

ABSTRACT

THESIS: From Burning Monk to Burning Pun: The Rhetorical Transformation of Self-Immolation

STUDENT: Andrew Sippie

DEGREE: Master of Arts in English Rhetoric and Composition

COLLEGE: Sciences and Humanities

DATE: July, 2011

PAGES: 105

My study addresses how and why responses to the act of self-immolation often involve desensitized reactions, such as the use of puns. Self-immolation was once more respected and influential than it is today. The best example of this is Thich Quang Duc's 1963 self-immolation protest that may have profoundly affected the Vietnam War. To understand the transition from Duc's self-immolation to our current times, I contextualize the rhetoric involved in self-immolation throughout history, culture, religion, and media. Integral to self-immolation is its body rhetoric that prompts rhetorical discourse. This discourse involves performative rhetoric, the disputed cause of the self-immolator, the mediation of the self-immolation, and the audience response. I consider current online user responses from various online spaces that report and/or react to recent self-immolations in America. My findings indicate that self-immolation is still able to challenge American ideologies, profoundly influence audiences, and prompt critical rhetorical discourse.