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2012 Literary Review (no. 25)

Sigma Tau Delta

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Literary Review

An Upsilon Sigma Chapter (Sigma Tau Delta) Publication

May 2012
No. 25

Whittier College
Whittier, CA



2012
Literary
Review

Whittier College
Number 25
May 2012

A Publication of



The Upsilon Sigma/Jessamyn West Chapter of
Sigma Tau Delta

2012 Literary Review Editor: Catherine Faris King
Sigma Tau Delta Advisor: Dr. Sean Morris

The front cover photograph, “**Sur le Pont de Sully**,” was taken by Julia Ellen Spruill-Smith, class of 2012. The back cover photograph, “**Roses of Notre Dame**,” was taken by Catherine Faris King, class of 2012. Both covers were edited and assembled in Adobe Photoshop CS2 by Catherine Faris King, with title in Adobe Garamond Pro.

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¹ It is our sincere regret that, due to formatting issues, Max Dahut’s essay *The Plausibility of Genocide in the United States* could not be published.

Foreword: From the Editor

Dear Reader,

What an honor it is to edit, organize, and present this compendium to you. I present this on behalf of the Whittier College Upsilon Sigma chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International Honors Society for students of English.

Our chapter is also known as the Jessamyn West Chapter, after the Whittier alumna who in 1921 founded a student society dedicated to the love and appreciation of language and literature. She went on to win acclaim with her 1945 novel, *The Friendly Persuasion*, and her influence is felt to this day in the Palmer Society and the fellowship of Sigma Tau Delta.

The motto of Sigma Tau Delta is a simple pledge: *Sincerity, Truth, Design*. Our symbol is the red rose, the thorny blossom that connotes earthly delight and spiritual perfection. Our society's seal shows a pen crossed with a torch. Like the two tapers of the Whittier College seal, which come together to create a great light, the crossed pen and torch suggest the great illumination that results when ideas and inspiration are communicated clearly and openly.

It is the hope of all of us in Sigma Tau Delta that this volume that you hold in your hands kindles such an illumination. This little book is the product of hard work and dedication on the part of not only Sigma Tau Delta's members, but of all of the students who freely offered their best work. And to each of these students, I offer my thanks.

To the faculty of the English department, who encourage the young writers of Whittier to new heights of expression and literacy, especially Professor Sean Morris, our dear faculty advisor, I offer profuse thanks.

To the secretary of the English department, Angela Freeland, who deals with rivers of paperwork with a smile and a bowl of candy, I offer the warmest thanks.

To the Media Council, who generously offered funding to uphold this tradition, and to Highlight Graphics for handling the printing and binding, I offer my sincerest thanks.

But enough of my varieties of thanks – it's time to turn the page and discover the dedication, ingenuity, and talent that Whittier's students have to offer. Read on, and enjoy!

Sincerely,

Catherine Faris King

Sigma Tau Delta President and Literary Review Editor

Whittier Poetry Award: First Place Winner
Letter to Our Professors¹
By Darren Taylor (2015)

All you aging students who race to write up on theories of your own
with social constructions of all the races and the race
to produce papers just to hold your place in line will kindly
look outside and imagine yourselves naked and step

With the Revolution. That's all the ones who taught me
how hegemony is inside my punk fuck head and everybody
is the people who do class and there's nothing manly about
me that you and the rest of 'em can't tear down when we start

To step to the ring tone of Revolution. If god is the eternal now
and every theory you've had me play back so I can enter the gentry
has taught me it's all just pretend and we have the power to make a world
without all these walls that your papers have been ripping up in the name

of Revolution. 'Cuz you didn't start piling up
dissertations of revised post-colonial indoctrination on top
of your internal colonization shown in flutters of papers
and not even that cause even old folks can delete walls and save

to the Revolution. Cause when I was kicking
up big empty trash barrels in alleys in contests with kids
while our parents watched soaps and we flashed each other,
I knew that you were here waiting me to show me the way out

and into the Revolution. Because that's what you had me read, and the
text is deconstructed and you've uncovered all the way Dynasties
fall and we just want to give you a hand up and marching is more fun
than grading and all the grades are doing you in and we all want to
know, if you advise us back and forth and stick us in your classes,

Then what the fuck are we gonna do in this exploding Revolution?

¹ Jacked from Langston Hughes (Author's note)

Whittier Poetry Award: Second Place Winner
Unrequited Lover
By Victor Vargas (2013)

“Don't you know?” Haley says, smiling.
Blacken eye positively shining.
“Hate is the new love.”

Holy shit, I wanted to scream.
I wanted to throw something out the window.
Grab her by her skinny neck and strangle her,
And later I'd tell the police I had suffered a psychotic episode.
Sure, not guilty by reason of insanity.
I'd tell them that I'd been crazy about the girl for twelve years,
before I actually went crazy,
because she started going out with Saul, my best friend.
Because they had started fucking so loud
that I could hear them across the thin wall
that separates our bedrooms.
Because they had started screaming so loud,
fighting so loud,
that when the silence finally came
I could hear each, distinctive thwack;
once, twice, and so many more times—
flesh being struck.

“Smacking is the new kissing,” Haley says,
and seeing her like that, sitting placidly in the kitchen,
wearing only his tee, a red bruise starting to form
along the right side of her mouth,
face pulled into a rigid smile, dimpled cheeks
managing to poke out from beneath the swelling—
I punched the refrigerator.
And Haley, she's like a mouse.
Her eyes pop, the noise makes her jump and
she can't understand why I can't look her in the eye.

Later, Saul is sitting in the living room,
shaking his head, while he plays *Skyrim* on the 360.
And he has me laughing, he's a natural at that,
you know. Telling you stories and jokes that make you
burst out in unreserved laughter. Make your eyes a little wet.
Maybe bite your tongue a little bit.
Look later and find out you pissed yourself,
just a few drops. Just a little bit.
He's playing *Skyrim*, and he's disappointed.
“There's not enough racism,” he says.
“It's all too subtle, and never directed at the player.”
Onscreen, a dragon razes a city to the ground,
Saul just shakes his head.
“Look at my guy, he's freaking green for christ sakes.”
I notice that Saul has a small bandage on one of his knuckles.

Like a joke. Like he cut his hand a little bit,
when he was smashing in Haley's face.
"Every guard I talk to should be threatening me with prison,"
Saul says. "Every town should have an *elf-only* section.
Every city guard should be following me around,
racially profiling my pointed ears."

"Tolerance is the new racism," Haley says, from his lap.
A new contusion already healing over her bottom, busted lip.

Saul agrees, nodding his head up and down,
sticking his hand down her front.
Sarcastically, he says: "It's all about celebrating everyone *else's* cultures now,
celebrating diversity. Because diversity is strength and being
like ourselves is boring. Everyone wants to be someone else."
And the way Saul sees it, that just means celebrating stereotypes.
Being racist in an acceptable kind of shitty way.

"Jealousy," Saul says, "is the one thing that hasn't changed.
But in a world where everything else has, even jealousy
ain't what it used to be."

Skyrim has elves and humans and orcs and lizard-people
and cat-people and dead people
"And they all get along too damn well," Saul says.
"Christ, they haven't even had a Holocaust of the elves,
or a genocide of the damn lizards."

"Fantasy is the new reality," Haley says, smiling,
while Saul feels her up.

My stomach can't take any more of this,
so I get up, I walk behind them, toward my room.
But I stop halfway and say to them:
"Don't you know?"
And Haley and Saul don't even turn around to look at me.
They can't hear me. And for the life of me,
I can't remember how long it's been like this.
All she can see is him. As he can see is everything else.
So I say:
"Knowledge is the new ignorance."

And I leave them like that,
Saul, our new Prometheus,
and Haley, his bleeding liver.

Whittier Poetry Award: Third Place Winner
Wear Something Silk for Quitting Time
By Darren Taylor (2015)

It was my job in the environmental labs
to pinch rubber tops of glass droppers
and squeeze out drops of aitch see ell,
and aitch three bee oh three
into glass bottoms.
But they never let me use any of it.

Good god, I still want acid drops for the fabric of society
to eat polygon holes out of that bleached table cloth,
so managers like us can't point or yank at it for support,
can't mark it up with explanatory graphs,
and can't keep us looking at each other
through constitutional veils.

When you gonna let the clothes out of the wardrobe?
Tumnus isn't hop-hop-hopping to fetch them
to the other wide, to give them reign over kingdoms
of cgi crowds lifting up the same repeated arm
and smiling like horny slaves up at moth worried uniforms.

Let's put the guns down and feel the weight of hammers
and make rock dust out of chiseled mannequins
American Idols, textile facades,
and infrastructures of finance that enclose us
in dimensions we wear but can't point to.

From everywhere, around the world, we'll go dancing.
Dressing down cops and bosses, twirling in bell dresses,
dressing up as each other, and wearing out the unity of
fabric sewn together, by un-thanked fingers padded
with worked to death skin, and sold to be worn by veiled bodies
that sell data entry, words for students, the grip of a broom
and the embroidery of poets like us.

Whittier Poetry Award: Honorable Mention
Someone's Daughter
By Elizabeth Reitzell (2013)

We stared as silk black panties
crouched and moaned above us.
Cradled by the net, the panties pulled
and pushed against the ropes
and showed us how to dance.

With eyes glued up, my London bloke danced on
until my throbbing feet refused to stand
atop my strappy leather spikes.

Whittier Poetry Award: Honorable Mention
The Swimmer Speaks of Pools
By Catherine King (2012)

I've known swimming pools.
I've known swimming pools as old as summer
And as new as cement and the city of angels.

My soul has grown clear like the swimming pools.

I kicked in the sunlit Mediterranean and held my little breath
I swam in cold Cheviot wavelets under cloudy morning skies;
I spent long nights in Venice and danced half in the air.
And time after time I've waded the sea, out to where the waves are born,
and felt the salty bosom gain power in the moonrise.

I've known water.
Clean, bright water.
My soul has grown clear like the water.

After "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," by Langston Hughes

I Really Wanted That Plum, Williams
By Catherine Faris King (2012)

It appears I crashed
The hard drive
Wherein was nestled
Your master's dissertation.

Forgive me,
But it was like an inviting fortress
So clever
Yet so vulnerable.

(After "This is just to say" by William Carlos Williams)

The Anniversary of Chaucer's Death, October 25

When October, with its misty cold,
Has pierced full well the stifling summer's fold,
And bathed every leaf in sweet moisture,
Before it drops from branch unto the floor,
When Boreas readies up his winter breath
To drive creatures to sleep in holt and heath,
So chilleth Nature in the souls of men,
They turn their boots and eyes homeward again
To gather round the deeply burning blaze,
And speak of conquests made in older days,
And start to put away the harvest rations,
We honor Geoffrey's death-day celebrations.

The noble author's memory to keep,
From whose words laughs and wisdom still we reap.

(After "The Canterbury Tales," by Geoffrey Chaucer)

At the Drive-in
By Apollonia Galvan (2012)

Swinging orbs of car lights spy into your car,
I can make out your Jimi Hendrix shirt and my wine-colored nail polish.
My hands form a vase as I hold your face closer to mine.

Your lips quiver like Jell-O
when I hug my legs around your waist.
Jumpy hair begins to blind me,
I search for your face.

I make infant laughs when you kiss my teeth.
We've found each other again.

The taste of milk chocolate M&Ms and Coke slurpee
glaze my adventurous tongue.
I can't remember what movie we're watching:
50 First Dates or Freddy vs. Jason?

The fog landslides on the front windshield,
blurs of Hollywood faces and sounds bites of Billboard music hits
penetrate the inside of your car.

I can tell you want me to forget
once you begin to whisper Zeppelin lyrics in my ear:

*You need coolin', baby, I'm not foolin'
I'm gonna send ya back to schoolin'
Way down inside, a-honey, you need it
I'm gonna give you my love
I'm gonna give you my love, oh*

The Technicolor night ends
with your fingers drumming on my thigh,
and my fingers spiraling in your onyx hair.

Anonymous
By Kady Olikier (2012)

I know you look at me and see nothing—
nothing but my pale lips
pouted in your direction,
nothing but my bare breasts
gleaming in the light.
I pull at the thin veil,
at the last thing protecting me
from the world,
and revel in the small
privacy I still possess.
To you, I could be anyone—
us women all look the same in your eyes.
You take my giggles as nerves,
but they are just noises to keep
me from screaming how I really feel.
I tell you my name,
but I'm sure you have long forgotten it
as I dance in front of your camera.
You probably think this is who I am
and all I will ever amount to be:
some whore taking off her clothes for any
amount of money,
some sleazy prostitute that grew up
troubled and doesn't know any better.
You wouldn't care if I told you I was saving
up for school myself,
and if you even *did* listen
all I would hear is laughter.
I don't like myself
for what I'm doing,
and when I stare back at you,
I wish
to forget everything.

Glass

By Kady Oliker (2012)

Figure upon a tattered mirror,
who are you that stares back?
Surreal features barely living
among those shadows
that take hold once the sun departs.
Nothing more than what I once was.
Now all that remains are cracks,
whispers,
glimpses into a past that has disintegrated
into little more than shredded curtains
suspended upon a rotting pole.

One is None
By Elizabeth Reitzell (2013)

God's death is ultimate liberation.
Switch human with ant and laugh out truth.
The sky is higher.

We are close to earth.
I am not an earth mover;
the earth does not move.

My death and yours
will be painful,
but only for a second.

We, earth unmovers, deserve eulogies
only the lengths of ourselves.
And sky is still higher.

Thoughts from the comedown

today i'll write a different voice:
one loud and soft and shy.
but tomorrow, though i'm still the same,
i'll write about the sky.
the third day, white explosions shoot
heavy plumes of chalk.
and next, i'm lonely as a cloud
until i read wordsworth.
i close all books and cough a cloud
and pour a bloody error.
i dig my toes into cold mud
and snort some lines of air.
with dizzy mental laxatives i
scribble up the stairs.
so now I have a voice to write:
a voice that's barely there.

Adventures in Middle-Earth

By Victor Vargas (2013)

It's like this: there was this ant, crawling along my wall.
I saw him first when he was starting out,
tracing the edge of a crack in the base of the plaster, behind a furl of wallpaper—
hills, spreading out against mauve paint. It could have been a vertical desert.
Gravity, a fierce and unending wind,
and the flickering light bulb above my head a dying sun.

And I wanted to crush the little ant
for daring to invade the domain of my room,
a sacred kingdom and the ant, an enemy scout.
I imagined his fat queen somewhere far away,
smiling in some dark underground crevice,
even now planning the theft of my dropped scraps and specks.
Grand theft crumb.

When I looked again, he had made some good progress.
Along the draped window (surely a forbidding clouded land for him),
I saw him disappear behind a poster hanging limply on my wall—
Middle Earth! A relic from the days I would DM for a pen and paper group.
He disappeared into Belegar, the Great Sea, and I like to think he swam for weeks,
six stick legs paddling desperately against the chop and cold and waves
and eventually he hit land at the cape of Andrast.
There he encountered the Drúedain people, who clumsily shot poisoned arrows at him.
He fought his way east, eventually forced to follow a mountain ridge north,
and for months he traveled like that, stopping for a week long respite only once
because a drunken dwarf mistook him for a long lost cousin and cut out his eye.
He followed Isen river eastward, trekking along the riverbank with new companions,
two human brothers, Daddry and Lumyr, with whom he got along well and spent
many a happy camp night, enthralling with grand tales of his underground kingdom,
and his beautiful queen, surely awaiting his return.
An offshoot of Isen led them into the White Mountains and I think that it was here
in these perilous mountains that Lumyr met his end, a victim to an unexpected
savage Dunlending attack in the early hours, from which the others only barely escaped.
Daddry turned back, returning home to bury his brother, and the brave ant ventured on
eventually breaking free of the mountains and coming upon the North-South road.
He followed this path northwest and eventually north, across valley and plain and town,
over river and through forest, and finally, after weeks, he reached Bree, that ancient village.
Maybe he spent a comfortable night in the Prancing Pony inn, reveling
with the human residents, regaling them with stories of all he had done and seen,
but the next day he was off, northward, over the North Downs, and
out beneath the edge of my map against the wall.

I walked over and slammed him with my flip-flop.

I hate the weak,
but I absolutely refuse to suffer the strong.

Prisoner of Fortune

By Victor Vargas (2013)

There's this guy, his name is Carlos, I write him letters sometimes.
Mostly when I'm drunk and bored. See, I get sappy when I drink,
real piss eyed. I cry my eyes out over everything.
That bitch who broke my heart two years ago. That dog I didn't like,
that got run over and died in my arms. *The Unit* getting canceled.
Arrested Development coming back for another season.
Happy things and sad things alike. It's something I get from my dad.
It's why I like to drink alone. Patrón tequila, if I can get it.
But I'll settle for a liquor store vodka and juice mix.

I drink alone, I write alone—for similar reasons.
I don't ever write about myself, as a sort of rule.
But between the lines, between the characters, things I never meant to say,
well, they come out anyways.
I drink, I throw up into the toilet.
I write, I end up throwing up onto the page instead.
I try to step away from the prose, keep a little distance, but it's hard
because where here meets there—
where the *I* punching in these keys, writing this line,
becomes the I formed by the pixels on the screen; the ink on the paper,
well, I always miss the exact moment when it happens.
And it drives me so goddamn crazy.

I like to imagine Carlos has a long, narrow scar on one side of his face,
a permanent reminder of where some guy he ticked off
slashed at his face with a hidden razor before the guards jumped on him and
saved Carlos' life.
And maybe Carlos wears his hair long these days, in thick curly waves—
maybe it's something he got from *his* father.

And his cell, I like to think Carlos' cell has a little rectangle iron-clad opening,
a window, that looks out between two other building and grants him the unique view—
part of the visitor's parking lot, a second's worth of a peek everyday
of people walking by, not freedom fighters,
freedom civilians, women in milky dresses, nervous children walking hand in hand.
I like to imagine Carlos presses his face against the bars at their fleeting image,
digs his scar into a comfortable groove, breathes in the faint wind,
free wind, and he lets it blow into his long hair, into his lungs.
Then he spits as far as he can.

I've never met Carlos, you see,
but years ago (which feel like a few, but are probably *many*)
Carlos pulled out a gun in front of a club in the heart of south L.A.,
and fired blindly into a screaming crowd.
Because they wouldn't let him in. Because he could.
My friend, the guy who sat next to me in class—the guy who looked
so fucking stupid whenever he smiled—he sort of died that night.
And Carlos, Carlos, Carlos,
well, he's San Quentin State Prison now—
death fucking row—
for gunning my friend down that night.

Don't get me wrong, I haven't forgiven Carlos, but I sort of feel
sad for him. Sorry for him, rather. Especially when I drink. Especially when
I'm crying anyways. He writes poetry, you know. He posts
some of it online, in a blog site he's set up. Very introspective.
Very depressing. I think he'd benefit from a workshop or two.
My favorite of his poems, for example, are
“Manifesting the Obstacles and “My 7x6 Cell.”
They've got great themes, great imagery,
but their endings are sort of weak.
It took me a while before I came to appreciate how much those two lines
of criticism might eventually come to describe Carlos' life.

I write Carlos letters all the time,
but I never actually mail the letters. I read them when I'm sober and my tone
is sometimes angry, sometimes loving. It's never right, I want him to know,
to understand, that I hate him, that I want to forget his name,
but I don't want Carlos to die.

I'd like to think that, maybe someday, I could

stop and tell myself, and be honest when I say it,
that I forgive Carlos. That it's okay. Water under the bridge. Forget about it.
It's really selfish, I know, but hey, what can I say?
I don't always want to be pissed off.
I like to think that, maybe someday, I can be a better person.

This whole, wide world, after all, is divided into two:
split between those people who are lost,
and those who are too afraid to admit
that they're afloat on a black ocean called chance.

We're all going to die, we're all on death row.

Like Carlos, except we're not locked up. We're free to
choose where we get to die. Unlike my buddy with the stupid smile.

Everything's an accident, and mistakes are what make the world go round.

Like what if my dad hadn't been able to get his pecker up
the night of my conception?

What if my friend had decided to not sneak out to that club?

What if Carlos hadn't had a gun that night?

What if, what if?

You can go crazy asking those sort of questions, so I'll stop.

I think I'm going to mail this poem,

to Carlos, I mean. I'll write it down, so I'll remember tomorrow.

I wonder if he'll read this, I wonder if he'll understand what I really want to say?

Probably not, though.

Christ.

How selfish can I get?

How can I expect some sorry bastard to understand
what even I can't?

Whittier Fiction Award: First Place Winner

A Life of Her Own

By Catherine King (2012)

Thunk!

The French class snapped to attention, looking around. Something had hit the window.

“Qu’est-ce que c’est?” demanded Monsieur Loomis. *“Un pigeon?”*

Ivy Clew, the quiet girl with short black hair, up and looked out the window. She leaned over, and announced, *“Je ne vois pas un pigeon, Monsieur. Peut-être – peut-être il est volé?”* I don’t see a pigeon, sir, perhaps it flew away?

Monsieur Loomis seemed satisfied; he merely corrected her grammar.

Ivy sat back down, stuffing the feather-fledged arrow that she’d found stuck into the windowpane into her backpack. *“Merde!”* she whispered.

Out on the front lawn of the small high school, Keita Greenstar, best archer in all the realm of Pandia, Protector of Freshwater, Hero in Progress, etc., tapped her foot in exasperation. What did Ivy mean, leaning out of the window and making that gesture? Anyone would have thought she meant to say, *“Go away!”*

Ivy spent exactly six minutes letting Monsieur Loomis’ words wash over her head without leaving a trace, as she tapped her fingers to her mouth. She tried to review her thoughts before the arrow strike. *“We talked about ‘yaourt’ – that sounds like ‘Raoul’ – so I thought of J. R. R. Tolkien a bit? Amanda spoke up, her French name is Gilberte, that made me think of Anne of Green Gables? What led me to call Keita?”*

When she figured she’d remembered as many of her thoughts as she could, Ivy stood up, wrote her name on the blackboard underneath the letters “W. C.”, and left the classroom.

Shortly afterward, she appeared, blinking, in the autumn sunlight outside. She spotted Keita on the lawn, and didn’t so much as say hello before she grabbed her sleeve and dragged her out to the Senior Patio, out of sight of any teachers, secretaries, or nuns who might be prowling the grounds.

“What are you doing here?” she asked the Protector of Freshwater, once she’d let her go.

“Geez! Nice to see you, too!” Keita inspected her green tunic to make sure it hadn’t torn – it hadn’t – and glared at Ivy. *“I was getting lonely.”*

“Lonely? You have a continent to save!”

“But you haven’t called me to visit you in months.”

“I’ve been busy. You know how busy I’ve been.” Keita’s face darkened, and Ivy, fearing a scene, shook her hands in a frantic *no*. *“It’s not like that! I still love you! You and your story are so important to me, you know that...”*

“That’s what I was hoping.” Keita sat down at the table, and laid her hand-crafted elfin bow beside her. *“So you’ll hang out with me today?”*

“It’s the middle of the school day, Keita. I have class.”

“Class? For what?”

“French.”

“Ah. Right.” Keita absorbed this information for a maddeningly long minute.

Finally, Ivy said, *“Well! Speaking of which, I should be getting back.”*

“Why?” Keita demanded, sounding awfully whiny for a brave warrior.

“Because this is my life. Don’t you have somewhere to be?”

She shrugged. *“Sure... Aurelius Castle. Trying to convince Prince Tetros to join our party.”*

Why should we? He seems like a jerk.”

“Yeah, he kinda is,” Ivy answered automatically as she studied the girl in front of her. She’d first drawn Keita in fourth grade. Her design hadn’t changed much since then: she had long reddish hair, because long red hair was *very* cool, cut in bangs because that was easy to draw. She had freckles (to go with the hair) and pretty blue-green eyes, but was otherwise... well... average looking. Ivy congratulated herself briefly on having not made Keita impossibly beautiful. A lesser writer would have fallen into that trap.

“What are you looking at me for?” Keita asked. “Hey!”

Ivy had tucked a lock of Keita’s hair behind her ear. “Just checkin’ to make sure.”

“Make sure of what?”

“Your ears – they’re not pointed anymore, just normal human ears. Well...” Ivy giggled, “on the prominent side of ‘normal.’”

Keita felt her ears, just to make sure. “They aren’t pointed. Why did you change that? I *like* them pointed.”

“Oh... just a... criticism someone gave.”

Keita stared. “What?”

“I showed a drawing of you to... someone.”

“And they criticized me?”

“Only a little.”

“And you *changed* me?”

“Only a little, Keita, they’re just ears. I would have changed them eventually anyway, pointed ears are *so* high fantasy.”

Keita stood up, looking eye to eye with her creator. “Funny, I thought I *was* high fantasy.”

“Look, I only checked to make sure, and this way you can blend in. Just – go maybe upstairs to the library, I think it’s study hour, and maybe no one will notice you.”

“Why don’t you want people to notice me?”

“I don’t have time to hang out with you now... Just... can’t you go back?” When Ivy had first summoned Keita, the fictional character flitted out of the story that the real girl had dreamed up, surprising but welcome, like a butterfly found in a shoebox. But since then, and especially since graduating elementary school, Keita had taken on a life of their own. For a fictional character, she was very difficult to predict, and unlike other imaginary friends, she was quite as visible as any other girl. And Ivy couldn’t just wish her character away, either.

Keita put her hands on her hips, frowning. “You know, I don’t think I *want* to.” She leaned onto her left leg. “Why are you so eager to be rid of me?”

Ivy started. “What are you doing?”

“Doing what?”

“L.A. hips! You’re doing that thing where you lean on one hip or the other! It’s *so* modern, *so* Valley Girl, where did you learn that? Did *I* teach you to do L.A. hips?”

“God, you sound like you’re my mom.”

“And *you* sound like you’re from the 21st century! Also, you don’t have a mom.”

“Yeah, thanks a lot, Miss Death-by-Childbirth.”

“It’s *dramatic*,” Ivy sighed, rubbing her forehead. “Look, Sister Louise always keeps a stash of uniforms in her office...”

“Why?”

“In case a student isn’t prepared on a Dress Uniform day. Maybe we can just get you to blend in...”

“You want me to just blend?”

“Well, yeah. It can work. You sound modern – I’ll have to fix that later – and you don’t stick

out. Well,” Ivy hid a smile, “except your ears.”

“Hey!” Keita covered the offending auditory organs. “Fine, then, let’s do that.”

“Just wait, like, five minutes, for my class to be over...” Ivy turned, peering to see around the corner. “Thought I heard a gardener...” she turned back to Keita, “Then we ... we can...”

Keita was standing in the shade, her arms folded, wearing a white blouse and gray skirt that exactly matched Ivy’s uniform, complete with the logo of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Academy.

“Where did you get those?”

“Where did *I* get them?” Keita repeated. “*You* wanted me to blend in. I guess you must have conjured them for me.”

“I did not! I only had a plan to... wait...” Ivy frowned, and tapped her fingers rapidly on her mouth. “Did I get you those clothes... and not realize?”

“Maybe I came up with the clothes myself,” Keita said, attempting to be casual.

“Did I call you and not realize? How can I not realize?”

“Are you even listening?”

“Keita, I’m trying to focus. No, I *have* to get to class.”

“What’s waiting for you there?”

“A grade for participation and attendance. *Please*, Keita, just go to the library and I’ll find you at lunch. Jesus, I have to go.” Ivy was already walking backwards, and turned around and rushed back inside, upstairs, to Monsieur Loomis’ class.

She only sat in her desk for a few minutes before the bell sounded for break. As Ivy was hurriedly packing her bags (she scratched herself with Keita’s arrow, and availed herself of a few colorful French swearwords), her neighbor across the aisle called to her, “*Tiens*, what did you run out of class for?”

Ivy looked up at Tabitha, her sort-of friend. “Um, well, I wrote my name on the board...”

“You stayed out for a while.”

“I, um... well... Say, we’re still doing that mall run this afternoon, right?”

“Yeah.” Tabitha gave Ivy a brief glance as she shoved on her own backpack, as if she doubted Ivy’s worthiness to accompany her and her friends to the shopping center down the street.

“Tabitha?” Ivy had to try to make her voice heard above the din of students leaving the classroom.

“Yes?”

“My character I showed you the other day... are you sure about the... the ears?”

“Oh, absolutely. I just think that’s a real cliché, don’t you?”

What was that SAT vocabulary word that fit Tabitha so well? Ivy racked her brain as she descended the stairs – *incisive*, that was it.

Ivy knew that, were this a novel about a young nerd’s high school experience, a girl like Tabitha would be Bad News. She’d be the poisonous schemer meant to be justly rejected and publicly humiliated in the last three chapters. But the novels never mentioned that Tabitha was the first real person that Ivy had ever known to talk about *writing* with. Ivy had Keita, and Tabitha had a steampunk mad scientist – though Ivy hadn’t dared ask if Dr. Jackman ever paid her a visit for tea. And Tabitha was friends (*really* friends) with Caitlin, and Emma, who didn’t mind how awkward Ivy was, and who shared her tastes in books and cartoons and her sense of humor. They were still sort-of friends, but Ivy was sure that they accepted her already.

Ivy turned the corner to the senior patio. Why was Keita so upset about the ears anyway? Change was perfectly natural in a –

Wait. She and Keita had agreed to meet in the library.

Back upstairs she went, backtracking in thought, Change was the nature of fictional

characters. Ivy had originally written Keita as “spunky,” “gutsy,” “peppy,” and other such adjectives. Then, on Keita’s first visit, her creator had realized that such a heroine, in real life, could turn annoying *very* fast. Keita’s personality had developed in a more subdued, balanced direction, making her an enjoyable companion. But she was still chivalrous, and brave, and constantly striving to improve herself – she was what a hero should be. And more than that, a good friend.

Now Ivy felt a pang of guilt, having left Keita on her own. Keita *was*, albeit fictional, her oldest consistent friend. Ivy was responsible for her.

She shook her head, whipping her black hair against her cheeks. Keita had, *multiple* times, faced the deepest dungeons, done battle against the evil villain Capricora, and encountered many other sources of angst, and come out fighting. She would be fine.

Keita wasn’t in the library. Ivy had crisscrossed that room five times in as many minutes, and Keita wasn’t here. Had she returned to Pandia?

A part of Ivy wanted to hurry to the corner of the cafeteria where her sort-of friends had designated their hang-out zone; every minute with them counted (for what exactly, she wasn’t sure) but she had to be sure Keita was gone first. . .

She was about to declare Keita returned home when she recognized a sound: Keita’s distinctive, hoot-like laughter (put together in fifth grade), coming from a group of –

Ivy swallowed. *Athletes*. And seniors, too, by the looks of them.

But she recognized the hair, which had now been braided. She tapped Keita on the shoulder. “Hey.” Why did she feel foolish?”

Keita acknowledged her with a nod. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Ivy approached her character, feeling oddly foolish.

“Hey,” Keita acknowledged her with a nod.

“Can we . . . talk?” Ivy took Keita to a relatively secure area – the rose garden of the convent, overlooking Overland Avenue, where traffic rumbled by, but at least they wouldn’t be overheard. “Um, how come you’re blending in so well with the athletes?”

Keita leaned heavily on her right leg, just to annoy Ivy. “You wanted me to blend in. That’s what I’m doing.”

“Great. Okay. This is fine. You look perfectly normal.”

Now Keita stopped the L.A. hips, and scowled. “Now you’re saying ‘normal’ like that’s a good thing.”

She groaned. “Stop being so contrary about this!”

“I’m contrary? You’re the one who keeps bleaching me out and then wondering why I look ‘normal.’”

“I just want you to fit in as – as long as you’re here, that’s all! When in Rome. . .”

“Why do I always have to fit in in Rome?” She glanced around. “Or fit in at M&M, anyhow. . . Why can’t you try and fit in in Pandia?”

“Because Pandia isn’t – it isn’t where I belong.”

“And I don’t belong here, but I visit here. Why don’t you visit me? Why do I do everything in this relationship?”

She started to laugh. “Oh, *you* do everything? I only created you!”

“And you expect me to do whatever you want, however little you pay attention to me, even if you trade me away for time with those vapid friends of yours—”

“They are *not* vapid!” Ivy shot back. “These girls are some of the kindest and friendliest people I’ve ever met. . .”

“Yeah, because you had *such* a wide range of experience in elementary school. . .”

“I just want to get through this day without you *complicating* things.”

“Yes, your life is so complicated, isn’t it, without, you know, temples to restore, and sorcerers to fight, and jerk princes to talk to—”

“Believe or not, Keita, my life can be complicated, too.”

“And that gives you a right to stop paying attention to *my* life?”

“*Yes it does*, Keita! Your life is entirely my invention! Your world doesn’t matter because I made you up!” As soon as she said it, she wished she hadn’t. She hoped Keita hadn’t heard.

But, of course, she had.

“Okay. Fine.” Keita lifted one hand, to finger the strap of a quiver that wasn’t there anymore. “Well. Have a great day with your *friends*.” She shoved past Ivy.

“I didn’t mean it like that – Keita – how the *bell* did you show up if –” But Keita had taken off running. Ivy tried to run after her, but the backpack was too much. In the glare, she couldn’t even see which crowd of girls Keita had disappeared into.

“Well, *fine*.” Ivy muttered. She went to the cafeteria, where hopefully Caitlin, Emma, and Tabitha had left a seat at the lunch table open for her.

After school, Ivy did the quickest circuit that she dared of the first floor and basement, looking for Keita, without missing her rendezvous with her sort-of friends.

Eventually, she gave up. She met Caitlin, Emma, and Tabitha in front of the Mary statue by the front gate. Tabitha, not even looking up from her sketchbook, asked, “So why were you running around the halls yelling ‘Katie, Katie,’ a minute ago?”

Ivy’s face turned red. “No reason. C’mon, let’s go.”

But she was the last to pick up her backpack and follow her friends out the school gate. In the crawling shadows of the afternoon, the dark-haired girl took an arrow out of her backpack and laid it at the feet of the white Mary statue.

She went to the mall. She had been there dozens of times before, but never with people her own age – never like this. At five, her father picked her up in his car. Ivy sat in the passenger seat, smiling, filled with a strange sense of accomplishment – a thrill that somehow reminded her of filling up a page with first-rate dialogue. She hugged herself with joy to think that she was that much closer to calling them *friends* – just that – no modifiers.

The next morning, entering the school, she glanced as she passed the Mary statue – no arrow. Probably the gardeners had taken it away. In the halls, she looked at all the girls who passed by, afraid that her character had blended in with them irrevocably, unable to be found ever again... taking on a life of her own... a perfectly ordinary one.

She tromped down to locker 99, and opened it – rather, tried to. Once. Twice. With much swearing and stomping, it opened on the third try.

“*Ivy*.”

She turned. Only Tabitha’s voice could carry that note of barely, but politely restrained censure. “G’morning.”

“Have you been messing around in my sketchbook?”

“What? Why would...?”

“You’re the only other person in our group who tries to draw, and there was a new drawing in there, next to the one I let you do the other day.”

“There is?”

“Yes. Next time, ask me and I’ll just tear a page out for you. As it is –” She ripped the page away from its black bindings. “Here.”

Ivy was too stunned by the encounter to do more than stare after Tabitha at first, with, absurdly, the phrase *‘you’re the only other person in our group’* sticking to her thoughts first and foremost. She looked down at the sketch-page in her hand.

In one corner was the sketch of Keita that Ivy herself had drawn – in pencil, in soft, uncertain lines, in a style that was desperately trying to shake off its anime roots and not entirely succeeding. Opposite it was a portrait that Tabitha had done, in stronger lines with a more assertive style, that was based on Keita but did not entirely resemble her.

And then – Ivy had certainly not drawn *this*. It wasn't in her style at all – it was rougher, executed, in definite pen strokes. And it wasn't of Keita, but of a girl with short, inked-in hair, a tiny downturned mouth, and a white blouse.

Ivy found herself grinning, at her portrait, until she realized that the picture had a background.

“Excuse me...” said another girl. Ivy realized she was blocking two freshman lockers, and took her backpack and piece of paper to the adjacent biology classroom, which was slowly filling up with juniors.

The picture showed Ivy wearing a colorless tunic, and standing in a forest. Behind her was a small door with a spiral glyph on it. Ivy knew that glyph; she'd designed it for the Sylvan Temple, where Keita received the beginning of her training as a Paladin.

Hmm.

Below, she read, in a sprawling hand,
See you soon. We'll always find each other. – K

Whittier Fiction Award: Second Place Winner

The Doghouse

By Allison Gilbert (2012)

I knew all about the flood. I knew all involved, and they knew me. They knew I had seen them drop little cherries into the toilets in the boys' locker room. I had tried to keep my distance, but the vandals, known as the Mad Dogs, found me anyway. They thought I had the intention of snitching. I was just trying to run as fast as possible out of the gym before something happened.

This occurred on a Monday. By Wednesday, the west wing of the gym was entirely in ruin, and water still poured in graceless torrents. Mary-Belle Wagner Lutheran Academy had Mass every Wednesday, no matter the circumstance. So, early that morning, all students had to sit on frosted metal bleachers, which felt like sitting on a throne toilet made entirely of ice.

"You son-of-a-BITCH-ass," Martin, the leader of the Mad Dogs whispered to me from behind "this is all YOUR fault that we have to sit out here in this stupid cold weather." He pulled me by the hair and whispered, "You fuckin' KNOW those cherry bombs were Mad Dog property. Next time mind your own fuckin' business, or my boys are going to put three new cherry bombs right up your tiny Asian ass."

I remained silent, my back stiffening in the cold. I hated when Martin and his "dogs" sat behind me. It made me anxious, and they knew it, or, at least I assume they knew because they did it often. I looked toward the football field and tried my best to listen to the principal talk into the microphone giving the morning announcements. Mass would start in five minutes.

"As you are all aware," came the bitter tone of our principal, "the gymnasium has been vandalized. Though the gym will be renovated within the next two months, we will continue to have Mass outdoors every week until those responsible either come clean or an outside party informs us."

I could feel Martin's hatred seeping into the back of my head. My heart rate increased, but I kept breathing evenly. Through the nose, out the mouth, repeating, repeating.

Martin made a motion to his second in command, Joaquin, a tall and lanky Guatemalan kid with crooked front teeth. Joaquin's frail exterior was concealed by the same oversized leather jacket every day. Though already a head taller than me, he wore platform combat boots which had ½ inch spikes lining the outside; the spikes were flattened on top. He moved down and filled one of the empty spaces next to me. I kept breathing.

"Here we go", I thought to myself. I began to count. Counting relaxes me.

Joaquin, taking advantage of his new seat, violently thrust his icy cold spikes into my lower back in one swift and incredibly affective motion. I counted the seconds it took me to hold back a yelp: two seconds. I counted the seconds it took the priest to open his arms to us: twenty three. I counted the number of times my thus beaten lower back beat throughout the ceremony and beyond: One...Two...Three...

This was not my first tiff with the Mad Dogs, and hatred stemmed elsewhere. Since my first day at Mary-Belle, I have been ridiculed. I was told to my face that the school had "hit a new low" due to my presence and the presence of one other Chinese boy. My classmates told me I was tainting the school's color palate and that the only way to fix it was to send me back to Japan. My teachers assumed by my silence that I didn't speak English; in reality, I had nothing to say. I would shut my eyes, praying my anger would subside into forgetfulness.

My mother was from North China. My father met her and fell madly in love. She tells me, even now, I am just like my Ba Ba was. She told me I was tall and the only recognizably "no-white" trait I inherited were her almond eyes. My hair is black with a slight wave; my skin a mix of ivory and olive; my classmates and teachers at Mary-Belle saw my eyes and assumed they knew everything about me.

Within twenty-seven days, the Mad Dogs knew me by face and name, but Joaquin would remember my name and speak it forever in immense disdain. At Mary-Belle Wagner Lutheran Academy, students are often assigned by their teachers to tutor those “sinkers”, and being that I was excelling in math, I was assigned to help students. Unfortunately, the teacher decided to pair me up with Joaquin, I guess thinking I would not be missed. I studied extensively with Joaquin after school. I tried, but throughout the process, he tormented me, belittled me, and filled me with fear of the Dogs. He warned me that if he failed any of tests, it was my ass. Eight days later, I am a bloody pulp with a paper stamped with an “F” on my face. This set my fate; Joaquin has since had it out for me, and Martin, the leader of the Mad Dogs, is Joaquin’s best friend. When Martin got word of Joaquin having to retake calculus, he punched me between the eyes and threw me to the ground and said,

“Chink, you’re dead. You’re out to get us, and we need to keep you in line. Don think you’re safe, ‘cuz yer not. My daddy hates your type too.” That’s all I remember, but there was more; the reasons for my blood tend to blur. Joaquin never forgave me for his “F” on that test.

I could not confront my dad on the issue of bullies. My dad had died when I was nine; death had come suddenly, like punches to the face. My face makes me a high quality punching bag, and there is not a soul to help me. Prejudice only leads to bloodshed. My dad was a spiritual man, and I know if he were with me, he and I would be walking to the shrine in our back yard. When he died, my mom uprooted the shrine, because the memory of him was too sad.

I missed my father throughout my lack of acceptance at Mary-Belle Wagner Lutheran Academy. I missed him with every intentional punch to the face, every bootless kick to the ribs, every small porcelain tile from the gym bathroom wall, its chilliness reducing the swelling of bruises. I wondered if he would be proud of me when he looked from Nirvana and saw his son clench his teeth in peaceful protest, breathing. That’s what he would want.

But school was not all bad. I enjoyed math classes; furthermore, the dread of entering made leaving all the better. My school was a private, highly acclaimed school and close enough that I could walk home in thirty minutes. It might have taken less time, but I always took a detour. At 4:00 every day, I would depart to the Mall. I never went a day without this detour, so there was no sense in measuring how much time I could save by walking straight home.

Ten minutes down Mary-Belle Street, past the then barren park to the streetlights. Make a right down the street with the Starbucks and the big Target. Soon, I would be there, and before I would finish reminiscing of the visits to the shrine in my backyard, the glorious Mall appeared.

The Mall was three stories tall, and each story had a row of ten large windows stretching across the face, which made me wish Mary-Belle Lutheran Academy would put in more windows in their chapel. The interior was as bright as one could interpret from looking at the exterior, though a lot of the natural light was starting to fade by now. I always looked toward the ceiling, the long and elaborate support beams crossing over each other dutifully. These wooden beams looked like a giant spider if one stood in the direct center of the Mall, across from the beret stand and the small but clean pet shop. This was what I would do after school; I would go to the Mall and stare at the beams that seemed to form a giant spider. I would purposefully make my vision blurry as I stared into the unnatural light shooting from the legs of this spider. In my blurred vision, I always saw something new and in a different way, trying to find answers I could not answer on my own. In a way, this process was a form of reading tea leaves; I always saw good omens, so I continued this ritual.

Then that day came.

Three weeks had passed since Joaquin had jabbed his spikes into my side during Mass. In fact, all of the Mad Dogs had been out of sight. Today was the first Mass I ever had that didn’t involve some kind of torment. I was so caught up in my bliss I didn’t ask the obvious questions. I knew I

was doing the right thing! Dad must be watching me from Nirvana.

How wonderful to know I was right!

I imagined my mother: "You have learn so much, my son", she would say once I informed her of the greatest day of my life, "God is looking you close."

"Oh, how tightly I will hold her when I get home", I thought!

As I was thinking about my mother, I was at my locker retrieving my books for math class, my favorite subject. Upon debating taking my detour to the mall, the wave of my good fortune fell crashing to the ground. I was in a heavenly ecstasy, until I closed the locker door and saw Joaquin's large dark eyes and prominent cheekbones; he stared at me as a starving rabid dog looks at a wounded mammoth. The entire gang stood behind him, hunching, bracing themselves for attack. All the Dogs were accounted for, all but Martin.

I was breathless. I remained silent, my head sore from the emotional confusion.

"You almond-eyed rat!" Joaquin said with a smile. His smile was ugly, crooked. By his tone, I knew he was surprised to find I had shown my face at school today. His brow was furrowed in an intense way that I could not interpret; I sensed danger.

Unable to gather my bearings, all that came out was a gulp and a quiet "W-Wh-Wha-t?"

The Mad Dogs laughed, all the harder when Joaquin violently raised me from the ground and slammed me against the lockers, a lock digging into my lower back. Joaquin was taller than me, though he held me up with great difficulty, but fear made me dumb to all logic.

I briefly noticed Joaquin wasn't wearing his signature leather jacket.

"My dogs and I got a problem here," Joaquin said still holding me up. The Mad Dogs laughed monotonously together, but Joaquin's smile was now humorless and sinister, his eyes looking into my eyes filled with plans I could not predict. I tried to count but couldn't.

"You snitched to the principal about the cherry bombs, and Martin, because of this SHIT HEAD!" He shouted turning to his Dogs as he said it. "Now Martin, my best BEST friend," a pause "is going to be suspended. Suspended! Because of this asshole!" Joaquin slammed me against the lockers. The metallic eruption of sound resulted in more laughter. He continued: "My dogs and I are NOT okay with this mess, and you're going to pay."

I felt like I was being lowered into a tank of starved sharks. Joaquin released me.

"It wasn't me!" I pleaded. "I am not a snitch. I don't make conflict."

"Well, you certainly did this time, RAT!!"

I don't remember much after that. But I distinctly remember waking up and seeing my once yellow locker painted red with my blood. I remember seeing my classmates still in class, unaware of my absence, or maybe they figured I had it coming all along. I then remember gathering my book bag and walking straight toward the Mall, limping. I heard a squish coming from the inside of my shoe and knew it to be blood.

I arrived at the Mall, found the beret stand and pet shop and looked up to the crossing beams. I looked up and expected the lights to blur my vision lovingly. But the lights in the legs were not on, and the lights from the large windows engulfed my already muffled head and I began to feel sick.

The Mall was so crowded, the beret stand surrounded by little screaming girls who wanted red ones and blue ones. The shopkeeper was unimpressed by the joy he brought to the little children.

"I can't...be in this noise." I thought to myself.

I turned away from the beret stand and saw the pet store that helped me identify the spider. I took a deep breath, through the nose and out the mouth, and walked into the pet store as one who walks on a tightrope for the first time.

As I entered the store, I was overcome by emptiness. I was completely alone, except for three customers and the yelping puppies that occupied the store.

The floor had once had clean white tiles, but overtime they became stained with scurried paw

prints. The tiles were slippery; one customer in sandals slid as he perused the aisles. Along the walls hanging on large hooks were a series of dog beds of all different sizes to accommodate many breeds. Past the beds were a variety of pup treats with flavors and allergens listed with their prices. Leashes and bright stoned collars stood near the cashier stand on the opposite side of the store.

There were three rows in the middle of the pet store, each making more noise than the next. As I walked down the one farthest to the right, I stared into the cages of each yelping pup (the word “dogs” no longer contained endearment).

I stared at a pup with grey fur that had a blue tint to it, and it had a black spot over his right eye. He was young and had a pointed nose. An Australian Cattle Dog, according to the sign.

“Boy is it nice to be with a dog that isn’t going to beat me down every chance he gets” I said into the cage of the youthful canine.

I put my hand to the criss-cross metal cage, close to the puppy’s nose so he could more easily acknowledge my smell. The dog seemed tired, but as my hand got closer, its eyes got wider. Suddenly, it started barking like a raving maniac.

The storeowner, my back toward him so all he could distinguish about me was my height and wavy hair, did not see my face. If he did, I imagine his choice of words would have been more derogatory.

“That’s a good breed” he explained, “He’s an attack dog. He’s friendly, but he does not take kindly to foreigners. His mother was a police dog. Good breed: strong, and loyal as a Labrador. Foreigners shouldn’t get too close; he would never hesitate to attack those.”

Out of blind ignorance, and maybe due to a slight concussion from the blows I had endured earlier, I asked the most irresponsible question imaginable: “Why would you need to attack a foreigner?”

I could only imagine the look on the man’s face; I was thankful my back faced him. I imagined he and I shared a look of dumbfounded-ness, his look due to my question, and mine from my attempt at interrogating a stranger.

He answered me.

“Foreigners ruin our country. They’re violent job snatchers. Besides, son, I imagine you beat up a Chink or two before. They’re popping up all over the place! But, as my son tells me, the look on the face of a scared Chink is...perfect agony. Their disgrace is our pride.”

Offended beyond all belief, struck so hard, I was liberated, because I was touched with blind fury. I had no desire to count or breathe or assume correctness. Though I did not understand the displacement of my rage, I knew this man needed to learn something. I looked at the cages of dogs scraping their claws against the criss-cross metal of their homes. I listened to their oppressive growls. I got the sense that if all of the cages broke right now, I may not live for more than a few seconds. The barking increased because they saw me.

I turned around to face him.

I asked again, “Why would you need to attack a foreigner?”

The look on the storeowner’s face went from confusion to pale-white shock upon seeing my slanted eyes, both painted thick with blackness. My voice remained steady despite my rage, my lips accommodating my English despite my swollen upper lip. I cannot be sure, but I think I saw him glance at my once white socks, now stained with sweat and blood.

I asked him again, “Why would you need to attack a foreigner?”

The rest I can only assume, because I can’t read this illogical storeowner’s mind, nor would I like to. I could only assume he was humbled by his own racist idiocy. I assumed by his silence he had nothing to say; I concluded by his inability to look me in the eye that he felt shameful, of himself and his dogs.

I do not know these things for certain, but he continued avoid eye contact with me, and he

had no rage in his voice.

“Get the fuck out of my store.” He said.

“Apology accepted.” I stated truthfully.

Whittier Fiction Award: Third Place Winner

Think Tank

By Jessica Miller (2013)

The sharks glided above my head, behind me—if one swam beside me I moved to the other side of the tunnel. The air smelt crisp, cold and fishy, and I had the sickening feeling of being inside a stomach. I crouched, as though being closer to the unanimated moving sidewalk would keep me further from the sharks swimming silently above my head. *Why*, I pled silently to myself. *Why, of all exhibits, did it have to be the shark tunnel?*

I heard a scuffling sound which prickled my spine. I turned— at the other end of the tunnel a punky-looking toothpick of a teenager stood gazing absently around. She wore tiger-printed cargo pants and a baggy sweatshirt, and hair that was stringy with traces of grease. She looked over at me, her eyes glazed with indifference.

“You work here, right?” She asked. I quickly tilted my hat and straightened.

“Yes,” I said, lowering my voice to give the impression of bravery. “Maintenance is a dirty job, but somebody’s got to do it.”

The kid gazed up at a nursing shark swimming over her head. “So why don’t you fix the belt?”

“Not that kind of maintenance,” I said, gesturing to the dust pan clipped to my hip. She remained at her end of the tunnel, slowly rotating her head to watch the sharks as they passed. I flinched as a goblin shark drifted past me, its crooked teeth practically etching lines in the glass.

The kid cocked her head to one side. “Do you like sharks?”

“I... well... I work here,” I ambiguously responded. I felt cool, prickling tingles shimmy down my arms. I never liked to be in here for too long, and now, with the sidewalk jammed and both exits on emergency lock, being stuck here was like being swallowed by Monstro the whale. With sharks inside.

The kid raised a finger and knocked her knuckle against the glass. I jumped.

“Don’t do that!” I cried louder than I had intended.

She looked at me blankly and asked, “Why not?”

I fumbled for words. Fear had clamped its jaws on my tongue and I found myself mutely sputtering out syllables.

“You’ll... it... it irritates them,” I eventually strung together.

She knocked on the glass again and chuckled. “Isn’t this glass, like, three inches thick?”

I wiped sweat off my forehead and began to desperately cram my hands into my pockets. “Do you have a cell phone?” I asked her. “We can call for help.”

She seemed not to hear me, and instead put her face right up to a white tip sliding its iridescent belly along the tank. The distance between them couldn’t have been more than five inches. As she stood stoically like that I felt as though all the weight in my head had dropped down into my stomach.

The white tip swam off and she turned back to me. “I heard of this one shark, called the *Carcharodon Megalodon*, that’s sixty feet long. Sixty feet. That’s like four trucks lined up bumper to bumper. Think of how many people you could fit inside four trucks.” I felt my entire body sinking into the floor as she spoke. “*Megalodon* means ‘big tooth’. My name is Megan. Some of my friends call me *Megalodon*. And their teeth—*each tooth*—is like seven inches. Just think about that. Here’s our tooth,” she pressed an index finger to her front tooth, “And here’s a *Megalodon* tooth.” She held her hands spaced apart in front of her. She stared at the space as though she were actually holding a seven-inch shark tooth in her hands. With this, the image of that giant white fang and the giant

mouth it must belong to flashed through my mind. The muscles in my face twitched involuntarily.

"They're extinct," I said, blurting out my own self-assurance.

She jutted out her chin poutily and said, "I *know* that. But wouldn't it be cool if they were still around? Like, you're just swimming at the beach one day, then all of a sudden you look down and there's this huge red mouth with teeth coming up at you. You wouldn't even be able to swim out of the way in time. Their mouths are *that* big."

I was on the verge of fainting. I whimpered, "Can we... not...?"

The kid interjected. "A sixty foot shark. Something that big swimming above you would block out the entire sun. They're the biggest shark that ever existed."

"They're extinct!" I yelled.

Suddenly, the tunnel went black.

I shrieked and jumped two feet in the air. My heart was beating at triple pace. Panicked, I pressed my back against the glass tunnel, wanting to condense myself into nothing, until I remembered what was on the other side of the glass and shrieked a second time.

I swallowed air. "Megan?" I called out. The voice coming from my mouth was unfamiliar—it was a shrill, whispery echo of my normal voice. I paused, suspended in the dark, for a response. I couldn't see my hand two feet in front of my face, let alone the grease-ball teenager at the other end of the tunnel. She made no response.

With my eyesight rendered useless, I began to hear small noises: water lapping the air above me, the minute creaks of the tunnel settling in the cold temperature, my own sparse breathing, my heart pounding like a fist on glass.

I yelled again, "Are you still here? Please! Are you here?" Nothing.

Before I could make another movement, the lights flickered back on and the moving sidewalk made its progression through the tunnel, carrying me with it. I stumbled and caught myself on the railing. Adrenaline yanked my legs from out of their hibernation and I sprinted toward the exit. The door opened. I spilled into the lobby, breathing in sheer joy and relief like a pilgrim stepping onto American soil. I began hiccupping with breath and laughter, unable to control the cathartic release of my anxiety.

I lifted my head and found myself under the bewildered gaze of a repairman, kneeling before a concatenation of wires and switches in the wall. I immediately straightened and coughed into my hand. I began to open my mouth, but it was clear he was not interested in my story. So instead, I turned back toward the tunnel. I saw straight through to the tunnel's entrance, but the teenage girl was nowhere to be seen.

I approached the tunnel cautiously, then, despite the creeping uneasiness settling back into my chest, reentered. The sharks swam silently around me, unacknowledging of my existence. As I approached the far side of the tunnel, I spied a small object being carried along the moving belt. I stooped down to pick it up. It was a tooth. A small, triangular shark's tooth. I peered around the tunnel once more, but the girl was gone.

I stood there for a moment longer, until a slight movement caught the corner of my eye. I turned to see a large tiger-striped shark moving slowly towards me from the other side of the glass. It stared at me with an eerie blankness and emptiness, and yet I could feel it seeing me.

I suddenly remembered how cold it was there in the shark tunnel. I tipped my hat down and exited the tunnel once more, the tooth in my shirt pocket, the sharks drifting lazily above.

Pay to Breathe
By Justin Dennis (2015)

“I only need a few credits!” he yelled, kicking the machine.

“Please do not kick the credit-dispenser,” said the robotic, feminine voice. “Each credit is eight dollars, sir.”

“I have told you: I HAVE NO MONEY!” he cried, flailing his arms frantically.

“Credits cannot be dispensed if they are not paid for, sir.”

“GIVE ME A CREDIT!” he howled, banging on the dispenser so hard he bruised his knuckles.

“I’m phoning the police now,” said the credit-dispenser.

Furious, he turned and left the credit-dispenser on the street corner where it was embedded into the wall.

What if I can’t get any credits... he thought to himself. *No, don’t think that, Mazushi—that can’t happen. It just can’t...*

He asked the people who went by him, “Any change? Any Breather credits?” but nobody even looked him in the eye, much less responded to him.

The device on his neck felt tighter than usual. He pulled at it to loosen it, but of course, it didn’t budge. He could feel it counting down—less than a day left. He turned the corner and hurried down the sidewalk. The hovercars in the street zipped by, uncaring to his predicament. More pedestrians walked by, ignoring his pleas for money or Breather credits.

His stomach tightened and growled. No surprise—he hadn’t eaten in two days. Breather credits and job application fees were more important. Food was optional.

He was walking as fast as his shaking legs would take him. He had already applied for every job in the city for which he was qualified. His last chance was to get to a Governmental Aid Building. He had heard of it but never dared to resort to it. That was for the poor people, the *other* people, the *failed* people. Somehow, though, he had become one of them.

His dreams had seemed so realistic. Doctors weren’t needed in Los Angeles, and he had heard that they were hiring in New York, but so far, that had turned out to be untrue. Hospitals were fighting for profits just like every other business, and they refused to hire Mazushi even though he was willing to take a minimum wage. He could—maybe—live off that. It would at least be able to buy him some Breather credits.

A violent vibration suddenly shook one of his legs. He jumped out of surprise and then realized that he was receiving a phone call. He wasn’t used to owning a cell phone yet; he had only bought it so that the jobs he applied to could call him back.

“Hello? Hello?” he answered nervously, almost dropping the phone as he pressed it to his ear.

“Yes, Mister Mazushi Kibo?” came a robotic, feminine voice.

“Yes, that is me!”

“We would like to thank you for your application to Healing America Corporation. Unfortunately, we are not currently able to offer you a position here—”

“—even as a janitor? ANYTHING?” he cried desperately. A few passersby stared at him.

“No, sir. We have no positions available, but we appreciate—”

“YOUR APPRECIATION WON’T PAY MY BILLS!”

Silence on the other end of the phone.

“Hello?” he voiced hopelessly.

But the Healing America Corporation bot had hung up. Mazushi yelled in frustration, causing his collar to tighten and forcing him to cough harshly as he fell to his knees. The pedestrians continued to walk by, some raising eyebrows but otherwise uninterested.

He stood back up slowly and continued to the Governmental Aid Building. As he was

approaching the front door, his phone vibrated again.

“Hello? Hello?”

Silence for a second, then a dull beep.

“Sorry, your phone credits for the month have run out. Please purchase more credits online at your earliest—”

But Mazushi didn’t hear the rest of the bot’s speech because he threw his phone against the nearby wall and it shattered into hundreds of plastic bits.

Can’t afford phone credits... he told himself. What if one of the hospitals calls me back? Doesn’t matter now.

Inside the Governmental Aid Building were several lines leading up to a counter with bullet-proof glass. Mazushi went and stood in the line that he perceived to be shortest.

His palms were dripping sweat; in fact, his whole body was. It was pretty cold outside, but having his life literally ticking down was rather distressing. His throat was so dry that it hurt to swallow. It was then that he remembered he hadn’t drunk anything yet that day.

He glanced to the wall of the building where a drinking fountain used to be, and his mouth began to water. He knew they had removed them because they needed metal for the wars, and people should be able to afford their own water anyway, but he could still remember the sips of cold water he would steal from them in his childhood. He licked his lips thirstily.

“Sir?” called the woman from behind the bullet-proof glass.

Mazushi broke his trance with the empty wall and approached the woman.

“I need money for Breather credits,” he stated as clearly as his mouth would allow.

“Okay,” she said politely. “Please fill out this form and get back in line. Next?”

Mazushi took the form she slid under the glass and went over to sit at a rickety desk.

Are you a senior citizen? read Mazushi. No. Are you a minor who has been legally emancipated by a Federal Court? No. What was your income last year? Zero. How much debt do you owe the Federal Government? \$843,000. Have you or a family member ever been active in the military? No. Have you or a family member ever been active in politics? No. Have you or a family member ever started a business? Yes. How much did you pay in Allegiance last year? Zero.

He took the form and went to stand back in line. A few minutes later he approached the same woman at the counter. She took his form and ran her finger down it, shaking her head at his answers.

“What is your debt for?” she asked politely.

“Medical school,” he replied as calmly as possible. Her insipid kindness was bothering him since he could be dead by the next day if he didn’t receive any money or Breather credits here.

“What is the business that you or your family started?”

“My mother started a hospital, but it went out of business.”

“I see.”

She continued to go down the list, shaking her head. “Sorry, you’re not eligible for aid,” she said. “The Government doesn’t offer aid for failed businesses. They believe that is the natural order of the free market. And since you haven’t been in the military or politics, we cannot help you there. And your failure to pay any Allegiance is very disturbing, really.”

Mazushi didn’t know what to do but stare at her in disbelief. He knew that the Government hired people on minimum wage because it was cheaper than technology like the credit-dispenser he had visited earlier, but it was easier to get mad at a bot than a real person, and he really wanted to be mad.

“You don’t understand, though,” he said. “I need this, or I am going to die.” At least people can reason and have sympathy, unlike bots.

The woman swallowed and stared down at her feet. “I can’t help you, sir. You know as well as I do that the Government believes you are unfit to live if you cannot pay your Breather.”

"I know what the Government thinks," insisted Mazushi, pressing his hands against the bullet-proof glass, "but what do you think?"

She refused to look him in the eyes, continuing to scan the area around her feet.

"I—I think you need to leave, sir."

"I'M GOING TO DIE!" he screamed, pounding on the glass. The people surrounding him in line backed away hurriedly. "YOU ARE GOING TO LET ME DIE!"

Security guards promptly lifted him up and threw him out into the street.

Why did you waste your money coming here? he said angrily to himself, getting to his feet and brushing the dirt from his jacket. *You could have stayed at home with your family. You could have lived.*

But that was untrue, and he knew it. His family was running out of money. His parents had planned on having more money when they had four children, but their business had gone under and now they couldn't support their kids no matter how many minimum wage jobs they got.

Mazushi kept on walking, not knowing where he was going, his mind wandering endlessly.

He had flashbacks to when he dropped out of high school, and he could hear his younger sister whimpering, *But, Mazushi, we need you here. Please don't go.*

But he had to go. When he was accepted early into a prestigious Los Angeles medical university, he had to drop out so that he could get a better education and eventually earn enough money to support his struggling family. He had wasted three years attending that school—three years neglecting his family and incurring more debt. He should have listened to his siblings and just gotten a job nearby to help them, but then everyday would have been a struggle, and he was only trying to make things better for all of them because they could never be happy like that.

We only want you here, Mazushi, we don't care about money.

But I want you to live another day, Shimai. I want you to know there will be food on the table tomorrow. I have to do this.

He had put in as many hours as he could at the local fast-food restaurant while at school, but it hadn't been enough. One job is never enough. He knew that had put a strain on his family. He had needed to focus on his school work, though, to retain the few scholarships he had received. Even his three younger siblings had multiple jobs at that point just to support the family. Everything was on him to get a high-paying job and help them all. But now he had failed.

Just come back safe, cried Shimai in his hazy memory. His sister's familiar scent crept from the back of his mind into his nose, and he could remember their last embrace vividly.

I won't fail you, Shimai, I promise.

Then, breaking the daze inside his mind, he almost collided with a massive sign. He stepped back and realized that he was standing outside a large, decorative church. The sign read: *Need help? Our door is always open.*

Mazushi had never been much of a church-goer, but he was desperate now. He immediately walked under the ornate archway and entered the church.

Inside, there were rows and rows of beautifully crafted wooden benches. At the end across from him was a podium with intricate carvings along the edges and different flowers and leaves embellishing it. Light fell through the stained glass ceiling like thousands of delicate paper birds, sprinkling itself atop the benches, statues, tables, and other opulent furnishings. The room, which sparkled as if everything inside of it emitted its own unique light, was almost completely vacant aside from one man in black robes who sat in the front row with his head down and hands pressed together in prayer.

"Hello?" voiced Mazushi. The word echoed throughout the building as if it were a cave.

He walked down the aisle and approached the man. "Hello," said the man, looking up and grinning at him. "I am Father Chikan. What can I do for you?"

"I'm going to die," said Mazushi between heavy breaths. "I need your help. I need money for

Breather credits or my Breather will shut off my airflow.”

Father Chikan smiled. “Of course, my boy. Now tell me, are you a devout Christian?”

“No,” said Mazushi truthfully and without thinking.

The Father’s smile immediately fell into a frown. “Oh,” he said with an appalled tone. “Will you become one?”

“Will you help me if I don’t?” Again, Mazushi didn’t think before speaking.

Father Chikan eyed him suspiciously. “I don’t know why you ask such questions; fate has clearly brought you to me for a purpose.”

“Okay,” sighed Mazushi. He didn’t believe in Christianity, but at this point, he would believe in any religion if it would give him a few Breather credits. “How do I become a Christian?”

“The initiation fee is seventeen dollars,” replied the Father.

“I have no money!” cried Mazushi. “That is why I’m here!”

“Then I cannot help you,” said Father Chikan emotionlessly. He sat back down and resumed his prayer.

“Because I have no money!? Because I’m not a Christian!?” yelled Mazushi. He couldn’t find it within him to hit the Father, but he had a strong desire to. Unfortunately, that wouldn’t get him any closer to paying his Breather. The Father remained silent, eyes closed in prayer.

Mazushi stormed out of the church angrily and began pacing the streets again. He headed towards the city center where the most people were. Without any chance of getting a job, governmental aid, or church aid, his last hope was to beg.

He sat down at the corner in the large city center in which many gigantic screens crowded the skyscrapers playing advertisements for all sorts of products Mazushi couldn’t afford. He wondered how much those screens cost. One could probably pay for him to live for years.

Within minutes, he was freezing, but all he owned was everything he had with him—and that was only the clothes on his back. He had been evicted from his apartment weeks ago and sold all his belongings and spare clothes after that. The last thing he had clung onto was his phone, but that was gone now too. Most of his money had been lost to job application fees, unfortunately, and he had also wasted it on food, water, that apartment for the short time he had it, clothes, and that phone. He had lived as minimally as possible, but maybe it wasn’t minimal enough? Could he have done better? The guilt sat on his chest like an anvil.

“Money? Change? Breather credits?” he asked the passersby. Nobody even gave him a second glance. Americans had long since learned to ignore the homeless. They would take care of themselves soon enough when they couldn’t pay their Breathers.

Mazushi looked around at all the other homeless folks. He could see at least a hundred from his vantage point, some begging, some huddled under boxes, others lying on the sidewalk dead—pedestrians simply stepping over them. It made Mazushi wonder if things had always been this bad. It didn’t seem to make sense to him that people should die, right here in such a rich area especially, when there was so much wealth and so many resources abundant. He almost felt pity for his fellow homeless people—his peers—but he didn’t even have enough emotion or thought left to spare them.

Nighttime passed without him getting one minute of sleep. His throat became even drier and his stomach curled up into a lifeless sponge. He was now having intense fits of shaking that must have been some combination of starvation, hypothermia, and fear of death. The busy traffic of hovercars eventually dwindled down to just a few cars every minutes, and rarely a few drunk pedestrians stumbled by. One vomited just beside Mazushi, and the rancid smell would’ve forced him to vomit as well if he’d had anything in his stomach.

Lying there less than a foot from the vomit and unable to move due to complete exhaustion, Mazushi realized how quickly death was sneaking up on him. He didn’t mind death so much for

himself; it was his family that he worried about. He had come here for them—to help them. If he died, his debt to the Federal Government would be transferred to them, and they were already barely getting by. They had given him all their excess money so he could find a job in New York. If he died, they died. His physical death meant nothing to him, but the thought sickened him because he knew of the implications it would have on his family.

His Breather was tightening and allowing even less and less air through. The sun rose and was now high in the sky, and the day was beautiful, but his Breather was going to close completely within minutes. A couple clouds danced by, fluffy and playful. They didn't need Breathers. Lucky clouds.

Hovercars began to populate the street again and more pedestrians began to walk by. Mazushi saw them mostly as blurs now since he was too dizzy to distinguish faces. Attempting to concentrate too hard on one area now felt like it might send him plummeting over the edge between life and death.

"I have some extra credits from an old Breather," said an old man standing before Mazushi. "Here you go." The old man dropped a few coins in Mazushi's lap and walked away uncaringly.

Mazushi was so light-headed that he could barely recall asking the man for credits. He scrambled for the coins and attempted to jam them into the machine on his neck. Maybe he had a chance after all... maybe he could live... but the coins wouldn't go in. He pushed harder, trying to jam them in, but they wouldn't budge. What little bit of hope he had had was now completely obliterated.

He took the coins in his hands and examined them: *Yoku Breather Credits valid for Yoku Brand Breathers only.*

Mazushi threw the coins across the street where they were struck by several hovercars and scattered about randomly.

"DAMNIT!" he screamed at the top of his lungs, and he felt the Breather pull tighter around his neck. He gripped at it with his hands trying to rip it off, but he lost his balance and fell face-first onto the cement sidewalk. Several small children, with Breathers on, stepped around him as they were led by their parents who also had Breathers on. The father was carrying a baby with a Breather as well. Why did everyone have to wear these accursed things? Was money really so important that everyone should die without it?

Suddenly, all the screens above Mazushi changed from their usual advertisements to one person's face: the President.

"My American citizens," said the President. "I am here tonight to give you the State of the Union address. This year has been very successful for us—"

But that was all Mazushi heard before he died. His Fuhai Brand Breather successfully cut off his airflow. His family would say that it killed him, but the Government would say that he allowed himself to die by not paying the Breather, and the CEO of Fuhai would fly his private jet to his vacation home in France and never even hear the name Mazushi Kibo.

The Many Things of Timothy Carl By Wesley Hackenberg (2013)

The Re-Beginning of Timothy Carl

Timothy Carl was a collector, not of things, but of possessions. At his age, he saw his life as only a setting sun, he thought, should be seen; just waiting for the peak of light to explode in a flash at the horizon, and then retire for the night. Just one epic scene then it's gone. He never held much anticipation for much of anything these days though. He spent most of his days walking the sand of the beaches and grass at the parks with his companion metal detector, which he received as a gift from his son on Christmas four years ago. At his age, his fragile bones gave him the occasional ache, but preventing him from wandering. He never saw much use for the metal detector when he first accepted it, thinking it was a cruel hint from his son to find a hobby. Now that his used bookstore has declared bankruptcy, Timothy Carl found himself ill content with the old wicker rocking chair on his back porch. The metal detector, still in its cardboard box, has been unleashed, and once again, gave him a reason to leave his home.

The Leisure Pursuit of Timothy Carl

Within a few short weeks of Timothy Carl trailing his metal detector, he has begun a nifty collection of knick-knacks, odds and ends, do-dads, and trinkets of all sorts. A few of his treasures were: a doll made of twisted hangers and colorful pea coat buttons, which he gave to his granddaughter, a brass belt buckle with a Native-American man and tomahawk, and a vintage can of Bernard's Dehydrated Water, just add water. Of all his unique objects, there was one that stirred the deepest corners of Timothy Carl's Imagination, a diary with a wooden cover and old iron lock. Because of its deteriorating condition, the diary was a simple flick away from its secrets. Timothy Carl spent his most recent days sitting in his favorite chair, reading away at this diary.

The Readings of Timothy Carl

The pages of the diary were made of handmade paper, the kind with the subtle grains and imperfections. Each page filled with the lines and curves that became words, words that made up a story about a young woman named Claire Silverton. Timothy Carl read each page of Silverton's story carefully, intrigued with the mystery of this book. He read about her first love, the loss of her father, and the lazy passing days that just kept each moment intertwined like a spider web. With each story fleeting, Timothy Carl felt like this distant acquaintance became a close friend through each reading. He saw only one date scribbled on the very first page, the second of November, nineteen-forty one. He was five years old. Timothy Carl wanted a face to these words now. Even knowing the chances of finding Claire would be harder than catching a ladybug with your eyes closed. He began to dream of her face.

The Woman That is Claire Silverton to Timothy Carl

"Today I spent my day laying on the hammock of my father's, reading this book that curiously had no name. I found it at this adorable used bookstore downtown. The cover has been worn away with years of incredible history. I decided, while I set the book down on my chest, I would imagine different names for it." Timothy Carl imagined it was his bookstore that she visited, when he was a young man and it was still open. Although he knew it wasn't. He would flip a few pages and read some more. "Today, father sat the family down and told us he is being deployed to England next month to fight the Nazis. I cannot help but be proud of him, yet I fear the worst, not only for him, but for myself as well. I have never said this aloud but father is the only one who understands me. Mother always prefers Barbara over me because she is domestic and a great cook. I look into the kitchen and all I ever see is a thingy-ma-bob with a spiraling do-hickey, a wooden spoon made for a monster, and a miniature baseball bat made of wires and such. I would not know where to start." Timothy Carl sat back for a moment and realized he would go on another search,

not with the metal detector, but for Claire Silverton.

The Prospect of Timothy Carl

In Greensborough, the small town outside of Timothy Carl's small town, held a weekly flea market everyday Saturday morning for locals to sell all kinds of nifty goods. Timothy Carl decided to sell his Lost & Found. He laid out all his random trinkets consisting of tin tops, erector set bars and bolts, a no-handled corkscrew, and knick-knacks of all sorts across the plastic white fold out table and sat under his umbrella and waited. He imagined to himself that all who bought his items were the original owners of them. He saw a little boy buy the tin fire truck toy he once found in the sandbox at the park. He thought maybe that toy once belonged to the boy's father, and now at last, he can enjoy it with his son. Another customer came by, an elderly woman, who was staring lethargically at the table and asked Timothy a rude but justified question. "Who would want to buy all this junk?"

Timothy replied. "Their owners." He gave a lazy smile to her as she shrugged and disappeared. All the while, Timothy was waiting for Claire Silverton to find the book and shout, "This is mine!" But by the end of the day, half his do-dads and odds and ends were gone, but the book remained.

The Discovery of Timothy Carl

Sunday morning came and Timothy Carl did his Sunday morning routine. He would start brewing some bold coffee, put his favorite Duke Ellington and his Orchestra record on, and grab the Sunday paper for some light reading. Mildly disappointed his journey yesterday yielded no results; he had hoped the new day could help him momentarily forget his impossible search. As he skimmed articles of sports and weather, of stock market results and coupons, a local piece caught his eye, *The Claire Silverton Library to Open Tomorrow*. As quickly as he could, Timothy Carl pulled on his Sunday slacks, his red and green flannel coat, grabbed the diary, and swiftly walked towards Main Street to the library.

The Final Introduction of Timothy Carl

Timothy Carl approached the concrete steps with caution, grabbing the handrail for support. His knees were weak, but excitement gave them the shakes. As he came to the glass front door, he peered inside and saw a beautiful young woman, around the age of forty-five, shuffling through papers and moving boxes aside. Timothy knocked on the glass with a childish grin. The woman approached and cracked open the door slightly.

"Can I help with you something sir? If you read our sign, the opening is tomorrow morning at nine."

Timothy, too excited to speak, just pulled out the diary from between his arm and side, and placed it in the woman's hand.

"I believe this belongs to you." Timothy said. "Are you Claire Silverton?"

"No, Claire was my grandmother... my name is Amelia Delaine." The woman proceeded to open the book and scan the pages, suspicious of its content. Suddenly Amelia Delaine's eyes grew wide.

"Excuse me, but where did you find this? This was my grandmother's diary, she use to tell me stories of it all the time. This is why the library is in her honor."

"Why is that?" Timothy Carl asked curiously.

"My grandmother collected books over her years, almost obsessively, but she read every single one, almost recalling each of them by memory until about two years ago when she passed away. I was told these stories growing up, so I wanted to pay tribute to her with this library. Many of the books inside were once hers. I can't believe you found this.."

"Well just consider it a gift from a friend."

The woman stood in amazement, paralyzed by the gift. She stammered, "What is your name sir?"

"Timothy Carl"

“Well Thank you Timothy Carl, you have no idea what this means to me. Where did you say you found the diary?”

Timothy Carl smiled, “Just on a walk. I suppose I was looking for it too.”

And with that, Timothy turned around and wandered slowly down the steps. Joints giving pain, but his mind was content and at ease. He stopped for a moment to turn and wave goodbye to Amelia Delaine.

The Great Possessions of Timothy Carl

Timothy Carl went to sleep that night, still grinning from the day before. Before he shut his eyes, he scanned the room and looked at his collection of many do-dads, and knick-knacks. They weren't lost items anymore, they were found again, and Timothy Carl went to sleep knowing this. The next morning never came for Timothy Carl though. He just contently laid there in peace, the Monday morning sun seeping through his bedroom. Amelia Delaine discovered Timothy as she went to invite him to the library opening that morning.

Weeks have passed, and a service was held. Timothy Carl's many acquaintances and family members attended. Amelia Delaine was in attendance. When the will was sorted, everyone got what they wanted: the house to the son, and the money to the grandchildren, leaving behind the do-dads and knick-knacks of Timothy Carl. However, they were not forgotten.

In the Claire Silvertown library, next to the organized shelves of historical non-fiction and biographies, is a glass case on display. Inside lay the many things of Timothy Carl. A picture was propped up in the corner of the case of a beautiful young woman with only the name Claire written on the bottom. On the back, a message was scribbled. “To Timothy, Thank you for restoring the spirit to this library.”

Dub-C

By Courtney Jackson (2012)

Leaving Hoover, your country of solace and comfort, your haven of safety from the heat and sanctuary from the territory of the Sciences, you begin the long voyage to the Land of the Smelly and Herculean, the illustrious Athletic Center (AC). First you traverse the wide Grasslands of the Lower Quad region, aware that from the heights of Mt. Library you are being watched by supreme intellectual beings. Perhaps they pity you, for they know your fate.

The expedition continues past the bilingual village of Diehl as you come to the Plains of the Upper Quad. Lions lounging in the sun eye you curiously. Avoiding eye contact so as not to provoke them, you jump and dodge the antelope stampeding inattentively as they chase a Frisbee, just trying not to be trampled by their naked, shoeless games. You draw closer to another large mountain face. From here you are also watched. You must be on guard so as to not be skewered with spears by the menacing race of Science Students who envy you for your freedom from captivity.

Then going up that Hill, with your heart pounding and sweat materializing, it is as if you are trekking to the farthest distances of the earth. A haven once resided in this distant realm across the desert. But now it is barren. You must go anyway. As you reach the top of the abominable Hill the Desert Parking lot, the Sahara where you once lost your favorite necklace freshman year, seems to literally grow longer before your eyes. On hot days it takes hours of crawling along on all fours, mirages materializing, with nothing but a backpack of books and a Speedo bag of gear. Men on camels, which look curiously like golf carts, speed by. You are too weak to yell out and they cannot understand your call.

Enduring the terrain you pass a colossal mountain range, Mt. Kilimanjaro, which extends into the plateau where the so-called Upperclassmen, a race of self-important libertines, live in villages divided by status or guild. This is also your home. You belong to the Nation of Swimmers. But you have yet to accomplish your quest, and must press on.

Weakened by the heat and the weight of your provisions, you reach Earlham, the caravan trail, only to arrive at another hill. This hill is bordered by a Barney colored court filled with Cannibals. They emit paralyzing shrieks and grunts, while waving weapons. Sticks with strange circles on top. They sway around what seems to be a mystical net, waving their weapons as if entranced in their dance. You sneak by as quiet as possible so as not to be seen and sacrificed or eaten.

You advance towards a skinny, daunting path which gives you chills. You know what lies ahead, but there is no other way. On your right is what used to be your oasis, your home and place of belonging. The Pool. For you are a mermaid among land creatures. Today, in place of your lagoon, huddle fat vermin with large yellow heads. They have captured the oasis. They cluster amidst a dirt cavern, which never seems to shrink. They do not move, but stand or sit, talking to each other on phones and staring at the cavern, yet never actually going nearer, as if it could swallow them if they moved any faster.

Continuing on with Indiana Jones stealth, you come to a cage on your left. A monstrous cage with Large Loud animals. They sway to country music and throwing white stones, their billed purple heads and white skinny legs meandering. When they notice you the whole herd spins and howls “HeeyGiirrl! HeyyGiirrl!” They become frantic and refuse your attempts to ignore, calling continually until you finally reach the end of the path.

Beyond the path you come to a heavy cold door jutting out of the mountain face, the AC. Inside you are engulfed by a Jungle and the most gruesome animals yet. The Meatheads prevail here, grunting, flexing, stinking, and sweating. They resemble Gorillas, but lack the appealing qualities.

You keep very quiet so as not to attract their attention. You weave between them, careful not to get too close and touch their bulging, wet bodies. Most of them pretend to be distracted. It is their mating call to you. They slam and throw large metal rocks, sticks, and sometimes even trees. They grunt rampantly, adding more rocks to their assemblage when they know you are looking.

Overwhelmed and terrified, you navigate through this Jungle to where the Beast lives. You stop outside, scouting your route. Breathing heavy and nervous you swing open the door.
“Hi Coach.”

A Story Told Daily
By Elizabeth Reitzell (2013)

I only know one girl who has died from the bug so far. Stan and I both knew her back in high school. The doctor calls Stan in and I sink into my too-thin wallet for a picture of the girl I tore out of a newspaper. The girl dropped out of school the earliest she could and left her father's trailer to live in her boyfriend's apartment by the freeway exit. I remember it was the biggest gossip at school when she started hooking for him behind the gas station near his place.

She was a normal-looking girl with long legs and hair matted into chunky braids, and he was just a guy with a place, a gun and a car. The more she hooked for him, the thinner she got. The thinner she got, the less she wore. The less she wore, the more she fucked. The more she fucked, the more she coughed – until no one would pull off the freeway for her anymore. And when that happened, the beatings got worse from her boyfriend, until one night when she stood by the freeway exit in a bra too big, stringy underwear and a cloth in front of her poxy mouth. Watching car after car honk and then speed past, she finally decided to use a breath between her coughs to run full-speed (which I cannot imagine was very fast) into the freeway. And then she was gone.

Her boyfriend dry-heaved and then drove slowly back to his dank second-floor apartment. He would miss exploring the insides of a body for free, but her death gave him more fear than sadness as he coughed himself to sleep. By the time the rumor had spread about her death and about his cough, the local grocery store was already out of bandanas.

So now, with a bandana tied around my nose and mouth, I wait in the orange bench-chairs in the clinic lobby watching a chef swiftly chop up a celery stalk. Shifting in the orange plastic, I remember my childhood dream of owning a television set. I have always dreamed of saving up for a television – even the cheap pink one at Wal-mart – but the notion of having money to save has always been foreign to me. As the television chef slides the olive-oiled root onto a tray and into the oven, I see a bandana-clad elderly woman twitching with anxiety. I reach out to give the sun-spotted woman a reassuring squeeze on the arm but she flinches away from me.

I realize then that the less we know about this bug, the more people we suspect as being carriers, and the more potential agents we begin to fear. No one is sure about the safety of water, so we all walk around covered in layers of filth. Food might be contaminated, so Stan and I have lived on tightly-sealed granola bars for a week. And of course, sexual contact is out of the question.

So when Stan and I first walked in the clinic reeking of sex, I thought, *Shit. We just had sex and everyone can tell.* But the tension from that breach in my modesty subsided when he got called into the office to get tested, and I remained seated in the lobby tapping my toe against the cold metal bench legs, staring up at carrots in the oven.

As the chef could pulls the carrot dish out, the door swings open and Stan comes out. I tease, “You jerk, why did you sign your name in before mine?” But instead of jabbing me back as usual, he sinks into the orange chair a seat apart from mine. At his absent response, the elderly woman wrinkles her forehead at me, and I pull out a cough drop.

Mrs. Moral Guardian Watches T.V.

By Julie Sanchez (2015)

Mrs. Moral Guardian was happiest most when she was miserable. Nothing made her more miserable than watching the second-hand television her children had insisted upon giving her two Christmases ago. So, following this strange logic, she watched it as much as humanly possible. This one morning, she was to receive a visit from her oldest granddaughter, Shirley. All day long she'd spent, cleaning every speck of dirt or dust off the Cleopatra sofa in her living room. As she savagely slaughtered the dust bunnies and pitiful creatures of the under-couch, cookie dough rose and singed until they were black with a hint of golden brown. At the ding of the timer, Mrs. Moral Guardian halted in her crusade to release the hardened lumps of dough. She scrutinized the cookies. Had her spectacles been higher up on the bridge of her ski-jump nose, she would have noticed that the prepackaged Toll House dough still had fattening chocolate chips on it, which never would do under ordinary circumstances.

The doorbell rang.

"Oh, my. That must be Shirley. Coming, dearie."

She scuttled on her cork-soled army shoes, over linoleum and hardwood with equal conviction.

The door swung open, as did little Shirley's arms.

"Grandma Muriel! How are you?"

"Oh, dear, you're practically naked! And at your age, too! Young women should know these things! Get inside before somebody sees you!"

Shirley stared somewhat confusedly at her grandmother, but adjusted her cardigan over her Gibson girl blouse. The hem of her circle skirt flounced indignantly against the doorjamb and whipped against the scar on her shin where she fell, roller skating, a proper penance for such immodesty.

"Oh, I love what you've done with the place, Grandma Muriel! Everything looks so new and shiny! It's like your own little suburban palace, isn't it? You'd make Betty Crocker proud."

"Hush, child! Do you want Grandpa Moral to hear you say that?"

"Uh, why not?"

"We don't tolerate pride here," Mrs. Moral Guardian snapped.

Shirley glanced helplessly at her grandmother.

"Oh, but what am I saying? Come, you must sit down and tell me everything that's gone on while you've been away at high school!"

Shirley eagerly sank into the Cleopatra sofa.

"I'll be back, dear. Please, make yourself comfortable."

The girl smiled and snuggled into the cushions.

Mrs. Moral Guardian skittered into the kitchen. Her cookies still lumped on the sheet, devoid of all golden-brownness. They were now just plain brown, like the solid earth. Mrs. Moral Guardian pursed her lips, as she was wont to do when she was truly happy, and raised the cookie sheet. Scraping away the patina of charcoal, they hadn't turned out badly. She arranged them equally on a plain white compote and masterfully poured two equally portioned glasses of plain white milk. Placing these items on a wooden tray, she solemnly carried the assemblage of sustenance to the living room. Not the good living room, which they called The Parlor, though. That was for *really* good company. Not that anybody especially important would visit plain, simple folk like the Guardians, Mrs. Moral Guardian was always sure to emphasize. But still, she firmly believed that a woman was duty-bound to keep an immaculate, pure home.

"Here, Shirley. Have some cookies and milk. But drink it slowly. You don't want to be a

glutton.”

“Thanks, Grandma Muriel. Oh, look, *Bonanza*’s on! Oh, gosh, isn’t that Little Joe dreamy?” Mrs. Moral Guardian’s eyes flew wide in shock.

“Shirley Guardian! Why on EARTH would you watch such a violent show? And only to gawk over a MAN?”

Shirley blinked rapidly.

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, forget about it. Just old Grandma Muriel flapping her big maw again. Nothing special. Just forget it, forget it. Go ahead, watch,” Mrs. Moral Guardian mumbled.

“Well, if you don’t want to, Grandma Muriel, I really don’t have to. But the TV was on and I just thought we could watch together and I—

“Never mind, dear. It’s all right. Go ahead. It’s fine with me,” Mrs. Moral Guardian replied dismissively.

Whenever Mrs. Moral Guardian objected to something, she always went along with it. After all, it was rude to tell people to stop doing something simply because she objected; a lady always accommodated guests in her home. And Shirley had insisted rather emphatically after all. It was wrong to become involved in altercations of any sort, unless it be with the Devil himself.

So Mrs. Moral Guardian sat primly, solemnly nibbling on her cookie and yanking down the hem of her skirt to cover her kneecap. Above all else, a young lady should observe the virtue of modesty.

“What are we watching again, Shirley?”

“*Bonanza*, Grandma Muriel!”

Mrs. Moral Guardian wrinkled her nose and daintily plugged her ears as the Cartwright brothers broke into a brawl onscreen.

“Such violence should not be permitted for viewing! What has the world come to when this is the sort of thing we call entertainment? Live maiming and torture! No better than the ancient Romans, we are, content with our bread and circuses!”

Shirley had to busy herself with her cookies so as not to guffaw.

“Oh, dear, do take smaller bites please!”

Mrs. Moral Guardian swiped Shirley’s plate and instinctively began to break the cookies into pieces for her, but Shirley stopped her.

“Grandma Muriel, I think I can take smaller bites without help,” Shirley laughed nervously, taking back the plate.

For a moment, an inferno erupted in Mrs. Moral Guardian’s eyes. She extinguished it with a mumble, and an indignant hair-pat for good measure.

“You okay, Grandma Muriel?”

“Oh, yes. I’m fine. But today’s young people are... Well. Never mind. Let’s just go back to watching your show.”

Shirley smiled and settled back on the couch, her cookies in hand.

“We now interrupt *Bonanza* with a word from our sponsor,” the announcer crooned.

“Oh, I love commercials!” Shirley said, “I know I’m not really supposed to, but some of them are so catchy!”

“Disgusting. All of it. What has this world come to when stores intrude upon our homes to sell us things we do not need?” Mrs. Moral Guardian croaked.

“Oh, Grandma Muriel,” Shirley sighed, shaking her head.

“I mean it. And what is this teaching us? That buying things is what makes us happy? What about family? Look at those two little girls! What sort of world will they grow up in? They’ll develop dollar signs in their pupils before they’re twenty!”

Shirley squinted and then smiled at the little girl onscreen seated on a windowseat.

“Grandma Muriel, this is Angela’s commercial!”

“Angela?”

“Yes, the little girl I babysit! She does commercials and other ad campaigns. Things like that. Isn’t she cute?”

“Oh, that’s right. You go to school in Hollywood, now, don’t you?” Mrs. Moral Guardian said in that tone that most adults take when they aren’t nearly as excited about what a child says as they want the child to think they are.

“Yes! Shh!”

Grandmother and granddaughter settled in to watch the two little girls in the commercial interact onscreen.

“Oh no, Sally! It looks like the Russians are coming!”

“Don’t worry Judy! We have nothing to be afraid of!”

“Why not?”

“Look! It’s Cold War Barbie™”

Mrs. Moral Guardian’s eyebrows shot up over her spectacles and well past her widow’s peak. She daintily coughed into her plain white cotton handkerchief, so quietly that Shirley could not hear. Then again, Shirley was in such a state of shock herself she wouldn’t have heard her grandmother anyway.

“Introducing Cold War Barbie™, the first militarily active doll for girls from Mattel’s most popular toy line!”

Onscreen, the camera panned into Cold War Barbie™, who seemed to talk on her own.

“Always true to the Red, White, and Blue!”

“Wow, what a pretty gas mask, Barbie!”

“This is just terrible!” Shirley cried, “Who would buy such a doll for their daughter?”

Smiling at her granddaughter’s opinion, Mrs. Moral Guardian decided that the time was finally right to impart her own on the girl. After all, a lady never gave her opinion unless someone else gave the same one first.

“Oh, my, yes. This doll is just awful for little girls! I feel it’s all in incredibly bad taste.”

“With Cold War Barbie™ and her many all-American companions, girls of all ages will learn not only how to protect themselves, but defend their country from the threat of foreign invasion by being model citizens.”

“Watch out, Barbie™! There’s a mushroom cloud over there!”

“No cloud’s big enough to block out Old Glory!”

“Look at that!” Shirley cried again, disgusted, but clearly not disgusted enough to change the channel.

“What horrible morals this is promoting!”

“I have to agree with you, Grandma. This is possibly the most horrible idea for a doll ever imagined!”

“Stick ‘em up, you commie trash! You’re gonna get it from Uncle Sam!”

“Cold War Barbie™ comes equipped with a state-of-the-art dual voice recording device and karate chop arm.”

“Oh, what an awful thing for a child to have to play with!” Shirley wailed.

“I know! Imagine a doll that encourages speaking poorly of other people, especially important people. It just isn’t decent!”

Shirley was about to voice another opinion. Then she realized fully what her grandmother had said.

“What did you say, Grandma Muriel?”

“Well, I don’t know about any other people, but I think this doll promotes rudeness in little girls.”

Shirley only stared.

"Cold War Barbie™ loves going on wholesome, all-American outings with her boyfriend, HUAC Ken™!"

"The only party I support is a dance party!"

"HUAC Ken™ comes with his very own miniature wire-tapping kit to share with Cold War Barbie™!"

"Listen, Judy! It really works!"

"Hrm... Sounds like ole Mr. Petrowsky from down the street's speaking a foreign language!"

"That means he's a commie!"

"No wonder he's so grumpy all the time. Right, Barbie?"

"And supporting promiscuity, too, no doubt! Look at that! This Barbie™ is going to make girls believe they need to be dating men even earlier than they already are! Look at you! You're already dating, aren't you? Isn't that why your parents sent you to the convent school?" Mrs. Moral Guardian held her hand out to gesture at the screen as she said this in a firm, but mild-mannered and well-reasoned tone.

"Uh...I don't *have* a boyfriend, Grandma Muriel," Shirley said, somewhat confused.

"Are you telling the truth? You know it isn't right to lie."

"Yes, Grandma Muriel. I *know*," Shirley assured her grandmother.

"Oh, excuse me," Mrs. Moral Guardian whispered, readjusting the hem of her skirt again, "I did not *mean* to make assumptions. I apologize."

"Equip Cold War Barbie™ with her very own real-working assault rifle! But make sure not to get her outfit too dirty with this lovely organza apron, tied neatly in a bow around her dainty waist!"

"Wow, look Judy! Cold War Barbie™ has the keenest Remington M1903 Springfield Assault Rifle of Justice™ I've ever seen! It's much prettier than the one in Daddy's workshop!"

Shirley crossed her arms in a huff.

"Okay, this is the lousiest idea for a toy EVER!"

"Watch your slang, dear," Mrs. Moral Guardian murmured.

"But look at that! This is such a horrible toy! I'm going to go write a letter to the station. I can't believe Angela's mother let her be in this commercial! Did she even read the script?" Shirley fumed.

"Shh...Dear, simmer down. It's unladylike."

"But don't you agree with me?"

"While I agree that the doll does promote cleanliness, with the apron and all, I don't think it's right that the doll should be made with such tiny proportions. Little girls will see that and think it's normal not to eat."

Shirley paused, relieved. She thought a moment, then, gasping in revelation,

"I didn't even think of that! That makes it worse!" Shirley reached for a nearby tablet to draft her letter. (If she tried doing it at home later, she wouldn't be as angry and it wouldn't come out nearly as well.)

"Oh, I definitely agree with you, dear."

Shirley nodded.

"After all, if little girls don't eat, they won't grow up to be good wives and mothers."

"Oh, I don't even want to think about that!" Shirley sighed to herself, amidst frantic scribbles.

"They'll grow up to be terrible wives and mothers who won't provide proper nutrition for her family at all! And what does that say about the future of human beings? It is disgraceful," Mrs. Moral Guardian grumbled, again patting her hair.

Shirley gaped in horror.

"You could catch a hive of hornets with that open mouth, Shirley. I think it's very rude."

When Mr. Guardian, the younger, came to pick up his daughter later that evening, his mother stopped him before he went to get Shirley.

“Joe, could I talk to you for a minute?”

“Yes, Mother, of course.”

“I really don’t think it’s such a good idea, you up and moving to Los Angeles like this, sending Shirley to that fancy school with all those...Hollywood people.”

“Mother, Mary and I hardly consider the Convent of the Immaculate Conception a ‘Hollywood school,’” Joe laughed.

“Well, then, I’m not so sure I approve of you letting Shirley congregate with that little hellion Angela, what’s-her-name, on television,” Mrs. Moral Guardian stated quietly.

Joe crossed his arms.

“Little Angela? What did you see her in?”

“This commercial for one of those Barbara dolls. It was simply horrible. All sorts of moral things wrong. Thank goodness Shirley’s too old for them. I think they’re so morally incorrect. Told her so, myself.”

Joe rubbed the space between his eyes.

“Don’t tell me, Mother. You and Shirley watched TV?”

“We did. It was hardly entertaining.”

Joe groaned, *Here we go again.*

“Is *that* why she’s hiding in the back bedroom?” he asked, exasperated.

Mrs. Moral Guardian fluffed her bun.

“Certainly not. She’s taking a ladylike nap.”

“Mother!” Joe grumbled, running down the hall to collect his daughter.

Mrs. Moral Guardian sighed, shaking her head. She watched Joe disappear into the dim, cavernous hallway of the house. The Guardians always kept the lights out because it was wasteful. If the Lord intended for them to stay up all night, Mrs. Moral Guardian surmised, he would have made the moon brighter.

“Then again,” she mumbled to herself, “that’s just something else them young people won’t listen to.”

Margins

By Victor Vargas (2013)

"I wasn't trying to kill myself," I say, rubbing the new stitches along the inside of my palm, feeling the tender white flesh along the wire. There's no pain, just a sort of numbness about my hand, and that surprises me. I look up at the doctor and sort of half shrug. "It was the fucking soap dish, doc."

The doctor shakes her head, and looks down at my file. She starts to say something but maybe thinks better of it because she stops and instead writes something down. I watch her do this—watch her scrawl something down in her bunched-up cursive, and although I can't decipher the meaning, it still bugs the hell out of me. Everything else on that page is written in black, but this new doctor, she's using a blue ink pen.

I don't think about it often but I guess that most everything I can't understand annoys me.

"You don't have to be ashamed, Mr. Jackson," the doctor says. Her tone is sympathetic but her eyes look tired and inattentive—her attention is somewhere else. "Depression is a lot more common than you'd think, especially in people with your kind of disability," She motions down at my bum leg, "but therapy and drugs will—"

"I *wasn't* trying to kill myself," I repeat. "I'm not crazy. I don't want to die."

Outside of the examination room, I hear a little boy crying. There's a sort of creaky rolling sound moving down the hall beyond the door, and the child's wailing becomes clearer as this rolling nears. I look at the open doorway and I have a momentary impression of a young boy being wheeled on a gurney by an orderly. There's a fat woman trailing a few steps behind and I can see that she has the exact same kind of weary eyes that the tired doctor in front of me sports.

"I-I d-d-don't want to d-die," the brat sputters and bawls.

"It's going to be okay, baby," the fat woman says. "The nice doctors are going to get your appendix out—"

And then they pass and all I can hear is the rolling of wheels and the scratching of pen on paper.

"Attempted suicide is a cry for help," the doctor says when I don't speak.

Before I can help it, my breath hitches. I learn forward and begin to cry.

The doctor's tired eyes widen, and for the first time since she has entered the room, she looks me in the face.

"Well, doc," I say, "it's like this..."

Look, doc. Sometimes, I like to play detective at the used book store.

It's not terribly hard, you know. Walk down the little romance aisle and pick up the pinkest, most frayed book you can find. Bonus points if it has a really sexy title. Something about pillows or lingerie or *horses* will do just fine.

First things first, if you're going to make a hobby out of this sort of thing, you want to try and set up a profile of your most *intimate* targets. After all, it's fun to pick up a book—say, *A Pirate's Love*—and make a note of all the highlighted parts, the dog-eared pages, and get a small sense of what exactly it was that turned this unknown person's randy switch on full throttle. But, and trust me on this, you get a much greater sense of appreciation and scope when you begin to recognize your *usual suspects* across a catalog of books. People don't usually offload their naughty books willingly, what with all the notes and names they tend to scribble inside them. It's embarrassing—a literary

porn collection. So for the books to wind up in a used book store usually means the person's moved out of town... or, more likely, they're dead. Whatever the case is, you can be assured that the used book store you've chosen as your stalking ground is a veritable treasure trove of *someone's* depraved collection just waiting to be discovered.

The only real question is, who is that someone?

Flip open the binding of a book and you discover someone's name in a bunched-up, tiny scrawl that you can barely decipher. This book belonged to: "Sarah J." Or maybe it's "Sophia J.?" It's too close to tell, but hey, it's a start. Six unfruitful books later, you come across a novel with a message streaked across the last page. Different handwriting, different pen, but the message wishes a "S. Joel" a happy birthday and it's dated for the twelfth of March. Inside the book, on two occasions, you find paragraphs highlighted with a pale purple color—a highlight color you find in both books. And just like that, you've made a connection, you've given your target a name, a possible birthday, and you're one step closer to *solving the mystery of their life*.

No, I'm not exaggerating.

I'm of the opinion that, given a notebook (to jot down notes and dates and names) and a used bookstore where your own personal book collection has been chucked away at the lowest price following your untimely demise, I can find out everything about you. Your name; your address; your favorite color; your favorite book; your fetishes; your personality; your dreams. You'd be surprised, I think, about how much people reveal in what they read. Some people say an author pours their very heart and soul into their work, and maybe that's true, but readers are worse—they're cannibals. They take a writer's soul-child and devour it whole, using it like some sort of depraved mirror to reflect their own person. Every torn page; every underlined sentence; every corrected grammatical error they scratch out; every joke they dot between the lines and margins—it's a perverse ritual they're offering to themselves.

"Sarah Joel, for example," I said, holding out the ruined remains of an old novel with a missing cover and a small cigarette burn on the revealed spine. "She was gay. I think." I have to add that last sentence because technically, this is all a theory. Sort of like evolution, but a lot more sketchy.

I was alone in my living room then, talking to myself, as per usual. "Oh, sure, maybe her husband never noticed, but come on." I finger through a few other books spread out on the table in front of me, each in various state of wear and tear. "*The Bachelor Girl*, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and *Gemini?* It's so *obvious*."

My roommate—his name is Hector, and he was in the next room, the kitchen, working the stove, cooking up another batch of crack; and so there was a sweet and sugary smell in the air. I looked at the wallpaper and imagined licking it, rolling my tongue on the little furls and curls—it might even have tasted like candy. Last week was bad. Hector had brought in a few friends and tried cooking up meth. They didn't get the solution right, and even I could have told him that a small-scale meth lab was a stupid idea from the start, but they went ahead and botched the ratio for hydrogen chloride and pseudoephedrine and ended up with shit for show for their investment. Hector was furious at the loss, but personally, it was the smell that had really bothered me. A mix of sickly sweet and sourly bitter; like burning metal and plastic. Every breath in our apartment had burned the back of my throat in a way that made me heave—unlike, say, the intoxicating barbecue roast a good whiff of a car's exhaust fumes will give you. Hector doesn't mind terrible smells, but they really bother me. So I spent a few days working to get it out of the apartment, scrubbing the walls, vacuuming the floor, lighting incense.

But it was still in the bathroom.

So I hadn't gone to the bathroom in five days.
Not to bathe, brush my teeth, take a dump, anything.
Not since I had seen the hanged man.
Oh, I hadn't mentioned that yet?
Give me a minute, doc. We'll get there.

"I think I might be dying," I had said, looking down at the cover of *Bastard Out of Carolina*: at the little girl with a long bowl cut with her hands on a wire fence, and behind her a woman—the mother, I guessed—who shielded her eyes from the sun as she looked on, disapproval cemented on her dark features.

Hector didn't answer me, but that wasn't strange. He never answers me. He never looks at me. Sometimes, I doubt that he even knows I exist. But then I'll wake up one night and he'll be screaming at me. He'll slur his words and stumble and then he'll lay into my head with his big fists. He'll climb on top of me and bash into my old scars, but punching takes coordination so soon he'll start clawing instead, spitting while he tries to get at my eyes, and by the time he's done, we'll both be tangled forms of sweat and blood dragging out shallow lungful's of air as we fall asleep like that, on top of each other.

I'm not a masochist, but I don't necessarily hate when that happens. I like being acknowledged. I *like* being reminded that I *am alive*—because it's surprisingly easy to forget when no one looks at you; when no one talks to you.

Hector doesn't talk to me, but in my mind, he does—I give him a voice. In my mind, he isn't just a body that squats in my apartment; in my mind, he cares about me. Worries about me, even.

In my mind, Hector loves me as much as I love him.

Buddy, I had him say. *You need a new bobby.*

I laughed. "Sure, sure. Because peddling out drugs is the new Saturday morning fishing, right?"

I look down at the cover of *Bastard Out of Carolina* and I gave the mother a soft sort of southern drawl. It's sort of familiar and comforting, but I'm not entirely sure why.

Don't be so judgmental, I had the mother say. *Hector does more good for this community than you imagine.*

I'm just filling up a demand with a supply, buddy, Hector said. *This is basic capitalism.*

"You're perpetuating a state of addiction," I replied to the voices.

If you want to talk about addiction, you could stand to do a lot worse, the mother on the cover said.

There aren't support groups for losers who stalk people through book stores. Besides, who says addiction is a bad thing?
"This whole conversation is stupid."

No, no, Hector's voice said. *She's got a point. Modern western society is entirely defined by addiction—addiction to the state, addiction to the media, addiction to technology, addiction to information; addiction to instant gratification is addiction to addiction.*

Every consumer is an addict, the mother said. *Without addiction, the capitalist-consumer market would fall apart. Western civilization as we know it would implode.*

"I've read your book. *Bastard Out of Carolina*? The daughter—Bone—she hates you," I said, looking down at the little girl on the novel cover, standing in the forefront.

The mother in my head just laughed.

Eventually, Hector's voice explained: *hate today doesn't even mean what it meant a hundred years ago. Today, people don't hate; they don't love; they're never sad; people never feel admiration.*

People feel annoyed instead of angry, the mother said. *Horny instead of love; disappointment instead of sadness; respect instead of admiration. My daughter doesn't know how to hate me.*

All the powerful emotions are gone, buddy, Hector said. *Emotions are addicting, and so when you expose people, kids, to the kind of media you see today—the sex, the violence—well they build up a tolerance to it.*

People aren't happy anymore.

People aren't afraid anymore.

People are amused; people are content.

Our ecosystems are in ruins, corporations are growing ever more expansive and intrusive, our economic banking systems are falling the fuck apart, and all everyone cares about is when the next iPad comes out.

Pettiness is the new passion.

I couldn't distinguish their voices anymore.

I threw the *Bastard Out of Carolina* book across the room. It hit the sweet, sugary wallpaper and bounced, landing open sprawl on the floor.

Something fluttered out.

I walked over and picked it up. It was a hard piece of paper, a business card that must have long ago been stuffed in-between the pages and since forgotten.

Printed in a goofy, looping script font was the name "Sarah N. Joel, M.D." Below that, a telephone number.

Now, about the hanged man?

I woke up and I was sitting on my bathroom toilet.

... You don't have to imagine that part, if you want. It's not very pretty. Sort of important, but no. Not pretty, not at all. Pretend I just happened to be sitting on the toilet instead, if you like. Just dozing there on that porcelain bowl, pants dropped around my ankles. I must have been tired though. To fall asleep while doing that, I mean. It was cold. Outside rain was pummeling the small window and the steady little prickle sound of *tip-tip-tip* made my fingers shiver. But that was the only part of my body that was cold. My thick, little fingers shivering in the dim lighting of the bathroom.

That's when I saw the hanging man.

Or, what I thought was a hanged man, at least. I looked directly to my left, into our gray little shower with the blue tile ducks at the base and cracked showerhead and I saw two long legs dangling in midair.

But then that terrifying moment of realization and disbelief ended and I realized how silly I was being. There was no hanged man in my shower. Just a shadow cast by a single draped towel that the light intersected weirdly and cut into two long shapes; a pair of legs swinging in midair. The towel itself substituted for what had appeared as an upper body and my shower chair, the little plastic fixture I needed because of my bum leg, had completed the illusion by substituting in for what the hanging man might have used to step up on and off when he finally decided to off himself.

There never was a hanging man. It was just a childish moment of sleepiness and wild fancy.

It's kind of funny.

It's okay. You can laugh if you want. I know it was stupid.

Here. I'll do it for you. "Hah hah," I said. There, I wrote a line of dialogue just for your benefit.

Hah hah.

The hanging man is still inside my shower.

Isn't it funny?

No.

It's not.

It's terrifying.

Because once I saw him, I could never *un*-see him ever again. Even if I moved the worn

towel that had first produced him and moved the shaky little plastic shower chair, I could still make him out in the corner of my eyes. Dangling there. Hanging there. Dead there.

I can't use my bathroom anymore.

I've never seen his face, but I get the feeling that I could if I wanted to. If, when I saw him, I didn't move my eyes to make him disappear but instead used my peripheral vision to inch up his long legs. Past his lanky upper body. Into his undoubtedly cold and pallid face. I think, if I wanted to, I could see his face and I think—I fear—that his face will be *my* face.

Yes. My face. If I look, I'll see my face hanging there, suspended from a line tied to the broken showerhead. Maybe it'll be the TV's cable line. Maybe it'll be the telephone wire. That doesn't matter, only the constant does. My neck. My face. If I look. *When* I look.

But I don't want to. I never want to see that.

So I just don't go into the bathroom anymore.

So it's been two weeks since I brushed my teeth. It's been two weeks since I took a shower. It's been two weeks since I took a dump in my own toilet.

It's been two weeks that the hanged man has been dangling from my showerhead.

I felt that I knew Sarah Joel—that I surely understood her better than anyone else had ever understood her.

We were soul partners.

After all, I knew everything about her. I had gone through her *Harry Potter* collection and discovered that she had a childlike sense of adventure; I went through her romance and erotic collection and found that she was sensual and emotional and *raw*, and maybe that she even liked to be handled roughly every once in a while—something else that her husband never knew. I combed through her cookbooks and exercise books and found within them a sort of wary and disgusted apprehension; I found a person going through the motions for the sake of others. I found a considerate person.

I read through her favorite novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wild at Heart*, *The Notebook*, *Dream a Little Dream*, *Gone With the Wind*—the freaking *Twilight* saga even. Every page that she had handled too roughly and thus left an impression on with her finger; every stain that she had left after falling immersed in the story and mishandling her cup of coffee or milk (and it *was* only coffee or milk that she drank; I had tasted each stain to make sure), or left after falling asleep and drooling onto the page—I had seen and cataloged it all.

Every dog ear, every pen scratch, every note, every highlight, every creased and bent page.

I understood Sarah Joel's interests and so, conversely, I understood her disinterests.

I knew she disliked science fiction about as much as she disliked historical fiction. I knew that she absolutely loathed *Wuthering Heights*, *Atlas Shrugged*, and a great many Stephen King novels (except, notably, for *Gerald's Game* and *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, of which she kept two much worn and much weathered, but also much loved editions). I knew that her favorite color was purple (four of the five bookmarks I'd found were this color, as was the highlight color she mostly used); I knew she had traveled frequently in earlier years (gleamed from her various airport paperbacks), but that she had since settled somewhat reliably within the city (most of her later purchases came from a local *Barnes & Noble*); and I knew a great deal more, but perhaps the most important thing that I knew about Sarah Joel—I knew that she was unhappy.

This conclusion—regarding her ultimate dissatisfaction—was the only one I reached without any retrieved evidence to support it. There was no scratched out message or hint to make me believe that it should be so, but the more I learned of her, the more I understood the details of her life, the

more I came to believe, nay, *know* that she was like me.

We were not burned out on addiction or passion; we were not merely content or satisfied.

We were the *un*-addicted; the ones desperately searching for an obsession.

We needed each other.

And because I felt that I knew Sarah Joel best, perhaps I made the mistake of assuming that the reverse was also true, that she must know me—or at least, because I had taken so much of her inside of myself, that she must be need to take me inside herself.

It was only fair. We couldn't have a give and give relationship—there had to be some give and take.

"She just doesn't know it yet," I cried out one night, from below Hector.

My roommate had crawled into my bed again—had breathed a musty taste of liquor onto my face before he had begun to swing widely at my temples, screaming some gibberish about termites and his father.

Don't contact her, the Hector in my head advised while the real one pinched me between the eyes and slapped my ear. *You'll ruin her if you do.*

"What are you talking about?" I asked, taking a nasty cut to my eyebrow when the real Hector squared my eye with a right straight. "I *have* to talk to her, I *need* her to know me—"

From my bedside table, the mother on the cover of *Bastard Out of Carolina* said: *Even god doesn't hold the people who never heard of him to the standard that he holds those that did.*

"I'm no god," I said, barely managing to mouth out the words before Hector finished busting my lips and numbing my face.

That's right, Hector said. *You're not a creator—you're a parasite.*

Reality doubled and blurred in and out. The blood loss and trauma made my vision pull back, and soon I found myself looking up at Hector from beyond a wide tunnel of twisting black. And Hector, finally tuckered out of his little episode, collapsed on top of me, gasping out greedy breaths of air. He put his nose right next to my neck, he inhaled deeply there, among my sweat and blood. And then his eyes popped open and his face sort of screwed up. He pulled back and spit out, stopping a wad along my heaving chest.

And for the first time in months, he talked to me:

"Dude," he said, "you friggin stink."

I looked at him from the end of the tunnel in my head, amazed.

He crawled off, stumbling away. "You really need a shower."

It was the fucking soap dish, doc.

I ripped the shower curtain off the line. I threw every towel on the floor. I moved the shower chair into another room. I reasoned that this would be enough—no shadows, no hanging man. Take a three minute shower and bam, Hector'll have no complaints. I'll see that there's no strange haunting vision of myself lynched in our bathroom. A happy ending. Everyone wins.

I should have known better.

I stripped off my grimy and dirty jeans, peeled off my sticky shirt and torn socks, and I stepped into the shower, but I never faced the water. I let the cold, hard water smack against my back, but I refused to turn around—to look at the showerhead.

To look at where the man was hanged from.

So I worked without turning around, stringing out my hair with the shampoo, scratching away at the dirt under my arms, my neck, with the wiry sponge, splashing myself with the freezing water.

The ultimate cold shower.

And before I knew it, everything was washing away.

Not just the dirt—but also my fears, my worries, my thoughts. It was all trickling away beneath the sway of the frosty stream, flowing down my heavy shoulders, down my back, between my legs, and down to the dirty tile below.

Hector and the mother too—I could practically *feel* their insipid little voices fall away; I could almost *bear* their cries and screams in the gurgling of the shower drain.

I was free; from expectations, from others, and, most importantly, from myself.

Feeling about a thousand times better than I recalled feeling in weeks, nay, months, I reached out and grabbed the soap dish against the wall.

I turned around and faced my showerhead, that stupid ceramic soap dish in hand.

And then I screamed.

I saw myself there, underneath the cracked shower head. The hanged man, looking back at me with bulged out eyes—*my* bulged out eyes. *My* face, my fate.

I stumbled backward and put too much weight on my bad leg. I slid on the wet tile and slammed against the grey tile side. I crushed the soap dish in the same action and ended up falling on top of it, landing on it with my hand.

I laid on the floor like that for a while, with only the chilling shower stream and laughing voices in the drain to keep me company.

You're so stupid!

Afraid of your own reflection!

I looked up and saw that they were right—I had not seen the hanged man; I had seen myself. Myself reflected in the small mirror that was hung below the showerhead, to be exact.

But I had bigger problems, then.

I looked down and I saw blood—a dark red flood of plasma seeping into the water around me, smearing against the tile, turning the little blue ducks in the tile a raw pink and red. It was coming from my palm. The soap dish had shattered in a bad way—created a jagged, porcelain cut that had ended up slashing at my hand when I had fallen on top of it.

I lifted my hand up and peered into the wide, ragged laceration, looked down below the pallid skin, the folds of tissue, and saw pooling blood forming along the wound. I snapped my wrist back and blood actually *shot* out, like a disturbing version of Spiderman's web, it gushed out and splashed against the wall.

I was so funny, I started to laugh.

I did it about three more times before I passed out.

The doctor, Sarah Joel, she was gone.

I had been too into the story, I hadn't notice when she had left the room; when she had excused herself. I hope it was later rather than earlier. I hope she didn't leave immediately when she learned about me and the books—about me and her. I hope that she had waited until near the end. I hope that she understood that what she and I had was something special.

"We're hanging under the shower head of fate, you and me," I say to Sarah Joel, wherever she happened to be. I like the sound of it.

Somewhere else, someone was paging security. It was time for me to go.

I limp out of the examination room and head on down the hall, turning here and there, touching the surgical sutures along my palm, looking at the passing faces of the patients, the doctors, the nurses—the addicts of the world.

Near a stairwell exit door, I come upon a familiar face. It's the fat woman from earlier, the one

with the crying son with appendicitis. It looks like they've stationed her here, outside the surgery ward, while her son undergoes the procedure. She dozes lightly on an uncomfortable plastic chair, every once in a while hitting the back of her head against the wall.

I limp on over to her and lean down; I say, "Excuse me."

She rouses, her eyes putter awake and bleary. She looks at me, confused.

"Your son hates you." I offer her this, just a little bit of myself, before I slip out the stairwell door, and out into the waiting world.

Sarah Joel isn't going anywhere. I have the books, her name, her phone number. We have all the time in the world for her to get to know me. And it isn't just her. There are others—so many used bookstores, so many people. They're all just waiting to be discovered, to be saved—

These people in the margins.

A Flowered Picture Frame

By Carsen West (2014)

– *Do your laundry.*

I'm not positive what exactly possessed me to go visit him. Hell, I'd never known the guy, and from what I remembered of him, he was probably one of the least likable individuals I'd ever had the misfortune of being related to. Maybe it was the overwhelming feeling of emptiness in the house, what with Marci being out of town visiting her family and her cats having completely disappeared into the backyard after her departure. Or maybe it was the incessant vibrating of my cell phone, reminding me how many voicemails from my mother and girlfriend were being left unanswered.

Umber, I could already hear Marci growling in her ever-condescending voice. I'll be home tonight, have you done everything on that list I left?

What really set me off, I think, was Bentley. The way his massive, charcoal-black eyes stared up at me plaintively as I poured his morning bowl of kibble, it was almost like he knew. On any normal day, he'd fiendishly hunch over the small pile of puppy pellets and loudly wolf them down as though he hadn't eaten for weeks. But today he just watched me, silent and expectant, leaving his breakfast as untouched as I had left mine. What, I grumbled, my words sharp and agitated, do you want from me? He whimpered softly, anxiously stepped from foot to foot. After several minutes frozen in stalemate, I frowned at him and stalked angrily off to my bedroom, selecting a collared flannel and a pair of dark jeans from my piles of unwashed clothes.

It was raining when I first stepped out of the house, and I got halfway to my car before I turned around and stomped back up the steps and through the front door. Bentley was there waiting, looking disappointed at my sudden return.

Blimey Bentley! I snarled, not at all self-conscious of the fact that I'd felt the need to justify my actions to an animal. I'm just getting a damned raincoat!

I was busy scouring the cluttered cave of my hall closet when a squeaky bark abruptly interrupted my concentration. Leaning back and glaring venomously at the Boston Terrier sitting rigid in the small entryway, it took me a moment to realize he'd squatted beneath a row of hooks; Marci had been hassling me to screw them in beside the front door, but from what I could tell, she'd lost patience with my procrastination and done it herself. Bentley's silent gaze jumped from me to the hangers positioned above him, and he yipped again.

My black windbreaker hung upon the middle peg.

Having become much more agitated than before, I forcefully slammed the closet door and snatched up my jacket, grumbling all the way to my small Volkswagen. As soon as the car thrummed to life, I started up my windshield wipers, and they worked furiously against the precipitation for a whole thirty seconds before the rain suddenly cleared.

When I pulled sharply out from the driveway, I caught Bentley's minuscule head peeking between the shades of the living room window.

– *Don't leave Bentley home alone.*

Seeing the "Bright Oaks Cemetery" sign brought a rather impromptu stop to my wandering thoughts, and I spent a long time parked in the near empty lot – with one other stopped car besides mine – simply listening to the droning radio. My fingers wrapped themselves about my car keys in a vice grip, and I mentally fought the urge to drive back home and pretend this day was just like any other. But something else, inexplicable, kept me curiously magnetized to the place; I had something to do here, and that was about all I was entirely sure of. As I finally stepped out into the musky, post-storm air, I was struck with the sudden guilt that I hadn't brought anything for him.

If it wasn't for the collections of gravestones spread throughout the tall, ancient trees, I

wouldn't have guessed Bright Oaks to be a cemetery; it was far too flowery and covered in green foliage, strangely full of life for a place designated for the dead. The towering, wrought iron gates surrounding the place had been left slightly ajar – as though they had been impatiently awaiting an uncommon guest such as myself – and as I skulked slowly inside, I spotted an elderly man beside and equally elderly pickup truck.

Ahoy there! the wrinkled man rumbled merrily when he finally noticed my cautious, unwilling approach. Come to visit a loved one, or just come to visit? His unnecessary pleasantness guilted me into forcing an awkward smile as I watched him lift cardboard box after cardboard box from the bed of his '63 Chevy.

Well, loved one, I found myself spitting out, furrowing my brow at the way the two words tasted in my mouth. He was more of a disliked-one; really, I'd never known the man enough to associate him with anything close to admiration or fondness. If I had wanted to be honest with the grave keeper, I would've told him I hadn't any idea why I'd wandered here in the first place.

Beautiful, isn't she? My train of thought vanished suddenly at the warm sound of the old man's voice, and my eyes refocused on him with a look of undeniable confusion. It then occurred to me, as he gestured with a wide grin to a picture frame in the truck, that he'd assumed I'd been staring at it; a teenage girl, obviously the man's daughter, was bordered within its worn, maple panels. He was right, I'd give him that; the girl was indeed very pretty, with waves of flaming red hair hiding a pale and freckled face matched by a crooked smile. The glass holding her in place was scratched, hazy, and fingerprinted, making the frame look as though it was a window into another time. After another moment of inspecting the photograph, I nodded and turned quickly away, deciding I might as well get this all over with.

– *Water the garden.*

February 27th, 1999. The sad numbers were carved beneath my father's first name, middle initial, and last name I refused to claim. Exactly twenty years ago he had died, drunkenly leapt off a bridge, and only three weeks before my first birthday. He'd gone and fucked it all up, left my mother to sob and scream and convulse each night for ten long years, no matter how much held her, smoothed her hair, or wiped away her tears. I was an inadequate consolation prize, something petty and worthless that simply reminded her of what she used to have.

The singsong twang of an unknown musical instrument drew my head away from the small, plain gravestone at my feet. As I casually stole a glance over my shoulder the corners of my mouth turned down in a frown, the grave keeper's daughter stood only a few feet away with a violin held tightly against her neck. She cradled the stiff, lifeless thing like a tiny newborn infant, nuzzled her face against its mahogany wood and gently trailed the bow back and forth across its strings. It was gorgeous, really, the way she'd delicately coaxed such a lovely sound from the small, wooden object. I remained silent for a long time; expecting her to eventually notice my presence, I inwardly debated what possible reasons she had to be out here.

What are you doing? I asked her finally. She spun on a heel and curtsied to me, which prompted an arched, skeptical eyebrow to spike high into my forehead. The dark wood of her violin contrasted wildly with the off-white ivory color of her sundress and she twirled its bow deftly between her fingers as she smirked at me, her silver eyes twinkling.

Everyone enjoys company and a bit of music, don't they? she'd spoken softly, but her voice rang like an old wind chime. I crossed my arms over my chest and wrinkled my nose at her, snorting at her positively bizarre behavior. I wondered to myself why the grave keeper's daughter found it necessary to play other people's dead relatives her violin, and why she didn't seem the least bit cold when the dark clouds above still threatened to spill their contents. Why should being dead make any difference? she trilled again.

I wasn't entirely sure how to respond, so instead opted for a change in subject.

Shouldn't you be helping your father? It was a stupid question; I could tell by the way her thundercloud eyes flashed at me, amused, she obviously thought it was quite ridiculous that I'd mentioned her father. She didn't comment any further than allowing her smile to spread wider across her narrow face, and she twirled closer to me with her violin held under her chin again. Her first note was high and strong, and the collection of those following was strung together perfectly. They started off quick and choppy, the different notes biting argumentatively at one another, before they gradually blended into a smooth, silky rhythm. The girl bent over my father's lonely grave as she drew out the song from between the strings, and I couldn't help but feel as though she'd poured the sound straight from her instrument and into a puddle upon his resting place. She'd gotten close enough to me that the sickly sweet scent of her hair flooded my nose, and as I averted my awkward gaze, my body stiffened and my lower jaw dropped away from the rest of my face.

A band of sunflowers had pushed themselves up from the grass; their bright goldenrod color against the cold gray stone burned my eyes. It was impossible, some sort of illusion, and as I turned to interrogate the mysterious girl my mouth was left ajar and noiseless. She had disappeared.

The sunflowers stretched gleefully up at the early afternoon sky, and they swayed in the nectarous rays of sunshine breaking through the cloud cover. They were just as much alive as I was.

– *Dust and vacuum the living room.*

I stood outside the grave keeper's tiny shack of a home for quite some time and waited for him to emerge. Eventually, confusion and impatience won out and I strode forward to rap a fist against the old door. Dried flakes of paint dropped off when I knocked. I thought I could hear the aged man making sounds from inside – he seemed to have heaved himself up from a chair – and his steady shuffling brought out a creaking from the whiny floorboards.

Your daughter, came my pointed, angry voice as soon as he opened the door, You really need to keep a better eye on her. His face glowed pleasantly at me, despite the fact that his brows had knotted above his eyes.

You must be mistaken, I haven't a daughter! he said brightly in response, and his ash-gray eyes wrinkled as he smiled up at me. At a complete loss for words, I pushed past him and searched the man's surprisingly organized surroundings, searching for something, anything to prove him wrong. At last, I found the tiny, handcrafted frame.

His daughter was caught there mid-laugh, framed by the light-colored wood, a mustard-yellow bundle of sunflowers gathered up in her arms. My eyes jumped back and forth between the grave keeper and the photograph, and as he made the connection his grin widened noticeably.

Oh, young man, that isn't my daughter! he assured me with a throaty chuckle as he patted a thick, knobby hand upon his swollen belly. I couldn't help but notice that when he looked up to face me, the sadness that brimmed in his beady eyes betrayed the continuous smile plastered upon his face.

That's an old picture of my wife, son. She died twelve years ago.

– *Call your mom.*

As I pulled into the driveway, Bentley was still poised in the window. The two of us sat fixated for a long time, just watching each other through the glass as we'd watched each other earlier that morning. His small head bobbed impatiently against the curtains and his strangely knowing eyes gave me the same uncanny feeling as Bright Oaks.

It struck me that after all of this I should call my mother.

Umber! I could imagine her answering after the first ring, as though she'd been waiting fervently by the phone for the moment I finally called. Her voice would be forcibly pleasant, as though the past twenty years hadn't happened and she wasn't upset by my disinterest for keeping in

touch. *Honey, are you doing all right? Are you and Marci living together?*

I'd grudgingly take the time to assure her I was fine, to tell her about the flat Marci and I had moved into, about the two cats and the backyard and Bentley. I would pause, still haunted by my encounter in the graveyard, and eventually, after a bit of prompting, I would tell her about that too.

Her tinkling laugh would catch me off guard, causing me to frown into the telephone. And then she would explain – with a faint smile woven into her words – about all the stories I would tell her as a young child of my father; how kind and funny he was, how much fun I had when he came to visit, how much I wanted to be just like him when I grew up.

You loved him so much, my mother would say, with a hint of painful admiration recognizable in her voice. *And all this time I thought you'd never even met him.*

*Photography &
Artwork*

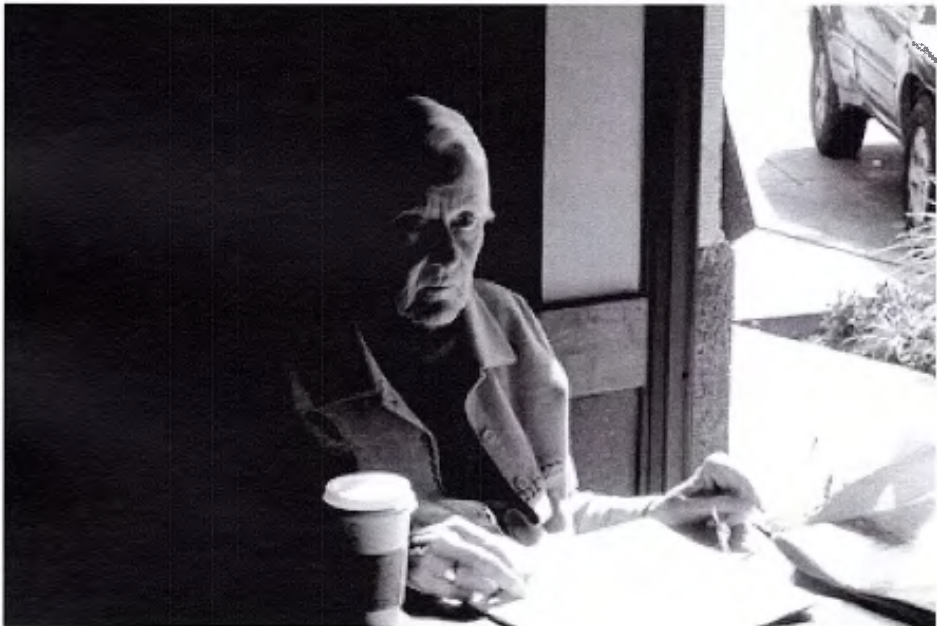


“Eyes On You,”
by Courtney Jackson (2012)

- Photography -



“Deafheaven” by Matthew Grant Arnson (2013)



“Finding the Light” by Kady Olikier (2012)

-Artwork-



“James Dean” by Davis Gerber (2014)

- Artwork -

Issue no. 25



SUPER POETS!

Emily Dickinson!

Phillis
Wheatley!

Edgar Allan
Poe!

Sylvia Plath!



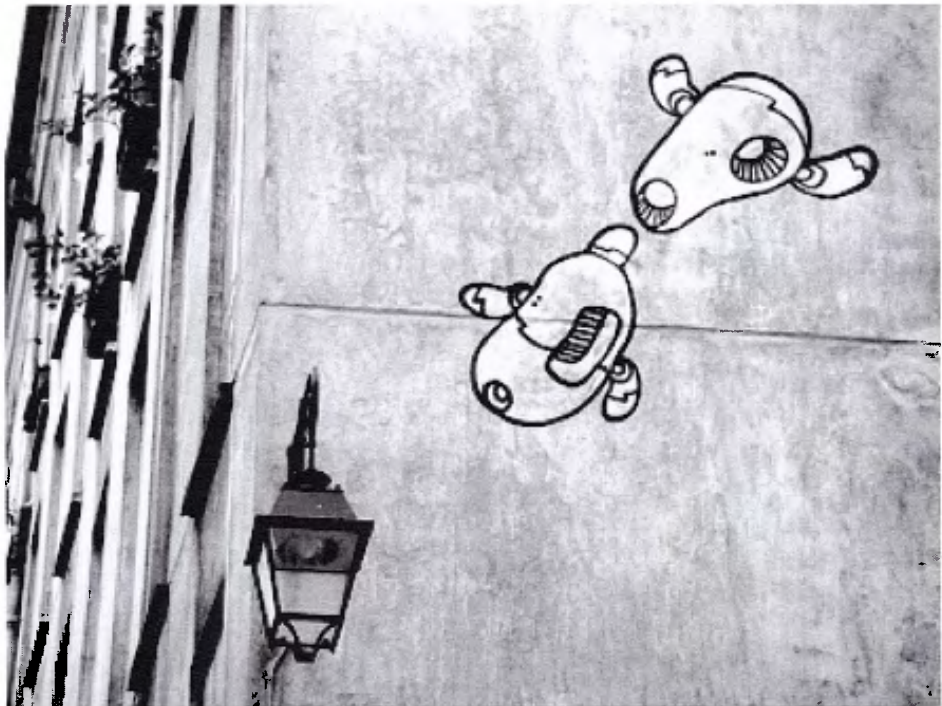
Whittier's Reflection Inside!
Dot Parker: Just what IS her Resume?!
Plus: Robert Frost Finally Picks a Road!

"Super Poets!" By Catherine Faris King (2012)

- Photography -



“Sunrise” by Julia Ellen Spruill-Smith (2012)



“Untitled” by Julia Ellen Spruill Smith (2012)

Freshman Writing Contest: First Place Winner
The Heroine's Dilemma:
Snow White's Dynamic Stupidity or Belle's Sedentary Intelligence?
By Julie Sánchez

Because fairy tales were written to instruct young children (girls in particular) in the proper social customs, storytellers have traditionally aimed to create virtuous, beautiful and kind heroines, often in that order. However, a fourth option, intelligence, remains largely omitted from most tales. In stories such as "Bluebeard," the question of intelligence presents itself thematically as a dangerous feminine tactic for the destruction of men. Although described as intelligent, Belle, the heroine of Jeanne-Marie Leprince DeBeaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" presents no such threat. Audiences consider Belle a strong female character because DeBeaumont informs them of Belle's education, literary prowess and fondness for learning, while emphasizing her docility and kindness. The Brothers' Grimm Snow White, meanwhile, exhibits no personal attributes other than her naïveté and physical beauty. This has led to Snow White being referred to as a "stupid" character. Such a comparison between the two characters cannot possibly be made because the two characters grew up in both different time periods and under different social standards.

Belle and Snow White provide each other with perfect literary foils. In "Snow White," the heroine escapes her royal life once aware that her wicked stepmother wishes to kill her out of jealousy, hiding out with seven dwarves until rescued by her Prince Charming. Beauty becomes the prisoner of the Beast after heroically volunteering to take her father's place in a grim bargain and ultimately, through her goodness, changes the Beast into a prince. The Grimms portray Snow White as an exquisite, if airheaded, beauty in distress, helpless to the cruelty wrought upon her. Belle, on the other hand, reigns as a heroine of substance who bravely sacrifices her life out of filial devotion and singlehandedly transforms a beast into a prince. However, such summaries deceive. Though De Beaumont initially depicts Belle as a strong, virtuous young woman, this impression plateaus and then declines as Belle succumbs to her captor's charms; Snow White plays the role of helpless child at the beginning of her story, but in facing death and hostility, grows from her ordeal into a stronger young woman. Although Belle does not evolve during the course of her story, she does remain consistently kind and intelligent, while Snow White, though apparently not as intelligent, takes courses of action which drive the plot of her story. Both heroines are equally worthy female role models, but in their own way.

The differing definitions of beauty between the stories affect the readers' perceptions of the characters as strong or weak. In De Beaumont's original story as recounted in Maria Tatar's *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Belle's beauty emanates from the fact that she is "better behaved" (32) than her sisters. Because of this, De Beaumont immediately biases her audience into deeming Belle the better role model. The thirty lines detailing Belle's virtue easily dwarf the four devoted to her good looks. Eliminate those four lines from the story and the effect is negligible. Belle's good heart earns her the crown, diminishing the

importance of her beauty to merely an auspicious accident. The Brothers Grimm, on the other hand, emphasize Snow White's physical appearance to the extent that it overwhelms any other personality traits the heroine may possess. So striking are the young princess's features that her would-be assassin cannot carry out his duty and the Dwarves cannot bury Snow White once she appears dead. Snow White's story warns of the dangers that abound from the potent cocktail of greed, jealousy, and competitiveness present in Snow White's stepmother as she becomes enslaved in the ceaseless feminine quest for beauty. Snow White exists solely to provide a contrast to her jealousy. Most authors portray Snow White as kindhearted in order to justify her outward attractiveness, but such efforts often read like an afterthought. Snow White's goodness, while a boon to the moral aspect of the story, does absolutely nothing to further the plot as Belle's virtues do in "Beauty and the Beast." Because the Brothers Grimm define beauty as exclusively external, Snow White seems shallow and one-dimensional compared with the almost Christ-like Belle.

Belle's knowledge and morality alone, however strong, do not necessarily make her an admirable character. To DeBeaumont's credit, readers laud Belle as a positive literary character for both her believability and reliability. Though DeBeaumont showers her heroine with praise, this does not come at the expense of omitting Belle's flaws. For example, although Belle conveys a notable amount of confidence, she martyrs herself for others more than is either necessary or even humanly possible. Once her family falls into poverty, for example, Belle dutifully resigns herself to drudgery so her spoiled sisters can continue their lives of ease. When Belle's father divulges the Beast's grim bargain to his children, Belle sheds no tears; she actually expects to die in her father's place, stating immediately that she is "prepared to risk [the Beast's fury]" (36) to prove her filial devotion. Later, however, Belle must "force herself to appear calm" (36) when faced with the gravity of her decision. Belle has been groomed to be so unquestioningly and cheerfully giving, however, that she accommodates even the men who throw her life into turmoil.

The inordinate amount of pressure heaped upon Belle seems to severely impair the heroine's sanity. By the end of De Beaumont's story, Belle exhibits all the symptoms of the psychological disorder known as Stockholm Syndrome. Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) defines Stockholm Syndrome as "a victim's emotional bonding" with his or her abuser, a relationship which, indeed, Belle develops with the Beast. Common symptoms of Stockholm Syndrome include "Victim having positive thoughts toward abuser" (Belle learns to see the Beast as kind), "Victim begin[ning] to agree with their abuser" (Belle reminds the Beast that he is not a monster and that she has met "men more monstrous" (38) than he), "victim learns to appease abuser" (Belle "dresses up in magnificent clothes"(41) to please the Beast), and "Bonding leads to conflicting feelings" (Belle cannot but wonder why she has not agreed to marry the Beast as he lies dying.) Ultimately, Belle sacrifices her freedom and sanity for a Beast. While the Beast surely treats Belle more kindly than his name would otherwise imply, as stated by Harvard Medical School psychologist Dr. Carolyn Newberger in the 2001 Disney exposé *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*, the Beast's behavior is "without question, frankly and horrifically abusive." Belle's "virtues" have blinded her to

the horror of her situation, rendering her character a shell of the heroic force it could have been.

Snow White's character flaws conversely serve to make her a less annoying character. Snow White very obviously lacks Belle's informed intelligence, if only by omission on the part of the author. Snow White expresses not even a semblance of a personality beyond her beauty. However, Snow White is not shallow. She has been repressed by the years of abuse at the hand of her stepmother. Bruno Bettelheim's allusions in *The Uses of Enchantment* to the themes of the "oedipal desires of father and daughter" and the accompanying "mother's jealousy which makes her wish to get rid of the daughter" present in "Snow White," are contrivances. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's essay "Snow White and Her Wicked Stepmother," also compiled in Tatar's *Classic Fairy Tales*, "the Queen's hatred of Snow White...exists before the looking glass has proved a reason." (293) In other words, the Queen does not hate Snow White for her youthful good looks. Rather, she loathes the fact that Snow White will always be the King's unchallenged favorite. After all, Snow White is both his only daughter and his only heir. Logically, the Queen's hatred for Snow White commenced when Snow White was but a baby. All her life, Snow White received a relentless torrent of abuse from the woman who should have been her mother figure. Understanding this lifelong hatred, Snow plays the role of "dumb bunny," as poet Anne Sexton describes the girl in her poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," as a defense mechanism. By donning a vapid persona, Snow White conveys the message that the Queen should not by any means feel threatened; the two women are not, nor shall they ever be, in the same league. What began as a tactic for daily survival eventually consumes Snow White's very being and thus, becomes her personality. If anything, Snow White embraces her vapidness because it is literally all she has.

Somehow, though, a life of unabated fear imbues Snow White with the ability to hone her innate survival skills. When petitioning asylum from the Seven Dwarves after they discover her in their house, Snow White may not be able to offer much more in return than an indefinite period of indentured servitude, yet consider: Snow White had the sense to seize upon her chance to flee the Queen's homicidal intents, which, if the Grimm version is any indication, took her "far far away" (86). Belle, as characterized by De Beaumont, would never do this. Additionally, Snow White's bargaining with the Dwarves displays a knack for negotiation; she knows what she has to offer and volunteers it as a means to an eventual end, which is escaping the wrath of her stepmother. Although it is tempting to decry Snow White's decision to become a domestic to seven men as reinforcing archaic, negative female gender roles, one must remember that Snow White is a product of her time, which, presumably is anywhere between the Renaissance and the nineteenth century. In that context, what Snow White has to offer itself is remarkable for a woman of her social standing. That Snow White, a princess, even knows how to cook or clean or sew reveals that either someone commissioned lessons for Snow White or Snow White taught herself these skills. Both possibilities reflect well on the princess. Furthermore, that Snow White was even willing to humble herself in that manner shows that she contains substance

and determination to survive. Unlike Belle who is “not all that attached to life” (36), Snow White does everything within her power to affirm hers, revealing a fighting spirit beneath the layers of demure ignorance.

As the story concludes, Snow White exhibits certain strengths Belle does not. Snow White willfully chooses to marry the Prince who rescues her, while Belle, for all intents and purposes, marries the Beast out of guilt. At her wedding reception, Snow White ultimately vanquishes the Queen by preparing a torture device for her abuser tantamount to those with which the Queen had thrice tried to murder the innocent Snow White: while the Queen tried to kill Snow White with such feminine items as a strangulating corset and a poisoned comb, Snow White has a pair of red-hot iron shoes prepared for the Queen, in which she is forced to dance until dead. Belle similarly saw her wicked sisters justly punished, but not of her own volition and at the hands of another. While Snow White unquestionably lacks Belle’s intelligence, Snow’s utilization of her own stupidity to her advantage indicates an inherent sense of self-preservation and an aptitude for accruing “street smarts.” Such activity casts Snow White in a more proactive light than Belle and, as such, she becomes the better-developed character.

What trends in breaking the cycle of stupidity Snow White began, however, the heroine in Charles Perrault’s *Bluebeard* perfected. Mme. Bluebeard, the intrepid female protagonist of Perrault’s dark, “anti-fairy” tale seems to be a blend of both Belle and Snow White in both what happens to her during the story and what events she causes to happen. Indeed, the very *Bluebeard* story itself hinges on traditional notions of stupidity and what makes a character stupid. In the story, a wizard disguised as a nobleman called Bluebeard courts a family of three young women, none of which feel any attraction toward him. He marries each daughter in rapid succession, after which each disappears. The youngest, however, manages to discover her sisters’ location once she becomes Bluebeard’s bride: a bloody chamber filled with the dismembered body parts of her two sisters. The two girls perished because they entered the chamber against their husband’s wishes, betraying his trust. Like Belle, the youngest girl survives because she keeps her wits about her as she explores her husband’s home. Ultimately she saves her sisters and destroys the evil Bluebeard in the process, but not without having to admit that she both made a mistake in becoming involved with Bluebeard. Madame Bluebeard finally redeems her momentary lack of judgment through the clever plan she devises to escape which involves both deception (getting Bluebeard to unwittingly smuggle her sisters out of the castle) and arson (setting the castle on fire with Bluebeard and his cronies inside.) “Bluebeard” is something of an anomaly of a fairy tale in that every character at some point or another plays the fool. The first three of Bluebeard’s wives were foolish in marrying the sinister wizard posing as a lonely aristocrat in the first place. In the end, the villain plays the fool when Madame Bluebeard’s passing her husband’s test renders the man powerless to his wife’s bidding. Like Belle, however, Madame Bluebeard exhibits wit and powers of logic. Like Snow White, Madame Bluebeard also knows how to use her husband’s perception of his wife as docile and simple-minded to her own advantage. Additionally, she mirrors Snow White’s

commitment to survival at all costs.

Madame Bluebeard's actions seem closer to Snow White's character than Belle's. While Belle would have died in order to save her sisters, Snow White would not only have rescued her family, but, like Madame Bluebeard, made sure other young girls would not fall victim to Bluebeard's villainy again by administering justice. Madame Bluebeard redeems her foolishness in marrying Bluebeard by overcoming this naïveté and maturing into a courageous young woman.

The story of Bluebeard itself hinges upon themes of foolishness versus wit. Margaret Atwood brilliantly explores this in her appropriately titled short story "Bluebeard's Egg." The protagonist, a middle-aged businesswoman named Sally, contemplates her husband, a heart surgeon named Ed, and, though she does not admit it aloud, she believes him to be stupid. The first several pages of this story illustrate how Ed's "particular brand of stupidity" fascinates the "smug" Sally. Sally muses on how she feels about Ed's stupidity. Sally likens her feelings to Ed to the fondness of men for "dumb blondes." The dumbness of these young women exudes a certain endearing vulnerability and evokes a natural urge to protect such a helpless creature that causes men to be attracted to them. Sally understands this because this is how she feels about Ed. In turn, this sentiment also accounts for Snow White's enduring popularity as a princess as well as her reputation as a "dumb bunny." Audiences cannot bear to see such an innocent creature hurt and thrown so violently to the wolves as Snow White is, yet at the same time, her childlike innocence overshadows the fact that Snow White relied solely upon herself for survival. Snow White only comes across as stupid because, unlike Belle, no author ever explicitly depicts her as "smart." Readers must extrapolate this latent intelligence themselves. Indeed, Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg" explores the concept of latent, almost invisible wit and its opposite, latent stupidity. Though Atwood establishes Sally as a well-educated, modern woman, ultimately, Sally's cleverness could not aid her strained marriage and home life. At a dinner party, Sally happens upon Ed in a compromising position with Sally's best friend Marylynn. Ed characteristically appears unaware of Sally's discovery, acting nonchalant after all the guests return home, leaving Sally to feel foolish. This causes Sally to question everything she had previously thought she had figured out about her husband and her marriage. Sally reevaluates her opinion of Ed and love and realizes that she may have been the fool the whole time. As Maria Tatar writes in an article for "Children's Literature" "In theory, the opposition of simple/clever... seems to serve as a useful guide for classifying fairy tale heroes. Yet in practice, it is not always easy to determine whether a figure exhibits a low or high level of intelligence."

Of the two princesses, Belle remains the better role model; Snow White, however, emerges as the more dynamic character. Belle's incessant devotion to serving others, though admirable, does at times suspend one's disbelief to the point of breakage in that it is entirely unrealistic to expect the little girls of De Beaumont's intended readership to behave in such a sinless manner. Similarly, Snow White's highly abnormal aversion to maturity and critical thinking provides an equally unwise example to the children of the Grimm Brothers' audience. However, while the moral of "Beauty and the Beast" implies that girls should

sacrifice their own personal interests for the sake of a convenient, loveless marriage, Snow White takes a different angle with the implication that one should escape unhappiness at all costs, for life is too precious, a moral echoed in the story of Bluebeard. Both Madame Bluebeard and Snow White exhibited the sense to escape their attackers, while Belle allowed herself to be seduced by hers. Snow White's usage of her own vapidly as a defense mechanism proves that she may not be as "dumb" as she appears. In her own way, she displays intelligence. In Belle's own words, "A fool never knows that [s]he is stupid." (38)

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Freshman Writing Contest: Second Place
Arcadia: A Means to Embed Math in the Soul

By Nicole Yamasaki

Everything moves from hot to cold. This notion, known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics, determines the destiny of Tom Stoppard's characters in his play titled *Arcadia*. Stoppard cleverly transports the reader back to the 1800s and forward to the 1990s, as the main characters attempt to understand the concept of determinism. Moreover, Stoppard ingeniously synthesizes characters from the past with those of the present in the final scene. The play's quest for knowledge and mathematical main character—Thomasina Coverly of the past—work to effectively “embed mathematics in the soul” according to the requirements of paramathematics as described by Apostolos Doxiadis.

In “Embedding mathematics in the soul: narrative as a force in mathematics education,” Doxiadis explains how storytelling can be used as a means to increase motivation and interest to learn more about mathematics and its history. He discusses how it is important that the reader identify with the story's hero (Doxiadis 9). The hero's journey must be filled with emotion (positive and negative), and the reader should be able to empathize and connect with the main character (Doxiadis 8). In addition, the story is a journey with a beginning and an end (Doxiadis 9). Throughout the journey, the hero experiences obstacles and successes, and meets his/her mentor. He emphasizes there is a vital correlation between “a writer constructing a narrative” and “a mathematician proving a theorem” because both involve a hero's journey (Doxiadis 13). Hence, the main character/mathematician is in search of something. He claims paramathematics is a discipline all on its own; it gives meaning to mathematics and makes obvious its relevance to and connection with society and history (Doxiadis 17). Most importantly, the narrative must discuss mathematics in a passionate manner to spur interest in the subject itself. If successful, paramathematics will strengthen the value of mathematics by having its audience comprehend mathematics in its historical and philosophical contexts (Doxiadis 18). This is the primary mission of paramathematics.

Towards the end of his address, Doxiadis lists four main characteristics needed to successfully “embed mathematics in the soul.” In his first point, he notes it is essential to study paramathematics in school—at the elementary and high school levels (Doxiadis 20). Here, the main objective is to amplify the attractiveness of mathematics and portray the subject as pertinent to our society. Using paramathematics allows students to be exposed to a different side of mathematics, as opposed to the standard technical side. Second, Doxiadis describes using paramathematics to make mathematics memorable. Teachers should incorporate mathematical narrative into their lesson plans; it should be used as a tool to help students remember the technical aspects of mathematics. However, he also argues that mathematical narratives should be the main focus of teaching because the majority of students will fail to remember certain technical matters. In other words, narrative is a more efficient way to make mathematics unforgettable and influential.

Doxiadis' third characteristic also focuses on how to use mathematical

narrative to teach students in the early years of their education. Doxiadis emphasizes that mathematical narrative should be used to facilitate the transition from the world of storytelling to the methods of abstract thinking, when students first enter school. By incorporating stories into mathematics, students are more involved, interested, and curious (Doxiadis 21). According to Doxiadis, students can actively take part in the hero's journey by actually carrying out mathematics and developing their problem-solving skills. Students work together (just like real mathematicians) to complete the "quest." By combining the best of storytelling and mathematics, mathematical narratives "embed mathematics in the soul." In his final point, Doxiadis identifies the incorporation of biographical and historical information as a characteristic of paramathematics (Doxiadis 22). This way, Doxiadis claims students will better understand the process of mathematical discovery and the actual mathematicians behind the theories, theorems, and equations they are studying. They will begin to find patterns and discover how mathematics is meaningful and relatable. When students learn the background information behind all of the symbols and techniques they are using, they will have a deeper understanding and better appreciation for mathematics. Thus, the mathematical narratives will follow the journey of how the mathematician (hero) achieved his mathematical discovery/proof (journey) (Doxiadis 23). Most importantly, in his final point, Doxiadis emphasizes the significance of teaching mathematics in a way that makes its purpose and worth readily obvious to students.

Arcadia satisfies Doxiadis' four characteristics required to "embed mathematics in the soul." His first characteristic focuses on incorporating the non-technical side of mathematics and on making the subject more interesting. This is seen through the play's mathematical prodigy. Thomasina Coverly is a true mathematical genius; the play follows her intellectual studies from age thirteen to the night before her seventeenth birthday. She is of the upper-class and is privately tutored by Septimus Hodge. Thomasina is extremely curious and intelligent; however, her innocence of carnal knowledge proves to be quite humorous. At the start of the play, Thomasina questions Septimus about "carnal embrace," instead of working on finding a proof for Fermat's last theorem—as Septimus instructed her to do so (Stoppard 5). Nonetheless, Septimus responds, "Carnal embrace is the practice of throwing one's arms around a side of beef" (Stoppard 5). He is, after all, her tutor. Thomasina's curiosity extends beyond the carnal level; her intellectual curiosity is immense. She asks Septimus a thought-provoking question: "When you stir your rice pudding, Septimus, the spoonful of jam spreads itself round making red trails... But if you stir backward, the jam will not come together again... Do you think this is odd?" (Stoppard 9). This is the start of her unknowingly developing the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Finally, Thomasina firmly believes that future actions and states can be predicted using mathematical equations. Consequently, Thomasina's spirit of exploration and discovery make mathematics fascinating and show students the non-symbolic side of the subject, as described by Doxiadis. Thomasina's discovery is historically and socially relevant; students will find her thought-process behind the Second Law is relatable. She takes an event people are familiar with—the idea that a mixture cannot be un-mixed—and concludes it is due to a

loss of heat. Her curiosity serves as the basis for her studies in mathematics. It teaches students how inquisitiveness drives great mathematicians to create the ideas and formulas written before them in their textbooks.

Arcadia also meets Doxiadis' second point. He states the second characteristic of paramathematics involves combining narrative mathematics and mechanical aspects of the subject to make mathematics unforgettable (Doxiadis 20). In the play, the narrative's historical relevance is evidenced by Thomasina's attempts to prove Fermat's theorem. At the time Stoppard wrote this play, Fermat's famous last theorem had not been proven. Septimus explains to Thomasina the note Fermat left in his copy of *Arithmetica* and how (at that time) it kept people perplexed for over a hundred years (Stoppard 10). *Arcadia* never spells out exactly what Fermat's last theorem entails, sparking the reader's own curiosity and leaving him/her to research this reference. Nonetheless, after Thomasina gives up trying to prove the theorem, she parallels Fermat's margin note, adjusting it to her own discoveries: "I, Thomasina Coverly, have found a truly wonderful method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their numerical secrets and draw themselves through number alone. This margin being too mean for my purpose, the reader must look elsewhere in the *New Geometry of Irregular Forms* discovered by Thomasina Coverly" (Stoppard 47). Thomasina comically and creatively parallels Fermat's format; however, the reader would not know this unless he/she researched this. Thomasina's work can be used to teach students about Fermat and his famous theorem. This lesson can be incorporated with a lesson on the Pythagorean Theorem, since this form of equation is the basis of Fermat's theorem. Additionally, students will find the Pythagorean Theorem and Fermat's story are unforgettable, after reading Thomasina's spin on the famous quote. The story is memorable and interesting. When students learn about background information and understand where equations come from, math is no longer about strict memorization.

Stoppard's play also fulfills Doxiadis' third characteristic, the idea that mathematical narrative can ease students into understanding abstraction through stories, and problem and puzzle solving (Doxiadis 21). Stoppard cleverly and effectively constructs his play to lay heavy emphasis on how significantly the two time periods mirror one another. Throughout the play, characters of the past and of the present work effortlessly to reason why the world does not follow a deterministic nature. The play focuses on a few specific "heroes' journeys." Thomasina (and later Septimus) tries to disprove determinism, Hannah Jarvis of the present tries to determine who the Sidley Park hermit is, and Chloe Coverly of the present also tries to explain chaos theory. All of the characters' quests teach valuable skills in problem solving, reasoning, and collaboration—all elements of mathematical deduction and thinking. For instance, Thomasina uses trial and error and collaborates with Septimus (her mentor) to determine how to use iteration and why Newton's equations are reversible (as opposed to the heat equations) (Stoppard 91). Iteration, as explained by Valentine Coverly, is the process of
"work[ing] out a value for y ...[and] using that as her next value for x . And so on. Like a feedback. [Thomasina] is feeding the solution back into the equation, and then solving it

again. Iteration, you see” (Stoppard 48). Thomasina recognizes patterns to create equations that require iteration to give results that, when graphed, depict forms found in nature (Stoppard 51). Students can follow along with Thomasina’s journey to discover iteration; it is especially helpful for students studying algebraic equations. Thomasina’s “rabbit equation,” called such because “it eats its own progeny” is a highly memorable story (Stoppard 82).

Arcadia complies with Doxiadis’ fourth characteristic with the “teaching of mathematical biography and history with a paramathematical slant” (Doxiadis 22). The story of Thomasina’s life, and how her life affects present day (in the story) are extremely important aspects of the story that give mathematics true meaning. It is this establishment of determinism as a major motif that makes Stoppard’s conclusion to the story profoundly ironic and chaotic. This is primarily evinced by Thomasina’s random death: when Hannah discusses Thomasina’s rabbit equation with Valentine she casually notes that Thomasina “was dead before she had time to be famous...[she] burned to death” the night before her seventeenth birthday (Stoppard 80). While this may not be news to Hannah, this bit of information is undoubtedly shocking. Thus far, the plot has been fairly determinable in nature; however, her sudden death adds a great deal of chaos to the plot. How ironic is it for the character who is able to create a feasible equation for the future and a theory for heat flow to be killed by a candle flame—a source of heat! Therefore, her death is extremely significant in demonstrating how unpredictable and disordered life can be (even for such an intelligent young girl). Moreover, the fact that Thomasina pressures Septimus into waltzing with her the night she dies, evokes an eerie feeling—she almost seems to accept that she cannot control her fate with equations. Like the true hero she is, Thomasina has come to terms with how the achievement of her goal has affected her life. Without incorporating Thomasina’s death, *Arcadia* would not have ended with the same startling effect. As a result, the play gives a much deeper meaning to mathematics. It stresses the mathematician’s (hero’s) main issues and how she reaches and fulfills her goal.

Emotions run high in the play, especially towards the end with the revelation of Thomasina’s sudden death. Thomasina is such a relatable character; she is humorous, curious, witty, and intellectually driven. Because she is so relatable, the reader cannot help but empathize with her unfortunate death. The play realizes Doxiadis’ greater goal because it gives meaning to mathematics and Thomasina’s discoveries. As the two time periods come together in the final scene, Stoppard demonstrates how the Sidley Park inhabitants of the past encounter the same issues—“sex, literature, and death” as those of the present day (Stoppard 77). Furthermore, Stoppard highlights the differences between the Romantic and Classicist stance on each of these timeless issues through the juxtaposition of certain characters. For instance, Thomasina embodies Romanticism; Septimus Classicism. Hannah the Classicist and Gus the Romantic are also juxtaposed throughout the play. Because these “couples” have such differing viewpoints, it is significant that the entire play ends with each pair dancing together. Hence the coming together of the time periods and Romantics and Classicists emphasizes how history repeats itself—the present is faced with the same concerns as the past. Overall, Thomasina’s mathematical discoveries have taught her the

value of living in the moment.

Stoppard truly gives *Arcadia* a thoughtful and meaningful conclusion that demonstrates how problems and situations are timeless. The conclusion effectively “embeds mathematics in the soul” and gives mathematics an obvious meaning and role in society. Additionally, Stoppard’s ending implies a didactic idea which must be taken into consideration: The mathematics and sciences must be in balance with the emotions and intuitions because, even in chaos, order can exist.

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Freshman Writing Contest: Third Place (tie)
The Power of Words:
How Lincoln Captivated the Nation in 3 Minutes
By Esther Leon

“Four score and seven years ago...” The words all too familiar preface a speech too little appreciated. President Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 address at Gettysburg has been memorialized and analyzed for the past 148 years, yet the general public remains unaware of its philosophical and stylistic subtleties as well as its impact on American culture. In a mere 272 words, Lincoln encapsulated the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, paid homage to the brave soldiers of the Civil War, set the nation on a renewed quest for freedom, and demarcated a paradigm shift in the way speeches were to be delivered thereafter.

To understand the Gettysburg Address one must first understand Lincoln’s view of the Civil War. In Lincoln’s eyes, the war concerned more than states’ rights – it was a battle for the preservation of the Union and the continuance of an ideal laid down by the founding fathers. It is evident in Lincoln’s letter to Horace Greeley that his priority as Commander in Chief was to save the Union, for he specifically states that this is his “paramount object”; even abolishing slavery fell second to its continuance (Wills, 168). But Lincoln did not place the preservation of the Union first merely out of a sense of presidential duty – he recognized the unique foundation of this young country, that it was perhaps the only country that had a chance to bring about equality for all. In his address to Congress in 1862, Lincoln referred to America as “the last best hope of earth” (Lincoln, final paragraph). Such faith in America was based on the words upon which it was founded, the words of the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty & the pursuit of happiness... (Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence).

To Lincoln, the Civil War was being fought to maintain the Union in the hopes of eventually reaching this ideal set forth in the Declaration.

But his ideas were not necessarily the same as those of the men who fought at Gettysburg. For the common soldier, the issue was much less philosophical. Some viewed the war as a battle to free the slaves, which was a noble cause but considerably more basic than Lincoln’s high-minded concepts. Others saw it as a fight to save the Union – but only because the South did not have the right to secede, not because they recognized how precious the Union was in the journey toward equality. Lincoln was a rare man, a visionary. He was an Enlightenment thinker. His thoughts “transcended” the common man’s in that he sought to attain good for *all* men; he sought to fulfill the proposition that *all* men are created equal. Lincoln was indeed a transcendentalist, and the ideal he wished to obtain was the one laid out in the Declaration. Not many saw the Civil War as so crucial in the struggle for the freedom of mankind as Lincoln did...not even the soldiers who sacrificed their lives at Gettysburg.

However, that does not diminish their role in fighting for this great cause. Lincoln held the Union soldiers' courageous actions in such high esteem that he admonished the crowd at Gettysburg to not let these men die in vain, but to instead dedicate themselves to the soldiers' "unfinished work." The living owed the dead a rededication to the "great task remaining." And what was that task? Bringing about a new birth of freedom, one that ensured that "government of the people, by the people, [and] for the people" would not perish (Wills, 263). This hearkens back to the Declaration of Independence. Again, we see Lincoln promoting the Declaration's ideas of fundamental freedoms, and we find the theme of "all men" in Lincoln's use of "people," an all-inclusive word.

Lincoln's choice of words was by no means an accident. As Gary Wills points out in *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, President Lincoln took great care in writing speeches. It takes a master to produce such an effective, meaningful speech as the Gettysburg Address in under 300 words. The brevity of the address made it much more memorable than a long oration such as Everett's, and Lincoln still managed to get his message across eloquently. He did not need to chronicle the battle in order to commemorate the soldiers' deeds. Instead, he says:

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate – we can not hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here (Wills, 263).

No names are mentioned, no places, no dates, yet these three lines somehow say it all. There is a power in Lincoln's words that stirs a deep emotion, and, in a matter of 20 seconds, the soldiers who gave their lives at Gettysburg are eulogized in a remarkably profound way. As if to bind up the nation's wounds after so horrific a battle, Lincoln proceeds to console and rejuvenate the American people by pointing them to the cause for which these men "gave the last full measure of devotion" and encouraging them to pursue that mission.

A key factor in Lincoln's ability to move people is his creative writing style. He does not simply say, "In 1776, our fathers founded a nation based on freedom," or "we can not dedicate this ground." Oh no! He adds delightful touches which show a genuine love for words and a desire to please the listener. He varies his sentence length and structure to avoid a monotonous pattern and uses triplets to create a natural rhythm in his speech (Wills, 157-158, 171-172). The result is that Lincoln's words fall upon the ear as captivating poetry and flow down to strike the heart.

Lincoln's style of speech at Gettysburg marks a revolution in the way speeches were delivered (Wills, 148). A model of the former style would be the two-hour, dedicative oration Edward Everett gave only moments before Lincoln's address. In *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, Wills remarks, "Everett's talk was given at the last point in history when such a performance could be appreciated without reservation. It was made obsolete within a half-hour of the time when it was spoken" (Wills, 148). From that day to the present, audiences seem to welcome political speeches that are shorter (though not quite as short as three minutes) and

written in terms that the common man can understand rather than in ostentatious, scholarly terms. Also, people today still try to find that “wow” factor in speeches that Lincoln was so good at delivering. Thus, the Gettysburg Address triggered a paradigm shift in oratory.

It is incredible how influential a three minute speech can be. Abraham Lincoln clearly demonstrated the power of words through his Gettysburg Address. He combined an excellent writing style with noble ideals to produce an unforgettable speech that still inspires those who hear it today. Ironically, the words that Lincoln said the world would “little note, nor long remember” have echoed across the globe for nearly a century and a half and have been canonized among the greatest ever spoken in all of American history.

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The Survival of Pakistan

By Anthony Akkawi (2014)

In contemporary politics, the success of a state heavily depends upon the cohesiveness and affinity of its constituent nation or nations. Countries are formed through a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, a shared language, religion, history, political ideology, economic interest, geographic proximity or security concern. The possession or lack thereof of these attributes between different peoples determines their likelihood of enduring or faltering as a unified political entity. A profusion of cultural, governmental and international power struggles posed by both domestic and foreign nations has placed the continued existence of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as a unified state in serious jeopardy. Since virtually all of Pakistan's challenges are somehow rooted in cultural tensions and conflicts, the cultural level of analysis is the most appropriate for evaluating its prospects for survival. Because the distribution of power is central to Pakistan's internal and external challenges, it is imperative that its situation is analyzed through the realist theoretical approach. The trials of the Pakistani state, at the basest level, are rooted in its creation and cultural heterogeneity.

Since its inception, Pakistan has been beset by domestic antagonism and conflict. The country was artificially created by the former British Empire through the compilation of sparsely related Muslim peoples from the western and eastern reaches of South Asia (Talbot 1). The country was originally divided into West and East Pakistan, separated by over one thousand miles of hostile Indian Territory (Talbot 2). Moreover, the remaining western half of the Pakistani state is subdivided into the distinctive provinces of Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (Lieven 259). Far from being a durable, centralized nation-state, Pakistan more closely resembles a loose, fragile confederation, marginally united under spiritual and security interests. The provinces of West Pakistan and East Pakistan constituted their very own, highly insular nations, possessed of their very own histories, languages and versions of the Islamic faith. As a collection of administrative units, Pakistan has struggled to consolidate the power of its many nations and allocate its resources toward common goals. The respective nations of the state have either failed or refused to accept the formation of an all-encompassing nation. Because of the immense diversity of the state, Pakistani nationalism is frequently trumped by regional loyalties.

In spite of the multiplicity of different cultures found within the republic, each strongly emphasizes the dedication of the individual to his or her own family, tribe and traditions. Many Pakistani's live under any number of "feudals," or nuclear politico-economic networks centered on land ownership (Lieven 17). Broadly defined, feudals are informal sociopolitical structures centered on the authority of powerful tribal chiefs (Lieven 17). A person living within a given area is obligated to pledge his loyalty, along with his financial and material faculties, to a local chieftain or other central authority (Lieven 17). In exchange, the chieftain, with the aid of his gentry, redistributes the resources granted to

him and guarantees a measure of protection against rival feudals (Lieven 17). Members of different tribes are raised to regard one another as competitors over wealth, property and power. The conventional means of enriching or empowering oneself is by helping his or her feudal seize upon the assets of rival feudals. It is through their sponsorship of mistrust and competition that the feudals have caused much of the local and regional strife and disunity that harrows the state.

The competitiveness and traditionalism of feudal tribes have helped solidify the separation of many Pakistanis from one another. Chieftains derive and exercise power to “defend against predatory rivals,” whether by negotiation or physical violence (Lieven 215). The devotion of individuals for their feudal chiefs stems from a combination of racial, religious, and regional affinities reinforced by the fear that other feudals may instigate the seizure or destruction of their holdings. Amidst this state of mutual distrust, the use of negotiation is often discouraged. Peace talks may signal weakness and cowardice amongst the feudal leadership, inciting predatory campaigns over territory and property (Lieven 216). Any perceived cession or lapse of power within one’s domain only invites additional seizures and losses. The schisms between different feudals are so immense that over sixty percent of all marriages are between first cousins (Lieven 16). This reveals the extent to which feudal loyalty stifles the amalgamation of Pakistan’s different nations. If Pakistani’s are so withdrawn into their feudals that they will only rarely marry outside of them, it is clear that future generations will be solidly infused with a sense of tribal loyalty and separatism. Furthermore, the apparent inability of local tribes to peaceably interact and integrate demonstrates how daunting it is to maintain unity and order within the state as a whole. In a sense, the many power struggles waged by feudals have rendered the Pakistani state weak and disunited. However, feudal tension and isolation is partly buffered by Islam, which has served as a sort of channel between the different tribes.

Islam has been both a source of cohesion and conflict for the Pakistani Republic. As British India came under the control of domestic powers; Muhammad Ali Jinnah led the Muslim League to carve out a democratic, “land of the pure” dominated by Muslims (Lieven 53). The efforts of the Muslim League were rooted both in practical and ideological objectives. The Islamic faith commands a rigid devotion to the ummah, or “universal world community of Muslims” (Lieven 44). Thus, Islam divided the world into two broad Islamic and non-Islamic nations. In theory, all Muslims were ideologically tied to a common, albeit bitterly contested nation. The central goal of the ummah is to impose proper Islamic conduct and uniformity within any given region or country. However, negotiations with Indian representatives had painfully highlighted the “numerical weakness” of the Indian ummah against the Hindu population (Lieven 57). If Jinnah hoped to sell the concept of democracy to the ummah, it was vital that he alleviate any fears that the Hindu population might overpower the Muslim population at the polls. While democratic rule was valued, Muslims, of any denomination, could not suffer a threat to the ummah’s supremacy. Thus, the division of India was a competition for regional dominance waged by Hindus and Muslims. The deliberation that created Pakistan is a testament to the sectarian consonance

of its people. Even so, the same forces that forged the Republic may also prove to be its undoing.

The continued membership of Pakistan's provinces hinges on the ability to reconcile religious differences and the conflicts that spring from them. The eastern and western halves of the Republic owe their separation to longstanding sectarian strife. The Bengalis practiced their own hybrid belief system, infused with Islamic and Vedic elements that were "open to innovation and change" (Milam 15). The more orthodox Muslims of Western Pakistan had developed an enduring contempt for Bengalis, who they regarded as neither "fellow countrymen [nor] even true Muslims" (Lieven 11). Furthermore, East Pakistan's comparatively liberal faith was "conducive of democratic growth" and strongly contrasted with the unyielding authoritarianism that gripped West Pakistan (Milam 30). Sharing a weak religious and ideological commonality, Pakistan and the Bengali Nation never developed a sense of unity. Pakistan's two halves soon found that they could not arrive at a consensus on any of the issues pressing against their state. As time drove on, their relationship descended into a state of parasitic enmity.

Resentful of their incompatibility, the resentment between Pakistan and East Bengal gave way to active discrimination. The West Pakistani government used its military superiority to coerce financial and natural resources from its eastern counterpart (Baxter 1). The sole reason for the West's insistence on retaining its union with the East was that it could use it to draw upon additional assets. As the one-sidedness of their relationship became increasingly obvious, East Bengal struggled to dissolve its union with Pakistan throughout the 1960s (Baxter 1). In the face of brutal repression and thousands of casualties, the Bengali people drew upon military support from India to win their independence from Pakistan and declare the state of Bangladesh (Baxter 2). In addition to "[undermining] the Army's reputation and influence," the secession of East Bengal devastated the Pakistani economy and traumatized fledgling nationalistic sentiments amongst Pakistani peoples (Milam 31). The independence of East Bengal represents the challenges that continue to threaten the unity and existence of Pakistan. Just as the western and eastern halves of Pakistan were averse to one another, the numerous administrative units of modern Pakistan continue to reserve enmity for one another. Under enough pressure, the numerous nations, provinces or administrative units of the Republic may choose to dissolve the state and form their own independent nation-states. Thus, the self-interest and heterogeneity of the Pakistani people serve as the Republic's greatest weaknesses. This sense of tension and detachment between Pakistan's constituent nations is channeled through the structure of government and its policies.

The power struggles resulting from cultural divides have manifested themselves in the weakness and turbulence of the Pakistani government. Over half a century after its creation, the government has yet to agree upon a universal code of law. The state's judicial system is divided between secular, religious and tribal laws (Lieven 87). Virtually all government-led efforts to create and impose a uniform code of law have garnered limited popular support. In defense of feudal power and cultural preservation, local laws

have dominated many Pakistani regions over national ones (Lieven 87). Although tribal and customary codes of conduct have proven the most popular amongst Pakistanis, many choose to utilize all three justice systems, often in conjunction with one another, to their advantage (Lieven 87). The ability to choose and interpret the laws that one wishes to follow has made wealth and power the major determinants of judicial victory. While this may lend some limited degree of power to the individual, it deflates the authority of government. In many cases, the individual, tribe, or business with the most money, connections and prestige can gear the court to adopt its preferred principles (Lieven 84). In this way, the stronger party significantly raises the chance of winning the case. Thus, the Pakistani judicial system has helped perpetuate the power of the country's elite. Even when a single system of law is adopted, each has been shown to bear its own shortcomings.

The Republic's secular state-sponsored laws and courts have long been plagued by ineffectiveness. Many of the state's laws were left over from the period of British rule and have not been translated from English to Urdu, the state language (Surendra 249). In addition, Pakistan's nations speak over four languages and countless dialects while displaying dismally low literacy rates (Surendra 251). Many courts are chronically understaffed with crucially needed translators, making the process of deliberation painstakingly slow. Relatively simple cases may end up taking months, or even years to complete, since laws must be repeatedly translated and interpreted. In addition, the judicial system struggles to build precedence, since few laws retain a particular interpretation for long (Surendra 251). Therefore, it is difficult to build precedent upon which to judge future cases and the trial of cases lack consistency in their outcomes. Also, obeisance and reliance upon the authority of secular laws has been looked down upon. According to the principle of *izzat*, or fundamental honor, an individual or family is obligated to use violence when confronted by certain types of insult or injury (Lieven 89). Those who resort to the state's court systems are perceived as being dishonorable and too weak to defend themselves (Lieven 89). Instead of discouraging future infractions, one becomes a prime target for more aggressive, predatory tribes. The *izzat* accounts for the overall unpopularity of state courts and needless violence that may accompany seemingly trivial disputes. In addition, the *izzat* demonstrates how the culture of Pakistanis can permeate the function of government, alongside other levels of analysis. While Islamic law boasts a greater degree of popular support amongst Pakistanis, it has also been the cause of more havoc.

Since Pakistan was formed by and for Muslims as a distinctly Islamic state the role of religious principles in law and governance is undeniable. Tens of millions of Pakistanis from all of the nations of the state adhere to "Sharia law," the Muslim code of conduct in all areas of life (Lieven 118). Pakistan itself was founded on the objective of uniting the Muslims of British occupied India under some variant of Sharia law (Crossette 1). The shared Islamic faith of the Pakistani people has helped the state mitigate the tension stemming from its immense diversity. In spite of the many regional, tribal and ethnic conflicts that continue to fester within the country, Sharia law has been a crucial source of unity and temperance

for many citizens. However, it is vital to realize that in spite of Sharia's popularity amongst Pakistanis, they do not follow a monolithic version of the Islamic faith. The Republic's nations follow Sunni, Shia, and Sufi denominations, variously intermixed with one another and countless local sects (Crossette 2). This multitude of religious groups means that no single sectarian code of law can be effectively imposed upon the Pakistani people. The differences between Islamic denominations have been a source of endless friction between the state's nations and political figures.

Disputes over the denominational characterization of Pakistani law has accounted for much internal conflict. In July of 1977, the pro-Sunni General, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, had ousted the conservative Shia Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Joseph 1). After having the prime minister executed, General Zia assumed power as Pakistan's supreme leader and imposed distinctly Sunni laws and regulations upon all Pakistanis (Crossette 2). General Zia's reforms had predictably inspired support from the majority Sunni population while disaffecting substantial Shia, Sufi and secular minorities. Religious enmity towards the general's laws had reached such a point that numerous factions within the state had sought to depose him. In August of 1988, Zia-ul-Haq's reign had ended following his mysterious death in an unexplained plane crash (Crossette 1). Although the reasons behind his death are disputed, Pakistani opinion polls reveal the popular belief that he had been killed by the Shi'ite Zulfikar Group (Crossette 2). The rise and fall of General Zia reveals the competition for religious dominance over the state law. Zia's reign also demonstrated the instability and inconsistency of Sharia law. This instability reflects upon the overall weakness of governmental institutions and the existence of cultural skirmishes between Pakistan's numerous nations. While secular and Sharia law have been sources of tension, tribal laws have inspired even greater discord within the state.

Local tribal laws have more often caused the ruination rather than the resolution of many local disputes. Nearly all of Pakistan's provinces have hybridized the laws of the state and local tribes with the creation of jirgas, or informal councils of local notables. (Lieven 94). The Larkana District's chief of police has told Kings College Professor Anatol Lieven "You can contain tribal violence by prompt police action, but to solve a conflict you always end up with a jirga" in a 2009 interview (Lieven 94). Pakistanis in all provinces show a preference for their jirgas over state courts. Many believe that the courts, in addition to being notoriously ineffective, will obligate either party to abide by state laws that are contradictory to their own. However, as much as the courts have been inefficient, the jirgas have been outright destructive. Many Pakistanis, especially in rural areas, follow the Pashtunwali tribal code, which strongly emphasizes Badal, revenge, and Namus, honor (McGinty 1). The Pashtunwali is notorious for its sanctioning of "honor killings," and gang rape as a suitable penance for both material and moral infractions (Mojab 2). Rather than restraining the continuation of violence, the Pashtunwali has exacerbated minor disputes into long-standing rivalries and feuds. This ethical code, amongst numerous others, have driven Pakistan's regional, religious and ethnic groups farther apart than closer together, troubling the state with even greater discord. The detachment between the states rival

cultures has produced weak, limited and harmful laws, translating into a comparably anemic government.

The variability of the laws coupled with the antagonism between Pakistani nations have kept the state's political institutions dreadfully underpowered. The depth of ethnic, regional and religious differences has kept "all [parties] from succeeding" to gain an absolute majority in government (Lieven 2006). Many of Pakistan's governments, whether democratic or authoritarian, have been marred by political gridlock (Lieven 2006). In a sense, the elected portions of the government are a microcosm of the country as a whole. As much as Pakistan's different nations are demarcated, so too are the politicians that each elects. Rather than fostering cooperation and progress, democratic elections have left the state perpetually mired by partisanship. Frustration with the weakness of the state has resulted in over four military coups since the country's founding (Belfiore 1). Three of these coups were headed by military leaders from the Punjab, the most populous, wealthy, militant and Sunni nation in Pakistan (Belfiore 8). The predominance of the Punjab has earned the loathing of the Republic's weaker nations, who feel underrepresented and overpowered by their membership to the Pakistani state. Thus, the Pakistani people are pressured between languishing under ineffective elected officials and oppression under military dictators or secession from the state altogether. These secessionist sentiments are central to the challenges and weaknesses of the state. However, the treacherous balance of power in South Asia has helped keep Pakistan united, in spite of the divisions between its nations.

The crucial factor that has bound the nations of Pakistan together is their collective fear and antagonism towards rival nations. Since its establishment in 1947, the Pakistani Republic has fought four wars against India in an effort to wrest the majority-Muslim regions of Kashmir from Hindu control (Shah 1). In addition to repeatedly exhausting the nations human, material and financial resources, the "Kashmir Wars" have repeatedly undermined the democratic government in favor of the Punjab-dominated military (Shah 2). On the one hand, the Kashmir Wars represented a series of shrewd, though unsuccessful attempts to bolster Pakistan's relative power in South Asia. On the other hand, they represented the exertion of ethnic and religious intolerance from the nations of Pakistan onto surrounding countries. Even after the wars over Kashmir, domestic factionalism continues to injure and derail the Pakistani state's foreign interactions.

The Pakistani nations are fiercely divided over their country's participation in the war on terror. Large segments of the Pakistani community are strongly opposed to America's battle against the Taliban and condemn their state's support for it (Lieven15). In the words of world-renowned philosopher Ernest Gellner, many zealous western Pakistanis are captivated by the "demanding, puritan unitarianism" under which the talibs and many other Afghans live (Lieven 424). Rather than seeing them as a terrorist network, the Taliban is perceived as a body of model Muslims. In turn, the Americans are seen as unwarranted, heretical occupiers. The resistance to the war effort posed by Pakistanis has impeded the escalation and resolution of the conflict. While keeping in touch with regional and religious loyalties, Pakistan's international challenges have been worsened.

Over the last couple of years, many Pakistanis have felt increasingly endangered by hostile forces. Since the U.S. invasion, the Afghani Taliban has risen to become the world's most prolific producer, processor and exporter of opium (Simpson 1). Large volumes of Afghan heroin continue to pour into Pakistani cities, making them the Taliban's top customers (Simpson 2). The expanding opium trade has afflicted the state's labor supply and increased already high crime rates. Because of this, the urban dwellers and religious liberals towards of eastern Pakistan have grown vehement in their demands to eradicate the Taliban, along with its drug network (Simpson 2). Thus, the rural west and urban east have locked horns over whether the state should oppose or support the Taliban's influence in Afghanistan. The western Pakistanis views the Taliban as an extension of the ummah, and therefore a proponent of Islamic power. However, the Eastern Pakistanis. However, recent developments in South Asia are likely to maneuver the Pakistani nations against the Taliban.

The sense of endangerment experienced by Pakistanis has begun to transform into one of encirclement. In early October of 2011, India had "pledged more than \$1.2 billion in reconstruction aid to Afghanistan" alongside military assistance as a means of "[keeping] friendly governments in Kabul as a bulwark against archrival Pakistan" (Dhar 1). Within days of this agreement, Pakistan experienced waves of confusion paranoia that swept over all of its nations. The religious conservatives who were previously certain of the ideological unity between their respective nations are now baffled at the apparent fraternization between their worst enemy and supposed ally. Pakistani officials from across the board have begun "[accusing] India and Hamid Karzai's government of covertly supporting militants" as a means of indirectly combating Pakistan (Dhar 1). In a sense, the religious conservatives that have opposed the war on terror have indirectly exposed themselves, along with their more secular counterparts, to Indian encroachment. Thus, Pakistan's international challenges have stemmed from its national divisions.

The realist theoretical approach and cultural level of analysis best explain the challenges faced by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. At all of the country's analytical levels, the organizations and persons involved are frequently engaged in a struggle for power and dominance. Because of the many spiritual, ethnic and linguistic differences that characterize the Pakistani people, the country is more of a heterogeneous collection of culturally defined nations, rather than a single homogenous nation-state. These cultural groups constantly vie for power over one another and draw the central government to further their interests. In this way, the Pakistani government is afflicted with the rivalries of its constituents, leaving it in a state of instability or gridlock. Next, the dysfunctional state of government translates into harmful, culturally charged international policies, such as the Kashmir Wars. Thus, the cultural rivalries between Pakistan's nations have significantly shaped and impacted the country's governmental and international levels of analysis.

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**The Words that Brought Them Life:
Examining Death and Silence in Forming Identities in Chican@ Literature¹**
By Emily Baeza (2013)

Chican@ Literature exists dually in the lands of the living and of the dead. “The bones of the ancestors were believed to be part of the Mexican soil beneath their feet, and the dust contained this sacred essence of the *antepasados*,” (Rivera 69). The dust that is inherent in the books we have read lies in the stories told as they are passed on in the ritual of storytelling. These authors must choose between a form of death and life, facing sacrifice within the ritual. From losing heritage, language, a grasp of the present, to finding life in storytelling, Chican@ Literature presents a simultaneous experience of both worlds of the living and the dead. This celebration of storytelling through the recognition of death is what Tomás Rivera would refer to as a total experience. “Chicano writing as a ritual of immortality, of awe in the face of the ‘other’—a ritual of the living, in sense, a fiesta of the living,” (Rivera 439). The works we have examined can be viewed as acts of salvation, part of the ritual to preserve the life of the stories that are left after a person has passed. To celebrate death is to celebrate the ritual of storytelling by giving life to these snapshots of time, the *memento mori* that leave landmarks of existence throughout history.

John Phillip Santos’s *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation* is a book of mourning, melding the worlds of the living and the dead to present a story of mystery and intrigue. The death of Juan José by the river is loaded with speculation of murder and suicide, causing the Santos family to suppress this event in their family history. The family’s efforts to silence his death ultimately lead to casualties in culture and heritage for the Santos. Seeking the truth, Santos himself travels to the land of his grandfather’s time to sort through the silences of this mystery and creates this book as a result. Thus, our first instance of death interacting with life as a death was the motivation behind the creation of this memoir.

Silence, a form of death through suppression, is that what kills Juan José in the moment of his death and also keeps away the life of his memory. *Preocupado* with feelings of grief and loss, he goes to the river bordering the places from his past and his present and is overcome with sadness and heartache. “If we stand still, we become spiritually sick, and eventually, whether in the space of one life, or over the span of several generations, this sickness will overwhelm us,” (Santos 49). His stillness, the death of his integration into the modern culture of his family’s newest generation leads to his ultimate disintegration from reality. Unable to cope with the chaos of the present, he dies a soul torn in a timeline.

“The dead are always with us, but the dead can be lost, too,” (Santos 45). In the same breadth, Juan José can exist past physical expiration through the perpetuation of his memory. However, as the family tries to avoid controversy, the mere memory is suppressed as well. Finding a way to unite with his origins, Santos is able to bridge two cultures and generations and bring life to his Chicano identity. But to be able to understand the world, he

¹ Chican@ is a “a quick way to simultaneously address Chicanos and Chicanas alike.”

had to view it through the chaos of life and death breathing the same air. *El Inframundo* is another idea of chaos and connections: “a portal out of history and into eternity, encompassing all of the gradations of darkness and light, where all of the dead dwell, simultaneously beyond, and among, us,” (Santos 49). Santos must visualize this invisible topography of the deceased in order to cross the bridge that will bring him closer to Juan José. In addition, Juan José dying at an entrance to the *Inframundo* (the river), leaves speculation to wonder if he has truly passed or if the secrets surrounding his death never crossed over with him. This work leaves the reader of the present time feeling open to existing simultaneously with people from the past “in flux, as if the [miasma was meant] to capture the churning energy of a creation where all things are connected in a single great motion,” (Santos 29).

Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* is an account of a young girl adjusting to her life in the barrio. However, this book can also be read as the depiction of the death of Esperanza’s youth. “You’re a liar. They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong. Only his dirty fingernails against my skin, only his sour smell again. . . . The red clowns laughing their thick-tongue laugh,” (Cisneros 100). This juxtaposition of the loss of youth occurring in a place of childhood wonder, like the carnival, is a representation of the novel’s integration of life and death. In order for Esperanza to grow and mature, a part of her innocence and youth must perish in the arms of her attacker. This is a sacrifice the developing Esperanza must face. However, she is troubled with a desire to become a participant in the murder of her youth. “I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt. Not this way, every evening talking to the trees, leaning out my window, imagining what I can’t see,” (Cisneros 73). As she matures, Esperanza wants to have the experiences she observes through her relationship with Sally—a girl whom boys find attractive. Esperanza finds Sally to be “beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away,” (Cisneros 89). Sally’s apparent control over men is what makes Esperanza attracted to her, to the power. Not until she is dominated by the man at sexual desire, blaming her for leaving her on her own that night. “I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate,” (Cisneros 89). Through maturity, Esperanza must allow her youth and innocence to die in order to choose life with her mature self. This conversation between life and death in Cisneros’s novel is vital to the construction of identity for Esperanza.

The inclusion of death in the formation of identity can also be seen in Demetria Martinez’s *Mother Tongues*. The death involved in the act of planning is what formulates a relationship in this novel. Plagued with constant thoughts of the future, the novel’s protagonist, Mary, has no basis of reality in the present time. Her mother tongue is dead within her past, repressed by her dedication to being future-orientated. Mary romanticizes the possible relationship she will foster with José Luis, a refugee from El Salvador she is to care for. “And I was one of those women whose fate is to take a war out of a man, or at least imagine what she is doing so, like prostitutes once upon a time who gave themselves in

temples to returning soldiers,” (Martinez 4). Before she even meets José Luis, Mary anticipates becoming a possible love interest for this refugee by whimsically pointing to a “once upon scenario.” What is more, this is all against her boss’s advice not to get romantically involved. She is more concerned with her own romantic possibilities than the well-being of the refugee in this present moment. Disconnected from her mother tongue, Spanish, Mary struggles to conjure up the words that will break the silence with her guest. Resembling Juan José’s inability to wrestle with the chaos in Santos’s novel, Mary cannot embrace the silence in this interaction. By repressing her mother tongue, she is allowing a part of her past to die while simultaneously allowing herself to become preoccupied with the curiosity of things to come. “My Spanish was like an old car, parts missing or held together with clothes hanger wire, but it got me where I wanted to go. Scraping together some words at last, I asked this man who had fled his country, did the airline serve you peanuts or a meal?” (Martinez 11). Mary is detached from this man who has just experienced a death of homeland, and selfishly claws at filling the silence between them.

“Soledad died many years ago, but I have her letters. He, too, is dead, but I have a tape recording of a speech he gave, the newspaper accounts of it, some love poems. El Salvador is rising from the dead, but my folder of newspaper clippings tells the story of the years when union members disappeared and nuns were ordered off buses at gunpoint (a country with its hands tied behind its back, crying, *stop, stop*. These and a few journal entries are all I have left to fasten my story to reality. Everything else is remembering. Or dismembering. Either way, I am ready to go back. To create a man out of blanks that can never wound me.” (Martinez 12)

Mary is not only encountering a death of mother tongue, but also the remains of a man’s life. He himself is part of the remains from a country “rising from the dead,” stricken with a people and culture murdered in a time of extreme adversity such as the El Salvador Civil War. Mary seems to be scared of this past and therefore suppresses the idea of war, along with her Spanish tongue. The cultivation of death with life in Martinez’s novel adheres to the use of death in the formation of identity for Mary. The act of remembering, or dismembering, is in itself a collision of the worlds of the living and of the dead, conceiving of desirable ideas of love poems and restraining the undesirable from surfacing. Mary would prefer to “create a man out blanks,” leaving the memories she does not want to be forgotten and dead while filling the story of their relationship to create the man she wants him to be. “Some women fall in love in advance of knowing a man because it is much easier to love a mystery,” (Martinez 16). Mary met José Luis already knowing that she would fall in love with him. By being future-orientated and planning their relationship before its conception, Mary chose a path that brought death to other possibilities for the two. She later refuses to learn his real name, claiming that she needed him to remain a stranger for the sake of preserving a preference in the bedroom. Mary is the Almighty, as her actions in this novel selectively give life to what she wants to be true, causing any memory of reality to die.

The act of writing and recording history with the intent of being published is one of careful selection, giving life to the stories the writer wants heard and killing off the

alternatives in the process. To write the history of a people or culture, time or place, is to offer proof of existence for generations to come. Jimmy Santiago Baca's "Coming into Language" offers an example of the way in which history is presented can affect someone. Forced into the field of hard labor over schooling, Baca dropped out after years of being punished for not understanding English in class. At the age of seventeen, Baca was illiterate, leaving him to feel unseen and unable to truly express himself. Baca felt his forced silence choke him to the point of vulnerability, scared to die in the silence. "Behind a mask of humility, I seethed with mute rebellion," (Baca 4). The catalyst for his journey into language happened when he was able to connect with the history living in a book he discovered entitled *450 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*. "...Those pictures confirmed my identity...this book told us we were alive. We, too, had defended ourselves with our fists hostile Anglos, gasping for breath in fights with the policemen who outnumbered us. The book reflected back to us our struggle in a way that made us proud," (Baca 4). This depiction of life in pictures saved Baca from a possible death incurred by silence. He finally recognizes himself as part of the community of revolutionaries in the book, helping to shape his understanding of self. The transportation of stories of los antepasados, or those who have walked before us, creates a bond with language for Baca who is finally able to break free of the numbness of silence. The combination of life and death present in Baca's short essay push against each other to create inner conflict for Baca. The tension created between death in silence and life in language presents a noble fight for the chance to tell stories. Baca leaves this story as a hero, a champion of language as revolutionary as the images of Cesar Chavez and Padre Hidalgo he found in the history book.

"I wrote to sublimate my rage, from a place where all hope is gone, from a madness of having been damaged too much, from a silence of killing rage. I wrote to avenge the betrayals of a lifetime, to purge the bitterness of injustice. I wrote with a deep groan of doom in my blood, bewildered and dumbstruck; from an indestructible love for life, to affirm breath and laughter and the abiding innocence of things. I wrote the way I wept, and danced, and made love."
(Baca 11)

Realizing the injustices thrust upon him through his biased schooling and incomplete history books, Baca chooses to engage in the storytelling of his heritage in order to aid others who may find themselves trapped in silence like as he was. He finds life and his calling as an avenger, dedicated to providing life for the stories in history that died at the hands of the textbooks' authors.

Experiencing a similar liberation in language is poet Lorna Dee Cervantes. Her work "Refugee Ship" is one of identity crisis, resembling the formation of identity in the Chicano@ movement. "Orphaned from my Spanish name", Cervantes is disconnected from her own mother tongue (line 6). Cervantes realizes the liminality of existing in one language when she rightfully belongs in two. She is put up against the strictly traditional figure of her grandmother, "Bible at her side" (line 3-4). Comparing herself to "wet cornstarch" in her grandmother's presence, Cervantes cannot be fully absorbed by either the culture of her family or the one her mother wanted for her (line 1). Cervantes points to her mother as the

reason behind the death of her language, leading to her inability to connect with her reflection—a reflection of bronzed skin and black hair. Her mother's attempt to bring death to her daughter's heritage was done because she did not believe that her own culture could be integrated with the Americanized life she envisioned for her daughter. In order to bring back to life the language Cervantes desires, she must find a way that to allow her present and her family's past to exist simultaneously—the dilemma faced by people of the Chicana@ heritage.

Similar to Baca, Cervantes makes a direct correlation between language acquisition and identity. The poem closes with what seems to be Cervantes claiming her stake on her own identity: "The ship that will never dock./El barco que nunca atraca," (line 12-13). She transitions from being completely apart from her mother tongue to using both languages to identify her perpetual state of movement on the waves as a ship whose journey will never reach any one final destination. The ship is destined to float between the two cultures as Cervantes exists as a Chicana. This poem illustrates the possibilities of a cohabitation of cultures within an individual; languages and heritages can be resurrected and both can live in this new Chicana@ culture.

In contrast, the death of culture can be witnessed as part of the ritual. Tomás Rivera's ...*And the Earth did not Devour Him* is written over the course of one migratory year in correlation with the season of work the migrant workers follow. The integration of death and life is built more so on fear in comparison to the author works. Death is something that this family is trying to avoid, rather than embrace. In the ritual of placing a cup of water under the bed every night, the mother is attempting to appease the spirits so that they will bring her no harm. This distancing of life from death creates an air of fear that is also reflected in the section about el Diablo. Rivera says that the most tormenting thing about searching for this symbol of death is not that you will see him, but that because you were looking, you will be plagued with fear that he may show up at any moment. This illustrates how the characters in this novel shut away a visceral component of their heritage—death. As reflected in the very composition of the book, this creates a fragmented sense of identity, incomplete and driven away by fear.

The ritual of work has dominance in this novel and is the main motivation for many of the characters' actions. Death is, at first, viewed as a consequence in the section entitled "The children couldn't wait." Tormented with thirst, a young boy worker disobeys the rules and warnings telling him not to sneak over to the trough to quench his thirst. In an effort to scare the child and make a point, their boss fires his gun, with the sole purpose of giving him a warning, when the bullet hits the boy in the head, killing him. The shooter subsequently shuts the world out, shaken by his actions. He turns in towards himself and continues to lose his mind, unable to tell his story. The boy's death brings life to a calling of breaking the cycle of migration work. With the shooter's insanity, the youth in this novel also learn of the importance of storytelling. The cycle of work that motivates the novel overall is challenged in this instance. Dedication to work in order to survive has replaced rituals of heritage and culture. The death of these important aspects in the formation of a

cultural identity, too, allow for only a fragmented Chican@ self.

The conversation and the relationship between life and death is a fundamental theme of Chican@ Literature. In a universe wherein dualities are the bases for the formation of a cultural identity, it is important to examine the two and how they influence each other in these works. The dust of *los antepasados* is what motivates the ongoing ritual of storytelling as an act of preserving a history. Deaths are necessary in order to create new life, just as a phoenix is born from the ashy remains of its past life, Chican@ writers use the dust to spell out who they are.

Beauty is Power

By Charlotte Bailey (2013)

Society has always placed an importance on beauty. There are beautiful people on the cover of every magazine and in every film. One is taught to take pride in appearance, and movie stars, models, and fashion designers all set the standards for what beauty is supposed to look like. This concept is by no means new. Beauty has been important for centuries and the long eighteenth century is a prime example of how beauty and vanity ruled society. During that era being beautiful was especially important for women. Women found power in their youth and beauty. Much importance was put on favorable looks in the sixteen and seventeen hundreds and women used that to their advantage to gain some sort of control over their restricted lives. The more beauty a woman had, the more powerful she could be. She had the power over men who desired her. She could draw suitors in and have some choice in who she married. This power had a short lifespan since youthful beauty could not last forever, therefore they used it to their advantage while they had the chance. A woman's security was dependent on others and her goal was to find a husband who could provide that security. Putting an emphasis on maintaining good looks was not only due to vanity; it was an attempt to have control over one's destiny and perhaps even the destiny of others. It was a chance to for a woman to have control in a world dominated by men. This struggle for power was recognized by writers of the time. Alexander Pope wrote about it in his mock-epic *The Rape of the Lock*, creating a heroine who fights with femininity. William Congreve's play *The Way of the World* is an ideal comparison of youthful beauty with all its potential and what it becomes after years of age. Both of these works satirize vanity and its role in life but, as satire is supposed to do, they are jesting with truth. The writers recognize the realities of society and point them out with comedy to make the truth more palatable. Mary Leapor takes a very different approach in *An Essay on Woman*. Leapor recognizes the same truths that Congreve and Pope do but her essay is more serious. She understands that women use their beauty to try to obtain happiness and security but it is all in vain. No matter how hard a woman tries or how beautiful she is, her power will leave her with age. By analyzing these works with the help of articles pertaining to the text one can begin to understand how much of a tool that beauty was for women and how it was their weapon of choice in their fight for authority in their small, confined worlds.

Alexander Pope's mock epic, *The Rape of the Lock*, is the great tale of the cutting of a single curl. It satirizes the importance of purity, appearance, and reputation; three things eighteenth century society insisted upon. The epic also satirizes gender roles of men and women. In *Reversal of Gender in The Rape of the Lock*, Ralph Cohen of Duke University explores the idea of Pope recognizing the power women had over men and displaying this though reversing the roles of males and females. Men are found to be the weaker sex, while women take on the strong, heroic roles (Cohen 54). Cohen points out that men are associated with lap dogs four times throughout the piece. Lap dogs were usually owned by women, and if men are being associated with them in the poem, this suggests that women actually own men and can control them like dogs. Cohen states, "men become the housebroken possessions of the women, to blither at their command, to obey their every wish, and to faint before the displeasure of their glances" (55). Instead of the women being the fragile possessions of men, the roles are reversed and the men are seen as delicate, unable to control themselves while the women are the possessors of men with the ability to dominate. We see this most clearly in Pope's heroine, the fair Belinda.

Belinda is the glorification of vanity in *The Rape of the Lock*. In Canto II, she is described in all her glory as she is "launched on the Bosom of the Silver Thames" (II. 4). She is associated with positive qualities and without faults so that vanity may be seen as good. Vanity may be a good thing when it is associated with such a fine character. The line, "Oft she rejects but never offends"

(Demaria 636; Canto II ln.11) tells the reader that Belinda has the luxury to reject men because she has so many suitors. Men pine over her because of her desirable beauty. Belinda also has, “a sprightly mind” (636; Canto II ln. 9). She is intelligent and can understand how to be in control of her situation. She can think and strategize to get her looks to work to her advantage. Pope gives us a likeable female character which allows the reader to be on Belinda’s side and understand where she is coming from in her desire for control over her circumstances. Cohen brings to light, the fact that Pope, “associates Belinda...with the god of war and the god of cunning and trickery” (59). She is a warrior but she also has wit. Her beauty is a tactic which she uses to draw in men and obtain wealth, security, and happiness.

As part of the formula for the classic epic, there must be a strong warrior, and *The Rape of the Lock* is no exception. Belinda is not the typical warrior fighting with a sword on the battlefield, but she is nevertheless a fighter, defending her honor. Belinda’s “weapons” are items of vanity which symbolize how beauty is used in the fight for control. She uses her petticoat as a shield:

We Trust th’important charge the Petticoat:
 Oft have we known that sev’nfold fence to fail,
 Though stiff with hoops, and armed with Ribs of Whale.
 Form a strong line about the Silver Bound,
 And guard the wide circumference around. (642; Canto II. 118-122)

One must admit that the sight of Belinda holding up her petticoats in front of her as a shield is quite funny, but still it is her symbol of defending her honor. As for her sword,

And drew a deadly Bodkin from her side.
 (The same, his ancient personage to deck,
 Her great grandsire wore about his Neck
 In three Seal Rings; which after, melted down,
 Formed a vast buckle for his Widow’s Gown:
 Her Infant Grandame’s whistle next it grew,
 The Bells she jingled, and the Whistle blew;
 Then in a Bodkin graced her Mother’s Hairs,
 Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.) (650; Canto V. 88-96)

Her hairpin as her dagger again symbolizes vanity being used to control her destiny. Cohen points out that the bodkin is drawn from her side, which would have been the proper holding place for a dagger; another example of Belinda possessing the masculine qualities of the epic warrior (Cohen 57). Despite her great fight against the baron, she loses her lock of hair. Her Achilles heel is found and she is defeated. The loss of her curl means a loss of her pure reputation in society. It goes quickly, and with it goes her power over her life. She cannot control what people think of her because appearance is altered and the sharp eyes of society will surely notice. Beauty is a powerful thing, but it can disappear with one small alteration. The reversal of the gender roles makes the loss all the more powerful. Women are supposed to be the dominating forces, but in the end the hero still has her power and dignity taken away from her. This brings the reader back to the reality of the world. As Cohen ends his article, “This depiction of a world in which the sexes are backwards and nature is perverted from the ideal to its opposite becomes a major satirical device in *The Rape of the Lock*” (60). One understands that although women were finding ways to be noticed, they still depended on temporary good looks to capture attention and have a sense of worth in their lives. The satire makes humor out of a less than humorous reality.

The Way of the World, by William Congreve, demonstrates the understanding of beauty being a fleeting thing and is illustrated by the contrast of Millamant and Lady Wishfort. The importance of beauty being used to maintain a sense of self worth also comes in to play. During Congreve’s time, women couldn’t own any sort of property so the only thing that they could really value was

their looks. Their beauty was what made them worth something in their eyes and in the eyes of others. Just as a man gained authority through the worth of possessions, women gained authority with their valued feminine airs and youthful looks. The young Millamant is the perfect example of the charming young lady who has power over the men who desire her.

“Female characters in comedies of the period are often outspoken with regard to the sources of personal power and the means by which women retain it” writes Jon Lance Bacon in his article “Wives, Widows, and Writings in Restoration Comedy” (430). Millamant is one such character; a woman who tries to get what she wants and voices her opinion while still maintaining her charm and poise. In Act II, Scene V Millamant proclaims, “One’s cruelty is one’s power” (Demaria 546). She understands the importance of power and understands what it takes to get it. “One’s cruelty” is the indifference to men or the turning down of suitors while playing coy and hard to get. Millamant knows that if she is “cruel” she will have the upper hand and work situations to her advantage. Millamant is very clear with Mirabell in Act IV Scene V when speaking about how she wants married life to be. She gives him a list of things that must be maintained and things that he is not to do. It is a lovely scene between the lovers and it is endearing in how open she can be and how accepting he is because he is enamored by her. Bacon interprets this as Millamant wanting her own liberty and maintaining a sense of independence from her husband (431). He goes on to say that, “in 1700 it could not be a legal identity, affording her control of property; marriage took that possibility away from the single woman” (431). Millamant knows that a married woman takes on the identity of her husband and she does not want to completely lose herself. That is why she sets her ground rules for married life and why she does it while she is still young and beautiful. With her beauty and no attachment to a spouse, she can still get men to listen to her; she still has the power to control her destiny.

Millamant is the object of beauty. She is the ingénue of the play, although she is not as naïve as some. She is the youth that everyone wants and with that comes great power. She has the chance to manipulate and get all she can while she is still young. In addition in Act II Scene V she states, “...and when one parts with one’s cruelty, one parts with one’s power, and when one has parted with that, I fancy one’s old and ugly” (Demaria 546). Millamant bluntly states that with age a woman loses her good looks and her power over men. She can no longer get men to obey her every wish because they do not pine over the face of an older woman. As Charles R. Lyons puts it in his article “Disguise, Identity, and Personal Value in The Way of The World,” “what is valued in a world dedicated to appearance is the youth” (265). Unlike in today’s world, one could not erase time. Once a woman started to age, the game was over and she would have to settle with whatever she obtained in her days of youth. Lyon’s also comments on Millamant’s reference to the Suckling Poem and how it indicates her fear of Mirabell’s love fading as her beauty starts fading (267). Although he may say he loves her, if Mirabell is only in love with Millamant’s looks, then the love would eventually die and she would be left without love or beauty. She would end up like her aunt, Lady Wishfort, an older woman whose youthful beauty has left her.

The character of Lady Wishfort represents what happens when one no longer has power. Her looks have faded over the years and she no longer has the beauty to attract a suitor. All Lady Wishfort wants is love and she is desperate to obtain it. She tries to cover the signs of age with make-up but she exclaims that, “I look like an old peeled wall...” (Demaria 552; Act III, sn. v). It’s as if the make-up is plastered on her face and it cannot cover the obvious. As Charles R. Lyons says, “Wishfort’s reality is a decaying, barren old woman ‘painted’ in white varnish to stimulate the smooth texture of a young skin” (260). Her reality is a lie. She wears a mask in order to deny the fact that she no longer has anything of which she values or is valued by others. She has lost her beauty, which in turn has taken away any sort of influence over men. This loss has left her lonely and longing for someone to love her. Even if she had had a husband at one point, he is gone now

and she is left without the identity of a man to live under or her own identity as a woman known and desired by others.

Even though her good looks are gone, this does not stop Lady Wishfort from trying her hardest to seduce a man. In Act IV, Scene I we find Lady Wishfort contemplating how she will make a first impression on Sir Rowland. She thinks out loud as she goes from sitting to walking, to lying, to finally deciding to “loll and lean on one elbow” (Demaria 564). It is a ridiculous scene, but it is a perfect depiction of her desperation and how even the smallest details do not slip her mind when it comes to having a chance at love. As Lyons states, “In order to maintain her own sense of personal worth, Lady Wishfort must commit herself to the presentation of the illusion of youth, futile as the presentation must be” (260). Her efforts are in vain but, as mentioned before, she is committed to her fantasy and will not give up the illusion. Wishfort is Millamant’s dreaded future reality and although she is portrayed as a comic fool in the play, she also represents the truth of a woman’s power being only temporary and delicate. If one does not obtain love while one is young, then it is hopeless when one gets older; and even if one does find love, that love can disappear and one is left with nothing.

Mary Leapor takes a different approach to writing about the powers of women. She doesn’t use comedy to tell the truth, but bleakly writes in her *Essay on Woman* that women have no power. Perhaps Leapor takes a more solemn approach because she herself is a woman and has experienced firsthand the frustrations of being powerless in a man’s world. She understands that beauty is a short lived splendor: “Woman, a pleasing but a short lived flow’r” (Demaria 889; ln.1). A young lady may blossom and be thought of as very pretty by others, but flowers do not last forever. They wilt over time and the prettiness fades away. Lines five through ten state that a woman aspires to wealth and she will only get it if she possesses the type of beauty accepted by society. Money was indispensable, and if a woman wanted to be taken care of and be happy according to society’s standards then she must marry well. In order for that to happen she had to rely on her looks. Just like Belinda, if a woman had many suitors, she could choose whom she favored most and who she thought could give her the most “happiness.”

According to Leapor, a lady’s charms no longer mattered once she was married (889; ln.13-15). This relates back to Millamant’s fear of Mirabell tiring of her after their marriage. If he grows weary of her face and does not think her charming, then how will she keep his love and interest? Leapor goes on to say that beauty as well as wit will get you nowhere (25-32). Beauty may grant a woman some power in her life as an unmarried young lady, but it will leave her as she ages. Wit, although highly valued in the long eighteenth century, was of no help to women either because it was not appreciated by men:

The Men are vexed to find a Nymph so wise:
And Wisdom only serves to make her know
The keen Sensation of superior Woe. (889; ln.30-32)

Women had a very small window in which they had a chance to control some part of their lives. Wisdom was not found as attractive and wouldn’t help, and beauty could help but only for so long. This had to have put a great deal of pressure on young ladies as they tried to maintain favorable features that would ensure them some sort of security. By the end of her poem, Leapor bluntly states that there is no hope for women when it comes to maintaining the upper hand. She implies that power gained from beauty is only a passing thing and “unhappy woman’s but a slave at large” (890; ln.60). Like Lady Wishfort, women are not only “slaves” in the sense of obeying the rules set forth in the world of men, but they are also slaves to vanity. They must maintain appearances and even when they grow old, they can’t let it go. Even though women are cunning and have “head strong will” (890; ln.58), it doesn’t matter. A sense of helplessness is felt because Leapor offers no solution to the problem. No matter how well equipped a woman is for taking on the world, she is

still in a powerless position.

Vanity was essential to the women of the restoration era. It was more than just taking pride in one's appearance; it was a form of survival. It was crucial that a woman constantly maintained good looks so that she could be desirable. The eighteenth century woman had to make herself a commodity that men had to have and by making men want her, she had the upper hand. If she was smart she would choose her lover wisely and try to gain all she could-not because she was selfish or greedy, but because her destiny would be out of her hands once she married and grew older. Being beautiful became a strategy for women. Maintaining some form of self worth was vitally important, and the only way to do that was by putting on feminine airs and beguiling men to grant your every wish. Writers of the time were keen to shed light on this situation, and it was done by men and women. Both Pope and Congreve handle it with satire. They make people laugh at this societal flaw in order for them to recognize the truth. Perhaps both men use comedy because they can't relate to the situation themselves. Mary Leapor, on the other hand, can take her own thoughts as a woman and try to convey the realities of life to other women. Although Leapor gives a clear picture of the realities of womanhood, one cannot completely discredit women by believing that they had no power at all. Pope recognizes this in his reversal of gender by making fun of the fact that men are just lapdogs when it comes to the ladies of their affection. Women did have power through their beauty and they knew it. They also knew that all good things must come to an end, including youth and beauty. Finding power within traits that were so highly coveted by society helped young women have a say in their fates. Their beauty might have been a temporary thing, but they used it to their full advantage.

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Chaos, Destruction and Restoration – the World of *Germinal* through Souvarine’s eyes
By Apollonia Galvan (2012)

Emile Zola’s rich and engrossing work *Germinal* offers the reader an explicit look into the grueling lives of French coalminers, their dependent families and their attempt to strike against the oppressive powers that be during the 1860s. Zola’s writing style and illustrative language are not the only aspects of this novel that capture the reader’s intellect; his ability to present a microcosm of the varying social ideologies of his day make a substantial mark in understanding the piece’s fascinating characters. From socialism to nihilism, these colorful personas exemplify these philosophies to their core with each of the miners seeing their own political beliefs as a way of ameliorating their burdensome state. But one distinctive personality who is prominent above all the rest is Souvarine and his anarchist ideals. Though primarily veiled throughout the majority of the novel, in some scenes it is Souvarine’s mystifying and powerful presence along with his terrorist outlook that garner him as the novel’s most harrowing character. His enigmatic and morally questionable background, his imperishable tendency towards violence and mayhem and his no-nonsense opinions on events in the story enable the reader to witness these miners’ rebellions through the anarchist’s lens.

First of all, Souvarine’s background and his overall mannerisms bring to light or, in essence, foreshadow his later actions in the novel. By scrutinizing Souvarine’s personal history, these little facts about him give the reader a look into how his narrative of the incidents would be articulated. His personal introduction into the literary work is sleek and sly as he is described as relatively young mechanic from Russia, an émigré absorbed by socialist principles with a dark and seedy possibly murderous past. His physicality and habits are explained further when Zola paints him as a rather effeminate man with a slim figure and delicate complexion. But a more sinister light is shone on him as a man whose eyes “gave periodic glimpses of a more savage side” (Zola, 142) and as a man who “was free, free of his own flesh and blood, and free of everyone else’s” (Zola, 143). This last line definitely exposes his insurrectionist inclination and his ability to side with a more radical change in society. It reveals his complete freedom from the influence and authority of the capitalist government and suggests his willingness to sacrifice himself in the name of anarchist discourse.

His leaning and sympathy towards anarchist beliefs upholds a significant amount of historical context that can be applied to the Revolutions of 1848 in France. Historically, these political upheavals were characterized with the annihilation of the constitutional monarchy and the spread of varying revolutionary perspectives ranging from Marxism to anarchism. Souvarine, without a doubt, is the anarchist model that is notable during these politically vulnerable times. His view on complete governmental demolition and rebirthing a society with a clean slate is an acclaimed standpoint that some of the French citizens of 1848 would advocate. Within the realm of sociological jargon, the dynamics of class certainly materialize due to the townspeople’s quick distrust of Souvarine based on his foreign status. According to the Le Voreux miners, because he derives from a different cultural background and has “bourgeois” physical characteristics (fragile frame, thin nose and skin tone) he is seen in a dissimilar class. But eventually this sociological implication of class is later abandoned once his political preferences and his apathy towards the

bourgeoisie surface. Quintessentially, his thirst for bloodshed and society's structural devastation reflect his dedication to the nihilist system of action which becomes more evident towards the novel's finale. This allegiance is made clear when he argues against Étienne and Rasseneur's socialist/communist convictions as he proclaims, "Can't you see! We've got to bring the whole lot down, or the hunger will simply start all over again. Yes, anarchy! All gone, a world washed clean by blood, purified by fire! ...And then we'll see" (Zola, 146). This lucid assertion bestows an automatic understanding of Souvarine's upbringing and ultimately denotes the magnitude of his later deeds.

From this point on, Souvarine's ethics are apparent with regards to the events in the rest of the novel. He openly rejects Étienne's Marxist claims and deems all the actions of the miners as "nonsense". While Étienne attempts to organize the miners under the International Association of Workers, Souvarine sees this as a pointless venture that will only lead to more red tape. Souvarine depicts his dispute against this action when Étienne asks for his advice on what you should be done to improve their lot, prior to Pluchart's arrival at the hall. Souvarine candidly affirms the necessity "to destroy everything...No more nations, no more governments, no more property, no more God or religion...To community in its basic, unstructured form, to a new world order, to a new beginning in everything" (Zola, 245). For Souvarine, this new world development would be the supreme goal of humanity, not unionization or a communal sharing of property as Marx would argue for. Had the story been documented through Souvarine's eyes, the entire piece would evoke propaganda and the obligation for total societal violence in order to achieve a higher state of being. Souvarine would not see these acts as barbaric or socially backward in any way, rather he would promote obliteration as the premier element of ridding the world of capitalist corruption and serving the critical good of all. For him, a mode of deconstruction is the only rational solution to the dilemma they are in and it is the only simple way of changing the world around them.

Another event Souvarine appears to contest is the strike at Jean-Bart when the miners gather in opposition against Deneulin, the owner of the mine. Although this strike is undeniably more confrontational and aggressive than what the miners have previously done, Souvarine still remains unimpressed with this action. To Souvarine, cutting the cables to the mine shafts and antagonizing Deneulin and his daughters is a trivial and unprogressive response compared to the depravity and maltreatment the bourgeois have endowed upon the workers. Souvarine would maintain that a merciless and ferocious undertaking such as burning the entire mine down (Zola, 321) would send a clear message to the capitalist leaders of the town. While Étienne sought some form of negotiation through this plan, Souvarine would do away with any form of arbitration. Discussion and an ethical understanding between the two heterogeneous groups would yield no solution to this human rights issue.

With respect to Souvarine's radical theoretical perspective, it begs the reader to wonder how the events in the novel would have played out if Souvarine was the protagonist as oppose to Étienne. Souvarine, who is bent on creating chaos and turmoil, would have made the work incredibly gruesome with nonstop warfare. As an apostle for anarchism, Souvarine would have manifested as the destroyer of all hierarchy and, in that case, of all humanity. Through his lens, Souvarine would acknowledge the benefit of nourishing the characters with terrorist intent and

straightforward action. The novel's images of rallies and union meetings would be completely absent from the piece since he feels that gradual reforms and the creation of new organizations would impede the emergence of a new society. In compliance to Souvarine's reasoning, an apocalyptic transformation of social issues and structures brings about the true spirit of anarchy: a society founded upon self-freedom, self sovereignty and fairness. The novel's story would reject the significance on humanity and human worth and would vouch for cold-blooded barbarism. Not surprisingly, the consequences of his reckless and trigger-happy nature would be beyond catastrophic. His scheme at the end of the book exhibits just a small judgment of what the social and public circumstances would have been like if he were leader of the insurgency. By loosening the screws on the mine's beams, Souvarine took the matter into his own hands. Disgusted with the cowardice around him, he committed the malevolent act that everyone else should have done (in his eyes) and without any consideration for the safety of his comrades, he maims the "foul beast that was Le Voreux, with its ever-gaping maw that had devoured so much human fodder" (Zola, 463). That sole action decided the dismal fate of many of the characters and highlights the outright heinous mentality that Souvarine possesses. Indicatively, the ramifications of Souvarine's deed would have been exponentially greater had he had control of the novel's plot. Based on the deaths of a majority of the main characters, Souvarine's plan of action would only conjure up social anguish, misery and desolation. His sense of social revolution is monumentally flawed and reaps only pandemonium with no hope of civil progress.

It is quite conclusive that Souvarine's ideological approach holds certain correlations with some of the French historical events and sociological issues of class and status. Within the historical sphere, Souvarine's frame of mind mirrors the radicalism of the French Revolution of 1789. Much like the stance of the *San-culottes* and Maximillien Robespierre, Souvarine adopts an obvious disdain for interclass deliberations and proposes the importance of violent and cutthroat force. His fanatical temperament puts him in this category of Robespierre through his creation of the Reign of Terror. Both personalities appear to share an instinct towards a bloodbath and lawlessness but both can also be seen as two individuals whose mentality for social change is futile and fruitless. Both Souvarine and Robespierre's (as proven through French history) justification for such calamity only produces social apprehension and hysteria. Ultimately, both strategies do not solve the issue of inequality or lead to the pursuance of civil advancement in society.

The sociological matters of class and status are also applicable to understanding Souvarine's political standpoint. As previously stated, his position as a foreigner puts him at great conflicts with his status in the community of Le Voreux. He is regarded as an outsider with a controversial past (assassination plots against the Tsar of Russia, being an *émigré*) whose social background is put into question. The novel makes it clear that he derives from a bourgeoisie class by him pursuing to be a doctor and based on his physical features (Zola). For these reasons, Souvarine is not considered trustworthy among the citizens. His social class as a previous elite denotes that he is not one of them and that he never will be. Although he changed his social ideals by taking on manual labor as a mechanic, in the miners' eyes he remains a separate entity. The novel portrays how his class and status in society essentially hinder him from being an active participant in the striking events. He is stigmatized for deriving from a commercial or capitalistic past and he can never escape this "scarlet

letter”. His aggressive and pugnacious social theory offers valuable insight into his psyche; he is destroying what he himself once was. His scorn for the aristocracy and bourgeois class is merely him hating himself and the fact that his status and class have defined who he is. Souvarine rather be defined by his political leanings than his social economic background. In other words, he is the model for the restraints the terms class and status can place on an individual and how one can never break away from them.

Fundamentally, Emile Zola’s morally complex character Souvarine brings vivacity and intrigue to the novel’s plot and message. Though exemplified by his anarchist and revolutionary principles, Souvarine serves his purpose in providing the reader with a contrasting ideology in which to understand the social and historical events of the time. His presence allows the reader to capture the miners’ desperation and social crusade for ethical treatment, and sometimes the necessity for extremist measures. Though Zola does not condone guerilla behavior or endeavors, he does acknowledge that Souvarine’s beliefs and plot actions hold prominence in answering historical and sociological issues in 19th century France.

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Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* – A Thematic and Cinematographic Echoing of Italian Neorealism
By Apollonia Galvan (2012)

Alejandro González Iñárritu's 2000 film *Amores Perros* absorbs the spectator's attention with its narrative containing three unique stories about characters whose lives connect after a gruesome car accident in Mexico City. The three intertwined vignettes survey Octavio, a young man who is in love with his sister-in-law Susana and desires to run away with her to escape his brother, Ramiro's violent and criminal ways. The second segment follows Daniel, a magazine publisher who dumps his family for an emotionally fragile supermodel. And thirdly, this story follows "El Chivo" a former private school teacher; now vagrant who became involved in guerilla movements and turns into a professional hitman. While the film's harsh, gritty cinematography or "the general composition of the scene" (Hayward, 76) and plot centering around the conditions of everyday life for the poor and working class are what make it stand out as one of New Mexican Cinema's hits, it is imperative to recognize *Amores Perros's* comparable themes and cinematic style to those of Italian Neorealism. With particular emphasis on the realistic circumstances of daily life, authentic characters, and documentary style shooting, it is clear that Iñárritu is evoking the Italian Neorealism tradition. Hence, by focusing on *Amores Perros's* thematic qualities and film shooting style, the result is a distinct correlation to the characteristics of Italian Neorealism, making Iñárritu's piece a possible homage to the said film genre.

Firstly, it is essential to address the aspects of the Italian Neorealism technique and some socio-historical context of Mexican cinema and its approach to cinematic storytelling. To begin with, Neorealism prides itself on films with "true-to-life plots and visual authenticity: straightforward camerawork and scenes shot on location" (Lindsey, "Italian Neorealism Film Techniques"). Much of the mandatory characteristics of Neorealism include, "a definite social context, a sense of historical actuality and immediacy, portrayal of contemporary social conditions with focus on the lower classes, authentic on-location shooting as opposed to the artificial studio and a documentary style of cinematography" (Lindsey, "Italian Neorealism Film Techniques"). The main reason that such an individual method came about was in part fundamentally due to the presence of Fascism in Italy at the time. This film form "owes its existence in part to filmmakers' displeasure at the restrictions placed on their freedom of expression," (Hayward, 227) which is greatly equivalent to the attitude of Mexican directors since the 1950s; this socio-historical parallel will be discussed subsequently when observing Mexican film society. Furthermore, after the decline of Fascist leader Benito Mussolini, Neorealism allowed "for the truth to be told about the impoverished conditions of the working classes and of urban life" (Hayward, 227). The directors of Italian Neorealism were able to profile the poverty and desperation among everyday people, which is quite similar to Iñárritu's concentration in *Amores Perros*. The mode of Neorealism continued on from 1943 in exposing realistic social problems in the aftermath of World War II, ultimately ending in 1950 as new film trends started to emerge.

Analogous to the socio-historical context of Italian Neorealism, Mexico too was subject to political tyranny and continues to have a high rate of crime. For over seventy years, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) was the primary political party in Mexico. This political and governmental entity had such overwhelming dominance that,

“From 1929 to 1982, the PRI won every presidential election by well over 70 percent of the vote-margins that were usually obtained by massive electoral fraud” (U.S. Department of State, “Mexico – Country Specific Information”). The existence of this autocracy obviously made it difficult and practically impossible to make socially conscious Mexican films, with most films being made to promote a good, moral image of Mexico. But, “despite recurring hardship and a decline in state funding since the notoriously corrupt Institutional Revolutionary Party seventy year rule came to an end in 2000, Mexican cinema is doing well nationally and internationally” (Hayward, 464). With the political climate being less turbulent, Mexican films in the last ten years are now able to be privately produced and funded, which is the case for Iñárritu’s *Amores Perros*. Thus, Italian Neorealist filmmakers along with contemporary Mexican directors share a common experience in regards to the oppressive reign of said governmental powers. Both cinemas formulate an opposing response to the lack of freedom given to them by the politically corrupt and powerful.

Equally important to examine is Mexico’s notably high crime rate which Iñárritu’s film zeroes in on. As of today, Mexico’s crime proportion increases especially in terms of violence. According to the U.S. Department of State, “Street crime, ranging from pick pocketing to armed robbery, is a serious problem in most major Mexican cities and the homicide rates in parts of Mexico have risen sharply in recent years, driven largely by violence associated with transnational criminal organizations” (U.S. Department of State, “Mexico – Country Specific Information”). Hence, Mexico’s recently excessive presence of violence adds to the film’s context. From the bank or department store robbing scenes to the murder scenes, Iñárritu uncovers the culture of brutality that impacts Mexico’s capital, Mexico City. While the bloodshed is at the forefront of the movie, Iñárritu is in no way glorifying this imagery but rather reflecting its effect on Mexican youth in urban areas. Young people like the film’s characters Ramiro and Octavio who participate in some form of violence whether it be dog fighting rings or theft ultimately have to resort to such abusive levels in order to gain money and survive. As a result, the film commentates on the daily struggles and desperations of the working or low income class, much like the works of Italian Neorealists. Iñárritu’s premier aim is to “reveal a city where the huge chasm between the rich and the poor is ever-growing and crime, as a means of survival, is rife” (Hayward, 465). On this basis alone, there is a resemblance between the themes covered in *Amores Perros* and films of the Italian Neorealism variety. Overall, Mexico’s crime serves as a useful context from which to analyze the topic of commonplace people’s strife in both film genres.

Given the socio-historical background of both Italian Neorealists and Mexico’s political and criminal climate, this information helps lead into the fundamentals of what makes *Amores Perros* a testament to the Italian Neorealist’s thematic genre. First and foremost, the matter of entering into the everyday life of Mexico City’s inhabitants is viewable in the first part of the film. Unlike in the two concluding vignettes, in the film’s opening Iñárritu presents the ordinary story of Octavio and his cohabitation with his family members: his mother, his brother Ramiro, Ramiro’s wife Susana and their infant son. The low income family lives in tight quarters in the poorer region of Mexico City, living day by day on the scarce earnings of Ramiro who works in a grocery / drug store. The economic difficulties they are going through are made apparent in the dialogue among the characters. From the mother asking her son Ramiro for money for his son’s diapers to Susana being

forced to leave her son in the hands of her own intoxicated mother, their underprivileged conditions bear comparison to those lives profiled in Italian Neorealism.

The director also focuses on their fairly unremarkable life as the mother watches her grandson, prepares lunch and the brothers come together to eat. There is no form of excitement or even familial love existent. The conversation centers mainly on money or the lack thereof and Ramiro's abusive behavior towards Susana. Hence, based on this sketch of their interaction, the elements of Italian Neorealist themes are comprised. The locale of their home and the subjects that encompass their verbal exchanges are similar due to the fact that their environment "is exclusively shot on location (Mexico City), mostly in poor neighborhoods and the subject matter involves life among the impoverished and working class. Realism is always emphasized, and performances are mostly constructed from scenes of people performing fairly mundane and quotidian activities" (The Criterion Collection, *Italian Neorealism*). Ergo, the segment following Octavio and his family exposes the social reality plaguing them; that of poverty and substandard employment.

On account of the overwhelming need for finances ultimately this leads to and unveils another theme typical in Italian Neorealism, that of the moral state of the country. Iñárritu accentuates the culture of violence that runs rampant in Mexico by featuring Octavio's monetary incentive to place his dog Cofi into a dog fighting circuit and Ramiro's frequent thefts. To make it crystal clear, Iñárritu is not glorifying or promoting this barbaric conduct but rather revealing how it provides many of Mexico City's urban poor, of which his characters are representatives of, the opportunity to make money. The director imparts the immorality being practiced by people and displays how "the elemental dog eat dog nature of humans is expressed not only in disturbing glimpses of brutal, backroom dogfights, but also in the relationships between other humans" (Schwarzbaum, *Amores Perros* Review). The dog-fighting scenes do not merely show the ravenous and savage nature of the dogs being forced to tear each other apart but also highlight the downright greed and desperation of their human counterparts. Octavio eventually becomes obsessed with winning several thousands by placing Cofi in these vicious fights, the battles go from the single digits to two digits in no time. Also, Ramiro's stint for robbery becomes more constant, moving from mediocre department stores to local banks. In the scene after Ramiro's first theft is previewed, Iñárritu shows Ramiro raining Susana with gifts, on this particular occasion, he gives her a Walkman portable radio player.

Octavio and Ramiro's morality seems to be murky as they both become consumed with greed and have a thirst for an increasing accumulation of money despite how unethical the way they attain it may be. By exhibiting a myriad of scenes of Octavio and Ramiro's wrongful behavior, Iñárritu is not condemning who they are because they are not perfect. But instead, Iñárritu is scrutinizing Mexican society's attraction or attachment to violence such as dogfights and criminal actions. The director is essentially contending that Mexico's sense of morality is warped and more reasonably nonexistent, especially as crime rates rise in the urban arena. It is apparent that Iñárritu is adopting the Italian Neorealist ideology on the compassionate point of view of the everyday people; in this case, Octavio and Ramiro. Octavio and Ramiro are simply doing what they need to in order to attain a good amount of money quickly. While their principles and their intentions are not

completely pure, they are not to blame for their status. To some degree, Iñárritu is arguing that it is Mexico's unsatisfactory economy and voidable morality that compels them to resort to such low levels in order to survive. Hence, Iñárritu is mirroring social realism which "refers to a depiction of social and economic circumstances within which particular echelons of society (usually the working and middle classes) find themselves" (Hayward, 357), which is likewise embraced in the Italian Neorealist thematic style. Both *Amores Perros* and the Italian Neorealism genres fixate themselves on the defective moral state of the country and how it in turn negatively affects the lives of poor citizens. Deep down, the country's moral vacancy triggers these inhabitants to act out in desperation for something more. By partaking in such illegal activities, Octavio and Ramiro are suffering from hopelessness that their economic situation will never ameliorate unless they do something about it, even if it means to break the law. Much like how Italian Neorealist characters serve as vehicles for the directors' disapproval of Fascist government, Iñárritu's characters too operate as those in opposition with the Mexican governmental system. Consequently, the themes and motifs on the poverty-stricken that *Amores Perros* presents directly parallel those of Italian Neorealism, bringing to mind Iñárritu's attempt to praise the Italian Neorealist film model.

Now on the stylistic level of Iñárritu's *Amores Perros*, the film also captures the Italian Neorealist cinematographic tradition. Italian Neorealism style comprising of "functional and basic camera set-ups, lighting very spare and unadorned, handheld cameras, and documentary visual style" (Lindsey, "Italian Neorealism Film Techniques"), Iñárritu utilizes these same components to encapsulate his narrative. His mimicking of the neorealist technique is perceptible in two significant scenes or sequences. The first is the establishing shot, "usually a long (wide-angle or full) shot at the beginning of a scene (or a sequence) that is intended to inform the audience with an overview in order to help identify and orient the locale or time for the scene and action that follows" and later followed by "a more detailed shot that brings characters, objects, or other figures closer" where Octavio and his friend Jorge on speeding to avoid being killed by enemies from the dog fighting competition (Dirks, "Establishing shot"). The handheld shot, "a shot taken with a handheld camera or deliberately made to appear unstable, shaky or wobbly; often used to suggest either documentary footage or realism" (Dirks, "Handheld shot"), is trembling and quivering in order to evoke Octavio and Jorge's frantic behavior after Cofi has been shot. The scene is incredibly gruesome as the dog's blood spreads all over the car as the camera pans ("panorama shot; refers to the horizontal scan, movement, rotation or turning of the camera in one direction" (Dirks, "Pan") quickly from side to side. Identical to the film texture of Italian Neorealism, the composition of this scene is grainy, lumpy and of inferior quality. Clearly, Iñárritu is striving to match the same rustic, gritty trademark of Italian Neorealist films. The sequence continues on by using a traveling/tracking shot ("a smooth shot in which the camera moves alongside ('tracking within') the subject, usually mounted on a dolly, in a side-to-side motion" (Dirks, "Tracking shot") as a sea of brick walls along the boulevard are made visible, another detail of Iñárritu's adherence to realism. Within this two to three minute clip in the film, "we see hectic cuts of the street, the traffic, the interior of Octavio's car, and the truck that pursues Octavio. These dizzy opening shots culminate in the horrific crash between Octavio's Caribe and Valeria's Nissan (the subject of the second segment)" (Menne, "A Mexican 'Nouvelle Vague' : The Logic of New Waves under Globalization"). This scene is not only representative of

the impetus that brings the three characters together but a demonstration of the influence of Italian Neorealism graphic, true-to-life shooting. The jolty employment of the handheld camera as well as the unpolished quality of film used greatly simulate the cinematography of Italian Neorealist pictures.

The second scene that depicts Iñárritu's imitation of the Italian Neorealist shooting style is towards the end of the narrative, the vignette about "El Chivo." Once again, a handheld camera is used to follow El Chivo's every move along the city's streets. The bumpiness of the camera allows for the viewer to put himself or herself in the cameraman's shoes. There is a sense that the spectator is following El Chivo in the scene where he is about to assassinate his client's partner. This moment leaves the viewer in suspense of the impending murder and causes him or her to question El Chivo's desires, intentions, and ulterior motives. The view turns into a close-up in which "the subject is framed by camera fills the screen, the connotation can be of intimacy, of having access to the mind or thought processes of the character" (Hayward, 355). This shot also gives a realness to this point in time. The camera pans from side to side facing the man he is planning to kill as if copying El Chivo's point of view. Eventually, the camera shifts its line of vision from El Chivo's standing in front of the restaurant window as it jerks and captures Octavio's car powerfully crash into Valeria's car. The sequence appears to be right out of a newsreel since it upholds some implication of realism. The fact that the actual streets of Mexico City are used garner Iñárritu's allegiance to the real world, something Italian Neorealists not only aimed for but seized considerably. The setting and moreover the vivid physicality of the characters El Chivo, Octavio and Jorge relate to the portrayal of similar aspects in Italian Neorealism. Thus, it can be argued that *Amores Perros*'s stylistic layout also echoes the film procedure of Italian Neorealists.

Based on the above analysis and investigation on Iñárritu's *Amores Perros*'s thematic and stylistic form, it is certainly instinctive to notice the similarities between this Mexican film and the Italian Neorealism genre on these two facets. Both this cinematic work and cinematic approach share common attributes with regards to the themes of the condition of the poorer classes and the presence of morality on the state level as well as the visual real-life shooting type. On account of these qualities, both pieces associate with Third Cinema or "a cinema of resistance coming from a third space" (Hayward, 421). Iñárritu and the Italian Neorealists "raise the two fundamental issues of politics of location and identity politics: where are 'you' shooting from (which nation/location) and who are 'you' and what position are you shooting from" (Hayward, 421) based on their focus on the lower class. It can most definitely be declared due to their likeness that "these films seek out the truth about the nation's troubled past, or expose unwaveringly the difficult social conditions experienced by these nation's poorest inhabitants" (Hayward, 463). So, it is at this point, exceedingly lucid and accurate to deem Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* an unmistakable incarnation and monument to Italian Neorealism.

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Hollywood Hustles: Hollywood Myths Vs. Chow's Figurative Fists

By Patrick Norton (2014)

With *Kung Fu Hustle*, Stephen Chow presents a world that challenges the classical conventions popularized by Kung Fu and Hollywood movies. By presenting unorthodox characters and situations that don't fit into the expected Hollywood mold, Stephen Chow is satirizing how audiences have come to accept as fact the romanticized and ridiculous notions put forth by the movie industry. For example, whereas audiences are normally used to seeing only the one chosen, identifiable, and masculine hero, in *Kung Fu Hustle*, multiple heroes are presented, none of them fitting into these stereotypes. Chow echoes this theme of not judging a book by its cover many times over, when for example, he depicts his protagonist, Sing, trying to pick out the weakest member of Pig Sty Alley out of a crowd, only to discover that those who seem like harmless children or fragile old men, are actually muscular marvels.

In fact, in *Kung Fu Hustle*, every single Kung Fu master, and character for that matter, is in some way strange and has been ostracized so that they all now take refuge in the aptly named Pig Sty Alley. The name is significant because it shows how the people living in Pig Sty Alley have been outcast to such an extent that they are equated with pigs. Even within the Pig Sty community, there is also a lot of division and name-calling. For example, many people make fun of an unattractive girl by calling her "bucktooth." By presenting this unattractive girl failing to make herself look any more beautiful by adding more lipstick, Chow is satirizing how Hollywood has engraved in audiences the idea that unattractiveness is a problem that can simply be "made-over."

Furthermore, Chow makes the statement that such superficial things as beauty have no bearing whatsoever on whether someone is equipped to be a hero or not, thereby implying that anyone can be a hero. In fact, the Kung Fu masters that Chow presents are unorthodox to say the least; there is an old landlady who uses her bellowing voice as a weapon, her wispy husband, who bends to avoid receiving blows, and the protagonist, Sing, who learns Kung Fu from a children's book. None of these characters are expected to be Kung Fu masters, and none of them actually emerge as heroes, until they actually set aside their differences and band together to stop their common enemy, the Axe Gangsters. Another example of the Pig Sty Alley community bonding after having belittled each other occurs when, after calling a gay man a "weak fairy," everyone provides him with support once they see that he is fighting for them. This gay Kung Fu master also challenges the stereotype that gay people are somehow weak and defenseless.

Similarly, Chow satirizes the stereotype of the helpless damsel in distress, when he shows a flashback of Sing trying but failing to save a deaf/ mute girl from a bunch of bullies, who end up beating him up and peeing on him. He further satirizes Hollywood in this scene by having romantic music playing in the background, thereby misleading the audience into thinking that Sing will successfully save the damsel in distress. This deaf woman serves as a literal example, of how the people of Pig Sty Alley are made voiceless by those who seek to cast them out from society and create disunity among them, i.e. the Axe Gang and to a greater extent, society as a whole. However, when the people of Pig Sty Alley band together, they find their metaphoric and even literal voice, as can be seen by the landlady's powerful Lion's Roar.

Chow also challenges the classic dichotomy between good and evil that is prevalent in every Hollywood story of a hero. In introducing the Axe Gang, for example, Chow satirizes the fact that audiences expect them to be presented as 100% intimidating and evil, by presenting them like members of the *Gangs of New York*, while simultaneously having them do a funny dance number. This split presentation foreshadows that there will be ambiguity between good and evil in many of the characters. And, as a matter of fact, not only does Sing evolve from a coward, who spends his time

committing crimes so that he can join the Axe Gang, but he also inspires the main villain Beast, to give up his evil ways and become his apprentice. In this way, *Kung Fu Hustle* goes against the ideas popularized by Hollywood that people have set roles that define who they are and what they are and are not equipped to do. By satirizing the Kung Fu genre in this way, Stephen Chow is prompting us to question the way we categorize people and cast them out based on superficial qualities and stereotypes.

The Virtue of Knowledge

By Krystal Valladares

The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which, being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection. But because our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be followed in all discreet teaching (Milton, 971).

Through this quote from *Of Education*, Milton reveals what he believes to be the true purpose behind the pursuit of knowledge. An education, Milton argues, is not aimed at glorifying the individual. To Milton, the objective of an education is to rectify the relationship between the individual and God, transcending the consequences of the fall in order to return to humanity's primordial state of being. The acquisition of knowledge is the foundation of true faith, upon which devotion and righteousness are cultivated. Milton's treatise *Of Education* echoes the words of James in the New Testament: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). Given humanity's present state of depravity, Milton argues that "our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things," thus highlighting the importance of a thorough education (971). As can be evidenced throughout the rest of his essay, Milton believes that the means by which to draw near to God and repair one's inherently flawed relationship with Him is through learning as much as possible so as to own one's faith, not just blindly accept its statutes. This is the ultimate goal, to play an active role in one's spirituality by assuming personal responsibility for one's understanding of God's nature and how it impacts one's life.

Milton's ideal education takes its form in the establishment of an institution that places equal importance upon the mind and the body of the student. This is accomplished by creating a school set on a "spacious house and ground" that would provide its students not only a place to study, but also a place to live, thus implying that just as one grows physically, one should also grow in knowledge (973). This marriage of life and learning proves essential to the Miltonic goal of using education to grow closer to God for it forces the individual to make connections between different aspects of his or her livelihood and realize that—though each serves a different function—they all ultimately work towards the same goal.

It is important to note that in order to accomplish this lofty goal, Milton does not limit learning to the sole devotion of one's time to the reading of Scripture. Instead, he emphasizes an education that is well-rounded in its scope, focused upon the acquisition of knowledge from a variety of fields such as languages and literature, mathematics and sciences, and economics and politics. He goes on to suggest that the ideal education ought to be capitalized upon by paying equal attention to both the body and the spirit; time allotted for rest and exercise, weapons studies, "military motions," musical studies, and spiritual meditation is also necessary (979). This liberal approach to schooling is purposed to provide the individual with a versatile, yet balanced, perception of the world around him or herself, thus preparing the individual to one day make a well-informed decision as to his or her personal code of ethics. Milton argues that after spending a significant amount of time in the ideal schooling system, "years and good general precepts will have furnished them more distinctly with that act of reason which in ethics is called *proairesis*, that they may with some judgment contemplate upon moral good and evil" (976). His stance is essentially that knowledge is itself a virtue, intrinsically good and consequently capable of cultivating good in its

pupil. By learning at an institution like the one Milton proposes, the individual will be prepared to act as a morally sound member of society, possessing “native and heroic valor” and a hatred for “the cowardice of doing wrong” (979). Milton suggests that these qualities, each in accordance with Biblical standards of living, are cultivated through years of devoted study and are essential to “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright” (971).

Milton’s philosophy of what a good and thorough education is comprised of and what it is purposed for is one that I agree with. As a Christian, I am of the belief that “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Such a command does not exclude the betterment of self, for it is through one’s actions that others can be drawn to God: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The Miltonic desire to live one’s life as an act of service to God is one that I share, and I feel that Milton is correct in stating that it is through knowledge that we can better understand His attributes in order to propagate them in our own lives.

ΣΤΑ

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