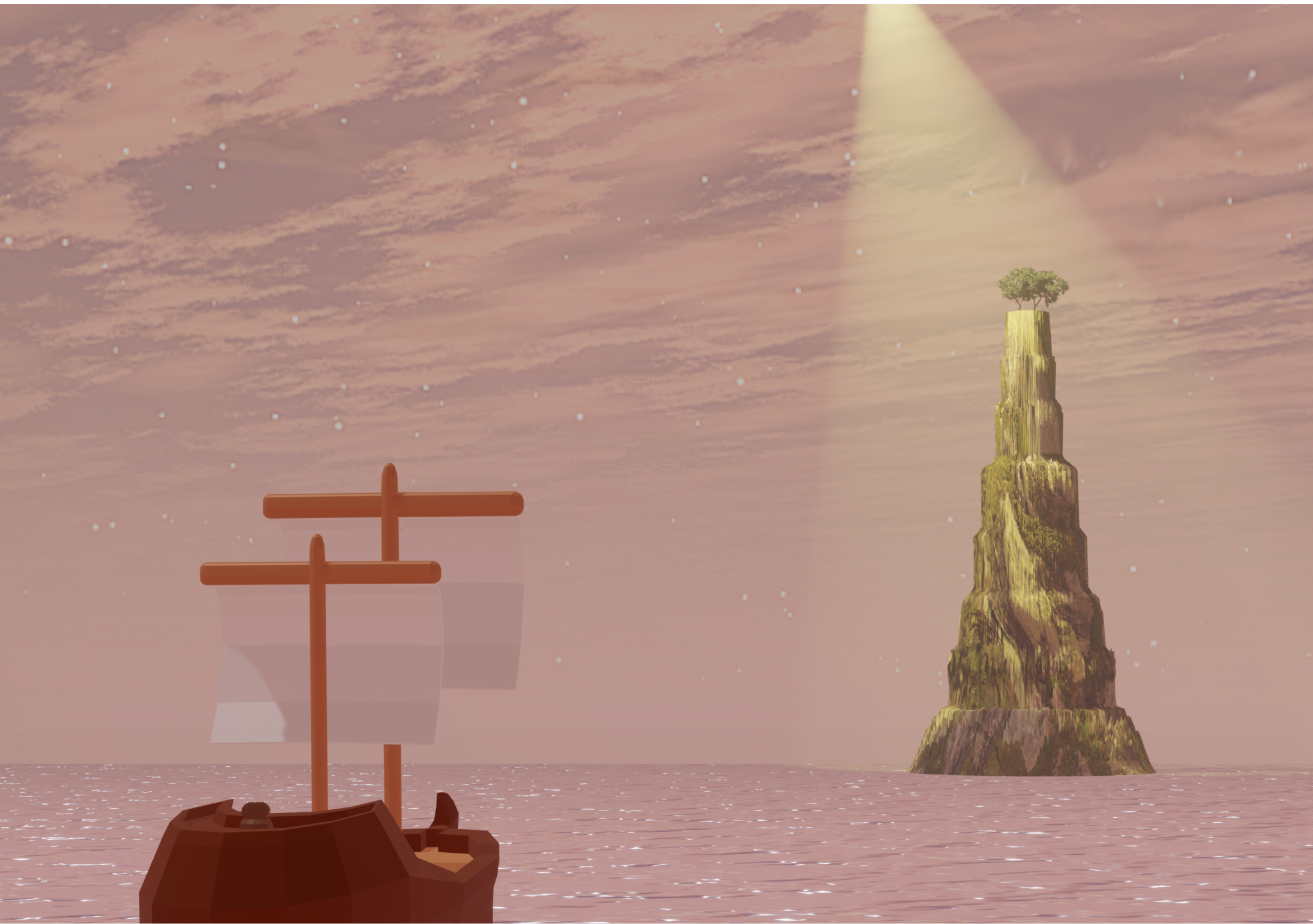
The Cornerstone Review

ISSUE 3 FALL 2022



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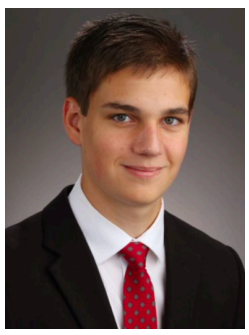
Front Matters

COVER ART
"The Voyage to Purgatory: The Wind Whispers Cato" by Douglas Smith



Douglas Smith is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Supply Chain and Operations Management. He was a student in Professor Bennett's SCLA 101 class. His artwork titled "The Voyage to Purgatory: The Wind Whispers Cato" was inspired by Dante's epic, *Purgatory*. Douglas' work seeks to answer a question that has often sparked wonder in Dante's readers: What is it like for souls to take the long voyage from Ostia to the shores of Mount Purgatory? One thing is for certain: the view is beautiful. Douglas's illustration won the second place in the Cornerstone Spring 2022 Contest.

The Cornerstone Review is produced each fall by Purdue University's Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts Program. It is created to celebrate the critical, literary, and artistic accomplishments of Purdue's undergraduate students who enrolled in Cornerstone's SCLA courses.

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PURDUE UNIVERSITY CORNERSTONE INTEGRATED LIBERAL ARTS

The Cornerstone Review

ISSUE 3 FALL 2022

An Interview with Teaching Award Winners

Professor Melinda Zook is the winner of Purdue's Murphy Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Award

CR: What is your favorite transformative text to teach and why?

MZ: Not an easy question! I love all the books we read in SCLA 101. I suppose Dante's *Inferno* is the most fun to explore with students. It isn't an easy text; there is a lot going on and of course, a little historical context is necessary. But what pleases me the most about it is seeing how students, who are often reluctant at first, grow into relishing our discussions, reading it aloud, and figuring out how the sin matches the punishment doled out to the damned. Many of the texts we read in SCLA 101 are easier to read and untangle than the *Inferno*, but when I meet with my students outside of class or even years later, that is the text they always want to talk about.

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

MZ: I am sure everyone knows the tricks of the trade: variety, being first and foremost, making class times different from one week to the next, challenging them to adapt to new ways of learning. Secondly, I think enthusiasm is contagious. We have such a golden opportunity to show them our love for a text and inspire them to see all of the richness, beauty, poignancy, and complexity of that reading. Thirdly, I also make sure that they know that I

see them as individuals and that I care about them. Compassion is key. Finally, I would say that bringing a sense of humility (knowing that you do not know everything) and being open to their ideas about what a text is saying helps facilitate discussion.

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

MZ: I learn new teaching and learning techniques from the Cornerstone faculty all the time. I will definitely steal some of their ideas when I teach SCLA 101 in the spring.

CR: What are the most important things you want your students to take away from your class?

MZ: First and foremost, I want them to be better communicators: to be able to articulate their ideas with precision and with confidence. Secondly, I hope that they have learned to continue to learn: to be open to the world, suspicious of nonsense, and understand nuance, ambiguity, and complexity. And I really hope they continue to read and are not intimated by challenging texts.

CR: What have you learned from your students in return?

MZ: I have learned to be a better teacher and a better human being. And a lot about Space-X.

CR: Do you any memorable "Cornerstone moments" in or outside the classroom? Please share!

MZ: Yes, many, but for the sake of your readers allow me just one. In spring 2021, they had just rolled out the vaccine and many of us had not received it yet. We were still in masks and very cautious. Towards the end of the semester, I felt they needed a break. So we met at the Wabash River where we could remove our masks and we read the last part of *Siddhartha* ('Om,' wherein Siddhartha learns from the river) together. It was a very existential moment. They were carried away; I was carried away and time was meaningless (at least for 50 minutes). Those who did not have to run back to campus sat on the bank of the river with me and we just talked and talked.

In Cornerstone, the faculty often talk about how much the students need us. They do. But we need them as well.

Professor Swati Srivastava is a winner of the
Antonia Syson Cornerstone Teaching Award

CR: What is your favorite transformative text to teach and why?

SS: I love teaching George Orwell's *1984*. Many students have encountered it before, but we extract additional layers they might have missed before (such as the second ending buried in the appendix!). It is a far more hopeful book than typically portrayed.

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

SS: I center my course around themes of great power, technology, and responsibility. Students are intuitively interested in these topics, but to keep the conversation going in class I pair close reading of passages with films and other multimedia.

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

SS: I have one assignment that students complete in pairs that involves research on privacy policies of major tech companies (like Apple, Amazon, etc.), In future classes, I would like students to design a campaign around what they have learned to share with the companies.

CR: What are the most important things you want your students to take away from your class?

SS: Students should see how the liberal arts equips them to experience more about the world through digesting complex thought. I want them to continue working on their critical thinking skills and expand their possibilities for action.

CR: What have you learned from your students in return?

SS: I have learned that transformative texts can often spark student curiosity in ways I did not anticipate – in fact I have quite different discussions of the same material across multiple sections.

CR: Do you any memorable "Cornerstone moments" in or outside the classroom? Please share!

SS: The slow reveal of *1984*'s second ending is always a favorite classroom moment. Even when I warn students it is coming, they usually do not see it. But once they do, they want to go back and re-read the whole text.

CR: Has your role as a teacher evolved in any way since you started teaching Transformative Texts?

SS: I have become better at leading discussion and going with the flow, sometimes at the expense of my lesson plan and delivering certain content. I also have learned how to challenge students with the appropriate amount of reading for each class.

Professor Michael Malone is a winner of the Antonia Syson Cornerstone Teaching Award

CR: What is your favorite transformative text to teach and why?

MM: Probably my favorite is *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. As the title suggests, the central character, Meursault, is one of the strangest characters in all of literature. Students react in unique ways to his actions and behaviors. He is someone who is immersed in his present lived experience but has a great deal of difficulty rationally reflecting about the meaning or significance of that present experience. There are many lessons from Camus in the novel. I'm most excited and rewarded when students leave the book with a greater mindfulness and genuine appreciation for their own present lived experience at Purdue.

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

MM: I believe in the transformative power of active learning. When students must "do something" to engage the material, they are more likely to comprehend the meaning of the work and to value it. I employ a pretty wide variety of active learning techniques which require that students become active participants in the class rather than passive observers. I don't know that I have any "secrets," but the necessary prerequisite for student empowerment and transformation is the creation of a "safe" environment where students are comfortable sharing and contributing. I try to make sure each student is respected and valued in the classroom.

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

MM: I teach SCLA 102 which requires students give presentations to improve their oral communication skills. Many students suffer from speaking anxiety and apprehension, especially when they speak in front of the whole class. For some students, this speaking apprehension is the biggest impediment to obtaining effective public speaking skills. I'm currently researching new ways to help students reduce their speaking anxiety. I hope I can use these new techniques to help students overcome or at last reduce their public speaking apprehension.

CR: What are the most important things you want your students to take away from your class?

MM: I hope they leave my class with a greater awareness of and appreciation for human dignity. I tell my students in the readings we are going to experience various kinds of human dignity, and we are also going to celebrate the dignity that we experience. I also want them to walk away with a greater sense of empowerment and new confidence about themselves. This latter point is especially true regarding their confidence in effective oral communication with others.

CR: What have you learned from your students in return?

MM: My students continually challenge me every semester. When I am a bit sluggish or tired, they energize me when I walk in the classroom. I often learn from their insights and reactions to the texts. Even though I have read the texts for the course many times, they still notice things I missed. I also learn much from their speeches. The final oral presentation assignment is a persuasive speech and I am pretty flexible about the kinds of topics they may choose. Each semester I learn what my students are passionate about and they often succeed in persuading me.

CR: Do you any memorable "Cornerstone moments" in or outside the classroom? Please share!

MM: I actually have many memorable moments. I will share three here. Over this past summer, a student I taught three years ago contacted me. He said he applied for a job and he had to give a presentation as part of the hiring process. He told me his future employers loved his presentation. He wanted to thank me because he believed his success was due to what he had learned in SCLA 102. Another student at the end of one semester met with me

and admitted that in high school he had never read a single book he was assigned to read. He was an engineering student. He told me this was the first class in which he actually did read all of the books. He said SCLA 102 "did something I didn't think was possible, it made me fall in love with reading books." This meant a great deal to me. Finally, during the beginning of the pandemic, the second half of our semester was moved online. It was difficult for both the students and for me. When the course was over, a student emailed me and she told me how important the class was in helping her through this challenging time. She later told me she has had many good classes at Purdue, but she said she thought SCLA 102 was the most "indispensable" of all of them. Again, this was really memorable for me.

CR: Has your role as a teacher evolved in any way since you started teaching Transformative Texts?

MM: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, I tell my students this course is about celebrating the human dignity we find in the characters we encounter in our transformative texts. My role was to empower them to see and appreciate this dignity. Since I have been at Purdue, I have had new and at times wonderful experiences of the dignity of my students. This has transformed me. I see my job not just as empowering them to understand and value the transformative texts. I also believe my role is to build a *community* in the classroom where each student may understand and value the dignity of one another.

Professor Molly Scudder is a winner of the Antonia Syson Cornerstone Teaching Award

CR: What is your favorite transformative text to teach and why?

MS: I recently started teaching the "Plague Narrative" from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. It's a great text for demonstrating what ancient works can teach us about our own lives. Processing such a momentous event in our lives as the COVID19 pandemic is not straightforward. Having another plague in a different time and place to discuss in the classroom helps to orient us to our own lives in a new way.

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

MS: I like to use the texts to help students understand the world around them. We always have a real-world problem to discuss. This means helps show students that they have something to discuss and bring to class even if the reading was difficult or hard to understand the first time through.

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

MS: I'd like to teach an SCLA study abroad in Paris.

CR: What are the most important things you want your students to take away from your class?

MS: That writing is thinking, and thinking is writing. If you are trying to figure out what you think, trying writing it down. If you can't express yourself clearly, maybe you have some more thinking to do!

CR: What have you learned from your students in return?

MS: I learn so much from my students!

CR: Do you any memorable "Cornerstone moments" in or outside the classroom? Please share!

MS: The first semester back in 2017 or whenever that was. Students didn't know what they were in for!

CR: Has your role as a teacher evolved in any way since you started teaching Transformative Texts?

MS: I am less beholden to the tyranny of content. I always tell colleagues that what makes SCLA different is that you don't have to prioritize "coverage" of certain material above all else. You don't have to make sure they get whatever pre-determined content down so that they can follow the next sequence. Instead, finding ways to help students think and write are what dominate my approach to teaching. This has served me well in other classes as well.

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Fiction

> "Good fiction's job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."
>
> –David Foster Wallace

Fiction

Fallen Angels

by

Jaden Thomas

Jaden Thomas is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biology. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. This story is a depiction of a young man attempting to escape an endless cycle of life and early death, one that has been set into motion by inner city politics and consistent unchecked trauma that knows no bounds of morality or respect, only pain.

A city of fallen angels I bet it changed you.
Growing up on the wrong block can really change you.
If you act funny they will run up on you and snatch your chains too,
A city of fallen angels but it won't change you.

Living the city is all they know,
But leaving the city is the only way to grow.
Take your time and work on up through the ranks,
But a microphone or basketball is really what it takes.

This city has too many fallen angels
That leave behind trauma, and yes it strangles
This city of fallen angels can only chain you.

Growing up in the City of Angels was no easy task for my family and I. You need a constant eagle eye watching your back or your face will be on a t-shirt for all the wrong reasons. Do not even think about wearing the wrong color in the wrong neighborhood because those vengeful eyes see deeper than clothing color can account for. You can not even wear the wrong hat or that carefully planned sports logo will morph into a neighborhood symbol that was built on the bloody backs of revenge and hate. These were just the starting accessories to the everyday outfit of maturity and toughness that was essential to survival in the city I call home. Growing up I was always the good kid that did everything in his power to stay as far from trouble as possible. I stayed after school to play sports and even participate in band just to stay away from the outdoor extracurricular activities that happened on my block. The older guys of the neighborhood always looked out for me because they knew I had talent and could make it far enough to bring some wealth back to my neighborhood. Although, as I got older that young luster and hope for fame and money quickly turned into a dull glow that lit my way straight to the streets. There was no telling what might happen on a daily basis, but I didn't care because of the ever-flowing respect and notoriety I had from my people. Money was no issue at all and it seemed as though everyone loved me, so in my eyes I felt like I had achieved my dreams on a small scale with the help of the streets.

One of my closest friends and partner in crime I knew from the streets was Andre. Andre was a cool guy and was easily one of the smartest people I knew, but instead of using that in school like his brother he decided to get that quick satisfaction that the streets could provide. Andre was always the most quiet and focused person in the room. People often thought he was mute because he barely said two words, but it was all because of how seri-

ously he took his business and the risk he knew it incurred. Andre's brother was named Kenny and he was the real athlete that had a shot of making it out of the hood for good. He was a five star recruit in baseball and basketball and had a 4.0 GPA all throughout his academic career. He had his choice of whatever illustrious college he would like to attend whether it be for school or both of the sports he played. The first day I met Kenny was after his brother had been shot due to a failed transaction and we were all waiting in the hospital for Andre to come out. Kenny looked so nervous, but the one thing that kept him calm was writing poetry. He wrote for hours on end as we all waited for Andre, saying nothing and only picking his head up to check the recurring highlights that were playing on ESPN. From that day forward I knew that he had something different in him. He had that quiet focus, intention, and ambition funneled toward great habits and hobbies that could change someone's life for the better, and I vowed to make sure I watched over him.

Following that realization, Andre, Kenny, and I were like three brothers. We did everything together. We played ball, listened to music, went to parties, and we all even helped Kenny with his advanced coursework he was taking even though he could manage without us. We were practically inseparable, but on a hot July summer night I had the deal of a lifetime to handle so I had to split from them at the local park for about 30 minutes. I was so excited about this opportunity to come up on some cash that I forgot Kenny had my burner phone that I needed for the transaction. Coming to this realization about 5 minutes into my commute to the rendezvous, I quickly turned around and lightly jogged to the park where I had left Kenny and Andre. I hastily turned the corner into the entrance of the park and was relieved to see they had not left yet, so I slowed my gate somewhat. Right when I began walking I saw a beautiful black muscle car with the windows down blasting music that was passing by the picnic table Kenny and Andre were at and it made me smile for that joy of summer. That smile turned into a serious gaze and my slow walk turned into an all out sprint when I heard two loud bangs and saw Kenny throw his head back and fall to the ground. I thought this was a dream. No way had they shot my best friend. No way did I let someone end the life of my little brother who I promised I would take care of. There was no way that happened. Sadly when I walked up to Andre and saw Kenny's body, I knew my greatest nightmares had come true.

After that fateful night, I never saw Andre with a smile on his face again. He made it a ritual to walk around the block at night looking for the guys who killed his brother. He was ready to send them all to the angels and continue the pattern this city and so many others knew all too well. He stepped with a newfound purpose whether that purpose would lead to positive action or not. Andre finally found an outlet for his demons on those walks and just as his brother took up poetry in his time of stress he took up art. I walked in his room on the

day of Kenny’s funeral and saw paper everywhere. He didn’t speak much so he depended on these forms of creativity to release that toxic anger and revenge that festered inside of him. He actually became very good at it too. A myriad of drawings that he created were published to newspapers, websites, and even notable galleries. Andre finally had found purpose in his pain and a great way to make money and provide for his family. I was extremely proud of him. The city mayor even allowed him to paint a mural for his brother right on his block. The mural was beautiful and it depicted Kenny playing the sports he loved with a pair of angel wings. Those daily walks Andre once took for revenge now became a therapeutic time for him to listen to music, think creatively, or just read his brother’s old poetry and soak in his surroundings. I often saw him on these walks and even joined him sometimes after my daily patrol of certain hotspots around the city.

The three year anniversary of Kenny's death had come around and I knew it would be a difficult day for Andre, especially because all of the press that came to commemorate his brother and all of the vigils that were held in Kenny’s memory, assisting in reawakening those dark feelings Andre was working on. There were many celebrations of Kenny’s life that night and there were many beautiful demonstrations, but I saw Andre taking his daily walk more than usual to calm his mind. Every time he embarked on these walks it would seem as though he saw something and began following it but then lost its track and came back to earth. I saw him do this five or six times throughout the day so on the seventh I decided to tail him and see what was up. It was difficult to tell from my vantage point, but it seemed as though Andre was following a light. He followed it past his childhood home, through the old basketball courts, right by the school, and he seemed to “catch” the light right at that park bench where he saw his brother for the last time. Andre tipped his head back and began sobbing, falling to his knees in agony. I figured this was all grief and decided to just let him have his moment, but as more time passed Andre began falling even farther, to his hands and knees, and then to flat on the ground. He even began shaking and twitching which is when I decided enough was enough and intervened, but it was too late. Andre was on the sidewalk, mouth foaming, with pills beside his body, and I knew then what I had just witnessed. The street light above me was buzzing and flickering like crazy, but it illuminated his body enough to where I could see a hint of paper sticking out of his pocket and a slight peaceful grin that finally glossed over his hardened face. I looked up to the mural he painted of his brother and exclaimed,“Another angel gone too soon!” and pulled the slip of paper out of Andre’s pocket. I heard a faint whisper in the distance that softly said,“This city makes angels, so what will you make before you become one?”

Right then I shed my first tear since preschool and opened the note that read , “ Kenny’s Poetry Page 1,

"A city of fallen angels I bet it changed you.
Growing up on the wrong block can really change you.
If you act funny they will run up on you and snatch your chains too,
A city of fallen angels but it won't change you.

Living the city is all they know,
But leaving the city is the only way to grow.
Take your time and work on up through the ranks,
But a microphone or basketball is really what it takes.

This city has too many fallen angels
That leave behind trauma, and yes it strangles
This city of fallen angels can only chain you.

Goodnight, from the city of Angels."

Writer's Statement

My creative vision for this short story was basically for the opening poem to be the root that this whole idea and experience grew from. It is meant to be somewhat of a foreshadowing tool as well as an opening description that entices the reader to immediately think why I would include something like this. This is also why I ended the story with that same poem so it can give you another chance to see why I did what I did and to also form your own opinions on how it ties in with what you read. In terms of the story, I wanted to bring a modern twist to the structure of the old ghost stories that we read. Along with that I included aspects such as a narrator that is telling the story so you have to always keep in mind that this is being told from another person how that might affect things. Another aspect I included was siblings who strive for that beautiful thing in life which in this case is money and the underlying rivalry that somewhat goes along with that whether they truly realize or not. I also intended to give both main characters that were being talked about a visual outlet for the problems that can be physically seen because in many of the ghost stories it either built up inside of them, which it also does in this and acts as a commentary on how you have to stand up and face your demons and can fake it to everyone but yourself, or their anger was released through negative outlets that caused their demise which is also hinted in parts throughout this story.

Another big aspect I wanted to focus on was the denouement at the end of the story with some supernatural power and in this story's case it acts as a sinister voice of motivation. There are also hidden symbols in the names used that represent artists, and symbols such as weather and atmosphere that help foreshadow foreboding events on the horizon. All in all, the main takeaway I envisioned from this story is that everyone goes through battles mentally and physically and they all deal with them in different ways, but at the end of the day we need to find purpose and be happy with ourselves before we go using those emotions to convey to others. Also, I wanted this to be looked at as like an old tale being told to the young hustlers on the block to show how universal it is and the cycle is going to continue if they continue placing value in incorrect aspects of their life. At the end of the day, every single person who reads this is a fallen angel, a person who has descended upon this physical earth to convey their purpose and accomplish their desires before they leave and it is up to you to decide that legacy that your own life story will leave behind.

Fiction

Elizabeth

by

Mei Lin Kmak

Mei Lin Kmak is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Agribusiness. She wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2021. The inspiration of the story was to create a modernized obsession story inspired by the stylistic features of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, particularly, "Ligeia."

I would say I am a fortuitous man to ever know that Elizabeth existed. I cannot remember what or who gave me a purpose in life before stumbling upon her. If I recall correctly, I believe I first laid eyes on her when I spotted her walking gracefully into a coffee shop one morning. Her beauty immediately entranced me as I had never seen someone as captivating as herself; everything about her was absolutely perfect!

Her stature was slender and petite in which I immediately knew she was a fragile human being. She had loose curls of golden hair that fell just past her shoulders that framed her face perfectly. I remember seeing how ghastly pale her complexion was, but her skin still looked as soft as a baby's butt with her round full cheeks. The paleness accentuated her light pink lips that were full and plump, and definitely kissable. Every time she smiled, I could see her perfectly aligned straight teeth that were impeccably white. However, the most prominent feature of Elizabeth was her exquisite doe-like blue eyes that displayed total innocence. It wasn't like any other pair of blue eyes I have ever seen before, hers were beyond unique. They were light eccentric blue with little waves of green on the edge of her iris, and almost obscure speckles of gold. It was like a galaxy with a million different stars, which is something that is indeed very easy to get lost into, but can you really blame me? This is Elizabeth we are talking about. If beauty had a definite definition, it would definitely be Elizabeth!

From the first time I laid my eyes on her, I had a sudden burning passion to know everything about her. I knew I had to do something about my intense love for this woman so I did what I felt was necessary. As the days went by, I fell into a strict routine waiting for her at the coffee shop in the mornings every day. I would always sit a few tables down from her and that is how I soon learned a lot about my beloved Elizabeth.

It was no secret she was a regular at this coffee shop and liked to do a little work for a couple hours in the back corner booth of the cafe. It did not take much to learn what her usual was, which was a honey oat milk latte. I decided to try the drink just because I knew she loved it, and when I took the first sip, I felt something I never felt before. I instantly felt a surreal connection to her, it was like a special bonding moment of love between Elizabeth and I. I knew we were growing closer together. This was something intimate that she and I shared together exclusively, and so I began to buy a honey oat milk latte every day, just for her.

As the weeks passed by we both fell into a consistent routine, we were so in sync it was absolutely perfect! Then one day everything changed for us. I had waited in line behind her

and we both ordered the same drink, she must have overheard me and her eyes lit up like a little kid.

"You get a honey oat milk latte too? I thought I was the only one!" She said in awe as soon as I finished paying. She beamed brightly at me, showing off her perfect smile that I knew too well of. Our eyes locked and I could see the twinkle in her alluring eyes that I had fallen in love with over and over. To say this girl was irresistible was certainly an understatement!

This was the first time hearing her say something to me, and it started to replay through my mind like a broken record already. Her voice had a light silvery tone that sounded like music ringing into my ears; oh how everything about Elizabeth is just heavenly!

"What can I say? We must have superior taste buds," I responded lightly, trying to play it cool. However, my heart was beating so hard it might as well just have jumped out and run away. The feeling of warmth flooded through my whole body as I felt everything tingling with happiness and desire and pure love for this woman.

Elizabeth simpered, seemingly pleased with my comment and she grabbed her drink and disappeared to her usual booth. I couldn't help the smile that slowly etched it's way on my face as we just had our first official conversation. As soon as my drink was made, I followed her to where we both usually sat. I peered at her from behind my newspaper and studied her like I do every day of the week.

She was too busy engrossed in her computer like always to even be conscious of her surroundings. I couldn't help but to absolutely adore the way she would scrunch her eyebrows when she concentrated, and the look of determination on her face as she would type away furiously with her slender piano fingers. My mind couldn't help but to keep replaying our interaction earlier. The happiness all over her face to see me was imprinted in my mind. The instant connection I felt between us was so raw. The way she seemed so thrilled that we had the same taste in drinks had to mean something, the fact that she even needed to point it out. Who would go out of their way to talk to someone if they weren't remotely interested? Oh this was just the beginning of our love story!

Suddenly her phone rang and she answered it with such enthusiasm it worried me for a second. A fleeting thought crossed my mind, what if she had a man? I shook my head, there was absolutely no way. I saw the way she looked at me earlier when she saw that we both got the same drinks, there was no denying that she did not feel anything for me. I was

cut out of my thoughts abruptly as I strained to hear who was on the other side of the call. The blood in my veins froze cold as soon as I could make it out it was a male tone.

“Okay see you in a little, I love you,” she said as she slammed her computer loudly. She then started to pack her things into her large purse in a hurried manner. Then she briskly walked by without even giving me a glance, and disappeared quickly into the women's restroom.

I felt like an absolute complete utter fool, Elizabeth had been stringing me all along! She made me fall in love with her on purpose! All these weeks, I had no recollection of knowing that she even had a man in the first place. I felt nothing but pure confusion and displeasure as I processed what was happening. I watched her come out of the bathroom and I could tell she had pampered up a little bit for this man. She put on a dark pink lipstick that made her eyes pop out even more, and it made her look slightly older. There was something all wrong with this, she didn’t put on the lipstick for me, she put it on for the other man.

My body got up automatically as if it was an instinctive reaction and I followed her out of the small coffee shop. There she was, a few feet ahead walking while holding her phone in her hand, texting away. It was almost impossible to describe what emotions or thoughts that I had right now, everything seemed like a blur and incomprehensible at the moment. I picked up my pace with absolutely no proper thoughts in my brain. I was absolutely fixated on only Elizabeth, my only goal was just to catch up to her. I subconsciously grabbed the nearest medium sized rock I saw and clutched onto it as I started to gain on her.

It was like she could sense she was being followed and she picked her pace up nervously, yet she was still looking down on her phone. She finally looked up anxiously and whipped her neck around, and her eyes grew humongous as soon as she recognized me. Before anything could happen, I smashed the rock down on her skull. It all happened so fast. Her body fell with a loud thud to the ground in slow motion and I could see the blood gushing all over her curls. Seeing her lifeless body, I suddenly felt washed out with shame and guilt of what I had just done, but that dispersed as soon as I realized that I had to get far away from her. However, I still needed one last goodbye moment with my love, after all she gave me the best few weeks I ever had in my life. I gazed at her angelic face, she seemed so peaceful asleep. Her luscious lashes fell upon her cheeks, her long hair spilled all over the sidewalk, and her dark pink lips were shaped in a tiny “o”. Dark blood started to ooze even more from the top of her head onto the sidewalk making a huge puddle, and I snapped back

to reality. I took one last longing look to soak in her everlasting exquisite beauty, I will never forget Elizabeth. My love, my beloved Elizabeth I am so sorry! Then I ran.

Writer's Statement

I wanted to be able to imitate Poe's work by a slight imitation of the story of "Ligeia" and the narrator's fixation on her beauty. It is insinuated throughout the story that Elizabeth does not really know of the narrator's existence, which can already allude to the narrator having an unhealthy obsession with her and being her stalker. I had the narrator in his head seem like he knew everything about Elizabeth, when in reality he knew nothing about her, which shows another aspect of him being mentally unstable. I decided to include the narrator killing Elizabeth because that ultimately confirms suspicions that the narrator is truly mentally unstable and a bad person. In Poe's stories, a majority of the protagonists were not good people, as they were normally violent, insane, or even both. Many of the narrators have committed murder, or have witnessed some type of horror throughout their story. I used a setting and vocabulary that is used to this day to make it more relatable and put a more modern twist. I tried to imitate how Poe was very descriptive in his works to be able to build some sort of minimal suspense for the first part of the story, and then have the climax happen what seems suddenly toward the end of the story.

Fiction

Tale from A Torture Cell

by

Kevin Burns

Kevin Burns is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Economics. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2021. The story was written in an effort to emulate the themes and writing style of Edgar Allan Poe, whose short stories we were studying at the time. His main goal in writing this was to create a psychologically dark and emotional piece that also incorporated Poe's signature grotesque imagery.

I find myself awoken in darkness. A shawl casted over my face, beneath my feet, damp, and mossy stone. My hands are bound by cold metal binds that hang above me. I do not remember a time before the cell, only the sounds of the water dripping, the rats scampering and the chains clanking. Time is lost in my never-ending misery, and all that I have ever known is gone with it. Any semblance of a life before this has been washed away by the streams of water that vein the floors of the cell.

A man walks in, I sense a familiar presence. He lifts the veil from my eyes, and I see my captor for the first time. An average looking man, of normal stature. His face is obscured by the executioner's hood. I am not scared; the man's presence seems familiar.

The room is composed of dark, wet cobblestones with an iron padlocked door with a small window, barred by iron rebar. No light lies within the room, and only a small trestle table in the corner furnishes the cell. An ornery thing, without a chair, made of dark walnut, casting a shadow from the residual light from the room beyond. The room beyond appears to be lit by candle. The room draws me towards it, I feel despair in knowing my present circumstance makes indulging in the wonders of the room beyond the cell infeasible.

My captor, breathing heavily through his mask, appears to look at me. I find myself unable to catch his gaze for more than a few seconds before a chill comes over me and my neck gives out forcing me to stare down at my feet. The captor draws something from his satchel. Unable to look up, I hear the clanking of bottles and my head perks up. The dark brown liquor swirling within the receptacle is instantly recognizable. The happiness of seeing an old friend makes me hoot and giggle with happiness. My captor pops the cork and I indulge in the sweetest of indulgences. The bottle empties, and just like he came, the captor corks the bottle and leaves, shutting the door window behind him.

It feels like days have gone by. I try to escape my binds, but my perpetual drunkenness disallows any progress I begin to make. Every night I lust for more drink, as is the agony of addiction. Every day the executioner comes by with more drink, and the more I drink, the more I dream. I long for the life in these dreams. I see, a beautiful woman, a smiling child a table full of food and flowers. Visions of pure joy and happiness. As great as a feeling as I have ever had in my life. As my mind sobers the desperation of my capture becomes apparent again.

The endless cycle irritates me, I become restless, longing for what is in the room beyond. I believe the contents of such a room are what constitutes my dreams. Every time I am poisoned by the executioner, I gain another fragment of what lies in the room beyond,

perhaps a woman, maybe the child I've in my dreams. As I sober, I make efforts towards my escape. The rusted iron that binds my hands is vulnerable if I could only just break through!

My captor comes in once more for my daily dosage of drink. I reluctantly down the last swallow. Just as he always has, the executioner corks the bottle and takes his leave. My vision is frightening, a woman, her throat cut, blood dripping down her body, hanging from rope. A child, screaming and crying. All accompanied by the familiar burn of liquor in my gut. My eyes peel open, in anger, I rip the weak iron cuffs from my wrists, and I fall to the ground, and instantly crumble to the ground. I hear footsteps from the room beyond. I gather the chain that once bound me and hide in the shadows. The executioner opens the door and the light of the room beyond swirls through the room. I look at my body to find marks of which I have never seen. Broken fingers, severed toes and chest lacerations that appear to have been fresh days ago. The executioner is unarmed, I rise, off balance from my broken feet with chain in hand.

There is a struggle. I wrap the iron chain around his neck and heave. I feel his body convulse and his limbs go limp.

Upon sensing my effort has been successful, I release the chain, collapsing to the ground. I crawl on the ground toward the cold corpse of he who tortured me so. Before that, I grab the bottle of liquor to celebrate my escape. To my dismay, the room beyond is another cell of very similar dimensions. The candlelight in this room illuminates a small table, and an ornery mirror on the wall. Upon staring through the mirror, I feel an odd inclination to lift the executioner's hood. I drag my bloodied mass over to the body and upon lifting the mask, I see the face of the killer!

Writer's Statement

For this particular story, I wanted to try and emulate Poe, but tried to put my own spin on his themes and writing style. I liked the idea of a torture cells being used as an introspective setting for an unreliable narrator. In doing this, I created the torture cell as a metaphor for the mind of the narrator, thus why it is dark and empty. The torturer or executioner in the story is supposed to be the narrator himself. I kept the hood over his face to mask the narrator's understanding that he is torturing himself for some particular reason, but he does not know the extent of the torture because of the alcohol that he feeds himself. The "torture" undergone throughout the story is meant to represent depression and anguish, and the narrator is not meant to realize he has been tortured until the very end. This

is where the alcohol comes into play. He forgets the damage he is doing to his body and mind by overindulging in alcohol. In the last vision, he kills his wife and child due to drunkenness and agitation. This is why at the end, he is able to break his binds and kill the person who has been reminding him of his previous life and what he did. In a way, he relives his own memories because he is torturing himself and this anger spills over into his only way to escape, killing himself symbolically and literally.

As I am writing this explanation, I understand that this is a very morbid story. I was just trying to put myself into the mind of Poe himself. Poe as a person was very troubled and contemplated suicide many times as an escape. I'd like to think of this story as an introspective look into Poe's mind. It is not in any way trying to generalize all depression. I added the narrator killing his family to reflect that he is not a normal person with depression. I felt that it would be problematic to try and represent depression as a mental illness through this medium, because I wouldn't want people to misinterpret and think I am saying that all people with mental illness are dangerous.

I tried to match Poe's verboseness and vocabulary, a mammoth task in its own right. I feel that my story has a more explicit introspective meaning than most of Poe's stories.

Fiction

Cold Faith

by

Anthony Stagnito

Anthony Stagnito is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Airline Management and Operations. He wrote this short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Robin Clair's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2021. "Cold Faith" was created with the idea of challenging the reader's definition of a hero by using an unfamiliar atmosphere and morally challenging circumstances. It was loosely inspired by *Hunt for Red October* by Tom Clancy and the death of Peter Fechter in 1962.

Their music was changing, no longer did the echoes of big bands seep throughout the streets, but a brasher tune of English voices bellowed below. “Is this the imperialism Chairman Ulbricht preaches, Josef?” Oskar mutters as he takes a long drag on his cigarette. “I suppose,” spitting out my last chunk of bread, nearly frozen as the winds from river Spree turn our watchtower into an icebox. Today, however, was fortunate as the winds blew east saving us from being smothered in coal and fuel oil soot. I peer through my binoculars as I have thousands of times before, my breath lightly fogging the lenses for a brief moment. The recent addition of the third line of fence and mines along the containment strip has turned the previously formidable border into one which “only those suicidal would attempt to breach,” as described by our commanding officer. Yet the only action we have seen since our posting has been the occasional unlucky animal triggering a mine that promptly turns it into no more but red mist. My attention darts as I see movement in my peripheral vision, leaflets fluttering a foot above the ground. *Western propaganda* I assume, however, NATO is clueless to its strongest asset. Other than our spotlights, Eastern Berlin is solely illuminated from the light pollution seeping from the West. “A sign of decadence which the working class pays for,” our political officer had stated, however, I question if this is what success looks like.

Success was something our family rarely saw, although some say we were fortunate as farmers. Our crop was first taxed then plundered by Hitler’s government and soldiers, leaving barely enough for ourselves. I can only remember the last months of the war, something mother says I should be grateful for. I was too young and naive to understand the consequences of the changing world around me, why we had to hide in the cellar when the drone of radial engines pierced the night sky, or why papa cried the night the horizon glowed an angry orange and the moon was obstructed by bellowing acrid black smoke. Only since then did I know what the city of Dresden was, and how the Reich lied to us and committed atrocities that were unheard of. As the rubble was cleared and independence of the German Democratic Republic declared, my destiny seemingly had been written for me by politicians: an unskilled laborer would join the National People's Army or starve over depleted soil.

Two winters ago I left for Moscow for training, although we had spent more time in a classroom with political commissar Makarov than on any firing range or field exercise. It was made clear to us that we were the front line for any war between the East and West, and our complete loyalty and effort was the standard for both the success of the Warsaw pact and its citizens. Still, it is clearer to me that our Germanic union, which was raised from the ashes along with the rest of Eastern Europe by the Soviet’s, was done so unwillingly by its people. Why else would our government limit and then cease our foreign travel, our defen-

sive border wall crowned by barbed wire facing inwards? It is evident to me, my comrades, most of those I've met that we are soldiers for the people yet against them. But I am left with no option other than to fulfill my duty, as failure will surely result in the Stasi visiting my aging parents whom I would most likely never see again. A system of distrust and fear, but how can I deny its effectiveness.

A sudden kick in my shin jolts me from my peaceful daze of times past. Oskar lunges over to the side of the tower, swaying it nervously. I follow his gaze below with the searchlight, flipping the crude copper circuit temporarily blinding the gravel below. Our alertness raised the attention of the neighboring post a few hundred meters to our right, responsively shining their light towards us searching along the layers of fence and containment field below. “I swore I saw something along the first line” he spurts out, clutching his papasha submachine gun close to his chest. Only a few months prior two comrades were shot by escapees, resulting in our order to shoot to kill without hesitation. The buzzing of electric current through the bulb drowns out the deafening silence between us, as I swivel the light farther through the coverless landscape. After a few moments I relax my posture, “could have been a blowing leaflet” I offer, but he refuses to loosen his tight grip along the cold steel magazine. We are both fully aware that the safety of not only our lives, but those of our families as well depends on our success. The more I think about it the more nightmarish this reality becomes. Our comrades to the east extinguish their light, and I follow. *False alarm, paranoia at worst* I think to myself as I attempt to warm my ears from the shifting breeze, my helmet offering protection from small-caliber bullets but nothing from the elements.

I gaze at the moon once more only for it to be blackened by a cloud, the only light now either reflecting gently off the water from the West or from our meager floodlights. I could now barely see the farthest fence dividing our capital, reconnecting a street that once bustled with city life and the rail line which hauled commuters from my hometown. Just as suddenly as the world had darkened it burst into blazing light as our neighboring guard shouts, “Stop or I will shoot!” I fumble throwing the searchlight in the general direction when I see two figures scurrying up the final mesh fence. Before my eyes could completely focus on the defectors a series of flashes blind me, along a dozen unmistakable cracks of a Ppsh. I rub them only to look up and watch one figure crumple down to the gravel while the other sprints down the West German street into an alleyway. Twisting myself around I punch the alarm button, activating an additional series of floodlights and triggering an air raid siren. Only then do I look at Oskar, his pupils enlarged showing a mixture of terror and emptiness inside. His knuckles are white as he clutches his weapons muzzle guard, its barrel steaming off the now sulfurous air. “I got him,” he whispers dryly.

Dozens of border guards flock to the fence from both sides as the seriousness of the situation settles on me. West German civilians begin to gather along the street, screaming “murderer!” and other obscenities while a group of comrades drags the body through the maze of mines and barbed wire. What must have been minutes felt like an eternity as we both came to our conclusions of what had just occurred. Our tower shakes as someone walks up the rickety staircase, the silver braided insignia with three studs representing a senior field officer. We instantly salute, my hand slightly trembling from a mixture of adrenaline and fear of the fate which he will decide for us. “I congratulate you on the elimination of the defector, although the other had successfully breached the board, the negligence and cowardice of the eastern tower leading to their failure to fire is to blame. The two of you will follow me as the Stasi investigates the incident, however, I can assure you that you will both be rewarded for your heroic actions and loyalty to the nation.” He shepherds us down our tower to an awaiting Uaz car, Oskar and I squeezing into the horsehair rear bench.

The cobbled streets were peaceful as we drove towards the Stasi headquarters, its bricks although chipped telling a long history of their own. A history that started long before me, one which holds tales of celebration and horror. Today they are marched on by hammer and sickle, dirtying and degrading them, but I pray one day they will again flourish under the bright city lights. A sharp right turn darts us past two officers waiting at a residence's door. I have questioned how the Stasi are any better than the Gestapo when they drive the same fear into the people, obeying out of survival rather than the national unity to which all East Germans pledged an oath. A system of fear is one which I have stood for, but I can now only dream of throwing my medal for exemplary border service as far as I can into the North Atlantic. I am unsure of what Oskar is thinking now, but I will ask for my leave and gather my parents, neighbors, and all I can who are willing to seek sanctuary west. From now on I am a traitor to my government, but I will be the hero of the people.

2

Essay

> “And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. ”
>
> –Sylvia Plath

Essay

The Monsters Within Us: Anxiety Disorders Compared to Monster Traits

by

Salma Alrowaie

Salma Alrowaie is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mechanical Engineering. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael Nichols' SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. Instead of simply analyzing monsters from ancient, classical, and contemporary times, Salma took a twist on the topic. As she delved into the intricacies of human nature and behavior, she became intrigued by the formidable monster that plagued the mind and manifested itself in different forms of anxiety, and she compared it to a multitude of monsters.

“Do fears always take the same shapes, or do nations and cultures have distinctive fears that may metamorphose through the centuries?” (Braudy, 2016, p. 2). As societies continued to evolve, their definition of a monster has taken on many different forms, often reflecting people’s fears. In classical mythology, monsters were often depicted grotesquely and had no redeeming qualities. In later years, monsters were associated with religion, and they often portrayed the contrast between good and evil, with the devil, for example, being a monster. Post-Enlightenment, monsters began to reflect social deviance as explained in *What if we've been misunderstanding monsters?* Reflecting people's fears of corruption, chaos, and so on (Delistraty, 2021). To examine what shapes people's views of a monster, we must address the root of the issue. Fear stems from a mental and physiological phenomenon called anxiety, and research about improving the mental health of youth explains how the two are interrelated (Foa et al., 2012, chapter 9). Moreover, people either fear a current situation or worry about a future unwanted event. Like monsters, anxiety disorders come in different forms, and they often take on typical monster traits. Thus, anxiety disorders are comparable to monsters in terms of how they invoke fear, specifically, through their scary imagery, unpredictable nature, and how they affect people's lives.

When people think of a monster, the first thing that comes to mind is an abnormal or disfigured creature that lurks in the shadows and torments people, but according to the journal article *The Anatomy of a Monster: The Case of Slenderman*, they are much more than that. “A monster is a cultural construct. By definition, it is a thing that shows or reflects cultural fears and forbidden obsessions, social and moral problems that express themselves in the body and behavior of the monstrous creature” (Boyer, 2013, p. 240). Nevertheless, monsters exist in various forms, but they generally share the same attributes. The most obvious trait to discuss would be the monsters' appearances. Monsters are the farthest thing from humans, with completely dehumanizing features such as sharp fangs and claws, extra or missing body parts, exaggerated features, supernatural abilities, etc. These characteristics are crucial in understanding the motive behind creating the monster and what it symbolizes. In the literary classic *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein's monster was created to encompass the highest standards of beauty, but as the novel goes on, he is described as an ugly wretch and an ogre (Shelley, 1992, p. 113). Although the monster becomes eloquent in speech throughout the story, people still feared him due to his demeanor. This could symbolize peoples' tendency to judge based on looks as opposed to substance, which is considered to be an unacceptable trait in society.

Like monsters, there are several types of anxiety disorders that manifest themselves differently depending on the person and their experiences. Though anxiety is not necessarily gruesome, the human mind is capable of creating hallucinations or delusional beliefs that

might seem that way. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), for example, occurs following trauma, and those who struggle with PTSD begin to relieve the frightening event in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, and disturbing images (Foa et al., 2012). In this case, the monster is not a physical creature that inflicts harm on you but rather it is your mind. One example of therapeutic work pertaining to monster imagery was on an adult who hallucinates a purple demon. Upon digging deeper into this imagery, the purple demon turned into an orange square that makes noises, then a lady with dragon eyes, and finally it developed into a clear image of the patient's teacher who hit him as a child. The hallucinations transformed into memories of the traumatic experience, allowing the patient to process the past and understand why it has emerged into his present (Hamilton, 2020). Furthermore, horrifying hallucinations of unnatural creatures could hold significant meaning, and understanding what these monsters symbolize could help people cope with their anxiety.

Not only are monsters associated with their terrifying appearance, but they also invoke fear due to their unpredictable nature. People can identify when a certain situation becomes dangerous or threatening, but when it comes to monsters, their behavior is erratic. For instance, Delistraty (2021) explains why Medusa exhibits "pure wickedness." The author goes on to explain that part of what makes Medusa frightening is her ability to turn people into stone by simply looking at them, so one look in the wrong direction could be fatal. Similarly, supernatural monsters such as evil spirits can hide in inanimate objects and eventually possess humans when provoked. This can be observed in the movie *Annabelle* when a demon possesses a vintage doll and begins terrorizing the settlers of the new home (Leonetti, 2017). Monsters also exhibit sudden violent behavior that leaves their prey paralyzed, or even worse, dead. In Heaney's *Beowulf*, Grendel the monster chose to wreak havoc one day, so he captured thirty innocent men, took them to his lair, and murdered them mercilessly (Heaney, 2000, p. 11). Another act of violence can be seen in the Sanskrit Epic *The Ramayana* when Ravana, also referred to as the grand tormentor, shot arrows that had heads with frightening eyes, fangs, and fiery tongues in an attempt to kill the hero Rama (Narayan & Kampar, 2006, p. 144).

There is no way to predict when a monster will strike, and they often catch people by surprise. Some anxiety disorders work in the same fashion and overwhelm individuals when they least expect it. Moreover, anxiety disorders resemble ghosts, they cannot be seen but they are capable of inflicting considerable damage on people. One disorder known as panic disorder, usually characterized by frequent panic attacks, involves paroxysms of fear or anxiety associated with somatic symptoms (Foa et al., 2012). What is most frightening about this specific monster is that it comes without a warning. According to *Panic Disorder*, an article published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, there is often no trig-

ger for panic attacks, leaving its victims feeling helpless or out of control (Cackovic et al., 2022). To illustrate this sensation, a woman named Corky Klein recounted one of her experiences with panic attacks to the American Association of Retired Persons. She stated, "Your heart is beating horribly, and that brings on more panic. You get this scared feeling and you want to run. But you're frozen. You can't move. You think the end is coming" (Crouch, 2020). It can almost be compared to being possessed by a demon or an evil spirit that has a mind of its own, and the only way to escape is to seek help and develop techniques that will help you slay your inner demons.

Due to the characteristics described above, monsters can make it harder for people to go about their day-to-day lives. In the horror movie *Lights Out*, two young women named Sophie and Diana were admitted to the same psychiatric hospital, the latter becoming overly sensitive to light and latching on to Sophie for support. The staff tried to cure her by subjecting her to intense light therapy that ended up killing her, so Diana tethered herself to Sophie and made sure to kill anyone that would get her treatment. Diana even went out of her way to harm Sophie when she attempted to take her antidepressants. The evil spirit would come and attack people once the lights were out, and as soon as Sophie realized that Diana was linked to her own consciousness, she committed suicide to protect her family from the evil spirit (Sandberg, 2016). Throughout the whole movie, Sophie's children Martin and Rebecca were attacked by Diana when the lights went out, leaving them paranoid of the dark. Martin could not sleep since Diana continued to terrorize him, and Rebecca was traumatized after her first encounter with Diana left her injured. Similarly, monsters such as Bloody Mary popping up on mirrors, the Boogeyman creeping under children's beds, and many others have had that same effect. They have made it hard for people to live at peace as they were always anxious about the imminent danger surrounding them.

Diana's spirit left the family on edge and paranoid, likewise, some anxiety disorders impede people's way of life. Moreover, Social anxiety disorder, as explained in *Social Anxiety Disorder: More Than Just a Little Shyness*, is characterized by a persistent fear of social or performance situations (Jefferson, 2001). This impacts almost every aspect of life since our education, careers, and relationships involve social interactions. Furthermore, people suffering from social anxiety feel even more anxious at the thought that others might see their visible signs of anxiety. Another anxiety disorder that gives people a tough time interacting with the world around them is obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). As reported in the article *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* in the journal Nature Reviews. Disease Primers, OCD is defined as repetitive and persistent thoughts, images, impulses, or urges that are intrusive and unwanted, and are commonly associated with anxiety (Stein et al., 2019, p. 2). Like social anxiety, OCD makes life more challenging for those who suffer from it. That be-

ing said, Stein et al. (2019) explain how common sets of compulsions and obsessions include concerns about contamination, symmetry, hoarding, and harm-related symptoms. People that struggle with OCD often find it hard to feel in control of their body and mind; thus, their quality of life is reduced.

In conclusion, monsters have taken up many different forms throughout the centuries, symbolizing a multitude of society's fears and reflecting a nation's culture. Like monsters, there are various types of anxiety disorders, and the severity of each one depends on the person they are affecting. The first aspect that makes monsters scary is their horrifying physical appearance. They were created in a symbolic way that stripped them of all human characteristics to emphasize society's fears. Similarly, anxiety can create terrifying images and hallucinations in its victim's head after they have been subjected to trauma. Another trait in monsters that invokes fear is their unpredictability. Monsters exhibit sudden acts of violence that stunt their victims, likewise, anxiety is also unpredictable and strikes people when they least expect it. Finally, monsters can disrupt their victims' daily lives. On one hand, monsters leave people on edge and paranoid about the harm that they could incur at any given moment. On the other hand, some anxiety disorders negatively impact almost all aspects of daily life. All in all, whether people fear the monsters that their societies have created or the ones that live within their minds, these monsters have a significant impact on how we perceive the world and how we live our lives.

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Essay

How Horror Scares Us

by

Lukas Schmalhofer

Lukas Schmalhofer is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Professional Flight Technology. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Wei's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. Lukas' passion for horror and stories of the supernatural as well as his interest in the Japanese literary art from of manga combine in his paper by analyzing the famous horror mangaka Junji Ito and his most well-known work *Uzumaki*.

We are all scared of something. We have rational or plausible fears, like the fear of failure or one's death, things that could genuinely or will happen. We also have primal fear or a common phobia, such as a fear of snakes, spiders, and heights, fears that are programmed into our brains to aid us in survival. However, irrational fears or implausible, learned fears are harder to explain. For example, the fear of clowns, ghosts, and other monsters that pose no actual threat to us or do not make logical sense is present in many individuals. Almost all of us have been scared of something supernatural or non-existent when we were smaller. Since then, we have gotten over these scary stories told around campfires and nightmares of monsters under our beds, but irrational fears are ever-present and used to significant effect in media. Many famous horror stories in literature and film use the supernatural to scare their audience, but how and why? How come shivers run down our spine while ingesting these stories in the comfort of our homes? Why do these supernatural events, beings, or entities scare us when we know they do not exist? Why do creators of these stories choose to add them, and what purpose do they serve? A perfect example of how and why supernatural horror stories scare us can be seen in the Japanese manga *Uzumaki* (1998) by Junji Ito. Ito demonstrates how terror can effectively be created through even the most simple and abstract ideas by using cosmic horror, psychological horror, and body horror, as seen in *Uzumaki* (1998) with the use of spirals.

Unlike classic literature and film, manga is not as well-known as a horror medium. Visual storytelling in the horror genre is seemingly exclusively represented through motion pictures, and, comparingly, drawings are not generally considered fear-inducing. However, Junji Ito, the author and illustrator (also known as "mangaka") of countless horror manga, is unrivaled in his craft. Junji Ito, born July 31st, 1963, in Nakatsugawa, Japan, has created eerily beautiful yet intensely frightening stories and art. His works range from longer-running series, such as his first title, *Tomie* (1987-2000), to short stories like "The Enigma of Amigara Fault" (2002), a tale about a man-eating mountain, and reimaginations of already existing horror stories such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Ito can create pure terror in minuscule things the reader would usually not think twice about, creating a torturing and never-ending fever dream that gives him the "Master of Horror" title in Japan.

Where Junji Ito shines the most is in his magnum opus, *Uzumaki* (1998). *Uzumaki*, first serialized from 1998 to 1999 in the weekly manga magazine *Big Comic Spirits,* is a horror manga about the supernatural events that take place in the fictional Japanese coastal town of Kurouzu-cho. The manga is a collection of individual stories and accounts of these hauntings that connect to a larger whole. What binds these stories together are spirals, the literal translation of the manga's title. Spirals are a recurring pattern that plays a role in almost every panel and is involved in every supernatural event. Throughout the manga, the

spirals slowly affect all the citizens and the city of Kurouzu-cho itself, resulting in the city's transformation into a massive singular spiral. Ito tells the story through the eyes of our main protagonists, high schooler Kirie Goshima and her boyfriend Shuichi Saito, as they witness, attempt to solve, and ultimately fall victim to the spiral's curse.

Why is this "spiral curse" scary? The reader should not be scared of a simple pattern. First, it is unrealistic and absurd to believe such events could happen. Furthermore, the reader knows nothing about the curse other than it suddenly appears and haunts a city. They do not know where it comes from, its intentions, why it is hostile toward the citizens, and even how it physically "works" and exists! Well, this is precisely why it *is* terrifying. One of Junji Ito's most significant inspirations is the work of H.P. Lovecraft. The famous American sci-fi horror writer Lovecraft is famous for implementing "cosmic horror," also known and coined after him as "Lovecraftian horror," in his stories. Cosmic horror is a subgenre inextinguishable in Junji Ito's works, especially in *Uzumaki* (1998). Vivian Ralickas, an English teacher at Marianopolis College, describes Cosmic Horror in her scholarly journal *"Cosmic Horror" and the Question of the Sublime in Lovecraft* (2007) as "that fear and awe we feel when confronted by phenomena beyond our comprehension, whose scope extends beyond the narrow field of human affairs and boasts of cosmic significance—compels the expansion of the experiencing subject's imagination." Cosmic horror explores the insignificance of human existence compared to the vast universe. It surrounds itself with the unknown, intangible, and incomprehensible, creating fear out of what we do not understand. Due to humanity's innate curiosity, the fear of the unknown is ever-present. Even worse, humanity's fear of not knowing or being able even slightly to understand or comprehend something leads to feelings of helplessness. Worst of all, realizing that humans are dealing with something on a cosmic level - far greater than anything they could ever imagine - renders them insignificant and worthless. Humans crave control, and in cosmic horror, characters have no control; they, alongside the reader, are at the mercy of mysterious outer, unknown forces, creating horrible anxiety and forcing the reader to imagine their darkest fears.

Uzumaki (1998) is full of cosmic horror. The supernatural events in the story are left unexplained, and characters can only delay their inevitable demise against a seemingly all-powerful force. The spirals are both the vessel and evidence of this cosmic horror. A specific example is chapter nine, "The Black Lighthouse." In this short episode, the abandoned lighthouse in Kurouzu-cho suddenly radiates immense, vertigo-inducing light that disturbs citizens. The lighthouse unnaturally affects the citizens, causing dizziness and rendering those who view the light too long permanently unable to walk correctly. No one knows why the lighthouse has become operational again, and all attempts to enter and investigate the

lighthouse have been unsuccessful, with those who enter unexplainably disappearing. Finally, one afternoon, Kirie ends up in the lighthouse attempting to find her little brother, who wandered inside out of curiosity. They find the burned corpses of those who have entered before them, and at the top is an unexplainable, alien-like, spiral-shaped lamp (Figure 1). Kirie realizes that the lamp instantly incinerates those entering the lighthouse while it operates at night. Kirie grabs her brother and is able to escape before dusk, but the chapter ends on a sour note. The city is left powerless, unable to stop the seemingly sentient lighthouse. The reader does not know why the spiral lamp is shining, why it hypnotizes those who look at it, and what this "being" is. Ito does not use cosmic horror to create fear in the reader but uses it so that the reader's imagination creates fear for him.

Figure 1

Another example of cosmic horror in *Uzumaki* (1998) that better touches on the "cosmic" aspect of the subgenre is the ending. At the manga's conclusion, Kirie and Shuichi venture underneath the Kurouzu-cho in search of Kirie's missing parents. At this point, the entire city has morphed into one giant spiral. All of the inhabitants have been twisted and intertwined with each other and turned to stone. Here, in a singular, double-paged frame, it is revealed that the ruins of an ancient alien or supernatural civilization lie underneath the city, catalyzing the supernatural events above (Figure 2). The ruins are massive, unearthly, and consist entirely of spirals. While Kirie looks up at this unfathomable city of swirls, she

lies upon humans' tangled and petrified bodies. This panel illustrates the incredible insignificance and powerless status that characters have had throughout the story, especially now on a cosmic scale. Unfortunately for the reader, Ito only reveals the ruins of what might have caused the cures leaving the reader to imagine the rest of the dreaded, unknown truth of what this civilization could be.

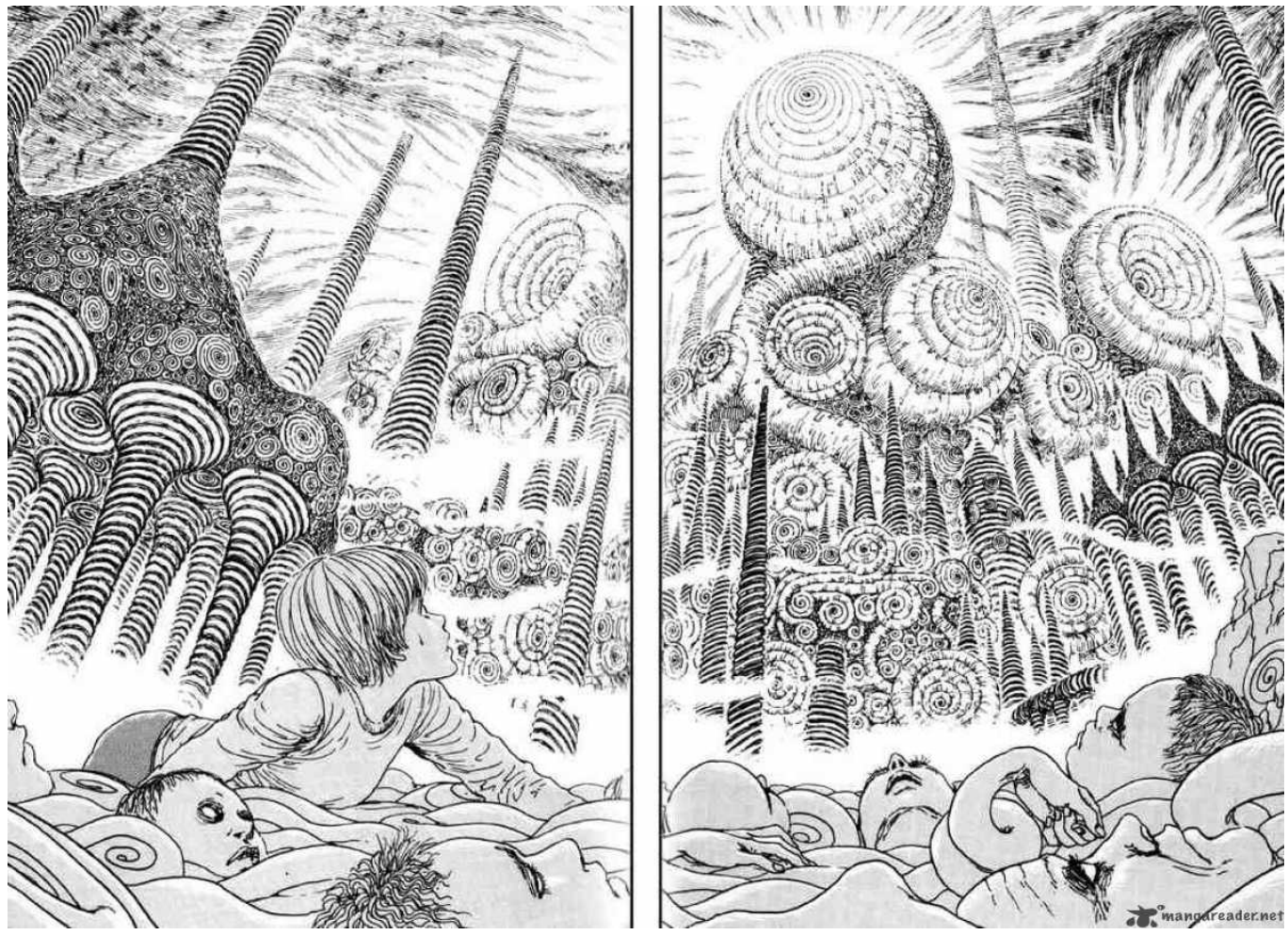

Figure 2

Another way *Uzumaki* (1998) plays with the reader's fears is through psychological horror. Unlike cosmic horror, psychological horror creates terror within the reader's minds through different methods. Instead of creating the fear of the unknown on a cosmic scale, *Uzumaki* (1998) also scares us with deeply human themes. *Uzumaki* (1998) presents the darkest parts of humanity to the extreme. Ito demonstrates that not only are others, such as unfathomable, omnipotent cosmic forces, to blame for our downfall, but ourselves. The subgenre of psychological horror scares us by playing with the emotions of the characters and the reader.

The first theme and human quality presented in the manga is obsession, specifically in the first chapter. Chapter one, fittingly named "The Spiral Obsession," is about Shuichi's dad, who slowly becomes fascinated with spirals (Figure 3). He collects countless items that contain or are made of spirals, starting a mesmerized infatuation over them. Finally, it gets

to the point that he does not go to work nor interact with his family anymore; now spending all his time madly studying spirals. The chapter ends with Shuichi and his mother finding to their horror, that Shuichi's dad turned into a spiral himself, killing him. Following this chapter, chapter two, "The Spiral Obsession Part 2," focuses on paranoia and trauma in humans. After the death of her husband through self "spiralization," Shuichi's mother becomes frightened by spirals. Like her husband, she is driven mad by the sight of a spiral. However, instead of obsession, she is traumatized by the pattern. She violently attacks any spiral she sees and even removes the spirals on her body by shaving her hair so that it does not become tangled and cutting the skin off her fingertips to remove the spirals of her fingerprints. This chapter also ends on a grim note; Shuichi's mother takes her life after being unable to live among the spirals that haunt her daily. Ito uses the themes of obsession and paranoia to make the reader feel uneasy. Instead of outright scaring us, Ito uses psychological horror to make the reader feel anxious and thrown off. Ito makes sure also not to reveal these themes early on. The chapters have a slow tension-building progression that ultimately ends in the character succumbing to their flaws, again creating feelings of hopelessness in the reader.

Figure 3

Speaking of hope, Junji Ito's *Uzumaki* (1998), like many of his other works, is a story of ill-fated characters. However, this does not mean there is no hope for the character and conflict resolution. In fact, hope is ever-present in the manga. In every chapter, Kirie and Shuichi are able to escape or survive the spiral curse, giving them more time to understand and attempt to end the maelstrom. The protagonists are the eyes of the reader, and their resolve allows them to push forward and explore deeper into the rabbit's hole. However, Junji

Ito does not write happy endings. The protagonists do not prevail, and just like every other citizen, Kirie and Shuichi meet their twisting and spiraling death (Figure 4). Ito creates terror by playing with the readers' emotions. He keeps us ensnared in the story by providing a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, only to crush it and our hope. Ito masterfully makes us believe that we can wake up from this nightmare, only to snap us back to reality.

Figure 4

Ito's final implemented aspect of psychological horror is reader-focused: subversion of expectations. Why does Ito use spirals as his "antagonist" in *Uzumaki* (1998)? Why does Ito not use something more generally seen as fear-inducing, like demons or ghosts, as his vessel of horror? Ito uses spirals because they subvert the reader's expectations. Ito "tear[s] [spirals] from the context of Japanese cultural, narrative and visual traditions in the late 20th century," says horror editor and research writer Sean Moreland in his 2018 article "The Downward Spiral: Thoughts on Lovecraftian spirituality and Ito's *Uzumak*i." Moreland (2018) mentions: "Ito's parodying of conventions of popular romance manga" as an example of how Ito changed how Japan sees spirals. Before *Uzumaki* (1998), spirals in Japanese media often depicted spirals on children's or lovers' cheeks, indicating warm and happy feelings. Alongside this, spirals often depict order and predictability, which Ito creates at the beginning of *Uzumaki* (1998). However, Ito quickly emphasizes that spirals can represent a "chaotic and unknowable [universe]," writes Moreland (2018). Therefore, Ito uses a positively depicted pattern such as a spiral as the cause of horror and chaos, which caused readers (especially Japanese) to feel uneasy and uncomfortable at the turn of the century as their previous expectations and unconscious presumptions were subverted.

Finally, Ito creates terror through body horror. Body horror is simple: gore, pain, and grotesque violations of the human body. As sci-fi writer Christy Tidwell (2021) points out in her book *Fear and Nature,* "Body Horror emphasizes the human body and its destruction" (p. 52). While other horror creators fail to employ it correctly, Junji Ito masterfully implements it in all his works, especially *Uzumaki* (1998). The first instance of body horror is at the end of chapter one, back when Shuichi's father turns himself into a spiral (Figure 5). This two-paged panel is incredibly frightening due to the unnatural, law-breaking state his family discovers him. More and more characters interlink and twist into helixes throughout the manga, and (Figure 6) later on, the reader even sees humanoid monstrosities comprised of the citizens' knotted and loose limbs and bodies (Figure 7). Finally, the best example of body horror in *Uzumaki* (1998) is arguably Ito's most famous drawing. In Chapter three, a new student arrives in Kirie's class. She instantly smites all the boys in her grade and becomes the talk of the town. The girl tells Kirie that the secret to her beauty is a birthmark on her forehead. However, this birthmark grows into a spiral that not only begins to consume the girl's face but devours those around her. The famous panel is the girl with her face now partially consumed by the spiral (Figure 8). Ito's incredible detail and the drawing of the spiral consuming the girl's eye into a ghastly vortex do not only pull those around her in but the reader itself. It is impossible to look away while the reader's mind is mesmerized by the gruesome and unnerving sight they see.

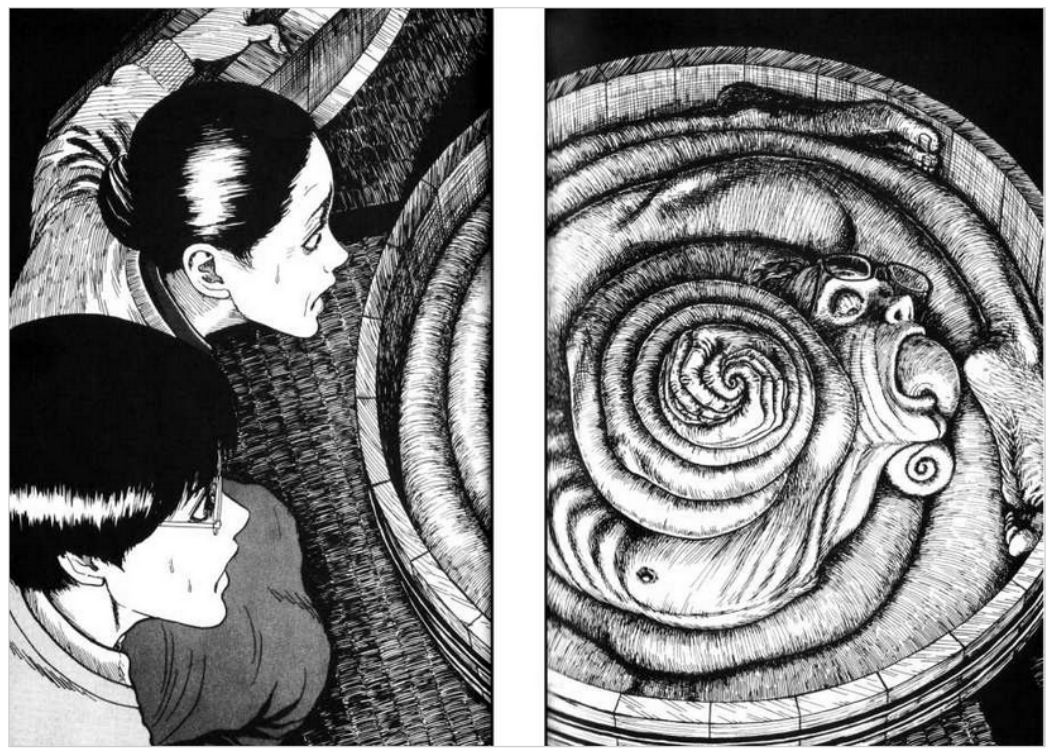

Figure 5

Why is body horror scary? While Ito's art might either make the reader look away in disdain or hypnotize the reader with its viscerally disgusting beauty, it taps into our primal fear. Tidwell (2021) explains, "through our identification...through our human sensitivity of such body parts," we "flinch and squirm" (p. 52) at the sight of body deformation. Addition-

ally, *Uzumaki* (1998) uses the uncanny valley to his favor. Ito "blur[s] [the] boundaries between human and non-human," (p. 52) says Tidwell (2021) and invokes the fear of the unnatural in the reader. Humans fear something that is human yet also not; They fear an unnatural human, humans, or events involving humans that go against all laws of nature. The abominations created by the spiral's deformation and all characters in the stories are human, yet also not. Characters affected by the spiral, such as Kirie's new classmate, are not entirely human; they are "different" and unnatural. They belong to the uncanny valley, a realm that causes immense feelings of discomfort to those who view it. Additionally, Tatiana Ivanchenko's research paper *Body Horror in Japanese Media: Manga* (2020) analyzes *Uzumaki* (1998) and refers to British anthropologist Mary Douglas's idea that "something is out of place [is] perceived as dangerous." Going off this idea, the out-of-place or unnatural deformations of the human body cause feelings of apprehension in the viewer. Therefore, using his grizzly, unnaturally human art, Ito can further create uneasiness and anxious feelings in the reader.

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

It must be mentioned that there are other reasons for how Junji Ito creates terror in *Uzumaki* (1998). One of these reasons is in Christy Tidwell's *Fear and Nature*. Tidwell (2021) argues that Ito effectively creates horror through body and cosmic horror but also brings up the argument of "ecohorror." Tidwell (2021) defines "ecohorror" as "horrific text and tropes [that] are used to promote ecological awareness, represent ecological crises, or blur human/non-human distinctions more broadly" (p. 42). She argues that *Uzumaki* (1998) is an example of ecohorror as "it addresses the natural world by representing major spiral effects in the air and water that mirror real-world natural disasters." While environmental phenomena could inspire the events of Kurouzu-cho in *Uzumaki*

(1998), ecohorror is not used as a tool of terror. Ito does not scare the reader by reminding them of natural disasters in the real world. No event involving the spirals invokes the thought of a natural disaster due to the abstract and unique nature of the events. *Uzumaki* (1998) is unlike anything else and cannot be compared to something "usual."

In conclusion, Junji Ito, the Japanese Master of Horror, provides an example with his highly acclaimed manga *Uzumaki* (1998), why supernatural horror and horror as a genre can scare us so effectively. Furthermore, Ito proves that we can be scared by even the most minor and abstract things, such as a simple pattern of spirals, by effectively implementing the concepts of horror such as cosmic, psychological, and body horror. Ito ignites the reader's fear of the unknown, unsavable, and unnatural in something the reader would never think twice about. Ito sucks the reader into the inescapable whirlpool of terror and anxiety, which is *Uzumaki* (1998).

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Essay

Feminism in Disney Classics and Myths of the Past

by

Ruchitha Jagana

Ruchitha Jagana is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science Honors. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Nichols's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2021. Her inspiration behind this work was not only her love for Disney classics, but also an interest in the progression of feminist perspectives and how they influenced the way stories are told. In an effort to support the advancement of female empowerment over time, she hopes that this work will help us understand how feminism has been portrayed in the past and in the present.

Disney classics have always played a prominent part in many of our childhoods. From the timeless *Cinderella* tale with the famous glass slipper, to *The Little Mermaid* exchanging her voice for human legs, these stories and countless more have shaped numerous lives, ideologies, and phenomena as they are seen today. Amongst these ideologies, one that Disney has played a major influential role in, is feminism. While the origins of feminism began in the early nineteenth and twentieth century, the beliefs and theories that align with feminism have changed drastically over the past several years, Disney films being one of the sources of this change.

Through their various character arcs and storylines, Disney films have transformed the feminine character from how they were once seen in stories of the past, to newfound feminine values and traits. Specifically, films like *Brave* and *Moana* have become a major stepping stone in creating a new definition of feminism and female roles in today's society, which is disclosed by the contrast of feminism in past stories and myths, like *Gilgamesh*.

Feminism is officially defined as the "social, academic and political assertion that women should be seen and treated as equal to men" (Crawford, 2009, para. 1). However, despite this definition being the foundational concept that oversees feminism, there is a plurality to feminism through the various ways different groups express it. Feminism is generally seen to have established itself in four waves: the first being the women's suffrage movement, the second, challenging the breadwinner and housewife duo, the third, redefining gender as distinct from one's biological sex, and the fourth wave, using social media to shed light towards women's sexual harassment stories and body image expectations (Schiele et al., 2020).

Due to these various waves of feminism, expectations of the female role and the characteristics associated with women have drastically changed throughout time. For many, what once was considered acceptable in the past, would be considered terribly frowned upon during current times, and vice versa. Thus, as a result, as we see these changes occur in society, we see a reflection of these changes occur in the media that is created, whether it is through books, movies, or any other type of modern media. Specifically, in this context, the changes that we see in the female role are seen through the comparison of modern Disney films to mythical stories of the past, such as *Gilgamesh*.

In the epic of *Gilgamesh,* which can be dated back all the way to 2100 BC, the female and male roles carry vast differences. Men were seen as strong, powerful beings, whose role was to be all mighty and take possession of women. The female character however, was diminished to being submissive to what a man wanted from a woman. Gilgamesh, for exam-

ple, as the king that held complete power in Uruk, “is he who mates first with the lawful wife. After he is done, the bridegroom follows” (Mitchell, 2004, p. 87). The bride is expected to wait “in her bed to open to him… to forget her husband and open to the king” (Mitchell, 2004, p. 89). From these lines, it is seen that the female character in the epic is inferior to the male role. Giving men the power and right to sleep with women however they choose, displays the lack of respect women get in Uruk society and their treatment as sex objects. Moreover, the bride having no say in her marriage and simply expected to let the king sleep with her, further emphasizes the woman’s role as a prize and satisfaction for men, and nothing else.

While it is possible to argue that the female role in *Gilgamesh* is not strictly limited to this singular mockery of women as Shamhat, a priestess in the epic, is respected greatly, it is demeaning to see that the respect she gets is still correlated with her sexuality as a woman. In the epic, Shamhat is described as a priestess “who gives their bodies to any man”. She is expected to “strip off her robe and lie there naked, ready, with her legs apart” (Mitchell, 2004, p. 77).

Although this role for a woman is revered in this time period and society, it is degrading that a woman can only be respected through this manner. While all the male characters in the epic are regarded for their strength, bravery, or intelligence, a woman’s path to respect is only obtained if it has to do with her sexuality and her service towards men.

Having now analyzed the epic of *Gilgamesh*, it is seen that the female role is often singularly defined by passive characteristics and sexuality due to the way society viewed females during that time. However, as mentioned earlier, as the waves of feminism have progressed, these changes have been implemented and expanded through the stories that are created—such as the way Disney has changed the way they have depicted their female characters over the years. When comparing these movies in accordance to the time it was released in, it is seen that the female role in each film reflects the time period it is in.

Starting with one of the first and most popular Disney films ever to be created, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* showcases the female character, Snow White, as the typical stereotypical woman of that time. She is a restricted character, who tends to cook, clean, and act very emotional during the film (Kizhan et al., 2021). It is also seen that Snow White is extremely dependent on the male character. It takes a true love’s kiss from the prince in order to wake Snow White up from her sleep, and at the end of the film, the prince has to carry Snow White rather than simply showing them walking together or holding hands. Furthermore, the way Disney chose to name Snow White emphasizes the purity and inno-

cence they were trying to encapsulate in her character as the color white is often associated with these characteristics.

However, this is not the first film in Disney where the female character is illustrated in such a submissive manner. In *Cinderella,* which was also released in a similar timeframe to *Snow White,* Cinderella is seen as a classic girl, "cute, lively, of medium build, weighing about 120 pounds—and with a tender heart for boys and animals" (Davis, 2005). Additionally, Cinderella's character is heavily dependent on the male role as her life prior to the prince is miserable due to her wicked step-sisters and evil step-mother. However, the movie depicts Cinderella as able to overcome all her problems back home and as the happiest she has ever been with the arrival of Prince Charming.

Snow White and *Cinderella* seem to have many backward notions, and this is most likely due to the fact that the inspiration for these stories was based upon folktales that were far older (Kizhan et al., 2021). Thus, it is continuously seen how the change of time periods and the views of feminism impact the female role that is seen in the media. Due to the fact that *Cinderella* and *Snow White* were written when the first wave of feminism was still occurring and only being accepted slowly, it makes sense as to why these female leads are still dependent on a male in their lives and idolize the idea of "marriage to the Prince as a means of transforming" their lives (Kizhan et al., 2021). However, as we move along in the timeline of Disney films that have been created, the connection between a male behind a successful female fades incredibly.

In the movie *Brave,* the main character Merida defies all gender norms that are typically associated with women. As an athletic archer, a girl who is loud, and someone who does not love to wear big, pretty dresses that are typically associated with women, Merida is a prime example as to how Disney films have redefined feminine roles today. When told she must get married, Merida states, "I suppose a princess just does what she's told?" (Andrews, Chapman, Purcell, 2012*)*. Unlike other female roles in the past, Merida refuses to submit to the patriarchal notion that women are submissive. Instead, Merida continuously asserts her own opinions and values, refusing to allow other dismiss her thoughts and act subservient towards the traditions that are forced upon her. Additionally, *Brave* is one of the few Disney movies that ends the film without a male love interest for the female protagonist. This is an idea that would have been absurd to see during the time period of *Gilgamesh* or *Snow White* and *Cinderella* as marriage has always been considered an orthodox and undisputed standard.

Similarly, this same newfound feminine role is seen in the Disney film *Moana*. In this film, Moana is forbidden by her overprotective father to go out beyond the reef; however, she wants nothing more to do so as she says that the ocean calls her, and she is meant to be out there. Moana's independence as a female character is depicted when she tells Maui, "I'm not a princess. I'm the daughter of the chief" (Clements, Musker, Williams, & Hall, 2016). Moana's refusal of being associated with the label of a "princess" displays her rejection of being seen as a pretty girl who wears dresses. Instead, like Merida, she wishes to be an independent girl who wants to venture out into the world. Moana's ability to continuously be determined displays that she is not a "damsel in distress", and showcases the idea that a woman can achieve the things she wishes to achieve through her own will, and at that, without a man helping her.

As seen through the various stories and films discussed, it is undeniable that Disney films have redefined the way a female is seen in society. For females that were once seen as objects and property that men could use in stories like *Gilgamesh*, the feminine role has changed to women who are capable of fighting for themselves, solving their own problems, and being independent without the male character. While female roles would still progress throughout society through the different media we have, Disney films have created a prominent impact on both female's lives and everyone's lives as a whole, as the stories they tell emphasize key ideas that shape our world today. It is through films like these that have been created, and will continue to be created that allow women to progress daily as individuals, and are still able to demolish society's deep rooted dependence on patriarchy.

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Essay

Upper Big Branch Mining Disaster: Profit Over People

by

Michael Borowinski

Michael Borowinski is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aerospace Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor William White's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. It focuses on a situation that is easily observed throughout human history: riches taking precedence over the well-being of others. He aims to draw parallels between a real-life disaster and a play while exploring the consequences of greed.

As Joshua Williams, a young miner who was working for Massey Energy, exited the Upper Big Branch mine on April 5th, 2010, an explosion rocked his mantrip and forced debris loose from the cavern walls. Williams described this moment as "when the world came to an end" (McAteer et al., 2011). Because the explosion had originated deep from within the mine, Williams was able to continue his journey out and reach safety. Others were not as lucky.

Such occurrences are not rare. Between the years of 1830 and 2000, 15,183 miners were killed in 716 different incidents (Mining Technology, 2010). Many of these miners lost their lives to enormous explosions, collapsing mines, dust/gas inhalation, and other factors. As mining related deaths became more commonplace, investigators over the years came to realize that almost all of these incidents were completely avoidable. In 1977, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) was established to protect miners and their rights. This administration works diligently to prevent unnecessary bodily harm by carrying out inspections, issuing citations, and raising concerns over potential hazards. So how could a disaster like the one that befell the Upper Big Branch mine occur in 2010, 33 years after the founding of a successful and devoted organization? In order to answer this question, one must understand the motives for any company: profit. Massey Energy, the operators of the mine, saved money by cutting corners in terms of safety and completely disregarding citations issued to them by the MSHA. This flagrant negligence is what ultimately led to 29 miners losing their lives. The point at which negligence becomes criminal and morally wrong is explored in Arthur Miller's play, *All My Sons*. Striking parallels can be drawn between Massey Energy's leadership and Joe Keller, the offender in Miller's play.

The Upper Big Branch mine exploded on April 5th, 2010 at approximately 3:27 p.m. Out of the 31 personnel on the mining site, 29 of them died that day. In the immediate reports following the disaster, 25 men were reported as killed while 4 men were missing. Rescue operations were delayed after this report because of the high concentration of toxic gasses, such as carbon monoxide and methane. After drilling into the mine from various locations in order to release some of these gasses, rescuers were able to travel slightly deeper into the mine. Hopes for finding living miners were low despite the fact that there were inflatable safety chambers in the mine — each capable of supporting around 12 miners for 8 days. It was unlikely that any miners were able to reach these facilities after the explosion, yet the community held on to hope. "We asked the Lord to watch over him," a family member told reporters (ABC News, 2010). Still, the news came from Governor Joseph Manchin III, four days after the incident; "We did not receive the miracle we were praying for," he explained (ABC News, 2010). The remaining miners were found dead, and the operation would shift to recovering the remaining 22 bodies left in the mine. After a few months, the

mine had sufficiently aired out, and it was time to begin the investigation into how such an explosion could precipitate in today's safety environment.

One of the most glaring indicators of how Massey Energy ran the Upper Big Branch mine were the over 1,000 safety violations that had amassed in the three years prior to the explosion and the 60 times federal inspectors had shut down parts of the mine in the year before the explosion (Public Radio International, 2010). These violations are a symptom of the flagrant negligence that has been engrained in Massey Energy's management culture. In a properly run mine, violations would be kept to a minimum and companies would quickly address them. Yet, there is evidence that Massey Energy was even "fighting many of the steepest fines, or simply refusing to pay them" (ABC News, 2010). If the company was not actively fighting the citations, they were doing the bare minimum to fix the condition and move on. According to the ventilation supervisor John Mackowiak, this was done many times with ventilation related citations. Revisions for the ventilation systems were made and only implemented in part or delayed so long that they were never implemented at all. Massey Energy even asserted that the suggested changes to ventilation proposed by the MSHA would harm workers, which the Governor's Independent Investigation Panel found no evidence of (McAteer et al., 2011). The lack of urgency displayed towards fixing ventilation issues is a main contributing factor to the explosion; the air was saturated with high levels of methane and any small ignition source could set off an explosion. In addition to properly ventilating the mine, it is essential to complete rock-dusting, a process where small, pulverized rock particles are dusted around the mine to impede the propagation of a coal-dust explosion. There is copious amounts of evidence that suggests that rock-dusting procedures were not properly adhered to: testimonies described the mine as not well dusted, only 11.6% of requested rock dustings were actually completed, the distance the explosion travelled was improbable given a correct amount of rock-dusting, the samples of rock dust taken after the explosion indicated a lack of dust dispersed, and more (McAteer et al., 2011). It is believed that the explosion would have been contained to a much smaller portion of the mine if rock-dusting was executed properly. Taking the citations seriously, properly maintaining the ventilation system, and ensuring that rock-dustings are completed require time and money. Things Massey Energy didn't want to lose. Similarly, Joe Keller in *All My Sons* allowed for the shipment of known cracked cylinder heads to the military. When faced with the decision of ensuring the safety of service men and women or preventing a decrease in profits, Joe Keller chose the latter. He reasoned that, "You got a process, the process don't work you're out of business. You don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good, they close you up, they tear up your contracts" (Miller, 3). Keller feared losing money and his business, much like Massey Energy. So, he sent the faulty cylinders off to the military

and covered up that he was ever aware of defects. Massey Energy feared becoming less efficient if they complied with all of the MSHA's regulations. They did the bare minimum to temporarily get by safety checks and did not take safety seriously. The results of Massey Energy's and Joe Keller's criminal negligence were the same: lives were lost.

The direct acts of Don Blankenship, the CEO of Massey Energy at the time, also speaks volumes about his and the company's priorities. One of first things Don Blankenship strove towards after acquiring the Upper Big Branch mine in the early 1990s was breaking the union that ran it (Public Radio International, 2010). After successfully doing this, miners worked 12-hour shifts, meaning that the mine was operational for all hours of the day. Massey Energy only had to pay two shifts of workers and only two shifts worth of health insurance. Fatigued workers in conditions as dangerous as those in a mine is a recipe for disaster; this was most definitely a contributing factor to the negligence that caused the explosion. The company saved money at the cost of endangering workers. Don Blankenship was also deceptive in the way he handled the company after deadly accidents. In 2009, during a criminal investigation after a fire in the Massey Energy-owned mine of Aracoma, Don Blankenship released this statement to his employees: "If any of you have been asked by your group president, supervisors, engineers, or anyone else to do anything other than run coal, you need to ignore them and run coal" (Public Radio International, 2010). The statement was later recanted, but the message was clear: do not incriminate Massey Energy. Don Blankenship also was the driving force behind Massey Energy asserting that the MSHA imposed safety regulations that Massey Energy did not agree with, and that this is what led to the explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine. However, as an independent investigation committee found, this claim was egregious and unsubstantiated (McAteer et al., 2011). This behavior towards responsibility is almost perfectly captured by Miller's character, Joe Keller. Joe Keller cleared his business partner to send out the faulty cylinder heads and claimed he would take responsibility for anything bad that may happen in the future. When appearing in front of a court room, though, he claimed no such conversation occurred and that he had no knowledge of the situation. His partner's children, Annie and George Deever, were also deceived by Keller. Keller explained that their father was a "little man" and had done bad things in the past in an attempt to make them believe him. He continued by saying, "There are certain men in the world who rather see everybody hung before they'll take blame. You understand me, George?" (Miller,3). The way Joe Keller shifted blame and created deception is eerily similar to Don Blankenship's methodology to escape blame. Blankenship attempted to deceive the courts and public by not allowing his employees to talk to investigators and shifted the blame onto a safety organization rather than allow it to be placed on himself and Massey Energy.

Negligence and criminal negligence are not uncommon in any industry due to the simple fact that industries are driven by profit. In the name of profit, corners are cut, issues go overlooked, and individuals' safety are cast aside. Massey Energy ignored and actively fought against safety citations, took a band-aid approach to fixing their ventilation systems, and rarely took part in safety measures like rock-dusting. Don Blankenship exhibited this same disregard for the lives of his employees and tried to impede the forthcoming of the truth. If money was spent ensuring the mine was safe, the explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine would have never happened. Similarly, in the case of Joe Keller from *All My Sons*, if his company had not allowed for faulty products to be shipped out and instead accepted the monetary losses, 29 pilots would never have lost their lives. Joe Keller and Massey Energy both had to pay for their crimes. Joe Keller took his own life before being taken down to the police station, and Massey Energy was fined $209 million on top of the approximately $30 million owed in safety violations (Department of Justice, 2011). One superintendent pleaded guilty to conspiring to impede the efforts of the MSHA and Don Blankenship served one year in prison. Putting profits over people is a behavior that has been omnipresent in humans. People tend to forget that money is temporary and will always be exchanged between the hands of greedy businessmen, but the loss of life is permanent.

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Essay

The Allegory of the Cave: Plato's Perception of Love

by

Pavit Hooda

Pavit Hooda is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aerospace Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment for Professor Nichols's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. This piece of writing is a part of Pavit's findings in his exploration of the nature of love. He hopes that this study of Plato's perception of love can be considered to be an authentic crimson rose that he has planted in the landscape of ideas.

Love. To experience it is to live by it. Yet, to observe it is to extinguish it. Should one attempt to examine love? The identity of love is accepted to be apparent and unquestionable, yet there have been a few rebels in history who have believed otherwise–a few rebels who have proclaimed that the emperor has no clothes. One such rebel, a great philosopher in history, Plato, believes that the topic is so elusive, that the answers are literally hidden in the shadows. Shadows projected on a cave wall, to be exact, a scenario he presents in *The Allegory of the Cave*. This allegory, famous for its epistemic lessons, offers insight into the core values that shape Plato's perception of the nature and practice of love.

The beauty of *The Allegory of the Cave* lies in its ability to have the reader extrapolate tremendously complex interpretations from a rather simple scenario. The allegory presents the reader with prisoners in a cave that are restrained to only seeing a cave wall. As explained by Plato himself, "Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners, there is a raised way" (Plato, 2015, p. 1). Between this raised way and the cave wall, travelers pass through the cave carrying various objects. The shadows of these objects are projected onto the cave wall by the fire. Therefore, to the prisoners, who grew up in these conditions, "The truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images" (Plato, 2015, p. 2). The allegory then delves into the idea of a prisoner escaping these restraints and discovering the reality behind the casted shadows. The prisoner then returns from the outside and is quickly ostracized for their inability to perceive the shadows in the same way as those who never escaped. They "would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes" (Plato, 2015, p. 4).

The allegory is a part of Plato's *Republic*, a work that speaks about the role of ignorance in their local society. *The Allegory of the Cave* is presented as a conversation between Plato's brother Glaucon and his mentor Socrates. At first, it's clear that this piece is a comment on the nature of knowledge and truth. The allegory seems to make the reader question their reality and their ability to know what is real and true, or just a shadow in their perception of reality. These lessons stem from one of Plato's main contributions to the field of philosophy, his theory of forms. This theory suggests that there is a realm of perfect entities, and everyday objects and ideas are unique instantiations of these entities. This means that according to Plato, "What we encounter in the world through sensory experience is not truly real; instead, what is truly real is the eternal and unchanging Forms or Ideas, which can only be grasped intellectually" (Walton, 2008, p. 1). The separation between the essence of an object and one's perception of it is evident in *The Allegory of the Cave*, where there is a detachment between the shadows, the prisoner's perception of reality, and the objects that make up those shadows. A key element of Plato's theory of forms is the ability to achieve the perception of these higher order of reality through the love of another individual, a topic in-

vestigated in *The Symposium*. Therefore, in this new framework, the reader can interpret *The Allegory of the Cave* to provide insight into the nature and practice of both love and knowledge.

Plato's views on love are best unveiled in *The Symposium*. This philosophical text is of the same conversational style as *The Allegory of the Cave*. The conversation takes place at a dinner party of multiple philosophers and key people. The conversation was made up of monologues of people expressing their understanding of the meaning of love, and how to practice it effectively. All the characters acted as mouthpieces for Plato and his ideas. Among the speakers were Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades. Each monologue presented a unique perspective on the meaning of love. Most speakers interpreted love as a divine figure and used love in the heavenly context: "In Plato's *Symposium* the gods are described as being complete within themselves, self-sufficient, autonomous by virtue of their absolute perfection… the gods, therefore, love nothing but themselves. That is the great difference between the gods and human beings" (Singer, 1984, p. 4). However, Socrates interpreted the topic of love in a more secular style, a fashion that is more aligned with the themes presented in *The Allegory of the Cave*. He spoke about a wise woman named Diotima. According to Diotima, love takes the form of a spirit. A spirit that mediates between people and the object of their desire. Love, this spirit, expresses itself through pregnancy and reproduction. This can occur either through sexual bodily love or through the reproduction of ideas. This reproduction of ideas with your mate is what allows one to attain knowledge of the higher form of realities, the same higher form described in Plato's theory of forms.

As written in *The Symposium*, Diotima presents a rather systematic approach to the practice of love. At first, there is bodily love or lust, and then a relationship must work its way up a ladder towards purer and purer forms of beauty. In *The Symposium*, Diotima states that after bodily love, "he must think that the beauty of people's souls is more valuable than the beauty of their bodies" (Nehamas, 1989, p. 58). Both partners in the relationship must then appreciate the beauty of the more and more divine, until finally reaching the love of beauty in its purest form, which is God. This action of uncovering more and more information or knowledge about your partner and the world that they live in is very similar to the situation portrayed in *The Allegory of the Cave*. At first, the prisoners are restrained to only shadows of objects in their reality, and then when one of them is released, they are able to achieve knowledge about their reality that they were not able to before. Therefore, breaking from the restraints can be considered parallel to the achievement of love.

Additionally, the achievement of a higher realm with the aid of a partner is included in *The Allegory of the Cave*. In the allegory, after the prisoner is released from the restraints, an omniscient instructor is introduced to the flow of the story: "As you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, will he not be perplexed?" (Plato, 2015, p. 2). This instructor's purpose in the allegory is to teach the newly freed prisoner the ways of the free world. Even though this instructor does not perfectly fit into the narrative of the cave and the seclusion of the prisoners, Plato found it necessary to introduce a new person into the journey of discovery. This suggests that Plato is trying to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between human connection and the pursuit of truth. The same relationship that was described in *The Symposium*.

To delve into Plato's perception of love, it is important to put the topic of love into a philosophical context that is related to Plato. The undefinable nature of love has made the topic quite untraditional in the eyes of philosophers. Many philosophers have resorted to the study of the psychology of love, while others have decided to create a philosophical framework to define the hidden magic of love. Plato belongs in the category of the latter. If Plato was asked if the undefinable nature of love inhibited the philosophical exploration of the topic, "He would have been amazed at the question, not only can he offer a detailed definition of it; it was central to his philosophy and therefore to what are today considered, in most respects, distinct fields like ethic, metaphysics, and aesthetics" (May 2011, p. xi). This unique perspective on the subject of love allows for Plato's immense understanding and curiosity about love to be explicitly evident in *The Symposium* and implicitly suggested in many of his other works, such as *The Allegory of the Cave*. The extent to which these themes are deliberately present throughout his work is unknown, however, the presence of the parallels can help readers get further into the mind of Plato.

To dive deeper into the parallels found in the philosophical work of Plato, there is a major lesson taught in *The Symposium* about the distinction between object and essence. *The Symposium* states, "Love enables us to get beyond a superficial relation to things—people, nature, object—to what is absolutely valuable about them" (May, 2011, p. 40). This is a lesson that transcends the philosophical category of love, the main theme of the philosophical piece, and delves into the epistemic themes present in *The Allegory of the Cave*. In the allegory, it was asked that when a prisoner "coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?" (Plato, 2015, p. 3). The contrast between the enlightenment reached by being exposed to the sun, and the darkness of the cave, suggests that knowledge about the shadow's true nature has been revealed to the prisoner, and he now lives in two different worlds. One where the objects have

valuable meaning, and one where the prisoner's understanding of reality is based on superficial shadows. This is the same dichotomy present in the lesson from *The Symposium*.

To continue, in *The Allegory of the Cave*, the prisoner that escaped comes back to a 'society' that does not accept the new knowledge that he has acquired. As stated before, the prisoners who remained "would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes" (Plato, 2015, 4). The display of the ostracization of this one prisoner suggests Plato's beliefs about the role of knowledge in human connection. The prisoners not accepting him due to an imbalance of ignorance of their reality is reminiscent of the ladder described in *The Symposium*. Diotima taught that the reproduction of ideas was a key element to a relationship. And now that the prisoners that never left believe that they do not think in the same way as the prisoner that escaped, Plato wrote that this warranted a sufficient reason to abandon him and destroy the human connection between them.

Even when described by Plato, one of the greatest philosophers in history, love does not take on a comfortable or concrete form. Great texts such as *The Allegory of the Cave* can, therefore, provide valuable insight into this topic and clear some ambiguity. Then it comes down to the individual to shape and mold the identity of love to fit the nuances and characteristics of their own life. This may be why one of the greatest things in life is so greatly misunderstood. People are too occupied pursuing an objective and universal understanding, while the true nature of love is hidden in the *shadows* that only that individual can perceive.

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Essay

The Hero-Monster and Father-Son Relationship Equivalency: A Study of The Godfather Films

by
Mohammad Khokha

Mohammad Khokha is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mechanical Engineering Technology. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael Nichols's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2021. The film *Godfather* and its sequel, which was an obsession of his, served as inspirations for this essay. He recognized that they shared similarities with both more recent films and literary works from a century earlier, which led him into this comparative analysis of the father-son relationship and the dialectics between heroes and monsters.

Complex family dynamics are very relatable. They are often the main feature in stories. Brothers feuding over their parents' attention or overbearing parents generating resentful children are examples of familial relationships that are not perfectly positive. However, one of the most complex familial relationships is the father-son relationship. In various stories across history and medium, this relationship forms the basis from which conflict occurs. From Shelley's Frankenstein to *The Godfather*, the complicated father-son relationship forms the crux of the conflict between the featured characters. While these stories have very different story arcs and plot devices, they have many similarities, specifically how they equate two seemingly distinct relationships, the father-son, and hero-monster. The hero-monster relationship embodies the father-son relationship in various stories across history and different mediums. This equivalency shows how intrinsic family strife is to the human condition.

The Godfather films, Part I and II, elegantly illustrate the equivalency of father-son and hero-monster relationships, one of many stories across history and medium. *The Godfather*, released in 1972 and directed by Francis Ford Coppola, tells the story of the Corleone crime family, a fictitious Mafia criminal organization from New York. After WWII, the movie starts with the wedding of Vito Corleone's daughter. Marlon Brando plays Vito Corleone, the patriarch of the Corleone crime family (giving him the title of "Don"). Later in the film, a man named Virgil Sollozzo tries to entice Don Corleone to distribute narcotics, to which Vito refuses. This refusal then kicks off a chain of events that leads to the shooting of Don Corleone and his eldest son Santino and an all-out war between the Corleone and Barzini crime families (Barzini's crime family supports Sollozo's narcotics business). Emerging from the violence, Michael Corleone, the youngest son of Vito Corleone, takes over as Don as his father's health has weakened. This ascendency is not without regrets as Michael had decided to go to college and enlist in the US Army to distance himself from the family business, and Vito Corleone had hoped that his brightest son would become a politician rising as high as a US Senator. This movie, at its core, shows two men, Vito and Michael, both as hero and villain and as father and son.

Vito makes offers that people cannot refuse, which epitomizes the horror of Vito Corleone's capabilities as a Don. For example, Vito threatens the movie director Woltz with the severed head of his horse to help Johnny Fontaine win a lead role (Coppola, 1972). This event is the first time the viewer sees Vito Corleone's capabilities. When Woltz flings the bedsheet away, revealing the severed horse head, the horror traumatizes Woltz to the extent that he capitulates and gives in to the Godfather's demands, revitalizing the career of Johnny Fontaine. Vito made good on his promise, and as a result, an innocent creature ends up slaughtered for his benefit, and the threat to Woltz is crystal clear. This violent behavior is

the act of a monster who uses horror and death for personal influence. Similarly, Michael recounts a story to Kay, his girlfriend, about how Johnny Fontaine got his big break by Vito "making him [the producer] an offer he couldn't refuse," i.e. threatening to kill another producer (Coppola, 1972). Michael catches Kay off-guard when he describes this, and Kay is visibly frightened at the thought of Michael's father threatening to end someone's life without reservation. These stories paint Vito negatively as someone capable of murder as a form of leverage.

In contrast to Vito, the hero in *The Godfather* is Michael Corleone. The film introduces Michael as a veteran of WWII, college-educated, and not a member of the family business (Coppola, 1972). He has distanced himself from the family business by going to college and seeing Kay, who is not Sicilian. The Corleone family is full of criminals and murderers, i.e., monsters. Therefore Michael, who has distanced himself from his family, becomes the hero. To reassure his girlfriend that he will not be like his father, Michael says, "That's my family, Kay, that's not me" (Coppola, 1972). This quote paints Michael positively regarding Michael's integrity and outlook. Kay is reassured when Michael says this, as she hopes that Michael is not capable of his father's horrible acts.

However, enveloped by the monstrosity of Don Corleone, Michael shows the audience he too is capable of violence. For example, Michael retaliates against those who attempted to murder his father, McClusky, and Sollozzo, by shooting both and accepting exile in Sicily (Coppola, 1972). Here is the first instance of Michael dirtying his once clean hands. Before this, he was a college man turned war hero. However, his integrity is intact in his family's eyes as this first instance of murder was in vengeance for his father's attack. This murder restored his family's honor by exacting justice on the men who tried to kill his father. This act is what a hero would do, even though this included the murder of people. For a just cause, murder can be justified as the right decision if people have severely wronged the hero. He also accepts his exile to Sicily. Michael is willing to accept danger to himself and sacrifices his freedom to reinstate his family's honor, like a hero.

The Godfather Part II tells a very different story from the first film. In The Godfather Part II the audience sees a film that tells two somewhat different stories. The origin story of Vito Andolini, who becomes known as Vito Corleone upon his arrival to America, and the monstrous rise of Don Michael Corleone, the new head of the Corleone crime family. *The Godfather Part II* shows a hero, Vito Corleone, and his son, the monster, the new Don, Michael Corleone. The young Vito Corleone escapes from certain death at the hands of a Sicilian mafia chief, Don Ciccio, because Vito's father crossed Don Ciccio. He then kills Vito's brother to prevent him from taking revenge, and then his mother begs Don Ciccio to spare

her only remaining son Vito. He refuses, citing the possibility of Vito's potential retaliation when he becomes an adult, and kills her after she lets young Vito flee. To escape a similar fate, Vito immigrates to the United States, where he grows up, and then returns to Sicily to avenge the death of his mother. Vito kills Don Ciccio by slicing him with a knife (Coppola, 1974). This desperate escape and eventual return is heroic because it shows his commitment to his family and his ability to escape harm and exact revenge and justice on monsters like Don Ciccio. It also shows Vito to be courageous and steadfast from a very young age. Vito's story of early trauma leading to the creation of a hero who goes back and exacts revenge is a classic character arc for a hero.

In New York, the young Vito Corleone, played by Robert De Niro, fights back heroically as he tries to make a name for himself and support his family. Vito Corleone murders Don Fanucci, the mafia boss who terrorizes the neighborhood in New York where Vito Corleone lives. He then uses his new reputation to keep a widow from being evicted to keep her from going homeless (Coppola, 1974). This selfless act shows Vito's ability to remove a tyrant terrorizing the people in his neighborhood. Vito frees them from intimidation and extortion, which leads him to gain much influence in the neighborhood. Using his newfound power to help people is what a hero would do, freeing his community from the rule of a tyrant. Vito has honor and integrity as his motivation. However, his methods of murder and crime lead to his eventual transition from a hero to a monster.

This transition from good to evil happens again with his son Michael, who transitions from hero to monster himself, just like his father. Michael Corleone orders the killing of multiple people in the film as the new Don of the family (Coppola, 1974). He orders the murder of Frank Pentangeli, Johnny Ola, Hyman Roth, and ultimately his brother Fredo, all of which represent the downfall of the once heroic Michael. Instead of using his powers and capabilities to do good, he uses them to do evil, like getting involved with gambling in Las Vegas and Cuba, which leads many people to betray him, including his brother. Becoming the new Don, Michael transforms from the veteran, college-educated hero in *Part I* to the criminal and cunning Mafia boss in *Part II*. However, the event that solidifies Michael's monstrous transformation is his reaction to his wife, Kay, after she tells him grave news. Michael hits Kay after revealing that she got an abortion to end the Corleone crime family, which she views as reprehensible. Michael then divorces Kay and takes her children with him (Coppola, 1974). Kay's abortion represents the failure of Michael to prove his good nature to Kay, to redeem himself after failing to live up to a promise to turn the Corleone crime family legitimate. Michael has turned into the violent criminal mastermind his father was.

This change from hero to monster happens to both Vito and Michael. When they came into power by becoming Don, they immediately began their transformation from hero to monster. While their initial intentions may have been honorable, their methods corrupt their hearts and make them monsters.

This equivalency shows how intrinsic family strife is to the human condition. Outside of these two films, there is more academic evidence for this equivalency. An academic paper sums up the Oedipus complex like this, "Delving into Greek myth for his leitmotif, Freud, having shocked the world with the revelation that human beings were sexual beings from birth, suggested that boys…saw their fathers as rivals" (Brown, 2016, p. 2). Freud's Oedipus complex offers a psychological explanation for the equivalency of the father-son and hero-monster relationship, as he suggested a psychological rivalry between father and son. Freud also suggested that this rivalry starts from birth, showing how ingrained this rivalry gets in people and would suggest both relationships start around the same time. This rivalry shows up in *The Godfather*, and those father-son relationships often show signs of rivalries.

Evidence from other texts comes in the form of another academic paper which analyzes more classical stories from the 18th and 19th centuries. For example, "Through their reading of Rousseau, Blake, and Shelley arrive at a similar formula…the mismanagement, neglect, and eventual abandonment of children by their fathers catalyzes the development of monstrous progeny in *Frankenstein* (1818/31), *Tiriel* (1789), *The Book of Urizen* (1794), and *The Four Zoas* (1795–1804)" (Schouten de Jel, 2019, p. 1). This is more evidence of the equivalency of the father-son and hero-monster relationship, from a different medium, books as opposed to films, and a different period, 20th century stories versus 18th and 19th century stories. This article and the three analyzed texts show how fathers can create monsters, creating rivalries between father and son and hero and monster.

More recently, Paul Hamilton's book, *Fathers, Monsters, and Sons,* discusses specifically the occurrence of the hero-monster, father-son relationship by discussing stories ranging from his personal life to the story of Abraham and Issac to *Star Wars*. "George Lucas made this theme central by pitting the father, Darth Vader, and the son, Luke Skywalker, against each other. In the first film, this father-son relationship was not clearly identified. As far as the moviegoer was concerned, these two characters drove the plot of the movie, the eternal conflict between good and evil." (Hamilton, 2017, p. 97). This quotation shows how a classic good versus evil relationship can also be the same as the relationship between a father and son. *Star Wars* represents the epitome of this equivalency as the similarity between Skywalker versus Vader matches that of Luke versus Anakin.

Another less specific but more definitive source is *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell, which discusses the similarities of all sources in general, and was the inspiration George Lucas used to create Star Wars. A specific quote that proves the cyclical nature of heroes and their father follows. "The hero blessed by the father returns to represent the father among men" (Campbell, 1968, p. 363). Campbell's classic novel about stories themselves essentially predicts and describes the repetitive nature of this equivalency, describing precisely, before the creation of *The Godfather*, how the villainous father leads to a villainous son, like how Michael follows in Vito's footsteps.

The equivalency of the hero-monster and father-son relationship throughout different stories shows how generational strife penetrates human society. Families are brought together frequently, not by choice, so when there are significant differences in generations, there is often less choice to keep those people out. Fathers and sons specifically, often patriarchs and heirs, come into conflict over power. More generally, because this idea of fathers versus sons, like heroes versus monsters, comes up so often in stories across medium and history, this idea transcends a region or time in history. It reflects the human condition that families are bonded together by love *and* internal conflict.

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Essay

The Illusion of Reality

by

Kevin Tracz

Kevin Tracz is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aeronautics and Astronautics. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael Nichols's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. His essay intends to explore the interpretations of education and reality found in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* and identify how the same ideas are represented in the modern era across a wide array of disciplines.

Greek philosophy has been a topic of great interest and great conflict since its inception. The great thinkers who first organized their thoughts into a collective topic must have had no idea the influence that their thoughts would hold, and certainly not their influence over 2,500 years into the future! Ancient Greek philosophy opened the doors to a completely unique way of analyzing the world and provided the seeds for the Western intellectual tradition that would blossom in the following two and a half millennia. It is impossible to pick just one piece of ancient Greek philosophy and point to it as the best or most important work, but when looking at nearly any list of the most popular and influential Greek philosophical publications, the *Allegory of the Cave* is bound to be near the top. This allegory, published by the widely known Greek philosopher Plato, was included in his work *Republic* which analyzes the nature and effects of education, particularly the lack of logical thought in human nature. The allegory, however, is more focused on the purpose of philosophy as it explores the different ways that humans perceive reality depending on their capacity to reason (Rouse, 2015). Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* is an extremely influential text, but how has the idea that reality is an illusion, brought about by the allegory manifested itself throughout history? This paper aims to explore the allegory's primary message of exemplifying Plato's two-realms view of reality and how Plato's ideas about reality have stayed consistent over two distinct periods: ancient Greece and contemporary history.

Before we can explore how Plato's ideas have changed, we must first establish what his ideas are. Plato was the most famous student of the great Greek philosopher Socrates and himself had an equally famous student named Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle were intrigued with practically every topic, but they held a particular interest in mathematics, education, and the nature of logical reasoning. Plato developed many important ideas during his lifetime, but his ideas can be grouped into three main theories: the Theory of Forms, the Theory of Knowledge, and the Theory of Love and Becoming (Moore & Brooder, 2014, pp. 35–43). This paper will focus on Plato's Theory of Knowledge, as this is the area under which his *Allegory of the Cave* falls. First, we must look at the allegory itself. Found in the *Republic*, Plato writes this allegory to explain his idea of two-realms philosophy. The two-realms philosophy dictates that reality is split between two groups: the realm of changing, sensory things which may be illusory (the cave) and the realm of true, pure, imperceptible knowledge (the outside) (Moore & Brooder, 2014, p. 38). In the allegory, prisoners are bound in such a way that they can only see the shadows which dance in front of them and are thus condemned to darkness, ignorance, and illusion. These prisoners represent the ordinary people who assume the shadows they see are true reality. In the allegory, one prisoner escapes and sees the beauty, wisdom, and truth of the real world bathed in sunlight. This prisoner represents the philosopher. The escaped prisoner attempts to return to

the cave and tell the others of what he saw, but the other prisoners refuse to believe him and think his mind is corrupt. This represents the idea that true knowledge is clouded by the opposition due to deceit and illusion (Rouse, 2015). As can be seen in the allegory, "true knowledge, Plato was certain, must be concerned with what is truly real. According to Plato, the highest form of knowledge is that obtained through the use of reason because perfect beauty or absolute goodness or the ideal triangle cannot be perceived" (Moore & Brooder, 2014, p. 41).

Plato was not the only one with grand views of reality in ancient Greece. Several other Greek Philosophers held similar views to Plato on topics pertaining to truth and reality, but there were also many sophists who disagreed with his insight. Perhaps the best-known sophist, a man named Protagoras, believed that knowledge is dependent on human perception (a topic which will be discussed later in this paper). Protagoras proposed that someone's personal view is valid even if others think it to be invalid because of differences in sensory perception. Protagoras says two individuals may experience the same event, but they will always perceive it differently. Because everyone's view is valid, Plato interpreted Protagoras' claim to mean that there is no way to determine absolute knowledge. The absence of absolute knowledge entirely conflicted with Plato's worldview, so he rebuked that if one person's views are just as valid as the next, then a person who opposed Protagoras was valid too. While Plato seems to have a sound argument against Protagoras, many philosophers throughout history have still used Protagoras' logic to back their arguments. (Moore & Brooder, 2014, p. 41).

Other sophists took a very different approach. Gorgias and Xenophanes both believed that "there is no reality, and if there were, we could not know of it, and even if we could, we could not communicate our knowledge" (Moore & Brooder, 2014, pp. 39–40). While this idea seems like a secure way to describe reality, Plato would have noted that it contains some fundamental flaws in education about our surroundings. If an atom or a smartphone was described to an ancient Greek farmer, they would not believe it to be real, and even if they did, they likely would not have the means necessary to communicate the idea of such an object to their fellow citizens. However, in present Western society, a basic understanding of the inner workings of an atom or a smartphone is common knowledge! Although Plato's worldviews faced many fierce opponents, his sound arguments and clever rebuttals are contributing factors to the long-lasting legacy of his opinions.

With the groundwork of Plato's ideas laid out, we can now explore how his views are pertinent to the modern age. The previous three paragraphs established that Plato's Theory of Knowledge was very focused on how the illusory nature of perceived reality clouds the

true nature of logical reality. Simply put, our senses inhibit us from experiencing the truth. This very idea has been exceptionally popular in modern media and can be attributed to the rise in technology which promotes illusion and ignorance. No such technology has provided more illusion than social media. Often, present society focuses on how technology users hide and distort their image online such that others perceive them differently from their true form, but the reason this is possible is because technology companies have specifically designed their software in such a way. A documentary titled *The Social Dilemma* details this illusion by examining how social media's design nurtures an environment that manipulates peoples' emotions, behaviors, and, most importantly, peoples' views of reality. The filmmakers interview former employees and executives from large social media companies who all seem to share the same message: social media uses a "disinformation-for-profit business model" (Orlowski, 2020). The documentary also explores the psychological factors that contribute to the manipulation of users and the addiction techniques which are used to trap users in their platform and discourage them from leaving. In many ways, the documentary parallels the *Allegory of the Cave*, a group of prisoners (social media users) are trapped in a cave (social media software) perceiving a reality that is not real at all! When those who have left the cave (non-users, former employees) try to tell the prisoners about their fake reality, they refuse to believe the discrepancy.

A popular, fictional film that explores the same idea is *The Truman Show*. This film follows the story of Truman Burbank, a man who grew up living a seemingly ordinary life which, unbeknownst to him, takes place on a large set disguised as reality to produce a television show about his life (Weir, 1998). The show very clearly follows the outline of a man who is trapped in a sensory-based reality without being able to recognize the true reality around him. When Truman first emerges, he cannot believe that his previous reality was a lie, but as he explores the new environment, he gradually begins to awake to the truth. While this film seems to be a fun, fictional thought experiment, it has roots that are deeply entwined in real life. One such example is in the field of psychology. A study conducted in 2012 reported on a "novel delusion, primarily persecutory in form, in which the patient believes that he is being filmed, and that the films are being broadcast for the entertainment of others" (Gold & Gold). This study is just one of many that reports on mental illnesses of illusory nature involving a patient's delusions about reality.

Not only are Plato's messages found in popular media, but the field of modern physics has also been influenced by the *Republic*, and specifically by the *Allegory of the Cave*. One such application, called the holographic principle, requires a comprehensive knowledge of astrophysics to completely understand. At its essence, however, the holographic principle states that "according to [Gerard] 't Hooft the combination of quantum

mechanics and gravity requires the three-dimensional world to be an image of data that can be stored on a two-dimensional projection much like a holographic image" (Susskind, 1995). Thus, according to the current understanding of quantum mechanics, the three-dimensional world that we are familiar with is more accurately represented by a quantity called "data" which is mapped on a two-dimensional projection! This projection is of course imperceptible to humans, but only through the logic of mathematics can we verify its existence (much like Plato relies on reason, not perception to verify knowledge).

An additional, more popular example that is also found in the realm of quantum mechanics is that of the Schrödinger's cat. This thought experiment illustrates the paradox of quantum superposition by stipulating that a hypothetical cat can be considered both dead and alive when placed in a sealed box with a truly random, subatomic event that may or may not occur (Schrödinger, 1935). However, the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics follows that the cat may be considered simultaneously dead and alive after a short while, which leads to the various new applications in quantum mechanics, including advances in quantum information processing due to the "two-mode [...] state of electromagnetic fields in two microwave cavities bridged by superconducting artificial atom" (Wang et al., 2016). When looking past the quantum mechanics jargon, we see at its base that superposition (as described by Schrödinger's cat) is simply another example of how perceived reality will fail when we try to examine a quantum particle, so we must turn to mathematics and reason to understand the workings of our universe, just as Plato predicted.

As established throughout this paper, Plato's influential ideas about the nature of knowledge and reality have not only stayed relevant since his lifetime but have remained a consistent part of humanity's understanding of reality. This paper first covered the origin of Plato and his Theory of Knowledge, the importance of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, and the relevance of Plato's ideas in ancient Greek philosophy. Then, Plato's views of knowledge and reality were compared with modern interpretations of those same topics with a particular emphasis on current media, psychology, and modern physics. It should come as no surprise that the man who created the first comprehensive theory of knowledge would be a relevant historical figure, but this paper proves that the ideas formulated by great ancient Greek philosophers like Plato opened the doors for the foundations of modern metaphysics due to their consistency throughout history.

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Essay

August Wilson and Real-life Gentrification

by

Allie Ludovice

Allie Ludovice is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Multidisciplinary Engineering. They wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor William White's SCLA 102 class in Spring 2022. They wanted to convey the importance of listening to a community before revitalizing or gentrifying their neighborhoods through connecting the lessons in August Wilson's play *Radio Golf* to the real-life gentrification occurring in the neighborhoods of Detroit, Michigan for the past years.

In August Wilson's famous play *Radio Golf*, viewers hear Mayor Harmond Wilks say "Some people say you got to tear [a city] down to fix it. Some people say you got to build it up to fix it. Some people say they don't know how to fix it. Some people say they don't want to be bothered with fixing it" (Wilson) as he discusses the revitalization of his city. This could not hold more true, and thankfully, Detroit, Michigan opted for the 'build it up' model after filing for bankruptcy in the summer of 2013. This shocking move became the largest municipal bankruptcy in Unites States history at an astounding $18 billion (Kurtzleben). The city had shown telltale signs of decline for decades, ever since the U.S. auto industry had started losing to competition overseas (Kurtzleben). This decline led to fleeing residents, drops in taxes and city upkeep, and a city untrusted by outsiders. This bankruptcy, however, gave Detroit the potential to change all of that through future revitalization, and while this change is still ongoing, the city has made large strides for itself and its residents.

Stories of gentrification such as the one in *Radio Golf* are not uncommon, especially those of displacement that pull at readers' heartstrings, however, Detroit has managed to revitalize itself while avoiding the displacement of many of its residents (Shaw). This starkly contrasts the story of *Radio Golf*, where the residents affected, particularly Old Joe, find themselves largely ignored and not considered in Pittsburgh's changing environment, as Old Joe even says,"I'm right here. People act like I'm invisible. If somebody asks me, I'll tell them I'm right here," which parallels the feeling of so many residents when their city disregards them in their strives for revitalization (Wilson). To avoid this common, deteriorating byproduct of growth and progress, the policymakers of Detroit stated that they wished to "create a framework that recognizes the great potential for inclusive growth of Detroit's oldest established neighborhood while preserving its cultural integrity" (Aguilar and Williams), making many of its residents feel valued and heard and alleviating many fears of displacement due to the city's gentrification.

Listening to its residents and their concerns has resulted in the leaders of Detroit making maintaining its local culture and low-cost housing its top priority (Shaw). Detroit policymakers have discussed housing possibilities with their communities and constituents in many unique ways, such as hosting exhibitions and design ideas for the city made by students (Shaw). These exhibitions include guidelines for the designs but also for the city itself, such as having students "impress the value of design on all projects and all audiences—emphasizing equity, design excellence, and inclusion" (Shaw). Working with residents and these guidelines, Detroit has thoroughly worked methods of keeping housing costs low into their revitalization plan (McGraw). For example, Detroit has a large number of empty plots of land. The city incorporated these empty areas into pre-existing neighborhoods to create

safer environments for the new developments (McGraw), allowing more people to take up residence in the city that so many fled not too long ago.

One of the neighborhoods most affected by this revitalization is that of Corktown (Aguilar and Williams). Irish immigrants established Corktown in the 1820s, and it stands as the oldest surviving neighborhood in Detroit (Encyclopedia of Detroit). As of 2018, Detroit constructed plans to revitalize the historic Corktown neighborhood as well as parts of North Corktown and other bordering communities, calling this the plan for "Greater Corktown" (Aguilar and Williams). With so much buzz about the revitalization of Corktown, the area has piqued the interest of many investors. In 2017, Ford Motor Co. decided to move in and become one of the largest property owners in the area (Aguilar and Williams). This news shook community members, as long-time resident Tony Formosa stated in 2018 "I remember even the news of the potential Ford deal changed what people became interested in," (Aguilar and Williams). Since then, Ford has planned to open their new facilities later in the year 2022, creating over 5,000 new jobs for nearby residents of Detroit (Aguilar and Williams). The company has even opted to assist in the city's mission of preserving its culture and history, as they decided to move into a historic train station in Corktown, repairing the structure and saving it from demolition (Naughton). While residents' feelings toward any form of gentrification will always vary, most seem excited for the new facilities and the opportunities they may bring. John Muster, a long-time Detroit resident and small business owner of a butcher shop on Dix Street, believes the city has taken a step in the right direction for Corktown, stating to *The Detroit News* in 2018 "I know this is going to have an impact—it already has in a way. This is something that will help small businesses flourish," (Naughton). Needless to say, the neighborhood of Corktown has some exciting improvements coming for its community, much like the opportunities provided by the chain stores implemented in Pittsburg in *Radio Golf*, but this time without the stress of displacement and the destruction of community history.

A bit of a different story than the historic area of Corktown itself, North Corktown featured significant areas of empty, vacant space. Most of it contained not even vacant structures, but completely empty plots, of which Detroit's Land Bank owned more than four hundred (Aguilar and Williams). Tricia Talley, president of the North Corktown Neighborhood Association, played a significant role in the planning of the area's revitalization. Regarding the project, she has stated, "our neighborhood can serve as an example of what redevelopment can be when you involve the residents, and you redevelop the neighborhood around the residents that are here," as the city has prioritized minimizing displacement of current residents and connecting neighborhoods (Aguilar and Williams). Progress for this

area has come underway, and North Corktown should soon resemble the neighborhood of Corktown itself in just a few short years (Aquilar and Williams).

As much of this gentrification started soon after the city declared bankruptcy in 2013, enough time has passed to see the effects of this legal maneuver and its results, despite the revitalization itself continuing to this day. As a unique situation, many found Detroit's bankruptcy and revitalization interesting enough to study, giving the public further perspective into the city's changes. One study conducted on Detroit's gentrification, "The Effects of Gentrification on the Well-Being and Opportunity of Original Resident Adults and Children," published in 2019 on the effects of the last six years of gentrification found that a majority of Detroit's original residents not only remained in their gentrified neighborhoods, but also shared in any neighborhood improvements made (Gallagher). Most notably, this held true for the low-income neighborhoods, as well as for residents with children (Gallagher). In addition, one of the largest complaints about the city's gentrification is residents' disapproval of white millennials moving to the city and nullifying historic African American communities; however, in observing census reports, the study determined that this shift is actually occurring far less than many people initially believed (Gallagher). Currently, the rate at which millennials enter cities is far higher in cities such as Washington D.C., Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington (Gallagher).

Many of the more specific findings of this study are extremely notable as well when observing the gentrification of Detroit as a whole. The study found that revitalization improved the lives of children in the city, as many "original resident children" remained in their homes and benefitted from the changes in their neighborhoods (Gallagher). Researchers also discovered that these children had an increased likelihood of enrolling in college and finishing with a degree (Gallagher). The authors of this study also found that while some displacement did occur, it affected a minor number of individuals and far less than what would occur with the flow of residents naturally moving in and out of the city (Gallagher). This study showed the numerous benefits of Detroit's revitalization, as well as just how minor the impacts of the negative effects.

The city of Detroit has suffered through a lot in the past several decades. From the decline of the American auto industry in the 1950s to the largest municipal bankruptcy on U.S. soil, the city has seen its fair share of poverty and struggle (Kurtzleben). Coming out of this struggle, though, arose an amazing effort to revitalize the city. Detroit went to great lengths to listen to and consider its residents and improve the lives of everyone in the city. On its way to restoring itself as the heart of Michigan, Detroit has made its way on track to become an amazing city full of even richer communities without the struggle and displace-

ment shown in so many other gentrification stories. It has managed to arrive at the happy ending of *Radio Golf* without falling victim to the play's tribulations. Detroit has become an example to follow in terms of rebuilding an impoverished city and its communities.

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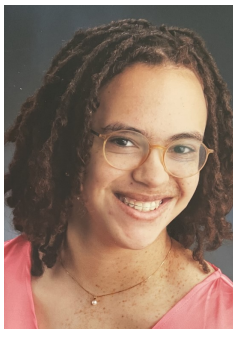
Essay

Using Black Fiction to Explore and Process the Generational Trauma of the Black Community

by

Kris Bostick



Kris Bostick is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Physics. He wrote this essay/short story to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Fall of 2021. "With the elevation of Black stories in media, it's important to discuss how these stories are presented to a wider audience. And ask the question, as storytellers, what are our responsibilities in representing these subjects authentically and respectfully?"

The genre of science fiction and fantasy allows Black creators to explore generational trauma in a way that doesn't exploit or fetishize it for larger audiences. Black trauma and violence against Black bodies is often used by non-Black creators, especially in Hollywood, under the pretense of raising social awareness, but in fact adds to the shared trauma of the Black community without creating any space for healing. In contrast, Black creators use nuanced stories to explore racial/generational trauma in a way that creates a space for conversation. And Black creators' increased involvement in the production of science fiction and fantasy writing has given and will continue to give rise to more nuanced conversations and deeper explorations of racial issues.

A common issue that we see in today's Hollywood is a growing genre of media surrounding the Black community and Black issues is what can be considered "Black trauma porn." Black trauma porn can be defined as "tired, narrow renditions of racism that only manifest themselves through police brutality, Jim Crow, and the KKK… and a constant re-opening of the wounds of racial violence, for very little payoff" (Bero, 1). There seems there is an inability for both white and black creators to not use the terrifying brutality of the time period set from slavery to the civil rights movement. It's rare to find a piece of media where there is a complex nuanced depiction of this period, else it would be considered inauthentic. This simplistic way of representing Black history reduces Black people's entire existence to only being terrorized or murdered.

Obviously, there's a difference in portraying depictions of Black suffering for a purpose vs doing it for shock value. Take for example, Colson Whitehead's novel *The Underground Railroad*. It re-imagines the underground railroad as an actual train that takes fugitive slaves to freedom. In this setting, Whitehead needed to have graphic descriptions of violence because that's the reality of slavery. As New York Times writer Michiko Kakutani says, "One of the remarkable things about this novel is how Mr. Whitehead found an elastic voice that accommodates both brute realism and fable-like allegory, the plain-spoken and the poetic — a voice that enables him to convey the historical horrors of slavery with raw, shocking power" (Kakutani, 2016). Violence and brutality is a huge part of the Black community's history. But it's still a subject that needs to be addressed delicately so as to not continue the cycle of violence. Simply showing slavery or the abuse of Black people doesn't do anything but add to the violent imagery of Black bodies seen in real life and fiction.

Black people experience "real-time images of Black people being killed by police and the violence that is enacted against them in subsequent protests" (Bero, 1). Frequent exposure to real-time images or videos of Black suffering poses a threat to the overall community's mental health. In the study conducted by researchers at the Department of Global

Health and Department of Epidemiology at Boston University, "38,993 of 103,710 Black Americans respondents were exposed to one or more police killings of unarmed Black Americans in their state of residence" in the 3 months prior to the survey which was associated "with a 0 to 14 day increase to poor mental health days" (Bar, Venkataramani, Williams, Tsai, 302). So, there's already a measurable decline in mental health within the Black community due to police violence. Obviously, this study's scope was focused on the effect of police brutality, but it wouldn't be an extreme leap to assume that with enough exposure to this kind of violence, one could develop serious mental health problems from stress. And plenty of people use TV, movies, etc. to escape and find enjoyment in a fictional setting.

So, when a TV show like Amazon Studios' *Them* was released with "its unyielding, never-ending depictions of racist violence and flat storytelling" it only reminded the audience of how Black bodies have been subjected to brutal racial violence (*Them* Review, 1). But racism isn't something the Black community needs to be reminded of, especially if there's no real addition to the conversation of race in America. In their review of *Them*, The Harvard Crimson poses the question – "At what point does creating a show like 'Them' become less about depicting the truth of what we as Black people go through every day and more about profiting off of our trauma?"—which perfectly encapsulates the general feelings of Black people with the new trend of Black film-making the spawned after Jordan Peele's *Get Out*. Following the summer of George Floyd, there's been a slew of media trying to profit from Black pain (*Them* Review, 2).

This creates a vicious cycle for the portrayal of Black people in media. With the dehumanization Black bodies, it feeds into negative beliefs and feelings towards and about Black bodies within the community and outside it. This then feeds into the violence enacted on the Black community, like for example police violence. And when that violence is broadcasted, and the cycle continues. All of these actions prevent the Black community from rising above their historical trauma.

The problem with this cycle is that it doesn't allow the Black community to be fully depicted in all its beauty. Despite all the violence and trauma, Black people survive, thrive, and create extraordinary art. Since the first Black people came to this country, they've created unique art even when suffering. Especially when using that art to process that pain.

Let's start with Rivers Solomon's novel *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. The story follows Aster, an orphaned, neurodivergent, medic on the spaceship Matilda. Matilda is a generation ship modeled off the antebellum plantation south, with black/brown passengers doing hard labor on the lower decks to enable the comfort of the white residents of upper decks.

There is beautiful representation of gender variance, queerness, and cultural variance within this book. Despite the violence that occurs in the book, is not a central theme but more like an everyday facet for Aster.

What makes Solomon's story better than that of *Them* is that it fleshes out its characters more and allows them to exist beyond just being targets of violence. Aster spends the book trying to decode her mother's journals, treats patients when she can, and enjoys a relationship with her friend/lover Theo. You get to experience not only Aster's pain, but her joy, her sadness, her anger, etc. The setting of the Matilda adds to the story elements. There's been so many stories set in the era of slavery, most only focusing on the abuse that came with it, but by setting the book in a futuristic spaceship Solomon can use those same elements of slavery, but without having to tie the story to "historical" accuracy. All of the characters we interact with are colorful and diverse in their identities. The argument I often see when minorities are represented in historical settings, is an uproar of cries that the story is "inaccurate" or "pushing an agenda." And while we live an era of more openness and acceptance, that doesn't mean that disabled, queer, or neurodivergent people never existed until now.

One thing I experienced while reading this book was complete joy. I was newly out of the closet and not only was I reading a book where the main character was like me, but one where she felt joy and love. And even when Aster faced abuse at the hands of her peers or upper deck residents, it was spaced out enough where the reader could breathe after a heavy scene. They could continue reading the book without fearing that there was another danger just around the corner. To this day *An Unkindness of Ghosts* is a novel I will always recommend.

A similar feeling of joy I experienced was when I read N.K Jemison's short story "A City Born Great." In this short story, Jemison asks and answers the question "What if New York City was alive?" In it we follow a homeless, black, queer man. Since he isn't named in the story, I'll be referring to him as MC (main character). MC is learning from his mentor, Paulo, to help New York City complete its transformation into a living being. It's important that he does this else New York with be left defenseless against an ancient, evil entity. MC is reluctant at first because he doesn't understand what Paulo is trying to teach him, but by the end of the story MC has become the "avatar" of the city. Meaning he embodies all its inhabitants and neighborhoods, and with this new power he can prevent the entity from destroying his city.

Like most media centering on Black lives, there are elements of oppression in the form of a policing force. But like *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, this element of the story is secondary to the plot. MC does mention his aversion to the police force, and each time it serves the fantastical element to the story. "Then a cop comes in… I imagine mirrors around my head, a rotating cylinder of them that causes his gaze to bounce away… For the first time, though, it sort of works: The cop looks around, but doesn't ping on the lone black face. Lucky. I escape" (Jemison). Not only then, but at one point Paulo refers to the entity's infiltration of the police with the line "The harbingers of the enemy will hide among the city's parasites. Beware of them'"(Jemison). What's great about this characterization of the police that other stories get wrong is that when MC or Paulo talk of the police, it's a casual mention.

By having the entity hide within the police instead of the entity being the police adds a dimension to the story. It's well established that the police and the Black community have a combative history, so stories in which the police force are the main antagonists, while like real life, isn't groundbreaking. But what makes Jemison's version superior is that on top of the usual anxiety of the police, MC has another, more dangerous enemy, hiding in plain sight.

"People cover the steps, laughing, chatting, mugging with selfie sticks. There are cops in body armor over by the subway entrance, showing off their guns to the tourists so they'll feel safe from New York. People walking past the cops leave short, stark afternoon shadows, barely there at all… And as I watch, the shorter one begins to . . . *stretch*, sort of, his shape warping ever so slightly, until one eye is twice the circumference of the other. (Jemison)" A great moment within the story is when MC sees through the facade the entity wears and realizes that the "police officers" in front of him aren't police officers. MC brings attention to the fact that everyone else around him doesn't notice or pay any mind to the "officers" which can be how it feels as a Black person when police are nearby. Everyone around you pays them no mind but a part of you watches them carefully, knowing that you could become the next victim of police violence.

The vivid imagery and intense inner dialogue of MC really helps put you in the story. You can feel the power growing in the story has New York City comes alive. Feel the same satisfaction as MC defeats the entity with the city's power. The fact that MC is a marginalized member of society makes the story itself more genuine. He understands the feeling of being on edge every day, of being angry at his circumstances with no real path to improving it. He felt real, like the universe Jemison created for his story could be real, making it extremely enjoyable read.

Of course, I can't finish this paper without discussing the queen of Black science fiction, Octavia Butler. Any of her works could be an example in this essay, but I'll be discussing her most famous novel, *Kindred*. It explores the life of Dana, a black woman who lives in 1970s Los Angeles, is transported back in time to the plantation where her enslaved ancestors lived. She is tied to Rufus, the son of the plantation owner (which Rufus becomes later in the book). Over the course of the story, Dana is deeply involved in what will happen to her ancestors and be proxy what will happen to her. And she learns very quickly there are no easy decisions or good outcomes.

This book might be the most disturbing out of all the ones I've mentioned, but in its context that violence is necessary. Like a novel like *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, which emulates the antebellum south, *Kindred* takes place in the actual antebellum south. I enjoy the way Butler navigates this space because she shows how decisions will always have long-reaching consequences. For example, Dana figures out she is a descendant of Rufus and Alice's (a slave girl he grew up with) children. But Alice doesn't want to sleep with Rufus. And when Alice's husband is killed, Dana has to be the one to convince Alice to be raped by Rufus (Rufus made Dana do this, and Dana explained to Alice that she could either fight, surrender and give in, or try to run away again). This allows Dana's ancestors to exist, but then causes Alice to hang herself after giving birth to three children and suffering under Rufus's long-standing abuse.

Every choice Dana makes has consequences, and there are no easy options. This makes Dana a wonderfully complex character. It's obvious that she wants to keep her family safe, but that safety comes at a high cost to herself and those around her. Dana also experiences first-hand the kind of abuse commonly used on the plantation. And witnesses even more, unable to do anything to stop it. Her choosing to stay and help her family has serious, lasting consequences. At one point her husband is stuck in the past for 5 years (from his perspective) and struggles to return to normal when rescued.

I like that Butler doesn't have the enslaved characters in the narrative simply function as plot advancers for Dana. They all have their own agenda and have agency in their decisions. Dana isn't an all-powerful hero that will free her ancestors, and everything will be well, she can't stop her relatives from being sold, whipped, beaten, raped, etc. Dana has to face the reality that she can't change this reality without threatening her existence and the world she knows.

I remember when I learned about slavery as a kid, my only wish was that I could travel back in time and save my family. But Butler's novel shows exactly why that's not pos-

sible. Like it or not, the Black community in the US are the result of those atrocities. We are descendants of those slaves, but also the enslavers. Changing the past wouldn't fix things for us, it would only have lasting consequences on the present. *Kindred* truly shows its reader that we can't change the past, no matter how it hurt us and our family. But we can make the choice to end the generational suffering by taking care of ourselves and others now. Through *Kindred* we can face the trauma of our ancestors and understand that while it's extremely difficult to process and move on from, we are still here, the children of survivors and fighters.

Continuing on that thought, this is why stories like *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, *A City Born Great*, and *Kindred* are important. Black Trauma Porn is harmful not only in its fetishization of Black trauma, but it ignores the fact that we survived. Through all that pain and suffering, Black people found love, family, and joy. And by ignoring that part of our story, Black people's strength is erased. We are more than our struggles and deserve to see that. Seeing Black joy is what would remind us of our strength. It would allow us to actually face the mountain of generational trauma laid out on top of us. It wouldn't fix everything, but it would definitely guide us into creating that brighter future.

I think sci-fi and fantasy has a genre are good for this because it softens the pain behind the writing. The looser rules of this genre allow for all kinds of concepts to come up. Octavia Butler's works are the best example of this, but there's also Rivers Solomon's *The Deep*. In which there's a race of mer-people descended from the Africans who, rather than be slaves, threw themselves off of the ships transporting them. That kind of writing allows the Black community to confront the horrid nature of the slave ships, but Solomon turns it into a story of strength and survival.

Sci-fi and fantasy are ideal for this reason. It isn't about changing reality, simply changing the way we perceive it. Technically BTP and authors like Butler, Solomon, and Jemison do the same thing, write the stories of the Black community, but it's the focus that's different. BTP focuses on the pain and suffering and capitalizes on it while pretending to be "socially woke" to its audience. BTP is only used to make money off of Black bodies, just as it's always been for centuries. But Black sci-fi/fantasy is the opposite. It focuses on the elements of Black history that helped Black people not only survive but thrive. It's easy to forget this part of our story because of all the seemingly endless Black Trauma Porn in media. But if people were more critical of media portraying Black people, we could see more stories like *An Unkindness of Ghosts* and less stories like *Them*.

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Essay

Responding to Simon Wiesenthal's

The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness

From Professor Jody Watkins:

In his work *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness,* Simon Wiesenthal writes of an experience he had when he was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp and was sent out on a work detail to a hospital. A nurse approached him and asked him if he was Jewish. When he responded affirmatively, she took him to the bedside of a dying Nazi soldier, a young man named Karl. Karl wanted to seek forgiveness from a Jewish person before his death for atrocities in which he had participated, in particular one incident in which 150-200 Jews were locked in a house that was then set on fire, while Karl and fellow soldiers shot anyone who tried to escape. Wiesenthal neither forgave nor openly refused to forgive; instead, he turned without a word and walked out. However, the question of whether he did the right thing continued to haunt him. At the end of his essay, he directly addresses the reader: "You, who have just read this sad and tragic episode in my life, can mentally changes places with me and ask yourself the crucial question, 'What would I have done?'"

Students were asked to respond to Wiesenthal's question, drawing from their own personal values and experiences. What follows are three student responses.

Sam Doshna is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mechanical Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins' SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. Sam offers reflection on the ethical dilemma posed in Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower,* drawing upon his Jewish heritage and personal reflections on the concept of forgiveness.

"What would I have done?" (Wiesenthal, 1998, p. 98) It's a question which no matter the context is always difficult to answer. In the case of *The Sunflower* the question is posed with regards to forgiveness of a dying Nazi. What would I have done? The question asks us to consider how heinous a crime we are willing to forgive. To me the two parts of this question hit two parts of my heart. The idea of forgiveness causes me to reflect on times when I have not been forgiven, and the fact that this forgiveness would be granted to a Nazi draws me to my Jewish roots. With these two central parts of my identity drawing me to two polar opposite answers I land on a conclusion which is somewhere in the middle. The actions cannot be forgiven but the man can.

Growing up Jewish there was no room for nuance when it came to the Holocaust. A Nazi was the worst possible thing that an individual could be. Nazi was a word which in my community even more than in others, represented the embodiment of pure evil. A Nazi was a creature that could hardly be called human. Even as I've grown and understood more and more about human nature and the intricacies of what leads people to commit unspeakable acts, this belief remains somewhere within me. This view of Nazis however is not the only Jewish value which was instilled in me at a young age. I was also taught of the Jewish value of *teshuva*, forgiveness. And so, despite the fact that I have strayed far from my religious upbringing, when Wiesenthal poses a moral dilemma about Nazis and forgiveness, I can't help but return to my Jewish roots.

In this spirit, when I look at the long list of responses to Wiesenthal's prompt my eyes are drawn to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel was a prominent Jewish American figure, and someone who's writings I have read from time to time. He puts into words a Jewish notion which was already on my mind, that only the wronged can forgive. (Heschel, 1998, p. 171) Heschel directs me to reflect upon Jewish teachings of forgiveness. I recall the early teachings that in the days before Yom Kippur, before one goes to ask God for forgiveness, they must first ask forgiveness of the person they wronged. It's taught that if the wrongdoer is not first forgiven by the wronged even God cannot forgive them. (Heschel, 1998, p. 171) And so, from this ideal it feels as if Wiesenthal has no right to forgive Karl, as he is not the one who was wronged.

Despite this seemingly definitive argument in my faith, withholding forgiveness still feels immoral. I cannot help but reflect on my own history with forgiveness. I put myself in Karl's shoes. I hear his words, "I want to die in peace, and so I need…" (Wiesenthal, 1998, p. 54) As someone who has been denied forgiveness, I know the impact that it can have on an individual. For me, a lack of forgiveness was what I needed to ensure I would not again commit unforgivable acts. But this realization came with time, something which Karl does not have. And so, it almost feels cruel for Wiesenthal to see a man in pain and inflict even more pain with the withholding of forgiveness. It makes me wonder, if we see someone in pain and add to it can we truly be considered better than them?

Given this dilemma I return to the writings of those more learned than me. I seek out Jewish teachings which may support my desire to forgive. After reading the essays of some more notable Jewish leaders such as Joseph Telushkin and Yossi Klein Halevi I land on the teachings of a less prominent Jewish figure, Deborah Lipstadt. Lipstadt (1998) helps me to find a middle ground. She writes, "The prisoner could have told the soldier that he personally forgave him… but could not have offered the soldier atonement" (Lipstadt, 1998, p. 195). Lipstadt writes of the differences between *teshuva* (forgiveness) and *kaparah* (atonement), the latter bearing a much higher standard than the former. (Lipstadt, 1998, p. 195). Lipstadt also does something in her writing which catches my attention, she refers to the dying man not as Karl but as "the soldier" (Lipstadt, 1998, p. 195). Whether intentional or not the word soldier conjures a different image than the name Karl. In a sense not only are these two images different, the two people are. In this sense I associate Karl with *teshuva* and the soldier with *kaparah*. Karl is capable of *teshuva* but Wiesenthal is in no position to recognize the soldiers *kaparah*.

And so, marking a distinction between the two, I would choose to forgive Karl, but not the soldier. I recognize that the man dying before Wiesenthal is not the soldier, but that the soldier lives within him. I would tell him that by offering forgiveness I am acknowledging the fact that he has changed. I would forgive Karl, and I would do it purely from myself and not on behalf of my Jewish brethren. I would make it clear to the dying man that he is not absolved of his crimes, but that he is human and that I see him as such. I think to be seen is something which is powerful enough on its own. With this, Karl may die with a bit more peace in his heart, but the memories of those we've lost will not be forgotten.

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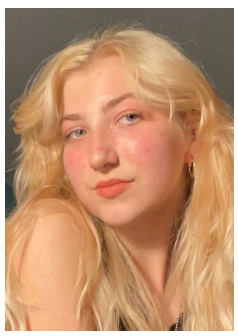

Madison Freeman is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Energy Engineering Technology. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins' SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. Madison was motivated to write this out of an anxious need to understand her family's history.

I stopped believing in God when I got my period. It is a famous story in my family, and among my friends. I have long questioned my faith and what people tell me to believe, so this change was not out of the ordinary for me. Although seemingly odd and maybe a little humorous, reaching puberty left a dark imprint on my spiritual growth. All that echoed throughout my developing brain was "*why*?" Why was I supposed to suffer because of what I was born to be?

I grew up in a family with so many religions I can barely keep track, where my grandparents are passive evangelical Christians, and my other grandmother is far from a devout Catholic, but I recently learned that I am German-Jewish through my mother. I know almost nothing of my mother's side of the family, other than that she is descended from a Jewish heiress and a Prussian Baron's affair. I failed to realize until I began outlining this essay how much of my family history, and identity, was stolen from me during the Holocaust. I asked my mother why she refused to seek out answers, and she responded that the Holocaust was 'one more injury that goes with everything else'. Because of my missing family line, I cannot forgive any Nazi for what they have done.

Coming from a Christian elementary school and a Catholic high school, my initial reaction to Wiesenthal's haunting question, "What would you do in my shoes?", was to forgive Karl. That was my first instinct, and ultimately what I believed *other* people would want to see from me. Conservative Christianity, in my personal experience, is hypocritical.

Whatever morals I taught in my Christian elementary school was never practiced by my peers, but we all forced ourselves into performing 'good Christian' behaviors for various awards and to save face with teachers. Every personal response to deep moral questions was a lie, and I knew this because of the abuse I suffered from my peers and teachers. I was taught to absurdly connect science projects back to God, do everything for God and never for myself, all the while I was suffering with mental illness as my peers physically and mentally bullied me into submission, and heard classmates hurl slurs and racist insults at each other. When I finally had the courage to bring my trauma to faculty members, they practically spat in my face and told me to *forgive and forget*. In *The Sunflower*'s Symposium, Robert Brown notes that Christianity always "carries the possibility of condoning, rather constricting, the spread of evil" (121). My peers were never punished for their behavior, and if I were to "forgive and forget," I would lose the small bit of self-worth I managed to preserve. After reflecting on my childhood, I realized my first instinct to forgive Karl was a learned behavior. I do not want to forgive Karl. It would not bring my family back. It will never secure my identity. It would not give me closure. When Wiesenthal said he "envied him because in his last moments he was able to think of a live mother who would be grieving for him," I felt that in my soul (31).

I will never understand how a man like Karl goes from a devout Catholic to someone who kills innocent people. If I was alive during this time, desperately trying to survive with my family, I too would be "kosher meat" (57). I would feel the exact same way that Simon does while he was at the concentration camp, where every sunflower reminded him of the cruel fate of so many of his brothers and sisters. Those six million people were also *my* ancestors. I agree with Wiesenthal, where if Karl "had really rediscovered his faith in Christianity, then a priest should have been sent for, a priest who could help him die in peace" (34). It is revolting that Karl thought he was being a good person and repenting, only for me to realize he was just a hypocrite, and that he did not change at all. Up until the end, Karl still objectified Simon, and turned him into a means to the end for his own forgiveness so he could feel better leaving this world. Not once did the Nazi stop to consider the emotional weight of laying yet another traumatic story onto an already abused Jewish person. Wiesenthal questioned: "But in their eyes were we human beings at all?" (57). Clearly not, and does a single Nazi, who willingly partook in the slaughtering of my ancestors "ask whether our children whom they were about to gas had ever had anything out of life?" (31). Karl, to Wiesenthal, and to me since I am imagining being in Simon's shoes, is the epitome of German Nazism. I think that Wiesenthal made the best decision for himself by staying silent, because as Moshe Bejski says, "Such an act of mercy would have been a kind of betrayal and

repudiation of the memory of innocent victims who were unjustly murdered" (115). I do not feel the same way, and I would not leave that room silently.

Karl was an individual part of a whole evil system, and when it mattered, while that family was trying to escape the flames of a house filled with Jewish people about to die, he still shot them. He probably had many opportunities to do the right thing and did not. Karl would have gone back home, without a title or any military prestige, but certainly with a life if he chose to leave behind the Hitler Youth. Since Karl did these heinous things, I fully agree with Bejski, where he notes that only Karl's "awareness of imminent and certain death induced him to think that his actions had been crimes against both humanity and God." (113). It took facing death to let a Nazi see the death and despair that he reaped on *people*. How did Karl come from a religion that emphasized ultimate compassion and respect for all people to become part of a nation of butchers? The question reverberates throughout my body: *why, why, why?* I might never retrieve my family history because of the thousands of other Karls, and "thousands and perhaps hundreds of thousands of Germans who participated in and committed genocide and crimes against humanity returned to their homes and to quiet, peaceful lives, without their consciences ever bothering them, without ever feeling any remorse" (116).

I believe in attacking the system rather than the individual, but when a Nazi society exists, it is so painful for me and many others to go out silently. Karl is only remorseful by his Christian value system because he believes that to go to heaven, he needs earthly forgiveness to make himself feel better. He probably thinks if a Jew can forgive him, God certainly will. What Karl does not know is that "God is on leave," and God would certainly be useless if he lets a Nazi get into heaven. Does God have the right to exist and claim to be a benevolent creature when his so-called children suffer at the hands of other humans? If God is still here, he must be cruel, and heaven must be a lie. Christianity, in its birth, was not imagined to be applied to a genocide of its own original people. I do not owe forgiveness, and it does not make me a bad person to withhold it. It might make me a bad Christian, but *I am not Christian*. I would tell this to Karl and force him to see my pure rage. I would curse him out on his deathbed and guarantee a small fraction of the pain he left in my bloodline, and in my heart. In Wiesenthal's place, death would be walking close beside me, and I wouldn't care if Karl would become angry and tells the nurse to kill me or send for a guard. Taking my anger out on him would be my act of defiance. Making a Nazi hear my anger firsthand, instead of my fear, would be a total victory. Matthew 7:12 says "Do unto others as they would do unto you." I am the other, Karl. I will never slaughter your family, but I will make you see my pain.

Dane Stahlhut is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Insect Biology. He wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Jody Watkins' SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. Dane simply hopes that his writing may serve as some small venture in the pursuit of truth, to the glory of God alone.

What would you do if you were me? I have been asked this question many times in my life, and I am often hasty to answer. However, as I have gotten older, I have found it to be a more complicated question than it seems to be at surface value. How does one even begin to consider what he would do if he were someone else? If every significant event in one's life, every input, and influence were matched with another, would they not come to the very same conclusions in any given situation? This technicality aside, it remains a difficult task to truly understand the depth of someone else's struggle and then make an unbiased judgement. Yet now, I am placed in the uncomfortable position of declaring what I would do in a situation that is nearly impossible for me to imagine. *The Sunflower* poses this question on its cover: "You are a prisoner in a concentration camp. A dying Nazi soldier asks you for forgiveness. What would you do?" (Wiesenthal, 1998). Wiesenthal himself was unable to give the man an answer; he left without a word. But would *I* forgive the dying soldier? To be frank, I simply do not know. I know that I would like to have been able to forgive—or at least guide him to where he could find forgiveness. But after suffering through the terrors of the Holocaust, I do not know if my merciful spirit would prevail.

I could spout off my religious beliefs about forgiveness and give a definitive answer that I would unequivocally forgive the murderer. But if I truly try to place myself in the mindset of a Jew during the Holocaust… I do not know what I would do. As Bejski posited, "I am afraid that anyone who has been there and experienced it all would not have behaved any differently than Wiesenthal did then" (1998, p. 114). Wiesenthal experienced firsthand the cruelty and horror of the Nazi regime. Then suddenly he found himself at the bedside of a dying SS, being pleaded with for forgiveness. In the end of his essay, Bejski expresses that Wiesenthal's mere act of listening to the dying man, and then refraining from telling the mother of her son's acts, was already far more grace than what Karl deserved. Indeed, I find it difficult to imagine a scenario where any further kindness could be shown to the dying SS (at least in the physical, earthly realm). How could I begin to understand the suffering that someone like Wiesenthal endured? How would I react to Karl's request if my entire race were treated as if they were more akin to insects or rats than they were to human beings? In one particularly impactful memory of Wiesenthal's, he recounts a time when he saw Eli, a Jewish child in the Ghetto, eating breadcrumbs: "He was standing by a window

and his tiny hand was sweeping up something from the sill. Then his fingers went to his mouth. As I came closer I realized what he was doing, and my eyes filled with tears: he was collecting the crumbs which somebody had put out for the birds" (Wiesenthal, 1998, p. 45). What would happen to my mind as I witnessed children living like dogs, as I watched friends and strangers alike being beaten and burned and shot, knowing that my fate would likely be the same? Would hatred and spite not inevitably rule my thoughts?

There is, however, another, perhaps more revealing question: "What would you do if you were just another German?" Do we really believe that an entire country was just a group of 'bad eggs'? The horrible notion to consider is that Germany was just like any other country. They were not uneducated savages; they were civilized people. So, to see what civilized people are capable of when you give them someone to blame, to dehumanize… It is worth noting that you are a 'civilized person' too. You think to yourself, "I could never bring myself to torture another human being. I could never be silent in the face of such atrocities." Then how on earth do you explain what happened? We are far more a product of our environment than we like to imagine. Although we have 'free will', our capacity for mercy and kindness is largely limited by our societal values.

It is a gut-wrenching thought, that our morality could be so easily stamped out of us. And yet there seems to be no other explanation. In *The Sunflower*, Karl illustrates this idea repeatedly. At one point, he quotes his platoon leader as saying, "'You and your sensitive feelings! Men, you cannot go on like this. This is war! One must be hard! They are not our people. The Jew is not a human being! … it doesn't matter whether it is a man, woman, or child, they are different from us. Without question one must get rid of them'" (Wiesenthal, 1998, p. 49). If this were the rhetoric that you heard from nearly every adult and peer whom you ever knew, over and over until you nearly started to believe it… what exactly would you become? I absolutely do not say this to justify anything the Nazis or the German people did. Quite the reverse. I merely want to point out that if you or I were placed in the same position, it is highly likely (statistically speaking) that we would be just as wicked and cruel and murderous as the next SS—or at least as complicit as the next German. And it would happen to us the same way it happened to them: one small step at a time.

Empathizing with someone is one thing; forgiving them is quite another. The question of whether Wiesenthal even had the right to forgive Karl in the first place is something of a moot point. Generally, I think most would agree that he did not. Forgiveness can only be extended by those who have been wronged, or at least by a representative of that party. For Wiesenthal to assume such a position could easily be considered as a major offense to

the many Jews who could never begin to approach the point of forgiveness. However, divine, transcendent forgiveness may yet remain.

At this point, my line of thinking diverges from philosophy into theology. In my mind, you cannot have one without the other, although many may protest this point. It would be nearly impossible to have this conversation without considering religious influences of some sort. In fact, I would go a step further in saying you cannot come to a logical conclusion on the matter at all in the absence of religion, or at least some vague concept of a higher power. Jean Amery highlights this point in his essay (1998, pp. 105-109). He states that the problem is a 'theological one' and therefore does not exist for him as an atheist. He does go on to give a sort of answer to Wiesenthal, but in essence, it does not really matter. Forgiven or not, what difference does it make? By the end of his essay, however, Amery joins the chorus in saying, 'never again.' Without a belief in some sort of deity, why does that matter while forgiveness does not? What is suffering, if not an unfortunate side effect of the survival of the fittest? If we are really only animals, which live, and die, and rot in the ground, what does it matter? You would not blame a lion for killing its competitor… and yet no reasonable human being seems to be able to rid themselves of the notion that human life has value—intrinsic, illogical, immeasurable value. In my opinion, Wiesenthal's question cannot be answered definitively without the necessary suspension of disbelief in the divine. After all, what is morality apart from God?

As a protestant Christian, I can at least provide my thoughts on what I would have done (or more appropriately should have done), if I were placed in Wiesenthal's shoes. If I had time to think it over, if I could even begin to separate myself from my emotion and anger and fear, I would attempt to articulate my thoughts to the dying man. I feel I would owe him that much, one way or another. I will not take such a harsh stance as to say what Wiesenthal ought to have done. I believe his actions were completely justified; all I will say is that which I would feel obligated to do. Bearing in mind that my religious persuasion does me few favors in terms of objectivity, I would have liked to have said the following to Karl: "You are, of course a sinner. You are, and so am I. In my estimation, your sins far outweigh mine, but my estimation matters very little. In the eyes of God, in the eyes of true moral justice, we are both just as deserving of death and hell as one another. We are both eternally guilty of unforgivable crimes. Now, if you had committed some terrible sin against me, I would like to think I could forgive you, in time, perhaps. But I have no right to forgive you on behalf of my people. Although you seem to me to show a genuine repentance, I dare not impose myself as a representative of their collective conscience. However, there is someone who does have the right to forgive your sins, because he already paid the ultimate price for them. It is not my place to say that you are forgiven (at least not in the

deepest sense). Neither is it my place to say that you are condemned. That is between you and God."

Although the responses to *The Sunflower* all express radically different opinions on the role of forgiveness, there is one common theme throughout nearly every one of them: we must never forget. I do not know if I could have forgiven Karl. I hope that I could have at least tried to guide him to the grace of God, but like Wiesenthal, I fear that my words would have failed me. There comes a point where one should no longer dwell on what could have or should have been done. Instead, we must turn our eyes on what yet could be. Our children, and our children's children, must not be shielded from the brutal reality of the twentieth century. They must grow up knowing, as we should all have grown up knowing, what the human race is capable of doing to each other. Because it is only when we know the power of our own ambition that we can begin to use that ambition for good. And who knows? Perhaps, in time, we could begin to build a world where, in the words of Robert McAfee Brown (1998, p. 124), "We do not have to ask unanswerable questions any longer."

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3

Chance Encounter

> "'I think it means,' I say, 'that chance encounters are what keep us going. In simple terms.'"
>
> —Haruki Murakami

Cornerstone Contest: “Chance Encounter”

Experience Growth by Jeff Priso

Jeff Priso is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in UX Design. He was a student in Professor Nichols’s SCLA 101 and Professor Malone’s SCLA 102 classes in Fall 2021. The lilies in his artwork represent growth and the pieces of newspaper represent literacy. Once the individual's head was taken away and the body is investigated, one can find beautiful ideas and thoughts as they fed themself with different perspectives. Jeff’s artwork won the first place in the Fall 2021 Cornerstone Contest.

Cornerstone Contest: “Chance Encounter”

A Hikikomori and A Fairy Ahjussi

by

Ju Na Lee

Ju Na Lee is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Industrial Design. She was a student in Professor Toya Mary Okonkwo’s SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. Her short story, “A Hikikomori and A Fairy Ahjussi,” combines English and Korean cultural elements and terms to depict the power of healing, comfort, and hope. Her story was inspired by the short story, “Homunculus,” in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* by the Seventeenth-Century Chinese writer Pu Songling. Lee’s story won the second place in the Fall 2021 Cornerstone Contest.

ahjussi (아저씨) = a middle-aged man

hikikomori (ひきこもり) = the avoidance of social contact, typically prominent in Japanese youths

hojeok (호적) = family register/family tree

hwaechori (회초리) = a wooden cane used for punitive purposes

kimchi (김치) = a popular Korean side dish made with fermented cabbage that has been seasoned with chili powder

mobeomsaeng (모범생) = a model student with exceptional academic standing

Nongshim (농심) = a popular South Korean food and beverage company

suneung (수능) = a standardized College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) used in South Korea to determine the university a student can enter

* * *

At exactly 4:44 PM on November 13th, Kim Da-Hyun had turned 28. She spent her birthday secluded in a one-room studio in Gangnam and ate moldy cereal because she couldn't bother to get up, brush her teeth, wear clothes, walk to the convenience store, take out her wallet, and walk back home again. Some would call her a *hikikomori;* young individuals that have withdrawn from society for months, and in severe cases, for years. Her days as a hikikomori were constant and mechanical, following a fixed, imaginary schedule she kept in her mind. She'd usually wake up at around 5 PM and spend many hours staying still until she'd enter a vegetative state. The process begins with Da-Hyun laying down on her back, parallel against the study wooden floor. Then, she waits until her body reaches what she calls 'the awakening'. During this phase, her body would be rock still, while her mind ventures off into another realm, escaping the gutters of reality. As she waits for the awakening, she'd often kill time by following the walls of her studio, her eyes jumping from object to object like a color by number game. Whilst Da-Hyun would examine the ceiling, she would often be disrupted by the lethargic whirring of the fridge, or the dissonant cacophony of impatient cars, or the screaming and slamming from her upstairs neighbor. Her upstairs neighbor was a mother-daughter pair, who fought every night until the daughter decided to run away. At least, that's what Da-Hyun had assumed, because one day in late June, all she heard was silence instead of the usual sounds one might expect to hear from a

slaughterhouse. There was no psychopathic banging on doors and walls, nor was there any squealing of insufferable pain. Nor did she hear anyone crying hysterically. Suddenly, Da-Hyun's stomach rumbled. Da-Hyun's stomach never rumbled. It was a response to the lingering smell of yesterday's ramen and overly fermented *kimchi* because she forgot to put it in the fridge. On special days, she'd see a smooth-backed cockroach, or an ebony-black ant walking on the ground beside her head and would just stare at its trail; hypnotized. Minutes before the awakening, her senses would be heightened for a couple of seconds, with the same intensity as the 3rd movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. And suddenly, it would fade and converge into a single point of nothingness. During the awakening, the only motion in that one-room studio would come from her chest, which moved up and down in a regular, oscillatory motion, like calm, swaying trees on a warm autumn day. Once released from this bizarre trance (which usually lasted for 6 hours), Da-Hyun would slap herself awake, and proceed with the rest of her day.

Da-Hyun was an unconventional hikikomori. She did not play any video games, nor did she read manga books. In fact, she lived a minimalist, and cost-friendly lifestyle by going to the nearest 7-eleven store once a month to buy the bare necessities: pads, *Nongshim* ramen, and water. Da-hyun ate 5 meals a week, mainly consisting of ramen, cereal, or other convenience foods overflowing with MSG. She did not own a phone, a computer, nor a TV. Instead, she owned a tattoo gun, packets of cigarettes, and a moleskin notebook. Da-Hyun is a 5'7 tall, slim-figured woman with dark circles that are horizontally symmetrical to the shape of her eyes. They look purple and veiny, like tiny grape sacs. She had a wolf cut which flowed down to her breasts in layers like ocean waves on a windy day and had a couple of short strands poking her forehead, obscuring her vision. Her hair was cakey because she hadn't washed herself for just a little over a week. Da-Hyun only wore loose black tank tops paired with jeans. Her hair was fully bleached to the roots, and her ears were adorned with countless stainless-steel piercings. She had a rather large flower tattoo wrapping around her right arm, and a blue dragon tattoo on the other arm. It had been a few years since Da-Hyun became a *hikikomori*, and she often spent her time people-watching because her one-room studio directly overlooked an alleyway. When she was awake, all she did was scrutinize the pedestrians using her cheap binoculars and took notes on peculiar mannerisms because she found them to be so comical. For now, Da-Hyun was moderately satisfied with her life. It wasn't too much, nor was it too little.

Back in the day, Da-Hyun had been an exceptionally bright child. She produced beautiful sounds with the piano, violin, and guitar, and was the volleyball team captain throughout all four years of high school. She won numerous prizes in piano concours, debate contests, and made national headlines by being the youngest silver medal recipient in

the Korean Mathematical Olympiad. Her dad, however, was furious that she did not win the gold medal and had Da-Hyun hold her arms up perpendicular to her shoulders while he struck her calves with a *hwaechori* every 5 seconds. The punishment lasted for about 2 hours as the swooshing of the paper-thin, wooden stick was the only sound that penetrated the thick blanket of silence which fell onto the house, like snow. Da-Hyun was the pinnacle of what Koreans would call a *mobeomsaeng*. She had aced her *suneung* (thanks to the diligent years spent at cram school) and was admitted into Seoul National University with ease. During her first year at SNU however, Da-Hyun started coughing up bright-red blood and was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Consequently, she took a gap year for treatment and quickly recovered, proceeding her bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. Employment was a piece of cake for Da-Hyun since she was immediately hired as an engineer for Samsung after graduating. To many, it seemed as though Da-Hyun had succeeded in every aspect of life. All she needed now was to marry a young, handsome, and rich husband and raise equally successful kids with him. One day, Da-Hyun's life took a turn during her second year as a Samsung employee. She remembers it happening on late May because she felt blue from the seasonal change. It was around midnight, and she was working overtime because she couldn't leave until her manager left. She was an obedient worker, completing all her delegated tasks on time and in exceptional quality. Suddenly, she felt a coarse arm caress her right shoulder through her white satin blouse, as it slowly followed every bump of her ribcage down to her butt. Her manager fondled her butt as though he were kneading dough and slowly moved downwards, like an inchworm. Occasionally, Da-Hyun would catch her male co-workers looking in her direction to spectate. Then, they would turn a blind eye and proceed to slave away in their tiny little cubicles. The next morning began uneventfully as Da-Hyun took her usual route to work. She walked to *Dapsimni* station to take bus 420, got off at *Gangnam* (subway line 2) station, and walked for 6 minutes until she arrived at Samsung HQ. It used to be a 44-level building, until the top-most floor was shut down out of respect for the employee who jumped off last week. Da-Hyun stood in front of the towering glass skyscraper and began to scream with her eyes fixed at the center of the entrance door. Her scream was animalistic and possessed with inexplicable hysteria and rage. She didn't blink, and her body was stiff. She screamed for several hours, and nothing could shut her up. Her coworkers couldn't silence her because her scream pierced through people's hands like a cinquedea. Nor could the police tackle her down because her body was the weight of ten boulders. Nor could the doctors sedate her because her skin seemed to be as impenetrable as cement. Da-Hyun screamed until she suddenly slapped herself and was escorted by the police to her house. She woke up the next day in her studio with no recollection of her odd behavior. Naturally, Da-Hyun was fired, and went from being an accomplished daughter to a disgraced member of her family. In fact, she was such a shameful ad-

dition to the *Gyeongju Kim* (光山) family, (tainting it with humiliation and ignominy) that her dad took her out of the *hojeok*. Da-Hyun stopped talking after that and was later diagnosed with selective mutism because she would only talk to her mom.

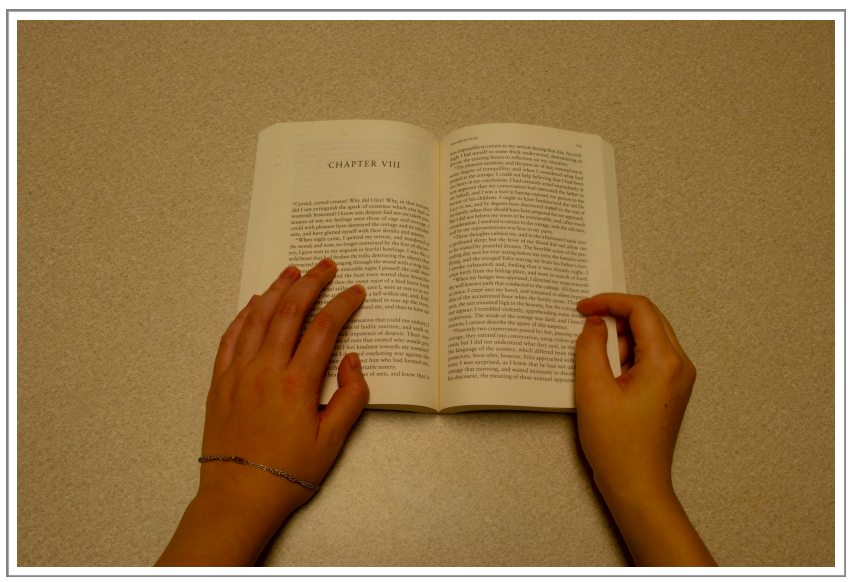
Although it was her birthday, today was no more special than all the other days. Da-Hyun lit up a cigarette and inhaled the nicotine as the warmth filled her desolate heart. She looked through her binoculars and saw the usual people walking by. She saw the same teenage girl rushing over to a car mirror to do her makeup because her parents would not allow it in the house. She masterfully applied brown eyeliner on her waterline, pearl glitter eyeshadow, mascara, blush, and bright red tint in just a few movements, and proceeded to pinch her shoulders to adjust her school uniform per usual and ran to school. She called her the girl "makeup". Makeup's behavior was so predictable to Da-Hyun that it was so amusing. A few hours later, Da-Hyun would see a man in his early 20s carrying eight coffee cups for his seniors. She called him "intern". Intern's walk would always be fast-paced and rushed. On the rare occasions when he wasn't holding anything, his arms would swing vigorously from side to side like a pendulum to accompany his aggressive walk. Da-Hyun continued people-watching for several hours, and night had come. Still, Da-Hyun continued to observe the alleyway and as usual, nothing out of the ordinary occurred. Around this time every day, she'd see people rummaging through trash. Today, it was a crippling old man she had seen before. But wait. What's that over there, underneath the headlights? Was it a fairy? No. It was an *ahjussi* wearing a flamboyant ballet tutu that was three feet in diameter. Clearly, it was too small for it at the waist since its belly fat seemed to trickle over the tight elastic band. It also wore satin pants that was checkered, as well as a sleeveless, white tank shirt that had seen better days underneath a doctor uniform that looked like it was about to burst any second. Da-Hyun looked down at its feet and saw that it was wearing fuchsia-colored bunny slippers. The oddest of all, were his fairy wings, which were so big that every time he turned to his right or left, the wings would slap his face. Da-Hyun was so astounded that she quickly proceeded to examine it further. The fairy *ahjussi* was holding a sparkling plastic fairy wand with ribbons and embedded plastic diamonds on one side, and a pink medical toy kit on the other. She then looked at its face and was even more astounded by the size of its nose. The fairy *ahjussi*'s face was similar to that of a pug. It had a series of short horizontal and vertical wrinkles on its forehead and had black beady eyes. Aside from that however, it looked like a typical Korean middle-aged man. As Da-Hyun continued observing it, the fairy *ahjussi* suddenly began to do cartwheels and other impressive twists and turns with its body, as though it were performing for a circus. It also began to tap dance and hummed a nice little tune to accompany its dance so loudly that even Da-Hyun could hear it through her window. The peculiar thing was that nobody seemed to take notice of the fairy

ahjussi, despite its unusual appearance and behavior. Suddenly, the fairy *ahjussi* had disappeared from the alleyway. Where'd it go? Da-Hyun's thoughts were abruptly disrupted by a rhythmic rap at her door. Nobody ever visited Da-Hyun. It was the fairy *ahjussi*. She barely opened an inch, but the fairy *ahjussi* entered through that tight space by shrinking itself and morphing back to its normal size again once it had safely entered the one-room studio. It took out its toy stethoscope and looked at her intently. It hummed the same tune as before, and pointed at a stool, directing Da-Hyun to sit on it. Da-Hyun obediently followed the fairy *ahjussi*'s instructions, as it hit her knee using a blue plastic hammer, and then proceeded to check her temperature using a toy thermometer. Next, it strapped her onto a toy blood pressure cuff and pumped the toy bulb and checked her throat using a toy tongue depressor. The fairy *ahjussi* wrote down some bizarre symbols on its clipboard and thought for a minute. It then took out a real band-aid and smacked it right across the middle of her forehead. The band-aid was star shaped and had a recurring teddy bear pattern. Finally, it hugged Da-Hyun, picked up its belongings, and walked out the door.

The next day, Da-Hyun woke up with a pleasant smile on her face, which caused her eyes to be folded into an upside-down crescent moon shape. She took a shower, brushed her hair, walked outside to the nearest payphone and called her mom.

Cornerstone Contest: “Chance Encounter”

by Shalem Lee



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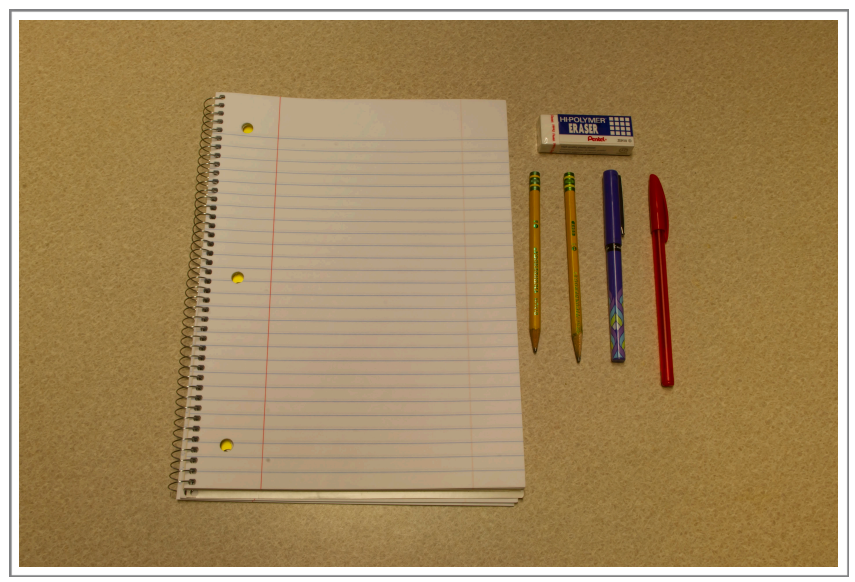

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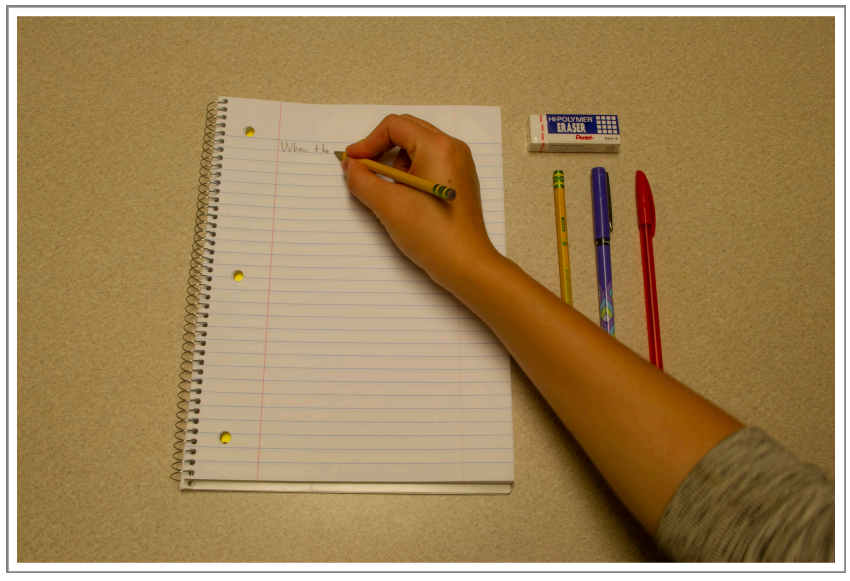

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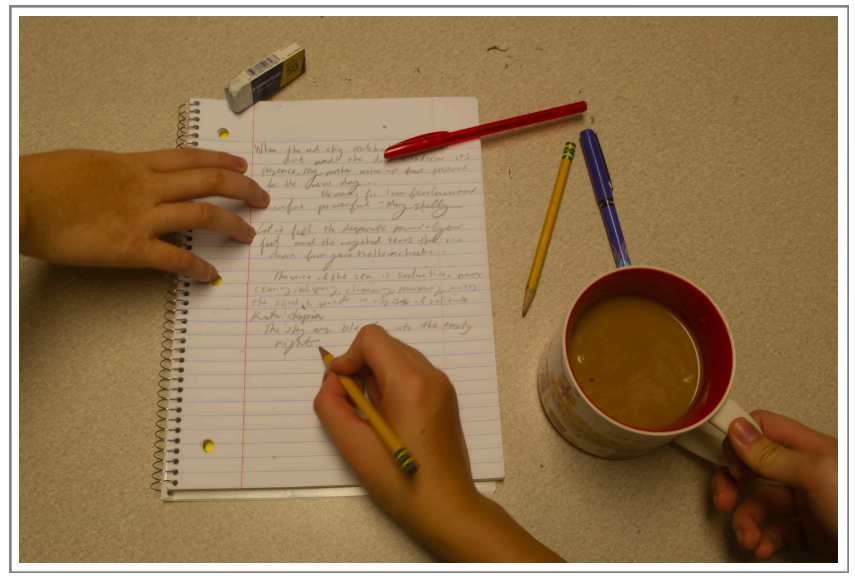

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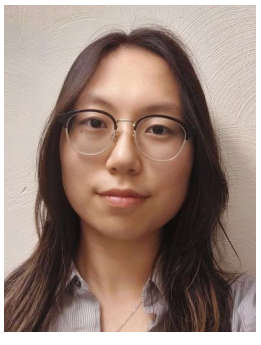
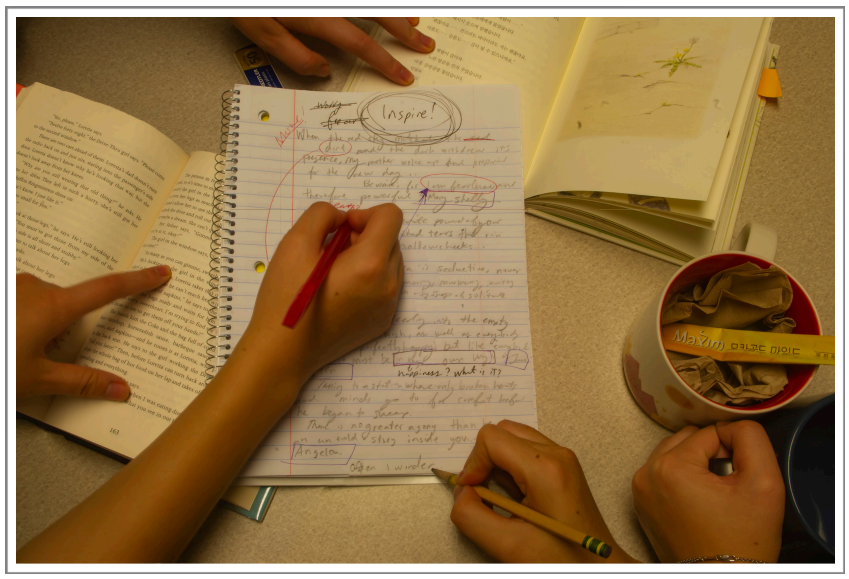


Shalem Lee is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Exploratory Studies. She took these pictures to fulfill an extra credit assignment in Professor Ayala-Chittick’s SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. Inspired by Duane Michals’s work, *Things are queer* (1973), Shalem’s work showcases how one chance encounter will nurture more ideas that can lead to more chance encounters, thus a continuous cycle. Shalem’s project received an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2021 Cornerstone Contest.

Cornerstone Contest: “Chance Encounter”

by Shalem Lee



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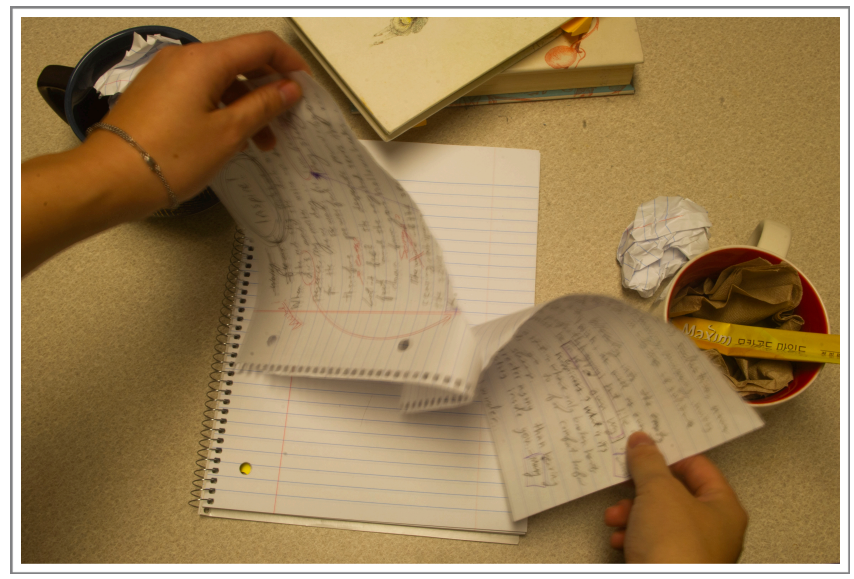

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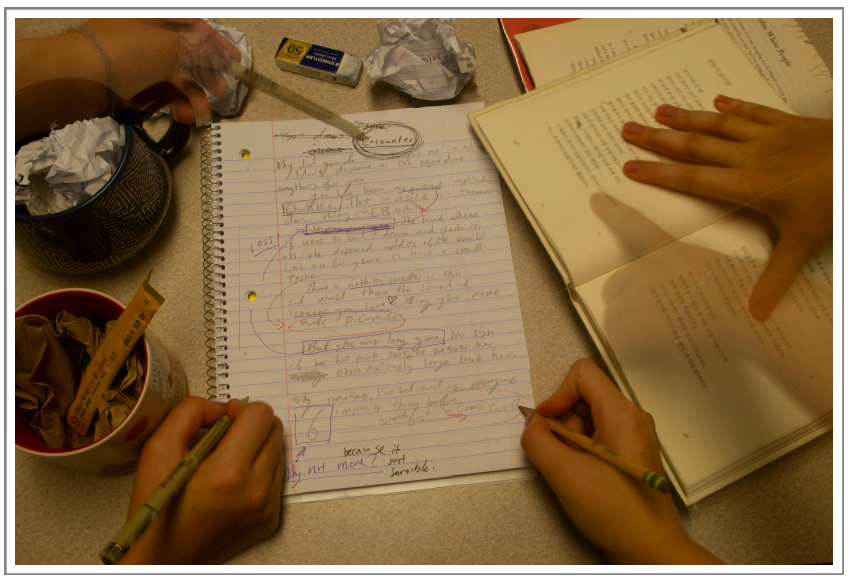

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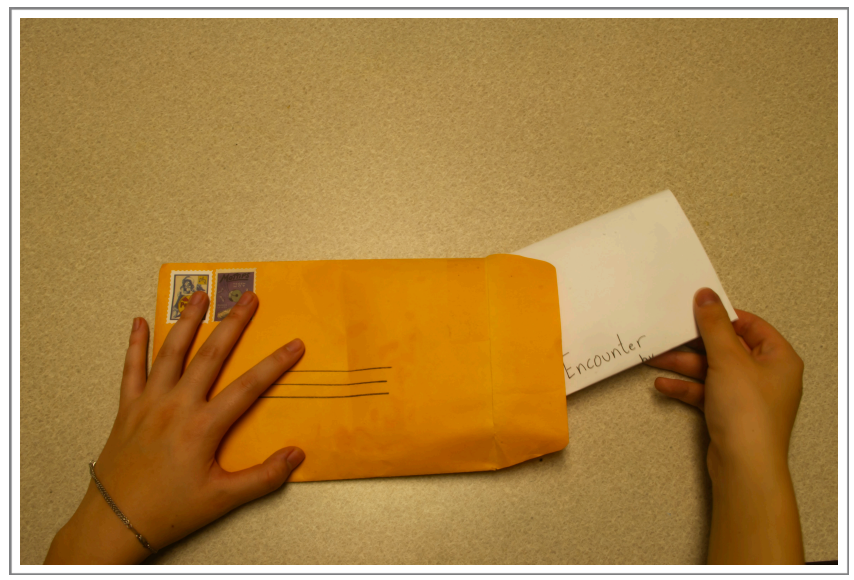

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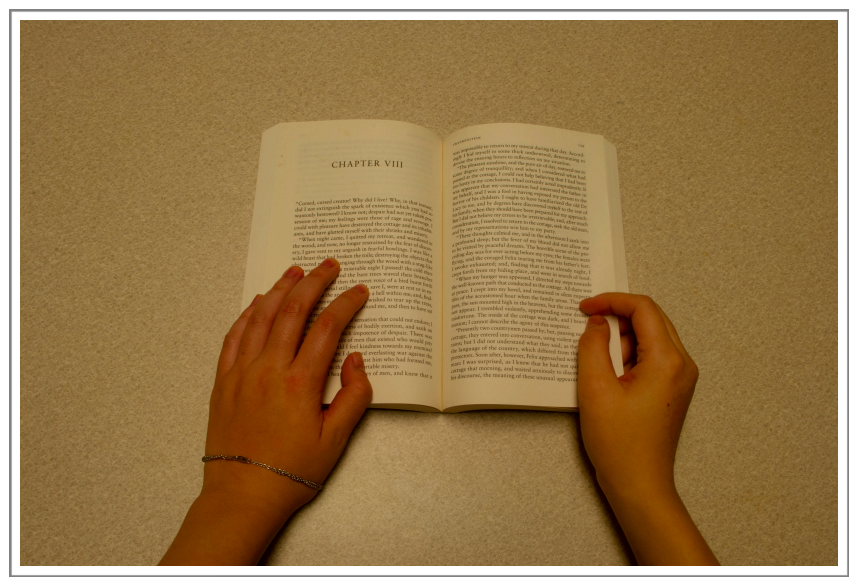

10

The Engaged Memory of Ruins Past

by

Mithra Sarkari

Mithra Sarkari is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aerospace Engineering. He wrote this poem to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Ayala-Chittick's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. Inspired by Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*, Mithra’s poem convey’s Ishiguro’s idea that the purpose of an odyssey is only revealed at the conclusion from an alternative perspective. Sarkari’s poem received an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2021 Cornerstone Contest.

The Engaged Memories of Ruins Past

As the hazy mist parted, revealing a path of worn cobblestone,
A dazed wanderer lost in mind and ignorant of his broken sight
Trudged through an archaic realm, pondering the esteem of the crumbled ruins.
Once a symbol of grandeur and strength, now a hidden land left alone.

With each pensive step, the breath of the wanderer carried greater weight.
His journey lacked a tangible destination, yet it was present.
Amongst the inscribed, fractured marble and its dense, overgrown lichen,
The wanderer stared at his odyssey's closure: the ruin's pale gate.

He ventured through the alien terrain, careful to not disturb its peace,
Noticing where the morning's tame dew had kissed the thin, emerald grass.
Coming upon the engraved cuneiform writings in ancient stonework,
The wanderer reached out, touching the cold masonry, feeling at ease.

Moving his hand across the marmoreal writing, caressing each figure
Knowing nothing of the individual character's subtle nuance,
The wanderer's somber eyes closed; his mind delved into memories past
To a time where his youth held strong and his life filled itself with vigor.

An endless realm of reflection manifested in his consciousness.
Each core image of his vibrant, colorful past containing itself
Within an ever-swirling ball of emotion, dogma, and ardor.
The wanderer drifted deeper into his world without Providence.

He conjured recessed icons of a lost and fragmented family,
A family once his own, a family ruined on his own.
Their warm smiles consoled his worn, tortured soul, calling him to return home.
Regret penetrated his bones, iced his blood, breaking his sanity.

In a moment of lament, the wanderer cried out in ailing grief.
His hand trembled on the milky marble, now as hot as freshly forged iron.
His body slumped, laying in a patch of chaotic, tangled weeds, weeping.
The ruins awakened sentiments long suppressed, long without belief.

When his strength returned, the wanderer cautiously stood, eyes wet with tears.
His long journey had taken him to places farther than human thought,
Yet the world's sights had not affected his essence as the unknown words had.
The wanderer once again turned to the stone with determination to quell his fears.

Once more he placed his hand on the white marble, once more he closed his eyes.
He returned to the infinite realm where his memories resided,
Prepared to confront the actions a naïve youth and its consequences.
The wanderer wanted just one thing: a chance to break though his disguise.

The disguise that held his journey together, which preserved his one drive.
He wanted to remove it altogether, to hunt for his soul's core.
The wanderer would no longer be endlessly lost within himself.
In his last memory, he saw his family, happy and alive.

The wanderer's eyes opened to the stone, no longer filled with remorse.
Each of his aging fingers could feel the fortitude of the ruins.
They had relieved him of his itinerant pain and his contrition.
The soul of an aimless wanderer left, revealing a defined course.

He returned to the milky gates of the grand ruins, to the founder
Of his novel, structured frame of mind; a soul and body with purpose
No longer constrained by his former, broken self and free to return.
Holding this moment, he found his life renewed from a chance encounter.

Cornerstone Contest: “Chance Encounter”

by Zih-Ting Yang

Zih-Ting Yang is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Animation and Visual Effects. She created this artwork to fulfill an assignment in Professor Jody Watkins’ SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. The artwork captures the surreal moment where two kids who have never met before recognizing each other beyond this current dimension. They wave goodbye and wish each other good luck in their separate journeys on Earth. Yang’s art received an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2021 Cornerstone Contest.

4

Reading Voyages

> “One glance at a book and you hear the voice of another person, perhaps someone dead for 1,000 years. To read is to voyage through time. ”
>
> –Carl Sagan

Cornerstone Contest: “Reading Voyages”

My Grandfather’s Book

by

Jade Mees

Jade Mees is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Electrical Engineering. She was a student in Professor Joan Timoneda’s SCLA 102 class. Jade’s essay was inspired by a book in German given to Jade by her grandfather and demonstrates that even unknown books can be significant. She learns to read German and realizes that each chapter of the book contains her family’s history, starting with her grandfather’s experiences as a Jewish boy growing up in Nazi Germany. Jade’s essay won the first place in the Spring 2022 Cornerstone Contest.

I stare at my grandfather with wide, confused, eyes as I examine the book, he had just handed me as a gift. Two sheer white covers bound by a dark blue spine encase about 70 pages of A4-sized paper, it did not look like an ordinary book, and it had no title. No description, words, or pictures decorated the front or back covers, there was simply an image of my family's crest on the front cover. *I am confused, what is this?* I ask carefully, trying to not offend him. *A book, from me and grandma*. He replies, staring at me with furrowed brows and sad eyes. He watches as I carefully open it, the spine cracks as it is opened for the first time, and I quickly notice it is written entirely in German. *I can't read this* I admit with shame, long compound words and accents flood my vision as I stare at the blocks of text, I was fluent in German but had not yet learned to read. *That is alright* he replies, *it is not for you to read now, you will keep it safe and read it when you are older*. I thank him and carefully put it in my suitcase, still quite confused.

My grandfather had always been reserved and I rarely saw him get emotional, he did not cry at his friends' funerals or get angry, rather he always maintained the calm facade he developed in his time as a judge. But on the occasions where I could see behind the mask he carefully wore; I would see his weary eyes and distant stare as he remembered the parts of his life I knew he would never tell me. I knew about his career as a judge and professor, and the consequences of the time and religion he was born into, but I knew better than to ask him how his life was as a Jewish boy growing up in Nazi Germany. Instead, he would always tell me the many stories of my father as a child and his legal studies, while my father would recount the details of my family and Germany's history to me.

As time passed, I would keep going back to my grandfather's book to see if my German was good enough to understand it fully, but unfortunately, my grandfather had written all of it in the same complexity he used to write legal documents and textbooks. I would get a couple of sentences in and find that I understood nothing, but the names mentioned. *You will be able to read it eventually*, my grandfather would always reassure me whenever I asked for help reading it. *If you cannot read it, you will not understand it*.

Soft summer sunlight dances through my room as I cough through the dust that floats off the cover as I take the book from its place on my bookshelf, brushing it clean. I open the cover to reveal the page that I had read dozens of times before, each time being unable to understand it. I read the names that I could almost repeat by heart and stare at the words that intimidate me. I was astounded and excited as I realized I was understanding and absorbing what I was reading, the names were my family members that my grandfather had known, and the book was my family's story.

As I slowly read through what my grandfather had written I quickly realized that this was the story of my family and the story of the holocaust from his experience, which I had thought he would never tell me. It was a personal recounting of every single family member he had known and known of and what became of them. It was the harsh story of the difficult reality he had lived in, some family members died tragic deaths, and some lived. It was real life; few chapters were concluded by a happy ending, and some were left unfinished as the family member was picked up by the Nazis one day and never seen again. I understood why he had wanted me to wait to read it, it was a very difficult topic that he wanted me to understand completely. The original excitement I had felt when I could understand it, quickly gave way to solemn silence as I read the tragic stories of my family members.

My grandmother had written her side of the family into the book, and at the end my grandparents had recounted their own lives. Their childhoods, careers, and experiences were all included as firsthand accounts. At the end of the book were two partially finished chapters for my father and uncle, and the very last chapter was titled with my own name. In it, my grandfather told the story of my own childhood as he saw it, right up to the age of 8 when he had given me the book. The final words were a message that I was a part of the family and that the book was mine to continue.

Later, I called my grandfather and asked why he had given me a book when he could have instead just told me. *Because someday, I will die. Your grandmother died last year, and someday you will die too. Who then, will be able to tell our stories? Who will remember us and our family?* He had responded.

Throughout my life, in school and on my own, I have read books written long before I was even born, legacies that the authors left behind. From Homer to Orwell, authors throughout history have preserved their legacies and names in the great works they leave for us to read long after they have passed. Authors are remembered for their works, just as scientists are remembered for their discoveries and politicians are remembered for their actions. Beyond telling stories or conveying information, literature provides a way to preserve and understand history. While the book my grandfather wrote will never be published or read by students hundreds of years from now it still preserves my family's history and there will come a day where my grandfather and I will only be remembered through our words.

Cornerstone Contest: “Reading Voyages”

A Journey into the Lives of Pre-Suffrage Women

by

Malini Nair

Malini Nair is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Economics and minoring in Communications and Political Science. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Johnson’s SCLA 102 class in Spring 2022. After watching Greta Gerwig’s adaptation of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women,* Malini was inspired to find how the interpretations of the novel evolved over time, and what the novel had to say about the lives of pre-suffragette women. Malini’s essay received an Honorary Mention in the Spring 2022 Cornerstone Contest.

With four movies and two shows, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is one of the most commonly adapted pieces of classic literature to hit the big screen. In the last two years, the novel has regained popularity amongst young readers after the release of Greta Gerwig's proto-feminist adaptation of the story. Feminism, as we know it, didn't exist when Alcott wrote the novel in the aftermath of the American Civil War, and the book often emphasizes 'wifely duties', but the novel remains to be a beacon of classic feminist literature. While *Little Women* in no way intends a 'feminist novel,' it forces readers into pre-suffrage tight bonnets and hoopskirts, illustrating the oppressive lives of women centuries after its creation.

Little Woman is a coming-of-age novel about four sisters, Meg, Beth, Jo, and Amy, as they grow into women in an America torn by the Civil War. The four sisters, each with wildly different personalities, learn lessons about love, generosity, and adulthood as they frolic in their small town in Massachusetts. It is impossible to know if Alcott took after Wolstencraft and Mott and intended to write a radical women's rights novel. Regardless her words capturing the strife and oppression of nineteenth-century women have evolved through time and been read and interpreted by generations of people living in different eras of feminist movements.

I have read *Little Women* twice in its entirety, once when I was ten and a budding feminist, and another time when I was seventeen and obsessed with feminist theory. During my first read, I became fascinated by the imagery of the novel and the theatrics of the March family, but the novel's meaning evolved during my second read. I understood a new side of the March family; I saw new dimensions of each of the sisters and the entrapment many of the characters faced. In my first read, I thought Amy March, the youngest of the sisters obsessed with marrying wealthy, was a selfish, lazy, goody-two-shoes who only cared about personal gain, not love. Once I reread the novel, I recognized Amy showed consideration to her family in her way. Amy realized the way she could help her family was by climbing the economic ladder through marriage. While Amy, unlike Jo, never tries to break social boundaries to help her family, she works extremely hard to gain economic stability for her family within the societal constraints of womanhood.

When thinking of iconic feminist characters, most people may think of Fa Mulan, Mary Poppins, or Katniss Everdeen, but classic literature enthusiasts tend to think of Jo March. Jo, the second oldest March sister and the novel's protagonist, is the original not-like-other-girls archetype written 141 years before A03 was created. While characters like her have become a monotonous stereotype in recent decades, Jo was without a doubt a unique personality for her time. Jo's character juxtaposes the ideal woman of the time in

every sense of the manner. From cutting her hair to writing a book about women, Alcott's plausible self-insert seeks a way to free herself from the shackles of housework and marriage. At the beginning of the novel, Jo says, "I can't get over the disappointment in not being a boy." She feels frustrated with the limitations of being a woman and seeks economic independence through various methods. Many women at the time were restricted from financial freedom and were unable to gain access to jobs. Most women were not well educated since society did not prioritize female literacy, and most careers were restricted to men. "Even those who were able to hold a job – for instance, as factory employees – could never gain a certain degree of independence"(Gutiérrez 10). Women were not allowed to get loans, open bank accounts, buy houses, buy contraceptives, and sometimes even travel without a man's permission. Additionally, many of the wages women earned were significantly less than their male counterparts, sometimes even less than a livable wage. Jo makes amends with the limitations of her gender after she cuts her hair and feels as if she had to sell her beauty to gain money to sustain her family while her father was away at war.

At the end of the novel, Jo eventually manages to earn a small sum of money from her writing but is criticized by her publisher for writing about women. This struggle is based on Alcott's own struggles when publishing *Little Women*. "In everything, Louisa Alcott wrote she made use of the outward details and the hidden emotional currents of her life, and her life was no children's book," (PBS, "The Woman Behind Little Women"). Alcott's life paralleled Jo's in her distaste for marriage and her hatred of the limitations of her gender. Alcott often vented the struggle of being a 19th-century woman in her novel. Unlike Jo, Alcott never married and wanted Jo to abstain from marriage but conformed to please her fans. Alcott's experience of being a woman is sown into the binding of *Little Women*.

"The story of four girls in their crucial adolescent years has survived the successive waves of both American feminism and antifeminism, able in some mysterious way to assume a protective coloration that blend with the prevailing ideological winds, emerging fresh, whole— different—for the next generation of women," said Madelon Bedell, author of *The Alcotts*, in the introduction to a 1983 reprint of *Little Women*. Generations of people have read the words of Alcott's unlikely feminist manifesto and been transported to the lives of four sisters as they interact with the social constraints of their society. With every generation of readers, the novel finds a newfound meaning and interpretation. Perhaps Allcott's novel is not a critic of gender constructs but a preservation of time, managing to take every reader on a new journey.

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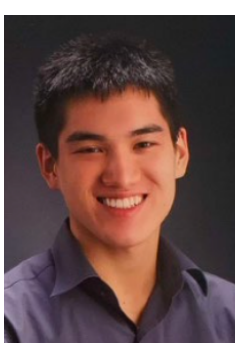
Where A Book Takes You

by

Sam Johnson

Link to the video speech: https://youtu.be/7OHA1C_a0go



Sam Johnson is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Visual Effects and Animation and Computer Engineering. He created this video in response to the theme of the Spring 2022 Cornerstone Contest—“reading voyages”—when he was in Professor Andrew Kunze’s SCLA 101 class. Sam wanted to create visuals blending the feeling of being engrossed in a book. Sam’s video received an Honorary Mention in the Spring 2022 Cornerstone Contest.

Teachings of the Buddha

by Oviyaal Kannan Jegadesan Valsala

Oviyaal Kannan Jegadesan Valsala is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Data Science. She created this artwork to fulfill an assignment in Professor Abigail Droge’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. When she read the *Teachings of the Buddha* for the first time in middle school, it completely changed her understanding of life. It helped mould her into the person she is today. Through her art, she wishes to encourage everyone to read this book.

The Power of Books

by

Abby Ahrens

Abby Ahrens is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biomedical Engineering. She wrote this essay to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Li Wei’s SCLS 101 class in Spring 2022. Inspired by Abby’s own childhood experiences, this piece attempts to convey the profound impact that literature can have on our lives.

The sun shone down brightly over the playground. The air was filled with the elated shouts of students. There was no mistaking the scene for anything other than the true treasure of elementary school, afternoon recess. Being the only chance to expend a fraction of that pent up childhood energy during a seven-hour school day, recess was a sacred rite of passage for every 8-year-old. There were epic games of freeze tag, kickball tournaments, ring-pop weddings, and pretty much any other activity our minds could think up, but for me recess represented a different kind of freedom. I couldn't run fast or kick far and all celebrations of holy matrimony required an invitation and formal attire, of which I had neither. This left me with only one option, but one that I accepted with great vigor. For most of my youthful, formative years from half past one to two o'clock I could be found in the shade of the big oak tree, curled up with my books.

Over the years I read hundreds of books. I loved mysteries, biographies, science fiction stories, picture books, and pretty much anything else I could get my hands on. Science was my favorite subject and sometimes I even read my textbook for fun when I thought nobody was looking. My mom always joked that I finished books faster than she could check them out. The public library was my favorite place on Earth. I begged to spend afternoons there the way most kids beg to go to the park or play with their friends. One day as I was looking through the new arrivals, I noticed a book with interesting cover art. I definitely judge books based on their covers, so I picked it up and began to read the first page. I was immediately drawn in. The book was called *Ivy and Bean* and, though I didn't know it at the time, it was the book that would change my entire life.

Ivy and Bean chronicles the adventures of two childhood best friends as they grow into their personalities and struggle their way through elementary school. I loved their stories because I felt like I could relate to the characters. Ivy was quiet and shy and loved to learn and read, just like me. Bean was loud and athletic and always had more energy than she knew what to do with, just like my best friend. The characters were pretty much complete opposites, yet they were the best of friends and they just seemed to understand each other. I saw so much of my life reflected in their friendship. I think this is the reason they were able to have such a profound impact on me.

The author, Annie Barrows, produced a total of seven books. I saved all of my tooth fairy and chore money to be able to purchase the books as soon as they were released. Each book recounted a new event in the girl's lives. Some of these adventures included expelling a ghost from the school bathroom, discovering and constructing dinosaur fossils in their back yard, making Mt.Vesuvius out of a neighborhood mulch pile, and creating the world's best science fair project. The stories were funny and entertaining, but they were also much more.

This was the first time I read about little girls like me who pursued their interests openly and didn't care what other people thought. The girls were constantly teased by their classmates and doubted by their teachers for thinking they could find dinosaur fossils or create potions, but they didn't mind. They just kept doing what made them happy.

As a child I was plagued by an annoying level of curiosity. I learned early to only ask an appropriate number of questions on field trips and to tell adults that teaching was my dream job when they asked because it hurts when they laugh at me for saying I wanted to invent time travel. Even my friends didn't want to come to my science museum birthday party, and they didn't understand my excitement when our teacher brought female engineer in to talk to our class. Ivy and Bean changed my whole perspective. I started embracing my interests and not shying away from things because other people thought it was annoying.

When it was time for me to choose what I wanted to study in college, the decision was easy. I knew that engineering was the right choice for me and that it would allow me to be curious and keep learning for the rest of my life. If it weren't for Ivy and Bean, I don't know how things might be different now. It's possible that I still might have found the inspiration that I needed, but I also might have caved under the pressure and conformed to society's expectation for my life. Engineering is a very difficult program, and sometimes I do feel like I must prove that I deserve to be here. It can be difficult to be a girl in a male dominated major, but luckily, I am surrounded by other strong young women in STEM. I still go back and reread the books sometimes when I am feeling discouraged. My confidence is always renewed when I remember the way that my childhood self was empowered by the tales of Ivy and Bean. That is why stories like this one are very important.

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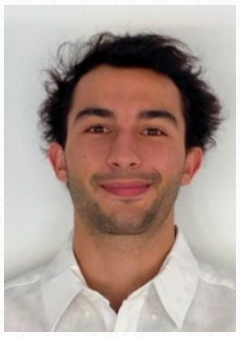
Enjoy the View

by

Ignacio Abbondati



Ignacio Abbondati is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Industrial Engineering. He wrote this poem to fulfill a writing assignment in Professor Michael Nichols’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. This piece was inspired by *Gilgamesh* and *The Little Prince,* both of which use a unique storytelling to introduce the wonders of friendship and adventures, and both delve into the complexity of morality while celebrating the beauty of life.

Enjoy the View

Somewhere in the herd,
Lies a child who is the third.
Scared of being unheard,
Deep down he knows it's absurd.

He dreams of discovering,
Opens his book and begins coloring.
Time feels like forever,
Being labeled as clever,
He wonders if titles mean anything, or whatever.

Time went on,
Suddenly life hit him with a con.
His best friend was now far and gone.

Scared of the unknown,
He was not his own.
He felt alone,
His heart turned to stone.

Yet, he overcame and grew.
He realized that he is human, too.
Happily, he said:
“No more feeling blue.
I will now enjoy the view,
Because I will never know when my time is due.”

Inspired by *Gilgamesh* and *The Little Prince*.

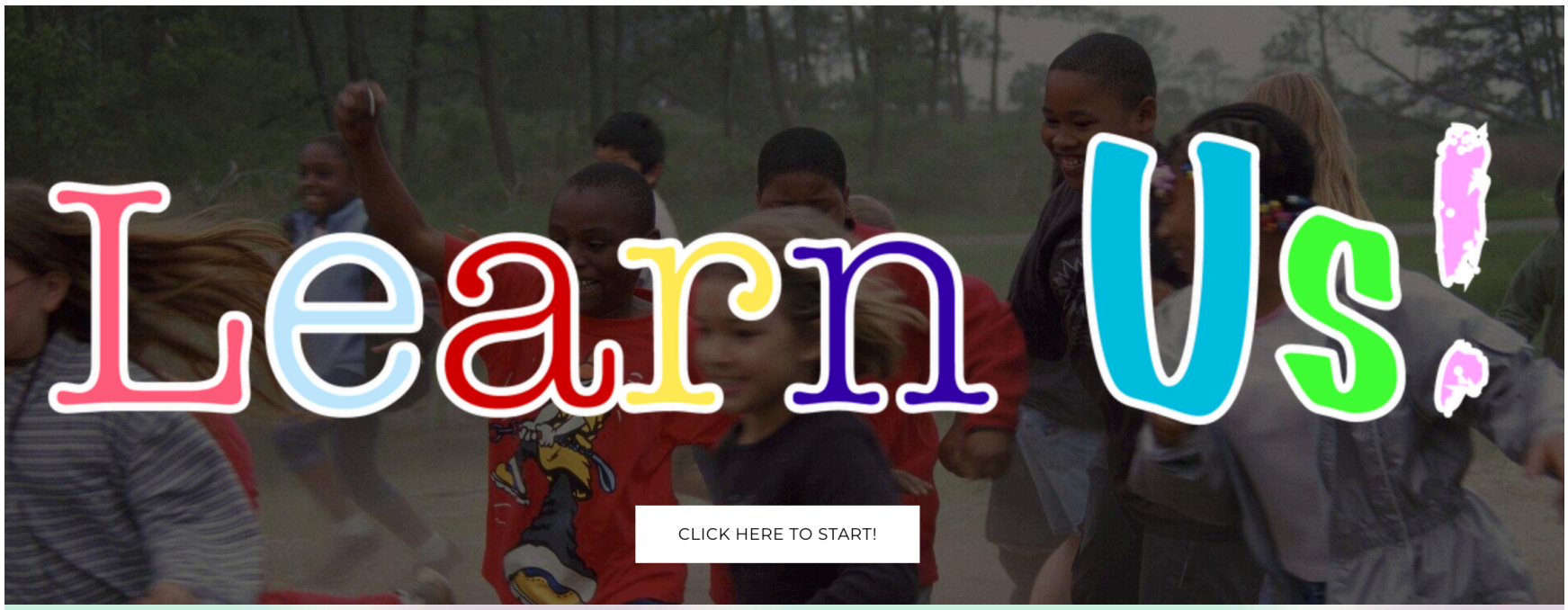
Shadows of the Moon

by Pavit Hooda

Pavit Hooda is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aerospace Engineering. He painted this artwork when he was in Professor Nichols's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2022. Pavit hopes that this piece of art would help convey the wisdom embodied by the mysterious Moon and the complexities of love. His infatuation with the Moon is not solely philosophical, but he also has dreams of one day developing propulsion systems that will take humanity back to the surface of the Moon.

The “Learn Us” Website

by Jackson Sanders



Jackson Sanders is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Industrial Design. He created this project—“Learn Us”—to fulfill an assignment in Professor Clair Mason’s SCLA 102 class in Spring 2022. This work was inspired by the writings of Chinua Achebe and the parallels that could be drawn from his text to the real world, specifically regarding the polarity found within modern society. The goal of “Learn Us” is to address this issue by demonstrating to children how to coexist and progress towards a better, more inclusive future.

The “Learn Us” Website

by Jackson Sanders

Jackson Sanders

A current college student at Purdue and a longtime advocate for inclusivity and diversity, Jackson founded Learn Us in 2022 with goal of helping solve the problems of today by inspiring the youth of tomorrow.

Chinua Achebe

The main inspiration for the creation of Learn US, Achebe is pivotal in our story as he is the author of "Dead Men's Path". This text transformed founder Jackson Sanders and is the seed for which Learn Us will grow from.

Claire Mason

Our entire story would not have started if it was not for the efforts of Mason teaching SCLA: 102 at Purdue University. Setting students out to create a product derived from a transformative text as the final; none of this would be possible without her.

Mission Statement of Jackson’s Multi-tiered Web Project:

The goal of “Learn Us” is to use transformative text to foster a society of inclusivity and consideration for all. The complete "Learn Us” product demonstrates the critical ideas of Chinua Achebe’s “Dead Men’s Path” with great attention and care. Critical ideas like equality, diversity, inclusivity, and consideration for all are derived from Chinua Achebe’s “Dead Men’s Path” which itself is a transformative text. One might point out that Chinua Achebe only directly mentions one of those critical ideas in “Dead Men’s Path” (inclusivity/ consideration for all). That is not, however, considering how one interprets and analyzes a transformative text; to transform yourself, you must critically read the text as has been done here. Once you can derive the critical ideas from Chinua Achebe’s “Dead Men’s Path” you can see how “Learn Us” will create a future of inclusivity and consideration for all using Achebe’s text.

BACK COVER ART

"Chance Encounter" by Raj Lunia

Raj Lunia is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. He created this artwork when he was in Professor Christopher White' s SCLA 102 class in Fall 2021. Raj said that when he read the prompt for the Cornerstone Contest theme—"Chance Encounter," he felt completely lost at first, and then he had the idea of juxtaposing two things that were the most unlikely to come together: a boy enjoying his book next to a loin. Every book is a chance for an adventure, and this artwork attempts to demonstrate that anyone can enjoy a book no matter where they are or who they are with.

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The Cornerstone Review

ISSUE 3 FALL 2022

FICTION · ESSAY · POETRY · ART

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CORNERSTONE
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