

The easiest way to convey my understanding of this topic is to use my own life as a lens in which to explore our subject (living in the throe of wonder). A large part of my childhood was spent traveling and it was in this space that a significant portion of my sense of self developed. Spending the summers with my parents (who were both secondary teachers) camping from National Park/Monument and Indian Reservation to another across the country placed me in situations outside of my familiar midwestern cornfield culture. I was exposed to all of the different sorts of people in the U.S from urban to rural, north to south, and east to west coast, and this interest in culture and society has coalesced into my eagerness to live in the throe of wonder. According to Western society, one should conform to societies standards and a way of living that takes away from living with the sacred. Remaining open to “devastating joy” is just that, devastating. This is why we as a culture and society are beyond horrified to allow this into our everyday life.

After high school, I also spent a great amount of time in college traveling. I found that it was my key to being able to be self-reflexive and discovering more about myself and what I wanted out of life. My experiences took me across America, into Mexico, and overseas to visit friends studying abroad in Nicaragua, England, France, Ireland, Germany, and finally California. Different ways of everyday life, different values, cultural priorities, and ways of categorizing invaded my own self-negotiation of identity. Professor Miller’s drawing of “Nothingness” on the dry-erase board really opened my eyes to the idea of just letting everything go. My fears of what life has to offer, what we’re taught as children to want in life, could all be wrong. It’s hard to put your guard

down and let wonder in your life because along with wonder comes heartache and pain. I may not be in the “nothingness looking up at god” yet, but I plan on living my life in a way to achieve that.

When we find something worthy enough to be the center of our life, take a “significant other” for example, we put it on a pedestal and protect it every way we possibly can. But the barricades we put up to protect that person repress the significance and brilliance of that very being. We can try to prevent the loss of something that means everything to us only by making its barricades like a coffin. To protect and keep something wonderful enclosed on itself, only suffocates the joy we felt from that particular person or thing. Dr. Miller talks about this very subject in *In the Throe of Wonder*. Our possessiveness of important things in our lives are actually doing the opposite of protecting them, they’re ruining them.

Having read Dr. Miller’s book once (slowly and carefully), many of the ideas are still foreign to me. I feel like I am grasping at the concepts, but they just narrowly escape my fingertips. It’s a difficult concept to “want” to be vulnerable, to “want” to feel longing and anguish. It feels like ever since I was young, I was imbedded with information telling me to flee from enduring these emotions. Dr. Miller is enlightened when he says in *The Way of Suffering*, “The way to find our heart is to return to our most haunting moments, those times when all the things we have kept hidden from ourselves seem on the verge of breaking through our long, laborious avoidance of them.” The year of 2010 has been one of the worst for me. Losing my Grandfather, and my father (my mentor) went to sleep and woke up blind. I try to find perspective in all these unspeakable things, and fail. I feel like my sense of self has been ruptured, and that my life will never be the same. My very core has been completely and wholly shaken and feels on the verge of

never repairing itself. The “nothingness” swallows us whole and spares no one. This is why we as people recoil from feeling such things. We go back to our domestic lives, our everyday routines in hope of never having to feel that sense of complete dread. Many people like me neglect these feelings, but I know now that to love something so strong, also means you must be willing to let it go. The deepest understanding and lessons one can learn is when one is completely lost with our chest feeling ripped open.

My SMC Professor (History of Religion) once told me about a conversation with his Buddhist friend. They were talking about death and the Buddhist said “Don’t you want to be present at death? Weren’t you present at birth? Don’t you want to be there for the transcendence of nothingness?” This seems to relate to everything you and Dr. Miller have tried to communicate to our class. So simple, yet so hard to accomplish. Of course I want to be present at death, but my fears and illusions keep me from surrendering to the throes of wonder. My tragic year has made me feel like my old life was not my own, and that the life I am living now is different. Something intangible has changed. I cannot see it with my own eyes, but I feel it with my whole being. My wounds are the answer to the truths I have been searching for my whole life, all my travels have led me here. The exact place and things I have avoided are the ones that have enlightened me the most, but also hurt me the most. Such despair should be humbling, not embarrassing.

Comment [dp1]: You are in the throes of temporality at all times with its constant rupture of the present with being pulled from a sense of the past and the known world and a sense of the not yet that you are pulled toward. BUT there are those magic moments and those moments of horror that erupt that make the true nature of temporality come through to us in our experience if we do not run from it. What is always at stake is the ego, the self and its attachments and aversions and the pain and suffering that is inevitable for such beings as we are. The old Greek adage: from suffering wisdom. This does not mean merely knowledge from having gone through the challenges of life. Rather, it means seeing through what we take as reality that gives the self the illusion of permanence and security. We are fundamentally vulnerable, fallible beings to whom things matter and we can never capture fully what that amounts to in our theories, whether religious or scientific. But we can come to live a transformed way of being in the world that Buddhists call Nirvana/Samsara (since the two are really one) and Christians call grace. It is a mysterious gift that we are here at all. We can come to love it completely without restraint, love overflowing. It is a gift and when we make our own lives a gift to others we are emulating being in its essence.

Even after realizing that to embrace “nothingness” will ultimately free me, I still grasp my old world and avoid “nothingness”. My moments of complete and utter sadness have taught me my life (the profane things like going to school, doing the dishes, getting married) is absolutely ridiculous. I should embrace the sad things, because ultimately they are the things that matter most to me, and bring me closest to the truth that is hidden in their loss. Our hearts, or souls, don’t belong in the darkness, but in the light, and usually one doesn’t realize that until the darkness sets in. These concluding moments offer me to experience existence as a blessing. The colossal wonder, after all, is accepting deaths embrace.

Comment [dp2]: Read Augustine about how he resisted this, yet knew it was what his heart desired. There is powerful Buddhist literature on what it is to be divided this way. If we were not divided, we would not be the in-between that our being is, always already underway pursuing our goals or deceiving ourselves in some way as to not face our condition of vulnerability and yearning. Nothing in life can fulfill that yearning because that is what we are. But transformation in how we undergo this, what our relation to samsara is, is the key to entering Nirvana, which is not another world. It is the ability to enter fully into the world we already are. Loss, impermanence is the essential feature of this and to deny this or to live as though it should not be so, is to ensure suffering. Suffering is not physical or emotional pain, which are unavoidable in life. Suffering is what you do with these. Wisdom is seeing this, but more so, living this.

Comment [dp3]: excellent

Comment [dp4]: As Kingsley and Parmenides tell us, the darkness and the light are not two different things. They are figments of beings such as ourselves who are always essentially divided seeking wholeness and who inscribe this division and yearning for wholeness onto the universe with our stories giving it meaning that we can live in. We live in our meaning, not a place. The universe, so called, is not being. It is the gift of being. Being is the absolutely unknown other that is presupposed by all the deepest realizations most centrally our nothingness, our contingency and vulnerability, that wisdom can come to realize, not in objective abstract knowledge, but in a certain attitude of acceptance and love toward all things as a gift. That is genuine liberation that allows one to be fully IN the world embracing it in its totality saying yes to the whole while nonetheless responding to its particularity from our finitude with our yes and no, our choice. But always with an open/wounded heart, the ability to love unreservedly. Wholeness/Healing only has its meaning in response to wound. Our condition as vulnerable beings is that capacity to be wounded and respond with vitality.

Such is finitude, always incomplete, fallible, vulnerable, with only one final option: Deep humility in the face of the mystery of this gift, that there is something rather than nothing and it is intelligible to us, but only through the meaning we give it through our finite capacity for language and interpretation. If we mistake our meanings, our “truths,” our reality for being, we cut ourselves off from the sacred.

Comments: From your heart which is wide open now from loss and intimate awareness of your core of vulnerability. From that standpoint you have applied Miller easily due to that openness and need to understand. This is quite good and you are certainly are in position to tie together the issues your essay prepares for:

What is the relation of wonder and horror to being and how do wonder, horror, and the throe of inquiry open us to the sacred? What is the problem of truth in this?

You answered all the other parts of the question quite well.

Grade: A-