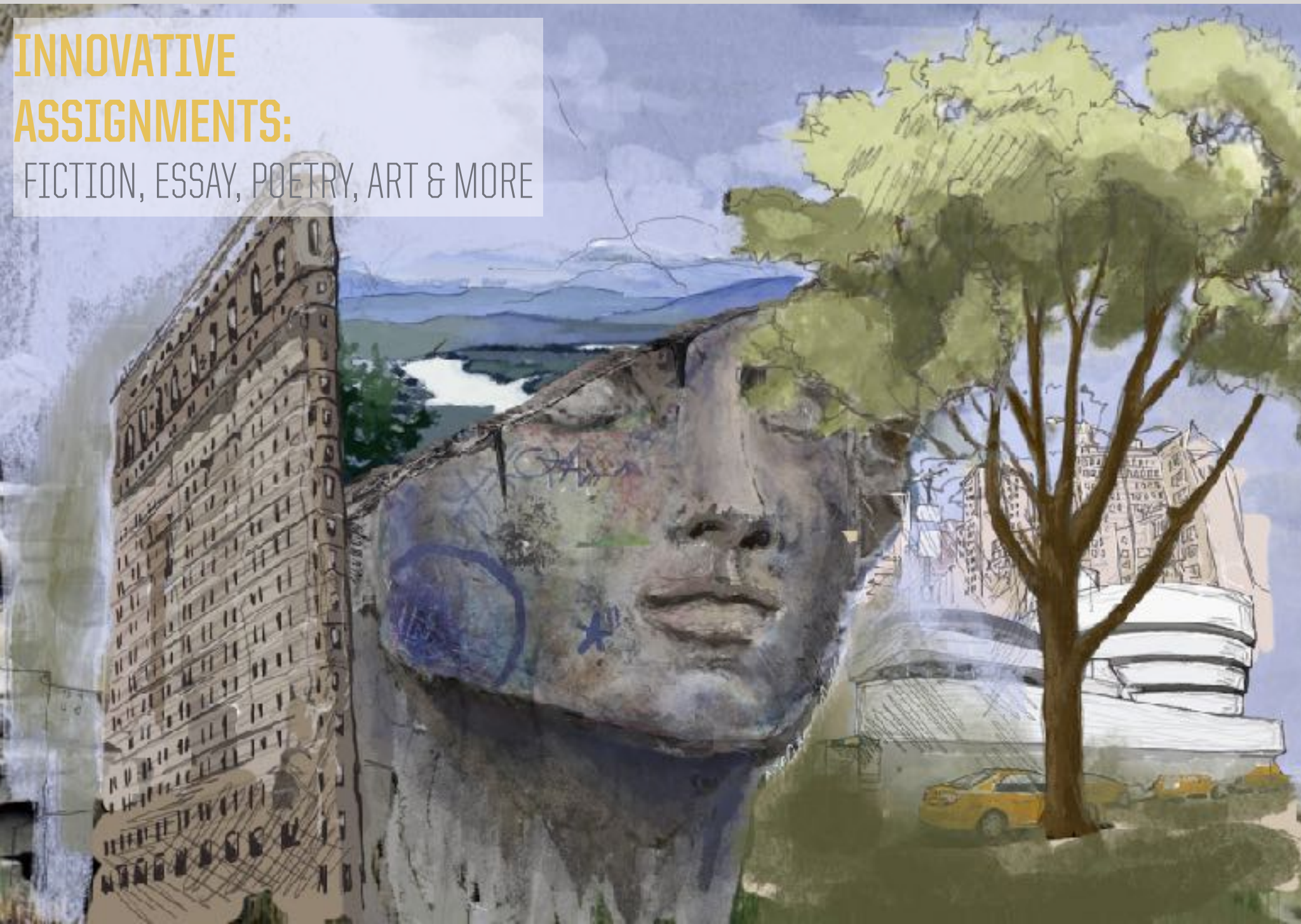


The Cornerstone Review

ISSUE 5 FALL 2024

INNOVATIVE ASSIGNMENTS:

FICTION, ESSAY, POETRY, ART & MORE



CORNERSTONE

INTEGRATED LIBERAL ARTS

Front Matter

COVER ART

Artwork “Place” by Gavin Barcan



Gavin Barcan is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Finance. Gavin created this artwork to fulfill an assignment in Professor Brandon Rdzak's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2023. His artwork takes inspiration from

landmarks like the Flatiron Building and the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, as well as Lake Placid in Upstate New York, evoking a sense of familiarity to reflect on his personal history and experiences. It blends urban and natural elements, juxtaposing the rigid architecture of city buildings with the organic softness of nature. The graffiti-marked statue head evokes a sense of decay and memory, while the serene landscape in the background suggests the possibility of renewal and reflection, exploring the interplay between human constructs and the enduring presence of nature. Gavin's artwork won an Honorary Mention in the Spring 2024 Cornerstone Contest.

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 who enrolled in Cornerstone's SCLA courses.

FIFTH ISSUE EDITORS

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The Cornerstone Review

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An Interview with the Antonia Syson Teaching Award Winner



Prof Michael Nichols is the
2024 Antonia Syson Cornerstone
Teaching Award Winner

CR: Can you tell us one transformative text on your syllabus that you felt had a significant impact on your students? What made it special?

MN: One text I know many other SCLA faculty also use that always seems to work well with students is *Gilgamesh*. It's fairly short and easy to understand, so I often start the semester with it. The themes of friendship and mortality are very strong in it and students are frequently taken aback that a text so old could have such long-lasting, contemporary themes to it. That seems to help them invest in the course from the beginning.

CR: How do you make your classes appealing to students? Tell us your secrets!

MN: Like many other SCLA 101 instructors, I try to vary the format of class sessions to make them a little different each time to maintain student attention and interest. I also try to include at least one popular culture work alongside the ancient texts. (For example, in recent semesters, I've assigned the graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns* as a more modern

treatment of an ambiguous hero.) Some students remark that seeing this on the syllabus piques their interest.

CR: What has been the biggest challenge you've faced in teaching SCLA classes, and how have you overcome it?

MN: Given the number of students (I teach four sections of SCLA 101 each semester), it can be a challenge to provide the kind of individualized attention that they deserve. One way I work through that is setting aside a fair portion of each semester as work time for the common assignment, the research paper. This provides the kind of in-class opportunities I need to be able to talk at length with each student, learn their interests more, help them with their project, and to assist in their development as writers.

CR: How do you create a classroom environment that encourages diverse perspectives and open discussions?

MN: At the beginning of each semester I tell the students that our task is to hear what they have to say on our themes and that while I might frame debates or introduce topics for discussion, the course is not about my opinions or interpretations, but theirs. We go over the parameters of what constitutes a constructive, respectful discussion atmosphere, but I make it very clear that the classroom is a space for them to express their thoughts on the reading, not to hear my point of view. From then on, the simple act of affirming and encouraging student responses works wonders. We also do a fair bit of in-class writing, which can give quieter students more confidence in voicing their perspectives during discussion.

CR: How do you integrate multimedia or other creative elements into your SCLA classes to enhance learning and engagement?

MN: As mentioned above, I am a big fan of including popular culture in the classroom. Since sometimes students voice challenges with the ancient nature of the material in SCLA 101, one way to counter that is to show or study contemporary media that echoes or continues the themes and ideas found in our texts. Since I frequently use texts around the concepts of “heroes” and “monsters,” this is very simple to do with the examples of those kinds of characters one finds in television and film.

CR: How do you approach feedback and assessment to support student growth and development?

MN: I start with assignment descriptions and rubrics included in the syllabus from the beginning of the semester so there is as clear an idea as possible from the start about what each assignment consists of. Then we go through each assignment in stages, with class time to work on them and answer questions, first drafts and peer reviews (in the case of papers), and then the ultimate due date. Though it takes time, I try to be detailed in my comments on the rubrics to give students an idea of how they earned the scores they did.

CR: What advice would you share with students who are currently taking or about to take SCLA classes?

MN: My advice would be to see SCLA as more than just a way to fulfill a requirement but rather an opportunity to explore their interests. Take advantage of the chance to read about ideas and topics that may be completely different from what you will study in your other courses. Make the most of your creative side.

CR: How do you prepare students for the evolving landscape of communication where AI plays an increasing role? What skills do you emphasize to ensure they are ready for the future?

MN: I tell students that in this current environment, their own voices and their own perspectives are that much more important. With tools like AI widely available, to stand out in the crowd, courses like SCLA where you can look deeply into yourself and think through how to express yourself are even more critical.

CR: How do you foster collaboration and critical thinking in your classroom, and what strategies have been the most successful?

MN: In addition to individual writing, I tend to use a number of group projects as well. For instance, I've tasked students to create a mini-play to go along with a work like *Medea* or to work in teams to prepare a debate on some of the key issues in the novel *Frankenstein*.

Generally, students seem to enjoy working together in groups and will help one another see elements in the text that one person on their own might miss.

CR: Do you have any exciting new plans for your future SCLA classes?

MN: I am considering changing themes for my 101 course to something new and trying some assignments with more creative writing elements. I'm always looking for new readings and new assignments and have been incredibly fortunate to work with great colleagues who inspire me.

Innovative Assignments

“As leaders in education, our job is not to control those whom we serve, but to unleash their talent.”

—George Couros

Medea

(Reimagined as a Murder Mystery)

by

Audley Eggold, Alina Li, Madison Montgomery,
Judith Oh, Raja Darshini Rajamani, Rebecca Watson



Audley Eggold (top left), an Interior Design major at Purdue, Alina Li (top center), a Computer Science major, and Madison Montgomery (top right), a General Management major, along with Judith Oh (bottom left), majoring in Animal Science (Pre-Veterinary), Raja Darshini Rajamani (bottom center), a Mathematics major, and Rebecca Watson (bottom right), a Biology major on the pre-med track, wrote this play for Professor Elise Frketich's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2024. They gave *Medea*, a Greek tragedy by Euripides, a modern twist by turning it into a

murder mystery. They hoped to keep the audience on edge and make them think about the complexities of human emotions and what could drive someone to extreme actions.

Characters:

Narrator: Madison

Scarlet (*Medea*): Alina

Judy Jason (*Jason*): Alina

Charlotte (*Princess*): Becca

Sheriff Charles (Creon-The King of Corinth): Audley

Nurse/Lucinda (*Nurse*): Darsh

Georgie and Michael (*Medea Kids*): Paper dolls

Scenes:

Scene 1 - The Discovery: Narrator's Introduction and Jason finds murdered kids

Scene 2 - The Announcement: Jason tells Scarlet and the Nurse that the kids are dead

Scene 3 - The Inspection: Sheriff Charles is brought in

Scene 4 - The Interrogation: Sheriff Charles starts interrogating

Scene 5 - The Confrontation: Nurse's guilt and Scarlet poisoning the ring

Scene 6 - The Deadly Proposal: Jason proposes to Charlotte and Charlotte dies

Scene 7 - The Departure: The Nurse leaves

Scene 8 - The Escape: Jason confronts Scarlet and Scarlet escapes

Props:

Scarlet's sons: Ripped up paper dolls

Mirror (In class)

Becca's ring

Squirt bottle for poison

Costumes:

Narrator (Madison): white jeans white shirt, black vest or black leggings, black shirt, black vest

Scarlet (Judy): all-red outfit (or something similar)

Jason (Alina): draw mustache, tie, Vans hat

Charlotte (Becca): crown (paper), nice clothing

Sheriff Charles (Audley): blue shirt and jeans: maybe belt holding like fake sheriff things (can be made of paper)

Nurse (Darsh): homely clothes

Plot: Murder Mystery

Scene 1 - The Discovery

(Lights off 5 seconds)

Narrator: This story takes place in March 2024, a bright beautiful morning in West Lafayette, Indiana. All is well, until a panicked scream pierces through the air.

Jason: *(wakes up from sleeping and goes into his kids' bedroom)* AAAAAAHHH! Georgie!! Michael!! My beautiful babies! NOOO!! *(Jason melts to the floor in sadness and picks up the remaining limbs of the kids and tries to reattach.)*

Narrator: This is a story of a murder mystery.

(Lights go dark for 5 seconds, ominous music plays. Jason leaves the scene, leaving only the narrator. Scarlet enters for the next scene.)

Scene 2 - The Announcement

(Lights come on)

Narrator: After Jason discovered the mangled bodies of his children, he immediately left to find his wife, Scarlet.

(Jason enters)

Jason: SCARLET!!! *(weeps even more)*

Scarlet: Darling! Why are you screaming so loudly this early in the morning! *(rises from bed and checks face in mirror)*

Jason: Scarlet! Look! *(brings her to the children)* WHAT HAPPENED? *(Scarlet gasps)*

(Nurse rushes into the room)

Nurse: The kids are dead! Oh my goodness! *(faints into Jason's arms)*

Scarlet: My poor dear children! Who could ever do such a thing! *(wails and throws the Nurse off to fall into Jason's arms)*

Jason: I'll go get the police. Don't touch anything! *(leaves the room)* *(lights off for 7 seconds)*

Scene 3 - The Inspection

(Lights on)

(Scene begins as Jason drags Sheriff Charles into the center stage/into the room)

Scarlet: Dear Sheriff Charles! My children are dead! Who could ever do such a thing! *(hand to forehead)*

Jason: What do you think, Sheriff? What could have possibly happened?

Sheriff: I am so sorry for your loss. Georgie and Michael were such lively children. *(sheriff bends down to inspect the bodies)* The bodies were clearly torn apart gruesomely. I have never seen a murder done in such rage. They're barely identifiable. *(sheriff touches a*

limb to see if it's warm) Their bodies are cold, they seem to have been gone for hours. The murder likely happened at night.

Scarlet: *(cries into Jason's arms)*

Sheriff: I need to know where everyone was last night. Nurse?

Nurse: Asleep in my bed around 10 PM.

Scarlet: *(mocks quietly)* Should have been washing the dishes...

Sheriff: Miss Scarlet?

Scarlet: How could you ever ask such a thing! *(sheriff gives her an annoyed look)* Fine! I was putting the children to bed around 8 PM because they have a strict bedtime. Then I did the dishes which *somebody* was supposed to do. Then I went to bed. Somewhere in the night, I believe early morning, I needed to take a pee so I went to the bathroom. I did stop by to see my beautiful boys and they were sound asleep and then I went back to bed.

Sheriff: Jason?

Jason: I fell asleep around 8 PM as well after saying goodnight to the boys.

Nurse: Oh...they were so sweet and innocent... *(puts a comforting hand on Jason)*

Scarlet: *(gets jealous and slaps the Nurse's hand off of Jason)* **OUR** kids were so sweet and innocent.

(Sheriff starts to become suspicious of the Nurse)

Sheriff: Alright folks, thank you for all your help. I will keep you updated on everything I find.

Jason: *(grabs the Sheriff)* Please help us! My boys need justice!

Sheriff: I will try my best. This is out of your hands now. *(Everyone leaves the room and the narrator enters)*

Narrator: The Sheriff noticed the hostility between the Nurse and Scarlett and had started to become suspicious. Maybe the Nurse had wanted to be with Jason and wanted to destroy any reminder of his past life with Scarlet. With this in mind, he began his interrogations.

(Lights off. Everyone leaves the scene except for the Sheriff. Sheriff starts writing on the board.)

Scene 4 - The Interrogation

(Lights turn on)

Sheriff: This will be a hard case. Only 3 people were in the house during the night, with no signs of a break-in or intrusion from the outside. I don't want to assume right away but the parents would never kill their own. The tension between Scarlet and the Nurse was palpable. Clearly the Nurse was trying her best to get Jason's attention for something.

(Scarlet enters)

Scarlet *(coughs)*: Pick me.

Sheriff: *(looks at her with disappointment)*

Scarlet: Sorry. *(looks down)*

Sheriff: Anyways. I can't really think right now of anyone else who would have any ulterior motives. Maybe the Nurse is in love with Jason and wants to get rid of the children... Although she seemed to deeply care for them as well. Nurse!

(looks at Scarlet) You may leave the room.

Scarlet: *(glances at the room of the nurse)* Of course.

Nurse: *(walks into the room)* Yes?

Sheriff: Please sit down. Unfortunately, I don't see you as the most innocent in this situation. You aren't a blood relation of the children and your story was pretty short. Is there anything you would like to add?

Nurse: Oh dear... Yes. I was cleaning up the boys' room before I went to sleep. I had watched Jason and Scarlet both say goodnight and tuck the boys in for the night as I went to the bathroom to get ready to go to sleep.

Sheriff: Hmm... Do you recall Scarlet ever going to the bathroom in the night?

Nurse: *(hesitates as if she is hiding something)* Y-yes.

Sheriff: *(takes note of her hesitation)* Understood. And there is nothing else I need to know?

Nurse: ... No.

Sheriff: Ok then. I must go now. Goodbye.

Nurse: Thank you sir. *(Sheriff leaves)*

Narrator: After the interview with the Nurse, the Sheriff was less suspicious of the Nurse, but he knew that she had more information than what she was saying. He left to do more investigating.

(Everyone leaves except the nurse) (Lights off 5 seconds)

Scene 5 - The Confrontation

(Lights on)

Nurse: Oh dear...What will I do...I am a liar.

Scarlet: *(enters scene)* Lucinda. Lucinda. Lucinda. You did absolutely EVERYTHING I wanted.

Nurse: I feel awful. How do you have no remorse? Those boys were so happy, how could they be killed by their own mother?

Scarlet: Oh shut up. I know you know that Jason has been cheating in this entire marriage with that disgusting Charlotte.

Nurse: I know how you feel, more than you know. My ex-husband did the same thing. He left me with no money, no house, and no means to provide for myself. My kids were all I had. But they brought light into my life, you need to make amends and move on with your life.

Scarlet: I have no kids now you fool. All I have left is revenge. And trust me Lucinda, I will get all of the revenge I deserve. I left my father, my brothers, and my home for him and he has done nothing but disrespect my name. I have no choice.

Nurse: You don't have kids?! You killed your own children! I know you don't want to hear this right now, but I promise you need to forgive him and move on with your life; the more damage you do, the unhappier you become.

Scarlet: *(starting to get upset)* SHUT UP LUCINDA. You are a wretched woman.

Nurse: I've done all I can with you. You need to seek help. *(exits scene)*

Scarlet: *(taking center stage emotionally)* How cruel is life? How did I end up here? I have murdered my children in cold blood, and all so I can destroy the one who humiliated me the most. Was it worth the blood of my sweet toddlers? Can my actions be redeemed by the satisfaction of revenge? *(sits in the chair the Nurse was in to contemplate. After a brief pause she continues-)*

Yes. I believe it can be, and not only for my sake. *(starts getting angry)* What kind of life would they have had? Sons to a man who cannot remain faithful to one woman? How could Jason ever take care of those two boys if he cannot stay committed to the one person in this world he promised to commit to? I have only prevented further pain with my actions. Why, if I had the choice to be killed, I would rather have died than experience the heartbreak of my life now.

And what of that woman, Charlotte? My boys would have been partially raised by a sloppy, stupid homewrecker! How could any good mother allow such a situation! Yes. In ending their time on Earth prematurely, I have only saved them much grief and suffering. And I shall soon do the same to Charlotte. *(pulls out a vial of poison)*. If I coat the inside of my wedding ring with this poison, anyone who wears it will die a cruel, painful death. With our poor children dead, Jason will surely propose to Charlotte shortly, and being too cheap to buy a new ring, he will reuse the one he got me all those years ago *(takes off her wedding ring and coats the inside with poison. She is admiring the ring)* My only regret is that I will not be able to see her squirm on the floor as the poison envelopes every inch of her body. *(Scarlet sets the ring on the table and leaves)*

Scene 6 - The Deadly Proposal

(Lights on)

Jason: *(paces back and forth)* With the poor kids dead, I think it's time to build a new life with Charlotte. Having kids with Charlotte *(sobs)* wouldn't replace Georgie and Mikey,

but I could start anew - build a happier life with the new woman of my dreams. *(looks at ring longingly)*. Scarlet left her ring on the table here. I could just take it.... and give it to Charlotte. Scarlet would be too distraught with grief to even notice... *(takes the ring and puts it in a bag) (leaves scene)*

Charlotte: *(enters scene, is in her house, waiting for Jason)*

Jason: Charlotte! *(comes into Charlotte's house looking very distraught)*

Charlotte: Jason what's wrong? Why do you look so upset?

Jason: My kids... They, they-

Charlotte: *(clearly annoyed, interrupts Jason)* They what? What about your kids? Spit it out, Jason.

Jason: They were murdered.

Charlotte: *(rushes to Jason's side)* Wait what?

Jason: I woke up this morning to the remains of their limbs scattered across the living room. It's like a hurricane swept through the room...

Charlotte: I'm sooo sorry pookie. *(gives a lingering hug)*

(Jason sobs into Charlotte's hug)

Jason: I'm leaving Scarlet. I have nothing left tying me to her. Here. *(hands her a ring)* Take our wedding band as proof of my love for you. Charlotte Gertrude Grosh, will you marry me?

Charlotte: *(cries in surprise)* YES!

Jason: *(happily puts the ring on her)* Let me go tell the Sheriff. I know he's working the case for me and Scarlet, but as your father, he must know my intentions.

Charlotte: Ok! Good luck! *(hugs Jason)*

Jason: *(Jason leaves the room excitedly)*

Charlotte: Oh this feels...odd. OW IT STINGS! *(starts twitching and falls to the ground) (yells in pain) (dies)*

(Jason and Sheriff enter the room)

Jason: NO! NOT ANOTHER ONE! CHARLOTTE! CHARLOTTE, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

Sheriff: CHARLOTTE! NOOOOOO!

Jason: Sheriff! This must end! I can't take it anymore!

(Sheriff goes close and bends down to look at Charlotte)

Sheriff: WAIT! Why is her finger warm? And why is the flesh surrounding the ring black? Was the ring poisoned? *(Sheriff looks at Jason)* WHAT HAVE YOU DONE! YOU STUPID UGLY LITTLE-*(has a heart attack and dies)*

Jason: Oh shit.

Narrator: And so another one bites the dust. Due to the unexpected grief of losing his beloved only daughter combined with his anger towards Jason for putting her in danger, the Sheriff had a fatal heart attack.

(Lights off 5 seconds)

Scene 7 - The Departure

(Lights on)

Nurse: Scarlet, you must come clean. I can't cover this up forever, my conscience is eating me alive. I know he's a bad man, but you've gone too far. Poisoning the ring? She was an innocent woman.

Scarlet: INNOCENT WOMAN? SHE'S A WHORE!

Nurse: She did not deserve death, and neither did Georgie and Michael! Those poor babies...

Scarlet: Don't make an enemy out of me, Lucinda. You don't want to be my 5th.

Nurse: I have to leave Scarlet, I cannot live in this house, the knowledge of what you have done is weighing too heavy on my heart.

Scarlet: Fine. Leave now before I change my mind. *(Nurse hurries away)*

(Lights off 5 seconds)

Scene 8 - The Escape

(Lights on)

Jason: *(walks in)* SCARLET. WHERE ARE YOU? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE! YOU BITCH. Charlotte and our own kids? What is wrong with you?

Scarlet: *(laugh sobs while saying...)* Why do you think, Jason? You cheated on me and planned to leave me and the kids to rot while you ran away to that wretched “*Princess*” *(finger quotes, sarcastically)* in her big, fancy mansion.

Jason: Charlotte is a sweet girl. She did *not* deserve this.

Scarlet: Yes Whatever. I knew you would give her my ring once the kids were gone. YOU CHEATED YOU LYING BASTARD! *(fake slaps Jason)*

Jason: I only cheated because Charlotte is LOADED! And what are you? *(fake slaps back)*

Scarlet: I'M YOUR WIFE.

Jason: AND POOR. YOU DON'T HAVE ANYONE NOW! NOT YOUR DAD, NOT YOUR BROTHER AND NOT YOUR KIDS.

Scarlet: YOU HEARTLESS LIAR!

Jason: Go to hell. I'm turning you in.

Scarlet: You first.

Jason: I know you put poison on the ring and killed Charlotte! The police *will* catch you.

Scarlet: Never! *(scoops up all the remains of children's bodies)* This is all that is left of them. *and runs out of classroom)*

Narrator: And so. The end of a classic West Lafayette story has come to a close. Scarlet ran far far away to Timbuktu and was never found again. Jason just found another wife. The nurse got psychiatric help.

(Lights off 5 seconds)

The Cycle of Harmony and Destruction

by
Lilly Kult

Lilly Kult is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Medical Laboratory Science. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. The short story was largely inspired by real events in history that began with the rise of Mao Zedong in China. Coincidentally during this time, the most preserved mummy in history would be found. The short story conveys a dialogue between two individuals from a chaotic present and a peaceful past.

It was 1970. Ling was tired. She had been digging in the same spot for hours. She wanted to drop her shovel and sit down, but she knew that the Red Guard would not be pleased with her. The ground swayed beneath her, and her head throbbed with pain from dehydration.

It had been one month since she and her brother had been detained by the Red Guard. They had been at home when it had happened, studying and messing around as they usually did. Their father was in the living room reading the newspaper, and the smell of hotpot wafted from the kitchen.

Ling missed the smell of her mother's cooking. If she focused just enough, she could just barely make out the scent of spices and delicious chicken broth. It smelled so good that Ling's mouth watered. A hard shove sent Ling falling to the ground, knocking her out of her thoughts.

"Jing Ling isn't it?" a young voice mocked.

Wei Yijun. He was one of Ling's former classmates and friends. That was until he accused Ling's family of being imperialists. Yijun's red armband was hard to ignore. Ling didn't dare look him in the eye. She picked herself up, keeping her eyes to the ground. His gaze roamed over her, and Ling wanted to give him a quick jab to the nose but that would spell too much trouble. "Take your shovel and dig over there." He pointed over to a spot that looked untouched.

Is he serious? Ling thought to herself. Apparently, he was. He gave her a mighty shove in that direction. He whistled while he walked away. For a moment, Ling contemplated kicking him to the ground while his back was turned, but she knew better. Once order was restored, he would be the first person on her hit list. Ling sighed and dragged herself over to the spot Yijun ever so politely pointed to.

Ling tapped her shovel against the ground and started to dig. The sun was just starting to get to her again when CRACK! A sudden pain shot up Ling's tailbone and all she could see was darkness. Ling sat up and looked around. The only thing in view was rock eclipsed by shadow. A narrow stream of light fell from the small hole that was made by her fall. Ling cupped her hands around her mouth. "Hello! Is anyone there?"

Nothing.

She tried again but louder.

Silence. Shuffling. More shuffling.

“Ling mèi!”

It was her brother, Jing Zhong. After the Red Guards ransacked their home and separated them from their parents, Zhong gē was always behind Ling, supporting her. He would never let any of the Red Guards touch her no matter how much trouble it would cause. “Zhong gē, I’m down here!”

A young yet shrewd face appeared over the hole, momentarily blocking the small amount of sunlight shining through. “Ling mèi! Are you alright? Did Yijun do this to you?”

“No, he didn’t touch me, but I’m stuck, and the hole is too deep to climb out of.”

“Well,” Zhong gē shrugged his shoulders, a sheepish grin on his face, “I guess you’re stuck in there. Maybe the Yin Shu will come and devour you before hunger and dehydration sets in.”

Ling gave him a dirty look. How can he still be joking around with everything that is going on? she thought.

“I’m kidding. I’m kidding. Let me see if I can find a rope or something.”

The sun returned when he left.

After a few agonizing moments, Zhong gē reappeared over the hole again, his expression mirroring disappointment. “Sorry, Ling mèi, but I can’t find anything.” He scratched his head in thought, his tone suddenly serious, “Ling stay right there. I’ll be back. I’m going to see if I can find you something else. For now—” He dropped a water bottle down the hole.

Ling caught it with shaky hands. *How in the world did he get this?* she thought. Water bottles were strictly prohibited outside meal times and meal times were not daily. “Drink that,” he turned, then turned back to the hole, “but don’t drink all of it.” He disappeared again.

Ling wondered how long it would take him to find something. The Red Guard and Yijun would certainly keep him busy. He had to be subtle. She knew that if Yijun or any of the other guards saw her down there, they would laugh, jeer, and maybe even throw things at her. If they caught Zhong gē, it would certainly be the end.

Ling fully believed that she had to save herself. She would not stay there and allow the Yin Shu to devour her. She would not sit there and wait for the Red Guard to find her either. Zhong gē's water bottle was already three-quarters empty. Who knew how long he had been saving the water? Ling took a small swig of water from his water bottle. This would have to do. The swaying of the ground did not disappear; however, it did become slower.

Ling pressed her hands against the stone. She walked along its path until it started to move outwards. The stone gave way to a path that led deeper into darkness. Ling made a momentary decision and decided to follow it.

After a short while, the stone hallway gave way to an open area. Sunlight streamed through a small hole in the ceiling and reflected—a lacquer vase? *Wait, aren't those super expensive?* Ling's gaze followed the lacquer vase to a large bronze carving of a bird and finally to a T-shaped banner. It was an interesting piece of art. She stepped closer to observe the painted designs. From what Ling could see, swirls of white, orange, and purple formed the shapes of dragons, and two people sat in the center of the T-shape. A large dark purple bird sat in a red moon on the right side. To Ling, the banner felt quite ominous. It felt like it was telling a message of death, rebirth, and ascension.

Ling silently prayed to Buddha that she did not accidentally fall into an ancient Chinese occult chamber. She felt her prayers fail when she tripped and stumbled onto a black box. Ling painfully picked herself back up. The black box was surrounded with more lacquer vessels, bronze carvings, jade ornaments, and other paraphernalia. Ling did not need to be a scholar to realize that these were objects of the rich. If it truly was an ancient occult chamber then the occult might be worse than the Red Guard.

She carefully stepped off of the box making sure not to disturb the artifacts. On closer inspection, she realized that the plain black box was more like a coffin. Instead of falling into an ancient Chinese occult chamber, she fell into a burial or sacrificial chamber. Maybe she could turn the occultists and the Red Guard against each other.

BAM!

Ling's stomach jumped into her chest and the sudden blood rush combined with dehydration made her dizzy. The noise erupted again. This time, Ling was paying attention. It was coming from the black coffin. Another thud then large lids flung off of the coffin, all landing in various areas around the room, disturbing the bronze and lacquer artifacts. Ling fell to the ground. A lacquer vase collided with a bronze horse which emitted a sound so

loud that her ears rang. She shoved her hands against her ears to muffle the sound, but her eyes stayed fixed on the lidless black coffin.

Something was sitting up. A beautiful woman covered in wraps of cotton and silk rose out of the coffin. A white mask shielded her face from the dust and gloom. Pale white hands peeled the silk off of her face revealing piercing brown eyes. Raven black hair was bound behind her head. The woman's eyes immediately placed themselves upon Ling.

The woman said something. Repeated it. She coughed into her hands. Ling removed her hands from her ears. "Servant, my name is Xin Zhui. I am the wife of Li Cang, the Marquis of Changsha, Lady Dai. I thirst. Fetch me some clothes and a cup of tea."

How, Ling was unsure. The woman claimed to be Lady Dai, a noblewoman. Ling had never heard of any person with that title before. No one in the past or the present matched that name. *Was she buried alive?* Regardless, she was certainly bossy for just raising from the grave. Her accent was certainly something. Ling had a hard time understanding it.

Ling started walking towards the coffin to help the poor woman until her statements fully reached Ling's ears. The subservience that had taken over Ling's spirit for the past month suddenly dissipated. "Servant girl?!" The woman visibly recoiled from Ling's outburst. "I am not a servant girl! I might not be the highest person in this place, but I will certainly not stoop so low as to kiss someone's boot!"

It took a few minutes for Lady Dai to respond. "What an insolent brat. Your Chinese is just as horrible as your manners. Once I speak to the emperor, I will be sure to have you whipped or even better, imprisoned for treating a noblewoman with such a lack of respect!"

Ling dropped the honorifics. "And you, lady, are an entitled hag!"

The entitled hag's response was much quicker this time. "Tch, insolent servant. Have you not been taught to respect your elders? Least of all, the families of the gentry?"

The guilt seeped in. It landed in the muscles first, loosening Ling's tight fists. Then it reached her head. Her eyes dropped to the ground, and her lips quickly bit back the scathing words on her tongue. The guilt finally made a home in her chest where the strong emotion erupted into a physical feeling of pain and shame. Indeed, her parents had taught her to respect her elders. Her mother had reminded her everyday. Splashes of red resurfaced in Ling's memory. Screaming. So much screaming. Lady Dai picked up on Ling's body language and once again ordered Ling to bring her some clothes and something to drink.

Ling eyes searched the sloping grottos and shelves lined with bronze statues, wood carvings, and jade. They finally landed on a beautiful yellow silk robe patterned with a design that Ling could not quite describe. She walked over to Lady Dai. The silk wrappings had started to slope off her back, and Ling was unsure if she should remove them or not.

“Servant, what is your name?” “Jing Ling.”

An amused sound came from Lady Dai’s lips. “A simple name. Gentle soul.” She chuckled. “How ironic.”

Ling slipped the robe over the woman’s shoulders. The combs in her hair were made of ivory decorated with a semi-circle of gold. In addition, her body seemed to be in near perfect condition. Not a wrinkle or zit marred her ivory body. Her eyes moved around the room. Her joints could bend, and Ling could see the steady rise in Lady Dai’s shoulders. She was alive.

She must have been buried alive. Ling thought. Whoever did this to her must have done this in the most traumatic fashion possible, so traumatic that this Lady Dai must have astral projected into a past life. Did the Red Guard do this? Ling suddenly felt sorry for her.

“What day is it?” Lady Dai asked.

“June. June 6, 1970. The year of the dog.”

She turned around, a confused expression on her face. “What is a June?” Ling raised her eyebrows.

“Ridiculous,” Lady Dai mused, turning back around. “I am parched. Where is my tea?” “I’m sorry Dai Tàitài. But I don’t think that there is any tea down here, but I do have this.” Ling handed her Zhong gē’s water bottle.

The mysterious woman inspected the bottle. She suspiciously eyed the plastic grooves and ran her index finger along the narrow lines. Once she decided that it was surreptitiously unharmed, she took a swig. Ling watched Lady Dai drain the entire bottle. *Entitled hag.*

Ling wanted to test something, “Tell me. Who is the emperor?”

“Shouldn’t you know this yourself, Jing Ling?” Lady Dai asked, tossing Zhong gē’s water bottle aside.

“Well, yes. Dai Lǎobǎn just wanted me to make sure that you were of a sound mind before having you return to your duties.”

“Hmph. Of course, the emperor is Emperor Qianyuan. My husband is Li Cang, the Chancellor of Changsha. I am Han Chinese. My father was Xin Baoshan, a scholar and sword master. My mother was Huang Xiaomei, a noblewoman. My son is Li Zhihao. The capital is Chang’an, and the religion is Confucianism.”

Ling was speechless. She was surprisingly alert for someone who had been potentially buried alive. If Ling’s memory was correct, then Lady Dai would be someone from the Western Han Dynasty. The capital of China had not been Chang’an for quite some time.

Lady Dai watched a variety of expressions dance across Ling’s face. First, it was surprise, then it was confusion, and finally neutral. It was enough to arouse her suspicions. “There is something that you are not telling me. I order you to tell the truth.”

Ling hesitated. She decided to be straight with Lady Dai. Despite the harsh treatment Ling had first received from Lady Dai, Ling felt that it was important to extend kindness to someone who had done the least harm to her in quite a long while. “Dai Tàitài, I’m sorry, but the Han Dynasty fell some thousand years ago. We are not in a dynasty. Like I said, it is 1970, centuries in the future. China is no longer under dynastic rule.”

“Impossible,” Lady Dai muttered, “The Han Dynasty could never fall. Do not try to fool me, Jing Ling.”

“But it’s true. People can watch images move on a screen in color just as if they were there. Rockets and other machinery are floating in space above us right now. In fact just a year ago, someone was walking on the moon thousands of li above us,” Ling stepped closer, “Dai Tàitài, you are in the future.”

“Impossible. How can this be? I remember eating melon, not that long ago. Afterwards, I retired to bed for a nap and then—and then—”

“You died.”

Lady Dai finally looked around herself. The artifacts. The banner. The slimy coffin that she was lying in. It all made sense.

“I died. Then I must be in the heavenly realm.”

“No. You are still in the mortal realm. We met by accident. I am not a spirit. I am a student who was imprisoned here against my will. My parents were stolen from my brother and me. The Red Guard makes me work day and night with no food and no water. I did not want to be here.”

“I don’t understand. Why am I here? I should be in the heavens.”

“I’m sorry Dai Tàitài, I can’t answer that. But you are here and that is what you must concern yourself with.”

“Jing Ling, what do I do?”

Ling stepped closer to her. “You have very little options. Run, hide, flee China, and don’t come back. Or be found by the Red Guard, be interrogated, and be imprisoned. It is your choice.”

Lady Dai guffawed, “Pfft. Flee China? A noblewoman being interrogated? Ridiculous. In my era, we had about 200 servants working in the house. I had a servant to wash my hair and clothe me every day and night. My clothes were made of the finest silk. I never starved. I could dine all day if I wished. Performers would beg to have me as an audience. No one would even think of accusing me or my husband of being unjust. These Red Guards are no threat to me.”

“Dai Tàitài, you are not in your era. The Red Guards do not care what you say. It is not the unjust that they are going after, it is those who do not kiss the feet of Mao Zedong, and I assume that you would not want to kowtow to someone who is not your emperor.”

“I am a woman of the noble family of Li—”

“They don’t care!” Ling shouted a little too loudly for her liking. Attracting the attention of those on the surface was not something she wanted. A little quieter she said, “They took my parents.”

“Who?”

“The Red Guard. They took my parents. My father was a government official for Changsha. One night, they ransacked our house and interrogated us. Though we were careful with our words, we didn’t say what they wanted us to say. A month ago, his blood washed the city streets. Hundreds watched him die, but we could do nothing. My mother, she was just a housewife. She was separated from us. I don’t know where she is. My brother, he’s the only

one I have left. The Red Guards don't care if you have a powerful family because that is exactly who they are aiming for."

"During my time," Lady Dai picked up a jade pendant of a Qilin, "the people were thriving. Starting from our very first emperor, Emperor Gaozu, he lowered taxes for everyone. The emperors after him established foreign trade. We had commodities. We had spices. We had tea. Emperor Gaozu hired people based on skill and skill alone. My husband was skillful, respected for his strong leadership. We did not become nobles based on our birth; we became nobles based on our skill."

"What does that have anything to do with it?"

Lady Dai ignored her, "Me? I was skilled at nothing. The only thing I was talented at was my womanly duties. If this Red Guard you say is targeting powerful families then they must truly feel threatened. It means your father was a skillful man. They were afraid of his abilities."

"So what? Politics combined with fear aren't so simple."

"No. But if you combine fear with power then the people will run with it. I would know. I was born during the Qin Dynasty. The boy emperor, he was ambitious. He erected so much architecture. He was so strict. He held China in his fist and squeezed. After the boy emperor's death, rebellion erupted. Rightfully so. The rice paddies burned. Families fled their homes. There was never enough to eat. It was utter chaos, but we lived. We survived."

"So what?" Ling grumbled. She kicked over a jade vase. "That vase costs more than your soul."

Ling gave Lady Dai a dirty look. She did not cower.

"I am saying that you will survive. Many families were not as fortunate, but what you have is greater than nothing. Your father was a skillful man. You should be proud that others feared him so much that they rushed to the only option they felt they had left. I am not saying that you should be happy that he died. I am saying that you should be happy that he was your father." Lady Dai moved on, "After Emperor Gaozu established his own reign, the era prospered. Peace returned and even better than it was before."

Ling averted her eyes.

“After an era of chaos, no matter how long, peace will always return, and that peaceful era will be even better than the pain that you endured. You will be happy that you did not give up.

Though you heartily insist that the dynastic rule has ended, I have a feeling that inside it never will. Chaos will reign, and peace will always return to soothe the souls of the wounded, only for the cycle to repeat again and again. This is the cycle of life, Jing Ling. Destruction and ruin may rule for now, but order will come. I guarantee it.”

“But Dai Tàitài, what if that order is bad?”

“Then you must find a way to survive. You certainly look like you’re doing fine just now.”

Ling was certainly not doing fine. All the calmness that she expressed on the outside was a show. Internally, she was in complete turmoil. She told Lady Dai so.

“Despite that, you’re still alive. That has to count for something. Though I may not know much about your era, I am curious about this color screen that you mentioned earlier.”

Ling was grateful for the topic switch. Any more conversation about the contempt she had for her government because of her father’s death and the chaos they did upon her life would undo her.

Ling’s explanation enthralled Lady Dai. She was fascinated that people were so intelligent that they invented color television. Her feelings of amazement were overshadowed by her disappointment that it was not a Chinese person who came up with the idea. Ling thought she was a bit ridiculous. There were more people out there than just the Chinese.

“Jing Ling, help me stand up.”

Ling wrapped her arms around Lady Dai’s frail shoulders. Because she had been sitting in her coffin all this time, Ling had not noticed how frail Lady Dai was. She was not much taller than Ling.

Lady Dai stood up on shaky legs and stepped over the artifact chambers lying near her coffin. Quietly to herself, Ling thought Lady Dai looked like a bipedal foal standing on its legs for the first time. The woman did not weigh much.

“Take me there.” She pointed to the patch of sunlight cast through a thin, small hole at the top of the burial chamber.

Standing in the sunlight, Lady Dai shielded her eyes. “I haven’t felt the sun on my skin for so long. It feels...nice.” She turned to Ling, “You can let go of me, Jing Ling.”

“Are you sure?” Ling did not believe that Lady Dai could fully balance herself. She had already struggled with walking a few li, and Ling did not want her to fall.

“Yes. I am sure.”

Hesitantly, Ling let go. Much to her amazement, Lady Dai stayed vertical, not even a wobble interrupted her balance. She closed her eyes, absorbing the sun’s rays. After a moment she opened her eyes again. Her expression was that of acceptance. She turned towards Ling. “Thank you, Jing Ling,” she smiled. “See you in my next life.”

Gold and red feathers sprouted out of Lady Dai’s body, and her body shrank into a quarter of its former size. A golden pheasant sat on the ground. With a mighty flap of its wings, it took flight and flew out of the burial chamber straight to the heavens.

Shocked, Ling looked back at the coffin only to find it sealed, just as she had found it. There was no evidence of a mummy rising from its grave or even of Jing Ling’s disturbance of the artifacts around it. Everything was as it was before.

“Woah, did you see that pheasant just now? I wouldn’t expect to see those in these parts.” “Zhong gē? Where have you been?” Ling peeked through the hole.

“Sorry. I really really had to search to find something for you, and the Red Guards were watching me like crazy—is that what I think it is?”

Ling turned in the direction he was pointing. “What?” Is that,” he paused, “a coffin?”

“WhoOoOoOoOo,” Ling imitated. “What? Have you never seen a coffin before?” “What? No! It’s just that... I don’t know. It’s just...” Zhong gē screwed up his face in thought, finally landing on the word “strange.”

Ling nodded. It was a bit strange and coincidental, but ancient societies did exist. The person she just spoke to was proof of that.

With the rope that Zhong gē stole, he lifted Ling out of the pit.

Six years later after the death of Mao Zedong, the Chinese government began to revive itself. They started by freeing the people who were wrongfully incarcerated and sending those who identified as the “Red Guard” to the fields in order to rehabilitate them. While

studying for an important exam, Lady Dai's words echoed through Ling's ears again. "Chaos will reign, and peace will always return to soothe the souls of the wounded, only for the cycle to repeat again and again. This is the cycle of life, Jing Ling."

Writer's Statement:

A lot of thought and research was put into this short story. The idea first came after discovering the existence of the "Most Well Preserved Mummy in Ancient History." Xin Zhui or Lady Dai was found in Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan, China between 1972-1974. In 1970, workers excavated areas for an air raid shelter. Presumably, they must have found something suspicious. Two years later, thousands of volunteer high school students helped archeologists excavate the area. They resurfaced over 1,400 artifacts and three tombs. The first tomb belonged to Li Cang or the Marquis of Changsha. The second tomb, archeologists believe, belonged to an unnamed son. The third tomb was Xin Zhui's. Because of her well preserved state, scientists were able to determine her exact cause of death and the various illnesses that plagued her life.

The setting for the present was highly inspired by the Cultural Revolution in China started by Mao Zedong. The Cultural Revolution took place during a chaotic decade between 1966 and 1976. Violence flooded the streets and many people were incarcerated because they were potential imperialists or expressed capitalist ideas. The Red Guard was made up groups of people who supported communism and Mao Zedong. They were students. Historical writings usually mark the end of the Cultural Revolution with Mao Zedong's death in 1976.

Many parts of this short story are fictional. Though Jing Ling and her family are fictional creations, many families in China had similar experiences. It was also never confirmed if the excavation of land for an air raid shelter was directly linked to the manual labor camps that many people were subjected to. The Cultural Revolution is also written from an American standpoint. In addition, aside from her station and family, not a lot is known about Xin Zhui's personal affairs or family. Her personality, parents, and son's name are purely the author's creations.

Furthermore, there are various Chinese honorifics used in dialogue. Ling frequently refers to her brother as Zhong gē and Lady Dai as Dai Tàitài. The narration does not consistently reflect the Chinese honorifics. The narrator refers to Lady Dai as Lady Dai outside of dialogue. This was a narration choice to express both names in both languages. In addition, Ling's former classmate Wei Yijun has no honorifics attached to his name. This is to express Ling's disgust and lack of respect for him.

The primary purpose of this short narrative was to reflect a conversation between Xin Zhui, a noblewoman from the past who lived during a relatively peaceful and prosperous time versus someone who lived during a chaotic and violent time. What words of wisdom would Lady Dai be able to offer? Would these two people be able to get along? Would Lady Dai be able to learn something from this person in the future? The inspirational message that Lady Dai tells Ling is partially inspired by the wise sayings of J.R.R Tolkien in his novel *The Lord of the Rings*:

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,’ said Frodo.

‘So do I,’ said Gandalf, ‘and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.’”

Jing Ling was inspired by this short dialogue from Netflix’s movie, *The Trial of the Chicago 7* directed by Aaron Sorkin. During the trial, the lawyer, Schultz, asks Abby Hoffman a question: “do you have contempt for your government?” Abby Hoffman answers, “Not as much contempt as my government has for me.” Though Jing Ling and her family are never confirmed to be imperialist radicals (that is purely up to the reader’s interpretation), Jing Ling has contempt for her government because of the chaos that Mao Zedong spread and failed to contain.

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Mongolian Legacy, American Future

by
Oluwatobi Olugbenga

Oluwatobi Olugbenga is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Cybersecurity. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. Genghis Khan is often viewed as the ultimate warmonger, and I think the other world powers and the US have the capacity to do just as much damage. Were morals enough to hold them back from mass violence? I thought it would be fascinating to write about the similarities between the two nations despite them not even existing within the same century.

A man walked through the thick and frigid rain as it fell upon him, making uniform and calculated movements every time he took a step. If the downpour bothered him at all, he did little to make that discomfort known to the private leading him to the army tent. The private reached the tent first and held open the flap, allowing the man to step past him and into the tent before following him.

Inside the green expanded tent was a set of screen monitors, wires, and archeology equipment, the last of which didn't fit to the soldier's mind. The room was occupied by five other men, who were scientists from the looks of their pristine white lab coats. The soldier's attention was diverted from the scientists to the center table, where there was something that resembled a shriveled-up old man.

As the two men entered the room, all eyes turned to them. There was a breath's length of silence before it was interrupted by the private's words.

"Atten-Tion!" the private shouted.

This caused the two other guards in the room to salute the two men, a form which they kept until the man in front of the private released them.

"At ease. I am Major Solomon Myers, and at approximately 03:15 yesterday I received an express call from Colonel Derek Adams issuing an order to fly into Mongolia and make my way towards this base. However, what I have yet to see is any other documented information relating to that order. I presume that said information is too important to be stated over the phone, and that was why I was ordered to come to this military base."

The scientist looked among themselves each with a confused face of their own, until one of them stepped up—the man that the private presumed to be the leader of this group.

"Indeed, you are correct. The findings from the last 24 hours held information that we desperately desired not to be known even by other branches of the army," stated the chief scientist, pausing just before reaching the major.

He extended his arm to greet the major, to which Major Myers took and shook with a firm grip. "My name is Lion El Johnson, and I am the chief archeologist of this little group," he said, turning his head and indicating the group to be the four other archeologists in the room.

“Come,” he beckoned to the major. “48 hours ago, the soldiers of this base uncovered a hidden tomb near the Burkhan Khaldun mountain. In the tomb, they found the same withered corpse you see before you.”

This caused the major to look at the skeleton-like body on the table. The corpse seemed to be that of a man of relatively average height; his skin was gray but looked rather undisturbed. He had the facial hair that the major had seen on some of the locals before arriving at the base, which is a long beard with a small patch of hair below the lip along with a mustache. However, all the hair on the body was snow white.

“The soldiers, under the orders of Colonel Adams, who was on site at the time, brought the body back to base, where they quickly realized that this wasn’t a normal corpse but rather one of considerable age.”

“And that’s where you and your team come in?” the major interrupted, removing his hands from his back and placing the table.

“Shit!” Myers cursed as he swiftly removed his hand from the surface to reveal blood running down his hand.

“Apologies! We’ve had little time to set up, and, as such, many things have been left out in the open, especially things that should have been put away.” Johnson apologized to the major, with that last part seemingly directed towards one of the scientists who quickly brought cloth dressing to apply to the wound and removed the scalpel from the table.

“No worries, continue,” the major ordered.

“Yes. The major contacted my team, who were in Europe at the time, and proposed a contract with us and the military base. Of course, we accepted, as we don’t often get to see bodies and skeletons from this area of Asia due to the practice of cremation being exceedingly common in Mongolia’s past,” Johnson continued.

“Where do I come into the equation?” questioned the major.

“Honestly, I’m not sure. The colonel just stressed that you had to be here as quickly as possible.” We know just about as much as you do about the situation,” Johnson replied, to which the other scientists in the room agreed.

While the chief scientist and the major conversed, the private observed the corpse. Somehow, he felt its skin was getting lighter, almost reversing in age. He initially dismissed

the notion as resulting from sleep deprivation on his part, but not even 3 seconds later, he swore he saw the index finger of the body twitch. This caused the private to approach the table and take a closer look at the body, and at first nothing happened, and he thought that it was once again a result of his lack of sleep. However, following this, he noticed the slight rising and dropping motion of the body's chest, indicative of breathing. This caused the private to stretch out his hand and tap the body's toe.

"We've run several tests so far, an-. Hey! What are you doing?" Johnson snapped.

"Touching a corpse without sterilized gloves could contaminate it!" the chief scientist yelled.

Before the major could reprimand the private, the room was suddenly filled with a tapping noise. The occupants of the tent traced the source of the noise to the table that held the body, specifically to the body's right hand, which was spasming against the table.

It appeared as if all other noises had been silenced by the tapping; even the heavy rain outside seemed like a light breeze. Everyone remained quiet as not only the speed but also the intensity of the tapings increased, until suddenly, like a blown out candle, it stopped. The room stayed silent for what must have felt like an eternity to the inhabitants of the tent. Everything remained still until the body budged, and slowly but surely the corpse rose and did something even more remarkable. It yawned.

"Хамгийн сүүлд хэзээ би маш сайн унтсан бэ," were the next words that emanated from the corpse's mouth. No one said anything; no one could say anything. Not while looking at something that defies science and logic.

Their confusion and reluctance to speak prompted the corpse to talk once more. "Та хэн бэ."

After another minute of silence, someone finally spoke up.

"What the hell is going on?" one of the scientists exclaimed.

"Ah, so I am with you; what did those cowards on their islands call your people?" the risen body mused.

"Ah yes, gaijin." the body concluded. It then turned to the side of the table, stepped onto the floor, and made its way to the major and the head archeologist. Its walk was clumsy at first, but, again defying all logic, the corpse was able to quickly adjust despite having

not used its muscles in centuries, and, by the time it reached the Major, its stumble had been refined into a full-on walk.

The private noticed that the corpse stood at relatively the same height as the major, if not a bit taller than him. The private also happened to notice that the corpse's skin was becoming fuller, as if, for some unknown reason, the corpse was getting better.

"You, man in charge, where am I?" the corpse questioned, pointing to the major.

"I am Major Myers, and you're at a US military base in Mongolia," Myers answered.

"The US? I do not know such a city. You speak the foreigner's tongue, yet your flags are unknown even to me, the great khan."

"Khan!" Gaspd the chief archaeologist, "As in Genghis Khan?"

"Of course, has history past so much that you forget the founding of your empire?" the Khan responded. This confused the archeologists who looked amongst themselves.

"Our empire?" they asked inquisitively.

"Yes, the city of the US, which is a stupid name, must be under my descendant's empire," the Khan confidently stated

"The US stands for the United States, a nation independent of Mongolia. In this day and age, the Mongolian empire no longer exists," the Major announced this to the dismay of the Khan.

"That's... That's impossible; I built an empire that would last for millennia. With such tactics, my soldiers would never know defeat," proclaimed the Khan.

"I will commend your tactics as being genius for someone of your age," the major remarked. "But as time passed, your tactics became useless and outdated, leading to the recession of the Mongolian empire," the major continued.

"How dare you!" the Khan roared. "Do your books hold no tales of the people I killed, the nations I defeated, or the cities I wiped off the map? Even the Chinese, those sniveling cowards hiding behind their walls, were barely a match for my armies, and here you are saying that I'm outdated.

What has your empire accomplished that deserves to be written down in the echelons of history?" ranted the Khan.

"The US has continually defined and refined the definition of warfare in ways you could not possibly understand," the major spat back.

"In what ways? We brought the long-range bow into war, changing the distance and tactics at which warfare was fought. The mere presence of our archers sent fear into the enemies' hearts," the Khan boasted.

"Private, tell me the average range of a Barrett 82A1?" the major questioned

"About 2km, sir," the private answered without hesitation.

"2 km," the major repeated to the Khan, "a number that far exceeds the ability of your bowman. In the past 600 years, since the Mongol empire fell, the world has continually improved its weapons of war. And in the last 300 years, the United States has been the forerunner of that development. We've developed such tools and munitions that, in the time it would take you to capture a city, we could have taken over half of a nation. Drones, weaponized submarines, and the stealth aircraft—all means that the US has used to wage war—all of which surpass the destruction that your armies could cause," Myers explained.

"If that is true, then why does the empire of Mongolia still exist?"

"Because we refuse to attack unprovoked, we are a nation of peace and prosperity. I believe it was Sun Zu of the Chinese, whom you so brazenly mocked, who stated, 'To be a warrior in the garden is better than to be a gardener in a war,'" Myers quoted to the infuriation of the Khan.

"Even if the weapons you use could supposedly outclass us, it matters nothing if the men who command such technologies are inadequate. The military strategies displayed by myself and my commanders eclipsed those of our rival nations. The employment of riders, skirmishers, and fake armies fooled our enemies while hiding our true forces; I even developed the Tulughma to make up for what we lacked in numbers. We championed the use of nonverbal signals to disturb, disorient, and defeat our enemies; can you say that your nation has managed such feats of ingenuity in war?" Genghis continued.

"Not only have we matched that, but we've also surpassed it. The division of our command into several structures allows us to command them more effectively. The number of aircraft and mobile infantry we possess could blot out the skies, the seas, and the ground of

any combat engagement. Our commanders hold the lives of hundreds of thousands of men in their palms and decide the fate of any nation they face. We do not need nonverbal signals when what we say can be instantaneously transmitted to someone across the planet. At a point in time, we had enough arms to take over the world, but we didn't, not because it wasn't possible, but because it wasn't moral. In this, we surpass you," Myers countered, earning the ire of the Khan.

The Khan took a moment to think. He paced back and forth between the rooms, deep in thought until suddenly he stopped.

"There is one thing that you as a so-called peaceful nation could never do, and that is to sow terror. The fact that you know of my armies shows that our tactics and strategies were etched into the annals of history. But we did not win merely through those means; we won through creating and manipulating fear in our enemies. We could siege a city and leave, only to come back the next month and then repeat the process, sowing fear into the people's hearts. We executed entire cities, with few being left behind to tell the tale. Even those we captured weren't safe, as we used them as meat shields, taking the brunt of the enemies' arrows while our men were safe. We struck and left as silently as the night, leaving only the emptiness of homes and the silent cries of a people." The Khan once again boasted. He showed confidence in his answer, even displaying a smug smile on his face.

"Great Khan. The US is a peaceful and prosperous nation. We have ties all over the globe with so few enemies that I could count them on one hand. But before this, the mere mention of our involvement in a war deterred entire countries from entering. When we strike, we strike strong, fast, and quietly, leaving only devastation in our wake. Imagine, if you will, that one day you go to leave on a hunting trip to the neighboring country and you come across a mountain that allows you to overlook your glorious empire; you see the streets busy with craftsmen and soldiers, carts going in and out of your gates, and your castle walls standing impenetrable as they have for decades; you think to yourself that its future is secure. But as you return from your trip, the only thing you see is a crater as the only remnant of its existence. There are no traders, no children roaming the streets, and no women talking amongst themselves—only the emptiness of the crater. That is what one of our explosives could do to you. Imagine if we had thousands of those.

Well, you wouldn't need to imagine, because that is the extent of what we are capable of as a nation. So, no, you do not surpass us in this regard," Myers denied.

Everyone in the room was silent; they were waiting to see what the Khan would say in response to that. A minute went by before the Khan opened his mouth. And he laughed? This confused both the soldiers and the archaeologist.

"You truly are better at the art of war than my empire. Hah! I've not had such an interesting discussion in decades. It made me forget that I am naked. "Come, scholars, show me where I can find some clothes," the Khan commanded as he exited the tent with the archeologists in tow. The words initially did not affect the major's pride after winning that bout, but like water going through cracks, the true meaning behind the Khan's words seeped in.

"Well, it looks like we won that argument," the private stated as he turned to face the major.

The face on the major was less than happy; it looked like somebody had told him that a relative had died.

"Anything wrong, sir?" the private asked, returning to his formal stance, which he had dropped during the conversation with Genghis Khan.

The major was reluctant to speak at first, but he eventually said what was on his mind.

"About your statement, that we... won the argument, that couldn't be further from the truth," the major sighed as he straightened his uniform and began to walk out of the tent. Back towards his transport. Back to the country of peace.

Writer's Statement:

The narrator is from the third point of view, but the conversation is between a major of the US army, Solomon Myers, and the corpse of Genghis Khan. I chose them because of their similar professions and skills, mainly that of fighting wars. I commented on the progression of the war. I thought it was interesting that Genghis Khan was considered to be the leader who has killed the most people, when the US also had the capacity to do even more damage, not that they would. I learned that every nation, regardless of the technological level that they had, possessed the capacity to cause great harm, whether it be the Mongolians with their swords, spears, and bows or the US with its guns, tanks, and bombs. Writing believable and naturally flowing stories requires research into the topics. I have to have knowledge of what I'm writing about, even if it is about the supernatural.

A Conversation with Federico Fellini

by
Elena Viazzo



Elena Viazzo is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Data Analytics. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. Elena wrote this short story as an assignment to create a conversation with someone in history. With a love of cinema and a close connection to her Italian heritage, she chose to create a conversation with Federico Fellini, envisioning how a discussion about film and life choices would play out if she ever got the chance to talk to him. The character in her story is loosely based on herself as she carries the same concerns. She, therefore, wrote this with an emphasis on “what would Fellini do?”

Being an art student is not easy. My parents forbade me from studying Filmmaking in university, but I did anyway. In some ways I feel guilty for making them pay my costly tuition to learn how to use a camera and how to tell a story (which are skills I already learnt in order to get into film school), knowing there really is no future in the degree I'm getting. Who would want to hire someone who can handle a camera, handle editing software, and potentially tell a story well? Most of this seems to be common knowledge in this day and age.

Maybe I am selfish and should have chosen a career path with more chance of success in the future. I thought to myself, this fear and worry plague my mind, and I can't seem to fall asleep. It's the middle of the night, and the only noise I can hear is the white noise that bothers all of my senses. I really wish I could just forget and fall asleep, but I really couldn't. The regret begins to kick in. I get up and walk to the bathroom to wash my face with warm water.

Perhaps that will help relax my brain.

As I walk back to my bed a new sound introduces itself in the darkness. However, the sound is coming from the light bursting out from my closet. I hear jazz, laughter, glasses clinking; what is this? I slowly make my way to the sound. I turn the closet door knobs but suddenly, the doors burst open, the music bursts in rhythm, and laughter comes roaring. For a split second I see a party full of color and cheer, but I close the doors shut with all of my might, hoping I won't wake up my parents and aunt next door. However, no one seems to be coming to check on me. With a sigh of relief, I open the doors again to take a better look at what is happening. The burst of light blinded me in the dark, but once my eyes adjusted, I noticed the strange costumes these people were wearing with their strange, unusual dancing... It looked like swing but with a certain variation to it.

Suddenly, I felt a pull on my arm. A girl reached out to me and pulled me into the light. I looked behind me as my closet doors swung shut. However, they turned into, oddly enough, stage doors. Where am I?

Being pulled onto the dance floor, I begin to lose my balance as they push me around. Their glittery outfits blind me, and my slippers begin to fail me as I dance; I try to push myself off of the dance floor. When I successfully free myself from the crowd, I am suddenly faced with a towering cake, which is glazed with cream-colored frosting and intricate flower bits. Craning my neck, my eyes lead me to the very top of the cake with the figure of... the Academy Award? THE iconic Academy Award?

“I’ll be taking my award now, thank you very much,” a man with an accent spoke behind me as he shoved me away to reach for the very top of the cake for his trophy. I can’t seem to make out who this man is, but people begin to laugh and cheer as he takes the award. People congratulate him, and I hear someone mention ‘Best Picture’; am I at the Academy Awards afterparty?

I begin to panic out of confusion. What is this? - No - WHEN is this? I begin to look around, trying to find some answers. I see a young woman with blonde hair and a short haircut. She is talking to another man by the bar. I begin to approach them, perhaps they can offer me some answers.

“Excuse me, I must be a little lost and I-” before I could continue, I choke on my words as this woman turns to face me. Her eyes are a light blue with a tint of blush, she has the softest smile. It couldn’t be... is that *Julie Andrews*? I begin to stammer, suddenly I have forgotten what I wanted to say, and I felt the blood drain out of my body. She looks so... *young*. It certainly cannot be her. No, why would she look so young?

“Is something the matter, dear?” she says in a soft-spoken manner. She shakes me out of my thoughts. I stammer, trying to find the right words.

“Umm... sorry, I must have lost track of time, can you tell me the time and date as of right now?” She looks up at the clock right behind me, and so does the dark-skinned gentleman she was talking to, who I did not recognise. Though in his hand he’s holding an Oscar Award, so he must be someone important.

“It’s half-past twelve.” The Andrews look-alike reads, “So, it’s officially April *fourteenth* of 1964.” She turns to the gentleman sitting next to her, “So, it is officially the day after you won your Oscar.” The two of them laugh, but I walk away, trying to process the information.

1964. *It can’t be*. How could it be? But how? I felt lightheaded, I needed to sit down as every piece of the puzzle began to come together. I finally found an empty seat by the bar. Sitting on it, I could finally catch my breath, but my chest felt heavy and my eyesight panicky.

“Is everything alright, miss?” I turned to the man sitting next to me, he spoke with a thick accent. I tried to analyze his demeanor, his face and even his accent, but I could not tell who he was.

“W-Who are you?” I manage to stutter without feeling like my heart was going to burst out of my chest. The older gentleman slides a glass of water towards me.

“That depends on who you ask. In Italy, I am Federico Fellini. But here,” he sighs as he looks around at the people dancing and laughing in their glamorous outfits, “I am simply an Italian director who won an Academy Award.” He picks up his trophy and waves it slightly. The sudden heaviness stopped as my eyes widened with pure joy.

“You’re THE Federico Fellini?” my body jerked to face him, my hands shook, and I began to grip my knees.

“So you know about me?”

“YES!” I stop myself and clear my throat. Perhaps I got too excited, noticing how loud I got and his reaction. He jumped due to my sudden enthusiasm. “Ahem, I mean, yes, yes I do. I’m a huge fan of *La Dolce Vita*.”

“Ah yes?”

“*La Strada, I Vitelloni, Amarcord!*” I exclaimed, but he seemed to be confused by the last name. I realized at that moment that *Amarcord* would only be made ten years later.

“I-I meant *Nights of Cabiria*, silly me,” I chuckled nervously, and he shrugs it off. I was internally relieved that he did not suspect my mistake.

“Then you know greatly of my work it seems,” he takes a sip of his champagne, and pulls out his cigar and a lighter, puffing on the former until it begins to light up. He offers me a smoke, but I refuse.

“But tell me, what made you so nervous before?” he inquires and I look around, trying to find the right answer.

“I-I just might have had too much to drink”.

“I know you’re lying.” He comments nonchalantly, “but if you do not want to tell me the truth, so be it, I won’t force it out of you. I could tell something is troubling you deeply inside.” I couldn’t help but jerk my head around and look at him with so much confusion as to what he could possibly mean, but I couldn’t find a way to answer him.

“You know,” he begins, looking out at the room of people gleaming with a joy and excitement that is still brewing in the very late hours of the night. “I look at this room and

ponder the future of cinema, how this room, full of devotion and love for the art, will influence our attitude in the upcoming years of filmmaking. It is hard for me to fathom what is to be made next after moving pictures. Is there a higher form that will come after talking pictures?" I pursed my lips as I listened to him talk. Since I had the chance to talk to Federico Fellini in this very moment, I could seize it by telling him what has been bothering me the most. But how? How could I bring it up without it sounding suspicious or him losing interest?

"Is art self-serving?" I blurt out. He cranes his neck in my direction, an eyebrow raises as he tries to study me.

"Self-serving? In what sense, cara?"

"Like..." I sit and ponder how to rephrase my question. "The people who pursue film, are they selfish? Self-centered people? That's what I've been told all my life, and it makes me feel bad for even wanting to pursue a career in film."

"Yes!" he responds, taking a puff of his cigar. Perplexed, I look at him with wide eyes. Before I could respond he spoke again.

"People who pursue film are indeed selfish, they are self-serving. But they are self-serving in a way that tells the world '*I am here!*' They must share their story, or they will go mad. If they find themselves telling a story that resonates with many others, then it is a great success. There is a reason I wrote and made *8 1/2*, and look where it got me." I look around the room, and then I look at his award, a golden statue with a copper plaque with his name carved on it, something that could never be taken off. It was his forever. Yet, he never looked at the award. In fact, as he faces me throughout the conversation, the award is placed behind his back. Anyone could snatch it from him, and he would not care. No one would even dare to snatch his award from him anyways since it had his name on it, and it could never be replaced. Perhaps he is right, the arts are self-serving, but they should be for those who are worthy of telling a story. Fellini knows that he is worthy of telling his story in a movie and be praised for it.

"I-I must make a confession," I start, "but it will come off as strange at first."

"Strange? There is no strange, there is only what we think and what there is," he smiles reassuringly. I nod to myself as I purse my lips, trying to decide where I should begin. I start by telling him about the dinner with my aunt, then about me getting out of bed and coming to the past where I don't belong. He doesn't comment, he only nods and pro-

cesses. He takes another puff of his zesty cigar. The smoke was so pungent that I have to resist a cough as it blows in my direction.

“Well,” he starts, “if you really are from the future, then answer me this, what is the future of our cinema?” I ponder for a bit, accumulating all of the good and the bad that happened in the movie business.

“Well, there are many good things, and there are many bad ones as well. One of the biggest changes, for better or for worse, is the use of a green screen.” he raises an eyebrow and looks at me with confusion.

“I don’t understand, we also have green screens for film. Here we use it for double exposure, and we put moving images on sets like video footage.”

“Yes, but it’s not like that. Our version of the green screen is animated by what we call ‘the computer.’”

“Ah,” he nods, “when will this use of a ‘computer’ come into prominence?” he sips on his champagne.

“Not until the 1980’s I suppose. Unfortunately, I cannot really pinpoint the first movie that uses CGI,” the word slips out of my mouth, and he tilts his head.

“CGI?” It took me a bit to realize that that word is not common, nor did it even exist in the 60’s.

“Computer-Generated Imagery... or animation, as some might call it.” “Ah, like the Snow White and Sleeping Beauty animations?”

“Yes, well... not like that,” I hesitate, trying to find the right words to describe what 3D animation could be to someone who does not even know what a computer is.

“Yes, animation, but with the use of a computer... They use animation to create something more lifelike. It is a great tool, used now to present what we imagine on the big screen, turning it into reality.” I ramble, but Fellini doesn’t stop me, he listens silently to my enthusiasm on the topic.

“And that’s why they call it ‘movie magic,’” he smiles, and I smile back. Suddenly the thought of every film that fits the term ‘movie magic’ begins to flash before my eyes. Cinema has come such a long way. Seeing what cinema has become now might have made Fellini

proud. I look at the award that he had won for 8 1/2 , arguably one of the first early films to use special effects.

“You mentioned there are the bad parts to the future of cinema. May I ask what are those bad parts?” His inquiry snaps me out of my thoughts.

“Oh! Um, well... As it goes with many things that become popular in the US, they made a conglomerate business out of film, leaving those who actually have a story to tell no chance to actually share.” I frown slightly, knowing I am one of those people who will be left out. Fellini furrows his eyebrows.

“What do you mean by that?”

“There are movie studios out there who recreate the same stories over and over again, and the audience becomes comfortable watching movies that tell the same plot with the same stories, but perhaps with real people this time instead of animated ones.” He takes in the information and nods.

“With the same character and everything?” I nod in return. He sits back and hums to himself, processing what he had just heard.

“That’s impossible, no person is interested in watching the same story again and again. We naturally look for something new, it is in our nature.”

“Perhaps it is but I believe that these movie studios brainwash us into feeling comfortable watching the same story again and again. They feed on the nostalgia of the audience.” I sigh, “I don’t know, perhaps it is because we are so far into the future that we have run out of ideas for stories to share in cinema.”

“Run out?!” Fellini exclaims, “why never! There is no such thing as running out of ideas for stories!” He leaves his smoked cigar on the ashtray, looks around, and leans toward me.

“I must confess, I am also guilty of repeating my stories. In fact, I direct each and every movie as if it were the same story. However, the key difference between every one of these movies is my motivation as to *why* I am telling these stories. For 8 1/2, I tell this story because not only was it based on my experience, but I wanted to create something that will say ‘screw normality!’ and see if there is a limit beyond the sky.” I could not help but smile as he goes on about his attitude towards his films. Yes, it may come off as a joke, but in reality there was passion in what he was making, and it was quite evident.

“Unfortunately, it is not very common to find films like that, something that is made out of love and care. Usually they are made out of money to create more money out of it.”

“What do you think Hollywood is?” I raise an eyebrow to his question, thinking about it now; while Federico Fellini was making films in Italy in the midst of Italian Neorealism, the Golden Age of Hollywood was on the rise.

“You realize that these movie studios, MGM, Paramount, RKO, Warner Brothers, and Fox, have built themselves a monopoly. Not only did they own the studios, but they also owned the movie theaters. They had control over the money they were making,” he made sure to lower his voice so no producers in the after party could hear him.

“But that’s not fair,” I purse my lips, “that gives them the ability to control their numbers at the box office.”

“Brava! Exactly! Fortunately, they don’t have that control anymore. But you see, this concept of a conglomerate business is not uncommon.”

“History repeats itself,” I murmur to myself. For a business that relies on connections and big names, there is no shot for me to make it.

“What do you suppose I should do? I feel that there is no hope for me in this business.”

“There is always hope, you just need to be patient,” he finishes his glass of champagne, “eventually people will get bored of the formulaic storytelling they release twice or thrice a month, they will yearn for something new... and that’s when they will look for someone like you: fresh and young, with a new perspective.” I blush at his comment.

“How would you know that they would want someone like me?”

“Trust me, they will... besides, you like my work which already says something, don’t you think?” I laugh at his comment, perhaps people would look for something new to watch. You can’t show the same superhero movie forever, it will eventually become redundant and people will crave a story that is reflective of real life, like a Federico Fellini film.”

“So, should I stick with film school and hope for the best?”

“Wait,” he pauses, “there is a school for film?”

“Yes, they teach the history of film and other important elements when creating one like aspect ratio, lighting, camera angles, etc. If you are wondering, they do teach you at film school, that’s how I ended up loving your work.”

“Huh.” He ponders for a bit, though a smile seeps through and his lips curl up, “so I will be talked about in the future.”

“Of course! You’re considered a legend in filmmaking,” I exclaim, he begins to blush bashfully due to my compliments. Before he could respond, a woman approaches Fellini. She is quite obviously drunk and is pulling him to go somewhere, perhaps to go home since, I look up at the clock and notice, it is already 3 am.

“Dai amore, ho stanco morte, andiamo a dormire,” his wife says,

“Spetta un attimo amore, devo dire buona sera alla signorina,” They speak to each other in Italian, his wife rolls her eyes and sighs as she walks off, maybe to wait for her husband as he says goodbye.

“I’ll have to go now, but I will tell you one more thing,” I nod as he leans in closer, lowering his voice. “Be self-serving in your craft. Pursue what you want because in the end, if you won’t tell your story, who will?” I smile at his final note. He stands up and walks over to his wife, who is waiting for him by the exit. As I looked around, I noticed that the room was starting to become empty. There were people either asleep on chairs or slowly trying to get their drunken selves home. As for me, I believe it was my turn to go home. I found the same doors through which I entered, turns out to be the kitchen doors now that I look at them. The bright light shines between the cracks, it was a sign for me to go home. On that note, I seized the opportunity to look back before I entered my room. After being in a room filled with music and people, the white noise seemed to be louder than before. But that did not matter because as soon as my head hit the pillow, I was fast asleep, though, fast asleep with a smile on my face.

Wukongopoly: A Board Game Inspired by *Monkey King*



Emre Gulec (Top Left), a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Political Science and Economics, Michael Piper (Top Right), an Electrical Engineering major, Luke Spear (Bottom Left), majoring in Construction Management, Thomas Moser (Bottom Right), majoring in History, Sebastian Martinez, a Mechanical Engineering major, and Lily Strugala-Webster, a pharmacy major, designed this board game to fulfill an assignment in Professor Michael Nichols' SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. This board game is a creative rendition of Monopoly, taking inspiration from the ancient Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, and the players' progression around the board symbolizes the pilgrims' spiritual advancement in the novel.

Wukongopoly is a reimagining of the classic game of Monopoly, encompassing many details from the tale of Monkey King. Players proceed “West” by playing in typical fashion, rolling the dice, and advancing the subsequent number of spaces, acquiring properties along the way. Every property on the board is a location from *Monkey King* and is arranged in chronological order according to Sun Wukong and his crew’s journey. All the components of the classic Monopoly game exist in our adaptation, with their own unique twists in order to maintain the theme of *Monkey King* throughout.

Properties

Each property placed on the Wukongopoly is from a different part of the story, progressing linearly to follow the story's natural progression. Starting with the first location, we find ourselves at Flower Fruit Mountain, the beginning of our game and of our story. The players and Monkey begin their journey here and can claim it as their home by either buying a temple or a palace. We chose Flower Fruit Mountain as it is the first place that is listed as a location in the story. More specifically, it is where Sun Wukong was born and lived for hundreds of years. Of this location and birth, Monkey King tells us that Flower-Fruit Mountain is located “in the small country of Aolai on the Eastern continent, where a rock has given birth to an egg, which has turned into a stone monkey, whose golden eyes have dazzled even your majesty” (Julia Lovell, p. 2). Following Flower-Fruit Mountain and just near the start of the next row, the players and monkey quickly find themselves at the Village of Gao. Sun Wukong has just been freed from his entrapment, and, now that he is journeying with Tripitaka, is limited in speed.

Our next location is Flame Mountain. At the end of the third row and near the end of the story, players can find themselves overcoming the obstacle of the fiery mountain, ruled by Red Boy and Princess Iron Fan. This was an important challenge in the journey as it tested the group in the final leg of the journey as Red Boy tricked the group and tested their minds. Monkey in this final section took control of the situation and used his fighting skills and thinking skills to find a way out for his party. Using Princess Iron Fan’s iron fans, the party extinguished the flames, and made it to the final challenges remaining before they became Buddhas.

Alternative properties, such as Railroads and Utilities, also hold relevance. What are Railroads in the traditional game have been turned into bodies of water in our adaptation. Several bodies of water throughout the story posed significant obstacles to the crew that required innovative modes of transportation to overcome. Because of this, we felt they were a

good replacement for the Railroads. The Utilities were reimagined as the “original” utilities of the world: “Sun” and “Rain.”

Miscellaneous Locations

As for the more nuanced locations on the board, we have accounted for those too. As players make their laps around the board, they will cross the “Travel West” square, our take on “Just Pass Go.” This square is derived from the subtitle of the book, “Journey to the West,” and is indicative of the arduousness, and as it seemed at times, futility of their journey. Frequently encountering obstacles and delays, spanning more than a decade, it is apparent that the crew must have felt as if they were going in circles on their quest, which is reflected in our game as the crew will pass over the same locations despite supposedly always traveling West.

“Free Parking” in the original game of Monopoly is a breath of fresh air. The player lands on a guaranteed safe space, collecting free money. We felt that a good equivalent of this location in *Monkey King* was the Peach Gardens in Heaven, where Sun Wukong has the opportunity to relax and indulge himself as much as he desires. Naturally, we designated the “Jail” location as Five Phases Mountain as it was where Sun Wukong was imprisoned for half a millennium. The two squares that demand taxes in Monopoly remain the same on our board with a minor alteration to “Heavenly Tax.” We kept this detail to represent the bureaucratic nature of Monkey King and the Tang Dynasty, considering how crucial this dynamic is to the satirical humor of the story. “Chance” is designated as “Monkey Business,” alluding to the unpredictable nature of “Chance” cards, and “Community Chest” is designated as “Village Treasure.” We felt that our variations on the classic non-property squares establish a good balance between relevant details and traditional functionality within the game.

Marketing Pitch

Introducing Wukongopoly, our Monkey King Monopoly board. This board dives deep into the epic tale of Monkey King and his crew. As you roll the dice, you step into the story of the Monkey King. Monopoly games always take forever. While our Wukongopoly also takes a long time, you are always engaged and on the edge of your seat. Do not miss this chance to play Wukongopoly. It is your ticket to a world of magic and adventure. Join us in celebrating Monkey King’s legacy with him and his crew.

Close-up of the Board: Peach Garden



Close-up of the Board: The Buddha



Rock, Ruin, Redemption

Rock, Ruin, Redemption by Sam Hicks

You can access this musical piece here: <https://youtu.be/3G4f4czoYMs>



Sam Hicks is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Cybersecurity and Network Engineering. Sam composed this musical piece to fulfill an assignment in Professor Claire Mason's SCLA 101 class. Sam was inspired by *Flight of the Bumblebee* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, in which the chaotic nature of the piece mimics the chaotic sound and nature of a flying bumblebee. I think that portraying some sort of idea or message through a piece of music is extremely interesting, so for my project I challenged myself to compose a piano piece that portrayed Sun Wukong's character development throughout the course of the book, *Monkey King: Journey to the West*.

Artist's Statement:

In this project, I tackle the idea of Monkey's progression as a character throughout *Monkey King: Journey to the West*. The way in which I accomplished this was through music, more specifically, a piano composition. In this composition, I explore a few major points in Monkey's character through the means of music dynamics, tone, and rhythm. Sun Wukong, according to Subodhi, means, "Sun who has awoken to nothingness". Monkey is born alone with no equal, and ignorant to the world that surrounds him.

In my composition, I begin soft and peaceful to represent this ignorance that Monkey has. It begins with a heartbeat, and then becomes more complex while keeping that same soft tone. Monkey however does not stay this way for long, and soon takes advantage of his power just after learning to properly make use of it.

Monkey becomes more powerful, and immediately develops into a carefree and selfish person with a large ego. In my piece this is reflected by the transition into a second section that adopts swing rhythm, along with being louder and faster. With this section, I wished to show Monkey's carelessness and ego, with a more carefree-sounding swing rhythm. This section also builds over time, just as Monkey's actions do. Monkey begins by stealing weapons and armor, then eating immortal peaches, and lastly, revolting against heaven itself. These are reflected in my piece in the three times where this section becomes louder and more complex just as Monkey's actions become more severe. However, Monkey is punished by the Buddha. 500 years later he agrees to learn Buddhism and leaves to go on a journey to the west, which leads to him develop into a better person.

While on his journey to the west, Monkey and his relationship with those around him lead to him growing and thinking more about his actions, and others around him. In a scene where Tripitaka is nervous about getting married off, Monkey "sooth[s] him" (p. 268), talks about his thought process, and explains that Tripitaka is "a compassionate person and wouldn't be able to bear the guilt of slaughtering so many people." (p. 268). This interaction between him and Tripitaka shows major development for Monkey as he had not previously shown this amount of deep care for another person. While he still lives carelessly in some ways, I wanted to show the aspects in which Monkey has grown within my piece because I believe it is very important to the overall story of *Monkey King: Journey to the West* and to Monkey's overall character.

Within my composition, I show Monkey's growth by first slowly building up to a more "hopeful" and major sounding section. This build up is meant to represent the various moments that present Monkey with development, such as his conversation with the Dragon

King after he runs away from Tripitaka in chapter fourteen. The section that follows the buildup signifies Monkey's positive development. With this section, I did not want to use a positive "happy-go-lucky" tone, rather I chose to use a more "hopeful" and cinematic tone in order to demonstrate that Monkey has developed positively but is not 100% done yet. He is going in the right direction, and if he continues on this path, he will continue to grow.

Lastly, the title of my piece, "Rock, Ruin, Reparation" represents the stages of Monkey's character touched on within this piece. "Rock" signifying Monkey's beginning and his birth from the stone egg, "Ruin" representing Monkey's recklessness and his resulting punishment by Buddha, and lastly "Reparation" showing his positive development. This title ties together all of the key points that are touched on within this piece, and it also gives context as to the overall message of the piece.

Through my composition, I want to show people that all positive development, no matter how big or small, is still very important and should be something to be proud of. Within this piece, the title along with the piece's various musical developments all come together in order to tell the story of Monkey and his growth he experiences as a person throughout the book.

Medea Pours Poison



Asya Sandker is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Animation and Visual Effects. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Claire Mason's SCLA 102 class in Spring 2024. She wanted to convey Medea's warring emotions towards Jason's betrayal and tragic situation.

2

Fiction

“If a story is in you, it has to
come out.”

—William Faulkner

Calypso's Loneliness

by
Ella Pegg



Ella Pegg is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Sustainable Food and Farming Systems. She wrote this essay/short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Huiying Chen's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2024. She wrote this essay after reading *The Odyssey* and being prompted to rewrite or reinterpret a portion of the text from a specific character's perspective. She was inspired by the goddess Calypso, who in the original text is portrayed as a possessive woman, and wanted to imagine how she might have felt during Odysseus' time on her island.

When he first washed up on my shore I was utterly mystified by him. The great Odysseus was known throughout the Greeks as the triumphant war hero; his grand tricks and mischievous acts had been heard even through *my* forests. On my shore, he looked broken, beaten, and devoid of life; unlike all the wondrous stories I'd heard, but I still admired his presence. My slaves carried him out of the sand and into my cavern, where I bathed and dressed him in my finest robes and waited for him to awake. When he finally had he was disoriented, asking about his crew and his ship; there were no remnants of the sort on my shores, but he didn't believe me. He tried to get up quickly and would have fallen over if I hadn't caught him. He grabbed his side and cried in pain. I attempted to feed him some ambrosia, but he knocked the liquid away and scowled at me. I could read the pain and distrust in his eyes, he had been tricked before, he had been burned before; I worried about what misfortunes he had encountered that made him lose his ship and crew.

"Why do you look at me with hate, great Odysseus, I'm here to heal you." I pleaded with him, but I made no progress.

"I will not fall for any tricks of the Gods, I know you do not wish me kindness." Even though he didn't say it, I knew he was speaking from experience.

"Do you even know who I am, how can you presume I am a Goddess with ill intent?" He stared daggers into my eyes, searching for any clues toward my intentions. I shifted in my position on the ground by his bedside. His eyes were gorgeous, one of piercing ocean blue and the other a deep, mysterious brown. I looked away from his contact, trying to hide my flushed face. *Now, looking back, I know he let his guard down as I was obviously of no threat to him; I was just another woman who fell for his unassuming charm. Just another woman.*

"What were you going to give me?" His questioning face now held a slight smirk that only I could see in the soft light of my cavern with his face merely inches from mine. I melted under my insurmountable loneliness and fell for his charms.

"Ambrosia, it will help heal your wounds." I couldn't believe I was able to get the sentence out, I almost dropped the cup I was trying to give him again. He drank the liquid without his eyes leaving mine and laid back down on the bed.

"Do you mind me asking now, goddess, what is your name?"

"Calypso," Saying my name aloud to him felt like I was saying it for the first time. And his much larger smirk that followed confirmed my greatest desires. I knew then that I want-

ed to save him from the wrath of others, from the torment of time and life; he would be mine forever.

By the first year, he was settled in, he had me however he wanted me, and that was all I desired of him. He never asked to leave; I presumed he was grateful for me saving him from the destruction of the sea and the wrath of the Gods. And after some time and many late-night talks, I presumed he loved me. Never as much as I did him, but I really thought he did. I could see in his eyes some nights the words that he kept inside, questions about his home, his wife, or his son, but he never asked, so I never pried. He would ask if he wanted to know. By the second year I could feel his distance. Instead of walking through my forests with me he would wander toward my shores, wanting to be alone more often. At night he still came back to me, but we talked less and less. By the third year, he stopped eating altogether. I was so concerned for his mind and what his actions meant that one night when he once again refused his dinner I finally spoke up.

“Why must you refuse my wondrous food?” By then I was utterly miserable once again as I was terrified by what my love was doing to him.

“Why can’t I die?” He quickly rebutted as if he had this question on his mind for many moons now. I knew I hadn’t told him what I had given him, but I was confused as to how he knew. What had he done to himself to reach such a conclusion? Had he stopped eating that long ago? Had he hurt himself in ways that I couldn’t see on the surface? I worried about whether I should tell him what I had given him. By the sheen on his eyes, I knew that he was not the kind Odysseus that I knew and loved.

“For your troubles, your kindness toward me, and your staying on my island, I gave you immortality.” I could see his head spinning. I wished I could read his thoughts and ease his troubles, but I had no clue what to say. I thought he would see this as a gift. His travels after the Trojan War had killed all his crew. He was constantly reminded of death all around him. At least now he didn’t have to worry his own. He could stay on my island with me forever.

“What if I wasn’t on the island?” His question tore the heart out of my chest, *he wanted to leave?* I was catastrophically devastated, I almost fell to the ground. I only held myself up as I wanted still to appear strong, even though I knew he would never see me as such.

“If you left the island... you would lose your immortality.” I hoped that would convince him enough to stay with me. With me he wouldn’t have to fear death, he wouldn’t have to fear the Gods. *But I was mistaken.*

Every day since he asked to leave, I have pleaded with him time and time again to reconsider. He doesn't see the beautiful life I can give him. All he sees is glory and thoughts of *his* home in Ithaca. I thought I was his home. I thought he loved me and desired to be with me. But he got tired of me and now wished to leave. But one day he'll see. He'll see that I have everything that he needs, and he will be my love again.

Fiction

The Story of Sheba

by
Michael Wong



Michael Wong is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Cybersecurity. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Chen's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2024. His inspiration behind this work was the thought that the stories of many-sided characters are often not told, and they should be shown to the world.

Some say the beauty of life is found in its adventure, some say it's found in its complexity, the decisions we make each day, how one small choice can drastically change the path we all follow. Others believe the only way to truly live is to seize the day, to do something every day to achieve meaning. For me, life is found in its simplicity, in the fact that every day I do the same thing, that I can continue to the next day without requiring much thought at all. Life is a slow ride that I enjoy while taking in all the scenery, from the moment I awake til the moment I sleep, with our caretaker always watching over us, letting us graze and eat to our hearts' content. Now I am no simple being, I simply enjoy a life of low complexity. I am aware of what is going on around me, I am aware of how everyone sees my great thick wool coat of a dirty white, how others so desperately desire to consume my succulent flesh or sacrifice it to the gods. Yet this means little to me as I enjoy my life of monotony.

Everyday is the same, from our great owner moving the boulder out of the way so that we may spend the day in the golden sun grazing, to the moment we come back and simply rest until we can repeat this the next day. This is how I define an ideal life. Each day, walking step by step, hoof after hoof, as I lower my neck to the ground and take a bite of grass, grinding it between my teeth until it becomes something that resembles mud after a rainy day, and allowing it to digest in my stomach. This simplicity is part of what makes life so desirable, being able to consume all that I desire while not having to work. This is repeated every day, every moment, living my perfect life, until the day he arrived, the day my life was ruined.

The day started out the same, our great Polyphemus opened the door, allowing us to graze as we may. It was a simple, full life, lacking any hindrances; it was a life of ease. Yet suddenly, these men on a boat spotted us and killed a multitude of my friends. Gone. I would never see them again. I watched as the javelins went in, slowly, as their thick white coats slowly changed to a shade of blood red, as they slowly tilted over and their souls left their bodies. With us all appearing to be the same, it could be said that I was lucky to survive, many others in this situation would be quick to thank the gods that they are still alive. Yet I remain unfazed. For this is simply the way life functions. We are all meant to meet death one day, that day just so happened to be the day for my fellow grazers. Soon, one of their men had the audacity to go to our great shepherd and demand gifts for themselves out of fear of the gods. The nerve of this man to make demands of the one who treats us so well, who has slain my brethren simply for food. To even think of asking for a gift from our master angered me to a degree that cannot be expressed in words. Yet even with all this rage, in my form, there was nothing I could do other than wait for this man and his peers to be slain by our great protector, Polyphemus. This was a simple matter of waiting, waiting for this

event to pass. Then life would continue as normal, in simple bliss, living my life to its fullest, living my best life possible.

Unfortunately, this simple occurrence would never come to fruition. The man who we now know to be Odysseus, who made such absurd demands of our shepherd, had managed to get away, had managed to escape with nothing but to be cursed in his travels home. Now, being the simple being that I am, I couldn't care less about what happened to others, whether they lived or died, whether they killed my fellow grazers or not. All I cared about was myself and being able to live my beautiful, simplistic life. It was the fact that this one man took that life away from me, that my routine was destroyed, that everything was now different, that I despise this man with something from very deep within me. The problem wasn't that my wool coat was no longer perfectly on my body, nor the fact that they permanently deformed me by hanging from my underbelly, nor the stress they put on my small legs as I had no choice but to carry them out of the cave. The problem was that the great caretaker was now blind. It was in this moment that I suddenly found that I could feel emotions, that I am capable of such a thing as rage and hatred. As that wooden stake was pressed into his eye, as he lost his sight, as he screamed in agony and pain, I saw my life being taken away. This pain I heard, that echoed through the cave, was almost silent as I heard my feet trotting on the grass, as I saw the life I had so dearly enjoyed shatter in front of my own eyes. As I witnessed this, I knew that life would no longer be as great as it once was. Never before had I so desperately desired to be wrong.

Everything had now changed. It wasn't the fact that we could no longer graze as we once did, but the fact that we could no longer rest peacefully at the end of the day. All night long, he would complain, he would curse, pray to his father that Odysseus would have a shameful return home. All his mumbling, stumbling, and knocking everything over, all his complaints as he must put everything back in its place, all of it created an environment where I could no longer sleep peacefully. Everything was always loud, items were always falling, and our master kept running into the walls. Now this life of mine is no longer the beauty it once was but a newly formed hellscape. For if one does not rest well, they will not live well. Yet there is still nothing I could do, in my form, as a sheep. All I could do was pray with my master that Odysseus truly does become cursed, that one day he receives punishment for ruining my life, the life of Sheba.

The Cyclops

by
Dillon Glass



Dillon Glass is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Professional Flight. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Huiying Chen's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. This creative writing piece aims at highlighting the stark differences between *The Odyssey* and the other supplementary texts studied during the semester regarding the true nature of King Odysseus.

Preface

I am a nobody, really. I spend my days tending to farm animals and disposing of their filth and defecation. My life has no glory, and I am not one to seek it out. I am only a young peasant worker in the arduous country of Ithaca. But take heed of my word, for it bares truths buried from long ago. I first must state that I never truly knew my father. He sailed to Troy with our King Odysseus when I was months old. To put it bluntly, he never returned. I do not know what happened to him, and it is most probable that I will never know.

Sadly, I know more of Odysseus than I do my father. The praises of Odysseus are sung often and with true passion throughout my country. Bitterly, I have always refrained from joining in this foolish devotion as I have always blamed him for the absence and presumably the death of my father. However, recently my aversion to Odysseus gained substantial evidence behind it. You see, I know the true Odysseus behind his altered tales and charismatic storytelling. I came to this realization after recently recovering my father's journal that washed ashore, covered in brine and barnacles. At first, I did not know the chronicle belonged to my father. However, after cleaning and recovering the contents, I began reading and learned of both my father's and Odysseus' travels. Further studying the diary, I discovered the brazen contrasts in character and actions between the Odysseus described by my father and the man that all of Ithaca believes him to be.

Do not take my word for it, though. The following is an excerpt from my father's journal that displays the poor leader that Odysseus truly was.

The Cyclops

My last entry was many dawns ago while we were still at sea. Since then, our company has dwindled in numbers as it imminently seems to do on this wayward journey. I write in this entry of the perils the crew experienced in the previous few days from where I last left you.

About half a day from my last entry, we disembarked from our journey after coming upon a seemingly uninhabited island. It was our hope to gather provisions as our supplies were dwindling from the days we had spent on the sea. Truthfully, I was happy to see land and plant my feet on the firm earth.

The company ventured further inland with Odysseus in the rear of the pack shouting commands as is usual for his cowardly and drunk demeanor. Eventually, we stumbled upon

a peculiar cave entrance that was partially obscured by a massive boulder. The lead men informed Odysseus of the observation. His curiosity got the better of him and one by one we each forced ourselves through the painstakingly slim gap the boulder left exposed. Immediately as I entered the cave, the smell of food overpowered my senses and I could hear the rumbling of all our men's stomachs. From the dim light given off by a dying fire, I could see large shelves full with stockpiles of cheese, milk, bread, and various other preserved goods. The crew was delighted.

Just before the last two men, Jarus and Etheas, made their way through the crevice, we heard a deep roar. The bellow carried such great power it shook the food off the shelves and stirred the fire, reigniting the embers and illuminating the cave. We could now see whose cave we had entered. Standing up he towered no less than fifteen feet tall and was the width of four of our girthiest men. One large eye loomed over us. I had always heard of these creatures, but never in my wildest days did I think I would encounter one. Staring directly into the cyclops' large eye, I froze. In my mind, I already deemed us all dead. In fact, a few of us were as the cyclops had already seized two of our men, one in either hand, and taken a bite from each as if they were pieces of bread. Meanwhile, a few of the crew members had snuck out of the cave and joined Jarus and Etheas in their freedom. Luckily, we had awoken the cyclops from his slumber and he was full from the two men he had mangled. With blood dripping down from his teeth, he tied and caged the rest of our group and returned to his nap.

Unable to sleep in the time preceding what I believed to be the doom of us all, the wait was unbearable. We remained in silence, for no man wanted to risk waking the cyclops and becoming his next meal. We all looked to Odysseus, as he was our leader and our king. However, no hope was provided as he lay face down in a pile of straw unconscious after he fainted at the sight of the cyclops. For several hours this setting persisted, and with it my anxiety and doubt.

That was until I saw Jarus and Etheas with the other men who managed to escape make their way back into the cave. Quietly they liberated us from our restraints.

All gathered now, the majority of the men wished to flee to the boat and sail away with their lives as a parting gift from this fateful encounter. I proposed that the company split up to achieve two objectives. One group would carry the provisions from the cave to the boat and ready it for a quick departure. The other group would take revenge on the cyclops. Odysseus, already half way through the crevice, stated he would lead the former group. With no leader to advance the more daunting task at hand, I selected eight other men and

took the lead of the latter group. With our plan devised, we proceeded. Improvising, the eight other men and I selected a particularly large and dense wooden log, sharpened one end, and set it to bake in the fire. Once the glowing red tip of the pole satisfied us, we hoisted it with four men staggered on either side and myself behind the blunt end. Erected in what closely resembled a battering ram formation, we bolted forward with all our might, puncturing the cyclops in his eye. Dodging his flailing arms, our company of nine promptly squeezed ourselves out of the cave and rushed to the ship as the blinded beast stumbled after us. Elated with our success, we boarded with the rest of the company cheering and launching curses and obscenities at our foe. But our excitement was short-lived as Odysseus succumbed to his massive ego informing the cyclops that it was he, Odysseus, King of Ithaca, who had bested him. I do not know which action of Odysseus angered the crew more, accrediting himself for the efforts of Jarus, Etheas, and myself, or the stupidity of enlightening this beast to his name. But I do know that we narrowly escaped this encounter and that I will surely gloat of this victory to my son if Odysseus does not get me killed by the time this dreadful campaign concludes.

Fiction

Eurylochus's Betrayal

by
Prisha Boreddy



Prisha Boreddy is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Engineering. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Huiying Chen's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. In *The Odyssey*, the character Eurylochus can be seen as a person who disobeyed Odysseus's orders, leading to the demise of the remaining members of the ship. While in the original story Eurylochus was portrayed as in the wrong, this piece tries to present a different perspective, one that explains a potential line of reasoning behind Eurylochus's decision to disobey Odysseus.

Eurylochus felt weak. Hunger gnawed painfully at his stomach as it had for what felt like an eternity. It had been a long time since the crew had run out of supplies and were forced to resort to hunting and fishing for whatever small animals they could catch. Although the men were noble soldiers, ensuring that the food they gathered could feed 46 grown men wasn't easy, especially due to the strong winds rolling over the island, making it nearly impossible to walk around, let alone hunt or fish efficiently.

As a result, the men went hungry. The hunger drove the crew mad and more often than not, arguments would break out amongst them. They'd fight over simple things like looking at each other funny or stepping on someone's toe by mistake. But sometimes the accusations would escalate, and Odysseus would be forced to intervene.

Although Odysseus did his best to calm the crew and boost their morale, they grew increasingly impatient. Eventually, even Odysseus's attempts to break up fights were failing and Eurylochus had to step up as the second in command.

All of this would be resolved if we could eat the cattle, Eurylochus couldn't help but think bitterly as he gazed at the oblivious cows roaming the island peacefully. While watching them, he couldn't help but salivate as he imagined how delicious and filling consuming them would be.

But I shouldn't.

Odysseus had commanded the crew that whatever they did, they weren't allowed to touch the cattle. This was because Odysseus had been warned by Circe, the goddess of sorcery, that the cattle belonged to the sun god Hyperion, son of Zeus. If they killed the cattle and consumed it, they would be cursed by Zeus and never return home, destined to be shipwrecked and drowned.

But just one cow wouldn't hurt...

Before he could do anything, he found himself making eye contact with Odysseus. The man was making his way towards Eurylochus, a solemn look on his face. Upon watching his approach, Eurylochus could see how tired and hungry even Odysseus appeared and couldn't help but feel guilty for the thoughts he'd been having.

"Eurylochus," Odysseus started, coming to a stop in front of Eurylochus and giving him a small smile in greeting. "I am heading out to pray to the gods for their wisdom. I entrust the crew's safety to you."

Without waiting for a reply, Odysseus sped off, leaving Eurylochus alone with his thoughts once more.

Sighing in frustration, Eurylochus paced anxiously around the makeshift shelter they had created for themselves. All around him he could see the men weakly performing their duties, and he felt powerless. *If only...*

As had become routine, the lowing of cattle could be heard all throughout the campground. Adding to the noise was the grumbling of stomachs and the irritation of the crew. As Eurylochus passed a few men, he could hear them talking about Odysseus.

“Why must we listen to him...” one of them grumbled in annoyance. His voice quieted as Eurylochus got closer. Despite the drop in volume, Eurylochus could hear the men just fine.

“He didn’t tell us about Charybdis and look what happened. Six of us died. Dead.”

“Even now he keeps sneaking off somewhere claiming to be praying, but only the gods know what he’s really doing.”

By this point, Eurylochus had gone far enough that he was unable to hear the men’s conversation. Despite that, their complaints echoed loudly in his thoughts and he couldn’t help but agree with them. After all, most of the problems they’d run into could have been avoided if they hadn’t obeyed Odysseus.

After all, it was upon Odysseus’ insistence that they had stayed in the Cyclops’ cave. Back then, Eurylochus and the crew that had gone with Odysseus into the cave begged Odysseus just to take the cattle and run. However, Odysseus refused to leave without greeting their ‘host’ and forced them to stay in the cave and act as ‘proper’ Greek guests. That mistake had cost the lives of many men and had traumatized all those who were fortunate enough to escape.

Even after the men had finally escaped, Odysseus gloated his victory in the face of the cyclops as they left the cyclops’s island. Odysseus had revealed his name to the monster and mocked it. Even worse, the monster happened to be the son of Poseidon, god of the sea, and as any loving father would do for his son, Poseidon cursed the men for the entirety of their sea voyage. Almost all of the misfortunes they faced after could have been avoided if Odysseus hadn’t angered Poseidon.

Although, Odysseus has also successfully gotten us out of all the troubles we've gotten into... Eurylochus guiltily reflected, recalling the mishap they'd faced on Circe's island, which had been mostly Eurylochus's fault. If it hadn't been for Odysseus, the men would still be stuck as pigs on the island, and Eurylochus would be branded the biggest coward in all of Greek history with nothing to show for it. Odysseus had also dragged the men away from the lotus plants when the irresistible taste of the plants had tempted the men to stay.

Thinking of the lotuses reminded Eurylochus of his hunger, and he let out another frustrated sigh before looking around the miserable campsite once more. It broke his heart to see how the thousands of men they'd started out with had been reduced to less than a hundred. It pained him to see the once noble Ithacan soldiers stumble around weak with hunger instead of enjoying a glorious feast back home.

I can't let this continue, he found himself thinking, making up his mind as another strong wind threatened to knock him over. Who knows when we'll be able to leave. What does it matter if we die at sea when we are on the verge of death here on this island anyway. The wind doesn't look like it's going to clear up anytime soon, so why should we starve ourselves while waiting when there's a whole herd of cattle that could last us weeks?

With his mind made up, he confidently walked to the center of the campsite, preparing an announcement that would doom him and the men forever.

3

Essay

“Research is seeing what everybody else has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought.”

–Albert Szent-Györgyi

And the Oscar Goes To ... Everything Everywhere All at Once

**by
Soham Pawaskar**



Soham Pawaskar is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor William White's SCLA 102 class in Spring 2024. The inspiration behind his essay was to analyze various pieces of literature the class read throughout the semester and compare them to the movie "Everything Everywhere All at Once," establishing a connection between the characters. He looks into the common theme conveyed by each of the works, which demonstrates how human connection influences our lives.

What could a seven-time Oscar winning movie have to do with Cornerstone authors like Margaret Atwood and Arthur Miller? As it turns out, quite a lot. Margaret Atwood's novel, *Oryx and Crake*, explores a dystopian world where humans have been wiped out. Tara Westover's memoir, *Educated*, follows her struggles as she leaves behind an isolated life and pursues education. Arthur Miller's play, *All My Sons*, follows the unraveling of tensions within a family riddled with guilt and loss. For this assignment, I chose to watch *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, in which a middle-aged mother develops the ability to travel across the multiverse and must fight a similar rival. Although these works are all different forms of literature and have entirely different plots, there are many similarities between the movie and the three other works. Specifically, they all explore the concept of human connection and relationships.

Oryx and Crake

Atwood's novel, *Oryx and Crake*, depicts the life of Snowman as he lives in a now-desolate world, his only purpose being to take care of the 'Crakers'. The Crakers themselves are genetically modified humans—developed by Snowman's friend Crake—who serve as supposedly perfect replacements for the human population. Snowman believes that they are the last humans left on Earth besides himself. Hence his recollection is told from his perspective as the last real person. There is an evident sense of longing as Snowman contrasts his past life, which was full of people, with his current, meaningless life. Throughout the novel he reminisces about his relationship with his parents, how he became best friends with Crake, his several girlfriends throughout college, and how he fell in love with Oryx. In fact, his relationship with the Crakers also demonstrates this. Snowman often tells them stories—about the chaos of the old world, and how the Children of Crake and Children of Oryx were created—similar to how a parent would to their child. Nevertheless, the Crakers are not complete humans; they do not have the same emotions and understanding as a “true” person. Because of this, Snowman longs for human connection.

This state of loneliness is like the character of Jobu Tupaki in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. As Jobu explains her backstory in the Alphaverse to Evelyn, she states that “nothing matters” because, as she has seen from verse jumping herself, the slightest thing can cause such a large difference in one's life. She believes that this proves that we have no control over our own lives. For her, life has no meaning. Both Jobu and Snowman face a major event after which they lose faith and purpose. For Snowman, it is the destruction of the old world. For Jobu, it is her mastery of verse jumping. Their new lives have one significant thing missing: human connection. This is best seen later in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. In one scene, Evelyn and Jobu are both rocks in a barren-Earth multiverse. Jobu

defeatedly cries that she has “been trapped like this for so long” and “was hoping [Evelyn] would see something [she] didn’t... that [Evelyn] would convince [her] there was another way.”

It is at this point that the audience understands Jobu’s real motives and desires. She mentions how she wanted to find Evelyn not to kill her, but to find someone who could see all the multiverses in the same way she does. By doing so, she wanted someone who could convince her that there is more to life, that it does matter. Jobu Tupaki and Snowman believe that they have lived in isolation, that no one else understands the world quite like they do. Though on different levels, they spend their lives searching for someone who does. While Snowman keeps in mind a slight chance of others like himself existing, Jobu actively seeks them out. Nevertheless, both maintain hope that others like them exist so that they could have people to connect with. They serve as examples of how such connection adds meaning to one’s life.

However, the closure each character receives is different. At the end of *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman returns to the beach where the Crakers live and discovers boot prints, leading him to a group of three people. As he watches them from a distance, Snowman contemplates how he lived the past years in such a lonely manner. Realizing that he is in fact not the only human left provides him with a sense of hope as he prepares to reveal himself to them. He acknowledges that they may be hostile yet is willing to take the risk simply to reach some sort of closure. However, the novel ends before Snowman reveals himself, and the reader is left to wonder what interaction takes place. On the other hand, at the end of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Evelyn and her daughter Joy, one of Jobu’s alternate realities, finally reconcile as Joy re-establishes her love for her family. While we do not know what exactly happens to Snowman, one thing is clear: both Snowman and Jobu Tupaki regain hope.

Educated

Westover’s *Educated* depicts her life growing up in a traditional Mormon family in rural Idaho. Throughout the memoir, she emphasizes her father Gene Westover’s complete lack of trust in the government. This is why Tara and her siblings were never sent to public school—a government institution—and were homeschooled instead. Thus, when Tara decides to pursue an education at Brigham Young University, she is forced to confront the will of her father. Tara explains how her father expected her to help him with the scrapping business and eventually become a midwife just like her mother. He wants her to take on the traditional roles of a woman rather than obtain an education.

A similar dynamic between father and daughter can be seen in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* between Evelyn and Gong Gong. Throughout the movie, Evelyn has multiple flashbacks to the moment when Waymond begged her to move to the United States with him. Gong Gong, however, opposed this and demanded that she stay. It was while Waymond was waiting in a car outside her house, with Gong Gong looking on, that she decided to get in the car and leave her family behind. Hence, Evelyn's backstory is like Tara's as they both faced denial from Gong Gong and Gene, respectively. What they desired—whether it was an education or a new home—went directly against the traditional expectations of their fathers.

This dynamic is furthered in the fathers' responses to their daughters' decision. In *Educated*, when Tara finally announces to her family of her intentions to apply to and attend BYU, Gene begins threatening her by telling her just to pack her bags and never return. Even later in her life, as Tara wishes to pursue education abroad at Cambridge, he again gives an ultimatum: she can either come back to Idaho or never return. Despite this, Tara continues to focus on her academic career. In *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Gong Gong similarly threatens to disown Evelyn after she gets in the car to leave with Waymond. Later in the movie, he even explicitly tells her “not [to] call me father! You are not my daughter.” In such a way, Gene and Gong Gong are both unwilling to accept change. Instead, they display stubbornness in prioritizing their own desires over those of their daughters. As a result, the bond between father and daughter is weakened. Both Tara and Evelyn were forced to make a life-changing decision. They could either stay behind with their families and live the life they had always known, or they could cut ties and pursue a new life. In both cases, they chose the latter, destroying part of their old life.

All My Sons

In Miller's *All My Sons*, Kate Keller maintains an unwavering belief that her son, Larry, is still alive despite having been missing for over three years. Everyone else, including her husband, Joe, and her other son, Chris, have accepted that Larry died during the war, as that is the only reasonable explanation for why he has not returned home in so long. Kate's unwavering conviction is evident in her unconventional attempts to prove Larry's continued existence. For example, she asks Frank, one of their neighbors, to create Larry's horoscope. When Frank confirms that November 25th, the date Larry supposedly died, was his fortunate day, Kate argues that there is no way that he could be dead. When Joe and Chris try to reason with her directly, she continues holding faith: “I want you to act like he's coming back.” She exclaims that “if he's not coming back, then I'll kill myself! Laugh. Laugh at

me.” Whereas the rest of the family had long given up on the possibility of Larry’s return, Kate remains hopeful because Larry was her son and she was his mother.

Similar to Kate’s unconditional belief in her son, in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* Evelyn has an unconditional belief in her daughter, Joy. Near the end of the movie, Evelyn confronts Joy right as she is about to get in her car and leave. In an ironic manner, she agrees with Joy in that “it doesn’t make sense” why, out of wherever she could be in life right now, she chose to be with Joy. Evelyn expresses her love, telling Joy that “No matter what... I will always, always want to be here with you.” For Evelyn, there does not need to be a logical reason for why she continues to be alongside her daughter; it does not have to make sense. She continuously supports her because she is her mother, and that is the only reason she needs. Evelyn and Kate are similar characters. Just as Evelyn reaffirms her faith in her daughter as a person, Kate maintains her faith in her son and his return even though it may not be logical and despite what others say. The movie and the play thus explore a sort of unconditional love between a mother and her children: a mother’s love.

Government Automation and the Future of Society

by
Brady Eggleston



Brady Eggleston is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Business Analytics and Information Management. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor James Mollison's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2023. Our class centered on the Capitalist economic structure, so I chose to explore an alternative perspective on wealth. While Capitalism often reduces wealth to monetary terms, its true nature is far more complex. I hope my writing effectively conveys this broader understanding.

Imagine walking down a busy city street. To your left, you see shops and apartments lined up and down the road. To your right, there are banks, a hospital, and a park, among many other things. Everything you see on this busy street is, in one way or another, under the authority of the United States government. Now, consider how that city street has changed over the years. The buildings may have been rebuilt, the park may have been re-designed, and, if you go back in time far enough, the banks would not even be there. This is because society is constantly changing. Since society is ever-changing, the government must be capable of changing with it. For that to happen, the government must be run by beings capable of understanding the distinction between society and the emotions of the people within it. I would like to examine the summary of a speaker's arguments in favor of automation of the government, pose an objection to those arguments, consider a reply on behalf of the speaker to the aforementioned objection, and provide an explanation of why the speaker's hypothetical reply is inadequate. Throughout the completion of these steps, it will become clear that artificial intelligence machines are incapable of governing human beings.

The speaker argued that the government in the United States should be run by artificial intelligence machines. His first point was that, on the individual level, humans are stupid. He elaborated on this statement by saying that everyone, including smart college students and doctors, has done stupid things in their lifetime. He further argued that the human mind was not created for efficiency but has barely managed to survive all these years. He said government systems are very inefficient because of the inefficient beings running them. The speaker's second point was that machines are very efficient. He highlighted that the computation skills of machines are far better than those of humans. He pointed out that machines cannot be biased by emotion, and thus are more reliable decision-makers. He argued that technology and its development is the main reason humans became the dominant species on Earth, and it is thus foolish not to use such inventions to improve the government. Along those lines, he said that there is no reason the government should not be in the path of creative destruction caused by technology. The third portion of his speech was dedicated to responding to a possible objection to his proposal, which was that machines will take over the world. In response to this hypothetical objection, the speaker proclaimed that current machines do not think for themselves, but rather take a set of options and determine the best answer. He also argued that, rather than being a violation of individual freedom, machines are the best way to protect freedom since they are objective judges. Finally, he clarified that his proposal is not a call for a "Machine Messiah," but rather a call to replace the current illogical structure of government—subjective humans—with humans' best creation—artificial intelligence machines.

While it is true that machines are objective in theory, I find it imperative to understand the topic further before allowing them to run a nation. It is important to remember that machines are programmed by subjective humans. When the speaker argues that machines will simply provide the best course of action in a given scenario, he is forgetting that what the machine considers the best course of action depends entirely on the code it was programmed with, which was written by a human that the speaker has determined to be “stupid.” Thus, by allowing machines to run the government, you are essentially letting whoever programs these machines to run the government. These machines will never deviate from their code, and they will never disagree, meaning whoever creates them will determine how they act. An example of the weakness of this proposal is the Legislative Branch of the United States Government. Currently, there are 535 people who determine which laws get passed in this country, and the process to pass those laws is incredibly tedious. If these people and this process were wiped out by machines, the power to make laws would be placed in the hands of the small group of people who program the machines. This places the power of the entire government in far fewer hands than it is currently in and presents the possibility for tyranny.

In response to this objection, I imagine the speaker would touch back on the point about how machines are not weighed down by emotional bias. So, while it might be true that a stupid human made the “objective decision-making protocol” that the machine operates on, the main difference between that machine and a human is that emotion will not influence the machine in the face of certain circumstances. Integrity is a rare trait in humans; it is automatic in a machine. While a human might divert from their objective reasoning due to emotional appeals, a machine will not. For example, think of an artificial intelligence judge. If they were judging a case, they would judge it on its objective facts, whereas a human judge might let their emotions sway how they feel about the case. Their personal views might shift how they view the facts and participants of the case. Thus, it is not a big weakness that a small group of people decide the machine’s objective reasoning since the machine’s objective reasoning is not its biggest strength. Its biggest strength is its ability to stick to that objective reasoning and make the right choice no matter the circumstances.

While it is true that a machine will not divert from its objective reasoning no matter the circumstances, I am inclined to argue that that is the greatest weakness of the machine—rather than its greatest strength—when it comes to governing human beings. The government’s main responsibility is to govern human society. To properly govern humans, you must be capable of understanding the complexity of their nature. It does not stand to reason that a purely objective being would be able to properly govern such subjective creatures. Take, for example, the relationship between Representatives/Senators and their con-

stituents. The entire notion of having these Congressional members is that they represent the people in the territory they govern. If, instead of a human, an artificial intelligence machine tried to do that job, it would be a disaster. This is because that machine cannot understand the intricacies of the people and the society it is supposed to represent; all it knows is the objective standards of reasoning it was programmed to abide by. These standards can only accomplish so much when it comes to the governance of individuals. It is imperative that a government be capable of understanding the nuances of the human mind and existence to be a proper authority. Additionally, there are situations when objective reasoning is not a factor, and a subjective choice must be made. For example, when international relations are tense, how would one “objectively” decide whether to declare war? That is a subjective decision that needs to be made by people who understand how humans work and the emotions of war and violence. This is only one example of a government decision where the right choice cannot be programmed; it must be determined using human traits such as emotion and empathy. As smart and efficient as machines are, government is a job best filled by humans, not by machines.

The debate about artificial intelligence playing a role in government is a unique one, and one that is quite topical considering the rising influence of artificial intelligence in sectors around the United States. Artificial intelligence controlling government responsibilities would be a huge leap considering the amount of influence that the government has within society. The speaker presented many points in favor of machines in government. Their main reasoning was that since humans are subjective, emotional, and stupid, they are more capable of making mistakes that harm the human species. On the other hand, machines are smart, objective, and efficient, making them perfect for a governmental role. A key shortcoming of the speaker’s arguments is that the “objective machines” are programmed by subjective humans who would get to decide how the machines think. This would place societal power in fewer people’s hands without providing the benefits that the speaker highlighted. The speaker would likely respond that a machine is still better than humans since it would stick to its objective nature no matter the circumstances. However, I would argue this is the greatest downfall of a machine: its inability to understand the intricacies of humans and civilization. Civilization has evolved an unfathomable amount since the time when humans lived in caves and hunted for their food, and it will undoubtedly continue to evolve in the coming years. For a government to adapt with a society, it must be controlled by people who live in that society and can grasp the subtleties of how that society interacts. Since machines fall short in this crucial category, they are incapable of running a government.

Which Type of Literary Hero Are You?

by
Michael Baudendistel

Michael Baudendistel is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Statistics. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael Nichols' SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. The inspiration behind this essay was online personality quizzes that ask a participant questions about themselves and group them into a category, often times connecting them to a celebrity or famous fictional character that shares their qualities. I felt that it could be fun for a reader to reflect on themselves and to see what type of hero they are most similar to.

It seems that everyone has an instinctive ability to recognize heroes in literature, film, and pop culture, which is more unbelievable than it may seem. The word *hero* has thousands of connotations, and yet regarding any given character in a book or film, virtually everyone would come to a consensus on whether or not that character is a hero. How does this happen? How is it that both a perfectly moral being with special superpowers and a corrupt, dictatorial military general can both be identified as heroes? And not just that they both *can* be identified as heroes, but that that identification is so universally understood and accepted? This seems like a huge contradiction.

It quickly becomes apparent that one concise and all-encompassing definition of the word 'hero' is impossible to create. Too many characters are heroes in their own ways. My solution to the issue that arises in defining the word 'hero' involves grouping characters into common hero archetypes and defining the qualities of that archetype. Then, it is easier to match the qualities of a given hero with the qualities of that smaller, more specific group. By only considering a handful of qualities that a character exhibits most strongly as opposed to their entire personality with all of its quirks and intricacies, it becomes easier to match a given hero to others.

All heroes share a small handful of qualities. "One characteristic of a hero is that he acts in alignment with his conception of morality" (Bernstein, 2019, p. 17). Second, all heroes "demonstrate superlative ability, whether intellectual, physical, or both." And, third, all heroes "face impediments and/or antagonists blocking their paths" (Bernstein, 2019, p. 17). All heroes share these three aspects of their life—a rigid morality, a superlative ability, and facing obstacles in the way of their goals. Outside of these three qualities, it seems that every other is rather variable.

The vast majority of heroes can be grouped into one of four categories, based on these variable personal qualities: Flawed Heroes, Warrior Heroes, Tragic Heroes, and Contemporary Superheroes. Because there is such a wide variety of characters that can be considered heroes, these archetypes are not going to be perfect. Almost every hero will overlap with multiple categories, whereas a select few may not even fit into one of these four types. This just goes to show how difficult the process of classifying heroes can be. While they do share three or so important characteristics, there is an infinite number of further qualities that almost certainly differ.

The first of the four hero archetypes is the Flawed Hero. The Flawed Hero has a complex personality with an "admirable [quality matched with] a not so admirable, offsetting personality trait" (Bauer, 2006, p. 121). They are human in the sense that they are imper-

fect. The Flawed Hero may give into temptations or be a poor role model at times, even though they still fight for their morality and face obstacles along the way. A Flawed Hero arises “by mixing the two ingredients, one from the [good] and one from the [evil] side” (Bauer, 2006, p. 122). For example, a Flawed Hero may be strong and brave, but have a tendency to brag about their strength and bravery. This hero has a mix of both admirable qualities and secondary, negative ones. Without these competing values, the Flawed Hero may be seen as an “unconvincing and—equally damning—uninteresting saintly hero” (Bauer, 2006, p. 122). Despite having flaws, the Flawed Hero is, of course, still a hero. If the bad outweighed the good, it may be hard to consider them a hero. “The key is to make [sure that] the admirable aspects [are] the dominant and defining ones, but to remember...that they possess some secondary negative traits as well” (Bauer, 2006, p. 121). For the Flawed Hero, the good still outweighs the bad. However, it may be tougher to see given their complex personalities.

If you, the reader, were considered a Flawed Hero, you may have an exceptionally complex personality. You may frequently act on your instincts, which can at times be a blessing and at times a curse. You may be a bit short-sighted, focusing more on the consequences your actions will have in the present rather than the distant future. Despite their minor shortcomings, sound morality and superlative strength still dominate, making Flawed Heroes the most human and relatable of the archetypes.

The second of the four hero archetypes is the Warrior Hero. The Warrior Hero often-times has overwhelming political and military authority, commanding great armies and leading thousands of people. They are obsessed with honor, glory, sacrifice, and competition, using their physical strength to set them above their peers and their enemies. Going all the way back to ancient mythology, “there was a strong link between the idea of warfare, especially death in battle, and the concept of the hero” (Jones, 2010, p. 22). A leader’s ability to win battles for his people was heroic, not just because of the power and prestige it brought to himself, but also because of the power and prestige it brought to his people. The Warrior Hero is “a hero venerated by his citizens” (Jones, 2010, p. 22). He is little without the glory and honor given to him by his people and the recognition of his works. This is where sacrifice fits in, especially returning again to ancient mythology. Sacrifice to heroes is not “a religious innovation, but [rather] proof of [a hero’s] magnetism and its effect on the power-rivalry between [good and evil]” (Jones, 2010, p. 25). Warrior Heroes can be so larger-than-life that religions form around them, emphasizing the magnitude of their effect on the people they lead and take care of. They command the respect of both their friends and their enemies. Further, “periodic contests are not exclusive to heroes, but are very often a

mark of heroization” (Jones, 2010, p. 26). Warrior Heroes like to compete to show off their skills and prove their worth. This again ties into the craving they have for honor and glory.

If you were considered a Warrior Hero, you may be especially resilient. You may have navigated yourself through a series of battles in your life—either physical or mental—and people admire you for that. Warrior Heroes are especially competitive and drawn to physical activity. Despite these good and admirable traits, Warrior Heroes are prone to having a quick temper at times, and may not always use their strength or competitiveness for good. At times, the power the Warrior Hero has over others may corrupt them or force them to make rash decisions. Nonetheless, despite their quick temper and active mind, Warrior Heroes are the most well-admired of the hero archetypes.

The third of the four hero archetypes is the Tragic Hero. The tragic hero is prone to excessive pride, which leads to their own self-destruction. “Hubris is the most common flaw of the Tragic Hero. Prideful arrogance has been the undoing of many leaders who allow power to go to their heads” (Allison & Goethals, 2013, p. 65). It is common for the Tragic Hero to start off moral and admirable only to make a singular poor decision that leads to their demise. Sometimes, this fall comes when “Tragic Heroes [allow] their fame, success, and power to compromise their good judgment” (Allison & Goethals, 2013, p. 67). The Tragic Hero is easily persuaded to give up their morality and honorable way of life for a more corrupt path. The Tragic Hero is similar to the Flawed Hero in that oftentimes they are both short-sighted and extremely human. Like the Flawed Hero, the Tragic Hero often makes his fatal decision based on the immediate effects, failing to take into account the long-term consequences (Allison & Goethals, 2013, p. 67). Further, “to be human is to be prone to intoxication by success, which is a sure recipe for tragedy” (Allison & Goethals, 2013, p. 67). It seems the Tragic Hero is destined for failure, and they still fall despite their valiant last-chance efforts.

If you were considered a Tragic Hero, you may be a very unlucky person. Sometimes, it seems as though the Tragic Hero cannot escape their fate, even if they try hard to overcome it. To escape the fate that is planned for them, a Tragic Hero may need to stay especially focused on their moral judgment and attitude toward power, not allowing it to corrupt their mind and cause them to spiral out of control. While the end result for the Tragic Hero in literature and film is almost always horrifying, when it comes to real life, this end can be much more tame.

The fourth and final hero archetype is the Contemporary Superhero. Our modern day superheroes are closely tied to modern day society. Contemporary Superheroes share much

of the same values with society as a whole, and emphasize the qualities that society sees as most admirable or beneficial. Contemporary Superheroes appear most often in pop culture, whether it be movies, television shows, or comic books. They represent strength, perfect morality, and traditional American values. Superheroes have a certain “majesty” about them, similar to the Warrior Hero, that commands the respect of their audience (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013, p. 81). The Contemporary Superhero “transcends the bounds of the literal picture and pushes into people’s cultural and sociohistorical views” (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013, p. 82). The Contemporary Superhero is closely linked to the society it was created in—early-to-mid-1900s America. The values of the Contemporary Superhero give insight into the values of its society. “Instead of simply seeing a Superhero in a comic book, movie, or television show, the audience is really seeing what is valued by its collective consciousness,” thus, “Superheroes have melded into the cultural consciousness of America” (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013, p. 83). These heroes are the ultimate heroes, whose “traits and appearance[s] have become the recognizable standard for heroism in America” (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013, p. 84).

If you were considered a Contemporary Superhero, you may keep up well with the times. A Contemporary Superhero shares the sentiment of society as a whole, especially American society. The modern Superhero always has a superpower, something beyond reality that allows them to achieve their goal. While this will never be relatable in a literal sense, it is still possible for a Superhero’s ability to be relatable in a more metaphorical sense, making them more similar to real people than it may seem on the surface. It is safe to say that the Contemporary Superhero is the new wave of heroes, and that they are the most well known today.

Now that these four archetypes of heroes have been defined, it is important to introduce the process by which one could classify a given hero into one of these types. To do this, I have included a sort of personality quiz at the end of the paper. In short, the quiz is designed such that one could take on the mind of a well-known hero—or any person—and, upon completing the quiz, it could be determined which archetype that person best fits. This quiz could be modified in any number of ways. The two that are most immediately evident are changing which archetypes are used and changing the questions and their resulting influence within the quiz. While the process by which I created the quiz was not totally scientific, I feel that it gives a good balance in the classification of heroes and is sufficiently all-encompassing. Of course, it could be more accurate through the inclusion of more than four archetypes and more than twelve questions, but I believe that it is a good foundation for a model seeking to achieve this goal. If nothing else, the quiz serves as a starting point for a bigger, better model.

It can be very difficult to define the word *hero* given the thousands of connotations the word can take on. One way to simplify this process is not by seeking to define the word on its own, but rather by identifying smaller, subcategories of heroes and grouping characters into these buckets. The process involves defining these buckets—in this case, Flawed Heroes, Warrior Heroes, Tragic Heroes, and Contemporary Superheroes—and then using a model (like a quiz) to identify in which bucket a character best fits.

Quiz: Which Type of Literary Hero Are You?

Instructions: To complete the quiz, first answer Yes or No to each of the following twelve Quiz Questions. Then, use the Quiz Key and your answers to the twelve questions to tally the total points earned in each of the four categories: Up, Down, Left, and Right. For example, if you answered Yes to Question 1, you would mark two tallies in the Up category and two tallies in the Left category. If you answered No to Question 1, you would mark two tallies in the Down category. Use the Point Totals section to tally your cumulative score for all twelve questions. Once you have your four scores, subtract the number of Down tallies from the number of Up tallies and the number of Left tallies from the number of Right tallies. Circle greater than or less than zero for each of the two resulting numbers, depending on whether they are positive or negative. Finally, in the Quiz Results section, match your two circled greater than / less than results with one of the pairings to determine WHICH TYPE OF LITERARY HERO YOU ARE.

Quiz Questions

#	Question	Y	N
1	Do you have a wide variety of interests?		
2	Would it be hard to explain to a stranger who you are?		
3	Are you indecisive at times?		
4	Are you impulsive at times?		
5	Do you exercise often?		

- 6 Do you worry about how other people view you?
- 7 Do you often find yourself in tough situations?
- 8 Do you ever feel superior to other people?
- 9 Are you easily persuaded of things?
- 10 Do you spend a lot of time on social media?
- 11 Do you buy into the idea of the American Dream?
- 12 Would you say you share the same ideals as society?

Quiz Key

#	Y	N
1	U2, L2	D2
2	U2, L1	D2
3	U1, L1	D1
4	D2, R1	U2
5	D1, R1	U1, L1
6	D2, R2	U1, R1
7	D1, L1	U1, R1
8	D2, L1	U2
9	D2, L2	U1, R1
10	U1, R1	D1
11	U2, R2	D2, L2
12	U1, R1	D1, L1

Point Totals

U:

D:

L:

R:

U - D = greater than / less than zero

R - L = greater than / less than zero

Quiz Results

greater than / greater than = CONTEMPORARY SUPERHERO

greater than / less than = FLAWED HERO

less than / greater than = WARRIOR HERO

less than / less than = TRAGIC HERO

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The Empathetic Heroine in Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind

by
Helen Brzozowski



Helen Brzozowski is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Materials Engineering. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael Nichols' SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. The theme of the SCLA class was heroes, and I had always been intrigued and inspired by the heroes that I've seen in Studio Ghibli films, many of whom are near and dear to my heart. This paper is my way of conveying that Nausicaä in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is a hero both to civilization and the environment in her capacity for empathy and her ability to see other perspectives.

Heroism is not defined by gender. Hayao Miyazaki, a well-known director of several Studio Ghibli films, creates heroes that are significant and defined by their personalities. Miyazaki creates heroes who are influential and memorable due to their actions and their ability to see multiple perspectives. Miyazaki's heroes also tend to have a way to connect with the natural environment. One of these memorable heroines is Nausicaä, a young girl who lives in a small valley in a post-apocalyptic world that is overrun by giant insects, most notably the giant worms called ohmu, that live in the expanding Sea of Decay. It is up to Nausicaä to take care of her village and protect them. In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Nausicaä's feminine traits of empathy, value of life, and selflessness help her in challenging situations, where her choices regarding action or inaction, influenced by her traits, make her a hero to both civilization and nature.

Nausicaä's feminine compassion makes her a strong hero for both her people and the surrounding environment. In "Miyazakiworld," Napier writes, "particularly refreshing is Nausicaä's combination of the conventional female attributes of compassion and nurturing with a steely and profound determination toward active involvement" (Napier, 2018, p.79). This quote exemplifies the compassion Nausicaä holds for both her community and the insects in the Sea of Decay. This is evident in the beginning of the movie when an enraged ohmu is running after a traveler and Nausicaä puts her life in danger to calm the ohmu (Miyazaki, 1984). By doing so, the ohmu peacefully returns to the Sea of Decay, and the traveler can go on his way. As seen through this example, Nausicaä's duality of both compassion and determination makes her a strong leader.

This compassion can also be seen through Nausicaä's empathy, which is one of her heroic strengths. Empathy is a trait that is strongly associated with females, and in a study done on empathy in female and male medical professionals, medical professionals were given a questionnaire to determine empathy. From this test, the results showed that the female subjects had a higher score on the empathy questionnaire than the male subjects (Rushitha, C., et.al, 2023). This is seen in Ghibli films as well where the female characters use their empathy as a strength compared to their male counterparts, who look at things from just one perspective. The empathy seen in Nausicaä lets her see multiple perspectives and thus enables her to take both her village and the insects into account when making decisions.

Nausicaä's empathy leads to her ability to take into consideration the effect actions have not only on humanity but also on the environment. This ability to see the big picture impacts her heroic decisions. While most people in the movie fear the insects and inflict harm on them out of fear or aggression, Nausicaä can enjoy the environment for what it is even if it is harmful and toxic to her. We can see this towards the beginning of the movie

when Nausicaä is in the Sea of Decay and is wearing a mask to protect her from the toxins, at the same time she is dancing underneath the very thing that could kill her. (Miyazaki, 1984). Nausicaä is in awe and wonder of the toxins and is enthralled by how something so beautiful could be so dangerous. In “Nausicaä and the Fantasy of Hayao Miyazaki,” Osmond emphasizes, “her innocence does not come from childlike naïveté but scientific wonder” (Osmond, 1998, p.65). Given her curiosity and empathy, she can see the beauty of the natural world amidst its toxicity. This strength of Nausicaä’s opens her perspective and empowers her to love both humanity and the environment.

It is through this love for the natural world and her village that she fosters a high moral value in the life of living things. However, it is not until Nausicaä witnesses her father’s death that this is revealed. Nausicaä is enraged because she saw her father killed in front of her. In turn, she attacks others. She is shocked by the cruelty she is capable of, saying, “I’m sacred of myself” (Miyazaki, 1984). It is after scaring herself that she holds herself to a moral standard not to kill another living being again. This has an influence on her character and the way she leads as a hero who does not kill. She can be a nonviolent hero who believes murder and killing is not the answer to solving problems and helping others. Shore supports this explaining, “not only does Nausicaä painfully regret her actions, but she also echoes her own response to her father’s reign: that the killing of all creatures must stop” (Shore, 2014, p.166). This further shows how Nausicaä can learn from her actions and implement them into her morals to see the value in every life and how murder is not the way to solve things to benefit both the environment and humanity.

Without Nausicaä’s ability to value and respect the environment she would never have found out that the natural water underground is what is healing the Sea of Decay (Miyazaki, 1984). With the moral value of life she holds, her empathy, and her curiosity for the natural world, she can broaden her perspective to see how humanity and the environment work together. Shore expands on this perspective explaining, “her consciousness is more mindful of the role that all life forms play in an intricate network” (Shore, 2014, p.161). It is seen here too that Nausicaä’s mindset lets her look at how the natural world and humanity need each other and how the Sea of Decay, the very thing that could kill them, is the same natural environment that deep in the ground is purifying the water they need to survive. Nausicaä can see how humans must learn to care for and coexist with the natural world rather than hate it.

It is through Nausicaä’s appreciation and love for her village and the environment that she puts the prosperity of both before herself as a selfless, self-sacrificing hero. As a princess, Nausicaä must put the common good of her village before herself to protect them.

An example of this is after her father dies and she is left with the decision of whether to fight against the invaders or be taken as a hostage, Nausicaä chose to be a hostage because she knew her village could not stand the attacks. Therefore, she gave up her freedom so that they would not die (Miyazaki, 1984). Nausicaä's role comes with great responsibility and thus puts a big weight on her shoulder, but it is one that she can handle. Shore describes this weight in "The Anima in Animation: Miyazaki Heroines and Post-Patriarchal Consciousness" saying, "it is in shouldering this weight that Nausicaä becomes an impressive heroine who accepts the hard work that is necessary to restore the natural world and rebalance society as a whole" (Shore, 2014, p.153). This highlights how Nausicaä's constant responsibility led her to put the natural world and humanity before herself in full selflessness.

In the end, this example of selflessness via self-sacrifice is seen. Nausicaä sacrifices her life to return the injured baby ohmu to the enraged ohmus that were about to trample her village. It is in these moments that she saved the baby ohmu and herself. She did this out of love for her people, to protect them from death, and out of love for the environment by returning the ohmu baby that was stolen from them. It is in this act that Nausicaä dies. However, because of this selfless act, the magical ohmu brought Nausicaä back to life (Miyazaki, 1984). Shore further generalizes this trait for many of Miyazaki's heroines saying, "Nausicaä is an example of the ways in which Miyazaki heroines, rather than resort to the victim-victor cycle, use compassion to peacefully bridge hostilities and cultural differences" (Shore, 2014, p.32). It is through her peaceful death she bridges the differences between the natural world and humanity. Where others failed to see how the natural world was important, Nausicaä saw and understood why her self-sacrifice was the only option because she was the only one who could empathize with both sides to prevent the fighting. Shore also explains, "Nausicaä willingly chose to be killed and sacrificed her own life to model the overarching necessity to stop the killing of others" (Shore, 2014, p.184). Shore emphasizes how Nausicaä gave up her life as an ultimate sign of her love for both her people and the environment. Through her death, they could stop killing each other and live longer.

Some say, however, that Nausicaä's ability to value the life and prosperity of the environment is a weakness. Some argue that it changes her moral code, and in so doing makes her a toxic heroine. This duality and ability to empathize with the natural environment is argued to be a weakness rather than a strength. Nausicaä's awe and wonder in the environment causes her to expand her morals and view insects and the environment as something worthy of her moral concern. In "The Toxic Heroine in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*," Nunes points out, "her fragile, mere mortal framework is the basis for this new perspective, and it allows her to expand her idea of morality" (Nunes, 2021, p.92). This quote claims that since Nausicaä is indeed a mortal human that her morals waver easily.

While Nausicaä is indeed human, her moral code did not change in the movie and her ability to empathize with insects and include them in her moral code is a strength rather than a weakness. Nausicaä's moral code has been the same since she was a little girl. This is evident in the flashback of Nausicaä as a little kid where she is seen hiding a baby ohmu to protect it from her dad who was trying to kill it, saying "insects and humans can't live in the same world" (Miyazaki, 1984). It is in this scene that Nausicaä, as a child, shows empathy toward insects and the mortal world. Therefore, her moral code did not change to include insects, rather it included them from the beginning. Shore further supports this view by saying, "in the climax of the film, Nausicaä sacrifices her own life to save an adolescent ohmu, and, in so doing, she restores humanity as well. This empathetic ethic stayed with Nausicaä throughout childhood and into her adolescence" (Shore, 2014, p.165). This quote shows how through Nausicaä's final selfless act of self-sacrifice, she not only was a hero to humanity by saving them from the ohmu's attacks, but she was also a hero to the natural world by calming down the ohmu by returning their injured youth. Without Nausicaä's ability to empathize with the insects, her village would have been trampled and killed by the giant insects, and further destruction of the environment would have ensued.

"She calmed them with her own life" (Miyazaki, 1984). Nausicaä's heroic actions helped not only her people but the natural environment as well. It was through Nausicaä's distinct personality traits that she embodied what it meant to be a hero. All her actions from a young age led her to this, from her childhood saving a baby insect to her teenage years sacrificing herself once again for a baby insect. Nausicaä's empathy is ever expanding, reaching beyond an average limited view to one that includes the natural world. Nausicaä's wonder, awe, and love of the world strengthen her as a heroine, opening her eyes to all possible solutions to save her village while harming the environment as little as possible. Nausicaä can see the value of life both in humans and the life of the Earth itself, which is why she becomes someone willing to lay her life down for it all. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, though fiction, paints a picture of how a capacity for empathy can help us coexist with the earth that we are slowly killing.

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Batman: An Interconnected Relationship Between Hero and Culture

by
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Federico Kong is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Industrial Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael Nichols' SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. Dr. Nichols' class centered around the idea of superheroes and their roles in literature and society. This creative boundary inspired Federico to reflect on how his own life was influenced by these surreal figures, sparking a unique interest in its evolution, both in the past and in the present. With this narrative, Federico wishes to use his favorite character, Batman, as a means of outlining how we as a society have evolved, and how our current socio-political landscape and sensibilities are reflected in the characters we idolize.

Batman is one of the longest running names in modern superhero history. Debuting in 1939, he has managed to maintain significant cultural relevance for over eight decades, a feat accomplished through the use of a malleable character structure that morphs to the needs of the current generation. As described by cultural studies professor Will Brooker, “Batman's survival as a cultural icon (...) can be attributed to his ability to adapt and change with the period” (Brooker, 1990, p. 33). With such a rich and complex history, a multitude of particularly significant works tend to arise, specifically, Batman's Silver Era (1956-1970) saw a rise among the general public for the character, following ABC television's popular yet controversial *Batman* series. Similarly, Batman's current-day influence can largely be attributed to Christopher Nolan's critically acclaimed *Dark Knight* trilogy. However, when comparing his modern day interpretation to his Silver Age persona, it is clear that Batman has undergone a stunning transformation, from a comedic, outrageously overdone superhero, to an odyssey for social justice and political commentary. This is a change that has reflected shifting cultural rhetorics and social narratives.

In order to fully appreciate Batman's evolution over time, it is important to consider the foundation on which the character has been built. Originally part of National Periodical Publications' *Detective Comics*, *Batman* told the story of a wealthy citizen from the crime-ridden city of Gotham, who at night would don cape and cowl and “obsessively fight crime, using his superb physical abilities” (Brooker, 1990, p. 37). Additionally, the character is described as being a dark and mysterious entity, striking fear into the hearts of criminals, not through the use of superhuman abilities, but by employing superior intelligence and superb martial arts skills. These basic attributes have been outlined by professors Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio to be the “lowest common denominator” of the Batman formula (Brooker, 1990, p. 33; Pearson & Uricchio, 1991, p. 186). This narrative, however, would see a substantial shift in 1966, as the introduction of the now iconic *Batman* series, starring Adam West, greatly overshadowed the more ‘lore accurate’ works of the time. The series' focus on comedy and entertainment turned the hero from an intimidating dark knight, to a silly, gadget-focused, caped crusader, ultimately creating the stereotypical, onomatopoeia-heavy archetype that defined 1960s heroes. “Accordingly, the vision of the 'dark' Batman, that grim crime fighter driven by an obsession born of tragedy, [now replaced with] the ['so bad it is good'] Batman of the 1960s” (Brooker, 1990, p. 174). Despite the intense criticism from Batman fanatics, Adam West's 1966 series is a product of its time: a reflection of a newly formed popular culture favoring hope and idealism following years of global political tension.

In stark contrast to the ‘so bad it is good’ era, modern depictions of Batman see the character return to his original film noir aesthetic. This can be observed in the comic book

world with the introduction of *The New 52* series of graphic novels, alongside a variety of minor revamps of notable Batman stories. However, these pale in comparison to the commercial success of Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, with the first installment alone grossing well over one billion dollars (Winstead, 2015, p. 573). Just as West's television series defined Batman for a large portion of the general media, so too did Nolan's films define the idea of a hero for its corresponding generation. Within contemporary society, the concept of a hero strays away from traditionalist homeric narratives, wherein a hero embarks on an epic quest. Rather, being replaced with the Platonic philosophy of heroism, promoting strong moral character and well aligned virtues above all else. "Other-regarding heroic action has become the defining feature of our contemporary discourse on the topic of heroism" (Kohen, 2014, p. 128). This shift in perspective is followed in tandem by Nolan's introduction of democratic tragedy into the *Batman* universe. Produced in a post-September Eleventh world, modern depictions of Gotham reflect many of the sentiments being experienced by Americans at the time. Political science professor Damien Picarello outlines the brilliance of this decision, stating, "many understand Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy by placing it in contemporary historical context, rendering it a commentary on life in the post-September Eleventh world where terror is an ever-present possibility and security proves at best elusive" (Picarello, 2019, p. 23). This relevance to modern society is further emphasized by directly attacking the values of a largely democratic audience. The 2008 film, *The Dark Knight*, depicts a battered and broken Gotham, pummeled by the relentless beatings of the city's criminal class. This inability to fight back can be interpreted as a failure of democracy, with their eventual savior, Batman, embodying the need for political reform. "This troubling force represents the possibility of not just security but also political renewal or rebirth" (Picarello, 2019, p. 23). This relation to current events elevates Batman beyond just a superhero. It places him firmly as a symbol of justice and virtue, a trait not present in earlier depictions of the character, subsequently outlining his ability to transform as a character in conjunction with shifting cultural narratives.

The monumental success seen by both the 1966 television series and the 2005 - 2012 trilogy can be attributed nearly in full to Batman's ability to remain fluid. "The public interest in Batman stems from collective memory of Batman's origins and stylistic elements rather than the minute details of the comic book narratives" (Winstead, 2015, p. 573). This phenomenon allows the character to maintain cultural relevance while still featuring a conformable narrative. When comparing the aforementioned examples, two very different characters emerge. It is impossible to arrive at the conclusion that Adam West's comedic, spandex-clad Batman, and Nolan's sinister Dark Knight are one and the same. However, once put into a cultural context, it becomes clear to see how each interpretation fulfills their

respective generation's needs. Dr. Göral Erinc Yilmaz and Dr. Serkan Fundalar describe how this evolution could be attributed to a shifting cultural perspective as to what being a hero means. They outline how superheroes are a product of modernism, a philosophy based on rational thinking that was disrupted following the cataclysms brought forth by both world wars. "Superheroes came into existence by the collective traumas of the two world wars and the Great Depression" (Yilmaz & Fundalar, 2022, p. 1). West's Batman, while less serious than its counterparts, reflects the needs of a society battered by war, whose focus has shifted towards peace and non-violent resolve. It is a much needed tonal shift from the previous, more serious Batman. Meanwhile, modern society tends to follow the post-modern school of thought, characterized by the rejection of foundational truths and the introduction of a more plural philosophy for telling stories (Yilmaz & Fundalar, 2022, p. 1). This altered perspective is reflected in Nolan's films through the inclusion of a combative character structure, introducing ethical dilemmas that bring into question Batman's status as a hero. "Throughout Nolan's Trilogy, set in an increasingly chaotic and irrational Gotham, Batman is challenged alongside each and every citizen to let go of any constitutive ethical value, to forget any point of reference as to what it means to be a complete and centered 'self,' and to happily dissolve into the city's insanity and corruption" (Yilmaz & Fundalar, 2022, p. 2). The inclusion of these conflicts displays postmodern values, showcasing an evolution within Batman's character that allows him to conform to the current definition of a hero, and as a whole, demonstrates his ability to follow cultural trends.

Despite the validity of the previous claims, an argument could be made for a contrary perspective. It is possible that Batman, both in a classic and modern context, fails to reach the level of dynamic complexity that would categorize him as a fluid character. Additionally, it is possible for current cultural influences to be ignored altogether within the Batman universe, existing alone, completely detached from the real world. When analyzing early Batman works, it is easy to arrive at this conclusion, as the character's wartime period (1939 - 1945) is infamous for its ignorance of the ongoing global situation. "The Batman of this period is notable more for his consistency and adherence to an established template than his fluidity" (Brooker, 1990, p. 33). However, this decision was in itself a response to outside influences, as a large majority of superheroes and other popular media fell into a spiral of endless patriotic newspeak and propaganda. "Around these key dates, America witnessed a massive shift in its popular culture as the majority of commercial forms, films, advertisements, posters, radio, comics, were given a common focus and enlisted into the war effort" (Brooker, 1990, p. 34). The ill-informed assumption of apathy towards reality was in fact a conscious decision, one that catapulted Detective Comics' *Batman* into the stratosphere in

terms of popularity, as a once patriotic audience sought relief from constant war endorsements.

This swift response towards general reader sentiment has remained consistent throughout the entirety of Batman's existence, going far beyond just the aforementioned time periods. When I reflect on Batman's influence over my own life, what the character has meant to me, I arrive at many of the same conclusions previously outlined by field professionals. For the present generation, Batman stands as a symbol, an elegant Dark Knight who rides the line between hero and outcast in the pursuit of a greater good. He stands as a pillar of virtue, tailor-made to the present culture surrounding heroism. Inversely, the Batman seen during the Silver Age provokes a surprising level of contrast, as the character's easygoing rhetoric adapted to the social narratives of the time. While it is easy to dismiss Batman as an unchanged, unevolved character, closer inspection reveals an insurmountable level of intricacy and cultural relevance. While some may believe that the *Batman* formula consists of Bruce Wayne, the Bat Cave, or his sidekick, Robin, it is important not to forget the other element that has remained consistent throughout the franchise's eighty-year history: the deep connections between hero and culture.

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Rousseau's Method of Imagination in Discourse on Inequality

by
Fern Rice



Fern Rice is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Insect Biology and History. She wrote this essay/short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Alon Kantor's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. It was inspired by a prompt considering how to interpret Rousseau's work and the degree of intellectual merit it holds. She took particular interest in the prompt due to her academic interests in both the sciences and the humanities, and how to fit an older text, typically considered to be one of humanities, into the modern and broad categories of the scientific and non-scientific.

A Discourse on Inequality is a foundational paper that has left an unmistakable mark on the world. The influences of the work can be found in many areas of academia, such as in later philosophical texts, government documents, political theory, and general views held by society. When looking at the impact and importance of *A Discourse on Inequality*, it is important to reflect on the methodology of how the text was constructed and the validity of the argument presented in the work. When reading the text, you find the purpose is a reconstruction of the origins and spread of social inequality in the world. Various arguments have been presented for the categorization of Rousseau's argument of the spread and origin of inequality based on how he constructs the argument, or how he imagines the origins of inequality. The three prime categorizations classify the text as a myth, a "just-so story," or a scientific enterprise. *A Discourse on Inequality* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau acts as an explanation of the ideas of the origins and spread of inequality in humanity in such a way that the text should be considered a scientific enterprise due to Rousseau's methods of constructing the past falling into what would be considered scientific.

A Discourse on Inequality by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (also known and referred to as *A Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* and *The Second Discourse*) is a treatise that explains and reconstructs the state of natural man and the origins and spread of inequality. The text first attempts to reconstruct the natural state of man, that is man before inequality, and states that men were more compassionate and had greater free will prior to the development of inequality (Neuhouser, 2014). This portion of the text leans toward hypothetical methods of thinking but still employs characteristics of science. However, that portion of the text will not be the focus of this paper. The text then shifts to its prime focus and follows the steps that lead man to diverge from his natural state into today, where social inequalities are present. This is followed by a look into how these inequalities have spread over time. The argument presented is that natural man left this state of nature due to the idea of property and that inequality spread through human competition, vanity, and ambition, and that forms of law only accelerated this.

The reason that a text was written can influence how it was written, the methodology, and the meaning behind it. *A Discourse on Inequality* was written by Rousseau in response to an essay writing competition, sponsored by the Academy of Dijon, inquiring about the origin of inequality among people in society (Neuhouser, 2014). This tells us that there were likely parameters and standards applied to the writing that had to be adhered to. We also know that Rousseau likely elected to compete in this competition as it aligned with his academic interests at the time, which shines through in the work. The tone of the writing is passionate, showing us there was interest in the subject outside of just the competition. A further reason that *The Second Discourse* was written is that Rousseau believed no other

philosopher had truly arrived at the state of nature or found the true origin of inequality. This is emphasized on pages four and five of the text in a discussion of his reasoning.

How Rousseau constructed this work is a crucial subject when wanting to explore *A Discourse on Inequality*. The topic of how Rousseau imagined the past is a very intriguing subject as it was not the traditional philosophical standard of imagination during his time. The word “imagined” here describes the process of constructing the past used, not Rousseau’s views on the past about the origin of inequality. Rousseau constructs the origins of inequality as a progression, almost that of a genealogy. With that genealogy comes a deeply intertwined evaluation of social inequality as a concept (Neuhouser, 2014). The two are inseparable, as the genealogy both uses and supports Rousseau’s evaluations of inequality. He divides the progression of the origin and development of inequality into several prime stages. However, it is important to note that Rousseau does not start these stages at a point when humans were like animals but starts at a point in time when humans had distinct free will, the trait that Rousseau sees as humans’ main distinction from animals. Rousseau also believed animals have very different behavior patterns from humans and could not be understood to the degree of mankind. He emphasized the distinction of humans having and using language (Lovejoy, 1923). This choice is significant because it displays to us the importance of historical reconstruction, using knowledge over speculation. After the more hypothetical construction of the natural state of man, Rousseau then begins to use historical events in early human history and in his, at the time, current human history to imagine the origins and spread of inequality. These observable developments of humanity through early writings and artifacts serve as the backbone of Rousseau’s reconstruction. In the format of the writing of *A Discourse on Inequality*, big philosophical ideas are intertwined, helping both explain and build the narrative in addition to rigid history and observations.

One presented argument on the categorization of *A Discourse on Inequality* is that the text is nothing but a myth. A myth can be defined as a story people create and specifically manufacture to tell an artificial tale for cultural, entertainment, or moral reasons. Many people may point to this being the reality of Rousseau’s treatise as they see it as a fairy tale constructed by Rousseau in order to prove a point or tell a story. Early critics argued the paper was written just to spite religion and to push the political agenda Rousseau had. A few early critics even described the writing as “impious” (Brennan, 2020). This was not Rousseau’s intended platform for *The Second Discourse*, even though religion was briefly mentioned. Due to religious ideas having such a prominent societal grip at the time, he had to let himself be affected by ideas of religion but be proactive to keep a distance away from ideas of religion in his writings (Lovejoy, 1923). This is something that differs from the tra-

ditional myth, which typically enhances religious ideas and rivals alternative religious ideology. The inclusion of religion was to show that Rousseau was considering and evaluating multiple viewpoints and acknowledging the common beliefs of his time. This is also a trait most myths lack, as they simply pull from the author's point of view and beliefs. Rousseau states that the purpose of the paper is to trace when nature became the subject of law and competition in the opening section of the essay on page four. Rousseau also mentions at various points in the text that flaws are possible within the text due to his own limits and biases. This shows us his agenda is not simply to make something up. He has a real desire to accurately retrace inequality's origins. This is not to say that the paper is not a critique, as the paper does critique inequality itself and other common beliefs. The distinction is that this is not the main goal, that is to prove a point, but rather to provide an explanation. Rousseau also does not directly call out individuals or common ideas specifically to critique. Additionally, when we consider the context of the paper being written for a competition at an extremely religion-dominated time in history, the risks of entering a paper purely and explicitly to mock religion would be far from logical and likely result in negative consequences. Even in Rousseau's time period, some kind of idea of evidence was standard in any type of academic writing, meaning a true myth would be much less respected. Additionally, on page 10, Rousseau stresses the lack of supernatural information in his construction, one of the defining traits of a myth.

A perfect example of a text that is a myth that was written to push the agenda of the author is *True History* by Lucian. The novel tells tales of extravagant, imaginary, cross-planetary adventures that are experienced by its characters. These stories fit perfectly into the definition of myth as they have absolutely no background or basis in real experience. There is also zero evidence of the occurrences. When Lucian wrote the text, his intention was to mock other writers of his time for writing myths and presenting them as the truth. Through the book, he was trying to bring awareness to the ridiculousness of ancient myths in a mocking way. By looking at *True History*, we can see how much of a contrast the content and intention of *A Discourse on Inequality* is in comparison. There is no otherworldly element to *The Second Discourse* or blatant calling out of previous work by other writers. When Rousseau brings up names of other philosophers, it is not a criticism but rather a consideration of their ideas. Rousseau also uses examples in human history to convey the story he is telling compared to Lucian, who does not provide evidence or examples of events.

An additional point to consider is the endurance of truth of *A Discourse on Inequality* compared to prominent myths from the time of the text and earlier. Myths are now taught in classrooms as stories and fairytales used by people of the past to teach lessons or tell

heroic tales, not as truth as historically taught. By contrast, *A Discourse on Inequality* is taught as a foundational piece of political work. The text is still taught to be taken as the reality of how social inequality originated and spread, and the subjects written about in the text are still used to influence policy and information today. Myths are not being used like this in any way, no one is citing writings like *True History* in impactful political decisions or writings. People would not take that seriously due to its fantastical aspects, while many would take *A Discourse on Inequality* seriously if used in such a context.

The next viewpoint concerns *The Second Discourse* falling under the category of what is called a “just-so story”. A “just so story” is a story that claims to explain the origin of something, but is untestable and lacks evidence. It is incredibly easy to see how one could take this perspective on Rousseau’s text, and it has been a subject of debate by philosophers and politicians alike. Rousseau’s discourse focuses on the element of forming an explanation of the origin of something, a trait present in this definition. This automatically may result in people placing the text in this category of a “just-so story” since the largest defining traits are shared. The problem with this is that other aspects of what makes a “just-so story” what it is are ignored.

The first trait of a “just-so story” that is not shared by *A Discourse on Inequality* is being untestable. Other people are able to follow and evaluate the same thought patterns Rousseau had, since the process is clearly stated within the essay. This means that the text is testable and also arguable. Being arguable plays into aspects of testability as you need evidence of reproduction with alternative results to argue an opposing perspective properly. Generally speaking, “just-so stories” are not arguable as no one can look at how the process of coming to an explanation was developed and, therefore, cannot do tests to provide evidence against the explanation. You can only assume to conclude if the origin is true or is not true without knowing the basis of the formulation. In Rousseau’s work, the process is found in the text, as the steps are presented in the narration and accompanied by reasoning. This allows for argumentative points to be made and opposing evidence to be gathered.

The other aspect of a “just-so story” is a lack of evidence. *The Second Discourse* employs evidence in a multitude of ways when the typical “just-so story” does not at all. There is even a clear avoidance of less scientific evidence such as metaphysical evidence within *A Discourse*. Instead, Rousseau uses empirical and observational evidence (Neuhouser, 2014). Rousseau employs this kind of evidence many times throughout the text. An example of this use of evidence is when Rousseau states on page 43, “the Caribbeans, the people in the world who have as yet deviated least from the state of nature, are to all intents and purposes the most peaceable in their armors, and least subject to jealousy.” This is observa-

tional evidence as Rousseau uses something currently observable to display a point and support his argument. These people who have not been exposed to much rule of law display different methods of living that are less controlling in attitude helps to show Rousseau's point of society becoming more controlled by inequality when law and property take precedence in society. You cannot find applicable real examples like this in “just-so stories.”

The argument of *A Discourse on Inequality* being a scientific work is the most rational viewpoint substantiated by the text itself as well as the traits and standards that come with works considered to be scientific. In order to understand this viewpoint, one must know the characteristics of good science. A few of these traits are the provision of empirical evidence, reproducibility, falsifiability, alignment with reality, and accountability for error and bias. When you evaluate *A Discourse on Inequality* on these bases, you find that the text contains all of these traits. It is important to mention many other characteristics of good science that exist in addition to the above list but could be applied to *The Second Discourse* as well. Due to restraints, only the most prominent ones listed above will be evaluated in this report.

Provision of empirical evidence is debatably the paramount trait of science. It is also a crucial part of how Rousseau constructed *The Second Discourse*. For Rousseau, this empirical evidence came from past and current observations of civilizations and societies. Empirical evidence is evidence that has an observable or recorded trait, something that is based on more than theory and logic. One method that Rousseau employs in explaining the behavior of man in the state of nature and the origin of inequality is simply observing the humans around him and listening to stories of human reactions. This leads to conclusions about generalized human nature being made by Rousseau and other philosophers at the time. An example of this is the idea that humans are self-interested creatures, observed by historical behaviors such as betrayal (Neuhouser, 2014). The other form of evidence came from the mention of real recorded events as mentioned above in the discussion of “just-so stories.” However, much more than just the example of Caribbean people is brought up in *A Discourse on Inequality*. In the stage of the spread of inequality that discusses the development of government systems, Rousseau employs many specific and non-specific historical examples. As a non-specific bit of evidence, Rousseau mentions the prominence of civil wars in times before him and his current times as a result of inequality of governmental power and oppositional views of the people. These wars, according to Rousseau, were simply a conflict based on how much control people wanted to have over them in terms of enforced inequality. We can consider this as empirical evidence because we know civil wars happened before Rousseau's time, during his time, and even now. Even though this evidence is non-specific, we know that these things happened thanks to documentation and historical patterns, making it valid empirical evidence. A piece of evidence that falls be-

tween being specific and non-specific is the discussion of the way elected governments work. Rousseau mentions this and gives the example of governmental systems, such as that of the elders in ancient Hebrew society, the Gerontes in Sparta, and the Senate in Rome as elective governments. He then goes on to explain that all elective governments are built on some kind of social inequality due to elections being swayed by money or merit. We know from recorded history that the listed governments and more dealt with this kind of election inequality, even though specific periods and rulers are not mentioned within the text. It is a recorded fact these issues occurred, allowing them to serve as empirical evidence. A specific mention of an event serving as empirical evidence can be found on page 78 of the text, where Rousseau quotes the French monarch, King Louis XIV. He uses this quote from the king and an analysis of the quote to point out how even good monarchs and tyrants further inequality through ultimate control. This piece of evidence cites a specific occurrence at a specific point in time, making it fit the mold exactly in what is generally considered as empirical evidence.

Reproducibility is one of the more difficult characteristics of science to consider within *A Discourse on Inequality*. The key trait of reproducibility is that the process of coming to the text's conclusion could be repeated by another person. This requires that the processes of forming the text's conclusion must be stated clearly enough that it could be accurately performed again. Rousseau is aware of this and dedicates time in the novel to narrate his own thought process of how he imagines inequality as he states what it is and how it spreads. Additionally, other people could follow the same thought patterns and find other historical evidence that continues to support the main argument instead of only disputing it. We see other philosophers work through Rousseau's process, and land at the same conclusion, both during his time and today. As mentioned in the discussion of "just-so stories" this makes the essay arguable, which is another important trait of good science. In the last paragraph of the essay, Rousseau adds support to this by explaining the process of reasoning used for the deduction of the content as a whole overview. This makes it easier for the evaluation and rethinking of *A Discourse on Inequality*. Rousseau also justifies the system he uses to explore the origins on page 41 of the text to help the reader not only understand the process, but the development of the process, and why it is accurate.

Falsifiability is the next characteristic of a good science. Falsifiability is simply the attribute of being able to be proven wrong. This is important as science does not prove things, but rather disproves them. Being falsifiable also means something can be debated properly, and results in a large amount of overlap with the trait of testability. When we evaluate *A Discourse on Inequality*, we find that it can be proven wrong. Someone attempting to disprove Rousseau's argument could seek out oppositional evidence by evaluating

different historical situations and then applying it to their own analysis. The paper is also structured in a manner that allows for criticism, as shown by many published papers debating certain points made by Rousseau. Through all of these debates, however, the favor still often falls towards the original text. We can additionally see the use of words to prove and disprove in the conclusion of the writing.

Error is a natural occurrence when forming any argument or proposing any solution. Rousseau is aware of this and is sure to make it clear in his narration that there is an acknowledgment of error. “I shall not claim to attempt this organization through exact perfection” is a statement found on the first page of the first part of the discourse. The acknowledgment of possible errors is important as it invites people to take a look at the content of the text themselves. Furthermore, it shows that he is taking responsibility for random natural occurrences and biases that could have had an effect on the conclusion. Rousseau also accounts for possible errors he made through improper processes, acknowledging the fact he is just a man.

The continuity of reality is incredibly clear within *A Discourse on Inequality* and truly cannot be overstated. As politically controversial as it may be, we are continuing to see gaps increase between classes and other groups in the Western and Eastern world. Differing viewpoints on everything imaginable continue to manifest as violence all across the world. The influence of government, a form of law Rousseau generally disliked, is something Rousseau blames for the prominence and spread of inequality. A perfect contemporary example of this is the massive increases in global inequality in the past few decades following the end of communism across Eastern Europe (Neuhouser, 2014). Now more than ever, we have numbers and quantitative data we can use to see the inequality gaps forming in the world, whether that is economic or equality of opportunity. We see that the spread of Western styles of government have increased this inequality by evaluating the numbers we have access to, even if we are living in a more “progressive” world. The modern patterns of society have resulted in more interest in Rousseau’s work to seek a possible solution and explanation to the problem of inequality by analyzing the origins and early thought processes on the subject. This continuity with current times shows that the genealogy Rousseau forms in *A Discourse in Inequality* is accurate since it still applies to current world conditions. This is important to science because we can see by example that something is true, just like that of a scientific research study. This is the strongest factor against the argument that *The Second Discourse* is not a myth or “just-so story” as these things lack the current continuity in nature.

An additional current connection that can be made is the entire field of anthropology. It may feel like the relevance of *A Discourse on Inequality* and the processes of the text can only be found to be important in modern philosophy and political theory. This is far from true, as influence can be found in the soft and hard sciences. Rousseau's construction of the origin of inequality within *The Second Discourse* employs empirical sources, such as observational biology and history. The modern-day field of anthropology similarly reconstructs the past of humanity, focusing on cultural values as Rousseau did (Brennan, 2020). This shows his methods are even still sustained by what is primarily considered a soft-scientific field with much credibility. Some even call Rousseau the herald of the field of anthropology because of works like *A Discourse on Inequality* and their methodology. In looking at other modern scientific fields, we see similar occurrences. Take Darwin for example, who takes a very similar approach to Rousseau in constructing the basics of theories of evolution and natural selection. Darwin's theories are now seen as some of the most impactful knowledge in life sciences today and over the past century. It can even be said that some of the language used by Rousseau was in Darwinian terms, years before Darwin. This shows that Darwin may very well have been influenced by Rousseau (Lovejoy, 1923). This shows that the influence goes beyond that of what people traditionally think the impact of the treatise is.

"I believe I have demonstrated it". These words uttered by Rousseau encompass the true intention of *A Discourse on Inequality*. Rousseau attempts to construct an accurate reconstruction of inequality that serves as more than a story through this treatise. The text still has widespread influence today, just as it did in the past. By defining and exploring the common categories in which *A Discourse on Inequality* is placed and evaluating the key traits of each, we can reach a conclusion about the placement of the text in the categories of a myth, a "just-so story", and a scientific work. *A Discourse on Inequality* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau acts as an explanation of the origins and spread of inequality in humanity in such a way that the text should be considered a scientific enterprise due to Rousseau's methodology aligning with traits of scientific methodology.

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A Liminal Purdue

by
Lilly Kult

Lilly Kult is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Medical Laboratory Science. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. The essay was largely inspired by the popular internet myth called “The Backrooms.” It explores what Purdue would look like within a space of liminality and emptiness.

Purdue University is a lively campus with thousands of domestic and international students. The campus features many well-known buildings, such as the Purdue Memorial Union and the Wilmeth Active Learning Center. But what would these places look like if they were a level of the Backrooms? How would they look if they were combined with the liminal? Liminality or the liminal space has been combined with artwork for centuries. The Backrooms and liminal artwork have many defining features: narrative distortion, *déjà vu*, and an array of perceived negative feelings. What would Purdue look like with these traits?

The Backrooms are a series of levels located in a dimension that exists outside of reality. Stumbling into the Backrooms is achieved by doing an action that results in “noclipping.” According to scientists Necpál & Šoltýsová, noclipping is the act of “randomly slipping inside without the player’s control by phasing through walls or other solid objects. Noclipping was originally used by developers as a way to test games” (Necpál & Šoltýsová, 2023). The authors of the Backrooms Wiki explain how noclipping can be achieved. It happens “via tripping, accidental collisions, and other occurrences of this nature” (Backrooms Wiki, 2023). Noclipping can also be used to access both lower and higher levels of this alternate dimension; however, required actions to phase into the next level may become more specific. Additionally, each level contains a different setting that can vary between quiet suburban streets (Figure 1) and an empty hotel that is made entirely of white marble and serene blue pools (Figure 2). Some of these levels contain dangerous entities like The Skin-Stealer depicted in Figure 3 and The Smiler in Figure 4. The first is known for wearing the skin of its victims and the second for pursuing any light source, including sources that humans will use to see in the dark. Others are filled with passive entities that are incapable of harm. Each level contains certain sublevels that can lead to higher and lower levels.

Outside of fandom, the Backrooms originated on a 4chan thread in 2018 with an image depicted in Figure 5. It depicts a slanted view of an entrance to an empty room that has a couple of visible exits. The walls are covered with a strange yellow design. Everything is a shade of yellow. Fluorescent lights flicker in even rows on the ceiling. Posted with the image is the description “if you're not careful and no-clip out of reality in wrong areas, you'll end up in the Backrooms, where it's nothing but the stink of moist carpet, the madness of mono-yellow, and endless background noise of fluorescent lights at maximum hum-buzz, and approximately six hundred million square miles of randomly segmented empty rooms to be trapped in. God save you if you hear something wandering around nearby, because it sure as hell has heard you...” (Backrooms Wiki, n.d.). This single photo assembled an entire community that creates stories, video games, and photography all under the name, the Backrooms.

The primary concept behind the internet phenomenon is liminality or the liminal space. All levels of the Backrooms are defined by the liminal space. Liminality has several definitions within the scholarly community. In the anthropology community, “liminality is defined as a rite of passage that one must go through” (Beth, 2012). In other scholarly communities, the concept of liminality or the liminal space is defined less specifically. Researcher Angela Kelly defines the liminal space as “a non-place” that has no predetermined destination, assuming that there even is one. It is “a liminal state of belonging and un-belonging” (West, 2017). In her Doctoral dissertation, sculptor Sarah Beth Truman investigates the constantly flowing definitions of liminality. Her determined modern definition was that “liminality denotes an indeterminate existence between two or more spatial or temporal realms, states, or the condition of passing through them” (Truman, 2012). Additionally, the TikTok aesthetic named “Dreamcore” also has its roots in the liminal space. Scholar Haoxing Wu defines Dreamcore as “a video (or image) form currently popular on YouTube” (Wu, 2022). In his paper, he states that the beginnings of Dreamcore are parallel with the creation of the Backrooms.

Prior to the Backrooms, many forms of art like painting and sculpting were inspired by the concept of the liminal space. Liminality in photographs also existed before the creation of the first infamous Backrooms photo. In artwork, the liminal space has many defining features: narrative distortion, *déjà vu*, and an array of perceived negative feelings. Each of these characteristics can be done in multiple ways.

Narrative distortion forces the reader to become an active participant in the artwork. In describing the liminality of Taryn Simon’s photographic series “A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters,” Homi Bhabhi describes her use of blind spots. He states that she uses the blind spots in order to have viewers “questioning the framing of the truth” (Bhabha, 2011). “The blind field, Barthes writes, exposes the liminal nature of photography; and in that breach of frame...the spectator takes on an interactive and interrogative role” (Bhabha, 2011). Framing is an important aspect of photography. What should be included and what should not be? By including and not including certain objects or scenery in the frame, viewers are unable to discern the true narrative of the picture. This trend can be seen in liminal photography used in the Backrooms. Figures 1, 2, 4, and 5 all use a blind spots and framing to distort the viewer’s vision. Level 9 (Figure 1) is entirely shadowed in darkness. Level 37 (Figure 2) is a long tunnel that leads to darkness. The viewer is unable to see where (and if) it ends. The Smiler (Figure 4) is shrouded in darkness. One can only see its iridescent grin and inhuman eyes. Level 0 (Figure 5) uses framing to distort the narrative. Only walls that lead to various hallways and other rooms can be seen. It gives no hints of an exit

or a way out. Active participation is caused by feelings such as fear, anxiety, and curiosity which provokes the viewer to find deeper meaning in the artwork.

The nature of liminal photography is unsettling. Similarly, Bhabha's article about "A Living Man Declared Dead" creates a similar effect where the spectator is viewing a world that is "alien or unsettling" (Bhabha, 2011). Creating anxious feelings in the viewer can be achieved through the use of repetition. West describes that repetition as "uneasy, anxious, and overbearing" (West, 2017). Figure 2 and Figure 5 both feature high repetition, figure 2 with its repeated swirling patterns and tiles and Figure 5 with its repeated yellow wallpaper and fluorescent lights. This can also be achieved with displacement. Displacement of familiar things such as a home or a city can create feelings of alienation and loneliness in the viewer.

Déjà vu is the strongest focal point in the Backrooms photography. Most Backrooms levels feature settings or objects that are familiar to the viewer or that the viewer has "seen before," such as a residential street in Figure 1 or a children's playhouse. According to Bhabha, liminal artwork is "prolonging the long lost past into the present" (Bhabha, 2011).

Each of the photos below use at least one characteristic of liminal artwork. All of the photos are taken on Purdue campus grounds. Most likely, the viewer has been in the places where the photos were taken. One may elicit memories of frantically studying for a final exam in Hick's Underground Library, and another may remind the viewer of traveling through the old buildings of Purdue where the paint on the walls is peeling and the floors are made of plain tile. Additionally, none of the photos feature a single person in them. The lack of people and the plainness of each photo elicit a feeling of displacement. Even busy areas like Photo 4, taken in Hick's Underground Library, is devoid of a single soul. Photo 6 features miscellaneous objects familiar to an office setting; however, these objects are not located in an office but in a hallway, abandoned and unused. Not only is the viewer displaced in the photo, the objects are displaced as well. Photo 7 was taken in a beautiful area of Stewart Center in front of the Office of the Registrar. Regardless of the morning and evening hours, this area is continuously scarce in population, only populated by the workers in the area. Students only come and go to receive physical ID cards or solve problems. The area is a symbol for beautiful work and architecture done for many to see, but abandoned by that same demographic that either does not see it or has complete and utter disregard for its meaning and beauty.

Photo 1



Photo 3



Photo 2



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 7

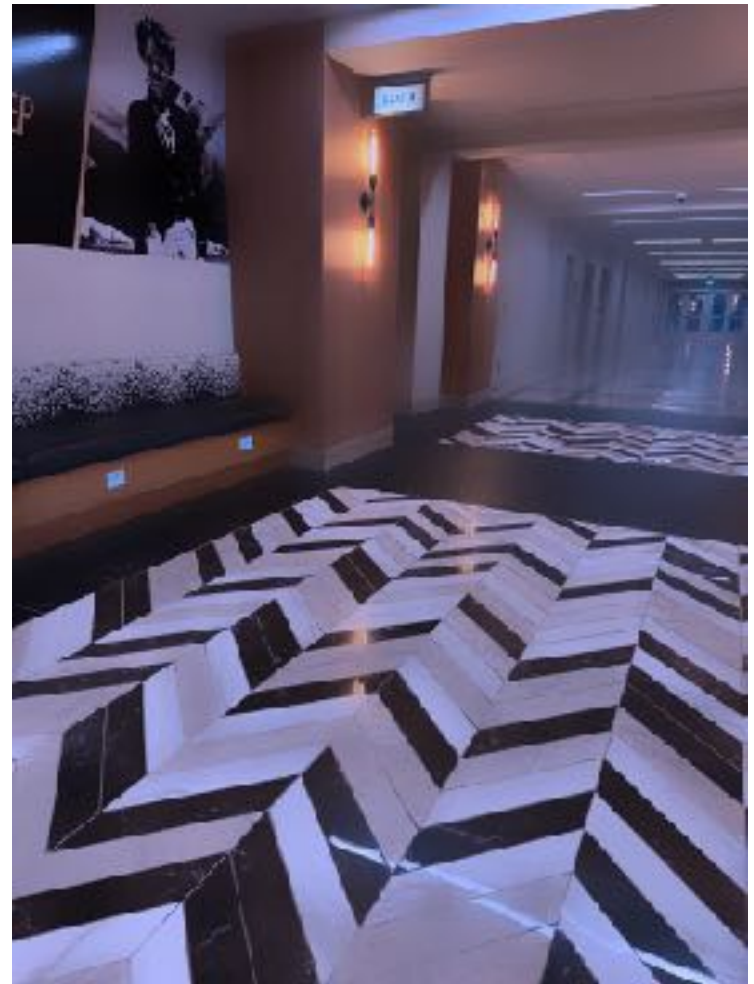


Photo 6



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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 3



Poetry

“Poems are moments’ monuments.”

—Sylvia Plath

Where I'm From

by

Amrita Konaje

Amrita Konaje is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. She wrote this poem to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Elise Frketich's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. The poem was born from Amrita's bittersweetness and sorrow as she navigated a completely new country and society as a new adult. When moving away from home upon reaching legal age, relationships with family evolve too, for better or for worse, and are much easier to see from a distance.

Where I'm from

I am from dirt roads,
From monsoons and the tropical heat,
I am from a big city and a small town,
A land of coconuts and palm trees and rice sown

I am from my mother's mind
From my father's tenacity
I am from my family's adoration
I am from a thousand people
But I can only think kindly of most
From a distance

I am from the tempered flame, from secret-keeping,
The skeleton to the grave-robber
I am from cut-up fruit and disdain
I am from silver and from gold
From the closed wound and the bleeding heart
Once brilliant, now nothing

Plenty of Fission in the Sea

by
Canyon Kettell



Canyon Kettell is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Professional Flight. He wrote this poem to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Claire Mason's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. Before attending Purdue, Canyon was a nuclear reactor operator in the U.S. Navy for six years. Inspired by his interest in nuclear power, he penned this poem about the life of a neutron in a reactor core.

Plenty of Fission in the Sea

A neutron is born with one task
one goal in its infinitesimally short life
to mate with a nucleus and reproduce
such is the life cycle of the neutron.

Born at lightning speed
the neutron must first slow down
lest the nucleus find it too energetic
leading to an unfruitful end to the neutron's life.

Water will help the neutron here
water knows just the speed to be
and water possesses much skill
at dragging others to its speed.

And yet other dangers ensue
little of which the neutron knew
hafnium rods aligned askew
can cause much trouble for neutrons too.

The neutron's path not always true
In the core much trouble brews
so much danger it must go through
but it has one job that it must do.

If the fission doth not occur
then the turbines will soon not whir
and here to there the lines will blur
soon we'll see the maids of mer.

For without fission we'll surely drown
but wait, our luck hath turned around
so turn that frown upside down
for not too far help's inbound.

5

Magic

“Magic is believing in yourself,
if you can do that, you can make
anything happen.”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Strange Tales

Fashion Edition: Inside-Out

by
Shikha Adhikari



Shikha Adhikari is a Purdue undergraduate student from the School of Agriculture. Shikha created this fashion magazine, complete with text and original artwork inspired by the Chinese folktale, specifically, Pu Songling’s short story “The Painted Skin” and the legend of the White Snake, to fulfill an assignment in Professor Li Wei’s SCLA 101 class. The magazine design deciphered her thoughts and breakdown of the author’s purpose in writing, and the message the stories entailed. Shikha’s expressive and exquisite artwork won First Place in the Fall 2023 Cornerstone Contest.

STRANGE TALES

FASHION EDITION
INSIDE -OUT

OCTOBER 2023



DESIGNED BY: SHIKHA ADHIKARI
INSPIRATION FROM THE PAINTED SKIN AND LEGEND OF THE
WHITE SNAKE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. MYSTERIOUS AUTHOR

Featuring the cover of strange tales magazine: inspiration of the strange author in the Qing and Tang Dynasty

2. THE WHITE SNAKE

This character is featured in her snake skin wearing a flowy white drape over a modern body-con

3. THE GOBLIN

Featured in her real goblin hide showing her horns. The clothing design features a modern two piece top and wrap skirt with an ombre transition from green to brown.

4. MADAME CHEN

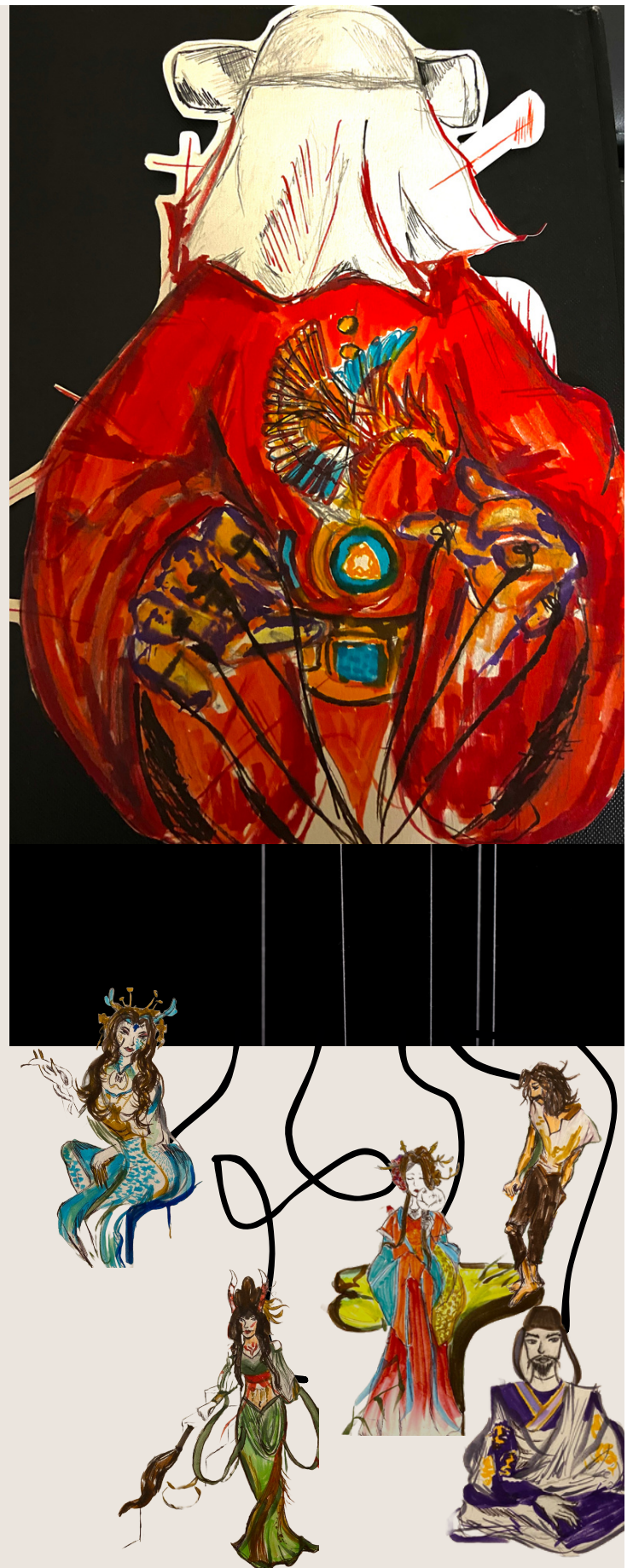
Featured in a sophisticated Tang dynasty traditional outfit. In the background lies a lily-pod stand with lotus flowers coming out.

5. MADMAN BEGGAR

Featured in a modern deep v-neck sleeveless top with knee-ripped cropped-leg pants to give the chic yet homeless look recreation.

6. DAOIST PRIEST

Featured in a royal purple traditional priest attire with a transparent silk drape and a Chinese putuo (cap)





DESIGN & CREDITS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Shikha Adhikari

ART DIRECTION

Shikha Adhikari

CONTRIBUTING INSPIRATION

Author Pu Songling: “The Painted Skin”

Author Feng Menglong “Legend of the
White Snake”

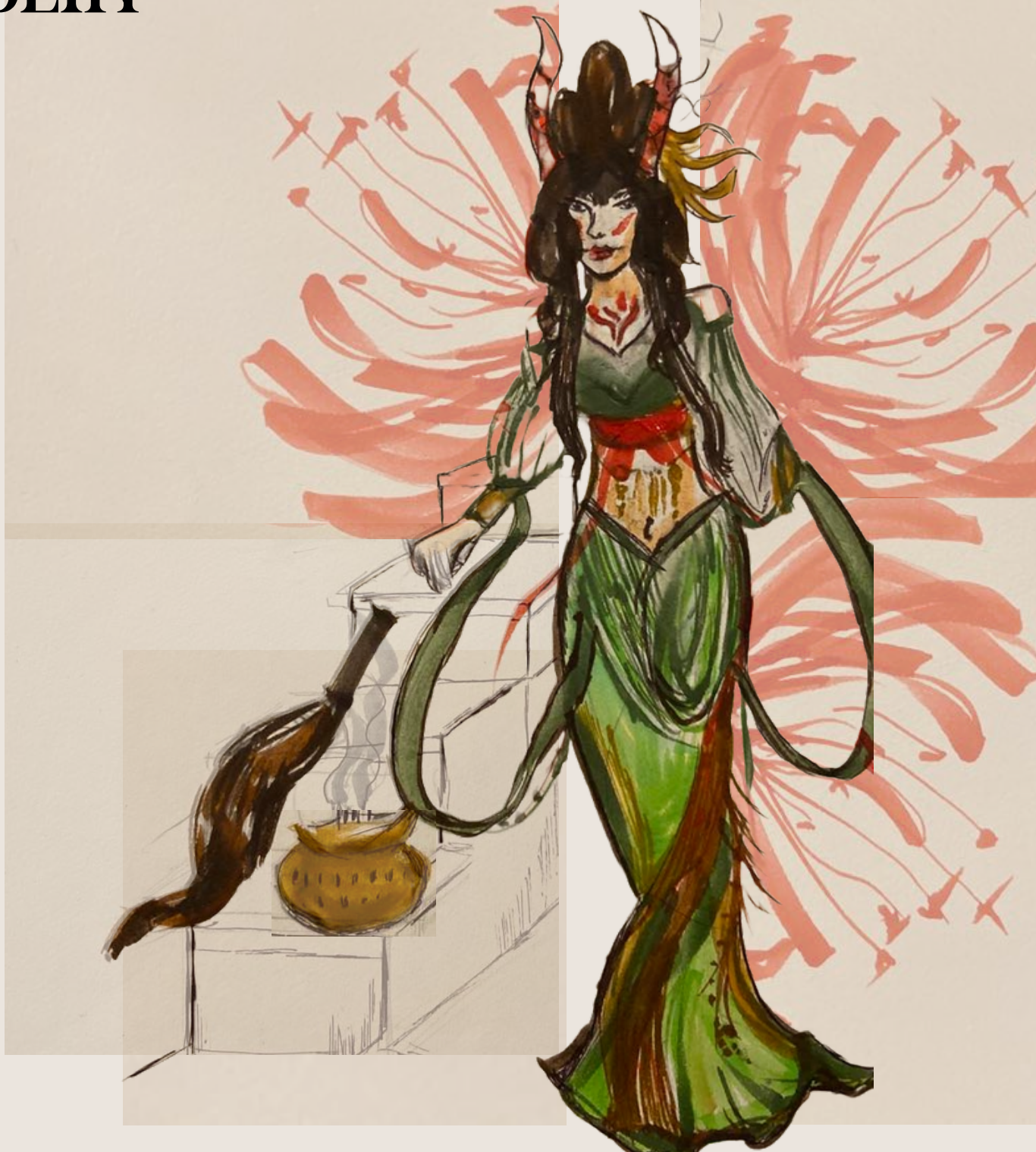
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WHITE SNAKE



GOBLIN



The White Snake (pg 1) is part of a ancient Chinese legend known as the “White maiden.” One of the most revered stories to caution the world about deception and exterior falsities, this piece of writing has greatly influenced the creation of the collection Inside-out. You can ever so slightly

detect the outward appearance of the snake by paying close attention to the model’s accentuated eyes and the glitter paint to give an effect of scaling. The model wears a crest to symbolize the descendance from a dragon and is garnished with gold to add to the “shiny” and decorated exterior.

The dress is an essential core to the reference to the legend and the contrast between the demon’s human exterior and the inner demonic thoughts.

This sensual integration of silk fabric and embroidered lace gives the illusion of a human wearing a snake skin yet also trace the model’s silhouette and hug close to her body. The inclusion of the golden claw rings on the model’s fingers helps tie the embodiment of the demonic figure together. What do you see first? The woman or the snake?

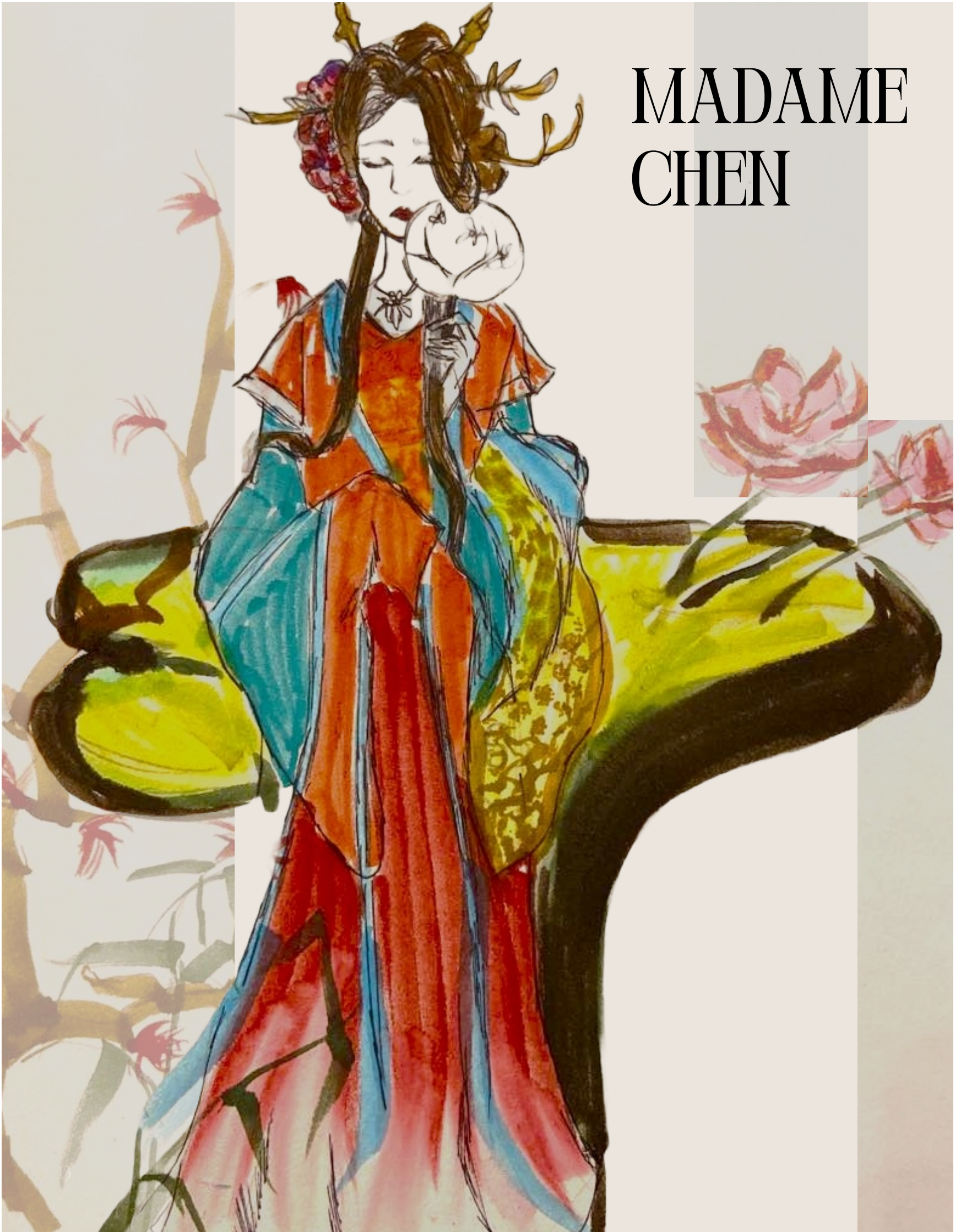
MADMAN BEGGAR

In this edition, the goblin is taken from Author Pu Songling's Painted Skin. This certain creature is caught painting the hide of a human while in its most truest demonic form. The two-piece outfit once again wraps around the model highlighting her curves and feminine attributes for the male gaze. The red spider lily provides a red, green, and brown color scheme to show the goblin's green exterior, brown grime, and red eyes. The models also wears the demon's horns to complete the demonic look. In the set the flyswatter and the golden urn used to trap the goblin is also featured.

The Madman beggar is another strange addition to the "Painted Skin." The unkempt look, gaunt and impoverished body is carefully sewn together with the angled and hunched posture of the model. Not to mention mirroring his twisted thoughts The model wears cotton pants cinched at the waist and a cropped leg look to show the lack of material he lives with. The chinese collared shirt immitates the sleeves less hanfu style with a modern twist of the deep v-neck.

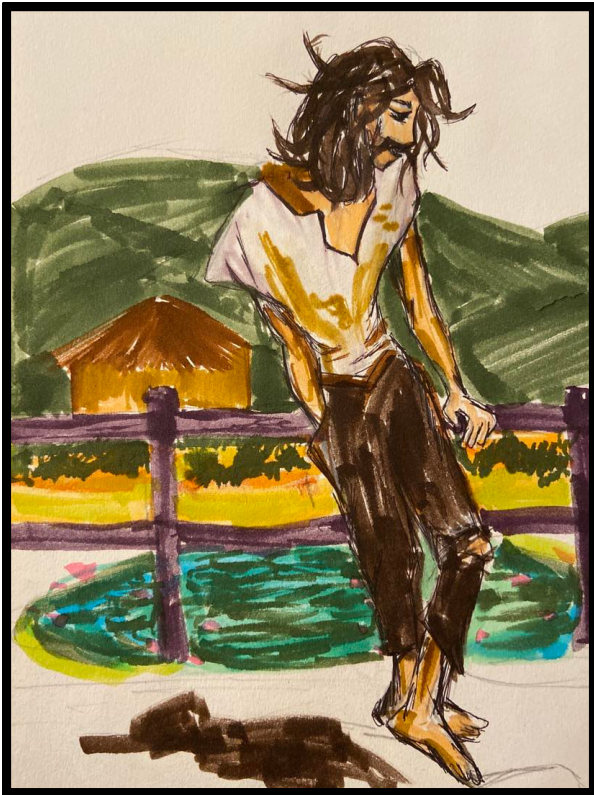


MADAME CHEN

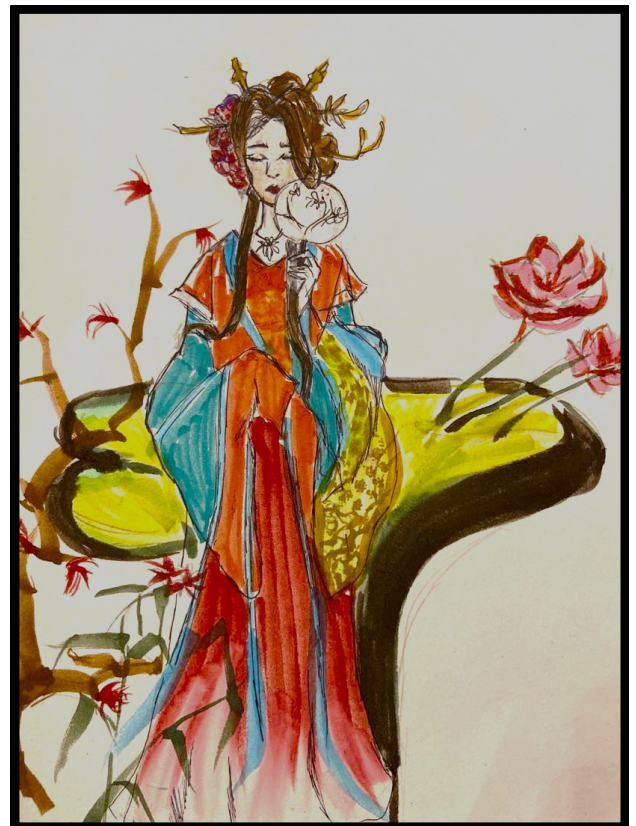


EXPRESSIONS

J U X T A P O S I T I O N

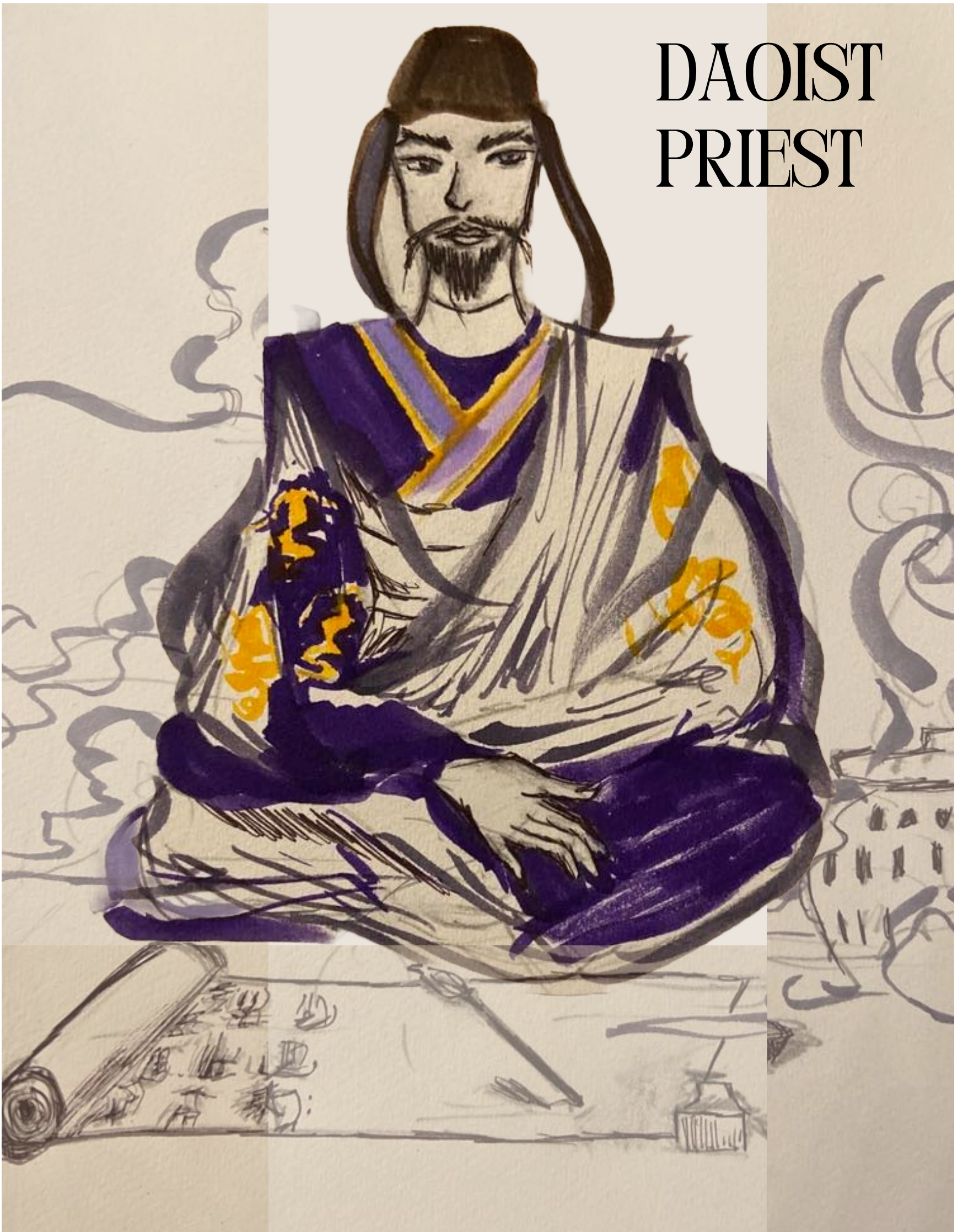


Taking a closer peek at this duo. There is an intense exchange between the two characters. Looking at model for the madman beggar, he has a carefully crafted smile and a sneer that one can sense a loose morality and iniquitous behavior. He maintains a lustful gaze in the direction of Madame Chen. Within his own background he can be seen standing in front of the lily pond almost as if mocking the purity and dignity of Madame Chen.



Madame Chen can be seen embodying the dignified exterior shown by her unfazed expression and closed eyes. The model wears a full cover up of a Qing traditional outfit with loose sleeves and a hidden figure. Throughout the entirety of the story Madame Chen keeps a sense of deep loyalty to her husband despite the infidelity and debauchery he indulges in. Her vibrant costume represents her wide range of emotion and elasticity in character as she strangely leaves her dignity behind in pursuit of marital piety.

DAOIST PRIEST





LETTER *from the* DESIGNER

What we wear is not what we
embody...

Through the various fashion, expressions, and sets featured in this edition. The commonality is that they are strange characters that originate from the strange legends in order to teach the people to develop strong values and avoid the seven sins. I hope to bring the depth of the strange tales by bringing out the “inside-out.” The characters are known to be hiding their true self so why not hide the human underneath while exposing their true nature.

Mr. WuMagic

by

Aarav Mangla



Aarav Mangla is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. Aarav wrote this poem to fulfill an assignment in Professor Huiying Chen's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. Aarav's playful poem “Mr. WuMagic,” was inspired by *Monkey King*, a modern English rendition of the 16th-century Chinese novel, *Journey to the West*. Taking inspiration from this character—bold, rebellious, a symbol of resilience, Aarav's poem draws parallels between the Monkey King's defiance of authority and the fight against societal injustices in today's world, underscoring how ancient mythologies can still inspire courage and reflection in modern times. This poem won Second Place in the Fall 2023 Cornerstone Contest.

Upon the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, from a rock,
I emerged, untamed, like a key in an endless lock.
For ordinary notions, I've never adhered,
Primal forces in me, eternally revered.
With fiery eyes and a heart of stone,
My sorcery reigned, each feat alone.
Rebellious spirit, antics dared,
Astride a cloud, through the sky, I fared.
Immortality as a gift and my body of stone
Presenting my courage, I claimed the throne.

My magic was an instrument of immense might,
Which made many demons run away in fright.
My beloved magic staff full of magical power,
Could stretch infinitely and over anyone could it tower.

Ruyi Jingu Bang was my beloved's name,
All the natural elements it could tame.
Iconic symbol of his might and will,
Reflecting light, undimmed, so still.
A staff that defines his ardent quest,
With power unmatched, it stands the test.

But my purest magic was something apart,
My strongest power, my hidden art
Sometimes a demon, sometimes a flame
Shapeshifting was this craft's name.
Shape-shifting master in forests deep,
Where secrets of my magic sleep.
In Star Cave's depths, I was groomed,
Human manners and speech were assumed.

Subjects mastered, my skills did bloom,
Favored by the Master, in secret, I loomed.
Creature to creature, swiftly I'd turn,
In playful games, my foes would spurn.

Resources galore, cloning so deft,
Anything transformed, no limit, no heft.
A world of shapes, a realm so wide,
Imagine and transform, with my magical stride.

My energy undiminished, in motion, a flight,
Emanating from within, an unceasing light.
Miracles and powers, so they're easily seen,
Impress mortals, but for me, they're routine.

Traveling thousands of miles, with a twist I'll ascend,
Transformations aplenty, my prowess won't bend.
A staff, mere as a needle, harbors might just as great,
Each hair of mine offer's options, an infinite state.

But alas, a transition to man I can't wholly embrace,
My tail's an obstinate appendage, stuck in its place.
Removed from Life and Death's binding chains, I've become,
Immutable, superior, speaking to those who succumb.

Yet within, something did lack,
Ego and pride marked a darker track.
Magic's lure for mischief and gain,
Lead my life in a risky reign.
But who knew my meaning of magic was flawed
A lesson was incoming from the almighty, the god

Before the shift, my magical dance,
A rebel's play, in a mischievous stance.
In grand display, in jest and play,
Me, The Monkey King, in my wild array.

Yet beneath the surface, a tale unfurled,
A transformation, about to whirl.
A journey emerging, its path in sight,
An unaware me, awaiting my light.

Climb trees, you ignoramuses, my presence won't wane,
Jade Emperor, upset, from my havoc's disdain.
From the Heavenly Kingdom, I soared so high,
Declaring my grandeur, a sage in the sky

"With one cloud Somersault can I travel 108,000 miles",
An overconfident me said to the Buddha with a devilish smile.
"Go, traverse the universe, display your grand span,"
I leaped into space, through the cosmic span.
Encountering pillars, my marks they wore,
"My presence noted," I scribed once more.

"You've traveled but a speck, a mere simple palm,"
Buddha's words unveiled the cosmic qualm.
Texts shrunk in size, a timeline's decor,
"My words diminishing," a grand cosmic tour.

But that day my magic failed me,
Captured beneath a mountain waiting for someone to set me free.
Someone did come 500 years later,
Who told me the meaning of magic greater.

The rebel and the egoistic in me
Found new tranquil and solemn in the Buddhist Sea.
My magic earlier was limited to power and might,
Found a new definition in this wisdom sight.

Magic isn't the ability to show others down,
Magic, on your head, doesn't put a crown.
Magic isn't just about your personal gain,
Magic isn't for spreading chaos and pain.

But magic is the strength for everyone to grow,
But magic is the compassion that melts a cold heart's snow.
But magic is the journey to attain higher spirituality,
And the journey to improve one's own self and morality.

My tale is divided into chapters three,
Birth, awakening, life's symphony.
From monster hood to chaos high,
Learning through error, as time flies by.

A youthful phase filled with blunders wrought,
Growing in strength, the battles he fought.
Maturity found through lessons earned,
A path of growth, where knowledge is churned.

A visionary shift in my fiery stare,
Beyond mere illusions, truth to bear.
A rebel's past, now connections within deep,
Spiritual teachings, wisdom's keep.

Magic's new face, a transformation grand,
From dominance wielded to a helping hand.
No longer for self-glory, my aim,
But for aid, protection, a nobler claim.
This perception change, a journey's prize,
From ego's grasp to my soul's rise.
My tale, an evolution's spin,
From rebel to sage, a change within.

In this tale of the pilgrim's quest,
My wild spirits were put to the test.
Contained, he steadies, finds his ground,
With stillness, worthy goals are found.

A transition profound, from selfish aim,
To compassion's call, a much higher claim.
A tale of magic, from dark to bright,
True strength in kindness, a radiant light.

With a coronet bestowed, my Monkey Mind at ease,
Restless thoughts quelled, and my spirit found peace.
This journey of power, an epic, my claim,

“Sun Wukong's journey,” etching eternity's name.

Embracing this journey of growth and change
I transformed from a monkey king to a hero not-so-strange.

Kizo’s Light

by
Mohan Gopal



Mohan Gopal is a Purdue undergraduate student initially majoring in Aerospace Engineering. Mohan’s “Kizo’s Light” tells the story of a young boy searching for his parents and the mysterious light that appeared in his last memory of them. Mohan’s story explores the ambiguity in life and how magic can contribute to finding your way in a world full of unknowns. Mohan wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor Claire Mason’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. Mohan’s short story won Second Place in the Fall 2023 Cornerstone Contest.

Kizo rounded the dark shape beside him. It was big enough to be a dumpster, or maybe it was one of those large computers that scientists used to use. Knowing this city, it could have been anything, and Kizo didn't want to take off his helmet to find out.

As he walked further into the street, his surroundings got a little brighter. It was almost imperceptible because of the overwhelming darkness of the city and the haze within it. But Kizo was used to it by now. He could sense almost any change of brightness, and this slight change meant he was approaching something. Kizo took a few more steps and stuck his arm out in front of him, feeling for the usual chain fence blocking the way. Instead he felt something else. Cool drops of rain stung his skin as the water pooled in his upturned palm. He walked forward and took off his helmet, the plopping of raindrops joining the sensation of the rain. Kizo closed his eyes as he turned his face towards the raindrops falling towards him.

Even though most of the city was covered to keep people from seeing the sky, sometimes Kizo was lucky enough to stumble upon open air just like he did tonight. Kizo kept walking, he wanted to see how large this hole was. Usually places this big that opened up to the sky were blocked by chain fences or owned by the fat men that created this place. But this one wasn't. Maybe he should come back here in the morning to see the hole more clearly.

Suddenly, Kizo dropped. Maybe he should have been watching where he was going, or maybe there was a reason that this part of the city wasn't blocked off. But all that didn't matter now. All Kizo could see were the raindrops no longer falling towards him—he was falling with them.

A light. It's not a normal light. When you look into that light and give your eyes time to focus, your vision blurs, the light doesn't. Then, eventually, if you look at it long enough, the light expands. It shifts into multiple colors, red, green, yellow. It's like a star in the sky except no star could produce the radiant spectacle that it creates. The light envelopes your view, consuming you, but simultaneously still existing as a single point in front of you. It twists and turns like a kaleidoscope, is as predictable as an electron, and dazes you without blinding you. The light is magic.

This is all Kizo remembers of the last time he was with his parents. He doesn't remember hearing them, and he certainly doesn't remember seeing them. He just remembers that they were there, along with the light, along with him. He doesn't remember what hap-

pened next. He wouldn't even have known anyways. All he remembers is now they are gone. Kizo misses his parents, but for some reason he also misses the light. Maybe this is why he seeks for the brightest place in the city. Maybe this is why he searches for any hint of magic. Maybe it will lead him to his parents, or maybe the light will take him too.

Kizo woke up in a puddle of cold water, the darkness of the city still surrounding him. He didn't know where he was, he felt lost without his parents. By the looks of it he was in a canal. It was mostly dry, and he had no idea it was there. Kizo's eyes were blurry, and his head throbbed from the fall. He should have been wearing his helmet.

"My helmet!"

He jolted upright and immediately started feeling around for his helmet. After a few minutes of frantic searching he found the helmet about ten yards away from where he originally lay. Kizo felt around the helmet for damage, and to his dismay, the otonator, usually situated behind his left ear, was gone. With a sigh, Kizo laid back down on the ground, the back of his head soaking up the cold water pooled around him. But Kizo didn't notice the cold. He was distracted by something he rarely saw: Kizo noticed the stars.

The sky trembled with its own magnificence. With the clouds gone, cleared away by the morning's rain. The stars could be seen in their full force. The stars were every color Kizo could think of: white and yellow, blue and green, red and orange. Some were even purple. They twinkled in and out, hidden by minuscule debris passing in front of them. But then came back brighter than they were before.

Kizo loved the stars. He rarely saw them due to the clouds and the channeled nature of the city, but they were the brightest things he had found. They made him feel hope that he would find his parents. When he was a child, his parents would teach him about the stars. Because he rarely got to see them, he didn't remember much of the lessons. But he loved the idea of how people used to use the stars to guide their way.

Only moving his eyes, Kizo traced the edge of Nature's Mother, a subtle asterism composed of five green stars, down to its lowest point, which was unfortunately blocked by a large black shadow of a building that was right over him. However, something glinted at him from a window on the top floor of that building. It wasn't green, so it wasn't a reflection of Nature's Mother, a verdant constellation. As he looked closer, he realized he couldn't tell what color the light was at all.

His mouth went dry, it was the light, The Light, the one he saw take his parents, the one he sees in his dreams. He yearned for his parents. He had to go to the light.

Kizo put his helmet on and scrambled up towards the building. His nails bent backwards as he frantically gripped his hands on the concrete walls of the canal. He splashed a foot into a stream of water, but it slipped backwards making him hit his ribs on the ground. He gasped out a breath and rolled over, clenching his chest. The light was still there, impossible as ever. He took a few breaths, cringing in pain when they got too deep. But he couldn't wait long.

Kizo poised himself to restart the climb, with one arm still tightly clenched close to his body. He got up on his other arm, and prepared to propel himself over the ledge of the canal. His arm gave out, and he hit the faceplate of his helmet on the cold concrete below. Slumped down, he paused, but then opted to roll over. It would take some pressure off his chest. As he did he winced, and, in frustration, swung his fist around him. He pounded his fist into the ground. But oddly, he noticed, he couldn't feel the rough texture of the concrete below, but rather a smooth, cooler surface. He was standing on metal.

Unable to see it well in the dark, Kizo felt around. The plate was about as big as his hand and curiously reinforced with welded bolts arranged in a looping spiral. What he could make of its appearance made it more curious, the metal was rusted, scratched, and scuffed in such a perfect way that it camouflaged in with the concrete beside it. If he had never fallen, Kizo probably would have missed it. Mindlessly he touched the center bolt of the metal plate, and, as if it were muscle memory, he traced the path of the Natures' Mother as if the bolts were stars. The plate slowly started to vibrate, and Kizo's breath caught. The metal was resonating, a soft satisfying hum, responding to his touch. By the time Kizo finally traced the last star, the oscillations were so vigorous that he had to stop right before the last star. But somehow, that was the right thing to do. When he lifted his hand, there was a hiss from behind the plate, startling Kizo. So he scooted away from it. The metal plate started to bend in like it was under a lot of pressure, and it continued to hum and scrape, slowly removing itself from its place embedded in the ground, turning itself into a cylinder of solid metal.

Now normally Kizo would have inspected that cylinder, but for some reason he felt different. He could only think about getting to the light. It was an interesting cylinder, it was rare that he found something that tested one's knowledge of the stars. (He had never found anything like it at all.) But he had to move on. Kizo placed a foot on the cylinder and hoisted himself back up to ground level, leaving the ditch behind.

Kizo felt like he had never been to this side of the city. It's not like he would know, the city was usually so dark you couldn't see defining features, and he spent most time trying to forget where he had been anyways. Kizo cursed himself. Of course he had probably been here before, it was probably just the light from the stars changing the lighting of the city, making it feel new.

Regretting having distracted himself from his usual task, Kizo headed over to a door at the base of the tower with the light. He looked around for a reasonably sized piece of rubble on the ground and threw it at the door with all his might. Even using all his strength, the piece barely made a dent. It was exactly what he needed.

Kizo fished around in his pockets for a dust charge. Whereas most people inhaled dust charges to make themselves fall asleep, Kizo had found another use for them. With his little trick, when a dust charge is set off in a low pressure area, it emits all its force at once. So Kizo jammed the charge in the little dent he made in the door, turned on the extraction on his helmet, and pressed his helmet down over the charge. With a short pop, mist seeped from the cracks from all edges of the door. Holding his breath, Kizo pushed in the door and hopped inside.

Kizo quickly went to the other side of the room. He didn't want to inhale the dust he had just spread by the doorway and fall asleep in a place he broke into. The dust, however, served another purpose, namely, as a defense to make anyone nosy enough to inspect what he was doing fall asleep themselves with the densely packed dust he released at the front.

Kizo looked around, inside the room there was a bunch of science equipment seemingly left untouched for a very long time. He would keep it that way. Spotting a staircase to the right, he went over and ran up it, right past a "danger-no entry" sign to the right. Kizo was used to seeing in dark places, he could see the sign well enough. But something inside him wanted him to keep moving—to find that light. Something inside him forgot about his fall earlier that day. Something inside made him forget about the dangers of ignorance.

Kizo got to the top and forced open the door with his shoulder. His helmet gave a little chirp, signaling it had filtered out any dust that had got in it from the charge. So to free his hands, Kizo put it on.

This room was odd. Dozens of robots lined the room, many broken or featureless, yet many as advanced as androids. All of them seemed broken or powered down. This was good news, Kizo could probably replace his helmet's missing otonator and get it fully functional

again. However, he had to find the light. He wasn't nearly as high as when he saw it from outside the building. He had to keep moving.

He spotted an elevator on the wall and walked over to it. This could probably take him all the way to the top if he could get it working. He pressed the open button, and surprisingly, the elevator opened right up. However, what startled Kizo more was that the inside of the elevator was lit by an actual light. He hadn't seen one in years, and it was blinding him.

Kizo shied away back to the robots, waiting for his eyes to adjust while crouching behind an advanced robot on a table. As he stood there, he realized that since he was waiting for his eyes to adjust and a perfectly suitable robot was right there, he might as well dig around for an otonator. An otonator was a composite device. He didn't know what it quite did for his helmet, but he also knew that it wouldn't work without it. So Kizo dug away. He took off the shell plate from the robot, wires snapping off as he pulled it away. He was about to pull out a drive wire when he heard a voice behind him.

“No.”

Kizo jumped up startled yet again. “Who's there?” he whispered. He dug into his pocket, and, taking no chances, lit yet another dust charge to knock out any foe in the room. The dark gray gas filled the area, and Kizo heard nothing more, so he turned around and ripped out the component from the robot's head.

“No!” said the voice, even louder this time.

Kizo shouted even louder too, “Show yourself!” Kizo was terrified. The voice survived the dust, so they probably had a helmet. Unlike him, common people weren't supposed to have helmets. So whoever was speaking was powerful or important.

“You aren't supposed to come up here,” droned the voice. “What do you think ‘do-not-enter’ means?”

“I'm sorry,” Kizo stammered, “I was just trying to get to the light. I'll leave. Right now.”

“No,” the voice said, “You chose to come in, you chose to ignore the sign, you chose not to leave in the first place, and then you killed that robot. Now, you have no choices. You already chose to die.”

“That robot wasn’t alive in the first place, ” Kizo tried to explain. But at that moment, something behind Kizo whirred. It was another advanced robot. Its green eyes were waking up and staring straight into him. Then, green pairs of eyes lit up all around him, all across the room. Kizo started backing away carefully. He didn’t know where the speaker was, but he also knew that robots were dangerous. Something to the left of Kizo jolted and stood up. A particularly large robot was glaring straight at him. Kizo ran. He weaved around the piles of components on the floor and the angry robots, and ran into the elevator. With a few seconds of hesitation, the elevator doors rolled shut, turning off the light inside the elevator, leaving him in pitch blackness.

Kizo almost regretted coming into this building. He knew something about robots led to the downfall of the scientists and his parents leaving. He wanted to avoid robots almost as much as he wanted to see the light, and anyone who could control robots was probably someone he didn’t want to mess with. He was pretty sure the voice wasn’t even a human at all.

Suddenly the voice came back, reverberating in the elevator around him. “That was a mistake,” the voice said condescendingly. “You think running into the elevator would save you? The elevator is a machine, the elevator is me.”

The elevator shuddered to a stop. Everything was silent, and the lack of light was more apparent than ever before. Kizo had never been uncomfortable in the dark, but he was uncomfortable now. Kizo clawed at the cold elevator door. It wouldn’t open, but he could fix that. To Kizo’s fear, the elevator suddenly reversed and started going back down. He had to think of something fast. Kizo had six dust charges left. He could put them all in his helmet like he had done at the entrance door, but a blast that large would incinerate his helmet and maybe him. After all this time, he’s had it, he couldn’t lose his helmet, it was his last connection to his parents. As the elevator slid to a stop and the elevator doors ominously opened up, Kizo cowered in the back of the elevator. He was trapped. Beyond the doors were a thousand angry green eyes staring down at him, waiting for him to come out, waiting to kill him. Kizo’s vision blurred, the green eyes morphed into one. Kizo thought about the light and about his parents, then Kizo thought about his life. The green lights comforted him, just like the green from Nature’s Mother. He didn’t need his parents, he had the stars. Without any hesitation, Kizo lit all six dust charges and jammed his helmet down on top of them. Kizo looked up at the robots for the last time, and then turned on the extract mode on his helmet. The elevator exploded in a giant gray cloud, obstructing the green eyes of the robots from view just like how the clouds block the stars. The explosion threw Kizo out the side of the building, and for the second time that day, Kizo found himself falling.

The light, it's not a normal light. It's an impossible, magical light. Even though its appearance was a paradox, Kizo had it memorized. Almost every night he dreamed of the light. It wasn't a star. Kizo could only describe it as a force of nature. And just as its colors and shapes were impossibly contradictory, Kizo realized something he never realized before. The light wasn't all that bright. This light that (took his parents?!?) wasn't all that bright. It was actually impossibly dark for a light. This caused Kizo to question more. His parents weren't scientists, why did they leave during the fall of scientists? Why did he have a helmet when no other commoner had one? In his memory, why was he so close to the light in the first place? Why did only he have a helmet and not his parents? Realization hit Kizo and he woke up.

Kizo didn't need to feel around to realize what happened to his helmet. Pieces of metal and plastic surrounded him in a disappointing circle. Ignoring his excruciating pain, he stood up. As expected, he was back in the bottom of the canal, the metal cylinder still jutting out of the side of the canal just above his head. Kizo put his palm on it; he knew what happened to his parents, and he didn't want to dwell on it. The cylinder shimmered under his touch. Somehow it recognized his hand from a time way earlier than this morning.

Kizo looked up, but this time not towards the stars, but towards the building. There was a hole blown through the side of the building. A deep gash in its overbearing silhouette. By now, to Kizo, this magical light meant trouble, but he would continue to chase it anyways. In a world full of darkness, it made sense to devote his life to finding the light.

A Strange Encounter

by
Lya Boeger



Lya Boeger is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in English with an Acting Certificate. Lya wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Brandon Rdzak’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. Lay created a story in the true spooky spirit of Halloween: a woman finds her life dominated by her fear of death. While trying to find a way to escape her own mortality, she discovers what it means to really be alive. This story delves into the existential tension between life and death, using Linda’s journey as a metaphor for confronting deep-seated fears. Lya’s work received an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2022 Cornerstone Contest.

Linda Randell was dead long before she died. She just didn't know it. Death has a funny way of telling us that it only appears once we cross a certain line. But it isn't just the absence of life, just like life isn't just the absence of death. One can walk down the street and appear to be alive but really not be alive at all. Just like there are people confined to a hospital bed, virtually giving an appearance of death but actually being more alive than most. Linda was part of the former category. She was an unusually pale, thin woman of about 45 years, although the map of lines running across her face gave her a much older appearance. Always carrying an auburn leather bag over her shoulder, she was prone to nervousness, which usually manifested itself in the bad habit of smoking. Although she was very well off in terms of financial and economic stability and had every reason to be happy according to the standards of society, she was restless, or rather, haunted. Unlike most wealthy people, there was no crowd surrounding her, praising her money. In fact, except for her personal assistant, Ruth, she was utterly alone. This was not because she was rude, or overly critical, nor was it because she was unpleasant to look at. But she had a strange fixation on death and her own mortality, which always seemed to suck the life out of any conversation, leaving her counterpart uncomfortably exposed and with a growing coldness on the inside that would only loosen its grip on them on their way home.

It was a cold Thursday afternoon in November when Linda stepped out of the muddy Yellow Cab and passed the rusty metal gates. She knew where she was going. Her feet instinctively followed the familiar cobbled path down to the older part of the graveyard.

Despite her warm winter jacket she shuddered and pulled her scarf up to her nose. It was colder here. Naked trees spread their fingers over the frozen ground, almost pointing in her direction as she passed the row of moss-covered stones, stopping only in front of a statue. It was the figure of a young woman in a simple dress. With her closed eyes and the flowers pressed against her icy chest, she gave the impression that she was really just praying and could put down her bouquet any second. But the green spots that covered the seam of the gown revealed that she had been there a long time. Almost 40 years, to be exact, ever since the day Linda had given her parents back to the earth and sealed her fate. With stiff limbs, she bent down to slide her hand gently over the stained brass letters at the base of the statue, slowly spelling out her past. She put her leather bag down beside her and began to dig among its contents until she finally pulled out a wreath of evergreen and mistletoe and placed it under the plaque. Satisfied with the result, she got up, wiped the dead leaves off her jeans, and shouldered her bag. She nodded toward the stone woman, and slowly turned to walk back to where she had come from.

Suddenly, she saw a movement out of the corner of her eye. Curious, she turned her head and walked toward a group of trees in front of a little lake that separated the cemetery from the park behind it. As she got closer, Linda discovered what appeared to be an old man with brittle white hair, pondering the stiff ground with a shovel. Despite the exertion of his physical labor, there were no drops of sweat shimmering on his brow. In fact, she couldn't see any signs of exhaustion on the man's leathery face. As she came closer, she noticed other oddities. He was wearing an old-fashioned dark cloak around his shoulders that fell flat on his body, disguising any shapes, despite the strong wind that was bending the grass around him. Hearing her footsteps, the old man stopped in his movement and looked up at her. His sunken, gray eyes seemed to penetrate her innermost being, drawing out all her fears and desires. She averted her eyes but could still feel his gaze on her.

"You are a strange one," he finally addressed her with a rumbling, rusty voice, sounding like the motor of a car that wasn't used to being used.

"I hear that a lot," Linda answered gravely. "What are you doing? Isn't it a little late for gardening?"

The man chuckled. "I'm not planting. I'm making room for the new arrivals."

Linda's confusion was so visible in her face that the old man pointed to three wooden boxes: coffins. Uneasiness slowly crept up her spine and under her skin. She took a cigarette out of the box in her pocket and lit its end with slow, trembling fingers, only to relax as she blew out a great cloud of gray smoke. Noticing that the man had narrowed his eyes with a certain skepticism, she hurried to say, "Oh, it's just a bad habit. I should really stop it, but I never did like the taste of nicotine gum."

"Why are you so nervous?"

"I'm not. OK, Maybe I am. I just don't like being close to death."

He laughed, and his breath fogged his face. "It's just my business, you know? Death is, I mean."

Linda watched the gleaming end of her cigarette, then she looked back at him. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude. It's just... I used to have terrible nightmares when I was a child. I was always lying in a coffin underneath the ground and I couldn't move. It was as if I was trapped away in my own body and there was nothing I could do about it."

"So it is death you are afraid of?"

Linda nodded, inhaling the smoke before pushing it out over their heads where it vanished between the trees.

“Let me ask you a question.” The old man put down his shovel and leaned against the gravestone behind him. He stared at her for a moment with an expression that was impossible to interpret. “Would you avoid death by all means if you could?”

“Who wouldn’t?”

“That is an interesting question.” He was silent for a while and stared off into the fog at the edge of the water. “Most people eventually accept it.” He pushed himself up and away from the stone and motioned her to follow him. He stopped behind a bush on the shore of the lake, and I could see a small wooden rowboat dancing on the shallow water. He turned around and smiled, exposing a set of polished white teeth that almost seemed to glow in the grayness of the day. “In the mood for a little boat tour? I will explain everything.”

At first, Linda Randell hesitated. After all, she didn’t know the man. And she could feel that there was something about him that she didn’t yet understand and maybe never would. Whenever she focused on his face, it seemed to hover, as if something was hidden behind it that he didn’t want to show her. But the perspective of escaping the fear that had dominated her entire life ever since the death of her parents was too strong to ignore. It was worth the chance. Besides, if the old man were to decide to try anything, he would not likely have the strength to overpower her.

As the man rowed them onto the water, his movements slid into each other, a perfect routine, resulting in a calming symphony of the gurgling of the water and the percussion of wood on wood.

“What do I have to do?”

The man turned back to Linda and stopped paddling, then he sat down opposite her and stretched out the paddle. “You just have to take this.”

Confused, she extended a hand and touched the paddle. It was as smooth as silk from a lot of use and hands moving it back and forth in a never-ending rhythm. A calming coldness seemed to emanate from its inside, pouring in waves over her, freezing her in place while seeming to attract her like a mosquito to the light. Hesitating, Linda looked up into the man’s eyes which were now burning with a strange might.

“What is the price?”

“The price?”

“There is always a price. I read *Faustus* in College. You can't fool me. I won't become one of those sad figures in a tragedy that makes a mistake and is forever doomed.”

He nodded. “All right. You will not be able to put down this paddle once you take it. But you will be exempt from the natural cycle of life and death. It is a little like pressing the pause button on your life. You will not have to be afraid anymore, but you have to take over one of my chores and bring passengers over the lake. Even if you change your mind, you will be bound to the paddle and the boat, at least until you have found a reason to live that defies death.”

Linda closed her eyes and listened to the storm inside of her until she could make out that cold, naked fear that had been with her for so long. She imagined grabbing it and pulling it up, outside, and away from her until she felt safe, calm, and free. She opened her eyes. “I won't change my mind.” With those words, she pulled the paddle out of the man's hands.

Suddenly, the leaves on the shore started dancing out onto the water and around her in ever-growing circles, whirling up into the air and drifting back down to touch the dark mirror's surface before beginning the dance anew, slowly growing faster and faster until it seemed like she was trapped in the eye of a tornado of red, gold, and green. The last thing she saw before the leaves darkened the world around her was a slumped figure underneath a statue and the old man's whisper close to her ear: “Now you're free.”

The leaves disappeared as fast as they had surrounded her. Silence spread over the scene. Not even the cry of a lonely bird cut through the tranquility. Linda was alone in the boat, and stretching her arms, she noticed the old man's cloak draped over her shoulders. Pulling it closer to her, she noticed a young man standing on the bank on the park side of the water. Linda did as the old man had told her to do. She steered the boat toward him.

“Where can I take you?” she asked, astonished as soon as the words left her mouth as to why she had asked that question.

“To the other side, of course.” answered the man in a slow, almost dream-like manner. “I need to get to the other side.”

As Linda followed the man's wishes and pushed them back out onto the water, she tried to focus on her passenger's face. But whenever she tried to focus on a specific detail, the rest of it disappeared and the detail blurred, making any strong recognition impossible.

The boat drive was carried out in silence, which was only broken when the bottom of the boat scraped over the cobbles on the other shore. The man rose from his seat and placed an odd-looking golden coin in her hand. Then he stepped on the earth and disappeared as swiftly as he had arrived. Only a feeling of calmness was left behind that swallowed some of Linda's confusion.

Despite the strangeness of the whole situation, Linda was happy. She had felt something deep within her change. The iron fist that she had carried with her wherever she went had finally opened and started to disappear. She was safe, safe from death, and safe from change.

The same scenario appeared over and over again, and soon Linda had lost track of how many people she had helped with their passage. The sun had risen in the east and fallen in the west, traveling with her in a cycle that was never broken until one day, another figure appeared on the shore of the lake.

The woman seemed very young and strangely familiar. As the girl climbed into the shaking boat, Linda gasped. She recognized her hovering face from a picture in Ruth's office. It was her youngest daughter. Suddenly, images kept flooding back to Linda about the conversation she had shared with her assistant about her daughter's entry into college. She couldn't be any younger than 19. Staring at her unexpected passenger, she finally awoke out of her trance and pushed them out onto the lake.

Eventually, Linda stopped paddling and faced the girl who was absently staring at the bare trees in the distance. "Margot?"

The mention of her name brought some life back into the girl's eyes, and, for the first time since she had sat down, she really looked at Linda. "Linda Randell?" Surprise lit up her face, "What are you doing here? Are you dead too?"

Sadness flooded Linda as she smiled at Margot. "No, I agreed to a trade. I don't ever have to die as long as I keep transporting people to the other side." Saying it out loud like this, suddenly made the words sound hollow and alien.

Margot blinked. "But then, are you alive?"

"I don't think so. I think I'm sort of stuck in the middle."

The girl nodded slowly as she was taking in her words. Her ghostly white fingers ran through her hair, twisting one of her long, brown curls. The movement of the hair revealed a hidden red wound on her forehead.

“What happened to you?” Linda asked, pointing to the wound.

“Oh, I slipped in the shower and hit my head on the shower head. Unfortunately, I had a blood aneurysm in the same place. I died pretty much instantly.”

“I’m so sorry. You are so young.”

“Don’t be. It was nobody’s fault. And although I was young, I still lived a full life. I met wonderful people, discovered myself, and fell in love. We all don’t know how much time we have, and living it is all anyone can hope for. If death is the price for that, I am willing to pay it a thousand times.”

It was silent for a moment. Linda didn't know what to say and instead continued to move the boat to its destination. Somehow, she felt silly for living her life in fear while Margot was so calm and ready to face her final transition. Then another thought occurred to her. What if she had been so caught up in the future that she had forgotten to live? She didn’t have any friends, family, or a job that she was passionate about. She couldn’t recount the last time she had done anything risky or just because it had brought her joy. If she was honest with herself, joy had mostly been absent from her life. She had always just counted the hours she thought she still had left.

As she hugged her passenger goodbye and waved until Margot had been swallowed by the fog, her thoughts started racing until suddenly, clear as the dewdrops on the grass, one thought interrupted all the others. “I don’t think I was ever really alive.” Overpowered, she sank back onto her seat and hid her head between her knees. Tears started to run down her cheeks one by one, following in each other's path. She had to get out of here, back to the world of the living. But how?

A memory slowly drifted out of the darkness and toward the surface. The old man’s face appeared in front of her inner eye: “Even if you change your mind, you will be bound to the paddle and the boat, at least until you have found a reason to live that defies death.”

At the time, it had sounded silly, “a reason to live that defied death” didn’t exist for her.

But now, she realized that life itself was what made it worth the price of death.

She stood up and raised her paddle skyward. “Old man,” she yelled, “Come here! I want to go back!” There was no answer. Of course. What had she expected? A thunderstorm and immediate attention? She yelled again. And again. When nothing happened after the seventh time, she collapsed back into the boat and naked panic rolled over her.

Abruptly, she heard a rusty voice behind her. “You don’t have to be so dramatic. You’re not my only client, you know. And some other people have way more serious issues than you.” The old man was sitting at the other end of the boat. He looked different now. His skin had crumpled up until it only barely covered his skull, and in the place where his nose was supposed to be was a triangular hole. His eyes gleamed red as if somebody had hidden coal behind them and lighted it. “Have you found your reason?”

Linda nodded and after he looked her over from head to toe with his piercing gaze, he smiled.

“Yes, I can see it in you. You seem stronger. More ‘alive,’ if you pardon the expression.”

“What happens now?”

“Well, you want to go back, don’t you? And now that you are alive, I can’t keep you here. You don’t belong here anymore.”

“So, I can just leave?”

“Of course. I mean it’s not like you could ever really run away from me.” The old man laughed, then he grimaced. “Apologies. Too early?”

Linda smiled. She rowed both of them back to where she had picked up all of her ghostly passengers and slowly got up. She gave the paddle back to the old man. “Thank you. Thank you for making me want to live again.”

The old man chuckled and nodded back at her. “I will miss my vacation.”

She stepped out of the boat and onto the shore. As soon as both of her feet touched the ground, darkness fell over her.

Linda felt a cool breeze on her face, tickling her nostrils and making her sneeze. She slowly, probingly, opened one eye and then the other. She was lying on grass and piles of leaves. The wet, earthy smell of fall clouded her senses and she deeply inhaled the cold air. Carefully moving a tired arm underneath her body, she pushed herself upward, leaning

against a stone behind her. Slowly, she began to take in her surroundings. She was still at the graveyard, but there was no boat visible on the lake, and no figures appeared in the shadows of the trees. Relieved, she leaned back further and something poked her in her lower back. With discontent and a certain amount of anger, she twisted her body to get a look at whatever had been the cause of her pain and almost leaped up in surprise. It was the same wreath she had bought when she had come to the cemetery, an event that felt incredibly long ago. However, the wreath was still as green as ever, and the mistletoe berries shimmered in the same pearly white as they had when she had laid them down. This could only have one possible explanation. She could not have been gone long. Looking up at the statue, Linda could have sworn that her expression changed for a second, and the flower girl smiled down at her. Hastily, she jumped up and searched for her bag before blowing her parents a final kiss and running down the path that she had come.

When she arrived back at her penthouse that evening, she lit her last cigarette and sat in an armchair, watching the sundown and pondering what had happened.

Her last thought before the fiery glimmer of her last cigarette died and left her in the growing darkness of the night was that from now on she was going to live, for her own sake and for Margot's.

From then on, it was as if the shadow that had been hanging over her like a veil had finally lifted. Linda Randell lived to see another 50 years. And when her time finally did come, she wasn't afraid but embraced death like an old friend she hadn't seen in a long time. But even though she had finally moved on, her story lived on in those she knew and gave them what she had always longed for: comfort in the faith that death was not the end but just a new beginning.

Faustus

by
Matthew Ma

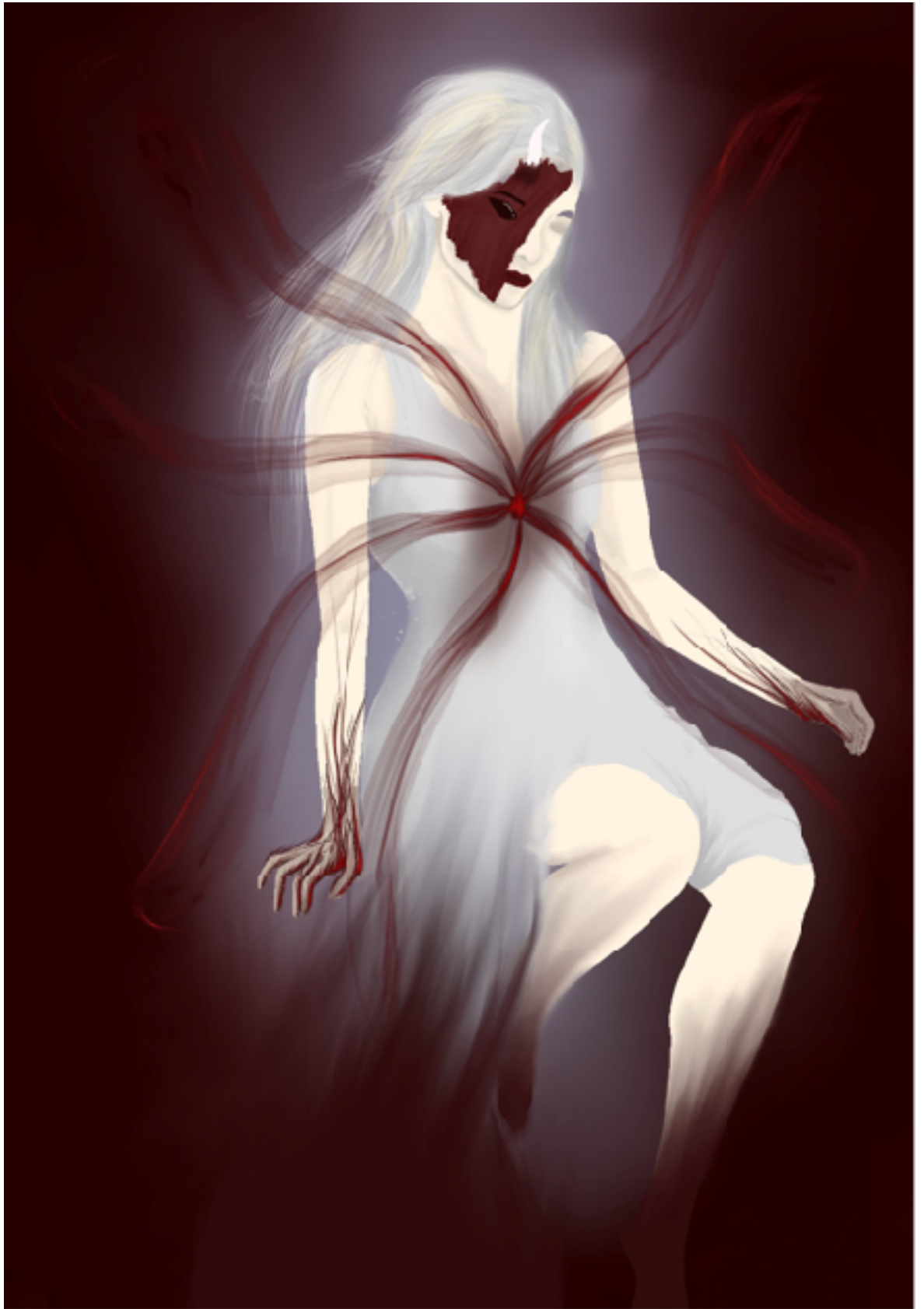


Matthew Ma is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Game Design and Animation. Matthew created this piece to fulfill an assignment in Professor Lindsay Hamm's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. By using colors to convey different meanings such as innocence, death, and passion, he was able to craft a piece interpreting the idea of corruption displayed in *Faustus: That Damned Woman*. Matthew's artwork won an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2023 Cornerstone Contest.

Cornerstone Contest: “Magic”

Artist’s Statement:

I wanted to use colors that contrasted with each other but also that had some sort of meaning. I know in previous works I've read, authors have used color as some sort of symbol. White was considered a symbol of both innocence and death, and red was considered a symbol of anger and passion, often associated with the Devil. The woman is mainly composed of lighter colors like white since, like Faustus, she was mainly innocent at the beginning of the book. However, when she makes a deal with the devil, the red slowly creeps up through her dress and legs. The legs also represent a foundation, and if a foundation is corrupted, then the progress built on top will also be corrupted. The red on her hands is how she actively uses her power, and the red coming out of her heart shows how she didn't want to be corrupted. Her hands represent the work she is doing, such as creating the digital world. I like to think that since she started on a bad foundation, everything she touched and did ended in death. I also added a somewhat devilish half-face for fun since Mephistopheles was Faustus's assistant. I hope this provides more insight into why I did what I did!



Thalia’s Lament

by
Daniel Tennett



Daniel Tennett a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Accounting. Dan wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Miriam Barnum’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. This story explores the emotional and ethical complexities of survival, using Thalia's journey to highlight the true nature of power and sacrifice—that true magic is found not in erasing mistakes but in using the lessons of loss to forge a brighter, more resilient future. Dan’s story received an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2023 Cornerstone Contest.

After the cataclysm that history would mournfully dub the “Great Shattering,” the world lay broken. Its once magnificent splendor reduced to whispers of ash and echoes of despair. Thalia, by some stroke of cruel fate, survived. A mistress of arcane arts, a guardian of the old world's mysteries. Her days were spent wandering through the skeletal remains of forgotten cities, and her nights were haunted by the ghosts of those she couldn't save. The weight of survival pressed heavily upon her, a constant reminder of her singular escape from death's grasp. Thalia had learned the ways of magic from legends as vast and varied as the stars, from tales of Faust's ambition to the journeys of the fabled Monkey King. Her knowledge was vast, yet not enough to turn back time, not enough to piece together a world shattered by its own reckless pursuit of power.

Within the tempest of her dreams, she discovered the Vestige. A realm of possibilities, a shadow of the world that might have been if not for the Shattering. It was a place where the imagination painted landscapes and breathed life into creatures of delicate beauty and hope. There, the silent forests were guarded by spectral stags with antlers of woven light, capable of healing reality's tears. Skies were cradled by Aeon Birds, winged sentinels with the power to rewind time's relentless march. It was in this realm of dreams that Thalia was tempted by the Wraith of What Was. This was a being that promised her a forbidden spell to undo the cataclysm, to restore what had been lost. The price? Her very soul, the essence of her being and the source of her magic. Torn by longing and guilt, Thalia considered the offer. To surrender her soul meant the chance to erase the Shattering, to bring back countless lives, and to lift the unbearable guilt that clung to her like shadows. But in the silent communion with her heart, where the wisdom of the ages still whispered, she understood the truth of her power. The essence of magic was not in rewriting history but in forging tomorrow.

Thalia refused the Wraith's dark bargain, realizing that her soul was not hers to give away but hers to use to light the way forward. Her magic would be a bridge between the Vestige and reality, not to escape to a world that never was, but to heal the one that is. She channeled her energies to create sanctuaries for the remnants of her world, places where memories of the lost could live on, not as shackles but as guiding stars for the living. The Vestige became a testament to resilience, a foundation for a future where the survivors could thrive.

Through her deeds, the survivors' eyes were opened to the new magic, a magic born of unity and healing, a magic that sought to mend rather than rend. Thalia, in her tireless labor, found a measure of peace. Her guilt was transformed from a burden to a source of endless empathy and drive, a constant call to build a better tomorrow.

Thalia's story became a parable of hope—a beacon that taught that the truest magic was not in undoing the past but in embracing the present and crafting a future. It was a gift not of the arcane, but of the heart, a magic woven not from the stuff of souls, but from the very essence of humanity's indomitable spirit.

6

Place

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

—T. S. Eliot

My Guava Tree

by
Luke West



Luke West is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Secondary English Education. Luke wrote this piece to fulfill an assignment in Professor Brandon Rdzak’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2024. He wrote it about a specific moment when nature helped him process the culture shock he experienced when he moved from America to Uganda in middle school. Inspired by Margaret Cavendish and Ralph Waldo Emerson, he uses the natural world as a method of self-reflection and learning. Luke’s poem won First Place in the Spring 2024 Cornerstone Contest.

My Guava Tree

(Breathe). . .

Colors and sounds spin around me.

They are up to my neck.

If I breathe in, they will fill my lungs and throat, and I will not be able to breathe again.

Everywhere, colors and sounds surround Fighting to exist.

. . . (Breathe)

I wipe the last stray tear off my cheek after I breathe in deeply. It's one of those deep breaths that hits their limit and breaks and skips; it makes me feel 6 years old again. I look around, and my senses begin to make sense. I am in the guava tree, where only the ants marching in their rigid lines keep me company. I come here when I cry. I sit at the top of the tree, among the swaying leaves, and take my new home in again. I find myself in a clashing world of aggressive green, gold, gray, red, blue, and brown. These are the colors of Uganda, never existing in solitude.

The green and red find themselves clashing inside my guava tree and its barkless wood. Blue and gray pit themselves against each other in the clouds, and brown and red struggle in the dirt, both trying their best to boast dominance over the other. It's headache-inducing. In the background, the golden blue kingfishers cry out in the trees of the overwhelming mountains in the distance, while nearby trucks, overflowing with sugarcane, try their best to drown out the little birds. Up in my tree, I feel so many feelings, all fighting like the colors in the dirt and the sounds in the air: green feelings, soft feelings, loud feelings. I feel blue feelings, and red feelings, quiet feelings.

I have been crying in my guava tree because I have been missing home with more force than I could ever remember feeling; it's a terrifying feeling, the feeling of being 12 years old in a culture that does not understand you the same way you do not understand it. I did not understand this new country with its unfamiliar culture and unfamiliar trees of unfamiliar colors. This tree could not exist in Indiana, it could *never*. Colors can live near the guava tree with more liberty than they could ever hope to have in America.

As my breathing slows, though, and as the ants keep their tempo among the leaves, I close my eyes, collect my thoughts, and open them again. As I look down at my hands, I see that the bark beneath the marching lines of ants was not in conflict as I had thought. The red and green were not *clashing*; they were ebbing, flowing, speaking life into the tree I sat in. I looked to the leaves, where my eyes rested upon a singing blue kingfisher, resting on a branch. The bird peered at me for a second and fluttered off, bringing himself into the col-

orscape of the sky; the clouds and the space between them suddenly seemed . . . softer than before. *The blue would never look so deep without the pale grey clouds to bring the contrast out*, I thought. As the bird flew down, it brought my eyes to the dirt again. The red and brown were not fighting as I had thought; they did not care about dominance. They were dancing, a harsh but beautiful dance of saturation and territory. As I closed my red eyes and listened, I found that the birds were not worried about the trucks' passing grumblings. The trucks were not overshadowing them on their way from the sugarcane fields, they were singing with them, harmonizing. And in the distance, the mountains did not have anything worth fighting for, save their own still, stoic beauty.

A last stray tear rolled down my cheek, and I wiped it off. I put my hand down onto the tree again and thanked it for what it had given me: the beginning of a new comfort in the unfamiliar colors I found within it. I had cried because I missed home, because I thought that this place was too aggressive in all of its alien colors fighting around me. I didn't know how to take it all in, how to navigate it. Still. The guava tree, in all of its alien liberty and bold coloring, in all of its overwhelming beauty, was my reminder that even though I found myself lost in this new place and new culture, there would always be a guava tree, or a cloud, or even a pile of red-brown dirt to show me the *beauty* of the unfamiliar, of the people I do not know and the culture I do not understand. I should not fight it. I should flow with it, like the colors of the tree. I should learn from the contrast of it all, like the clouds in the sky. I should dance with it, like the colors in the dirt. I should be still in it like the mountains standing tall behind me. As I climbed down the guava tree and headed home for dinner, wiping the fading red blotches from my eyes, I decided that I would not fear the guava tree and its place. I would not fear this country. I would learn from it.

And I did.

My Identity’s Fabric

by

Kimberly Nicole Reyes Rodríguez



Kimberly Nicole Reyes Rodríguez is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aerospace Engineering. Kimberly wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Stacy Sivinski’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2024. In this essay, which stems from her deep connection with her homeland, El Salvador, Kimberly aims to convey the intertwining of cultural roots and personal identity, while exploring the resilience and sense of belonging that arise from balancing nostalgia with new experiences. Kimberly’s work won the Second Place in the Spring 2024 Cornerstone Contest.

Places hold great significance in shaping one's sense of self, weaving strands of memories, emotions, and connections that define who we truly are. For me, as a girl originating from El Salvador, my homeland is not just a geographical location, it's the fabric that envelops my identity and will perpetually be deeply ingrained in my heart and soul.

El Salvador is more than just a small dot on a map; it's a symphony of traditions, flavors, warmth, and colorfulness that embrace me in a sense of belonging. The aroma of freshly made *antojitos*, our traditional snacks, filled with love and heritage, drifts through my memories, reminding me of joyful family gatherings and the comforting embrace of familiar tastes. The rhythmic beats of cumbia, salsa, and the melodies of marimba transport me back to lively events, where laughter and togetherness create bonds that transcend time and distance, shaping the core of who I am.

Every bite of *pupusas*, our beloved national dish, carries with it the taste of home and the love of family gatherings. The vibrancy of colors present in our infinite list of traditional festivals, like the joyous celebrations of Independence Day or the solemnity of *Semana Santa*, echo through my memories, reminding me of the rich cultural heritage that binds me to my roots. These experiences, steeped in authenticity and love, form the foundation of my connection to El Salvador, fostering my sense of self and shaping my worldview.

Our homes, schools, cities, and natural landscapes are not just physical spaces; they are reflections of experiences, aspirations, and a sense of belonging. The familiar sights and sounds of my childhood home evoke a deep sense of comfort and security, anchoring me to cherished memories and values. Similarly, walking the halls of my engineering school, I feel a sense of purpose and growth, surrounded by like-minded individuals and a shared pursuit of knowledge and innovation.

Yet, stepping into a foreign land, the familiar embrace of El Salvador fades and is replaced by a sense of displacement and longing. The language barrier becomes a tangible reminder of my foreignness, a constant companion as I navigate through unfamiliar streets and interactions. The bustling halls of engineering buildings, while intellectually stimulating, also amplify the distance from my homeland, a reminder of the sacrifices made for academic pursuits. Despite these challenges, each step taken away from home strengthens my appreciation for the deep roots that anchor me, infusing in me a resilience born from the fusion of longing and determination.

In the midst of this longing, however, I find comfort in the friendships forged in this foreign land. Like newborn stars in a nebula, these friends offer companionship and understanding in a place where we are all learning how to live by ourselves for the first time. Their

warmth and acceptance create pockets of familiarity in an otherwise foreign landscape, easing the ache of missing family, friends, and the love that envelops me in El Salvador. In their laughter and shared experiences, I find echoes of home, bridging the gap between the past and present, and illuminating the path towards a future where the essence of El Salvador remains an integral part of who I am. But even as I navigate this new world, a part of me always yearns for the familiar embrace of my homeland, a poignant reminder of the bitter-sweet journey of growth and adaptation.

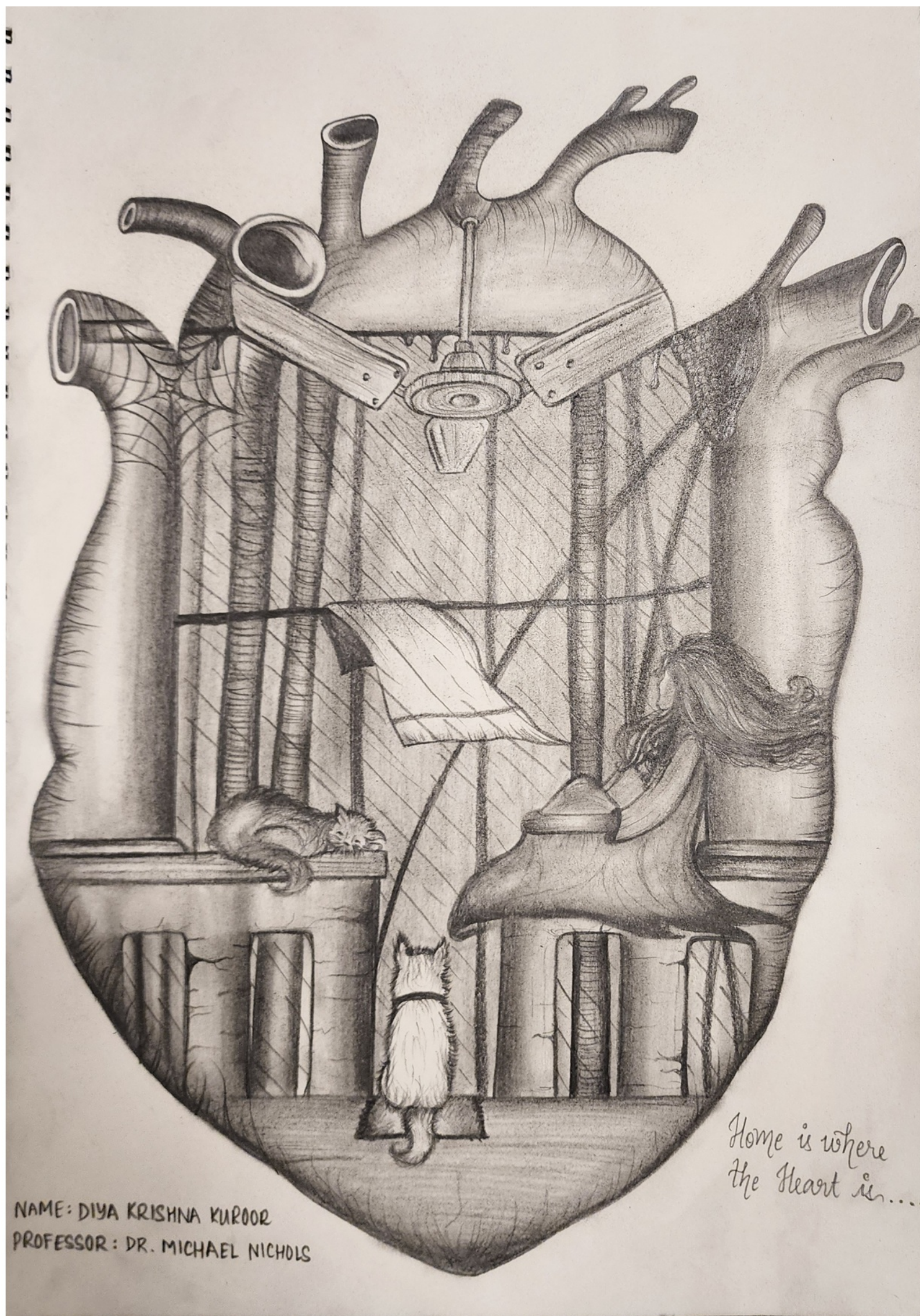
Home is Where the Heart is

by
Diya Kuroor



Diya Kuroor is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biology. Diya created this piece to fulfill an assignment in Professor Michael Nichols' SCLA 101 class in Spring 2024. This work was done in a 6-hour span throughout the night, as Diya wanted an escape from the academic stress for a few hours, so she picked up a pencil and drew what she missed dearly: her home. The piece achieves a unique fusion of warmth and surrealism, using the literal heart as a vessel to symbolize emotional comfort and belonging. Diya's artwork won an Honorary Mention in the Spring 2024 Cornerstone Contest.

Cornerstone Contest: "Place"



NAME: DIYA KRISHNA KURROOR
PROFESSOR: DR. MICHAEL NICHOLS

BACK COVER ART

“The Acceptance of Abyss” by Shikha Adhikari



Shikha Adhikari is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Animal Sciences. She created this artwork to fulfill an assignment in Professor Li Wei’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2023. Shikha’s artwork uses the symbolism of koi fish in *yin-yang* (a)symmetry to embody the ancient Chinese

Taoist thinker Zhuangzi’s philosophy of rejecting societal conformity and embracing the natural flow of life, encouraging viewers to seek freedom and individuality by letting go of rigid perfection.

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INNOVATIVE ASSIGNMENTS: FICTION, ESSAY, POETRY, ART & MORE



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