

Dear Reader,

While formulating the concept behind this short play, I was thinking about the readings and viewings we did during our second unit, particularly on PARO, a robot seal, and *Ex Machina*, a movie about artificially-intelligent robots. I was fascinated by the sense of comfort that PARO seems to provide to elderly patients; it is purposefully designed to have a nonthreatening, cuddly form, and it has aspects that are much like a baby or small pet that encourage the patient to care about its “wellbeing”. The way PARO functions is similar to pet therapy, but there are some clear benefits to having PARO over a real pet. For example, an elderly patient suffering from dementia would not be able to sufficiently care for another living creature on their own, so a real dog or cat would likely be malnourished or neglected. However, since PARO is mechanical, and so does not need to be fed, bathed, or cared for, the patient can have the full benefit of petting and cradling a “pet” without the physical or mental labor of having to take care of one. Essentially, PARO embodies all the beneficial aspects of having a pet.

Although using PARO to comfort patients has its benefits, that fact that it is not a real pet raises some ethical concerns. Since PARO is often used with patients who have mental disabilities, such as dementia, they are sometimes unaware that PARO is not a real pet. They will care for the robot as if it is their real pet, or even as if it is a child. The element of “realness” can add to the experience for the patient, making the therapy more effective, but some believe that allowing the patients to think so is deception. PARO can also incite genuine feeling from the humans it interacts with, despite not being able to reciprocate. In one paper we read snippets of, “Ethical Implications of Using the Paro Robot with a Focus on Dementia Patient Care”, patient Pierre Carter states, “I know that this isn’t an animal... But it brings out natural feelings” (qtd. from Calo, Hunt-Bull, Lewis, Metzler 87). Another patient “knows it [PARO] is not real but still loves it” (Calo, Hunt-Bull, Lewis, Metzler 87). I thought it was extremely interesting that something fake could cause people to feel real things, simply because it looks and acts real, and I wanted to explore that in my Dean’s Date assignment.

The phenomenon of a robot receiving real feelings from a human repeats itself in the film *Ex Machina*, with protagonists Caleb and Ava. Ava is an artificially-intelligent built by the brilliant but reclusive CEO of a Google-like tech company, and Caleb is an employee from said company who is chosen to test Ava to see if she actually has artificial intelligence. The test that Caleb administers is just him talking to Ava like a normal person, and then determining if she has AI based on how he *feels* about her. (The criteria for his decision are entirely too loose, which I explore in my R2, but I digress.) In the process, Caleb begins to develop a crush on Ava; she is curious, inquisitive, gentle-voiced, and most important of all, pretty. His feelings for her are so real that he believes in her humanity, and he helps her escape her creator’s mansion at the end of the film. I find it incredible that Caleb is able to, essentially, fall in love with Ava despite her obvious robotic nature--in under a week, no less. I attribute it to the fact that her form is humanlike, as well as the fact that she is modeled after Caleb’s preferences (as the CEO reveals

later in the movie that she is based on Caleb's porn-viewing history). Ava also behaves sort of like a human, as she likes to ask questions, walk around, draw pictures, and dress up. She shows (or, at least, feigns) interest in Caleb by asking probing questions such as, "Are you attracted to me? I hope you are." Even though she is not a real human, Caleb is still infatuated with her. It is unclear whether Ava can reciprocate or not (in my R2, I reason that she is not conscious and therefore cannot reciprocate, much like PARO), but Caleb's feelings are not dependent on her reciprocation. All that matters is how she makes him feel.

Taking both PARO and Ava into consideration, I started to think about the recent trend of dating sims, which are video games in which a player can interact with and "date" a cast of girls or boys (depending on the game, as they are marketed to different audiences; to my knowledge, there are no games with a mixed-gender cast where all characters are dateable). Over the course of a game, the characters will vie for the player's affection, with some being direct and others being more indirect. In general, whether the dating sim is marketed towards women or men, there are clear character archetypes. There is the gentle, soft-spoken type who is often shy but overwhelmingly kind; the abrasive, kind-of-mean type who secretly has a heart of gold; the childhood friend, who might have a lifelong unrequited crush on the player (or vice-versa); the really hot one with no personality; and the smart, uppity one. Not all character tropes make an appearance every time, but these tend to be typical. Usually, the player can choose to romance whichever character they would like, and most dating sims portray the journey as being analogous to courting a real person.

I thought it was interesting that people enjoy dating sims and sometimes can develop strong feelings about the characters, even though they are simply pictures and text on a screen. A closer examination of the content of these video games can reveal why. Because the characters are not real people, the relationships that players pursue with them are untethered by the struggles that often plague real human-to-human interactions. For example, the player will always be able to talk to the characters whenever they want, whereas a real-life crush may live somewhere far away or may be busy with work most of the time. Additionally, the player does not have to spend extra time and resources to take the character out on dates. The characters are also (generally, although it can vary between games) actively in love with, and trying to spend time with, the player, making them feel wanted and cared for. The player may not be receiving any attention, romantic or otherwise, from people in real life, and so they receive their validation from the characters within the dating sim. Most troubling of all, dating sim characters' personalities are a bit two-dimensional--though that can sometimes be a caveat of writing the staple archetypes. A dating sim character's main purpose is to serve as a romantic interest for the player, and although a fleshed-out personality can be attractive to some, most video games will opt for creating a character that is wholly devoted to making the player happy. Catering to the player can look different depending on who the game is for. For example, in dating sims marketed toward women (which typically have male characters), a character could bring the player flowers, bake cookies with her, shield her from the rain as they walk through the park, or

let her bandage him up after getting into a fight to defend her honor. In dating sims marketed toward men (which typically have female characters), a character could give the player a homemade lunch, help him with homework, or take care of him while he is “sick” (in the game’s universe). Regardless of gender, the emotional intimacy that often goes with performing such acts speaks to the loneliness that players must feel in their personal lives. If they are seeking emotional comfort from a video game, they are probably struggling at creating meaningful relationships in real life.

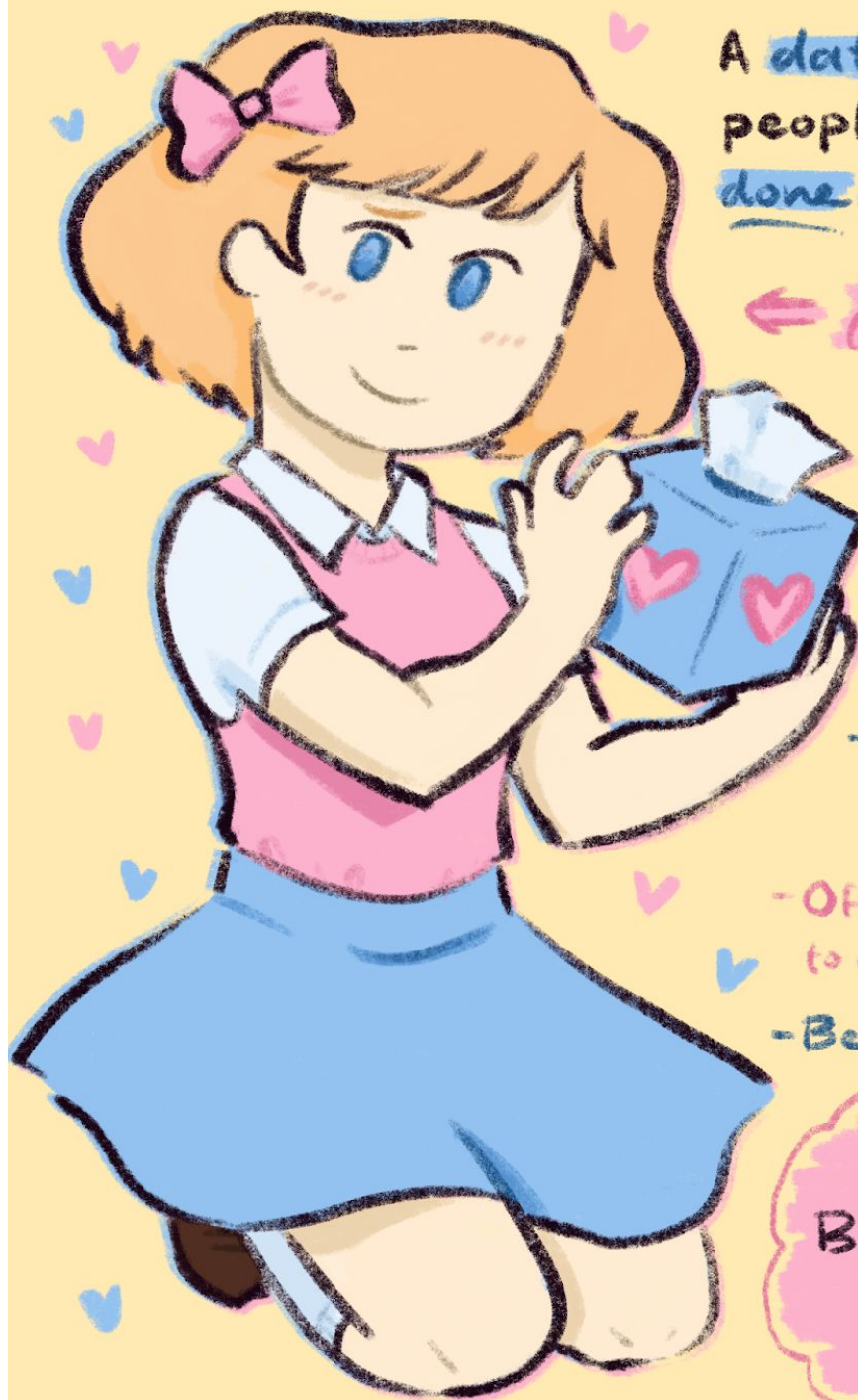
Within *Solace*, I decided to tell the story of a gaming enthusiast named Brennan who has recently broken up with his girlfriend, Lenore. He finds comfort in a video game called “Solace”, which is marketed as “a dating sim for people who are done with dating”. The purpose of the game is to comfort people who have recently ended a relationship. The main (and only) character of the game, Dahlia, is designed after the “gentle, soft-spoken” archetype; she has rounded features, her eyes are wide and non-threatening, and she is entirely pastel. She takes care of Brennan as he reels from the breakup, and they form a strong bond—at least, it seems that way from Brennan’s end. He feels as though he can talk to her about anything. Even though she cycles between the same few standard phrases to respond to his troubles, he thinks she understands him in a way that no one else can. Dahlia never questions Brennan when he wants to divert the topic, or suddenly do something different. In contrast with the other people (women) in his life, Dahlia is perfect, because she goes along with whatever Brennan wants to do. She is PARO, in that she is a comfort tool turned real; and she is Ava, in that her human form and mannerisms earn Brennan’s affection, despite her digital origins.

Solace is a testament to the average man’s loneliness, his emotional needs, and how those emotional needs are not sufficiently met by technology. The way I have chosen to structure the play also reflects the inherent misogyny in the way that men typically seek emotional comfort, because the way female characters take care of their male player in dating sims often displays the same tropes. Women in video games and real life serve as therapists, mothers, and girlfriends to men, usually without any sort of acknowledgement. One of the biggest dangers in seeking validation and comfort from a video game woman is that she does not have to be acknowledged at all, because she has no feelings and does not exist outside of the player’s mind. Her entire life revolves around the player; her sole purpose is to make the player happy. The long-term consequences of interacting with digital women on a daily basis is that men will start to expect the same thankless devotion from real women; their social skills as a whole will decline as well, because every interaction within a dating sim occurs with self-interest at heart (think of all the memes about gamers being rude to women, and people in general). While video games can be fun, it is important not to seek genuine validation from something that is not real. Instead, it would be better to talk to friends and family, and then listen when they have something to say. The development of mutual care and respect results in a much stronger and longer-lasting bond, and each becomes a better, kinder, more considerate person in the end.

Works Cited

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solace



A dating sim for
people who are
done with dating!

← dahlia

is here to wipe
your tears!

She will:

- Ask you about
your day
- Remind you of
the good things
in life
- Offer a shoulder
to cry on
- Be your best friend!

10/10

Better than a
rebound!

~IGN

“SOLACE”

Monique Legaspi

Characters

Brennan, Female Voice, Dahlia, Mom, Therapist

(Note: All female characters should be played by the same actress.)

Lights up on the left half of the stage. There are three chairs lined up next to each other, facing the audience. The legs of the chairs are covered with a long cloth. BRENNAN enters, carrying a laptop and a blue tissue box with pink hearts adorning its faces. He sniffles and rubs his nose with his arm. He sits down in the middle chair and sets the tissues down next to him, opening his laptop.

BRENNAN

This--[sniffs]--better be worth the \$20. That cashier gave me such a weird look. Like, what, never seen a guy buy a video game with--[sniffs]--snot and tears running down his face? Grow up.

BRENNAN begins typing on his laptop, sniffing intermittently. After the second sniff, he pulls a tissue from the tissue box and blows his nose into it.

BRENNAN

Ugh. At least it came with tissues. That was kinda nice.

A startup noise can be heard, followed by sweet, calming music. The other half of the stage slowly lights up, revealing a single empty chair which also faces the audience.

FEMALE VOICE [recorded or offstage]

Welcome to *Solace*, the dating sim for people who are done with dating! I hope you're doing alright. What's your name?

BRENNAN [as he types]

Uhh... Brennan.

FEMALE VOICE

Hello, Brennan. What is your most recent ex's name?

BRENNAN

Jesus, right for the jugular, huh? Can't I leave it blank?

BRENNAN attempts to press enter without entering a name. Silence. He attempts it a few more times. Silence. BRENNAN sighs.

BRENNAN [typing]

Lenore.

FEMALE VOICE

Excellent. Sorry if that made you uncomfortable; we'll just be using the name to generate a new one that is completely dissimilar.

BRENNAN

Oh. Okay. That's pretty cool, actually.

FEMALE VOICE

Hold tight, Brennan. Your confidante will be here in just a second!

BRENNAN leans back in his chair, crossing his arms as he waits. After a moment, a girl steps onstage, holding a tissue box identical to the one sitting next to BRENNAN. She is dressed all in pastel, but her outfit also seems modeled after a school uniform. Her hair is curly and strawberry blonde, and her large, blue eyes stand out against her pale skin. She sits down in the lone chair on her half of the stage.

DAHLIA [shy, smiling]

Hello. Your name is Brennan, right?

BRENNAN looks a little less heartbroken than before. He'll always love Lenore, but... this girl looks exactly like the cover art! So cute!

BRENNAN [clicking the trackpad]

Yup.

DAHLIA

Nice to meet you. I'm Dahlia.

BRENNAN [slightly unimpressed]

Well, that has an L in it... not totally dissimilar.

DAHLIA

How are you doing today?

BRENNAN [typing]

Good.

DAHLIA

No, I mean, how are you *really* doing? Are you okay?

BRENNAN [typing]

I'm just fine.

DAHLIA [concerned]

Hmm... okay. Well, you know I'm always here for you, right? Come back anytime you need someone to talk to.

DAHLIA holds out her tissue box.

DAHLIA

We can talk about anything. No judgment.

BRENNAN rolls his eyes.

BRENNAN

Good to know.

BRENNAN closes his laptop. As he does so, DAHLIA's half of the stage goes dark. He sniffles and rubs his nose with his arm.

BRENNAN

What a waste of money.

As BRENNAN continues talking, he puts his laptop and tissues under the chair and retrieves a plate of food.

BRENNAN

If I wanted people asking me if I was okay, I'd go visit my mom.

BRENNAN starts to eat the food on the plate. The other half of the stage lights up again, and in the other chair now is a woman with a ponytail, apron, and slippers. She has a plate of food in her lap, too, and she's cutting something delicately with her knife and fork.

MOM

So nice to have you home, Brennan. It's been ages! Your father and I missed you so much. Look--we're even having your favorite for dinner!

BRENNAN [chewing, not looking up from his food]
Mhm.

MOM

How's the job? Are they paying you any good?

BRENNAN

They're paying me.

MOM [laughs]

Someday they'll recognize just how smart you are.

BRENNAN

Mhm.

MOM

Smart and hardworking and compassionate. They'll see it in you. Just like Lenore did.

BRENNAN chokes on his food at the mention of Lenore, coughing violently for a few seconds. He beats a fist against his chest to clear his throat.

BRENNAN [weakly]

Mhm.

MOM

By the way, how is Lenore? How come you didn't bring her with you? I love it when we have our little double date nights.

BRENNAN

She... um, she...

MOM

What? Is she working late? Is she sick? [loud, excited gasp] IS SHE PREGNANT? OH MY GOD, I'M GONNA BE A GRANDMA!!!

BRENNAN

What?? Mom, no, she--

MOM [shouting]

IT'S OKAY THAT YOU'RE NOT MARRIED YET--SOMETIMES LIFE JUST TURNS OUT THAT WAY!

BRENNAN

She's not--

MOM [still shouting]

BUT HOW COULD YOU LEAVE HER AT HOME? POOR THING, SHE MUST BE SO TIRED! YOU SHOULD HAVE ASKED ME TO COME / OVER INSTEAD--

BRENNAN

MOM SHE BROKE UP WITH ME.

Long beat.

MOM

...What?

BRENNAN

She broke up with me, Mom. Last week.

MOM

Why? What happened?

BRENNAN

Nothing. I don't know. She just said it wasn't... working between us. Anymore.

MOM

Oh, honey...

MOM starts to rise out of her seat.

BRENNAN

Mom--it's fine. Really. It's fine.

MOM

But sweetie, I just want to give you a hug--

BRENNAN

No. Don't get up. I'm fine.

MOM

But do you at least want me to--

BRENNAN

MOM!

Silence. MOM sits back down.

BRENNAN

I don't want to talk about this anymore, Mom.

Beat.

MOM

...Okay. Just let me know if you need anything, dear.

BRENNAN

Space, maybe.

Beat.

MOM

Okay.

MOM and BRENNAN eat in silence. Then, MOM gets up, carrying her plate with her.

MOM

There's cake in the fridge. Take some with you before you leave.

BRENNAN doesn't say anything. MOM exits, and her half of the stage goes dark.

BRENNAN [sighing loudly]

See? Utter torture. All she does is smother me.

BRENNAN returns the dish underneath his seat and retrieves the tissues and laptop again. He hesitates for a moment, drumming his fingers on the laptop cover. Then he opens it slowly. The other half of the stage brightens at the same speed, and the sweet music comes back. DAHLIA is sitting in the chair once more.

DAHLIA

Hi, Brennan. How are you today?

BRENNAN [typing]

Fine.

DAHLIA looks worried again. BRENNAN distantly wonders if that face pops up every time he types in "fine". It's the same face MOM gave him at dinner. He doesn't like it.

DAHLIA

Did you do anything interesting today?

BRENNAN [typing]

Not really.

Beat. DAHLIA twiddles her thumbs.

DAHLIA

Are you feeling okay?

BRENNAN [typing]

Just fi... [backspaces] Peachy.

DAHLIA gives him a different look this time, less worried than it is skeptical. BRENNAN isn't sure he likes this look, either.

BRENNAN [typing]

Look, I know you're supposed to talk to me, and I'm supposed to talk to you, but I'd prefer if it were just... quiet, right now.

DAHLIA

We don't have to talk. We can just sit here.

BRENNAN [typing]

Um... [pause] Okay.

The two sit there in silence for a good ten seconds. It's awkward, but also sort of peaceful (due to the music). DAHLIA watches BRENNAN, smiling. After a moment, she holds out her tissue box.

BRENNAN

Okay bye.

BRENNAN shuts the laptop abruptly, and the music and DAHLIA's lights go out in the same fashion. He starts to put the laptop and tissues under the chairs, moving to lay on his back across them.

BRENNAN

Jesus, that was worse than therapy. Why did I even buy this stupid game? Sure, she's cute, but did I really just pay \$20 to sit and watch her watch me?

Lights go back up. A woman in a smart blazer and glasses sits in the DAHLIA's place, holding a notepad and pen.

THERAPIST

Now, Brennan, how are you doing today?

BRENNAN

Fine.

THERAPIST [sighs]

We've been over this, Brennan. Try to use words other than "fine". There are plenty to choose from.

BRENNAN

Dandy.

THERAPIST

Also, try not to lie.

BRENNAN

How do you know I'm lying? You're not me. You don't know me.

THERAPIST

I'm a professional lie detector, and you've been my client for three years now. You think I don't know you deflect when you're upset?

BRENNAN

I don't deflect! You deflect! You're the one deflecting here!

THERAPIST [rolling eyes]

Why don't we talk about the breakup? It's been a few weeks. You can talk about it now, right?

BRENNAN [crossing his arms]

There's nothing to talk about.

THERAPIST

I think there's plenty. Did Lenore ever tell you why she left?

BRENNAN

No. Not really.

THERAPIST

"Not really" isn't no. What did she say?

BRENNAN [sighs]

She... she basically said we don't work together anymore. That's it.

The THERAPIST raises an eyebrow.

BRENNAN [reluctantly]

And that I wasn't, like, paying enough attention to her--look, can we not talk about this now?

THERAPIST

You need to talk about it at some point, Brennan.

BRENNAN

I don't, actually.

THERAPIST

Talking about it will help. Maybe we can figure out what went wrong.

BRENNAN

I don't need to figure it out. It wasn't my fault.

THERAPIST

We won't know that until you talk about it.

BRENNAN

No, I already know.

THERAPIST

Do you still love her, Brennan?

Beat. BRENNAN swallows, says nothing.

THERAPIST

If you know what went wrong, it'll be easier to make / amends--

BRENNAN

No.

THERAPIST

No, what?

BRENNAN

No, I don't love her anymore.

Beat. The THERAPIST scribbles something in her notepad.

THERAPIST [doubtful]

Okay. Good to know.

BRENNAN can sense her doubt. He feels the need to prove himself, for some reason.

BRENNAN

Actually, I met a new girl.

The THERAPIST looks surprised, but in a hopeful kind of way.

THERAPIST

That's good news. What's her name?

Beat.

BRENNAN

...Dahlia.

THERAPIST

That's wonderful. I'm glad to hear it, Brennan.

BRENNAN

Yeah, yeah.

The THERAPIST looks at her wrist, standing up.

THERAPIST

Looks like our time is up. I think this was a really good session. Let's keep up the good work.

She scribbles some more things into her notepad as she walks offstage, and the lights go down on her half. BRENNAN sits back up and retrieves his laptop and tissues.

BRENNAN

Oh, my god, she is so *pushy*. I thought you paid therapists to make yourself feel better, but I always leave just feeling raw. [pause] But, I guess if I'm still paying her after three years, it must be doing something good for me...

He opens the laptop. The lights go back up, and the sweet music returns. DAHLIA is sitting in her chair again.

DAHLIA

Hi, Brennan. How are you today?

BRENNAN briefly considers typing something like "fine" or "dandy" or "peachy" again, but decides against it.

BRENNAN [typing]

Been better.

DAHLIA

Oh, no! What's wrong?

BRENNAN [typing]

Well...

BRENNAN presses his lips together, tapping his fingers lightly on the keys. He doesn't know what to type next.

DAHLIA

Take your time. Go as slow as you need to.

BRENNAN [typing]

Well, I guess... I kind of... um...

DAHLIA nods in encouragement.

BRENNAN [typing]

I miss my ex.

DAHLIA [smiling]

That's perfectly natural.

BRENNAN [typing]

Yeah, I figured. It sucks, though.

DAHLIA

Do you want to talk about it?

BRENNAN

Uh... [pause] No, I'm good.

DAHLIA

Okay.

DAHLIA holds out her tissue box.

DAHLIA

I'm here whenever you're ready.

DAHLIA flashes a smile. BRENNAN shuts the laptop, turning out the lights and the music. He leans back in his seat, pressing a hand against his forehead.

BRENNAN

Oh, Christ.

BRENNAN presses the heels of his hands into his eyes, sniffing. He pushes the laptop into the seat beside him and pulls a cell phone out of his back pocket, shakily dialing a number. He holds the phone against his ear with both hands. One ring. Two. Three.

FEMALE VOICE

Hey, it's Lenore.

BRENNAN

Lenore? Lenore, / I--

FEMALE VOICE

I'm busy right now. Leave a message at the beep.

BRENNAN sighs and hangs up, draping an arm over his eyes. He sits there, sulking for a moment, then sits back up and dials her number again. One, two, three rings.

FEMALE VOICE

Hey, it's Lenore. I'm busy right now. / Leave a--

BRENNAN hangs up again. Then calls her again.

FEMALE VOICE

Hey, it's Lenore. / I'm--

BRENNAN throws his phone down and curls up in his seat, trying (failing) not to cry. He stays like that for a moment, then uncurls himself and reaches for his laptop again. He opens it, and the stage brightens, music returning. DAHLIA is exactly where we left her. (As the conversation continues, the music slowly fades into mechanical humming.)

DAHLIA

Hi, Brennan. How are you today?

BRENNAN [typing]

Just awful. Like, genuinely terrible.

DAHLIA

Oh, no! What's wrong?

BRENNAN [typing]

I tried to call my ex.

DAHLIA

Oh, dear...

BRENNAN [typing]

And I got her voicemail. Three times.

DAHLIA

Oh, that's just awful.

BRENNAN [typing]

I just don't get it. I thought she wanted me to pay more attention to her. And now she just ignores me when I do give her attention?

DAHLIA nods sympathetically.

BRENNAN [typing]

I guess I understand. But it's not my fault. She's the one who broke up with me, not the other way around.

DAHLIA

Oh, dear...

BRENNAN [typing]

I just wanted to see her again, that's all. I miss talking to her.

DAHLIA

Oh, that's just awful.

BRENNAN [typing]

I mean, is it so wrong to want to see her? To like, hug her or something? To wish we could just sit on the couch and cuddle like we used to? Maybe I didn't do it enough when we were still together. But I want to now. It's natural to want that, right?

DAHLIA nods sympathetically.

BRENNAN [typing]

I just--I don't know. I miss her. I miss being with her. I miss being... wanted. Being cared about. No one seems to care about what I'm going through anymore.

DAHLIA

I care.

That startles him. He looks up from his screen.

BRENNAN [typing]

...You do?

DAHLIA

Of course. I care about seeing you get better. Moving on from all of this. That's all I've ever cared about.

BRENNAN stares for a long while. His eyes begin to water.

BRENNAN [laughing wryly]

Oh. Haha. Wow, uh...

DAHLIA holds out her tissue box. Long pause. The mechanical humming noise is loud now--so much louder than the music ever was--but neither of them seem to notice. BRENNAN slowly pulls a tissue out of his own tissue box, wiping his eyes with it. DAHLIA pulls back, smiling.

DAHLIA

I wish I could be there to give you a hug.

BRENNAN tries (fails) to suppress a smile. He sniffs and puts the tissue down.

BRENNAN [typing]

Yeah. Me, too.

END

I pledge my honor that this paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

End of Term Reflection

Dear Reader,

Going into writing seminar, I thought the class would be a waste of time. I knew learning to write was important--I had seen enough papers by STEM-oriented classmates to be aware of the necessity for good writing skills--but I felt as though having a whole class devoted to writing would just be unnecessarily hard and laborious. During the class, it certainly seemed that way; each writing assignment would come right after the last, almost rapid-fire with no rest and no end in sight. At some points, I wanted to give up. Nothing was graded except for the revisions, right? I seriously considered not turning in some assignments, because I had become so exhausted and burnt-out. Ultimately, though, I pushed through and submitted (most of) them, because I remembered that the purpose of every assignment was to help me hone my writing skills. The revision would not be any good without feedback on my drafts, and the drafts would not be any good if I did not flesh out my essay ideas in the pre-drafts. In the end, the hard work paid off; I can really see the improvement when I look at my D1 and compare it to my R3.

My D1 was not bad, as I had carried over my essay-writing skills from AP English Language and Literature; I could defend my point well and support with evidence. I did not have the most skill with transitions and the flow of an argument, though, which was a problem for me even in high school. The way things play out in my head is very clear to me, so I find it hard to see where I am supposed to guide the reader when the topic switches. In my R3, I believe I have gotten significantly better at anticipating where the reader could get confused, then adding some extra padding so that the segue is not too abrupt.

I think another consequence of me knowing all about what I want to say, but not having the skills required to say them in a way that other people understand, is that my larger significance is always lost in translation. Generally, the purpose of writing my papers is implicitly known, but I have gotten feedback letters from professors and classmates alike that it is not always explicitly clear. Even in my R3, my larger significance is not as clear as it could be; I hope to get better at expressing my ideas clearly as I progress through my academic career.

Although I believe all of my theses for my papers in this class were important and well-thought out, I still needed help finalizing them in the conferences after the first drafts. The main idea would still be there, but it would shift slightly to focus on something related--for example, my R1 shifted from being about Maddie's relationship with the farm to being about Bollinger's definition of relationships, with Maddie and the farm being used as primary evidence. Every thesis has been partially shaped and improved in some way by my discussions with Professor Fedosik-Long, and while I am very grateful, I know I cannot discuss all of my future papers with her. I would like to be able to hone in on the most important part of my proposal on my own, so that I can start writing with a clear purpose without needing to consult so many people about whether my idea is good or not.

I also am not the best at articulating motive, particularly as it relates to exhibit evidence. This lacking of mine is apparent in my R3, where I do not relate most of my points back to my exhibit

(although it was said in my feedback letter that doing so was fine in this specific situation). I want to get better at tying my points together; I can see, even in the cover letter for my DDA, that my thoughts are floaty and only immediately recognizable as related by virtue of being in the same document.

I have not yet taken any other classes that require writing of the same caliber as this writing seminar, as I have mostly been taking STEM classes, so I have not been able to practice writing in this style for other subjects. However, I will try my best to keep what we have learned in this class in mind when I eventually take more humanities-oriented class (as I plan to do in the future) and apply them to any essays I may need to write. Even if the writing does not need to be so rigorous, I will hold them to the same standard as my papers were in this seminar; I want every piece I produce for this university to be of the highest achievable quality. I will plan and brainstorm the way we have been taught, and I will look at my essays with the same critical eye with which I examined my peers' essays this semester.

Overall, I strongly believe writing seminar has improved my essay-writing skills. I have been made a better writer, reader, and reasoner by participating in this class. I will continue to practice what I have learned in my future years at Princeton and beyond. Thank you to Professor Fedosik-Long and to my fellow classmates for cultivating an inquisitive, yet welcoming, environment where we could express opinions, share stories, and eat snacks.

Sincerely,
Monique Legaspi