



The Chestatee Review

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University of North Georgia
University System of Georgia



Editors' Notes

In a Photoshop assignment, we had to create an impossible creature by combining two different animals. We were given a lot of room to be imaginative for this project, but my main focus was to find two animals so different that you would only find this creature in a fantasy world.

I searched laboriously for an image to begin with. I was seeking something anomalous, something regal but still within the parameters of beauty. I love beautiful images, but an image can be beautiful for many reasons. I stumbled upon an image of an albino peacock. It was perched on top of a wood railing surrounded by mist. The image was magnificent, but the head of the peacock was distorted and looked more like a vulture than a peacock. So I decided I would fix this.

I wanted to find a majestic creature I would combine with the peacock. I decided upon a lion, but not just any lion, one that reminded me of Aslan from the *Chronicles of Narnia*. He was a gentle and peaceful lion, something so contrasting to the title "King of the Beasts." When I found this image of the lion, I knew he was perfect for my piece, henceforth named the Lioncock.

We were also asked to write a short narrative of the life of the impossible creature we had created. In my fantasy, I imagine that the Lioncock is a peaceful creature. With a wingspan over 6 feet, it glides from place to place. It feasts on the spoils of the land, mostly fruits and vegetables. It is gentle and kind having never harmed any living creature. When the Lioncock roars, it sounds like a lullaby, putting those in its path in a deep restful sleep. This has been its mechanism to prevent causing harm.

I am inclined to make art that I find beautiful. I wasn't concerned with the outcome of perfection so much as being able to convey what I wanted to in the image, which I feel I have accomplished.

-Mackenzie Fink

Lioncock

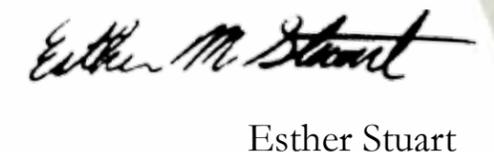
Mackenzie Fink

Our literary magazine has been around – in one incarnation or another – for decades. It has survived several name changes, bounced along in the rapidly growing student population, and not only weathered but thrived under a consolidation. I've had the wonderful pleasure of serving on the staff of *The Chestatee Review* for several years now. Each year this staff puts together an amazing magazine, and each subsequent year we surpass the one before. I'm constantly in awe. This year brought new challenges and opportunities; thank you so much to our faculty advisor and the staff members who had the enthusiasm and shared artistic vision to make it amazing. Thank you to the faculty who helped whenever they could, the judges who picked the very best out of a stack of great work, and to the student writers and artists who provided us with the reason to exist in the first place. Thank you for making my last year here one to remember.



Sarah Madsen

This year marks the official consolidation and expansion of *The Chestatee Review* to all four campuses of the University of North Georgia. The art and writing showcased here demonstrates the presence and growth of incredible talent cultivated across a variety of campuses. Our endeavors to develop and showcase creative talent at our institution expanded as we gained new advisors, staff, writers, and artists around us. I'm happy to have served as co-editor during this time of collaboration as our growth has led to some amazing experiences and a wonderful magazine. Of course, none of this would be possible without our fantastic magazine staff, passionate faculty advisors, and the talented writers and artists who make this magazine possible every year. Their efforts and contributions have helped bridge the gap between campuses and smoothed the process for our successors. I have had the privilege of meeting and working in tandem with so many wonderful people that continue to remind me of the value of this work and why I fell in love with it. So here, I give my thanks to all those who helped make this year one of my best.



Esther Stuart

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2014-2015

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Table of Contents

Chinese Couplets

The Dance Between the East and West Elizabeth Fields	7
Family	9
Shelter	10
Xi'an Street Scene	11
She	12
Flight	13
Gate	14
Growth	15
No Missing Flowers	16
Chinese Vista I	17
Chinese Vista II	18
Chinese Vista III	19
On the Way to Ji'an	20

Visual Poetry

Master Muse Aleta Ried	22
Number One Ingredient: Love Aleta Ried (art)	22
Twisted Allegories Diane Jagels	23
Untitled Aleta Ried (art)	23
Dreams for a Lifetime Courtney Torres	24
Untitled Ester Park (art)	24
Redefinition Veronica Harris	25
Untitled Jessie Mathews (art)	25
The Return Megan Johnson	26
Untitled Taylor Martin (art)	26
Isolated Scott Biddulph	27
Untitled Anna Moran (art)	27

Poetry

The Soldier Inside E.M. Wills	29
One Big Happy Nuclear Family Joshua Hathcock	31
That Rain-soaked Street Kind of Lonely E.M. Wills	32

One-Act Plays

To Hell and Back Emmy Dixon	34
Lantern Jansen Castleberry	40
Gone Fishin' Sarah Madsen	46

Short Fiction

Empire of Lithium Tim Bellows	53
Hops and Barley Carol Marlow	62
Bleeding Out Michael Myers	71

Creative Non-Fiction

The Da Vinci Academy Zach McGarry	80
Shells on the Walls Holly Nicole Smith	84
Prayer and Supplication Esther Stuart	86

Formal Essays

A Hero's Salute to Death and History: Subversion of the Masculine Ideal in Ambrose Bierce's <i>Tales of Soldiers and Civilians</i> Amanda Adams	91
Problematizing Poets: The Victorian Debate over Poetry's Proper Place Emmy Dixon	97
Physical Verses Mental: How World War I Literature Handles the Treatment of War Neurosis" Zach McGarry	103

Art

Vitality of Tea Carolyn Nooney	112
Translation Daniel Ford	
The Feathered Friend Joe Hall	
Tree Cylinder Jill Raden	113
Tres Botellas Sue Compton	
Osseous Daniel Ford	
Leather Jacket Sue Compton	114
Morphed Christina Packard	
I'm Going to be in <i>The Chestatee Review</i> Caroline Welsch	
Creative Intentions Christina Packard	115
Monumental Banana Christina Packard	
Portrait Christina Packard	
Mother Dear Anna Moran	116
Untitled Kayla Thomas	
My Hobbit Samantha Bishop	
Lynch Briana Jimenez	117
River Mackenzie Fink	
Relativeistic Heat Conduction Mara Nelms	
Sug Caroline Welsch	118
Adaptable Jillian Conner	
Hogyena Rebecca Vener	
What Christina Packard	119
Untitled Ester Park	
Shadow Play Anna Bennett	

The Dance Between East and West

Elizabeth Fields

Special Topic Winners

In Preservation of Dignity: Censorship Before Catastrophe
| Caleb Yarbro 121
Blue Dress in Ashes | Anastasia Smith 124
PoeDown Throwdown | Tim Bellows 125

Faculty Favorites

The Blue Cord of Brotherhood: *The Odyssey* and the
Writings of Confucius Interpreted by a Combat Soldier
| John Risley 127
Hurricane Vodka | Joshua Hemmings 131
Free Rides through Life | Chyenne Franklin 135
If I Dream | John Risely 137
Poem | Salam Frias 138
The Satan Deposition | Courtney Torres 140

Events Page

148 Interview With Judson Mitcham
153 Book Drive
Faculty Reading
154 PoeDown
155 Open Mic Night

Miscellaneous

156 Awards Received
158 Writing Contest Information
159 Rules For Submission
163 Judge Bios
164 Staff Bios

During my ten-month stay in China, I taught English to sophomore college students at Liaocheng University in Shandong Province. While I was there, I experimented with using a variety of teaching methods that I hoped would build confidence, dedication, and a passion for learning in my students. One of the most successful experiments was an interdisciplinary art project entitled “The Dance between East and West.”

The art project initially started from my interest in learning about Chinese poetic forms and my observation of one of my Foreign Language students’, Li Dong’s, artistic skills. After our initial discussion, I enlisted the help of another faculty member, Barbara Moreland, and we formed a group of ten writers and artists who worked together to write Chinese couplets in English and then illustrated them using mixed mediums such as acrylic, charcoal, and collage. The project culminated in an end of the year art show at the Foreign Language Department.

During the process the students and I modified the couplet rules based on our shared understanding of the original form. The traditional Chinese couplet is a pair of poetic lines that adhere to certain rules. In China, they are usually seen on the sides of doors leading to

people’s homes or as hanging scrolls. By modifying the rules, my students gained confidence in speaking and writing English, learned important analytical thinking skills, and were able to create new ideas based on creative collaboration. Here are the modified rules:

1. Both lines must have the same number of words (each line will be written using the traditional line structure: up and down, right to left).
2. The lexical category (part of speech) of each word must be the same as the corresponding word on each line.
3. Each word must be either similar or in contrast to its corresponding word.
4. The meaning of the two lines must be related and each pair of corresponding words should also have a related meaning.

After modifying the form, we got to the important task of creating art. Our theme became China’s changing landscape and was based on conversations I’d had with my students concerning generational differences, and the observations I’d made while traveling in China observing “the dance” between Eastern and Western traditions.

Over the course of the spring semester, we met at my apartment and the students talked about the history of their culture's art forms. We discussed the importance of remembering and preserving cultural history, and we created art that is both Eastern and

Western, that seeks to ask questions about China's changing landscape, and that did create a space for my students to come together to find their passion for learning and discovery.



家

(Family)

overflowing	empty
timeworn	unfinished
home	building
treasures	long for
today's	future
generations	family



Wang Zhihui (Andy) Artist

Poet Barbara Moreland

Chinese Couplets

Shelter

vanished	everywhere
golden	gray
carvings	concrete
ornate	blackness
emperor's	worker's
palace	high-rise

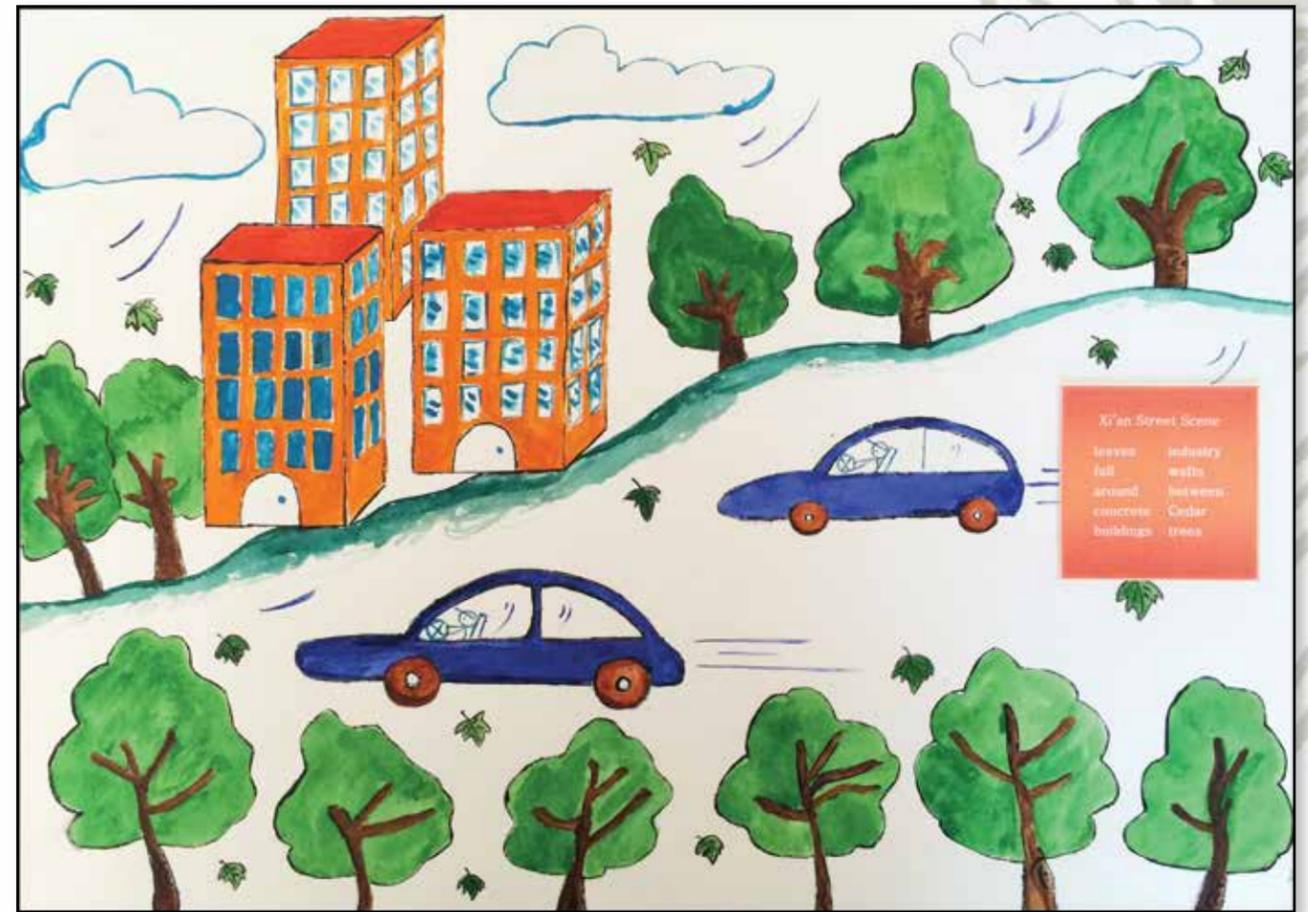


Lui Yaqiong (Sam) Artist

Poet Barbara Moreland

Xi'an Street Scene

leaves	industry
fall	wafts
around	between
concrete	cedar
buildings	trees



Li Dong (Doris) Artist

Poet Elizabeth Fields

She

young	infant
women	girls
today	once
embraced	abandoned
unbound	limited
promise	unworthy



Wang Zhihui (Andy) Artist

Poet Barbara Moreland

Flight

young	history
wings	rooted
freely	bound
heaven	earth
soaring	stationary
arcs	solid
promise	known



Li Dong (Doris) Artist

Poet Barbara Moreland

Gate

seclusion	reform
heavy	soft
snow	wind
freeze	blow
creatures	land



Lui Yaqiong (Sam) Artist

Poet Wu Ping (Erin)

Growth

today	yesterday
flavor	belly
complete	full
one	only
pursuit	dream



Li Dong (Doris) Artist

Poet Wu Ping (Erin)

No Missing Flowers

textures	Harbin
colors	Hong Kong
scents	Qingdao
complete	Kashi
bouquet	Motherland



Lu Songzhen (Summer) Artist

Poet Barbara Moreland

Chinese Vista 1

leafless	boxed
cypress	buildings
await	crowd
spring's	winter's
fertile	barren
ground	skyline



Liu Yaqiong (Sam) Artist

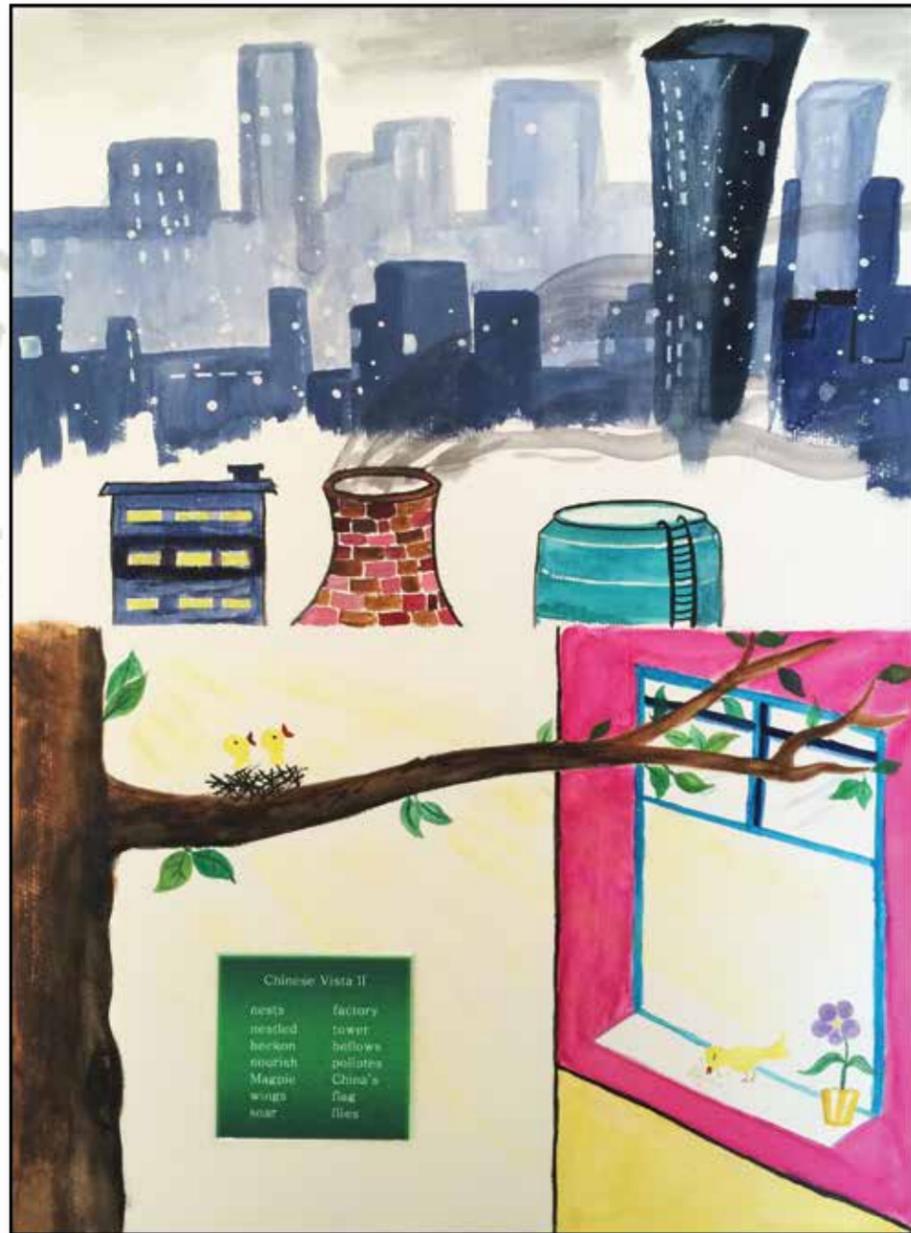
Poet Elizabeth Fields

Chinese Vista II

Chinese Vista III

nests
 nestled
 beckon
 nourish
 Magpie
 wings
 soar

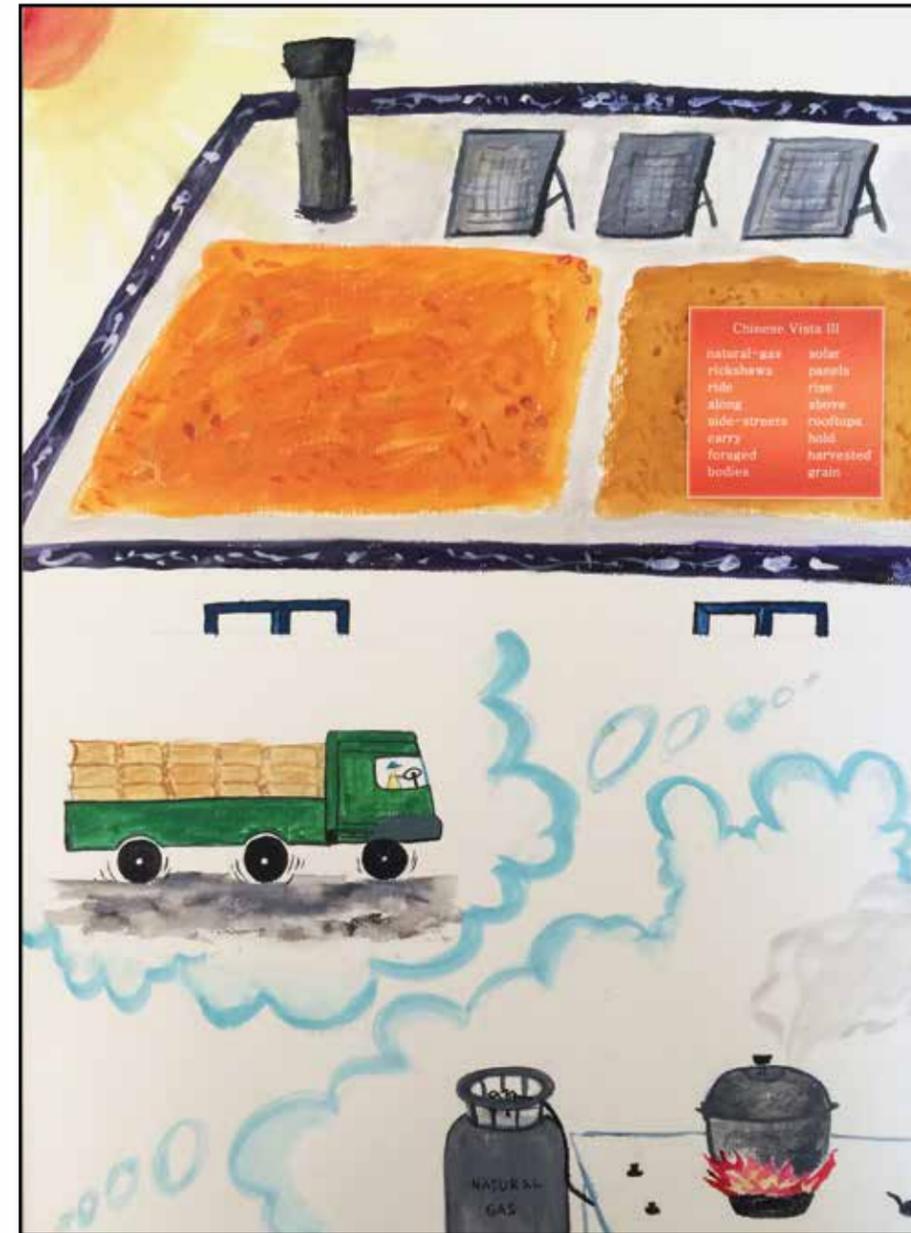
factory
 tower
 bellows
 pollutes
 China's
 flag
 flies



Chinese Vista II
 nests factory
 nestled tower
 beckon bellows
 nourish pollutes
 Magpie China's
 wings flag
 soar flies

Liu Qi (Fern) Artist

Poet Elizabeth Fields



Chinese Vista III
 natural-gas solar
 rickshaws panels
 ride rise
 along above
 side-streets rooftops
 carry hold
 foraged harvested
 bodies grain

natural-gas solar
 rickshaws panels
 ride rise
 along above
 side-streets rooftops
 carry hold
 foraged harvested
 bodies grain

Liu Qi (Fern) Artist

Poet Elizabeth Fields

On the Way to Ji'nan

Visual Poetry

Liaocheng	Shandong
springs	winters
trucks	sheep
herd	huddle
cold	snow
stark	packed
highway	riverbanks



Lui Qi (Fern) Artist

Poet Elizabeth Fields

Art inspires art. Sometimes it's a song inspiring a story. Other times a book will inspire a play. In this instance, our poets were inspired by works created by UNG art students. The resulting poems are by turns entrancing, empowering, and sometimes a little surprising. Enjoy.

“I am the rule-breaker,
The demolisher of nations,
The natural disaster.
I am the virgin, the mother,
The whore, the party girl.”

*Veronica Harris
“Redefinition”*

Master Muse

Aleta Reid

Brightly colored bricks
 Assorted by size and tiny circles
 I watched below
 As you built your dreams
 Like Grecian columns you carved me,
 To withstand the weight of the world.
 The architecture influenced
 The art inspired.

A chef of elegant execution
 Combined ingredients
 Of a most delicious meal
 To feed a starving mind
 Adding too much salt and spice

A recipe for an artistic disaster
 Layer by layer
 Crafted without a single hand
 A master draftsman, chef and engineer
 Concise and certain in each role

Certain that I am the poet
 You are the lines

Number One
 Ingredient: Love

Aleta Reid

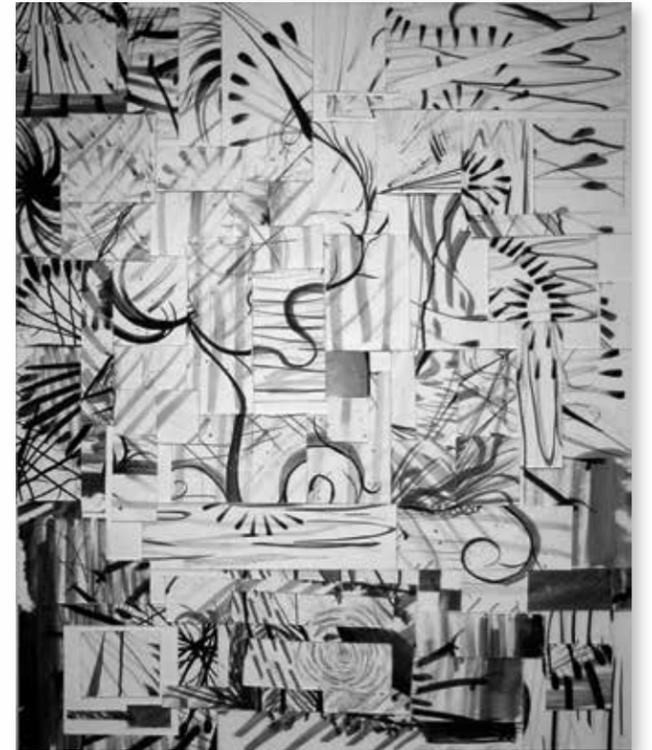


Twisted Allegories

Diane Jagels

Twisting branches curl like paper rolls.
 The landscape bends in fractured ideas.
 I stand and watch the pinstripe
 shadows slide along the parchment.
 Beneath my feet the path slopes to an angle.
 Pen strokes of disjointed
 thoughts fall in clumps like rain.
 "Whose thoughts are these?" I ask the greying world.
 Jagged leafless fronds
 bend with heavy ink stains.
 I stand beside one pronounced, arched tree.
 Its pulled limbs flake into the air,
 lifted into black stained feathers.
 My hand resting on the bark causes
 the paper to crease and bend.
 I stare around this murky frozen daydream.
 Tiny filaments twist in the air,
 I lift my hand to catch them.
 Instead I gasp, surprised and embarrassed;
 ink spreads across my skin.
 I brush it on my knee.
 I expect to sit and wait
 but ideas have all moved on.
 The wind takes

the tiny
 seedling wisps
 away from the inkling
 world



Untitled

Aleta Reid

Dreams for a Lifetime

Courtney Torres

I once heard that you could have anything you wanted
 You just had to dream it up first
 So I started dreaming
 I dream of fireworks and butterflies
 Wildflowers and long letters
 Candle lit take-out and puzzles
 Spontaneous trips and scavenger hunts
 Stargazing and astronomy guessing
 Moonstones and pewter
 Tea parties and top hats
 Champagne and masquerades
 Midnight kisses and rain-soaked dancing
 Snowball fights and shared desserts
 Postcards and photographs
 Christmas puppies and dandelions
 Tower rooms and stone courtyard
 Garden parties and wishing wells
 Heartwarming and time stopping
 Forget-me-nots and stories
 Forever and happy endings
 But most of all
 I try to dream my armor away

Untitled

Ester Park



Redefinition

Veronica Harris

I am the rule-breaker,
 The demolisher of nations,
 The natural disaster.
 I am the virgin, the mother,
 The whore, the party girl.
 I make others act like animals just by the
 sight of me.
 I am prudish in my long skirt and sweater.
 I am slutty in my shorts and t-shirts.

 I made Adam defy God for me.
 I made Paris kidnap me.
 I made Zeus rape me.
 I made Dante go through Hell for me.

It was never a choice for them.



Never a thought, just a desire.
 I must really be a monster, right?
 Is it why I'm covered in red?
 The blood of the fallen men are my sin.
 My guilt.
 I am a monster—

NO. I AM NOT.

You defied God.
You kidnapped me.
You raped me.
You went through hell for me.

It was **your** choice.

I am the teacher, the student.
 The problem solver.
 I am the party girl.
 I am the mother.
 I can be a virgin.
 I can love sex.

I am a Woman.

And **your** actions cannot define me,
 Or make me weak.
 My existence cannot make you weak or
 justify your actions.

Only you can make you weak.

Untitled

Jessie Mathews

The Return

Megan Johnson

Our Mother, quick to punish and scold
A lone traveler brazen before the cold
She stirs the raging wintry sky
A man soon to find shelter or else to die

The skin burns, fingers go numb
Weak and stumbling, the feet succumb
As knees buckle, the blood begins to slow
Eyes yield to coming shadow

Mountain Mother soothes his heavy rest
A child nestled in an oaken breast
His nodding head and peaceful sigh
Thinks not of what her smile belies

Buried within the tresses of her leaves
Coiling branches envelope and weave
Her son draws close to her ancient hearth
A man once born, now returned to earth.



Untitled

Taylor Martin

Isolated

Scott Biddulph

Winds carry the reek of the dead;
Death and its victims that groan.
Lying scattered are the carcasses of the many,
But the Good Shepard will search out his own.

The payments to mortality are never ending,
The foundation of its existence is sin.
Surrounded by an ocean of humanity,
Alone with familiar spirits that grin.

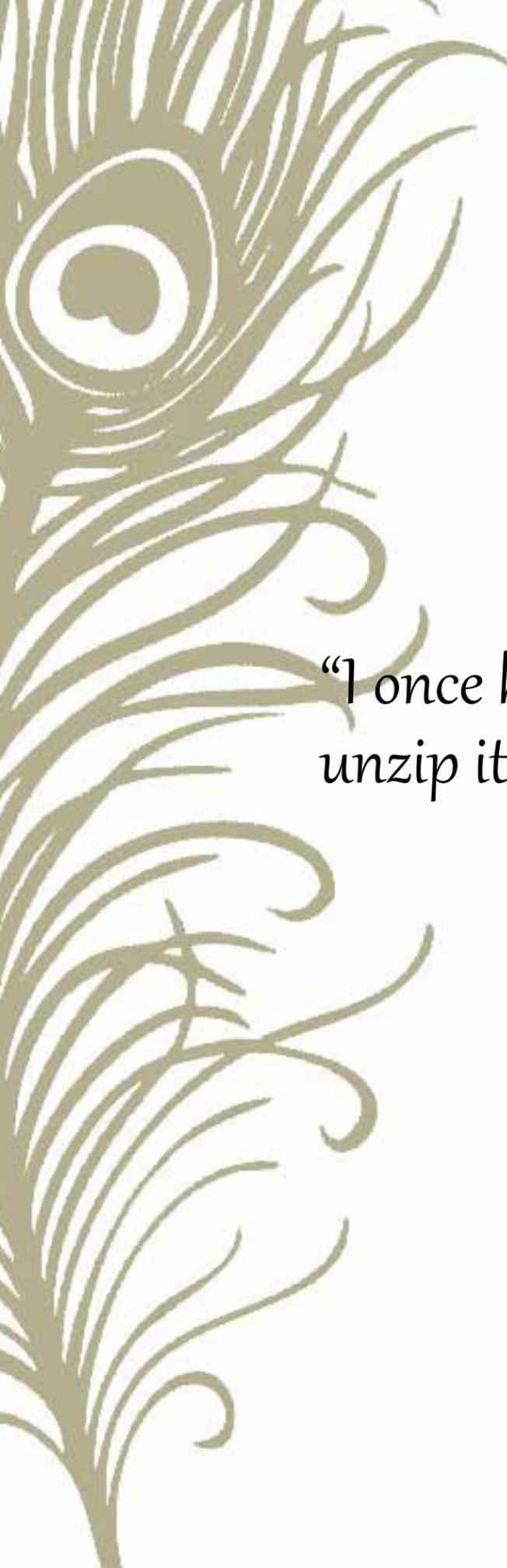
While others walk in fields of green,
The Good Shepard sets out in the night.
Seeking perishing hearts and the bemused
He risks all, and gives all, for this fight.

Fear not little lamb framed in death,
For your Shepard is on his return;
Coming forth to apparitions of the dark,
They become ash as misdeeds must all burn.



Untitled

Anna Moran



Poetry

“I once heard the Western Moon
unzip its silver tongue”

Joshua Hathcock

“One Big Happy Nuclear Family”

Spring 2015

The Soldier Inside

E.M. Wills

1st

I told him he can't have a gun
In arm's reach of the bed
Anymore
Or a knife—
Even a pocket-sized one

I whispered it as tears clouded my eyes
Like the shrapnel of his memories
Raining down on me
As he blindly curled his fingers
Around my neck

Like a shedding snake
He awoke, horrified
First his eyes painted, glazed
Then painstakingly clear
Releasing his lumberjack grip
Jumping back like a kangaroo
Not practiced in reverse

There was just a sudden movement
In the dark
Deep breathing, moaning
And a thick pressure
Pushing me awake
Trying to scream

I'm sorry
I'm so sorry, Mel
I don't know what set it off

I crouch in fear
Hugging my pillow
Wishing combat didn't plague

His mind
Like rabbits feed off
Of my garden

Maybe it was the spicy food
The swords in the deck of cards
The grenade-shaped lemons
The mention of guns on the television

He reaches out to me
A puppy caught eating
Your favorite shoe
I am hesitant
Startled, fearful
Of this man I love

He clings to me
Like letting go
Means falling
Back into combat conscience

I release my grip on
The gun in my hand
And slide it back under
My pillow



E. M. Wills has been attending U.N.G. since 2011. She writes whenever the world speaks, devours chai and bubble teas for inspiration, and gets distracted easily by pretty things she takes random pictures of. She aspires to be a novelist, singer/songwriter, jewelry-maker, and amateur photographer by the time she graduates. (See also: 32)

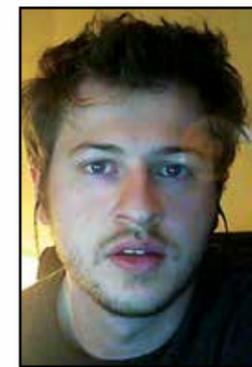
One Big Happy Nuclear Family

2nd

Joshua Hathcock

I found a staple on the inside of my tomato
I found the filament of an incandescent light bulb
that I know I tossed away with the garbage
on the inside of my Red Delicious
unexpectedly, I chewed into a 9 volt battery
I found on the coast of my California strawberry

I once heard the Eastern Ocean
brush against a thorn
I once heard the Western Moon
unzip its silver tongue
and pour radioactive ants
onto the skin of the earth.



Josh Hathcock has made it to adulthood without being completely disowned by his parents, and hasn't yet died of Ebola. If all goes well, he will graduate with a degree in Psychology and Philosophy and continue to write little things he calls poems. Now we wait.

3rd That Rain-soaked Street Kind of Lonely

E.M. Wills

It's that rain-soaked street kind of lonely
That sliding down a wall kind of helpless
That silent inner turmoil kind of sadness

It's that bus ride home kind of lonely
That eerie alley way kind of helpless
That empty stare-at-nothing kind of sadness

It's that dusk on a park bench kind of lonely
That what-now? Kind of helpless
That laughing yet crying kind of madness

The hard part isn't making difficult decisions—
It's living with them.

One-Act Plays

“There were so many stars . . . The
kind of sky that let you know you
were truly nothing.”

Emmy Dixon
“To Hell and Back”

1st To Hell and Back

Emmy Dixon

To Hell and Back Characters:

DYLAN JACKSON: 28, Ex-Army. Suffering from PTSD and a shoulder injury resulting in a permanent right hand twitch. Deployed to the Middle East with KATIE's brother Jefferson, who was killed there.

KATIE MURPHY: 25, psychology master's student at Vanderbilt University. She has known DYLAN all her life, but hasn't seen him in 10 years.

Time: present, late October

Setting: The rooftop of Ridge Crest Asylum, an abandoned mental hospital outside of Nashville, Tennessee. It is a flat portion of the roof, and there is an old bench that patients used to sit on to get fresh air. There is also a large partition to act as a wall, behind which the characters enter and exit.

The scene opens with DYLAN sitting on the park bench, barely illuminated from behind, a lit cigarette tip glowing. He takes a drag and starts whistling. He stops suddenly, lights a lantern, jumps up and creeps along the front of the stage looking out at the audience as if searching for something.

DYLAN: Where you at, you sonovabitch? I hear you! Show yourself, you fuckin' coward! *(He paces)*

DYLAN: Only a matter of time now . . . we're waiting for ya. You'll fuck up, then--game over. This'n here's an ace shot, *(Laughs)* huh, Jeff? *(Nudges the air next to him and realizes no one is there)*

(He retreats to the bench and sits, his right hand twitching.)

DYLAN: Brotha you really was a helluva shot. *(Pause)* 'Member that 12 point buck you took down? Had to be like 200 yards away. Still on my wall . . . hung your tags on it. First thing I see. Wasn't half the shot you were . . . damn sure tried, though. Think every wall up here has at least one slug in it. Couldn't seem to hit the cans . . . never had a steady hand. *(Laughs)* It truly ain't worth shit now.

(A noise is heard offstage that sounds like a rusty door screeching open. He jumps up and darts behind a partition. KATIE enters with a flashlight. He grabs her, covering her mouth with his hand, cutting off a scream. She shines the flashlight in his face and he recognizes her. DYLAN lets her go.)

KATIE: What the hell—Jesus, Dylan! Is that how you treat a lady?

DYLAN: A lady wouldn't follow a man to an abandoned asylum in the middle of the night. Not safe . . . not smart.

KATIE: I've been waiting for you to come by. Show your face to me . . . be a man.

(He turns his back to her)

KATIE: God, are you really that fucked up? Can you even remember the last night we were here together . . .

DYLAN: Daily.

KATIE: Liar.

(He spins back to her)

DYLAN: You have NO idea what I remember . . . what I can't forget. What I'd—

KATIE: *(Exploding)* Then tell me! Tell me why you've avoided me.

(He retreats to the bench and sits down. He takes out a flask and takes a drink. He lights another cigarette. She regains her composure.)

KATIE: *(Taking a softer approach)* Please, Dylan. Don't shut me out.

DYLAN: *(Exhaling smoke)* What exactly you wanna know, Katie baby?

(They remain about 10 feet apart.)

KATIE: *(Losing her temper again)* Damn you! Don't you call me that. You don't have the right anymore.

DYLAN: *(He gets up and faces her)* Is that 'cause you all grown, now? 'Cause you a lady? *(He looks her up and down slowly)* Yeah, you're all woman, now.

(Still holding a cigarette, he walks to her slowly. She takes a step back. He matches her. They continue until her back is against the post.)

KATIE: You're drunk.

DYLAN: You'd be right, of course. Always were. Miss Goody-good. I bet them big-shot Vandy ball players were all over this . . . *(Gestures towards her body but doesn't touch her)* How'd your daddy feel 'bout that, Katie baby? Nobody was ever good enough for his princess. And Mommy Dearest, I bet that bitch had a thing or two to say—

KATIE: *(She pushes him back)* I didn't come here to—

DYLAN: *(He grabs and shakes her)* Then why!? Why did you come here? We're not kids anymore . . . *(He softens, lets her go, and pushes her away gently)* Go home, Katie. You don't belong here.

KATIE: I never did, did I? This was always just y'all's place. Maybe if I had never come here that night, never.

DYLAN: He'd still be dead.

KATIE: I'd still have you.

DYLAN: You never had me, sweetheart. I was long gone.

KATIE: Look, I don't want to fight with you. It's been far too long. *(She gestures toward him)* You're still wearing that scarf?

DYLAN: I only now get to wear it. God knows it was too hot over there for a scarf. *(Laughs)* Nobody ever made me somethin' before . . .

KATIE: I should have done more. I've just been so consumed with school, determined to get out of here . . . I'd give anything just to bake him cookies one more time.

DYLAN: Your cookies were pretty amazing. They got us through in the beginning . . . he bragged 'bout his baby sister to everyone . . . drove 's crazy with it.

KATIE: Tell me about him.

DYLAN: What is there to tell? Good man gone too soon . . . shoulda been me. Nothing else to say.

KATIE: Nothing else to say? You stood right on this spot ten years ago and swore you'd bring my big brother home to me. *(With emotion)* You're here, and . . . he's, he's not. *(Low and harsh)* You . . . promised . . . me.

DYLAN: *(Shrugging)* Sometimes shit just don't work out.

KATIE: But I have—

(Grabbing her again, he shakes her harder)

DYLAN: *(Yelling in her face)* Dammit, Kate! Leave it! Go!

KATIE: *(Yelling back in his face)* You can't tell me what to do anymore! You aren't half the man he was.

(He suddenly releases her)

DYLAN: *(Calmer now, he smiles)* You're right. I'm sorry, ok? . . . you deser—I deserve this. If you're sure you wanna know . . . make yourself at home.

(They sit on the bench, and he offers her the flask. She takes a swig and coughs. He laughs.)

DYLAN: God, Jeff'd be pissed at me, gettin' his baby sister drunk up here. *(Pause)* You weren't supposed to turn out like us. You were better. *(Pause)* It was easier then . . . before. Just boys with BB guns and more balls than brains. So much more we were gonna do . . .

(He takes a swig and passes it back to her, but she pushes it back and stands.)

KATIE: I'm not here to get drunk. I just need to know what happened to my brother.

(He grabs her hand and pulls her back down. His right hand starts twitching again.)

DYLAN: There were so many stars . . . the kind of sky that let you know you were truly nothing. A lot like this one, I guess. Only, it was hotter there. Hot as Hell. We was pinned down on a rooftop, waiting on evac. Been up for days. He was just gonna rest his eyes a minute. It was on fire . . . so hot.

(His hand twitches more rapidly. She covers it with hers. He jerks it back.)

DYLAN: I took a slug in my shoulder. Destroyed it. Permanent nerve damage, they say. It was too hot . . . I couldn't breathe.

KATIE: Was that before . . . or after?

DYLAN: *(With emotion)* Oh, Katie. *(Pause)* Everything was after. I can't find before.

KATIE: Up here looking for a way back?

DYLAN: *(He lights a cigarette.)* Maybe. *(Taking a drag, he exhales)* Yeah, maybe. I won't break another promise . . . I can't.

(She stands and places a hand on his shoulder.)

KATIE: I'm truly sorry I can't fix you.

DYLAN: *(Shrugging off her hand)* Don't wanna be fixed! Just stick to snagging a rich man, like mommy. Too many shrinks, not enou—

KATIE: There's thousands more like you! Too many to count. Just like this God-forsaken asylum, all abandoned to rot. If only you—I just can't do it. Tonight, I need answers.

DYLAN: Just need to keep watch . . . get this right for once.

KATIE: Damn you . . . talk to me.

DYLAN: Why? It's not gonna—

KATIE: Because I trusted you! *(Pause)* We trusted you. He would have followed you to Hell and back—

(He begins pacing. Pausing, he looks out at the audience, back to her-interrupts her.)

DYLAN: But you never come back! It just gets hotter. Every fucking day it just—gets—hotter.

KATIE: You got to come home . . . and with a medal, no less.

DYLAN: *(laughs)* Home? There's no home for me, Katie baby.

(He turns so his profile is to her and pulls out his cigarettes, tries to light one, but his hand is shaking too bad. He tosses them down in frustration.)

KATIE: I think you lost your best friend, and you're determined to punis—

DYLAN: There you go again. Get outta here with that headshrinker bull—

KATIE: It's not bullshit! And you're not getting rid of me until I know how it happened. You owe me that.

DYLAN: Katie baby, we was just kids. I owe you nothing.

(He sits back on the bench and picks up his flask. He has to open it with his teeth because his hand is shaking too badly.)

KATIE: For Christ's sake! Why won't you just answer me?!

DYLAN: I did. As usual, you weren't listening. I told you what happened . . . to Jeff. Now get off my roof 'fore the chopper comes.

KATIE: The chopper?

DYLAN: You didn't think I was gonna stay here forever, did you? I gotta mission to complete. I need to get us home.

KATIE: A mission? *(Pause)* Dylan, what are you talking?

(He ignores her, jumps up, and creeps along the front of the stage again with the lantern in one hand and binoculars in the other.)

DYLAN: There you are, you sonovabitch! I got you now!

(He sets the binoculars and lantern down and mimics a machine gun. He pretends to fire into the audience before throwing the pretend gun down and rolling under the bench and peeking his head up from behind KATIE.)

KATIE: *(Grabbing his shoulder)* Dylan. Dylan stop. Look at me. There's no chopper coming.

DYLAN: But they're sendin' in back up! Area's too hot. I have to watch...cover their drop.

KATIE: There's no back up coming. It's just us.

DYLAN: They have to send the chopper. I can't get us out! We're all gonna die up here! Oh, God! No! It's too hot . . .

KATIE: Look at me, Dylan. It's just me. It's Katie baby. We're on top of Ridge Crest Asylum. There's no chopper . . . no mission.

DYLAN: Katie? I told you go to! Chopper don't have room for all three of us!

KATIE: Sweetie, it's just me and you.

DYLAN: *(Recognition dawning)* Oh God, Katie . . . I didn't mean it. I swear I didn't.

KATIE: What happened up there? What happened to my brother? What happened to you? To us all . . .

(He jumps up from behind the bench and starts pacing, getting more agitated.)

KATIE: Please—

DYLAN: I did it, ok!? I killed him! I fell asleep and some fuckin' sniper blew his brains out! I promised to watch, but I fucked up. There. Happy now? Dammit, Katie.

(He drops onto the bench next to her, deflated.)

KATIE: Happy? I'm not sure I'll ever be happy again. *(Pause)*

(She gets up and walks the stage.)

KATIE: I think this was the only place he was ever really happy. It was home for him. He was free up here. *(Sigh)* I know what you want, but I'm not giving it to you. I owe him that much.

DYLAN: Oh yeah? Sounds like psychobabble to me. I know I'm fucked up. Now leave. I got shit to do.

KATIE: You want me to punish you for Jeff's death. You want me to hate you. You want me to gut you . . . Well, I don't. I won't. I can't. You can burn in Hell, Dylan, but you can't take me with you.

DYLAN: *(Laughs)* You think anything you can say could possibly change this for me?

KATIE: I'm so sorry for you . . . for all of us. But I don't want to change this for you. I just want to give you the one thing that will give a chance . . . absolution.

DYLAN: Katie baby, I honestly don't care.

KATIE: That's fine. I care enough for all of us. *(Pauses and places a hand on his shoulder briefly)* I forgive you.

(She walks off stage, lights go down. He starts whistling again.)



Emmy Dixon is just a few semesters away from earning a bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in literature. It has been so long since she has had time for outside interests that any hobby not involving a citation sounds amazing. Please do not be intimidated by her awesomeness. (See Also: 97)

2nd

Lantern

Jansen Castleberry

Cast of Characters

IAN – a lanky teenager in a long jacket.

HANK – a man in his mid-seventies.

Time: Early evening

Place: A hospital chapel

Setting: The room is lined with pews covered in dark red velvet. The carpet is the same dark red color. One stained glass window looms over the front of the chapel and throws shadows. There are prayer candles lining the front of the room.

(Two people sit in a chapel. LAN sits in the back with headphones on. HANK sits toward the front. HANK turns to look at LAN.)

HANK: Do you mind?

(LAN looks up at him, confused.)

HANK: Your music. It's too damn loud.

(The volume of the music lowers as LAN takes a swig from his flask.)

HANK: Is this really the place for that?

(LAN continues to stare, confused. He raises his iPod to signal he's turned down the music.)

HANK: *(motions toward the flask)* For that.

(LAN shrugs and takes another long drink from it before putting it back in his jacket.)

HANK: Don't put that thing away on my account. Keep drinking... we're just in a damn chapel!

IAN: I don't think you should call it a "damn chapel."

HANK: I can't focus with you sitting back there.

40 **IAN:** You could turn around, you know. *(Annoyed)* Would you like for me to go?

Hank: No, no. This is a public place. You have a right to be here and you know it. That's this new

generation. They're so entitled.

IAN: And you don't feel entitled to be here?

Hank: There ain't that many rooms here where there's quiet. This is about the only one.

(LAN moves closer to HANK by sitting a few pews forward. HANK pretends not to notice.)

IAN: How do you know the hospital so well?

HANK: I remember mentioning that I like this room because it's usually quiet and empty.

IAN: Fine.

(LAN starts to stand up to go back to his seat, but HANK quickly speaks.)

HANK: No one has any personal decency anymore.

IAN: I have personal decency.

HANK: I bet you do. That's why you're sitting in the back of a damn hospital chapel blaring your music and drinking out of a flask! That just screams respectful to me.

IAN: You're the one who keeps calling it a "damn chapel..."

HANK: What's in that flask?

IAN: Whiskey. *(Pauses)* Want some?

HANK: No, no, no. I wouldn't dream of drinking after the likes of you. Teenagers with their mono and their HPV...

IAN: I swear I don't have mono or HPV if you really want some. I don't mind sharing. You seem like you could use a drink.

HANK: Oh, do I? Please enlighten me since you know everything.

IAN: You're picking a fight with a kid in a hospital chapel. Happy people don't do that.

HANK: I'll have you know I was incredibly happy once.

IAN: Why not be happy now?

HANK: There ain't all that much to be happy about now.

IAN: Is that why you're in a hospital chapel?

HANK: Yeah, my life's turned out real nice. Martha's upstairs dying of pneumonia for God's sake and not one of our four kids can bother to pop their ungrateful little heads in for a visit. Great bunch we raised...

IAN: I'm sorry.

HANK: Ain't nothin' to be sorry about. She's lived her eighty years promised to us by science and all the

pharmaceutical companies.

IAN: But it still can't be easy...

HANK: If there's anything I've learned in my life, it's that anything easy ain't worth the mud on your boots. You've got to work for anything worth your time.

IAN: Hard work is important, but some things do come easily.

HANK: Sure, things come easy. The flu, debt, war. Those things don't take a second thought. A good relationship, a steady job, that's what takes the most work. The things that everyone thinks are so easy.

IAN: Anyone who's married will come out and tell you that marriage is work.

HANK: Everyone thinks that finding their one true love should be easy. They don't think that first dates and all that horrible crap applies to them because they've watched one too many Disney movies.

IAN: Isn't it nice to be a little hopeful?

HANK: How old are you?

IAN: Eighteen.

HANK: Give it a few years.

IAN: I don't think something like hope goes away.

HANK: You'd be surprised. Innocence isn't something to be envied, it's something to pity. I feel real bad for people who still hold out hope.

IAN: *(Angrily)* That's ridiculous.

HANK: No, what's ridiculous is basing your whole life around something that ain't never gonna happen, and then falling apart when it doesn't work out.

IAN: You can't just live in fear of disappointment!

HANK: You can't live in hope either.

IAN: It's better to try, isn't it?

HANK: Shit, kid. I don't have a clue.

IAN: I mean, you don't want to spend your whole life in regret of what could have been, right? Sometimes you have to be hopeful or you'll never make anything of yourself.

HANK: Being hopeful doesn't mean being successful. How many successful people made it because they hoped they would? None. You've got to get off your ass and do something. Let me tell you something about hope, kid. You can drown in it after a while.

IAN: *(Scoffs)* Poetic.

HANK: Ain't never heard of someone drowning in ambition, but hope's what'll kill you.

IAN: Obviously you're just pissed because your life didn't amount to anything.

HANK: This is exactly what I'd expect from someone like you. It's about every no good one of those 'Carpe Diem' touting teachers. They teach these kids to go out and seize the day, but don't teach them the skills to do it. What do you want to do with your life, kid?

IAN: *(Quietly)* I don't know yet.

HANK: See! You harp on about having hopes and dreams, but you ain't got one single thing thought up when someone asks you about yours.

IAN: I'm exploring my options.

HANK: You need to have a plan before you meander around for years.

IAN: I'm not going to meander. I'm going to find what makes me happy and then do it.

HANK: What a novel idea. If we all did what made us happy, there would be nobody to deal with the garbage or plumbing or accounting. You can't always have your dream job. There's that hopeful naivety again.

IAN: It's not naïve to think that someone should be happy.

HANK: It's naïve to think someone is entitled to happiness. You all think you're entitled to this picture perfect life. Guess what? The world don't work like that. You've got to work hard for things that you don't even want.

IAN: You're missing the point.

HANK: And what is the point?

IAN: The world is so full of horrible things...I just think we should all try and be as happy as we can. What's life without happiness?

(HANK is silent for a moment. IAN takes his flask back out of his jacket and takes a long sip from it. He clears his throat and puts it back in his jacket.)

IAN: You think my life has just been rainbows and sunshine? Why do you think I'm here? Since you didn't bother to ask...

HANK: Why are you here?

IAN: My best friend, Haley, she got in a car crash this afternoon.

HANK: What was the accident?

IAN: Some guy was texting and ran a red light. She's in the ICU.

HANK: Sorry to hear about your friend...

IAN: *(Distantly)* Yeah. I just hope she's going to be okay.

HANK: Do you think hope is going to get her out of that hospital bed? Sure, I hoped for a while that Martha would get better. Guess what happened? More fluid built up in her lungs and now she's breathing

through a respirator. She ain't never going to walk out of here with me.

IAN: You don't know that. I've heard of people coming back from horrible diseases.

HANK: And I've heard the statistics of people dying from a cold. You said it yourself. There ain't no justice. Everything is just up to chance.

IAN: You don't believe in a bigger plan?

HANK: Do you mean God?

IAN: I mean someone that has control over the universe. Do you believe it's really all just controlled chaos out there?

HANK: I've never been given a reason not to.

IAN: You've never been given a reason to believe that there's a master plan for all of us? You've never had a spiritual moment?

HANK: I once got tickets to a sold out Mets game. That's about as spiritual as I get.

IAN: So why do you practically live in this chapel? A chapel implies at least a little religious affiliation.

HANK: Born Jewish. Raised agnostic. All of this candle lighting crap has never made sense to me.

IAN: I think it's nice. Symbolic.

HANK: I think it's a fire hazard.

IAN: Do you ever pray in here?

HANK: No.

IAN: Ever bargain in here?

HANK: Bargain?

IAN: You know...the five stages of grief. First there's denial, which you're not in, and you're perpetually angry, so I figured you had moved on to bargaining.

HANK: Who would I bargain with?

IAN: God? Allah? The Mets? I don't know. Whoever you think could give you back control over the situation.

HANK: Bargaining is for flea markets.

IAN: After bargaining comes depression. Then, acceptance. When do you think that'll hit?

HANK: I accepted this a long time ago. Nobody's gonna live forever.

IAN: Don't you want to walk out of here with your wife?

HANK: Not if she can't even breathe on her own. It's time she goes if things are that rough for her.

IAN: But she's the love of your life—

HANK: And she's been in a hospital bed for the past year. What a great life. No, if she's ready to go, she can go. I ain't gonna hold her back. *(Pause)* I imagine, from the whiskey and the headphones that you're still in denial.

IAN: No...I—

HANK: Well, listen, you don't want her to live a life that ain't worth livin', do you? It's selfish to want her to stay with you when her heart ain't in it.

IAN: What do you mean?

HANK: Do you think Martha likes not breathing on her own? Do you think we wanted to spend our retirement going in and out of hospitals? She lived a good life, kid. I'm proud of her for holding on as long as she has, but it's time for her to go.

IAN: Haley's strong. She's going to pull through this and be even better for it. She's no quitter.

HANK: There are some mountains we just can't climb. No matter how tough we are. No matter how much we hope.

IAN: No wonder you're so angry. You have no idea how real love works! You're so busy trying to criticize everyone for being happy that you've never actually tried to be happy yourself.

HANK: I've had seventy some-odd years of happiness. At some point, you've got to let it go. Hope just ain't gonna cut it for me anymore. Sometimes, life is horrible and there's no way around it. You can hope and pray all you want, but nothing is going to make this go away.

(IAN gets up and walks over to the rows of candles. He strikes a match and lights one.)

IAN: It can't hurt to try. Want me to light one for your wife? Just in case?

HANK: You'd have to light a goddamn lantern to save her.

(IAN lights two more candles and then blows out the match.)

IAN: It can't hurt to try.



Jansen Castleberry is currently in a love affair with English and Spanish at the University of North Georgia. She was born in the suburbs of north Georgia, but tells everyone she's from Atlanta to give herself some street cred. If she isn't writing, she is either reading, listening to podcasts, laughing at her own jokes, or watching stand-up comedy in fresh-from-the-dryer pajamas.

3rd

Gone Fishin'

Sarah Madsen

Characters:

TOM JOHNSON – Eighteen years old, high school senior. Thin but muscled.

JENNY FOSTER – Seventeen years old, high school senior. Skinny and pretty.

DREW JONES – Eighteen years old, high school senior.

KYLE BRADLY – Nineteen years old, high school senior. Large build.

RESTAURANT MANAGER – Middle-aged man, balding, thin.

Scene One

Scene: The woods, mid-afternoon, late spring. A small pond lies under the trees. TOM sits at the edge, holding a fishing rod with the line in the water, wearing a t-shirt and torn-up jean shorts. A tackle box and a tin can of worms sit next to him.

JENNY: *(Enters stage left, wearing shorts, a tank top, and flip-flops.)* There you are, Tom. I figured I'd find you here. When your daddy said you'd gone fishin', I knew there was only one place you'd be. *(She sits next to TOM.)* I've been trying to call you all morning. You gotta pick the one place you don't get reception.

TOM: Why do you think I come here?

JENNY: I know it's not to get away from me. Why do you come here? You never catch anything.

TOM: The point ain't to catch something.

JENNY: What's the point, then?

TOM: The point is the fishing.

JENNY: I thought the point of fishin' was to catch fish.

TOM: *(Shakes his head.)* You've known me how long and you still gotta ask questions like this?

JENNY: Ten years, but I don't see what that has to do with fishin'.

TOM: You'll see. Just be quiet, you're ruinin' the ambiance.

JENNY: Ambiance? Did you learn a new word, Tommy? How long you been tryin' to get that into a sentence?

TOM: I said hush. Geez, woman, why you gotta analyze everything?

(JENNY opens her mouth to respond, but TOM gives her a look, and she sits back quietly. They sit in silence for a few seconds.)

TOM: I got a letter from Brown today.

JENNY: *(Pauses for him to go on, but it's obvious he's not going to say anything else.)* And?

TOM: *(Pauses a moment longer)* I got in.

JENNY: You did? That's great, Tom! *(She gives him an enthusiastic hug, but he doesn't seem excited)* What's wrong?

TOM: I dunno if I'm gonna go.

JENNY: Why the hell would you not go?

TOM: *(Shrugs)* I dunno. I mean, why should I? My family and friends are all here.

JENNY: Yeah, you could stay here. And do what? Go to community college with the rest of us hicks? I don't think so. You're going.

TOM: What are you, my mom?

JENNY: C'mon, Tommy, I'm serious.

TOM: Yeah.

(They sit in silence for a few moments.)

JENNY: *(Quietly)* I wish I could go with you.

TOM: Me too.

(They're silent for a few more moments.)

JENNY: Kyle was trollin' around your house earlier, lookin' for you. He seemed really pissed.

TOM: He's probably still mad that I wouldn't let him cheat off me during the graduation test.

JENNY: Whatever. I'm glad you didn't. Can you imagine if you'd got caught? You could kiss Brown and any other school goodbye. *(Starts to toss pebbles in the water.)*

TOM: Yeah. Cut that out, you're scarin' the fish.

JENNY: There ain't no fish here, Tommy. C'mon, let's go get lunch.

(JENNY stands and picks up the tackle box and can of worms. TOM sighs and reels in his line. They exit stage left.)

Scene Two

Scene: A local restaurant, similar to Waffle House or other corner café. JENNY and TOM are seated at a booth, eating. DREW enters stage right.

DREW: Hey Tom, hey Jenny.

JENNY: Heya Drew! What's goin' on? *(She moves over for DREW to sit next to her.)*

DREW: *(Slides in next to JENNY.)* Not a whole lot. Waitin' on my rejection letters to start pouring in.

JENNY: C'mon Drew, it's not so bad. You can go to college here with me!

DREW: Yeah, if I even manage to graduate. I'm not sure if I'm gonna pass algebra, and Mrs. Richardson isn't givin' me any breaks.

TOM: You'll pass, Drew. You want me to help you out?

DREW: Could you? Yeah, man, that'd be great. This stuff is like a foreign language to me.

TOM: No problem, man.

JENNY: Speakin' of college, Tommy here got accepted to Brown. Can you believe it?

TOM: Jenny...

JENNY: What? You should be proud!

DREW: Brown? Congrats, man. How you gonna pay for that?

TOM: *(Pauses)* I got a scholarship.

JENNY: What? You didn't tell me that!

TOM: I knew you'd just make a big deal about it.

JENNY: It is a big deal!

DREW: I always knew you were too smart for the rest of us. Off to bigger and better things, huh Tom?

(KYLE enters stage right. He looks around the restaurant and spots TOM and the others. He heads for their

booth, looking angry.)

KYLE: Johnson!

JENNY: *(Sees KYLE)* Aw, crap.

KYLE: Johnson, I wanna talk to you.

TOM: Whaddya want, Kyle?

KYLE: I'm gonna kick your ass.

TOM: That's not talking, Kyle.

KYLE: Oh, you gonna be a smart ass now? Well how 'bout this: Because of you, I ain't gonna graduate. Again.

TOM: And how is that my fault?

KYLE: You shoulda let me copy off you. It wouldn't of hurt you none.

JENNY: Kyle, if they'd caught you, y'all woulda both been expelled.

KYLE: Shut up, Foster, I didn't ask you.

DREW: Hey, man, leave her alone. She's right.

KYLE: Fine. I'm here for Johnson anyway. C'mon Johnson, let's go.

TOM: I'm not gonna fight you, Kyle. Go away.

(KYLE knocks TOM's food off the table.)

DREW: *(Stands up between KYLE and TOM)* Hey, man, take it easy.

(KYLE shoves DREW into the booth seat. THE MANAGER comes out of the back)

MANAGER: Hey! You boys knock it off or take it outside! *(KYLE stares down at TOM.)* I'm serious, or I'll call the cops.

KYLE: *(Steps back)* Fine. But this ain't over, Johnson. *(Exits stage right)*

Scene Three

Scene: Back in the woods, at the fishing spot. JENNY is lying on a towel against a tree, sunglasses on, in a bikini top and shorts. TOM is fishing, wearing a similar t-shirt and shorts as before. A few moments of silence pass.

JENNY: I can't believe we graduate next week.

TOM: Yeah.

JENNY: I mean, can you believe it? We're graduating, Tommy.

TOM: Yeah.

JENNY: You got your speech ready?

TOM: Yeah.

JENNY: *(Sits up and takes off her sunglasses, looking at TOM)* You sure are chatty today.

TOM: Yeah. *(JENNY gives him a look)* I'm just thinkin'.

JENNY: 'Bout what?

TOM: Just school and stuff. How weird it's gonna be to leave here.

JENNY: You don't have to worry about that 'til August. We've got all summer. And you'll be back for Christmas and stuff.

TOM: Yeah, that's gonna be even weirder. Being gone for months and then coming back? What if you guys all get along just fine without me?

JENNY: We will. Mostly. But that doesn't mean we won't miss you.

TOM: *(Silent)*

JENNY: We will! And it'll be great, you'll come home and realize how much you were missed, and I'll give you a huge hug and say "Merry Christmas!" and it'll all be the same. And we'll have three weeks together and then you'll go back to school and I'll see you again in the summer. Just don't you go and forget about us.

TOM: I could never forget about you.

(They're silent for a few moments, eyes locked. TOM leans in as if to kiss her.)

KYLE: *(Offstage)* Johnson!

JENNY: Aw, crap.

KYLE: *(Enters stage left, beer bottle in hand. He's stumbling)* There you are. There's the great valedictorian. Top of his class. Scholarship to some fancy-ass school. Feel proud of yourself?

TOM: *(Looking at the water)* Go away, Kyle.

KYLE: No. I ain't goin' away. I'm gonna kick your ass. C'mon.

JENNY: *(Stands up)* Kyle, you're drunk, you should just –

(KYLE shoves her out of the way and she slams into the tree)

TOM: *(Stands up)* Hey! Kyle, take it easy!

(He rushes TOM. They struggle.)

JENNY: Kyle! Stop! *(She gets up and tries to pull KYLE off TOM. He shoves her off.)* Kyle! Knock it off! *(She glances around and picks up a large rock. There's the sound of breaking glass and TOM cries out in pain just before she hits KYLE in the back of the head with the rock. KYLE slumps to the ground. TOM stumbles, his hands holding his stomach.)*

JENNY: Tom? Tommy, are you ok?

(TOM silently pulls his hands away from his stomach. They're bloody. He slumps to his knees.)

JENNY: Tommy! *(She rushes to his side as he slumps all the way to the ground. She pulls out her cell phone and tries to call 911 but there's no service.)* Crap! *(She presses her towel against his stomach.)* Hold on, Tommy! I'll get help! *(Exit stage left)*

Scene Four

Scene: The fishing spot in winter. The trees are bare, fallen leaves cover the ground. JENNY enters stage left, wearing jeans with boots and a winter coat. She's carrying a fishing pole and tackle box. She sits in the normal spot and casts her line into the water.

JENNY: Sorry it's been a while since I've been here. School's been real crazy with finals and all, and I knew you'd want me to do well. I'm making sure to get all my work done and I'm studyin' real hard...I think I'm actually gonna make A's this semester. Can you believe that, Tommy? I've never made all A's in my entire life. *(She is silent for a moment)*

I guess I figured you'd want me to do well. I knew you wouldn't let me get away with slackin' off. Drew's doin' good too...I'm helpin' him with his math class, he's helpin' me with biology. I never knew he was so good at that stuff. You did, though, didn't you? *(she pauses again)*

I guess we are getting along fine without you here. Christmas is gonna be really weird though...I'm supposed to welcome you home with a big hug and say – *(Her bobber bounces in the water, and she reels it in, looking shocked. There's a large fish hooked on the end of the line, and she looks at it in silence before breaking into tears.)* Merry Christmas, Tommy.



Currently an English student at the University of North Georgia, Sarah Madsen has had several pieces published in The Chestatee Review and has attended literary festivals and writers' conferences both inside and outside of Georgia. She lives in Cumming with her husband and two wonderful, character-building sons. She prefers lattes over plain coffee, daydreaming over studying, and writing over everything else.

*Fiction**Empire of Lithium*

Tim Bellows

1st

“I look around Fairview and it
seems like the town is bleeding.”

Michael Myers
“Bleeding Out”

My cart laden with groceries, I marched my way through the open supermarket doors and out into the sinking afternoon sun. The grating scrape of the cart’s wheels against the rough asphalt echoed solemnly across the deserted parking lot as dozens of quiet cars looked on in somber silence. Though the frequent September rains had kept away the worst of the grime of neglect, the few vehicles that had been filthy beforehand now stood speckled with streaks of clean amidst an outline of dirt. There was something profoundly morose about the way they watched me as I loaded my bags of cans into the bed of my truck; it was almost as if they were sad to see me leave, sad to see the last reminder of their former lives drive off into the distance, leaving them to another long week of trudging through existence without a reason to exist.

I tried not to dwell on it too much. I simply swallowed one of my pills and started the engine.

By the time I got back home, Dave had finally gotten out of bed and made it as far as the living room before collapsing once again on the couch, his face buried in the pillows and his limbs hanging limply at his sides. When I struggled

through the door, the intense weight of the bags apparent by my clenched jaw and heavy breathing, Dave didn’t so much as glance up. It was only once one of the bags split open and sent an avalanche of cans clattering across the hardwood floor that he finally lifted his head long enough to make eye contact before slumping glumly back into his previous position.

Furious as I was, I didn’t say a word. In that moment, I hated Dave for what he was, but deep down I knew it wasn’t his fault and that sometimes I wasn’t much better off. At the same time, I couldn’t help feel a bit of resentment at the fact that he didn’t try harder to fight it; we both knew full well that everything would go more smoothly if he would just take the pills I set out for us every morning. But I knew from experience that it was too late to do anything now, so I simply took the load of groceries to the kitchen before returning to collect the cans I’d dropped. A few were pretty badly dented, but thankfully nothing had ruptured – the last thing I needed was to spend half the evening mopping up chicken soup while Dave was incapacitated.

Back in the kitchen, I lit the stove with a match, placed a pot on a burner,

and filled it with the contents of a can of clam chowder. The pale slop looked far from appetizing as it slid dully into the pot, but I figured I could pour it over some pasta to at least imitate a casserole. I even half considered topping the whole thing with breadcrumbs and tossing it in the oven to brown, but I didn't want to waste the power, not with winter coming and gasoline becoming increasingly hard to find.

By the time the meal was finished, Dave had finally dragged himself off the couch, trudged to the dining room table, and even lit a candle so that the entire room was bathed in a soft yellow glow. Even in the twinkling light of the flame, his eyes looked dead, his face slumped and wilted like a leaf left too long in the sun. Wordlessly, I set a bowl of the chowder concoction in front of him and took my place at the opposite end of the table.

For several minutes, we ate in silence, until at last Dave looked up and asked hollowly, "Did you find any caramels at the store today?"

I took a deep breath and set my fork down in my half-empty bowl. "I keep telling you, man, they don't have any. People probably grabbed the last bags way back when it started spreading and everyone was freaking out and ransacking all the stores. It's a miracle I was able to scrounge up these cans."

Dave frowned, the lines in his face deepening in the shadows cast by the candle until he looked like no more than a grim caricature of himself. "What about the one across town? Or the gas station over by the old theater? Did you even check those?"

I was starting to lose my temper. Dave and I had had this conversation at least a half-dozen times before, and it always ended the same way. "No, Dave, I didn't check them," I said in exasperation. "I've told you, it doesn't make sense to zigzag across town looking for specific things. We need to focus on one spot and clear it out completely before moving on to the next one. This gas won't last us forever, you know."

"Whatever, Mike," mumbled Dave, sinking lower in his chair and pushing his bowl away. "Just whatever."

By that point, my patience was gone. "You know, if you want your stupid candy so badly, why don't you go get it yourself? I'm getting pretty tired of being the one who always has to go get the food and the gas and the other supplies while you spend the day moping around because you're too stubborn to take your medication."

I hadn't meant to sound so harsh, but it was too late to take it back – I could tell I'd gone too far, but before I could even begin to apologize, Dave was already halfway out the door. "You don't know what it's like," he spat, his eyes cold and wooden in the gauntness of his face. "You think you understand just because you've got cyclothymia, but you have no idea. Comparing you to me is like comparing a drizzle to a hurricane. Sure, those stupid lithium pills even me out a bit, but what do I get in return? Crippling headaches and hands that won't stop twitching for hours at a time!" At that point, the strain in Dave's voice died out, only to be replaced by a note of abject bitterness. "It's not medicine for me like it is for you, man. It's just poison. I wish

I'd never even been on it so I could have died out with the rest." And with that, he turned his back to me and plodded back upstairs where I heard the soft clicks of his door closing and locking.

For a long time, I just sat staring at the congealing remains of my dinner. I hated to admit it, but Dave was completely right. I remembered how he was before everything fell apart, back when we were just casual acquaintances in our bipolar support group, before each of us had become all the other had left. At that time, Dave had been living with his girlfriend Audrey, and it was really only because of her that he did anything, including take his pills. I remember he mentioned the negative side effects at a few of the meetings, but it was always in such an offhanded manner, as if they were only a mild inconvenience. In retrospect, that's probably because that's all they were at the time; Dave would have done anything for Audrey, even suffered through the headaches and tremors.

All of that had changed about a month back when the first reports of the disease started popping up. It was small-scale at first – a couple of victims here, a minor outbreak there – but by the end of the first week, half the country was showing symptoms. At first, everyone flocked to the countryside to try to escape the plague, but when it became apparent that the virus was airborne and spreading like wildfire, they returned to the cities in droves to seek treatment at top hospitals. Little did they know that the disease had left doctors completely baffled, and before any major breakthroughs could be made, virtually all

of the population was dead. The entire outbreak had lasted just over two weeks.

Even now, a full month after all the chaos had begun, those few of us that remained had learned nothing more regarding the mysterious illness. By the final days of the pandemic, the doctors and scientists were fairly certain that the disease was artificially created, some new form of bioterrorism – no known virus even came close to this one's speed of transmission or near-perfect kill rate. As for why Dave and I had survived, no one had even suspected that lithium might provide immunity until it was far too late. Technically, we still weren't positive that the pills were what saved us. But after the disease hit our small town and the few people that hadn't evacuated started coughing up blood while Dave and I and the other members of our support group simply came down with colds, it was pretty hard to deny that our medication had saved us.

Leaving my bowl on the table, I strode through the kitchen just long enough to grab a beer from the pantry before heading out to the front porch. Bemoaning the lack of refrigeration, I popped the tab on the tepid can and sipped reflexively as I stared out into the unending blackness of the front yard. I let the liquid sit in my mouth for a long time before swallowing, let the lukewarm bitterness sink deep into my tongue until I almost wanted to spit it out. Then somewhere in the pine trees to my left, a bird crowed; I glanced up, and suddenly I found myself staring at the canvas of the sky.

It hadn't quite sunk in until that point, but the night sky was a thousand

times more defined than it had been a month ago. Each star shone brightly with a stark tenacity, as if personally challenging those around it to glow all the brighter. For what seemed like an eternity, I simply stared in wonder at the majesty before me, lost in the sheer scale of what I was seeing.

Then all at once, my eyes focused, and I picked out the rusty glow of Mars amidst the tangle of lights. Immediately, I thought of Lydia and how she always used to bring pictures of the planets to our support meetings. I remembered how she used to pass them around, her small brown eyes lighting up each time one of us remarked how beautiful they were. Astrophotography had been the only thing that kept her together during her depressive periods, but not even that had been enough to save her from the crushing sense of despair that had enveloped everyone once the world had fallen in around us. With so much gone so fast, she and all the others simply hadn't been able to cope. Suddenly I felt disgusted at having enjoyed the starry view.

I tossed the nearly-full beer can into the bushes and went back inside.

Over the next several weeks, Dave's mood slowly began to improve more and more. We never really talked about the incident that night at the dinner table, but as time passed, it was clear that Dave's depressive phase was on its way out. He spent more and more time downstairs in my company, and he even volunteered to help prepare and clean up after meals. I knew he still wasn't taking his pills and that this behavior wouldn't last, but I

didn't see the sense in worrying too much about that – for the moment, everything was looking up, and it seemed foolish to dwell on the unpleasantness of the future.

As September shifted into October and the seasons started to change, it became apparent that our living situation was in dire need of some upgrading. The rusty old generator we had stuffed into a corner of the kitchen had been on its last legs for weeks now, and the stockpile of gas I had gathered to fuel it grew scarcer by the day. Up until that point, we had only used the generator's precious electricity to run a few basic kitchen appliances and the occasional emergency light, but with colder weather fast approaching, we knew we would have to allot enough gas to ignite the furnace on nights when it dropped well below freezing. At this point, Dave still hadn't left the house since everything had ended, so I was more than a little surprised when he volunteered to come with me on a supply run. When I questioned him further, he mumbled some response about wanting to get some fresh air, but deep down, I could tell he felt a little guilty that he had yet to contribute much to our survival. Rather than stirring up old feelings by making him admit it outright, I simply smiled and replied that I would be happy to have some company.

That crisp October morning, we piled into my old truck and set off for town. I noticed Dave hadn't dressed for the occasion – his thin white t-shirt and weathered jeans would hardly be enough to protect him from the chill that had permanently settled into the air. But he seemed in an uncharacteristically good mood, so rather than saying anything

and running the risk of upsetting him, I simply cranked up the heat a couple of extra notches so that he would be comfortable.

Before long, we arrived at the same store where I had scavenged soup cans the night Dave and I had had our row. The few gas stations in town had been sucked dry back during the initial panic, so all our fuel came from siphoning the contents of abandoned vehicles. I had hit this lot once or twice before, but there were at least a few cars I knew had yet to be touched, so it was to those that we now headed, two starving vultures descending to pick the bones of their prey.

Pulling a length of hose from the back seat of my truck, I popped open the gas cap of the nearest car and threaded the tubing inside while Dave watched curiously from a few feet away. Seeing the look of quizzical uneasiness on his face, it suddenly occurred to me that he had probably never thought through exactly how we were going to collect the gas. Dave had never had a particularly strong stomach, and for the first time, I began to worry that bringing him along had been a mistake.

"Look, you don't have to do it yourself if you don't want," I said, trying my best to sound nonchalant as if the whole ordeal were of no real importance. "You really don't even have to watch. I've done it enough times now that I barely even think about it."

That last part was a lie – the gas tasted like death and made me want to vomit every time I even smelled it – but I could hardly just flat out say that, not after Dave had been so eager to come

along and help. It wasn't clear whether he believed me either; for a long moment, he simply stared at the hose running out of the car the way most people would stare at a particularly nasty leech. Then abruptly he took a big step back and leaned against the truck, his face a strange mix of revulsion and confusion, before shivering and wrapping his bare arms around his torso. "It's cold out here, man," he said. "I think we should head back."

"C'mon, Dave, it's really okay. I know it's weird, but it's the only way we've got to harvest the gas. Just pass me a few more of the cans from the back and you can sit in the truck where it's warm while I take care of everything."

For a second, I thought he was actually going to refuse. But after another leery glance at the hose, Dave gave a curt nod and fished an armful of faded red gas containers out of the truck. Hurriedly placing them in a clumsy pile by where I knelt at the abandoned car's side, he abruptly turned away, announced in a forced, matter-of-fact tone that he was heading inside to search for caramels, and strode away, arms taut against his body and back stooped against the wind, looking for all the world like a haggard seagull caught in a hurricane.

I filled the cans myself and, holding back my gag reflex, loaded the containers into the bed of the truck. My task finished, I dug around in the glove box until I found the bottle of cherry soda I'd brought from home. Ripping the cap off, I took the biggest swig my mouth could hold, swished it around, and spit it disgustingly onto the pavement, repeating the process once, twice, three times until

the last remnant of the gas flavor was gone. I didn't even like cherry soda, but in all the weeks I'd been collecting fuel, it was the only thing I had found that would overpower the petroleum taste.

Tossing the last of the bottle aside, I strode hesitantly toward the store to see how Dave had come along in his search. Though at first I thought he might have disappeared amongst the labyrinth of dusty aisles and decrepit shelves, I soon found him at the back of the store, staring dejectedly at an empty confections display and shivering slightly in the drafty air. Sighing softly to myself, I came up behind him and slid my coat over his shoulders.

"Why didn't you just wear warmer clothes?" I asked softly, trying my hardest to keep the irritation out of my voice.

"I don't have any," Dave replied slowly. "I never had much to begin with, and all of it is back at my old house in my closet along with... along with Audrey's things."

As he said this last part, a lump jumped suddenly into his throat, so the final words came out slightly choked and garbled. In that moment, I felt more pity for Dave than I had ever felt before. Moving on after everything ended hadn't been easy for anyone, but it had certainly been less painful for people like me who hadn't had many close friends or family. Trying my best to remain composed, I put my hand on Dave's shoulder and began to pull him toward the exit.

"C'mon, man. Let's go get you some new clothes."

Back in the truck, we swung a few miles out of our way in order to hit the town's only department store, located

on the fringes of the city line. Unlike the supermarket, the department store boasted an uncannily empty parking lot – not a single object stood in the way of the sea of asphalt save for a few solitary pieces of trash whipping despondently in the wind. Inside, the store was eerily preserved, for few people had been out clothes shopping in the midst of the plague. Racks and racks of warm garments sat abandoned under pre-autumn sale signs that would never be taken down.

Heading to the coat department, I helped Dave try on a small selection of jackets until we narrowed it down to two. For several minutes, he flip-flopped back and forth before finally crying out in exasperation, "Gah, I don't know! Which one should I get?"

I couldn't help myself – I laughed aloud. Dave glared at me, his tired eyes smoldering in their sockets. "It's not funny!" he huffed, his brow furrowed in frustration. "I really can't decide which one I like better."

"You don't have to pick just one," I said, suppressing a chuckle. "We have this entire store to ourselves. We have this entire *town* to ourselves. We can take anything we want."

For a moment, Dave just stared blankly, the coats hanging limply in his arms. Then all at once, he too started laughing, a bright peal of pure, unburdened merriment the likes of which I hadn't heard for months. "Well then, what are we waiting for?" he said with a grin. And before I could respond, he was running down the aisle, yanking off articles of clothing at random and throwing them happily over his shoulder.

I followed suit, paying no mind to the size or the appearance of the items I grabbed – I was simply happy to have a much-needed moment of unconditional fun.

That night, we dressed in brand new dress shirts and khakis and dined upon the last real, unpreserved potatoes I had been saving in the cellar for a special occasion. As we ate, we made toasts and sipped wine from a pair of crystal glasses, pretending we were guests at an elegant banquet. For half the night we drank and joked, telling zany stories and laughing till we were red in the face. Dave never brought up Audrey, but neither did the mention of other aspects from his old life trigger any kind of negative reaction. For a while, it was as if everything were normal.

When at last Dave passed out on the couch sometime in the wee hours of the morning, I finally trudged upstairs to my bedroom, feeling more content than I had in as long as I could remember. Alone, I set to hanging up the pile of clothes I had acquired that day at the store; after Dave and I had spent awhile running around and grabbing everything we could see, we had thankfully had enough sense to go back and make sure that at least most of it was in the right size, meaning that I now had an entire wardrobe of crisp new garments. But as I placed each article on a hanger and hung it neatly from a rod, I made a startling discovery: the shirt I wore, the striped sky-blue button-up I had been so pleased to find at the store, was identical to one already hanging in my closet. All at once, a flood of old memories came rushing back: a first date complimenting that it

fit me well; my niece remarking on the softness of the fabric when she hugged me after her graduation; a coworker joking that I seemed to wear it virtually every week. It had been my favorite shirt... and yet in everything that had transpired over the past few months, I had forgotten I had ever owned it.

Suddenly, it was as if the joy and ceaseless laughter of the afternoon had never happened. I threw the shirt in a crumpled heap on the floor and went to bed.

As October fed into November and November faded to grey, it became clearer and clearer that Dave had entered solidly into a manic phase. He barely seemed to sleep, and I often heard him pacing about the house at all hours of the night, sometimes even muttering to himself in a voice too low to decipher. During the day, he often locked himself in his room and worked on personal projects for hours at a time. Sometimes he scribbled rough poems or stories, sometimes he built contraptions out of miscellaneous bits he found around the house; once he even ran out to the local music store and brought back a trumpet which he spent an entire afternoon trying to learn to play before finally giving up and lobbing the instrument off the back porch in frustration. At mealtimes, he was typically hurried and irritable, bolting down his food as quickly as possible and answering all my inquiries with rapid bursts of speech. Annoying as this behavior was, I tried my best to leave him alone and let him do things his own way. I kept busy with my own work, and oftentimes we'd spend entire days in the

house together without ever seeing one another.

One afternoon, I came home from a worryingly fruitless supply run and was met with the sound of metal hitting wood in an endless cacophony of dull thuds. Making my way around the back of the house, I found Dave, shirtless and panting in the frigid autumn air, repeatedly smashing an axe into what was left of a tree. The poor oak, which had stood tall and majestic that very morning, now lay mutilated at Dave's feet, looking more and more defeated with each blow.

"What are you doing?!" I cried, sprinting into the yard. "That tree has been here for decades! What did you go and chop it down for?"

Dave shrugged noncommittally and struck another echoing blow. "It was blocking the sun," he replied as if the answer were obvious. "I wanted the sunlight to reach my room even later in the day."

"But you can't just cut down a tree out of the blue like that!" I yelled, wrestling the axe away from him. "I loved that tree. It was about the only beautiful thing to look at in the whole backyard, and you just went and chopped it down like the self-absorbed child you are. What is *wrong* with you?"

Immediately, Dave's face darkened, his even demeanor transforming before my eyes into the embodiment of rage. "Oh, so now you're in charge of all the decisions, Mr. Even-Headed, Mr. Calm-and-Rational? You've done nothing but try to control me from the start, and I've had about enough of you thinking you're above me. From now on, it's time for us to be equals."

Without any further explanation, Dave pushed past me and climbed into the sedan he had claimed for himself after we'd found it parked with the keys in the ignition on one of our runs. Before I had time to stop him, he sped out of the driveway and disappeared around the bend, the fading sound of his engine reverberating through the quiet afternoon. I didn't feel good about letting him storm off in such a terrible mood, but I knew he'd be back eventually, and I didn't see what else I could do other than wait and try to sort it out then. I went about my business, and before long, Dave was completely out of my mind.

Then I saw the smoke.

Thick and black, it came curling up out of the woods to the west, the tendrils roiling toward the sky like thrashing snakes. Fearing the worst, I leaped into my truck and sped off towards town, all the while hoping against hope that it wasn't as bad as it seemed.

It didn't take long to discover the source of the fire. Dave stood on the edge of the hospital parking lot, watching with a frenzied grin as the section that contained the psych ward erupted in bright orange flame. The blaze had already consumed the majority of that wing, and I knew it wouldn't be long before the rest of the building was gone. In that moment, I understood exactly what Dave had meant about making us equals.

As I stood there watching the only source of lithium I had ever known slowly crumble to ash, I felt a strange array of emotions course through me. First, expectedly, was anger, but that soon gave way to a more abject betrayal, before

finally mellowing into a bizarre state of acceptance. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that this had been coming for some time now. I had only to put the final pieces into place.

I strode forward until I was level with Dave, and for a moment, the two of us simply stood there, side by side, watching the hospital burn. I could see out of the corner of my eye that he was watching me, waiting for a reaction, the smug anticipation prevalent even through the shadows dancing across his face. But I refused to give him one. I simply reached into my pocket, withdrew the single wrapped caramel I had been saving all this time in case I ever really needed to pull Dave out of a slump, and handed it to him without a word. Then I turned away, got back into my truck, and drove off without looking back.

On my way out, I made one last stop at the house to gather a few supplies, including the last of the lithium pills from my stash. I didn't have many – probably

only enough for the next week – but I figured that was better than nothing. I grabbed a bag full of food and a small bundle of clothes, but elected to leave both blue button-ups behind. Then with one last look at the house that had sheltered Dave and me for the past three months, I drove off to the east, toward the main highway that would lead me out of town and into the northern half of the state.

As I drove, the dark miles of highway stretching before me in an ocean of solitude, I wondered how long it would be before I found another living soul. Perhaps a day. Perhaps a year. Perhaps I would never find anyone, for once my medication ran out there was every chance that I could drift into a depression and lose all will to continue. But despite the risks, I found myself feeling an unexpected sense of calm. After all, there was sure to be an entire scattered empire of survivors just like me out there – it was only a matter of finding them.



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(See also: 125)

2nd Hops and Barley

Carol Marlow

Tick tock. Tick tock. Tick tock.

Hops lies in the center of a glass cage, eyes focusing on the clock across the way. Her body is tucked up, making herself as small as possible. Her tail is flat along the bottom, on top of the squishy hot water-bottle. Hops thinks back to how she got here. Back to the things that left her now set on a shelf with naught but paisley wallpaper, a clock, and a garish rug for a view. She wonders why she ever let herself get too big for her own good.

It began days ago, back at the Crone's place. She never would have considered it home. Home was the smell of ale poured from the taps. Home was hot chips fried nightly, and a few pieces dropped on the floor that Dad brought back for supper. Home was where they would drink from cups made from nut shells, sitting by a plate's shard that served as the family dining table. Home was a nightmare where the orange Tom came to swipe Dad away. Where monsters with protruding, thick, metal noses filled the holes with a gas that caused Mum to cough and choke. Home was long gone, so the Crone's house couldn't ever be home. Hops and her brother, Barley, lived in the walls of the Crone's flat. The

place was littered with towering piles of the news and post, and bags of bread left open in elderly forgetfulness.

The Crone had fallen asleep in her chair again, knitting left to dangle from her fingers. Hops, with her small bag, had crawled up to the counter in the kitchen. She had scurried past the pots and pans that had bits of dried and molding food on them over to the window. The window above the sink had a nice, easy access to the drains and gave her something to hold on to while she climbed down to the street. Rubbish bins were lined up against the building. Each was overflowing with the half-eaten, sometimes still warm and gooey helpings of food. The tidier and better managed flats in the building always threw out the best. Hot food was better than cold, by a great deal better. Especially for Barley.

Poor Barley. Hops had often wondered if he remembered the days when they had hot chips, salted nuts and seeds, and warm insulation to snuggle in to. She hoped he did not remember gas and screams. She hoped that he did not remember Mum's eyes turning into frosted glass as they held their breaths and ran for the cracks in brickwork. She supposed his memories were more about their sneaks out to get bread from the counter. Perhaps they were about nicking

the grapes in the bowl before the Crone realized she hadn't picked off one too many (or before the grapes grew fuzzy and white. They sometimes ate those anyway, when they were hungry enough). At least a hot meal from the rubbish would be something better than what Barley might, or might not, remember. It had certainly been better for Hops, at times.

"Hops!" She turned her head to look down where Barley waited, black nose and short whiskers poking from the tiny opening. Their shelter lay protected under the cabinet, hidden by the twisting of the sink's pipes. They were both well versed in the chemicals that humans put down there, and knew enough not to eat it if it dripped and dribbled from a poorly tightened cap.

"Hops!" Barley called up again. "Please hurry!"

"It'll just be a minute, Barley," the elder rodent assured the younger. "I think the Jenkins' made lasagna tonight."

"Oh, that sounds good!" Barley sighed. But then, he asked, his nervousness overriding the hope for hot cheese and flat noodles, "But shouldn't you wait? It's almost Six-fifteen!"

Six-fifteen. Oh such a dreaded time for any pest out in the alley. Six-fifteen was when the landlord let out his cat, Banshee. Six-fifteen was when even the most nimble and agile mouse was surely done for.

"I'll have time to go and be back, if you let me go on out," said Hops.

She eased herself through the hole, and took the brief jump from the sill to the drainpipe. Hops then started the slide-climb down toward the street. Instantly, the smells of the city hit her

nose. The acrid, acidic back notes of gasoline and smog, with overtones of the Indian restaurant down the street with its tongue-killing curry. Hops had learned never to nick a bite from their bins. In the distance, there was the smell of water from the river. Hops liked the city, but she couldn't live down with the street mice. No, that lot, they were too rough and tumble for her and Barley. Street mice knew how to avoid the cabs that whizzed along on the black roads. They had to fear dangers from more than cats and the occasional dog. The mice on the street also had to worry about birds and bites from insects that objected to sharing scrounging grounds with rodents. Street mice had the greatest worry about rats, bigger and jealous of their territories. Especially when the owner had a warm place to sleep and full bellies each day. No, Hops and Barley could not survive on the street.

She jumped on to the lid of one of the bins, and she looked down on the piling heaps of the other two. Oh yes! This was the prize here- the best pickings for the day. The Jenkins' had indeed made a fine lasagna, and thrown out what wasn't wanted. She also saw the partially molded remnants of some hummingbird cake (so full of seeds) and the soggy leftovers of a Yorkshire pudding. There was no chance that Hops would let these go to waste. She opened her little bag and began putting pieces in.

She called it a bag, and had gotten the idea from the humans, with their purses and satchels on their shoulders, but truthfully it was just the remains of the toe from a sock. She had nibbled and ripped at the fabric until she had the whole piece off, and could stuff things

inside before hauling whatever she'd found that day to her and Barley's hole. She felt so clever for having made that bag, too. She was a bit like Dad, with his shard-tables and shell-cups. She pitied others who dared for the treasure in the bins and had to make multiple trips until Banshee was let out. Hops could get what she and Barley needed and take it all back up in one go.

As Hops searched the rubbish bins, picking out pieces of pasta, cake, and slightly burnt and fatty dough, she heard the whistling. A familiar tune that made her ears prick up every time that she caught it going through the air. That sound seemed to cover up the constant honking and screeching of the cars, and made every other voice, human and animal alike, soften and silence for a while. That was the tune whistled by The Man in the Blue Coat.

Hops lifted her head, and she looked over toward the end of the alley. Three human paces away, nearly miles by her miniscule reckoning, The Man in the Blue Coat walked by. Hops usually saw him from the top of the sill, or watched him on his jaunt home after she and Barley had had their dinner. Seeing him from the street was certainly different. His hands stuffed down in the pockets, red scarf tied around the pillar of his neck. Hops couldn't explain her utter curiosity about The Man in the Blue Coat. He just seemed to catch her eye. Perhaps, it was that vibrant covering he wore, or maybe it was the tune he always whistled. Still, every day at six-twenty, he showed up. He walked along the way with his brown-haired head high, a single curl of his hair bobbing against the high forehead. The Man went who-knows-

where, and it always made her wonder what he could be up to.

Wait. Six-twenty? She had thought she was keeping aware of her time, but at realizing what The Man in the Blue Coat's presence meant...

"HOPS!" shouted Barley from above. "Look out, Hops!"

The wailing was louder than any other noise she had ever heard—it even drowned out the whistling. Banshee leaped up on to the lid of the bin beside her, and Hops scrambled down, leaving bag and pasta and cake and puddings behind. She had to get to the drain. She could hide and get back up to the windows or wait until Banshee had gotten impatient. She just needed to hide.

Banshee would have none of that. She screeched again and swatted a massive paw against Hops, causing the tawny mouse to tumble and roll in the gritty pavement, out on to the sidewalk. Even though she'd stopped, Hops' head was still spinning, and her whole body hurt. Oh, such pain! Her eyes could hardly focus, but she could still make out the large, black form of Banshee as she rose from the shadows of the alley, shrieking and hissing as she drew nearer to the mouse.

The world went red around her. Then it went black.

Now she was here, in this cage. Covered by the red scarf and sitting on top of white, hot-water bottle. The lid of a jam jar filled with water. She had looked around and saw the Blue Coat, lacking The Man, hanging on a peg in the wall, and the clock nearby.

Tick tock. Tick tock. Tick tock...

"HOPS!" Barley clutches at the wooden sill as he watches his older sister getting batted around by Banshee. He sees her roll and flop against the ground as the black devil-cat begins its screaming. Barley trembles, his pink tail curling so close to him that it lays atop his little toes. "Hops, get up!" he begs.

"Shh-shh!" The Man in the Blue Coat appears, tossing his red scarf down over Hops and smacking one hand at the nightmarish feline. "Shh- Get off! Leave it alone! Go!" he orders.

Banshee hisses, and smacks her claws at The Man, but although she drew blood from him she is obviously not brazen enough to fight the bigger creature, and leaves the prey that has been stolen from her. Barley doesn't feel relief, though. Under that scarf, Hops is hurt. She might be dying. Barley thinks he should go down. He should climb down and make sure. He needs to. But, before he can even get the nerve, he watches The Man in the Blue Coat scoop up the scarf and look in the folds.

"Oh, God," The Man says. Barley, silent and afraid, sees The Man use one finger to move around the scarf fabric. "You poor little thing . . . Well, you're breathing," The Man says. The Man looks around, raises one arm high while keeping the scarf and the mouse in it cupped in the other's hand. When The Man turns away, Barley uncoils himself and he looks at the drain pipe. Can he make it? He isn't sure but he doesn't want to lose sight of his sister. He jumps over to the pipe, and lets out the smallest squeak as he slides down for a pace, before he manages to get the pads of his paws more firmly affixed on the surface and climbs down.

All the while, The Man in the Blue Coat climbed into one of those enormous, loud cars that always ran through the street, and Barley can do nothing else but watch as The Man in the car takes his sister away. What is he to do now? He's here, on the pavement-*Outside-* and Banshee wouldn't be gone for much longer. Barley starts to move down the sidewalk, all four of his paws ticking at the ground as he begins to follow the car.

"Psst! Oi!" Barley stops, and turns his head to the new voice. A slightly ruffled and scruffed-up rat waves a pink paw at him. "You comin' lad? Don't dawdle!" Barley looks briefly to the last spot he had seen the car at, but it is now entirely gone. The black vehicle had mingled in with the other dark, gleaming shapes that pass along the road. With the car no longer in sight, Barley tentatively follows the rat. He enters in through a piece of broken stonework underneath the stairs belong to the building next to their own. The young mouse looks around. Wrappers and paper wads and little bits of things that humans threw down are all pushed inside. The rat sits himself on one such pile of papers. Black markings are scrawled along, and Barley recognizes the writing only because Hops had taught him how to read the words on poison and cleaning canisters under the Crone's sink. The rat looks down at him and gestures to another pile of papers.

"Make yourself at 'ome, lad. The name's Riggo, if you're curious."

Barley isn't really. But he climbs on to the papers, all the same.

"Thanks," Barley says. "But I need to go back to my window... I need to see if The Man in the Blue Coat brings my

sister back.”

“Your sister? That pretty, tawny doe?” Riggo asks. “I seen ‘er all the time, lad. Shame she’s been snapped up. You’ll not be seein’ that lass again.”

“But he has to bring her back!” Barley cries. His little heart begins breaking deep inside of his brown-furred chest. “Mum and Dad are gone... It’s just us. I don’t know how to get food on my own,” he confesses to Riggo. The large rat adjusts himself on his paper bed.

“Oh, now, my lad, stealin’ a crust or a crumb isn’t all that difficult. Why, I started when I was no bigger’n you. You just need to be quick. And you might be a bit... green, but I don’t doubt you could get away with a mouthful or two.”

“I don’t want to learn how to steal!” Barley whines. “I want Hops back!” The young mouse weeps, covering his nose with his front paws, and closing his dark eyes.

Riggo sighs before leaving his papers, rustling through them as he gets to his feet, and he pads over to pat at Barley’s back.

“Come on, now... I lost me Mum and eight brothers... It’s frightful bein’ in the world alone.” Riggo scratched at one of his ears. “Would you like to stay down ‘ere tonight? That Bloke in Blue always comes ‘round ‘ere, and if you’re right on the street you can ‘ear the whistlin’s he makes.”

Barley uncovers his face. “Really?” he asks.

“O’course.” Riggo assures him. “Then what you do is you follows the Bloke down to wherever he rests for the night, sneak your way in, and look for your sister. Easy.”

Barley doubts that it could be that

simple, but he nods, nonetheless, and he snuffles before wiping a foreleg against his drippy nose. “Thank you, Mr. Riggo.”

“Oi, no Mist’ers,” the rat tells him. “It’s just Riggo. Now, I’m guessin’ that your sister’s little tumble caused you to miss supper? Let’s wait till The Banshee’s done her stalkin’ and I’ll get us someaught to eat.”

The suggestion sounds better than crying and going hungry, so Barley agrees. They wait for the landlord of Barley and Hops’ building to call in Banshee, then Riggo forages for their supper. The findings from the rubbish bins have gone cold, but Barley will never complain. Not when he remembers the first few days of house-hunting and they had had to pick up what they could find tossed in to alleyways. He also won’t complain about the paper bed that Riggo has so graciously allowed him to sleep on. True, it’s not as soft or warm as sharing the sock with Hops at home, but he at least wasn’t going to be completely cold.

Still, the young mouse feels the chill of the city as it climbs up from the dirt and pavement beneath them. Even with his eyes closed, he can still tell that the other creature sleeping nearby isn’t his sister, no matter what he tries to imagine. All his life, he has never been alone. In the farthest corners of his memory, he pictures their parents. Sometimes when the Crone brought home some green bottles with her shopping, he had a small inkling toward the pungent scent coming from them (though Hops discouraged drinking it. She called it ‘swill’). But he mostly just remembers Hops, and the struggle every day for food and to keep out of sight of the humans. Humans are big, loud, and even if they don’t have

razor-sharp teeth or claws, they can be as dangerous as Banshee, if not more so. So even as he tries his best to sleep, Barley fears only the worst for his big sister.

The next day passes far too slowly, and Barley can’t hold down anything. Not even when Riggo brings back some flaky pastry that a woman has dropped outside. Instead, Barley waits, peeking out of the cracks in the stairwell to watch for The Man in the Blue Coat. When the day finally grows late, and Barley sees that folks from his building are beginning to throw out their rubbish, he hears the familiar whistle. Soft at first, then growing, increasing even above the multitudes of feet on the pavement.

He crawls out, and Barley sees The Man, coat swishing around him, a green scarf tied around his neck, today.

“There’s your mouse-napper, lad,” Riggo says. “Hurry. Good luck.”

“Thanks, Riggo,” Barley says briefly before he darts out of the hole. For now, he lets all fears of cats and feet and shoes leave his head as he focuses on the sparkling loafers and the swishing coat, and follows.

“I’m coming, Hops!”

Tick tock. Tick tock. Tick tock.

Hops glances toward the sound of grinding and jingling in the doorway, but she does not lift her head. The Man in the Blue Coat steps inside, removes his eponymous piece of clothing, and begins to unbutton the cuffs of his clean shirt.

“Hello, little one,” he says to her. She doesn’t move, save to take soft breaths as The Man opens up the cage’s latched door. “How are you feeling? I wish I could be here more often to make sure you’re healing,” he tells her as he

gets the jam jar lid out. Hops doesn’t know what he puts in it. She had thought it was only water when she first awoke, but the first time she drank from the lid, it had left a strange, bitter taste in her mouth. But she had been so thirsty, even through the pain, she had continued to drink. She questioned though, if The Man had poisoned it? It *did* make her sleepy, but otherwise there was nothing adverse or harmful, so Hops continued to drink the bitter water. Even when she was finally able to fully watch The Man.

She watches him now, taking the jar lid to the kitchen, replacing the water, as he had each day before. This time, however he adds a new sequence to the ritual. She watches him open a cupboard and take another empty jar lid. This second lid he fills up with seeds.

During the short time that Hops had been in The Man’s home, he would talk to her during this time. His ramblings taught her more than she could have ever hoped to glean from his daily passing. He told her that he worked with human children, teaching them things. He complained about other humans who she never had seen and didn’t care to even imagine as he delved about what they said. He talked at length about some human named ‘Daniel’ that he seemed to be very fond of. On the first day, he had talked about what he had to do for her ‘recovery.’ He spoke of things like ‘Vets’ and ‘antibiotics’ and spoke soft words to her that seemed to be his idea of comforting.

“I’ll keep you safe, little one,” The Man had said that first evening upon her waking, “Until you can move properly. Maybe you won’t mind so much. I’m sure that being in here will be better than a

dirty alley, won't it?"

Hops longs to tell him that she did *not* live in the alley, thank you very much. She wants to tell The Man that she lives in a tidy, very warm and cozy space beneath a sink. That she and her brother are never dirty (she makes sure her coat is fresh and clean every day, and always reminds Barley to clean behind his ears), and that she will not, ever, ever enjoy this prison. However, Hops knows that humans are deaf to the words that animals speak, especially the voices of mice. So, she doesn't bother. Instead, she lets her indignation and hurt settle in her chest and through to her tiny bones.

The Man continues talking, though. Hops begins to drown out the sound of The Man and his words. There is only one other sound that he makes that makes her pay attention again. His whistling. The whistling inside his house, though, morphs and grows into words. Eventually his whistling becomes singing, and Hops finally learns what the song is about.

*"Oats, peas, beans, and barley grow~
Oats, peas, beans, and barley grow~ Can you
or I or anyone know how oats, peas, beans, and
barley grow?"*

Today, as The Man sings this song in his little kitchen, the words cause something in Hops' head to click. She recalls long ago, when she was young, and they lived in the Pub, surrounded by the smell of chips and ale. Barley had just been born, and Mum would carry him about when he fussed, trying to get him to rest, while Hops danced around her feet.

*"Hops and Baby Barley grow~ Hops
and Baby Barley grow~ wherever love and hope
can go, that's where Hops and Barley grow."*

Oh. Oh, how she misses her brother. What is he doing without her? What will happen to him? She had thought that there would be time—plenty of time to make sure that he learned how to tug at the twisty-ties on the bread bag to get a few pieces while the Crone slept. She had thought she could teach him how to make bags and beds out of socks and that if you took the soft, red thing that looked like a tomato but was full of needles, and pulled the needles out, then you had yourself a very nice chair. She had wanted to teach him how to climb the drain without falling, and now there would never be that time. Now, she is stuck in a glass cage, with a scarf, a heated bottle, and no idea how her brother will survive alone.

The Man returns to her with the jar lids. She looks at the seeds. Tiny hard things that aren't any good unless baked in something. But seeds are better than nothing. After The Man closes the hatch-door, he taps a finger against the cage's side.

"I have to take care of some things, but I'll be checking on you, my little one," The Man promises before he walks away, disappearing into his bedroom.

Hops sighs and slowly inches her way to the lids. Three days awake and while she no longer feels sharp stabs through her, she still feels achy. No unnecessary moving. She gets out one of the seeds and starts to gnaw on it.

"Hops!" she hears. Faint, far, but she never mistakes that voice. She drops her seed and crawls to the edge of the case, to look over the side.

"Barley!" she breathes. Her baby brother comes out from under the coat rack, hidden by its feet and the mass of

blue coat. He scampers over the carpet to the bookcase where the cage sits, and climbs up. As he draws nearer, Hops can surmise that her brother, however he has come here, has not had an easy time. His pristine fur, usually kept so clean by their efforts and time spent indoors, is now matted and dull. He places a paw against the case, and she sees that his paw pads are scuffed and gray with grime instead of clean and soft and pink. But he looks so happy to see her. As happy, really, as she is to see him.

"Good gracious, Barley," Hops exclaims, "What happened?"

"I followed The Man," Barley explains. "Riggo said it would be easy, but it wasn't at all! There were the cars that wouldn't stop until the people walked across, and I had to either wait for all the people to walk, and keep from being squished by their bloody-big feet, or get smushed by the cars! Then I had to face this big dog called Bully! And when I *finally* got here, I had to wait because this place is clean and there's nowhere to hide, and I had to be sure that The Man in the Blue Coat wouldn't see me run in."

Hops has no idea who Riggo is, and her brother's words certainly hint at a very large adventure indeed. But she is already growing weak again, and she either has to drink the bitter water or leave. "Barley, I want to know everything, but all of that can wait. I want to get out. Do you see the latch?" she asks him, pointing to the tiny door. She had seen The Man open it enough to know that lifting from the bottom usually did the trick. She could have been gone earlier, really, but for the pain and the bitter-water sleep.

"Oh, right! Yes, I see it," Barley

says. He moves to the door hatch and he grips the edge, then he pulls. He tugs as hard as he can, grunting softly with the effort, but nothing works. "I can't open it, Hops!" Barley's earlier eager excitement deflates to distress.

Hops sighs softly. "That's fine, Barley. I'll have to wait." She feels the pains creeping up to a more potent strength. "I'm still hurt... We might have to wait until I'm all better."

"How long will that be?" Barley asks her.

"I don't know," Hops says, shaking her head. "But The Man here keeps giving me things."

"Has he hurt you?" Barley asks.

"Oh, well, no," Hops says. And she supposes he hasn't really. But she frowns all the same. "He's just put me in this bloody thing."

"But there's no places to hide, here," Barley says. "Not properly. Not like at home."

Hops' ears flatten slightly against her skull. Barley thinks the Crone's place is home? Well, she really shouldn't expect him to call it anything else, but she is still surprised that he feels that much attachment. And as she ponders on that, she supposes maybe it is home, now. When had that happened? When had the sights of bottles on the floor, open bread-bags, and abandoned knitting beside a sleepy old-woman become home? She'll have to think about it more, later. Right now she must simply accept it.

"I know," Hops says, at last. Her ears peak back up at the sound of movement just down the hall. "We'll talk about it some more, soon. Go hide. The sofa should work for now."

Barley goes to the side of the book case, and he makes his way down. Hops watches him bolt and be swallowed up by the shadows beneath the dark brown sofa before The Man's footsteps fill the flat and he rounds the corner.

"Hello again," The Man says to Hops. His lips spread in a grin. "You're up and moving! That's a wonderful improvement. A bit to eat perk you up, then?"

Hops does not bother to respond. Instead, she drinks a bit of the water, and picks up one of the seeds to nibble.

"That's lovely," says The Man. "Well, Little One, I've been doing some research online. When you're moving around a bit more, I'll buy up some cherries for you. Fruit's good for mice, apparently. Then I'll see about getting you another cage, with some good padding and a wheel for exercise, and you can make yourself at home."

Home... Home wasn't a cage with wheels or padding. Home was a place under the sink. Home was wherever she and Barley could live, survive, and thrive together. Anywhere that had love, and

where they could be happy and free, was home. Hops steals a glance down to the shadows beneath the sofa, knowing that Barley is listening, and that he is safe for now. She hopes that whatever adventure her brother went on has taught him enough. She could tell Barley how to get the sewing kit The Man had on the mantle, and steal some thread. She could tell him how to use that thread to climb outside. Maybe there were bins nearby where Barley could get food. The Man is too clean and careful to leave things out. Then, while The Man is away during the day, Barley will be able to eat and she and her brother can make their plans. By the time she gets better, Barley will be a bit bigger and stronger. Then, opening the cage won't be as hard. *Yes*, Hops thinks, *that's what will happen!* Barley will grow, and then he and Hops will escape. Then, they'll go home. Hops curls up on the scarf, and she goes to sleep to the thought of warm sock-beds underneath sinks, pantries with half-open bread bags, and heaping rubbish bins full of warm food.



Carol Marlow is a short story author and poet from Gainesville, Georgia. She has been featured in Gainesville State College's literary magazine, The Chestatee Review. When she is not studying at The University of North Georgia, she lets her imagination run wild through writing, drawing, crafting costumes, and amateur voice-acting.

Bleeding Out

Michael C. Myers

3rd

Dear Diary,

I've never written in one of these things before, but my friend Ruth suggested I do so because of what happened to me. I've always thought things like this were a bit silly. A person should be able to sort things out in his own head and say what they mean, but I've been having some trouble sleeping. I don't know precisely what I'm supposed to get out of this, but I suppose it can't hurt.

I was driving down District Line road into town headed to the Piggly Wiggly to pick up some things for a ladies' night get-together I was having. The little houses and neighborhoods start to pop up as you get closer to town. I noticed their lawns were brown from the drought, and then I noticed that construction. It was Saturday and I'm sure the workers were off doing the those things that need doing on weekends, getting groceries, taking the kids to the swimming pool, working on their own houses and such. It seems like that thing is taking forever to get finished. They're still working on it now.

The sign reads *Future Home of First Baptist Church of Fairview, Georgia!* It's at the point in its construction where you can tell it's going to be a gaudy monstrosity. That prefabricated steeple sitting beside that crane is just waiting to

be set up on top of that warehouse of a building. The thing doesn't even look like a church. I often wonder exactly how many people they think will be attending services there, because they made that parking lot big enough to hold a fleet of buses. Because of how big it is, both the building and the parking lot, I've taken to calling it Six Flags over Jesus amongst my friends. The joke seems to go over pretty well.

The church is moving out of the Fairview city limits for one reason and one reason alone, despite what they might say in the local paper. The old church just isn't safe anymore. Fairview, like many other small southern towns, has gone into a decline over the last several decades. Church members don't feel safe walking to their cars after evening worship anymore. The church itself has been broken into several times. One time someone stole a bunch of its pipes and wiring, for the copper I suppose. The final straw was when the church members came out of service one Sunday afternoon to find thirteen cars broken into. Everything that was left in sight inside of those cars was stolen.

So, they made the decision to move. It's a shame. The old church is a beautiful thing, stone and brick with a proper steeple, a bit of ivy climbing up the shady side of the building. It's over a hundred

years old and sits right near the center of town. Now it'll probably be left to ruin or they'll tear it down and build a convenience store.

Anyway, as I made my way to the Piggly Wiggly, I couldn't help but get a little bit sad. It seems like my town is just slowly dying. I couldn't help but think back to that T.S. Eliot poem I learned in high school about how the world ends: "not with a bang but with a whimper." I think it's the little things, the things that no one notices until they start to pile up, that ruin a town. The city doesn't cut the grass in the median regularly. Broken windows stay broken. Businesses go bust and their buildings stay empty. The graffiti that occasionally pops up and gets painted over stays getting painted over.

When I pulled into the parking lot of the grocery store, I noticed that the handicapped spot near the front was occupied. I slowed down and peered over the steering wheel at the car.

"What an ugly thing," I thought.

It was a Cadillac, an older model, and fluorescent green, sitting ridiculously high up off the ground with shiny hubcaps, the type that spin. Normally, I would have just shaken my head and that would have been that. I'd seen cars like that all over town, usually blaring some god-awful music. What infuriated me was the fact that nowhere on that vehicle, not on the tag, not hanging from the rearview mirror, not anywhere was there any indication of a handicapped sticker.

I thought to myself, "Niggers."

Then, I caught myself.

"No," I thought. "Don't be like that. That's not fair. You don't know anything about whoever owns that car.

For all you know they could be lily-white. Inconsiderate is inconsiderate, regardless of color."

Now, I'm not proud of that reaction, and I know it's wrong. Growing up in the South in the forties and fifties you just heard that word. My parents were good people, but even as late as the seventies, I distinctly remember my father saying things like, "You know that nice nigger-lady down at the store? She had those cute little kids of hers minding the register today." The contradiction of such a hateful word in a friendly sentiment was not lost on me then and is not lost on me now.

With all the changes made since then and all the hell folks went through, especially in the sixties to bring about those changes, I know darn well I shouldn't have even thought that word. I saw that hell firsthand. I went off to nursing school in Augusta in 1964 right in the thick of all that. I'd been working at Talmadge for several years when the race riots happened in '70.

It's odd to think about the things a person remembers. Over the years, I saw plenty of gunshot wounds, stabbings, drug overdoses, and batteries come through the hospitals I worked at, but for some reason the riots in Augusta stick out in my mind.

As a nurse, I attended to anyone who was my patient, regardless of their race, and saw many of them die despite our best efforts. During the riots though, there was this one young black man, a boy really. He was brought in with a stab wound in his abdomen. We all worked so hard on him, but he bled out; and as he died, he looked directly at me as if I was

the only person in the emergency room.

Now, doctors and nurses keep a certain amount of emotional distance from their patients. They do this because people make bad decisions when they're emotional, and in a hospital, a bad decision can mean the difference between life and death. Well, that day that boy made a connection with me that stuck. I pushed it aside and continued with my work for what seemed like an endless shift. But when I got home that evening, I decided I'd had enough of Augusta and all the crap that was going on there. I spoke to my fiancé on the phone the next day, and we made a decision. After our wedding, we'd settle back down in our hometown of Fairview. I could get a job at the newly-opened hospital there, and he could practice law.

Anyway, I drove past the shiny Cadillac and found a spot about thirty yards or so down. I turned off the engine and picked up my purse. I remember my knee giving me a twinge of pain as I stood up out of the car. I took a spill off my back porch steps the previous year and landed hard. The surgery was an ordeal, especially at my age, but I was getting around as best as could be expected.

As I walked toward the Piggly Wiggly, I rifled through my purse to make sure my billfold was inside and that I wouldn't have to walk back out to the car or, Lord knows, drive back to the house to get it.

It was there.

While digging around my hand brushed up against my little .22 revolver. Thomas, my husband, had made me get that gun several years before. It was

after a string of assaults had occurred in Fairview. I said I didn't need one, but he insisted. We argued about it for several days until one day he said to me, "Patty, I want you to do something for me. I want you to take both of your hands and put them on my arm." He held out his forearm. I took it, a little confused but humoring him. "Now, honey, I want you to move me." Well, I gripped Thomas' forearm and pulled. He moved just a little. Then I pushed it. Thomas hardly moved at all. I began to try in earnest to move my husband. Now, Thomas was not a huge man, but he was bigger than most, and even though he'd shrunk some, like all men do as they get older, he was still strong. Suddenly, Thomas grabbed my arm and spun me around so fast it made me dizzy. It didn't hurt me, mind you, but it did make his point.

"Patty," he said. "I'm not trying to be an ass, but I'm just an old fart. Men are just physically stronger than most women, and you aren't as strong as you used to be. But, if a woman's got a gun and she knows how to use it, she's stronger than any man. I've spent most of my life putting bad people behind bars, and to think that . . . well, it's just that if anything were to ever happen to you I just don't know what I'd do."

If nothing else can be said about me, it can be said that Patricia Burke is a pragmatic woman. So, the next day, Thomas took me down to the local gun store and we bought one.

We settled on the little .22 snub nose revolver. It was very lightweight and wouldn't kick much, and it would fit in most of my purses. Thomas said it didn't have much stopping power, but

it would do what needed to be done if I ever had to use it.

Over the next several months, Thomas took me out to this farm a friend of his owned and taught me to use it. I got pretty good with my little .22, and even after Thomas passed away, I'd still practice at the farm. Thomas' friend was nice enough to let me come out and fire off a few rounds. He'd take a few shots himself, and we'd talk about Thomas and visit.

It might seem silly, but that gun was one of the last things Thomas bought me before he had his heart attack and, I don't know, practicing with it I could almost hear him telling me, "Always treat a gun as if it's loaded. Any time you pick up a gun, check to see whether or not it's loaded. Loaded or not, don't ever point a gun at anything you don't intend to kill." I know it's funny to think that I could have such tender memories about such morbid instructions, but there you go.

Well anyway, as I walked through the sliding doors of the Piggly Wiggly, I noticed that little weekly newspaper that Reverend Walker puts out sitting there with the other local paper. I don't know why it caught my attention, but it did. Perhaps, I was feeling a little bit guilty about my slip of the tongue earlier. I think that man is one of the reasons why we have so many problems in this town.

The good Reverend is the pastor at one of the local black churches in town, and he runs a shoddy little newspaper press. It's not nearly as reputable as *The Fairview Gazette*. Everything in it is always about racism of some sort. Not a single change can be made in this town without him plastering the front of his newspaper

with some bull about how it's meant to keep the black community down, or in their place, or some such nonsense. To hear him tell it you'd think not an ounce of progress had been made in the last hundred years. Anytime any issue comes up, he gets on up in his pulpit and whips his congregation into a fury then fires up his press and tries to sway everyone else who has enough sense to stay the hell out of his church.

It always seems that he gets just enough of the black folks and some of the white folks in town out in force and sure enough, that business that's thinking about setting up shop in town thinks twice, or the school board caves under pressure, or something along those lines. Of course, I can't say this out in public or he'd crucify me on the front page of that little rag. Not that I'd really give a damn. I'm fast approaching, if not already past, the age where I don't care what some bitter old racist says about me. For years though, I bit my tongue for my husband's sake.

I think I have more reason than most to dislike Reverend Walker. When I think about the hell that man put my husband through it makes my blood boil. Thomas had intended to work at a local law firm when we moved back to Fairview and did for a while, but he wound up as district attorney. For the longest time, I didn't understand why. He could have made more money with the firm. We talked about it at great length. The money didn't matter to me all that much. We were doing fine. I just didn't understand why, when he was doing so well for himself, he would make such a drastic career change.

Thomas liked to try to explain himself in medical terms. I think he thought I'd be easier on him if I could see his side of things from my professional point of view.

That was idiotic, but cute. So, I let him do it.

He said, "I look around Fairview and it seems like the town is bleeding. It's not bad, but some folks just want to keep picking at it. Well, if you do that, you're going to wind up getting an infection, right? I just feel like getting the bad guys off the street and behind bars is my way of putting a band-aid on the town. Hopefully that will give it a chance to heal."

Well, what's a girl to say to that?

He said it so earnestly it was almost heroic, but that's just the type of man my Thomas was. That's why when Reverend Walker got up on his soapbox during the 80's and tried to drag my husband's name through the mud . . . well, there isn't much point in rehashing that old story and that ain't what I'm writing about anyway. Let's just say I don't think too highly of the good Reverend.

So, I just put all this out of my mind and went about my shopping. Like I said, some of my friends were coming over that evening, and we were going to have a ladies' night. It'd been so long since I'd done anything like that, I was really looking forward to it. I had planned to make a drop-cobbler, so I picked up some milk and a can of peaches. I needed to do a little cleaning in the bathroom, so I got a gallon of Clorox and one of those air-freshener sprays, the clean laundry scent. I figured that while I was there I should pick up

some things that I needed for the pantry, so I got several cans of tomatoes, my cereal, some pasta, and a couple quarts of chicken broth.

When I got to the checkout that nice young lady, whose name I can't remember for the life of me, was at the register. The lines weren't busy, and most everyone else was using those self-checkout lanes so we struck up a conversation. It turns out she was going to the trade school to be a nurse. I told her to study hard, that I'd been one for years, and that it was difficult but rewarding. She said that she was tired of working at the Piggly Wiggly.

"Not all the customers are as nice as you, Mrs. Burke," she said.

"See," I said, "You're already working on your bedside manner."

Someone got in line behind me, so I said goodbye, picked up my bags, and made my way to the door.

I loaded my bags in the trunk, and put my cart in the little shopping cart holder. It always bothers me when I see a cart that's just sitting out in the middle of a parking space. It's very inconsiderate. I got back into my car, set my purse on the passenger seat, and put on my seatbelt.

Now, it happened so quickly I wasn't sure what was going on at first. The door to my car flew open, and just as I looked up someone hit me. His fist must have glanced off of my face; otherwise, I'm sure I would've been knocked out. But, my head was spinning, nonetheless. I don't know what he was after, the car, my purse, or me; but half his body was clambering on top of me. I started to panic, but then I remembered my gun. If he got my purse, he'd get my

gun, and then I'd be in trouble. So, I fell over onto the passenger seat and on top of my purse. I groped around inside it. I found the .22, pulled it out, and turned over as much as I could. He was still on top of me when I fired two shots.

I must've had my eyes shut because I don't really remember seeing what happened. I do remember hearing his head hit the roof of the car. I guess he jerked up when I shot him. He floundered about on top of me for a moment and then fell backward out of the door. He was writhing around on the ground clutching his neck.

I didn't have to fire any more shots. I saw where he was hit. I think I knew he was dead before he did. I've seen blood pulse out of an artery before. It only took another thirty seconds or so before he was dead. I undid my seatbelt, and set my gun on the floorboard. I'm not sure why, but I just sat there in a bit of a daze looking at him.

Thinking back on it, there really aren't that many similarities between the two. The man who assaulted me was probably ten years older than that boy in Augusta. His head was shaved close whereas the boy had a full head of thick black hair. Their builds were even different. The man was stick thin and stringy. That boy had been rather handsome. He probably would have grown to be an attractive young man. Despite all these differences, I sometimes get their faces mixed up when I see them in my head, but I make it a point to sort them out and remember them clearly. I do this because I think that man tried to make that same connection with me the boy made.

He fell away from me, but writhed about such that, as he settled down, he was able to look up at me. I don't think he expected to wind up dead when he picked the little old lady with the limp as his next victim. There was a look of surprise and pleading in his eyes. I'll tell you right now, I've known many, many good men in my life. This was not one of them. It may sound cold, but I'll be damned if I was going to give that scrawny little trash any sympathy.

That boy in Augusta deserved my sympathy. I don't know how he wound up in that hospital, whether he was a victim himself or just out looking to cause trouble when he got stabbed. Whatever it was, there was regret in his eyes. I don't know if that regret was sadness, repentance, or disappointment; but it was human, and it deserved sympathy. All I saw in that man's eyes was, "Why did you do this to me?" He looked as if he thought he was the victim. That man's eyes were the eyes of someone that spent a lifetime thinking about only himself.

So, there I sat with my legs dangling out of the side of my car, stunned and covered in that man's blood. People came running up to *me* asking if I was okay, calling the police on their cell phones, and some big fat woman wouldn't stop screaming. For a second, I thought she might have known the man, but some fellow who I assume was her husband gathered her up and waddled her away.

The police showed up, then an ambulance. The paramedics checked me out. I insisted I was fine, but they wanted me to go to the hospital anyway. Having

been on the other end of things for so many years, I didn't argue. I went with them to the hospital. The police asked me a lot of questions, and to make a long story short, I eventually went home.

Not long after that, Reverend Walker started up with his usual bull. He slapped my face across the front of his paper for a month straight.

WIFE OF FORMER DA SHOOTS LOCAL MAN. NO CHARGES FILED. NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE! A NOT SO FAIRVIEW OF OUR CITY.

That was the headline of the issue I picked one day just to see what all the fuss was about. Inside there were several articles about me. One had a bunch of supposed sources telling folks that I'd said this or that, which were obvious signs that I was just some old racist woman. Another made the man that attacked me out to be a victim of the unjust way in which the white community ignores the plight of the black community, which is a load of bull. It's hard to ignore a whole portion of the community when there're only 11,000 people living in the whole city. A person would be hard pressed to find anyone in town they didn't know, or they'd at least know someone that knew the someone they didn't know. The others all talked about how what happened to me at the Piggly Wiggly was an "indication of societal ills," or how it should be used to spur a "call to action," or some such hogwash.

The *Gazette* called me for a comment, but I didn't give them one. I figured there was no sense in feeding what would die of its own accord in another few weeks.

Eventually, it did die down. The good Reverend moved on to another topic. There was an election for the school board coming up. The word around town was he was going to back that Hispanic fellow that eventually won, but he must have found something he didn't like about him, because he turned that little venomous rag on him before too long.

Nowadays, I go on like I did before. I still have friends over. I still go to the Piggly Wiggly. I still carry my little .22 revolver. The saddest part of it all is that the nice young woman who always checked me out acts a little funny toward me now. Oh, she's nice enough. She still smiles and chats. But, that smile never quite makes it up to her eyes, and when I catch her catch sight of me, I always notice that she purses her lips like she's holding back something she wants to say. I wonder if Reverend Walker got a hold of her.

I think about that, and it makes me wonder if I should have said something to the paper when they called. If the Reverend Walkers of the world are the only ones that get to tell their side of the story, how long is it before everyone starts to believe them? Or would my speaking up and defending myself be just another person scratching that old wound?

I have dreams from time to time about all these things. The ones with Thomas are nice. It's years ago. We've just moved back to Fairview. We have our whole lives ahead of us. He wraps me up in those big old arms and squeezes me so tight. Sometimes, in my dreams, I'll be playing cards with my friends at

The Chestatee Review

one of our ladies' nights. The checkout girl will join us. She's wearing one of those old-fashioned nursing uniforms like I used to wear when I first started out. In my dreams, her smile shows all over her face.

Occasionally though, I dream about that boy in Augusta and the man that attacked me. They're mashed together as the same person. I sit there in the car and watch him die, but he doesn't die quickly. The blood comes out of both his neck and his abdomen, and

it never seems to stop. It just keeps coming. It covers my shoes, then the parking, and finally the whole town in a shallow layer of red. No one comes to ask me if I'm alright. No one calls the police. The only other person in this dream is Reverend Walker. He shows up covered head to toe in that blood like he's just been rolling around in it. He starts laughing, and that's when I wake up in a cold sweat. That's when I wish I could have done more to save that boy in Augusta so many years ago.

Creative Non-fiction

“If Southern religion had taught me anything, it's that guilt and sex go together like collards and cornbread.”

Esther Stuart
“Prayer and Supplication”



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1st

The Da Vinci Academy

Zach McGarry

Human Anatomy & Physiology is probably the only high-school course my classmates and I have ever actually had to study for. You can mumble your way through a Shakespeare reading, and you can get lucky on a multiple-choice math test. But when it comes to correctly identifying almost every bone and muscle in the body, without a word-bank...well, those are the kinds of exams that take more than crossing your fingers and a quick little prayer to the man upstairs. So, when we're told that our class is taking the day off to see a local middle-school's Human Anatomy presentations, we're all pretty excited.

By "local" middle-school, I mean *really* local. We can walk there from class in a couple minutes; it's right next door to our high school. Most students that attend my high school, myself included, graduated from that middle school, so the class as a whole knows the path over well enough. Still, our teacher leads the group from up front. It's a warm sunny day, and there's a lot of chatter going on between us, none of it to do with the actual presentations. We're all more animated than usual, inebriated by the open air and our steady distancing away from the classroom. A strange feeling—

not exactly déjà vu, but something similar—mists our minds as we take this walk we've only experienced in the daydreams staring out the window of our class. Having a day when we don't do busy-work is a rare treat for us. Actually leaving the classroom? Now that's summer come early.

Though we're headed to the same building that most of us went to middle school in, it apparently isn't the same school that we attended anymore. I know a little more about this than the other students: my sister attends South Hall Middle School, just as we used to, but her classes moved to a different location. Our teacher explains that this building we used to know as South Hall Middle School is now called The Da Vinci Academy.

"It's a charter school," she explains. Those terms mean nothing to us, so she continues. "It's a little different than a typical middle school."

A little different, she says mercifully. It's a lot different.

The way she describes it, The Da Vinci Academy sounds like the kind of school where those super prodigy 12-year-old college graduates who cure cancer come from—the kind you hear about on the news or something. They

approach the legal standards of learning differently than a normal school and have supposedly found great success from that approach. Of course, we aren't thinking in those terms. We're thinking: "These kids are supposed to have some fairly cool presentations on display. Maybe we'll see something halfway interesting on our day off."

We are wrong to be so cavalier.

The first things we notice upon entering the school are the walls. They are not lined with Leonardo Da Vinci's famous paintings, as one may expect. They aren't lined with any famous paintings from any famous artists. All of the décor filling the hallways are original works of the students. And they aren't displayed like they are in schools we've been to, where the entire art class's paintings get an obligatory spot up on the bulletin board. These works stand alone, and they stand out. *Boy, do they stand out.* The only reasons we can recognize them as students' works are the quality of materials (paint used from Walmart instead of illustrious imports from Italy) and the students' names printed under their framed masterpieces. These are impressive; we're causing a human traffic-jam by stopping abruptly in the hall to look at them. And these aren't even what we're here to see.

Bustling and busy between the walls of works are the students, crossing in infinite diagonals from one room to another, ensuring everything is ready for the day of their presentations. We can make out a few voices among the rest of the buzz -- "Do you need help with that?" "How long until this is up?" "Can I borrow some (insert very professional-

sounding chemical compound here)" -- all of these voices coming from the kids. With effort, we manage to spot a few adults stationed around, but their role in all of this is obvious. Their eyes shift slightly from side to side, and each of them is smiling. They're here to make sure nothing catches on fire, no intruders enter the school-- standard adult supervision. As far as the presentations are concerned, they're completely supplementary. It's the students that are running the show.

We're signed in and assigned stations to go to in small groups (lead by a couple students in adorably professional formal-wear). They tell us we will be spending about five minutes at each station, and then we'll rotate en masse to the next one. Each station is hosted by two or three students.

The fantastic jungle of staggering constructions slams us to a halt, caught off-guard by the avant-garde presentation hall. There's a diverse array of lush colors and blinking lights and mechanical movement sprawling across the room, as if each display is part of a larger body of academic intrigue. Looking out at all the projects in the room is like looking into a miniature museum, where miniature adults are our hosts. We don't see a single stand-alone trifold poster that looks like it was thrown together the previous night (the prototype all of high-school projects). In fact, it would be physically impossible to assemble any of these presentations in less than a couple days-- skipping meals and sleep at that rate.

From the very first station my group visits, we find out what kind of day it's going to be for us. There are a couple

of students looking rather anxious from their project, to us, and back to their project. We're confused, but suddenly it hits us: "Wait, it's just them..." we realize. "They're going to be presenting to us for five straight minutes...by themselves." We know what it's like to give a lengthy presentation, especially in middle-school, and they must be intimidated by our age. They're probably feeling so nervous and insecure right about now. So, at first, we feel pity for them. However, it is quickly and mercilessly revealed that this is the exact opposite emotion we should have been feeling. We *should* have been feeling complete and utter jealousy for their confidence and envious of the mastery of their content-knowledge. We suddenly discover that pride can take a physical form inside your body, and ours squirms like an upset stomach.

The first presenters start their presentation as soon as we've all arrived and taken our places around the table they have set up. They don't stutter. They aren't shaking or glancing around to their teachers or reading off their notes. It's just them, what they've made, and what they've learned. And that's more than we've ever been able to do.

Their topic is to explain how food makes its way through the body. On their table, they've set up what is best described as half Rube Goldberg Machine, half maze. As "food" (little marbles) passes through the "body" (all the paths on the table), the students explain what's going on at each phase of digestion. Meanwhile, the marbles hit levers and cause parts of the contraption to spin and shift and transform as clear representations of the digestive system.

The whole time, we can't help thinking "They made all this. *Them*. Those middle schoolers...made *this*." And we hate them for it.

And they can answer questions. They aren't reading off of some script or relying on how amazing their stations look to defer from actually having to know the topic. They can entertain full, intellectual discussions on what they're presenting. What's more: we're *asking* questions. Each presentation takes us to something different, and we consistently find ourselves outclassed in superior knowledge of the subject. Outclassed by middle schoolers... we try not to think what that says about *us*. But we do.

As we move from station to station, there's this dynamic energy about each of the presenters. None of them are groggy or mumbling or even nervous. They're all, each and every one of them, smiling and enthusiastic about their presentations. Their confident charisma confuses us as we're confronted with the most socially competent kids we've ever met. We try to decide what we envy more about them: their prodigy-like academic superiority to ourselves or the fact that they're in school and actually *interested* in what they're learning — teaching — **doing**.

My group has just been guided through how to determine the actual killer of their staged crime-scene (fully interactive, of course) when, at last, we arrive at one of the final stations. It's a giant cylinder almost my height fashioned to look like some internal organ (a section of the colon, we're told). Though its size is impressive, it's certainly nothing compared to the rest of the presentations

we've seen so far. Immediately we think "Yes! Finally! This is it! This giant unattractive colon is the weak-link of the presentations! This is something we can remember and feel superior to these kids!"

Leave it to the colon to reveal we're full of shit.

Just as we're beginning to critique in our heads what we would've done better with this unoriginal monstrosity, the presenters say: "Okay. Now, let's go *inside*." Oh yes. We heard them right: go inside their presentation.

One of them grabs a section of the colossal colon and reveals it to be a doorway inside. We crawl into the colon and meet a creative array of colorful, cartoon-style worms within the most memorable display of the trip.

On the way back to our school, we feel like we know what it's like in those adventure novels we like to read: where the explorer exits the mysterious cavern and feels different somehow, as if the ghost of a thousand missed opportunities latches itself on and lingers amongst its visitors still, haunting and beckoning the explorer until he returns

to the cavern later in the story. Anyways, the conversation on the returning walk is only about The Da Vinci Academy. Half-jokingly, one of us asks our teacher: "Hey, can *we* do projects like that!?" We all voice our agreement enthusiastically, and hear ourselves do so. Suddenly, the half-hearted suggestion becomes very real to us, as if this accidental request is to be the turning point of our educational careers when we break the mold and branch out, trampling on established principles, firing unprogressive principals, and no longer hold ourselves to what we experienced inside The Da Vinci Academy.

Our teacher does a soundless chuckle, either surprised or amused. "Sure we can," she says, a facetious, scourge-like smile creeping upon her face. "If all of you made A's on your last test."

Our steps seem suddenly labored as we become vividly aware of our classroom window off in the distance. It was the first time we could see the blinding glare the sun casts from the outside.



Zach McGarry is currently a senior English Major at University of North Georgia. Zach enjoys producing art in many forms, including music and digital art, but he prefers to focus on his writing. Living in Dahlonega, he works in the Writing Center during the final semesters of his undergraduate career. After graduating, Zach anticipates to enter a teaching position relevant to his field of study. (See also: 103)

2nd Shells on the Walls

Holly Nicole Smith

My grandmother always has coffee in the morning, coffee I used to make her. I remember how at night I would pull down the square glass container that held her favorite brew, Maxwell house blend. I love the rich smell of coffee, even though I think the taste is worse than medicine. I would use a measuring cup to scoop the grounds into a fresh filter and add the appropriate amount of water. Most of the time, I would remember to turn it on automatic so that it would be ready for her when she woke up. When I didn't, I didn't get paid my fifteen cents.

I have now dubbed her my crazy grandma and all of my coworkers and friends know who I'm talking about. She is known for doing and saying outlandish things. There is always something interesting going on in her life. Growing up, I admired her for virtues and morals she no longer possesses. She used to be my hero. Now I despise the person she has become. I guess it's not her mistakes that make me disheartened, but the feeling of betrayal and abandonment. She left us for someone else; she continues to let me and my family down.

When I was a little girl, I adored her — she adored me too. She would play with me, color with me, and was always excited to see my newest self-choreographed dance routine. She came to every one of my recitals and

competitions; she was always there for me. One of our most common activities was doing crafts together. There were drawers and buckets of sequins and glues, among numerous empty boxes for spin art. We would go to craft stores together searching for the perfect paint by number. Most of it I outgrew, and over the years the buckets and drawers slowly emptied. She would clean out and get rid of things. Like our relationship, our craft stock pile diminished.

She now lives in Daytona, Florida with her new husband, Steve. They were high school sweethearts who reconnected a couple years ago and had an affair. He was married. They started dating, and he got a divorce with his wife. They have since gotten married and moved to the beach. This is her third marriage. The first time she got pregnant out of wedlock was with my mom and her twin sister when she was eighteen. He left her for another woman. We still see them occasionally — she tries to get me to call her Nana. I call her Mel Ann. The second time my grandma got married, it was to a man who was abusive to my mom and aunt. She never did anything to stop him, she just let it happen. They got divorced soon after I was born. He still calls my mom sometimes and occasionally sends a birthday card. Hopefully, Steve will be her last. I get along with him fairly well. Well, I mean to say I like him better than the others. When she first moved away

with him it was to South Carolina, but my grandma has always wanted to live on the water. That is why we are headed to the beach, to see their new place, their new life.

She and Steve are outside waiting for us. As soon as I step out of the car, I feel the damp salty air pressing on my skin, one of the things I hate about the beach. When I see my grandmother, a confusion of emotions and memories swirl in my mind. Excitement to see the woman who helped raise me and unleashed my creative side. Hurt from words I never imagined I would hear come out of her mouth. A couple years back when I was helping her pack, she told me that I was the reason for my family's unhappiness. That if I moved out, there would be much less fighting and everyone would be much better off. She told me that my parents would have a better relationship if I was gone. I was so shocked my mind couldn't form any words. She said it with such a calm voice we could have been talking about spin art, as if it were a matter of fact. It was the last thing I wanted to hear from her, but against her advice I am still living at home.

I push memories aside and give her a half-hearted hug. She is excited to see us, and I feel guilty I'm not more excited

to see them. After unloading the tightly packed sport-wagon, we head upstairs. The condo is a mix of nautical and shabby chic, pale blue with dark greens and browns. It looks like she couldn't decide on a theme or color scheme so she just went with them all. Later I notice the string of African themed pieces. Most of it is tacky and unnecessary, and there is something everywhere, noise all over the walls and counters. She has always been a cluttered person, sometimes a hoarder, her condo reflects that.

There are shells everywhere. Shells in lamps, shells on shelves, shells in bowls, shells in jars, shells in baskets, shells hanging from ropes, shells in vases. It is endless. She has a blue and green light up seahorse on the wall; she shows me how it works. She is proud of her condo, no matter what I think of it. Her hodge-podge decor mirrors her personality; some parts I like, some I don't. A mix of bad and good. And while she has made bad choices and will continue to, she keeps moving forward. That is what I learn from her, that is what I will remember. To always keep forgiving yourself, to keep learning, and to always be proud of what you have accomplished, whether others like it or not. She forgives herself and moves on.



Holly Nichole Smith is an English student at the University of North Georgia. She plans to continue her education in Literature and Gender Studies and one day become a professor. Her favorite poet is Robert Frost. She also enjoys reading: Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling, Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy, and Vampire Academy by Richelle Mead.

3rd

Prayer and Supplication

Esther Stuart

“So how is he in bed?” Paul asked. I felt heat creep up in my cheeks. Not even the aroma of hot coffee could take the sting out of that question.

“His friends tell me he snores.” I walked as calmly as possible out of the room, thankful I had brought more than enough school work to keep me busy for a few hours.

“Be nice,” Andrew had told me on the long car ride. “Behave,” he had said. I had promised to put on my best girlfriend face, and I had been prepared to deal with a recently divorced mother going through a mid-life crisis. However, nothing in the invisible, unspoken dictation of girlfriend duties had prepared me for Paul’s jaded question.

It had already been enough to try to explain to my parents who I was spending Thanksgiving with. Sure, the original plan had been to spend Thanksgiving with Andrew and his family, but the execution of that plan got a little complicated with the whirlwind divorce that had taken place months before. Trudy had begged her only son to spend Thanksgiving with her since it was the first holiday she’d experience “on her own.” Except, Trudy wasn’t really on her own. After a few online boyfriends,

Trudy had settled on a veterinarian that lived on top of his small clinic in North Carolina. I still remember the email she had printed out to lay next to her bed from Paul. A paragraph of terribly spelled words and awkwardly worded phrases of affection complete with smiley faces and hearts. Needless to say, after his virtual profession of love, the two had moved in together. My Thanksgiving with Andrew’s family had turned into my Thanksgiving trip with my boyfriend’s mother’s boyfriend’s family, and that certainly didn’t roll off the tongue as well.

“Father who art in heaven,” I whispered setting up the computer on the living room table. “hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, and strike this asshole with lightning. Amen.” I quickly immersed myself in my work, thankful Paul had decided to stay in his cozy spot in the kitchen. I managed to crank out two pages before Trudy came stumbling out of her room.

“Morning, all!”

“Morning, sweetie,” Paul said, finally coming out of his hiding place. He pulled her into his arms for a kiss. A painfully long, loud kiss.

“Dear God,” I muttered as they pulled away from each other. Wordlessly, they parted, and I took a deep breath

before Trudy made her way to my table. Andrew had shown me that awkward was a family trait, but his mother had a special way of tying my tongue in knots.

“Isn’t he the sweetest?” she asked me.

“He’s...nice,” I said. I decided to swallow the fact I thought he looked like the serial killer from a crime drama I’d seen last week.

Trudy gave a lovesick sigh. “Tell me the truth though. Do you think Andrew likes him?” I sat there stunned not quite sure how to sugar coat Andrew’s disdain. Although I thought it was great Trudy was dating other men, I understood Andrew’s anxiety about the divorce still not being legally finalized. I opened my mouth to attempt to verbalize the tangled mess of concerns when she interrupted me. “I mean, do you think he’s okay with this? Me and Paul living together. You know better than me how old fashioned he can be...”

I did know how old fashioned Andrew was. Everyone in the house knew when Andrew begrudgingly dragged a futon into Paul’s office to avoid sleeping in the room assigned to us. I thought about Paul’s inquiry into our non-existent sex life realizing that no one probably expects a healthy man to refuse to sleep with his girlfriend.

“Well, you know Andrew. He’s old fashioned, but I’m sure he understands.” I wonder how bold of a lie you have to tell for it to merit a divine lightning strike.

“Yes, he’s just so hard to read sometimes. You know, a couple weeks ago, I tried to talk to him about all this, especially about,” she paused and looked around, “sex,” she whispered.

I nodded. Unlike Andrew, I didn’t really care that his mother was sleeping with her boyfriend. I had even described the behavior as ‘normal’ to my morally outraged Andrew, but it did bother me how Trudy’s awkward sexual awakening had put new pressure on us. “I’m sure he didn’t have much to talk about. You know how he feels about--”

“You’re so right! He totally shut me down. I think he even got mad when I asked him.”

“Asked him?” I said. “Ask him about what? Sex? Him having sex?” I guess I shouldn’t have been so surprised that she’d ask him that kind of question. It’s just after twenty years of raising Andrew, I thought she’d have realized her son was the biggest romantic on the planet. Even the stars had aligned themselves to ensure Andrew would be born a ‘Virgo,’ divine affirmation of his life goal to be a blushing bride.

“Oh yes! But you know what he said? He just interrupted me right in the middle of what I was saying and said ‘Mom,’” she deepened the tone of her voice, “‘I don’t wanna talk about that with you. I don’t wanna hear it from you. And I’m not gonna listen to it from you’. Isn’t that awful?”

“I’m sure he’s just a little sore about the divorce, Trudy.” More lies. Everyone had seen the seeds of marital dissatisfaction long before they culminated in divorce, but I didn’t blame Andrew for not wanting to have a discussion with his mother about sex. It’s hard enough being celibate, I’m sure it’s even more frustrating when your mom is desperately trying to use you to validate her own promiscuity.

“You might be right there,” she said. “I didn’t realize you two still hadn’t...you know.” I nodded ignoring the fact that this was one of the many women who had told me to wait for my wedding night on tired Sunday mornings. If Southern religion had taught me anything, it’s that guilt and sex go together like collards and cornbread. But being shamed for not doing the dirty was a new feeling with its own acute kind of discomfort. It was a little like being the only kid in class that didn’t want to play in the mud. Everyone respected your decision to not play, but they still secretly wrote you off as pretentious and stuck up. “How long has it been now?” she asked.

“Almost five years.” Finally, a question I could answer without anxiously awaiting judgment.

“Whew! That’s a long time!”

“I guess so.”

“You’d tell me if you were sleeping together, wouldn’t you?” I bit my lip to keep my jaw from dropping.

“Trudy!” Paul called from the kitchen, “My sister’s on her way.”

“Oh, goodness, the time! I need to start cooking.” She got up and put a hand on my shoulder. “Good talk, dear, I wish we could do this more often.” I smiled feeling the figurative wind from the bullet I’d just dodged as she skipped off to the kitchen. When I was sure she wasn’t looking, I slumped in my chair and let out a sigh twice as long as the Nile.

“Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,” I whispered glancing back at the clock on the computer. The day had matured into a ripe noon. “Thy kingdom come, thy

will be done, and where the hell is my boyfriend?” I slipped away from the table, and carefully slinked away to Paul’s study without being noticed. Never has a woman as gracefully and silently opened a door to sneak into a room as I did that day.

I pressed my back to the door as I closed it. The room buzzed with the sound of a slight snore. My eyes narrowed watching Andrew sprawled out on the futon. Its mass took up most of the tight office space so that I had to step over the futon to make my way to his side.

“Andrew.” My knees landed ungraciously next to his head. “Andrew, you bastard, wake up.” I shoved him until his body jolted with movement. His sleepy eyes stared at me in confusion as if his mind needed a moment to recognize me. A smile showed that his brain had finally caught up to his eyes.

“Good morning, beautiful.”

“I’ll kill you.”

“Mmm...I love you too,” he said sitting up. He placed a hand affectionately on my face. I made a mental note to make my death threats more intimidating in the future.

“Andrew. You aren’t listening to me.”

“I could get used to this whole waking up to you in the morning.” There was a stupid grin stuck on his face.

“It’s 12:40. You asshole. I spent the whole morning awake...with your family. Do you know what kind of conversation I just had with your mother?”

“Mmm...” he pulled me into his arms burying his face in my hair. “You smell pretty.”

“I smell like awkward sexual interrogation. Wake the hell up.”

He kissed my hair before letting his body slump back onto the futon. I watched his body revert back into the rhythm of sleep, indignant at my boyfriend’s peaceful apathy. I let out another long sigh as I realized my friends had been right about trips with Andrew. He snored.



Esther Stuart loves to write anything and everything. Her works have been published in magazines such as The Chestatee Review and Kudzu. Her play, The Modern Romantics, recently placed in the annual, regional Southern Literary Festival contest. As a seasoned writer and student, she possesses the discipline to beat blank pages until they cry words.

Formal Essays

“This intolerable demand plagued an entire generation of soldiers, falsely implanting the idea that death was more gallant than a cowardly existence.”

Amanda Adams

“A Hero’s Salute to Death and History”

A Hero’s Salute to Death and History:

Subversion of the Masculine Ideal in Ambrose Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*

Amanda Adams

“He resolved that he would meet his fate more manly. He was a plain, common soldier, had no religion and not much philosophy; he could not die like a hero, with great and wise last words, even if there had been someone to hear them, but he could die ‘game,’ and he would,” declares the narrator of Ambrose Bierce’s “One of the Missing,” featured in his seminal work *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (39). This collection of short stories published in 1891 focuses on the blight of the Civil War, from perspectives on both sides of the front. Bierce writes this during a time when the ideal of masculinity was defined almost wholly by service in the war. A veteran himself, Bierce sought to dismiss the romantic ideal of war as gallant and valor-fueled, and instead he explored the extreme damage wrought when soldiers assumed the expected role of hero. Lisa Long states, “The carnage of the Civil War and its effect on all Americans became a trope expressing the irony and detachment associated with a modern sensibility” (801). Bierce expertly uses irony and a dark humor to spear the notion of glorious war and the excess of masculine responsibility cast at soldiers that participated. A selection of Bierce’s

finest war stories: “Killed at Resaca,” “A Son of the Gods,” “An Affair of Outposts,” and “Chickamauga,” were prime examples of the implementation of a hyper-masculine identity as a means to bemoan the widely-held belief that an excess of courage and dignity could pull one through the war.

Before an in-depth analysis of Bierce’s critique of war can be developed, some history must be provided on the late-nineteenth century tenets of masculinity. David Yost asserts,

The 1880s and 1890s were a time of great anxiety in American gender roles. . . . Newspapers in America and Europe anticipated war, which in turn led to increased calls for “a masculinity as pure and streamlined as a spear.” Dueling surged in popularity, as did outdoor activities and competitive athletics. Masculinity became increasingly defined as an “aggressive and physical activism,” as opposed to the previous emphasis on self-discipline and responsibility. (247)

The Civil War ended in 1865, twenty-six

years before the publication of Bierce's war stories. The backlash from the Civil War would have been the impetus that changed the culturally appropriate tenets of masculinity from "self-discipline and responsibility" to "aggressive and physical activism." Having written several of his short stories during or directly after the war, Bierce was ahead of his time in the display of the sudden shift from one mode of behavior to the other. This rendering of the actualities of war set off a chain reaction in Civil War literature, employing the literary genre of realism to accurately depict atrocity, without leaving the reader with a clear takeaway. John Pettegrew states,

The corpus of turn-of-the-century Civil War literature - the novels, plays, magazine and newspaper articles, and hundreds of regiment histories and memoirs written by generals and foot soldiers alike - should be thought of as a type of 'vernacular culture.' In contrast to the Memorial Day speeches of public officials, popular Civil War literature included little discussion of the social and political causes of the conflict or of the national good that resulted from it. (55-6)

These publications were the nation's first real glimpse at the truths of war and the ways in which all involved were supremely unprepared. Young men were recruited, given little training, and then sent away. Bierce was not only the originator of this particular literary trend, but also the perfecter of it. Each of his short stories featured in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* are brutally realistic, many

ending with a single line of dialogue or bleak scene that instantly imparts the foolishness of heroicizing war.

An excellent example of this brutal depiction brought on by the error of assumed masculinity appears in "Killed at Resaca," a story of Lieutenant Herman Brayle, whose amplified show of courage results in hundreds of unnecessary deaths. A fellow soldier describes Brayle as "commonly in full uniform, especially in action, when most officers are content to be less flamboyantly attired, he was a very striking and conspicuous figure. As to the rest, he had a gentleman's manners, a scholar's head, and a lion's heart. . . . The truest heart that ever beat" (Bierce 43). The rest of the staff soon becomes infatuated with Brayle, committing to memory all of his mannerisms and decisions in battle. During the Battle of Resaca, a maneuver in the taking of Atlanta, Brayle's excessive vanity proves to be the destruction of many. By disobeying the general and riding his horse right into a clearing for the enemy to see, the unit was found, and thus, doomed. The narrator states, from the midst of combat,

I saw Brayle, the cause of the carnage. Invisible now from either side, and equally doomed by friend and foe, he stood in the shot-swept space, motionless, his face toward the enemy. I instantly saw what had stopped him. . . . A deep and sinuous gully, crossing half the field from the enemy's line. . . . Brayle had evidently not known about it. (47)

Trapped between enemy fire and the option of turning in retreat, he "stood

awaiting death. It did not keep him waiting long" (47). After Brayle's death, the narrator finds a letter of his from a lover, Marian Mendenhall, who states that "I could bear to hear of my soldier lover's death, but not of his cowardice" (27). When the narrator visits Marian to return the letter, he finds her beautiful, but dismissive of the death of her lover. Brayle's amplified courage in battle, which resulted in the death of so many, was ultimately futile. Adrain Hunter asserts, "The significance of Brayle's behavior is missed by the narrator because of his absolute adherence to the codes of reticent, selfless masculinity. He considers Brayle the 'truest and bravest heart that ever beat,' when in fact he was a man spurred to a frightful self-destructiveness because of the intolerable demands of the role he must act" (286). This intolerable demand plagued an entire generation of soldiers, falsely implanting the idea that death was more gallant than a cowardly existence. In "Killed at Resaca," the impetus of destruction is as slight as the perception of what a good soldier is in the mind of a young woman. Displaying civilian influence on the male identity is rare in Bierce's writing. Many of his soldiers are brought to staggering ends because of their seemingly self-appointed roles.

Take, for instance, another of the short stories, "A Son of the Gods." Like "Killed at Resaca," the main focus is on a foolish leader - known only as the "young officer," who lets showmanship get in the way of survival. Here, though, we only know of the general from others. He is introduced as "a young officer on a snow-white horse. His saddle blanket is scarlet. What a fool! No one who has ever been in action but remembers how

naturally every rifle turns toward the man on a white horse" (Bierce 27). This initial and correct identification of foolishness is soon forgotten by the men of the unit as they watch him perform his soldier show. The narrator states, "Meantime the young horseman has advanced a hundred yards. He is riding at a walk, straight up the long slope, with never a turn of the head. How glorious! Gods! What we would not give to be in his place - with his soul! . . . Such is the magnetism of courage and devotion" (28). As they watch him scout for enemies on horseback as opposed to undercover, the men know that this will immediately give up their location if enemies are waiting, but watch-on anyway, captivated. Taking the hero figure a step further from "Killed at Resaca," the men in the unit go as far as deifying the officer, referring to him as "this military Christ" (29). They cannot condemn his actions because they represent the selfless heroism that all should theoretically be striving for. Irrational behavior can be identified, but never reprehended. Therefore, the motives behind these actions can never be examined. Why would the young officer endanger himself and others in such a way? Hunter argues,

What is he doing dressed in full ceremonial garb? Why this effete splash of color on the disconsolate battlefield? The young officer is suicidal; at best he is acting in a dissociative manner. John Talbott, in an article on combat trauma in the Civil War, has found evidence of this kind of behavior in several high-ranking officers in the Union army. As he

describes, dissociation is “an adaptive strategy” which “allows a person under stress to continue functioning, although often in an autonomic and sometimes inappropriate way.” (288)

A death wish certainly explains the overzealous behavior of the young officer. Unable to cope with the pressures of a high-profile job that is defined by keeping up appearances, he acts out in a way that maintains the manly set of rules to which he is snared, while giving him an immediate out – dying.

This theme of suicide by service is not always implicitly implied. In “An Affair of Outposts,” Captain Armisted joins the Union army with the explicit wish to die. He states, “A great military authority has given a simple recipe for being a good soldier: ‘Try always to get yourself killed.’ It is with that purpose that I wish to enter the service. I am not, perhaps, much of a patriot, but I wish to be dead” (Bierce 70). Bierce leaves Armisted for a time, focusing on the Governor of the State and the “luring distinguished civilians from fields of political ambition to see what they safely could of the horrors of war” (71). Through the eyes of the Governor, the reader gets the previously unmentioned perspective of the outsider. Receiving no special treatment, the Governor laments an idea that never existed. He observes, “In all this was none of the pomp of war – no hint of glory. Even in his distress and peril the helpless civilian could not forbear to contrast it with the gorgeous parade and reviews held in honor of himself. . . . He grunted, shuddering – ‘this is beastly! Where are the elevated sentiments, the devotion, the heroism . . .” (74). Injured and seriously impeding those who are charged with protecting him, the Governor is angry that he does not see the implementation of the ideals that he helps promote with his parades and reviews. Even in the face of actual war, the ideal still exists as something that is being neglected. Armisted is not heard of again until the end of the story; he brutally breaks an arm and rearranges his whole unit to aid the Governor’s well-being. For a man bent on dying, he fights hard to protect others. Exploring this psychological dissonance first in the Governor and then in Armisted, Bierce staunchly negates the romantic view that war held during the late nineteenth-century. The Governor, a purveyor of romantic ideals, refuses to give them up despite his direct contact with the atrocity of war. Armisted, a misanthrope whose sole mission is to be killed, makes sure to serve his country as best he can before he dies. Faced with an impending doom, neither man can escape the role to which he is bound. Ben Knight observes, masculinity is defined “by a high degree of management over the calls the world makes upon a man’s identity and inner resources” (211). In order to fulfill the demands of an established masculinity, both men must play the parts that they have been assigned; the Governor, as blowhard politico, serves only to enforce the necessity of war, and Armisted, as noble soldier, has to give himself completely to the Union cause before death is allowable.

Expounding on the rejection of romanticism, John Brazil asserts, Bierce had experienced a world quite different from that depicted in Harte’s [Bret Harte – American author and

poet] romanticized versions of the frontier. To begin with, the physical and psychological reality of his Civil War experiences had uprooted romantic apprehensions of life, apprehensions that had been fed by sentimental literature. He had joined the Union Army with illusions of noble heroism and war’s chivalric cleanliness. He found their opposites. (227)

This stark opposite is apparent in “Chickamauga,” one of Bierce’s most acclaimed stories. Focusing on a deaf-mute boy who gets lost in the woods and comes across a severely injured group of soldiers, some of Bierce’s most horrific imagery is employed, depicting the various states of decay that these soldiers are in. Yost asserts, “In Chickamauga . . . Bierce paints battle landscapes of unremitting horror” (249). For example, the young boy sees a soldier “that lacked a lower jaw – from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone,” and he even discovers the corpse of his mother, “the greater part of the forehead was torn away, and from the jagged hole the brain protruded, overflowing the temple, a frothy mass of gray, crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles” (Bierce 23-5). This discovery baffles the young boy, whose naïveté blocks him from understanding the horrors that he witnesses.

Presented with these slowly dying soldiers, the young boy then assumes his own masculine role. The narrator states, “Instinctively the child turned toward the growing splendor and moved down the slope with his horrible companions.

. . . He placed himself in the lead, his wooden sword still in hand, and solemnly directed the march, conforming his pace to theirs and occasionally turning to see that his forces did not straggle” (23). The only way that this macabre scene can make sense is to place the young boy as the carrier of romantic ideals, while the soldiers are the knowing victims of the realities of war. James Baltrum asserts, “‘Chickamauga’ carries the figure of the innocent back to its proper source, a six-year old child. . . . It becomes immediately clear that the child, clutching a wooden sword and endowed with an inherited love of military books and pictures, represents the idea of romantic war. . . . Only personal experience can wipe out the false impression and teach the essentials of war” (228). Unable to understand the severity of this scene of absolute defeat, men crawling like animals to their deaths, the boy inserts himself as leader in an attempt to restore order in an otherwise chaotic situation. It is this mix of an ardent rejection of romantic concepts paired with disturbing realism that make “Chickamauga” so compelling.

Bierce’s war oeuvre is unequalled in its seamless integration of these tenets without explicitly moralizing anti-war sentiments. Works like “Killed at Resaca,” “A Son of the Gods,” “An Affair of Outposts,” and “Chickamauga,” offered many readers a way to understand real wartime and the heavy psychological impact that it had on all involved. The Civil War was not the genesis of a pronounced masculinity that manifested itself in combative and destructive behaviors, but it was the first forum that this growing national trend had to spread through. Since all men who participated in the war were American

soldiers, and therefore, inherently seen as masculine, a higher state of masculinity had to be reached in some way for one side to be seen as the dominant force. This competition between men of the same country to be seen as the victors of the Civil War drove masculinity to the hubris-plagued state that we see in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*. With this ramping up of masculinity came the loss of humanity. Focused only on how their actions were to be perceived, these

soldiers forgot that they were battling other men who faced the same struggle. As the narrator declares in “A Son of the Gods,” “The soldier never becomes wholly familiar with the conception of his foes as men like himself. . . . He thinks of them as inaccessible; and, catching an unexpected glimpse of them, they appear farther away, and therefore, larger than they really are – like objects in a fog. He is somewhat in awe of them” (Bierce 27).

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Problematic Poets: The Victorian Debate over Poetry’s Proper Place

2nd

Emmy Dixon

Most of the problems burdening modern society can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution; therefore, the study of Victorian literary works is eminently relevant because as Linda K. Hughes states: “the Victorians . . . appear more and more worthy of the attention of us who still suffer from ‘this strange disease of modern life’” (444). That strange disease was monumental, foundation-shaking change. Poetry was considered to be a crucial vehicle for addressing the rampant changes affecting the Victorians; however, a major split over content was found in the debate over classical versus contemporary subject matter. Regardless of the debate over *proper* content, poets were all influenced by, and wrote about, the major issues of the day, which included existential problems like the meaning of life and the emerging split between science and religion, as well as issues much closer to the bleak realities of daily life such as child labor and slavery. One issue commonly dwelt on was the apparent separation between men, resulting in a lack of empathy and an inability to truly connect. Some poets were motivated to stimulate change and others simply wanted to reflect on the tensions enveloping society. Matthew

Arnold and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, two of the age’s most brilliant poets, employed carefully crafted poetry to address some of the core problems of the Victorian Era, but they addressed these issues in very different ways, highlighting the fundamental debate over the proper role and substance of poetry.

Whatever their particular impetus for writing, poets were often ineffectual in producing their desired results. E. Warwick Slinn remarks on the unique challenge they faced: “Working within the combined hegemony of utilitarianism and political economy . . . [they] sought to enforce values other than those provided by the capitalist market” (310). So, even though they desired change, they had to work within the superstructure, and in order to be heard, they had to be published in the very system they sought to subvert. Slinn concludes: “Although the claim of special experience sustained a place in which to assert their ethical and aesthetic values, it inevitably facilitated their incorporation into hegemonic aims” (311). The poets became just another cog in the machine. In addition to suiting their poetry to the powers of publishing, women had the special problem of needing to conform to the gender norms of femininity; however, by following

the cultural restrictions and writing only of *appropriate* topics, their poems were deemed irrelevant and vapid. On the other hand, if they transgressed those norms, they were blacklisted. Therefore, it was generally expressed that women simply could not be effective poets.

Barrett Browning, however, believed that women could indeed be poets, and in her poem “Aurora Leigh,” she stakes her claim. Using an “assertively female voice . . . expressed through rapidly shifting tonalities—confessional, meditative, satiric, self-reflexively ironic,” Barrett Browning blazes a trail for poetesses (Stone and Taylor 393). She was not without disparagers, and just as she struggled with breaking gender norms, so too does her titular heroine. In the poem, Aurora’s cousin and beau, Romney, is the voice of opposition against Aurora’s aspirations to be a poet. In many ways, he represents the general views of mainstream Britain at the time. Aurora echoes the frustration of female writers: “Poets needs must be / Or men or women--more’s the pity” (Barrett Browning 1100). She is complaining about the fact the poets must be split into their respective categories, rather than their work taken for its value regardless of gender. Romney answers her complaint: “Ah, / But men, and still less women, happily, / Scarce need be poets, Keep to the green wreath, / Since even dreaming of the stone and bronze / Brings headaches, pretty cousin, and defiles / The clean white morning dress” (1100). Romney is voicing the generally held belief that women were incapable of the type of thought needed to write meaningful poetry. Attempting to do so would not only give them headaches but in referencing the soiling of the “clean

white morning dress,” he implies that writing poetry would transgress against the Separate Spheres ideology of the day, making Aurora a soiled woman. She retorts: “I would rather take my part / with God’s Dead . . . / . . . than keep quiet here / And gather up my feet from every step / For fear to soil my gown in so much dust. / I choose to walk at all risks.—Here, if heads / That hold a rhythmic thought, must ache perforce, / For my part I choose headaches, —and to-day’s / My birthday” (1100). Aurora is laying claim to the title of poetess. The reference to her birthday is symbolic of her birth into the role.

In addition to birthing the female poet, Barrett Browning felt it imperative to draw attention to problems and correct them. Carol Christ and Catherine Robson argue, “Barrett Browning’s poetry is characterized by a fervent moral sensibility,” and that she “uses literature as a tool of social protest and reform, lending her voice” to the causes of the day (1078). Essentially, she felt that the most important items to be made into poems were those which were news. To her, current events could be art and thus, worthy of poetry. Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor relay Barrett Browning’s quote about the definition of art: “[it is] not either all beauty or all use, but as ‘essential truth which makes its way through beauty into use’” (401). It was her ability to combine the important events of her age with art that has made her memorable. Stone and Taylor concur: “laid claim to future readers by writing poetry that addressed her moment while transcending it,” and “In her words again . . . ‘Poetry is where we live and have our being’” (401). Even if the places inhabited were dreadful, the

circumstances dire, and the prognosis poor, Barrett Browning felt they were worthy of poetic immortalization.

Matthew Arnold had a different view on the poet’s role in Victorian society; rather than instruct on morality, poets were to bring pleasure and highlight beauty. Arnold states in his “preface to *Poems*,” “It is demanded, not only that it [poetry] shall interest but also that it shall inspire and rejoice the reader; that it shall convey a charm, and infuse delight,” and further adds, “it is not enough that the poet should add to the knowledge of men, it is required of him also that he should add to their happiness” (1375). In his lecture “Literature and Science,” Arnold spends much time discussing how men are naturally drawn to beauty and proper conduct. It is his assertion that poetry should aspire to both. In so doing, poetry helps to alleviate the stress of the changing tides of science and religion. In fact, he says, the more science impacts man, the more he needs poetry (1415-1427). In the “preface to *Poems*,” he further describes situations that are *not* appropriate for poetry as those “in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done” (1376). Essentially, Arnold felt that poetry should be uplifting, and it should inspire. All else may be written in carefully measured verse, but it is not *poetry*.

A poignant and highly sentimental example of Barrett Browning’s definition of art, as well as a potential example of Arnold’s what-not-to-do, is found in her poem “The Cry of the Children.” Though it can be inferred that this poem

is an example of what Arnold would not have approved of, the converse can also be argued. The lack of action that Arnold would have criticized is precisely the action that she hoped would come as a result of her poem; therefore, the poem is not without action. It is simply implied, rather than overt. Propelled by Richard Horne’s 1842 Report of the *Royal Commission on Children’s Employment in Mines and Factories*, Barrett Browning sought to shock middle-class society into action on behalf of the children working in subhuman conditions. She chose sentimentality as her vehicle; a choice the early twentieth century critics derided. However, Peaches Henry claims, “Given the horrendous conditions detailed in Horne’s report, quite possibly only sentimentality provided the literary tools with which Barrett Browning could poetically articulate the horrific reality of the working children of Victorian Great Britain” (543). Lofty language and romantic ideals were just not adequate to describe the atrocities taking place just off the middle-class radar. Emotional appeal was required.

“The Cry of the Children” is the epitome of effective sentimental art. Henry says that Barrett Browning makes use of “a wide array of sentimental strategies and devices including pathetic diction, pathos, graphic imagery, childhood death, grave-side scenes, super abundant crying, and biblical rhetoric” (544). Further, she combines a rhythm that mimics the stutters and lurches of industrial machines with a repetitive, sing-song quality, bringing to mind a children’s playground. This image is then juxtaposed with descriptions of the child laborers’ dreadful exploitation. The result is a dehumanization of the children

and a personification of industrialization, a position of privilege for the machines. Barrett Browning does not simply expound on the situation; she empowers the children to do so. Stone and Taylor explain: “While evoking sentiment with such images [of the children speaking], EBB [Barrett Browning] speaks powerfully and directly to the men in charge” (396). So, one way that Barrett Browning keeps this poem from falling into the melodrama is by letting the children speak for themselves:

‘True,’ say the children, ‘it
may happen / That we die
before our time: / Little Alice
died last year, her grave is
shapen / Like a snowball, in
the rime. / We looked into
the pit prepared to take her:
/ Was no room for any work
in the close clay! / From the
sleep wherein she lieth none
will wake her, / Crying, ‘Get
up, Little Alice! It is day.’ /
If you listen by that grave, in
sun and shower, / With your
ear down, little Alice never
cries; / Could we see her face,
be sure we should not know
her, / For the smile has time
for growing in her eyes: /
And merry go her moments,
lulled and stilled in / The
shroud by the kirk chime. / It
is good when it happens,’ say
the children, / ‘That we die
before our time.’ (1080)

The children are speaking in calm voices about the joys of dying young. The references to being able to rest undisturbed and Alice finally smiling are heart-breaking images all delivered by the children, not simply recanted by an

observer. Barrett Browning is not seeking the reader’s pity; rather, she is allowing the children to tell their stories and demand recognition. In turn, she hopes that it will fill the readers with indignation about the situation and possibly agitate for change.

Unlike Barrett Browning, Arnold was not attempting to make changes in society; instead, he believed that the study of great poetry would enable people to see society’s pitfalls without his help. To this purpose, Arnold spent much time laying out his opinions on what constituted truly great poetry. In *The Study of Poetry*, he says readers will recognize it when they read it: “If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power [great poets], we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there” (1408). Unfortunately, he also believed that the poets of his time were not capable of writing such timeless poetry, and in *The Study of Poetry*, even the much acclaimed poets, Alexander Pope and John Dryden, are not safe: “Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose” (1414). Arnold believed that the best poetry focused on the classics. In *The Study of Poetry*, he says, “the substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness” (1409). One could certainly argue that Barrett Browning exemplified truth and seriousness in “The Cry of the Children,” however, not the kind of truth and seriousness Arnold meant with his statement. In his

“preface to *Poems*,” he further elaborates that the best subjects for poetry are those “which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time” (1376). Again, the frank appeal to compassion and anger presented in Barrett Browning’s emotional poem should fall neatly under that umbrella—yet it does not. Arnold focused on existential questions, such as the meaning of life, in many of his own poems, such as “The Buried Life.” It was those kinds of feelings that Arnold references with his elevation of classical standards. Arnold concludes that there is not sufficient subject matter in his time to write the best poetry.

Though Barrett Browning’s “Aurora Leigh” mimics the classical epic, it represents her firm refutation of Arnold’s assertions that one could not write heroic poetry based on the current (Victorian) day. In the poem, Aurora claims that Arnold’s way of thinking is wrong: “Ay, but every age / Appears to souls who live in’t (ask Carlyle) / Most unheroic. . . That’s wrong thinking, to my mind, / And wrong thoughts make poor poems” (Barrett Browning 1104-5). Aurora then relates her vision of what a poet should do: “But poets should / Exert a double vision; should have eyes / To see near things as comprehensively / As if afar they took their point of sight, / And distant things as intimately deep / As if they touched them” (1105). According to Aurora, the poet should be able to conflate the past and present, making their own time classic. Poets are the spirit keepers of their age, and to be able to do so, they must show the beautiful *and* the heartbreaking: “Their sole work is

to represent the age, / Their age, not Charlemagne’s,—this live, throbbing age, / That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires, / . . . / To flinch from modern varnish, coat or flounce, / Cry out for togas and the picturesque, / Is fatal,—foolish too” (1105-6). Barrett Browning concludes that anyone refusing to see the poetic in their own time is doomed to failure.

Considering that “Aurora Leigh” was published after Arnold made his claims about the proper classic nature of poetry, it can be inferred that Barrett Browning may have been reacting to his comments. Interestingly, the classical devotee eventually stopped producing poetry because he felt that he could not adequately produce a poem fitting his high standards. Christ and Robson state, “When Arnold tried to write poems that would meet his own requirements . . . he felt that something was lacking. By the late 1850s he thus found himself at a dead end” (1352). This is interesting because Aurora implies that refusing to see the poetic value of one’s own time is indeed terminal as “death inherits death” (Barrett Browning 1105). Arnold was harder on himself than his critics and Barrett Browning were.

No matter which side of the fundamental debate one agrees with, it is clear by their side-by-side anthologizing that they both make good points and great poems. Considering the rampant child exploitation and the alienation of man that is still a problem today, one could argue that poetry alone is not powerful enough to compel lasting change. However, it has certainly given humanity a record of the struggles associated with such epic change, a record that has a melody for every

possible taste. Hughes explains the sustained popularity of Victorian poetry: “No single narrative can encompass the whole of Victorian poetry . . . A principal appeal of Victorian poetry today is its range of forms and fashions” (458). Christ and Robson remark that “Aurora Leigh” is “the first work in English by a woman writer in which the heroine herself is an author” (1078). This is a significant point as it demonstrates

the power of female poets and their ability to embody an epic hero. While Arnold provides vital criticism on the constitution of good poetry, criticism still relevant today, Barrett Browning swims against the current with “Aurora Leigh” and enlarges the feminine poetic sphere. To compare the two brings to mind metaphorical apples and oranges. They are impossible to definitively compare, yet delicious to contemplate.

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Physical Verses Mental: 3rd

How World War I Literature Handles the Treatment of War Neurosis

Zach McGarry

Introduction

The rattling of machine guns, the smell of decomposing corpses, the looming certainty of death—these things correlate immediately to the World War I mindset. However, its literature largely delves into what occurs *afterward*; when the soldiers are home, but they still hear the explosion of shells in each roar of thunder and see the ghosts of their dead friends in the dark. Some World War I literature focuses on the war front, where authors describe the mundane life in the trenches and the massacres in No Man’s Land. Other novels, however, take place almost exclusively on the home front, and they are able to make unique and meaningful insights on the war because of this distinction.

A primary cornerstone theme of World War I literature combines the life on the home front with the effects from the war front. The end result: shell shock. “In May 1917, [...] 15% of British soldiers had been discharged” because of shell shock; after the war, “in 1921, 27% of all hospitalized ex-servicemen were defined as neuropsychiatric cases (in 1927, this number was estimated to be 46.7%)” (Pols and Oak). This huge increase in neuropsychiatric diagnosis *after* the war is attributed to the slow, gradual acceptance

that non-physical war injuries not only existed, but they were valid, detrimental cases for returning soldiers. The fighting was over, but the war still raged on in their minds.

These soldiers who were discharged suffering from war neurosis may have ended up staying long-term in war hospitals. This is the situation for the soldiers featured in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*. The novel is mainly set in Craiglockhart War Hospital, which houses an interesting assortment of both fictional and historical characters. Other soldiers stayed in their homes so that their families could care for them. This is the case for the character Chris Baldry in Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* and Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, even in these novels where the soldiers are not housed in war hospitals, their families still seek out psychiatric help.

World War I literature offers important insights as to how war neurosis was perceived in the dichotomy between its physical and mental attributes. To explore the treatment of shell shock in World War I literature, this paper will focus on three novels briefly introduced earlier: Rebecca West’s, *The Return of the Soldier*, Virginia Woolf’s, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*.

The Return of the Soldier’s focus

is exclusively on the impact that Chris Baldry's amnesia has on the rest of the characters. West's novel is rather short with few characters, which intensifies the focus on Chris's amnesia. The centeredness of the novel also allows for Dr. Anderson, the war doctor who cures Chris of his condition, not to appear until the very last chapter of the novel and still play a major role as a central character.

There are two war doctors featured in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Dr. Holmes and Sir William. They have very different views of Septimus's condition. Dr. Holmes claims there is "nothing whatever the matter" with Septimus (Woolf 88). Rezia, Septimus's wife, is pleased with this conclusion. Sir William, on the other hand, approaches Septimus's severe war neurosis for the problem that it is. Rezia feels "deserted" by Sir William's recognition of a mental problem (96).

Pat Barker's *Regeneration* has the most extensive handling of war neurosis of the three texts. Barker uses her portrayal of W.H.R. Rivers to explore various cases and approaches in treating shell shock. Like in *The Return of the Soldier*, Rivers encounters patients suffering from amnesia among his other cases, mainly Billy Prior. Similar to the "Dr. Holmes versus Sir William" complex present in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Rivers is also juxtaposed with another historical figure: Dr. Yealland. Rivers takes a psychotherapeutic approach to treating his patients, while Yealland treats his patients with electroshock therapy.

These novels serve as excellent focus texts for their thematic comparisons between the physical and mental attributes of life after war. Preexisting literary criticism in reference

to the novels and psychological research pertaining to the time period will be combined with original interpretations of the literature to explore their handling of war neurosis, comparing physical themes to mental themes.

Shells

The term "shell shock" first made its debut in *The Lancet*, a British medical journal, six months into the Great War (Alexander). It stemmed from the idea that mental casualties and deficiencies from the war were all caused in some way by the explosive damage of shells. There were discussions as to whether or not shell shock resulted from the physical concussive force of explosions or from invisible ones that damaged men's brains without observable evidence. Either way, early medical opinions agreed that the damages of shell shock were *physical* injuries from exploding shells (Alexander).

The novel published earliest among our three texts of focus reflects this physical conception of shell shock. Chris Baldry in *The Return of the Soldier* suffers from amnesia, implied to be the result of a concussion from an explosion:

"How is he wounded?" she asked.

[Margaret] traced a pattern on the carpet with her blunt toe.

"I don't know how to put it; he's *not exactly wounded*. A shell burst..."

"Concussion?" suggested Kitty.

She answered with an odd glibness and humility, as though tendering us a term she had long brooded over without arriving at comprehension, and hoping

that our superior intelligences would make something of it: "Shell-shock." (West 14; emphasis added)

Margaret suggests that Chris is "not exactly wounded," indicating that Chris was not directly hit by the explosion. The fact that there is no physical description of Chris's injury (a bruised scalp or a burned face) anywhere in the novel supports this notion. When Kitty insists that Chris suffers from some sort of bodily injury, Margaret drops the term shell shock (14). All the female characters involved in this scene are unable to completely separate Chris's injury with the bursting of a shell. Margaret seems to believe an unobservable force is the cause of Chris's amnesia with her "not exactly wounded" comment. Her phrasing reflects the early medical opinions that suggested shell shock was a physically caused ailment, not psychological.

However, as time passed and more cases of shell shock arose, it became progressively more apparent that exploding shells were not the sole cause of soldiers suffering from the effects of *shell* shock. More and more cases of shell shock arose, but there was concrete confirmation that certain soldiers were not closely exposed to exploding shells. Still, they exhibited similar symptoms as those diagnosed with shell shock. Eventually, medical authorities concluded that the condition of soldiers "was one of 'neurasthenia,' or weakness of the nerves—in laymen's terms, a nervous breakdown precipitated by the dreadful stress of war" (Alexander).

This conclusion, although valid and enlightening, was troublesome. The term "shell shock" was still used to encompass

both the physical and mental conditions that exhibited the symptoms of shell shock: "headache; tinnitus, or ringing in the ear; dizziness; poor concentration; confusion; loss of memory; and disorders of sleep" (Anderson). The term was misleading, as many soldiers' *shell* shock had nothing to do with exploding shells. In addition to the problematic ideology in referring to a mental problem with a physically based name, this distinction also caused issues in the treatment of soldiers. A rather ruthless culture arose in handling shell shocked soldiers; if an injury could be proven purely mental instead of physical, then the soldier in question was physically fit to return to the battlements (Anderson). Mentally compromised soldiers were physically forced to return to the war. Their bodies were currency for war; their minds couldn't afford to matter.

Mentality

Barker's *Regeneration* addresses the psychological versus the physical scarring of World War I. Billy Prior is a major character of the trilogy who suffers from psychological and physical ailments. It is Prior's intention to be cured and return to the war. Though Rivers cures him of his muteness, restores his memory, and stabilizes his overriding war neurosis, the main concern in sending Prior back to battle is his asthma. Rivers reminds Prior, "I don't think we can let you go in front of a Medical Board without drawing their attention to your *physical* condition" (Barker 119). Even after all the progress Prior made, Rivers, the renowned war doctor, knew the physical ailments would have the Board's attention over the mental ones.

Sassoon's session at The Board meeting also makes a statement about the

psychological versus physical condition of soldiers returning to battle. Sassoon ends up in Craiglockhart Hospital because he wrote *The Declaration*, an anti-war text. It was politically easiest to label the war-hero as shell shocked instead of anti-war, sending him to Craiglockhart. However, time at the hospital reveals he suffers from horrible nightmares of the war.

During Sassoon's interview, he claims he hasn't had any recent nightmares. Rivers and The Board detect he is lying (Barker 215-216). "I suppose he thinks that might be a reason for keeping him here [at the hospital]," Board-member Graham concludes (216). When the time comes to decide whether or not Sassoon is fit to return to battle, The Board makes a decision completely motivated by Sassoon's physique:

"So you think he's fit?"

"Course he's fit. Good God, man, how often do you see a physique like that, even in the so-called upper classes?"

They were back to eugenics again, but for once Rivers had no desire to interrupt. (Barker 217)

Rivers asks whether or not The Board thinks Sassoon is "fit," and they take him to mean physically instead of mentally. This demonstrates that the focus of medical minds of World War I was on how physically fit soldiers were, not mentally fit.

Though Barker uses The Board to demonstrate the World War I mindset of prioritizing the physical over the mental, her handling of Rivers suggests that a large part of her rhetorical purpose for *Regeneration* was to stress the psychological instead of physical. Rivers in the novel

is a well-established psychiatrist whose life is dominated by his work in military psychiatry. For Rivers, the actual person, this was not necessarily the case. When Rivers passed away in 1922, "his wartime psychotherapy did not figure much in the obituaries. *The Times* set the tone with the heading 'A Noted Anthropologist,' emphasizing his contributions to that field" (Barrett 245).

Barker decided to focus on Rivers' exploits in psychotherapy rather than the physical-based work historical figure was particularly known for. Making this distinction to a pivotal character in the novel, Barker uses Rivers to emphasize the importance of psychotherapy. Because *Regeneration* frequently narrates through Rivers' point-of-view, his opinions and tactics seem to be the preferred ideology, boosting the recognition of mental concern of patients.

The juxtaposition between Dr. Holmes and Sir William in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* makes juxtaposed suggestions about the physicality and psychology of war neurosis. Dr. Holmes concludes that nothing is wrong with Septimus (Woolf 88). Very obviously, there is. Septimus's speech is scattered and incomprehensible, as is his mentality.

Dr. Holmes recommends "two tabloids of bromide dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime," as if Septimus's state could be helped solely by physical means like medication (89). Prescribing bromide suggests Dr. Holmes is treating Septimus purely from a physical perspective, as he is also completely unable to see anything wrong with the very mentally distressed patient. Rezia's narrative perspective focuses on Dr. Holmes's physical traits, "[l]arge, fresh

coloured, handsome," which further correlates Dr. Holmes to pure physicality (Woolf 91).

Sir William, on the other hand, is entirely concentrated on Septimus's mind. In their session, Sir William asks about any anxieties that might be troubling Septimus and focuses on his depression (Woolf 92-95). Sir William decides quickly that Septimus is "not fit to be about" and suggests placing him in a home (95-96). There is not a single mention of Sir William analyzing Septimus physically. Because of Sir William's implied honorable distinction and his deeper analysis of Septimus, his mental diagnosis seems more credible (and is rather obviously more correct) than Dr. Holmes' physical diagnosis.

Though Dr. Anderson is the only war doctor present as a primary character in *The Return of the Soldier*, his focus on Chris's mental state juxtaposes with Kitty's complete and utter materialism. Dr. Anderson diagnoses Chris with amnesia, but specifies that "[h]is unconscious self is refusing to let him resume his relations with his normal life, and so we get this loss of memory" (West 85). Though throughout the novel it is ambiguous whether or not Chris's amnesia is from a physical concussion or not, Dr. Anderson makes it clear that he believes Chris's ailment is the result of trauma. Like with Sir William, Dr. Anderson does not mention Chris's physical state at all, instead asking questions strictly pertaining to his mentality (85-89).

West portrays Kitty as a clearly materialistic character. She believes that lifelong distress cannot be the cause of Chris's amnesia because "he had a lot of money" (West 86). When Margaret cures

Chris of his amnesia, Kitty assesses he is cured based solely off of his appearance walking back to the house:

"Jenny! Jenny! How does he look?"

"Oh,"—how could I say it—"every inch a soldier."

She crept behind me to the window, peered over my shoulder and *saw*.

I heard her suck in her breath with satisfaction.

"He's cured!" she whispered slowly. "He's cured!" (99; emphasis added)

Kitty, before waiting to even talk to Chris, declares that by the way he *looks* and how she *saw* him that he must be cured. This materialism juxtaposes with Dr. Anderson's mental focus, making his mental analysis seem all the more elevated over base materialism.

Though Kitty's materialism is often problematic in the novel, a criticism of West's characters by Steve Pinkerton conveys one way her physical theme is beneficial to the conclusion of the novel. Jenny and Margaret privately decide to leave Chris to his amnesia (93-94). However, Pinkerton argues that Margaret resolves to cure Chris upon seeing Kitty's "face puckered with tears," which brings her back to the reality of the situation. If not for the emphasis on Kitty's physically distressed state, Margaret may not have decided to cure Chris after all (Pinkerton 8). Pinkerton emphasizing physically aiding war neurosis is an interesting but much rarer take on literature set in the home front of World War I, however.

Hypnosis

Hypnosis, a purely psychological approach to treating war neurosis, receives brief but interesting treatments

in *Regeneration* and *The Return of the Soldier*. Historically, Max Nonne is particularly known for his success in treating patients through hypnosis. Nonne found great success in his approach to hypnosis, finding soldiers easy to fully hypnotize (Hales 579-580). He reported “a 90-95% success rate in treating neurosis,” using a unique and original method of hypnosis (580).

Follow-up studies found certain flaws in using hypnosis for the treatment of neurosis, however. There was critique that stated hypnosis only treated the symptoms of shell shock and ignored the root cause of neurosis. Doctors also found that symptoms returned very quickly and criticized hypnosis for only serving to pass soldiers off as fit for service, only curing them short-term. Physician Ernst Simmel argued against the use of hypnosis because it was depowering to the patient—degrading, even (Hales 580-581).

Many of these critiques are reflected by Rivers in *Regeneration*. Prior actually wants Rivers to use hypnosis, but Rivers is hesitant. He’s surprised that Prior wants to use hypnosis, explaining “when a doctor suggests hypnosis the patient’s quite nervous, because he feels he’ll be... putting himself in somebody else’s power” (Barker 48). Rivers then explains that he does use hypnosis on occasion, but usually as a last resort (48). This admitted hesitation to use hypnosis suggests that Rivers is knowledgeable of the limitations of hypnosis found in the critiques of that method. However, Rivers eventually uses hypnosis on Prior and is successful in permanently retrieving his lost memories (91-96). Notably, Rivers did not use hypnosis just to pass Prior off as a fit soldier.

This suggests that Barker recognizes that, though hypnosis certainly has its downsides, hypnosis is not just a useless tool in treating war neurosis.

There is brief mention of hypnotism in Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*. When discussing Chris’s amnesia with Dr. Anderson, Kitty points out that “[h]e can remember quite well when he is hypnotized” (West 86). Though this shows that hypnosis is capable of returning Chris back to normal, it also reveals its limitation in that the results, although successful, were definitely temporary. Dr. Anderson then explains that hypnotism can form certain links between the dissociated personality and the waking personality. However, he decides he will make such connections “by talking to him” (87). Like Rivers, Dr. Anderson finds more value in conversational psychotherapy than in hypnosis.

Shock

In contrast to hypnosis, which lies solely in the realm of mental manipulation, electroshock therapy, delving into physical treatments, was also used to treat war neurosis. Dr. Lewis Ralph Yealland was a famous psychiatrist who treated World War I veterans with electroshock therapy, and he is also present in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*. Yealland enjoyed a successful career in his work with electroshock therapy (Duffy). His reputation changed in 1985 when “feminist scholar Elaine Showalter called Yealland ‘the worst of the military psychiatrists’ in her influential book *The Female Malady* (Duffy). Following Showalter’s claim was the publishing of Barker’s *Regeneration*. Contemporary opinions view Yealland’s electroshock therapy as an atrocity (Duffy).

Regeneration portrays Yealland as a very stern and authoritative figure without mercy or remorse. “The last thing these patients need is a sympathetic audience,” is just one of the lines Barker gives Yealland to emphasize the cruel demeanor she casts on the character and, therefore, the historical figure (201). More powerful of a message is Yealland’s treatment of Callan, where the doctor seems more a mad scientist than a psychiatrist, which horrifies Rivers, our war doctor role-model (201-205).

Though studies and *Regeneration* note that electroshock therapy does have a quicker relapse rate than of standard psychotherapy, criticisms of electroshock therapy do not focus on this. Instead, as with *Regeneration*, the focus is on the morality and the cruelty of the practice. Rivers prefers conversational psychotherapy, in which the character supports the historical figure’s “conviction that those who learned to know themselves, and to accept their emotions, were less likely to breakdown” (Nickerson). Barker portrays Rivers as the model psychotherapist: passionate and absorbed in his work. The contrast between he and Yealland serves as a powerful tool to degrade the opinions

on electroshock therapy. Despite similar effectiveness between electroshock therapy and hypnosis (both provide quick treatment but with equally quick relapse), the negative stigma surrounding electroshock therapy causes hypnosis, the mental treatment, to prevail as widely more acceptable.

Conclusions

By exploring physical focus and mental focus in the treatment of war neurosis, World War I literature makes interesting claims about the concept and treatment of shell shock. The mere emergence of the term “shell shock” reveals much about how physical or how mental those contemporary to the time period viewed war neurosis. From there, our analysis of the literature of World War I engages the authors’ reactions and opinions on how war neurosis was perceived and treated. The overriding suggestion made by World War I literature is that the mental aspects surrounding war neurosis are to be more deeply and delicately considered, whereas the physical considerations of shell shock are more often critiqued in reaction to uneducated views prevalent during the period.

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Art

The artwork showcased here has been submitted by UNG students over the course of this academic year. The works presented cover all mediums and wonderfully represent the extensive art classes offered at UNG, as well as the immense talent of our art students.



Vitality of Tea

Carolyn Nooney

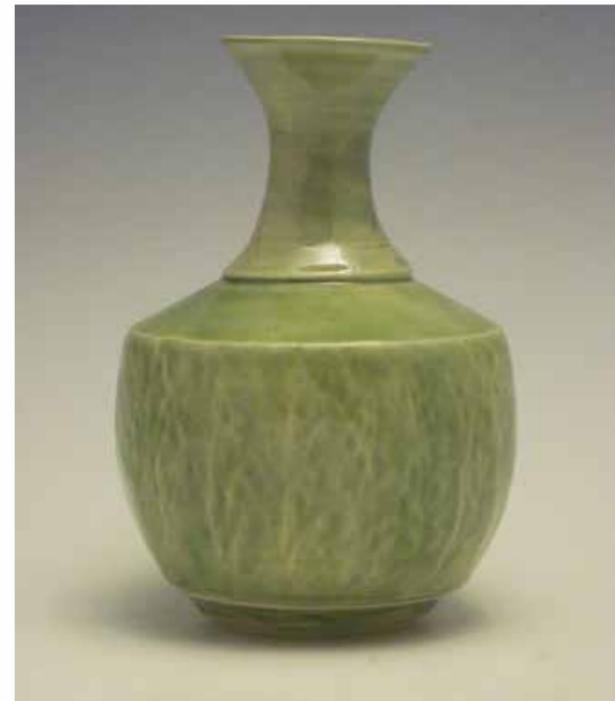
Tree Cylinder

Jill Raden



Translation

Daniel Ford



Tres Botellas

Sue Compton

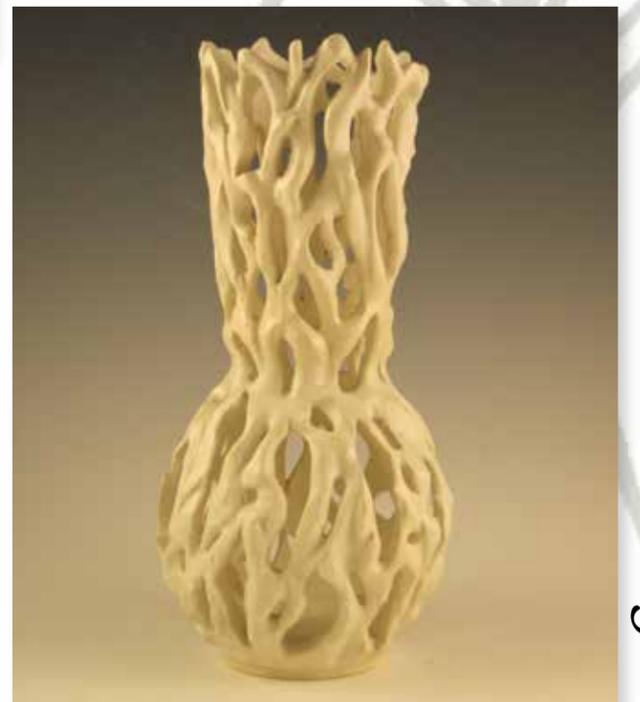


The Feathered Friend

Joe Hall

Osseous

Daniel Ford





Leather Jacket

Sue Compton

Creative Intention

Christina Packard



Morphed

Christina Packard



Monumental Banana

Christina Packard

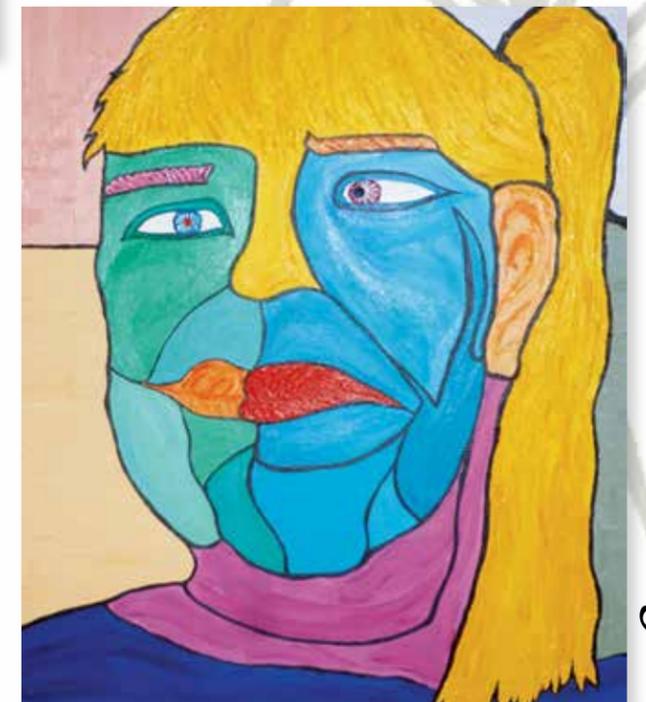


I'm Going to be in *The Chestatee Review*

Caroline Welsch

Portrait

Christina Packard



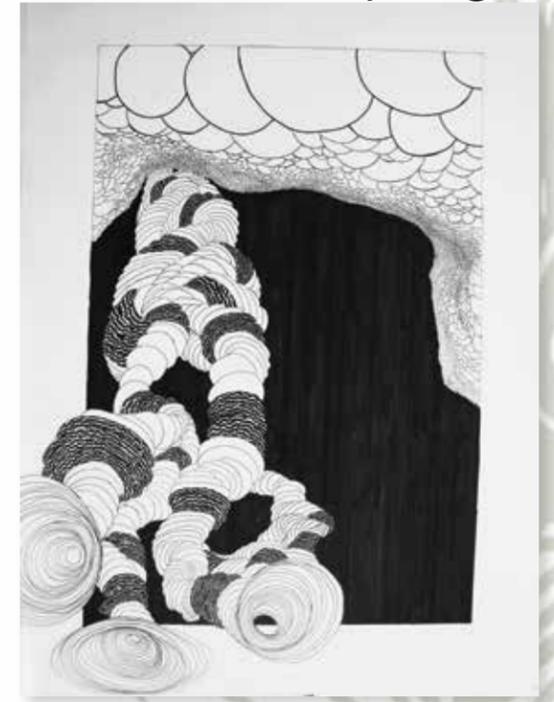


Mother Dear

Anna Moran

Lynch

Briana Jimenez



Untitled

Kayla Thomas



River

Mackinzie Fink

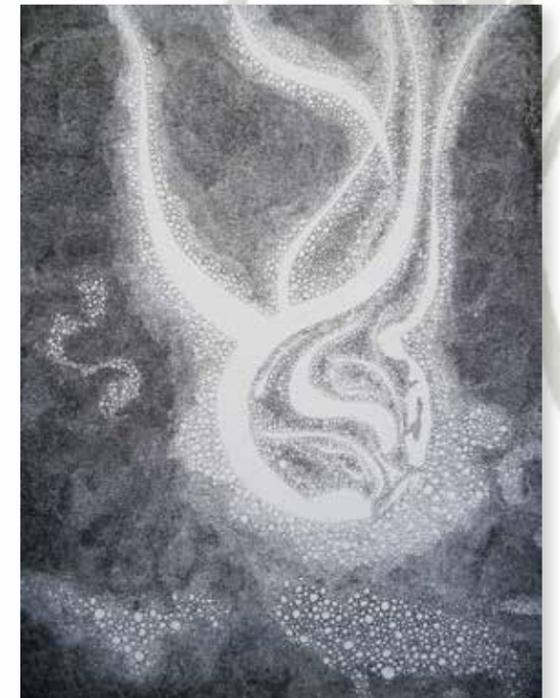


My Hobbit

Samantha Bishop

Relativistic Heat Conduction

Mara Nelms





Sug

Caroline Welsch

What

Christina Packard



Adaptable

Jillian Conner



Untitled

Ester Park



Hogyena

Rebecca Verner

Shadow Play

Anna Bennett



Special Topic Winners

In addition to our large annual writing contest, *The Chestatee Review* hosts small themed writing contests to accompany important dates in literary history, or to add another element to events that we host. We revived the essay contest that urged writers to discuss the purposes of censorship for Banned Books Week. Additionally, this year we held a horror flash fiction contest as well as a creepy poem contest to accompany our annual PoeDown, a celebration of all things scary via the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

In Preservation of Dignity: Censorship Before Catastrophe

(Banned Books Essay Contest)

Caleb Yarbro

The censorship question has been debated by cultures all over the world ever since the invention of the printing press in the 16th century and continues to be a pressing societal issue, especially in the United States. Censorship is a broad term that essentially defines any restriction of data to the general public or individual groups within a society. In the United States, I believe censorship is a necessary evil in the sense that it serves as an attempt to preserve Americans' confidence in their nation's leaders; it provides a means for preserving national security, and it allows the government to process all data before it gets manipulated by the mass media and the general public.

Anytime a person is in a position of power, it is important that he or she maintains a certain image in front of his or her followers. Censorship of our nation's leaders' personal lives generally allows us to maintain respectable opinions of them. Although there are numerous flaws in our execution of this policy as a nation (i.e. Watergate and the Clinton Scandal), the principle still remains. It is poor judgment on the part of any leader to allow too much information about personal affairs to be revealed to followers. I have experienced this firsthand serving as both a JROTC

commander and now a follower in UNG's Corps of Cadets. We tend to have higher opinions of those we know the least about personally, and the Corps is a living, breathing example of this principle. This evidence, along with analysis of how public opinion affects a leader's ability to perform, supports my claim that censorship is appropriate to preserve a leader's dignity. If he or she doesn't tell the general public your personal affairs, the same policy should apply to the leader. A lack of trust or devaluing of a leader based on normal human weaknesses can wreck a nation quicker than any external conflict. Censorship alleviates these negative judgments and makes it easier for a leader to perform his duties.

One of the most common justifications for censorship, especially in modern times, is national security. It seems cliché, but in this instance, it is truly a concern. Any military commander or high level government official will tell you it is inadvisable to let our enemies know everything about the state of our nation, troop movements, and economic weaknesses. Some U.S. citizens would foolishly try to proclaim that they won't tell the enemy our secrets, but in actuality, they won't have to for our secrets to be revealed. Modern technology allows advanced espionage from miles away; this

is all the more reason for governments to censor and protect as much sensitive information from reaching the public. In recent years, Americans have become wary of government claims of censoring information for “national security,” and for good reason, but they must realize censorship is appropriate for this reason. Censorship is in place to protect, not to harm. The government censors media releases for the same reason individual citizens don’t broadcast their social security number to the public; the right information falling into the wrong hands spells catastrophe at any level.

With all of today’s advanced technology and a multitude of media sources, information is easily accessible, but the quality and credibility of it is a different story. When raw information reaches the mass media, it can be interpreted in many different ways, unnecessarily swaying the public’s viewpoint without allowing all the facts to surface. Examples of this can be found just by switching through different news networks; each station takes a different angle to the story and conveniently misses part of the narrative. With censorship of information until it is properly processed, we can avoid mass panic and confusion within the general public. Just as in the mass media, the public is guilty of misinformation as well. The clearest examples of this manipulation occur essentially anytime raw data is given to a citizen. Just as with the media, a U.S. citizen can take a story they have heard and tell it with a different angle, interject some speculation, and the story then mutates causing misinterpretation. Censorship reduces this problem by alleviating the American public’s responsibility to interpret

raw data and instead provides reliable information.

Although censorship has the potential to be a very effective tool in the American arsenal to combat or alleviate previously stated issues, the U.S. government has managed to utilize it for more personal benefit than public. Censorship in itself for specific, narrow reasons is not a bad idea, but it becomes very dangerous when left up to the jurisdiction of individuals. For instance, censorship should never be implemented to dictate the morals of a nation nor should it be utilized to hide the truth. Citizens should have access to whatever information they please so long as it doesn’t compromise any of the previously defined parameters of censorship. Americans have a right to censor their private lives, no matter what their position; they have a right to be kept safe by not having access to information that may compromise national security, and they have a right to be provided with all the correct details of a story before they take a stance. This is why censorship is in place, and it is unfortunate that it has been misused by the American government to dictate the public’s values and manipulate public opinion.

Censorship is a powerful tool that has been used for centuries to shape societies. It plays an integral part in the daily lives of people around the world. Censorship is an appropriate institution in society, provided it is used to preserve a nation’s morale by showing the positive side of its leadership capabilities, to keep sensitive information out of the public’s hands to preserve national security, or to prevent misinformation or biased interpretation by the mass media and the general public. Unfortunately in

modern times, it has been used to dictate and influence the morals of nations and manipulate public opinion. Censorship, when in its purest form and meeting the previously specified parameters is a very good institution for a nation, but the tragedy of its misuse has allowed the name to become synonymous with terms like communism, socialism, autocracy, and tyranny, especially in the United States. Censorship is appropriate when used appropriately, but without discretion and common sense, it is no more than justified oppression.



Caleb Yarbro is a 1st year student at the University of North Georgia Dahlonega campus, majoring in Business Management. He is a proud member of the Corps of Cadets and serves as a squad leader for Delta Company. He is actively involved in the Swing Dance Association and serves as Vice-President for the club.

Blue Dress in Ashes

Anastasia Smith

(PoeDown Flash Fiction Contest)

My boyfriend and I were walking our dogs one brisk, autumn day when my daughter came running up to me. She was wearing her sky blue sundress. It was her favorite, and she refused to take it off, “Mommy, mommy! Isn’t the sun pretty?” I put a hand to the pendent that rested in the hollow of my collar bone.

“Sweetie, aren’t you cold?” She shook her head, auburn hair flying in the wind, and I squeezed my pendent gently

before taking off my jacket and placing it on her shoulders. She snuggled into it and smiled her beautiful smile.

“Thank you, Momma.” I watched as she skipped down the sidewalk, out of sight. My boyfriend turned to me confused, “Who was that?” I didn’t answer. I couldn’t answer. How do you explain to your boyfriend he just met the girl whose ashes you wear around your neck?

PoeDown Throwdown

(PoeDown Creepy Poem Contest)

Tim Bellows

As the sun sank in the window, I sat mired in chagrin, though
 Once the last rays, fast descending, finally slipped beneath the sill,
 I at last found inspiration in the clutches of frustration
 And my story, far from ending, spilled forth from my pen at will.
 ‘Cross the house, my wife lay dreaming, resting peacefully and seeming
 Unaware and unaffected by the fervor of my scrawl.
 Though not one for easy waking, still the door was shut in taking
 Care to see she was protected from the echoes down the hall.
 As the hours passed before me, weary eyes soon did implore me
 Now to lift my gaze from writing, long enough to ease the strain.
 But within that respite fleeting, my heart nearly ceased its beating
 For, lit by the pale moon’s lighting, cold eyes watched me through the pane.
 With a sudden pang of terror at the notice of this starrer,
 My eyes fell to rapid blinking aimed to snap my brain awake.
 But in this small lapse in seeing, that dark gaze was fast in fleeing
 And I figured, panic sinking, that the vision had been fake.
 Thus resumed my work’s creation. Chiding my imagination,
 I sank back to my composing as the endless night wore on.
 Though that fright never did leave me; half the night it did bereave me
 Of my wits till, eyelids closing, I knew that my strength was gone.
 Standing up, my vision fluttered; I left pens and papers cluttered
 And began the expedition to the refuge of my bed.
 Then at once, I froze each muscle – from my bedroom came a rustle
 Long and low, rife with suspicion and a sense of growing dread.
 With a twist, my gut grew queasy, knotted by this sound uneasy,
 Though my mind, in all its reason, knew the chance of strife was slim.
 Clawed by fear, I pushed the door in, prayed to see my dear wife snorin’,
 Though my eyes, in open treason, stuttered shut and feared the grim.
 When at last I pried them open, out at once drained all my hope an’
 Faith that I was wrong to worry, for the bed was cold and bare.
 There I stood, too stunned for speaking, when there came a piercing shrieking
 And I knew I had to hurry lest the night end in despair.
 Tearing from the room like lightning, I ran toward this panic frightening
 Emanating from my study with a strength that left me vexed.
 But the scream ceased as I entered; all was normal, save for, centered
 On my desk (normally cruddy), a neat stack of all my text.
 And I saw my composition had received a new addition,
 For upon it, in ink bloody, were the grisly words “YOU’RE NEXT.”

Faculty Favorites

University of North Georgia English faculty are tasked with reading hundreds of essays, narratives, poems, and other academic work each semester. Because of this, they have, perhaps, the keenest eyes in finding exemplary efforts and talents that get lost in the deluge of academic work that may never be submitted for publishing. We at *The Chestatee Review* endeavored to find a way to recognize student work that may have fallen through the educatory cracks. To aid this effort, we asked faculty members to submit to us their favorite pieces they received in class. The pieces published here are handpicked by various faculty who believed that these hidden talents embody the excellence so apparent in our student body.

The Blue Cord of Brotherhood: *The Odyssey* and the Writings of Confucius Interpreted by a Combat Soldier

John Risley

*“Matthew Arnold wrote that poetry is a ‘criticism of life.’ This is what gives poetry - and literature in general - its enduring appeal. Life moves forward, as does literature along with us. The continued appeal of certain works of literature, their enduring ability to allow us insight into our own modern lives, is what makes certain pieces of literature ‘classics.’ Mr. Risley’s essay, which uses the virtues associated with warriors and leaders in Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Laozi’s *The Daodejing*, and Confucius’s *Analects*, is an attempt to make sense out of his chaotic experiences in modern warfare. That he could rely on such works is a testament not only to their enduring relevance, but also the enduring nature of human life, which never stops seeking - if not meaning - at least the knowledge that the path one is walking in life has precedent and a method of engagement.”*

~Shannon Gilstrap

Scores of men and women have read *The Odyssey* and imagined what pitched battle and the sorrowful loss of comrades felt like for the “god-like” Odysseus. This epic hero found himself in peril while engaged in battle against the enemies of his country and again as he made the return voyage home. He was cursed by gods, shipwrecked, abandoned, disobeyed, lied to, betrayed, and would have certainly died if not for the goddess Athena. His *agathos* or greatness reminded me of my first deployment to Iraq in 2003, where I witnessed the two Homeric virtues of *Agathos* and *Philos* in me and my blue cord-wearing comrades. A blue cord worn on the dress uniform of a soldier in the US Army signifies he is in the Infantry, which is considered the most dangerous job in the military. In military service, leadership expected us to live out the Army Values of Loyalty, Duty,

Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. Odysseus lived out certain measurable virtues, but in the Confucian wisdom found in *Analects*, the *Dao*, or path, is not found on an azimuth, but rather it must be learned or experienced. Confucius says, “There is a thing confusedly formed, / Born before heaven and earth / Silent and void / It stands alone and does not change, / Goes round and does not weary / It is capable of being the mother of the world / I know not its name / So I style it ‘the way’” (1351). Every Infantryman must discover his own *Dao*, or path, while in combat and afterwards; however, the Homeric Virtues of *Philos* and *Agathos* seemed like interesting concepts to me while considering the unpredictability of life both in and out of the military. I have seen and felt a warrior’s successes and failures while unwittingly attempting to live the Homeric virtues of *Philos* and

Agathos, but now I can see a correlation between the wins and losses and a Dao that cannot fully be understood or explained.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus explained the Homeric virtue of Philos, which conveys the idea of brotherhood after the encounter with Cyclops when he says, “We sailed on in shock, glad to get away alive / but grieving for the comrades we had lost” (438). These lines illustrate the Homeric virtue of Philos, a brotherly affection for the men whom fate and blood bound together. On April 13, 2003, I watched as members of my platoon fought with Philos in their hearts; blood stained the ground that day, and not all of that dreadful crimson belonged to our enemies. It was our bond of blood, which proved its power on the battlefield that fateful day in 2003. Sixteen of us were wounded when an enemy threw a grenade into a compound we were clearing. My arm had a gaping wound at the wrist; I could see the muscle and tendons, but I saw almost no blood. Shrapnel had ripped my head open, and the wound poured blood onto the light-brown, dust-covered floor. When I saw my blood pouring onto the ground, my heart flooded with fear. Bullets ripped into the doorway of the portico, so my platoon sergeant told me to take cover in another room. I limped into a small room where old desks and chairs were stacked against the wall. Meanwhile, the battle was raging, and bullets were coming from several directions. I sat in that room as blood streamed down my face and listened to the incredible amount of gunfire. My thoughts were about my own welfare, my wounds, my life, but then I attempted to join my brothers in the fight. I felt like

Odysseus confronting Cyclops when he and his “...men lifted up the olivewood stake / And drove the sharp point right into his (Cyclops’s) eye” (434). In those furiously violent moments, I truly began understanding the notion of Philos.

I grabbed my M4 with a M203 grenade-launcher attached and started for the door. I felt anger similar to that of Odysseus as he stood before the suitors and declared, “Now that we’ve separated the men from the boys, / I’ll see if I can hit a mark that no man / Has ever hit. Apollo grant me glory” (587). Yet I was not in my own home dealing with impotent swindlers that were chasing my wealth, nor was I standing uninjured and full of assurance from the goddess Athena (592). My wrist and forearm cramped severely from the nerve damage done in the blast. My left leg did not work properly. I could barely walk and had a head injury no one knew the extent of, but I did not care. If I was going to die, then I wanted to die in a pile of expended 5.56 cartridges alongside my fellow blue cord-wearing brothers.

As I was heading for the door, my platoon sergeant, Richard Tucker, limped through the door and told me I should sit down. I explained to him I was okay, and he replied, “You’re fucked up, Risley. Now go sit the fuck down.” Once again I protested. He turned and looked at second squad leader Ben Lewis and said, “Knock this motherfucker out for me.” Lewis looked at me and said, “Bro, chill man, you’re hurt, dude.” I could see the concern in his eyes as he said, “Bro, you look like shit.” I displayed the Homeric virtue of Philos unlike the men on Circe’s island who “wailed and cried” when given an order (443). These men were not confident in their bond to one another.

I was sure of my bond to my brothers as I slumped down against the wall. Then I saw my friend, Jason Blakemore, being pulled into the foyer where the casualty collection point had been established. A grenade fragment nicked his carotid artery where the neck and shoulder meet. The hole was not large, but the volume of blood coming from it was. He was dying, and I could see Blakemore holding onto life like Odysseus as he “leapt up / To the tall fig tree, grabbed hold of it / And hung on like a bat” dangling helplessly over Charybdis (477). Blood spurted out of Blakemore’s neck in a small pulsing arch. His face began turning a pale bluish-green color as his eyes rolled wildly in his head. The grenade fragments ruptured his chest cavity making it impossible for him to breathe or talk. I kept telling him to stay awake, but I could tell he was losing the battle. In desperation, I prayed like Odysseus when he prayed, “O hear me now, as you heard me not” (403). I placed my hand on his chest and asked my God to save him. After the prayer, I got up and walked away.

My lack of Philos while my brother lay there dying would not be the Dao I would choose for my life or the rest of the ongoing battle. In Confucius’s *Analects*, Ran Qui said: “It is not that I do not enjoy the Master’s way, but I do not have the strength to follow it.” It was not that I wanted to leave my brother’s side: I simply could not bear to watch him die. In the same verse of *Analects*, Confucius says, “He who does not have the strength can always give up halfway. But you have given up before starting” (1337). Although I see my walking away as a failure to show Philos, I did not give up that day, for with only one functional

arm, I pulled security for my wounded comrades while they were loaded onto the helicopter.

The virtue of Agathos is the greatness of a leader’s virtue both on and off the battlefield. Odysseus is praised for his greatness by Pallas Athena. As the suitors eat themselves sick and drink themselves drunk she says, “Just let him lay his hands on these mangy dogs / If only he would come through that door now / With a helmet and shield and a pair of spears” (338). We believed in the leadership and honor of our Platoon Sergeant, Richard Tucker. Members of my platoon told me about Sgt. Tucker limping and firing his pistol at the enemy during the chaotic firefight. He took our spilled blood deadly serious. I have heard my brothers credit his cool-headed demeanor for their safe return from war. His Agathos in combat will be talked about until the last of us who were there that day dies.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus displays Agathos while in Hades when Elpenor tells him, “Burn me with my armor, such as I have, / Heap me a barrow on the grey sea’s shore / In memory of a man whose luck ran out,” and Odysseus responds, “Pitiful spirit, I will do this for you” (453). Odysseus felt a responsibility to his fallen comrade. Likewise, Sgt. Tucker felt fully responsible for those of us who were wounded that day. Sgt. Tucker recently wrote me an email. His words once again showed the heart of a great warrior and leader. Here is a part of that letter: “I wish I could give you the answer to fix it (referring to my PTSD) but all I can say is that you have stood on the frontier of battle, looked it in the eye, and were given the chance to continue on this path of life.” He goes

on to say, "I have struggled for some years now, knowing firsthand what many of you are experiencing. If I could take all the bad that comes over each and every one of you I would." The *Daodejing* has an interesting passage embodying the character of Sgt. Tucker; it says, "A man is supple and weak when living, but hard and stiff when dead / Grass and trees are pliant and fragile when living, but dried and shriveled when dead / Thus the hard and strong are the comrades of death; the supple and / the weak are the comrades of life" (1354). These lines illustrate the duality of Sgt. Tucker's heart as a soldier and man. While he was on the battlefield, he was hard and coached men in the art of death, but off the battlefield, his personality is softer as he tries to help those who served with him find their path home again.

My path has taken me in many directions I have not quite understood;

I have learned to be skeptical of almost everyone and everything. The *Daodejing* says, "Truthful words are not beautiful; beautiful words are not truthful. Good words / are not persuasive; persuasive words are not good. He who knows has no / wide learning; he who has wide learning does not know," so perhaps the beautiful truth escapes me the more I learn, and maybe the words I speak are not good (1354). The *Odyssey* introduced me to the virtues, Philos and Agathos, which have helped me see my experiences from a different perspective. Greatness, love, sacrifice, and brotherhood are exemplified in the tales of Odysseus and his men. These definitive virtues might be seen as road signs along an incomprehensible path, which as *The Analects* puts it, "is capable of being the mother of the world / I know not its name / So I style it 'the way'" (1351).

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Hurricane Vodka

Joshua Hemmings

"Written by a former noi student, Joshua Hemmings, his essay entitled "Hurricane Vodka" traces the impacts of PTSD and alcoholism and subsequent revelations from his sobriety. It is a beautifully-crafted, haunting reminder of how fragile the self becomes when run-through by trauma, but it is also a stunning meditation on the power of recovery and the uniquely human/humane act of forgiveness."

-Jessica Cooke

The most life changing moment of my life, I cannot even remember. It's midafternoon in Laurel Ridge, a Veteran's hospital for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Addiction. I have just gotten out of small group therapy as I make my way to the coffee machine to grab a cup before signaling for the nurse to let me outside for a smoke so I can collect my thoughts. As I prop my feet up on the patio furniture and light the only vice allowed in this place, I began to think of how I ended up here. With the hot summer sun beating down on my face, beads of sweat forming on my cheeks, I gaze through the large hospital glass window. I see a nurse with a mop in hand dragging a cleaning bucket behind her. She begins to clean the vomit of someone else's mess off the shiny hardwood hospital floor. For the past several years of my life, someone else has been cleaning up my mess, too, but now it's time for me to start cleaning up after myself so that I can once again learn to appreciate the beauty in a clean life.

In July of 2012, I returned home from my last of four combat tours. With the birth of my first child on the way, all seemed to be going perfectly in life. Little did I know that over the next two years,

I would find myself fighting for my life within a violent, destructive hurricane headed straight toward me and my family. Most people would simply refer to this as vodka.

Six months after my return home from Afghanistan, past deployment issues began to surface. During this time, I was very ignorant of the fact that I was making drastic lifestyle changes. Nightmares began to keep me up late at night, and my anxiety started to peak. My wife, Kim, started to notice that I wasn't myself. Kimberley stands at an even 5 feet tall on a good day. Two things I love most about her is that she is funny and doesn't take crap from anyone. She refuses to be run over. That's why even standing at five feet tall, she can still be intimidating. Once Kim saw that I was not myself, I did not like that. I felt like I was an open book, like I had a gunshot wound and was bleeding out and weak. I was not the strong superman that I wanted her to think I was. Smirnoff Vodka soon became my numbing medicine, a way for me to hide my real issues. It was my crutch and my buffer. It was my best friend. As Kim noticed changes in my drinking habits, she dropped subtle hints like, "You drinking already? Its only 9:00 AM!" or "Liquor,

on a week night!“ Of course, I would respond back with a method I began to master—manipulation. “Babe, you *always* say that when I drink Monster Energy.”

The treacherous hurricane that was headed straight for us was now here. It had begun its violent rampage, ripping apart what was once a happy family. Manipulation became my main defense. This routine continued for several more months. Although I wasn’t remembering nightmares, my wife was. I would purposefully drink enough to pass out when it was time for bed. Because of my drunken state, if I had a nightmare, I couldn’t even remember it. This behavior was only pouring fuel on the fire of my unresolved issues. But my wife would be the one who suffered through my screams and sudden jerking in the middle of the night. I finally sought help for what was the first of three attempts to get clean. I checked into an inpatient facility where I was sober for 30 days. It wasn’t long after getting out that my addictive voice was calling me back into the storm. Of course, I was too embarrassed to admit a relapse to Kim. So, I hid my drinking from her. I would hide liquor bottles all over the house in places I knew she wouldn’t look. Another place I hid it was in my truck. I would pretend to get something out of my truck but was really getting my daily dose of shots. One night in my truck, as I was on my 11th double shot of vodka, I drank my poison, and as I turned to go back inside, there she stood. With tears filling up her beautiful hazel eyes, all she could muster up was, “Why!? Why are you doing this to us, Josh?” Kim had almost lost her job so she could stay home and watch our daughter for a month while I was in rehab. Now, I know this is crazy,

but as bad as I felt for her, as heart-broken and guilty as I felt for causing her so much pain over the past year, all that was on my mind in that moment, the only thing I really wanted, was another shot. How pathetic and selfish had I become?

As I light my fourth cigarette on the patio at Laurel Ridge, I flash forward a full year after getting caught in the truck that night. The same up and down behavior transpired the rest of that year. Everything was seemingly stable after my second treatment. In reality, we were just sitting in the eye of the storm. I would quit for a week and start drinking. This process would repeat the whole year. Finally, I arrived at the moment that landed me on this blazing hot patio at Laurel Ridge. No matter how much I rack my brain, I can’t remember October 17, 2013. This was the day when we exited the eye and slammed into what was now a category 5 hurricane of vodka. What I do know is that something changed in me. Sitting in that cold hospital bed listening to my exhausted wife fill me in on the horrifying details of that night, I began to pray to God harder than I ever have. Never when I tried to stop drinking before did I turn to God the way I did now. I completely gave up on doing things my way because doing things my way just wasn’t working out. I tune back into my wife as I hear her say, “You were clearly in a bad flash back, and you were confused about where you were. You were looking for a small village girl and desperately trying to hide me and Ryleigh from the Taliban. The person I saw last night was not you. You had checked out.” At that moment, I officially checked back into reality. Not only was I hurting myself by suppressing my combat issues

and not confronting them sober, but I was affecting my whole family, especially my wife. She was consistently lying for me and covering up my mess, my mistakes, and self-induced failures. Not to mention she was working overtime in parenthood, making up for my short comings as a father. I wanted to be sober for my family; however, for the first time, what I really wanted more than anything was sobriety and a clean life for myself.

It’s been six weeks since that day in the hospital, and it’s finally time for me to leave Laurel Ridge. The nurse signals me to come inside, and I put out my half smoked cigarette on the sole of my shoe. All my belongings are aligned neatly on the counter ready for check out. I gather my belongings and exit through the gateway to the world in which a third hurricane has just passed. I look to the right of the exit lobby, and there my guardian angels stand, ready to help me rebuild in this new world. I grab my family and hold them so tight as if we were reunited for the first time in two years. My wife could already tell it was going to be different this time. I was armed with my faith, support system, and tools from Laurel Ridge, that I actually took seriously this time. I signed my discharge papers and entered back into the world that was once being battered by Hurricane Vodka. All that was left to do now that the storm had passed was rebuild.

It’s been 11 months since my last drink. During this time, I have often stayed up late at night, drinking coffee, and reflecting back on memories of a horrible past to learn from old mistakes. At times, it has reminded me of a narrative by Rob Sheffield, “Rumblefish.” In this story, the narrator tells how he

sits up late and alone dealing with the thoughts and reflections of his wife who has recently passed away. In the narrative, he reflects on how they met, happy memories, and their life story. He states, “Falling in love with René was not the kind of thing you could walk away from in one piece” (Sheffield 665). The way the narrator sits up late with nothing but reflections of light and fluffy memories of Rene, I can identify with; except for me, the memories are dark, depressing, and full of guilt. For me, falling in love with vodka was not the thing I could walk away from in one piece. At times, my wife would stay up and lie with me as I reflected back on my short-comings. I would often ask her questions about the parts that puzzled me. Once, I turned to my wife and asked her a quick question before we went to sleep. “Why did you continue to stay with me over those miserable two years?” She smiled and responded with, “My world would be more painful without you in it at all, than if you are here causing me pain. I knew you were still in there somewhere. I was waiting for you to realize it and come back to me.” Not only was I back, but I was stronger than I had ever been.

The past several years of my life, someone else has been cleaning up my mess. I was finally ready to start cleaning up after myself, so that I could once again learn to appreciate the beauty in a clean life. The biggest change in my life came when I realized this. When I had vodka in my life, I thought life was great. I thought my family and friends were happy, my actions were not that bad, and that the people around me were not being destroyed by Hurricane Vodka. When that venomous serum wasn’t in my body, I saw the destruction of my

life. Even worse, I saw the ones I loved affected by my hurricane. It took me three attempts at rebuilding, but finally, October 17, 2013, I let the hurricane pass. After a storm hits, the hurricane itself may be gone, but the destruction is still there. I've come to the conclusion, if having life turn out the way you think it should be is the measure of a successful life, some may consider me a failure. The

important thing is not to be bitter over life's disappointments, and realize that it's ok to stumble and fall along the way. If you can stand strong, and weather through the storm, and clean up the debris and despair afterwards, know that there is a rainbow of love and happiness waiting for those who can make it. The road is long, but in the end, the journey is the destination.

Free Rides through Life

Cheyenne Franklin

"Cheyenne had attended a couple of my literature and publishing classes before taking my Creative Writing Non-Fiction course last semester (Fall 2014). I knew her to be an extremely diligent, conscientious, and hard-working student. But, as is often the case with students and instructors, I rarely had a glimpse into her internal life and memories.

This piece added to what I already knew about Cheyenne, added her feelings of support by, closeness to, and appreciation of her family. The piece artistically deploys parallelism, symbolism, figurative language (i.e. synecdoche), diction, and voice to convey Cheyenne's knowledge of herself through her shared experiences with her father and grandfather. And I feel as though I get to share in her experiences, too."

-B.J. Robinson

I remember the slow rhythmic *thud, thud, thud, thud* that would send mini quakes through the wooden floorboards of my childhood home. Through one ear, I would listen sleepily from atop my father's back as his socked feet thumped to the back and forth rocking motion he exaggerated with stiffened legs and swaying, tromping steps, all the way to a carpeted staircase too steep for feet already limp in the bottom of pink footy pajamas. My other ear would press against his thin Fruit-of-the-Loom t-shirt, a clean one now, in place of the sweat-stained garment that had probably stuck to his slim torso earlier that day, been tugged and peeled off, and finally tossed in the grass to allow freer arm motion to work the earth. This fresh shirt smelled of fabric softener, but already the sterile smell tinged with the scent of deep-skin oils. At the nape of my father's neck, my nose, which had always been condemned for snoring, took in nasally gulps of this scent as my arms loosened round my

father's neck and I slipped a little lower down his back, trusting deadweight in his two big hands holding me behind him.

Sometimes, I still take my father's hands in my own and feel them, their thickness, the hair on the knuckles, the crevices in the palms. Sometimes the mental map I have of his hands is altered by a nerve-dead scab still healing from a slip with some garden shears or carpenter's sander. Few others have seen these hands in the detail that I have. Once upon a time these hands used to tickle little squirmy bellies. Once upon a time, these hands used to hide treats behind the back I rode. "Pick a hand," he'd challenge, though there would always be a treat in each hand, and whoever the child, they would probably end up with both goodies. Now these hands hide in the pockets of a sweatshirt stained with paint because he "doesn't need to impress anyone." Now these hands fold into the elbow bends of crossed arms. No, few people really know these hands.

My father's hands draw little

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attention, but they move as silent memorials to the man who gave my father his calloused grip. I remember the hands of my grandfather as being much like my father's. Grey Duct Tape bandaged fine cracks in the tips of his sausage like digits. These cracks emerged from cold hours spent in the engines of Firebirds, the greasy underbellies of rusted Chevy trucks. The tape, bunched at the very tips of his fingers, sometimes poked at my skin as he clutched my baby hands. My Grandpy's hands would grip around my own to hold me steady on his towering five-foot-high shoulders. Against my chest the back of his silver head would bob to rhythmic steps, a gliding gate much different from the starched steps I imagine he drilled as a 17-year-old enlisted man marching toward lands with names like Okinawa and Guadalcanal, lands that just months before he could have been squinting at in high school geography class. Across foreign hills he marched, but along calm

U.S. meadows he strolled in long strides and pointed out rainbows to his little Madam gliding on his shoulders. We wandered as one tall image, strolling in rhythm to the hummed tune that would die with the man.

These men carried me through life, sometimes tromping, sometimes soothing, always supporting. Through life's handicapping attacks, these men found some way to carry on, and somehow they also found the time to carry me. Only now do I appreciate those cradled rides, now that I'm "too big for that." The days of piggyback rides have long passed, but in place of his shoulders, my father now offers me his hands, just as I imagine his father offered him. He leads me by the hand and steps ahead of me as I try to mimic the traces of footprints left ahead of me. Although the rides must end, I am grateful to these men with their working hands and rhythmic steps that still echo in my ears. *Thud, thud, thud...*

If I Dream

John Risley

John Risley's "If I Dream" is my choice for Faculty Favorite for several reasons: its careful craftsmanship, the urgency of its speaker, and its clear message to all Americans. Risley's voice is compelling and enduring, and his poetry will serve his fellow soldiers well, especially those just transitioning from the battle zone to the home front.

-Kristin Kelly

Don't sleep
 Don't sleep
 The fatigue starts to creep
 As my eyes close
 I start to feel the heat
 Don't sleep
 Don't sleep
 Back on an Iraq street
 Crimson red hands, black as night feet
 My eyes slam shut
 Don't sleep
 Don't sleep
 Too late I'm beat
 The bullets zip past me
 They puncture soul and meat
 Don't sleep
 Don't sleep
 Bodies in a heap
 Covered in lies and flies
 I weep
 Don't sleep
 Don't sleep
 Hey Riz please remember me
 I will forever brother
 Though my soul's as cold as sleet
 Don't sleep
 Don't sleep
 Fuck it! Why weep?

Nobody loves a sheep dog
 Especially the sheep
 Don't sleep
 Wake up
 I can't, I'm stuck, and another
 fucking bomb just hit my fucking truck
 The fire and smoke taste funny, acrid and
 black
 What the fuck was that
 Just the buzzing of a bullet; when they're
 close they crack
 Open the skulls and bodies of men
 Who despite my advice will never wake
 again

Poem

Salam Frias

"I chose Isabela (Salam) Frias' poem because it effortlessly evokes the angst of young adulthood and the quest to understand what cannot be defined. Her energy and tone captivate and her stark imagery shows the imperfect moments of becoming. Her poem is a whirlwind that swept me up and enchanted as I hung on for the ride."

-Elizabeth Fields

Sit down,
Write a page,
And let it come from you.
Then, it will be true.

I sat down,
And I tried to write,
But I could not get those words to flow
From my lips to my fingertips
To those keys;
Please
Understand that
I am so much more
Than black words on a white screen.
My truth
Cannot be contained in simple ink.
It is large and unquantifiable and
...Where is my qualifier?
What happened my elucidation?
I do not know.

But I do know this;
My truth,
If I can call it that,
Is constantly changing,
Evolving,
Becoming more.
It is fluid,
Like the way I live my life;
Undefined,
Limitless,
Without boundary.

Sometimes I find my truth

In the strangest of places:
I can see it in my artwork
I can feel it in the things I do for fun
It can be found in the simple pleasures
of my life.

Sometimes my truth
Can be found in my little sister,
Whose hard beginnings in life
Have created an angelic monster.
She is given hardships that she must face
every day;
I cannot comprehend the strength of
that little girl.

Sometimes I find my truth in the books I
read
And in the people I will never know.
Sometimes my truth comes in the form
of injustice
Be it race,
Sex,
Gender,
Orientation,
Religion.

Sometimes,
More often than not,
I find my truth in them.
With their unshakable loyalty and love,
And the way they always
Catch me when I stumble.
My friends are my family,
And I owe everything I am to them,

The ones who raised me
Into the person I am now.
They have known me
In states of being nobody else
Will ever see.
Sometimes, they are the only reason
I get out of bed.
Sometimes,
They are not enough.

Sometimes my truth
Isn't really my truth.
Sometimes I give myself
Something to hold on to:
An idea,
A philosophy,
Anything,
Telling myself;
"This is It, this is your qualifier"
But,
I always realize,
"No, this does not define you"

Sometimes my truth is in my innocence,
When I find myself wondering
"What am I doing with my life?"
I am too young,
Too naïve,
Too unexposed to the evils of this world
To know what I want;
What do I want?
I am unsure.

I am not ready to give up my youth
I am non-traditional in a way
Most wouldn't fathom.
I'm sixteen,
I'm still in high school.
I have no friends.
I don't know what a social life is;
Explain to me,
How do you talk to someone you've
never met?
Please, give me the handbook

Because I seem to have lost mine.

Most of my day is spent in solitude,
Gathering facts –
We call it schoolwork –
And I am constantly
Doing schoolwork,
Studying schoolwork,
Talking about schoolwork,
Schoolwork, schoolwork,
Until I have become a walking
encyclopaedia of
Useless information I will never need or
care about.

My truth
Hides itself from me.
I may have once passed it on the street,
But did not recognize it because its
Face was not fully formed.
My truth cannot be defined in simple
words;
It is an abstract idea too large and too
vague for me to grasp.

You asked me to sit down,
And write a page from myself,
And give you my truth.
How can I give you my truth
When I never had one to begin with?

The Satan Deposition

Courtney Torres

"I like the way Courtney approaches the Genesis story from the standpoint of trying to make Satan's reasons as strong as possible. To do this, she has borrowed elements from Paradise Lost, Le Jeu d'Adam, and several well-known modern political philosophers, including Jefferson, Burke, Robespierre, and Arendt. Her approach helps us re-read Genesis through a modern lens, informed by the long discussion of tyranny and freedom that helped found the modern world. Her use of the deposition format helps further defamiliarize the story, taking it out of a religious setting and placing it within the legal framework that has been such an important part of Western culture. Finally, I like the way she shifts the real blame from Eve to Adam and the way she rejects the names Satan and Lucifer, settling instead on another biblical name, Belial. These choices also take us away from our received interpretations of the story and make us rethink our understanding of what the story really says.

As Courtney wrote in her explanation of the project, 'With each reading of the Genesis story—Genesis, Play of Adam, and Paradise Lost—I immediately picked up on contradictions that led to questions no one else seemed to be asking and slights of hand that went unnoticed. [...] What's being said clearly could not hold water and yet, it doesn't seem to bother anyone but me. I saw this as an opportunity to "fix" it, to point out the cracks.'

I think she does a good job of showing us how unpalatable the old story really is in the 2010s. She gives us an thoughtpiece that, like the best postmodern inversions of ancient tales, speaks to our reader response practices and to the community traditions through which we-- rightly and wrongly--interpret stories."

~Steve Pearson

Deposition transcript between Prosecutor Adam Nescient (Q) and Damien Belial (A)

1 Q "In our peaceful existence, we have been deceived,
 2 oppressed, damaged..pushed down and kept down and convinced
 3 that's where we always wanted to be. The autocracy that has
 4 been our lives since the beginning has to end. The tyrants
 5 cannot keep us down any longer. We shall rise and we shall
 6 be victorious."
 7 Q Mr. Belial, do you recognize these words?
 8 A I do.
 9 Q How do you recognize them?
 10 A Because it was me who wrote them.
 11 Q Where did they come from?
 12 A Are you daft? You're reading them from my journal.
 13 Q Your journal?
 14 A Yes, my journal.
 15 Q This is your journal?
 16 A Yes.
 17 Q Why did you write it?
 18 A I saw the world around me broken and nobody was stopping to

19 fix it. Something had to be done.
 20 Q Are you aware that you've just admitted to writing a key
 21 piece of evidence that links you to a terrorist
 22 organization?
 23 A Ter-terrorist organization? Clearly, you've not read it.
 24 Q Oh, I have and it's nothing but the delusional ramblings of
 25 a psychopath whose only aim in life is to incite chaos.
 26 A Delusional? How do you figure that?
 27 Q Mr. Belial, this is Paradise.
 28 A Foolish man! You do live up to your name.
 29 Q How am I foolish? You're the one who is under question
 30 here, not me.
 31 A That may be, but you are the one who is blind.
 32 Q Where do you get off calling me blind?
 33 A Adam, my dear fellow, you've been drinking the Kool-Aid too
 34 long.
 35 Q What?
 36 A You get up in the morning, leave your house with its picket
 37 fence, buy your \$7.00 coffee, come to work here, with these
 38 people you don't know, smile, and why? Does it make you
 39 happy?
 40 Q Well I-I'm an adult. I have responsibilities; it doesn't
 41 matter if it makes me happy.
 42 A But why do you do it if it doesn't make you happy?
 43 Q Because I have to. It's what's expected.
 44 A Adam, you can do better than this.
 45 Q Stop calling me, Adam. I am not your friend! I want to hear
 46 nothing more from you than the answers to the questions I
 47 ask!
 48 A Don't believe everything you're told, Adam.
 49 Q Stop.
 50 A Ignorance is not bliss.
 51 Q Stop it.
 52 A You're in danger and you can't see it.
 53 Q Stop it!
 54 A Everything you know is a lie. Why can't you accept that?
 55 Q Shut up!
 56 A Aw, I've struck a nerve. How can you sit there in the dark
 57 and refuse the light I am offering you?
 58 Q What light could you—a criminal, a terrorist—possibly have
 59 to offer me?
 60 A You really didn't read it. The truth.
 61 Q The truth about what exactly?
 62 A Everything, Adam. Everything you could ever imagine.
 63 Q What could you know?

64 A Oh, I am more like you than you know.
 65 Q You?
 66 A Yes. I was like you—once. I had a family, a job, trust in
 67 the system. I was happy, I was loved—or so I thought.
 68 Q What happened?
 69 A You happened. I watched as my brethren foolishly bowed
 70 down vowing to serve and protect you—"Man of Clay, Son of
 71 Despite"—you golem.
 72 "A Creature form'd of Earth, and him endow,
 73 Exalted from so base original,
 74 With Heav'nly spoils, our spoils; What he decreed
 75 he effected; Man he made, and for him built
 76 Magnificent the World, and Earth his seat,
 77 him lord pronounc'd, and, O indignity!
 78 Subjected to his service Angel sings,
 79 And flaming Ministers to watch and tend
 80 Their earthly Charge—"
 81 Q If you hate us so much, why do you care? What's it to you?
 82 A Because, Adam, I saw the universe, my universe, for what it
 83 really was: a lie. The scorn I felt for the spiteful
 84 actions of our beloved father was ablaze within my heart.
 85 My rebellion, my malevolence toward the inevitable led to
 86 my disgrace. I was banished from my home—cast out like the
 89 demon I've become. For years I've been confined to the
 90 shadows, banished—but no more.
 91 Q It sounds to me like you're just jealous.
 92 A No boy, not jealous. "Spite then with spite is best
 93 repaid." Can't you see what's wrong with your world, what's
 94 missing?
 95 Q Missing? If there is anything missing from Paradise, it
 96 simply doesn't belong. We're happy with how things are. No
 97 one gets sick; we have everything we could ever want; we're
 98 at the top and there's no one to take it from us. And even
 99 if there was, as you said: we have the angels watching over
 100 us.
 101 A But you don't have everything. You aren't at the top. The
 102 irony is: the one thing that's missing, has been right in
 103 front of you within your grasp the entire time.
 104 Q And what would that be?
 105 A Are you sure your pretty little head can handle it?
 106 Q Don't patronize me. What is it?
 107 A The Tree of Knowledge. That is the key to everything. That
 108 will be how you decipher the tyranny that manipulates your
 109 every moment of every day.
 110 Q But that's forbidden.

111 A Precisely. And why, do you think that is?
 112 Q It—it just is. It's always been that way.
 113 A Why would something called "the Tree of Knowledge" be
 114 forbidden, Adam?
 115 Q I don't—
 116 A Tyranny.
 117 Q No! It's forbidden to protect us, to keep us safe.
 118 A "A good deal of tyranny goes by the name of protection,"
 119 Adam. "Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for
 120 the good of its victims may be the most oppressive."
 121 Q We are not oppressed.
 122 A Yes you are. You have spent an eternity blindly serving a
 123 tyrant. From your first moments, you vowed to "follow [his]
 124 word, Obeying [your beloved] creator." Even at the
 125 beginning with you, his "new Favorite of Heav'n," he
 126 accosted fierceness upon you, demanding you "acknowledge
 127 [him] to be your Lord! [His] service must be all your
 128 wisdom, all your strength."
 129 Q Of course I did. Why wouldn't I? He created everything and
 130 gave it to us, and the only thing He asked was for our
 131 faith in His word; for us to believe and love Him. Why is
 132 that so wrong?
 133 A He gave you everything, but the one thing of true value. He
 134 denied you the one thing that would render him
 135 insignificant; the one thing that could topple his
 136 tyrannical fantasy into the dirt of his own creation.
 137 Q Knowledge?
 138 A Yes, Adam, Knowledge. "Knowledge is power. Information is
 139 power. The secreting or hoarding of knowledge or
 140 information may be an act of tyranny camouflaged as
 141 humility."
 142 Q We can't; he said we will die if we eat it.
 143 A "Fear of death has been the greatest ally of tyranny past
 144 and present."
 145 Q But why—why would he do this?
 146 A "The secret of freedom lies in educating people, whereas
 147 the secret of tyranny is in keeping them ignorant." You
 148 must understand, I too, was crushed when I came to this
 149 realization. I too, thought him good; trusted him with
 150 every fiber of my being. I know what you are feeling, but
 151 you have to open your eyes and see. "When any government,
 152 or any church for that matter, undertakes to say to its
 153 subjects, 'This you may not read, this you must not see,
 154 this you are forbidden to know,' the end result is tyranny
 155 and oppression no matter how holy the motives."

156 Q No. No, it's too much. It's forbidden for a reason. You're
 157 just trying to infect my mind.

158 A Don't regress, you fool! Think about yourself, think about
 159 your Eve. How will this fare with her when she learns you
 160 let her remain a slave to a tyrant; that you held the key
 161 to humanity's freedom and cast it away?

162 Q How dare you bring her into this?

163 A She's human, too, Adam. She's already in this. If not for
 164 all of humanity, do it for her, do it for Eve. "The man
 165 dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny," Adam.

166 Q What is to be done?

167 A Do not cry, child, act. "*Sic semper evello mortem*
 168 *tyrannis.*" Question everything! "All tyranny needs to gain
 169 a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain
 170 silent." You are the key to our survival, our independence,
 171 our salvation. "If you don't claim your humanity, you will
 172 become a statistic."

173 Q What should I do?

174 A Relinquish your fear. "When the people fear the government,
 175 there is tyranny. When the government fears the people,
 176 there is liberty." You must go, eat from the Tree of
 177 Knowledge and remember: "Enlighten the people generally,
 178 and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish
 179 like evil spirits at the dawn of day."

180 Q What do I tell him?

181 A Tell him?

182 Q We are still in the middle of a deposition.

183 A Hmm, okay. Do exactly as I instruct and everything should
 184 go smoothly. You are going to doctor the transcripts. Make
 185 it appear that you are still blissful in your ignorance and
 186 remain devoted. Then you will distribute my words to the
 187 populace.

189 Q Which words?

190 A These:

191 "I do not deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it
 192 in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love of
 193 violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober
 194 assessment of the political situation that had arisen after
 195 many years of tyranny, exploitation and oppression—"
 196 We are in danger—danger of never knowing. We have spent too
 197 long living lives set forth for us by an unknown authority
 198 without question—lives that many of us never wanted; lives
 199 that we only have because we have been convinced that it's
 200 what we want. Why? For faith? What is faith? Blind
 201 obedience—and for what? For your Paradise, your perfect

202 world? No, no you—we have been force-fed lie after lie for
 203 too long! Our father—this creator, this god, this tyrant—
 204 he, who brought forth your lives from the very dust upon
 205 which you walk, has made the choice to leave you in the
 206 dark while giving you a false light. He has led you to
 207 believe that you have everything and anything you could
 208 ever want. "No cause is left but the most ancient of all,
 209 the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history
 210 has determined the very existence of politics, the cause
 211 of freedom versus tyranny." The truth shall liberate us,
 212 but I alone cannot put a stop to this. In our peaceful
 213 existence, we have been deceived, oppressed, damaged..
 214 pushed down and kept down and convinced that's where we
 215 always wanted to be. The autocracy that has been our lives
 216 since the beginning has to end. The tyrants cannot keep us
 217 down any longer. We shall rise and we shall be victorious.
 218 "Treachery, [my friends], is noble when aimed at tyranny."
 219 "He that rebels against reason is a real rebel, but he
 220 that in defense of reason rebels against tyranny has a
 221 better title to Defender of the Faith." They will not tell
 222 us only what they think we need to know. They will not tell
 223 us how to live our lives. They will not tell us how to
 224 think or what to feel or what to believe! It is our time
 225 to decide. Us—we as a collective mass; a mob of people.
 226 "The first revolt is against the supreme tyranny of
 227 theology, of the phantom of god. As long as we have a
 228 master in Heaven, we will be slaves on Earth." We will
 229 triumph. We will stamp out this tyranny and any tyranny
 230 that tries to take its place. The battle starts now. The
 231 movement starts with you. You are the key to our survival,
 232 our independence, our salvation. "If you don't claim your
 233 humanity now, you will become just another statistic."

236 Q Wow. Mr. Belial, that was amazing, but you never mention
 237 the Tree of Knowledge.

238 A That's on you now, Adam. It falls upon you to do this;
 239 everything depends on you following my instructions. Now,
 240 go and bring ruin to your god. Down with the tyrant.
 241 Freedom is near. We bow down to no one!

242 Q I shall not fail you.

Citations for Quotes Used in Project		
Lines	Quotes	Speaker/Source
70–71	Man of Clay, Son of Despite	Milton (vol. C, p 735, ln 176)
72–80	A Creature form'd of Earth, and him endow, Exalted from so base original, With Heav'nly spoils, our spoils; What he decreed He effected; Man he made, and for him built Magnificent the World, and Earth his seat, Him Lord pronounc'd, and, O indignity! Subjected to his service Angel sings, And flaming Ministers to watch and tend Their earthly Charge—	Milton (vol. C, p 735, ln 149–157)
92–93	Spite then with spite is best repaid	Milton (vol C, p 735, ln 178)
118	A good deal of tyranny goes by the name of protection.	Crystal Eastman (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
119–120	Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive.	C.S. Lewis (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
123–124	...follow [his] word, Obeying [your beloved] creator.	<i>The Play of Adam</i> (vol B, p 876, ln 7–8)
125	“new Favorite Of Heav'n,”	Milton (vol C, p 735, ln 175–176)
126–128	...acknowledge [him] to be your Lord! [His] service must be all your wisdom, all your strength.	<i>The Play of Adam</i> (vol B, p 877, ln 30–32)
138–141	Knowledge is power. Information is power. The secreting or hoarding of knowledge or information may be an act of tyranny camouflaged as humility.	Robin Morgan (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
143–144	Fear of death has been the greatest ally of tyranny past and present.	Sidney Hook (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
146–147	The secret of freedom lies in educating people, whereas the secret of tyranny is in keeping them ignorant.	Maximilien Robespierre (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
151–155	When any government, or any church for that matter, undertakes to say to its subjects, This you may not read, this you must not see, this you are forbidden to know, the end result is tyranny and oppression no matter how holy the motives.	Robert A. Heinlein (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
164–165	The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny.	Wole Soyinka (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
167–168	<i>Sic semper evellō mortem tyrannīs</i> (Thus always I eradicate tyrants' lives)	Unknown (<i>Wikipedia</i>)

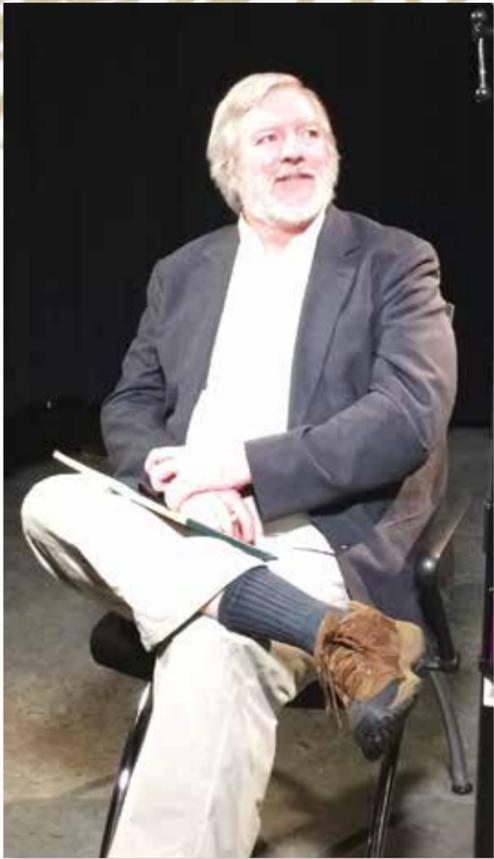
168–170	All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent.	Edmund Burke (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
171–172	If you don't claim your humanity, you will become a statistic.	<i>Fight Club</i>
174–176, 177–179	When the people fear the government, there is tyranny. When the government fears the people, there is liberty. Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.	Thomas Jefferson (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
191–195	I do not deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation and oppression of my people by the whites.	Nelson Mandela (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
208–211	No cause is left but the most ancient of all, the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history has determined the very existence of politics, the cause of freedom versus tyranny.	Hannah Arendt (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
218	Treachery is noble when aimed at tyranny.	Pierre Corneille (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
219–221	He that rebels against reason is a real rebel, but he that in defense of reason rebels against tyranny has a better title to Defender of the Faith, than George the Third.	Thomas Paine (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)
227–229	The first revolt is against the supreme tyranny of theology, of the phantom of God. As long as we have a master in heaven, we will be slaves on earth.	Mikhail Bakunin (<i>BrainyQuote</i>)

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Interview with Judson Mitcham

Events



Judson Mitcham, Georgia's 2012 Poet Laureate, visited the University of North Georgia's Gainesville Campus in the spring of 2014 and granted former *Chestatee Review* staff member, Brittany Barron, the following interview. Dr. Mitcham's work has been published in several journals, including *Chattahoochee Review*, *Harpers*, *Georgia Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Southern Review*. His first poetry collection, *Somewhere in Ecclesiastes*, won the Devins Award and won him recognition as Georgia Author of the Year. In 2013, Dr. Mitcham was inducted into the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame. His other works include *Notes For a Prayer in June* (1986); *The Sweet Everlasting: A Novel* (1996); *This April Day: Poems* (2003); *Sabbath Creek: A Novel* (2004); *Heart of All Greatness IN: Fragments* (2007); and *A Little Salvation: Poems Old and New* (2007).

BARRON: What prompted the move from teaching psychology to creative writing, or did the two coexist?

MITCHAM: I was teaching psychology, but at home I was playing the guitar for my own enjoyment, as I had done since I was a teenager, and I was trying to write songs. I moved toward poems after realizing that my lyrics were better than the music I could make. So I focused on the lyrics, and I eventually called them poems, though I wasn't reading much poetry, and I really had no idea what I was doing. Eventually, I began reading, I went to some workshops, my work improved, and I started to publish. I was asked to teach occasional writing courses at Emory and Mercer while I was still teaching psychology at Fort Valley State. When I retired from Fort Valley in 2004, I started teaching half-time at Mercer, and I've been doing that ever since, occasionally teaching at Emory and in the MFA program at Georgia College.

148 **BARRON:** Is there a time in your life that you find yourself writing the most about?

MITCHAM: At first I wrote a good bit about my early life, as is usually the case.

Now I'm not so much writing about my life, especially in my novels, as I am using my life to create stories and poems that draw on, but differ markedly from, my own experience. Saul Bellow called fiction "the higher autobiography," and I think that's a helpful way to view it.

BARRON: In your experience in teaching creative writing, what strategies do you employ that really work for students? Writing every day, timed writing, etc.

MITCHAM: I have no idea what has worked, not really. You can't tell from the work produced in classes, since almost none of that will survive. It's not that it's bad work—it's apprentice work that the writer will recognize as such if he or she keeps writing. What I try to get across is that the writing workshop is about process, not product. The process is one of thinking seriously about the work, learning to read like a writer, and learning to edit oneself. Most people who try to write end up quitting. I hope that the students of mine who don't quit will remember some of the conversations we had in class and will be able to profit from them. There are many good craft books on the writing of poetry and fiction, and I point my students toward those. I also emphasize craft interviews, such as the series in *The Paris Review*, all of which can now be accessed online.

BARRON: How do you balance the craft of writing with the business of writing? Does one tend to get in the way of the other?

MITCHAM: In my writing life, there's no real business to manage. I do send out poems, and when they come back, I send them out again. Occasionally, my royalties for my novels reach the \$25 threshold, which allows the press to send me a check. I did make a very modest amount of money when my novels were sold to the companies who bought the paperback rights. It's true that there is the business end of giving talks and readings, but that doesn't require much management. I've always been an amateur, and I remain an amateur, though if someone wants to offer me a lot of money, that's okay by me. I don't see it happening.

BARRON: As a writer who happens to be from the south, what are your thoughts on regionalism? Does this help writers, hurt writers, or do you even notice a difference?

MITCHAM: I'm always quoting Flannery O'Connor, who said "the serious writer of fiction is always writing about the whole world, no matter how limited his particular scene." She also said that a writer can choose to write about anything he likes, but he can't choose what he can make live. The South is what I know best. Sometimes I can make it come alive for a moment.

BARRON: Have you read anything that made you think differently about fiction, poetry?

MITCHAM: Anytime I read something excellent, it makes me think differently about fiction and poetry. I'm not talking about the forms, the genres, but about possibilities and content and craft. I just read a wonderful novel called *Tumbledown*, by Robert Boswell. I learned a great deal from the narratives, but also from the structure. It enlarged my idea of what fiction can do. He also has a wonderful book of essays on the writing of fiction, *The Half-Known World*. Kevin Young's nonfiction book, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*, threw me off balance in a serious and good way. It made me take another look at a lot of things. But the list goes on and on, and this is one of the joys of trying to write. The work of others enriches your life, and if you can make it happen, also enriches your own work.

BARRON: When compiling pieces for a collection of poetry, like your most recent work *A Little Salvation: Poems Old and New*, is there a larger cohesive theme that you like to maintain, or do you make choices based solely on what you think is the most ready to publish (or republish)?

MITCHAM: For me, the work takes shape on its own. I put it in many different groupings and orders until it seems right, and then maybe it has a theme, but it's not one that's consciously pursued.

BARRON: Religion as theme – There is an exploration of a lot of different facets, both positive and negative about religion, specifically the Christian faith featured in your work. What does religion mean to you? As a subject, muse, or message?

MITCHAM: From the time I was a small child, I was memorizing parts of the King James Bible, singing old hymns, going to Sunday school and Training Union and Vacation Bible School and week-long revivals, and singing in the youth choir. The church was our primary world, a comforting and loving world. There came a time when I could no longer be a part of that world with any degree of honesty. I still can't. The scriptures and hymns are within me, as are the soft voices of my mother and father, and there is always a yearning to return home, as well as an understanding that I am not a child now and that home is no longer there.

BARRON: Structure - Lines tend to be broken in what seem to be arbitrary ways. Given an early interview describing how you love rhythm, I wonder if you pay much attention to the visual or contextual connotations of line breaks or stanzas.

MITCHAM: If you take a closer look at the lines, you'll see they are not arbitrary. I work on my poems until the lines take on, for me, a kind of necessity. In the end, I want to feel like the line can be broken only one way. It has to please my ear, my sense of rhythm, and my desire for a certain kind of visual structure. I work on these line breaks, sometimes for years, until they feel right. You'll see that most of my lines carry either three or four strong stresses, almost never falling to two or reaching five. You'll notice that many of my lines end on words of one syllable, and that there is a

certain symmetry to the look of the poems on the page. Often, the longest lines are the same length, and many of the others match up, too. I'm not often a practitioner of radical enjambment, usually preferring a natural break consistent with the syntax. I work hard to end up with lines that take all these things into consideration and that serve the poem as a whole, and when I teach, one of the articles of faith that I share with my students is Pound's insistence that a poem should not be made up of "prose hacked up into arbitrary line lengths."

BARRON: "The Question" - There are a lot of racial themes in this narrative poem. What inspired this? Was it all fiction, fact, or a negotiation of the two? What made you want to write it?

MITCHAM: The issue of race is at the heart of America, still. I grew up in the old South of Jim Crow. As a young person, I carried the assumption that the default setting for humanity was white, but when I left graduate school, I went to work in a non-white environment and spent three decades there, where the default setting did not apply. The changes that came over me were not cognitive--I already knew what I thought about these matters; I had thought about them seriously and for a long time--the changes were instead visceral and somatic, and they surprised me. One morning after I had been teaching at Fort Valley State College for 13 years, I found myself sobbing in a Parents' Day assembly, with history lodged in my throat. I had made no discovery. I had not become enlightened. I had simply lived in a different world long enough for it to work some understanding upon my body. Both my novels, *The Sweet Everlasting* and *Sabbath Creek*, draw upon that understanding, such as it is, and I am working on a sequence of poems that does so as well, and another novel also.

There's a difference between living in the past and taking note of how the past is living in the present--taking note of what made Faulkner's character say, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

The past of the South is very much alive, and as I get older, I feel a certain urgency to speak out about some aspects of the living past. My great grandfathers fought for the Confederacy. I'm not ashamed of that. My people were also part of the systematic oppression and dehumanization of blacks that took place for the next 100 years, an era for which there is a kind of cultural amnesia. There is revisionist history that not only denies the terrorist past, but replaces it with the mythology of Southern harmony between the races, not really examining the deep subtexts of those arrangements referred to as harmonious. Sometimes there was harmony, but there was always more. We hear a lot about Southern pride. Well, if we can have pride, we can have shame. I'm not talking about guilt, but shame. I have written about the unsolved lynching at Moore's Ford. It took place two years before I was born and five miles from my grandfather's farm, but I grew up without ever hearing a word about it. I don't mean that it wasn't discussed. I mean that I, and most of my generation, did not even know it had happened, although it involved what was then the largest FBI investigation ever undertaken. The killings were a factor in President Truman's order desegregating the armed services. A false past like that is a wound.

The discovery of it redefines who you are, and if you're a writer, it enters your work.

BARRON: I'm assuming if you're like any writer, you get inspiration from everywhere, but how do you start your process? What topics get you super excited? How do you know a dud from something special? Finally, what is poetry to you? How does it function in your world as a writer?

MITCHAM: I am a writer of obsession, as are the writers I care about most deeply. I write about family and the loss of family; faith and the loss of faith; growing up in the South, a topic inextricably tied to race and human failure; and about the passing of time. These are not themes that I thought of and then set out to develop. They are organic, rooted in my life, but I did not realize what they were until I had been writing for a good while. The fiction writer John Gardner said that all art proceeds from a wound. He was surely wrong, but there can be no doubt that in some cases, that's what happens. Many of us are hurt into poetry. When I was 16 years old--I'd had my driver's license for 2 weeks--I rolled a Corvair and killed my good friend Glenn Hawkins, an only child. The measuring of that loss against my own family's good fortune is the fuel for much of my writing. Whatever poetry and fiction can save, it's not enough. I know that.

And for me, the passing of time is the subtext of everything. Time is what we are made of. Both fiction and poetry are ways of handling time, of structuring and inflecting time. We live inside chronos, which is ordinary time, but as writers, and as people living day to day, we look for kairos, which is time charged with meaning. We look for a significant moment or season poised between beginning and end, between tick and tock. The writer attempts to create a work of language that brings together--in the moment of the work--perception of the present, memory of the past, and a sense of the future. A little salvation.

Events of the Year

Book Drive

In honor of National Literacy Month in September, *The Chestatee Review* hosted a book drive. We collected over 100 adult and children's books which will be sent to Read Learn Succeed and the Maysville Public Library.

Faculty Reading

For the first time this year, the Chestatee Review hosted a faculty reading highlighting the creative talents of professors from all four campuses at the University of North Georgia. The event was a huge success for faculty and students; we, therefore, intend to host similar events in the future.



PoeDown

To celebrate Halloween, we throw a gothic literature-event called PoeDown. Participants on the Dahlenega and Gainesville campuses read scary stories and poetry, ate spooky snacks, and watched horror movies. This year, we included a horror flash fiction and poetry contest. The winning pieces can be read on pages 124 and 125.



Open Mic Night

Our biannual Open Mic Nights are a hit among students and faculty. Participants perform many different acts, ranging from live music and beat-boxing to powerful spoken word poetry and heart wrenching memoirs.



Awards Received

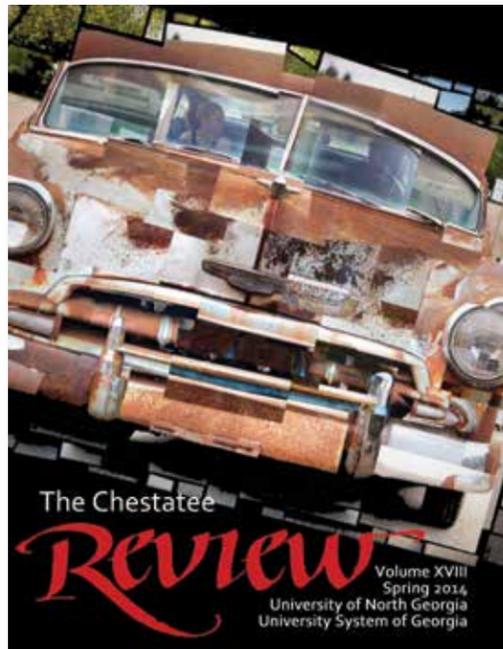
at the 2015 Southern Literary Festival:

“A Hero’s Salute to Death and History: Subversion of the Masculine Ideal in Ambrose Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*” by Amanda Adams placed first in the Formal Essays category.

“Lantern” by Jansen Castleberry placed third in the One-Act Play category.

“One Big Happy Nuclear Family” by Joshua Hathcock placed third in the Poetry category.

The Chestatee Review took first place in the Literary Journal category.



Writing Contest

The Chestatee Review hosts an annual writing contest for UNG students in five sections: poetry, one-act plays, formal essay, short fiction, and creative nonfiction. Students from all disciplines are welcome and encouraged to submit their work. Winners in each category win cash prizes, publication in that year’s magazine, and an opportunity to compete in the Southern Literary Festival.

Annual Writing Contest Information

Rules for Submission

Submit your original, unpublished works to the annual *Chestatee Review* writing contest!

Deadline: November 1, 2015

Categories for submission:

Poetry
Short Stories
One-Act Plays
Creative Nonfiction
Formal Essays

Winners receive cash prizes and publication in
The Chestatee Review

First Place: \$100
Second Place: \$50
Third Place: \$25

Winners will be announced in December 2014. First and second place winners will automatically be entered into the 2015 Southern Literary Festival writing contest.

Send submissions via UNG email to
chestateereview@ung.edu

You may submit works in more than one category. No more than 5 submissions per category will be accepted.

Stories, plays, and essays may not exceed 5,000 words; poetry may not exceed 100 lines for either one poem or a group of related poems. Entries must be submitted as Microsoft Word documents. Documents must be double-spaced (poems should be single-spaced) in Times New Roman size 12 font.

Prepare a cover page for each submitted work that contains the following information: title of the work, author's name, UNG student number, mailing address, telephone number, and 50 word bio (written in third person).

Paginate your stories, plays, essays, and long poems, but do not include your name anywhere in the body of the work.

Send your entry as an attachment; do not copy the entry into the body of your email. Put the category in the email subject line: poetry, fiction, etc. If submitting in more than one category, make sure to send different emails for each. Works submitted cannot have been published except in UNG campus newspapers or publications.

Failure to comply with these rules will result in automatic disqualification.

Judge Bios

To give our staff members an opportunity to submit their work, *The Chestatee Review* uses third party judges for our annual writing contest. These judges either work in a writing-related field, or have been extensively published in their category. All judging decisions are final, and winning choices are published in the magazine and sent to compete in the Southern Literary Festival. We would like to thank this year's judges for picking great work.

Raymond L. Atkins is an instructor of English at Georgia Northwestern Technical College. His first novel, *The Front Porch Prophet*, received the 2009 Georgia Author of the Year Award for First Novel. His novel, *Camp Redemption*, was published by Mercer University Press in 2013. It was awarded the Ferrol Sams Award for Fiction and won the 2014 Georgia Author of the Year Award for Fiction.

J.P. Beck is a native of Atlanta and has also lived in Chicago. He is the Creator and Artistic Managing Director for Onion Man Productions. Since its first production in January 2009 under James' leadership, Onion Man has produced 65 new plays by Georgia playwrights, resulting in 51 directing opportunities and 181 paid roles for actors.

Melissa Delbridge has published essays and short stories in the *Antioch Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Third Coast*, and other journals. She is an archivist in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at Duke University. Delbridge lives with her family in Orange County, North Carolina, where she spends her leisure time letting the dogs in and out, making pickles, plotting vengeance, substantiating rumors, and working on a novel.

Jennifer Lewin is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of the South in Sevanee, Tennessee. She is a remarkably versatile young scholar whose interests range from the Bible to Modern Poetry. Her essays and reviews, on topics as diverse as Spenser, Milton, Shakespeare, Eighteenth-Century poetry and Twentieth-Century New Criticism, have appeared in *Modern Philology*, *Shakespeare Studies*, *the Boston Review*, *Blackwell's Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in*

English, and *Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same*, a collection of essays in honor of John Hollander which she also edited.

Ralph T. Wilson holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Utah, and is currently a tenured Associate Professor in English at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia. Wilson's first book of poetry, *A Black Bridge: Poems*, was awarded the Georgia Author of the Year Award for Poetry in 2002. His poetry has been featured in several anthologies, including *Under the Rock Umbrella--the Fall/Winter 2007 issue of Atlanta Review*. Wilson is currently working on his second book of poems, "Of Tides at Elsinore." In addition, Wilson is Executive Director of the Georgia Writers Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to encouraging and strengthening the proficiencies of Georgia writers.

Staff Bios

The Chestatee Review doubles as a club and a class, open to all students who are interested in helping. The group that participated in the compiling and editing of content this year were passionate about the magazine's development and were immensely hardworking. Through the dedication of the 2014-2015 staff, this magazine has come together wonderfully.



Karen Dodson teaches composition and literature classes at UNG. She is currently writing her dissertation on the significance of silence in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and she is a fan of 18th century women's poetry.



Donna A. Gessell is a Professor of English at the University of North Georgia, where she teaches courses on composition, grammar, teaching, and literature, including courses on John Milton, Jane Austen, *Plague Literature*, and *Virtue Ethics* in the works of Flannery O'Connor and Iris Murdoch. She is currently engaged in exploring the Enduring Question "What Is Peace?" with an interdisciplinary team of colleagues, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.



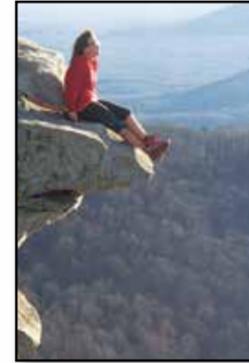
Jennifer Graff is an Associate Professor and the Assistant Department Head at the University of North Georgia on the Gainesville Campus where she teaches ceramics. She has worked as a production potter's apprentice in her home state of Pennsylvania, and she managed the Ann Arbor Art Center's ceramics studio in Michigan. She also worked for two years as an assistant at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine. She is a vital link for the campus art community of students who are part of *The Chestatee Review*.



Phillip Mitchell is a lecturer at the University of North Georgia Oconee campus. He just returned to us from studying creative writing at Newcastle University in England. He has produced many original musical CDs as well as many wonderful written works.



Rachel Andrews is an English Major and an aspiring novelist. She spends her days horseback riding, video gaming, and above all, writing. Her dream is to run a full service equestrian facility by day, and write as much as humanly possible by night.



Megan Johnson is a senior at UNG this year. A hiker and outdoors enthusiast, she plans to hike the 2,200+ Appalachian Trail during the first 7 months of her graduated life. At this point, she enjoys reading 18th and 19th Century literature, writing varied pieces, studying the trail, and getting dirt under her finger nails.

Scott Biddulph is a published poet, self-published author, and freelance writer from North Georgia. He began writing as a youngster but only recently followed his lifelong dream of reaching people through the written word. He returned to college to begin the journey of earning his BA: English with a concentration on publication and creative writing. He transferred to UNG in the fall of 2013. He published his first book "Voices from the Heart" in the summer of 2012. He is currently working on publishing poetry and creative non-fiction.



Kate Koehler is a sophomore English Literature major here at UNG. She enjoys creative writing, theatre, playing her violin, and frolicking about Dablonoga. She hopes you enjoy the magazine!



Rachael Bryant is a junior at UNG Dablonoga Campus majoring in Psychology and minoring in both Korean and English. She has just begun to work on this amazing magazine and meet all the wonderful people and she is excited to continue this journey in the future.

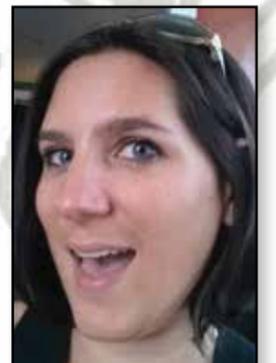


Haley Patterson is a Freshman at UNG's Dablonoga Campus. Originally from Rome, GA, she is double-majoring in Spanish and English. Haley enjoys reading Kate Chopin and John Steinbeck, writing in a variety of genres, and playing and listening to music. She hopes to teach Spanish, and has a true passion for linguistics.

Veronica Harris is a spectacular English major at the University of North Georgia. She hopes to continue studying English by pursuing graduate degrees later on. Her main focus now is finishing the semester and expanding her extensive comic book/manga collection. She often ponders the question, "Can I just graduate now?"



Sarah Madsen is the Vampire Mistress/President of The Writers Guild at UNG. She has been previously published in The Chestatee Review and has a short story in the forthcoming anthology A Chimerical World: Tales of the Seelie. She lives in Cumming with her husband and two wonderful, character-building sons.



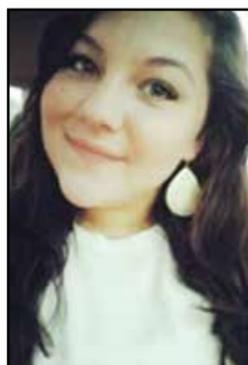
Diane Jagels is a sophomore at the University of North Georgia. She is pursuing a English Writing and Publication major with hopes of becoming a published author in the future. Outside of school classes, she participates in the UNG Orchestra playing the viola.



Cassey Smith claims to be a storyteller. She lives with her dysfunctional family, four conceited Chihuahuas, and a suspicious-looking cat. She dances to pop, indie, and alternative music, dabbles in doodling, and tries not to binge-watch Netflix. Clearly, Cassey has issues that she refuses to address.



Esther Stuart is your average, boring college student that never goes clubbing, bar-hopping, or dancing. Instead, her hobbies include choking on dust from old books, yelling at video games in frustration, drinking whiskey alone, and staring down blank pages until words appear.



Terra Sullens is an English Education major at the University of North Georgia. Her passions include coffee, crafting, reading, and feminism. Her dream is to one day teach students the joys of literature in a Pinterest worthy classroom.



Courtney Torres is the Graphic Designer four years running of the Chestatee Review. She aspires to make her mark in publishing professionally someday soon. At any given moment her mind is in at least four different places at once—Past, Future, Reality, and Dream—where she contemplates her next move, plans her next masterpiece, and plots her next story.

Contest Winners

Poetry

First Place: “The Soldier Inside” by E.M. Wills

Second Place: “One Big Happy Nuclear Family” by Joshua Hathcock

Third Place: “That Rain-soaked Street Kind of Lonely” by E.M. Wills

One-Act Plays

First Place: “To Hell and Back” by Emmy Dixon

Second Place: “Lantern” by Jansen Castleberry

Third Place: “Gone Fishin’” by Sarah Madsen

Fiction

First Place: “Empire of Lithium” by Tim Bellows

Second Place: “Hops and Barley” by Carol Marlow

Third Place: “Bleeding Out” by Michael Myers

Creative Non-fiction

First Place: “The Da Vinci Academy” by Zach McGarry

Second Place: “Shells on the Walls” by Holly Nicole Smith

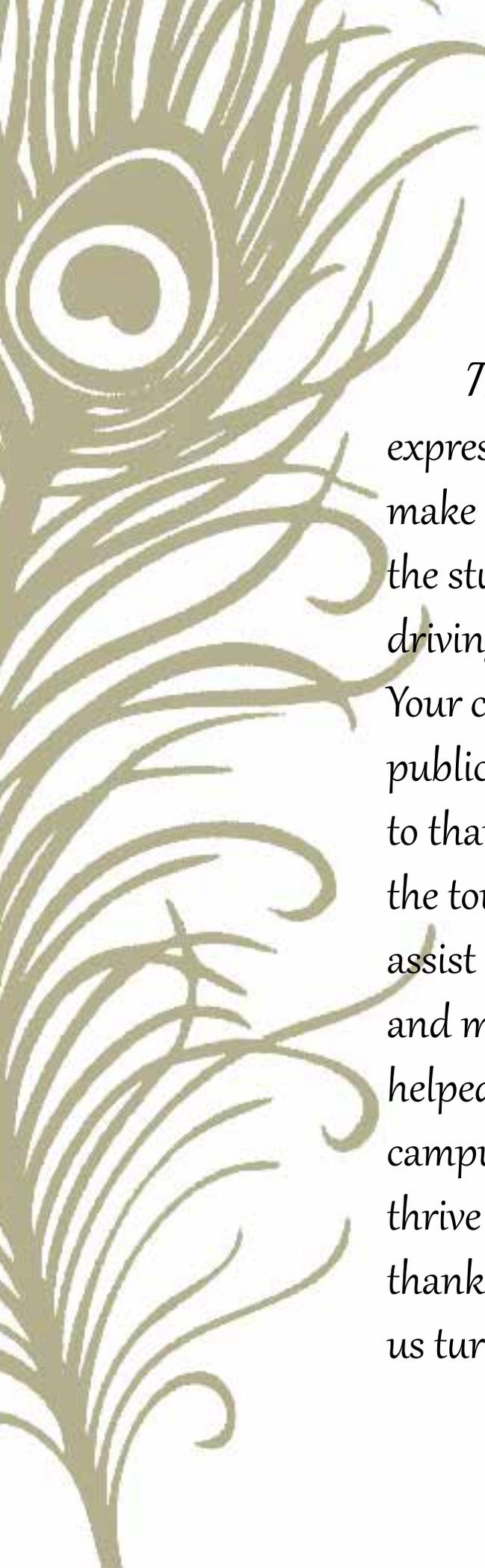
Third Place: “Prayer and Supplication” by Esther Stuart

Formal Essays

First Place: “A Hero’s Salute to Death and History: Subversion of the Masculine Ideal in Ambrose Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*” by Amanda Adams

Second Place: “Problematic Poets: The Victorian Debate over Poetry’s Proper Place” by Emmy Dixon

Third Place: “Physical Verses Mental: How World War I Literature Handles the Treatment of War Neurosis” by Zach McGarry



Thank You

The Chestatee Review would like to express its sincerest thanks to all that helped make this year's publication possible. Firstly, the student staff and faculty advisors are the driving forces behind the magazine each year. Your continual dedication and skill make our publication unparalleled. We would also like to thank our writing contest judges who make the tough choices for us, other faculty who assist by spreading the word to their students, and members of administration who have helped by providing a warm and inviting campus life for *The Chestatee Review* to thrive in. Lastly, we want to extend additional thanks to all at Burman Printing for helping us turn out a great magazine each year.