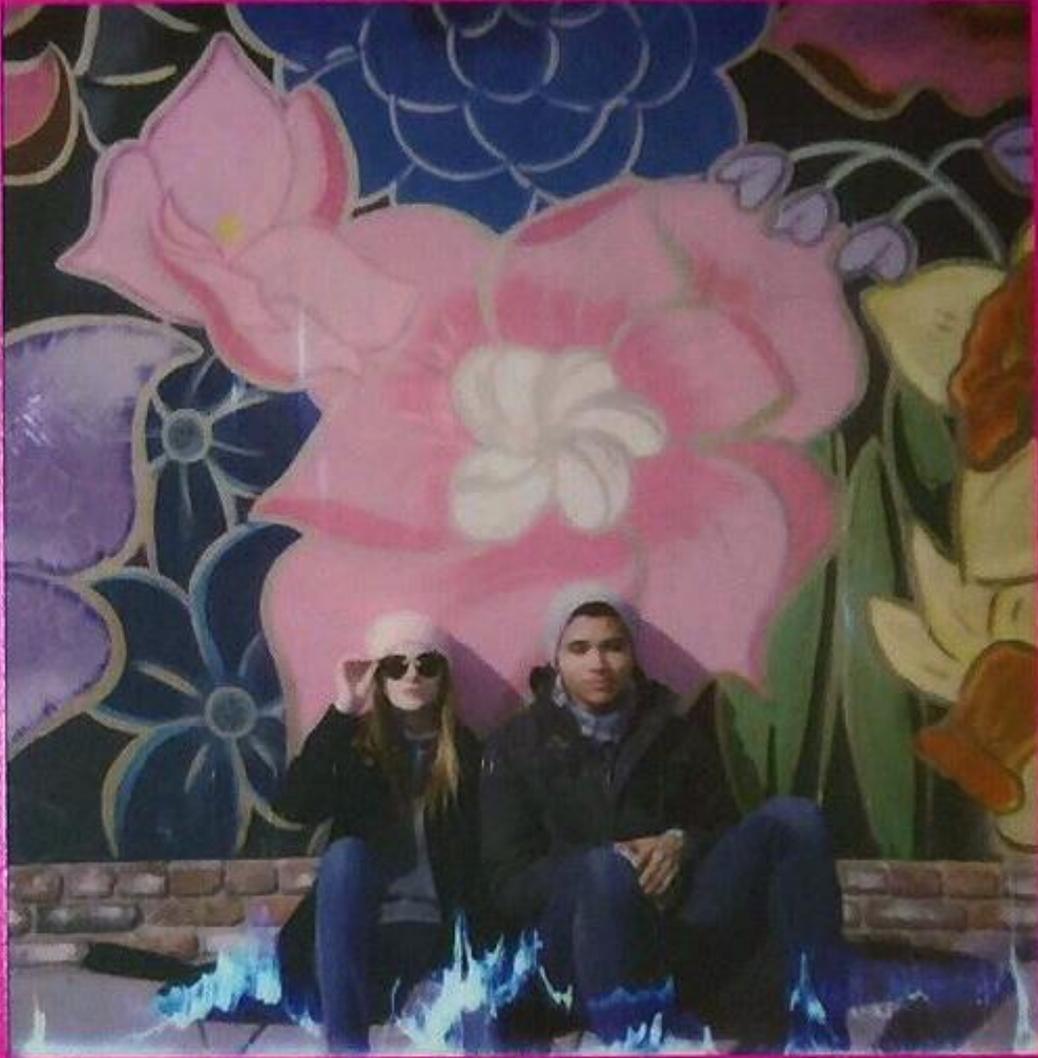


Jongleur



2018

PUBLICATION

The *Jongleur* is an annual publication of student work that is formatted and edited by a student staff. It is created for both the benefit of Louisiana State University at Alexandria and the distinctive voice of its students.

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Jongleur
Louisiana State University at Alexandria
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EDITOR'S NOTE

It has been a year since the smell of fresh pages have graced our noses (what we can smell despite the pollen anyway). Many students have graduated, many more have enrolled. LSUA is growing community of both artistic and analytical minds, and we aspire to give a platform for them both. This year we were reminded to include pieces from Humanities Conference, an annual event that helps students practice speaking and researching skills. It is important that hard work is rewarded, and these students worked their tails off.

Additionally, due to last year's success, we got more people submitting! Our numbers are slowly growing, and I am ecstatic of the progress. This year, we were not able to accept everything due to length requirements, but the work we have chosen represents only a portion of our diverse individuals here at LSUA. I continue to encourage those who have something to say or express to act. It does not matter if your medium is Times New Roman, colored pencils, or a computer mouse. You, matter, and only you can see the world through your eyes and we're all anticipating seeing it.

I want to leave off with a quotation from Linda Thompson, "Our uniqueness, our individuality, and our life molds us into fascinating beings. I hope we can embrace that. I pray we may all challenge ourselves to delve into the deepest resources of our hearts to cultivate an atmosphere of understanding, acceptance, tolerance, and compassion. We are all in this together." If this was one of the hardest years for you, you are not alone. If it was one the greatest you've ever had, you are not alone. If this year, you managed through, you accomplished what you set out to do but not much else, you are not alone. Take pride in what you have completed. You worked hard for it.

Always,

Kennedy Runyan
Editor, 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is nothing like holding your work, or anyone's work for that matter, in your hands. A concrete representation of all the effort, the struggles, and the triumph. For this opportunity, I would like to thank the CFO of LSUA, Deron Thaxton, once again. People are slowly being consumed in the digital world, and it can be a magazine such as this one that reminds them they can't live there, but they can thrive here. Furthermore, I would like to thank our English Dept. for fronting the funds for the contest once more. I am eternally grateful that they see as much potential as I do in the *Jongleur*.

This year, I was not the only student staff member, which is fantastic! Our small student staff of one transformed into a crew of four. While working on this project we had many unofficial meetings on the library floor, discussions between classes, and 3am conversations. Sometimes we didn't always agree, and we took the skills we've learned here at LSUA to back up our cases. However, there was not one unenjoyable moment. So, to Carli Smith, thank you for emailing students during the email changeover where many things were lost and recovered, and thank you also for your constant communication throughout. To Victoria Bloodworth, thank you for having strong opinions of your own but listening to others. You are able to see the work as it stands and not because of who stands behind it and that is a valuable skill. To Brody Kennen, who not only helped me with formatting and layout, but who entertained my constant ramblings at all hours about the *Jongleur*.

Lastly, and certainly not the least, I'd like to thank Dr. Gallagher and Mr. Alai for their continued influence and advice. They are constantly checking me, showing me my mistakes, and teaching me how to fix them.

Enjoy.

Kennedy Runyan
Editor, 2018

WINNERS

Prose:

1 Place: “A Concert From the Muses” Kennis Gremillion

2nd Place: “See You Around” Brandon Pitchford

3rd Place: “My Sunshine” Gabrielle Hooper

Honorable Mention: “The Alexandria Conspiracy” Ben Gremillion

Poetry:

1st Place: “Little Toy Boats” Kennis Gremillion

2nd Place: “The Silence Between” Kristin Lea Curtis

3rd Place: “She is the Flowers” Cortland Castro

Honorable Mention: “Even Though You Have Gone Away” Cecilie Ting Mortensen

Papers:

1st Place: “An Examination of the Chivalric Code in A Song of Ice and Fire” Kristin Curtis

2nd Place: “Icarus’ Influence on Suffering: Affected and Unaffected” Komal Shabih

3rd Place: “Dr. Faustus” and Unsound Theological Reasoning” Benjamin Sanson

Honorable Mention: “SAA: Smartphone Addicts Anonymous” Cailey Scadlock

Art:

1st Place: “Untitled” Brianna Morace

2nd Place: “Smoke” Saije Cousin

3rd Place: “A Personal Visual from Nirvana’s “Help me, I’m Hungry” Kenady Dauzat

Honorable Mention: “Untitled” Harli Matt

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A CONCERT FROM THE MUSES

1st Place

By: Kennis Gremillion

Rebekah hummed some childhood melody to herself as she wiped down Mrs. Livingston's windowsill. "Everything must be immaculate," the old widow would tell her each day. And so, Rebekah would take a trolley from the Manhattan ghetto to the wealthy suburbs, remembering that a job poorly done would mean she was fired.

But when Mrs. Livingston left for her errands each morning, Rebekah was free to sing as she worked. Her mistress thought of Jews as somewhat like children, attributing to them that old phrase "better seen and not heard". But she couldn't hear her young maid from her tea party, or wherever she was during the day.

So Rebekah sang as she worked, her high, clear voice almost like a siren's, flowing like a gentle, calming brook. In her mind's eye, she was not here but in Jerusalem, the holy city she'd never seen that her grandmother told her about. She was singing in the temple, Hebrew words filling the air and bouncing off the walls. As she stood on a chair to dust above the curtains, she was singing hymns at the altar. While she swept the floors, she was sweeping the front of a baker's shop, watching her people walk by in safety and freedom. As she washed the dishes, she was at the city gates, singing for an audience who clapped and appreciated her.

Her grandmother had been there once on a pilgrimage, and when she died she gave Rebekah a little seashell pendant she had bought there, which she now wore around her neck daily and only took off when she bathed. She described it so vividly that Rebekah could smell the fresh, unleavened bread and the fish in the marketplaces. She could hear the rabbi's prayers echo throughout the streets, and she could envision the temples as clearly as a memory. If she was stuck in the poorest area of the city, cleaning house for a woman who insulted her entire people, then at least she could have her own Jerusalem, her imaginary concert audience welcoming her to escape for a little while to a place where Jewish people were respected and treated equally.

As she mopped the kitchen tiles, Rebekah was temporarily snatched from her silent reverie by the falling of her hair in front of her face. It must have come out of its ribbon again; her thick, dark curls were as wild and untamed as the spirit within her. She felt a pang of frustration for a moment, but as she picked up her ribbon she laughed, tying it around her wrist instead of her hair. For now it fell in a curtain around her face, free and able to breathe. She didn't care if Mrs. Livingston found it unkempt, her job was to clean, not to meet her fashion standards.

The laughter continued pouring from her chest like the peal of church bells, and she sang as loudly as she wished as she finished her mopping. As long as she was here, alone, she was free! Her parents escaped to America when Russia drove out all its Jews, and she was treated with much of the same disdain here in New York, looked down on as filthy, lower-class, and greedy for the stereotypes that plagued her ethnicity. But alone in this big and dazzling house she was without a soul to judge her, and the sunlight that poured in through the sparkling windows opened a door in her heart to the city she longed for, to the city where she'd never been.

With the money she made here, Rebekah could help her parents afford a nicer place to live, or at least more food to last the year. Maybe one day, her family, too, could live in a comfortable, luxurious home in a safer part of town like Mrs. Livingston did. And maybe, one

day, she really could sing for a crowd, surrounded by her own people, those who understood her. She doubted she could ever afford a trip to Jerusalem like her grandmother did, but she could come to something close.

Rebekah held the pendant in her hand, running a thumb along the soft ridges of the shell. She hadn't seen the ocean since her family went to Coney Island when she was fourteen, but there was something in those waves that sang with the same longing that she did. There was a new hope in Rebekah's heart as she sang, her voice carrying through the long corridors of the house she dusted to perfection. And all the fancy old furniture and the dazzling chandelier were her audience, silent as she sang to them and wiped them clean.

Mrs. Livingston walked in at two o'clock in the afternoon just like she always did, her butler carrying her packages from the most expensive department store. "Well," she drawled in that ridiculous Transatlantic accent of hers that only rich people seemed to have, "it seems all is in order." She looked Rebekah up and down. "Your hair is undone."

"Yes, ma'am. I lost my ribbon."

Mrs. Livingston scoffed under her breath, unimpressed. But she couldn't complain, because the house was immaculate just as she ordered. Just like always. "Well, you may go now. You'll get your pay on Friday."

Rebekah curtsied on her way out, lowering her eyes in respect like a servant before her queen. She could pretend to respect that old crone all she wanted, because she had a secret that people like Mrs. Livingston would never understand. She had found Jerusalem.

AN UNPRECEDENTED REUNION

By: Laurel Reading

All of this nonsensical business began with a simple misunderstanding with an Elikzni House. Though it held the potential to destroy what's left of humanity, it was the kind of misunderstanding that found itself in the hands of a Guardian who knew how to make the best of it. That Guardian was the newly recruited Aloy and her Ghost. The two patrolled the Cosmodrome for stolen artifacts and highly valued bounties posted at the Bountytracker. They currently hunted a band of Elikzni making off with a crate of ether seeds. This particular pack belonged to a House that reclaimed a foothold at the old Skywatch. The intention was to scare them away from the loot, and only kill if necessary.

Aloy funnels the Dregs, Vandals, and Shanks into a gorge, and follows atop the surrounding cliffs. Her pace gains an advantage as she runs ahead of the group, firing explosive rounds behind them to keep them running to her. However, they disappear into the rocks below. That's odd. There's no opening leading in from the other side of the gorge in this area. Unless it leads somewhere else! She leaps down from her perch on the cliff, and observes her surroundings. Her eyes stumble upon a cave that led into unknown territory.

Ghost speaks to her. "That cave sure is dark. Are you sure you want to head in there where a bunch of Fallen are most likely waiting for you? Because I feel a bunch of Fallen in there waiting for you."

"If we don't, someone else will find this place and empty it themselves." Aloy walks into the cave with her bow at the ready. "We don't want that to happen."

"Because of loot? Or..."

"Because of an opportunity. Maybe..."

"Maybe? Is this about the House of Rain?"

"Shh! I hear them."

Aloy steps out into a cavern illuminated by the light of electricity and Ether lamps. It seems she has stumbled upon a gruesome fate for an inexperienced Guardian. Vandals, Dregs, Shanks, Servitors, and one Captain filled the cave, and already have their sights set on her. A moment of stillness sits between them before the plasma bullet storm rains. She dives behind a stalagmite, and takes out all of the Shanks and Servitors. Anyone else that decides to go for a melee kill also suffers a similar fate. It wasn't until the Captain himself engaged her that things started getting out of control.

Her final arrow downed three more Shanks when she noticed the Captain looming over her. They jump at her for an attack, but she has a few tricks up her sleeve as well. She slams her hands onto their furry shoulders to brace for the attack. It never comes... She knows that it won't. Everyone in the cavern stops in their tracks. They only stare at the audacity of their enemy. She glances around the cavern at all the faces of the other Elikzni. They're between lowering their weapons and firing at her. She looks the Captain in the eyes. They don't move, but their eyes are pleading with her to do something about this. She tenses and bares her teeth in awkward solidarity. This has to go one way or the other, so...

Aloy runs her hands back and forth through the Captain's fur. The others let out a shocked screech at the action. Half of them even drop their weapons at the sight. The Captain feels differently of the situation. They turn to pudding as she scratches them in what seemed to be all

the right places. They even go so far as to lean on her shoulder for support. She could hear them faintly purring at the sensations. She did her best not to laugh for fear of offending the entire pack. As soon as they stop purring, she gently sets them on the ground.

A Vandal jumps at her with two blades at the ready. She pushes them away to pet them too. They screech at her, and she backs away from them with her hands up. The cavern sits in stillness again. The Vandal stands there in silence as they stare at the floor.

Am I missing something here, Ghost inquires, ***because I don't understand what just happened.***

Eliksni are sensitive to touch, especially around the furred areas. They save these kinds of encounters with family and loved ones, Aloy explains, *They don't like it when you do it out of the blue like this. It's considered a taboo when it's between strangers.*

Then, why did you do that?

Watch.

The Vandal shakes their head. They gently grab her hands, and place them on their head. The Dregs begin to laugh at the encounter. One of them even falls to the ground, they're laughing so much. The other Vandals shake their heads at their comrade. The singled out Vandal screams at the others. Those screams are quelled by the gentle petting of yours truly.

See? I knew I heard a Vandal get called a homewrecker.

That's insane, Ghost chastises, ***How long have you known about this?***

Since my encounter with the House of Rain. I've seen them do it, asked about it, and now I know.

I wonder what they're saying to each other...

They're talking about how promiscuous this Vandal is by allowing a Guardian to touch them like this. It's kind of hilarious, given the connotations.

Wait, what?

The Vandal leans against her for support, and she also lays them gently on the ground.

The other Eliksni attack all at once. The Dregs each grab one of her limbs as the Vandals keep their guns trained on her. More Dregs support their Captain and Vandal before they all head out of the cavern. They backtracked through the gorge, and headed across the Cosmodrome. Ghost immediately sends out a distress signal to the Tower for any fireteam to come to the rescue. It'll be an hour until anyone arrives on the scene, but by then it might be too late for our heroes.

The Eliksni bring Aloy into a different cave system lined with lamps of light and ether. Within cave pockets lie Prime Servitors. Each of them turn slowly and ominously to watch the bounty of their incoming Eliksni. They silently leave their pockets to follow them to the end of the cave. The path leads to an enormous cavern decorated in House banners, more intricate lighting hung from the walls, soldiers, and bigger Servitors. The Eliksni standing guard pointed their weapons at their incoming brethren. The returning drop their prisoner at their feet, as the Prime Servitors line the walls. The returning begin to explain the situation.

Aloy staggers to her knees. "Very warm welcome, guys..."

Ghost speaks to her again. ***What's going on?***

They're asking to speak with their Kell.

Gee, I wonder why...

The Eliksni practically scream at each other at this point as one of the other Vandals face a Baron. The rest of the incoming Vandals back their comrade, as if preparing for a brawl. She can only watch helplessly from her spot as their arguments escalate. One of the Dregs pointing their weapon at her shakes their head.

Can't believe a Guardian's going to tear us apart, they grumble.

I'm not doing anything, Aloy murmurs.

The entire room falls silent. Eliksni from every corner turn to stare. Even the Servitors float closer to the prisoner in curiosity. Did they hear that right? Here sits a Guardian speaking their language almost flawlessly? The Baron weaves past the Vandals, and approaches her. She tries to scurry away, but the Dregs keeping her make a point of not letting her go. With a knife to her back and her neck, all she can do is stare in panic as the Baron settles inches from her face.

How have you come by our language, he hisses.

It's now or never, and it all comes down to this one moment.

Aloy swallows hard. **I have been fortunate enough to befriend a House in my past.**

What House would this be?

The House of Rain.

Chatters of disbelief echo through the cavern. Glancing around, the Baron holds up a hand to silence them all.

He turns back to Aloy. **That's impossible. The House of Rain perished in the Whirlwind on our home planet eons ago.**

Maybe, but that's what they called themselves. An Eliksni by the name of Zolvaks saw the potential of an alliance when his people needed it most. He taught me your language to strengthen the bond between the Eliksni and us humans. Thankfully, his Kell heeded his advice and we were able to vanquish all of our foes together.

Who is this Kell you speak of?

Irivan, the Unbroken.

Silence.

What's going on, Ghost inquires, *What did you say to them?*

That's quite enough, Guardian. The Kell finally makes her appearance known. She steps out from the shadows, and crouches to the ground. **Do you really think that you could convince us that a noble, Eliksni House, which was already wiped out, was wiped out *again* alongside the Wildlanders?**

Aloy narrows her eyes at the accusation. **I know you would believe the truth. I have spoke nothing but.**

Have you? Even if we were to believe your outlandish claims, why would we let you leave here? You pose nothing but a threat to us.

Do I?

You have attacked our people, and claimed countless Eliksni lives. I say that counts.

I've only attacked when your soldiers attacked.

The Kell rolls her eyes. A rare trait for Eliksni...

Aloy holds her arms out. **I haven't attacked any of you, and as of now, I have no reason to.**

You're outnumbered here.

But not necessarily outmatched.

The Kell stands to her full height. **Is that a threat?**

Depends. Maybe fate smiles on both of us this day, and we leave on amicable terms.

Improbable, given the paths our lives lead. The Kell takes a long look at Aloy. **Who are you? No being on Earth outside of our noble Houses can understand our language let alone speak it in the dialect as you do. The Eliksni who spoke in that exact same way have long perished.**

Surely another outsider has understood the language before me.

The Kell hesitates, **There was one long ago who used technology to help her learn to speak and read our language. Given how archaic her equipment was, we don't understand how the humans could comprehend us in such a short amount of time.**

Did it look like this? Aloy tucks her hair behind her ear to reveal a glowing, triangular device.

What? How? The Kell approaches her, and holds her head in her hands to observe the device closer. **How have you come by this device? There's only a handful of its kind, and it was last in the hands of a tribe of humans who disappeared eons ago. One of them actually made friends with us... like you... said...** Realization dawns on her as she can only stare at the Guardian before her.

Died, actually. Aloy turns to the Kell. **Buuuut, she was resurrected as a Guardian, and thankfully, she had this device on her to help her remember everything about her past life.**

The Kell's attentive silence urges her to continue.

She especially remembers her Elikśni friends that lived with the Wildlanders. And one of their younglings stood out to her when she first met her new friends. Though inexperienced, the youngling was feisty, courageous, and determined to bring the House of Rain glory and honor. She wonders what happened to that Elikśni and the rest of that House, but it seems that youngling is keeping her promise to her people.

The Kell can only stare as her words permeate the air. **Aloy?**

You've grown since we've last seen each other, Iryxas.

Iryxas punches her in the shoulder. **That's all you have to say to me after all this time?! You have been dead for almost five hundred annuals, and that's all you have to say for yourself?** She punches her again. **How could you?! How could you side with those murderers after everything we've been through? After what you know our people have gone through with the Great Machine and the Whirlwind that took it away from us?**

Aloy hugs Iryxas close. **I'm sorry, Ryx, I'm sorry.**

They killed everyone... Iryxas almost sobs. **Everyone...**

What is happening, Ghost pleads, **I am so confused!**

I knew this woman at one point, back when she was just a child, Aloy explains, *Call off the distress signal. I think we're safe here.*

I... Okay.

What do we do? One of the Dregs keeps their weapon trained on Aloy.

Most of the others shrug.

Lower your weapons, but stay alert, the Baron orders.

The other Elikśni do as their told. They can only watch as Aloy rocks Iryxas back and forth, petting her fur. This was such a weird situation for them. Iryxas crying was normal. She cries at everything from newborn broods to life threatening battles. But to be soothed by an outsider? And a Guardian of all things? No. Not to mention the fact that she knows whom this Guardian is. However, they don't dare to intervene. They only watch on as a Guardian calms their beloved Kell. Few of them may know it, but this moment was the beginning of a healing process for both Elikśni and Guardians alike.

:° ✧ ❁ ✧ ° :

The Hall of Heroes stands quiet this day. Not in grievance, but in thoughtful confusion... Before the Vanguard sits their classless, Lightless recruit and her ghost who have recently returned from patrolling the Cosmodrome. Earlier, said ghost sent out a distress signal to rescue his kidnapped Guardian from the clutches of the Fallen. Thirty minutes later, the signal was cancelled, yet here they are, unharmed. They have quite the conundrum on their hands given the facts they had before them: eyewitness accounts of her fighting with just her fists or stolen enemy weapons, her ghost telling this fantastic tale of his Guardian talking her way out of execution in the Fallen language, and said Guardian refusing to accept or deny the truth of the matter. In fact, she's not speaking to them at all, not even her ghost.

"... So, that's basically what happened," Ghost explained, "Or rather, it's what I understood happened."

"Guardian, would you like to add anything," Zavala asks.

Aloy shakes her head.

"Alright, let it be known that we have another Fallen House hiding out in the Cosmodrome in the caverns near the Skywatch. We search and exterminate them immediately." He turns to Aloy and Ghost. "We'll call upon you if you're needed again."

Aloy and Ghost leave the Hall for their quarters.

Ghost floats by her side. "Those Fallen are already long gone, aren't they?"

"Of course."

"Why? What did you say to them?"

Aloy stops and rolls her shoulders. She lowers her voice to a whisper. "That Kell is a good friend of mine. Her name is Iryxas, and I've known her since she was a child. Now, if we play our cards just right, we might find ourselves in the middle of reconciling the Elikśni Houses and the City."

"What?" Ghost floats in front of her. "Did one of those Fallen hit you too hard on the head? The Consensus won't allow it, let alone the Vanguard. Not after everything that happened between us."

"If the City's own Factions can reconcile their differences, they can do the same with the Elikśni."

"That's different."

"Is it? If a bunch of savages like me can reconcile with an alien race, why can't the City?"

"Because... they're trying to take the one thing that keeps us alive and flourishing. They want to kill all of us for the Traveler. Who knows what they plan to do to it if they succeed?"

"Worship it, probably." Aloy holds her hands out. "It's not like we're doing anything different."

Ghost barely lets out a laugh. "I can't believe we're having this conversation."

Aloy stops at the banister looking out over the City, and leans on her hands. "You know, I don't understand why the City would think an alliance with the Elikśni is a bad idea. If I didn't know any better, I'd say humanity wants to die."

"It's probably good that you don't know better."

"But, as a surviving species, don't you think that's a bit counterintuitive? What else could we possibly lose at this point?"

"Our home, our friends, our colleagues, the Traveler, its Light... It'll take me all day to finish this list, and I'm being generous."

Aloy leans close to him. “Ha. You think you’re so funny.”

“I know I’m funny, and *this* isn’t funny.”

“Be honest though... They’re trying to fend off the Darkness just like us. It would be better if we worked together.”

“And how do you know that the Fallen want to work with us?”

“They don’t have to want it. They just need to see the necessity in it.”

“Not like you can ask them nicely. They’ll just start shooting at us.”

“Not necessarily. I mean, has anyone tried?”

“No, and *exactly* for that reason. I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

Aloy turns her gaze to the City just as the sun begins to set over the horizon. The Traveler floats lifelessly above the remains of humanity as a reminder of the Collapse. A reminder of what humanity strives to never let happen again... A reminder of what humanity fights for... Why not share that sentiment with those who were also under the influence of the Traveler? It’s not like it’s going to protest the idea. It’s a force of good in this world, and brotherhood is a force of good... right? Besides, the Elikśni have basked in the Traveler’s light as its allies long ago, and their feelings haven’t changed since they were abandoned.

She tightly balls her hands into fists. Why does everyone think that everything has to be solved with violence? This City, all of its citizens, and the Guardians that protect them all believe that they’re more sophisticated than those who refuse to live within the walls. Maybe that’s true on the surface, but in the end, they’re still scared of the unknown. Only instead of choosing the peaceful path of cooperation, they decide to kill everything that opposes the Traveler. A force of good... That doesn’t sound like that actions of the good guys, does it? Then again, the Traveler is dormant, and the only one who can speak for it is the Speaker. Does he really speak for the Traveler? Or only himself?

She sighs. There *has* to be another way.

“What are you thinking over there,” Ghost asks, “You know I don’t like it when you keep things form me.”

“Nothing important.” Aloy lets go of the banister, and walks away with a plan formulating in her mind. “We just have a busy week ahead of us.”

THE ALEXANDRIA CONSPIRACY: A JOEL KNIGHT STORY

Honorable Mention

By: Ben Gremillion

1:22 PM CDT

Tuesday, April 8

Alexandria International Airport (AEX)

Alexandria, LA

I love air travel. I really do. But just like anything in the world, it's flawed. Namely, its flaw is the seeming eternity it takes to do anything. You have to wait in long security lines, wait hours on end to board a flight, wait in the plane before takeoff, and- the worst of all- wait to get off the plane once you've landed.

I was on board an Embraer ERJ145, a twin-engine regional jet, operated by Envoy Air under the American Eagle brand. The plane was sitting on the tarmac at Alexandria International Airport, and I was waiting to disembark and begin doing what I had come for after an uneventful flight from DFW to AEX. Despite being on official business for the United States Department of Justice, I had bought my own ticket from Dallas to the central Louisiana city of Alexandria, and thus was seated in economy, in the third-to-last row. I now drummed my fingers impatiently on my armrest as passengers began to exit the aircraft at an amoeba's pace.

My name is Joel Knight. My title is Special Agent. My employer is the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and my specialty is counterterrorism. I had been called to the decent-sized Rapides Parish seat to aid in the investigation of a recent bombing suspected to be the work of a homegrown Islamic State loyalist.

At long last, the seats in front of me cleared. I grabbed my personal bag from under my seat, my carry-on from the overhead bin, and shuffled into the aisle. I then proceeded toward the forward passenger door, ducking to avoid the small jet's low ceiling. I walked through the jetway and reached the terminal, finally stepping out of the security area into the main waiting area. Once I was there, I was greeted by a tall red-haired man in a New Orleans Saints sweatshirt and a medium-height Hispanic woman in a windbreaker embroidered with the letters *APD*.

"Special Agent Knight?" the red-haired man queried.

"That's me."

He extended his hand, which I shook. "Special Agent Dylan Boswell. I'm with the Alexandria RA." He was using the acronym for "resident agency", a term denoting the FBI's many satellite offices in smaller cities like Alexandria.

"Good to meet you," I said.

The woman then shook my hand as well. "Lieutenant Nicole Espinosa, Alexandria Police Department."

"Good to meet you as well," I replied.

Boswell motioned toward the escalators, which led down to the airport's main lobby. "Got any checked luggage? The claim's down there."

"My P229," I replied, referring to my weapon of choice, a Sig Sauer automatic pistol. "Can't bring that in my personal item. But that's it; I have everything else right here." I lifted up my personal and carry-on bags. "Clothes, toothpaste, secret Taco Bell stash. All I need."

We went downstairs, where I retrieved my handgun case from the baggage claim. The rental offices were right across from the claim, so I booked a red 2015 Ford Taurus. I found it in the rental lot and followed Boswell and Espinosa to downtown, where I checked into a Holiday Inn near the FBI's resident agency.

I walked to the RA. When I got there, I was directed to the office of Boswell, who it turned out was the Bureau's number-two man in Alexandria. He and Espinosa were waiting there for me, and Espinosa held a file folder in her left hand.

"Keep this," she told me, handing me the folder. "It goes into more detail. You can read it tonight. But Dylan will give you the basic rundown."

"Thanks," I said, opening the file and glancing at its first page. It bore a picture of a young man, probably not much older than twenty, walking through a store aisle in a gray hoodie. It was clearly a security camera photo.

"That guy is Amir Esfahani," Boswell told me. "Age twenty-three. From Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Parents are from Esfahan, Iran- hence the regional surname. Yesterday, he perpetrated a suicide bombing at Walmart on Highway 28 West. Killed three civilians- which is why you're here, of course. Security cameras showed him carrying out the attack, and NCIC matched his face to a burglary mugshot in Cedar Rapids. Nicole showed the mugshot to witnesses, and they positively ID'd him." NCIC was the acronym for the FBI's National Crime Information Center, the criminal database available to local, county/parish, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

"What was his supposed reason for being in Alexandria?" I inquired.

Lieutenant Espinosa took that one. "We don't know. No family here or anything like that. All we know is that he flew in from Des Moines, through Atlanta, on Wednesday the second. Stayed in Best Western on MacArthur Drive."

"And how do you know he's loyal to ISIS?" I asked. "Social media?"

Espinosa shook her head. "Nothing suspicious on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. The only indication was his words right before the attack. Witnesses say he shouted, 'I serve Allah and the Islamic State!'"

"Well, that's strange," I remarked, "because ISIS is a Sunni Muslim organization. Iran is a majority-Shi'a Muslim country. Different theology. Of course, there are Iranian Sunnis, but most people there are Shi'ites. It seems a little odd."

"You're right," Boswell conceded, "but right now we really don't know much. But we should definitely keep that in mind."

I agreed. "Do we have any idea if he was a lone wolf or if there's a terrorist cell?"

"No evidence of a cell," Espinosa responded, "but again, we don't know."

We stayed at the RA for the rest of the day, talking about the case, looking through files and security footage and Esfahani's personal records, but nothing significant came about. So that night, I retired to my hotel room and prayed that there wasn't an ISIS cell operating in the United States.

9:18 AM CDT
Wednesday, April 9
FBI Resident Agency
Alexandria, LA

I had been awake for four hours when we got our first major break. It was shocking to have such a big development in such a short time, but what was even more shocking was that it meant my fears may have been realized.

It was a little past nine when Boswell's office phone rang and he took the call. "Mike, how are you?" he said into the phone. "Say what?...You're sure?...Hold on, let me write this down." He scribbled something on a piece of note paper. "Thanks, Mike. You may have saved a lot of lives."

"What's going on?" Espinosa asked anxiously.

Boswell inhaled deeply, then exhaled. "That was a friend of mine at ICE," he announced, referring to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "They've been monitoring this guy, Abdol Hosseini, age thirty-five, who moved here from Bandar Abbas, Iran six years ago. He came here illegally, but was never deported. He's been living in Billings, Montana for the past six years, but on Monday he flew from Billings to New Orleans and took a rental car to Alexandria. And guess what happened last night?" Boswell shoved his illegible notes in my face. "Hosseini and a local black market weapons dealer, Frank Alford, were arrested by Rapides Parish Sheriff when Hosseini attempted to purchase several pounds of C4 plastic explosive from Alford. The sheriff's office had an informant close to Alford, and he blew the whistle on the transaction."

"Another Iranian, from another part of the US again," I remarked. "There has to be something going on here that we can't see."

"Let's go talk to Hosseini," Espinosa suggested.

"He and Alford are at DC-1 on Johnston Street," said Boswell. "Let's go."

9:32 AM CDT

Wednesday, April 9

Rapides Parish Detention Center I (DC-1)

Alexandria, LA

DC-1 was the primary jail of Rapides Parish, and was also where pre-trial prisoners were held. It was downtown, not far from the FBI RA, and in a matter of minutes I was seated in an interrogation room, across a table from a handcuffed Abdol Hosseini.

He was a large, muscular man with narrow eyes and a receding hairline. He stared maliciously at me, as if daring me to speak to him.

Rule number one in interrogation: establish dominance.

"C4, huh?" I said, casually leaning back in my chair. "Esfahani used a suicide vest. I guess you're too cowardly to martyr yourself, aren't you? Just plant the explosives and use a remote detonator, no harm done."

To my astonishment, a look of genuine confusion crossed Hosseini's face. "Who's Esfahani?"

Initially, I was perplexed. But suddenly it became clear to me: someone had sent the two attackers separately, not telling them about each other. That way, I supposed, if one was caught, he couldn't expose the other.

That meant there *was* a cell.

And there were probably more of its members on the way.

I tried a different line of questioning: "What was your target going to be?"

Hosseini grinned. Clearly, I was getting to his ego. "Cherokee Elementary School."

My blood boiled. *What an evil, depraved man.* But I had to keep my cool to save more lives, so I swallowed my rage and inquired, "Did the person who told you to do this pick the target?"

He shook his head, smiling wickedly. "All my idea. He just told me to kill infidels."

"So there is someone who sent you."

"Of course. Allah sent me."

“A human being, Abdol. I want a name.”

“Allah’s name is not enough?”

I paused for a minute, thinking. “Abdol, are you loyal to ISIS?”

“Yes, I serve Allah and the Islamic State.”

“So you’re a Sunni, not a Shi’ite.”

“I serve Allah and the Islamic State.”

“Amazing how we’ve got two Iranian Sunnis in two days who are loyal to ISIS,” I commented. “I’m starting to doubt that you’re really who you say you are, Abdol.”

He shrugged. “Then doubt it. I don’t care.”

I nodded, standing up. “That’s fine. But just remember, you’ve admitted to conspiring to commit a terrorist attack on American soil. You’re not a US citizen. That means Guantanamo Bay. Not a happy place, Abdol.”

With that, I exited the interrogation room and walked up to Boswell and Espinosa, who had been listening through a microphone. Looking at Espinosa and gesturing toward the room, I said, “Bad cop’s done here. Have at it, good cop. But, as you can see, he’s a hard nut to crack.”

She gave a half-smile. “I’ll give it a try.” Then she walked into the interrogation room.

I turned to Boswell. “You heard him say he doesn’t know Esfahani, right?”

“Yeah, but he could be lying,” the red-haired agent replied.

“He could be, but it would make sense if he were telling the truth. Think about it. Compartmentalization. No one knows anything about the plan beyond their part in it. It’s a good way to keep secrets.”

“You’re right,” Boswell said. “And it tells me that someone knows what they’re doing.”

“An organized nationwide cell,” I replied. “And I bet I know who’s sanctioning it.”

“Tehran.”

“Yep. But look, I had an idea. I want to talk to Frank Alford. It seems he’s a big name in the local underworld, and there probably isn’t that much organized crime in a place like Alexandria. Unless Esfahani got his weapons in another city, he likely went through Alford as well- and so might future attackers.”

“Let’s give it a shot,” Boswell said.

Soon I was in a second interrogation room, sitting across from a raggedy, pale twig of a man who until last night had controlled central Louisiana’s illicit weapons market. Next to him was a well-dressed gray-haired man who introduced himself as Nelson Mills, Alford’s lawyer.

“Frank, you’ve provided material support to a terrorist organization,” I told Alford. He squirmed nervously. I stared at him intensely, unblinking. “That’s treason.”

“I didn’t know they wanted to blow people up!” he protested.

“What else do you use a suicide vest for? Come on, Frank, you’re an illicit arms dealer. Don’t try to tell me that you didn’t know your clients intended to hurt people.”

He sat silently, nervously biting his lip.

“You’re going down for a long time,” I said. “But you can make it shorter. All you have to do is tell me if anyone else from Iran made any contact with you.”

He sat there, looking down at his feet, pondering. Finally he turned to Nelson Mills and said, “Get me a plea deal. Now.”

12:47 PM CDT
Wednesday, April 9
FBI Resident Agency
Alexandria, LA

Lieutenant Espinosa hadn't gotten any more out of Hosseini than I had, but we had what we needed anyway. Alford had identified twenty-seven-year-old Farrokh Khavari of Providence, Rhode Island, born in Qom, Iran, as purchasing a Makarov nine-millimeter pistol several days ago. Khavari had moved to America at age ten, and was only in the NCIC database for misdemeanor theft. But he was definitely our guy, and Espinosa had APD combing the city for him.

Suddenly there was a knock on Boswell's office door. He opened it to reveal a large man in a black suit and tie, with dark hair and rough features.

"Can I help you?" Boswell inquired.

"Special Agent Boswell?" the man responded.

"That's me." Boswell extended his hand. "And you are?"

The man shook Boswell's hand. "Jason Cole, Deputy US Marshal."

"Nice meeting you," Boswell replied. "This is Special Agent Joel Knight from the Bureau's Dallas Field Office, and Lieutenant Nicole Espinosa of the Alexandria Police. How can we help you?"

Cole motioned to someone outside the office door, and a moment later there appeared a tall, thin, Middle Eastern man in his sixties or seventies. "Dr. Reza Shirazi," he introduced himself to us. Then he declared, "I'm the reason all this is happening."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Shirazi took a deep breath. "I am a nuclear physicist from Tehran. I worked in the Iranian nuclear program. The government told me I would be helping to produce nuclear reactors to power our cities. To make the Iranian people's lives better. But they lied to me. When I found out that they actually wanted me to make nuclear weapons to use against Israel and possibly America, I fled the country. I went to Israel, but Iran has a strong presence in Lebanon and Syria, both right across the border. There were several attempts on my life. So the Israeli government made a deal with the US, and I was placed in the Witness Security Program under the care of the US Marshals. They gave me a fake identity and sent me to Alexandria, but now it seems Tehran has tracked me down."

Boswell, Espinosa, and I stood speechless. Deputy Marshal Cole spoke up, saying, "The US Marshals Service wanted to inform the FBI and APD's investigation of this matter."

I informed Shirazi and Cole of our new suspect, Farrokh Khavari, then wondered aloud, "So why the false-flag ISIS attacks?"

"Plausible deniability, I guess," Espinosa suggested. "Tehran can deny involvement in the murder of a defector on US soil by blaming the attacks on an ISIS cell comprised of the Iranian Sunni minority."

"So how do we know how many more Iranian agents are coming after you, Dr. Shirazi?" Boswell mused.

"If Khavari comes after Dr. Shirazi, he's probably the last one," I replied.

"How so?"

"Because Tehran would want to limit the possibility of exposure. More fake ISIS attacks after they complete the mission would unnecessarily increase the risk of the Iranian government

being implicated. Of course, that's all guesswork, but if we catch Khavari, he could certainly tell us a lot about all of this. Why don't we set a trap for him? I've got a plan."

Cole shrugged. "I'm open for suggestions. Let's hear it."

I stood up and began pacing around the office, a lifelong habit that always helped me think. "I'm going to call my friend Ricky Wayne in the FBI Cybercrimes Division," I announced. "At six p.m., Farrokh Khavari is going to get a phone call, ostensibly from an Iranian number. He'll be told that Dr. Shirazi will be at the food court in the Alexandria Mall from seven to eight this evening. If he knows the name Reza Shirazi, it's probably because he's the one sent to kill him. Either way, he'll be told to eliminate you, Doctor-" I looked Shirazi's way- "and he'll show up at the mall. But you'll be safely hiding at the RA. Meanwhile, the four of us will be at the mall, and we'll have plainclothes APD officers covering all the entrances. We'll catch Khavari for sure."

I looked around the room. "So who's in?"

Not surprisingly, everyone was.

7:57 PM CDT

Wednesday, April 9

Alexandria Mall Food Court

Alexandria, LA

The Alexandria Mall was not very busy, especially at seven o'clock. The food court consisted of a raised platform with dozens of tables, now mostly empty, surrounded on three sides by restaurants. I sat alone at a table, consuming my fourth Chick-Fil-A sandwich, and at other tables were stationed Special Agent Boswell, Lieutenant Espinosa, and Deputy Marshal Cole.

"Three minutes," I radioed to the group over a microphone hidden on my shirt. "He's got three minutes to get here."

"Give him five extra after it turns eight," Boswell replied. "Even terrorists get stuck in traffic sometimes."

"Sounds good," I responded.

But, at 8:05 p.m., Khavari still had not come.

The game was up. It was time to do what I'd come for.

I walked to the trash can and threw away my empty Chick-Fil-A bag. Strolling over to one table, I pulled my Sig Sauer P229 from its holster and pointed it at the Iranian mole in the United States government.

"Jason Cole, you are under arrest for aiding the enemy," I announced.

The marshal spit out his drink. "*What?!*"

"Put your hands where I can see them," I ordered.

Boswell stood up. "Knight, what on earth are you doing?"

"*Hands up, Cole!*"

Reluctantly, Cole complied. I removed his sidearm, put him in handcuffs, and quickly searched him.

"How do you think the Iranians knew where Dr. Shirazi was?" I asked Boswell rhetorically. By now the whole mall was watching. "Someone on the inside had to be feeding them information. Someone in Jerusalem, Washington, or Alexandria. So I started with the suspect closest to Dr. Shirazi- Deputy Marshal Cole."

"How do you know it's him?" asked Espinosa.

“Because Khavari didn’t show up to the mall,” I replied. “He was warned it was a trap. And I can prove that.”

Cole scoffed. “How?”

I grinned. “Because Khavari was taken into custody by the FBI half an hour ago. He tried to shoot up the RA, but I’d told security ahead of time he’d be there. Of course, he went there because you, Cole, told him that was where Shirazi was- because that’s where I said he would be. In reality, Shirazi’s in protective custody with the Rapides Parish Sheriff’s Office at DC-1. Sorry to keep you others out of the loop, but I couldn’t let this slip.”

“Fine by me,” said Boswell, astonished.

I motioned to one of the plainclothes APD officers. “Mirandize him, please, Corporal. Thank you.” I handed Cole off to the patrolman.

Boswell shook his head in disbelief. “That’s one too many heart attacks today,” he said.

“But it’s one more good man who won’t be murdered,” I replied. That, I think, was well worth the price.

3:26 PM CDT
Thursday, April 10
34,500 feet above sea level
Near Dallas, TX

I love air travel. I really do. But just like anything in the world, it’s flawed. However, in the end, it’s worth all the long waits for the feeling you get when you look down at the ground miles below, knowing you’re en route to some exciting location. I still think all airlines should give out those little cookies like Delta does, though. That would be an improvement.

After a good night’s sleep in my hotel room and a farewell breakfast with Dylan Boswell and Nicole Espinosa, I had to leave. As usual, there were many long airport waits, including- *oh, the joy!*- a boarding delay for a landing gear malfunction, but finally I got up in the sky and headed back home.

Dr. Shirazi was safe in God-knows-where small-town USA, with a new US Marshals liaison who didn’t want to betray him to his mortal enemies- always a nice commodity. Jason Cole had given up the Iranian contact who paid him, and the contact in turn gave up the cell’s ringleader and directly implicated the Iranian government in the conspiracy. In the ringleader’s New York City apartment, federal agents discovered a complete list of the cell’s members nationwide, and at the very moment that I was descending back toward Dallas, dozens of FBI and Homeland Security raids were being executed across the country. Meanwhile, all in the same busy news day, the US and Israeli governments announced a plan for joint war games to show the Tehran regime they meant business.

As for me, it was time to simply relax. When I got back to Dallas, I was sure there would soon be another threat to protect the country from, but for now I could rest knowing that wicked men had failed and freedom’s bell tolled on.

MY SUNSHINE

3rd Place

By: Gabrielle Hooper

If you ask a woman what her color is, she will proceed in a lengthy conversation of each particular color she likes best. Blue goes well with her skin tone. Red makes her figure look curvy. Green causes her eyes to shine. There is a different explanation each time.

Black is my color. Black heels. Black leather jacket. Black dress. Black jeans. Black. I wear it everywhere, everyday. You can imagine that deciding on an outfit for a funeral is not difficult.

My color was not always black. In fact, it used to be yellow. I couldn't get enough of it. Yellow bracelets. Yellow dresses. Yellow scarves. The color reminded me of happy, sunny days, which always made me smile. My mother would later regret forcing me with a black and blue dress for the funeral. "Yellow just isn't appropriate for this sort of occasion." The yellow was mixed with black at first, then altogether stuffed to the back of the closet. The yellow became too bright for my eyes.

"It won't take long. Maybe a couple of hours to see the shape of the house and sort through what belongs to us." My mother has said this three times while driving to the house. Whether she is saying it to reassure herself or to get me to respond is unclear. Either way she knows I only came out of support, not because I wanted to.

It is obvious the house hasn't been lived in for months. Dust coats the furniture causing a musty smell to flow throughout the house. Mom seems to hesitate in the doorway as she looks around. I take her hand and lead her to the kitchen. "How about you start here and I handle the bedroom." She gives me a grateful smile as she walks to one of the cabinets. I notice as she turns the familiar tissue bulge in her back pocket.

There isn't much in the bedroom. It was the room that was partially cleaned months ago. No clothes. No bedspread. Just furniture and filled boxes. The closet door is closed. I take this as my first challenge and pull hard on the door. More dust and lightly packed boxes on the floor. These, however, have no writing on them like the one's stacked along the wall. This closet hasn't been looked through yet.

Kneeling, I reach for the first box that obeys to my tug. Each box I go through, loading what is left to us, and putting aside what is for others. My pace is fast, not thoroughly looking at each item, just sorting. There needs to be at least one strong person in the house and it is not going to be the one in the kitchen. I can see the last few boxes in the closet. In the farthest right there is a jewelry box that catches my eye. My eyes recognize it immediately and before I know it, I am sitting cross legged with my hands greedily reaching for it. Holding my breath I open it. As I hoped, a tiny ballerina pops up and begins to dance to the twinkling music. Around and around she spins in front of me. She dances as if she hasn't been stuck in the box, frozen, for months.

When the music stops, the trance is broken. The ballerina is frozen once more. I wind it up, yearning for the music once hummed so many times by *her*. As it plays I sing along and open the many drawers of the antique jewelry box. I am eight again. Trying the costume jewelry on

and posing in front of the dusty mirror. Clunking around in the shoes that were once too big for me. Adorning hats meant only for tea time or strolling in the garden. Curtsying to potential suitors than joining them in a dance.

The music stops. The trance is broken.

How ridiculous I look. This is exactly what I wanted to avoid. Slowly I relent all the items in their designated place. Before closing everything, I gaze at the ballerina one last time. Beside her, somehow I missed a parchment of paper. As I look it over, I realize it is a neatly folded letter. With trembling hands, I lift it from the box, feeling that within there is an odd shaped item.

I glance over my shoulder then turn the parchment over. With a gasp I see in familiar handwriting my name in the left hand corner. Impatiently I open the letter and dump the contents in my lap. Out falls a letter and a simple gold chain necklace with a beautiful sun pendant.

My Butterfly,

I saw this necklace and thought of the ray of sunshine you have become for everyone. You have truly blossomed into a beautiful young woman. Don't stop shining!

Love,

Mommo

I am in shock. My face is damp from the tears that are never allowed out of their cage. As I am putting the necklace on in front of the mirror that has seen so much and spoken of none of it, my mother walks in. Her eyes match my puffy eyes and her nose is red from the tissues she has rubbed it on. I can see her confusion from how much my face mirrors hers. "What did you find?" she says looking from my newly decorated neck, the still opened jewelry box, to the letter lying beside it.

I found my sunshine.

SEE YOU AROUND

2nd Place

By: Brandon Pitchford

Adam woke up knowing that today was the day. The occasion did not change his morning routine. He slipped on his favorite sweatpants and graphic pullover of a doodled, sleepy cat hovering over the phrase “Not Today.” He slid headphones into his ears and picked the most depressing album within his ipod, which took time off his set routine since there was many to choose from. Slowed down by at least five minutes, he finally began his walk downtown. He couldn’t keep the thought out of his mind, but it was culminated in guilts, regrets, and a seething dread. The guilt was the worst part, and he strolled down the street apprehensive as even the old art-deco buildings, blackened by decades of rain and dust, seemed to warp looming over and glaring at him. And yet the passersby were unusually friendly. Everyone smiled and nodded at Adam and a few even giggled and pointed to his “relatable” pullover. This contrasted with his sadness battling it with a feeling of slight pleasure. “Not today,” they would smirk and laugh. *Not today*, he kept thinking on the way. The bridge to downtown was just ahead.

Adam made it halfway across the bridge’s walkway and stopped to rest his arms and chin on the rail to look to the brown water below. The currents whipped the water in every direction creating a ballet of whirlpools. He wondered how strong the currents were. None of the cars slowed down as they zipped by. A person on a bike would pass him every now and again greeting him and one rider went as far as to ask how he was doing. A few people walking across the bridge had took a moment to say hello as well. “I love your hair!” a girl stopped to compliment him. Adam’s hair was long, mostly black but with bright blue bangs that hung over his face. He smiled, but before he could reply the girl laughed and said “Not today.” She bid him to have a good day and kept walking. Adam chuckled with a half-smile and quaked. His hands massaged the railing as he looked back down to the dancing waters below. *Not today* echoed over the guilt and the loud silence that had been in his head. He hesitated.

Adam went to work after all. He was a few minutes late, but his boss made no comment and only said it was good to see him. It was a slow day but he made a few cups of coffee and everyone had smiled and had told him they hoped he would have a good day before he could wish them the same. His shift slowed down until an old man wandered in. He wore striped

suspenders that kept his pants high above his waist with a small purple vest covered in patches and pockets. His face was as bright as his attire and his smile gleamed and his spectacles sparkled. “A small cappuccino and a *hello*, please,” he said after a warm greeting. Adam frothed the milk and pulled the espresso; the shots came out perfectly and the foam smooth without big bubbles. The old man sipped and his face lit up brighter than his excitement when he first walked in. Adam gave him his hello and blushed when he realized he had actually smiled. “Perfect!” the old man exclaimed. He had to ask how it was done for there was something just different about the cappuccino that Adam made compared to the other coffee shops he’s been. Adam shrugged and said it was his favorite drink to make.

“It’s nice to meet someone, even modestly, passionate about what they do,” the old man smiled. “If one is to serve bad coffee, they could at least smile. You serve great coffee with a smile.” They spoke for most of the shift about coffee and Adam learned the old man used to be a barista as well. The old man laughed a lot and always smiled even when quiet. He listened attentively never broke eye contact. For someone to actually be this interested in everything he said was overwhelming to Adam and he could not help but feel a bit appreciated. Of course, the old man laughed at the sleepy cat on his pullover and chuckled “Not today.” He paused for a moment, his lips trembled but held a grin. The elderly man said he remembered something and abruptly walked off while snagging a napkin and a pen from the counter. He returned with a ten dollar tip for a three dollar coffee and slid it across the counter with a note scrawled neatly on the wrinkled napkin. Adam let out a nervous chuckle as the happy geezer left and gingerly picked up the napkin and read it.

“I am old, alone, and depressed. I was tired of living and having outlived my friends and family. I had planned to kill myself today, but somehow you reminded me that there is still some good and passion in a desolate world, and new people to meet. Thanks for your meaningful company today. See you around. Gordy.”

Adam wiped away some tears and sat with the note during his break. The guilt and sadness had drifted away and he had thought about how powerful of an impact he had on a stranger for just making a decent cup of coffee. He counted the amount of people he made laugh with just a cat on his pullover. He thought of these little things that added up and that alone just made things a little better. He just had a few bad days, but there were plenty more good days like this one to come. He awoke the next days thinking “It’s a new day,” instead. He made sure to greet everyone with a smile, just passing strangers by, as something simple as a smile could change a life or give someone another day.

AN EXCERPT OF *THE CADMIAN AWAKENING*

By: Daniel Fontenot

Dear Editors, Judges, and Esteemed Readers,

This piece was a work that was long overdue, the idea for this story has been years in the making just fumbling around in my head with concepts of themes, characters, and plots. Finally given its chance to shine, I present this piece with the foremost hope that you enjoy this opening excerpt of a continuing saga. This is the story of a boy discovering a machine once thought to have been lost to time as well as the secrets it holds...

<***>

A child sitting atop a great sand dune watched night fade and greeted the new day. He wanted to see the twin moons set into the Scarred Lands before going to work. His grandfather came outside telling the boy to come back, it was time for him to leave and start his day.

“Now remember Rendan, do not talk to the robots or dally around with them. They are dangerous fighters and your job is to fix them, not to be their friend.” His grandfather reminded Rendan of this everyday, to no avail.

Rendan was a curious boy, he talked to the robot fighters while repairing them, although he knew none of them would respond. It made him very unpopular with his boss and the other technicians. They always told him that these fighters would never talk back and that the boy was foolish for doing so.

As he rode the transport to the Arena, he asked his grandfather why the Arenas were made. He explained to Rendan that before the Scarred Lands were created two hundred years ago, the Martian Government separated itself from the United Earth Government and started to collapse after the Blast, the explosion that wiped out the entirety of the Glasgow Providence along with the Martian capital, Meridian. News spread that it was a robot given sentient intelligence named, Elegy Red, that caused the catastrophe, and as a penalty on all of robotkind, they were treated as objects and were forbidden to be given any intelligence whatsoever. Being the objects as the world saw them as, robots were built or captured and forced to fight in the Arenas, large coliseums built to keep the people from focusing on how lame or miserable living on Mars was.

The fights were the only thing to preoccupy the populace and no one dared to pry their eyes away from today of all days. It was the Championship Match. Etude Iron was the reigning champ and was defending his title from the rising star, Virtuoso Gold. Rendan had patched up both bots before and Gold had higher tech under the hood, but Iron was made of much more durable metals and alloys it was visible in his wide and sturdy structure. Even his grandfather agreed that this fight was “one for the ages”.

<***>

Meanwhile in the cool, dry air of the Scarred Lands, a pod hissed and sprayed sterilized air from its entrance and began to open. Revealing a robot that history thought it had forgotten. The machine awoke, it's systems booting up, sensing.

<Designation: Cadmium Chord / Location: Meridian, Glasgow Providence, Mars / Systems: Functional. SENSORS DO NOT MATCH RECORDED DATA OF: Meridian /

Memory: . . . Booting. .ERROR - MEMORY NOT FOUND! / Objective: Search area for lifeforms.>

The land was black, brittle, and pitted; a massive field of hematite. He did not recognize this place from the Meridian from his databases. He had no memory of his life before exiting this stasis pod. He wandered around passing ruins of the city of Meridian, walls that stood with flash burns of scared people huddled together. This place unsettled him, the location was unrecognizable and alien to him.

He wondered to himself, <How long have I been in stasis?> He hoped to be answered when he saw people in a truck in the distance. He waved it in invitation, unaware that it was greedy scavengers who built robots out of the scraps in the Scarred Lands and sold them to the Arenas as cannon fodder. These scavengers were just as unaware of the dangerous individual that they were about to capture.

<***>

The Championship match was underway and things were just heating up as Iron threw a punch throwing Gold into the air. Gold recovers and launches itself off of the nearby wall slamming a knee into the side of Iron's head. Iron crumples at the blow but rolls to the side landing a piston-powered punch down on Gold's chest. Gold's chest now looked like a crushed can, bent in the shape of Iron's hammer-like fist. The crowd roared at Iron's recovery, the arena's rules allowed many forms of combat with very few rules. Robots fight for their lives every time because they can be repaired. People can't.

Gold got back up and faced Iron, fainted a punch making Iron dodge and with that chance kicked in Iron's knee joint, breaking the motor with no chance of repair on the battlefield. On the ground, Gold throws volley after volley of punches into Iron's chest. Iron resorted to its last-ditch effort, its arm contorted and in a flurry of machinery, the lower end of the arm became a cannon. It charged up and shot into Gold's weakened chest, the force launched Gold off of Iron.

Gladiator bots were built to never give up a fight, even to the last scrap of its being. Gold landed with a hard thud, removing what was left of its chestplate revealing the core of Gold's machinery. Lunging forward over Iron, Gold took Iron by the shoulders and drilled its hand through the back plate of Iron's chest ripping out the power core. Iron's body lay on the red dirt floor of the Coliseum, defeated.

Gold raised up the core in triumph and let out a mechanical roar, commanding the audience to follow. The crowd got up and cheered and chanting praises of Gold's victory. Rendan piloted the towing lift to pick up Iron's body and brought it to the pit for repairs. He felt bad for the machine. It was a good champion, it had the armcannon and yet did not use it in any matches until now. It almost seemed... honorable.

The next fight would be less prestigious, it was the Rookie Scraps, fights using robots thrown together and salvaged from anything anywhere. Proving grounds for promising fighters, only an eighth of competitors would pass through to the Leagues. Today was a rare occasion, some scavengers bringing in a bot in nearly mint condition, it was lithe and had a more human compared to the exaggerated figures of other fighters. It looked pristine except for the painted tags on his durocarbon exterior, covering all of the fine craftsmanship and aesthetics that went into this wonderful machine. It was given the name, Cadmium Chord. Fighters were given a name consisting of a musical term and a color to pay homage to Elegy Red, a cute way for people to show they do not forgive robotkind for its atrocity.

Seeing the competitor made Rendan snap from his nerdy stupor, the thing was a behemoth, a homunculus of welded metals and scrap with wires woven through to a central core.

Whether it's junk or not, it is twice the size of any fighter that Rendan had seen. The Scrapheap Behemoth let out a giant roar, rattling its chains and jerking the handlers like ragdolls. Cadmium was David and the Scrapheap Behemoth, his Goliath.

<***>

Cadmium looked around and thought he had been taken to some sort of coliseum, how primitive of a species that once roamed the stars. He was in chains and was being led to a common room with other robots. Upon further investigation and perusal, these robots were not like him, they seemed to be like many other robots before him, programmed. Like a puppet on strings, they had no free will, no consciousness, no feeling. To become them would be akin to having a lobotomy. Cadmium knew his sentience was by design and not by accident. His creator must have been a genius to have done so, he felt sad that he would never meet or remember his creator.

He sat by the gate to the garage and saw this coliseum's last victim, and the young technician who was desperately trying to save it. He tried to speak to the child to explain his predicament but all that came out was a wheeze. His vocal systems were broken. Frustrated, at his inability to articulate, he banged on the gate. The child looked up from his doomed patient, seeing the yellow bot, down-trodden and hopeless.

"Hello, you must be one of the new bots. I'm Rendan." He scrolls through a roster on his wrist-mounted holopad, "Cadmium Chord, that's you?" Cadmium nods. Rendan temporarily overlooked the robot's nonverbal response. "Says here you're fighting some sort of Behemoth. I'd hate to be you, pal. Those are notoriously vicious..." Rendan catches on that the robot nodded at a question, a delayed reaction from expected non-responsiveness. He asks, "Can you understand me?" Cadmium nods fervently.

"This is amazing! Finally an aware robot! Grandfather has to see this. He will be so shocked to see you." Cadmium looks away as the boy hops around in celebration and excitement. His mouth flashes to a frown and stops his hopping.

"But he won't be able to see you if you get slagged by that Behemoth. You're going to need help if you want to defeat that thing." He gasps. "I can help you win the fight! The Behemoths have a general weakness in their designs, but you can't tell anyone I told you. Okay?" The robot earnestly shakes his head.

"Behemoths are made by all kinds of Scavver gangs but they are less than master engineers. The behemoths have a weak link in their outer plate, a well placed strike there could puncture a coolant reservoir and cause them to overheat and burn out faster. Looks like your match is up. Good luck, my new friend." He smiled, patted Cadmium on his shoulder plate, and started toward his fight.

"Rendan! What did I say about talking to the slaggin' bots, boy?" Rendan's boss came and reprimanded his errant worker. As he raised his hand toward the boy, he feels a cool, metal hand wrap around his wrist. Cadmium glares at the Pit Boss and shakes his head, slowly wagging his index finger side to side. No human had seen anything like this happen from a bot. The Pit Boss shakes free of Cadmium's grip and runs away. Assured of Rendan's safety, Cadmium continues to the Arena.

<***>

Cadmium stepped from the dim, artificially lit Pit. The burst of daylight to his visual receptors made his aperture eyelids squint. The Arena welcomed and cheered their new challenger, they cheered for him as a feast would for a pig. A sacrifice.

As the gates opposite of him started clanging and rattling, the crowd roared with applause and chants for the Behemoth. The gate opened, the beast leapt out and roared in reply. A far off bell rang out signaling the start of the match.

The fighters square off, Cadmium readies himself, the beast hunches back and charges forward like a bull. Broken metal beams jut out of its face like tusks, ready to skewer its prey. Cadmium rolls left and jumps onto the side of the Behemoth. The crowd praises his craftiness with cheers and applause. But the beast bucked and thrashed, as Cadmium tried to climb, he grabbed hold of a plate loosely bolted to the Behemoth's chassis and held on without relent. Agitated, the beast threw itself all over the Arena trying to throw its opponent. The match was beginning to look more like an oversized rodeo. The panel started to rattle, the bolts ripped from the machine's salvaged metal frame, and Cadmium was thrown along with a hunk of the Behemoth's armor. Cadmium was satisfied with this result, he had exposed a weakness and the game had just begun.

The Behemoth was really a simple machine, it was programmed with two actions: run down its target to impale it on the tusks, and to thrash and buck if the target were to latch on. Cadmium observed this simple nature of his opponent and prepared to take it down. The beast charged once more; seeing opportunity, Cadmium jumped for the right tusk and landed just as it threw its head up to pierce him. This counter threw him up where he grasped the side of Behemoth's head and wound back a punch. Something snapped when he concentrated the power in his systems to his arm, a whirr and a click in his arm turned into a grind and a crunch. When he threw his punch, it landed with enough force to crumple a car like a tin can. Cadmium's shoulder servo malfunctioned and damaged itself. An explosion of pure force made a crater sized dent in the side of Behemoth, a gust of wind ripped the stadium, and Behemoth collapsed on its side. All the crowd could see was dust.

The dust was great cover to disable the beast, he hopped onto the side and reached into its systems. A fighter would have ripped out its power core, torn out its electronic synaptics, or overall dismantling the bot. Cadmium was different and wanted to prove he was not some savage gladiator. Having located the systems, he found the power core and navigated his fingers to a main power cable, and pulled it from its jack.

As the dust cleared, the crowd saw the yellow robot standing over the Scrapheap Behemoth, having disabled it instead of destroying it. The underdog known as Cadmium Chord was lauded as the match's victor, and brought to the Winner's Circle of the Pit where fans would take pictures and see the victors up close.

<***>

Rendan ran to his grandfather to tell him of the amazing robot he met. The grandfather demanded to see this robot at once, so Rendán brought him to the Coliseum to watch the fight. What his grandfather saw rocked him to his core, "This machine should not exist, he died hundreds of years ago." As the fight progressed, he noticed something was different about this robot, "He's compassionate... but how?"

"Grandfather, those things you were saying, what do you mean?" Rendón looked up at the hunched old man with curiosity in his eyes. He was intrigued by this robot and wanted to know everything about it.

"Rendan, we need to buy that robot, go to the Winner's Circle and give your boss these credits for Cadmium Chord." Rendán had never seen his grandfather so serious in his life. He ran to the podium and asked his boss to buy Cadmium Chord.

“Betting on the rookie, huh, kid? Tell you what, I’ll even throw in what’s left of Old Ironsides, if anyone could fix him up it would be you.” Those were the nicest words that Rendan had ever heard from his boss. “Really? Thanks, Chief!” He flashed a toothy grin, hooked up the trailer for the bots, and drove his quadricycle home to the outskirts of town.

Grandfather told Rendon to sit down in the workshop. Grandfather picked up a rotodriver, replaced the hyperservo in Cadmium’s shoulder, then tinkered around Cadmium’s mouth for a bit and sat back. “Hello Cadmium, My name is Ethro Thomson, do you remember that name?”

Cadmium’s mind raced, then flooded with a wave of information, <THOMSON: RECOGNIZED/ MEMORY KEY OPENED/ Thomson, Albram was my creator. But he didn’t create me, no, he created->

“My grandfather, Albram Thomson, created Elegy Red, the destroyer of Meridian and the cause of robotkind’s enslavement,” Ethro hunched in his chair, as though to physically show his shame in his family name.

<Our creator is no one to be ashamed of, he was human and had his flaws, but he made the mistake of treating Elegy more as his child than his creation.> Cadmium spoke, his voice had a metallic timbre but there was a comforting mood about it.

“How did he create you? Much less, how did you survive the destruction of Meridian?!” Ethro leaned forward taking a more interrogative stance. Rendan sat there confused, he always asked his grandfather about his heritage, but would have his questions shrugged off or sidestepped with off topic remarks. This was the first time he was learning about his past.

<I do not remember much of my past, I’m sorry. I can only gather that I had been created shortly before Elegy went out of control, and put into the stasis capsule where I only recently awoke from.> Cadmium was just as confused about his origins as these two humans were. That flash of memory he had minutes ago gave him hope that he could regain his memory, if he could just find more of these “memory keys”.

<***>

Ethro devised a plan of action to keep Cadmium both in the spotlight and under wraps at the same time. “For the time being, we need to keep you in the Arena, people will get suspicious if you suddenly disappear from the public eye after your little spectacle with Behemoth. We’ll get that horrible graffiti off and put some fresh paint on you, clean you up for the audience. We can go to the Scarred Lands to look for things to jog your memory, but the public must never find out you are related to Elegy Red.”

Rendan looked up at the both of them and gave a wide smile of unadulterated excitement, “And I can fix up Steel!” Ethro looks at Rendan, “Who is Steel?” Rendan lifts the rest of the tarp off of the trailer revealing the remains of Etude Iron, “I would hate to see Iron’s legacy go to waste. So I want to rebuild him, and make him twice as strong. Like steel!”

Ethro remembered the day when his son, Rendan’s father, decided to rebuild his first bot. It gave him a small satisfaction knowing his grandson’s apple did not fall far from the family tree. It seems the Thomson family was fated to clear its name.

LITTLE TOY BOATS

1st Place

By: Kennis Gremillion

The American dream is like little toy boats
Put 'em in the water and watch them float...away
We all emerge- sword and shield in hand-
To claim our own sort of promised land
Some succeed, and others fail
In our quest for the Holy Grail
The American dream is like little toy planes
You launch with eager eyes and watch them fly away
And they sail into the sun and then they fade away...bon voyage...
No more dreaming today

Life was like a storybook
Fishing poles and reading tales
Of knights and ships and Robin Hood
And making little wooden boats with tiny sails...
Thinking one day it could all be yours
You can be anything you wanna be
For all the tired and the poor
Isn't that beautiful to believe

The American dream is like little toy soldiers
You place 'em in battle and you imagine they shoulder
Responsibility for an ideal they serve
Hoping one day they might achieve what they've earned
The American dream is like a friendly little ghost
It sparks curiosity, but it always floats...away

Our parents paid their way through college and provided for spouses
Our grandparents worked blue-collar jobs that got 'em houses
And we live bit by bit while people who never had to stress
About money tell us money can't buy happiness
We work our hands into calloused things
We try to pass the hours by singing about dreams
We talk about what we're gonna do when we get out of this place
But we know that half of us will end up lost in the middle of the maze

The American dream is like candle flames

They light up the night, but they slowly fade...away
And we all emerge- sword and shield in hand-
To fight to the death for what we have planned
And we work, and we pray that we won't fail
We'll be the ones who find the Holy Grail

And in Hollywood, we project lights onto screens
And we make them look like stars
And in the rest of the country we can only dream
That we could get that far
It's such a discouraging feeling
Growing up with the notion
Of a white picket fence kind of fairy tale
And watching it fade in slow motion
Knights without a king or queen
Zealous in our desperate quest
To find life and liberty
In our pursuit of happiness

And you MUST share your opinions
But only if they're the right ones
And we all pretend that we don't worry
About what it'll be like for our daughters and sons
And we all stand divided
Sword and shield in hand
Still searching for what it really means
To find our promised land

The American dream is like little toy boats
Put 'em in the water and watch them float...away

ME AND POETRY

By: Shannon Chenevert

I'm not sure where our love affair began, how it started or when I first picked up that pen
all I know is that this poetry thing seems to have no end
when emotions get high and my heart gets filled to capacity
the words flow and sometimes they even get the best of me

It may be hard for some to understand or even want to comprehend
But me and poetry we seem to have no end
As far back as i can remember you have always been there
walking with me through every trial and making your presence feel near

Even on my darkest days you seem to shine your best
Me and this poetry thing I think we will outlast the rest
When I need to let them know that life will not get me down
Poetry speaks through me and lets them know I'm ready for another round

So I write to express
I write to reminisce
I write to share joy
I even write when I'm pissed

At the very least if no one reads my words or can recognize what was said
Even after I'm gone from this place ashes scattered under the waters
I will rest at peace knowing that you were always there
I will always know that this poetry thing always cared

HAIKU #15

By: Benjamin Sanson

With this, I await
Until the moon takes me home
A lunar rabbit

A MOTHER'S VIEW ON ADOLESCENCE

By: Kristin Lea Curtis

What gangly creature is this?
all elbows and knees
Splayed out like a four-legged spider in my chair
Eating string beans and a hotdog he smiles at me—
this stork with golden hair—
and opens his beak to swallow another fish
Gulping it down he rises from his perch
and offers me his empty plate
I point to the kitchen—*and away he darts!*
Like a frilled lizard
I can't help but laugh

CRASH!!!

Sighing, I go into the kitchen
There is no need to hurry,
for I know what I will find
Caught in my headlights this gazelle is staring
wide-eyed, mouth gaping,
at the pieces scattered across the floor
I shake my head and point to the broom
He turns sharply—
like the wind blowing a weather vane
Clown feet, oven mitts for hands,
nothing works as it should
The mess cleaned up
I embrace this gangly creature
and kiss his pocked forehead
“I love you my son,” I say

SUPERHEROES

By: Ben Gremillion

Verse 1

Superman patrols the streets,
responds to calls, and walks his beat
He wears no cape, he wears no mask
but silently performs his task
And every day, he gives his life-
a hero's greatest sacrifice
And many people have no clue
that superheroes dress in blue

Verse 2

Some like to yell and shake their fists
and call our heroes prejudiced
Their hearts are bitter, filled with hate
that media will propagate
They shield their ears from unpleasant things,
for lies are pretty and truth can sting
But if they walked in officers' shoes
they'd see that heroes dress in blue

Verse 3

Superman patrols the streets
He's under fire, taking heat
He's helping out the best he can
He's bringing food to a homeless man
He's dodging bullets at a bust
He's saving lives, in God he trusts
Whatever comes, he'll see it through
'Cause superheroes dress in blue

NIGHT CHILD'S PRAYER

By: Dustin Williams

Oh Luna,

Sweet Mistress of Night

Who dances slow;

Who shines so bright

Adorned this eve in veil of white

Strewn with diamonds,

Twinkling in delight

Your smile is full;

Your eyes do shine

Pale silver skin,

A sight divine

Oh Luna,

We give you praise

For guiding your children

Through Darkness' maze

And for the soothing of your light

To troubled minds

And prideful blights

Sweet Mistress, though you must depart

We pray you soon return

Your children hold you in their hearts

And for your closeness yearn

TO BE CONTINUED

by: Benjamin Sanson

I drove past a cross by the side of the road
Curious, I parked and went to see the cross
On it was a single piece of yellowed paper
“To be continued, the untold story of our Saviour
The one who has canceled our reservations in Hell
The one who arose from Death in three days
The one who sacrificed Himself on His own cross
The one who would give His life so that we will be saved
The one who was betrayed by Judas
The one who burdened His cross before He was killed
The one who wanted to make disciples of all nations
The one who will return to save humanity from its sins
The one who rules in the Kingdom of Heaven
The one who was baptized by John the Baptist
To whoever reads this,
Jesus’ work is not done on this Earth
Please continue His works in His name
And we will receive eternal glory in the Kingdom of Heaven.
For all of Jesus’ miracles....
To be continued...”

SHE IS THE FLOWERS

3rd Place

By: Cortland Casto

She is the flowers that bloom on a sunrise hill

I am the earthworms beneath her feet that cultivate the ground she grows on

And if rain is sadness then at least it helps us grow in leaps and bounds

Like the way my heart does every time I hear her laugh

And I still hear it through phantom lonely hallways after your graduation

In your mother's house just like the night I realized that I lost all my courage

And for now I am a child's teddy bear

Comforting and weak, although that's why you love me, you outgrow me

You sat me on your bed as I traced my fingers across the sunlight through your window onto your sheets

I could drive with you across the city for the rest of my life even when you look away

MADEA'S PORCH

By: Tara Sanders

On Madea's Porch
We laughed, we cried.

It was our family place,
To run and hide.

Oh Yes! We were in plain sight
But, that porch was our guide
In the day, and in the night.

On Madea's porch
We all had a story to tell
If you wanted to get your words in
You had to yell.

On Madea's porch
We drank coffee and beer too
We had to use a paper bag
So that the beer can wouldn't show through.

On Madea's porch
When we were wrong; we were scolded
Madea also showed love
That's how we were molded.

She didn't always smile big
But had a heart of gold
She didn't mince her word,
and was bold.

When Medea died, that was a very sad day
Tears were flowing from us all, I must say
The porch became our comforter in many ways.

God has blessed us, for we still have these memories
This is just a reminder of
How thing use to be
On Medea's Porch

BLANK

By: Levi Allen

Blank.

A worthy description of my face,

Every time that I see yours.

Blank, although the innermost desires and of my heart and soul race.

That's what you do to me.

Butterflies are beautiful, I should know,

I am frequently attacked by an armada of the most beautiful, and deadly species known to man.

I don't know if they have a name, their residence is my stomach.

I think that's your fault.

MALL BIRD

By: Kennedy Runyan

He slacked in his chair.

Still, in the chaos

of kindergarten conversations,

a carousal ride,

the jingle of keys,

slapping of cookie dough,

the metal ping and sizzle of fries

dropped carelessly into oil,

a man instructing the proper cooking

of chicken salad,

and the slurping of a dedicated five-year-old.

Quiet, he sat in his windbreaker.

This mall did not know him as it did me,

but he loved it the same.

EVEN THOUGH YOU HAVE GONE AWAY

Honorable Mention

By: Cecille Ting Mortensen

Even though you have gone away
The memories of you will always stay
Take the people in this room for a start
I believe you have touch everyone's heart

Scrabble, cards and red wine
I will remember for all time
I have tons of memories with you
And I think that everyone else does to

Seen together with the world you might be small
But you were a beloved person to us all
You always wanted us the best
You love was to us all addressed

Forgetting all you did we will never
Thankful for you we will be forever

HAIKU #3

By: Benjamin Sanson

The bird in the sky
Fly away, bird, fly away
Come back tomorrow

TO BE A POET

By: Aimee Clark

Oh to be a poet
How I would love to know it
To have thoughts and words collide
That together they would harmonize
Many a dreamer has tried and failed
But their victory they almost unveiled
Such misfortunes can leave one broken
Even in this there is much to be spoken
For good verses are not just in one's enjoyment
But the best stories come from those who have seen disappointment
So to all those poets who have fell and felt demoted
Don't let the fall define you
But let the rise define your moment

CONTEMPLATION

By Kennedy Runyan

A wedding ring rolls around a teaching finger
A pen is capped and clicked
lives curve, bending to the will of the page
under observation of the ears
A beard is stroked in thought and agreement
feeling of steel wool and curly discussion
Fingers paint the air
tap the table
crackle in a lap
And shaky patient hands rest of steadfast arms.

THE SILENCE BETWEEN

2nd Place

By: Kristin Lea Curtis

The silence between chirps of grasshoppers
is heavy, warm, presses against the skin;
like lying in bed beside a lover.

The silence between lightning and thunder
is deadly quiet, holding its charged breath;
like the void before the spark of Creation.

The silence between old friends conversing
is the kind that is comfortable, peaceful;
like napping outside on a breezy day.

The silence between partners in marriage
can chill the heart to nearly not beating.

And I wonder if the world has ended,
or if it's merely stuck somewhere between.

HAIKU #12

By: Benjamin Sanson

Love: a mystery
Staring into your dark eyes
Gravity escapes

MY MUSE

By: Jennifer Lonix

Oh me u fascinated.
Oh me u elated.
The way u walked.
That teasing tantalizing talk.

That soft sensual smile.
I got caught up all the while.
Those sexy seducing eyes.
I still get lost, and I fantasize.

Your living, loving, laughing.
Is this really happening?
Your heart, your hair, your heat.
Thinking of u I cannot sleep.

What am I to do?
I can no longer see U.
Knowing that u are gone.
Knowing that I must live on.

You will always be my muse.
So, I dedicate this work to U.
Knowing this is not the end.
Rest my fascinating friend; I shall one day see U again.

PASSION

By: Kristin Lea Curtis

Ice without and ice within

Dead heart beats a steady rhythm

Dead ears hear but do not listen

Fire without and ice within

Dead eyes awaken, look, and drink in

A new world that has never been

Fire without and fire within

Waves of emotion roil, churn, and spin

Tongue traces flames along the skin

Ice without and fire within

Dead flesh made alive cools once again

The heart is the last to give in

Ice without and ice within

Dead heart beats a steady rhythm

Dead lips close but yearn to open

CONNECTION

By: Kennedy Runyan

Midnight is tangled up in the little
moving spaces between
your legs and mine.

The gentle whisper you possess when
the sky is clear will move the
second-hand across our skin.

A cricket's chorus wafts over to us
upon a cool breath of air hardly strong
enough to prod my bottle-cap wind-chime

With your hand on my head and
my cheek buried in the t-shirt you always
wear, you'll murmur stories dwelling in your heart.

And we'll look up one last time at
our favorite star, the one so bright it's
a pinhole to the other side of the universe.

FLUORESCENT LIGHTS

By: Cortland Casto

Driving down the old road towards the school that we both went to

Listening to boost indie punk bands and thinking about warm colored fluorescent light

That night I stood in your kitchen until 2am listening to you talk about the things you were
passionate about, and your regrets

I want to take pictures of you in your car, watching the rain fall across the lights in the parking
lots of abandoned buildings under indigo skies and that summer breeze that reminded you of
when you were a kid

It made me think about the night we held hands stargazing, you told me what you were afraid of

I don't want to be afraid anymore

GRIEF: STAGE ONE

By: Kristin Lea Curtis

The part of me that was you
Has been ripped out of my soul
The part of you that was me
Has been buried in that hole
What now am I to do

When I am missing
a part of you

How do I—live and be
“Without the part of you that was me?”

The only way for
you me us we
To co-exist eternally
is for me to lie down with you

For the rest of me to die, too
I am a ship without an anchor
I am a tree with shallow roots
I am a table with uneven legs
Adrift... *shaky*, and *l o o s e*
Dizzy from this merry-go-round
I cannot walk a *straight line*
Gravity ceases to hold sway
I rise
Up...
Up...
Up...

The part of me that was you
Has been ripped out of my soul
The part of you that was me...
will never again be *w h o l*

SOMEDAY

By: MLB

Someday I won't look to someday anymore
I'll find what's happy and free and light
Peace will find me on the beach of freedom
My soul sunning in freedom from night

Grand gestures made in the light of day
They can't justify the rage under the stars
Someday I'll discover an unforeseen liberty
I'll find a freedom from internal wars

Someday seems so far away
Can it be attained?
The chains of the here and now
Give the feeling of tightening reigns

I won't give up on my someday
For with it go my ambitions and dreams
If only there were by my side an equal
Not a dominant soul capable of vicious schemes

Life is indeed pain and we must all go on
How do we press forward while always looking back?
We must strive on in pursuit of our someday
While we learn our hearts are full and our adversary bears the lack.

HAIKU #23

By: Kennedy Runyan

Rose-colored lenses
scratched, smudged, dusted, spackled, worn.
but still colored rose

DADDY DAUGHTER DANCE

By: Brittany Bailey

Today is the day, I have been waiting for all my life.

When I go from being your little girl to being someone's wife.

I am getting all dolled up hoping you will approve.

I swear I can feel every beat of my heart move.

It's all said and done, I now have the ring.

There is only this left,

Just this one thing.

Everyone is out there

Everyone is waiting.

Should I go out, it's something I am debating.

But I am brave, I walk out alone.

Everyone watches,

They think I am on my own.

I walk out into the crowd, they look where I stand.

We are not exactly hand in hand.

But even though they cannot see.

I know you are in Heaven looking down on me.

IF EVER

By: Kristin Curtis

If ever a world existed
where you and I could be free

If ever a time was reversed
and took us back where we wanted to be

If ever love mended all wounds
and erased them from our minds

Then—and only then—would we triumph
and leave the world deaf, mute, and blind

UNTITLED

By: Levi Allen

Sometimes, I miss you.

These thoughts are few and far in between, and fleeting.
I noticed a place I can find these thoughts at will.
Namely, the bottom of any glass bottle I decide to numb the pain with.
I tried to stop the thoughts, I promise I haven't touched a drop since then.
I've found I can't stop the lonely nights, that's where you inhabit my entirety.

Sometimes, it gets bad.

Sometimes, I get angry at you.
Sorry about that.
I got my anger from you, you know that right?
Only thing that ever stuck with me.

I hope you're proud of me.

Most times, I'm getting better.
Most times, I love myself now.
Most times, I'm in love with the fact you aren't hurting anymore.

Most times, I know that you are with me!

But there are sometimes..

ROAM

By: Cortland Casto

I took a walk during the autumn you didn't come home
Comparing the seasons and the reasons you felt the need to roam
While I was tied down in this piece of a town that we both called ours although we never really wanted to
I guess we couldn't help it
I couldn't leave and you'd always return
No matter how far you went or what bridges you'd burn
And the smell of every cigarette reminds me of you
I never enjoyed such a habit but I know that you do
And no matter how many times I tried to make you quit
I'd catch myself handing you a lighter as if I never meant it
3 months of adventure and building we spent
You always had such talent and I was jealous I admit
Because even more than that you had commitment
So I'd hate to see you give up on your dream
But which are you chasing now?
You have over a hundred it seems
Now I'm burning a cigarette to remind myself of how short we get to live our lives
You told me your fears about it maybe once or twice
So I decided I wouldn't hold you back even if it's chasing your vice
Because I know it gets anxious and boring around here
But I hope you'll come back like you do every year
And I'll welcome you with cheer and make sure that we adventure while you're home
Until you feel your next dream, your next need again to roam

WHITTLE ME A FLUTE

By: Kristin Lea Curtis

Whittle me a flute grandfather,
so I can hear music in its pure form.

Knit me a blanket grandmother,
so I will never be without your warmth.

Sit on the old front porch with me,
shell peas, sing songs, and rock away the time;
tell me stories of better days,
and try to catch the years flying by.

Give me sound advice grandfather,
teach me all the ways in which I should go.
Show me how to love grandmother,
what it truly means to hold someone close.

Explain how to be happy grandfather,
no matter what the circumstance.
Train me how to live with joy grandmother—
to always have reason to dance.

Gift to me your wisdom my grandparents.
Spare me not correction and pain.
For what would it matter to me if I
lose my soul and the whole world gain?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHIVALRIC CODE IN *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*

1st Place

By: Kristin Curtis

It is the hubris of man that leads him to reach for the stars, and it is the same hubris that makes him come crashing back down to Earth. Mankind is always striving for some element of the divine, which leads many to following the principles of one religion or another. Most religions preach a general goodness of character and helping one's fellow man. Christianity values the moral teachings of Jesus Christ. Some of these teachings include: doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (Luke 6:31); love thy neighbor as thyself (Mark 12:31); taking care of orphans and widows in their affliction, and keeping oneself unstained from the world (James 1:27); and learning to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, and plead the widow's cause (Isaiah 1:17). Inspired from the doctrines of the Holy Bible, in the Middle Ages a system of morals known as a code of chivalry organically grew up around the medieval knights that fought for their liege lords and homelands. This code went above and beyond the general rules of combat, esteeming qualities such as loyalty, honor, bravery, courtesy, honesty, justice, piety...just to name a few. In George R. R. Martin's book series, *A Game of Thrones*, the author sets his story in a medieval landscape and, in a non-didactical way, uses his characters to examine the reality of living by such a strong set of principles. Martin takes one virtue of the code—loyalty—and shows that this virtue can either make or break the code, be the strongest or the weakest link. Various motives will always sway loyalty and no one, no matter how good they are, can truly live up to such high standards. Man is an imperfect creation, prone to making a multitude of mistakes, and virtues are all too quickly pushed out of the window when hard decisions have to be made. Martin uses his characters to illustrate four different forms of loyalty—loyalty out of duty, loyalty out of love, loyalty to family, loyalty out of personal gain—and shows that no matter the motive, living by a chivalric code is admirable but not always feasible, especially when competing loyalties collide.

Martin begins his novel *A Song of Ice and Fire* with the character of Lord Eddard Stark, liege lord of Winterfell and the North, and uses him to examine loyalty out of duty. Ned, even though not a knight, lives and breathes a chivalric code. In the opening chapter of the book, he is

called upon to serve justice to a deserter from the Night's Watch. He brings his sons and his ward out with him to witness this execution. This demonstrates that Ned is teaching his children how to be good rulers according to his own principles and belief system. Bran, the youngest of the boys present, watches his father and thinks, "He had taken off father's face [...] and donned the face of Lord Stark of Winterfell." (pg. 14). Because of the solemnity of the duty before him, Ned's face reflects that he has locked away any emotions he might have about this event. He must look strong and do what is expected of him. Afterwards, Ned asks Bran if he knows why he wielded the sword instead of a paid executioner. When Bran does not know the answer, Ned replies, "Our way is the older way. The blood of the First Men still flows in the veins of the Starks, and we hold to the belief that the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword [...] A ruler who hides behind paid executioners soon forgets what death is." (pg. 16). Here, Ned says two important things: one, Ned's principles/code have been passed down almost since time immemorial; two, these set of principles keep him grounded and make him a good ruler.

When King Robert Baratheon, First of His Name (*titles, titles*) journeys to Winterfell to ask Ned to become Hand of the King, it is these same set of principles that make Ned accept the position. Even though he really does not desire the position, he sees it as his duty to perform whatever task is asked of him by his king. Ned is very loyal to this king because he and Robert have a long history. They have been friends since childhood and they have fought and bled together on more than one occasion. So when Ned learns that the previous hand of the king, Jon Arryn, was possibly murdered, he feels it is his duty to uncover the truth. The can of worms that Ned opens, however, leads to his ultimate ruin. In the process of discovering who poisoned Jon Arryn, Ned uncovers the shocking and disgusting truth about Robert's children: none of the three are his. Instead, Joffrey, Myrcella, and Tommen are the incestuous offspring of the queen and her brother. Once again, Ned's principles urge him to a certain course of action—the action of mercy (or as Ned later tells Varys, "the madness" of mercy)—and he tells Cersei to take her children and run far away. She does not take his mercy. After Robert's death, she has Ned arrested as a traitor and thrown in the dungeon. Up until Varys visits Ned, he is still dead set on adhering to his principles. Then, Varys mentions Ned's daughters and what will become of them if Ned is killed. The love for his daughters prompts Ned to do something he has never done before—set aside his code—and lie in order to save his life and protect his daughters.

Unfortunately, it does not work and Joffrey demands Ned's head. Through the character of Ned Stark, Martin demonstrates that no matter how well one lives by a code, there will inevitably come a day when a reason arises worth shedding it. Ned began his journey loyal to his king and what he perceived as his duty as hand of the king, and his rigid adherence to that duty resulted in the disastrous consequences of his death and the troubles his two daughters had thereafter.

Martin turns chivalry on its head with the character of Jamie Lannister, a member of the elite Kingsguard, and uses his character to demonstrate loyalty out of love. Unlike Ned, Jamie actually is a knight, but only goes through the motions of living by a chivalric code because his heart is not really in it. Jamie is known throughout Westeros as the "Kingslayer" because he murdered the previous tenant of the Iron Throne—the Mad King, Aerys Targaryen. Jamie served the Mad King as a member of his Kingsguard. Aerys Targaryen was called mad because he became paranoid to the point of declaring genocide on the inhabitants of King's Landing. This mad king wanted to burn alive every man, woman and child in the city. Instead of following orders and upholding the oaths he swore to obey his king, Jamie Lannister breaks his chivalric code and strikes him down. In doing this, he saves countless lives, however the people of Westeros never see him as a hero. They see him as nothing more than a man who murdered a king and he is looked down upon from that moment forward. It is therefore understandable why Jamie no longer cares about the code. He does what he has to in order to do his job, but that is all. Also, Jamie has a secret—he and his twin sister Cersei are in love. As morally appalling and twisted as their love is, Jamie is so loyal to her that he commits attempted murder in order to keep their secret safe. While at Winterfell, Bran (who loves climbing) is passing the day visiting all of his favorite haunts and stumbles upon Jamie and Cersei fornicating in the bell tower. Cersei sees him in the window and screams, "He *saw* us!" (pg. 85). Reading between the lines, Cersei is really screaming for her brother to do something. Jamie looks at Cersei and replies, "The things I do for love," and pushes Bran out of the window. For a knight, the attempted murder of a child was especially heinous. Knights were sworn to protect the young and innocent. Even though Bran does not die, he is paralyzed. Jamie's actions spark a chain of events that lead to disastrous consequences—open warfare between the houses of Stark and Lannister, between the North and the South.

The chain of events that follows this monstrous crime leaves no doubt that Jamie—and by extension Cersei—is responsible for the Westeros world war. Joffrey hires an assassin to finish the job Jamie started, and Joffrey gives the assassin a dagger that Catelyn later comes to believe belongs to Tyrion Lannister. This second attack on Bran and the verification of the dagger's owner gives Catelyn Stark all the proof she needs to accuse the Imp of attempted murder. Catelyn captures Tyrion Lannister and takes him to the Eyrie for judgment. Her actions inspire Jamie Lannister to attack Ned and his men in King's Landing. Jamie then orders "The Mountain", aka Sir Gregor Clegane, to begin burning and pillaging villages around Riverrun (Catelyn's childhood home). Jamie's actions then prompt Ned to send Sir Beric Dondarrion and his men out to capture Clegane, strip him of all titles and lands, and bring him to justice. Only, Clegane kills Dondarrion and escapes. Meanwhile, Robert dies after naming Ned Protector of the Realm, but Cersei tears up the paper and has Ned arrested for treason. After promising everyone mercy for Ned, Joffrey orders Ned's execution. This inspires Robb and the Northmen to declare open war upon the Lannisters. All because of his loyalty to and love for Cersei, Jamie Lannister became responsible for sparking an enormous war. Once again, Martin uses another character to demonstrate the unfeasibility of living by a code...especially when one's heart is not in it. Knights are expected to show compassion and kindness to children. Young boys especially look up to them as role models. Bran Stark, at age seven, was properly enamored of all the famous knights, Jamie included. Yet, Jamie endangered his innocent life in order to protect the woman he loved. Jamie was faced with competing loyalties—loyalty to the code or loyalty to love—and chose the latter.

Loyalty to family is the form of loyalty most often found in Martin's lore, and those strong ties create the backbone and structure for his medieval landscape. Noble families are divided into houses, each with a sigil and a catchphrase that everyone in the realm knows. For the Starks, their sigil is the dire wolf and their words are, "Winter is coming". Jon Snow, assumed bastard son of Ned Stark, decides he wants to take the black and travels with his Uncle Benjen to the Wall. Even though he loves his siblings, he is tired of being treated cruelly by Catelyn and feels it would just be easier for everyone if he left. At the Wall, Jon's identity is stripped away and he takes on a new identity as a man of the Night's Watch. The men in black become his new family and he swears vows of loyalty and service to them. Before a heart tree,

Jon kneels and recites, “Night gathers and now my watch begins. It shall not end until my death. I shall take no wife, hold no lands, father no children. I shall wear no crowns and win no glory. I shall live and die at my post. [...] I pledge my life and honor to the Night’s Watch, for this night and all the nights to come.” (pg. 522). These are some pretty serious vows, and once made, cannot be revoked. The reader finds out from the first chapter of the book that the penalty for breaking these vows, for deserting, is death. Jon is sure this is what he wants to do with his life though, and becomes a man of the Night’s Watch, steward to Lord Mormont.

However, as irony would have it, within days of taking those vows Jon receives the news that his father has been beheaded and his brother Robb has gathered the banners and is marching to war. Jon’s loyalties are tested for the first time. Which family needs him most? His blood family or his new family at the Wall? Loyalty to his kin wins out and Jon makes the decision to desert. It is not an easy decision, and while he is racing through the night, he has his doubts. “No matter what he did, Jon felt as though he were betraying someone. Even now, he did not know if he was doing the honorable thing.” (pg. 774). This passage serves to prove Martin’s point: it is very hard to know what is right. Right for whom? According to one’s code, one’s principles, how does one decide what the “right thing” is? Even Jon—who had been raised by a man who lived and breathed a chivalric code—could not decide which was the more honorable choice. If his friends had not chased after him, he would have become a deserter and most likely been beheaded. Jon goes back to Castle Black, still intending to run away again, until he has a talk with Mormont. The Commander helps Jon see things a different way and makes a very valid point, “Gods save us, boy, you’re not blind and you’re not stupid. When dead men come hunting in the night, do you think it matters who sits the Iron Throne?” (pgs. 783-784). Basically, Mormont points out that the supernatural trumps everything, and he goes on to tell Jon that he wants to investigate what is going on beyond the Wall. Jon realizes that their war against the supernatural is more important and that he is needed more with his family at the Wall. Martin uses Jon to illustrate the toughest of all competing loyalties—where is one’s true place in life?

Strangely enough, the only form of loyalty that actually seems to work out in Martin’s world, is loyalty out of personal gain. There is truth to that famous line from the musical *Cabaret*, “Money makes the world go around”, and money—or gold—makes the world go around in Westeros. If one is rich enough, one can buy the loyalty of almost anyone. Now, this brand of

loyalty does not adhere to any kind of chivalric code because it is based solely on self-preservation. However, people with this form of loyalty do maintain their own set of principles. One such character in Martin's story is the common sellsword Bronn. Tyrion Lannister, while journeying back to King's Landing from the Wall, stops at an inn for food and rest. As fate would have it, this is also the inn where Catelyn Stark is staying and she has just discovered that the dagger used in the attempt to kill her son belongs to Tyrion. Bronn is also there when Catelyn calls for men to help her arrest the Imp for the attempted murder of her son and helps escort Tyrion to the Eyrie. At Tyrion's farce of a trial, Bronn volunteers to be Tyrion's champion in trial by combat and kills Sir Egen, thus saving Tyrion's life. Bronn does this for the promise of wealth, and makes no qualms about his motives. The two men leave the Eyrie together, Bronn now employed in Tyrion's service. When Tyrion reconnects with his father Tywin on the battlefield, Bronn receives payment, and afterwards accompanies Tyrion to King's Landing and earns even greater wealth and prestige in Tyrion's service. Out of all the examples of various forms of loyalty found in this novel, it appears as if Martin is suggesting that the only form of loyalty that produces good results and promotes self-preservation is loyalty to one's self. If one does not choose sides, one does not make as many enemies. However, in the character of the crude sellsword the reader sees where that kind of loyalty leads—a lonely life and general hardness of character. Martin lets the reader discern for themselves that having nothing or no one to be loyal to, is pointless and lonely. So, even though loyalty to duty, love or family comes with risk, it is worth it. Mankind will always endeavor to be good, to strive for greatness, because what is the point of it all if nothing matters?

Martin writes in a very non-didactical way, letting the story speak for itself. This allows the reader the chance to see characters and events presented in an objective way. It is clear to the observant and discerning reader that through the characters of Eddard Stark, Jamie Lannister, and Jon Snow, Martin realistically examines the unfeasibility of loyalty within a chivalric code, and suggests that chivalry does not work because one can never uphold its principles every moment of every day. The hubris of man will always fall short of such high standards and ideals because reasons will inevitably arise to make one set aside one's principles. Perhaps people are merely pawns on a massive chess board, being moved here and there by the pull of their loyalties. Does this mean that living by a set of principles is futile? No, Martin does not seem to

suggest that. Even with all the negative outcomes the reader sees from characters with idealistic codes, Martin seems to suggest the opposite: life is only worth living if one has something or someone to be loyal to and fight for. Whatever is good, whatever is holy and just, is always worth the risk. Otherwise, the world would be comprised of nothing but Bronns, selling themselves to the highest bidder, discontent and lonely in the game of life.

ACTIONS OF MEN: THE SHAPING

By: Stevie Rhiannon Barras

Life is like a potter's wheel: it keeps turning as the result takes shape. The events that occur are like the hands of the potter: they define and strengthen the final shape. This analogy is true both in real-life and in art. Zora Neale Hurston's real-life male-centered experiences and those of her book "Their Eyes Were Watching God" leading character, Janie, define and shape their lives and the lives of others.

Author, Zora Neale Hurston was born in the late 1800s to former slaves (biography.com). Her early life was marred by the sudden death of her mother and the subsequent remarrying of her father. This hasty remarriage would be the first of many male-involved events that would shape Ms. Hurston's life and art. According to ZoraNealeHurston.com, after remarrying, Zora's father "seemed to have little time or money for his children". This momentous event triggered a series of major occurrences in the young Zora's life. First, she was forced to work while attempting to finish school. By her mid-twenties, Ms. Hurston had not completed a high school level education. Her solution to this problem was to lie about her age to "qualify for free public schooling" (zoranealehurston.com).

Unfortunately, the influence of male-dominated occurrences would continue to impact the life of Zora Neale Hurston. In 1948, a shocking accusation of molesting a male-child would derail her life and career (biography.com). Hurston was "able to prove that she was out of the country at the time of the incident", but the damage was done (biography.com)

Even in death, Hurston was unable to escape the influence of male dominated decisions. In 1945, she reached out to W.E.B. Du Bois requesting to establish "a cemetery for the illustrious Negro dead" (zoranealehurston.com). However, Du Bois coldly rejected the suggestion. When Hurston passed away, her lack of financial stability lead to her being buried in an unmarked grave (biography.com). The once vibrant, powerful, and prolific writer had been reduced to a nameless hole in the ground. Her final resting place was partially due to Du Bois's sharp rejection and partially due to Hurston's willingness to speaking her mind.

Although, the expeditious remarrying of her father, the false accusation of molestation, and Du Bois's rejection influenced Hurston's experiences; Hurston immeasurably influenced and shaped the lives of others. One novelist she intensely influenced was Alice Walker, who is

known for *The Color Purple* (georgiaencyclopedia.org). Walker, a considerable influence in her own right, is a testament to Hurston's impact on the lives of others.

The main character in "Their Eyes Were Watching God" experiences male-centered events that profoundly shape who she becomes throughout the book. At the age of sixteen, Janie experiences her sexual awakening resulting in her kissing a local boy. This seemingly small action changes the course of Janie's life forever.

The kiss is witnessed by Janie's grandmother as her (Janie) developing into a woman. Nanny then gets the idea to arrange the marriage between Logan Killicks and Janie. This occurrence is the first of several major events that will shape Janie into an independent and free woman.

Janie begins the marriage under the spell of naivety; she believes in attraction and marriage making love. When Nanny reveals Logan Killicks' desire to marry Janie, Janie's immediate reaction is "Naw, Nanny, no ma'am!...He looks like some ole skullhead in de graveyard" (Hurston 13) She does not have an attraction to Logan in the magnetic way the bee does to the bloom; the opening to her sexual awakening. Even after her official marriage to Logan, she holds to the idea of attraction as seen with "Ah wants to want him sometimes. Ah don't want him to do all de wantin'." (Hurston 23) As the marriage continues, Janie learns "marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream (is) dead, so she (becomes) a woman" (Hurston 25).

The loveless, brief marriage between Janie and Logan is what ultimately pushes Janie into the arms of Joe Starks. Janie is no longer the naïve sixteen-year-old but she still romanticizes certain aspects of life. Unlike Janie's feelings towards Logan, she holds some attraction to Jody. "He did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (Hurston 29).

The "chance" Janie takes on the marriage results in "change" for her. Logan meant for Janie to work but Jody states "if you think Ah aims to tole you off and make a dog outa you, youse wrong. Ah wants to make a wife outa you" (Hurston 29). However, Jody's idea of a "wife" is more like an object that he can mold and control. His domineering behavior is what forces Janie to find her voice.

Jody was insistent that Janie's "hair was NOT going to show in the store" (Hurston 55). After Janie is complimented by Hambo for being "uh born orator", Joe does not authentically smile or verbally respond; instead, he "bit down hard on his cigar and beamed all around, but he

never said a word" (Hurstun 58). The fact he "bit down hard" suggest aggravation. His insecurities show throughout the book with not allowing Janie to make a speech, demanding she wears her hair up, and not allowing her to participate in conversations (Hurstun 58). He even goes so far as to verbally demean her "somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves." (Hurstun 71). Joe stifling Janie's voice causes her to think

about the inside state of her marriage. Time came when she fought back
with her tongue as best she could, but it didn't do her any good
...He wanted submission and he'd
keep on fighting until he felt he had it (Hurstun 71)

The result of Jody's actions removes "the spirit of the marriage left the bedroom and took to living in the parlor...The bed was no longer a daisy-field for her and Joe to play in... She wasn't petal-open anymore with him" (Hurstun 71). Jody's actions are the catalyst to Janie transitioning from a controlled woman to a woman in control.

The union of Tea Cake and Janie, shapes Janie in several ways. The marriage itself helps her to find true happiness and strength. The experiences with Tea Cake gives Janie a taste of freedom and adventure unlike her previous marriages. "Sometimes Janie would think of the old days in the big white house and the store and laugh to herself" (Hurstun 134). With Tea Cake at her side, Janie attends card games and participates in conversations. "The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to" (Hurstun 134). The freeing experiences revert Janie back to her ideals of love. "Ah loves yuh and feel glad" (Hurstun 180). Unlike Logan and Jody, Tea Cake was affectionate towards his wife. When questioned, Tea Cake readily admitted "Janie, Ah gits lonesome out dere all day 'thout yuh" (Hurstun 133).

Tea Cake's death worked with her experiences in the marriage, to make her stronger and independent. She "saw the ferocious look in his eyes and went mad with fear as she had done in the water that time...The fiend in him must kill and Janie was the only thing living he saw" (Hurstun 184). In that moment, Janie was left with the options to kill or be killed. "It was the meanest moment of eternity...She had wanted him to live so much and he was dead" (Hurstun 184). To make the decision to another person's life, much less the life of someone she loved, is the ultimate shaper.

The Janie that returns home after the death of Tea Cake is different than the one who left. She returns “wid her hair swingin’ down her back lak some young gal” (Hurston 2). She tells her friend “you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there” (Hurston 192). Janie had been there and returned a stronger woman. She, like Hurston, even inspired another female as Pheoby states “Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listenin’ tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo” (Hurston 192).

Each male dominated experience influenced Zora Neale Hurston and Janie’s ending results. The hurried marriage of Hurston’s father, the dastardly accusation against her, and Du Bois’s dismissively curt rejection changed the entire course of Hurston’s life. Without these harrowing experiences, Hurston may not have been inspired to write “Their Eyes Were Watching God”. Without “Their Eyes Were Watching God”, Alice Walker may not have been empowered to pen “The Color Purple”. In Janie’s fictional world, without becoming a young woman she would not have the notions of what 'marriage' was. Without Logan, she would not have questioned her thoughts on what marriage is. Without Jody, Janie would not have truly found her voice. Without Tea Cake, she would not have found the strength to keep and project her voice for the world to hear. The three marriages and the way they evolved brought about and forged the strong, independent woman that is Janie in the end. Reality or fiction, the male-centered events changed the worlds of both Hurston and Janie.

“DR. FAUSTUS” AND UNSOUND THEOLOGICAL REASONING

3rd Place

By: Benjamin Sanson

Christopher Marlowe wrote “Dr. Faustus” sometime within the time frame of 1588-1592, and it focuses on man’s division between good and evil and whether their final resting place will be in the realm of Heaven or the fiery damnation of Hell. Anne Lanchashire describes this split as “psychomachia” which she defines as “the conflict within a man between virtue and vice, with virtue eventually triumphant.” (Lanchashire, 35). However, the good does not always win the battle at the end, since Dr. Faustus is dragged down into the Underworld to keep up his end of the bargain when he bound his soul to the demon Mephostophilis in Act 1, Scene 3. This bears relation to the Calvinist theory that every person on Earth was predestined to end their life on Earth in Heaven or Hell. Pauline Hodenrich notes that, according to John Calvin, “all man’s natural inclinations are towards evil, and that any good he may perform is brought about solely by the grace of God”. (Hodenrich, 4). Dr. Faustus calls out to God multiple times throughout the play, but he steadily made his way to the abyss of the Underworld.

Throughout this play, Marlowe pokes fun at the church and church rule. When “Dr. Faustus” was written, the church was the supreme law of the land below the monarch. The people were to follow the Church’s rules in order to walk among the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In “Dr. Faustus”, Marlowe has Faustus disobey some of these rules, most prevalently in Act 3, Scenes 2 and 3. In Scene 2, Faustus and Mephostophilis trick the Pope into restoring Bruno, a prisoner in chains from Germany, to his former power, and then some. In Scene 3, Mephostophilis turns Faustus and himself invisible at the dinner, and Faustus steals the Pope’s meat and wine before striking the Pope around the ear. In the days of the Renaissance Church, people did not steal, trick, or attack Church people, since if they did, their soul would wind up on a journey to Hell. The Pope defends himself by simply crossing himself with his fingers after he hears from the Bishop that a ghost has escaped from Purgatory and seeks redemption and ordering a band of friars to sing the ghost away. Mephostophilis asks Faustus “What will you do now? For I can tell you, you’ll be cursed with bell, book, and candle.” (*Dr. Faustus*, 3.3.91-92ff), to which Faustus merely brushes Mephostophilis’ claim off. The priests soon enter and sing their song, only to be attacked by Faustus and Mephostophilis who beat up the friars and fling fireworks at them.

Within these examples, Marlowe says satirically that the Church cannot defend itself from the wrath of God or the Devil. The Pope cannot fully cast devils from the Underworld simply by crossing his fingers. It takes more than a song sung by holy men to drive the Devil away. The Church is utterly weak when it comes to its barriers against the wrath of celestial beings, according to Marlowe, so how can it protect ordinary citizens from the attacks by the Devil and to stay on the path to Jesus Christ and Heaven, no matter how many times they repent for their sins? Is it man's fault, going back to the time of Adam and Eve, to wind up on the path of Hell no matter what? Marlowe presents the audience with a very valuable lesson. One must be careful with the sins and errors of the Underworld realm while they are still alive, or they will be dragged down to Hell for their charge(s) and suffer their sins even more than when they were alive, no matter how many times they call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

Faustus learns this lesson significantly towards the end of the play when he awaits his final hour of being alive before he joins the lost souls in Hell. Even when he descends into Hell to atone for his own sins and for his dabbling into necromancy, Faustus still tries to save himself, although it winds up to no avail when the scholars find "Faustus' limbs, all torn asunder by the hand of death." (*Dr. Faustus*, 5.3.6-7ff). The Good Angel remarks that Faustus had "lost celestial happiness" during his twenty-four year contract with the demons of Hell and that if Faustus had kept on the path to Heaven that Faustus would have "In what resplendent glory thou hadst sat in yonder throne, like those bright shining saints, and triumphed over Hell." (*Dr. Faustus*, 5.1.101-16ff). The Good Angel soon departs, leaving Faustus to suffer in Hell for eternity for his sins.

Faustus was strong in his ambitions to achieve the status of a god and eternal life. He quotes that

all things that move beyond the quiet poles
Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces.
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds.
But his dominion that exceeds in this
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of a man:
A sound magician is a demi-god.
Here, tire my brains to get a deity. (*Dr. Faustus*, 1.1.55-62ff)

Marlowe also pokes fun at people who wish to rise above the level of the church and the monarch in order to rule the entire world. While magicians can captivate their audience with slight-of-hand tricks, their magic is nothing compared to the power that a god has. According to Margaret Ann O'Brien, Faustus' desire to rule the world causes him to "abolish every hallmark of salvation" (O'Brien, 4). Faustus went above and beyond Church rule to claim something that he would never fully grasp. Once Faustus bound his soul to the demon Mephostophilis, Faustus came close to imagining having the power of a god in his mortal hands, but never found a good grip on it before he joined the lost souls in torment in the Underworld.

Faustus strives to learn more about the world around him and beyond it into the celestial realm. Faustus claims that he "art still but Faustus and a man." (*Dr. Faustus*, 1.1.23ff). Faustus desires more knowledge about everything, which he accomplishes, as John C. McCloskey notes, through the power of, "necromancy-traffic with the devil himself-which will make Faustus more than human, will make him like a god." (111). This delve into the realm of necromancy tempts Faustus to learn what a mortal human would never have an answer to. The only catch on Faustus' terms and conditions with the demons of the Underworld is that in twenty-four years' time, Faustus will be stripped of his powers and the devils will drag him down into the fiery realm of Hell. Faustus drinks this otherworldly knowledge like a thirsty person drinks water. They both want more to drink, only for that drink to kill them in the end. They are both aware that it will end in death, but they both want that powerful elixir to continue. In his soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 1, Faustus ponders the idea that, if he continues on this path, he is eternally damned, but brushes it off and asks Mephostophilis

Come, Mephostophilis, let us dispute again,

And reason of divine astrology.

Speak, are there many spheres above the moon?

Are all celestial bodies but one globe,

As is the substance of this centric earth? (*Dr. Faustus*, 2.1.33-37)

Marlowe also satirically attacks people who call out the name of God in order to save their soul from eternal damnation in the pits of Hell, yet who still live in their corrupted and twisted world. Dr. Faustus calls out to God to save his soul from the bargain that he has willingly put himself into with the powerful spells of necromancy. Faustus fell from the glory of God and, although he tried to salvage what hope there was to reach the realm of Heaven, still continues on

in his bargain with the Devil, such as in Act 2, Scene 1, where, during his conversation with Mephostophilis, Faustus asks “Ay, go, accursed spirit to ugly hell. ‘Tis thou hast damned distressed Faustus’ soul. Is’t not too late?” (*Dr. Faustus*, 2.1.74-76ff). Within the same scene, Faustus also calls out to God and Jesus to save himself by proclaiming, “Ah, Christ my savior, Seek to save distressed Faustus’ soul.” (*Dr. Faustus*, 2.1.81-82ff), to which Lucifer tells Faustus that his soul is too far gone on this path, and it cannot be saved to enter through Heaven’s gates. Faustus then goes on with Lucifer and Mephostophilis, only for Faustus’ contract to lead to his death. Another example is when Faustus declares that “if heaven was made for man, ‘twas made for me. I will renounce this magic and repent.” (*Dr. Faustus*, 2.1.10-11ff), but fears that he may not be saved, no matter how hard his declarations to God go. Faustus mentions that

My heart’s so hardened I cannot repent.
Scarce can I name salvation, faith or heaven,
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears
”Faustus, thou art damned.” Then swords and knives,
Poison, guns, halters and envenomed steel
Are laid before me to dispatch myself.
And long ere this I should have done the deed,
Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair.
Have I not made blind Homer sing to me
Of Alexander’s love and Oenon’s death?
And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp
Made music with my Mephostophilis?
Why should I die then, or basely despair?
I am resolved, Faustus shall not repent. (*Dr. Faustus*, 2.1.18-32ff)

Faustus calls out to Heaven in Act 5, Scene 2 by exclaiming

Oh, I’ll leap up to my God: who pulls me down?
See, see, where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament.
One drop would save my soul, half a drop.
Ah, my Christ! (*Dr. Faustus*, 5.2.140-43ff)

Faustus' final futile call to the Lord God Almighty does not save Faustus within his last hour of life. Although God "stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows" (*Dr. Faustus*, 5.2.146-47ff), Faustus continues on his downwards journey into Purgatory for his actions that he has committed while he was on the planet Earth.

All in all, Marlowe leaves "Dr. Faustus" with us for a valuable lesson. One must be extremely careful when following the path to eternal salvation with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Do not let the powers of the Underworld sweet-talk anybody into leaving the one true path to the eternal glory of Heaven. Otherwise, if they do, their punishment will be far more dangerous than the sins and errors they made while they were alive. People should not dabble in something over which they have no control.

ICARUS' INFLUENCE ON SUFFERING: AFFECTED VS. UNAFFECTED

2nd Place

By: Komal Shabih

“Musee des Beaux Arts” is a poem that consists of two stanzas and twenty lines. “Waiting for Icarus” is a poem that also consists of two stanzas, but this poem has twenty-one lines. In “Musee des Beaux Arts,” the tone is casual and a little pensive, and the speaker is completely absorbed in Brueghel’s painting, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. In “Waiting for Icarus,” the tone is resentful, and the speaker and Icarus are lovers. The poems, “Musee des Beaux Arts” and “Waiting for Icarus,” have similar and dissimilar elements. Both poems’ settings are centered on Icarus’ journey to the sun, and both poems use simple language to convey the theme of suffering. However, “Musee des Beaux Arts” shows that the surrounding, which is described through a painting, is not affected by the loss of Icarus, but in “Waiting for Icarus,” the speaker, who is a woman, is affected by the loss of Icarus.

The first similarity between “Musee des Beaux Arts” and “Waiting for Icarus” is that both of the poems’ settings are focused on Icarus’ flight towards the sun. In “Musee des Beaux Arts,” Icarus is mentioned in thirteenth line. In “Waiting for Icarus,” Icarus is mentioned in the title, and throughout the first stanza, Icarus is referred by the pronoun, he. To understand the setting of both the poems, a little background on Icarus is required. According to the Greek mythology, Icarus was the son of Daedalus, who was an inventor. Both the father and the son were kept as captives within the walls of Labyrinth. To escape the captivity, the father created two pair of wings, which were created from wax. The father warned Icarus that flying too close to the sun can melt the wax, but Icarus forgot about his father’s word of advice. Therefore, Icarus’ wings melted, and he plummeted to the sea and drowned (Houtzager 53). These mythological explanations give background information, which help create the settings of both the poems.

Another commonality is that both poems use simple language to convey the theme of suffering. For example, in “Musee des Beaux Arts,” the speaker mentions, “In Brueghel’s *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turn away/ Quite leisurely from the disaster” (Auden, lns. 13-14). In these lines, the simple language shows that in Brueghel’s painting, no one was affected by Icarus’ drowning. This exemplifies the theme of suffering, which is that humans are apathetic towards other humans’ sufferings. Similarly, “Waiting for Icarus” also uses simple language,

which highlights the sorrows experienced by the speaker. For example, in the last two lines, it is mentioned, “I would have liked to try those wings myself. / It would have been better than this” (Rukeyser, lns. 20-21). These lines show that the speaker wants to escape the misery, which is caused by Icarus. Furthermore, the lines highlight the hardships of the women, who are oppressed by society and closed ones. By using simple language, both the poems make the theme of suffering more prominent.

Even though both the poems have similar elements, the poems also differ. In “*Musee des Beaux Arts*,” the surrounding, which is described through a painting, is not affected by Icarus’ drowning. In “*Brueghel’s Icarus and the Perils of Flight*,” it is mentioned that the painting, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, shows Icarus’ drowning and the lack of awareness of the bystanders” (McCouat 5). The reference to the painting and the representation of the phrase, “lack of awareness of the bystanders,” is clearly shown in the second stanza of the poem, “*Musee des Beaux Arts*.” For example, in this poem, it is mentioned, “the ploughman may/ Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry, / But for him it was not an important failure” (Auden, lns. 14-16). These lines clearly highlight the indifference of the ploughman. When Icarus plummeted into the sea, Icarus might have cried for help, but the ploughman did not consider Icarus’ drowning as a crucial matter. Furthermore, the speaker, who is absorbing the details of the painting, pensively notes, “the expensive delicate ship that must have seen/ Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,/ Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on” (Auden, lns. 18-20). In these lines, the indifference of the people, who are on the ship, is highlighted. The people on the ship must have witnessed Icarus falling out of the sky and collapsing into the sea, but they made no effort to stop and help Icarus. Instead, the ship still kept sailing as if nothing happened, and the ploughman was apathetic.

On the other hand, in “*Waiting for Icarus*,” the speaker is affected by Icarus’ drowning. In the article, “*Women and Poets See the Truth Arrive: Muriel Rukeyser and Walt Whitman*,” it is mentioned that Rukeyser wrote poems, which highlighted the injustices towards women, and her poems mixed romantic beliefs with women’s distress (Barnat 110). The combination of romance and women’s suffering can be seen in “*Waiting for Icarus*.” For example, in this poem, it is mentioned, “I remember she added: Women who love such are the worst of all/ I have been waiting all day, or perhaps longer” (Rukeyser, lns. 18-19). These lines show that speaker of this poem is waiting for her lover, Icarus. His failure to come back shatters the dreams of the speaker,

and the speaker feels betrayed by Icarus. Furthermore, in the last two lines, it is mentioned, “I would have liked to try those wings myself. / It would have been better than this” (Rukeyser, lns. 20-21). These lines show that the speaker was so depressed that she felt suicidal, and for the speaker, death is better than living with the pain, which she is experiencing.

In conclusion, both poems are similar and dissimilar. The poems’ settings and the use of simple language are the similar elements. In both the poems, the setting orbits around the Greek mythological character, Icarus. Also, both “Musee des Beaux Arts” and “Waiting for Icarus” use simple language to show the theme of suffering. However, both poems show the concept of suffering in a different way. In “Musee des Beaux Arts,” no one is affected when Icarus drowns. The ploughman does not pay heed to Icarus, and the ship does not stop sailing to help Icarus. These two incidents show that humans are indifferent and apathetic towards other humans’ sufferings. In “Waiting for Icarus,” the speaker does suffer when Icarus does not come back from his flight. The speaker in this poem feels betrayed by Icarus, and therefore, she desires to escape from her miseries.

SAA: SMARTPHONE ADDICTS ANONYMOUS

Honorable Mention
By Cailey Scadlock

Technology is constantly innovating every year. In 2018 it seems impossible to live without a smartphone. We use our smartphones to communicate by: reading email, the news, and see what are friends are up to on social media. Our society is continuously engaged in technology. We do not even realize that our behavior is consistent with those who are addicted to alcohol or drugs. With the technology integrated tightly into our daily lives, 2018 could be considered a utopian age by many users; however, research studies say otherwise. According to many articles, continuous smartphone use is actually an addiction. Smartphones can actually cause addictions, decrease our common knowledge, and disconnect ourselves from the world around us.

What is a smartphone? A smartphone is “a mobile phone that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touch screen interface, internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded applications” (Matar and Doris 2). These devices have many attractive qualities that are extremely useful in certain situations, but “intense use of technology restricts the individual’s true social environment interactions and interpersonal relations which cause the individual to move away from the real social environment” (Mustafa and Aysan 1). This proves that technology can disconnect us from our society. We also use dating sites to disconnect ourselves from regular society. Instead of looking at the people around us, we look towards people that are distant from us. Elizabeth Segran writes, “There is a certain amount of psychological anxiety involved with any social interaction and we can avoid that feeling by retreating into our device” (2). Many people today use smartphones as a way to deflect conversation. This act is an active form of disconnection. According to a research study done amongst university students in Korea, “35.8% reported that their interaction with family members is decreased on account of smartphone use” (Matar and Doris 1). This is a staggering amount of individuals who decrease interaction with the people who seemingly are closest to them. Imagine this percentage on a global scale. Many people believe that smartphone usage actually keep us connected while being disconnected at the same time. The ability for one to connect with people they would never have the chance of meeting is remarkable, but overuse of this technology can ultimately lead to one’s downfall. Smartphones can cause us to be antisocial and social at once.

Not only does technology disconnect us from the world around us, but it is also an addiction. Many academic studies have investigated smartphone usage as a behavioral issue and characterized behaviorism as “a learned behavior that is subject to the stimulus-response-reinforcement principle” (Aljomaa 1). With the technology constantly expanding and the rise of society using smartphones, the “very definition of addiction for it not only refers to drug or substance abuse, but now also includes behavioral addictions such as gambling, internet gaming, or even excessive smartphone use” (Matar and Doris 1). Many research studies “are confirming that habitual smartphone use is associated with several addictive characteristics that are analogous to symptoms of substance-use disorder as per DSM-5 including preoccupation, tolerance, inability to control craving, impairment of daily life functions, disregard to harmful consequences, and withdrawal” (1). According to a research study amongst university students: “More than one-fourth of the students in our sample reported indications of compulsive behavior

(e.g., 38.5% reported that surfing the smartphone has exercised negative effects on their physical health)” (1). Considering the research study was questionnaire based, many people can lie and this percentage has the potential to be higher. The research study has also discovered: “More than two-fifths of the sample reported indications of tolerance” (1). This information shows that the students had to add more smartphone usage in their day to satisfy a need. This is consistent with drug and alcohol addicts. Tolerance means to add more of a thing, to feed or feel a psychological or physical need. The research study also found signs of withdrawal: “More than one-sixth of the sample reported indications of withdrawal (e.g., 63.5% reported that the idea of using smartphone comes as the first thought on mind when waking up each morning)” (1).

Withdrawal symptoms are also consistent with addiction. Unlike alcoholism, smartphone overuse is not a stigma of any kind. Society believes the behavior to normal, which eventually will cause these symptoms to be much more drastic. According to another research study, it was recorded that: “By 2016, 46% of the world population are users of internet, 31% active social media, and 51% smartphone users” (Mustafa and Aysan 1). Now in 2018, these numbers could have doubled, or tripled. Now when one goes to the mall one can find stations to charge cellphones and connect to wifi. Stations like so, deals on smartphones and smartphone plans, as well as marketing make buying a smartphone more attractive to consumers. Smartphones are not bad things to have, but relying heavily on such a product is an issue. According to other research studies: “Students have come to depend on a smartphone to do even the simplest daily tasks. This overdependence can result in negative physical, psychological, social, familial and educational effects” (Aljomaa 1). This proves how bad the overuse of smartphones can be.

Smartphones also decrease our intelligence. According to research studies: “Disturbance of adaptive functions indicates the negative consequences, such as neglect of schoolwork and falling school grades, caused by smartphone overuse” (Changho and Lee 1). It had been proven that one cannot multitask. For example, texting and driving, one cannot split their attention, one only dulls their senses in one way or another. Smartphone usage, like texting and driving, also affect the road ways. There has been thousands of accidents caused by smartphone usage. Society’s use of smartphones have actually killed or seriously injured people. There is a stigma against texting and driving, but there is not a large stigma with the overuse of smartphones. According to another research study: “54.3% reported that they were told more than once that they spent too much time on their smartphone” (Matar and Doris 1). This shows that other people do communicate to smartphone users that they spend too much time on their smartphone, but it is not stigmatized like drunkards and drug users are. Another research study reported: “using smartphones has exercised certain negative effects on their schoolwork or job performance, respectively” (1). This shows that students cannot multitask and smartphones are highly distracting. This idea also shows that society cannot even do basic things without a smartphone. In reality these things are very easy and quite capable to happening without a smartphone. Some people cannot even figure out where they are without a smartphone. It is like a clutch. If we have a computer doing everything for us how will we be able to function in a scenario without technology? Writers often write about dystopian futures where only the rich and wealthy have access to technology, such as in *The Hunger Games*. This class affluence is already seeming to become reality. Not everyone has access to technology. If society becomes highly dependent on smartphones and technology alike we will not have the ability to cope. There are many things that are being lost in our learning. Most of society would not and could not function in a society twenty or so years ago when the technology just began.

Technology, specifically smartphones can be addictive and damaging, but they are useful. According to a research study: “The positive effects of smartphones include the facilitating and enhancing of communication and information sharing among researchers and students as well as the sharing of valuable experiences among countries through the various applications that they include” (Aljomaa 1). Now we can communicate across continents instantly. If one was lost, one could instantly get directions home. In case of an emergency there are apps that send police one’s exact location with the touch of a button. Smartphone technology is innovative and spectacular. Without smartphones many of us would not know how to get to places in a foreign city, what time it is going to rain, or how to cook foreign food. Many people view smartphones as personal assistants which is really accurate to say. We have Siri, Alexa, etc. that instantly answers our questions when asked. There are many uses to smartphones that can be crucial to one’s daily life. However, the overuse of smartphones is the real issue.

Technology does have its uses and might seem like a necessity, but in reality they cause society to behave like zombies. Overuse of smartphones causes us to become disconnected, addicted, and unintelligent. Smartphone technology will continue to innovate into extraordinary and spectacular things, which one might be excited to see. However, when one views these issues they seem very minor, but all together they are a problem if society continues to let their phones absorb them. Smartphones are not the key issue here; society is.

The following papers were presented at the LSUA Humanities Conference. The conference is held every Spring semester and allows students not only to showcase their best work, but also gives them practice in presenting. This annual conference enables students to be confident in their work and speaking skills, as being able to present one's findings is a key skill in many occupations.

THE SYMBOLISM OF WALLS IN "BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER"

By: Morgan Primeaux

Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! Ah symbolism! In Herman Melville's short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener", the recurring theme of walls and barriers has many interpretations as to what they could signify in context to the story. The more common interpretations are that of the barrier of language and communication, man's shortcomings, nihilism and the meaninglessness of material objects, and barriers between social classes. There is plenty evidence to support each of these interpretations, but comparing them gives the reader a better understanding of the story as a whole.

Firstly, the interpretation that the walls are literal representations of the barrier of language makes sense when considering that the lawyer never truly understands what Bartleby means, which isn't entirely his fault when Bartleby isn't interested in communicating with him. Sanford Pinsker puts it perfectly in his article "'Bartleby the Scrivener: Language as Wall'", Melville's narrator discovers that language only makes the haunting Bartleby more perplexing and less definable. 'Walls' are the central motif of Melville's story, extending from the Wall Street locale suggested by the sub-title, through a maze of physical walls which separate one man from another and finally to those walls of language which make human understanding impossible. (17)

The more the lawyer tries to talk to Bartleby the more frustrated he becomes because Bartleby not only refuses to perform the tasks he asks of him, he also refuses to explain why he denies to complete these tasks. The lawyer also insists on trying to define Bartleby, he struggles to figure out if he's deranged or just rude or something else entirely, which confuses the narrator and makes him even more determined to figure out exactly who Bartleby is. But as Pinsker has pointed out, this is impossible when one man refuses to communicate and the other does so through false-charity. The lawyer is also somewhat unknowingly cutting himself off even more from Bartleby when he isolates him from everyone, but still keeps him close enough to hear him bark out commands, "I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined," (Melville 1108). That last statement is completely ironic when considering he and Bartleby can't even see each other when he speaks to him. Doesn't the narrator know that eye contact is important for good communication? But Bartleby seems to have some insight going on in the situation and he seems to actively work at being misunderstood, "Bartleby calls the consensus reality into question by refusing to be rhetorically understood. The physical walls which separate employer and scrivener operate at one level of reality; the walls of language operate, more insidiously at a deeper one," (Pinsker 20). Bartleby knows that the lawyer does not understand him and he also seems to know that the lawyer may

never understand him either because he cannot see that there is an underlying problem of communication in their employer-employee relationship.

The second interpretation of the walls gets even deeper inside of Bartleby's head and takes what could be Bartleby's direct interpretation of the walls as man's inability to overcome some great moral problem which has impeded man since the beginning of time. Bartleby spends much of his time in the story literally just staring at a blank wall, and it is obvious to the lawyer that Bartleby is contemplating something. What that something is, is never really clear to anyone, but a logical theory is that of death. The lawyer even calls the long periods of time that he spends staring at the wall "dead-wall reveries". Leo Marx tries to explain why Bartleby stands and stares at blank walls in his article "Melville's Parable of the Walls", "For him the important thing is that he still fronts the same dead-wall which has always impinged upon his consciousness, and upon the mind of man since the beginning of time. Bartleby has come as close to the wall as many man can hope to do. He finds that it is absolutely impassable," (Marx 618). Bartleby knows that, in life, he will never be able to overcome this great, terrible wall that he constantly sees in front of him. He recognizes this wall can be "comparable to man's inability to surmount the limitations of his sense of perceptions," (Marx 618). Bartleby must then figure out how to get over this impending wall, and he decides that death must be the answer, and when he is imprisoned, he follows through with this plan to get past the wall, "Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby," (Melville 1127). Bartleby lives the remainder of his life in a dead-wall reverie and seems to die in one too, one can only hope that he has found his way over, around, or through his dreadful wall.

The third interpretation of the walls goes hand-in-hand with the previous and theorizes that the walls represent a form of nihilism and the meaninglessness of the materialism of Wall Street. Norman Springer believes this is what all these walls must mean, especially to Bartleby who stares at them all day, "Bartleby's behavior is that of a man in front of a blank wall (an absolute barrier, a barricade, like the wall of the Tombs where he dies). Blankness is the only truth, and to know this is to wilt and die. Are not the assumptions the narrator lives by only there to cover the terrible barrenness of the wall which Bartleby faces? The narrator's occupation, his immediate concerns and his total profession, can be seen as his attempt to make meaning where there is no meaning," (Springer 414). Bartleby must see the meaninglessness of all that surrounds him on Wall Street because wilting and dying is exactly what he does, although he does not think the lawyer can see the nothingness that surrounds him because he questions the lawyer about it when he gives up writing altogether to only stare at the wall,

Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall reverie. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing. "Why, how now? what next" exclaimed I, "do no more writing?" "No more." "And what is the reason?" "Do you not see the reason for yourself," he indifferently replied. (Melville 1117)

Bartleby sees that there is no point to writing or really in doing anything at all, but the lawyer cannot see that there is no point, and if he can see it, he refuses to acknowledge that it is all meaningless. The fact that Bartleby is alone in his feelings of nihilism isolates him more than any wall does throughout the entire story. He is trapped in his dead-wall reveries with no one to share his loneliness with. The lawyer seems to catch on to Bartleby's loneliness, but does not understand the deeper meaning to Bartleby's feelings of isolation,

In plain face, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness...But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic. (Melville 1119)

Even as the narrator describes Bartleby's uselessness and loneliness, he compares him to material objects, which makes it obvious that he does not see what Bartleby sees in his dead-wall reveries, that materialism is pointlessness, and there is no real meaning between the walls of Wall Street.

Lastly, the walls in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" can be interpreted as a barrier between the two classes that make up Wall Street. James Wilson explains this interpretation further in his article, "Bartleby": The Walls of Wall Street,

The lawyer finds what he calls a "satisfactory arrangement" by placing Bartleby behind a "folding-screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice". Thus, the walls reflect the division of this particular society in two distinct classes: the property owners and the property-less workers. (335)

Bartleby represent the workers while the lawyer is one of the property owners and they are separated by numerous walls in the story and Bartleby also seems trapped by these walls. And while he is trapped, the lawyer is free to come and go. This entrapment is shown by the fact that Bartleby doesn't really leave the office and actually refuses to leave when the lawyer fires him and again when the lawyer completely moves offices. It may not be that Bartleby refuses to leave (or "prefers not to"), he simply may not be able to leave these four ensnaring walls. But when he is physically taken out of this figurative jail, he is taken to a literal jail where he finds another wall to sit and stare at. Although, Bartleby believes that all of Wall Street is a prison to him and those that are a part of the "property-less workers". The lawyer may seem to want to help Bartleby, but at the same time, he pushes the separation of the classes just as much as the physical and figurative walls of Wall Street. When Bartleby refuses to write and refuses to leave, the lawyer asks, "What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?" (Melville 1120). The lawyer equates human rights to the fact of whether that person pays taxes or owns property, so he seems to be well aware of the separation of the classes. But even as the lawyer acknowledges this separation, he still does not realize that Bartleby's refusal to leave is really an inability to escape the class system that the lawyer perpetuates. Wilson goes as far as comparing Bartleby's existence on Wall Street to that of a slave,

By equating the Tombs with ancient Egypt, he by extension equates Bartleby's plight with the plight of the oppressed masses, the slaves of ancient Egypt. After all, the pyramids were built with slave labor, just as Wall Street was built by the labor of multitudes of Bartlebys, who are no less slaves than their distant counter-parts. And to extend the metaphor further, the lawyers and other property-owners are the new pharaohs: the walls of Wall Street were built in their name, and to serve them. (336)

This metaphor further executes the point that the walls of Wall Street entrap Bartleby, and though he "prefers not" to leave or quit, he is unable to leave or quit Wall Street, except, of course, when he dies.

But why are these interpretations important for the understanding of the story as a whole? Each of these interpretations of Bartleby's walls point to the bigger picture, the moral of the story: apathy leads to the destruction of man. Bartleby is apathetic to everything around him throughout the story which ultimately leads to his demise. The lawyer only has the pretense of

really caring, but he only really cares about what people would think of him if he treated Bartleby poorly, not how his actions would actually affect Bartleby. He comes to realize this flaw in himself and in society when he finds Bartleby dead in jail. He marks this realization with his final words, “Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!” (Melville 1128).

AN ARISTOTLE INTERPRETATION OF THE UNITED STATES DECLARATION

By Alexander C. Eversull

“The Declaration of Independence says that all human beings are created equal. Using Aristotle’s ideas about human nature, political order, and justice, write an Aristotelian criticism of this position. You should also include an evaluation of Aristotle’s view of equality.”

Note: Paper will be constructed using a first-person perspective of Aristotle or a student of Aristotle. Dialogue may not follow modern American prudency, though no offense is intended.

Declaration Excerpt: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

I do not recognize this rhetoric as coming from an appropriate (Greek) tongue of acceptable and insightful citizenry. At a glance, it appears to be the ravings of an inferior individual with limited knowledge, but closer inspection may be required to discern its true merit. The discussion that “all men are created equal” is not proper and speaks to the ill-defined makings of a foreign State ruled by slaves who are incapable of proper participation in (Greek) society. All peoples cannot be truly insightful, and skills of peoples do not equal themselves precisely. This also fails to incorporate the conduct of ruling over others outside of their own borders. Slaves ruling over slaves is lost on me, and the printed decree does not condone this practice. Are these slaves willfully setting themselves up to failure? They do seem to understand the value of living but living without the proper form of government is not living at all! If slaves rule other slaves, then I see no semblance of liberty nor happiness for all men, though if the words were to be used by a proper ruler, then I might see a degree of truth and not some strange familiarity. I find it near incomprehensible how any slave or group of slaves were able to design such a decree of their own volition and sounds like the rhetoric of a citizen from within the confines of some familiar (Greek) territory. If true in all honesty, then I find it most peculiar that I do not recognize this manner of speech from a man encountered in my experience. I would prefer a rendezvous with such a man and learn of his exploits, but also to see the fruits of his labor and correct all recognizable oversights! If such a man is a citizen of (Greek) propriety, he may have the makings of a ruling individual and could be made to govern well. If he is mere slave, then he has no such capability and his ideals have already failed him and his people, though he would be the most well-known slave to ever walk this or any other land!

The man who wrote that “all men are created equal” has views on the morality of life which appear sound at a glance, and any State which exists to enslave others must have a vast military of great effectiveness at its disposal to best ensure that these views reach fruition! If any land of slave-organized rule is to be effective at enslaving others with the support of an immense fighting force suited to accomplishing such a task, then the children of this land are likely sired into service, be it political or military, by the most dutiful women ever known! The children are shown a semblance of generosity by the land and its women and learn the value of aid and service for the good of the State! This gives some sense of support to “all men are created equal” if all boys are raised to serve with purpose! It is both absurd and remarkable at the same time, and I never thought such was possible until I read it and saw others with the same feelings toward “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”! If this follows the earlier idea that the only

such man who could develop such insight was that of a former (Greek) citizen, I sincerely wish that I grace myself in his presence for I find his thoughts refreshing if not misguided, which suggests that he might be a former ruler or traveler with many years behind him. Perhaps that is why I know not of this man, as most of society has forgotten him due to the length of his journey and his efforts. He was likely well-educated and a proper citizen before he departed and learned of new knowledge along his way. It might possibly be suggested that he was not suited for ruling and therefore found a new land in which his propriety could be subjected over others, which calls into question all of his efforts as they are not for the good of everyone but himself, which explains the folly of his rhetoric and gives support to his length of years as age might have soured his mind. All men will never be truly equal under the laws of a proper State, but this could be a 'deviation' brought on by years and a confused understanding between "equality" and "purpose". In a sense, all are equal if all truly have a delegated purpose under the good of the State, especially if the State is vast in population. A large State is difficult to maintain, so specific roles for all men and even women to perform are inescapable.

Large tracts of land for people might also explain such a vast population and require increased slavs to better use the land for the good of the citizens and the State. The military presses additional slavs into service for the sake of men who are shown good values by the women and therefore leads to a land where everyone may truly know "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness". All are "equal" if they have a purpose. Such strange rhetoric, and I admit that while I do not agree fully, I feel as though I understand it well enough that I wish to meet this ruler and learn more. If he is a proper (Greek) citizen and neither born from or raised by slavs, then I feel his makings of a "State" could become second to one of our own, so long as it is led under true moral guidance.

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT 1545-1563CE:
THE CATHOLIC REBUTTAL TO THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND
INNER REFORM.
1ST PLACE HISTORY

By: Rhiannon Malone

The Catholic Church of the sixteenth century was in dire need of reformation. Absenteeism, pluralism, educational and moral laxity were just a few of the issues besieging the body of Christ. The need of moral and administrative reforms within the Roman Catholic Church, coupled with the threat of continued advancement of Protestant theology lead many to call upon the papacy for a universal council. However, political disputes between various popes and Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V prevented such action from occurring for many years. Calls for reform were not a new occurrence, but such pleadings, amongst both Catholics and Protestants, had abounded in the century prior to Luther's issuance of his 95 Theses. It was not until the Council of Trent (1545-1563 CE) that large measures would be taken to correct the egregious wrongs in the Catholic Church. This paper attempts to provide an analysis of reforms and Catholic doctrines presented during this Council within a historical framework.

During the early years of the Reformation, popes often ignored pleadings for a council, fearing a general council would encourage a resurgence of the conciliarism movement and its consequent challenge to papal authority. It was not until Pope Paul III (1534-1549 CE), who felt confident in his abilities to control such a council, and being well versed in each group's various demands, that the papacy opened preliminary negotiations and began conferring with Catholics and Protestants alike. Later historical writings debate Pope Paul III's true sentiments. Various sources argue that the pope hoped for reconciliation while others state he in fact wished to ensure a separation by clearly delineating doctrinal differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. Regardless, Paul III's initial attempts at securing a council were met with failure. All parties involved argued about the degree to which the papacy should control the council's proceedings. Protestants demanded the council be held outside of Rome's sphere of control. Charles V demanded the council be held in a territory of his holding. Papal requests for a council at Mantua in May 1537 CE came to naught due to French resistance. A council proposed in 1538 CE at Vicenza was frustrated due to the Holy Roman Emperor's apparent indifference resulting in the presence of not a single bishop. It was not until 1542 CE that a proposed council to meet in Trent, Italy was accepted, though even this council was postponed until 1545 CE.

The Council of Trent, considered the Nineteenth Ecumenical Council, was opened in Trent, Italy on December 13th, 1545 CE and was formally concluded on December 4th, 1563 CE. Though Pope Paul III first issued a decree for a general council in 1537 CE, the initial council did not open its first formal session until 1545 CE. The beginning of the council is typically referred to as the first period. Lasting three years, the council held eight formal sessions during which they attempted to clarify Catholic doctrine and craft reform legislation. By 1545CE the rapid growth of Protestantism was proving a threat to areas long considered Catholic strongholds. New protestant interpretations of scripture called into question long accepted views regarding the papacy, traditions, and doctrines. In response, prelates at Trent felt the need to not only condemn the Protestant movement, but discuss and issue Catholic interpretations and/or positions on every item which had been called into question. Council members throughout the period attempted to make clear delineations between Catholic and Protestant doctrines. During

the first session *sola scriptura*, or scripture only, was attacked. After much debate, prelates announced the acceptance of the Old & New Testaments, but also included apostolic traditions which they claimed were to be accepted with similar reverence to that of scripture. Interpretation of scripture was the sole right of the church and the Latin Vulgate was acknowledged as the only authentic, biblical authority. When quoted in lectures, debates, and sermons, the Vulgate was declared to be beyond dispute. Session six dealt with the heart of Luther's reformation, justification by faith. With no recourse from earlier decisions to draw upon, the council debated the matter for seven months in an attempt to formulate a uniform Catholic position without alienating various Catholic schools of theology. Ultimately, the council affirmed that God's grace was necessary for justification although it did not disregard disposition for grace or collaboration of free will. The council thus accepted a doctrine proclaiming the grace of justification is based on good works done through the collaboration between grace and the believer. The Catholic position also stressed that grace can be lost as a result of sin, yet may be regained through penance. Though the aforementioned doctrines illustrate that much was achieved during the first sessions, political relations between Pope Paul III and Emperor Charles V were deteriorating. Under the pretense of avoiding a typhus epidemic, the pope moved the gathering to Bologna, an area within the Papal States. The majority of the council's members moved as the papacy directed where discussions continued; however, the emperor ordered his bishops to remain in Trent, viewing the move as a maneuver to subjugate the council to papal authority. To prevent further aggravation of the Emperor, the council produced no doctrines while situated in Bologna. Yet despite such measures, increased tensions eventually led to the council's first formal suspension on February 15th, 1548 CE.

Following the death of Pope Paul III, the new pope, Julius III (1550-1555 CE), reconvened the Council, returning it to Trent on November 14th, 1551 CE creating what is historically recognized as the second period. Consisting of sessions nine through fourteen the second period was the shortest assembly held in the Tridentine Council lasting only several months. Despite its brevity, notable issues were discussed. Catholic doctrines regarding the Eucharist were examined in extensive detail during the thirteenth session. Transubstantiation, that is the real manifestation of Christ during communion, was affirmed while the various Protestant Eucharistic doctrines of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli were refuted. During the fifteenth session, theologians representing protestant viewpoints arrived and were present for the first and only time. Though initially their presence brought hope of reunion, Protestant demands that previously defined issues be discussed again were met with great resistance. Protestant demands did lead to a debate on the Sacraments of Mass though discussions were abandoned after the German Princes' revolt against Emperor Charles V which forced a second suspension of the council on April, 28th, 1552 CE. Suspension of the council led Pope Julius III to begin preparing an extensive bull reform to clarify what had been accomplished thus far; however, his death prior to its completion led the document to remain unpublished. An additional ten years would pass before the Council of Trent would be reopened. Such delay stemmed largely from Julius's successor, Pope Paul IV's, anti-protestant stance. With Paul IV's death and the invocation of the new pope, Pius IV, the council was once again reconvened, this time completing its work in 1563 CE.

By the mid-sixteenth century the split between Catholicism and Protestantism had grown to such an extent that reconciliation now seemed most unlikely. Further inroads of Protestantism into traditionally Catholic areas worried members of the Catholic clergy. Such fears appeared justified as the advance of Calvinism into France appeared to threaten the very existence of

French Catholicism so severely that only a general council was believed to be able to salvage the remnant. In response to such issues, Pope Pius IV (1559-1565 CE) opened the third and final period of the Council of Trent on January 18th, 1562 CE. Sessions during the third period were noted for opposition between papal legates and the three bishopric factions: Imperial, French, and Spanish. Papal successes were largely due to papal legate, Cardinal G. Morone who skillfully crafted doctrines and presented them in such a way that all sides could reach consensus. It was Morone who created the council committees to reproduce the essentials of Catholic doctrine on the issues of indulgences, purgatory, veneration of saints, and relics. Such issues had been deemed an essential topic for council discussion as they were the issues at the heart of Luther's 95 Theses. The committees produced extensive resolutions. It was stated that the Church has the full power to offer indulgences, though the practice was greatly reformed and reigned in. Purgatory was affirmed as a place in which the dead are purified and is accessible to the faithful through intercession and sacrifice. The church upheld the use of relics and the veneration of saints as being 'good' and was permissible in churches because, as stated by the seventh ecumenical council, "honor given them is directed to the originals whom they represent."

While clarification of scripture and Catholic doctrine was important, the Council of Trent also produced numerous Catholic reforms. Weary of the apparent preeminence of the Italian bishops, Spanish and French bishops produced reform petitions stating that since salvation of souls is the supreme law, selection of bishops should be based upon the worthiness of the candidate. This reform instituted competition for pastoral appointment. Better appointment practices increased the need to produce an accepted, uniform curriculum. Much attention was thus given to an individual's education in preparation for the priesthood. The council ordered the establishment of seminaries for the training of priests citing successful examples of organized training at Verona and Granada. Prior to this, there had been no generally accepted regulations; instead, each candidate would have been responsible for acquiring the necessary training for priestly functions. The establishment of guidelines for education and appointment were furthered by the adoption of doctrines eliminating pluralism stating "it is a divine precept that the pastor know his flock". In an effort to prevent simony, ordination was forbidden until the candidate had reached his twenty-third year and to the priesthood before the age of twenty-five. Monasteries, long considered houses of learning, were reorganized and prescribed better supervision. Session Twenty-three of the council condemned strife that accused bishops named by the Pope as being illegal, thus further asserting papal authority. The aforementioned were just a few of the reforms instituted during the three periods of the Council of Trent.

Though the Council of Trent is hallmarked as one of the great councils in the Catholic Church today, throughout the three periods, attendance at the Council was abysmal. Unlike previous councils with attending bishops numbering in the hundreds, Trent boasted just thirty-one prelates in the first session and a marginally increased attendance of 213 at its conclusion. Attendance issues were further complicated by the nationality of bishops. Though influential in the third period, the French were absent from the first two periods of Trent, both in 1545-1548 CE and 1551-1552 CE, as they were entrenched in the Wars of Religion. Throughout the council the largest representation of bishops, with over two-thirds majority, originated from the Italian peninsula. Complete French absence coupled with such an overwhelming majority of Italians, troubled bishops from other nations who feared Italian bishops and the papacy would dominate the council's proceedings, thus limiting reforms. At formal conclusion of the Council of Trent in 1563 CE the final decrees were signed by 6 cardinals, 3 patriarchs, 25 archbishops, 169 bishops,

19 proxy bishops, and 7 generals of religious orders, marking the largest attendance number during the entirety of the council. The signatures did not end the difficulties - but moving the issues from the religious to the secular sphere. Resistance from sovereigns, who for the last century had been consolidating their powers separate from that of the Church, now feared such decrees could transfer personal power into the hands of the papacy. In response, many rulers would not allow the Tridentine decrees to be published in their territories or stated decrees were conditionally accepted. It is interesting to note that despite such fear of papal control, not one of the three popes who reigned during the duration of the Council's periods ever physically attended, instead sending legates to represent the papal positions instead.

The Council of Trent (1545CE-1563CE) marked the beginning of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, serving as the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation. Such differentiations between Catholicism and Protestantism marked the final death blow to the ancient ideal of a singular church with the pope as its head. Catholicism now existed alongside various protestant interpretations. Doctrines and reform decrees issued during the Council of Trent came largely from compromises between Catholics of both the traditional and radical reformers of the sixteenth century. Emerging from this Council was a not a revival or even a simple reform of the Middle Age church of old, but rather the emergence of something new. This more modern Catholic Church now bore reactionary marks against Protestantism. The foundation laid at Trent also crafted the basic tone of Catholicism that would hold true for the next four hundred years: "to protect the church at all costs, seeking for it as much freedom and power as possible, and subordinating all other issues to this overriding concern." Ultimately, the Council of Trent created a sense of renewal felt all the church over. Strengthening of ecclesiastical life, a revival of scholastic theology, and a moral transformation helped to avert the critical danger of disappearance threatening Catholicism and create a lasting religious zeal visible even within parts of the Catholic Church in the 21st century.

AN ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD:
DEATH AND PERPETUAL EXISTENCE IN *HOUSEKEEPING*
1ST PLACE ENGLISH

By: Carli Smith

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* is a complex examination of death and of human perception of loss. Sisters Ruthie and Lucille have experienced the loss of what little family they had and are left to the care of their mysterious aunt, Sylvie, who prefers living in train cars to the stability of a traditional home. Also important is the setting of the novel; the girls are entrenched in a frozen landscape that seems entirely inhospitable to life and has on numerous occasions actually taken the lives of its residents. Repeated references are made to those who have died in Fingerbone—whether by natural causes or drowning or simply freezing when exposed to the elements. Robinson uses the character of Ruthie to show a child's unfolding perception of immense loss, and in the process of coping with and finding meaning in this loss, Ruthie undergoes a journey of self-discovery and realizes her own transient perspective in life.

Fingerbone lake is presented as an otherworldly force that frequently sucks the souls of the town's residents into its depths from which they are never recovered; Ruthie appears to view it as a harbinger of death that retains all those who have lost their lives to it. The lake is a looming presence from the outset of the novel; early on we are told Edmund Stone was killed in a train wreck, and his body was never recovered from the frozen water (8), and that the girls' mother, Helen, drove her car into the lake, from which we are left to presume she was never retrieved (23). It is Ruthie's musings about Fingerbone lake that truly begin to solidify her own sense of death. She imagines the raising of "a great army of paleolithic and neolithic frequenters of the lake...[from] eons [ago], down to the earliest present," including her mother and others she has heard stories of being lost (91)—and adds the following:

Ascension seemed at such times a natural law. If one added to it a law of completion—that everything must finally be made comprehensible—then some general rescue of the sort I imagined my aunt to have undertaken would be inevitable. For why do our thoughts turn to some gesture of a hand, the fall of a sleeve, some corner of a room on a particular anonymous afternoon, even when we are asleep, and even when we are so old that our thoughts have abandoned other business? What are all these fragments for, if not to be knit up finally? (Robinson 92)

Here Ruthie is shaping her own concept of death into a physical removal of the body with an inevitable return; Ruthie has this immense faith—if not in a God, then in the natural order of the universe—and to her own understanding there must be some ultimate resolution of the loss she and everyone else endures. Tyndall and Ribkoff more deeply examine what they term as Ruthie's "optative" narrative, noting that "Ruth learns the positive value of wandering through the dark territory of loss, loneliness, and mourning...in which individual losses are woven into a narrative predicated on a sense of universal loss" (87). It is this "universal loss" that Ruthie seems to embrace and believe that natural order will eventually rectify.

Yet Ruthie's understanding of her own loss is constantly evolving, reflecting her meditations on both her own life experience and the material remnants of those she has lost. When spending the night lost in the woods with Lucille, Ruthie thinks:

Everything that falls upon the eye is apparition, a sheet dropped over the world's true workings. The nerves and the brain are tricked, and one is left with dreams that these

specters loose their hands from ours and walk away, the curve of the back and the swing of the coat so familiar as to imply that they should be permanent fixtures of the world, when in fact nothing is more perishable (Robinson 116)

With this passage Ruthie's ideas about the impermanence of life are beginning to emerge. As time passes, Ruthie is continuously developing this idea of impermanence and notes the insignificance of "relic, remnant, margin, residue, memento, bequest, memory, thought, track, or trace" in the face of a "perfect and permanent" darkness (Robinson 116). If anything, she is only solidifying the idea that these earthly remnants are meaningless when stood before the vast nihilism that is death and darkness, but to her both these souvenirs of life and the death and loss that they fight to usurp are meaningless in a universe that will ultimately resolve this universal loss. The continuing theme of impermanence seems to be an isolated theory of the author that fits into her own broader belief that "experience" is "emblematic" and that "reality is of a piece" (Schaub 239); here Robinson uses Ruthie to signify this collective understanding of the universe that supersedes the ephemeral with the interminable.

Robinson contrasts Ruthie's imagining of Fingerbone's death as unchanging with descriptions of the physical decomposition and disarray of the house Sylvie and the girls live in. In doing so, she further illustrates the temporary nature of the material. Ruthie describes the chipped and yellowing paint of the once well-kept home as well as the thick layer of dust. She also tells about the curtain that was burned by her own birthday candles. There is some question here about why the curtain was never replaced—while Sylvie has demonstrated that she has no regard or simply does not think about things like curtains, Ruthie suggests that "Sylvie's pleasure in this event had been intense, and perhaps the curtain reminded her of it" (101). The dichotomy here is interesting: Sylvie's preferred lifestyle requires a natural shucking of materialism, and yet she is preserving some of the relics that Ruthie later renounces. The distinction here is between material possessions and those physical representations of memories and the emotions that are associated with them. This passage in particular is evidence that, while she starts as Ruthie's guide into the world of transience, in the end Sylvie is at least cognizant of the material in a way that Ruthie has entirely dismissed.

There is a sharp disparity between Ruthie's ideas about death and reality and Lucille's almost hysterical devotion to the continuation of life in Fingerbone. Lucille's perspective on life diverges sharply from that of Ruthie and is best understood through their individual memories of their mother; whereas Ruthie remembers Helen as parenting with a "gentle indifference," Lucille remembers Helen as being "orderly, vigorous, and sensible" (109). This parallels the way Lucille increasingly clings to the practical, material things—like sensible shoes and mittens for the frigid winter. These are things that, while not permanent, are lasting in a way the pretty sequin slippers Sylvie gives the girls are not. There is an unspoken spectrum at work here—Lucille represents a more traditional approach to life and covets human interaction and practicality, Sylvie has retreated from interpersonal connection and only notices material things for their beauty, and Ruthie transcends the physical plane and rises to some higher meditative state. This division is insurmountable for the girls, and Lucille's departure hastens Ruthie's acceptance of the transient lifestyle.

Ruthie's eventual acquisition of Sylvie's lifestyle is perhaps the natural progression of her own philosophical musings. After all, the transient lifestyle is nothing if not the disregard of socially-constructed notions of ownership and how it determines the perceived fulfillment of the individual's life. Ultimately, burning down the house is a physical manifestation of Ruthie's

disowning of the physical existence, and crossing the bridge to catch a train is her acceptance of impermanence. However, this interpretation of the novel's conclusion is debated; it has also been suggested that Sylvie and Ruthie perhaps did not survive the crossing of the bridge and were themselves absorbed into the lake. Painter submits that "[e]xpressing Ruth's desire to reunite with lost family members, [Robinson] leaves Ruth and Sylvie's mortality suspended, in favor of characterizing a prodigal, unworldly form of loyalty;" however, this interpretation fails to explain Robinson's epilogue (323). Ruthie describes her life with Sylvie many years in the future, always drifting from city to city and only stopping to take a menial job until her customers or coworkers grow suspicious of her reticence. The way the narrative is here depicted makes the epilogue hard to puzzle out—it is at once autobiographical with the whisper of a fever dream weaving throughout—but there is a piece of Ruthie's narrative that is haunting. She speaks about Lucille having dinner in some distant city or even still living in their house in Fingerbone, and she imbibes this image of Lucille with the same wistful contemplation that she herself speaks with. This once again illustrates the universal nature of longing, whether we chose to embrace the physical or seek comfort from some higher understanding of the world's inner workings.

“DEAFNESS AS A LITERARY DEVICE IN ELLEN DOUGLAS’ *CAN’T QUIT YOU, BABY*
PRESENTED AT THE NULC

By Carli Smith

Ellen Douglas’ *Can’t Quit You, Baby* was published in 1988, almost two complete decades before Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*, at a time when the literary world was perhaps not quite ready to take such an honest look at race relations between women—particularly at a fictional account written by a white female author. While *The Help* fell under significant criticism for its relatively soft portrayals of the intense violence of the civil rights movement, Douglas stared into the face of such harsh and uncomfortable topics and did not blink. *Can’t Quit You, Baby* addresses this violence — physical and sexual — as well as the immense injustice and lack of sympathy many African American women felt from their white female employers. Another aspect of this injustice is that in many ways white women suffered some of the same experiences and social injustices that have separated genders for much of history in the majority of human societies. Douglas’ white female character, Cornelia, is exemplary of this dichotomy in that she ignores the socially unacceptable parts of her maid’s stories about her own life. Of course, within the setting of this novel, the maid, named Tweet, is an impoverished African American woman who is financially dependent upon her job in Cornelia’s home. In choosing to make Cornelia deaf, Ellen Douglas gives physical manifestation to the tradition of women in Southern culture who ignore the things they simply do not wish to know while living their lives largely in silence; however, Cornelia’s physical inability to hear is what makes her revelation in finally hearing Tweet’s metaphorical voice so monumental.

The idea of the Southern white woman as a pristine standard to uphold and as a submissive bystander is well established in Southern literature. This image is an enduring theme for the genre; in fact, one would be hard pressed to name an example of a female character that does not in some way fit this description. This theme endures yet because of the immense historical and social roots of feminine subordination in a patriarchal culture in which William Dalessio says “ingrained in southern ladies...were the values of self-suppression, inferiority, and fatalism; ironically these ladies came to accept these negative values” (par. 3). Dalessio goes on to add that “Women of the American South, both of antebellum and more contemporary times, have ‘consented’ to their subordination” (par. 6). History would suggest that this “consent” originates from time not so long ago when women of all colors were in every way legally and socially dependent upon the favor of men; perhaps what is more modernly termed “consent” is in actuality a kind of learned helplessness held over from darker days when female agency was practically unheard of.

Within the context of her own childhood, Cornelia is a first-hand witness to the complexity of walking this figurative tightrope. The daughter of an absentee father and an emotionally abusive mother, Cornelia repeatedly falls victim to her mother’s intense frustrations and unhappiness. The narrator relates a particularly profound incident of Cornelia, age nine, being switched by her mother for some unnamed offense. The rage of her mother is fierce, and the peach-tree switch she whips Cornelia with—a Southern emblem in and of itself—draws blood from the lashes on her legs (40). This rage, while directed at Cornelia, gives the impression of having a much more significant source than a child’s impertinence and is likely to

be an outburst born of the tight social constraints her mother was forced to live under. In fact, the narrator later reveals another flashback in which a still newlywed Cornelia plays an interesting game of double solitaire with her mother who recounts a time she left her husband and took her two children home to her own mother's house. Possibly over a parallel card game, Cornelia's grandmother's response is biting. She says: "...don't think for a moment you can come home to *me*...*you* married him. You chose a life with him of your own free will. Now, if you want to change your life, it's your business, not mine" (67-68). While Cornelia's mother claims that this was the correct response and she herself displays a similar stance to Cornelia, the reader is left to wonder if the complete lack of choice on her part is some of the origin of her horrible treatment of Cornelia.

By writing Cornelia as a character whose inability to hear grows steadily worse throughout her life, Douglas *gives* Cornelia the ability to cull the information about her surrounding world in a very selective way, allowing her to form a picturesque existence that reflects only the frailest exoskeleton of reality. In this way, Cornelia's unquestioning approach to life is simply a continuance of the legacy of her mother and countless other Southern women who came before her; by living this unexamined life, Cornelia is continuing this tradition of willful blindness (or deafness in her case). It is important to note that Douglas is using the character of Cornelia and her relationship with her maid Tweet in an incredibly skillful way to do something that Donaldson phrases as "[bringing] attention again and again to all those long-simmering tensions lying just beneath the surface of her storytelling—silences, habits of willed deafness and amnesia, refusals, and outright disavowals" (Donaldson par. 2).

In shaping her world and the events within it to suit her picture of how things should be, Cornelia is continuing the fairy tale existence that Douglas established early in the novel. Douglas has her narrator paint a picture of young Cornelia brushing her hair in her tower bedroom (Douglas 71) before escaping the clutches of her evil mother and running away with her Prince Charming (92). It is only through the complete destruction of this fairytale that Cornelia begins to "hear" the truth. Douglas uses Cornelia's grief over the death of her husband to make Cornelia receptive to these stories Tweet has been telling all along. It is incredibly poignant that Cornelia, who has thus far heard so little, has her great awakening by hearing the disembodied voice of Tweet. Ann Bomberger states that "[b]y listening to the past that Cornelia has shoved to the periphery of her consciousness her entire life, Cornelia can become whole" (25).

So why is Cornelia so resistant to Tweet's "gift of truth" (39)? Cornelia lived through and defied her own mother's prejudices about her husband, John O'Kelly—a working class air force pilot and Irish Catholic to boot—described by the narrator in such a way as to suggest that Cornelia will be *better*, will not be the woman that her mother would have her be. In a large way she isn't: where her mother was cold and cutting, Cornelia is soft and withdrawn and reserved. Where her mother would stomp her feet or lock Cornelia in a tower, Cornelia works so hard to circumvent those things she finds unacceptable—she ensures her own children have "straight backs, straight teeth, and straight A's," remember(11)? After all, Cornelia is still the little girl who took the switching from her mother in complete "control" because, as spoken by the narrator, "[the] absurd occasion [was] something first to ignore and then to blot out" (40). This is a stance on life that has carried on into adulthood, but where it once was a mark of maturity, it later becomes a crippling refusal to acknowledge the world as it is. Early on, the narrator suggests that Cornelia may in truth view "her deafness [as] the guarantee of good fortune,"

which we can only view as an acknowledgement, whether conscious or subconscious, of the unique position in which she is placed (11).

If Cornelia's deafness is her guarantee of good fortune, it is her hearing aid that allows her to modulate the amount of good fortune she is given. The narrator says that during Tweet's story—about her naked father singing the blues with his wife as she dances in the front room of Tweet's grandfather's house—Cornelia is uncomfortable with the “explicit description. Nor, perhaps, does she wish to reveal her reluctance—her revulsion—to Tweet. To reveal, after all, is to admit—to reveal oneself. Does she surreptitiously turn the tiny knob that lowers the volume in her hearing aid? I believe she does” (47-48). Yet in the flashback to that terrible card game with her mother, the narrator tells us that “Cornelia does not want to hear this. She does not. But she doesn't dare turn off her hearing aid. Her sharp-eyed mother would see that surreptitious movement in an instant,” but this seems to be an exception to Cornelia's always present “selective hearing”. In addition to Tweet's implicit “moral code” that she apparently finds repugnant, Cornelia also actively uses her inability to hear in her relationships with her husband and children. The narrator describes Cornelia's awareness that “[h]er children, her friends, her father...even her beloved husband may respond at the dinner table to a question from one of the children in a voice so low she cannot make out what he is saying” (14). Cornelia has assured herself that this obvious way of speaking around her is not intentional. It may be that she has no wish to examine the things the people around her are saying; Cornelia “never never asks anyone to repeat himself unless she is sure what was said was meant for her. She never says: What are you talking about? Never says: Speak a little louder, please. Never says: What?” (14) Cornelia does not fight against the decline of her hearing but instead seems to embrace it in a way that parallels her reluctance to embrace knowing those things she does not wish to know.

The last scene of *Can't Quit You, Baby* is invaluable to Cornelia's understanding of her own transformation. This first confrontation and first reconciliation between Tweet and Cornelia is charged with all the things that Tweet must say in order to even begin to resolve the inherent conflict in their relationship, and these are things that Cornelia is only now able and *willing* to hear. Part of this conversation is spurred by Tweet's bowl of mementos:

...Andrew and Sarah give me them beads when they come back from—stops, pounds the chair arm. . . .

Mardi Gras? Cornelia says.

Yeah. Them fake dollars, too. Don't know why I kept them. Luck? She laughs. The other stuff—dime-store beads my daddy and—and—Claree brought me. I keep them to remind me of—evil. And that—she points to a pair of earrings. Nig give me those to distract me when he was going out with *Miss Puddin*.

Maybe you ought to throw them all away, Cornelia says.

That's what you'd do, huh? (252)

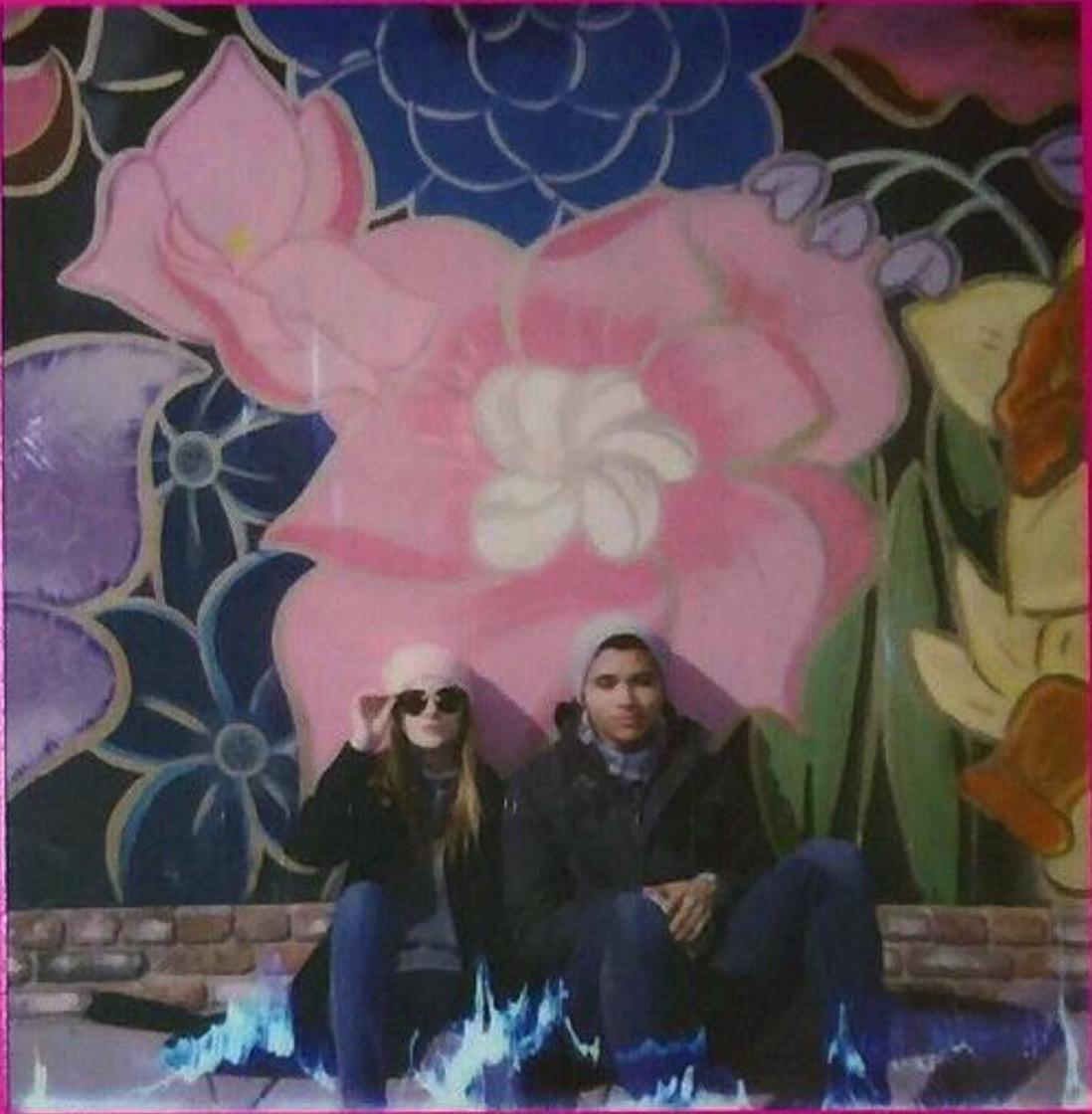
This moment between the women is so understated but strikingly important. Here Tweet is finally commenting on Cornelia's silence and unhearing and is drawing pointed attention to the way Cornelia has thus far actively strived to either not know or to forget those things that make her uncomfortable within her own life. Nobody said this process would be easy, though; when Tweet really begins to say those things that bring to forefront the tragic, inherent inequality of their relationship, the text says that “Cornelia moans. She feels as if her joints are being pulled apart, as if a jackhammer is sending its vibrations all through her body” (254). The reader can imagine her wracked with these figurative growing pains, caught between her newfound wish to

know these uncomfortable things and the sudden flood of those feelings she has avoided for most of her life.

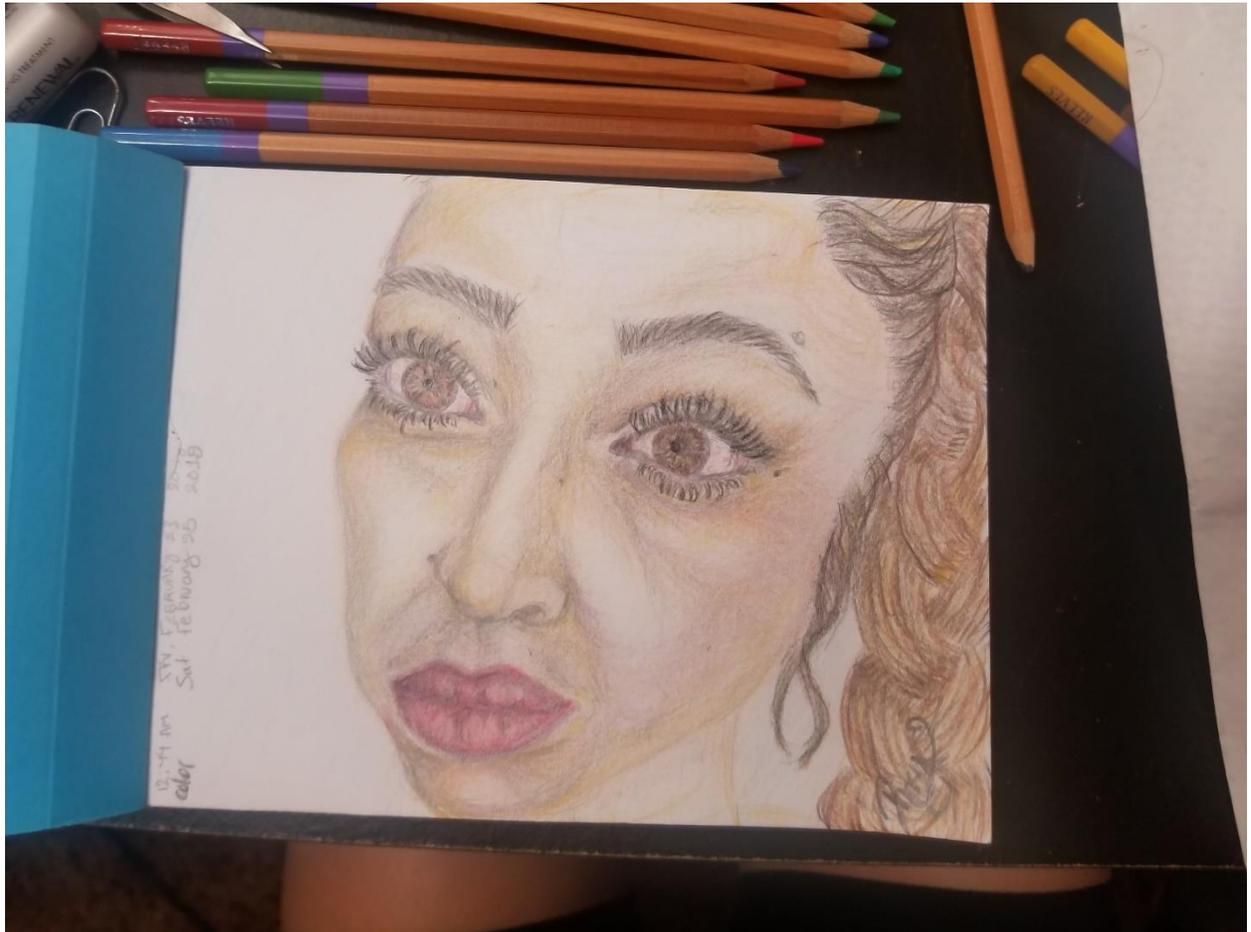
Douglas' novel addresses these things that still make us uncomfortable in ways that Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* did not. Instead of Stockett's Skeeter, a lovable character who is portrayed as simply unknowing and whose redemptive arc debatably reflects her education on the finer points of racial discrimination, Douglas gives to us Cornelia, a character who Dewald describes as "metaphorically blind and quite literally deaf" and who "lives the bulk of her adult life in a fantasy" (Dewald 66). Cornelia is not presented as a victim of circumstance in the way that Skeeter is and therefore is not as immediately sympathetic as Skeeter. In contrast, Cornelia is in turns pitiable for the lack of authenticity in her relationships, enviable for her existence free from the angst of acknowledged social injustice, and commendable for finally perceiving in herself Dalessio's "consent for subordination" and consent for the subordination of others. Where Stockett crafted a story that values entertainment over enlightenment, Ellen Douglas' novel forces the reader to acknowledge injustice and to grow along with Cornelia.



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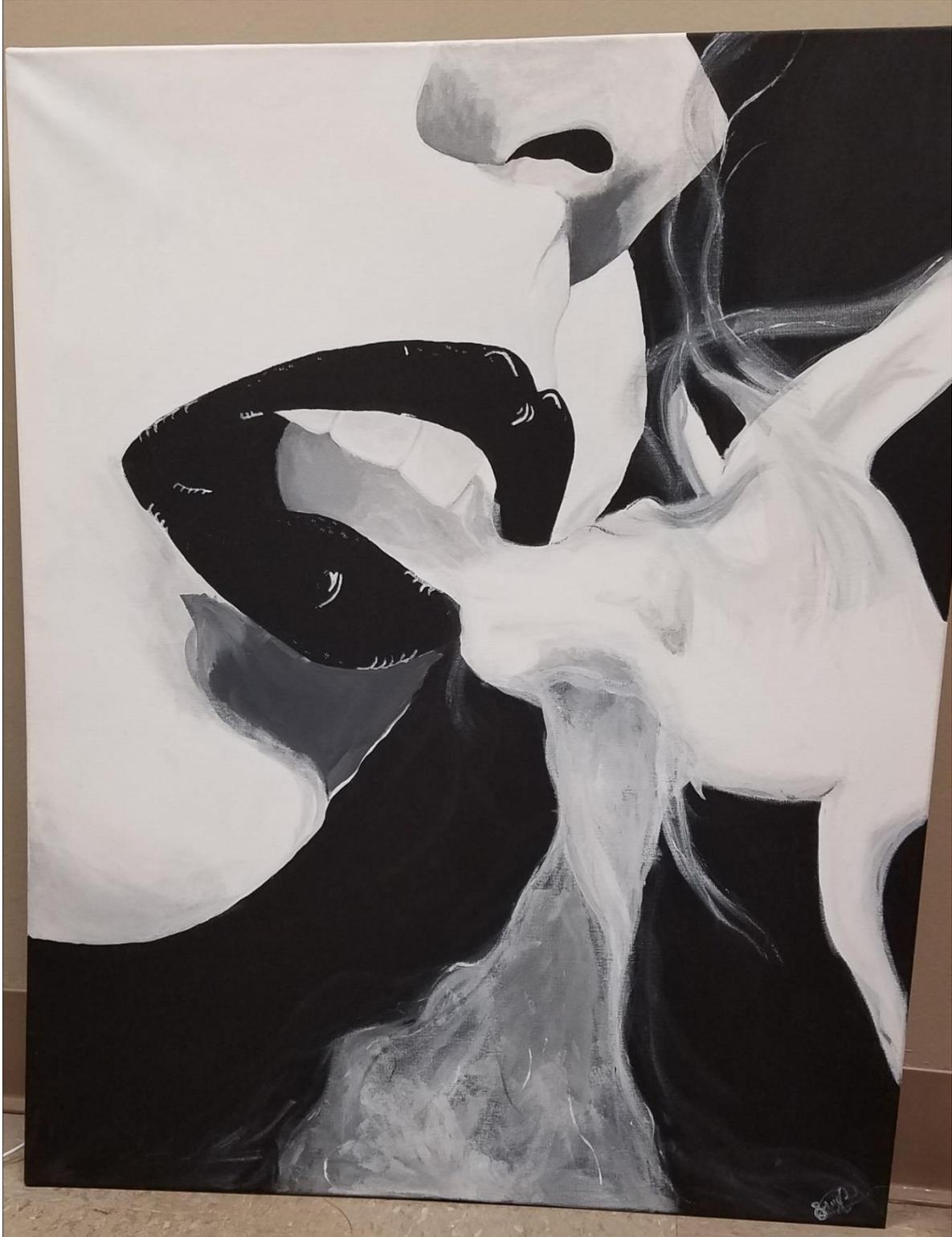
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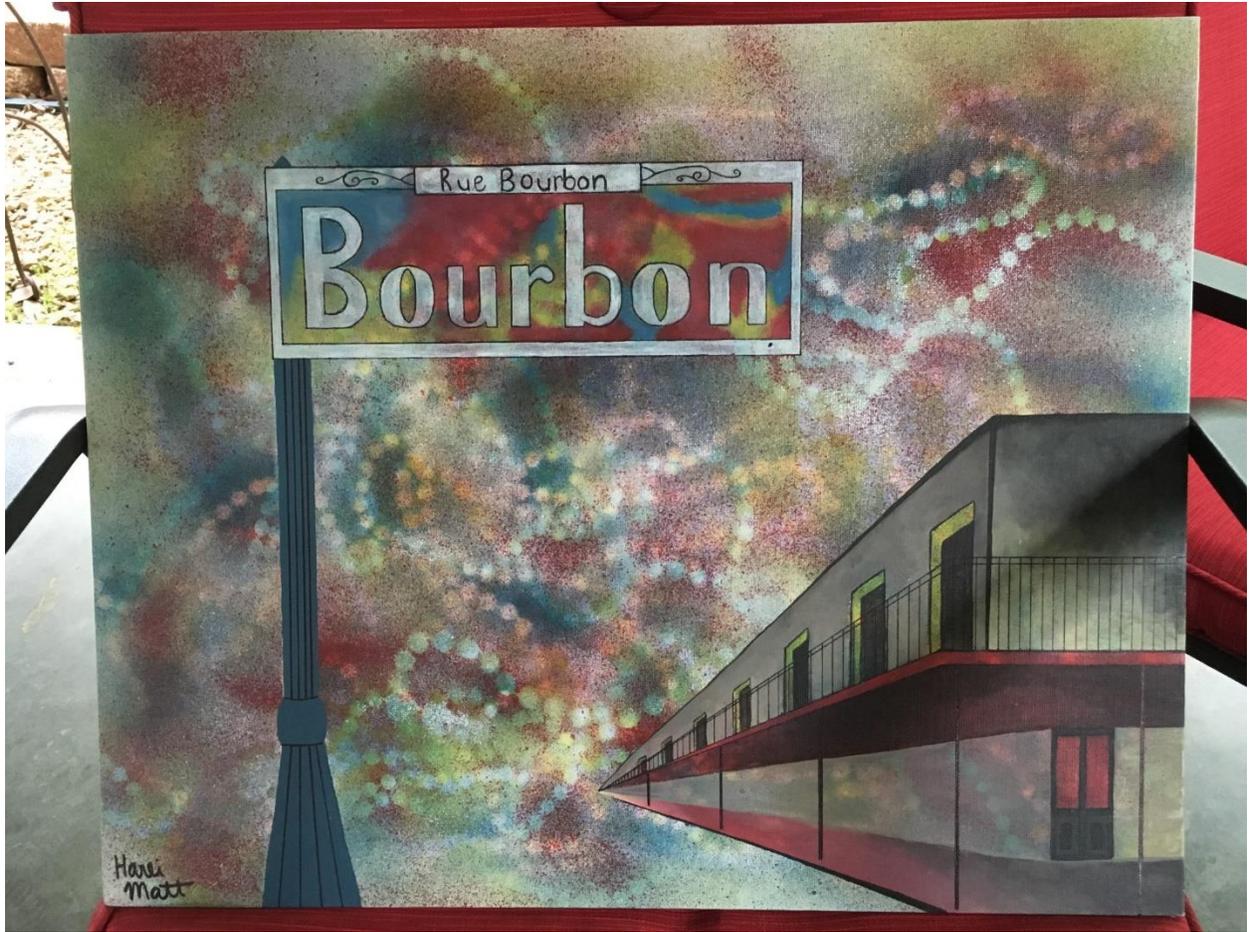
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