

Childhood's End: A Speculative Fiction

Do not wait for a reason to be happy.

Caring is a reflex. Someone slips, your arm goes out. A car is in the ditch, you join the others and push. You live, you help.

Until I saw Chardin's painting, I never realized how much beauty lay around me in my parents' house, in the half-cleared table, in the corner of a tablecloth left awry, in the knife beside the empty oyster shell.

The way to love anything is to realize that it might be lost.

Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

Dancing: A series of movements involving two partners, where speed and rhythm match harmoniously with music.

You've spent the semester looking to the past, seeing the same ideas that weigh on us today expressed in our most ancient texts, and figuring out how to connect those distant days to your current lives. But we've spent relatively little time looking forward.

Dante viewed the inability to look forward, to see where you're going, as a punishment worthy of the Eighth Circle. The way sinners earned that punishment, of course, is by trying to look too far forward into the future.

It seems to me that humans have always been more fascinated by what lies ahead of us than by what lies behind us. The denizens of the Fourth Bolgia are there because they tried looking forward in order to profit, sometimes at the expense of others. But we're the only species endowed with the ability to sit and dream about what's still to come, and I don't think an indulgence of that curiosity is bad, in and of itself.

Take flight, for example. It's the thing we're not supposed to be able to do. We're not designed for it. Dante had a pretty healthy fear of it, for what he considered (based on the stories he'd read) to be very good reasons. What's the thing every child dreams of doing, and later accepts that he or she will never do? Fly.

And yet...

On December 17th, 1903, the Wright Brothers launched the first successful sustained flight in human history. We looked into the face of a universe seemingly designed to prevent us from doing something, bound to the ground by gravity and physical inability, and found a way to do it anyway.

In the spirit of the Wrights, I want you to look forward – to look not at what we do, but at what we're going to be able to do someday. Specifically, I want you to think about the core tenet of *Press X for Beer Bottle* – that storytelling methods in the 21st century are likely to undergo a seismic shift – and roll from there. I want you, in short, to reject Booker's thesis – that every plot has been developed – by proving him wrong with your work.

You may set your final, five-page-minimum, MLA-formatted story for this class anywhere you like, use any characters you like, utilize any plot you like (it **must** be school-appropriate), etc.; I recommend setting it in the future, or elsewhere, but it's up to you. You can use old archetypes...or you can dare to dream up new ones. The key lies in how you tell the story: I want you to think about how you consume narratives vs. how, say, your grandparents consume narratives, to think about how your grandchildren will likely consume narratives...and then write a story in the "style" you think we'll use in the late 21st century.

This is speculative fiction, in other words, in form, not necessarily in plot. And it's a heck of a lot of fun to write. Good luck!