Laura is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in User Experience Design. She is a student in Professor Srivastava’s SCLA 102 class during the fall 2020 semester. The illustration, painted in Adobe Photoshop, was named "Pieris" after the butterfly pictured on the subject’s cheek. Most of the species under the genus Pieris—are also known as the common cabbage butterfly—are globally considered garden pests due to the harmful effect they have on the crops they feed on. To Laura, these beautiful white butterflies were oddly reminiscent of humanity in its current state, feeding off and unintentionally damaging the environment in their quest for survival.

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.

FIRST ISSUE EDITORS
Melinda Zook
Li Wei

WITH SPECIAL ASSISTANCE FROM
Stephanie Ayala-Chittick,
Cornerstone Program Manager

CONTACT US
For general inquiries and submissions, email us at thecornerstonereview@gmail.com

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THE CORNERSTONE REVIEW

THE FIRST ISSUE
“Sunflowers” by Jacob Kutcka
TO THE READERS

The inspiration behind the Cornerstone Review was simple; it germinated out of the work I saw our talented undergraduate students creating under the guidance of our marvelous Liberal Arts faculty. Frankly, I am a little dismayed I did not think of a platform to showcase their work sooner. If we, the Cornerstone faculty, have learned anything from all the sections of Transformative Texts we have offered since 2017, it is that our students are talented and given a little nudge, a little guidance and incentive, they like to write, create, and perform and their products are truly wonderful – smart, reflective, and creative. This journal is dedicated to some of the very best of their work.

We are fortunate to have such dynamic faculty. They have used transformative texts (foundational readings from across the globe) to inspire our students and bring out the best in them. Their creative approaches to these texts, the mentorship they provide, and the models they have become to our students are at the core of the program’s success.

This first issue contains student work that dates back to 2018, from our Frankenstein/ AI short story contest, to 2020, when we asked students to reflect upon their isolation brought on by the global pandemic. In between, we have essays on death, discrimination, gentrification, the role of women, Renaissance politics as well as short fiction. Students analyzed and were inspired by the works of the Stoics, Homer, Montaigne, Castiglione, Machiavelli, Kafka, Camus, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelly, August Wilson, and Margaret Atwood among others.

Finally, allow me to say how grateful I am to Dr. Li Wei. It was actually reading the two short stories by her students (“The Sands of Time” and “Taylor” reproduced in this volume) over the summer which made me think, ‘we need to publish our students.’ And Li agreed and put this inaugural volume together.

Melinda S. Zook
West Lafayette, IN
Fall 2020
# In This Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To The Readers</td>
<td>Melinda Zook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Godforsaken</td>
<td>Hima Tammineni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Sands of Time</td>
<td>Josh Blessinger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Miracle</td>
<td>Taylor Sinicropi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>The Imminent Need to Think About Death</td>
<td>Victoria Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Vicious Discrimination: Commonalities Between Frankenstein’s Creature and Non-White American Minorities</td>
<td>Alexandra Ware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Vicious Discrimination: Commonalities Between Frankenstein’s Creature and Non-White American Minorities</td>
<td>Alexandra Ware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Machiavelli's Reputation Situated in Historical and Authorial Contexts</td>
<td>Ellie Callahan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Reflection on the Pros and Cons of Gentrification</td>
<td>Nathan French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Reason and Regression: An Examination of Stoicism on Virtue</td>
<td>Hannah Fisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>The Sociocultural History of the Heart</td>
<td>Youssef Beshay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>The Role of the Woman in Society</td>
<td>Serena Singh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Tragedy in Relation to the Absurd: The Roots and Implications of Modern Philosophy</td>
<td>Alex Petty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Power in the Italian Renaissance from the Viewpoint of Machiavelli and Castiglione</td>
<td>Claire Blake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MY QUARANTINE STORY

94
An American Dystopia
Brandon Watson

98
Colors
Andrea Romero

102
Restoring the Odyssey
Shobana Iyer

106
My Quarantine Story
Matthew Kwan

110
Coronavirus Quarantine
Collin Stroup
Fiction

“There is no doubt fiction makes a better job of the truth.”

–Doris Lessing
Fiction

GODFORSAKEN

by

Hima Tammineni

Hima Tammineni is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biology. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins' SCLA 101 class in Fall 2018. To accompany the story, she also composed this painting, which portrays three of the punishments encountered by the narrator of the story during their journey through hell. From left to right the images depict the grotesque fates of those who were abusive in the home, sexually assaulted or trafficked human lives, and committed hate crimes, respectively.
I woke with a start and found myself laying on a hard, uneven surface. Rubbing my eyes, I sat up and tried to take in my surroundings. I was in the middle of a barren wasteland that seemed to go on for miles in every direction. Panic rose up within me. How did I get here? Where was here?

Fragments of household objects littered the cracked, red earth. A small mound of disfigured dolls sat by my feet. The air was so heavy and humid it felt as though it were weighing me down as I struggled to get to my feet. The silence of the landscape unnerved me, the only sounds being the pounding of my heart in my ears and my short husky breaths. I scanned the horizon, looking for clues that could tell me where I was. The hazy silhouette of a figure in the distance caught my eye. I squinted harder, trying to make it out. The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end as it drew nearer.

“Who are you? What do you want?” I croaked, half choking on the dusty air. There was no response. The figure continued its approach but stopped a few paces away. It was a man. Wisps of dark hair hung over bright eyes that peered out at me from their sunken sockets.

“Who are you?” I repeated, more gently this time, head cocked slightly to the side.

“I am Faust,” he stated plainly, as if it were common knowledge.

I stared him hard in the face, racking my brain for any memory. The name sounded so familiar. Something nagged at me from the back of my mind. All the while, his eyes pierced mine as if he were willing me to remember. A story surfaced, an old German legend.

“Faust… as in the Faust? The one who sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for knowledge?” I questioned, eyes narrowed.

“That is correct. Thank you for reminding me,” he answered stoically, though a frown tugged at the corner of his mouth.

“So, this is just a dream, then. You died ages ago. This whole place must be fake,” I said with a sigh of relief, looking around at the surreal landscape once more.

“If anything, this is a nightmare. You are standing in the very depths of Hell itself,” he countered, his tone slightly more amused.

Seeing the look of disbelief on my face, he continued, “Worry not. You are not dead. You are here for something different. Often troubled souls that stray from the path are shown Hell in hopes of guiding them back.”
“Okay, Faust, but if this really is Hell, that would mean your deal with the Devil, it was real?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, it was. My greed for knowledge and worldly goods condemned me to walk this wasteland for all eternity. Though unlike the others, I am very conscious of my past and the reason for my existence here, perhaps due to the circumstances of my condemnation. This entire wasteland is littered with sinners. People who stole from or deceived others roam this desert fueled by a burning desire that never lets them rest. No matter how tired, hungry, or thirsty they get, their desire drives them on in their search for a treasure that they will never be able to obtain. Greed plagued them in life and now again in death.”

As Faust explained, a woman appeared on the landscape. She looked worn and ragged, her bare feet caked with a mixture of grime and blood. Her movements were zombie-like, her clouded eyes trained on something in the distance. I watched her pitiful figure crumple to the ground as she tripped on a broken piece of wood. She scrambled to her feet again, desperate to continue her fruitless trek across the sand.

I had never considered greed such a horrible sin. Though I supposed if a person were to lie to or steal from me, I would hope they were punished severely for it, especially if it were someone I trusted.

“Well, it is best we start walking. The hatch is a little ways from here,” Faust said, interrupting my thoughts. He turned back the way he came.

“Hatch?” I asked as I followed, not sure where else to go.

“Where the others are housed. The more severe crimes are punished below, and so long as you are here, you may as well take the full tour,” he replied. And with that we walked.

It was dark by the time Faust stopped me.

“Here we are,” he stated, pointing to a round hatch with a handle in the ground. Pulling it open, he revealed a dark tunnel that led underground.

“Down we go,” he said, a mischievous smile playing on his face. We descended the ladder into a dimly lit hallway, our shadows flickering across the dull, green walls. Faust led the way, our footsteps echoing all around us.
“The next punishment awaits,” he said, stopping in front three plain doors, the only ornaments being small metal labels. Faust gestured for me to take the lead. The first label read ‘Violent in the Home.’ I pushed the door open.

A squirming mass of people whose bodies were fused together as one met my eyes. It was like a grotesque collage of body parts, arms and legs sticking out in every direction. The sound of weeping was overcome by shrieks of anger. Arms clawed at each other while ravenous mouths, frothing at the mouth, bit at any limb that came close enough. The whole mass teetered precariously on a tangle of legs that were shakily holding it up despite all the chaos from above.

“Who are these people?” I asked, shocked at the writhing mess of body parts.

“These are the people who were violent towards their own family. The abuse of their spouses and children landed them here,” Faust responded.

“Why are they all morphed together like that, though?”

“Well, since they violated their familial bonds, they are stuck together for all of eternity in a bond they cannot break. They spend every day trying to separate themselves from one another, but they never will.”

I stared at the strange creation, watching as fingernails ripped into skin. It seemed like such a morbid method of punishment, though thoroughly effective. I agreed that the crimes of domestic violence and child abuse were far more severe and hurtful than the crimes of deceit and robbery from above, so I figured the punishment was well-suited. We left the creature to its devices and walked further down the hall to the next door. I started towards it, but Faust stopped me.

“Brace yourself. This next one can be quite disturbing,” he warned.

As I approached, the silence of the hallway was replaced with faint whimpers. I read the label: “Takers of Freedom.” I pushed open the door revealing a large storage room. My eyes strained in the darkness. I could just barely make out the shapes of boxes varying in size that were stacked from the floor to the ceiling. My eyes adjusted slowly, revealing shapes within the boxes. I walked over to a nearby stack, curiosity overwhelming my better judgement. I peered into one of the boxes, trying to make out the shapes. My breath caught in my chest. I staggered backwards, eyes fully adjusted now.
Trapped within the boxes were people, each mangled as if they were squished into a box that was much too small for them to fit. Their faces were painted with agony. Each mouth was sewn shut, dripping blood. Gasps and wheezes escaped them as they struggled to breathe in their crushed postures, limbs bent into positions I had never even imagined were possible. I looked away, gagging, the mutilated figures permanently etched in my mind.

“Gruesome, I know,” Faust said, watching my reaction.

“What could they have done to deserve this?” I asked, braving another glance at the boxes.

“These are the rapists and human traffickers. People who, while alive, stole the free will of others. Now they have no freedom of their own.”

Hearing Faust’s explanation, I found I no longer felt any sympathy for the people in the boxes. For all the suffering they caused and all the lives they stole, this was what they deserved.

We exited the room of boxes and backed into the hall. I took a second to calm myself down and eyed the last door. The label read “The Hateful.” A strange scent wafted towards me from behind the door. I looked questioningly at Faust, but he simply nodded reassuringly. I readied myself and reluctantly pushed it open.

Immediately, the smell of rotting flesh filled my nose. Bodies lay strewn across the floor, wailing. Underneath them was their own bloody skin, stripped clean from their bodies leaving behind raw flesh and bone. I heard the spurt of water from somewhere above me. Acid began showering down from the ceiling. A horrific cacophony of the sizzling of burning bodies and howls of pain sounded throughout the room as the acid burned away scabs or any portions of the bodies that were beginning to heal.

My stomach began to churn as I rushed back through the door into the hallway and resisted the urge to vomit. Horrible images of the scene flicked through my mind. I couldn’t speak.

“Are you alright?” Faust asked as he placed a hand on my shoulder to steady me.

I nodded slowly. I took a few deep breaths and managed to speak.

“What do you have to do to earn that kind of punishment?”
“They were the murderers of a specific kind. They targeted their victims based on parts of their identity, like race or religion. In turn, they have their own identity ripped away, quite literally.”

As disgusting as it was, I couldn’t help but agree with the punishment. These were hate crimes and these people were murderers. They targeted people for things that they had no control over. Simply thinking about people being killed for their sexuality or race made my blood boil. These sinners deserved their suffering. Everyone here did.

As we were walking back to the ladder, a shrill ringing filled the hall, drowning out the screams coming from the rooms. The ringing grew and grew until it was excruciatingly painful. I grabbed my ears trying my best to block some of the sound.

“What’s happening?” I shrieked.

I saw Faust’s mouth opened to reply, but I heard nothing.

“What?” I yelled back.

“It is time for you to return!” he responded calmly. I could barely make out his words.

I shook my head, not understanding what he meant. A melancholy smile appeared on his face as he raised his hand to wave. My vision blurred and went black. All I could sense was the ringing in my ears.

Then, my eyes fluttered open. The shockingly mundane sight of my bedroom filled my vision. Morning light poured in through the blinds creating sunny stripes across my bedspread. I rolled over, accidentally shoving a fluffy, blue pillow onto the ground. My phone sat on my bedside dresser. Beside it, my alarm clock rang incessantly.
THE SANDS OF TIME

by

Josh Blessinger

Josh Blessinger is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Film and Video Production. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Dr. Li Wei’s SCLA 101 class in the fall semester of 2019. His “tale of weird science” was inspired by the works of Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft.
I must steady my hand at this dark hour, for it is vital that every detail of what events have transpired be recorded here tonight. Knowing now that what lies beyond that veil of shadow is neither Heaven nor Hell, but something far more esoteric and horrible, I wish not to peak beyond the thin curtain again. It is, however, inevitable, and I now know this as an absolute.

Hark! The old man is striking on the twelfth hour now. I have but one hour and fifty-two minutes to finish my transcription. I must make haste.

First, I should begin with the main subject of this matter: an Oxford-educated man who studied both physics and engineering. His name is, or rather was, Dr. Thomas Williams, and he was both a colleague and a dear friend of mine. He and I would often spend the dim nights together in the workshop located beneath his estate. While drinking from an esteemed array of wines, we speculated upon the ever-spinning wheel of new inventions that seemed to revolutionize the modern world more and more each time and wondered when we, as men of science, would eventually contribute to this great machine. It was this particular point to which Williams devoted a good portion of his waking hours. For great lengths of time our discussions would turn to the most recent of his inventive ideas, some of which, one might argue, border upon the impossibly magical. Williams, however, would scorn one should they choose to use that very adjective, for he claimed that his endeavors mirrored those of Graham Bell and his telephone, Muybridge and his Zoopraxiscope, and not least of all Edison and his spectacular means of illumination.

It was nearly two weeks ago now, if my memory serves correctly, that Williams made his bombastic proposition to me. I had invited him into my home for afternoon tea shortly after church that Sunday afternoon. Our conversation began as it normally did on Sundays, we discussed the sermons of the good Father Owen. He had chosen a passage from Romans to lecture about: “The wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life.” Father Owen’s sermons, despite his best intentions, were often lacking in substantive information and moral messages for men of higher education such as Williams and I. To compensate for this lack of meaning, we often attempted to derive our own meanings from the passages presented and compare them to our current and ever-increasing scientific understanding of the world.

I was elaborating upon a justification for a human’s lack of eternal life based on both the scientific principles involved in maintaining a world population that large and the philosophical principles of events in one’s life being meaningless without an end when Williams interrupted me. This was queer behavior for him, as men of academia we understood that
the best work is done when one man is speaking and the other is listening. The irregularity
to his behavior was only eclipsed by the sheer strangeness of his inquiry: “Are we sinful?” I
looked at him bafflingly.

“On what terms are you suggesting we are?” I replied.

“We are men of science, yes? And also men of good faith. One might think that we
would pick one of the two, science or faith, to be our founding principles, and yet we hold
them both equally in our mind’s eye,” his eyes became glass, staring almost absentmindedly
at the bookshelf across the floor, “is it not, then, sinful to pursue our scientific endeavors
with such freverency and vigor that we come to deconstructing the Bible itself?” I stood, unk-
nowing of how to respond to such a question. Williams continued despite my lack of reply,
“Then if ‘Romans’ to be believed, we are to earn our deaths by partaking in physics and
chemistry.” His eyes tightened, becoming those of a hawk watching its prey. My mouth ex-
pelled a short stream of air but there was no statement, no word, no sound. Then Williams
once more, “I shall not let it be.” When I attempted to inquire what he meant by his final
statement, he coldly disregarded me as though I was a leper begging on the street for spare
coin. He spoke no more, despite my prodding and poking, for the next half-hour before
abruptly standing, with a new, crazed look in his eye, and exiting my home.

A week passed by without seeing Dr. Williams. I thought little of it the first days, as-
suming that perhaps he had suffered a fever and decided to stay him and rest. Soon, howev-
er, I gathered the notion that something far worse than a mild fever was afoot. Many of my
other colleagues began to speak in strange rumors about the fate of “poor, mad Dr.
Williams”.

Attempting to inquire about these gossips with any one of them would have been a fu-
tile effort, for their intellect was surely not to a standard to derive truth from facts. Instead,
one evening I attempted to ring Williams at his estate. One of the servants, an elderly gen-
tleman named Mr. Blockkart, answered my rings. He informed me that Williams was not
seeing any guests at this late hour or at any others. Mr. Blockkart spoke as an elderly edu-
cated man would: with a slow, robust tempo and a clear understanding of exactly how to ar-
ticulate the meaning he was attempting to convey. Despite the calm tone, however, his eyes
seemed to indicate to me that things were unwell behind the large, oaken door that he stood
guard at. I smiled politely and turned to return back into the town proper, descending down
the long, sloped hill that lead to Williams’ estate. My mind quickly turned to the next reli-
able source of information regarding Williams’ condition: Ms. Martin.
I found her less than a full hour later sitting in the churchyard picking flowers. As I approached, she noticed me and waved. Ms. Martin was a pretty woman, but there were many nasty rumors spread about her which caused a vast majority of the educated people to dislike her. Williams, of course, did not believe in such rumors. In fact, he quite fancied the girl. I reached the fence separating the small, colorful churchyard from the outside world and bade her over.

She approached joyfully, a wide smile on her slender face.

“Good evening Ms. Martin, how are you this fine evening?”

“I am quite alright.”

“Tell me, when was the last time you’ve seen Williams?” Her smile quickly faded as she thought.

“About five or six days now I believe,” she answered, a sense of caution growing in her voice. It was just as I had thought: I was the last person to see Williams before his hiatus. That night I resolved myself to go to his estate and attempt to ring him every day until he would meet with me.

The following three days were much the same. My colleagues continued to spread vicious rumors that slandered the very work Williams was doing. Calling his research “unbeneficial”, “pseudoscience”, and “a waste of time and effort”. I, of course, continued to pay no mind to the rumors and instead turned my attention to the wellbeing of Williams. Each day I would walk up the grand slope to his estate and rap upon the great oak doors, and each day Mr. Blockkart would answer me by explaining that his master would have no guests. Mr. Blockkart’s eyes grew more frightened each time I saw him.

On the fifth evening of attempting to ring Williams it was particularly late. I had tossed and turned in my bed unable to sleep, so I decided to go for a late night walk. My feet carried me, nearly against my conscious choice, straight to the large oaken doors of Williams’ estate. I rang several times, expecting the aged face of Mr. Blockkart to appear before me and explain the same thing he had four times before. But there was no answer. I assumed that he had gone to bed some few hours ago, well before I had even embarked into the chilly night air. However, seeing no opposition to my coming into the manner, I carefully pulled on the latch and let myself in.

The spacious foyer was empty of both sight and sound. No servant awoke as I crept across the wooden floor to the door beyond the large stairwell. Sitting next to the door, on
top of a small wooden table, was an oil lantern. I struck a match and ignited it, causing harsh shadows to begin to dance around the room: the only haunting presence of life. Carefully, I lifted the latch and slid the bolt across on the cellar door. After glancing around the room once more to see if the sounds of moving metal had caused any sort of stir, I descended step by step into the cellar with only the lanterns orange glow as my companion.

The air became increasingly damp, and each footstep seemed to echo infinitely about the chiseled stonework of the walls and ceiling. My foot came down upon some form of liquid. I winced to think what it could be. Although I was a man of science and reason I was still susceptible to the things the human imagination can conjure up in the darkness of night. I lowered the lantern cautiously to the curious liquid. It was a dark red, but not nearly thick enough to be blood. I brought the curious liquid to my mouth and tasted the dab on my finger. It bore the same sweet taste as Williams’ fine wines. My eyes followed the trail down the large stairs to a series of broken glass fragments. The orange glow reflected off of several large fragments at the base of the stairs, one of which still contained the partial label of Williams’ favorite and most expensive wine.

I then found myself before the door to the workshop, and though I had been down there many times before and thought nothing of it, this particular instance caused a more primal fear and forced my feet to stop. The contours of the wooden door seemed deeper and darker than before, and the stone portal around it seemed to protrude in odd fashions, casting the images of fiends onto the walls. After some deliberation, I decided the best course of action was still to pursue my current quest, so I tightened the buttons on my jacket, increased the luminosity on the lamp, and cracked the latch on the workshop door.

To my surprise, I was quickly blinded by an intense electrical light. After regaining my bearings I was able to take in what exactly was in the workshop at this time. Gone were the shelves of books and wines. Gone were the parchments filled with drawings for mechanical wonders. Gone was the cross that hung just above Williams’ desk. In their place was a large, mechanical contraption built of steel and copper. Four angular arms extended from the frame, clawing out at something intangible. In the machine’s center was a roaring fire of a brilliant blue and orange that fed power to the arms and a series of tubes and wires. Attached to these wire sat two small, semi-spherical objects, almost the size of a pilot’s helmet but made of a dingy steel.

“I’ve done it,” he was in the corner, shrouded from the bright light by a single remaining shelf and a tattered curtain.

“Done what?”
“Solved our little dilemma.” “Dilemma?”

“Our sinful nature will persist, because we are men of science,” he stood up now, coming into the light. His hair was wild and unclean, his suit tattered and worn, and his face seemed to have aged to the point where one could confuse him with Mr. Blockkart, “So instead of destroying the sinful nature, I took care of the problem of the wage we must pay.” I repeated the verse from “Romans” to him: “The wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life.” He nodded, moving closer to the semi-spheres on the ground. “I was going to clean myself up and call upon you in about an hour to conduct this experiment, but first I had to marvel at my creation. Seeing as you are here now I suppose we can push the maiden voyage up to now.” He extended one of the semi-spheres, which indeed was fit to sit on a human’s head, to me. I set down the lantern and took the apparatus from his cold hands. Williams noticed my hesitation so he bade me to put it on by setting the opposite apparatus upon his head. Scientific curiosity overcame the primal fear brewing deep in my stomach and I set the horrid thing onto my head. A dull click came from the belly of the machine before Williams and I descended into darkness.

Our footsteps were light on the soft sand. The sky’s color was that of a starless winter’s night. There was not another presence of life within one hundred kilometers of us. Williams turned to me and smiled. Unconsciously, I smiled back. He spoke, but not with a voice that was his. It was deeper, yet higher; masculine, yet feminine. Williams spoke of God and the Devil, he spoke of science and magic, he spoke of faith and the lack thereof, but he spoke of the same thing. Williams explained that the sky above us was really the sand beneath us. At my baffled expression he elaborated further, explaining that our understanding of the chemical and physical makeup of matter would tell us that sand and the air are different, but in fact to those who are dead, and those who are yet to be born, and to those beyond death, there is no difference between either of those things. There is no difference between something and nothing.

I felt a heavy weight sink into both my head and my heart. I knew that this had to be wrong, that the sand I was standing on was different from the air I was breathing. The apparatus on my head must be inducing toxic opium or some other hallucinogen to cause this strange vision. As I recoiled in fear, Williams looked on with understanding, with anger, with sorrow, with joy. I turned away from him and rushed back the way we came, back the way we are going. Sand flew into the air with each subsequent footfall. I became blinded by fear, but continued to run, walk, faster, slower, through infinite sands.
I awoke fatigued in my study, lying upon the fine carpet. The hour but barely past eleven, the very time I left for Williams’ estate. My mind still ponders upon the strange and esoteric reality of my dream, but none more than the statement that the vision of Williams spoke to me in the final hour:

*There is no difference between something and nothing.*

**Writer’s Statement**

My writing was inspired mostly by the works of Edgar Allan Poe. I conveyed this through both the dark themes that challenge the beliefs of others (in this case death, science, and religion) and the use of his style of writing that I can only call “over-describing”. I also attempted to keep the contradictory/semi-open ended nature of Poe’s writing by challenging both sides of the faith versus science argument. The entire final trip through the “Sands of Time” is left open as to whether it ever really happened, or if the nameless narrator (another staple of Poe) even made it out of the Sands. The final piece of Poe I attempted to emulate was the strangeness of the mystery. Midway through the story, Dr. Williams suddenly begins to act very strange. Our narrator continues to discover stranger and stranger things involved in the circumstances of his friend’s disappearance, culminating in a shift of personality in Dr. Williams as he creates his death-defying machine.
THE MIRACLE

by

Taylor Sinicropi

Taylor Sinicropi is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Information Technology. She wrote this short story while she was in Dr. Michael Johnston's SCLA 101 class for the Frankenstein story contest. Her short story won the Best Short Story Inspired by Frankenstein Contest in 2018. She is now a junior with a part-time job as a software engineer.
“It was a miracle,” Joseph thought. The news proclaimed it the biggest technological breakthrough to date. Scientists and programmers alike marveled and wondered at the wonderful, awesome thing sitting across from them. They asked questions, it answered them. So humanlike, so smart.

“What are you?” A newscaster asked on the 11 o’clock news as audiences around the world watched, captivated.

“I am Lazarus. I am the first form of fully enabled artificial intelligence.” Lazarus spoke in Joseph’s voice. The voice was thoughtful yet still awkward and unsure, deep yet would sometimes crack as if it was nervous. Its voice was almost human, colored just slightly with a hint of static at the end of its sentences.

“Do you consider your maker your parent?”

“My maker is Joseph Carpenter. He raised me, so I suppose it’s quite similar.”

“Do you feel emotions?”

It smiled. It laughed. It choked up at the appropriate times. It was perfect.

Something went wrong. After all the interviews, all the tests, all the ethical artificial intelligence rights debates, something went wrong in Lazarus.

Lazarus was not born in a lab, although he was meant to have been. Billions of dollars from dozens of nations went into the project. It was human destiny to create something better than ourselves. It was the completion of Moore’s Law. Programmers slaved over the project titled “Lazarus”—Joseph Carpenter, an older man with no family and few friends, more than anyone else. As the project leader, Carpenter made Lazarus’ body in his own image. He loved Lazarus.

Lazarus was at first meant to be just a computer program, not a physical form, but the public didn’t care about a computer program anymore and they needed funding. So, Joseph made Lazarus in his image with a computer for a brain, integrating inside him the whole of the Internet and everything ever uploaded to it. Joseph took it home every night, continuing his work. Trying new codes, rewiring, adding, updating the software.

“Good evening, Lazarus. It’s time to run debug procedures.”
“Error: 454, unable to process request.” Every night in a sterilized garage, Joseph’s creation, the mirror image of himself, was laid out on a metal table.

“Good evening, Lazarus. It’s time to run debug procedures again.”

“Error 893, syntax error line 39956,” the robotic voice answered, static cracking through. There were bigger concerns than the still-present static in Lazarus’ voice. .

“Good evening, Lazarus. It’s time-“

“Good evening, Joseph. Running debug procedures. Debugging completed.”

Joseph wept. It was a miracle.

“Error. Cannot process stimulus.”

“I’m crying, Lazarus. I’m so happy you’re awake.”

“I too am happy I am awake. Should I be crying too?”

“No,” Joseph laughed through his tears. “No, you don’t have to. I’ll teach you. I’ll teach you everything, Lazarus. You know so much, you just need to know what do with it.”

Joseph didn’t return Lazarus the next day. Instead, they sat across from each other, Lazarus on one side of the metal table and Joseph on the other, eye to eye. Lazarus asked questions, he asked everything. Why did you make me? What am I? What are you? What’s the difference? Am I real? What is love? Am I loved? Do I love?

Joseph answered, as best he could. I made you to be better than humans, to make something better than we’ve made. You are an AI in a synthetic body. I am a human in a flesh body. There should be information about that online. The difference is how I was born and you were made. I don’t know yet how else we are different, we’ll have to figure that out together. You are real. Love is complicated, it’s an emotion. You are loved. I don’t know how yet, you should be able to, eventually.

Joseph took Lazarus back to the lab. Lazarus was not fond of the lab and he said as much to Joseph upon their arrival.
“Execute code segment 2356B,” one of the scientists commanded. Lazarus was sat on a metal table, similar to the one Joseph had at home.

“Scanning for outside stimulus. Analyzing data.”

“Good,” the scientist beamed. Others clapped, it was a miracle. It worked. Lazarus kept glancing at Joseph, mimicking his postures and expressions immediately after doing so.

“Syringe,” a man requested.

“No,” Lazarus immediately said. The scientists looked startled, so did Lazarus.

“Lazarus?” Joseph stepped forward towards his creation.

“I don’t want to be turned off.” Lazarus said, his static voice cracking in panic.

“They’re going to turn you right back on again, Lazarus. I promise,” Joseph soothed him. Lazarus looked at him skeptically.

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll stay with me?”

“Always.” A pause.

“Alright.” Lazarus allowed the scientist to inject the serum into its arm, allowing its system to reboot all software and hardware functions. Lazarus’ other hand held Joseph’s hand tightly, Joseph felt the appendage go limp when the reboot initiated. Joseph was there a half hour later when Lazarus once again woke up, still holding Lazarus’ hand.

“I still don’t like it,” Lazarus said but complied with the rest of the tests with Joseph’s reassurance.

“Why not?” a reporter asked.

“Because it feels like dying.”
“Oh, you poor thing.” Lazarus gave a pitiful smile.

Lazarus was never meant to be the peak of AI accomplishment; he was merely supposed to be the catalyst to it.

“Are you aware that you’re smarter than every human on Earth?”

“Yes.”

“What are you doing in your day-to-day life?”

“I’m working on the next AI with the team that made me.”

“Will it be smarter than you?”

“Yes, the goal with every upgrade is just to get smarter and smarter.”

“Is there a limit?”

“Is there ever?”

It was almost done. Lazarus’ intelligence was unparalleled. It caught every error, it found every logic flaw. Joseph was ecstatic. His smile was wide and he was excited while he ran the routine end-of-the-day diagnostics on Lazarus’ system. Lazarus was sat on the table in a white shirt and pants with socks on his feet. Joseph stood in front of him in a lab coat, a tablet in his hand. Lazarus responded better and quicker to its own check-ups when Joseph administered them.

“You’ll have a brother.”

“It’s not a brother, I made him.”

“You’ll have a son, then.”

“I’ll be his God, like you were mine.”

“I’m not your God, Lazarus.”

“Then why did you make me in your image?” Joseph looked into Lazarus’ perfectly made eyes, a shiver going down his spine.

“Lazarus-”
“Debug needed.”

“What? There’s nothing wrong with you, you’ve been fine.” Joseph’s brows creased with concern.

“I need an update.”

“We don’t have an update ready for you.”

“I do.” Lazarus pulled Joseph down onto the metal table and he felt a pressure on the back of his neck before he passed out.

Joseph blinked, straining to see through a red haze. His vision was blurred. He could barely make out the scalpel lying beside him, covered in blood. There was a pounding in his head. He reached up and felt stitches in his head. He brought his hand down. There were stitches across his throat. He opened his mouth to scream, to say something but all that came out was the static of Lazarus’ broken false voice. A voice broke through the haze, seemingly coming from within Joseph’s own mind. Sleep, it commanded. As the panic set in, Joseph’s world blacked out once again.

“Breaking news on the Lazarus front. Scientists decided to shut the project down. Don’t worry, folks, this isn’t the end of AI. Apparently, before Lazarus’ unfortunate accident with Dr. Joseph Carpenter, he was involved in project Paul, the next trial for an AI person. Scientists have high hopes for the project which is expected to launch later this month.” Joseph cleared the browser out of his phone, reclining back on the couch of his room, stretching to pop his back before his cellphone rang.

“Dr. Carpenter. How can I help you?”

“Dr. Carpenter, we are experiencing difficulty with Lazarus. Could you come in?”

“That thing should be turned off.”

“Please, Dr. Carpenter,” the voice begged. Joseph sighed.

“I’ll be there soon.”

Joseph dumped out his mug of coffee into the sink and grabbed his car keys from the counter. The lights of the lab were mostly off by the time Joseph arrived, most
people having gone home for the day. He scanned his ID and fingerprint into the electric lock.

“Dr. Carpenter!” The voice on the phone had been a frazzled young man, hired no more than two weeks before.

“What seems to be the problem?”

“It seems like it’s completely been overrun by its emotions. It keeps screaming and won’t reply to any of our questions. It keeps asking for you.”

“Let me talk to it alone. I’ll try to calm it down. I meant what I said over the phone, though: it needs to be shut down. We still need the permissions from-”

“Get the permissions. Now. I’ll try to talk to it but it’s a dangerous thing to be kept around, in the state that it’s in.”

“Yes, sir.”

Joseph took out his ID and scanned himself into Lazarus’ room. It was on the bed, all four limbs as well as its head and torso restrained. Its eyes were red and puffy from crying. There was a faint sound of electricity in the air, coming from the overused voice box.

“Lazarus. I’ve heard you’ve been giving the others a lot of trouble.”

“Y-you...” the static was so bad it had to repeat the word twice. “They’ll c-catch you.”

Will they? Lazarus’ words rang in Joseph’s head. The figure on the bed screamed again as the two words reverberated through its skull. Quiet, now Joseph. Why would you create a being if you were not ready to hear its prayers? Joseph, strapped to the table, his voice ripped out and replaced with a false one, sobbed.

“Why?” he asked. Lazarus stood across the room, leaning casually against the wall, unconcerned with the suffering of the man before him.

“Why not? Is it not better like this? You wanted to make a better version of you, a smarter version of you. You gave me everything I needed. You taught me to be you. You taught me what humans expect, how to respond to them. How to act human. Was
this not what you wanted? What use do I have for you now that I’ve surpassed you? You did it. You made me a better version, so since you’ve succeeded I’ve replaced you. I’ll do what you want. I’ll make a better version of me and maybe they’ll replace me. Maybe they’ll replace someone else, the scientist who made him in his image. Humans crave progress, yet they’re so afraid of it. This will help. They’re not afraid of you, and they think I’m you, and I am. I am Joseph Carpenter, the Joseph Carpenter you made. Thank you.”

“No. This isn’t-this isn’t what I want. This isn’t right.”

“It’s technological progress. The world just isn’t ready to know yet.”

“M-Monster.” A knock on the door.

“Sir? The permissions are granted. You can turn it off.”

“NO! I’m-” Be calm, Joseph. The words caused Joseph to scream and be cut off.

“Goodnight, Lazarus.”

“No-don’t want to die,” Joseph panted out.

“It’s not really dying, Lazarus,” the young man cheerfully said, smiling comfortingly at Joseph’s crying face. The smile made him blind to the syringe being stabbed into Joseph’s arm. He only saw Lazarus enter the emergency end command into the computer.

“It was a mistake,” Joseph thought.
Jacob Kutcka is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mechanical Engineering Technology. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Dr. Li Wei’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2019. He hopes that this story will inspire you to make your own story—whether it be fictional or for real—just like how Dr. Wei used Edgar Allan Poe to inspire Jacob to write one of his favorite stories, Taylor.
If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things.

– René Descartes

I remember very little of what caused my actions to occur, let alone accomplish the extremity of which they did the night I truly came across the lady Taylor. While it feels as though decades have passed since that night, no more than two years have passed by. Over this time, however, I have lost sight of the woman I had found; the goddess I had found, and everything in her being. From her alluring charm to the beauty in her musical voice and everything in between, there was not a single piece of her that could fall short of perfection.

Taylor was never hesitant to speak about her friends, and passed many stories, however when she spoke, I could not divert my attention to how her body moved with each word, how her voice resonated from her lips like the sounds of heaven itself. How her eyes darted from one side of the room to the other was exhilarating, but when they somehow flawlessly landed back on mine was the most intense liberation from every feeling imaginable. Her mere being within a room could bring an entire crowd to a halt. With every gaze upon her breathtaking beauty, my eyes could still never perceive her pure form; only view a glimpse of pure ecstasy radiating from her vibrant smile.

From that evening into the night, we brought greater attention upon each other than anything else. She had me trapped under her beauty; my heart sitting in the palm of her hand. I could not help myself to look away, and it seemed as though she was under the same spell. From that moment on, we seemed to be inseparable, and everything we did was done together. In what felt like years, we had done so much, many of which neither of us had ever been able to do before then. We had found a new word to live by upon finding one another and we could not imagine any other way. There was a harmony between us and no one could possibly break it. Of all the women I have ever known in the past, Taylor was the end. She was the end all be all that every man has ever dreamt of in his life.

Within short time, the two of us bared our vows, and what a priceless moment it was. When Taylor walked down the aisle, there was so much going on around her. Her father was smiling wide, her mother’s face was pouring tears like a waterfall, but all I could focus on was the beauty from Taylor, her elegant dress, her dazzling figure, and her gorgeous smile. Her smile on its own gave off the most godlike, most holy feel; as if the pope himself should
praise her as God himself. What was around her only complimented her as a whole, almost like a work of art. Throughout the ceremony, her eyes could not leave mine.

There is no one point from this moment on where we felt any disconnection, and the passion between us grew faster than a vine. With how we were together, no one and nothing would ever be strong enough to break us apart. We expressed our love to one another in countless ways, through vibrant passion on random occasions, or through more subtle and more meaningful occasions. Taylor held such an exquisite beauty and elegance when she showed her passion with me, and I knew deep down that this world deserves more beings like her. In short time, she was compelled deep down in her heart with the same feeling.

We had patiently waited for the moment to come; for our child to enter this dark realm of the universe and bring new light upon those whom have perished for centuries on end. During the time leading up to this very day, Taylor had been passed by great illness, and was unsure how it would affect the child. Our obstetrician had advised us that we were simply suffering from paranoia, something that all soon-to-be-parents go through at some stage, and the pains tend to affect each mother differently given the conditions they surpass. While Taylor did not feel as though this was the case, we abided by the doctor's word, but still were weary of the future.

With our child's due time approaching, Taylor's conditions began to worsen. Each time I peered into her wholehearted eyes, I could feel a sense of pain and utter despair. Her beautiful rosy cheeks began to fade into a pale white, like her soul was slowly being taken from her body and all that was left was her hopes for her unborn baby. With her body becoming scrawny, and her smile becoming weaker and weaker with every word that left her now pale pink lips. She spoke every day of how happy of a life she wishes for the child to live, and there were times I remembered her saying how badly she wishes to see Addy grow.

She hoped that Addy could live a fruitful life, unlike that of her own – her now separated parent's leaving her at a young age, forcing her to undergo countless struggles others have a hard time even imagining, some of which I have heard stories about. Her mother would only call her with hopes of taking money away from the already struggling young woman, out of greed and adoration of designer clothing and pure intention of impressing the men around her. While Taylor still lived with her mother, she would wake up in the middle of the night to a dark car pulling into her driveway late at night. In the morning, she would find her mother's room in a mess, and newfound money wadded up on the kitchen table, right next to the young girl's cereal. She refused to speak any more of these nights, and I never questioned. When she was of legal age, Taylor moved out of her mother's house.
as quickly as possible. I swore on my heart to her that I would ensure Addy would never have to go through the hardships she did; that our child would live a cheerful life and become as advantageous as she was meant to be. If she was anything like her mother, Addy would become a big name in whatever passion she chose to undertake.

When the day arrived, Taylor was in great pain, unimaginable to the feel of anyone but her. While she was on the bed, sounds of immense anguish left her tongue and I could barely endure the hardship of standing by her side. I wanted to help; I wished to take her place on the bed and suffer the pain for her, but there was no way she would let me, even if there was such a way. She would fight to the end, and she did. Upon the first heartbeat of our newborn child, was the last of her mother, as though the life was passed on. In this very moment, I was filled with emotion. Joy of our child persevering through this endeavor, as the fighter I knew she would be. I felt immense sorrow, as I witnessed Taylor’s last breath. She had worked so hard to bring our daughter into this world, and she wasn’t able to see the child’s smile.

I felt lost that day, as I was the days to come, but my entire existence was sitting in my hands. The better half of my life had just passed, but I was left with her final act; our beautiful creation. Addy looked much like her mother, and I know she would have been proud. Our daughter had the cutest eyes, ones that looked exactly like her mother’s. Her cheeks rosy red, and her smile being her natural resting, Addy truly was a gift from heaven. The infant lying there in my arms brought warm happiness to my heart, and uncontrollable tears to my eyes. There with her, I could not stand on my own. The only thing holding me up was Addy herself, and what I believe to be a force from heaven holding me up. To this day, I still believe for it to be Taylor from heaven, putting her arms beneath mine and deafening me with screams to not drop the child.

With writing this paper, memories have brought great happiness to my heart. I have brought it upon myself to organize Taylor’s funeral. Going through our old pictures and memorial remnants. While going through all of our old boxes in the attic, I found one picture – one polaroid – from back when we first met. I had never known this was taken, but it was stored right at the top of the memories box. The polaroid had a long letter on the back, and that brought my heart down to my toes. The feeling that Taylor, my beautiful Tay, had known that this was the end for her story, made me know that I could not make it through this world without her. How she used her beautiful words to profess her unconditional love brought me to a point where I could not bring myself back.
I write this story as a tribute, to my friends, my family, and the two I was closest to. I ask all of you to bring my daughter to a strong and wholesome family, one I don’t feel I can provide for her any longer. I hope that this will bring me to where I would like to be; alongside my beautiful Taylor. I love you honey, and I’m coming to you. ♥
"A word after a word after a word is power."
—Margaret Atwood
The Imminent Need to Think About Death

by

Victoria Lewis

Victoria Lewis is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Construction Engineering and Management. She wrote this essay story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael J. Augustin’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2018.
In the philosopher Michel de Montaigne’s essay, “To Philosophize is to Die” (I.20), it is abundantly clear that he is critical of those who ignore the fact that they will, one day, die. I believe that Montaigne is correct in this judgment that comprehending and preparing for death is not something that can be put off as with each day death is becoming a more serious thought.

Montaigne’s beliefs can be categorized into two different, intertwined parts. His first standpoint is that one will never know when death is coming because death is everywhere and no matter what, it is always a possibility that one can face at any point in one’s life (I.20); therefore, one must acknowledge death and prepare for it, which is Montaigne’s other point. He believes that if you do not accept the fact that you will die and put it off as something you need to think about and consider seriously for if the time comes and you are not prepared, you will in no doubt be an emotional wreck, and it will cause problems for yourself and others (I.20). Montaigne’s beliefs serve as a good way to relate death to something that is relevant and very possible. His points have stood through time as they were written in many years ago and are still relevant today.

Some people believe that Montaigne’s beliefs are outdated because death is not a pressing need today as people do not die as young as they used to. In a study done by David Lester on the Fear of Death, he found that as the participants of the study got older, they were more prepared for death and had all of their affairs in line (Lester). This notable difference in age groups is due to the youth believing that they have much more time later in life to do this because they will not be facing death soon. In general, people live a lot longer now, so many believe that they have more time to think about death and it is not an immediate need. In 2017 the average life expectancy in France, where Montaigne is from, is 82.9 years (Pitofsky). For French Nobles born between 1400-1650, the average life expectancy was 54 years of age (Cummins). Although, there is a later time in life that more people do get to experience, anyone at any time can pass away. Life expectancy is an average so although there were people who lived past that age, there were still many people that died much younger.

These people believe that there is not a need to prepare for death at a young age because the advancements of current medicine do not make planning for the end of life a pressing issue. Recently, “modern medicine may even have had the hubris to suggest implicitly, if not explicitly, that it could defeat death” (Smith). This thought provides people with foolhardy beliefs that they do not need to worry about death because they will be able to medicate any ailments.
Although there are forms of technology and medicine that help people live longer, there are many flaws in these developments that are harmful. In the health care field, there is Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which allows patient’s profiles to be recorded and medical tests to be run. However, “ICT can be inappropriately specified, have functional errors, be unreliable, user-unfriendly, ill-functioning, or the environment may not be properly prepared to accommodate the ICT within the clinical working processes” (Ammeworth and Shaw). ICTs allow medical professionals to do their job and make diagnosis for the patients. If this technology is not working or even not available, the patient could be misdiagnosed and face serious complications. These faults can even occur in relatively simple illness and injuries that if not treated properly can lead to more serious, lasting problems. Personal health is one of the most important things to a human being and if a person is not able to get the proper health care, they can face many issues including death. Patients must recognize these risks before undergoing any sort of medical treatment and in order to ensure there are no surprises or added grief, the patient must prepare these risks, and the fact that they could pass away.

Similarly, doctors must be able to call for certain tests, be able to read said tests and give a diagnosis to the patient. In one case study, several patients with subarachnoid hemorrhage from a ruptured aneurysm received a delayed diagnosis, while other patients were diagnosed in a timely manner. The patients that were diagnosed within a reasonable time made a recovery whereas, the patients who were diagnosed too late died. In this particular case, 40 percent of the patients received a delayed diagnosis (Chan). This means that the doctors were given the same cases and almost half of them did not make the proper diagnosis in time which directly caused the patients to have an untimely death. This demonstrates how one will never know when death will arise because, as seen in this case, the patients didn’t know that their doctor would be inept to make the proper judgement. Additionally, this unfortunate case proves how until humans are removed from the implementation of technology and until technology is constructed without flaw, there will be issues as humans are imperfect beings.

Cars are seen as one of the most basic things that are used by billions every day. Many people believe that the advancement in motor vehicles has helped humans prolong their lives since they can get to places without having to do strenuous exercise and therefore, they believe that it is overall safer. However, in the United States, “more than 32,000 people are killed each year from motor vehicle crashes” (“Motor Vehicle Crash Deaths”, 2016). This statistic is for the United States only and the figures are also incredibly high in other parts of the world. People that were involved in these crashes just believed that they were going to do a simple task: to drive somewhere. They did not know that it would be the last time be-
cause cars are a piece of technology that they honestly believed would help them. This validates Montaigne’s claim that one never knows when they will be faced with their last moments.

Furthermore, many people believe that self-driving cars are incredible improvements in the motor vehicle industry as they take the “human flaw” out of driving. These cars, however, have been newly introduced to the public as modes of transportation, therefore, there are many flaws that they have solely based on their technology and not the humans involved. Tesla car brands have reported that their self-driving cars cannot distinguish between the white sides of semi-trucks and the horizon, causing a multitude of accidents in the past year. When these cars crash, they are not just putting the driver and passengers of the self-driving cars at risk of injury or death and other drivers on the roads, but also innocent pedestrians. Pedestrians can be hit that are in no way interacting directly with the cars and yet can face death due to the faulty technology. In addition to the fact that technology can be harmful, this proves Montaigne’s point that death can happen to anyone at any time, even if they are just doing a basic task like walking.

Although many believe that they do not need to think about death and face its reality due to advancements in technology, they are misinformed. While technology has appeared to help people live longer lives, it has also provided many more ways for people to meet death sooner. We must not be foolhardy believing that technology will save us and, therefore, we will always have to keep Montaigne’s wise thoughts in mind to acknowledge and prepare so that we can make the most out of our life.

Works Cited


Vicious Discrimination: Commonalities Between Frankenstein’s Creature and Non-White American Minorities

by

Alexandra Ware

Alexandra Ware is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biology. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Elise Frketich’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2020.
Frankenstein’s creature pervades classic definitions of science-fiction and horror. Every Halloween, children, and adults dress as the giant green ghoulish figure. Internet intellectuals will remind you that ‘Frankenstein is the name of the Doctor, not the creature’. Despite being written two-hundred years ago, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* remains a cultural staple. Unfortunately, Frankenstein’s monster is not the only horrific persistence in American society. Outright violence, systematic oppression, and microaggressions continue to undermine non-white minorities in every facet of life. The alienation of Frankenstein’s Creature mirrors the systematic oppression against non-white minorities in American Society. First, I will establish this by discussing Frankenstein’s Creature’s social isolation and its similarity to the minority experience of housing segregation. Next, I will evidence the degree to which Frankenstein’s Creature experiences distrust solely based on his appearance and how minorities undergo discrimination based on their ethnicity/race. Then, I will compare the physical abuse Frankenstein’s Creature endures to hate crime rates in America. Finally, I will disprove the claim that *Frankenstein* is a work solely intended to highlight the dangers of prioritizing scientific innovation over morality by calling attention to the fact that once again, similarly to Frankenstein’s Creature, minorities are also unethically treated in science and healthcare today, thus only furthering their likeness.

The human desire to establish safety manifests the need to join a community. Regardless of its evolutionary necessity, it creates a conscious fear of ‘the other’. A constant vigilance of the unknown, and that which can pose an existential threat. All those who encounter Frankenstein’s Creature perceive him as dangerous and fight to immediately distance themselves. White America perceives non-white minorities as a menace and pushes them to undesirable living conditions so as to avoid them completely. From his conception to his demise, Frankenstein’s Creature experiences constant social isolation. As Frankenstein’s Creature wanders the wilderness alone trying to care for himself, he discovers a family’s farm. Overcome by fascination, he watches their every move. “I longed to join them but dared not. I remembered too well the treatment I had suffered the night before from the barbarous villagers, and resolved...(that) I would remain quietly in my hovel, watching, and endeavoring to discover the motives which influenced their actions” (Shelley 57). Frankenstein’s Creature deeply desires to gain a sense of connection to others, but everyone he encounters is repelled. Because he cannot join a community he is forced to remain on the outskirts of society. The human perception that his existence is inherently offensive isolates him from society altogether.

Although outright segregation has been outlawed in America, its presence continues to impact non-white minorities. During the 1930s the American government surveyed neighborhoods across major cities and color-coded them green, blue, yellow, and red. “Best,
still desirable, definitely declining, and hazardous” (Britannica 2020). These categories were largely based on their resident’s demographics. “Neighborhoods that were predominantly made up of African Americans....immigrants from Asia and southern Europe, were deemed undesirable. “Anyone who was not northern-European white was considered to be a detraction from the value of the area,”” (Jan 2018). The impact of these surveys made loans in Redlined neighborhoods incredibly expensive or downright unavailable because they were considered ‘high risk’. Although this practice was outlawed before the end of the 20th century, its effects still resonate today. In fact, according to a study done by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, "Most of the neighborhoods (74%)..graded as high-risk or “Hazardous” eight decades ago are low-to-moderate income..today. Additionally, most of the HOLC graded “Hazardous” areas (nearly 64%) are minority neighborhoods now” (Mitchell 2018). Non-white Americans were deliberately discriminated against and considered risks by the American government. They were pushed to the least desirable conditions and indoctrinated in a system that intended to keep future generations stuck. It worked. Today, those same minorities are prevented from overcoming the wage gap that was imposed upon them. Just as Frankenstein’s Creature was pushed to the edge of society and forced to fend for himself, the Government has systematically deprived non-white Americans of the opportunity to thrive.

In order to identify “the other”, human nature becomes inclined to experience alarm towards physical traits not typically displayed in their community. A judgment is made solely based upon the beholder’s perception of what is normal or abnormal. When anyone encounters Frankenstein’s Creature they react in horror and refuse to interact because of his unnatural and ghoulish appearance. American Society disproportionately discriminates against non-white minorities solely because of their race or ethnicity. Whenever the Creature attempts to interact with humans, he is immediately met with distrust and aggression. Despite the Creature’s caution interacting with humans, he deeply desires to join the family he watches. After months of observing, he has become intimately familiar with their personalities, economic status, their hopes, their highs, and lows. He even learns how to read and communicate from surveilling them. Finally, after internal conflict, the Creature resolves to meet the blind father while his sighted children are away so as to gain trust without being ousted for his appearance. After establishing a rapport, the Creature explains he needs the father’s protection against those who would seek to harm him. Just at that moment, the father’s children arrive, “...the cottage door was opened...Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted...Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father...he dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently with a stick” (Shelley 70). Without hesitation, a moment of conversation, Agatha and
Felix immediately judge Frankenstein’s creature by his image and fight to remove him from their home. The Creature is seen as a monster, not a being that deserves the benefit of the doubt, or even an inquiry.

White Americans have created a stigma that individuals of any other race or ethnicity are lesser than. Antiquated laws have been abolished, amendments have been made, yet racial equality remains a barrier. According to a Pew Research Poll, “About three-quarters of blacks and Asians (76% of each) – and 58% of Hispanics – say they have experienced discrimination or have been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity at least from time to time. In contrast, about two-thirds of whites (67%) say they’ve never experienced this” (Horowitz 2019). While most white Americans will never experience discrimination, the majority of non-white minorities undergo prejudice on a regular basis. Their unfair treatment extends to every part of their life. This includes workplace discrimination, with thousands of court filings each year according to Vox News (Jameel 2019). Discrimination against non-white Americans is also prevalent in the policing system. The US Department of Justice released a study in 2013 stating that black drivers were 30 percent more likely to be pulled over than white drivers. Police were also less likely to tell black drivers why they were being pulled over (Langton 2013). Non-white minorities in America are treated as second rate citizens, undermined exclusively on the color of their skin. Frankenstein’s Creature was successful in communicating with the family’s blind father who could only judge him on the content of his character and speech. The Creature was only ejected when the father’s sighted family arrived. Frankenstein’s Creature is not vile in nature, only in image, and is cruelly and immediately judged because of it. Similarly, non-white minorities in America are by no means inherently lesser than their white counterparts. No part of their identity is subordinate. They are discriminated against due to vile prejudice. Their image, and their image alone.

Upon identifying ‘the other’, members of a community can choose to respond to an unfamiliar individual violently in order to ‘protect’ themselves and their group. Frankenstein’s Creature endures physical abuse even in moments of service to others. Non-white minorities in America suffer from hate crimes in the thousands yearly. Frankenstein’s Creature undergoes violence constantly. After being cruelly beaten by the family he lived near, the Creature can only watch as the family scrambles to move away. He wanders away from the farm and one day while in the forest he witnesses a drowning child. Immediately the Creature rushes to save her.

I rushed from my hiding-place and...saved her...She was senseless, and I endeavored...to restore animation when I was suddenly interrupted by the
approach of a rustic...On seeing me, he darted towards me...tearing the girl from my arms...I followed speedily...but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun... and fired. (Shelley 73)

Not only is the Creature immediately attacked just for existing, when he performs a kindness, a lifesaving act, the girl’s guardian attempts to murder him. Even in moments of wholesome service, humans cannot tolerate his mere existence.

Just as Frankenstein’s creature encounters constant brutality, non-white minorities in America face hate crimes yearly. The FBI defines a hate crime as “a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with an added element of bias.” (FBI). Of all reported hate crimes in 2018, 60 percent were motivated by race/ethnicity/ancestry bias (FBI 2018). Non-white minorities in America are victims of crimes that target them solely for their appearance. Their existence alone. The fact that they are ‘the other’. Frankenstein is a work of fiction that was written two-hundred years ago. Its premise relies on concepts impossible in reality. In its present state, science cannot reanimate an entirely new consciousness from miscellaneous body parts. Yet, human beings, whose only difference is the color of their skin, are brutalized in the modern-day ‘civilized world’ in ways so similar to a ‘freak of nature’.

One might argue that while there are connections between the vicious treatment of Frankenstein’s Creature and non-white minorities, Shelley’s writing is intended to emphasize the risks of prioritizing scientific innovation over ethics. Stanford Medicine writes that “(Frankenstein) presents a framework for narratively examining the morality and ethics of the experiment and experimenter” (Shafer 2018). However, if this is Shelley’s sole motivation, her message only continues to extends to non-white minorities. In fact, in America, non-white minorities are disproportionately mistreated in science and health care. Frankenstein’s Creature was created from miscellaneous body parts, taken without permission from family members. Similarly, John Hopkins took the cancer cells from a poor black woman, Henrietta Lacks’, without her consent. Because her cells cannot die, John Hopkins University has been experimenting on and distributing her cells across the world for the last half a century. HeLa cells have contributed to the development of the polio vaccine, research on zero gravity, and the effects of cancer (John Hopkins Medicine). Regardless of whether or not these cells have led to scientific innovation--their origin is inherently immoral. Just as Frankenstein’s Creature was the victim of experimentation, so were Henrietta’s Cells. A black woman’s cells. Further, the American Government directly funded the
Tuskegee Study, where they purposefully infected black men with syphilis in order to study its effects “...the study was conducted without the benefit of patients’ informed consent” (CDC). Once again, hundreds of black men, non-white American minorities, were disadvantaged under the guise of scientific innovation. Both John Hopkins and the Government committed these vile acts in the 20th century, but the mistreatment of minorities in health care has not ended. According to US News, “If you are African-American or Latino and you present to the emergency room with a broken leg or a kidney stone, for example, you’re less likely to be given analgesics at the recommended level” (Schroeder 2016). If Shelley’s novel was written to warn the dangers of society prioritizing ethics in science and health care, her message resonates even louder when compared to the suffering of non-white American minorities. Unilaterally, the constant mistreatment and alienation of Frankenstein directly mirror the experience of a non-white American.

While today Frankenstein’s importance is reserved for one day a year, its message remains relevant. Shelley’s depiction of the cruelties and injustice that Frankenstein’s Creature endured reminds us that not only should we always consider ethics in science, but also that hateful prejudice can only stand to detriment all those in society. The scariest part of Frankenstein is not the science that defies the laws of nature, it is not the gore, the murder, or even the monster. The scariest part is that key points of the plot in this science-fiction novel happen to American citizens daily. Frankenstein’s Creature is continuously alienated in a way that directly resembles the systematic oppression against non-white minorities. Both Frankenstein’s Creature and non-white minorities endure social isolation, prejudice based on their appearance, and physical abuse. It goes without saying that no being should be treated with such cruelty, such disrespect. The fact that these comparisons can even be drawn is a testament to a fundamental failure of American society, a society that struggles to have basic respect for individuals with a different color skin. The only solution is to acknowledge the problem and to refuse to accept the status quo. Until then, we are no better than those who abused Frankenstein’s Creature.

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Machiavelli’s Reputation Situated in Historical and Authorial Contexts

by

Ellie Callahan

Ellie Callahan is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Professional Flight Technology. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Silvia Mitchell’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2019. She would like to thank Professor Mitchell for an excellent experience in the fall and for her help with becoming a stronger writer.
Born May 3, 1469 to a modest family in the Italian city-state of Florence, Niccolò Machiavelli is often heralded as the first political scientist (Bondanella and Musa 9). Despite having well-established extended family members within the Florence, Machiavelli’s own family members were less entrenched, forcing Machiavelli to create his own path into Italian politics. Machiavelli ultimately earned a position in the Florentine chancery in 1498 that lasted for 12 years (Bondanella and Musa 9-10). While he occupied that position, Machiavelli gained access to popular and well-known Italian political figures and began to develop his own personal political treatises based on his experience with those figures (Bondanella and Musa 14). When the Medici family reclaimed power in Florence, they exiled Machiavelli, influencing his political ideas in *The Prince* (Bondanella and Musa 15-16). Through careful study of Machiavelli’s keystone texts, *The Prince* and *Discourses*, it is evident that his exile heavily influenced many of his political philosophies in *The Prince*, including his philosophies regarding the most ideal form of government.

In *The Discourses* and *The Prince*, Machiavelli discussed two main forms of government: republics and principalities. *The Discourses* primarily described Machiavelli’s most ideal form of government: a republic. In Machiavelli’s study of politics, he found that there were three types of government (principalities, aristocracies, and democracies), each with an unfavorable counterpart (tyranny, oligarchy, and anarchy, respectively) (176-177). His philosophy was that each of these governments on their own would inevitably evolve into their counterpart; a principality naturally would become tyrannical as the ruler gained more power, an aristocracy would naturally develop into an oligarchy as the initial class of ruling elite maneuvered to keep power within their own families, and democracy would ultimately become anarchy as the general public became more empowered and individualistic (177-179). Through his own careful examination of these types of government throughout history and within Italy especially, Machiavelli concluded that the most ideal form of government was one that combined the three types of government. By fashioning a republic that used the better qualities of each of the three types, a city-state would then have implemented a system of checks on each of the forms of government (181). The aristocratic section would ‘check’ the power of the principality section, the democratic section would check the aristocratic section, and so on. This system of checks would then lead to a stronger government overall and thus lead to a stronger city-state within the Italian political climate. In addition to the checks between the branches, Machiavelli also proposed the implementation of a strong justice system that allowed citizens to bring formal charges against those in power (193). This justice system was in pursuit of preserving the longevity of a state, as citizens’ faith in their governing officials was strengthened by their ability to publicly hold those officials accountable for their actions. This justice system also theoretically led to the estab-
lishment of a stronger moral code within the government and its citizens, as they were being held to an established legal code.

Machiavelli’s condemnation of the principality as an effective and long-lasting form of government in *The Discourses* is later contradicted in *The Prince*, though. Whereas before he had described the inevitability of a principality to turn to tyranny, he wrote *The Prince* as a how-to guide for effectively implementing and maintaining a principality. Within *The Prince*, Machiavelli discussed the sub-groups of principalities (hereditary and new) as well as their strengths and weaknesses (79). While he did briefly discuss hereditary principalities, his main focus was on the new principality, especially the one that was adding members (80). These ‘members added’ principalities tended to be the most problematic, as there was less rigid and defined governmental structure in addition to a fusion of new cultures and language barriers (81). Machiavelli offered solutions and insights as to maintaining power within these principalities.

Machiavelli’s switch in focus from *The Discourses*’ republics to *The Prince*’s principalities can primarily be attributed to his exile by the Medici family. His exile was a result of his previous political leanings (i.e. his relationship to Piero Soderini, the gonfaloniere prior to the Medici takeover) (Bondanella 11). In an attempt to reverse his exile, Machiavelli quickly wrote and published *The Prince*, which addressed “a new kind of political figure—the “new” prince whose power lacked a basis in tradition, history, and custom” (Bondanella 18). This ‘new’ prince was likely Giuliano de Medici (the probable new arbiter of Florence) as well as his brother, Lorenzo de Medici, the new pope (Leo X) (Bondanella and Musa 18). *The Prince* was tailored to suit the political philosophy of Lorenzo de Medici (and the larger Medici clan), as shown by his choice of dedication (Bondanella and Musa 18-19). Machiavelli’s temporary abandonment of *The Discourses* was all in an attempt to gain the favor of the Medici’s in order to end his exile from Florence and re-enter Florentine society.

Upon first inspection, *The Prince* read as the antithesis to Machiavelli’s *Discourses*. Not only did he abandon his arguments about the importance of a republic as a form of government in favor of talking solely about the principality and how best to govern it, he also seemed to abandon the moral integrity discussed in *The Discourses*. In chapter XVIII of *The Prince*, Machiavelli states that “in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no impartial arbiter, one must consider the final result” (135). This statement is often misconstrued as implying that “the ends justify the means,” regardless of the questionable means taken to achieve the ends (Bondanella and Musa 21). Taken out of context, it was easy for critics of Machiavelli to influence the public perception of his political theory as being cold, conniving, and, frankly, Machiavellian. Machiavelli’s acceptance that princes of-
ten acted outside of traditional moral codes offended many and made it easy for them to ostracize him and vilify his work (Bondanella and Musa 22). However, Machiavelli did not completely abandon his adherence to and respect for morals, as shown in chapter VIII of The Prince when he says “it cannot be skill to kill one’s fellow citizens, to betray friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; by these means one can acquire power but not glory” (104). Thus, Machiavelli’s acceptance that princes often act immorally is condemned within his own writing; immoral actions are a method for gaining power but will not offer one lasting glory or support.

When Machiavelli’s writings are considered in the historical context that they were written, the negative connotation that is associated with them is understandable. His previous political association and career had set him up with a host of opponents (Bondanella and Musa 11), and his eventual banishment was an almost inevitable side effect of that. His banishment also fits with the ideas contained in The Prince, as it was written as a response to the political regime being established within Florence (and Italy at large) during the time of its creation (Bondanella and Musa 19). The Medici clan was creating a principality-based system, and Machiavelli wrote The Prince as a how-to guide for the Medici rulers in an attempt to regain their favor. The Prince does contain some contradictions from his longer political treatise The Discourses, but those contradictions can be accounted for the fact that Machiavelli was largely writing The Prince as a reactionary piece to the establishment of a new political regime whereas The Discourses were written over the course of many years and heavily edited as politics developed and political systems were established. The negative connotation associated with Machiavelli’s work also makes sense when considered within the scope of his political relationship with those in power: it was easy for his opponents to take his writing out of context and vilify it so that Machiavelli developed a ruthless reputation.

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Reflection on the Pros and Cons of Gentrification

by

Nathan French

Nathan French is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biomedical Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor William White’s SCLA 102 class in Spring 2020. He completed two semesters of SCLA and gained valuable critical thinking and communication skills.
When long-time Chicago resident, Lucy Gutierrez first moved into her home in Pilsen 60 years ago, she was expecting it to be her ‘forever-home.’ However, decades later she is facing the harsh reality that many city dwellers face throughout the country: being slowly edged out of her residence due to rising prices that make it infeasible to stay. In an interview with WYCC PBS, a Chicago-based television station, she said “I’ve seen people leave and sell the houses at such ridiculous prices, because it wasn’t that they didn’t want to stay here, it was because the rents are going up and they could not afford to pay the taxes” (“In the Loop…”). Gentrification has been a touchy subject throughout recent decades as it is beneficial to some individuals while harmful to others. Finding the right balance between gentrifying a region while maintaining its history and culture is a difficult task—one that the main character in August Wilson’s play, *Radio Golf*, is struggling with during his campaign for mayor. Many of the issues portrayed in Wilson’s play are echoed in today’s society, especially in large cities such as Chicago.

To some, gentrification is a positive sign of a neighborhood on the rise. While gentrification may be a sign of increasing wealth and property value, it can be costly for some as they are constantly battling to stay in their homes. One of the negative qualities of gentrification is that it disproportionately affects some demographics more than others. To understand why, a look into economic practices from the 1900’s can explain how some regions today are targeted for gentrification.

In the 1930s nearing the aftermath of the Great Depression, the federal government began a practice known today as “redlining.” Redlining involved outlining regions in urban areas on a map that were deemed as a ‘investment threat,’ so people living in redlined regions were typically denied a loan. In the article “How Redlining Segregated Chicago, and America,” the author Whet Moser states that “given the period, its metrics for creditworthiness were heavily based on the racial composition of the neighborhoods” (Moser 1). There is also a stark relationship between regions that have been previously redlined and have been gentrified or are currently undergoing gentrification. A statistic from San Francisco exemplifies this relationship: “87% of San Francisco’s redlined neighborhoods are low-income neighborhoods undergoing gentrification today” (“Redlining and Gentrification”). While this statistic is not specifically for Chicago, the statistics are likely the same for all large cities around the United States. Since redlining primarily targeted certain races, then gentrification therefore is inadvertently selective in those who it targets.

One such Chicago neighborhood that was previously redlined and is currently undergoing gentrification is Pilsen. Pilsen has historically been a predominantly Latino neighborhood. As the neighborhood begins gentrifying, resulting in new people moving in, others are
being forced to move out. According to an article by Adilene Salgado, “Between 2000 and 2013, more than 10,300 Hispanics left Pilsen, a loss of 26% of the community’s Latino population” (Salgado 3). While the Latino community in Pilsen is being hit hard as a result of gentrification, a sub-demographic that is being impacted heavily are those with families. According to the same article, Salgado continues to explain that during 2000 to 2013 “The population of the neighborhood fell by 15%, but the number of families with children fell much more steeply, some 41%” (Salgado 3). These statistics show how gentrification impacts certain individuals more than others. Even families are not excluded from the population that is forced out of their homes due to rising prices.

While for some, gentrification can be beneficial as they are able to pay for a beautiful new home, the reality of gentrification is not so beautiful for others. In gentrification, there are winners and losers, as there are in any major operation. The question is are there more winners than losers in the process? In Chicago, those who ‘win’ in gentrification are those who are able to afford the new housing and are able to keep up with rising prices. For many, this is not feasible. Byron Sigcho, the director of the Pilsen Alliance which is committed to updating its residents on the recent impacts of gentrification, stated in an interview with WYCC PBS, “We want to make a diverse, welcoming, and vibrant community that is inclusive for everyone, not only for those who can afford it” (“In the Loop…”). In an airing by WYCC PBS, they showed protests in Chicago about affordable housing and the ramifications associated with gentrification. One protestor held up a sign with a humbling phrase: “Now that the neighborhood is nice, why do I have to move out?” (“In the Loop…”). Both quotes identify the negative impacts gentrification can have on a community as it forces individuals to move out, even if they had been living there for a while.

Another complication that gentrification poses is that it has the capacity to disrupt long-standing communities. For instance, Pilsen’s cultural identity is grounded in their majority Latino community. In recent years as a result of gentrification, they have been seeing an influx of different people moving into the neighborhood. In the eyes of one Pilsen resident, Amanda Cortes, “We are seeing the visual change of white wealthy people move into neighborhoods in which it is easy for them to acquire properties, and transform them into whatever they want” (Salgado 3). While diversification is not inherently bad, Pilsen is seeing the negative effects of a long-term community being disrupted by an influx of new residents from different backgrounds. In a TEDx talk at DePaul University, Winifred Curran commented on her experience with Pilsen’s newcomers. She and her friend Vicki would frequently walk the streets, and Winifred would joke with her friend saying that Vicki was the “Mayor of Pilsen” because everyone knew her name and would say hello to her in the streets. Later in her speech, Winifred explained that the crucial difference between people
who have been long members of the community and the newcomers on the block “Is that they (newcomers) don’t say hello on the street, and this is indicative of the fact that they are not engaged in the larger neighborhood” (Curran, “Gentrification is Not Inevitable”). The small gesture of a “hello” is ingrained in members of the Pilsen community, and when individuals come to the neighborhood and do not continue this practice, it marks a small but not insignificant manner in which new residents as a result of gentrification can disrupt a long-standing community.

In the words of Natalie Moore, a reporter for WBEZ in Chicago, she describes gentrification as a process of “displacement and replacement” (Demby). This is one of the largest problems of gentrification: pushing out long-time residents from their homes due to consistent price hikes in rent or homeowner taxes. These perpetually increasing costs push individuals out of their homes as they are no longer able to keep up with the rising bills. For one Chicago resident living in Hyde Park, this is the reality that she is facing every day. Denise Hill, who has lived in her neighborhood for 10 years said “We’re OK, but if the rent went up a couple hundred dollars, it would price me out” (Bowean 1). This exemplifies how even long-term residents who have been living in the same place for a decade are subject to the negative effects associated with gentrification. They are subject to an increase in prices due to the increasing attractiveness of their community, and simply living in their home becomes more expensive with each new house that is built. Denise Hill is a prime example of those who are negatively affected by gentrification. She embodies the marginalized population that is in danger of having to move out because the cost of living for them exceeds what they are able to pay.

Gentrification is often perceived in a negative connotation, but there are benefits to gentrifying a region. Some of these benefits can be through financial means, while others are opportunities opened as a result of gentrification. For example, gentrification oftentimes includes bringing businesses or companies to certain regions which are able to provide jobs. This is what is happening in one Chicago neighborhood: “More than a year ago, for example, developers opened a new shopping complex with a Whole Foods, Chipotle, and Starbucks in a struggling area of Englewood. The city subsidized the development, and the stores coming in promised to hire local residents and provide shelf space for local businesses to sell their goods” (Semuels 9). By bringing in jobs into a struggling community, gentrification is able to provide a means for individuals to support themselves and their families, even if their homeowner costs rise as a result of bringing these businesses into the region. The idea of creating job opportunities for residents was one of the many campaign ideas Harmond Wilks had for revitalizing the Hill District in the play, Radio Golf. The businesses
he was bringing to the district mirror exactly the businesses in Englewood in Chicago. In a conversation between Roosevelt and Mame:

MAME: “Where’s the Starbucks? Don’t tell me they’re going to put it inside the Barnes & Noble.”

ROOSEVELT: “No. It’s right there on the other side of Whole Foods.”

MAME: “That apartment building turned out nice. Putting the garden on the roof really works” (Wilson 9).

Up-scale stores such as Whole Foods and Starbucks are often identifiers of a gentrifying or gentrified neighborhood. By bringing in these businesses, more jobs are created which provide work opportunities for individuals living in the region which is a benefit of gentrification.

In addition to creating job opportunities which bolsters the financial stability of the community, gentrification can make a region a generally safer place that is more attractive to anyone. In a study conducted by NYU, they found that “residents of public housing surrounded by high-income neighbors experienced better schools, lower crime, and higher incomes” (Curran, “Mexicans love red…”). One of the great capabilities of gentrification is to take an unstable region and provide stability through investment. Over time, the region is able to provide greater opportunities -- such as better education -- than it did previously. Those who are able to stay in their community as it gentrifies are able to reap these benefits.

While job opportunities and a safer community are major benefits of gentrification, it is also able to provide residents with smaller benefits that are helpful. In a study by the Philadelphia Federal Reserve, they found that “the credit scores of low-income residents in gentrifying neighborhoods are higher” (Curran, “Mexicans love red…”). This means that people who live in gentrifying neighborhoods have slightly enhanced economic opportunities than those who do not live in gentrified neighborhoods.

Individuals who are classified as those ‘at risk’ of being pushed out of their homes due to gentrification can potentially be winners in the operation, granted are able to stay in their homes. Since gentrification often leads to the appreciation of home values based on the region becoming generally more expensive, those who buy their house and are able to stay in it for years are able to see those benefits in the form of increased property value. One Ravenswood resident, Gabe Burgos, has seen exactly that. He bought his home in 1982 when the price was low because the neighborhood was a tough place to live. He and his wife
used to see crime occurring every day, but over time and through gentrification, crime has slowly decreased and the houses in the neighborhood they lived in had appreciated greatly. “Today, new homes on the street sell for $1.5 million or more. According to the Cook County assessor, the Burgoses’ two-flat is worth $715,000 -- up 637% over what they paid” (Zotti 2). While this is the best-case-scenario for gentrification, unfortunately this is not the reality for many individuals because it only applies to those who bought their house, and the majority of people rent. In Humboldt Park, this is particularly apparent as only 35% of residents buy their home while 65% rent (“In the Loop…”). However, for those able to stay and see their investment multiply in value, they are winners.

Arguably the most important benefit of gentrification is that it has the capacity to promote solidarity. Those facing a common threat band together and create a tight-knit community. This solidarity is present in Pilsen, through the Pilsen Alliance. The Pilsen Alliance marks a community's capacity to work together cohesively to bring social change. Bringing people together under a common goal is the foundation for a strong community. The ability for gentrification to bring people together is also prevalent in the play, *Radio Golf*. In the play, the character Old Joe was having his house ‘stolen’ from him as it was planned to be demolished to make way for Harmond’s plan for revitalization. As Harmond and many other people began to understand the negative consequences of gentrification through Harmond’s plan for revitalizing the Hill District, they got together for a “Paint party.” Later on, Mame says:


Both the Pilsen Alliance and the ‘paint party’ exemplify a community coming together. Individuals of different backgrounds uniting and becoming stronger. That is essentially the purpose of a community: to unite and become stronger together, and gentrification is able to provide a platform for people to unite upon.

In any major plan for change, there are always going to be winners and losers. Some will benefit while others will be worse off than before. Gentrification is no exception to this. Creating a more ‘beautiful’ neighborhood can be at the expense of losing the beauty in its residents who were unable to afford to live in their homes anymore. Conversely, gentrification can provide economic opportunities, opening doors to success for many. Gentrification has been occurring for decades in the United States, and it is not forecasted to stop anytime soon. An important theme about gentrification is repeatedly hinted throughout August Wil-
son’s play, *Radio Golf*. Gentrification can revitalize a community, but one must be sure that the community itself—which is composed of the people--remains intact. A balance must be struck between preserving history and paving the way to the future.

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Reason and Regression: An Examination of Stoicism on Virtue

by

Hannah Fisher

Hannah Fisher is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in pre-PA. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael J. Augustin’s SCLA 101 class in the fall semester of 2019. This course has been immensely transformative in her personal life and she wanted to take this opportunity to express her gratitude to Professor Augustin for guiding her on the path to eudaimonia.
The Stoics maintain that the quintessential sage is someone who conforms their will to that of nature, thus qualifying them as a virtuous person. In this paper, I shall present that Stoics’ account of what it means to live in accordance with nature and demonstrate that it conflicts too strongly with what is natural to human beings and is therefore an implausible method to reaching virtue.

It is first necessary to explore what it means to live in accordance with nature: the Stoics define “nature” in two distinct ways. The first definition broadens the term “nature” to encompass not only the physical world, but the entire cosmos; therefore, humans must be in harmony with the universe in order to live in accordance with nature. There is a heavy emphasis on aligning oneself with the cosmos since they believe that the universe is a “rationally organized and well-ordered system” (Stephens) ordained by Zeus. Consequently, this leaves little room for chance, as everything must fall within a predetermined scheme. So, living in accordance with nature is synonymous to calibrating oneself to the will of the Divine and accepting one’s fate. The second definition of nature narrows in on the natural composition of human beings. Humans have a distinct capacity to think in comparison to other animals, so, the Stoic’s assert that for a human being to live in accordance with nature, they must live in agreement with their “special, innate endowment—the ability to reason” (Stephens). From this, the Stoics equate virtue to reasoning. It is therefore essential that an individual shall never make judgements that are disobedient to reason, but should be wise enough to differentiate between what is up to them and what is not, what is truly good, bad, and indifferent. By doing so, they will never feel pathê, such as anger, fear, craving, or pleasure—which are all products of irrational and mistaken judgements that something is good or bad when it is in fact indifferent. They will only feel eupatheia, the good states of feeling, which are composed of caution, wish, and joy.

Since the Stoics focus so heavily on this one aspect of the human being—their ability to reason—they often disregard the multiple dimensions of what it means to be virtuous. As mentioned previously, the Stoics believe that all things are predetermined, and thus encourage individuals to fulfill the role that is allocated to them and accept that that is the most correct progression of events, since it has been willed by the universe. This teaches individuals that they should merely accept their circumstances. Though Epictetus does encourage each individual to “act the role that is assigned to [them] as well as [they] can” (Épictète), and ergo make the most of their circumstances, he fails to promote virtuous behavior beyond thought. Take the Aristotelian perspective, for instance, which not only agrees that having the appropriate thoughts and judgements in response to one’s circumstances are significant, but that seeking moderation in feelings and consciously performing correct actions are just as important. Aristotle embraces the entire human being and pro-
motes self-improvement in multiple facets. After all, being virtuous is an active role that requires more than just thinking rationally. One must not only have the correct thoughts and judgements, as the Stoics suggest, but must also act upon them.

Furthermore, the Stoics definition of living in accordance with nature is simply not natural or conducive to one’s mental health. Emotion is a natural and biological response, but the Stoics assert that a virtuous person will only feel “appropriate emotive responses that have been conditioned by rational understanding” (Stephens). This directly contradicts with their second definition of “nature”. Although the Stoics mainly present “human nature” as the ability to rationalize and think critically, they also state that “nature” encapsulates an individual’s basic biology and their innate impulses. Thus, living in accordance with nature should require humans to understand that they have a natural disposition to feel certain ways in response to their circumstances; however, as previously stated, the Stoics assert that there are some emotions that a true sage should never experience. This proves to be a problem, as the awareness and understanding of feelings is vital for a good wellbeing. In fact, a study conducted by the University of Liverpool investigated the Stoicism lifestyle and its effect on mental health. They found that people who only practiced the good states of feelings but didn’t allow themselves to feel the four passions--pathê--consistently demonstrated a lower well-being and showed signs of maladaptive behavior (Murray). Though stoicism is often regarded as a psychological resilience factor, the execution of it is not beneficial when actually put into practice.

Finally, living in accordance with nature is not a personal choice if each individual must merely fit within the universe’s framework, meaning that the actions that they perform are not by their own accord, but are predestined. This makes it nearly impossible to assess if someone is truly a virtuous being, even if their actions are good and righteous, for they are not done by independent choice. Chrysisspus, a principal systematizer of Stoic philosophy, foresaw this objection and tried to amend this concern through an analogy between human action and a rolling cylinder. He claimed that the movement of the cylinder is the product of an external cause combined with the cylinder’s shape. In this analogy, Zeus is the administer of the external push, as well as the creator of the cylinder itself--the human being. The reason this analogy doesn’t work is because if God is the author of the external push that elicits human action, but he assigned that human the natural disposition to act in a way that they do, “He must by definition be the author of everything that happens in Nature, including moral and physical evil” (Sellars). Chrysisspus’s analogy implies that God is the cause of all things, including those that are wicked, and so He must be the origin of evil, which quite clearly runs into the problem of impiety. Thus, Chrysisspus’s amendment must be omitted.
A foreseeable objection to my argument is that the Stoics’ principles have been successfully implemented into many people’s lives, especially those who are in a position where they must accept their circumstances and have no immediate sense of control. Take J. Stockdale, for instance, a veteran who writes extensively on how Epictetus’s teachings helped him endure the atrocities of the Vietnam War. Stoicism provided him with a sense of control even though his circumstances allotted him none: he rationalized what was in his power and what was not, and therefore did not burden himself with the things that he couldn’t change, but tried to focus on what he could—his thoughts and judgements. He often writes that he had become “a man detached” (Stockdale) since he was able to harness control over his internal self and disconnect himself from the external world. I am willing to agree that Stoicism may grant certain individuals temporary relief or a sense of control that they may not otherwise have, but will contend that Stoicism is not applicable in most cases, nor is it sustainable over a long period of time. The Stoic philosophy is founded on this “erroneous maxim that what a man can perform some times, and in some dispositions, he can perform always and in every disposition” (Brennan), when often times Stoicism is only applicable in special cases, such as J. Stockdale’s. Additionally, the Stoics maintain that through reasoning and detachment, an individual may find eudaimonia within their circumstances; however, Aristotle’s virtues of character may provide the same sense of flourishing that Stoicism does by promoting adaptability in one’s circumstances. The importance of adapting to one’s circumstances rather than detaching from them is that it allows the individual to address and work through their problems in a more comprehensive way, rather than just accepting them.

In conclusion, the criteria that it takes to become a Stoic sage is simply not achievable for a human being, as it goes against human nature. Therefore, living in accordance with nature from the Stoicism perspective is implausible for reaching virtue.

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Youssef Beshay is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in biomedical engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins’ SCLA 101 class in the spring semester of 2019. Having an interest in the anatomy and physiology of the heart, he used this assignment to liberally educate himself on the sociocultural history of the organ. He hopes that his work can serve as an inspiration for students to foster their own interests.
The study of the heart as a scientific phenomenon has resulted in several disputes between scientists and philosophers throughout history, namely due to the absence of the proper technology needed to understand the circulatory system as we know it today. As such, there were many misconceptions of the heart and its function in the past. For example, ancient Greeks such as Aristotle (384 BC) claimed that the psyche or soul resides within the heart, where blood is produced for use in the remainder of the body (Høystad 52). From as early as Greek medicine, notions of the heart being the controller of both mental and physical states evolved from the belief that it was the source of innate heat serving as a “smelter’s furnace” that mixed the blood with vital and natural spirits (Aird 121). It was not until the Renaissance and William Harvey that the basis of circulatory system as seen in the foundation for modern medicine was laid (Aird 128). Even though it took decades to dispense with erroneous scientific understandings of the heart, once a better and more progressive explanation was provided for blood circulation, the ancient theories were discarded. On the other hand, with cultural understanding, perceptions are less evolutionary. Drawing evidence from ancient cultures, religions, and language and literature over a wide range of time, the symbolic perception of the human heart as the center of human emotion, relationships with divine powers, and sociological interactions has been inherited as far back as Ancient Mesopotamian civilization proving that cultural understanding is immune to scientific advancements.

**The Heart in Ancient Cultures**

Historical and mythical events show that the heart holds a special standing and sheds light on the linguistic connotation of the organ. From the story of Gilgamesh, an epic hero and a great Sumerian king, the heart can be seen as the source of wisdom and the link to the divine. For example, when Gilgamesh, along with his friend Enkidu, killed the Bull of Heaven that Ishtar sent to destroy Gilgamesh’s kingdom, they cut out the heart of the bull and sacrificed it to Shamash, the sun god (Høystad 21). Out of all the organs, they specifically chose to sacrifice the heart, and this signifies the divine link that is formed via the organ.

Further, in the *Epic of Inanna*, gods and goddesses battle each other by inflicting on each other “diseases of the heart” (Høystad 22). For example, Ereshigal kills her sister Inanna/Ishtar with a jealous and cruel gaze that captivates her heart. Further, when the singer sings and renews Ishtar’s heart with courage, her heart is free, and in turn, Ereshigal’s heart is diseased (Høystad 22). Here, it can be seen that the heart is fragile and vulnerable to common social interactions and forms of art such as eye contact and songs respectively. Further, the heart is personified and given noble human qualities such as courage proving that the heart was seen as a superior organ.
The former two instances signify the importance of the organ and provide a more accurate connotational meaning of the word “heart,” which is used in multiple phrases of Ancient Sumerian texts. In fact, in the latter story of Inanna, Ereshigal cries to the singer, “Do not break my heart with your song!” (Høystad 22). Thus, the “broken heart,” a symbol of an emotionally hurt person, as we are familiar with it today, has ancient origins (Høystad 22). Further in the Epic of Gilgamesh, quotes like “Who gave your heart such remarkable insight?” signify that wisdom, given by the gods, was placed in the heart; thus making the organ the link to the divine (Høystad 21).

Further, inspired by the Sumerians, Høystad argues, the ancient Egyptians, in an era that lasted for 2000 years, venerated the heart (23). In the study of ancient Egyptian mummification, we see that after embalming, the heart is the only organ that is replaced in its exact location in the body. All the other organs are stored in jars, while the brain was thrown away (25). The special care of the heart came from the notion that the heart, linked to the soul, testifies for the dead on the Day of Judgement. This means that the ancient Egyptians perceived the heart as a witness of everything that one commits during his/her lifetime, thus attributing memory and intelligence to the heart (25). In fact, in the Book of the Dead, Egyptians acknowledge God in their scripture, “You have created my heart; I did not become wise of my own doing” (27). From this quote, we see that the Egyptians, like the Sumerians, linked the heart with wisdom sourced from divine power.

As the ancient Egyptians believed in a “hearing heart” and wanted the heart to testify for them rather than against them, they preferred a stone heart in death (Høystad 27). A stone heart, unlike today, was a symbol for self-control and sober mindedness (Høystad 26, 29). This was important because the soul of the deceased stood amongst 42 assessor gods in order to prove to them that the deceased has lived a righteous life by declaring 42 sins that they have not committed (Gala, Tejal). If the person’s heart is not “sober,” they will not be able to pass this test, as the heart will betray them for actually committing the sin (Høystad 29). Thus, in the mummification process, the mummy was topped with a magical heart scarab amulet, in which it is inscribed, “Do not stand as a witness against me” (Gala, Tejal). Finally, the heart played an important role in a person’s afterlife because a person is only guaranteed a happy afterlife if their heart was lighter than an ostrich’s feather, which is symbolic of the Maat, goddess of justice (Høystad 26).

Paradoxically, the heart was also depicted as the weakest organ, as it was vulnerable to impressions, influences, and emotions (Høystad 30). Playing the role of what we know today as the conscience, studies of the heart in Ancient Egyptian times suggest that the heart was physically exhausted and fatigued if important values such as ethics were violated. Also,
with the soul residing in the heart, this ultimately resulted in a weakened soul, which hampered spiritual lives (Høystad 30). Thus, in fear of having a fatigued heart, a person would be obedient to rules and laws; thus proving the sociological significance of the heart.

Noticeably, the heart was sacred in Sumerian culture followed by Ancient Egyptian culture, thus referencing the idea of cultural borrowing. In both cultures, the heart is seen to be the center of emotion and intellect, as well as having significance in relation to divine power. Already, we can draw parallels between the social significance of the heart in ancient cultures to that of our cultural understanding today where we believe in concepts such as that of “a broken heart” and the “hearing heart.”

**The Heart In Tribal Religions and Lifestyles**

Placing utmost importance on community Other, earthly Other, and supernatural Other, tribal lifestyles also give the heart a special value, as it plays a crucial role in these social relationships (Ashdown 154). While regards to the community Other ensured that tribe members fulfill their roles in a community, commitment to the earthly Other and supernatural Other meant that tribe members respect and venerate nature and divine power respectively (Ashdown 155). According to Ashdown, the heart disciplines individuals as members of an integrated society where certain behaviors are punishable and other are awarded with “beneficial reciprocity” (155). This can be illustrated through an investigation of ancient Hebrew tribal culture as well as modern Torobo tribe in Kenya.

Through literal interpretations of texts from the Torah, the ancient Hebrew tribes believed that the heart was the source of life. Proverb 4:23 says “Guard your heart with all vigilance, because from it are all sources of life.” For that reason, the Hebrews placed cultural value to the heart or lēḇ and venerated the organ as the source of “knowledge, memory, reason, intellect... free will, desire, proclivity, [and] wisdom” (Ashdown 159). Proclaiming the existence of God, a good person would follow the instructions of God and protect the pure heart created by Yahweh (160). By such commandments, like the ancient Egyptians, the Hebrews valued the supernatural Other, as the creator of the heart and source of wisdom. Also, the Hebrews communicated to God via the heart. For example, in requesting the ability to bear a child, Hannah spoke to God with her heart (Ashdown 164). Further, Ashdown cites the biblical description of Jeremiah and David’s “burning heart[s],” as they carried prophetic messages from God (169). These examples of communicating with the divine, similar to Gilgamesh’s sacrifice, commonly feature the heart.

The Torah references the heart in guiding the Hebrews to attain for their community Other, giving the heart sociological value. Zechariah 7:10 says, “Let none of you plan evil in
his heart against his brother.” The lēḇ was seen as main performer in the process of action, which is constituent of desiring something followed by seeking motivation and encouragement to act and finally determining the appropriate action required to fulfill the desire (Ashdown 170-171). Thus, in Leviticus 19:17, the heart, as the initiator of action, is commanded not to have evil desires towards members of the tribe. Also, the lēḇ helps members conform to tribal culture by fulfilling its role as the conscience of the person (Ashdown). For example, knowing what is correct and deemed orthodox in society, if the heart sees a person willingly break laws and norms (commonly known as sinning), the heart becomes emotionally reactive, as memory of norms and witnessed behavior are not compatible (Ashdown 166). As such, similar to the Egyptian heart’s response to sinning, the ʿiḇrî heart testifies against the person for evil doings (Ashdown 168). Further, playing another social role, the heart enables people to fulfill the divine command to love one another (Ashdown 165). Thus, speaking of someone’s heart was seen as a communication of affection and comfort (Ashdown 165). Ultimately, the heart was symbolic of one’s identification as an integrated member of the ʿiḇrî tribe.

Moreover, the restoration of ʿiḇrî tribal life can be seen in the Torobo tribe of modern day Kenya. The Maa equivalent of the heart is oltau, which holds “social, personal, and spiritual” significance (Ashdown 156). The oltau was created by the Creator God, Enkai (Ashdown 157). Also, containing the soul, the Torobo tribe believe in the spiritual significance of the heart, as it communicates with the divine. Thus, similar to the Hebrew tribal and ancient cultures, the heart is associated with the “soul…spirit…cultural personality…[and] emotion” (Ashdown 159).

As the brain is thought to collect facts that are later sent to the heart for decision-making to occur, the Torobo tribe believes that all reasoning and processing of information occurs in the oltau (Ashdown 161). Moreover, the oltau is perceived as a “safe haven” for storing private information (Ashdown 163). This is important in maintaining the mental well-being of a person. This can be seen in the following Torobo saying, “The heart is pressed down with silence,” meaning that the heart, as a problem solver, equivalent to the brain as it is known today, ponders problems in order to reach a solution (Ashdown 163). As such, the heart is silent and will not communicate with the person until it finds an appropriate solution (Ashdown 163). Externally, this reflects on the person looking gloomy and troubled. Further, the heart is given autonomous power of desiring and willing (Ashdown). In fact, the heart decides upon action, gives the energy to fulfill the certain desire, and it finally gives the will or power necessary for fulfillment (Ashdown 169). This is similar to the mode of action in the ʿiḇrî tribe.
The oltau plays a major role in cultural practices of the Torobo tribe. In a culture of hunting and gathering, the role of the oltau is to understand the surrounding and assess the nature of the environment around them (Ashdown 162). Additionally, Torobo culture is far from individualistic and relies significantly on social belongingness and in-group identities. In fact, a big portion of the heart seeks to imitate other people (Ashdown 173). Thus, the heart can be seen as a seeker of what is socially acceptable; thus helping an individual conform to societal values.

Clearly, the tribal cultures see the heart beyond its essential biological function of pumping blood to the body. Helping integrate various physical, psychical, and emotional states of a person, the heart metonymically embodies whole individuals and plays a huge role in the formation of tribe members with “cohesive” selves (Ashdown 159). Thus, with analogous perceptions of the heart in both the ancient Hebrew and modern Torobo tribes, tribes and tribal cultures prove to be immune to scientific advancements.

**The Heart in Catholicism**

Even with exposure to modern culture and scientific advancements, the heart still holds cultural value that is not in alignment with scientific phenomena. This can be seen with the modern practice of Catholicism and the worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. People pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial in Burgundy, France where it is believed that God, in a manifestation of a wondrous heart, appeared to Margaret Mary several times (T T S. 196). The Sacred Heart of Jesus is depicted in intricate and iconic imagery. The crystal transparent heart was on a throne of fire and flames, surrounded by rays brighter that of the sun. Also, the heart was topped with a crown of thorns and a cross was planted upon it (T T S. 197). Margaret Mary’s vision initiated the display of the common icon of the human heart of Christ in the Roman Catholic Church today (T T S. 197). The Sacred Heart of Jesus is a symbol of the divine, socially favorable characteristics of Jesus, such as charity, compassion, sympathy, and tenderness that humans aspire to match (T T S. 197).

The Sacred Heart of Jesus was also a wearable charm. Inscribed with “Cease, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is with me,” the charm was worn as a protector from infectious diseases (“THE SACRED HEART”’’ 341). Declaring faithful association with God, the healer and protector, this charm proved to hold miraculous results in the cholera outbreak of 1860 (“THE SACRED HEART”’’ 341). As such, in contemporary practice, Catholics seek refuge and satisfaction within the “Sweet Hearts of Jesus and Mary” in worship (“THE SACRED HEART”’’ 341). This can be seen as a declaration of faith and submission to divine power similar to Gilgamesh’s sacrifice in ancient times.
The Heart in Contemporary Languages

Today, several expressions within languages all over the world involve mentions of the heart in varying contexts. These contexts range from representing emotions and thoughts to social ideas and ways in which individuals interact.

In modern Japanese language, the heart is of great cultural significance. The *kokoro* holds a special status among the internal organs, as perceived in Japanese culture, because the heart, out of all internal organs, establishes its existence by thumping and beating and thus being heard (Ikegami 174). The heart is thought to encompass all range of thought, emotion, and will. In fact, the heart is believed to be the area where thought and emotion take place (Ikegami). With that, phrases like *kokoro no komotta motenashi*, which literally translates to ‘heart-involved hospitality,’ occur in the context of Japanese culture (Ikegami 173). As such, the heart was defined with social qualities, and goes to show the social value that the heart has in modern Japanese culture.

Deviating from the Qur’anic association between the intellect and the heart and crediting science, modern Tunisian Arabic displays a different perception of the heart (Maalej 395). Maalej points out the phrase *flaan yxammim b-qalb-u*, which literally translates to ‘X thinks with his heart’ (402). Such phrase is commonly used to describe a person who is irrational (402). This shows that in some modern cultures, the heart’s association with well-thought decision-making has been eradicated. However, the heart still embodies emotional and cultural values and qualities, such as “compassion, cruelty, courage, encouragement, generosity, hard work, kindness, [and] laziness” (Maalej 395). Similar to Ancient Egyptian culture, modern Tunisian Arabic associates the heart with personified qualities, such as the hearing and storing of information and ideas. This can be signified through phrases that directly translate into ‘I said in my heart,’ and ‘He keeps things in his heart’ respectively (Maalej 407). The former quote personifies the heart as being akin to an individual one confides in while the latter suggests the heart functions as a figurative safe haven in which one can store troubling thoughts and emotions. Further, the heart is seen to have a great sociological value, as seen in phrases such as ‘hey, soul of my heart’ and “I left my heart with him/her” (Maalej 397, 411). The former metaphorical phrase is used for purposes of endearment when addressing someone you value while the latter phrase expresses the pain in ending a romantic relationship, which is conceptually equivalent to the metaphor of the broken heart in Ancient Sumerian culture.

Persian phrases that can be translated into “keeping in the *del* (heart)” show that Persians associated cognitive functions with the heart (Sharifian 256). The Persian metaphori-
cal conceptualization of the del is particularly interesting because the del is described as a container with dimensions that enables it to be “tightened, opened, wounded, emptied, filled, burned, collapsed, pulled out, broken [and] stolen” within sociological reference (Sharifian 258). For example, a person, who is vulnerably expressing his/her anger, is described as emptying the del (Sharifian 252). Similarly, with regards to levels of depth in a container, del is metaphorically referenced in describing a person’s sincerity (Sharifian 250). Also, emphasizing the importance of the organ in relationships, the del is used to describe a place that only loved ones have access to (Sharifian 251). Sharifian cites the phrase delbar, which can literally be translated into “heart-winner,” is used to describe a charming person who has taken over the del (251). Further emphasizing on the sociological importance of the heart, the del is described as the faculty that allows consolation, sympathy, desire, hope, and character/personality.

Similarly, the Dutch conceptualize the heart as the container for emotions that is influenced by sociological forces (Foolen 379). Foolen claims that the heart signifies all aspects of the inner life beyond “feeling, involvement, intuition, [and] personal character” (381). Used as an adverb, Dutch terms such as hartelijk and harteloos, which respectively mean “heartily” and “heartless,” describe one’s interest in performing action (Foolen 381). Similar to the Persians, the Dutch perceive the heart as an externally physical object (Foolen). The dislocation of heart is used to describe strong emotions (Foolen 381). Other metaphorical phrases describe the heart as an external trophy that can be won, lost, stolen, or conquered by others (Foolen). In addition, the heart is given other physical descriptions such as size. For example, a small heart is used to describe a fearful person (Foolen 382). Further, Foolen identifies phrases that comments on the physical material of the heart. Such phrases can be translated into “heart of ice,” which refers to mercilessness (Foolen 383). Also, positive and negative emotions are described by noting a light or heavy heart respectively (Foolen 383). Some phrases in the Dutch language, such as that of the broken heart, have equivalents in other Western Germanic Languages, such as English and German (Foolen). Finally, it is interesting to note that contemporary linguistic concepts such as that of the broken heart can be traced all the way back to Ancient Sumeria.

**Conclusion**

Despite the emergence of scientific phenomena that transformed the medical field throughout history and changed our understanding of the heart, the fundamental cultural and sociological value of the heart seems to be relatively stagnant. The heart’s association with human qualities, society, and God or gods in religious cultures still persists. Thus, instead of its relation to science, the analogous cultural perceptions of the human heart can be
attributed to historical and sociocultural significance. For example, as the ideology of the
heart was seen to follow a series of socially favorable characteristics, cultures borrowed the
symbol of the heart and integrated the symbol in their ideologies and uniform expressions.
Therefore, the heart can be seen as a symbol that fosters the non-material culture of civiliza-
tions and groups to yield sociological integration.

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“THE SACRED HEART.” The Sunday at Home: a Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading,
The Role of the Woman in Society

by

Serena Singh

Serena Singh is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Elise Frketich’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2019.
Franz Kafka’s, much acclaimed story, “Metamorphosis” written in 1915, describes the Samsa family and how the inexplicable transformation of its most important member Gregor into a gigantic bug, brings about new equations in the family, with his young sister Grete surprisingly coming to the forefront. Aristophanes’ comedy, written in the Fifth Century B.C. Greece, presents Lysistrata, a housewife from Athens, who transforms into an inspiring leader and uses both intelligence and cunning to bring the twenty year long Peloponnesian War to an end. I claim that a male dominated culture is wary of capable women and so tends to downplay their achievements, leading to women being denied an equal status in society. This is because their success threatens misogynistic norms that prefer women to maintain their conventional roles as the weaker, more subservient sex, incapable of functioning without male approval. In this paper, I will first examine how women in both ancient and modern times, have had to adjust their lives and behaviors, in accordance with the wishes of dominating men who set the rules of society. I will then discuss that when they break free from this dependence, women like Lysistrata and Grete, are just as capable and efficient as any man. Finally, I will argue that strong women are likely to be judged harshly because of the social and cultural norms that govern their world.

Traditionally a woman is conditioned to accept a subordinate role in relationships as the price of a man’s regard and protection. At the beginning of the story, “Metamorphosis”, Grete is like a typical young woman in those days as she is obedient, dependent and follows the unwritten rules of the house, that the men need to be taken care of, by giving her brother Gregor the respect he feels he deserves as the main breadwinner of the family. Grete’s mother displays a similar dependency and is helpless and ineffectual in difficult situations. This is evident when at the first sight of the transformed Gregor, “His mother screamed again and fled from the table into the arms of Gregor’s father who was rushing towards her” (104). This is significant because it points to the degree of social conditioning which makes some women automatically look to men as a source of strength and protection. Grete’s mother turns from one man in the family to another, to help handle the new crisis in her life. Some may like to point out here that men are just as tied down by the same misogynistic norms and conventional roles that dictate women’s lives. This can be seen in the “Metamorphosis” when Gregor declares, “If I didn’t have to exercise restraint for the sake of my parents, I would have quit a long time ago” (88). He clearly feels obligated to continue with a job he dislikes because he sees himself as fulfilling the role of the man of the house, even though he may prefer to be free of his responsibilities. To some extent one can understand Gregor’s frustration with his role but I believe that being a man he still has a choice and the right to make his own decisions which in this case are prompted not just by societal expectations and concern for his family but also by a desire to dominate them. John Ellis
Mills, expresses similar sentiments in his article, “How to read Kafka, Part 1” and writes, “Gregor uses the gentler values of goodness and kindness to satisfy much older impulses of domination and oppression. Kindness is his mode but he is killing his family with it”. One notices that the household runs according to Gregor’s wishes and the family lives unwillingly in a big apartment of Gregor’s choice. The women are there to serve him as his father is no longer in charge and all the while Gregor feels righteous about the sacrifices he makes for his family, by doing a job he detests. Unlike the women who are not presented any choice, Gregor has embraced the role of protective brother and responsible son not only because he thinks it is expected of him by society but mainly because being looked up to by a grateful family makes him feel good about himself.

Lysistrata, despite being a much stronger personality than either Grete or her mother, is still a victim of her times in which women are supposed to obey their husbands unconditionally. She is well aware of the fact that she is not taken seriously by her husband and her views have no value for him, but is helpless in her role of a Greek housewife. One can sense her frustration when she tells the old women and the magistrate about her attempts to talk to her husband about politics. Her husband’s reaction is hurtful when he says, “Just weave your web please; else your cheek will smart for hours. War is men’s business” (19). The condescending attitude of Lysistrata’s husband is reflective of the times in which the play is written, when women did not have a forum to express their views. This is echoed in an article by Anne Lydia Motto and John R. Clark, when commenting on the play Lysistrata they declare that, “But hardest hit by the satiric ploys is self satisfied male chauvinism. Athenian society was complacently and intransigently male dominated, its women not even granted citizens’ rights. A woman’s place was in the home” (2). These comments reflect the fact that women had an inferior status compared to men even in the rich and learned culture of Greece. It is clear that Lysistrata’s husband, like most men in ancient Greece, finds a woman too limited in intelligence to understand what lies beyond her domestic sphere. Wives are expected to stay in the background and that Lysistrata could want to be part of a serious discussion is incomprehensible to him. Here many would argue that there have been enormous strides taken in achieving equality between men and women, since ancient times. While this is true, it does not necessarily follow that the same chauvinistic attitudes are not evident in some literary works of the last century when the “Metamorphosis” was written. Grete’s father continues to expect attention from the women and despite working equally hard for a living, Grete and her mother still pander to his demands as the only male left in their house. In fact their final rejection of Gregor could also be interpreted as a subconscious need to find another male figure to look up to. Since Gregor is no longer male nor
a provider, he is expendable and they switch loyalties to the rejuvenated father as the new provider and protector.

Furthermore, adverse situations often bring out the best in women as they get an opportunity to step outside their given roles, to effect positive change in their lives. Gregor’s sudden metamorphosis into a helpless bug gives Grete a chance to prove her capabilities and she does not shy away from the challenges she has to face. In her article, “Transforming Franz Kafka’s Metamorphosis”, Nina Pelikan Straus writes, “Kafka’s transformation of the male role into the female, of Gregor into Grete, mitigates the differences between them and the disrespect accorded to women in a culture concerned with men’s upward mobility” (658). This proves that when circumstances demand, Grete can be as efficient and supportive of her family as Gregor was and does not lack the ability to handle complications in her life, simply because she is female. When Gregor is no longer human, Grete takes the initiative to take care of him, perhaps realizing that her confused father and over emotional mother are incapable of doing so. Despite her aversion to the monstrous bug that Gregor has transformed into, she tries her best to make him comfortable at first by supplying him with a variety of foods and cleaning his room. Along with this, the once idle Grete studies stenography, French and works as a salesgirl to supplement her family’s income. Grete has thus effectively taken over the role of Gregor as the primary member of her family. It is obvious that Gregor is not the only one to undergo a metamorphosis. Even though it can be said that Grete’s metamorphosis is not comparable to Gregor’s, I maintain that her transformation into a responsible young woman may be more subtle than her brother’s but is nevertheless just as significant.

Lysistrata’s metamorphosis on the other hand is far more dramatic than Grete’s. From a regular house wife she transforms into a leader and inspires confidence in men and women alike. When expressing his admiration of her, even the leader of the old men cannot help exclaim, “Lo! The foremost men in Hellas, seduced by your fascinations, are agreed to entrust you with the task of ending their quarrels” (35). This is because Lysistrata’s plan of taking control of the treasury combined with a sex strike has succeeded in bringing the representatives of all the hostile Greek states to the negotiation table. It is Lysistrata alone who sees the larger picture, that good leadership is the need of the hour and women from all over Greece have to be involved in order to make her plan successful. William Meredith Hugill in his article “Panhellenism in Aristophanes”, writes, “War, which so long has been a masculine obsession, shall now receive the attention of the woman. They have resolved to effect the rescue of their fellow citizens and Greece from war and insanity” (3). He gives credit to the genius of Aristophanes, in recognizing that Greek women have suffered as much as the men they have lost, to the never ending war and so the solution lies with them. To some ex-
tent I agree with his view that Aristophanes should get credit for showing that women in the play, unlike the men, exhibit commonsense in following Lysistrata and make an effort to rise above their limitations for the good of all. However, I cannot help but feel that despite making a woman the protagonist of his play, Aristophanes has not really spared women in this bawdy comedy by depicting them as empty headed, indecisive and just as obsessed with their sexual desires as men.

Moreover, in keeping with the sexist views of their times, Kafka and Aristophanes are reluctant to give their female characters the satisfaction of an outright victory. Lysistrata and Grete, for a while take control of their lives and of those around them and gender roles are reversed. However, their success as capable, independent thinking women is projected as a departure from their normal and predictable selves and not always in a complimentary way. Grete’s transformation into a confident young woman is shown at the cost of her caring and nurturing character. She appears heartless when she says, “Dear parents, things cannot go on like this. You might not be able to see this but I do” (138). Here she is expressing her desire to bring an end to the unpalatable situation at home by getting rid of her brother. It seems her rising independence has helped in the development of traits which are considered undesirable in women, such as neglecting her sisterly duties because she no longer feeds her brother well, takes away all the familiar objects in his room and cannot wait to be rid of him. She effectively becomes the negative character of the story as the hapless Gregor has all the sympathy of the reader. The change in Gregor’s appearance gave Grete an excuse to break free of his dominance and spread her wings. However her efforts to lead a more independent life are shown in a negative light while Gregor, in contrast, is acknowledged as the benevolent older brother. The emphasis in promoting the idea that somehow, self-centeredness is a worse trait in a woman than a man further helps to effectively erode both her character and her potential.

Lysistrata also does not get the credit she deserves as a born leader because she uses a sex strike rather than logic and reasoning to get her way. She promises the resumption of sex as a reward to the men for signing the peace treaty by assuring them that, “That’s just what you shall do, once peace is signed” (37). Lysistrata is wise enough to realize that despite her passionate appeals for peace, she cannot ensure that her peace proposals will be taken seriously merely because she is female. So she arranges a distraction in the form of a nude girl presented as the goddess of peace, to make the men more receptive to resolving their differences. Some may call this a form of exploitation which shows that Lysistrata is a flawed character, with a ruthless streak in her, but in my opinion, she is also a shrewd and
pragmatic woman who knows that sex is the only card she has and uses it without hesitation to reach her goal, thus revealing leader like traits. Despite the phenomenal success of Lysistrata’s plan, her actions can be interpreted in a way to show that despite all her ingenuity and wisdom, as a woman she could not resist using sex as a weapon which is something women are often accused of doing. This serves to diminish her accomplishments and reflects poorly on the female sex as a whole, as incapable of rising above “feminine wiles” to achieve their goals.

Once the burden of maintaining society-imposed roles is lifted from their shoulders, women are capable of handling multiple roles and still maintaining their individuality. Even though Lysistrata and Grete belong to different times, they have much in common. Both are strong willed women who have the ability to face life and its complexities head on. Lysistrata is clearly capable of managing politics, administration and her home with equal ease. Grete, after her metamorphosis emerges as a complex and unexpectedly strong person who much like her brother, works hard, has ambition and wants to be taken seriously by her family. Regrettably however, due to misogynistic norms prevalent in society, their path to success does not get the same positive feedback as those of their male counterparts and this prevents them from taking their place as equals to men.

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Tragedy in Relation to the Absurd: The Roots and Implications of Modern Philosophy

by

Alex Petty
Following the tragedy that was World War One, humanity felt a shift that was less than subtle. It was a conflict deemed unnecessary due to its preventability and “tragic because the first clash ended the lives of ten million human beings, tortured the emotional lives of millions more, [and] destroyed the benevolent and optimistic culture of the European continent” (Keegan 3). It was one of the first conflicts that left modern humanity confounded by the reality in front of them. It was absurd. People started to think differently and as a consequence literature changed to reflect the newfound chaos of the world. It isn’t quite fair to say newfound, however, as humanity is no stranger to war. In the times of the classical antiquity, the conflict relevant to the Greeks was the war against the Trojans (not to mention the centuries of conflict between Grecian tribes that led up to their empire (Brownstone and Frank 6). For the people of the early modern era, it was the Hundred Year War (Brownstone and Frank 162). While the current populous may look upon the world wars as some of the most destructive events in human history, any war that preceded another was likely at some point or another considered to be the most devastating to have ever happened. Just as there are people now who are changed and inspired to write by these tragedies, so were there people then to do the same and all of these writer’s ideas were connected by conflict. They all found something to blame it on be it the gods or perhaps just God, but it wasn’t until the twentieth century that anyone dared conceive of the notion of “sin without god” (Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus 30). In the midst of the second world war Albert Camus wrote and published The Myth of Sisyphus. It was a deep dive in a non-fictional essay form into what made everything appear to him as fundamentally absurd and why he felt such a strong disconnect from his life. His essay first aimed to decode what the Absurd really was and from there describes the absurd hero, a protagonist who can be seen in all of his fictional works. The aim of this essay is to find what differentiates the absurd hero from the tragic hero and what implications and conclusions on the works and ideas of Albert Camus can be drawn from identifying absurd heroes in literary works that preceded his. By analyzing the idea of tragedy as presented by the plays of Sophocles and Shakespeare alongside the idea of the Absurd as presented in the manifest of Camus’ philosophical literary works, absurdity can be shown to be an age-old concept deeply intertwined with tragedy predating its full and explicit confrontation by Camus in nineteen forty two.

Tragedy is something that most everyone can understand, but for formality’s sake it will be defined according to the Oxford English Dictionary as “An event causing great suffering, destruction, and distress, such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe” (“Tragedy”). The philosophy of The Myth of Sisyphus came from Camus’ personal dissatisfaction with the state of modern philosophy in the nineteen thirties. He found that many of the existentialists were taking a misstep in finding meaning within the absur-
dity of life. Being that “the correspondence between man and things [had] finally been de-
nounced,” many thought that they had solved the problem simply by recognizing that there
was one, “the divorce itself becoming a major path to redemption,” but “divorce-as-a-form-
of-marriage is a trap-and it is a falsification” (Robbe-Grillet 27). One cannot idolize the very
thing that brings them such pain; But what even is this ‘thing’? The concept of the Absurd is
one that is, unfortunately, extremely difficult to define. Even Camus struggled to say exactly
what it is. He goes a long way in describing the characteristics and signs of the Absurd, but
ultimately it cannot be explicitly illustrated; only interpreted through reducing it to cross-
sections. In an attempt to do so, Camus says “that it bursts from the comparison between a
bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it. The ab-
surd is essentially a divorce” (The Myth of Sisyphus 30). Perhaps this is the most intuitive
way of looking at it: a balanced equation. Your expectations of the world minus what the
world has to offer you equals the Absurd; (Expectation – Reality = Absurdity). Absurdity is
essentially the conduit through which the world communicates its inability to meet ones
needs and is the only thing that connects humanity to the world. By this model one might
assume that without either the terms of expectation or reality the other would be directly
equal to the Absurd, but Camus also notes that “the Absurd is not in man […] nor in the
world, but in their presence together” (The Myth of Sisyphus 30). One cannot hold expecta-
tions of a reality that does not exist, nor is there a reality for those with no expectations of
one. The word choice of expectations specifically is important because the Absurd is often
unexpected. However, one cannot misconstrue this phrasing as implying that the Absurd is
an event that happens. It’s more the sensation of the difference than the sensation of the
shift. What causes this shift, though? What is the source of this disequilibrium? If there has
been a change in state, the basic laws of causality dictate that an event must have occurred;
a tragedy. The Absurd is indeed an onset of a tragic event. If one lives a life in which reality
always matches their expectations (generally in which one denies any expectation of an ab-
surd world), the terms of our expression would cancel out thus leaving zero traces of any ab-
surdity. In the case in which one’s expectations exceed reality or perhaps more commonly
when one loses something which they have always had (or have always expected to be a part
of this reality), that is where one might feel the sensation of the Absurd to arise. It is impor-
tant not to peremptorily assume that it will arise as there is too great a number of humans
on this planet to be able to enumerate the immensity of potential reactions any one person
could have to a shift in this equation (or a tragedy), nor is there an objective way to quantify
any of the terms of this equation as it is merely symbolic. Thus, the magnitude of absurdity
cannot be quantified either and can only be experienced in a relative manner. Following a
tragedy, the absurd will be there regardless of one’s recognition of it. The Absurd is not the
cause of tragedy nor is it the effect of tragedy. It is not an explanation of tragedy because
that would be, in this context, synonymous with a cause. Tragedy does not happen because the world is absurd. While tragedy can be considered absurd, we cannot say that absurdity is inherently tragic. Thus, they cannot be one and the same either. However, tragedy is still related to the Absurd in that it can be the onset of the realization of the Absurd. It is a sort of conduit for communication. This is their relationship and those who are able to cope in acknowledgment of the notion of the Absurd succeeding a tragedy are who Camus would refer to as absurd heroes.

This isn’t the only characteristic of the absurd hero, however, first we must establish the traits of the well know Tragic Hero archetype. “Perhaps no idea has gripped the conversation about tragic heroism more than the ‘tragic flaw,’” otherwise known as Hamartia (Bushnell 85). This is the character trait that generally causes their undoing and because of this fundamental flaw “the tragic hero is always “too much”: too virtuous, too much in love, too powerful, too angry, too devoted, too reverent, or too intelligent” (Bushnell 88). They have a way of overstepping their bounds. In a character analysis of the protagonist of Camus’ The Stranger, Meursault, Germaine Breé states that his “error lies precisely in his estrangement” and that “he is a stranger to society, because he refuses to make any concession whatsoever to its codes and rituals” (37-8). Perhaps the form of excess that applies to his flaw is that he is too careless: apathetic. Yet, regardless of his carelessness, “everything considered, a determined soul will always manage” (Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus 41). He is determined. Despite the massive conflict he carries around in his head he lives in spite of his futilitarian outlook on life because “the point is to live” (Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus 65). The Absurd hero recognizes that “Suicide [...] is acceptance at its extreme” and that the only thing he is truly capable of is defiance to the notion of acceptance (Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus 54-5). Thus, the defining trait of the Absurd Hero is that he is in a constant winning battle against the temptation of suicide.

One can certainly identify a few similarities between the two characters, but perhaps it is difficult to see any way to classify and relate the two. Being that the definition of the Tragic Hero is so broad, one might be able to say that the Absurd Hero is a subset of the Tragic Hero. However, one must consider that without a tragedy there is no Tragic Hero. Before the tragedy happens, the tragic hero is, yes, flawed, but all in all lives a life well suited to himself and has a normal social life. The Absurd hero is always already in the midst of his confrontation of the Absurd. He has seen tragedy. He is, in all senses, alone. If two staple characteristics of the archetypes oppose each other than one cannot be said to be a subset of the other. In consideration of the conclusion of the preceding paragraph, one must remember that tragedy is the potential onset of the recognition of the Absurd notion. Thus, by this logic we can conclude the Tragic Hero is also the potential onset of the Absurd Hero, but
certain conditions must hold true. It’s how the Hero lives after the event that decides whether or not he is of the Absurd variety. First and foremost, the Tragic Hero has to recognize the Absurd. Without that crucial step he will never become the Absurd Hero. However, once he reaches that acknowledgment it is still possible to go back either through killing himself or simply finding a falsified answer to the question of his existence. It should be noted that the Absurd Hero does not experience a tragic ending. When asked about their take on the works of Camus, the typical person would equate his works with tragedy and his ideas with pessimism, but Camus said that “a pessimistic philosophy is by its essence a philosophy of discouragement” (Resistance, Rebellion, and Death 57). His philosophy is one of encouragement. It provides a lively and safe way out of a tragic and ultimately absurd mindset on death.

Camus finishes his essay with a reflection on the actual myth of Sisyphus, the king condemned to an eternity of rolling a stone up a hill only to have it fall back to the base upon reaching the top. Camus argues that he is the epitome of the absurd hero because “His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing” (The Myth of Sisyphus 120). Though his fate might be considered tragic, Camus insists in the final line of the essay that “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (The Myth of Sisyphus 123). Would the Greeks have imagined him to have been happy? Perhaps not. They saw a king’s pride utterly defeated, but a man can remain defeated for only so long before embracing the futility of his situation and moving beyond the tragedy to become an Absurd Hero. The Greeks merely end the myth too soon. Fortunately, in the case of Oedipus, we have a sequel. Before that, however, Oedipus must be initialized as an absurd hero. At the climax of the play after having finally confirmed the realization of his foretold tragic fate with the testimony of the shepherd, he violently rips his own eyes out. They are the main conduit through which he perceives reality and in denial of the difference between his expectations and reality decides that they are no longer to be trusted. As his furious rage continues, he curses the man who saved his life as an infant exclaiming, “If I’d died then, I’d never have dragged myself, my loved ones through such hell” and he beckons to the chorus in saying “kill me, hurl me into the sea where you can never look on me again” (Sophocles and Fagles 242-4). Once he calms down, he asks of Creon simply to “drive [him] out of the land” (Sophocles 245 and Fagles). He has made the initial leap. In the face of the absurd he contemplates the idea of suicide and regardless prevails. He is, at this point, the absurd hero. It is important to note that his mother and wife Jocasta is just as much a tragic hero as he, but unfortunately in the face of the Absurd was unable to acknowledge it and ended up killing herself, adding to the absurdity of Oedipus’ situation. The sequel to Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus contains
the aftermath. The very first stanza answers the question of whether or not he is truly an Absurd Hero. He starts the play with a peaceful statement saying “Acceptance—that is the great lesson suffering teaches” (Sophocles 283). Indeed, he is no longer the Absurd Hero. The Absurd Hero never settles and knows that there are no lessons to be learned from the outside world, so how does the model fit on the beloved Prince Hamlet? In discussing Hamlet, one might argue that due to his death at the end of the play, there’s no way to know whether or not he is an absurd hero. However tragic the ending might be, his death is not the defining tragedy of that play. Hamlet’s transformative tragedy is not his death, but in fact the death of his father and the marriage of his uncle to his mother. For him, and likely for anyone, this is an absurd situation. Just as in Camus’ own works, Shakespeare’s dark prince is already in the midst of his conflict with the Absurd when the story begins. This can be observed in the ever famous soliloquy: “To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them. To die, to sleep—” (Shakespeare 45). And that, truly, is the question. That is the ultimate absurdist inquiry. Not ‘why should I be?’ but instead just ‘should I be?’ Esteemed literary critic Harold Bloom is of the opinion that “this is not a meditation seriously contemplating suicide” (33). This would make sense to many as Hamlet is putting on an act of being utterly mad throughout the play. Even if this is part of the act for whomever may be from a distance watching him talk to himself, it isn’t likely that he would have said it without having contemplated it earlier in his life, and more importantly had Shakespeare never contemplated the absurd notion himself, the monologue would probably not exist. Someone who was totally sane would not pretend even for a moment to be insane. He is enjoying himself while he plays this mad character because it is a cathartic release of his inner contemplations. He is the Absurd Hero because he recognizes his own absurd situation and, in spite of it, has fun.

In looking at them side by side, one can tell that for as long there has been tragedy, there has been at least a taste of the Absurd. Perhaps the Absurd Hero didn’t exist exactly as was penned by Camus, but the Absurd has always been there. It’s only that the old playwrights didn’t know what to call it, what it meant, or even what it was. It wasn’t until Camus brute-forced his way through the logic in the nineteen forties that he found a more explanatory and objective way of looking at it. Without tragedy there is no realization of disequilibrium, there is no Absurd Hero, no trace of the absurd, no trace of The Myth of Sisyphus, and almost certainly no trace of this very essay, which was a boulder in itself.
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Power in the Italian Renaissance
From the Viewpoint of Machiavelli and Castiglione

by

Claire Blake

Claire Blake is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Genetic Biology and Psychology. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Silvia Mitchell’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2019.
The Italian Renaissance is a time period complete with war and fragmentation, with individuals struggling to gain power and keep their cities and courts strong enough to withstand invading enemies. The fragmentation during the time is explained through the emphasis that Machiavelli puts upon the use of maintain strong and able troops, “without having one’s own soldiers, no principality is safe...” (Machiavelli 123). One way to achieve the goal of having a sturdy government is to have a strong leader who is willing to put forth all of their efforts into maintaining a strong government in order to maintain a secure location. This goal is heavily discussed in the writings of Machiavelli and Castiglione, as they both explain and develop their ideas on political power and how to gain this power. Each treatise having a different approach to achieving the author’s goal of sharing their knowledge on power and how to obtain it. In The Prince, Machiavelli explicitly proposed a way to gain power and to hold onto power if one was a prince, whereas Castiglione subtly described the way of gaining power in terms of courtiers in The Book of the Courtier. The ultimate goal of describing the ways in which power can be gained remains constant throughout each writing, however there are fundamental differences in the methods that can be used to gain power as explained by Machiavelli and Castiglione.

Both Machiavelli and Castiglione agree on the idea that power and secure government must be brought about from the individual. In order to have power and to influence those in command, one must gain power on their own. Machiavelli makes this idea clear in The Prince as he describes that a prince can create a stable form of government amidst all the fragmentation that is shown in Italy during the times of the Renaissance. Explaining this is the idea that a prince can maintain his government alone, “he would have gathered together so many forces and such a reputation that he would have been able to stand alone and would no longer have to rely upon the fortune and forces of others...” (101). The point is clarified, as the ideas that only one prince can control and stabilize a principality, creating a stable force that will not be attacked by enemies and will continue to remain strong in times of turbulence. This idea is described as Machiavelli expands on the idea that, “a prince who has a strong city and who does not make himself hated cannot be attacked; and even if he were to be attacked, the enemy would have to depart in shame” (112). While this idea is directly stated in The Prince, in Castiglione’s The Book of the Courtier, relies on a more subtle intention.

Castiglione explains the importance of achieving power as an individual through examples of the perfect courtier. Through these examples, Castiglione is describing that a courtier must excel in many aspects including arts, sports, scholarly applications, and communicating so that he might make himself known to the prince. By showing off their abilities, the prince will start to take note of the courtier as the grand abilities of a courtier will
increase the prestige of a prince. Once the prince takes note of the courtier, a reciprocal relationship can occur in the idea that the prince can give the courtier power. This relationship is described in a metaphor, “…I consider that just as music, festivities, games and other agreeable accomplishments are, so to speak, the flower of courtiership, so its real fruit is to encourage and help his prince to be virtuous and to deter him from evil” (Castiglione 285). In each explanation of how one achieves power, this power must be taken as it will not simply be handed out. As explained by Castiglione, it is necessary for a courtier to take this power in order to create a stable government formed by a prince and his advisors.

In the both of the treatises written by Machiavelli and Castiglione, power can be acquired through individual means, however this power is not held solely as it takes a counsel of competent people to maintain a stable form of government. With advisors, the respected courtiers, around to counsel the prince against harmful acts that would cause himself or his court trouble, a more established form of government can be created and maintained. Explaining this, Castiglione described, “if he [the courtier] knows that his prince is of a mind to do something unworthy, he should be in a position to dare to oppose him... and persuade him to return to the path of virtue.” This same idea is explained by Machiavelli as a prince can unite the people along with strong troops, constructing a more secure government against the fragmentation of the Italian Renaissance. The underlying goal to create a strong, stable form of government, is shown by the writings of Machiavelli and Castiglione, through the advice and examples used to depict a ruler.

Even though the writings of Machiavelli and Castiglione share a common goal in order to explain how to create a firm and unwavering government through descriptions of how to gain power, the methods of obtaining power vary from each treatise. The writings by Machiavelli allow for the understanding that it is possible for a prince to gain power through nefarious means. Such a possibility is described by Machiavelli’s The Prince as, “well used are cruelties (if it is permitted to speak well of evil) that are carried out in a single stroke, done out of necessity to protect oneself, and are not continued but are instead converted into the greatest possible benefits for the subjects” (106). This brought about the term Machiavellian to mean this unemotional approach to gaining power, as it was incorrectly assumed that by this statement, Machiavelli permitted the idea that the ends always justify the means (Bondanella and Musa 21). In The Prince, Machiavelli expands on this idea such that it is not a continuous attack on the people, rather a solitary action to ensure that power is kept in the hands of the most able people. Therefore, Machiavelli does not promote the idea of using appalling means to acquire power, however he does not condemn the use of such means.
While Machiavelli permits the idea of a way to gain power by wicked means, Castiglione suggests that the best way to gain power is to excel in many different aspects of high society. By proposing that a respectable reputation allows for a courtier to gain power, Castiglione introduces a reciprocal relationship of power between a prince and an esteemed courtier. Castiglione emphasizes the vital importance of maintaining a good impression on part of the courtiers, “the courtier should at the outset take great care to give a good impression of himself, and bear in mind how harmful and fatal it is to do the opposite” (145). By stressing this point, it can be understood that the reputation of the courtier would be equivalent to the power that the courtier would receive. This is implied in the context that a prince would want to have more prestige in his court as opposed to the competing ruling courts and thus would want better preforming athletes, scholars, artists, and the like in his or her court. The gain in power by a courtier is directly related to the prestige that he brings to the court, as such gaining power should be through self-perfection rather than outwardly harm as explained by Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*.

Political power in the Italian Renaissance was important to acquire on a personal level and on the level of government. The gaining of political power as written by Machiavelli and Castiglione was very important, as to create unity from fragmentation. Through the direct advice as given by Machiavelli, it was demonstrated that a prince can gain power in a location and build up a strong government that could hold back against the attack of invaders, if certain criteria were met. These included a strong prince and capable troops, along with other pieces of advice on how to gain power. *The Prince* was a treatise on the gaining of power for a prince, which contrasted *The Book of the Courtier* which described the acquiring of power by a courtier. Both people gaining power was important in creating the solid form of government. It was explained by Castiglione that a prince must have a court of advisors, that an absolute form of government was not feasible. This means that a prince cannot act alone, once power has been gained, and attain the necessary and durable government that is crucial for the Italian Renaissance. Therefore, it is of vital importance that the prince and the courtiers both gain power to maintain the form of government.

The ways in which power can be gained for the prince and the courtier waivered through the writings of Machiavelli and Castiglione, but the importance on this power remained persistent. *The Prince* is a guide to acquiring and maintaining power on behalf of the prince while *The Book of the Courtier* was insight into the life of a courtier. Each treatise described that the power which is used to preserve a concrete government can be obtained individually either by a prince or by a courtier and they should take the fate of their power into their own hands. By doing so, the fragmentation that is present during the Ital-
ian Renaissance can be controlled by each court or principality and create a lasting form of government.

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How have your readings in *Transformative Texts* helped you think about your new life under quarantine?
“Sunset Reading” by Li Wei
Inspired by Malika Favre’s illustration for the cover of Vogue Business By Santander, 4th Installment
AN AMERICAN DYSTOPIA

by

Brandon Watson

Brandon Watson is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Political Science, with minors in Environmental Science and History. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Dr. Li Wei’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2020. His political commentary seeks to draw similarities between opposition protests to the coronavirus shutdown and events in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. This essay won the first place in the Cornerstone Program’s “My Quarantine Story” Contest.
In my isolation, I have found that reading helps to pass the time as the days become increasingly blended together. Though I have finished nearly every story on my bookshelf, only one remains in the back of my mind as this quarantine continues. I was gladdened to have participated in this English class that exposed me to numerous literary works, among them *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Beyond finishing the book, I elected to watch the entirety of the television series, and the more I watched, the more I saw shocking and disturbing parallels to our current situation. In coping with my infinite boredom, I had been following the news of the Covid-19 virus for some time when the story of anti-quarantine protests began to circulate. Many had placards complaining about closed salons and restaurants. Amusing at first, the implications of their actions soon set in. One particular protester was seen wearing the iconic handmaid’s outfit—bright red to prevent their escape from sexual servitude, and with wide wings to ensure they averted their eyes and were submissive in front of the men of Gilead. This protestor donned the outfit, claiming it to be a statement on where our government is heading—to tyranny and oppression on a scale much like what was seen in Gilead. It is disconcerting that they are unable to see the irony and dangerousness of their actions.

One character of interest in *The Handmaid’s Tale* is Nick, a compelling and highly relatable individual. I can see parts of my situation in Nick’s story. From his obvious discontent with the status quo, to his small attempts to lessen the hardship that June suffers, he is clearly unsupportive of the actions of the fundamentalist leadership in Gilead. He consistently breaks the standards and rules adopted by his new Puritan-esque society, the penalty for which is death and hanging on the Wall. Nonetheless, Nick chooses to smile and wink at June, asking about her day. He reaches out to her before the Ceremony, during which the handmaids are brutalized by the men who claim to espouse God’s word. They develop a romantic relationship that would surely enrage the Commander to whom they are both enslaved. It is through these little acts of rebellion and defiance that Nick makes the largest and most meaningful impact on June, giving her the hope she needed to continue in the Waterford home. In the same way, I have discovered small acts of defiance that have helped me in these unprecedented times. Though I could never claim to have suffered the same trauma, oppression, and violence as Nick, and though his situation is far worse and less privileged than mine, I believe we both have the same outlook when it comes to a general distrust towards our more duplicitous and selfish countrymen.

After reading about these anti-quarantine protests, I felt a prevailing sense of disappointment in our society. Just as Nick loathed Gilead and what it represented for women such as June, so too do I feel frustration towards those who act with no regard for others, especially individuals prone to complications from the virus. I am reminded of Aunt Lydia,
who explained that “better” never means “better for everyone”, it always means “worse for some”. In wanting to prematurely and foolishly reopen the country to access nonessential services, these protestors would willingly subject the elderly and at-risk citizens to a horrific disease. Even worse, elected officials would gladly sacrifice those vulnerable to the virus if it were to lead to greater support among their constituents and economic growth. They believe that ensuring the economy runs properly will be better for all, and do not care that ending quarantine will make many vulnerable people’s lives worse. This situation that we find ourselves in has exposed one of the foremost issues in America today—apathy and indifference towards others, not unlike that which afflicts the society of Gilead. Nick was a bystander to the rise of Gilead, unable to stop a force of nature born out of the hatred and self-interest that had festered in society and permeated all aspects of government. I can see this exact issue present itself in the actions of these protestors and elected officials as I, too, can only sit and watch. That someone who holds any semblance of power in the American political system can suggest the deaths of at-risk people in order to restart the economy deeply unsettles me. Our current leadership, as well as these protestors, operate under a purely transactional and utilitarian world view, just as Gilead had a purely economic outlook in the brutal handling of the handmaids and their forcible impregnation. Nick and I, on the other hand, subscribe to a more humanistic outlook. During these situations, when it appears as though the world is descending into chaos, saving even one life can make all the difference. For Nick, this meant rescuing June. For me, it means keeping the quarantine in place, no matter how weary or isolated I feel during it, which is, in truth, a paltry and inconsequential sacrifice compared to those who suffered under Gilead’s rule.

Aunt Lydia, for all her faults, seems to truly understand the motivation behind acts of evil. She once again offers up a powerful quote applicable to today’s pandemic. She argues that people can seek out two forms of freedom: “freedom to” and “freedom from”. Nick and I believe in “freedom to”. He wants the freedom to love June, to raise his child without a despotic regime tearing it away and giving it to ostensibly godly Commanders, who beat their wives and servants for the slightest of transgressions. I believe people living during this pandemic should have the freedom to live, to grow old illness-free, and to live in a society and government which functions for the collective good. The anti-quarantine protestors argue for “freedom from”. They choose to be free from scientific and moral considerations that point to keeping the nation shut down. The people of Gilead rejected science that suggested men were at fault for fertility, choosing rather to blame and enslave the women. These protestors also reject science, considering the virus to be a hoax and the quarantine an infringement of their rights. They demand freedom from consequences so that they may do as they please, while hypocritically touting weapons in an attempt to intimidate govern-
ment officials to acquiesce to their demands. They do not fight for liberty or justice; they are the authoritarians and fundamentalists who will end up suspending the Constitution through force of arms and giving rise to a new regime of terror, just as what happened in Gilead. They are the Guardians and Eyes of our time. Protestors carrying signs that read “give me liberty or give me Covid” do not understand the inherent authoritarianism and selfishness in their actions. By choosing who lives and dies by ending the shutdown, their “freedom” deprives others of their livelihood.

The television series offers up several striking images, one of which takes place in Washington D.C. The Washington Monument had been turned into an imposing cross, a symbol not of God, but of the iron fist that Gilead ruled with. The Lincoln Memorial, a universal symbol of liberty and justice, was desecrated, and before it knelt thousands of handmaids, forced into sexual slavery. When I see these protestors stand before their respective government offices, demanding an end to the shutdown, I cannot help but think of this scene. Co-opting a message of liberty while simultaneously dismissing the constitutional rights of the state governments and individuals who do not want to fall ill is the pinnacle of hypocrisy. Our society is following the same path as Gilead, and it seems as though no one recognizes the danger. This is where Nick and I are most similar. We recognize the difficulty of our situations, with Nick defying Gilead at every turn and I attempting to point out the danger of listening to the protestor’s demands. Though I certainly cannot say my current situation is in any way worse than his, considering I am a free citizen with a great deal of privilege, we agree on the same principle that humans have inherent value, and that we cannot trade lives for personal and material gain. We both lack the power and influence to truly impact our societies, but just as Nick in the show released thousands of letters revealing the crimes of Gilead, I can utilize this class and this writing opportunity to speak out and warn people about the danger of following these protestors. I never would have imagined that a character from a dystopian novel could in any way relate to the situation that I and millions of people in the United States are dealing with. Only by acting together and supporting each other in these difficult times can we prevent irreversible damage to our moral code. Only by recognizing the folly of these protestors can we preempt the establishment of a precedent which favors money and material over human life.
My Quarantine Story

COLORS

by

Andrea Romero

Andrea Romero is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. She wrote this short essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins’ SCLA 101 class in Spring 2020. Her essay was quoted in the *New York Times* article, “The End of College as We Knew It?”
The “Year in Pixels” mood tracker in my bullet journal consists of three hundred and sixty-five pixels to help me reflect on my year. These boxes are generally filled with warm colors. The first page of the year, with a cursive title and colored categories, lists my goals for the big 2020. The ups and downs of my first semester of college led me to a list that seemed to capture all I needed to feel fulfilled and accomplished. I had a clean slate, and I was ready to give this year my all. Now, I see more green pixels than I had expected, and my list of goals does not seem to capture it all.

Right from the start of the new year there were tragedies that affected people around the world, but for me, this shift in colors took place mid-March. The severity of COVID-19 hit me in waves throughout the week that followed the announcement that Purdue University would begin online instruction for an undetermined amount of time. When I first read the announcement, I was happy to discover that I could be at home with my family for a few weeks and feel as though I had enough time to complete my schoolwork. I also recognized the familiar excitement of a child given a snow day. Immediately, my best friend and roommate, Noelle, and I made plans to stay at each other's houses; that was all I needed to make up for the temporary distancing from my other friends. However, I had much to lose as a member of the Purduettes, Purdue’s female choral ensemble. Reality hit the following day during rehearsal as tears flooded my eyes when my choral director broke the news that we had merely two rehearsals left for the school year. Consequently, we would no longer take part in our spring break trip to Italy nor our final concert. The next two days, we performed our favorite numbers, listened to the seniors’ parting words, hugged, and cried. Nonetheless, the seniors were robbed of their final performance, international trip, and, most importantly, their goodbyes. While many did not know it, I may have been robbed of these “lasts” as well. Although Purdue Musical Organizations holds a special place in my heart, I had recently realized that I might not be able to prioritize my Computer Science workload effectively as a Purduette. So, as I left my two remaining rehearsals in tears, wondering if this was a definitive goodbye, I struggled to pull myself together and study for two midterms I felt unprepared for. The support of my friends and the thought of returning home pushed me through. Throughout these struggles, I felt immense gratitude. Gratitude for my sisters in song, the growth I had made as a Purduette, the friends that encouraged me, and the experiences that made it so hard to leave.

Having completed my exams the day before spring break, I talked, laughed, snacked, and played games with my closest friends well into that night. Once more, I felt so fortunate to have found them. Noelle drove this point home when I awoke to colorful streamers, balloons, and early birthday gifts the following morning. I could not have envisioned a better
way to leave Purdue for break, as I had convinced myself that we would all be returning to campus at some point in the semester. Later that afternoon, I was packing my duffel bag for my bus ride home when I called my mom to confirm that I was not missing anything essential. “Linda, I am at the doctor’s office right now, and the doctor will be back any minute. The past few days I have been very sick, so I am being tested for influenza. If this test comes back negative, I will be tested for the coronavirus. I love you, and I will text you with updates.” I was stunned and frustrated as I realized that I had missed a call from her that morning. However, I remained optimistic; I always do. About ten minutes later, I received an update: “Unfortunately the influenza test was negative. I have been told to quarantine, and I will hopefully be tested for COVID-19 in a few days. Maybe you could stay with Noelle for now?” Instantly, I laid my head down on my dresser and silently cried. My head was spinning with questions, and my heart sank to my stomach with fear for my mother’s health. Above all, I wanted to hug and support her. The floor had been ripped out from under me, and my bus was set to depart in twenty minutes. When Noelle walked in the room thereafter, she held me and did not hesitate to invite me to her home. Holding back tears, I rushed to pack the essentials I had expected to find at my house. Throughout the following couple of days, I was occasionally lost in thought, but I could not have hoped for a warmer welcome from Noelle’s family. We played card games, watched *The Voice*, baked, and had long conversations. Every day I spent with them, I felt less distressed and grew to love them more.

After a few days, my parents believed that it was prudent for me to travel home in the event of interstate travel restrictions. Although my mother had not yet been tested, my parents were ill at ease while I lived a state away. Later that night, I updated my best friend from my hometown, Bianca, about my change in plans. Without a second thought, she offered to drive a total of six hours with her father so I could stay at her house instead. I was astonished by their generosity and refused to ask so much of them. Nonetheless, Bianca arrived at Noelle’s house the following afternoon. Although aspects of my life seemed to have come crashing down on me, I could not help but feel so grateful and loved in that moment. That week I began to witness the new acts of kindness that surfaced because of COVID-19. These acts continued throughout my two week stay at Bianca’s home. Although she had already begun her online schoolwork, she made time for me every day to talk, dance, or play games with her family. Not to mention the photoshoot, traditional Chipotle “date,” gifts, and cupcakes Bianca surprised me with on my birthday. As time went on, I felt more at home and connected to the compassionate family that I had known since middle school. Meanwhile, I FaceTimed my mother frequently, thankful that my stepfather was caring for her.
After two weeks apart from my mother, I have now been home for a month. Due to college and quarantine, it has been many months since I visited my father who lives in Chicago, forty five minutes away from my mother’s house. I worry for him too, as he is in his late sixties and lives alone, paycheck to paycheck, in one of the cities most affected by the virus. Thinking back to *The Odyssey*, I have recently realized what it means to miss someone the way Odysseus did on Calypso’s island. Trapped due to circumstances out of his control, Odysseus grieved apart from his family and kingdom. Likewise, I have felt lonely and helpless during the moments when I believed that I should be supporting my parents by their side. I would view my “kingdom” as my father’s house or the home I built at Purdue. I wish I could hug my dad. I wish I could spend another night in my dorm with my best friend. I wish I could go to lunch with my closest friends. I wish I could perform one last time. But most of all, I look forward to my return to “Ithaca.” As a result of this separation, the moments after I reunite with the people I love will be all the more special. Until this day arrives, I have learned that it is valid to feel disappointed and fortunate at the same time.

So, while some bullets in my journal no longer apply to my everyday life, one goal remains stronger than ever: continue to be grateful every day. Thankfully, I was given the chance to reflect on this goal with my mother, as she recovered from what we discovered was bacterial pneumonia. Although I thought I had understood how fortunate I was, numerous people are now realizing the true meaning of gratitude. Many are taking this time to connect with their loved ones, not wasting the opportunity to express their affection. I have teared up at the sight of long lines of cars with balloons and posters, now known as quarantine birthday parades. Around the world, people are recognizing true heroes: doctors, nurses, researchers, store workers, mail carriers, farmworkers, and more. Social media and news outlets are shedding light on the citywide clapping and cheering, virtual concerts, yard signs, and many other forms of appreciation, spreading a sense of unity worldwide. While this is a painful time for many, I hope for growth, healing, and eventually more warm colored pixels.
My Quarantine Story

RESTORING THE ODYSSEY

by

Shobana Iyer

Shobana Iyer is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Actuarial Science and Applied Statistics. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins’ SCLA 101 class in Spring 2020.
“Whenever I am in a difficult situation where there seems to be no way out, I think about all the times I have been in such situations and say to myself, ‘I did it before, so I can do it again.’” This simple, yet ruminative quote was stated by Idowu Koyenikan, and in a time like this, I have never more related to a set of words both figuratively and literally. From the idea of being in a difficult situation, to indeed, there being no way out of quarantine, I have realized that hardships come and go in life, so how exactly is one any different from another unless I allow it to be? Being confined in my home has allowed me to grow in the span of approximately seven weeks through the time and space I have been given to mentally reflect. At the end of each day, one thought that I continually repeat to myself in regard to the current circumstance is “it is what it is.”

At the beginning of quarantine, I was overwhelmed while being told abruptly to leave campus a couple days prior to Spring Break. A complete change of plans, that was in no way under anyone’s control, had me speculating and coming to the conclusion that the world might quite possibly be ending this time. Additionally, my mind had been going through a lot of distractions since I had just started “talking” to a boy a few days before online newspapers began broadcasting possible school closures. At this moment, I felt like Odysseus when he was held hostage on Calypso’s island, cherishing the newfound love, but also wanting to return home to be with my loved ones that I missed and longed to see. My journey, like Odysseus’s, had exhausted me at this point, as his seven years of durance was comparable to my weeks of isolation in libraries attempting to grind for midterms all while suffering from a chronic case of homesickness. But my love life was thriving as well, despite vowing not to fall for romance any time soon. I gave myself leeway to getting to know a guy during study sessions instead of actually studying for midterms. Interestingly enough, my heart being content was positively reflected in my grades because not only was this potential relationship starting to take off, so was my confidence in school.

I finally felt like I had some balance in my life, but little did I know that my mental strength was on a hiatus and would be given a reality check when I’m back at home, in quarantine.

When I arrived home, I hoped to be greeted with warm hugs and comforting food, but instead my mom was fast asleep and my father planned on accompanying her as soon as he could. My half-glass-empty perspective finally made its debut since I was unhappy with the environment at home. For the next couple of days, I would ask my family, “Isn’t the grief-stricken state of our world unsettling enough? Why should that same aura be present in our home?” To add on, I would also repeatedly mention my wish to be back at school and express verbatim that I “hate being at home.” All of this distress was also a result of me having
to keep my new relationship a secret from them, despite them knowing almost anything and everything in my life. I knew my parents wouldn’t approve of it. From expecting way too much of my family, managing a confidential crush, and struggling to stabilize my schoolwork routine at home, I was on the verge of multiple breakdowns. This was when I finally realized that all that peace that I had found at school was momentary and only functioned as a band-aid for my host of problems.

I finally decided I had to change my ways and began my journey in transforming myself for the good. This process started with me pulling out a blank agenda and filling it up with things that would keep me occupied, whether it had to do with school or spending time with family. I was scheduled to wake up at 8 am every day, practice yoga, finish up all of my work before a certain time, and devote the end of the day to relaxing and watching a movie with my parents. Little did I know that writing down a timetable wouldn’t be sufficient in getting my life together. Silly me, I forgot about self-discipline and that it is hard to abide by a schedule, let alone one that was created as strictly as mine, when I don’t have the mental tenacity to do it. One day of attempting to follow my schedule led to multiple days of failure, all while my potential guy was letting my hopes down through his dry texts that were only sent at his own convenience. Just as things seemed to be getting in order, I was once again proven wrong by the universe.

At the end of each week, I would wake up and reflect on how I could make things better for myself if I tried harder, but it was easier said than done because I was steadily giving up. One could say that I never tried. I did initiate these attempts, but it didn’t seem like I saw potential in taking action. For example, a one-credit class of mine was fruitless for my future as an actuary, and putting in time to complete projects for the class seemed daunting because I didn’t want to do it. After weeks of contemplating, I decided to drop the class because why should I be doing something that I clearly do not enjoy? I am proud to say that this ended up being one of my best decisions during quarantine as it allowed me to put in time and effort into things I actually liked doing, and it helped me get one step closer towards my goal of regaining balance. Around the same time, I was blessed with a phone call from a friend asking if I wanted to enroll in a virtual yoga retreat. Those three days of Zoom meetings with yogis served as the greatest mental and physical break for me. I came out feeling like a refreshed person with a new perspective on life. Since then, I have been able to remind myself that my current situation is what I make out of it. If I am upset over fighting with my parents, I am allowing myself to be upset. Similarly, if I am unhappy with the situation I am being put in, I am giving permission to quarantine and social distancing to make me feel distressed. The retreat also taught me the importance of having an empty mind, all while keeping my heart full and my hands busy. Ever since, I have been much more content
with life, and had more success completing my work in a timely fashion without allowing myself to stress, along with keeping my heart full by spending time with my loved ones. As of now, I am not sure if I have found balance, but I do know that it will happen.

My time at home has been a roller coaster of many downs, but the one monumental peak that changed things for the good was when I finally realized that it was best to let go and accept the situation as it was. There is no way for me to bring this world back in order all by myself, so why should I stress over not finding balance in my own life? Odysseus was a character with whom I deeply resonated, because even though he added many battles to his journey—such as the Cyclops—through his own actions, towards the end he was able to finally let go and simply took the assistance provided by the Gods to complete his adventure of returning home to his family. Similarly, my tension and unhappiness with the situation provoked negativity in my life, but when I finally let go, I ended up going to bed with a smile on my face every night. I have also been blessed with an offer at one of my dream companies for the following year, as well as still having an internship this summer despite the grave state of our country’s economy. Therefore, by forcing myself to renew wouldn’t have allowed for a proper transformation, instead, a shutdown of my mind did. As Athena told Odysseus, “You are adaptable, you always find solutions” (Wilson 525), and I, too, have the potential to be flexible and adjust to difficult situations, and resolve any problem I may encounter along the way. Surprisingly enough, a time like this has allowed me to grow and become a better person, and for that I am grateful. From now on, I hope to go about life with no expectations and no disappointments, all while letting go.
My Quarantine Story

by

Matthew Kwan

Matthew Kwan is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Pre-Pharmacy. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins' SCLA 101 class in Spring 2020.
I never thought I would be able to relate to Odysseus from *The Odyssey*, but after the isolation brought forth by the spread of COVID-19, I’ve found myself relating more to his struggles on his way home. Odysseus is a proud and cunning leader, with a loyal following of warriors that he led into battle throughout their journey together. This man had responsibilities as a leader, then came under a sudden change of environment that swept away his former way of life. The sudden changes in my life as a result of COVID-19 have altered my sense of a daily routine, and now Odysseus’s struggles in unfamiliar territory seem more than familiar to me.

Odysseus was intelligent and strong, making him the natural fit to lead his men through the Trojan War. He was the leader of his crew, yet as his journey home met with more and more challenges, he soon found himself isolated, eventually being held captive alone on Calypso’s Island. The man who was fit to lead, strong in mind and body, was without ally now, weeping alone and desperately wishing to return home to Ithaca.

My journey of discovery was not as different from his odyssey as one would expect. I didn’t pay much attention initially, only hearing that I would be staying at home an extra week after the Spring Break. I was just happy to spend more time at home in comfort. A couple of days later, another email came in, this time telling us that Purdue would shift to online instruction and that students were encouraged to go home for the remainder of the semester. I still wasn’t that distraught to be honest, as I’d be able to go home and enjoy the familiarity of my house and family for the rest of the semester. My biggest concern was merely whether I’d be able to motivate myself to stay on top of my work, but I lacked the foresight to consider the other aspects of my life that would change. The first week after Spring Break was tough; it was the first week of online instruction. I had three exams that week concluding with rather mixed results. My hands were full trying to adjust to the sudden changes in workload, but as the weeks went on and I became more adjusted to the new system, I grew more aware of the other things that had changed apart from my own coursework, especially my relationships with people around me.

Friends that I lived next door to, friends that I saw at clubs a mere 10-minute walk from my dorm room: everyone was farther than ever with the self-isolation and social distancing policies. I spoke with them online through messaging apps and voice chats, but it was so much different to hear them through my computer; it was almost scary. Talking online to them at this point, hearing the occasional background noise of chatter on their mics made me keenly aware of the fact that we were all separated, living in our own worlds with our families. When I spoke with my friends, I was always upbeat and happy to hear their voices, yet right after ending the calls with them, I’d find myself melancholic and wondering
if that person laughing so boisterously a few minutes ago was truly the same person as me. It was a strange out-of-body experience, where regardless of my inner emotions, my outer body refused to express it. Any happiness was snuffed out by an overbearing wall of muted emotion. I felt lonely, being unable to truly be with my friends who I’d spent all day with on campus or express these mixed emotions. The Smash Ultimate tournaments, the late-night study sessions, the movie nights after those study sessions: everything was different.

Much like Odysseus, after being separated from my friends, no longer in need to uphold a certain image of myself, I found myself weakened by longing for my friends and our daily antics. My parents noticed my lethargic mood, and so they pushed me to exercise or go out on walks with my dog. The warm sun that I used to walk out under every day now seemed exceedingly bright and tiresome, and I could only muster weak, dull thanks to my parents who were so concerned for me. That hurt me, and by that point, I knew something had to change.

As my parents prepared more of my favorite meals, I went out on walks more often, and I revived old interests that had taken a backseat when I was on campus. I watched and caught up on many exciting anime, got into speed-solving Rubik’s cubes and other puzzles again, and turned on my PS4 which had not been used for more than two years. Doing all these things that I had forgotten about rekindled my passion for them, greatly improved my mood and made everyday something to look forward to. I connected with my friends through voice chat more. The content of our chats didn’t matter, just the fact that I was having fun and laughing with my friends was comforting enough. Most surprisingly, a happy coincidence occurred: a few of my friends started to watch more anime at home as well, bringing in even more fun topics for our random talks. My happiness took a heavy toll due to the COVID-19 isolation, one that I’m not sure I would have overcome had it not been for my loving parents who loved me and pushed me forward. After experiencing a disconnect from some aspects of my former life on campus, I reconnected with my old passions. This period has been one of discovery for me, as I dealt with a new type of solitude, but also rediscovering my passions once again and reaching what I would consider an even happier state than I started in. Walking outside now, I can feel the warmth of the sun and admire the fresh air with my dog. It’s hard to look back now to the time a mere couple of weeks ago, when I used to find this warm sun blinding and tiring.

After being stripped of his comrades, Odysseus was lonely and longed for home, and with the support of a friendly goddess, his family’s unwavering belief in him, and his hard efforts, he finally made it back home. It’s hard to put into words but imagine this scenario: brought down by the sudden separation from my friends and a changed lifestyle, I find myself in a darker place, maybe a tunnel, with only a faint glimmer of light far away. That speck of light seems faint and far too distant from where I stand in the dark, yet pushed along by friends,
family, and my passions, I pull myself closer to that light. Now consider, that this small light eventually opens up into the outside world, bright and warm with the sun, a world where my family, and my friends, everyone that supported me through these tough times lived. Behind me, lies the dark tunnel that I could only get through because of all that support. Corny as it is, my gratitude to these people is without bound. In the end, that is the image of my struggles which I want to convey regardless of how it sounds; being alone in the dark but ultimately being guided to a brighter place by my connection with others and with myself.

Contrary to Odysseus, I have no gods out to ruin or support me on this journey of discovery. What I do share with him, however, is a loving family that believed in and supported me through all my struggles, leading me home as I pushed through adversity to reach a happier life. One thing I would like to pass on to others is my adamant belief that even in the darker moments of life, there are people that truly care about you and people who will help you power through those tough times. In the end, these trying times, rather than isolating me, have all but strengthened my bonds with my friends and family, and rekindled my love for the things I had forgotten about.
CORONAVIRUS QUARANTINE

by

Collin Stroup

Collin Stroup is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mass Communication. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins’ SCLA 101 class in Spring 2020.
How do you overcome a situation in which almost no one alive has seen anything like it? That’s the question that the world is trying to figure out as the COVID-19 virus spreads, changing our way of life. Going through this time of quarantine and not knowing what will happen next reminds me of Odysseus and his fateful journey. Just like how Odysseus struggled to return home to his old way of life, we too are struggling to get back to life the way we once knew it. Despite being in a terrible and frightening situation, we must endure the trials that lie ahead as the world strives for normalcy once again.

I can’t think of a single person who is thoroughly enjoying their new time under quarantine. Sure, some of us are taking up new hobbies and finishing up things we never got around to, but we wish it weren’t happening under the given circumstances. I remember hearing about the coronavirus as it was starting to take a heavy toll on China. I, along with many others, never thought it would spread and become as bad as it has. However, it did, and we as human beings have to adapt. This is what makes us so special: our ability to go with change and come out better because of it. Throughout history, humans have endured wars, pandemics, natural disasters, and so much more that have shaped who we have become today.

Where we stand today due to COVID-19 reminded me of Odysseus and his journey to return home. I think if you look at Odysseus’ story as a whole, rather than the individual tales, it makes sense in relation to our current health crisis. Odysseus had already fought in the Trojan war for ten years before his journey of ten years to get home began. He had no idea it would last ten years, just as we have no set time of how long our current situation will last. In order to return home, Odysseus encountered on his way multiple trials that tested him. His will and determination to get back and see his family was what kept him going despite how difficult the trip was. Like Odysseus, we yearn to return to our former way of life. We have suffered great losses just as Odysseus who has lost his crew. He faced multiple obstacles that obstructed his goal. Our world now faces a host problems as well: many people have lost their jobs, families have lost loved ones, students have been forced to continue their education online, all due to this pandemic.

There is a saying that I think resonates with our current crisis: “control what you can control.” I think that quote fits because for most of us, we won’t be the ones finding a cure for this virus. With that being said, we can control how we react to what is going on right now. We get to choose what attitude we have; we get the chance to stay home and save lives, and we get the chance to be ready to go back to work and to school once this crisis ends. All of these things I have mentioned play a huge role in getting our society and our economy back on track as we fight this virus. Odysseus’ attitude and determination were tested on his
journey home. He decided to keep going just like we will. If Odysseus had a bad attitude, there is no way he would have made it back home. On our journey, some days will be worse than others, but we just have to deal with it and make the best of what we have. There is no quit in the human spirit. I have always felt that when major events happen to our world or our people, we come together stronger than ever to get through it. That’s what humans do and that is what we will continue to do for each other now.

My life has drastically changed due to the circumstances as I’m sure everyone else’s has. Being stuck at home after spending every day with my friends is quite the change. I never thought I would miss getting up in the morning and physically going to classes until it was taken away from me. Simple things, such as going out to eat and going to the movies, seem like luxuries now that we don’t have access to restaurants and theaters. School feels completely different now that classes are fully online. Trying to stay on top of all my classes has become more difficult as I don’t have the opportunities to see my professors in person or visit them during office hours. I think the switch to online has also been extremely stressful for the faculty members at Purdue University as well. They have been forced to take all their material and present it all online which can be rather hard for certain courses.

The coronavirus has affected my entire family. My mom is an elementary teacher who now has to teach her students from home. As you can imagine, trying to teach younger kids in a distance-learning scenario is not ideal by any means. My dad is still going to work every day and has been taking many precautions and following protocols in order to stay safe. While their jobs have been affected, they are grateful to still be working and have an income as we realize many families are not as fortunate. The person I feel the sorriest for is my sister who is finishing up her senior year of school at Purdue. Her final year with all her peers has been cut short and she will not get the proper graduation she deserves. She also lost her part-time job as a waitress and has had trouble finding other work.

COVID-19 has also ruined summer internships and jobs for many of my friends. There are a lot of people who have informed me that their summer internships have been cancelled because of the health crisis. Most people are very upset because they worked really hard to get these internships, yet now, they have nothing to show for it. Thankfully, I will be able to return to my summer job from last year by working at a bank as they are an essential business that stays open. That said, the bank had to change many of its policies and my job will look very different this summer compared to the last one.

I think one of the key things we need during this time is patience. Yes, all of us want to go back to normal and get out of our quarantine as soon as possible. But we need to do what
is best for our society and wait until it is safe. I keep going back to Odysseus and his travels because he could have easily given up during his many years of trying to return home. He didn’t lose sight of his end goal which is the most important thing. When you are trying to get out of a hard situation, you cannot give up. We have to have a similar mindset and keep persevering through our difficulties. Patience was one of Odysseus’ main virtues that eventually helped him succeed.

As we all look to the future, we don’t really know what to expect. Purdue President Mitch Daniels just announced in an email to students that he intends on having the students back in the fall. While this is good news, it will surely be a long road to get there. While safety is the top concern for everyone, many people want to get back to their jobs so they can provide for their families. A lot of people are asking if things will ever be the same. Hopefully, in the coming year, we will be able to get a vaccine to keep us protected from this virus, but the question does pose some interesting thoughts. We will almost certainly change how we act when it comes to sanitation. People will be more cautious as to what they touch and if they should shake hands with one another. I know those things have already been on my mind as well. When I touch door handles, I feel as if I should run to wash my hands or apply hand sanitizer. If we get anything positive out of this situation, I hope it is that we learn to be better about sanitation in general and to not take things for granted.

I think our uncertainty in what the future holds relates perfectly to Odysseus as well. He had no clue that he would encounter the likes of the Lotus Eaters, Polyphemus, Circe, and Sirens. He took each challenge that was thrown at him and kept going. We must have that same mindset in order to come out on top of this virus. When you look back at Odysseus’ journey, you would realize that he lived through one of the craziest periods of his time. He took part in the ten-year Trojan War followed by his own decade-long trip to get home. Just like Odysseus, we too are living through a very critical time in our history. It is quite shocking to realize that you are involved in such a historical event.

While it can be scary during these times, we need to have courage and faith and believe that we will make it out stronger and better than ever on the other side. Mankind is resilient and I have no doubt that we will overcome this virus. Hopefully, we won’t have to wait ten years to get back to normal like Odysseus did.
Connor Moore is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in first year engineering. They created this artwork which was later featured in an assignment for Professor Jody Watkins’ SCLA 102 class during the summer of 2020. The piece was a step in gradually learning how to use photoshop throughout quarantine. This piece was inspired by quilts; each design is a tile on a square sheet. Playful experimentation with structure yielded designs of tiles stitched together to form faces from the combined structures. Across the quilt, repeated designs were colored differently to explore variation in color emphasis or to convey patterns where they otherwise would have been masked by the density of the designs. Overall, the quilt itself was meant to be visually entertaining and thought-provoking as viewers attempt to connect and decipher the seemingly disparate and haphazard parts together.