

The Cornerstone Review

Volume 6 – Fall 2025



**Celebrating Student talent,
creativity, and excellence**

FRONT AND BACK MATTER



Lorén Ortiz Ocasio is an undergraduate student at Purdue, majoring in Animal Sciences and minoring in Art & Design. She made this artwork to fulfill an assignment in Professor Seagraves'

SCLA 102 class in Fall 2024. In this artwork, she aimed to reach all the students, who, like her, have struggled to find their place in crowds of people who are also figuring this out themselves. Although college years can be challenging, they are fundamental years because they give us the opportunity to analyze where we come from, what our values are, and who we strive to be as we continue through the unpredictable journey of life.

The Cornerstone Review is produced each fall by Purdue University's Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts Program. It is created to celebrate the critical, literary, and artistic accomplishments of Purdue's undergraduate students enrolled in Cornerstone's SCLA courses. Thanks to our student editors, this volume of *The Cornerstone Review* is blind peer-reviewed.

SIXTH VOLUME EDITORS

Melinda Zook

Elise Frketich

Raleigh Heth

SIXTH VOLUME STUDENT EDITORS

Reilly Gareau

Evan Hoyt

Kairyn Kolluru

WITH SPECIAL ASSISTANCE FROM
Stephanie Ayala-Chittick

CONTACT US

For general inquiries and submissions,
email us at:

cornerstonereview@purdue.edu

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The Cornerstone Review

VOLUME 6 FALL 2025

TO THE READERS

During the first class of the semester, many of us Professors who teach in the Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts Program at Purdue begin with introductions. We warn our students—with gleeful and knowing smiles—that we will be talking about anything and everything that makes us human over the course of the semester, so we had better get comfortable with one another. We anticipate hearing the majority of students introduce themselves as STEM majors, especially First-Year Engineering, Computer Science, and Math majors—a Cornerstone class is, after all, a cross-section of Purdue’s enrollment statistics—and we are curious as to how many Agriculture, Construction Management, Design, Aviation, and, yes, Liberal Arts majors, among others, will also be present. We look forward to placing pins on our mental maps, signaling the multitude of American States as well as countries around the world that our students call home.

These introductions are the first step to creating community in our classrooms, and each community is a space where our students can feel emboldened to explore the questions that are at the forefront of their minds. Despite their differences, whether it be their majors, where they are from, or their cultural backgrounds, they are united in asking those pressing, formative questions that we each asked at their age: Who am I? Who do I want to become? What should I prioritize to become that person? And what world do I want to live in? The transformative texts that we read are one place where they can seek answers; their writing—and any other work that they create in a Cornerstone class—is another.

This journal is a celebration of those works. It is a celebration of our students’ efforts to find answers. It is a celebration of their talent and creativity. It is a celebration of those questions that bind us with our students and our students with the authors across millennia whose works we read, questions that make us human.

This journal is also a reflection of a motto that we at Cornerstone often repeat, namely “writing is thinking.” The works it contains demonstrate the myriad ways in which our students grapple with these pressing questions and, in so doing, demonstrate the worlds of humanity and creativity that they contain.

The selection of works that makes up this volume has been distilled from a sea of excellence. First, each work was nominated by Professors who teach in Cornerstone, hand-picked out of hundreds of students’ works from the classes we taught during the 2024-2025 academic year. We remember our favorite assignments, meetings with students, “aha!” moments, and surprise results, and we make the difficult decisions to cull them to a few. Second, these nominations have undergone a blind, peer-review process.

Our talented, dedicated, and discerning student editors, now upper-year students, narrowed down the selection even further. Here, we owe a special thanks to Reilly Gareau, Evan Hoyt, and Kairyn Kolluru. Finally, this volume would not be possible without the knowledgeable and wise stewardship of Melinda Zook, the Director of Cornerstone. Thank you.

Elise Frketich and Raleigh Heth,
West Lafayette, IN
Fall 2025

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ESSAY

10 RULES FOR A GOOD LIFE

BY ANSLEY ARMSTRONG

Ansley Armstrong is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Selling and Sales Management. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Czader's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2025. The inspiration came from a book she read in her senior year of high school, *12 Rules for Life* by Jordan Peterson. She was trying to convey Aristotle's vision of the good life and give high school seniors practical rules that they can apply to live more meaningful and fulfilling lives.

In today's society, success is measured by social status and material wealth. This is reinforced by social media, where luxury and extravagant lifestyles are glorified. Many individuals are exposed to this idea, but specifically high school students. Aristotle presents his views on this idea in his *Politics*. He states that a good life is not about gaining wealth or power, but it's about virtue, engaging in the community, and pursuing wisdom (Aristotle, 1998). I have used Aristotle's views to develop a guide for seniors in high school to encourage them to make good choices towards their future.

Aristotle believed that wealth is a supporting factor. Aristotle argued that wealth should not be to become rich but to develop good character and contribute to society (Kraut, 2002). A successful life to Aristotle, is lived with purpose, integrity, and a sense of responsibility. This viewpoint contradicts modern values, which suggest that financial gain contributes to happiness. The American Dream suggests that anyone can succeed through hard work, which is success from an economic viewpoint (Hochschild, 1995). Aristotle's ideas challenge a different dream where moral character, intellectual growth, and community engagement are the priority.

In order to help students navigate the difference between the two philosophies, ten actionable rules have been created based on Aristotle's ideas in *Politics*. These rules can be used in daily life by students. The first rule is to cultivate virtue over wealth. Money should not be the ultimate goal, but it should be used as a tool instead. Aristotle states, "wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else" (Aristotle, 1998, p.7). Students should value honesty, kindness, and courage over financial success. Rule number two is to become engaged in the community. Students should become involved in activities such as volunteering, attending events, or joining clubs. The students would experience support and purpose from becoming part of a community. Aristotle states, in *Politics*, that "A man who is isolated, who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to because he is self-sufficient" (Aristotle, 1998, p. 2). To seek knowledge and wisdom is rule number three. Education is not only for professional gain, but it is important to become a well-rounded person. Students should view learning as something positive that will help them throughout life. Rule number four is to pursue meaningful relationships. Aristotle says that friendship is good when based on virtue (Aristotle, 1998, p. 145). Friendship is based on mutual respect and shared values, not on convenience. Students should seek relationships that support personal growth. To practice self-discipline is rule number five. "The good life is that in which virtue is exercised" (Aristotle, 1998, p. 198). Living a good life requires an individual to act on reason rather than on impulse. This could be exhibiting good time management, avoiding distractions, or steering away from peer pressure. Rule number six is to develop good habits early. Aristotle's ideas can be used to say that good habits formed in youth make all the difference. The soon-to-be graduates should understand that their daily choices shape their long-term character. Students should use wealth responsibly, which is rule number seven. Aristotle warns that "the life of money-making

is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking" (Aristotle, 1998, p. 7). Excessive materialism could potentially be harmful for an individual. Students should learn that money is a resource and to use it like a tool rather than a goal to reach. Rule number eight is to think beyond oneself. It is important to realize the role that one individual can have on a larger group. These young adults should think about how their actions affect others and how they can use their influence for the common good. They should engage in politics and public life, which is rule number nine. "He who is unable to live in a society... must be either a beast or a god" (Aristotle, 1998, p. 2). It is essential for civic engagement. This could mean that students use their voting rights or simply stay informed and discuss current issues. Informed citizens are important for a society to flourish. Lastly, rule number ten is to reflect on one's purpose. Aristotle states that "the best way of life, both separately for each individual and in common for cities, is the life of virtue" (Aristotle, 1998, p. 198). He believed that people should live for a purpose so students should reflect on the values that align with how they want to live.

Modern culture does not follow the same ideas that Aristotle presents. Happiness is linked to an individual's income. Social media encourages this idea by painting a picture connecting wealth and success (Twenge, 2017). Today's youth seek validation and value it more than genuine self-appreciation. Aristotle offsets these trends by calling to live with purpose and be grounded in virtue and civic engagement. They should understand that money does not equal happiness. Take Robin Williams as an example, a famous actor and comedian, who ultimately committed suicide. He had an immense amount of money but was still not internally happy. Students should stray away from this modern idea and create an enjoyable life. They should apply the actionable rules listed to help achieve this.

Engaging in community service, reflecting on personal values, and seeking knowledge will lead students to live a meaningful life and not an overwhelming feeling of striving for material success. Aristotle's ideas teach that a good life is not measured by money or fame but by how people grow as individuals and contribute to the world around them. These ten rules are a foundation for students to make smart, ethical, and fulfilling choices that they make throughout their lives.

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ESSAY

ZERO TOLERANCE, ZERO FUTURE: The Mirroring of Prisons in Our School Systems

BY CHLOE FIELDS



Chloe Fields is a Purdue undergraduate student, double majoring in Law & Society and Film & Video. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Robson's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2024. The inspiration for her paper is the fact that so many children's lives, whether it be their physical or educational lives, are ended in schools today. She wanted to shine light on an issue that is plaguing our children, friends, and neighbors, one that will only get worse if nothing is done about it.

According to the American Bar Association, in the 2011-2012 school year alone, public school students lost an estimated 18 million instructional days due to exclusionary discipline policies. Exclusionary disciplines are any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes students from their usual education setting. Examples of this are in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. This loss was the equivalent of 100,000 school years or 49,315 calendar years. Over time, schools in the United States have begun to mirror the criminal justice system (CJS). While many believe the idea that school systems funnel students into prisons is a harsh and inaccurate comparison, I believe it is a fair and foreboding one – one that is evident in the treatment of their students. We've begun to treat seventh graders as potential violent threats to the school environment because they won't remove their hats. We treat high schoolers who won't turn off their cellphones as if they've just committed a felony. More often than not, kids are stuck worrying whether a single misstep could permanently derail their academic future instead of if they got into their favorite college. Rather than preparing kids for future careers and higher education, our schools create a pathway referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, steering marginalized youth towards a high school career of anxiety and juvenile and CJSs. School systems are creating this pipeline through the heavy policing of schools, the disproportional impacts, exclusionary policies, and the overall lasting impact it has on children and the communities in which the schools are located.

The environmental shifts in schools have a major influence on students. Those who belong to the school-age demographic are in a fundamental period of their developmental lives. Negative educational experiences due to disciplinary action have pointed to an increase in lower education, job instability, greater levels of juvenile delinquency, and incarceration (Hemez, et al., 2019). A major environmental shift in the operations of schools was the introduction of zero-tolerance policies (ZTP) during the time of the War on Drugs. As we approach the midpoint of five decades since the War on Drugs (WOD) began, it becomes clearer how these policies are infiltrating our schools. The WOD brought forth mandatory minimum sentencing, which took away judges' discretion and handed them strict guidelines for sentencing crimes. In the same way, we have the introduction of ZTPs in schools. This school discipline was implemented in the 1990s as a result of rhetoric mentioned in the policies enacted by the WOD and the increasing concern of gang shootings despite the rates of school crime decreasing (Heitzeg, 2014). The beginning of ZTPs was where the partnership between schools and law enforcement came about. We see this through kids receiving law enforcement referrals and court sentencing for actions done in school. ZTPs refer to the mandated suspension or expulsion of students for a variety of offenses. Any violation, no matter how minor, results in suspension, expulsion, or arrest (Department of Education, 2021; Fader et al., 2012). This is a major problem because when you have minor infractions that should be handled by school staff being handled by the justice system, you are exposing kids to the CJS

prematurely, ultimately harming their chances of even graduating. Many sociologists and experts in criminology comment that these exclusionary policies play an integral and immediate role in feeding and supplying the school-to-prison pipeline (Heitzeg, 2014). The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) refers to an interconnected system of criminalized disciplinary policies and practices that push marginalized students out of school and into the juvenile and CJS (Warren, 21). The original intended purpose of ZTPs was to have severe punishments for students who brought weapons to school. However, throughout time, the severe punishments have been distorted into policies for minor or nonviolent violations (Heitzeg, 2014). Some examples of the areas that ZTP targets can range from being absent from school to “disrespect” or “noncompliance” (Poter, 75). In other cases of severe punishment, they’re charged in criminal or juvenile courts, thereby cementing them into the pipeline and further pushing them into the CJS and the likelihood of never finishing school. Studies have shown that the increase in punitive discipline has a lasting negative impact on the futures of students (Hemez et al., 2019). In a study, it was shown that drop-out rates quadrupled when discipline included a court appearance (Bush, 70). Many have compared this type of discipline to a “one size fits all” perspective (Porter, 75), which forces admin’s hand to take drastic measures against the student, ultimately harming their educational career for a minor infraction. These policies have caused an increase in law enforcement referrals because of minor offenses such as disorderly conduct. Disorderly conduct can range from refusing to follow directions or listen to inappropriate language or actions. With the rise of these referrals and exclusionary discipline for minor infractions, it has created a doubled and sometimes quadrupled rate of dropouts because of students’ inability to catch up in courses because they were forced out of school for so many days (Bush, 70). This is taking away educational opportunities not only for the betterment of the student but the community as a whole. When you have a lack of people gaining education, they cannot pour back into the community to improve it. To put all of this into perspective, these are real-life examples of practiced exclusionary discipline. In 2000, two Hispanic fifth graders, age 10, put soapy water in a teacher’s cup and were charged in juvenile court for misdemeanor assault and battery. According to records, it was originally placed at felony level charges (Davis, 2000). Finally, in 2013, a kindergartener was waiting in line for the bus when she told her friends she was going to shoot them with a Hello Kitty toy that makes bubbles. Originally, she was served a 10-day suspension and was to undergo psychological evaluation. However, it was later reduced to two days and the incident was reclassified as a “threat to harm others.” Through this, the mother of the child said her daughter had to undergo all of this suffering over something so small (Rubinkam, 2021). All of these punishments were a direct result of ZTP’s drastic measures. Unfair action was taken against children who had no malicious intent towards others, or they were just playing a joke, as kids do. Now they will be continually worried about when the next incident like this will happen to them again, or how this may affect their chances of education in the future. This is not an environment any child should have to go through.

Following the introduction of ZTPs came the presence of Student Resource Officers (SROs) in schools. SROs, according to the National Association of School Resource Officers, are “carefully selected, specifically trained, and properly equipped law enforcement officers with sworn authority, trained in school-based law enforcement and crisis response...” (NASRO). The beginning of police presence in schools came from crime bills from President Clinton’s era and the tragedy of the Columbine school shooting. The growth of their presence has been large. From 2005-2006, 42% of schools reported having one or more security staff present. This number grew in 2017-2018 to 61% (ABA). In perspective to other service positions in schools, the American Bar Association reports 1.7 million students are in school with police but no counselors, 3 million have police but no nurses, 6 million have police but no school psychologists. The two perspectives on SROs’ presence in schools vary greatly. One side claims it makes schools safer, but the others say their presence has led to more violence and arrests. According to a study done by the NIH regarding school safety, they found that when school shootings happen, the number of deaths in schools with SRO presence nearly triples (Bush, 73). Students’ perspectives in this situation also carry heavy weight. Mowen and Feng, who did a research study to understand students’ perspectives about safety, found that the presence of SROs did not make them feel safer. If anything, it made them more uneasy and stressed during school hours (Mowen & Feng, 2018). This unease can affect a learning environment greatly. We expect children to be able to engage and learn properly when they are worried about whether one misstep will get them in serious academic and legal trouble. However, according to a study done by Mark Warren of Oxford University Press, SRO presence doesn’t lead to more total arrests, but it does lead to more arrests for disorderly conduct (Warren, 212). Disorderly conduct is defined as anything that disturbs the peace, morals, or safety. It also can be described as behavior that causes others to become annoyed, offended, inconvenienced, etc. Other opinions on SRO presence are that parents fear that their kids will be arrested or mistakenly put through the juvenile justice system because of their race, gender, or other attributes that authority figures do not care for. An example of this happened to Niya Kenny and a student identified as Shakara in South Carolina. On October 25, 2015, Niya Kenny filmed a white SRO body slam her classmate, a Black 16-year-old girl named Shakara. The Deputy Sheriff placed Shakara in a headlock, flipped her desk over, and threw her across the classroom floor because, allegedly, the girl refused to hand over her cellphone. Niya filmed the whole thing on her own cellphone and the video was later posted to the internet. However, the story doesn’t end there. Both girls were arrested and charged with “disturbing school” and sent to juvenile detention centers. After countless petitions and rallies in September of 2016, the charges against the two girls were dropped. However, the officer who was filmed body slamming Shakara was never charged with any criminal wrongdoing. Through all of this, the girls were asked to comment on the situation, and they said they felt like they did something wrong. Instead of being treated like victims, they were treated as perpetrators (Warren, 212-215). This situation brings in the topic of how these exclusionary disciplines

affect marginalized groups more heavily. Therefore, it affects their probability of being further pushed into the STPP more than others.

A major part of people's issues with the STPP is not only the exclusionary discipline but the disproportional impacts it has. Marginalized youth are more susceptible to being negatively impacted by it. Marginalized youth in this context refers to students of color, students with disabilities, or students who identify with the LGBTQIA group. Author of the book *Willful Defiance*, Mark Warren, describes the reasoning of this prejudice as a means of social control that reproduces social inequality and keeps marginalized communities poor and powerless. Willful defiance is a category often used in reasoning for exclusionary disciplines. This type of behavior can be classified as "disturbing the peace," "disruptive behavior," or "annoying conduct." Not only would this category of behavior get you expelled from school, but it becomes a criminal charge. Like in the aforementioned story of Niya, her charge was "disturbing school." As stated by the ABA, nearly half the suspensions in the 2011-2012 school year in the state of California were for willful defiance. They defined it as "a category of student misconduct that includes refusing to remove a hat or turn off a cellphone or a school uniform violation." They also state that, in 1999-2000, insubordination accounted for 22% of suspensions for five or more days, transfers to specialized schools, and expulsion, whereas, in 2007-2008, it shot up to 43%. This is an increasing issue. In the 2015-2016 school year, 2.7 million K-12 students received one or more out-of-school suspensions. Out of the total number of students polled, Black or African-American students made up 8% of the whole demographic. However, when looking at out-of-school suspensions, they made up 25% and 14% of their respective genders. When we focus on just law enforcement referrals during the 2015-2016 school year, there were 290,600. Of the total number of students, 15% were Black or African-American. However, they represented 31% of the actual referrals. To add to this picture of the total demographic, White students made up 49% of the students, but they made up only 36% of the referrals (ABA). These numbers are not representative of the population, which is a big issue. It shows how much more these students are targeted. Not only does this affect people of color, but also LGBTQIA students. Between 20-40% of all incarcerated youth identify as LGBTQIA, and 85-90% of them are youth of color (ABA). Students with disabilities are also at risk of being targeted for the STPP. The ABA reported that students with disabilities are twice as likely to be suspended and Black girls with disabilities are four times as likely. People with disabilities make up 12% of the student population. However, they make up 2/3 of those subjected to seclusion or restraint in school. They were 69% of the students who were placed in involuntary confinement or physical restraint. When looking at arrests, they made up 7.8% but only account for 2.3% of the student body (ABA). It is also reported that 60% of juvenile offenders have disabilities. They are one of the most targeted groups for the STPP, proven by that statistic alone. This calls into question the practices informing these disciplinary actions. Which leads us back to ZTPs and how disproportionate their effects

are. Once again, all of these things are forcing marginalized groups who need education directly out of it. Ultimately, this forces them into less stable lives because they were forced out of schools or into the prison systems.

With such polarizing issues and policies often comes pushback. The reason for being against the reformation of these issues often comes from those who benefit from them. Those systems are private prisons. The private prison sector is the industry of for-profit prisons that are operated by companies under contract with the government. Private prisons are one of the main backers of ZTPs. With policies pushing kids out of schools or providing them with a formal introduction to the CJS, it puts people and money directly into the hands of these private prisons (Poter, 67-68). An example of this is in Florida, where one private prison system and its executives lobbied \$400,000 in the last 15 years to candidates and committees who promoted ZTPs in schools. This, in turn, shifts the focus away from providing good and quality education. Another disagreement comes from people saying the current systems in place are improving our schools. The impacts and implications of these things say otherwise. The effects of these institutions reach far beyond the classroom doors. These negative in-school interactions with police and authority figures will stay with these kids for the rest of their lives. It will affect their out-of-school view of police and authority. This will cause tension in the community, not only between students and police but their parents as well. Ultimately, this will not only harm the community members but law enforcement too. It will make their jobs harder. If you are trying to interact with people who don't trust you this will cause them to be less cooperative in the long run. The long-term effects of these policies and positions will continue to be a detriment to not only marginalized students but their families as well as communities.

Through exclusionary and punitive disciplines, SRO presence, the disproportionate effects on marginalized groups, and the community effects, we see the installation of the STPP is rampant in schools across the country. The evolution of education from one of empowerment to exclusion. The transformation of students into prisoners. The perpetuation of this harmful cycle must be reformed into one that creates opportunities and protects our students. Without change, the decline and imprisonment of our kids, friends, and neighbors will never stop. It is time to trade this pipeline into an outline for restorative school measures that benefit all.

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ESSAY

THE MONSTROUS PORTRAYAL OF QUEERNESS

BY KATIE HARRISON

Katie Harrison is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Plant Science. They wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Nichols' SCLA 101 class in Fall 2024. While reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Katie saw their own experiences reflected in the text. In this essay they share how the experiences of monsters, like Frankenstein's creation, in classic literature often reflect the lives of queer people.

Throughout the years, queerness has been censored, shunned, and banned from the media. However, queer readers have examined classic horror stories, and many relate to these classic monsters. People in the LGBTQ+ community have analyzed and connected with many themes and characteristics of these monsters. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a well-known example of a story containing these themes. The story is about a creature created by Victor Frankenstein, who is ostracized by society and unfairly judged by the people he encounters. This monster illustrates the queer experience by personifying the theme of otherness and characteristics of non-normative gender and sexuality.

Prior to the creature's creation, Frankenstein pictures himself as a father to the creature. "No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (Shelley, 2018, p. 42). Victor and the monster have a parent-child relationship, and like most parent-child relationships, the creature, or child, does not turn out as expected. Frankenstein is terrified of the creature and wants nothing to do with it. All too often, this is the experience of queer children. Parents only see the parts of their children that fit into their heteronormative and cisgender perception. They choose to ignore the parts of their children that diverge from the sexual and gender norms. Before Victor brings the creature to life, he only sees the beauty that he had given the creature. "I had selected his features as beautiful" (Shelley, 2018, p. 45). However, once the creature is brought to life, Victor can only see the creature's horrifying features. "But these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes" (Shelley, 2018, p. 45). Victor sees the monster for what he truly is, and he is terrified. "I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created" (Shelley, 2018, p. 42). Victor focuses on the parts of his creature he finds acceptable or beautiful until the creature is fully formed and brought to life. This reflects how unaccepting parents can react to their own child's queerness.

Not only is the creature abandoned by Victor, but he is also abandoned by the cottagers he encounters. In the story, it is shown that the creature is not inherently dangerous or evil. The creature helps the cottagers gather firewood and do other chores. In addition, he stops taking their food once he finds out that it harms them: "I had been accustomed, during the night, to steal a part of their store for my own consumption; but when I found that in doing this, I inflicted pain on the cottagers, I abstained, and satisfied myself with berries, nuts, and roots" (Shelley, 2018, p. 102). The creature desperately wants to connect with these people because he is so alone. He is unable to fit in with the people in the story because they are unwilling to accept him for who he is. This often reflects the experience of queer people who are unable to connect with most people in society and attempt to connect with others like themselves.

The creature eventually does try to connect with the cottagers. But not before he takes a lot of time to observe them, because he has only ever had bad experiences

interacting with others throughout the story. As noted by Jones and Harris (2012), "And so queers omit the expected pronoun or the 'we' as acts of self-care to protect ourselves from rejection...Such bargains are dangerous gambles for the queer subject, as they were for Shelley's monster" (p. 521). The creature is taking a risk by revealing his true self to the cottagers, much like queer people coming out to their friends or family. However, the creature has observed their kindness and generosity, and he believes that they can accept him for who he is. But when the creature decides to meet these people face-to-face, he is only met with fear and hatred. "He dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb...and I refrained" (Shelley, 2018, p. 127). Every person the creature tries to interact with assumes that he is dangerous based on his appearance. Therefore, they only treat him violently. This is very similar to how queer people are viewed by society. As explained by Halberstam (1995), "the connection between homosexuality and sociopolitical otherness can be made quite clear in terms of a belief in the inherent evil of certain groups of people" (p. 43). People in the queer community are feared because they are viewed as dangerous. They are assumed to be violent and immoral because of an aspect of their identity that they cannot control, just like how the creature is treated.

After failing to befriend the cottagers, the creature decides the only way to have companionship is through the creation of another being like himself. The creature asks Frankenstein for a companion. He believes the only person who can love or accept him is someone like him. "My companion will be of the same nature as myself and will be content with the same fare." (Shelley, 2018, p. 138). The creature says that he will move away from society completely if he has someone like him, someone who understands him. In a world where those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community are the minority, queer people long for companionship. They long to find people who understand them because they are feared and rejected by society.

Not only does the creature exist outside of the social norm, but Victor does as well. Through the creation of the monster, Victor pushes the boundaries of science. He goes against the "natural" way of creating life through a heterosexual relationship. "The suggestion that a homosexual bond in fact animates the plot adds an element of sexual perversity to the monster's already hybrid form" (Halberstam, 1995, p. 42). Not only is the creature monstrous because of his appearance, but he is also monstrous because of the way in which he is brought to life. However, Victor is responsible for this monstrous act. Therefore, he also stands outside of gender and sexual norms. Bagocius (2022) suggests that Victor's creature is the embodiment of his own queerness (3). Victor is terrified and hates the creature because he is a part of Victor – a part that Victor is ashamed of. "Victor famously remains unable to face, let alone befriend, his Creature, who embodies queer subjectivity... Victor either runs from his Creature in shame or attempts to annihilate him in fear" (Bagocius, 2022, p. 3). Victor is not only fearful of the creature, but he is ashamed of the part of himself he has brought to life.

Why do readers often pick up on themes of queerness within classic horror stories? Gender non-conformity, femininity, and homosexual actions are often used in these stories to create a scary, monstrous character. "Stories of 'queer shame' are read as relatable, sympathy-generating, and therefore acceptable queer narratives, while proud, fluid, perverse and politically angry narratives are deemed 'too hard' for most listeners to see, hear, or bear. As such, these narratives remain persistently unintelligible and therefore monstrous accounts of queer selves and lives" (Jones & Harris, 2016, p. 3). Narratives of obvious homosexuality or gender diversity are often looked down upon or labeled as "inappropriate." This is why many queer readers often observe queer characteristics of monsters or villains. "These performances are inflected with and sometimes deflect the rage, shunning, and fear that Shelley's famous monster laments: the unspeakable, the ugly, the terrifying. How we make love, show love, understand love and speak our love is unseen or, when seen, is often misunderstood, feared, or shunned by those around us" (Jones & Harris, 2016, p. 2). Frankenstein's portrayal of these queer characteristics is acceptable because they are hidden by a hideous monster that is meant to be hated and feared.

Some may argue that this portrayal of queerness as horrific monsters is harmful for people in the queer community. As Westengard (2012) states, "the truly gothic are so often cast as the villain or the monster that is too hideous and perverse to exist in the world" (15-16). However, in the case of Frankenstein, the creature is not only monstrous. As previously discussed, the creature attempts to help and connect with other people and is only met with hatred. This creates empathy from many readers. As Halberstam (1995) states, "We are disposed as readers to sympathize with the monster" (39).

In summary, the creature from Frankenstein is shunned from society for his differences and displays aspects of gender non-conformity and non-normative sexuality that many queer readers relate to. The creature's tragic loneliness and relationship with society mirror the lives of the LGBTQ+ community and how they are treated by others. Comparing queer people to a horrific monster may seem hateful. However, the creature is a complex, kind, and intelligent character and receives empathy from many readers. This iconic book has been an important piece of literature for many years. Looking at literature like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein through a queer lens is important to people of the LGBTQ+ community who see their experience reflected in it.

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ESSAY

HEART: The Cornerstone of Education

BY BELLA HIEMSTRA



Bella Hiemstra is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Applied Statistics and Math with an emphasis on statistics. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor White's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2024. She has always been very passionate about the importance of accessible education and was hoping to highlight a community who fought hard for the same cause.

The famous Scopes trial from 1925, a play from 1955 (*Inherit The Wind*), and school closings in 2024 share intriguing connections. The most well-known thing in Kingsford Heights, Indiana, is the Kingsbury Ordnance Plant (KOP). It was one of seventy-three ammunition manufacturing facilities built in the United States during WWII, giving it the nickname “Victory City” (PlacesThatWere). It has long since been abandoned, and if you were to drive past it, you may not know that it was anything at all. No trespassing signs and rusting chain link fences guard a wild and overgrown field of long grasses and tall trees. But I think what is very often overlooked, even by the members of the county, is the tight-knit community of Kingsford Heights. It's not a very big town; one could drive around the entirety of it in twenty minutes. It's a drive from the rest of La Porte County, with a Dollar General, a park, a library, and most importantly, an elementary school – one of seven elementary schools in the La Porte Community Schools Corporation (LPCSC). Its smaller size is well made up for by great test scores, engaging programs, and caring teachers. It is the heart of the growing Kingsford Heights and a hub for the community. Many students currently enrolled are not first-generation Kingsford Heights attendees. So, it was a shock to everyone in the community when it was announced on March 1, 2024, that Kingsford Heights Elementary School (KHES) was being considered for closure.

In early January, I received a text from my mom, a long-time third-grade teacher at KHES. It was something along the lines of, “They’re shutting down Kingsford Heights.” I was stunned. This seemingly came out of nowhere, and I wasn’t the only one who felt that way. Higher-ups in the district had been investigating ways to fix the decreasing profit in the district due to the lowering enrollment (Tyonna Baxter, 01 Mar 2024), and found a solution in KHES, which had a high per student expense due to its smaller enrollment (Hiemstra, Bella F, and Wendy A Hiemstra). They told the teachers in January that they were considering shutting down the school, and, in February, told them they were officially recommending the closure to the board. “We were devastated,” my mom recounted (Hiemstra, Bella F, and Wendy A Hiemstra). KHES had been flourishing, all due to the staff’s tireless efforts. It was clean, well-decorated, and offered several programs such as the Boys and Girls Club, tech clubs (robotics, coding, and 3-D printing), and after-school sports (ring toss, basketball, and track) that were run by the staff. In recent years, KHES has even hosted robotics tournaments with high turnouts. It was absolutely crushing to these teachers that all of the hours that they had poured into cultivating an exemplary learning environment for their students would be shut down simply because of the district’s budgeting issues.

Suffice it to say, it felt like a very rash and unplanned decision by the board. Kingsford Heights had also been in the process of developing new infrastructure, and it was questioned how they would expect the town to grow if there was no school. The La Porte Community School Corporation had been struggling with a bus driver shortage for many years. There were many times my bus would be canceled thirty minutes before the

final bell rang, and I was left to wait for hours until one of my parents got off work. Yet it seemed ridiculous to close a school whose main form of student transportation was walking or biking. Even worse was that LPCSC was struggling with the teacher shortage. In closing KHES, they would inevitably lose more teachers, overburden the existing ones, exacerbate the bussing situation, and potentially tarnish all the work that had been done by La Porte County to bring more people and businesses to Kingsford Heights.

With the severity of the issue, it wasn't long before rumors about KHES' closure spread, and on March 1, 2024, it was officially announced that it was being considered for closure by the board. The community was devastated by the news, and many of them were left to wonder if the education of their kids was at stake. "Trying to bus all these kids to another school that's the same size as this one is going to lead to severe overcrowding, understaffing, and it's going to be a disadvantage (for) all the kids," (Tyonna Baxter, 01 Mar 2024, Mike Easley). One of the many things the board didn't anticipate was the Kingsford Heights community's intense rally to save the school. A similar sentiment was shared by the townspeople of Hillsboro, the fictional town of the play *Inherit the Wind*. Leading up to the trial concerning their own school board controversy, Reverend Brown proclaimed, "We must show him at once what kind of a community this is" (Lawrence, Jerome, and Robert Edwin Lee). That's exactly what the townspeople of Kingsford Heights did. On March 6, 2024, there was an "organized community-led meeting" where citizens voiced their concerns and presented many facts as to why this would disadvantage the school district, with one saying, "What's the number one thing people are thinking about moving into another area, in a new house? It's the school. The school is the most important thing (Tyonna Baxter, 06 Mar 2024)." From then, it was decided that an official school board meeting would take place at KHES on March 13, 2024, and that the fate of KHES would be decided then.

In the early evening of March 13, I pulled into the parking lot of KHES. The sky was gray, and any warmth that came with spring was whipped away by the bitter wind. The parking lot was fuller than I had ever seen, with cars piling out into the streets and into the grass, including police cars, a firetruck, and several news vans. When I walked into the cafeteria where the meeting was to be held, it was reminiscent of the courtroom in *Inherit the Wind*. "The townspeople are packed into the sweltering courtroom . . . as if Hillsboro itself was on trial" (Lawrence, Jerome, and Robert Edwin Lee). It truly felt like the fate of Kingsford Heights was at stake that day. I could immediately recognize many people in the room. They were my mom's former students, former and current staff, and parents I had seen around pickup and at robotics tournaments. The seats were filled to the brim, and I saw more being brought in and crammed against the wall. It was hard to find a person in the crowd who wasn't wearing the school's color, red. Many people had made their own signs. Teachers were still in their work clothes, clutching tissues in their hands and still holding it together to greet their students. So many people from the town had come to fight for their children, for their teachers, and for themselves. It felt surreal

to me that this could be it, and after spending almost every day after school here with my mom for fifteen years, it made me feel heartbroken to see that the board had no desire to consider the immense love in this community. “Kingsford Heights has always had a stigma of being lesser than,” my mom stated, and it was even more apparent in this room (Hiemstra, Bella F, and Wendy A Hiemstra). The group of board members sat at a table on the stage at the front of the room, stone-faced in their drab suits, mindlessly scrolling on their phones as if they had a million better things to be doing. It was a stark picture of power and of the school board’s relentless pursuit of profit over community.

The meeting began with statements from Interim Superintendent Peggy Hinckley. The cafeteria was silent, clinging onto every word that left her mouth as if each one was another breath. After a short speech about the issue of money that almost everyone in the room already knew about, she said what no one in the room had expected to hear, at least not ten minutes into the meeting. “Tonight, you didn’t disappoint us because you’re here, because you love your school. And so, we will not be considering the closure of Kingsford Heights” (Kate, Annie). The energy in the cafeteria dramatically shifted, with people jumping, cheering, crying, and hugging one another. It was shocking, especially since a line had already begun to form at the microphones to voice opinions. What we thought would be a battle was an instant victory. The fate of the town was saved simply by showing up. One woman stayed at the microphone, and in thanking the board for their decision, she was cut off by Hinckley due to ‘time.’ It all felt very performative – to wait until the cameras were on the controversial board members as they “save the day.” Nevertheless, the school remained open, and it has continued to prove that it is not only the beating heart of the community, but an integral part of LPCSC.

In the aftermath of the school board meeting, KHES staff and the community have been wary of trusting the school board. The threat of cuts in other ways looms over the entire corporation, with other schools fearing that if things get bad again, they may also be on the chopping block. La Porte County is so often underestimated. But for all its problems, it has that much more community, and the KHES school board controversy was a prime example of how the heart can win over power and money.

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FICTION

THE LICHE

BY AIDAN LEFORT



Aidan Lefort is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Computer Science. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor George Elliot's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2024. The aim of the assignment was to produce a work that thematized the pursuit of knowledge. "The Liche" tackles this idea as a cautionary tale, taking inspiration from folklore and fantasy concepts of a creature called a "lich."

The wind whistled a foreboding tune across the icy wastes that comprise the Siberian hills. Over two months had passed since I first set off on this expedition, about four weeks since my party left Moscow. Andrei marched callously through the snow-laden weeds, clearly accustomed to such harsh winter conditions. He was a large, broad-shouldered man, head and face enveloped in a thick blanket of coarse, black hair. His breath produced white clouds as he constantly mumbled to himself in a low tone, undoubtedly cursing us for roping him into this job. Finding a guide both capable and willing to ferry us across the country in the middle of this chilling February was no easy feat. But after a convincing plea (and a hefty sum of rubles), Andrei reluctantly complied. My work simply could not wait any longer.

The Siberian winter is a notoriously difficult and deadly challenge to overcome. The cold was irritating, but manageable through layers of thick fur and reindeer hide. The dense snow was difficult to trudge through, but was made easier by the path left in Andrei's wake. The greatest obstacle, however, was one that I was sorely unprepared for. Even though most of our rations and water had been consumed at this moment, our heavy, supply-rich packs were an incredible burden for a man of my stature. And then there was my briefcase, carrying all of my research notes and supplies, weighing my arm down heavily as we trudged forth through the wild.

"Rocco," I heaved as we reached the crest of the latest hill, turning to the other member of our party.

"Yes?" he replied in a thick Sicilian accent. I could tell by his tone that he knew what I was about to ask, and even more so that he did not approve.

"Would you kindly ask our guide how much longer we have until the village?"

He briefly met my gaze with a sharp glare. Frost clung to his pencil-thin mustache, and his motionless expression was interrupted by shivering, but I could still sense his apprehension as he turned to the six-and-a-half-foot-tall Russian goliath that walked shortly in front of us.

"Are you sure, sir? Surely if we are patient-"

"Just ask him the damn question!" I cut him off. I was out of patience, and my nervousness only exacerbated my mood. I knew we were close, purely mathematically. The journey from Moscow to the Krasnoyarsk Krai is roughly four weeks, and only another day or so until the village of Kislokan. Still, it all felt inexplicably surreal. I had spent years of my life learning history and science, searching desperately for any hint of significance. I wanted to break boundaries, discover something new, something that would enshrine my name among the greatest scholars of history. Centuries from then, I wanted for the masses to utter my name alongside Aristotle, Plato, Newton, and Galileo! I knew I was on the cusp of it. I knew that I would find my breakthrough in Kislokan. And

yet, I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. Perhaps what I was looking for was not what I expected it to be. Perhaps this journey, and everything that I had invested in it, was to be my ruin. I brushed these thoughts aside, writing them off as merely nervous apprehension, and repeated my demand with conviction.

"I am paying you to do one thing, so you better do it if you want to see the rest of your fee."

"Fine," he sighed, preparing himself to receive the full wrath of our contracted behemoth. He repeated my initial question in fluent Russian, the only language that Andrei understood. This was Rocco's purpose. Although I am a highly learned man, my education did not include the memorization and familiarization of sixteen different European languages. Rocco's did. I hired him out of Cambridge, where he had recently finished a job translating for a guest lecturer at Harvard University, my alma mater. He was a thin, suave man of clearly Sicilian origin. His lips seem bare now without a cigar, something, along with permanently slicked back hair, that appeared to be a permanent fixture of his being before we departed Moscow. Together we traveled across the Atlantic, and he aided me in communicating with the locals while we made our way across Europe. Despite his heavy accent, people seem to understand him well enough when he speaks their native tongue, helped by his charming persona. He was an indispensable asset, but often reluctant to follow orders.

Andrei stopped in his tracks. Without turning around, he unleashed a hurricane of furious Russian speech, bellowing throughout the woods. All of the nearby treetops rustled as what must have been hundreds of birds evacuated the surrounding area, squawking into the night. Rocco and I flinched, fearful that perhaps these utterances were those of a raging grizzly and not a human being. He must have gone on for at least thirty or forty seconds without taking a single breath. Once he finished, he let out a growling sigh before continuing on his route.

"Soon," said Rocco, again without turning.

"That's all?"

He shook his head, muttering something in Sicilian. "That's all you want to know. The rest is too... colorful to properly capture in your tongue."

Soon. That's all the reassurance I needed, really. The pit in my stomach sank deeper, but I was resolved to press on when I could be mere days away from the culmination of years of research. *Marcellus De Delgado*. His name rang through my head like church bells. He was who I had come to find, or at least his corpse anyway. He was a 17th-century alchemist, hellbent on exploring the full extent of mankind's power to manipulate the forces of Nature. He was hated, of course, shunned by the majority of Christian society for his "blasphemous" experiments and abrasive attitude. He fled Spain

in 1609, avoiding lifelong imprisonment for the death of a child that he had allegedly caused. After that, few historical records mention his name, and it was completely unknown what had become of him for the rest of his life. I, on the other hand, was too intrigued to let his mystery remain. Delgado's research largely included the search for a method of artificially extending life. The *Elixir of Life*, widely regarded to be impossible by modern science, was a common goal among alchemical scholars. Delgado, however, was searching in a place that few others dared to peer. When delving into the details of his investigation, I found that he had a particular penchant for mythology, often citing folklore and ancient religion as evidence for his hypotheses. It may have sounded insane to any sound-minded scholar of my time, but I believed that he was onto something. Shortly before his escape, his latest examination took special interest in Koschei the Deathless. Koschei is a common antagonist within Russian folk tales, an immortal man with supernatural powers who terrorized the young men and women who opposed his cruel ways. Delgado must have believed there to be some truth to these tales, resulting in his final experiment that somehow cost the life of his child subject.

Whatever he discovered must have been a breakthrough because reports of a deathless man terrorizing the village of Kislokan have survived for generations. Livestock, children, and sometimes even men and women would regularly disappear from town, sometimes leaving behind only a bloody mess. Those who claimed to see the culprit described it with the appearance of a walking cadaver, but with the demeanor and qualities of a wild mongrel. One resident even claimed to have shot the creature, but even that seemed not to have phased it. They called it the "Liche." For ten decades, the people of Kislokan suffered before reports of these incidents suddenly stopped thirty-seven years ago, in 1804. Eventually, they were all compiled by a traveling writer interested in cataloging Slavic folklore, but the locals continued to insist that they were authentic. I found a copy of that catalog, *Slovak Narodnye Skazki*, and many books on Delgado and alchemical history in the Harvard University library, where I connected the dots.

After fleeing Spain, Delgado must have sought to continue pursuing the origin of Koschei's tales in his homeland of Russia. Whatever he discovered must have been a success, extending his life far beyond that of a normal human. Somewhere along the way, madness overtook him, and he was never able to share his newfound knowledge with the wider world. Once I made the connection, I knew I had to verify it for myself. I pleaded with my peers and other academics, but none were receptive to my hypothesis. They all thought me mad or foolish, refusing to offer even a penny's worth of assistance. I vowed to prove them wrong and have staked all of my wealth and reputation on this venture. Those naysayers will be forgotten, but, when I return to America with the secret of immortality, the name William Clybourne will be immortalized within the annals of history.

...

The Sun had just begun to crest over the canopies of fir and spruce that stretched for miles into the horizon. Bordering the dense woodland was a small settlement just across a bend of the Nizhnyaya Tunguska River. We had been marching for hours without rest, but finally our destination was within view. We sat at the top of a massive hill, more similar in size to a mountain. Smoke rose from the roofs of what could be no more than a few dozen buildings, sparsely populated and intermingled with the tree line. While the three of us took time to rest our weary legs, I could feel pangs of hunger berating my stomach. Just as I started to produce a stick of dried meat from my pack, Andrei rose suddenly to his feet. He grumbled something, presumably directed at Rocco, before continuing down the hill faster than before. I looked to Rocco with palpable confusion and annoyance. He was already on his feet, a look of concern emanating from his sharp features.

"A storm is coming," he noted, extending his hand to me, "we have no more time to waste if you want to reach the town alive."

Reluctantly, I restuffed my meal and rose stiffly with Rocco's help. I returned my gaze to the treetops, looking higher and further out than before. It appeared a great distance away, but a dark mass of clouds and mist began to aggregate beyond the town. It wasn't long before I noticed it getting closer. And darker. It seemed improbable to me that the small wooden cottages and huts of Kislokan could withstand such a tempest, but I had to put my faith in the people of this land. A matter so simple as the weather could not deter me when I was so close to my final objective.

The final leg of my journey was filled with headache-inducing tension. The possibility of failure had never seemed so tangible as the moment that we crossed the Nizhnyaya Tunguska. A small raft lay half buried in snow on the southern bank of the river. It was hardly big enough for all three of us, but it had to do. As we set sail, the craft's sickening sway invited icy water to spray us from all sides. The bone-chilling fluid sent indescribable shivers down my spine, as if it were awakening me from a deep sleep. Andrei was stone-faced, Rocco seemed bored, but I was facing down a sense of utmost dread and uncertainty. Once we had reached shore, however, the dark clouds were no longer visible over the tree line. With a deep breath, I clung to my wavering sense of clarity and pushed my doubts ever deeper within my soul. *This is it*, I thought, resolving myself for the final push toward victory.

The town was desolate. Few people wandered its beaten dirt paths, and even fewer dared to look us in the eyes. Those who did were able to offer us directions. Prokopyi Kiselev was the man that I ventured here to see, who apparently resided just a short walk into the woods from town. He was a woodsman, as was his father and his father's father and so on. They were the oldest family in town – one whose names appeared several times in the chapters of *Slovak Narodnye Skazki* concerning the "Liche." It wasn't easy to track

down the last heir of their dynasty, but, thankfully, Prokopiyy elected to continue the family business.

The trail to his cabin was short but narrow and covered by branches and brush. The trees seemed to move closer and closer together as we traversed the woods, becoming more oppressive and thick. It wasn't long before we reached the clearing populated by a singular, large log cabin positioned perpendicularly to a small stream of running water. The stream gently collided with a small wooden wheel that groaned as it turned lazily in place. It was evident that this place had seen better days, but the smoke rising from its chimney and light bleeding from the second-story curtains indicated a few signs of life. I glanced at Rocco as we approached the threshold. "Do your thing," I told him sternly, nodding my head in its direction.

He rolled his eyes at me but cleared his throat and raised his hand in a knocking gesture. He tapped rhythmically against the wooden door, simultaneously uttering a Russian greeting. It took a few moments before we received a response, but the sudden thump of boots on hardwood alerted me to a presence within the home. The door creaked open about halfway, revealing the hardened face of a white-haired old man glowering at us from within. His eyes darted between the group before finally landing on Rocco. His gaze met mine for just a moment, but it immediately resurfaced my dread. Despite our language barrier, I could tell that this man despised me in particular. We hadn't even met yet, but his judgment radiated from the agape entryway in an oppressive wave. I would have been offended if it were not for my overpowering worry. *Will he even consent to my interview? Or will he simply turn us away, dashing my hopes and dooming us all to the mercy of the incoming storm?*

After a short exchange between him and Rocco, at least one of my questions would be answered. The door opened wider as the man turned around and hobbled efficiently into another room. "We are meant to follow," said Rocco, but Andrei was already through the door. We took a seat beside the hearth, already ablaze with freshly harvested lumber. An ax rested gingerly against the stone chimney, ascending through the ceiling above. Andrei folded his arms impatiently. It was clear that he would have rather turned back the moment he noticed the blizzard. Thankfully, I reserved half of his payment until the completion of the return journey. Rocco lit a fresh cigar, inhaling deeply before tilting his head back and releasing a hearty puff of tobacco smoke. The old man took a seat opposite us, narrowing his eyes at the three of us. I still felt his contempt as his eyes passed over me, but it was too late to back down. Rocco stretched his arms, cigar in hand, as he prepared to translate the coming conversation.

"Are you Prokopiyy Kiselev?"

The man nodded. I could feel the hairs on my skin prick up. It was really him. I was close.

"Your family has resided here for six generations, correct?"

Again, he replied with a simple nod. I proceed to ask for details, learning more about his family. This cabin has existed for at least four of those fifteen generations, built by his great-great-grandfather and with enough rooms to house at most three generations at a time. His wife, Yeva, had passed less than eight years prior, her grave recently added to the collection of grave markers visible through the eastern window. Visible, too, through the window were the first flakes of falling snow. It began slowly but picked up over the length of our conversation. Andrei cast irritated glances at the window, slowly coming to terms with being trapped in this hellhole. As we talked, Prokopi's gaze eased up. Perhaps he had misjudged me, my intentions purer than he first came to expect. Unfortunately, my next question would prove him wrong.

"What do you know of the creature called the *Liche*?"

His eyes reignited with contempt, quickly overcome with hatred. He rose quickly for a man his age, shouting and waving his fists in a tone so loathsome that even Andrei was shocked. Rocco's cigar nearly slipped from his lips as he rushed to diffuse the situation. He rushed to stand between Prokopi and me, raising his hands in a surrendering gesture. After a few more moments of Rocco's pleas, the man finally sat back down, catching his breath. He looked me directly in the eye, warning me wordlessly not to resume that topic of discussion. He turned back to Rocco and Andrei, sharing a few short phrases between them before getting up and leaving the room. Andrei soon followed suit. Rocco turned slowly to me with a sigh.

"He's letting us stay here for tonight. The blizzard is too strong for us to make it back to town tonight, much less journey home," He averted his face from me, cueing me to brace myself for disappointment. "We are to leave immediately tomorrow morning, however, and not to investigate this matter any further."

"Wait! That's it!? What exactly did he say? I put everything I had into this; you can't tell me that this is the end," I pleaded as he turned to walk away. He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose before addressing me again.

"He said..." Rocco hesitated, "He said that he saw the thing, the creature, or whatever it is you are after." He took a long drag of his cigar, "He saw it when he was a kid in a cave or something, not far from here. He told his father, who told him never to go there again. That's when they passed down the story, and he has been wary of it ever since."

My expression shifted immediately. Suddenly, there was hope again. It wasn't over yet. "That doesn't change the fact that we aren't going anywhere," he said sternly, "Don't get any ideas, once this storm passes, that will be it. I am not getting dragged into any more of this bullshit." Unfortunately, he didn't have a choice. That night I didn't sleep at

all. I removed my supplies and notes from my briefcase, manically reviewing everything that I knew and compiling a plan. The wind howled as ice battered my window and blanketed the ground below. The stream was completely covered, and the Kiselev grave markers were buried halfway beneath the snow. Even then, I knew that going out that night would be a bad idea, but I didn't know just how bad it would be.

Soon after midnight, I left my room with a lantern and heavy winter gear. I knocked on the door to Rocco's room softly but at a rapid pace. My excitement was substantial. He answered the door wearily, annoyed that I had interrupted his sleep. Before he said anything, he looked bewildered as he examined my clothes and equipment. His eyes widened as it suddenly dawned on him. He began to shake his head in refusal, but I reminded him that, if I had died, then he would be unable to collect his payment. He muttered a curse in Sicilian. "I am of a mind to kill you myself, you old fool!"

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We wandered aimlessly through the storm for what felt like eternity. The cold was far worse now, clawing at every pore, seeping the life from our flesh. Rocco had taken on Andrei's demeanor, cursing and shouting as we pushed forth into the night. Admittedly, it was a terrible idea. The cave could be anywhere. There was no telling if it was even within a night's walk. Still, I would not give up. I *could* not. I wish I could say that it was my resolve or willpower that kept me going, but now I know that there was something else. Something... inhuman that motivated me. I had only really begun to feel it then, some invisible force pulling me towards my destination. The further I wandered, the stronger it would become. From beneath an ancient tree, a small cavern could be located, obscured by roots. The snow seemed to have almost swallowed up the entrance, but, by some miracle, it was still just big enough for me to fit. I could hear them, the voices, coming from below, echoing from within the inky void that I now stood before.

"You're not *really* going in there, are you?" Rocco asked in disbelief as I began to squeeze myself through the hole in the ground. I did not answer him, myself enthralled into a stupor. Reluctantly, he followed.

Our lantern light shone meagerly through the darkness of the cave, but it was just enough to make out the inane scribbles on the walls. They seemed extremely old, barely even legible, likely preserved by the cold and the isolation of this place. They somewhat resembled alchemical formulas, but I did not recognize many of their elements. "What do you make of this?" I asked Rocco.

"I don't know. Most of it is Spanish, but... some of it makes absolutely no sense to me." I could tell he was intrigued. It's not often that a man with his knowledge is perplexed by etymology. Before we could delve deeper, however, my attention was drawn further within the cave. That force was pulling me there, the very end of this place. I inched closer, keeping my lantern close. As the light reached the end of the cavern, I could finally see it.

It was a corpse, rotten and limp. Hardly any flesh clung to the bones of the nauseating cadaver, but it maintained an upright sitting position against the back wall of the cave. Its mouth hung agape, head cocked with empty eye sockets staring forward. I heard Rocco retch from behind me before he turned away. My curiosity, however, was undeterred. "Wait!" he exclaimed as I shuffled closer to the sickening object, "It could be him! The *Liche*!" but his objections were obscured by a putrid stench. The arms of the creature clutched a thick, leather-bound tome. Something within me urged me to take it, pry it from the dead man's hands. They appeared so brittle and frail, undeserving of whatever power this book could bestow. Its clutch was surprisingly firm, but no match for the strength of the living. I wiped dust from the book's cover, inspecting its title. The words were written in the same strange characters that were on the wall, but the author's name was clear as day: Marcellus Delgado. This was it, my prize, the key to understanding. Whatever knowledge Delgado beheld would now be mine, and I would herald those discoveries into the modern era of science. I had officially made history.

My enchantment was not yet broken, however, as I felt my gaze avert towards a secondary object visible within the cadaver's chest. I was captivated by it, and, motivated by the thrill of discovery, I reached my hand into its rot-laden rib cage. Just beyond it, where the corpse's heart must have once been, was a spherical metal cage, not much larger than my fist. Along each of its bars ran continuous ridges that circled the entire object. Rotten, black vestiges tendrilled off of the sphere, connecting to long-dormant organs. It appeared that it had once been connected to this man, much like a vital organ. Unlike its resting place, it was solid and sturdy to the touch. Something compelled me to grab it and pull. With a jerk and sickening crack I freed the object from the body and claimed it for myself.

"Clybourne!" interjected Rocco, a mixture of sickness and anxiety accompanying his words, "Look!"

His interruption irritated me, but once I noticed the object of his concern, I understood his haste. Our exit was almost entirely covered with snow. Moonlight was becoming more scarce, and we would soon be stranded. Rocco immediately took action, retrieving a spade from our supplies and hacking furiously at the snow. I had to protect the tome. It was too important to risk. Once he had cleared enough of a path for escape, he scrambled to pull himself back to the surface. His outstretched hand then returned in his place, offering me a chance to egress. With the tome securely in my pack, I took his hand and we made our escape.

It was much easier to find the cabin, and, once we had returned, Rocco immediately lit another cigar. "I hope that was worth it for you, you damn nutcase," he said, still reeling from the experience, "But I'm not risking my skin for another penny if you're involved". He walked shakily back to his room without offering me so much as another glance. *No Matter*, I thought, *I have what I need*. Without hesitation, I returned

to my room and supplies and began pouring over the text. It wasn't written in Spanish, Russian, or even Latin. I didn't recognize the letters, but they did remind me of some of the symbols on the cave walls. It would take time to translate, but I was determined to make it happen. That was until I noticed a chapter that was conveniently translated already, written in Latin. *Immortalis* was the title, each translation of it about thirty pages long, accompanied by illustrations and diagrams. My first thought was that it could be my "Rosetta Stone," my decoding device between this and the strange symbology employed by Delgado throughout the rest of the book. But as I began to read, I came upon a different realization entirely. These pages held the secrets to the *Elixir of Life* – immortality. They told of a process by which a concoction could be produced that would temporarily extend life beyond that of a typical human span. The primary ingredient: a beating, human heart. The realization took me aback. Delgado indeed was the Liche, and he must have tested this on the inhabitants of Kislokan. He did what no other of his station dared to do, unlocking the pinnacle of alchemical secrets through pure cruelty alone.

The following pages depicted sketches and models resembling the device that I had drawn from his corpse. He called it the *Phylactery*. The significance of the name is still unclear to me. It was not an amulet, nor did it seem to have any connection to Hebrew or Jewish culture. With the traditional associations of the word written off, I looked deeper into its function. It seemed from the diagrams that the object would act as a sort of vessel for the elixir, absorbing it through the grooves that ran along its surface. I also noticed that there appeared to be a latching mechanism, allowing the cage to open and close. I polished and dusted off the *Phylactery* in my hands, testing how its functionalities aligned with the diagram. Once renewed, the object clearly shone bright gold under the candlelight of my workspace. Its intricate designs were oddly beautiful, yet I could not deny that it bore a sinister aura. I would come to understand why when exploring further diagrams in the book, depicting detailed instructions on a procedure to implant this device around one's own heart. This was the final step, to open your chest and engage your most vital organs within the bounds of this accursed object.

I shuddered at the horrifying picture of Delgado performing this procedure on himself. It would have required preemptive murder and the willingness to mutilate himself, all for the confirmation of what was still a theory. I looked at the small knife on my table, an alchemical tool that I procured as part of my research, and questioned whether I even had enough drive to do such a thing. Such brutality was unfathomable to me at the time, but clearly this was more than just a theory. Regardless of how he was able to come up with such a theory, Delgado was right, and his sinister deeds live on in legend as proof.

That fateful night would not end there, however, as my revelations would soon turn into new horror all on their own. Deep into my research, I had neglected sleep until at least half past four in the morning. It was then that I heard heavy footfalls outside my

door. I was jolted out of my concentration when Prokopiý swung open the door. His eyes darted around the room, from me, to my desk, to the book and *Phylactery*. I'm not sure what conclusion he had come to, but my hair stood on end as he swiftly closed the door behind him. He began to speak to me in what I could then recognize as raving, furious Russian. As he approached, his volume rose, seeming to ignite more wrath within him with each step. I begged him to be quiet, to calm down as I quickly rose from my chair. Panic had full control of my body in that moment, and it guided my hand toward the knife on my table as Prokopiý's fists began to rise. He may have been large, but he was slow and old. He could not stop me as I drove the blade deep into his throat in what felt like an instant, striking his spine. Immediately, he fell silent, arms limp, but his frenzied stare lingered on my face. As quickly as I had inserted the knife, I removed it, slicing more of his neck as I drew it back. I covered the poor man's mouth in an attempt to silence his gurgling cries, before laying him on the floor where his resentment would seep away with the remainder of his life.

Blood splattered all over the ancient wooden floors of this lodge and stained my skin and clothes. I turned back to the tome, relieved to find it in spotless condition. That's when it dawned upon me. I turned my gaze back to my knife and the dead man that lay at my feet. *It's not my fault*, I reasoned with his blood on my hands, *I was merely defending myself!* While it is true that I did not want to kill him, it was not myself that I was defending, but that damned book and the key to my notability. Regardless of ethics, however, I found myself faced with a golden opportunity. I only had a few moments while his heart still beat, so I took to my work ravenously. I am no surgeon, so I carved and cut everything in my way until I reached my prize. With my instruments at hand, I took what remained of his life essence and converted it into my elixir. I poured it over the *Phylactery's* grooves, which emanated a soft red glow in response. Any sense of moral quandary had fled my psyche, supplanted by the elation of success. I had done it – successfully completed the first step of a ritual thought to be impossible by modern science!

The stench of death brought my thoughts back to reality, however. I still had a dead body lying on the floor, and two companions whom I could not risk misunderstanding the situation. I turned to see the storm still raging outside my window, another perfect opportunity. I dragged the body of Mr. Kiselev to the window of my room, dumping him onto a pile of snow below. With a muffled thud, he was already half-buried in the powder upon his collision. I tossed my bloody clothes out as well. I searched his house for rugs and blankets, anything that I could use to cover the bloody mess on the floor. Lastly, I scrubbed the blood off my hands and face for good measure, doing my best to leave little hints of my misdeeds. It was almost morning by the time I was done, and, heavy with exhaustion, I nodded off to sleep with what little time I had left.

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My sleep was abruptly interrupted by a loud knocking down the hall. I heard Andrei calling out for Prokopiya to no avail. Rocco's voice responded to him instead, in a much softer tone. I met them outside my door, fully packed and ready to leave.

"Ah, William," said Rocco, turning as he noticed my presence, "you wouldn't happen to know where our gracious host has gone, would you?"

"I don't know, he's probably out collecting wood or something. He has a living to make after all."

As Rocco relayed this, Andrei rolled his eyes with a snort. I didn't need a translator to relay his dissatisfaction with my answer. He could not have possibly known, could he?

"This conversation is a waste of time anyway, the weather is calm, the sun is out, and I am ready to go home," I said with increasing frustration. The weather was indeed much calmer than before, but the Sun being "out" was more up for debate in the grey skies of a Siberian winter. Rocco agreed, but Andrei hesitated, offering me occasional glances as we packed for departure. He had taken very little note of me before unless I addressed him directly. He must have known something was off. In order to avoid confrontation, though, I rushed us out of town and back into the wilderness. I hoped that his guidance would distract him for the month remaining on our return to Moscow. The tension would not dissipate, however. Andrei and I rarely spoke at all for the two weeks we spent on that journey. I watched him closely to gauge his suspicion, only drawing more attention when he noticed me while doing the same. Too often, I would glance his way only to notice his head tilted back slightly, eyeing me already. My eyes would dart away immediately, but each time it felt like a small admission of guilt. *He knows*, the words rang through my head, *he must*.

I tried to distract myself with my research on our breaks from walking, but to no avail. In fact, my hope for discovery seemed to slowly slip away. I had explored every understandable portion of the text, and the strange symbols seemed impossible to decipher. It might be years before I could finally understand the text, and years further before I could explore its applications. What I had already found was substantial, but I know that nobody else would believe it or even authorize experimentation given its grisly requirements. Perhaps I could make use of executed criminals or mortally ill patients, but it would still take years to verify the results. I had already spent *months* on this expedition, *years* factoring in all of the research that led me here. Suddenly, time was running short, even shorter if the man whose task it was to bring me home decided to turn on me.

By the 17th day of our journey, I'd had enough. Andrei was a threat and would need to be dealt with if I had any hope of finishing my work. Not only that, but Andrei had a beating heart. One that I could use, that, if I could find someone to perform the procedure, could sustain me for long enough to see my discovery through to the finish. I waited until we had made camp that night, and both Andrei and Rocco had fallen asleep. I had no hope

against him in his waking hours, not like Prokopi. Andrei was no old man, and even with blood gushing from his throat, he could likely best me. I had to be swift and decisive. I retrieved my knife from my bag. I had killed with it before, and I felt comfortable doing it again. Slowly, I crept to his side, kneeling by his head. His neck was turned perpendicularly, exposing one side of his temple. I took a deep breath, raising my thin blade above his head with one hand and positioning the back of the handle in the center of the other's palm heel. I struck swiftly, jamming it through the thin bone of his temple and directly into the brain. His eyes opened with a jolt, but he quickly slumped over. Whether he was dead or merely unconscious, I wasn't sure. Regardless, he was in too catatonic a state to resist my operation. I dragged him off into a nearby thicket of trees along with my bag and supplies. Even in the icy wilderness, my satisfaction was immense as I drew his heart from his chest, his passion now a part of the vessel that would allow me to explore my own. I left his body carved on the ground.

I hadn't even considered how I would explain his disappearance to Rocco, much less find my way home. None of that would matter, however, because as I returned, clutching the glowing *Phylactery* in one hand and a bloodied knife in the other, I saw Rocco standing clutching a hatchet in both hands.

"Not another step, Clybourne!" he announced, fear and determination peppering his words.

"I can expla-"

"NO! I don't want to hear another word from you! I trusted you, I thought you were a man of science. I thought we were on a quest for knowledge, not violence and death! I don't care why you did it, I don't care what you learned, but I am going to end it!"

I stood frozen as he lunged at me. He landed a solid blow to my chest, forcing me to drop the *Phylactery*. I could feel my ribs crack against its force. As the pain shot through my bones, though, my instincts were reignited and I slashed furiously at his body. He pulled the hatchet from my chest, howling in pain and desperation as he attempted another swing. I was too close, though, wild and passionate, my will to live was stronger, and the wounds would eventually overtake him. He collapsed, swinging wildly as he bled out into the snow. In a final act of defiance, he threw the hatchet limply before accepting his fate. "Curse you, William. Hell is waiting for you," he spat viciously before turning to the sky to utter a final prayer in Sicilian. Suddenly, the world was silent.

I was alone, and I was wounded. I inspected the gash on my chest as it bled profusely. I stumbled as the excitement of combat finally subsided, and I was left with the realization that my wound would be fatal. I was many miles from the nearest hospital and had little more than a simple first aid kit in my possession. It could not end here. I could not let such astounding discoveries go to waste. Besides, Rocco was right. I had already gone too far. If I died here, I would spend my eternity among the fires and brimstone of

Hell. That left me with one option. The *Phylactery* lay next to me in the snow, pulsing its eerie red glow, waiting for its moment. I clambered to my pack and retrieved the book, flipping frantically to the pages covering the final step of the ritual. I could feel my blood thinning as the world began to spin around me. I used my final moments of consciousness to tear open the gash in my chest, focusing on the pain to stay awake. I pulled the broken bones of my ribcage back to reveal my damaged but beating heart. Fighting against every urge to die, I opened the *Phylactery* and locked it onto my heart.

The pain was immeasurable, my body began to warp itself, twisting in unnatural ways as my flesh melded back together. New veins and arteries sprang from the *Phylactery* and rejuvenated my dying brain with a new sense of feeling. The sensation was like death all over again, except I could feel it in every excruciating detail. It felt like an eternity before this effect was over, but my body was born anew. I stood, taking in the incomprehensible feeling of immortality, finally ready to go home.

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I wandered for over two years before I finally found my way out of that frozen wasteland. Not that it mattered anymore, as time was no longer of the essence. The winter had already begun to subside and make way for spring. The pain of my wound still felt fresh, even though it had closed. I would get used to it, though, as I would bask in my inability to die. I also found an inability to sleep, or at least I didn't need to. I was too enraptured with my findings to rest, so if it was no longer necessary, then I wouldn't. I ran out of food before making it to Moscow, but I found that I no longer needed to eat or drink either. My hunger and thirst remained, but it was merely pain that could be overcome. Instead, I could focus all of my downtime on studying the text and understanding its origin.

When I finally reconvened with civilization, I was met with a rather unexpected welcome. The people of Moscow seemed appalled by me as I trudged back into their town. Many had approached me, seeking to take me to what I discerned was a hospital. I denied their aid, however, assuring them that I was perfectly fine before I noticed my reflection. At first, I assumed it was a trick of the light, a misjudgment based on the translucent surface of the window I stared into. What stared back was not how I remembered appearing, shriveled and emaciated. My skin was wrinkly and aged, with most of my hair either grayed or fallen out. Even my eyes had lost most of their color, appearing as grey orbs staring lifelessly into themselves. *It must be wearing off*, I thought, remembering the conditions of the elixir. It only *temporarily* prolongs human life, and I used a lot of vitality to finally make it to my destination. I would need to perform the ritual again to ensure that I made it home safely, and I would need to do it soon. When the sun went down, I stalked the streets and alleyways of Moscow before finding a suitable target. It was exceptionally easy now to kill and maim, like second nature. I used their heart to recreate the elixir, cutting open my chest to pour it into the *Phylactery*. It did not restore

me, however, and I found the same haunting visage in my reflection. Clearly, it had not been enough, so I would continue.

For decades, I haunted various cities of Europe as I tried desperately to rejuvenate myself, but to no avail. Not only that, but it was getting worse. My form was shriveling, and I was decaying. I no longer recognized my cadaverous figure, despite my lucidity. Could I be sure that it really worked? That I wasn't simply dead and existing in some kind of personal Hell? Or perhaps I have yet to die and have hallucinated the past years as I still bleed out into the snow. Unfortunately, reality is much crueler. People had begun to recognize me and my actions. My killings were well documented across the continent, and many made an effort to put a stop to me. I had been shot, stabbed, beaten, and brutalized more times than I could count. Each time a new scar and deformity formed on my appearance, and intensified the constraint pain of my undying body. At times, I wished that it would all end, but even years after of elapsing the ritual I would still be alive. I would inevitably then decide to reuptake my habits, because my work was too important.

I had made some substantial progress on deciphering the tome. I would sneak into various libraries at night when I could and pour every ounce of etymological research into the contents of the book. I had come to the conclusion that it isn't derived from any language of human origin. Its grammar was too unfamiliar and made very little linguistic sense. It seems impossible to speak with human syllables, possibly designed for a being capable of another form of vocal expression. Why then did Delgado scribe his works with it? How did he come to learn it? And why did he leave what surely must be his most groundbreaking discovery untranslated for anybody to read? His motives were clearly esoteric and seemed to lead to more questions than answers. I could only get so far with the various archives that I could unearth here. I needed access to those from my university, where I may finally achieve some understanding.

Newly resolved, I skulked my way across Europe back to the ports of France, where I would stow away for passage back home. I left a bloody trail behind me as I could not let death consume me before I made it back. Weakness had begun to infiltrate my body. I could feel my flesh and bones becoming ever more fragile, and my energy waned with each passing day. The ritual would provide temporary solace from these ailments, but each new elixir felt weaker and weaker. I was fading, but my mind was still as sharp as the day I died. I would not let my corporeality stop me now, not as I had become so very close.

Upon docking in Boston Harbor, I made a quick escape into the sewers of Cambridge. I knew I had to stay away from prying eyes, and the tunnels would give me access to anywhere I needed to be. It had been almost seventy years since I had been home, but I was too encapsulated. The next fifty or so years of my life would be spent in study and slaughter as I put all that remained of my life and many others' into my work. I would sneak into the vast libraries of Cambridge's universities in the dead hours of night, stealing books to read in the sewers each day. It became more and more clear that

Delgado's inspiration was not human, but something more. As I slowly began to comprehend his script, I saw references to deific beings beyond the stars, creatures of such immense proportion and power that the human mind is incapable of understanding their nature. Was he referring to God? Angels? Had he found a way to view them with mortal eyes? Perhaps that was the motivation behind his ultimate discovery. If the beings he speaks of, those whose scope exceeds the limits of human comprehension, perhaps he sought immortality so that he could expand his mind to reach those limits. Perhaps Delgado was no madman, but a genius like myself who made the necessary sacrifices to unlock the precipice of observable truth. Or perhaps we are both fools who merely share the same folly.

The puzzle pieces finally started to fit together when the world became a blur. I was teased with a taste of the arcane secrets Delgado witnessed, but I was still so far from the summit of his knowledge. It was a cruel joke that then would be the time that my eyesight gave out. However, I did not perceive the humor at first. Rather, I was enraged. I killed so many more in an attempt to retrieve my sight, the blood of thousands now on my hands. Next would be my hearing, as the world darkened from a blur to pitch black. Silence and darkness are my reality now – one that I have come to accept. This is the price for my transgressions against humanity, unforgivable even to serve the purpose that they did. I am little more than a skeleton now, unfeeling, rotten, and without the strength to move my body. It has been a decade now since I performed the ritual, yet somehow I last. There is no telling how much longer I will exist, or what will become of my consciousness. I am now trapped alone in a corpse, forced to eternally reflect on my actions. It haunts me to think that this may have been Delgado's reality. Perhaps his *Phylactery* was the first heart that I ripped out. Maybe he even still remains conscious. Part of me hopes that it's true, that the answers I sought are somehow still within me, and that maybe I can reach them. My true hope, however, is that he did die that day, and that when my body is inevitably found, someone will rip my heart out of my chest so that I may finally rest.

FICTION

THE BAG OF WINDS

BY ANIKA MAJI



Anika Maji is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Computer Science. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Huiying Chen's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2025. This story was inspired by in-class readings of Emily Wilson's translation of *The Odyssey*, which describes Odysseus as "complicated," rather than as clever or wily, as well as Natalie Haynes' retelling of *The Odyssey* from Penelope's perspective in the novel *A Thousand Ships*, when Penelope frequently wonders at the motives behind Odysseus' wanderings. Ultimately, this story aims not only at illustrating the events of *The Odyssey* from a unique point of view, but it also aims at providing a different perspective on Odysseus—rather than being an infallible, golden hero, Odysseus was just human.

When Odysseus, lord of Ithaca, famed Achaean general, favored of Athena, came to our gusty island, my cousins' opinions of him were as varied and numerous as his epithets. Wily, some called him, their eyes flitting about him and his crew with suspicion and caution. Others called him ingenious, clever—these ones could barely contain their brimming admiration as they hid behind the pillars to watch him feast with the king's family. Some whispered stories of his feats—at Troy, with the whole horse business, and of course the Cyclops incident, and the Lotus-Eaters and Cicones. And, of course, our king couldn't help but boast to all his godly relatives (especially to any Olympian who happened to pass by—he always *did* want a promotion) about how he'd convinced his renowned guest to stay a whole month on our faraway, remote island, and how the resourceful, crafty Odysseus needed *his* help to sail home. Me, though? I didn't know what to think of the son of Laertes. At least, not at first.

While he was our guest, my cousins and I all stayed in our natural forms, only encountering Odysseus and his crew on our daily rounds of the island to provide a pleasant, calm breeze as they enjoyed their well-deserved rest. It was only at the end of the month, when about ten of my cousins and I were summoned by our king to the council room, that we all adopted our corporeal manifestations.

"My subjects," boomed Aeolus. As king of the winds, he was always booming and bellowing. Perhaps it was the acoustics in his cavernous palace. There were always a couple of my relatives floating around, and they made sure his voice always carried and echoed in a properly regal and frightening way.

"I have gathered you here today to inform you that you have been selected for a mission of the highest honor," Aeolus continued. His face, which usually shifted between various human forms every few moments, now settled and stayed on a solemn countenance, his long, gray beard swaying and his stormy eyes sparkling. "You will accompany and guide Odysseus and his men to Ithaca. He is worth very much to the gods, especially our esteemed monarch, Zeus, and his wise daughter and advisor, Athena. His swift and safe return to Ithaca will please them immensely."

Here, King Aeolus paused and looked meaningfully up at the ceiling, presumably to alert any Olympians who might've been in the vicinity of the great service he was doing for them. I could hardly stop myself from giggling. But I did, laughing at the king of the winds was not a good look for a minor breeze such as myself.

"As such, you will be bound in this satchel," Aeolus held up a small, brown pouch. "You may only leave it when Odysseus or his crewmen untie it. Under no circumstances are you to leave its premises otherwise."

My cousins started griping and groaning, nudging each other and making faces. We may not have been our uncles—fierce, frosty Boreas, or gentle, revered Zephyr—but we had some dignity. We may have been lesser winds, but we were the *winds* after all.

Forces of nature, worshipped by the Greeks, alternatively loved and dreaded, but always respected and always feared. We were not used to being bound up and confined like this, especially to follow the orders of a mortal. And besides, I had my own reservations about this so-called mission. We were supposed to guide Odysseus back to Ithaca. But, I mused, even for these snail-paced humans, the journey from Troy to Ithaca was not an exceedingly long one. And Odysseus had, knowingly or unknowingly, invoked the wrath of the feared Sea-God, Poseidon. For what? He had certainly made our task of escorting him safely through the seas much harder than it had to be.

I wondered, did Odysseus even want to go home?

But of course, my opinion did not matter. I was one of the nameless winds, ignored and scorned even by my minor wind-deity cousins. So, I said nothing and stifled my apprehension.

On the day we set out, I was uncomfortably nestled in the corner of the little satchel, praying this trip would end quickly. Each night, we were let out for a few hours, and I relished those minutes of sweet, unrestrained freedom. Even though we had a set course, those moments of being alone and uncontrolled by anyone—be it the Olympians, the king, or my relatives—were priceless to me. I filed them away into my memory to relive whenever I felt trapped and helpless on Aeolus' island. I soared under the star-studded sky, scudded across the wine-dark waves. My cousins and I never agreed upon anything, but for these few nights, we were a team. Together, we raised our dozens of invisible hands and propelled Odysseus' ship straight towards rocky Ithaca.

Everything changed on the tenth day of our journey. We were only a couple of hours away from our destination. My cousins and I all crowded around the prow of the ship to see—we'd never been this far from our home. It wasn't much to look at, Ithaca, but seeing the smoke rising above the rugged land moved Odysseus and his crew to tears. I saw them all hugging each other and excitedly pointing out the sights they recognized, even after a decade away from home. Though it was a moving scene, I felt a pang of sadness. If only I could feel the same way when I saw Aeolia.

Odysseus stood a few feet apart from his men, staring at his homeland as if he couldn't believe we were that close. But I could see his eyelids drooping forward. Understandably so, as he'd almost singlehandedly been helming the ship, obsessively checking the maps during the day and the positions of the stars during the night to ensure we were on the right course. He appeared very dedicated to getting his men home. But sometimes I noticed him, standing off in the corner, absorbed in his work, looking up at the sky with a wistful look in his eyes. And I knew then that while he cared for his crew very much and wished them a prompt reunion with their families and friends, he wanted a different fate for himself. He knew his men wanted to go home. But he wouldn't mind wandering for a bit longer.

Perhaps that was a small part of why he decided to let go of his obsessive map-checking on that tenth day. Perhaps that was why he decided to tell his men he would take a short rest before helming the last leg of our journey. And perhaps that was why he did not tell his men what was in Aeolus' bag.

It was the small hours of the night when I felt the pouch being untied and glimpsed Odysseus' crewmen's faces staring down at us. But, shocked as they were to not find piles of riches, they gave us no directions. We did not know what to do. Confused and panicked, we all shot out of the bag. We floated around for a few seconds, giddy with the rush of freedom but perplexed at our lack of orders. Whenever Odysseus had let us out, he had given us clear directions on which way to guide the ship. As we had no commands, no orders to carry out at this moment, we took it upon ourselves to return to Aeolia. We thought our work was done. Don't blame us—we are the winds, after all. We are unused to following the instructions of mortals.

It was only when I was a great distance away that I heard them. Odysseus' men, all gathered on the deck, sobbing uncontrollably. For in our hurry to return to *our* home, we'd inadvertently robbed them of their chance to reach theirs. We didn't mean to, but the force of four dozen winds all blowing in the opposite direction must've turned Odysseus' ship back. I saw the heartbreak and pure, unadulterated misery on their faces. Odysseus, though, wore a stoic expression.

Clever, cunning Odysseus, I wondered, famed for your tricks and traps. If you are as clever as they say, then why didn't you tell your men of Aeolus's bag of winds? It was then that I realized that we are a bit of the same, Odysseus and I. Both belonging to one home but longing to be anywhere but there. Both driven by the thrill of wandering into the unknown, of the freedom and the uncertainty that comes with it.

But we are different, Odysseus and I, in one important way. In the pursuit of his own happiness, he'd accidentally sacrificed his men's. And as annoying and irritating as my cousins are, we are still family, and I would stay with them till the end. And it was in that moment that I finally decided what I thought of lord Odysseus, chosen hero of grey-eyed Athena, revered soldier of the Trojan War, king of rocky Ithaca. Yes, he was clever and cunning and wily, and brave and resourceful and stubborn. But he was also selfish and manipulative at times, and rash and impulsive. He was completely unlike all the glowing stories I'd heard about the heroes of legend. But those are just stories, and this was reality. Odysseus was a *complicated* person, and flawed, but then again, aren't we all?

ESSAY

COLORING THE ANCIENT GREEK WORLD: An Analysis of Chromatic Oddities in the Homeric Texts

BY PURAV MATLIA



Purav Matlia is an undergraduate student, majoring in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Huiying Chen's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2025. Inspired by studies on color perception, this work explores the puzzling absence of a word that can be confidently translated as "blue" in Homer's *Odyssey*. It is reminiscent of dorm-room debates like, "What if my red is your blue?" Through the lens of this puzzle, the paper probes timeless questions in the philosophy of mind, inviting a profound, natural sense of empathy.

Introduction

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

(Arnold, 1867, lines 15–20)

In “Dover Beach”, Matthew Arnold conjectures what Sophocles heard long ago by the Aegean Sea. This research paper seeks the answer to another question: what did Sophocles see by the Aegean Sea? Not merely the rays of light that fell upon his retina, but the complex interplay between sensing and interpreting that constitutes perception.

I found the use of color in Homer’s epics quite odd. The sea is described as “wine-dark,” waves as “purple,” cloth as “sea-purpled,” wool as “dark as violets,” and the sky as “bronze.” When I first came across these phrases, I was perplexed by the dissonance between the chromatic adjectives and the hues I associated with the objects being described. I spent time trying to resolve this discrepancy, frantically searching for hints in the context that might aid my understanding. But even after interpreting the phrases across a diverse set of known contexts, I felt that Homer’s intended meaning (or that of the group of poets—whom, for simplicity, I’ll refer to collectively as Homer) continued to elude me. The idea that perhaps the Greeks perceived color differently and had a distinct chromatic culture took hold of me. Further research led me to the astonishing observation that the color blue is not mentioned even once in either the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad*.

To understand the use of color in the Homeric texts and the chromatic culture of ancient Greece is to take a peek through a gateway into another world. A world that mirrors our sensory stimulation, but differs in the interpretation of it. Human creativity is a manifestation of the diversity of experience, and it is this capacity for experience that enables us to be a dynamic species, constantly innovating. The ancient Greek chromatic culture manifested itself in seemingly odd phrases in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Analyzing it can deepen appreciation for the diversity of thought, experience, and perception, encouraging empathy and understanding by illuminating Homer’s careful intentions. In this Zeitgeist marked by polarization, it is important to empathize with other people.

Hence, I seek to answer the question: what does the use of color in the *Odyssey* tell us about the interpretation of color in ancient Greek culture, and how did it inform their perception of the natural world?

It is important to note that incorporating the theory of color expounded by ancient Greek philosophers—Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle—and other historical sources may

offer a fuller understanding. This research paper, however, answers the question from a purely literary context by investigating the impact of their chromatic culture on the Homeric texts.

Arguments

In this section, I will analyze popular arguments, providing my own input and assessment.

1) *The Greeks had a different visual sensory configuration.*

The simplest answer to the question. One of the first to have noticed the odd color usage, William Gladstone, in his 1858 book *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, suggested that the Greeks were colorblind. However, Gladstone (1958) would later disagree with this interpretation of his text.¹ In the context of the Darwinian spirit of the 19th century, this theory was considered to be a viable explanation on the assumption that eyesight had evolved since the Greeks. However, we now know that a few thousand years is not long enough to result in detectable evolutionary modifications to eyesight.

Marc Bornstein (1973) assessed numerous studies and concluded the presence of a pigmentation in certain races that affected sensitivity to different wavelengths in the visible spectrum. However, the sensitivity was not a significant shift relative to the other races and does not explain the color oddities in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*.

This argument, therefore, implies that while the Greeks may have had access to a different range of hues, the structure of expression—their chromatic culture—was assumed to be identical to ours.

2) *The phrases are semantically empty, fulfilling only the verse's metrical requirements.*

The *Odyssey* was composed in dactylic hexameter. Milman Parry (1930) explains that epithets for ships—such as “swift,” “red-cheeked,” “black,” “prowed,” and so on—are utilized not to describe a relevant quality of the ship in context, but rather to satisfy the metrical requirements of the verse. Ships described as “seafaring” are often beached in the *Iliad*. Likewise, the frequent invocation of “rosy-fingered dawn” can partly be attributed to the needs of the meter.

This argument elucidates dissonances that go beyond chromatic descriptions. Milman Parry's work revolutionized our understanding of classical Greek literature, illustrating how these texts might be the product of long-standing oral traditions where epithets that seemed odd served the purpose of filling metrical requirements and consequently aiding memorization of the oral tradition. While these epithets may be

¹ Gladstone wrote that “the organ of colour and its impressions were but partially developed among the Greeks of the heroic age.”

mismatched with the objects they're describing in the given contexts—for instance, beached ships being described as “seafaring”—they are still plausible descriptors for the objects in other contexts. A ship can be seafaring; what would be truly absurd is a description such as “swift-footed turtle.” My point is that while “wine-dark” may have been utilized to satisfy the dactylic hexameter metric of the verse, there exists some link between “wine-dark” and “sea.” I do not think that the choice of the epithet is completely arbitrary and meaningless.

The conclusion of this argument is that inferring the chromatic culture from the Homeric texts is a futile endeavor because phrases are semantically empty, intended only to satisfy metrical requirements. But as I outlined above, phrases may not have a context-appropriate description of the objects, but they still connect to some aspect of the object. Extrapolating chromatic culture from the texts, therefore, cannot be completely crossed out.

3) *The Greeks used appropriate color adjectives.*

A vast swathe of time separates us from the ancient Greeks. The temporal distance encourages the conjecture that perhaps the physical world appeared different then—maybe the sea was “wine-dark” or, alternately, the wine was blue.

Chemist Robert Wright and classics professor Robert Cattley (1983) suggested that the geological marble and limestone formations in ancient Greece would have made the groundwater alkaline, raising the pH level of wine and changing its color from red to blue.² Thus, because wine appeared blue to the Greeks, the description “wine-dark sea” appropriately describes the sea, which parallels the blue wine.

Rutherford-Dyer (1983) argues that the sea might have been imparted a “wine-dark” appearance by the mix of darkness and red hues of a sunset or twilight. He solidifies his argument by illustrating how mentions of the phrase are followed by a transition into nighttime.³

The conclusion here is that the chromatic culture of the ancient Greeks was no different from our own; however, these arguments only justify the epithet “wine-dark” and neither consider all of the other chromatic dissonances nor explain the absence of blue.

4) *My argument*

² Wright and Cattley also note the common practice at Greek *symposio* (συμπόσιον) of diluting wine with six to eight parts water. The term *symposium* itself derives from the Greek *sympínein* (συμπίνειν), meaning “to drink together.”

³ It is mentioned in the *Iliad* when Achilles is, by the funeral pyre of Patroclus, looking at the sun setting over the sea; in the *Odyssey* when Telemachus sets sail to see Nestor at Pylos; and when Zeus destroys Odysseus’s ship for the crew’s transgressions against the Sun God Helios.

- i) The effect of culture on color vocabulary and why blue is absent from the ancient Greek color vocabulary.

In the present day, children learn a color vocabulary by observing highly saturated primary hues on toys and in books. Such stimulation is necessary for a term to be included in a color vocabulary. Consider the color red: it is the color of our blood, a hue emanated by fire, the color of ripe fruits, and so on. There is utility in having a term for red to allow communication and cooperation, which ensures survival. For instance, referring to ripe red fruits among green foliage. Blue, although a salient color, is quite rare in nature. Consequently, there is no utility in having a term for blue. Then how did cultures evolve to include a term for blue? Berlin and Kay (1969) suggest that dyeing industries exposed people to a higher frequency of stimulation to saturated primary hues. They note a positive correlation between cultures that have an advanced dyeing industry and having a term for blue. In ancient Greece, dyeing was known, but the industry was in its infancy. Hence, because they were never exposed to saturated blue colors, they did not need to include a term for it.

One may question the conclusion above, “but isn't everyone exposed to a saturated blue by the sky?” The sky, however, is not a thing or an object at all. Studies show that speakers of modern European dialects do not associate the sky with a color term (Kristol 1980). The ubiquitous color vocabulary that all of us learn and which describes the sky as blue is a function of imperialism and globalism, imposing the same chromatic culture on everyone.

- ii) Metaphorical richness

“Wine-dark sea” is translated from the Greek words *oînops pōntos*. A more literal translation of *oînops* would be “wine-faced” or “wine-eyed.” P.G. Maxwell-Stuart (1981) interprets the descriptor *oînops* as furnishing the object it describes as dangerous, unpredictable, and violent—the qualities of a drunk man with bloodshot “wine-eyes.” Other interpretations build on the seafaring prowess of the ancient Greeks. The sea was intoxicating and captivating to Greek sailors—not inducing a state of drunkenness but rather overwhelming the senses, akin to the effect of wine. In the same vein, bronze in “bronze sky” does not necessarily describe the appearance of the sky. Bronze in this context translates from *polychalkos*, which literally means “of much bronze.” Thus, what the phrase is referring to is the abundance of bronze in the abode of the gods: the heavens, where resources—including bronze, which was precious to the Greeks—are plentiful.

The metaphorical meanings seem to have been lost in conventional translations to a hue-based chromatic utilization that we are so familiar with. The translation of *oînops* to “wine-dark” and *polychalkos* to “bronze” seems disingenuous. The reason for these conventional translations may be to satisfy the metrical requirements of the translated

versions. A lack of a one-to-one correspondence of *polychalkos* with any English word may prompt translators to use “bronze” instead. I argue a similar case happens with *porphyreos* which is conventionally translated as purple. Again, metaphorical richness is lost in this translation. *Porphyreos* may be associated with luminosity or a glimmering effect owing to the bright purple textiles drawn from *porphura*. Therefore, a “purple wave” or a “sea-purpled cloth” may refer to the luminosity of the objects and not strictly to hue.

iii) The perception of the ancient Greeks

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis or linguistic relativity says that perception and expression are informed by language. While the strong version of the hypothesis is not proven, studies have been conducted to show that a weaker version may be true. A study on the Himba tribe in Namibia showed the tribespeople had a harder time differentiating between blue and green relative to different shades of green. This is because their color vocabulary does not have a word for blue, but they do have words for different shades of green. Their knowledge of these terms for different shades of green enabled them to recognize subtle differences; however, a lack of a term for blue meant it was more difficult for them to distinguish blue from green (Goldstein et al., 2009).

Thus, perception is a function of language, and perception informs expression. Greek words such as *oînops*, *polychalkos*, and *porphyreos* provide us with insight into how the Greeks may think about the natural world. Where we might think of a hue-based descriptor as appropriate, the Greeks may have preferred a more figurative approach. The sensory input their minds received from the physical world was not different from ours. However, how their minds interpreted the sensory information is where the space in between us lies.

A modern analogy that may help us understand this difference is illustrated by the Japanese word *amae*. Conventionally translated as “presumed indulgence” and related to spoiled children, the word has positive connotations in Japanese culture but may be interpreted negatively by English speakers. The positive connotation lies in the allusion to a loving relationship—for instance, between a parent and a child—where the child can ask the parent for help freely without feeling as if they are burdening the parent. This difference in the conception of emotions is analogous to the difference between our interpretation and the Greeks’ interpretation of the natural physical world. While their color vocabulary may not be as expansive as ours, their associations with objects such as the sea and the sky were metaphorically rich.

Conclusion

The ebb and flow of the Aegean Sea may have reminded Sophocles of the cycles of human euphoria and dysphoria—but what did he see?

He sensed the deep blue hues of the sea mirroring the sky, but what he attended to, perhaps, was the luminosity and glittering caused by light refracting off the water's surface, much like the shimmer of bright purple textiles at home. He saw the immense vastness and power of the sea, the domain of Poseidon. He may have stood at the very edge of the water, where the waves brushed near his toes but always fell short, recalling to him, perhaps, the myth of Sisyphus's eternal struggle. The sea's intoxicating allure overwhelmed his senses as he scanned the distant horizon. He may have associated the restlessness of the crashing waves with the volatility and energy of youth, and the stillness of far-off waters with the wisdom and serenity of old age.

This is what I conjecture: a sensory experience intertwined with rich metaphorical interpretation. What Sophocles experienced is forever out of our reach. Yet what we can understand — and learn from—is the space between our minds. Our differences in subjective experience diversify modes of thought. As Thomas Nagel outlines in his seminal essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (1974), we may never fully grasp what it is like to be another conscious being. That is why we must profoundly appreciate our differences—and embrace empathy.

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ESSAY

SHOULD COMPANIES BE SELFISH?

BY ALEXANDER ORLOV



Alexander Orlov is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Finance. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor James Mollison's SCLA 102 class in Spring 2025. This piece was inspired by a class debate on capitalism and corporate responsibility. It examines whether profit-driven companies can truly promote social progress, ultimately arguing that lasting societal change requires deliberate and sustained action, rather than relying solely on self-interest.

In recent years, some have argued that selfish companies, which focus entirely on maximizing profit, can still improve society as a byproduct of capitalism. This idea is appealing because it suggests that social progress does not require intentional effort. Instead, it only needs the pursuit of self-interest. Max's recent presentation defended this idea by claiming that when companies focus on profit, the world becomes a better place. While his argument draws from real-world examples and historical evidence, it ultimately oversimplifies the truth. Capitalism's profit motive may sometimes lead to innovation or relief, but it also causes harm, deepens inequality, and prioritizes image over impact. In this essay, I will fairly reconstruct Max's position, present an objection, consider his likely response, and explain why that defense ultimately fails.

Max's central claim is that companies should act in their own self-interest because society benefits as a result. He supports this thesis with three key arguments. First, he invokes Joseph Schumpeter's theory of creative destruction to show how capitalism forces companies to innovate. He contrasts the United States and the Soviet Union's aircraft development during the Cold War, arguing that capitalist competition produced superior results. The American F-15, built by competing private firms, far outperformed the Soviet MiG-25, which was created and produced by a state-controlled system focused on quotas. Second, Max refers to economist Milton Friedman's view that corporate charity is often driven by tax benefits or public image. However, he argues that even when the motive is self-interest, the outcome still tangibly benefits society. For example, companies that promote Pride Month or disease awareness may do so for branding purposes, but the exposure and funding still contribute to public causes. Third, he defends sweatshops by claiming that in many underdeveloped countries, low-wage jobs are often better than the available alternatives. He cites studies showing that workers in Nike subcontractor factories earn significantly more than their local minimum wages and that these are in high demand. Of the three points, I believe the argument about innovation seems the most important because it supports the overall claim that selfishness leads to progress.

While Max presents these arguments clearly, he overlooks the fact that the harms caused by capitalism are not just unfortunate side effects. Rather, they are built into the system itself. The same incentives that encourage innovation also push companies to exploit workers, cut corners on safety, and ignore long-term consequences. For instance, tech companies such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok innovate rapidly. However, they also design addictive platforms, harvest personal data, and spread misinformation because those strategies increase profits. According to a Pew Research Center report, 65% of Americans believe major tech companies often fail to anticipate the broader consequences of their products, and only 24% think they do enough to protect personal data (Pew Research Center, 2018). Similarly, corporate charity motivated by public relations may raise awareness, but it often turns serious issues into branding opportunities. During Pride Month or Black History Month, companies flood social media with slogans and merchandise but offer little meaningful support. Even "round up to

donate” campaigns often benefit companies more than the causes they claim to support, as companies collect donations from consumers but claim the tax deductions themselves. This aligns with Inger L. Stole’s analysis, which argues that cause marketing has become a prevalent form of corporate philanthropy, primarily serving as a public relations tool rather than a genuine effort to address social issues (Stole, 2008). And although sweatshops may offer slightly better wages than local jobs, that does not mean they improve lives in a lasting way. Many operate under harsh conditions for decades with little sign of progress. The core problem is that if social good only happens when it aligns with profit, it becomes unreliable and fragile.

Max might respond by saying that capitalism, despite its flaws, has reduced global poverty more than any other system. He could point to large-scale economic transformations in countries like China and India, where market reforms and foreign investment helped lift hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty. Max might also argue that all nations must pass through early industrial stages, such as sweatshops, before they can achieve high labor standards, just as the United States and other developed countries once did during the Industrial Revolution. He may claim that while these jobs are unpleasant, they represent the first steps toward industrial growth and better conditions in the future. Additionally, Max might argue that the motives behind corporate charity are less important than the tangible results. A donation made for tax reasons still funds cancer research or disaster relief, and branding campaigns tied to social issues can still raise awareness and generate funding. He might even say that competition, no matter how self-serving, pushes companies to offer better products, improve efficiency, and ultimately raise living standards for everyone involved.

However, this response misses the deeper issue at hand. Just because capitalism has reduced poverty in some areas, it does not mean that the system always works this way, nor does it excuse the damage it causes. The improvements in countries like China happened through tightly managed state interventions combined with market incentives, not pure corporate greed. In many other countries, sweatshops have persisted for decades without leading to meaningful reform or industrial advancement. These jobs may offer more money than farming or street vending, but they often trap workers in dangerous, underpaid conditions with little chance for socioeconomic mobility. The assumption that every country will naturally evolve into a developed economy ignores the global structures that allow rich nations and corporations to exploit cheap labor without creating pathways to equality. Research by Muchlinski and Arnold (2024) challenges the idea that sweatshops inherently foster economic growth, emphasizing that such environments often violate labor rights and entrench exploitative working conditions incompatible with human dignity.

Regarding corporate charity, its value becomes questionable when it depends entirely on whether helping others aligns with a company’s financial interests. If tax

benefits or positive press were to disappear, so would the support. This means the social good produced is conditional, not committed. Competition may drive innovation, but it also pushes companies to cut corners, burn out workers, and externalize environmental and public health costs. When the only guiding principle is profit, the well-being of people becomes optional. That most certainly is not a stable or ethical foundation for building a just society.

In conclusion, Max's defense of corporate greed is based on selective examples and ignores the deeper structural flaws of capitalism. While it is true that some good can result from self-interested behavior, this does not justify promoting selfishness as a guiding principle. The benefits Max describes are inconsistent and often come at a high cost. If we want a fairer and more stable society, companies must be held accountable for their actions and not be left unchecked. We cannot rely on profit to guide progress and simply hope the outcomes are positive. The world needs intentional care, not accidental kindness.

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FICTION

"IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP"

BY HAMOND RAHARDJO



Hamond Rahardjo is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Aerospace Engineering. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Chen's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2025. "It's Time to Wake Up" was inspired by Jonathan Swift's depiction of Laputa and by Hamond's own struggles with constraints on creative writing. Through satire and metafiction, he explores how structure can serve as both a limitation and a foundation for creativity.

Disclaimer

The following essay is a work of fiction and creative satire. Any resemblance to real persons, living or deceased, is purely coincidental, with the sole exception of Dr. Chen, who is referenced strictly within an academic context. Any depictions of Dr. Chen, her assignments, or her teaching methods are fictionalized for narrative purposes and do not constitute an actual critique or commentary on her professional practices. The views and reactions expressed by the protagonist are entirely dramatized and should not be interpreted as reflective of real-world perspectives on academic instruction.

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By reading this essay, the reader acknowledges that any perceived critique of individuals, institutions, or academic practices is unintentional and purely a function of creative storytelling. The author disclaims any liability for misinterpretation, unintended offense, or conclusions drawn beyond the intended scope of satire and fiction.

No Dr. Chens were harmed in the making of this assignment.

It's time to wake up.

Start your essay with the above sentence.

Walking down the steps of HAMP 1252, Hamond was dejected. Dr. Chen had imprisoned his creative courage, his wealth of words, his sanctuary of storytelling. An empty helplessness filled his heart, sharply contrasting Dr. Chen's jubilant demeanor as she skipped merrily away, finally liberated from lecturing her horde of college zombies. If *Bah Humbug* were a person, it would surely be this post-SCLA101-lecture Hamond.

Hamond was simply suffering from a mild creative crisis: Dr. Chen had instructed the class to compose an essay beginning precisely with the words, "*It's time to wake up.*" For Hamond, whose essays usually spiraled into a tangled mess of incoherent ramblings and nonsensical tangents held together by the barest thread of logic, this felt like literary imprisonment.

So as Hamond slogged through his remaining ENGR132 class, grabbed a sad sandwich from *Earhart*, and trudged back to his apartment, he was haunted by Dr. Chen's merciless prompt. He collapsed onto his bed, drained by the sheer burden of academic oppression, and rightfully fell fast asleep.

But tonight, he would break free from his academic oppression.

"...henceforth ..."

"...quasi-local mass..."

Hamond drifted back into consciousness. Those mutterings, he had heard them before. Keeping his eyes shut, he listened.

"...most incontrovertibly!"

"...taking the Hamiltonian constraint..."

"...inquisitively, the Einsteinian field equations..."

Wait. General Relativity??

Hamond shot upright in disbelief, then turned to see the source of those mutterings-

Before him stood a disheveled figure, dressed in robes embroidered with swirling mathematical symbols, celestial coordinates, and music notation so bizarre that Beethoven would've gone both deaf and blind. "Its" hollow eyes—one gazing absently at the sky, the other twitching as if trying to escape his own mind—they looked so lost and forgotten they might as well have been in Area 51. "Its" head was uncannily asymmetrical; one side flatter than a ruler, the other curved like a withering pretzel that gave up halfway. And there were more of "them"—all muttering, murmuring, their words forming an amorphous cloud of ideas, floating without shape or direction.

Yet somehow, that wasn't even the strangest part.

Hamond realized he wasn't on the ground, but a colossal island miraculously floating in the sky. He took a deep breath; never before was the air so crisp, yet so thin he nearly went into hypoxia.

As beautiful as the sky and clouds were, the same couldn't be said for the "buildings" (if you could even call them that). Towers were shaped so bizarrely that only divine intervention held them together. Random stairs spiraling out of nowhere, houses built by 4-year-olds in GeoGebra, and other structures reminiscent of physics textbooks

(Hamond swore he saw a house shaped like a contour integral). Think *Alice in Wonderland*, written by a PhD mathematician tripping on ketamine.

After (attempting to) process where he was, he gathered the courage to approach the "being".

"Uh... hello? Hello? Ni hao?" he tried.

"It" remained in its trance, lips still moving in a ceaseless murmur.

"你说中文吗?" He mustered what he remembered of 4th-grade Chinese.

(understandably, still nothing.)

"Bro, are you dea-"

The figure snapped its head toward him. In a monotone yet frantic voice, it finally spoke:

"Do you believe the Riemann hypothesis holds true for all nontrivial zeros?"

Hamond blinked. "What?"

"The distribution of primes, the zeta function, the asymptotes—it all unravels should the hypothesis fail. Declare your thoughts!"

So that wasn't very helpful.

Hamond glanced around, searching for anything that seemed less lost in theoretical nonsense. Surely someone could explain where the hell he wa-

smack

An unexpected, sharp whack to the side of Hamond's head jolted him back. He blinked, and before him stood a new figure. She seemed far more grounded, a stark contrast to the lost mathematicians around them. Her stick, with its inflated pouch, looked both ridiculous and oddly functional.

"What the—"

The new arrival smacked the "thing" next, directly on the ear. The robed figure twitched, blinked twice, then slowly refocused its drifting gaze.

"Ah," it muttered, as if waking from a trance. "Yes, yes, some dinner."

Then it wandered off.

"What the hell was that?" he demanded.

The stick-wielding individual—shorter, sharper-eyed, and dressed in simpler clothing—sighed like a weary babysitter explaining the obvious.

"Flapper duty, innit?" she mentioned in the heaviest, most unapologetically British Cockney accent imaginable.

Hamond stared. "Flapper... what?"

"Another newbie. Brilliant."

She gestured at the figures with her stick.

"These lot get so lost in their own heads they forget basic things, don't they? Eatin', listenin', answerin' back, not walkin' off a bloody cliff—you name it."

She gave the stick a small, expert twirl before resting it on their shoulder.

"That's where we come in."

"So you just... smack those things until they function?"

The flapper shrugged. "Bout sums it up, dunnit?"

She extended her hand. "Name's Delta, by the way. Oi, since yer new, why don't ya think up some chairs so we can 'ave us a proper little chat, eh?"

Hamond blinked. "What?"

Delta sighed. "Mate. It's your dream. You own this whole reality, and me, though technically that went illegal in 1833."

Hamond stared at her. "That's ridiculous."

Delta folded her arms. "Right. 'Cause the floatin' island full o' mathematical Yodas an' a random Cockney slapper definitely makes sense."

...

"Ok, fair point."

Hamond sighed, feeling ridiculous, but figured he had nothing to lose. He focused, and in an instant, two chairs popped into existence—one a perfectly ordinary desk chair, the other a non-Euclidean horror film.

Delta plopped herself onto the nightmare chair without hesitation.

"Cheers!" she mentioned as she sipped on a right-ol' cuppa.

(Oh God, the narrator's going Cockney too).

"Welcome to Laputa, floatin' island of geniuses, or as I like to call it, 'proof that too much brainpower makes you completely useless.' Those walkin' textbooks? Yeah, them's the Laputians."

Hamond glanced around at the wandering, murmuring figures, still lost in their own theoretical worlds.

"Yeah, I was starting to get that impression."

Delta smirked. "Smart lad, these lot," She gestured broadly. "Absolute world-class minds. Could solve the mysteries o' the universe before breakfast. Only problem is, they'd forget to eat breakfast 'cause they was too busy derivin' a new way to do it."

Hamond frowned. "So they just... wander around muttering math?"

"Aye. And physics, astronomy, some even dip into music theory if they're feelin' spicy." She rolled her eyes. "All thought, no action. No common sense. No function."

He nodded slowly.

"Look at 'em—what's it all amount to? Jack bleedin' squat. 'Cause only fancy thoughts ain't worth a damn without some structure, yeah? All brains, no buildin'. All thinkin', no doin'."

Hamond was beginning to see where this was going. "...And that's why you're here."

Delta smirked. "Gold star, mate."

Hamond exhaled, glancing again at the impossible architecture, the impractical designs, the sheer overwhelming lack of anything useful. It was a sight to see, and Hamond couldn't really belie-

smack

"Ow! What was that for?" Hamond snapped at Delta.

"Sorry, luv. Force o' habit. You looked like you was about to go down a train o' thought."

Delta leaned back in her chair. "Speakin' o' thinkin' too much, let's talk about that Dr. Chen."

Hamond blinked. "Wait—how do you—"

"Mate, this ain't some foreign land—it's your own bloody consciousness. I'm just a figment o' your imagination."

Hamond looked around, one more time.

"So all this is me??"

Delta snorted. "Course it is. You're the one buildin' this world, mate."

Hamond frowned. "Okay, but you still didn't answer my question; what on Earth does Dr. Chen have to do with—"

He stopped mid-sentence.

Something clicked in his head.

He glanced at the Laputians, still lost in their own theories, trapped in infinite loops of thought with no end in sight. Though they had unlimited freedom with their minds, that freedom amounted to nothing. They might have possessed all the knowledge and creativity in the world, but without structure, it was chaos.

His mind raced back to Dr. Chen and that essay prompt. Up to now, he hated it because it felt like a cage, a restriction on his creative freedom. For so long, he had thought structure didn't amount to true creativity, but rather, it became a burden. Dr. Chen's prompt had felt like a cage, limiting his boundless ideas. But looking at Laputa now—at what happened when there were no restrictions at all—Hamond realized he had it backwards. The Laputians had unlimited freedom, and it had left them paralyzed. Without a framework to guide their thoughts, their ideas floated endlessly, leading nowhere. What he considered "unlimited" creativity wasn't truly "unlimited"—it trapped you in the weight of endless possibilities.

True creativity, however, came from the foundation of structure.

"You finally got it. Nice lil' bit o' inspo at the end there, eh?" Delta smiled.

"Wait, how did you know I wa- oh wait, yeah, same consciousness." Hamond frowned.

Delta stretched, downing the last of her tea.

"Right then. Reckon it's time for yous to wake up."

Hamond barely had time to process that before the world around him swirled and spiraled. The Laputians fading away, the floating island disintegrating, then—

The white ceiling with minor cracks.

The smell of leftover Panda Express.

The glow of a 27" Dell monitor.

Hamond woke up. He was home. It was dark. The clock read 4:37 A.M. Microsoft Word was still open, the cursor blinking expectantly at the top of the page.

He stared at it for a moment, his brain still catching up. With a groan, he dragged himself upright, rubbed his face, and shuffled to his desk. Cracking his knuckles, he placed his fingers on the keyboard and started typing.

The words poured out effortlessly. No hesitation. No frustration. The dreaded prompt was no longer a cage—it was a launchpad. The room was silent except for the steady click-clack of his keyboard. Sentence after sentence. Until—

Done.

Hamond exhaled, staring at the finished document for a moment before uploading to Brightspace. He collapsed onto his bed, drained by the sheer burden of academic *redemption*, and rightfully fell fast asleep.

Until.

bzzz.

bzzz.

bzzz. bzzz.

Hamond groaned as the vibrations from his phone rattled against the nightstand. Barely cracking his eyes open, he blindly reached for it, squinting at the glowing screen.

Mom

WhatsApp Call

With a sigh, he swiped to answer. "Hello...?"

"Hamond! How are you? Have you eaten?"

Hamond blinked groggily. "Mmh, yeah..."

"Why do you sound half dead? What time is it over there?"

Hamond turned his head toward the clock. 1:26 P.M.

His SCLA101 class was at 1:30 P.M.

Oh no.

"Uh..."

"Wait—it's almost 1:30 there. Don't you have classes??"

Hamond groaned, rubbing his face. "Mom, I—"

"Haiyaa, no excuses!" She scolded, while munching on what looked like Mantou.

"Hamond!"

"...Yeah?"

"HAMO—"

"OKAY okay geez what's up?"

"IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP!"

FICTION

BROTHER

BY SUYA SHEN



Suya Shen is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Botany and Plant Pathology. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins' SCLA 101 class in Fall 2024. This short story is about siblinghood and the weight of cultural memory.

Vocabulary List

Ā-pah - father*A-chek* - uncle (father's younger brother)*Hia-koh* - elder brother*A-ché* - elder sister*A-chím* - wife of uncle (father's younger brother)

Brother

Your auntie tells you a story. A great-uncle walks out from under the graveyard still wrapped in his burial shroud, covered with black stains of soil like tanned patches of sunlight. Six hours earlier, he had drowned at sea, but here in the night, he is alive and limping like an animal having clawed its way out of the womb.

When he crawls home, into the room where his wife and children sleep, he doesn't make a sound. He unties the flax coat he was buried in and spreads it over them, and then lies down by the foot of their bed and dies.

The gun is as cold and heavy as an atrophied limb in your hands.

You fiddle with the bolt handle. It's an American bolt-action hunting rifle, so ancient that the resinous sheen of the polished wood is long gone, but *ā-pah* keeps it meticulously clean so that the metal still glints in the sun. Your face twitches. There's a mosquito flitting around on the apple of your cheek – that stupid insect – but you don't have any hands available to bring it to an untimely death.

"Eyes up," your father says, the English words thick on his tongue and only existing as a benefit to you. "Steady."

The scope on the rifle is shattered front to back, so you aim at the nearest tree with one eye shut. Your father had tried to paint a target with a soup of oil and turmeric powder, but on the dark backdrop of the cork oak bark, it is almost invisible to you.

You have an entire life to make that gun your home.

First bullet fired. The recoil feels like being thrown. Several inches away from where you had been spotting, a hole appears as the bullet vanishes into the thick bark.

"Keep arm still," your father advises, his hand lighting over your wrists. Gentle as a knife's blade. "No more shake." The air hangs after he speaks, thick and buzzing with mayflies, like even the birds are expecting something else to follow. Nothing does.

Ā-pah is kind in that you can tell he's resisting something constantly, the urge to bite at you, a private little hatred that he keeps carefully disciplined just for his family. You know from your sister that he was not always this careful.

Second shot. The butt of the rifle rams into your collarbone, and the bullet flies several feet before disappearing into the tree line, entirely missing the target tree.

Sweat rolls down from your temple all the way to your chin. The heat is almost unbearable, but it would be even more difficult to look him in the eyes.

"No worry." He pats your shoulder. There is a strange feeling in your chest as you wonder why your father hasn't shouted yet. The birdsong pauses ceremoniously after his thick, broken-English statements, like they're waiting for a fanfare that will never arrive. You don't know how to tell you that you are thankful for whatever gives him this patience, but you are. "Let *ā-pah* show you."

His aim is perfect. A product of a war.

"Do you like shooting?" You ask him.

He reloads the gun with a terrible metallic clack. "No," he says. And then he looks at you, a little contemplatively. "I don't."

—

It's early morning — or late at night — and the air is finally thin enough to move through, and all the mosquitoes have yet to crawl out of wherever they hide when it's dark, although you still have to swat away a few tenacious insects that swarm to your exposed arms. Slipping through the support beams and sugarcane-backbone thatching of your rooftops, the almost-dawn air is like cold water.

Sitting cross-legged on the edges of the taro fields, barely illuminated, you can see your older sister braiding sashes of broomcorn into full ribs of wings. She catches your eye from the ground and makes a face, and you make one back, and that is the end of the interaction before she goes back to ignoring you.

Your father broke your family's broom last night by throwing it into the kitchen wall, so *a-ché* is up early to replace it. She knots a thick bundle of stems into the shape of a turkey's wing, brushing loose millet from her lap when it falls; you keep asking her how she does it and she keeps denying you the knowledge. The night sky outside is still dark blue and glittering, so she lights her work with the burning edge of a coconut frond.

Ma-ma will be upset if she sees the broken broom. There is your father's anger in physical form, shattered pink plastic and frayed bristles. She hates the reminder.

You wonder why he's been so patient with you, then. Even when you let go of the rifle and didn't pick it up again. There is a patience in him that is growing and growing and getting older, tempered by time and weathering – lucky survivor, youngest child.

A-ché says that one day, in some far idea of a future, when she gets married and has her own kids to care for, she will never let them hold a gun. *Ma-ma* says that is how it should go.

You ask your uncle what family is, and he tells you that once, when you were little, real little, minnow-like and stupid, you had smashed your head against the jagged lava stone and floated to shore in a halo of red water. Your older brother was there that day and watched you fall.

You weren't awake, chest full of seawater, one big stripe of ripped flesh shorn down the side of your head, but *a-chek* says that when your brother touched your arms to drag you inland, you bared your teeth like a dog. Really, truly bared them, your lip rolling up all the way to your bleeding gums, incisors snapping and betelnut-red with blood. *A-chek* says that your brother touched your temple to measure the depth of the wound and you bit him so hard that the bone in his thumb crunched and shattered like an oyster shell.

He says *hia-koh* wrapped you in his sarong like a sick child and carried you with one hand all the way up inland into the marsh taro fields. *A-chím* heard the wailing, saw the blood covering your mouth, and thought that you were possessed by evil spirits, but your father had come running first, screaming like a dying animal, and *a-chek* says he's never heard him scream like that before.

Your brother never lost that moment, your uncle says. There were little stars in the meat of his palm, two ugly pink spots of keloid tissue with a space of your front teeth in between, for the rest of his brief life.

Are you still a sibling if your sibling is gone? They say *Cain and Abel*, like a matched pair. Is Cain still Cain without him? Your uncle doesn't tell you this, but the day your father finds your brother's body, his firstborn cradle-baby with fingernails split to the beds like he had been dragging himself home, he screams the same sound.

Your father watches your mother braid cold, fresh flowers into your hair with nimble fingers, still wet from morning dew. It's unbecoming of you, he would've said once, but he's lost his edge after seeing you miss a shot so many times.

"Hn," he says instead, the sound huffed out like he is being squeezed a little too tightly. It's a sound of neither agreement nor dissent.

There might have been a time far away, a generation older, where his persistent wrath would have turned you into a marksman, where he had tried with *hia-koh*, but he leaves the path unturned.

Instead, he lets the family loose during the two hours in the evening when he used to practice his marksmanship. Your sister is surprised that he lets you go. You are also a little surprised because you kind of assumed that after the age of 18 and a lifetime of holding a gun, people forget how to have fun.

But your father gives up on the rifle with you. You're younger and better than your brother.

"*Kheng*," he calls to his wife, watching her fold the last stems of bruised frangipani into the baby hairs at the nape of your neck. Your mother looks up. "*Góa liáu-kái a.*"

You're not sure what he's saying, but your mother smiles, and it is like the morning sun.

Some days you wake up and your sister has put garlands of star jasmine on the stand where the family rifle hangs, just to make the whole house smell sweet for the entire week. Your father used to shout at her for it, but he just looks at it now from your worn-out reed-mat couch. The old warzone has returned to meadows. The trenches have filled with orchids and mountain yams. His rifle gathers dust on the wall.

There is an unspeakable kindness that has entered his posture, an almost unbearable tenderness that is impossible to ignore. A brother is still a brother, even when the brother is gone.

I will be kind to you, is what he says (or what you think he would've said, had he been any better at English, because really all he says to you is *you look so happy pó-peh*, and he's smiling like you've never seen before).

—

Sometime far in the idea of a future, your sister tells a story. An elder brother walks out of the sea wrapped in his sibling's blood.

ESSAY

"ACCESSORIES TO THE PLOT":

Women, Power, and Narrative Resistance in *On the Road* and *Thelma & Louise*

BY MERUYET SISSEN



Meruyet Sissen is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Cybersecurity. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Huiying Chen's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2025. Behind this essay lies hours of research into the nuances of the female presence in well-known American works. She wanted to focus on the particular perspective that women, more often than not, are treated as accessories to the plot. She hoped this work would help readers understand that power dynamics and societal norms still greatly influence the way women are treated in society, look deeply into understanding why that happens, and think about what we can do to move forward—understanding is always the first step to a solution.

To be a woman is to perform. Such is a theme explored in the novel *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac and the movie *Thelma & Louise* by Ridley Scott and Callie Khoury. *On the Road* follows Sal Paradise in his long journey of self-exploration during the Beat Generation, while *Thelma & Louise* portrays the trip of two women turned criminals in the early 90s of Southern USA, ultimately ending with one final leap into freedom. Both works follow the journeys of protagonists who embark on a life-changing journey and learn along the way that life is fleeting—one's destiny must be decided by oneself. In this journey of self-exploration, however, also comes society's scrutiny, particularly of women. More specifically, the portrayal of women within these two works differs greatly, especially considering the societal expectations of the decades they were set in. Thus, this essay will compare and contrast the ways in which *On the Road* and *Thelma & Louise* portray women as responses to societal expectations. While both portray women as initially submissive, they diverge in how women respond to that role. *On the Road* maintains this portrayal, whereas *Thelma & Louise* illustrates the evolution of the female protagonists, reclaiming agency and self-determination.

Women's autonomy and agency have been questioned and controlled throughout history, and this is emphasized at the start of the journeys of the female characters of these works. Marylou, the most prominent female character in Kerouac's work, is consistently portrayed as being passive with male characters, who berate her for her actions. The text states, "Marylou, why are you traveling around the country like this and what are your womanly intentions concerning the shroud" (Kerouac, 1957, p. 74). Their questioning of Marylou's expeditions with a condescending tone reveals their disdain for Marylou's decision to travel around America instead of conforming to American post-World War II ideals of settling down and establishing a nuclear family. Their derision towards her actions is underscored by the short yet impactful addition of "like this." Had Marylou travelled as a wife and mother rather than wasting her prime childbearing years, her actions likely would have been accepted. Additionally, questioning her "womanly intentions concerning the shroud" highlights how Marylou is reduced to her gender and what she, as a woman, can do for men, which is very much in line with American societal expectations of the 1950s. Once men returned from war, women were forced back into menial housework and, thus, laboring for the men in their lives. Similarly, the role of Thelma is a very passive and meek wife, as portrayed in a scene where her husband Darryl starts his day by berating her, "Damnit, Thelma, don't holler like that! Haven't I told you I can't stand it when you holler in the morning" (Scott, 1991). This line, accompanied by the slow, boxed-in camera pan, visually traps Thelma in a small domestic space and emphasizes how the movie was intent on initially portraying Thelma as a regular housewife of the 90s. Her life is portrayed as so mundane and boring, and her husband loathes her so much that any speech from Thelma is "hollering" and thus annoying. Hence, the movie shows how initially Thelma's character is meant to have little to no autonomy. Both works initially present women as lacking autonomy, shaped by the era's

expectations—Marylou as a would-be homemaker in the 1950s, and Thelma as a subdued housewife in the early 1990s.

Equally important in both works is the character development of women, which is something we do not see in Kerouac's work. When Sal and Dean reunite, Sal finds out that Dean's thumb is broken because his "thumb only deflected off [Marylou's] brow and she didn't even have a bruise and in fact laughed" (Kerouac, 1957, p. 99). This offhand manner of talking about domestic abuse illustrates how Marylou remains a powerless character who is unable to resist abuse. Dean even highlights the lack of a bruise, as if to dismiss the severity. However, whether or not Marylou truly laughed, the moment reflects how normalized and dismissed domestic violence was in 1950s America, especially seeing as laws protecting women from any such assault were rarely enforced. This is different from *Thelma & Louise*, where the duo takes complete control of their own autonomy and does not let anyone violate it. The most moving example of this is when Louise finds Thelma being assaulted by Harlan and says to him with her gun at his neck, "Let her go... or I'm going to splatter your ugly face all over this nice car" (Scott, 1991). After he lets go of her, he goes on to provoke them further, causing Louise to actually shoot him. This is the most public declaration of complete independence and agency for both Thelma and Louise—by ending the life of a man who could have caused them and, potentially, other women further harm, they illustrate their reclamation of their freedom as women. Though not entirely in accordance with the societal expectations and norms of the feminist landscape of the time, the act of murdering a rapist illustrates how Scott and Khoury decided to use their portrayal of Thelma and Louise to show a bold rejection of the era's expectations of female silence and passivity, instead showing how women are in complete control over their actions and agency. The close-up shot of Louise's hand as she pulls the trigger furthers the director's intent on emphasizing that Louise is the one who has complete autonomy and agency, and control over her own life and how she will be treated. Ultimately, the two works differ greatly in how they portray the autonomy and agency of the women.

One's relationship with authority should be rooted in trust and protection—yet all too often it happens that those in power take advantage of their influence. In both works, women are portrayed in relation to the men who hold authority over them, with their identities largely shaped by these relationships. Galatea Dunkel, the wife of Sal's friend Ed Dunkel, is a prime example of how the portrayal of some women in *On the Road* revolves entirely around their dependence on men. Galatea was initially being used for her money for the group taking a trip, but after she spent one too many nights in a motel, "she was broke. Dean and Ed gave her the slip in a hotel lobby and resumed the voyage alone, with the sailor, and without a qualm" (Kerouac, 1957, p. 67). The imbalance of power dynamics in this relationship fits perfectly with the societal norms of the time. It seems that Galatea had no purpose in her life before Ed. She was, therefore, willing to give all her time and money to him, and he readily took advantage of her generosity. Ekstrand

notes that even financially independent women like Galatea are ultimately used and discarded, exposing how Kerouac's version of "freedom" often excludes or exploits women under the guise of spontaneity and nonconformity (Ekstrand, 2013). As was traditional at the time, the woman was to wait upon every action of the man and come running whenever he expected something of her. She conformed and yet he still abandoned her "without a qualm." To leave a woman alone is no problem. But the fact that he left her alone in a hotel lobby in the middle of a road trip is cruel. Yet that was the norm for men of the time in the 1950s. Kerouac's portrayal of Galatea reflects, rather than challenges, the societal norms of the 1950s. Similarly, Thelma puts a lot of trust in a man she meets on the road – J.D. – as shown when she allows him into her motel room late at night, saying, "You're kinda the best thing that's happened to me in a long time" (Scott, 1991), before sleeping with him. She thus puts her complete trust in a man she barely knows. This setting, accompanied by the directorial choice of shooting Thelma with a high-angle shot to make her appear smaller and lesser, and shooting J.D. with a low-angle shot to make him seem bigger than he actually is, once again plays into the typical gender and power dynamics expected of the 90s.

For two works set in different eras and focused on different groups of people, it is hard to expect them to share the same perspective on women, which is especially emphasized in *On the Road*. Galatea is consistently portrayed as a woman deeply dependent on her authoritative husband, Ed. Kerouac describes her as a "serious girl. She was pale and looked like tears all over... 'Where have you been? Why did you do this to me?'" (Kerouac, 1957, p. 79). Her emotional and physical reaction, being sick with grief, underscores the intense control Ed had over her life, while he, in turn, viewed her as far less significant—a temporary presence rather than a partner. Galatea's desperation and emotional fragility are not explored with any complexity, nor does Kerouac provide any means for understanding the character's development. Rather, these characteristics highlight the indifference of the male characters. This lack of development reflects Kerouac's broader portrayal of women in the novel as weak, passive, and dependent figures who exist solely in relation to the men around them. They neither experience growth nor demonstrate agency, and their emotions are dismissed or ignored. In contrast, *Thelma & Louise* presents a different trajectory for its female characters. While Thelma initially appears naive—placing trust in J.D., who ultimately betrays her and steals the duo's only financial resources—this moment serves as a turning point. Rather than spiraling into helplessness, Thelma learns from the betrayal and reclaims authority by robbing a store, taking decisive control of her life, and contributing equally to their survival. Her transformation is emphasized through bold action and visual framing, showing her evolution from passive housewife to empowered outlaw. Unlike *On the Road*, where male dominance remains unchallenged, *Thelma & Louise* deliberately shifts power over time, allowing its protagonists to resist male control and assert full agency in shaping

their own fates. The film thus reclaims the road narrative—traditionally reserved for men—and turns it into a space of female empowerment.

The ending of a work often acts as one final statement to the world, a final declaration of the work's core message. This is evident in both works: Sal concludes his final meeting with Dean by discussing their current life affairs, with Dean saying, "[Camille] gave permission of course—waiting for me. Camille and I all straight forever-and-ever... I—I—I want [Inez] to come back to Frisco with me live other side of town—don't you think?" (Kerouac, 1957, p. 154). Kerouac's decision to make his final portrayal of women all about Dean's inability to decide between two women he loves indicates to readers that Kerouac's intentions have been the same all along—women exist solely in relation to the men around them. Furthermore, Dean is discussing them in a very casual way, saying he wants both of them at the same time and that he is willing to forego the emotions of both if it means that he gets to enjoy the best of the two women, primarily for their physical appeal. It is also highly ironic that he asks for Sal's approval of his idea, saying "don't you think?" when Dean is usually so sure in himself and his actions, underscoring how even male uncertainty is centered while women's voices remain absent. Similarly, *Thelma & Louise* ends with a bold act of self-determination. Rather than submit to the police or return to the roles society expects of them, Thelma and Louise clasp hands and drive off the cliff, choosing an end on their own terms. The scene, amplified by the freeze-frame and swelling music, transforms their final act into a symbol of liberation and solidarity. Scholars argue that this act is more than cinematic rebellion—it is a protest against systemic failures that silence women and restrict their autonomy, a declaration against a status quo that limits justice and agency (Liang, 2023). Their decision rejects the passive roles women are often given at the end of stories—victim, survivor, or redeemed wife—and instead asserts that women can control their own narratives, even if it means defying all social norms. In this way, the endings of the two works offer starkly different messages: *On the Road* reaffirms traditional gender dynamics, while *Thelma & Louise* radically upends them with a final, unforgettable act of rebellion.

Ultimately, works centered solely on male journeys often fail to offer meaningful or progressive commentary on women. The key difference in the endings of the works is that *On the Road* leaves readers with a sour taste in their mouths as Sal's final reflections confirm that women were never central to his journey, but rather ornamental, as shown in his thoughts when he talks about how he "came back to my girl" (Kerouac, 1957, p. 153), mentioning neither her name nor any qualities beyond her relation to him. Sal's portrayal of her illustrates how he reinforces societal norms. Sal believes that she is too unimportant to describe, other than the fact that she is his, and that he can come home to her loving arms. This contrasts largely with *Thelma and Louise*, where, as previously discussed, their refusal to accept any future but the one they create themselves. This directly opposes the 1990s American context, where women were still heavily constrained

by societal norms but beginning to resist them. Even then, few had the power to truly shape independent lives.

It is vital to note that *On the Road* was written as a narrative centering on a man who often embarks on journeys surrounded by other men, with women appearing only sporadically and often in secondary, supporting roles, whereas *Thelma & Louise* is entirely focused on the trip of two women. Although male characters appear occasionally, their primary role is as law enforcement—figures of control and surveillance. Ultimately, this narrative distinction significantly shapes how each work portrays women, and while it should inform our analysis, it need not constrain it—instead, we must see it as an opportunity to see how the portrayal of women differs across a variety of works and time periods.

In examining *On the Road* and *Thelma & Louise*, it becomes clear that the portrayal of women is deeply shaped by both narrative perspective and historical context. While *On the Road* reflects the postwar era's rigid gender norms, presenting women as passive figures in a male-driven journey, *Thelma & Louise* challenges those norms head-on, transforming its protagonists from submissive housewives to women who reclaim their agency—even through defiance. The contrast between Sal's indifferent return to his unnamed "girl" and Thelma and Louise's leap into self-determined fate encapsulates the core difference in these portrayals: women as accessories to male stories versus women as authors of their own. Though separated by decades, both works shed light on the cultural expectations that have long defined femininity. However, only one dares to supersede them. In the end, *Thelma & Louise* doesn't just offer a road trip—it offers a revolution.

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FICTION

AN OPENED MIND

BY NICHOLAS STEINGRAEBER



Nicholas Steingraeber is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Environmental and Ecological Engineering. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Wijeyeratne's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2024. His inspiration for this piece came from his own experiences in liberal arts classes as a student who says his mind is better suited to understanding the STEM courses he encounters in engineering.

They teach this stuff in colleges, you know—the good ones too. There's what is probably a man, bobbing around on a block of concrete like he's in a calisthenics class. He's quilted in green—a shade you wouldn't wear in public if you were sane—and speckled with ping pong balls. Yeah, I know I have a low judgment tolerance, but I'd be embarrassed if I were him.

I'm not kidding. The place of a bright, young girl who wants to cure cancer could be easily usurped by someone majoring in acting, or playwriting, or theater, or any other luxury most cannot afford. Imagine spending ninety grand a year for your son to study film at Harvard. Perplexing. Anyway, focus.

I can't help but notice the true star of the show—these cameras! The colossal kinds that make you wonder how anyone can afford to own them, let alone figure out what all the buttons do. They glide around like dancers, a metallic ballet choreographed by operators who seem to know just the right moment to tilt, pan, or zoom. It's hypnotic and addictive to watch. The lenses are so sharp, I bet they could follow a single snowflake in a snowstorm, let alone whatever drama unfolds here. I find myself staring at the rigs holding them up, the elaborate cranes and stabilizers. It's amazing how they've turned cold, mechanical parts into something that moves like it has a mind of its own.

The craftsmanship engulfs my attention—it reminds me of my first time seeing a magnifying glass. My grandpa, nestled far too deep into his colossal, fake-leather recliner, pulled it from the living room drawer all those years ago. The print on the Sunday crossword was evading even his thick-paned, rimless glasses. I remember staring at it as his eye bobbed in and out, adjusting his sight to see the word, see the sentence, see the word. Well, I didn't know that's what he was doing then. I just wondered, pondered, and stared as he played with his toy.

I finally got my hands on that trinket once my grandpa's yawn signaled that the crossword had bested him again. I asked to hold it, politely, and he growled in the way I assumed all grandpas did—a tentative affirmation that allowed my sticky little fingers to yank and run, prize in hand.

Safely stowed in the sleepover room down the hall, I swung the glass popsicle around the room. A dash of light darted from floor to ceiling. I aimed it at my closet door, then the wall, then the bedspread, watching the patch of sunlight morph into weird little ovals and streaks. It felt like I had a secret superpower, one that could make light dance wherever I wanted. Then I tried it on my face in the mirror and screamed when my nose ballooned to double its size.

I just kept staring at it. "How does it work? Why does it work? What else can it do?"

Thump. The old man plopped down beside me on the bed.

"Cool, huh? Wanna know how it works?" he growled. I kept staring, nodding slightly. "Magic!"

What a silly old man. I was irritated—magic isn't real, and I wanted to know how it actually worked. How does it work? Maybe it's not the glass but the light—where'd that dash of light go? I searched around the room until my grandpa growled again. Poor guy. But it isn't completely his fault. Most adults were silly, saying things like that. Magic? Phuh. Man, are they dumb.

"Here to see some movie magic?" Her squeaky voice made me jump.

She stood five feet flat, skinny enough that a light breeze might take her down the block. Her dark hair was a bold choice for her unnervingly pale skin. Though she was standing but a pace away, her eyes seemed much further. They were circled by hues of deep purple and red; is that what authors mean when they say a character has eyes sunken into their face? It took me a second to recall where I was. Impressive, really. How do they make makeup that looks so real? I've always wondered that. It'd probably be impolite to ask what she studied in college. I won't do that.

"Of course!" I can't forget to smile. "This place is absolutely amazing; I can't wait to get started." I'm still smiling. I can probably stop now. Good Lord, I hope I don't actually have to talk to these people while I'm here.

"I heard we had a new sound tech intern! I love meeting new people! Hey, could you wait here a sec while I finish this take? Then I can show you your set?"

"Oh, sure." But I doubt she heard me, already scurrying over to a green box while being preyed upon by six makeup artists. She planted her feet, stood tall, and screamed. Blood-curdling scream. Stopped, sighed. Planted her feet, stood tall but slightly more crooked, and screamed. A deeper yet still piercing scream.

She finished and turned toward me, striding over cheerfully. Her little legs moved fast, almost comically so.

"Wow, that really made a statement! I hope people don't wear headphones when they watch your movie!" I giggled sarcastically. I forgot to smile. Oh well, too late. Whatever.

Her gaze hardened. "You don't get it, do you?" she said pointedly, her voice cutting through the hum of activity around us.

"What? I just thought it was funny," I replied, my tone half-defensive, half-apologetic.

Her lips twitched, not quite a smile, but more a display of pity than anger. "That scream isn't just noise. It's a battle cry—a woman leading an army of zombies. It's a call

to arms for women who've been told for centuries that they can't lead, that they can't be strong. This movie, with its zombies and its chaos, is about showing the power of women in a different context, in a way that people can digest. Because, trust me, they won't if it's served straight."

I blinked, caught off guard. A part of me wanted to dismiss her as dramatic, but her words carried weight I couldn't ignore. "Huh," I murmured, more to myself than her. "I never thought of it that way."

Before I could respond, she waved me toward a nearby doorway, all business again. "C'mon, let me show you your set."

We wove through a labyrinth of scaffolding and cables, passing extras and crew who barely spared us a glance. She kept talking as we walked, her energy unwavering. "You'll be working on the audio for *SuperBot Squad*. Ever heard of it?"

I snorted. "Oh, I'm sure this has a really powerful message too, right?"

She stopped mid-step and turned, fixing me with a look that said she wasn't in the mood for sarcasm. "Actually, it does. Children's media shapes who we are more than anything else. Shows like this teach kids about friendship, resilience, and empathy—things they'll carry for the rest of their lives. That's not just powerful; it's essential."

She didn't wait for me to reply, launching into an impassioned spiel. "Take *The Rainbow Fish*, for example. People argue over its message—is it about sharing your gifts or sacrificing individuality? And don't even get me started on *Curious George*. Those stories aren't just bedtime entertainment; they're blueprints for how kids see the world."

We reached the sound stage, a kaleidoscope of colors and oversized props. She gestured at a screen showing a rough cut of the latest episode. On it, two animated superheroes fought off a colossal robot while trading quips.

"They say laughter is the best medicine," one of the heroes said, launching a pie into the robot's gears. "Turns out it's also great for defeating giant robots!"

She turned to me, her expression softening. "See? It's simple and kinda silly, but the message sticks. Positivity can be a weapon against life's challenges."

I stared at the screen, something stirring in me I couldn't quite name. Words had always felt like tools—functional, mechanical. But here, they were doing more. They were shaping futures, sparking change. Maybe this wasn't just a job. Maybe it was an opportunity.

I turned to her, a small smile tugging at my lips. "You know," I said, "I think I'm starting to get it."

Her grin was triumphant but kind. "Good. Now, go make something worth watching."

FICTION

THE SPACE BETWEEN

BY HANNAH STRUEBING



Hannah Struebing is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Industrial Engineering. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Frketich's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2025. She was inspired by Kafka's *Metamorphosis* to give a voice to Gregor's door, something that usually goes unnoticed, but carries the weight of his family's fear and rejection. From this perspective, she wanted to capture how the space between Gregor and his family becomes a fragile line between love, belonging, and abandonment.

I have been many things in the Samsa household. A guard. A confidant. A punching bag, once. A witness, always. I was there long before fear settled into the walls. For twenty-three years, I stood solid between Gregor Samsa and the rest of the world. Secrets are absorbed through my grain, tension through my hinges, and this routine repeats daily. Today, however, something feels off. The boy with the briefcase who typically vanishes quietly each morning frantically scurries behind me like a prisoner or a pest. Mother knocks first, with that hopeful rhythm she uses when she is holding back tears. Then Grete, soft, yet urgent. Lastly, and inevitably, his father. A man who never asks. A man who pounds. Hard. The space I divide is no longer a hallway and a bedroom; it's love and fear. Between the son they remember... and whatever he is now.

Suddenly, I feel a new rhythm. A knock that is unfamiliar and quite arrogant. A man who does not ask. A man who expects. A lot. He smells like fresh ink and moist wool. I do not like him. Honestly, I never have. He is one of those people who speaks about respect but treats people like fabric – measuring their worth in how well they fit his needs, cutting off what doesn't, and discarding them when they no longer serve his purpose. Now, he paces frantically in the hallway, each step making the wallpaper drip with sweat in response to his disapproval.

"Mr. Samsa," he repeats over and over. "Mr. Samsa!"

Each syllable chips away at the paint on my frame. Inside, Gregor stirs. His weight shifts across the floorboards unusually. There's a scuttle, something that sounds like there are multiple sets of legs in his room. Too many legs. I feel Gregor's weight press against me, hesitating. Often, Gregor would slam me open without thinking twice. Now? He whispers apologetically. He shudders. As if I might judge him. Of course, I still feel it. The trembling uncertainty, the awkward scrape of his new limbs against my rusted brass. He's fumbling. His jaw presses against my cold metal, and his breath is warm but distraught. Not hands. Not even claws. Just desperation. The soft, sacred gesture of belonging. And then... something shifts. A pressure I haven't felt in years. The key turns slowly and reluctantly. He is unlocking me from the inside. Still trying, and still human. He used to turn the key so gently as if he didn't want to disturb me. Even when he was running late. Even when his briefcase slammed against my frame. That quiet little turn meant he would be back. A trickle of a sticky substance runs down my keyhole. It is brown and bitter. I imagine the sticky trail being blood, though I know it is not. That's not important. The pain is real. He is hurting himself just to open me.

"Listen," the manager says. "He's turning the key."

For a moment, I have hope. Maybe they will praise Gregor. Maybe they will cry out words of encouragement and gratitude. Maybe this act, a gesture so simple and so sad, will be enough.

But they don't.

No round of applause. No thanks.

Only silence. Only fear.

The last turn comes with a hollow click and a sigh from my core. I feel the wind flow through my grain as I swing open. Gregor stands there hunched and heaving, not a monster, but not a boy. Something in between. Something struggling deep inside.

Their gasps split the hallway like a held breath, finally breaking. I flinch. It isn't the sound itself, but what it carries. Not fear. Not grief. Pure disgust. Final and clean. I want to close myself again and protect Gregor, but I stay open. Exposed and helpless. He's not moving. They won't either. There used to be footsteps, but now there's just silence. Grete used to hum. Mother used to hover her hand over the knob and pause at my frame. Even Father, for all of his shouting, would still speak Gregor's name.

The manager is the first to retreat. He doesn't even say a word. He just backs away, as if Gregor was going to stain him. Mother collapses. Father stares, not at Gregor, but through him. It seems like he is looking for someone who is no longer there. Gregor does not move. He doesn't run. He simply exists, and even that is too much.

I don't remember closing, and I definitely don't remember being told. Suddenly, I am slammed shut, my frame shudders, and my latch rattles like teeth in a frozen mouth. Father's newspaper slaps my lower frame. Then the cane. It struck hard. It was a warning. A promise. Behind me, Gregor scrambles. I feel every moment like a bruise. I don't want to hold him in. That's not what I was built for. But I do.

The following days blur. Dust begins to gather in my corners. Nobody touches me anymore. Only to lock. Only to leave. Gregor presses against me sometimes. The way he folds himself against my wood like he wants to remember what it feels like when I was open. He never tries the key again. He knows. He mourns it, too. The key was more than metal. It was a bond. A whisper of autonomy. A common language between him and the world. A reminder that he was still part of this family, not an outsider. Even when he scuttled around and frightened them, the key made him human.

One evening, I hear it sliding in from the hallway. I thought... it might be him. That maybe, for once, he found his way back. But the hand was too strong. A firmer grip and a colder hand. Not Gregor's. The turn is clean, not an ounce of hesitation. Suddenly, I am locked against him. With that tiny click, Gregor is no longer a son. He is no longer a brother. Just a creature behind a door. One whom I am no longer allowed to love.

At that moment, I finally understood. The key was never just about the lock. It was trust. Voice. Choice. The fragile bridge between belonging and abandonment. Now it's gone. Taken from him. Turned against him. I didn't choose this. I didn't ask to be the wall they built between love and shame. But I never resisted. Maybe that is the worst part.

They needed me to separate them, and I let them. They whispered around me, cried against me, and struck me when their fear had nowhere else to go. Still, I stood.

I don't know if Gregor still waits for them. If, in the dark, he listens for footsteps that no longer come. I wonder if he still dreams. In words. In names. In places outside of this room.

What does this say about me? That I did nothing? I stood here and let them decide that he no longer belongs. That I never once asked to be turned. I have become the thing that keeps him out of the world he once called home. I used to open it for him. Now I seal his sentence.

I am not a door. I am a verdict. No one ever asks the verdict if it wants to be passed. They just turn the key and walk away.

Long after the Samsa family has forgotten about Gregor, long after they've moved on, painted, and rearranged, I will remain. Still closed, still waiting, and still holding what they couldn't.

ESSAY

STOICISM AND MASCULINITY: Ancient Ideals, Modern Misinterpretations

BY JON TALKA



Jon Talka is a Purdue undergraduate student, majoring in Mechanical Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Borlik's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2025. By making connections to ancient rhetoric and Virgil's *Aeneid*, he examined the roots of Stoicism and how those roots influenced the definition of masculinity in the past. He also explored the concerning misrepresentation of Stoicism in modern media/culture, and how these misrepresentations damage the mental health of men and those around them today.

“You have power over your mind, not outside events.” This timeless wisdom comes from Marcus Aurelius, one of Stoicism’s most well-known and revered philosophers. Throughout the centuries, masculinity has been molded and shaped by many different influences. However, none may have been so influential and powerful as Stoicism. Emerging from ancient Greece and refined in Rome, Stoicism presents a vision of emotional control, toughness, and civic duty. But in the modern age, this ancient philosophy is too often misunderstood and re-packaged in ways that pervert its original purpose. This essay analyzes how stoicism has defined masculinity and the duty of men in the past, as well as how modern reinterpretations have distorted or reinforced these ideas. Masculinity in ancient Rome adhered to the Hellenic roots of Stoicism and its ideals of emotional restraint, civic duty, and virtuous masculinity. However, twentieth- and twenty-first-century reinterpretations often distort its meaning, promoting the suppression of emotion and masculinity devoid of empathy.

The engineering of the Stoic school of thought is widely credited to Zeno of Citium. Zeno was a Phoenician fisherman who, after surviving a shipwreck, turned to the philosophy (Vogt, 2015). Originally, he studied under the cynics, applying to their teachings a more philosophical, structured approach. Zeno’s philosophy emphasized living in accordance with nature and reason, teaching that true happiness comes not from material possessions or events, but from cultivating inner virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance (Pigliucci, 2022). These teachings established a framework for such future philosophers as Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

Seneca, one of Rome’s most famous Stoic philosophers, wrote about how wealth and power should be handled with detachment and virtue. He believed that before prioritizing one’s own gain, one must prioritize the benefit of the public (Vogt, 2015). Although he was entangled in the political intrigues of Emperor Nero’s court, his writings advised a balance between public duty and private moral development. He warned against being consumed by ambition or luxury. Epictetus, a former slave turned philosopher, emphasized the distinction between what is within our control (our judgments, desires, and actions) and what is not. He taught about achieving inner freedom by mastering one’s own mind. This is a theme that deeply influenced later Stoic thought on masculinity. Together, Seneca and Epictetus shaped a masculine model that valued rational self-command, ethical consistency, and resilience in the face of external chaos – all of which were ideals adopted by later philosophers.

Virgil’s *Aeneid* is an important Roman text illustrating the interplay of Stoic virtues and masculine ideals. The hero, Aeneas, at most times, embodies Roman virtues – duty (*pietas*), grit, and controlling one’s emotions. These are not so much acts of repression of emotion as conscious choices of higher obligations to desires. One of the most obvious cases of this is when he departs from Dido, the Queen of Carthage. Though loving, Aeneas remains committed to fulfilling his destiny and founding Rome. “I sail for Italy not of my

own free will" (Virgil, *Aeneid*, IV 499). These words say it all about Aeneas's internal conflict. He does care about Dido, but he adheres to a sense of duty rather than personal satisfaction. His decision is human, emotional, and painful. He admits his feelings but will not allow them to derail him from his greater purpose. Thus, Stoicism in the *Aeneid* defines masculinity neither as insensibility nor coldness, but as the ability to feel deeply while still acting according to duty and rational principle. Nussbaum (386, 1994) points out that Stoic ethics aims for emotional health, not numbness. Seneca also emphasizes in his Letters that "No man is more unhappy than he who never faces adversity" (Sparrow, "Seneca," 2022), showing that adversity is a place to cultivate virtue, not to escape feeling.

Today, particularly in internet spaces like the "manosphere," Stoicism has been reduced to a caricature of repression rather than mastery of feelings. Leaders like Andrew Tate promote this perversion, equating feelings with weakness. Parent and Gobble (p. 280, 2020) discuss how social media fosters loneliness and hyper-individualism, worsening masculine isolation (279). Rather than mindful engagement, suppression of emotion breeds mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, and violence. Particularly due to the rise of toxic masculinity, they have noticed a sharp increase in such illnesses since 2018. They find that males who engage with these forums and consume content regularly from the manosphere are more prone to suffer from male loneliness. One direct effect of these forums is the reinforcement of patriarchal ideals and "general misogyny" (Parent and Gobble 2020, p. 279). Parent and Gobble argue that these negative traits often arise as a coping mechanism for men who already feel vulnerable. They believe that these men suffer from "masculine depression," which they define as "pressures felt by men to limit certain emotional expressions." This would appear to be the polar opposite of the ideals of masculinity set by the ancient Stoics. The particular danger with this phenomenon is that the effects are not limited only to those who actively engage. Due to the internet's nature, most young men (myself included) are exposed to this content. Andrew Tate, for example, is quite prevalent on the social media feeds of many simply due to the popularity of his content.

The modern-day misapplication of stoicism shares a great amount of similarity to the current phenomenon known as machismo. Machismo prevails in Latin American and Mediterranean cultures, but it stretches far and wide across the globe. Machismo is a societal construct of masculinity, aggression, and repression of emotion. It's often conflated with stoicism, but, in reality, it radically deviates from the standards of stoic philosophy. While both advocate for patience and self-control, machismo distorts these qualities by linking them to pride, power, and dominance. As seen in classical authors like Seneca and Epictetus, Stoicism advocates for intellectual mastery over emotions, acceptance of fate, and action on virtue, not for others' benefit but for one's honor. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, we see the tension between these ideals in the character of Aeneas. Aeneas is portrayed as a stereotypical stoic hero – he suppresses individual grief and desire (especially in his painful farewells to Dido) to fulfill his divine duty to the gods and his

providential calling as Rome's founder. His restraint is not driven by ego or a need to control others, but by a higher purpose and civic responsibility. Turnus, his arch-nemesis, embodies many of the characteristics that would today be attributed to machismo. He is driven by rage, pride, and ambition for personal glory at the expense of his own destruction. Turnus's quick temper is in sharp contrast to Aeneas's measured restraint. Where stoicism requires mastery of the emotions in the service of wisdom and justice, machismo prizes suppressing feelings only to present a mask of strength, typically driven by insecurity and the fear of being thought of as weak. This is an important distinction: stoicism fosters toughness without pride, but machismo tends to promote violence, emotional unavailability, and self-sabotaging habits. Self-sabotaging habits are similar to those exemplified by many young men today who have registered themselves as emotionally unavailable. These habits can cause insecurities, which then have physical manifestations such as lashing out and being overly defensive (Parent, Gobble, p. 279, 2020). Thus, while on the surface they look similar, machismo and stoicism are, by nature, incompatible, and confusing them jeopardizes the moral essence of stoic philosophy. The true danger of conflating machismo with stoicism becomes apparent with time, as the truth about what separates the two can fade, allowing lies and or half-truths to become more prevalent.

In book XII of the *Aeneid*, there is a lapse in Aeneas' stoic behavior. After already having defeated Turnus, Aeneas appears to be willing to spare his life, but after seeing Pallas' (a young ally of Aeneas) belt around him, his anger flares up.

Fierce under arms, Aeneas looked to and fro, and towered, and stayed his hand;
and now, with hesitation,
he gazed and stayed. And then he saw the belt,
worn by Turnus on his shoulder,
the belt of young Pallas, whom Turnus slew...
Inflamed with fury, terrible in anger,
he cried: 'Shall you be snatched from my grasp,
wearing the spoils of my friend? It is Pallas,
Pallas who slays you, and takes vengeance on your guilty blood.'
Saying this, burning with rage, he buried his sword
deep in Turnus's chest. (Virgil, *Aeneid*, XII 1279).

Aeneas' stoicism and reason abandoned him. He succumbed to a "macho" impulse. This moment leaves a sour taste in the reader's mouth. This scene complicates his stoic image, showing how easily even the most disciplined hero can fall into the traps of honor culture and emotional retaliation. This passage may very well have been written as a warning to all about the consequences one will face when they have even a momentary lapse in practicing stoicism. This again goes to show the importance of addressing emotions and not suppressing them. Throughout the *Aeneid*, Aeneas always seemed to

continue on after the deaths of his compatriots. He appeared to have stayed collected, but with his execution of Turnus, we see that this is not the case. Aeneas, who had thus far seemed infallible, lashed out and lost his composure. It is apparent that he had difficulty processing the deaths of those around him, and now these unresolved feelings had boiled over. Yet, it is only natural that Aeneas should feel emotion and eventually show some reaction, for such is human nature.

There are, however, some scholars who interpret the Stoic goal of *apatheia* (freedom from passions) as detachment from emotion entirely, suggesting that ancient Stoicism leaned closer to emotional austerity (Graver 2007, pp. 85-86). To justify this claim, Graver referred to the tale of Gellius. Gellius was at sea, and a storm, bringing near certain doom, had overtaken the ship. At his most panicked and emotional, Gellius observed a stoic philosopher sitting alone. He was sitting pale and with his hands trembling. Gellius had judged that his philosophy might have protected him from such feelings and that he should have felt no fear at all. Even Graver had believed that *apatheia* idealized a suppression of emotion, but he then acknowledges the discourses of Epictetus (a traditional Hellenistic Stoic), which refute that idea. The stoic philosopher read to Gellius, “‘Mental ‘impressions,’ through which a person’s mind is struck by the initial aspect of some circumstance impinging on the mind, are not voluntary or a matter of choice, but force themselves upon one’s awareness by a kind of power of their own. But the ‘assents’ through which those same impressions are cognized are voluntary and happen by one’s own choice” (Graver 2007, p. 85). It is thus argued that one does not need to divest oneself of emotion completely. Graver argues that, according to Epictetus’ discourse, the Stoic is justified in his reaction. The nature of his circumstance was such that it was only natural to respond in some form of shock, and he had every right to react in the way that he did.

Stoicism has been a profound influence on the building of ideals of masculinity over the centuries, valuing mastery of the emotions, civic duty, and right action ahead of aloof heartlessness or mere muscle. While their Stoic forebears of old, like Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, instructed active confrontation with emotion and commitment to values greater than self, more recent reinterpretations – particularly online – have all too often reduced these lessons to damaging caricatures that equate masculinity with repression, dominance, and emotional numbing. The distinction between positive Stoic resiliency and negative machismo is significant because the conflation of the two risks destroying the ethical and philosophical depth that Stoicism offers. True Stoic manhood is not an elimination of feeling but the wise administration of it, in the cause not of ego or dominance, but of virtue, and justice – a lesson as essential today as in antiquity.

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