhaps the second or third largest city of the country. I have no clue as to where we are traveling, and I cling to my mother, terrified by the strange images outside us: the calls of the street vendors, the people thronging in the roads, the wails of the babies. We stop abruptly. A man runs into the window, smashing his face against the dirty glass. His eyes are gruesomely red, the black pupils glazed over. He curses as he runs into the window, and hits the window a few times before
another man appears to lead him away. Both men are filthy, dressed in once-white yellowish tee shirts, their pants splattered with mud. I watch them as they walk away, holding on to each other, swiveling my neck after we pass them.

“What’s wrong with him?” I pester my mother, poking her. My uncle answers me.

“One of them is blind, the first man that came up to the truck. The man that led him away is deaf. They live together, rather than in an institution.”

So there they are. A man without sight, but still able to hear; his companion without hearing, but still able to see. The two, helping each other down the sidewalk, functioning as a unit, a single entity.

Strangely enough, I feel a sense of kinship with them and others with similar afflictions. Not so much because I am physically disadvantaged, but more because I will always cheer on the underdog. Like the kid in class labeled the nerd, with four pocket protectors, five calculators and no friends, who would trade his intellect for a position on the football team. Or the girl thirty pounds overweight who eats lunch by herself in the corner of the cafeteria, who believes that if she were slimmer, trimmer, she would be perfect. Or, for that matter, the young black boy who thinks his only choices as a young black man are professional basketball or jail.

I share this weird bond with them because I know what it is to reject a part of yourself and yearn to be something else. I have felt others’ rejection, like the people at school who called me a chink, and the kind, grandfatherly old man who pleasantly told me he believed all non-Caucasian peoples to be inferior to the “superior Aryan race.”

Yet that rejection of the self must pass, as it did with me. Acceptance comes eventually. Like the two men assisting each other in life, what was rejected before is confronted and dealt with. It becomes a source of pride and strength. I know a girl, her legs useless, who confided me that one of the best things about being in a wheelchair was that she could pop a wheelie every so often.

Truly, I have no idea how it feels to be blind, to be deaf, or in a wheelchair. I am fortunate in that respect. Yet we are all the same in that we are victims of those twisted prejudices and barriers set up early in life. We
Jim Kuerschner’s is a subtle argument against surveillance in our culture, but he focuses on the complicated ways in which his own generation seems drawn to public revelations of private information about themselves on Facebook. His work with a variety of sources (personal testimony, books, newspapers, and a host of Internet sites) is both rigorously analytical and imaginative.

**JIM KUERSCHNER**

*Big Brother Is on the Facebook*

You see him every day as you cross West Fourth street. You’ve never spoken to him, but you know his name, his age, major, and relationship status. You’ve never officially met, but you know what his high school friends look like, how his spring break trip to Cozumel was, and what he looks like while under the influence. Giving him the awkward “I-know-you-but-I-probably-shouldn’t-know-this-much-about-you-so-I’m-not-sure-if-I-say-hello-or-if-I-just-walk-on-by-and-pretend-to-not-see-you” smile, you continue on your way, wondering if you could have sparked conversation by humming one of his favorite tunes or quoting one of his favorite movies. The tension builds, you cross the street, and nothing happens. Heaving a sigh of relief that you haven’t just made a fool of yourself to a complete stranger, you begin to wonder, am I a stalker? No, you reassure yourself, you are simply a member of the Facebook.

In 2004, students at Harvard created the popular website, “Facebook.com,” lovingly and begrudgingly known as “The Facebook,” with a grant of $500,000 from Peter Thiel, founder of Paypal. Members of Facebook,
an online social network for college students, can post a
personal profile and search through profiles of other stu-
dents across the country, linking themselves to friends
at their own school and at other schools. Eventually
encompassing more and more universities, the Facebook
provides access to more than 25,000 high schools and
2,000 institutions of higher learning (Naing). The cre-
ators of Facebook have continued to update and improve
the web-profile service, adding the ability to display
photos and join interest groups; within the past month,
Facebook users have gained the ability to communicate
on the Facebook via cell phone and can now search for
phone numbers and other personal information from
anywhere with decent cell phone reception (Yuan). With
more and more features added, students spend more
and more time surfing profiles, filing through pictures,
and reading favorite quotes.

The constantly growing popularity of the Facebook
has generated quite a bit of controversy since its incep-
tion two years ago. Current discourse on its use runs the
gamut from the vehemently opposed to the insouciant
to the most vocal champions of the online college-profile
service. Most opinion comes from college-aged students—
those who traditionally have access to the website. How-
ever, though the opinion makers are similar in age and
level of education, their opinions are vastly different.
Those in favor of the service include D.J. Johnson of
Bowling Green State University who writes, “Facebook
is the door to the worlds never explored. Millions of peo-
ple have uploaded information about themselves online
in an effort to be read. To be discovered.” He continues,
“It’s an optional service, so men and women around the
world are voluntarily submitting information for the
pleasure of others.” He claims that it is ridiculous to hide
our fascination with the site as it has provided beneficial
services to millions of users.

Julia James of the University of Alabama disagrees.
Explaining the dangers of having your personal infor-
mation on the web, she claims that “anything negative
on your Facebook profile can and will be used against
you.” She also addresses the issue that administrators
and prospective employers can view the site, which could
potentially be problematic. University of Pennsylvania
writer Cezary Podkul may quell James’s fears. He writes
that Facebook “is a Web site created for fun and amuse-
ment” and that “Penn officials have better things to do than comb through the 3.85 million registered Facebook users ... looking for incriminating material.” Even if they did, as Johnson might suggest, everything posted online is done voluntarily, and students are well aware of what they are making available for public display.

Employers and college administrators have also taken a stance on the issues that Facebook presents. “It is a tricky issue,” says Catherine Arnory, interim director of career services at Northeastern University. “I’m not so sure that students shouldn’t be free to be themselves. On the other hand, if they intend to work for a conservative institution, then they need to be more careful” (qtd. in Lewis). This phrase, however, seems to suggest that we have the freedom to express ourselves—as long as what we express is acceptable to the head of human resources at a blue-chip corporation.

Whatever stance you take, Facebook usage is here to stay. Over 10.5 million unique visitors explored the Facebook in February of 2006 alone, making it one of the most popular sites on the web (Yuan). College newspapers, as well as student sentiment and interest groups on the Facebook itself, curse its hypnotic, addicting powers, yet students are still unable to free themselves from checking the Facebook countless times a day. Even with the knowledge of Facebook access by administrators and prospective employers, students fearlessly post incriminating pictures of themselves—some nearly softcore pornography, others more akin to Smirnoff advertisements. Clearly, college students have many better things to do with their lives than sit for hours on end examining the Facebook profiles of their friends and coming up with witty comments to post on their pages (or “walls,” in Facebook lingo), yet for some reason the majority of the college populous is enamored with the Harvard-created site. Why then, when we have the ability to speak face-to-face with a vast number of college students simply by walking through our campuses, do we feel the need to use such a profile service?

The Facebook embodies the Big Brother spirit of our generation. While some post purely for viewing by their own friends (and indeed there are privacy controls that allow very limited visibility), many update their pages constantly, knowing that someone will probably see their new silly or sexy picture, perhaps inducing a message or
a “poke”—one of the more strange features of the page, which allows users to send any member of the Facebook, even if you have no idea who they are, a message reading, “You have been poked by [insert real name of Creepy McCreepster here].” In a generation when Internet chat rooms and online dating services have been around for most of our lives, we are much more comfortable sending messages to those we don’t know than people have been in the past. Facebook allows us to put every moment of our personal lives up for public display, if we wish. And many do.

Yet while we are okay with everyone knowing our personal affairs via Facebook, we hotly protest (and rightfully so) the ever-increasing surveillance that has been imposed on our society post–September 11th. Is there a difference? Perhaps we fall into a false sense of security, refusing to believe that anyone other than our college buddies and other university students can view what we make publicly available. Facebook’s privacy policy, made available to every member, however, states that the site has the right to share information with a third-party when it is “reasonably necessary to offer the service”—a quite vague description (“Privacy”). But if I’m not doing anything wrong, why do I care that someone knows what I’m doing? The problem is that added surveillance can turn into added control, especially when we are not aware of how we are being monitored. When do we draw the line between harmless monitoring of Internet profiles and constant Orwellian watch?

Surveillance and voyeurism, binaries evoked by the Facebook, have caused rifts in society for hundreds of years. “The philosopher Jeremy Bentham,” writes Ellen Goodman of the Boston Globe, “once described the perfect prison as a ‘panopticon’ where prisoners were under complete surveillance and yet could not see the watcher.” Would modern society feel the same way? As hundreds of thousands of people over the years have applied and auditioned for television programs such as MTV’s The Real World or Big Brother on CBS, it appears as if Bentham’s penitentiary would be far less frightening. On these TV shows, participants have every moment of their lives recorded and broadcast to millions of viewers across the country and the world. By freely giving away their rights to privacy, these individuals seem to illus-
trate a growing acceptance in today's culture of constant surveillance.

On any given day, how many times do you think you are captured on video? According to one study, reports Alexandra Marks of the Christian Science Monitor, a Manhattanite is caught on screen an average of 73 times. Feel like a celebrity? For millions of reality TV viewers, this could be amusing. In an article by New York Times writer Emily Eakin, communications professor Mark Andrejevic of the University of Iowa at Iowa City remarks, “Today, more than twice as many young people apply to MTV’s ‘Real World’ show than to Harvard,” he says. “Clearly, to a post–Cold-War generation of Americans, the prospect of living under surveillance is no longer scary but cool.” Members of our generation are excited by the chance to expose themselves, to get their fifteen minutes of fame. The thought of being overwhelmed by paparazzi is considered glamorous, “an entree into the world of wealth and celebrity,” as Andrejevic writes in his book, Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched (qtd. in Eakin). Facebook, too, offers individuals a taste of this celebrity world, as members can have a webpage totally devoted to themselves, where whatever they want to say or display can be viewed by anyone with an Internet connection. We each want a voice. We want to be heard. But do we really want every detail of our personal lives available to the public? To some, the chance to connect with other people via similar experiences, personality traits, and even through compromising pictures is worth the sacrificed security and privacy. Behind the need to display this information is a need for attention. When our need for personal relationships diminishes, so too may our desire to connect with strangers through the Web.

There are other reasons to refuse to sign up for the popular profile service, though. Preserving one's online anonymity seems to be at the forefront. Surveillance, to many people, is incredibly intrusive and frightening. The thought of someone viewing personal information causes some to edit their profiles, removing all incriminating or potentially dangerous information. This self-censorship is reminiscent of George Orwell's dystopian novel, 1984. Andrew Hultkrans writes about the power of Big Brother, the constantly scrutinizing government in Orwell's hellish world:

ANALYSIS

Paragraphs 10–12 deal with our need for: (1) attention in a “celebrity world,” (2) our tendency towards “self-censorship” as surveillance increases, and (3) our unwillingness to live without the benefits of increasing technology even we sacrifice our freedom for other benefits. How does our need for “security” contribute to our loss of freedom?
Orwell’s surveillance nightmare 1984 [explores] the collective insanity (and absurd paradoxes) induced by constant panoptic observation. The key to the absolute hegemony of Big Brother is not that “he” is actually watching you at all times (in fact, there is no “he” at all), but that, as in Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon prison, you come to believe he may be watching you any time, thereby policing yourself. (Hultkrans)

The ominous thought of having our actions under perpetual watch can be frightening, and in the case of the Facebook, many are now choosing to remove their information in an attempt to free themselves from an outsider’s field of vision. And while Facebook surveillance is worrisome, it alerts us to the horrifying nature of modern surveillance in our daily lives. With the Facebook, you have the option to keep away from the glare of other members by simply not signing up—the only negative effect being minor social ostracism. We cannot, however, choose when third parties read our e-mails, or whether or not we are recorded when we enter a bank, a grocery store, or a city street.

But what is more puzzling is that we cannot seem to live without the new technologies that make such surveillance possible. “Contemporary consumers,” writes Hultkrans, “clamor for more ATM machines, more point-of-purchase payment options, more smart cards, digital cash, and online shopping while simultaneously decrying the invasion of privacy intrinsically connected to such cyber-cash convenience.” Though we may not like that our Web surfing can be monitored, it is nearly impossible to imagine a year without the Internet or the myriad of services it brings us. Moreover, in the name of security, our society has for the most part accepted the addition of surveillance devices, as long as surveillance is done in the name of security. We are comforted by the camera lens, believing no harm can come to us under its protective eye. Now, it is impossible to use government as a scapegoat when there is no protestation on a large scale from citizens. Suddenly, by allowing our every move to be monitored, we ourselves are partially to blame.

At the same time, this move towards constant surveillance is not a new one. We have been gravitating towards it since the dawn of human communication,
each new technological advance slowly encroaching on our abilities to live free from the scrutiny of others. In Ancient Rome roads connecting outside provinces to the heart of the empire helped officials easily govern people not in immediate view. In Nazi-ruled Germany, the Hitler Youth became government watchdogs inside family homes. Now, video cameras in parts of the United Kingdom, the United States, and a host of other countries watch the actions of drivers, automatically sending punitive tickets to those who violate the laws of the road. In 2013 it will even be mandatory for citizens of the U.K. to be included in the National Identification Register, a database that will include biometric information from their compulsory ID cards—including fingerprints, iris scans, and digitized facial scans—along with all of the places of residence of all residents of the United Kingdom throughout their lives (United 2). U.K. Information Commissioner Richard Thomas has announced his fear that we may “sleepwalk into a surveillance society” (“Mass”). My fear is that we already have.

The purpose of surveillance, it seems, is to keep the people of a community, nation, or empire in line. If Big Brother is watching, we won’t commit crimes or criticize the government. By installing cameras to monitor us, institutions are trying to simulate a hyperactive conscience—a more strictly defined sense of right and wrong. The Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, which, at the time of its construction in 1829, was the most expensive building in the United States, was designed so that each cell has an opening at the top to make the prisoner feel “penitent,” giving him a renewed (or new) sense of conscience and moral standards (“Eastern”). But what about our own consciences? Some would claim that over the thousands of years of civilization we have lost our compunction and that we now require some sort of institution to tell us what we should not do. The synthetically constructed conscience, though, gives us more than rigid principles. It hinders us from asking questions that may make someone, including ourselves, uncomfortable. It stops us from investigating anything too dangerous, anything with the potential for revolution.

Government-implemented surveillance has always justified itself in terms of national preservation. Know when people are going to attack, and you can attack them first. In this case, knowledge, quite literally, is
power. So this artificial conscience doesn’t tell us what is good or bad at all; it only tells us what is primarily good or bad for the institution. The goal for surveillance, then, should ideally be focused on refining our existing consciences, not on creating new ones. “Liberty of conscience,” as John Locke writes, “is every man’s right,” and surveillance-induced superegos rob us of this right (“Letter”). Though I’m sure there are those whose consciences would allow them to do things not beneficial for a society, taking away our right and obligation to decide what is acceptable strips us of our right to think and at the same time transfers responsibility to the monitoring institution. The criminal is not culpable for his actions; the failed security camera is.

We are being watched and monitored, be it through the Facebook or an ATM, an outdoor surveillance camera, or an e-mail scanning program. Still, we, the people, have freedom. We can knowingly post incriminating pictures on our websites and send furious e-mails about Presidential policy, or we can try to avoid our omnipresent observers. The problem is that our information is out there—a low profile might just mean it takes an extra week to find it.

Sadia Kalam’s light-hearted, often funny essay seems on the surface to be a process piece, a chronological accounting of how she came, over time and through experience, to learn something important about lust. But the essay is more about the development of the mind than a strict accounting of a procedure over time. Her effective descriptive work, her stories, and her rigorous analysis reveal just how lust for the body and lust for the spirit are not such strange bedfellows as we might imagine.

SADIA KALAM
Lusting for Literacy

My knowledge of lust came from Joel. I sat directly across from him at Saturday school, in a house-turned-masjid on 168th Street and Highland Avenue in
Jamaica, Queens. Joel was tall, perhaps the tallest boy in the room. I thought that he must have been in junior high school but later learned that it was only a year that separated us. He was beautiful. His skin was soft and his lashes curled. He was perfectly sculpted.

I pretended to recite Arabic reading exercises aloud without looking at my books, but I was generally mumbling nonsense as I stared at his face. I would periodically shift to prevent the carpet from imprinting its bland pattern on my bare feet. And each time I stretched my legs, or rubbed my feet to keep them from falling asleep, I would look at him. I would observe his body, his face, his eyes. But whenever I looked, his head was dutifully bowed over the Qur’an, as if his mind were devouring the words. He never looked back at the stranger with the lop-sided head scarf and the wandering eyes.

I knew I didn’t belong in the masjid. I spent my cold Saturday mornings in Arabic class solely because of Joel. I progressed very slowly in the class, if learning the alphabet over a span of two months can even be called progress. The otherwise lackluster hours spent there were mostly devoted to daydreaming. I imagined Joel approaching me after class, his hands equipped with the Word of God. I envisioned him smiling at me, his splendid mouth, the one with which he uttered those holy words, one day on my lips. I even imagined how his body intertwined with mine would one day produce lots of beautiful babies.

I was seven. And I still couldn’t read Arabic. I lusted after Joel. Those lips that smiled, those lips with which he recited divine utterances intoxicated my soul. But more than his soft lips and perfect smile, it was his head that fascinated me. His was a head that almost never looked up from reading. A mind totally engrossed in his Arabic books, in the beloved Qur’an.

At first, it was the physical lust that consumed me. It was a desire to become physically linked to his body. In Psychology class, I learned how there are different stages to love, that while it begins as attraction, it progresses to romance, then passion, and finally commitment. However, I could not conceive of a love that developed in stages. There was no structure to love. Instead, lust and love were inexorably linked, overwhelming, uplifting, and captivating my heart all at once.
But was it Joel, my body, my nafs, yearned for? Or was it the projection of Joel that had moved me as a nymph child of seven? Of course, I never gained that physical proximity to Joel, never shared an embrace, or even a conversation. Instead, I lusted after his passion, his dedication, his concentration. More than his body, I wanted to revel in his mind and his spirit. The physical desire continued to tear my senses the way your eyes flood and your nostrils burn when you’ve inhaled the onions and masala from your mom’s spicy soup. But gradually the biological desire to eat Joel was confounded by another desire—to understand the active participation with which he engaged in the Qur’an. He did not merely recite scripture. He seemed to absorb it, drink and understand the verses as if the words were of secular, everyday origin rather than through the divine transmission of the Prophet. I wanted that same connection to text. I lusted for Joel because through him I first learned to desire the ability of others.

Throughout my life, I have modeled myself after others. In high school, I would borrow other peoples’ characteristics. Sophomore year, I would catch myself wanting to become Sharma. I would be funnier, less serious, and very interested in Mos Def and black studies. Later I would want to become Seth, to get A’s without even going to class. And then by senior year, my wandering eyes would find Moran. From him I would learn to warm my heart to others, to listen and appreciate my friends. Layer by layer, my character would develop as my eyes wandered from my books and lusted after these remarkable boys, who possessed the qualities that I lacked, whether it was the stellar bubble-filling-in ability that allowed for a 1580 SAT score or the patience to attend an 8 AM class.

Beginning in the fourth grade, I walked a mile to the Queens Central Library to do research for my weekly biography reports. The Asian librarian with the chunky legs and sheer silk blouses showed me how to find books in the Youth division, but every time I entered through the wooden arch, I was wrought with paranoia. My palms liquefied as I feared that the books I needed for my report were already checked out, leaving me with only secondary sources like encyclopedias with which to do my research. To read paragraph summaries of the lives of famous people seemed like an easy but cheap
trick because I missed out on the drama and complexity that make autobiographies worth reading. But just as I was afraid to be left with only the World Book Encyclopedia to extract information from, I also appreciated the concise, linear structure of the encyclopedic entries. I liked how the infinite wealth of knowledge was systematically alphabetized and catalogued, making the facts and dates of a good report accessible to me.

Yet I knew the seemingly simplistic composition of the encyclopedia belied its inherent contradiction. How can all of knowledge be reduced to 23 volumes of the alphabet (xyz was a single volume)? How can a one-dimensional book that prided itself on objectivity further your quest for understanding if it reduced people, events, and nations to dates, facts, and maps? What could you gain from a secular book that did not allow emotion and colorful nuances to shape its interpretation? Despite its reductionist logic, the encyclopedia offered a shortcut that I continued to exploit when writing my reports.

The use of secondary sources instead of primary documents for my assignments did not bother me, just as my lust for Joel never seemed like a moral dilemma. The English-translated Qur’an did not seem problematic either. Secondary sources were just another roundabout way to arrive at the same ideas.

But was there something lost in the translation?

In my “Images of the Orient” class, I learned that with each translation of a particular trope (whether a hookah pipe or odalisque) in nineteenth century French Orientalist art, the trope changes. The recycled image is rendered unique by each artist. For example, Nicholas de Nicolay’s 1567 travel book included the first pictorial representations of a veiled woman and her slave adorned with what appears to be a large and decorative lamp as a headpiece on their way to the bath. What appears at first to be only an amusing engraving has influenced the works of many subsequent French Orientalist artists, including Ingres, who in his rendering of the Turkish Bath (1808) relocates the now unveiled woman in an orgy of naked bodies that lie about leisurely, some napping, others prancing around. Ingres’s translation of the veiled woman created a nuance in reading the hamam, or Turkish bath.

Perhaps one of my favorite images from the class however is Girl Reading the Kuran, 1880 by Hamdi Bey.
In it, a woman sits with her legs tucked under her almost metallic gold-patterned caftan, with its wrists stylishly cut and embroidered. The red bandanna tied around her hair looks like a split watermelon, ready to be eaten. Despite the woman's costume and keen fashion sense, I am drawn to her eyebrows, which are knit as her eyes are solely focused on the Qur'an. It seems she is not merely reciting the Book. She is thinking, interpreting, maybe even questioning. Nevertheless her focus is the Book. A book I have yet to read.

The Qur'an is positioned in the center of the painting, perhaps to divide the canvas into two parts. Directly behind the reading woman is the mosaic wall, patterned with hexagons within dark-blue Stars of David. The ordered tiles are on the right but to the left is a contortedly screened window behind which tall conifers stand pregnant with red fruit. But instead of metal safety bars across the window frame as would be found enclosing me within my 21st century apartment building, the window is covered with a bronze metal that has been twisted and elongated into a chaotic pattern that seeks to rearrange the background. It does not overtake the background like safety screens often do, but it does create the illusion of a nature jigsaw puzzle.

The many elements to my personality were like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, stolen and collected from all those that I admired. The intelligence was borrowed from Seth; the racial commentary was a remnant of Sharma; the rare bouts of sincerity I learned from Moran. And the lust was from Joel. I had gradually imprinted these people into my psyche. I was a composite of these collected qualities and traits.

I was the composite Muslim who did not choose between the encyclopedia and the translated Qur'an. I did not choose between lust and literacy. I did not choose because I could not choose. There was no distinct choice between physicality and spirituality, between illiteracy and literacy. The Qur'an in the painting does not divide the room as I had once thought it did. The woman’s ability to read the Qur'an, too, does not create a barrier between the open window and the ordered pattern of the mosaic wall. Rather, the Qur'an serves to integrate the differences between the disorder of the open window and the order of the man-made mosaic. It is Islam that integrates the secular world of lust with the divine text.
of creation in an amalgamation of color and emotion and reason.

In an attempt to create a dichotomy between the secular world of lust and the quasi-divine realm of the translated Qur’an, I have alienated myself from the truth of hybridism. By denying my hybridity, I have failed to learn the Qur’an in Arabic because I feel that somehow a part of my wretched secular self will be lost in translation. But ultimately, I do not need to relinquish my lust for God. I can find Him, despite lust.

Joel was the first piece to my inner mosaic, and he left an indelible mark like no one since. Lust began earlier and traveled deeper than any of my other borrowed traits. Lust began in my body but enhanced the pores of my mind with an intense yearning to mold, to shape, to sculpt myself into a better Muslim. Perhaps lust was the prerequisite for being a better Muslim. To hold the Qur’an with the same degree of reverence, with the same degree of knowledge and understanding that Joel possessed, with the same degree of concentration as the woman in the painting, was all I desired. I lusted after the Qur’an so I could find the textual Islam I had been avoiding for so long.

Ideally, Quranic literacy should bring me closer to God. I know that if I cannot read the Word of God, then I can neither learn to authenticate my life with Islam nor appreciate the beauty of the Qur’an. I cannot function in masjids or in Arabic class. I cannot function as a Muslim because I cannot read the Qur’an.

Nevertheless, I purposely sought illiteracy for the past eighteen years. My Pickthall translation of the Glorious Qur’an has left me complacent. Out of convenience, I have clung to my English translation, just as I have clung to Joel as my very own secondary source to greatness, just as I have resorted to the half-truths of the World Book Encyclopedia for my biography reports. Even without absorbing melodious Quranic recitation, the Islam in my heart continues to grow. While the seeking of knowledge is compulsory for Muslims, my particular lust is also integral to my iman, or faith. Lust is a natural and necessary part of everyday human experience that does not impede the moral dictates of religion. In fact, I reaffirmed my Islam through secular means, by ogling the beautiful boy from my Saturday Arabic class. “There is no distinction between the sacred and the
profane,” writes Seyyed Hossain Nasr, a prolific scholar of Islamic Studies. “[W]hat we now call the ordinary or every day is integrated into the matrix of the sacred.” Somehow the ordinary act of lust brings me closer to my faith because, like Joel, I wanted to know God.

Without ever speaking to me, Joel reminded me that I was all style and no substance. I was a fake because I could not read Arabic but continued to love Islam. The qualities I borrowed I eventually managed to integrate into my own personality. Lust, sincerity, humor, intelligence—they are part of the Sadia-package now. But the Qur’an never became my own because I could not pass off the translation as anything other than a translation, a secondary source.

I started attending Arabic classes again this semester. Unfortunately, this time there is no beautiful boy cross-legged and facing me across the room. Now, there is a partition that cuts through the room, flimsy but effective dividers that separate the boys and the girls. But here I was no longer looking for lust of a boy, but lust of my faith, something that I had not lost, because it had never been found. I wanted to be able to read and satisfy my lust.

One of the first chapters I examined in class was Sura Iqra. When the angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as a man, the angel said, “Recite.” “I cannot recite,” the Prophet replied. He then describes how the angel whelmed him in his embrace. When he let the Prophet go, Gabriel commanded “Recite.” Again, the Prophet replied that he could not recite. And again Gabriel squeezed the Prophet and let him go only when he was exhausted. Then he said, “Recite,” and the Prophet said, “I cannot recite.” Finally, Gabriel squeezed for a third time and said, “Read in the name of your lord, who created (all that exists) man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous!” Gabriel said in Arabic:

\[
\text{Iqra biismi rabbika allathee khalaqa} \\
\text{Khalqa alinsana min Aalaqaqin} \\
\text{Iqra warabbuka alakramu} \\
\text{Allathee Aallama bialqalami} \\
\text{AAallama alinsana ma lam ya Alam}
\]

Notice the use of analysis to bring together all that the writer has been trying to say about learning and the passion that accompanies it.
Lisa Pallotta’s essay, “What’s in a Name?” is grounded in causal analysis, with an emphasis on analyzing the consequences of a woman’s changing her name when she marries. The writer uses specific examples to illustrate her dilemma as she changes her name from Lisa Johnson to Lisa Pallotta. She injects humor into her essay in a variety of ways to suggest her exasperation at being misidentified and misunderstood because of her new married name. And she introduces a note of seriousness as she reflects on the consequences of her name change and, more generally, the significance of names in our culture.

**LISA PALLOTTA**

*What’s in a Name?*

I stood with the pen in my hand staring at the words *Marriage certificate* printed with big scrolly letters. The woman at the counter of the Town Clerk’s office was gazing at me with a faint smile. Was she laughing at me? I looked again. No, she was not laughing at me. Maybe she was remembering the time in her life when she too sacrificed. Did she hold any resentment? I looked at the man I loved who smiled at me, not realizing my dilemma. I caved in. I took his name, Pallotta.

Until I was 26 years old my last name was Johnson. I hated it—it was too common—too boring. I wanted...
change, identity. I did not want to be as common as generic aspirin. I wanted to be unique, something Johnson could never convey.

Yet there I was two days before I got married, waver-ing over my name. To hyphen or not to hyphen. Should I add a middle name (something only I would know about), or should I shun the bonds of womanly suffering and retain my maiden name in defiance of androcentrism?

Two days later, at a small ceremony with a Justice of the Peace, I was officially inducted into the Pallotta family. At the time, I didn’t realize that’s what was happening. I thought I was marrying the man I loved. That happened too, but I didn’t know then that when a woman changes her name, she changes her identity.

A few days later, when I returned to work, the consequences of that understanding began to hit me. The phone would ring—“Hello, this is Lisa...” and then the silence of electronic static would hang in the air for a moment as I tried to remember my name... “Pallotta,” I would utter. Finally, in frustration I took out my thick red marker and scratched “Lisa Pallotta” over the phone on a piece of paper. It was the only way I could consistently remember it. Similarly, when I signed a letter or a check I had to repeat to myself, “Pallotta, Pallotta, Pallotta,” though sometimes my hand would still scrawl out “Johnson.” Eventually I got out another piece of paper and practiced writing “Pallotta,” again and again across the pages, filling reams of paper like a crazed fool. I had to get it right—“Pallotta, Pallotta, Pallotta.”

I thought my identity crisis was bad then. But it soon became worse. Strangers on the phone would call me at work and say odd things. My ethnic name seemed to be leading people astray.

“That’s Italian, isn’t it? You must be a great cook.”

“Oh! You’re Italian, you must get a great tan.”

Who did these people think they were talking to? What kinds of assumptions were they making about me because of my Italian last name? When I went by the name of Johnson, no one assumed anything. Johnson was not a named “marked” for being noticed. It was a kind of invisible name. “Pallotta,” on the other hand, screamed out—ITALIAN! As a “Johnson,” I could say whatever I wanted about myself and it would be accepted. I wouldn’t hear things like, “You’re Italian and you don’t cook?”

Here the writer begins to present the issues of personal identity with which she has struggled.

The thesis here lays out the main idea of the writer’s essay and how she will discuss the effects of changing one’s name.

Again, the writer presents a second idea of how a name can have an ethnic marking associated with it and how that impacted her personally.

Again, the writer gives vivid details of her experience so that her readers can visualize the scene. The repetition heightens the effect of her story.
For the first time I began to realize that my maiden name meant something to me. I realized that a common name had the advantage of escaping stereotyping labels. This new Italian name I had taken came with many labels that I was neither prepared for nor willing to accept. And as much as I resisted these labels, I soon realized that I had fallen into the same habit as well. I didn’t realize this until a close friend changed not only her last name but her first as well. When she changed her name, I began to think of her differently.

Liz Trippi and I have been friends since ninth grade. We met in biology class over a tray covered by a dead fish. We were both “brains” and decided that playing with the fish was more educational than actually dissecting it. Two poked-out eyes later we were friends for life. We’ve seen each other through high school—the proms, disaster dates, and college applications. We’ve seen each other through college—the final exams, more disaster dates, and pangs of separation from home. We’ve seen each other through marriage and career, and now Liz is embarking on the joyous adventures of Motherhood. We’ve grown up together, our common history creating a strong bond between us.

I never thought about how our bond had been partially created through history until a few months ago when I called her at work. I asked for Liz Trippi. I was wrong on both counts. A confused receptionist said that there was no “Liz Trippi,” and did I mean “Elizabeth Hein”? Would I like to speak to her?

“Oh yeah” I blurted out. “I keep forgetting she got married.” What I really meant was that I kept forgetting that she had changed her name. She had dropped “Trippi” and adopted “Hein” for her marriage. But another metamorphosis had occurred as well: she was Elizabeth and no longer “Liz.”

“You’re going by Elizabeth now?” I asked her when we were finally connected.

“Yes,” she said, “I was sick of Liz, and this is more professional.”

“Oh... should I call you Elizabeth now?” I said, praying that I would still call her “Liz.”

“No, Liz is fine. I still answer to it.”

“Oh good,” I sighed. “I have a hard enough time remembering your last name. I don’t think I could handle a new first name too.”
“It’s not a new first name; it’s just my whole first name,” she answered. True enough, I thought.

This topic ended, we turned to other matters, such as how the baby was growing and that we should get together soon, etc. After the call, my mind kept wandering to the change in her name. She had changed herself. Now there was a significant number of people in this world, including her husband, who called her “Elizabeth.” Should I join this trend? What did it cost me to call her “Elizabeth”?

In the end I realized that the cost was high: our mutual past torn from my fingers like a book and flung out the window. Liz Trippi was an out-of-print edition that no one read anymore. But that book had character, great meaning. I still wanted to check it out of the library.

One unique aspect of women’s lives is the knowledge that our names will change when we marry. Due to this fact, women do not attach as much self-identification to their names as men typically do. We must, I feel, evolve a separate identity apart from our given names. To paraphrase the Bible, the Father giveth and the Husband taketh away. Until recently, women had no control over that aspect of their identity.

Unlike men, we do not cling proudly to family names. In fact, when I announced my engagement to my then boyfriend, one of the first things his father told me was the history of the Pallottas, a history that had been preserved for centuries. My surname of “Johnson” was pretty self-explanatory, but even other names in my family, such as Gallant and Marold hold no meaning for me.

Society and history create these ties. Names are a way for us to bond. My Italian name reflects the suffering of a great many people as they struggled to gain a foothold in the United States. This sense of struggle is also similar for people of Jewish heritage, who have little more than their names to help them recognize each other. With such deeply planted roots, it is easy to see why people can make assumptions—both good and bad—from a name.

However, even though our names change, our essence does not. I do not feel like a different human being because my last name is “Pallotta” now, I’m still me. When we change our names for business we are
changing the impact we have on strangers. Our loved ones will know the real us. The change is for effect, like using a metaphor in a novel.

One thing to remember is that even though we can change names at will or whim, there are always people who remember the old. Our names do live on in some people’s minds. The book might be out of print, but someone will still be able to quote a few lines.

“What’s in a name, thou art thyself though not a Montague,” moaned Juliet from her balcony. Shakespeare’s line rings through my head, his resonance echoing through the centuries.

Note how the writer brings the metaphor of the book back to help end her essay.

Jenny Gartshteyn’s essay focuses on the relationship between art and science, taking its bearings from E. O. Wilson’s “The Bird of Paradise: The Hunter and the Poet.” The writer relies primarily on analysis to establish a relationship between art and science, but along the way she makes excellent use of description to give us glimpses of M. C. Escher’s art, and her personal narratives deepen and substantiate her argument about the interdependence between scientific analysis and imaginative interpretation.

Lying before me is a scrambled jigsaw puzzle; resting in my hand is a puzzle piece; racing through my mind are a medley of thoughts. Science is a jigsaw puzzle that analyzes the world in terms of its many pieces. Solving a jigsaw puzzle is an art that synthesizes the pixel-like pieces into a comprehensive whole. What then is the relationship between science and art, and the jigsaw-like framework of the everyday universe?

I have recently read “The Bird of Paradise: The Hunter and the Poet” by E. O. Wilson. In the essay, Wilson identifies himself with both a hunter and a poet. He is a hunter of science—analyzing the world around him. Yet he is also a poet, for he possesses the artistry and imagery to produce a new world by synthesizing the most
elementary pieces of it. Wilson relates his experience in the “enchanted world” of nature in New Guinea where the poet in him marvels at the beauty of the Emperor of Germany Bird of Paradise. Yet, as Wilson looks on, the hunter in him begins to analyze the bird as “an object of biological research,” with enzymes, microfilaments, and electrical impulses. But all this is just the setup; the real interest lies in the questions that Wilson poses. Is the hunter insensitive to art? Has his analytic approach reduced nature to mere chemicals? Are scientists “conquistadors who melt down the Inca gold?”

“The Bird of Paradise: The Hunter and the Poet” brought back to me a personal experience of a few years ago. I had received an email from a friend describing a “trick” where I was to pick a number, from one to nine, apply a series of mathematical operations to it, and then somehow arrive at a three-digit number where the first digit was my original number, and the last two digits were my age. I remember having shared my friend's enthusiasm at what at first appeared a rather unexpected solution. However, I also remember feeling that with more knowledge and experimentation, the driving mechanism of the “trick” could be unveiled. I can still see the torn piece of notebook paper and the two-inch tall relic of a No. 2 pencil that I had chosen for the next task. Holding the pencil stub almost vertically I began to retrace the steps of the “trick,” replacing with the variable x the number I had originally chosen.

Unknown to me at the time, a cerebral neuron fired: an electrical impulse triggered by the mathematical interpretation passed along the axon terminal, was translated and transported by a neurotransmitter over the synaptic cleft, and passed along the dendritic spines to activate the next brain cell. With these electrical impulses rushing through my cerebral cells, I made a mathematical connection that explained both how and why the “trick” had worked. Having fully developed an enthusiasm—and what’s more—an understanding of the “trick,” I had replied to my friend’s email, revealing my “scientific” interpretation. Her response was rather cold. “You’ve ruined the trick,” she wrote to me. “You’ve taken away its magic by analyzing it with numbers.” Taken aback, I had stared at my pencil stub, wondering what I had done. I had analyzed, understood, and reinterpreted what at one point appeared mysterious and
beyond comprehension. I meant neither to downgrade the aesthetics nor to detract from the “art” of the trick. Rather, I had aimed for an understanding—an explanation that would have allowed me to view the “trick” from a different dimension with a more direct correlation of cause and effect. Had I indeed ruined the trick?

Receiving my email on the other end of the POP3 email server was my friend. She is an artist by nature—a dabbler of colors, a painter of impressions. She is a creator who synthesizes everyday shapes and shades into works of art. As an artist, she sees fewer boundaries and sets fewer limits. Unlike a scientist, she is unconcerned with how realistic or practical an idea is. Instead, her concern lies with her ability to translate aesthetically the idea into tangible and physical forms. That she is an artist, there is no doubt, and that she was frustrated with my scientific approach, there is no doubt either. But can a person be just an artist, and never a scientist? Is art strictly synthetic—or is it, at least partly, also a practical, analytical science?

On the walls by my window hang two M. C. Escher prints, one on each side. The first, titled Reptiles, shows a jigsaw-like arrangement of creatures as they “walk off” one of the sides of the two-dimensional surface on which they are drawn, returning to fall right back into the jigsaw pattern on the other side. The jigsaw pattern of the art work is based on the mathematical concept of tessellation, or the tiling of a plane by polygons such that no gaps or overlaps exist. Escher applied this idea to the creatures that make up Reptiles. The second print, titled Print Gallery, shows a young boy in an art gallery looking at a print of a seaside town with an art gallery in which stands a boy looking at a print. In the print there appears to be a warp of both space and time as the image deforms and twists upon itself, taking the boy outside of his own experience to look upon it. Once again, Escher relied on an extensive knowledge of topology—a mathematical concept studying those properties of space, which stretch or bend by distortions, but neither tear nor puncture. If one looks at the grid paper that Escher prepared for Print Gallery, one notes that it is not a regular Euclidean grid—but rather is a grid as distorted and twisted as the final print itself.

As I look at the works of Escher, I realize that he was not just an artist; he was a mathematician and a
Look carefully at the way the writer uses definition in the sixth paragraph, clarifying two scientific concepts: **tessellation** and **topology**. Her use of Escher’s prints as examples help readers to visualize these concepts. Note especially her analysis in the seventh paragraph.

What then can be said of science? Is science strictly analytic—or is it at least partly abstract, synthetic art?

In “The Bird of Paradise: The Hunter and the Poet” E. O. Wilson is both a poet (artist) and a hunter (scientist). To the question are scientists “conquistadors who melt down the Inca gold?” Wilson says no. The hunter, or scientist, may break down and analyze—yet it is from these elementary breakdowns that the poet, or artist, synthesizes a new, deeper understanding of the species. A scientist, therefore, is both an inquisitive hunter and an artistic poet united as one under a common goal to observe and explain.

The idea can be extended to the relationship between science and art. When I had first witnessed the “trick” work, I was surprised, mesmerized, fascinated—that was the artist within responding to something aesthetic. Vigorously calculating and jotting variables with a stub of a No. 2 pencil—that was the scientist exercising abstract thought in an analysis for answers. Exhilarated at having been able to prove, understand, and explain “the trick”—that was the artist, synthesizing the analysis to recreate the artistic result of the trick, this time with newfound appreciation of its execution. Forming new questions and hypotheses—that is the next creative step of the scientist. The process then begins to repeat—and the roles of art and science, cycle. It appears as if for every practical law of science, there is a fundamental groundwork of abstract thought and imaginative creativity on which the science is synthesized.
Some may say that strict scientific analysis takes away from the appreciation of art. Others may say that the idealistic freedom of art takes away from the practicality of science. But thinking back to Wilson, Escher, and my own experience, I am convinced that art and science complement one another, enriching each other and our understanding of the universe. I struggle with the round knob of a jigsaw piece as I try, and fail, to interlock it with another piece. It must be a familiar experience to the scientists and artists, who work daily to assemble the irregularly shaped puzzle pieces of their work into patterns. Whether it is the hunter’s analysis, Escher’s art print, or a musician’s composition—each is an example of a jigsaw puzzle whose framework is built from the pieces of the practical understanding of science and the abstract creativity of art. Perhaps everything in the universe, including the universe itself, can be thought of as a jigsaw puzzle with infinitely many pieces in it.

In the *History of Art*, Anthony F. and H. W. Janson write that the first artists of the ancient worlds were probably shamans, “magicians who were believed to have divine powers of inspiration and to be able to enter the underworld of the subconscious in a deathlike trance.” The book then shifts to modern artists, describing them as people probing the outer limits of imagination, “never quite knowing what they are making until they have actually made it.” Yet the two aspects of an artist are invariably connected by tradition, or that which has been handed down: “Tradition provides the firm platform from which artists make their leap of the imagination. The place where they land will then become part of the web and serve as a point of departure for further leaps.” Where one artist stops, another takes off with a “leap of the imagination.”

Imbedded in the *History of Art* is a correlation between a scientist and an artist. In the ancient times, just as the first artists were shamans, the first scientists were prophets. Any person who (through scientific observation) could predict the next eclipse or flood was a prophet. Similarly, the modern scientists, much like the modern artists, are participants in the game of find-and-seek, in which both, as the seekers, never quite know what they’re looking for until they find it. And finally, are science and art not both grounded in a similar web of tradition, where the scientists and artists of each new
The concluding paragraphs (14 and 15) point toward larger, universal matters. What does the reader want us to leave this essay thinking about?

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**Works Cited**

