stereotypes

November 2014
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Front cover photo
by Fiona Williams
taken in Costa Rica

This photo by
Edward Ross at
Norwich Cathedral

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Dear Radix Readers,

Pathetic fallacy can be such a welcoming concept. As the weather begins to cool and the leaves continue to fall, I cannot help but think of how the transition of the seasons can relate to the changes we experience in our everyday lives.

Every single day presents a new opportunity. Do accept my apologies for the cliché, but do not cancel it out entirely. Especially in an academic setting, every day does indeed present itself as an opportunity: for growth, for learning, for understanding, and for serving.

The theme of this issue hopes to challenge your beliefs and understanding of the world, as they are today. With this issue, we are bringing prejudice and stereotyping to the forefront; stereotypes of ethnicity, religion, class, language, or nationality—we will not ignore that it happens, nor will we let others turn the blind eye.

As irrational acts of violence continue to plague our world, I think it is imperative that we, as part of the global community, engage in healthy discussion about our differences and our similarities.

We hope that the following pages of poems, columns, and pictures inspire you to examine your own biases and limitations with the understanding that, as Charlotte Bronte wrote in Jane Eyre, “prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilised by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones.”

Thank you.
Italians are lovers, the French don’t shower and love going on strikes and holidays, Australians are gone surfing all day, Chinese are Kung Fu masters, Americans are obese fast-food eaters, Canadians are apologetics, Dutch smoke weed, Irish are gin-gers, the English have awful food and drink tea 24 hours a day, Colombians do drugs and Mexicans drink tequila and wear sombreros…

I like national stereotypes. They are funny. We need them.

Can you think of a country without them? When you don’t know anything about a country, stereotypes help you get a picture of what it might look like. How hard would it be to picture a place without using stereotypes? If you don’t know a place, have never been there and are unaware of its culture, you link it to something, whether fictional or true, in order to create an image.

If I say Russia, you think vodka, stone-faced and cold people, winter, fur hats, and babushka. Although each of these items is subject to conditions and explanations, they’re not false.

National stereotypes are oversimplified facts about a country and therefore should not be categorically generalized, but viewed as realistic caricatures. Most ethnic stereotypes are (arguably) true facts, while others need to be qualified. It is true however that some are false images, potentially racist, that stain a population’s image and need to be corrected. But, the latter category doesn’t account for most stereotypes and, depending on context, we should not be too emotional over ethnic stereotypes in general.

How do travellers contribute to national stereotypes? We arrive in a country with many preconceived notions about it. We end up seeing those stereotypes because we see the country through our stereotype-oriented mind: That’s what we are looking for and that’s what we convince ourselves to see.
Ask anyone about India: “poor and dirty”! One goes to India to see the “real Indian experience” of living in poverty, seeking minimum comfort and making their way into the chaos of Indian streets. Thus, that’s what we end up seeing. Yes, a large part of India is extremely poor. But middle-class and rich neighbourhoods are plentiful in India. It’s not poor, it’s not dirty and it’s India!

Greeks are lazy and eat souvlaki all the time! Since I ate souvlaki during my holidays in Greece, I tend to see this country as overly relaxed and full of souvlaki-eaters. No! That was just my state of mind while there, and therefore that’s how I saw the country.

Most of all, travellers feed stereotypes when they return home! When travellers talk to their friends and family about the country they visited, stereotypes are often reinforced. Whether it is refuted or approved by the traveller doesn’t actually matter. What matters is that the stereotype has been talked about and therefore remains alive and well.

People get excited when one talks about stereotypes. This is often because people can relate to them. If one talks about a warm camping trip in Russia with campfire and incredibly welcoming and smiling Russians in the Irkutsk Oblast, then surely that’s nice! But this isn’t what people think of Russia and may not resonate with people’s minds. On the other hand, if one talks about the party they had in Moscow and how they drank a lot of vodka…. “VODKA !

“Yeah, yeah, you drank vodka with Russians; That’s the true Russian experience!”.

That’s what most people will remember of your travel: the vodka part even though it was only an anecdote.

That’s how we should take national stereotypes: humourous and entertaining portrait of a country, arguably true, usually based on some historical facts, and which should be a source for open minded conversations with foreigners about the culture of a country regardless of individual particularities.

And oh yes, Canadians are excessively polite, Chinese are noisy and Mongolians are incredible riders. But I’ve met rude Canadians, quiet Chinese, and Mongolians who have never ridden a horse in their lives!

Léa Croset is a modern nomad and wanderer, currently a U1 student in Philosophy and Religious Studies.
Stereotype, a definition:

by Michael Clarke

A static formulation of an individual; hearsay.
To anticipate behaviour without prior substantiation.
A judgement formed a priori.
To disallow complexity.
To indulge in oversimplicity.
To deny Truth its gray vestments and vague vespers.
To yield to Confirmation Bias; see Pattern Recognition (Psychology).
To indiscriminate.
To inherit the assumptions of one’s immanent culture.
To unwittingly bastardize a people; see xenophobia.
To yield to Arguments from Authority; see filial piety.
To believe without knowledge.
To understand without compassion.
To see without Love.
To laugh without smiling.

Michael Cody Clarke (MCC) is a Spoken Word performance artist based in Montréal, QC.
He has represented this city in the 2013 and 2014 Canadian Festival of Spoken Word (CFSW) in Saskatoon and Montréal, respectively. He has performed on a variety of stages, including the Rialto, the Mainline, Casa del Popolo, The Mariposa Café, and La Sala Rossa.
What makes Meryl Streep such a great actress? She does not tackle characters head on, enveloping herself within an artificial persona that will carry her through a film.

She plays little moments - moments that collectively constitute the complexity of the characters she embodies and the situations those characters find themselves within. In those moments, we believe the raw truth of her acting because we indulge ourselves in them.

That is how I feel about the 4K… I cannot pinpoint a single moment when a diametric shift occurred within me that would alter how I saw the world. But, I can certainly pinpoint all the moments that together created a wave of indisputable changes. It was certainly gradual… The grandeur of its totality is what amazes me the most. I went in to the trip expecting to be changed; in fact I wanted to change. But, it was the realization of the moments I had collected that brought me the most clarity.

Over the summer, I participated in an American cross-country bike ride that spanned from Baltimore, Maryland to Portland, Oregon in 70 days. Alone, this event served as platform enough to reshape my outlook on life. But it was an event on June 13, 2014, that firmly cemented it.

A dear teammate and friend, Jamie Roberts, was hit by a car while changing a flat tire and passed away. In grief, I observed how we internalize and cope with death. It led me to question not just our culture’s fear of death, but our outlook on medicine as an omnipotent force. Today’s medical culture reflects our belief in a grandiose power, able to cure anything (and everything), that clings to its bedside.
Why do we view death as a failure of medicine instead of a naturally occurring event? In biomedicine, death is the ultimate failure. We are told, despite the relentless efforts of medical staff, when we are unable to sustain this life, it dies. Once the understanding of the event crosses this threshold, people look to religion and to spirituality to cope with the grief, pain, and confusion. Yet, there is a clear dichotomy in this diagnosis. Medicine does not bring immortality, nor is death an unnatural event. So why do we treat it as such? Why are we left so embittered and pained when someone dies? It seems as though biomedicine’s reach only stretches as far as this life, after which its ability to cure all seems to fade.

Perhaps, the fault lies in our discomfort with uncertainty. Often, doctors are able to cure their patient’s ailments, but patients are left with irreparable damage that may alter the quality of their life forever. We often choose to take this route, in the hopes of prolonging one’s life. I once heard a beautiful metaphor, detailing a butterfly that flies into one’s hand. We keep our palm open and let the butterfly sit, marveling at its beauty while we are in its presence. When that butterfly flies away, we are left with a choice. We can let it fly and appreciate the time we were given with it, or we can clasp our hand, clinging to it as long as we can. When we clasp our hands, we crush its beautiful wings, we distort its colour, and we alter it irreparably. When is it time to let go?

This summer was a summer of discovery. Beyond that, it was a summer of moments. It wasn’t until this particular encounter with death that brought me new clarity. Simply because I didn’t view it as a failure of medicine or the loss of a battle hard fought – but a natural and candid moment among a collection of moments.

Jocelyn is a U1 student studying psychology and the social study of medicine. She hails from the great city of New York and is a writer for the McGill Tribune, an avid cyclist on the McGill Cycling Team, a salsa dancer at Salseros, and active at the MORSL office on campus. She is thrilled to be joining the Radix staff this year as a columnist.
poem

by Gurjinder Gill

The mind is such a powerful thing
It makes one do good deeds and others sin
How to explain for this discrepancy
Is this part of our individuality or humanity?

It is the centre of both our actions and inactions
As we look for a place to hide
In our society and our imagination
Where compassion for all is despised

We talk about democracy and equality
Progress is the term that we all apply
But have we made progress?
Is it the law, the sciences, moral values or technology?

How to measure such progress
That seems to make us more self-centred
Giving is an inherent part of our existence
Yet, what is it that we are searching for?
Simply look within, all the answers will be there.

Gurjinder is majoring in Physiology.
Writing is an activity that he has always enjoyed on and off since high school. He started to take interest in poetry just a couple of months back while he was waiting for a class to begin. It was a little unexpected, but he has now realized how writing can be an amazing process overall.
So you say that smoking causes hiccups…
well I never would have known…
I always thought spirits were the culprits…
but now this truth you’ve shown.

but your truth sees only the end which burns
thus you see merely the price…
for you fail to see the side which soothed
when nothing else would suffice…

I make no attempt to defend my choice
but I wish you understood
at times my choice was not my own to make
though I did all that I could

for my heart had taken ahold of me
but sorrow had stolen it
while my soul had been drenched in misery
worse, my mind had lost its wit…

Although there was nothing to break the spell,
no object of salvation,
a knight came along who mended my soul,
a task beneath his station…

It did not result in more than a dream
yet the outcome was love still…
It did not work out, though we made a great team
but a wish is more than nil!
Arrived a white knight who mended my heart,
a task beneath his station…
he did not seek me, that was all my part,
he made it his vocation…

Suddenly, tables turned, all for the best,
we found a way to connect.
We steered Modernity at my behest
And that had such an effect!
narcissist

by Inam Inina

I am a hen-sitting sphinx atop a sandstone pulpit. Born of rock, like a sprocketless cage of cooped up cocks midpuffing their hunched coats from the doorhole.

I am a black chair and a black room; My face: the coarse tan wall-to-wall carpet, the silver smell of the A/C vents. My thick cheeks blubbering his each syllable back like little rubber balls.

If the light switch flipped, you’d see perched An oyster pearl. Ostentatious, lusted, gleaming bright as a dustbowl moon. I’ll illume. Do not forget I am a robot. Do not believe I’m not. I sit, wait, invigilate. The triple-tongued dog with tri-set eyes converts on the shift of my palm. The lightbolts crack like chisel slits.

There is long; space; dejection. There is an eagle; my wormhole; your father. There is dissonance, particularly in the dogbark fuzz and stewing through my dish of mushrooms, Who eyeball up at me with peculiar curried heads.

Inam is a former environment, current literature student, interested in visual and literary art. She is currently exploring paradox, unity, and divinity in the nature of things, especially through the study of soil.
a shakespearean
sonnet

by Tian Zhou

I stand amongst the campus of White’n Red,
Where Kant’s words speak, and the Bard’s rhyme rain.
Behind the learned place, a small mountain bed,
Slopes, summer green sprinkled by autumn paint.
I sit within students from East to West:
China, Britain, Laos; countries seas apart.
The more I meet, the more voices stressed,
“How distant ideals from fulfillment are!”
I am but ambitions spoken way soon;
Dreams of Law, Medicine’n Poetics too.
Since my very essence downs me to doom,
No birds nor planes can lift my sombre mood.
Though I sense my world upon beauty lie,
But no more can I be; to sleep, to die.

Tian is a proud Chinese-Canadian;
An aspiring Weatherman turned English Lit Major;
A pretentious self-proclaimed writer;
A lost soul forever stuck between his great perhaps and his understanding of the importance to live in the moment.
shells

by Edward Ross

My shell is thick.
It is my skin.
It keeps me warm
in winter wind.

It is my safety,
and it’s my home,
but outside of it
I can not roam.

My shell is the part
that most will see.
It does not make up
the whole of me.

The outside part
feels like a gaffe.
When others see it,
they only laugh.

I did not know
that so much pain
could come from those
who are so vain.

They judge my shell,
with a long leer,
for its colour, its shape,
why is unclear.

If it is green or red,
or short or tall,
it does not mean
you know me at all.

I am who I am.
I am not someone else.
Get to know me first.
Judge me for myself.
transformation

by Ellen Cools

December snow falls on the ground,
the car lights illuminate the snow
which falls in delicate swirls.
The girl stands at the window,
mesmerized by the transformation
that comes with the end of fall.

She thinks about the fall
of branches and trees, some time ago, on the ground,
a dark storm that caused a new transformation.
The ground was not covered in snow,
but tree limbs threatening to break the window.
They flew straight at them, not in swirls.

The wind picks up speed, the swirls
no longer beautiful but a menacing fall,
quickly collecting against the window
making it hard to see the ground.
It is part of life, says the snow,
reminding her of years ago, a transformation

which shocked her to the core, a transformation
so deep it sent her mind in swirls.
Outside was bright and sunny, no snow
in sight, but the threat of a fall
lingered in the house, the ground
tiptoed upon, no noise heard from the window.

Standing by the window,
she had longed to be outside, part of a transformation
of nature, and not of family. The ground
they based their strength on, now swirls away, into darkness, the fall of her family like the endless falling snow.

Outside the wind howls with the snow, the girl can only see white out the window, the blizzard has started. The fall of her family is over, their transformation into a broken unit, and yet her mind swirls until she feels as if the ground will crumble and fall. Watching the transformation of everything familiar through the window, as she swirls out of control like the snow, waiting to crash to the ground.

Ellen Cools is double majoring in English literature and Political Science. She is an avid reader and writer, and hopes to one day work for a newspaper or magazine. She occasionally writes poetry as a way of exploring different perspectives of the world.
I sit here and contemplate,
The truth in the words we say,
Some are used to heal, some to break,
They are food and they are heartache,

Stuck in a whirlpool of possibilities,
With each second bringing upon a new end,
What’s the point in hating life,
If you likewise fear your death?

Those who reach for the stars,
Often stumble at a simple straw,
It’s hard to hear above the sound,
Of worthless words thrown to the ground,

I pity those with ears below,
The clouds of hollow words aglow,
I pity those who will never know,
The depth of words beneath their shallow flow,
There is untold shame that awaits,
Those who use their pens to feign,
For the sake of the crowds, pain,
Beware, lies have melted, and will melt again,

When silenced, thoughts scream out,
And when on the inside, dreams never lie,
But I pray you, do not bring them out,
For they will fall from their truths, down,

Truths are unspoken, while lies become woven,
Into the words of those who forget nature’s rule,
And in turn render their silver tongues broken,
This will not last, for nature is no fool,

For those who said before,
I pray you say no more,
Let silence speak the truth,
Or death will suffer you,

Noemie is a U2 Arts student majoring in English literature and minoring in Music. She was born in Paris and raised in Miami, Florida.
She could feel his breath woven into the insides of her golden skin, so she ran away into the fringes of light, hidden in the caves of never ending darkness. Where her thoughts lingered in the whispers of the winter winds, where she could feel the hairs on the back of her neck, 
So she shut her eyes, to the sound of her mother’s laugh, the rain, the whistling of the tea pot, 
For so long, she ran thoughtlessly into the arms of tree trunks, bus stops and park benches. 
For so long, she tasted the honesty on the top of her tongue, the truth in between her teeth.

Before this, she never had the audacity to be naked, to be stripped completely of pretenses, to lie before herself where her imperfections were centre stage.

In all honesty, she often went to sleep wrapped in other people’s emotions, back riddled with the misfortunes of those she loved the most, hands bruised from fighting battles that were not her own.

Truth is, she felt most at home when she was anywhere but in her own skin, where she knew he would be waiting for her.
Art work by Claire Gignoux.
She is a U1 International Student at McGill coming from France.
She studies International Development and a double minor in International Relations and Art History.
“God is dead,” in the widely quoted words of Friedrich Nietzsche. “God is a concept by which we measure our pain,” said John Lennon. God is “the great surveillance camera in the sky,” quipped Richard Dawkins. How easy it is to stereotype God, yet much more difficult to discern the truth! Though the nature of God is among the most rigorously examined and vehemently debated subjects in human history, most religions maintain that the Divine cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind. How, then, are we mere mortals to conceive of such an intellectually evasive Divinity?

So often in our culture the image of a God who punishes prevails – of a God who watches our every step and waits in the wings, set to spring out and condemn us. Or of a God who is distant, detached from human realities, silent when He is most needed, and generally disinterested in daily life. As a science student, I am often confronted with the presumption that the notion of God is irrational, anti-scientific, fictitious, and downright juvenile. All of these, in my opinion, are highly problematic and deeply unattractive, leading us to a distorted image of God instead of an authentic encounter with the Ultimate.

How is the believer to combat these misconceptions? For me, the answer lies more in the nature of our lives than the persuasion of our lips. How do I, by living my image of God, communicate who I believe God is, by the way I treat others, how I prioritize my time, and how I go about my day-to-day?
As a Christian, if I truly believe that “God is love” (1 John 4:8), how is this truth expressed in my life? If for me the Lord is “compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psalm 103:8), how do I strive to exemplify these characteristics? If I believe that Jesus was sent “not to condemn the world but to save it” (John 3:17), how do I avoid being judgemental and see the best in those around me? If I believe that Jesus told His disciples that the greatest love is “to lay down one’s life for one’s friend” (John 15:13) and demonstrated this by His own life, how do I lay down my life for my own friends?

If I believe that Christ came “that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10), how are my actions life-giving for others? Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin once beautifully wrote: “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.” If I am to agree, how do I live my relationship with God with a joy-filled heart?

In a world where God is so easily misunderstood, and a universe where God can never be comprehended in completeness, let us dare to offer authentic images of God by the authentic witness of our lives. Let us make the Unknowable known.

Julian is a fourth-year Biology undergraduate with a Minor in Catholic Studies. A native of London, Ontario and former resident of McGill’s Newman Centre, he is also past President of the Newman Catholic Students’ Society.
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The McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)
MORSL, a proud member of McGill Student Services, is located in the Brown Building, suite 2100. Please feel free to stop by our Meditation/Prayer Room any weekday from 10:00am to 4:00pm! You’ll find a full-spectrum light therapy lamp, CD’s for guided relaxation, a serene space with floor pillows and meditation stools, and some suggestions on how to meditate in different traditions. Take time for some serenity and zenity! Stay connected with MORSL on Twitter @SpiritualMcGill or like us on Facebook: fb.com/morsl

Weekly Zen meditation
Every Friday morning at 8:15am, McGill Zen Buddhist chaplain, Myokyo offers guided Zen practice in the Birks chapel (3520 University Street, 2nd floor). Must arrive early or on time in order to join!

The Rabbit Hole Café
Food for Thought’s vegan collective, The Rabbit Hole, cooks up vegan lunches every Friday at 1:00 p.m. Drop by, pay a toonie, enjoy the company and eat up! All proceeds go towards maintaining this Yellow Door program (3625 Aylmer) along with their Food For Thought student food bank, sponsored by the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.

The Radical Christian Students’ Association
Thursdays at 6pm in the Presbyterian College second-floor lounge (corner of University and Milton). Exploring, living, and testifying to the justice mission of Jesus Christ. Enjoy a free vegan meal and spiritual conversation, then move into Bible Study or a presentation, followed by music and prayer. Rad Christians support each other’s social justice work. Check out facebook.com/radicalchristiansmcgill or e-mail radchristiansmcgill@gmail.com

McGill Student Parents’ Network
The MSPN provides a support network for McGill students who are parents. We have grown! No longer based in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, we are now housed with PGSS. We still offer regular “Study Saturdays” at Thomson House, where parents can study while the kids enjoy free programming, and more. Interested families can contact the MSPN at mcgillspn@gmail.com.

Newman Centre
Newman Catholic Centre, 3484 Peel Street, is a home away from home for Catholic Students. Visit www.newmancentre.org to find out more about this centre for Catholic spiritual, social, and intellectual life on campus!
Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Orthodox Christian Students
Join our weekly student meeting, Orthodox Christian Fellowship! We also have monastery visits, picnics, and movie nights. Contact McGill’s Orthodox chaplain, Father Ihor for details: ikutash@gmail.com.

The Muslim Students Association of McGill
MSA aims to provide spiritual, social, and educational services. We offer weekly study circles, free Islamic educational materials, Ramadan services, lectures/conferences, and a wonderful library called House of Wisdom. We also have many community events to serve others (eg. Project Downtown), as well as exciting social events (eg. ski trips, cultural dinner nights, MSA Frosh, and so much more!) Come drop by and say hi to us in our office (Shatner building, room B09.)

Mondays at MORSL
New this year! The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life hosts “Mondays at MORSL” – a variety of free Monday-night events, including art therapy, yoga, zen meditation, Quaker meditation, Om meditation, talks on World Religions, Orthodox icon-writing workshop, movie nights, and more! Like us on facebook at fb.com/morsl to find out more or email morsl@mcgill.ca.

Drop-in Friday Yoga:
End your school week with a relaxing drop-in Ashtanga yoga class in the Brown Building (suite 5001) at 4:30 on Fridays. A suggested donation of $5 to the instructor is appreciated. Mats and tea provided. Bring your own mug!

The Jewish community at McGill
Visit www.hillel.ca and www.chabad-mcgill.com for information on shabbat meals, holiday celebrations, educational programming, and fun social activities!

My Neighbour’s Faith Series
This series of monthly visits to Montreal’s places of worship joins forces with Concordia’s “Sacred Sites Visits” to provide a guided experience with various world religions being practiced in Montreal, and a free meal! Visits include a Sikh Gurdwara with Punjabi meal, a Baha’i temple, a candle-light Christmas Carol service, and more! Email morsl@mcgill.ca to join the mailing list or visit http://www.mcgill.ca/morsl/what-we-offer/my-neighbours-faith”

Winter Coats Needed!
Donations of clean winter coats in good condition are desperately needed for the Winter Coat Project. Smaller donations can be dropped off at MORSL (Brown Suite 2100) Mon-Fri 10am-4pm and large bags of donations can be dropped off at the Newman Centre, 3484 Peel Street, 10:00am - 2:00pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Please mark all bags clearly as “Winter Coat Project” and drop them in the Newman lobby via the lower entrance.
RADIX Call for Submissions!

McGill’s Student Spirituality Magazine

Theme: Celebrations

Deadline for Submission: November 24th

radix@mail.mcgill.ca

McGill