



The Literary and Arts Journal of Sigma Tau Delta's  
Eastern Region  
2013 Edition





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***Editors' Notes***

A mural is specifically defined by the way in which the architectural elements of the structure it is painted on are incorporated into the mural. In a mural, the line between form and function blurs. While murals can come as paintings or tiles, they can also come as writing.

Allow us to explain.

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What is writing? Well, it can be a lot of things. It can be an essay on the postmodern in Shakespeare, a poem about apricots, a short story about a church with a broken window, a shopping list, a love note, a trite introduction to a regional literary magazine, ad infinitum. Even more, writing can be regarded as both a noun and a verb -- a form and a function. How are you writing? In cursive? Print? Fountain pen? Computer? Writing can be a lot of things. The word is inherently inadequate to explain what you're doing.

Or is it? The common denominator of all these writings is the use of symbols to convey meaning. Writing, in all its haphazard glory, is the use of symbols to share reality. Yet, sharing isn't a one way street, as we learned in preschool. All writing, when it is read, becomes an interpretation. We place our own unique meaning into the words -- our own reality. And so in writing, the function of the author, the function of the reader, and the form of the symbols collapse into one. Writing is a mural of shared realities.

And with that, we proudly present *Mind Murals*, a collection of critical, visual, poetic, and fictitious realities -- writing -- to share with you.

Brian Hartt  
Co-editor in Chief  
Associate Student Representative, 2012-2013  
Eastern Region, Sigma Tau Delta

Of all of the street art I have seen since moving to Pittsburgh, my favorite thus far is a mural. A two-story building along Penn Avenue in the neighborhood of Garfield juts out further than the homes it follows. This section of wall is filled with a depiction of a bride ascending the stairs into her home, the windows of which are open to allow the curtains to waft outward in the breeze. The colors and the mural and its orientation complement the houses and lawns around it. It is an example of someone's artistic work can both reflect and impact a community.

Nothing is created in a vacuum. That mural is an example of this, as is this collection of works. By contributing to *Mind Murals*, you are sharing your work, your thoughts, your inspiration, your fears, your anxieties on display for the entire Sigma Tau Delta community to see and interpret. *Mind Murals* functions in a way very similar to that wall in Garfield, in that it represents a single fragment of the entire community of scholars and composers.

The difference between that mural in Garfield and this issue of *Mind Murals* is that we know personally that this collection contains multitudes. The work of several writers, artists, and editors has gone into the creation of this beautiful work. This particular issue has seen its share of difficulties and delays, but despite the problems it has flourished into something of which I am proud to be a part.

Through the tireless efforts of the writers and artists contained within and the readers and editors tasked with narrowing down which pieces made it to print, we present to you a piece of your impact on the Sigma Tau Delta, your addition to the wall.

Joe Nelis  
Co-editor in Chief  
Student Representative, 2012-2013  
Eastern Region, Sigma Tau Delta

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**Apostle's Creed**

Families that pray may stay together;  
although, fear may rise from Atheism,  
the prayer of a liberal endeavor.

Temptation to flee the sacred oppressor  
is fought to avoid a cataclysm.  
Families that pray may stay together.

From freedom of thought to a transgressor,  
deviating from Catholicism,  
would seem like a fatal endeavor.

Sacrificial beliefs are made in error,  
so as not to create antagonism.  
Families that pray may stay together.

Loyalty is begged by Mother and Father,  
who blessed you with the curse of Baptism.  
This cause is becoming a hopeless endeavor.

Renounce your Communion, and see the danger  
in an outcast's view on chauvinism.  
This family may pray, but not together,  
since honesty is a fated endeavor.

**My Beautiful Christian Neighbors**

ignite me and flip me over and turn me in  
i am the bad child who runs away from home  
whispered confessions in a church full of sin

i kiss all the boys that leave scars on my skin  
but i know better than to call them my own  
ignite me and flip me over and turn me in

the door licks its splintered metal skin  
the neighbors tear down the forest they have grown  
whispered confessions in a church full of sin

i went to the bible study to find a new friend  
but all i found was a soul poorly sewn  
ignite me and flip me over and turn me in

madness found a friend in the sharp teeth of gin  
the neighbors chanted prayers all night on the phone  
whispered confessions in a church full of sin

i am their little lost child with a head full of pins  
and the stains on the earth all covered in snow  
ignite me and flip me over and turn me in  
whispered confessions in a church full of sin

**Ana Mia**

Bones protrude  
taut  
skin  
jut and meld  
maps  
glass slippers,  
with its rounded borders garbles  
and she, standing naked  
and shaves  
excess  
there is nothing left  
and bones  
carved out by words  
bigger

like broken glass under  
blue veined  
and sharp edges  
with scars and road  
made by shattered  
and the talking mirror  
reality like a Picasso  
gnaws  
  
until  
but teeth  
and hollowed spaces  
from those no  
than mice.

**Ode to the Toilet**

Sublime shitter  
the one exposed to the annals  
of human disgust and misery  
and serves as reservoir for the waste that runs

deep and true, yes you,  
with your round and porcelain orifice  
you swallow the remains of sadness.  
The baggage that pulls us down,  
makes us sick. You take it.

You're devout and dedicated  
with a hard cased shell to cover  
the sacrosanct chore of forgiveness,  
a denial that we can afford but you deplore.

The stench of our lives is a testament  
To your work. The highest Gandhi the holiest  
Christ you are the paragon for what it means to serve  
Granting relief from the pain that we ourselves deserve.

**Omagh, August 15, 1998**

You know people are dying every single day through bitterness and hate, and we're saying why?  
Larry Mullen, Jr. drummer, U2.

Sharp crack  
Cuts cold.

Echoed peers  
Bound off brick  
To bent ears.

Birds rise,  
Flap frantic wings,  
'Scape to sky.

Mother's cry –  
Clean round hole  
Below baby brow –  
Straight through  
Blue eye.

**This Time**

My best friend told me how she planned to end her life.  
The girl with bright lemongrass eyes  
and freckles spotting her eggshell cheeks  
hoped to poison her blood  
with a bottle of prescription sunshine.  
I knew she had tried it before,  
the same week I saw her dangle her legs  
out of her bedroom window in her bright pink shorts,  
like a blossom about to spin to the ground from a high branch.  
After whispering her plan in my ear,  
she uncovered the strawberry gashes  
all over the pale undersides of her arms.  
The cherry-coated whites of her eyes  
showed when she slowly peeked  
up at me, as if I had caught her stealing candy.

**Won't You Guide Me Tonight**

starlights  
    starbrights  
are the stars that shine for me at night  
capture my dreams, I begged, I plead  
let me wake up in tears,  
as babies do  
crying out for their mothers  
oh how I've cried for you

"you're going to have to grow up very fast"  
so I crawled and then walked and soon began talking too  
a beautiful toddler who looks just like you

but I wasn't growing fast enough, you see  
because you are still gone and I am still missing, me  
look like you  
sound like you  
act like you too  
But I wasn't growing fast enough, so again, I grew.

Teenager, shmeenager - who knew you would go?  
Right before I turned twenty.  
My father, my anchor - one star is for you  
"you're going to have to grow up very fast"  
so again, I grew.

Twenty is here as I stare up at the sky  
my mother, my heart, no one as precious as she  
now there is one star for you -  
two stars for me

starlights  
    starbrights  
are the stars that shine for me at night  
as I lay on the ground and stare at the sky  
An adult, crying over both parents graves,  
who cannot help but ask "why?"

**Fight Club**

There's a sense of serenity in dodging raindrops,  
bobbing and weaving as the clouds cry.  
And the chill of the breeze  
assaulting touch, taste, feel, hear, see.

Strands of hair adhering to strands of hair  
forming clumps -  
deity-made dreadlocks of sopping wet  
caramel-colored  
proteins.

And eyeliner  
violently smeared by miniscule drops of water  
pummeling tired eyes  
and smoke-screening the view  
of a solemn scene.

Lips chapped by wind-chill and replenished by sleet.

Sandals shoved between unpainted toes  
squeak.

**Emmett Till**

It's okay, sweet boy.  
It's all going to be okay.  
They're just taking you on a ride.  
They just want to talk,  
Don't be scared.  
It's just a ride.

"Rock a bye baby  
In the tree top."

Please, hear me.  
I know it hurts,  
But they mean no harm.  
It will be over soon  
And I'll get your favorite  
Band-aids to patch you up.

"When the wind blows  
The cradle will rock."

Hear my voice  
Pass through your bones  
And believe that  
I would never  
Let anything bad  
Happen to you, son.

"When the bough breaks  
The cradle will fall."

You're just going for a swim.  
I'll be waiting with a towel  
When you come out  
And we can talk  
All about your adventure.  
I love you, Emmett.

"And down will come baby  
Cradle and all. "

### **My Deliverance**

Caged up like an exotic creature  
You wanted no one else to see my beauty  
My glossy dark hair, velvety skin, seductive brown eyes  
I slid out of your narrow shackles  
Like a black mamba  
I abandoned you for eternity  
What a wondrous feeling it was to have the invigorating breeze caress my skin  
The noose which you had tightened around my throat had been slashed off  
Allowing myself to breathe again,  
I notice all the space around me  
My barricade has been torn down  
And I can taste a new world on the tip of my tongue  
Inhaling all the oxygen I want,  
Intoxicated off the scent of liberation  
Wants, needs, limitations of yours  
will no longer bury me down  
Wanting me to be someone I'll never be  
Needing me to take care of you like a child  
Limiting me to a hopeless future  
You will no longer have your hold on me  
I am now a free, gorgeous creature,  
For the world to see

**Child**

1

Unclear,  
his name was confused  
with “child”  
for years.

He cradles a jarred lizard,  
wiping sweat and dirt  
in broad streaks down  
his cheeks.

Days later a girl gave him her prize,  
the muddy urn  
under whose cloth  
stood a wigwam of twig  
and grass—he shook,  
angling his eye.  
Sunlight swam in the tilted  
jar until he saw  
a high wet dome,  
total black  
from compact temples,  
to pinched anus,  
of the fattest cricket in the world.

And if a minute would pass  
when he did not see it,  
it became monstrous;  
without spying the legs,  
the insect, the ticking of hard bodies  
against glass  
was the deepest prism  
in the afternoon.

But the most fearful thing  
is to feed them;  
The snakes and lizards who  
wait alone in that jar.

18

2

My child hands easing  
the lid into a breathing slice,  
a momentary door,  
the air exhaling from within,  
and expert with a child's  
cruel fingers, dragging in  
the cricket, in mortal  
haste, splitting its black wings  
in my terror, I tip,  
it falls, I,  
just snapping down the lid,  
where a fresh leg is now sealed,  
an elbow of black hair.

Within, the tips  
of my fingers are red  
ovals on the glass walls.  
And a green head  
tilts,  
the eye ponders.

3

My hand recalls  
the evening beside the wire fence  
where I sat in boots, feeding a  
hatchling garter  
snake my finger.  
She did not want to eat. Veering  
her enameled nose,  
she had rooted tight her  
lipless mouth but I kept  
my two eyes  
on the hole in the center of her grin,  
Where the dim mouth breathed,  
budded a tickling tongue.

She spoke her forked tongue  
over my bleeding knuckle,  
her eyes bleary  
pellets, pure,

and beat her tail  
over my patient wrist,  
engrossed in some distant thought.

I waited.

Then ready, she yawned  
and tested her infant teeth  
on my fingernail.  
Give her a moment;  
I leave her in my palm,  
her crib.

Two black stones  
Set shallow in her head,  
She watches me as if from across a table,  
saber phrasing,  
uncovering me  
with Spring looks and  
Autumn thoughts,  
though I can only see one  
stone at any moment.  
I drench her  
with sovereign kisses but  
she starves for my soul,  
My eruptive loss.

She breathes in through her nostrils,  
mournful mouth full.  
When she releases her bite,  
she chirps.

I wait.

Again taking her taste,  
she clamps again,  
nimble onto my Swiss watch.

I pry it from her mouth,  
The lover infinite,  
and watch her,  
serpent thwarted.

4

20

Nothing shadowy.  
Nothing frantic.  
She considers me.

So I present her again  
My fingertip.  
Sip! She's taken it,  
head on,  
the jaws unhinge,  
she engulfs,  
now green,  
yet blue angelic,  
she engulfs.

Her armless shoulders seize  
my palm, now coiled,  
her back jolts,  
and tail thumps, coiling at once,  
like a vine of snow pea,  
it curls translucent green  
around my arm.

Her elite chin, warping golden  
in sunlight,  
engulfs.

The red straw  
is narrow  
that I begin to feel.  
This childsnake  
can hardly eat a worm.  
Dreamy, her distracted face  
loosens like soil.

The tubes within her fiery throat  
widen as she claims  
her prize,  
she's killing me.

5

For years, lizards swept  
their long toes

behind them, rushing  
for the water's edge.  
Frolicking garters looped  
and foreign blacksnakes  
humped their backs as they  
dove into their holes  
in the grass.

Crickets ticked in jars.  
Trucks woke me,  
smiling,  
sparrows had me squinting,  
armies of ground bees kept me running, but  
still my name meant "child"  
for years.

6

Caught in solar trance,  
the glass walls of the jar  
bake.

A tail propels  
the grown lizard over  
bark chips and dirt,  
wrapping its rubber  
jaws around the insect's  
oblique middle,  
lotion bursts outward,  
white as the veins in  
those terrible arms.

“Life doesn’t stop for anybody”  
We built a fort  
out of blankets and pillows  
and crawled underneath  
away from the harsh  
and ever-changing ways of life.  
We escaped for awhile  
in the darkened shelter  
and lived in a fantasy world  
amongst the wizards and dragons  
and enjoyed each others’ happiness.  
We emerged after hours  
of endless imaginative bliss  
and sighed in the dimly lit room,  
aware of our surroundings  
and the time on the clock.  
We watched as the sun  
sank beneath the sky line  
and faded from sight  
as if foreshadowing our future  
and the inevitable departure.

**Perfect Wrists**

Such the artist, so tortured and so torn up,  
Shiny straight crimson lines  
Across wandering pastel-blue veins  
And she could have showed you how  
If you'd been around.  
She played all sorts of daring games  
Up and down that pale porcelain street  
(Hide and seek);  
She is no one's favorite charity  
But they assume they know the causes.

Hairy legs and perfect wrists,  
The sweet red rust  
Has finally worn away.  
Now she worships fingers.  
The mirror loves you,  
You and your perfect wrists  
Look perfect.

She likes living below zero  
And she sleeps in the graveyard  
She calls her body  
She calls her heaven;  
On violent windy days  
Only the plastic flowers will touch her  
And only the whispered air will speak.  
Remember me like a headstone  
And I'll love you like the meaning.

So there she is with hairy legs  
And perfectly scarred wrists,  
The masterpieces of years' work;  
Empty orange bottle  
Because stomachs must be filled  
And endings must be perfect.  
She is a sweet-smelling victim  
Of impermanence,  
Saying her hollow Sunday goodbyes  
When not even flowers  
Will stay.

### Going Up

There is a sheet of paper,  
pure, simple, and white,  
lying out on a boy's desk  
awaiting manipulation.  
With all his ingenuity and will,  
the boy begins to fold it,  
and bend it,  
and shape it,  
into a long, pointed bill.  
Through an open window it takes flight,  
piercing into the invisible walls of air  
for a moment's glory.  
Gradually restrained and defeated,  
it accepts gravity's beckoning  
and enters the inevitable descent.

But then it rises up against the Earth.  
The stiff, flat wings spread out.  
The edges of paper split into dull blades,  
soft blades of snow that  
furiously beat against the air.  
A body fills out,  
tail, head, and feet are born.  
At the front, two dark pebbles awaken,  
and the soft-tipped bill hardens to bone.  
Now this little creature,  
pure, simple, and white.  
flies through the changing of days,  
the pilgrimage of seasons.  
It gleams in the sun, reflects the moon,  
and the creature's beauty  
acquires man's appeal.  
Nothing more.

But still the creature grows.  
Its wings burst out, extending in length.  
As its body expands,  
the soft exterior burns to a darker hue,  
yet the head remains a crown of glistening white.  
The bone of its mouth curves

down into a golden hook.  
The small black feet shed their skin,  
unleashing large claws of sulfur  
that grasp life itself.

With fierce eyes, the magnificent beast  
sees everything.  
Its piercing cry threatens those below,  
echoing over the mountains  
and through the trees.  
Its powerful wings command the wind,  
they majestically flap,  
requesting an encore from the setting sun.

Man is impressed.  
Man treasures the beast,  
and marvels at its glory.  
Nothing more.

But still the beast grows,  
Its frame expands yet again,  
hardening to sheets of glistening mail  
that blend into one solid layer.  
The wings grow very stiff,  
stretching out to their full length.  
The beak bends and twists,  
spinning and humming, faster and louder.  
As the eyes melt away,  
a translucent dome sprouts forth.  
Its thick claws roll up into rubber.  
Rows of nostrils permeate from the neck,  
angrily spitting and coughing.  
The construction flies.

At great speed, it slashes opposing winds,  
It chases the sun and follows the moon,  
Man salutes the construction,  
Man joins it in the clouds,  
Man destroys distance and time with it.  
Nothing more.

But still the construction grows,

Its sharply edged wings slant back for attack,  
A large, menacing beak reforms, the dome shrinks.  
The sleek, grey body flexes,  
muscles bulge out from the neck.  
Small rubber feet fold up into its chest,  
while the tail curls into a pair of fiery cylinders.  
Dense but light, strong but hollow,  
the steel infused skin bends and curves,  
molding into aerodynamic perfection.  
Two fins stand up from the back,  
electric current flows through copper veins.  
The masterpiece soars.

Wielding man's ingenuity and will,  
it claims victory over the sky.  
Destruction and death take residence beneath its wings.  
Relentless fire propels it at the greatest of speeds,  
proclaiming its deafening roar across the land.  
Sound, sight, and gravity are jealous,  
the masterpiece defies them all.  
Man has finally surpassed the Earth,  
Now, to the heavens.

**Eight Years Old (Through the Three Stages of Being)**

Day is a disk, spun and spun  
by the centrifuge my father  
purified water with (for hosing  
down the Chianinas before  
branding).

Night is the tabby cornered by two  
rottweilers (the neighbor's) and  
its dull, carpet claws and my eyes  
wide, silent upon jaw-strength and  
retina diamonds colliding.

Sleep is the Pinto I raised, her smoothness  
making tamps in my stomach  
and the black eggs of her eyes  
cracking, the star slosh pooling  
in the lean-to where we keep the saddles.

### **During Lull in Storm**

You know that line of crows like a shuddering nerve  
inside a thorn, that all night crowds into cutout thieves of clouds  
behind your shoulders: it traces around your wrist  
like an inlet knotting a grove; echoes the sound of an open  
coffin filling with slant rain; burns down  
the woodgrains in your head—a head in which wisteria  
is piled in a wheelbarrow, topped with poplar shreds  
and left in a clearing.

You saw a tornado walking  
home. Your boots worn from kicking timber, cutting woods  
of ponderosas. You forget you could stall you could miss  
the train within a minute like a cardinal's departure  
through your glasses, between roofs. You look up at the eclipse  
of storm and forest: within are battered  
pillars, reversed are the rivers and tilting  
are the empty rowboats. Who could fall any higher  
than you? There lies a laurel that looks,  
to you, a wineglass. Every night drops the drum's  
repercussions as one eyelid slackens like the sawing  
of a thin vine. First your nose seeks  
the balcony then the bed and a quick bedding  
of ferns stretches its neck to the windmill's turn.

You wander back to your private square: it is walled  
with windows curtained by burning dresses—the night mirrors, the tresses,  
the empty chests all your nesting. But, no—you are not  
content to settle on these branches like crows,  
even white crows, crows  
with talons of hair. In the painting the girls are running from bayonetting  
beach caves; without meeting a glance you toss a towel  
over the book and repeat what you already know:  
the windows are broken on the inside alone.

## NOLA

Stars reflect off the murky river water slapping the rocks  
of the Mississippi. Cold and unforgiving, the steamboat cries  
into the night telling a tale of woe we may never know.  
Hands high in the air, we wave to them, the passerby's, faces hidden  
in the moonlight so that we may never know who they are or who they'll be.  
Maybe it was meant to be that you and me stay here in this new and exciting  
place where dreams are made and hearts are broken by the boy  
with the perfect smile. His hand reached out and our fingers touched,  
electric running from him to me, but in a moment he was gone, taken into the sea  
of beads and hookers and small town girls far from home and boys with beer  
in their hands and caressing words on their lips.

We shared late night beignets and café au lait at the Café Du Monde,  
powdered sugar upon our lips as we laughed and you bent forward.  
For a moment, I thought this was it, the kiss, the moment  
where all would be revealed. The moment when the mystery behind  
your cold blue eyes would melt, but no. Those tears fell from my eyes as the boy  
with the teardrop tattoo touched my hip and shoulder and I cried out for you,  
but you were gone again; lost in the city of music and mysteries left unsolved  
but for the tiny plaques stating who lived and who died and who survived  
that rush of water over the shores of a beach no longer adored by the tan skinned  
boys and girls who lost their loved ones just as I've lost you. The hurricane in my hand pulling  
the heavy debris from my mind, the catastrophe, the tragedy I've been running from.

The cold, dark night when two boys took the only thing I had left.  
When the hairy monster under my bed, the one in the dreams that left  
me screaming, jagged pieces of my soul throbbing in my throat  
as the sheets restrained my struggling limbs. I tried to get to you before  
it was too late, but all I could do was watch the monster stand towering over you  
with a faded black hoodie and smoking gun. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, I can't go on.  
The world is wrong, the days of safety and happiness are left behind.  
Left in the turquoise Chevrolet with the boy and girl, hand in hand, as they traveled down the highway.  
Unknowingly, they left safety behind at the turn of the century when parents  
stopped caring and kids ran free to do as they please.

The never-ending train blocked our path  
as four girls with hands stretched before them, let their fingertips brush the silver steel  
of the railcar. The electricity is gone and all that is left is the coals that melt into the fire,  
burning brightly in the night, propelling them forward, leaving me behind.  
As I walk past, blues flow through the cracks in the window of the Spotted Cat and I pause,

waiting to hear if it will be your voice to mingle with the steel drum  
of the street performer sitting on Bourbon Street. The same four girls with passion  
in their souls and adventure on their minds surround an aqua blue  
fish bowl and take sip after sip as the colored lights blur and the city awakens.  
Strings plucked on an antique banjo rouse their tired toes to move in the circles  
of a sacred dance, and the joker reaches out a hand. We go round and round.

Purple, yellow, green, purple, green, yellow, purple.

The dazzling beads hang from our necks, bouncing to a beat that is their own.  
Men and women, young and old, marvel at the history cemented into the brilliant  
buildings and cobblestone roads where secrets whisper from mouths  
you may never see because their hidden behind the glitter of the masks  
and the fear of the shrouded figures who beckon us forward to gaze  
into the haze that is our future. His soft voice whispers, "Stay with me,"  
but it was never in the cards.

**Kayaking**

Solitude trickles through my wetsuit,  
and I am submerged in stillness  
produced by churning rapids.  
Brokers in the business

district breathe easy, ensconced  
in skyline offices, but my safety  
waits downstream after Ralston Falls—  
a forty foot drop with scree

collecting just beyond the pool.  
Water thrums along channel riffs  
as I take my strokes, punching  
through a wave, toward the cliff

lip worn smooth as a boxing glove.  
Such vertical energy is captured  
only by personal experience—  
I fly the waterfall and go to church.

**Trapped Between the Panes**

A hurried flight, a wing began to swerve  
Straight for the glass, the wind a labyrinth  
Of currents, overpowering its strength.  
What secret pain it must have learned  
To suffocate and watch the world observe?  
We caught Mosquito! See its tiny mouth  
And bloody straw? We drink to timely death:  
Few, if any, would call it undeserved.

A man awaits his time, strapped between  
Cushions and rope, his last supper prepared  
By tomorrow's ghost. Can microphones  
Amplify inaudible pleas? Thirteen  
Years of separation from human life.  
Mosquito, tell us now. He only groaned.

**Bamboo Stalk in the Bamboo Grove**

“Fall seven times, stand up eight”- Japanese proverb

Shorter than all my brothers,  
I stood straight, firm in place,  
and pushed through Mother’s  
soil, filling in an empty space.

Standing straight, firm in place,  
I grew through sunlight and June  
soil, finding only clouds, space.  
I pressed higher toward the moon

but as time moved over June,  
I’d just wobble by myself in air.  
So I pushed beyond cold moon  
craters and reached for His care.

I felt nothing but myself in air.  
And as I stretched, I splintered,  
searching farther for His care,  
before my thin spine snapped,

one side yellow and splintered.  
Shorter than my new brothers,  
I roll under wind, side snapped,  
sinking slowly back to Mother.

**“Don’t Call Me Annie”**

*To have and to hold from this day forward,*  
and backward, and forward again. The rickety plastic painted pony  
rocked in your outdated kitchen next to the table. I gleamed from the saddle for  
hours, rubbing the springs to irate tones that made you regret  
bringing it down from the attic.  
For better or for worse,  
the plight eradicated after I heard the drone of my own anagnorisis. She  
held the title of “sister” and knocked me from the artificial stallion. “Take turns!”  
hoarsely bellowed from the living room couch as skull met  
the hobby horse and ricocheted onto the faded yellow  
tiles. Stained with my red face paint,  
in sickness and in health.  
You were more familiar with those  
white walls and ticking noises than I.  
Three weeks passed, and I sat, caressing my scars,  
stroking each thread of skin hem in the chemo wing, imagining  
my gallant steed in your kitchen. Your hands trembling as you held the kidney bean  
bowl and proceeded to fill it with the water you just swallowed. You raised the bowl of bleached  
red liquid to your lips and took a sip. You didn’t even notice that you were drinking  
stomach acid. I didn’t say a word, but you laughed at the  
look on my face, and took another sip.  
For richer or for poorer,  
we are tied by the lineage. A burden of  
the same surname, I am cursed to be mistaken  
by your personal designation, tainted by  
heredity, and a similiar spelling.  
Until death do us part,  
but  
it’s  
as  
if  
yo  
u  
ne  
ve  
r l  
ef  
t.

**Lost**

Wondering where?  
Wondering why?  
Wondering how?  
Wondering now?  
Why is it like this?  
She sits there thinking,  
"when is it going to change?"  
Her thoughts say,  
"how long must I deal with this all?"  
The abuse, the words, the noise  
are killing her slowly.  
She knows she has a reason to live,  
but she hasn't found out what.  
She loves only two things, music and God.  
That's all she has to hold onto.  
She lost all trust.  
She's heard all the lies.  
She thinks we're living in hell.  
This hell we've created is not yet defined.  
It's going to end somehow.  
The birds, the greens, the never-ending seas  
will soon evaporate,  
this is not what was planned.  
"What have I done to deserve this?" she asks.  
I've seen death.  
I've seen sex.  
I witnessed a robbery.  
I am corrupt and I didn't even try.  
Can you please tell me why?  
Little kids resort to cursing,  
and mothers resort to pushing.  
We are fallen,  
but how far can we go?  
Wondering and wondering into the unknown.  
Never to give up, never to know

**Yi Peng Festival**

-- Response to viewing Van Gogh's Wheatfield With Crows upside-down

Hanging their arms over the edge of some unseen cloud,  
believers light rice paper on fire and simply let go,  
tilting their heads back towards the sea for a better view:  
ten thousand jellyfish flickering an origami pointillism on a blue  
backdrop. Stars moving in the wind. Waves flow  
with a question. What does water taste like? Is it the slow  
feeling of a free-fall out of frame to eternal life or an unbowed

lantern lighting a wanderer to the thing that's desired most?  
An invisible fisherman spears a few jellyfish and they curl  
up into extinguished bats, collapsing into the black corner  
of the horizon where they drown in solitude next to the ghost  
of a painter who spent his final days as a self-mourner  
in a wheatfield with crows. Crooked khom loi and a sea-colored pearl  
float under the gap in the sky between the wings of a girl

jumping from heaven, hoping to flood her halo. There's  
so much loneliness in the black holes of an illuminated sky.  
Only the fallen have been to these secret pits stuck in the shadow  
of light the way a lapsed angel ties her scarf to the gate in prayers  
to be reborn like someone who has made merit at the Thai  
festival. The scarf snaps straight, barely submerging her head in the shallow  
water, her suicide only visible in the wheatfield's inverted golden glow.

**BALANCE**

Remember the beam that hung  
from the ceiling and swung  
above the ground?

Remember the rushing sound  
that filled your ears before  
you took a walk

one-foot  
two-foot  
one-foot  
two-foot

above the coffee-  
colored carpet?

You, the long-legged  
bird, you, stepping with  
your arms wide as if to  
catch the wind and fly  
if you slipped.

Fear not,  
    fall not.

Fear not,  
    fall not.

Your little stomach tied  
itself in double-knots,  
but you'd learned a  
trick to keep yourself  
from slipping:

forgetting  
there's a  
floor.

Fear not,  
    fall not.

Fear not,  
fall not.

This was your  
greatest lesson.

**If. If.**

Today, I wish to breathe as the heavy, golden fabric of the lager unfolds on my tongue.

I would have never drunk the poison if he were alive. If. If.

Like a clock I can hear the tick of the "if's" rolling off my tongue with the lager.

I can taste my breath. Thick.

I can't feel my brain. I am okay.

If. If.

He would hate me now. Right now I can hear him, standing next to me, asking me what the hell I'm doing. Why are you drinking? Why are you being stupid?

Because I want to breathe.

My mind is numb, and it is beautiful, because I don't have to think about you, and him, and him, and him, and him, and her.

I don't have to explain a damn thing to anyone, even God.

I wish to breathe.

I wish to breathe.

I can barely type anymore. I am okay.

Numb. Numb. Such a beautiful word and thought and feeling on my fingertips, on my fingertips, and my lips and my tongue as somewhere in the distance, a guitar twangs once, twice on a television and a single, opaque droplet of water falls from the sink and cascades into the deep, dark tube of the silver, coiling pipes, falling down, down into the mucky unknown of the lake that sits somewhere to my left. Somewhere.

Somewhere.

I am numb.

I take a sip. It trickles down my throat and I forget, forget about you and him and him and her and it and that night and that day as I sit here, in front of the glowing lamp on my desk.

I take a sip, and I remember you again. I remember how heavy your casket felt, even though my fingertips are numb and I can't feel the pencil next to me.

I hear a car on the highway in the distance.

I hear my feet shuffle under my chair on the carpet.

I feel nothing.

I feel nothing.

Breathing. Breathing.

Breathing, I'm okay.

**Rule**



### **Late for a Funeral**

The service had already begun by the time I arrived at the church, so I slipped in and took a seat in the back. The church was cavernous, easily able to sit over a thousand people, with high ceilings and stained glass windows. I wound up sitting beside another man in a black suit that I did not recognize. Up at the front the priest was doing a reading from the book of Peter.

The deceased was someone I knew, but not well. We had worked together, played handball together, but I never really got to know the guy. He always seemed distant, even when we were hanging around the bar or watching the game over a couple of beers. I was here to pay my respects and slip out as quickly as possible; just put in enough of a showing to show the boss I care and get home before rush hour. The front rows of the church were packed in tight with hundreds of mourners. I guess that's what happens when a forty-year old guy drops dead - there's a lot more people around to say goodbye.

I turned to the man beside me and whispered "What a blow, eh?"

I think I startled him because the fact that I was talking to him at all made him jump. He looked at me curiously, then shrugged. "Yes it is."

I am not a religious guy, so while the priest kept going on I couldn't help but fidget. He asked us to rise for the gospel and I stood up, but my attention was everywhere but the sermon. I straightened my tie, brushed a piece of lint from my sleeve, and tried very hard not to think about anything inappropriate (like the very attractive rear of the woman I could see about a dozen rows up, crying into the shoulder of the guy she was with). I turned back to the other man, "So how'd you know him?"

He again seemed shocked I was talking to him, but strangely didn't look annoyed at my interruption. "I didn't."

I nodded. "Yeah, me too I guess. I mean, I hung out with him from time to time, but I didn't really know him. I read a lot of the posts about him online last night. Seemed like a hell of a guy. Wife and kids too, right?"

"Yes. Two children, a wife, an ex-wife, and many friends and admirers." His voice was a soft drone, one that I probably wouldn't have been able to hear over the priest if I wasn't leaning in.

I could feel part of me trying to get me to shut up, but I always get chatty in uncomfortable situations. When my flight is delayed for three hours, I'm the guy chatting up people at the airport. I'm the one that talks to other guys standing at neighboring urinals. I talk to people in elevators in hospitals. "Always a tragedy, though, right? Young."

At this point the man looked at me with an amused look in his eyes, like I told a joke or something. In fact, the last time I told my one-legged stripper story the guy I told it to didn't look as entertained as this guy was. I felt self-conscious all of the sudden. "Was it something I said?"

The man shook his head, "No. But cemeteries are full of tragedies, and full of untold stories."

"Untold? You mean like, unfinished chapters and all that?"

The man pointed at the mass of mourners off to the left. "See that man?"

"What, the one in black?" I smirked. The man rolled his eyes.

"The one with the thinning gray hair and glasses."

I saw the man he meant. Looked like anyone else in the church. "Sure, I see him."

"He molested his niece for ten years. Drove her to multiple suicide attempts in her teens."

"Holy shit, really?"

"And the woman beside him is his wife, who knew about it all along, and said nothing. Every time the girl would leave their home, she would give her fifty dollars to buy her silence."

"Wow!" I said, almost too loud, my voice carrying a little bit further than I wanted it to. The woman with the nice rear end shot me an angry glare as we all sat down.

The man simply smirked and began pointing to others in the crowd. "That one has gambled away his son's college fund and hasn't told his wife yet. That one has been unfaithful to her husband thirty six times with twenty eight different men, contracted HIV, and has since passed it on to her completely faithful husband. "

My jaw hung open. "Holy shit." I wanted to tell him to stop, but I couldn't. I was fascinated.

He continued. "That one indulges in child pornography when his wife thinks he's working late. That one pays the teenager that mows his lawn an extra twenty dollars to perform oral sex on him."

"How do you know all of this stuff?"

"It is my job to know."

"What about the deceased?"

"What about him?"

"What's his dirty secret? I mean, I always suspected there was something off about the guy."

The man shook his head just a little. "He was selfish and materialistic."

"That's it?"

"That is all."

I sat back in my seat. The man looked over at me again. "You seem disappointed."

"Well, you know, you had all these other stories, I thought maybe you had something on him."

The man cracked a smile that made my blood chill. It wasn't a warm or friendly smile, but the smile of a predator that just figured out its next prey. "The question is, does it matter?"

"What do you mean?"

He lowered his hand back into his lap. "All of these things I have told you, will they matter on the day of their deaths? Will people eulogize about child molestation or prostitution? Will the people gathered to remember them choose to remember infidelity and repressed homosexuality?"

"Probably not."

"Assuredly not." He looked down at his watch, then back at me. "Death has a way of washing the slate clean, at least in the eyes of the living. No one is as good as people remember them day after they die. Eulogies tell of happy memories and how the world is a better place without them, even if that isn't the case. Sometimes people are better off dead. Sometimes the world will be just a bit better for their passing. Sometimes the potential of harm outweighs the tragedy of their shortened lives. Memorials are to reassure the living, not tear down the dead." He stood up.

"I suppose you're right. Hey, where are you going?"

He turned sideways to push by me in the pew. "I have an appointment. It's why I'm here."

"An appointment?"

"The widow has swallowed an entire bottle of Vicodin in the bathroom."

"You... what? Wait! Are you shitting me?"

He straightened his jacket, "Funerals are for the living. I'm here for the dead." With that he stepped to the back of the church and walked straight through the back wall as if it wasn't there.

I could see a thousand stories painted on everyone's faces like grotesque tattoos. I could somehow feel the weight of everyone's secrets pressing down on me. A thousand un-confessed sins hung in the air like toxic fumes. I sat in silence until the priest told us to go in peace.

I made my way outside with everyone else, hoping the fresh air would calm me down. I asked the woman with the nice rear if she knew the guy I was talking to in the back row (trying hard not to pay attention to the cloud of shoplifting that surrounded her), but she said I was sitting alone. Somehow I knew she would say that (and knew the watch on her wrist was stolen the day before the service).

Then there was the commotion when they found his widow in the bathroom, an a whole new wave of pain and crying and all that. I slipped off to my car before I got caught up in it all. I barely knew the guy, and had never met his wife.

Besides, I didn't want to know what her sins were.

**Excerpt from *Trooper***

**December 18<sup>st</sup> 1941**

**1:15 PM**

"It's cold!"

I couldn't even count how many times George had said that in the past fifteen minutes. We were at Corona Park, hitting some baseballs in the cold for fun. George had insisted on coming, claiming he'd developed an apparent love of baseball. He claimed all eight-year-olds loved it.

Yeah, okay.

"You didn't have to come, George," I called to him from behind home plate.

From the pitcher's mound, Henry turned around to look at George, who was standing at second base disguised as a bundle of coats, sweaters, hats, gloves, and warmth.

"George," Henry said, "We need ya! All the real players have to play in the cold. They'd be impressed with ya, trust me. We're almost done anyway. One more pitch!"

George stood there and shivered.

"And now," Henry narrated, his hands cupped around his mouth as he shouted to inform the empty park, "Babe Ruth steps up to the plate. The crowd is going absolutely nuts! I've never seen anything like this before!"

I took a few practice swings as Henry mimicked a cheering crowd. Boy did I love baseball, even if it was friggin cold.

"The Bronx Bombers are down by two. It's the bottom of the ninth with two outs. The bases are loaded—"

"No, they're not," George commented, obviously oblivious to the effect Henry was trying to create.

"Babe's already got two strikes. Let's see if the lefty's got the win in him."

Henry, the starting pitcher for our school's team, mounted the plate and got into position. I kept my eye on him, ready to knock that ball out of the park. Henry's eyes were concentrated on my own as he tried to psych me out. I was used to it, though. I knew all his tricks.

The wind felt as if it was slicing my cheeks. My hands were numb, and I couldn't even feel the bat anymore. The feeling of my hands molded into that of the bat. My nose was running as my teeth chattered.

I wanted him to throw the damn ball already.

It was like slow motion when Henry released it. From the power of his throw, his right leg flew up in the air behind him. The ball was spinning forward like a bullet. It was Henry's classic curve ball. I knew him all too well.

I closed my eyes, and with all the strength I had in me, I swung the bat. It shook with the collision, sending a vibration up the wooden bat and to my hands. I opened my eyes and watched the ball soar like a bird that had no intention of ever coming down. I could just imagine the cheers that would erupt from a crowd.

"Run, George!" Henry commanded George. I dropped the bat on the plate and began sprinting towards first.

I couldn't help but laugh at George, who waddled like a penguin in all his gear as he fought to run towards the ball, which was setting sail with the wind on its side.

George stopped in the middle of the field.

"I'm not runnin' anymore."

Henry laughed and dashed towards him, grabbing him at the knees and swinging him around his shoulders. George couldn't stop laughing as Henry carried him back towards the infield. As I approached home plate, I pretended to wave to the crowd.

"They can't control the wild crowd!" I shouted. "The Yankees win!"

Henry followed me with George still wrapped around his shoulders and put his free arm around my own shoulder.

"That's Johnny for ya," he said with fake choked up emotion. "Always making me proud."

I shook him off.

“Stop being a sap,” I told Henry as I picked up the bat.

Henry grabbed my shoulder again with a chuckle and led us out of the park.

“What are you saying? You’re never gonna cry over me?”

“Wasn’t plannin’ on it,” I replied with a smirk. I gave Henry a shove, causing him to trip, fall, and drop George. George, of course, overreacted with a shriek, but Henry and I got a kick out of it.

It was a day that three brothers could be just that—three brothers.

**February 21<sup>st</sup> 1942**

**12:00 PM**

The day Henry was set to leave for war was two weeks before my seventeenth birthday.

Henry hugged Ma and George goodbye. I’d never seen Ma cry as much as she did that afternoon. She just kept bawling. Just when you thought she’d recover and finally calm down, there she went crying again. George didn’t seem too upset, and I think that’s because he was too young to understand what was really happening. George had this unrealistic image that Henry was going to become some kind of hero. And I knew that as a fact because he told me so. I wanted to smack him and tell him what was really happening. War wasn’t all fun and games. It was nothing like what these twerps played at recess where they’d pretend to get shot and then, when the bell rang, they could get right back up and go back to their normal lives.

Geez. I hated how I was overanalyzing everything.

I was lucky enough to accompany Pops and Henry to the train station. I wouldn’t exactly say the two of them were on good terms. I think Henry was expecting Pops to start idolizing his courage of joining the Marines and start treating him how George had been treating him. That didn’t happen. If anything, things got even tenser between them.

So the three of us just stood at the station platform. My heart was pounding and I was getting real excited. That’s when I realized Henry was ready for war. He was ready to make his name known.

“I’m gonna miss you, bud,” Henry said as pulled me into a hug. I patted him hard on the back in response.

“I’ll be there in a year,” I said to him.

The speck of doubt I'd previously seen in his eyes was replaced with a look of excitement.

Pops stood beside me and watched the two of us. I couldn't have told you what he was thinking if I tried. Henry stood there boldly, waiting to see what Pops would do. Pops then extended his hand. It was open, waiting for a handshake. Henry stuck his hand out and firmly shook Pops' hand. I stood there staring at the two of them. Pops then smiled and had a look of pride in his eye. Henry ended the handshake, grabbed his bag, and saluted to the two of us. We saluted right back, and Henry climbed into the train. The platform was pretty clear when it started up, so I decided to run the length of it. My heart thumped and my arms pumped as I dashed the distance. I kept turning my head at Henry, who was laughing from the opposite side of the window. He gave me a thumbs up. But it wasn't any ordinary thumbs up. Instead, his thumb had his dog tag chain wrapped around it. And attached to that chain was the pocket watch I'd given him for his eighteenth birthday.

Time kept ticking for Henry, and time was winding down at the same time.

**April 19<sup>th</sup> 1943**

**10:06 PM**

I was surprised at how calm I was that night. I sat at my desk, looking at the empty surface. It was a burning question as to why I had a desk. It's not as if I had anything to put on it. It was just there really. Most of the time George played with his toys on it, but he'd kind of grown out of that and began playing outside with his friends.

So I made use of what I had, which was a pencil. I kind of drew on the desk, engraving God knows what. Then when that got boring I began tapping the desk. The steady sound of taps filled the room.

I was so fidgety. I guess I was just eager for the morning to come. For years now I'd been wondering what the day when I left home would be like. All I needed now was a few more hours to finally find that out.

There was a faint knock at the door.

"Come in," I answered, expecting Ma to come creeping in.

But to my surprise it was Pops. He poked his head through the narrow opening of the crack in the door, his eyes wearisome.

“What’s on your mind, Pops? At dinner you seemed so...”

“Stressed?”

“Distracted.”

Pops took a seat on George’s bed, watching me intently before he spoke. He was still in his work clothes, his red tie askew. I think I noticed a gray hair by his temples, which I’d never perceived before that night. Pops was aging, which meant I sure as hell was too.

“Ma’s worried about you.”

“I know. I’d be kinda worried myself if she wasn’t.”

Pops hesitated for a moment, and I wanted to tell him that I needed to get some sleep, but he decided to talk at the right moment.

“What pushed you to join the army?” he finally asked me.

I hadn’t planned on telling him my story, the whole story that is. But I decided to be frank with him.

“You.”

Pops let out a sigh.

“Do me a favor,” he requested.

“Sure.”

“Be a little more confident in your endeavors. They’re really all you’ve got.”

“It’d be nice if you could too.”

Pops just watched me, an invitation for me to explain myself.

“Ever since I mentioned that I was enlisting, you’ve been some kinda downer just moping around the place. When Henry enlisted you were proud. Why can’t you do the same for me? I’m doing this to make you proud, Pops.”

“Don’t you do it for me. Do it for yourself. Do it for your country. Never do it for me.”

“Well then why—why’ve you been so glum about all this? Why can’t you be like how you were with Henry?”

Pops didn’t speak. I could of sworn he choked up.

“Henry needed to go into the Marines. He needed to toughen up. I think it’s good for him. Am I worried for his life? Of course. Am I proud that two of my sons enlisted? Words can’t describe it.

“What worries me is the effect it’ll have on you, Johnny. Henry doesn’t let a thing bother him. You’re different. You can relate with people, understand them. The idea of you killing a man just seems... I just have a horrible feeling that it might get inside your head and take the best of you.”

That was one thing that had been holding me back for so long—my fear of death. But I’d finally gotten it through my thick skull—I had to fight for those who didn’t have a voice, the underdog. For so many years I’d been that underdog. In fact, that feeling of knowing you can’t change who you are because you’ve already made a name for yourself is probably the worst feeling, since there’s really no way you can ever truly change somebody’s mind.

Yet I couldn’t explain all that to Pops without going on some kind of rant for hours.

“Nobody’s getting inside my head, Pops. That’s a whole another fight—in my head. The fight between fear and myself. And I can tell you this—fear sure as hell can’t beat Johnny Simms.”

**April 20<sup>th</sup> 1943**

**3:09 PM**

Before I climbed down the last step, I took a glance around the neighborhood. I didn’t know when I’d be back, or if I’d be back, but if I came home I was sure that things wouldn’t look the same. Kids would grow up, people would die, and summers would go by. That’s what scared me a lot. Life at home would be going on, despite me being gone.

Ma and Pops stood on the sidewalk, watching my every move. I couldn’t help but imagine that they were trying to remember this day as well; it could be the last time they ever saw me. Ma was leaning on Pops’ shoulder forlornly. His arm was around her waist, probably keeping her upright. It was a flashback of Henry’s last day. Ma always looked so put together and indifferent to the world. But now, as I watched her feebly hold back her tears, I saw her imperfections. Yet they were her own perfect imperfections.

I hopped down the last step and looked at Ma and Pops. Ma broke away from him hurriedly and engulfed me in an embrace. Her arms slung around my shoulders as her back rose and fell with her hassled breaths. It pained me to see this. It killed me to think that I was the one making Ma this way.

With her arms still suspended on my shoulders, she lifted her head and looked into my eyes. Her blue eyes looked like an ocean in a storm, waves of tears crashing along the shoreline. I didn't know what to say or do. I'd never been put in a position like this. So I just smiled halfheartedly, and she returned the favor weakly, running her weathered palms along my face. That's when the storm in her eyes diminished into a hopeful sky, proving to me once again that there was always that slight chance of hope.

Pops and George accompanied me to the train station. A bunch of punks I recognized from school were there too. I gave George a big hug after I heard the train would be pulling in shortly. Hell, once ol' George started to cry I couldn't help myself. He was my kid brother, and it killed me to see him so upset. It killed me to see my whole family upset. I mean, they hadn't been this way about Henry, so why the hell were they being like this for me?

The train whistled from down the block, and that's when my heart stopped and stomach dropped. This day I'd been waiting years for was finally here.

I was going to war.

Pops shook my hand firmly before I left, then pulled me into his solid clasp. He didn't need to say a word. This was probably the most affectionate moment I ever had with Pops. He was never the guy to say "I love you," but never once did I doubt it.

Before I entered the train car, I looked out to see Pops and George one more time. It wasn't hard to make them out in the crowd. George didn't look half as excited as I had been when I came with Henry as he departed. And barely, just barely, could I see the look of pride on Pops' face. It was there, but it was buried under the lines of concern.

I relaxed as I sat on the train car. A friendly-looking guy sat across from me. He started talking up a storm once the train started rolling out, puffing on a cigarette at the same time. But there I saw George running across the platform, screaming out my name in agony. Pops ran up behind George and held him back as he wrestled and screamed. It looked like a distant memory from my childhood, but nevertheless, a completely different perspective.

## The Color of War

"Sara Dominguez to the Principal's Office," the loudspeaker boomed.

"Ooooooh," the students chanted, "Sara's in trouble!"

As the teacher quieted the class, Sara packed her books and walked out of the classroom. *Typical high school drama*, she thought.

Principal Titus was waiting in the hallway to walk Sara into his office. His lips formed a thin line that made Sara uneasy. "Right this way," he motioned.

Sara sat down in the cramped office, waiting to see what this was all about.

"Miss Dominguez, you're here for your little act of rebellion this morning. Want to tell me what that was all about?" Principal Titus smiled callously, not looking amused as he closed the office door behind him.

"I didn't know that sitting during the Pledge of Allegiance was a crime," Sara shot back, immediately defensive. *If only he knew*, she thought bitterly.

"Would you explain to me why you caused a scene?" he demanded.

Sara looked out the tiny window. "You wouldn't understand."

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"Sarita," Vivian choked through her sobs, "Never let anyone tell you that you aren't good enough. Never let them take your dreams away from you. Learn how to make the gray grass beautiful again."

Sara had no idea what the gray was, but she was willing to find it for her grandmother.

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Vivian wasn't one for words. She had a hard time expressing herself, but hey, it's America: Land Of The Free, isn't it? The "Land Of The Free" was costly, she came to realize after 35 years of Communist Cuba chased her away and she came to America with hopes of a better life for generations to come.

What was the word? *Alien*. She stuck her tongue out in disgust at that ugly American word she came to know as her identity.

*Ail-ih-an...Ale-eeh-uhn...Alien*, she muttered softly.

Forty years later, she was still stuck in that transition, the elderly-seventy five-year-old-not-quite-American-non-citizen-green-card-holding-Spanish-speaking-immigrant-alien-from-that-strange-place-across-the-ocean-called-Cuba. Stick a passport in her hand and look at her tired eyes, and you will see her the way the embassy did. The way her employers did. The way everyone does. An *Alien*.

Vivian walked along, into the Stop and Shop market on the corner of the busy road by the school just a few blocks away. *I can't keep doing this*, she thought sadly. Vivian's body was deteriorating; like her hands, her legs knew the soreness of Communism. It seemed like the fruits of her labor were etched on her skin; every crack, every wrinkle, every scar and crevice just another reminder of the torment she escaped and the arms of false freedom she ran into. The grass wasn't greener, it was gray, she decided. It was murky, foggy, almost too thick to touch, and fickle. There were so many promises on the other side of the fence, laden in lies, too tempting not to hop over and look, only to find the same patches of grass growing just beyond the fence. It was almost too perfect, actually, to hope for something for so long and end up right back where you started. Knowing this feeling all too well, Vivian sighed, picked up her tired frame, and kept moving.

Her nerves started as she entered the motion-sensor door of the local Stop and Shop, hoping and praying the evil woman wasn't there. Her nametag read, "Hello, my name is Margaret!" and Vivian hated those five words almost as much as Margaret herself. How a woman could ever be so cruel troubled Vivian deeply. She wanted to meet 'Hello, my name is' Margaret's mother and have a nice long talk about manners and respecting the elderly.

Vivian spotted 'Hello, my name is Margaret', and frowned.

Vivian walked up to the register, wordless, with three packets of meat from the clearance section tucked under her arm.

"Thanks, have a wonderful day, ma'am!" Margaret smiled politely at the young blond woman ahead of Vivian. Vivian placed her items down, slowly, and made eye contact with the five-worded woman she despised the most. Margaret instantly frowned.

"3 for \$5," Vivian whispered, motioning at the inky coupons that had now smeared onto her hand from the sweat that accumulated. She didn't know how tightly she was grasping the small piece of paper.

"Ma'am, I don't understand you," Margaret spoke dryly. "It's 6.56."

Vivian tried again, holding the coupon out in her trembling hand, and Margaret snatched it from her.

"This expired today," Margaret snapped. "Can't you read?"

The words visibly stung Vivian, and Margaret smiled, enjoying it. She squinted at Vivian, her eyes screaming *Alien*, as she bared her fangs, stained from her bloody red lipstick.

Vivian composed herself, tried ignoring the comment, and felt small. She fought back the tears and opened her mouth to speak.

"Tomorrow is the sixth," Vivian managed, almost inaudible now. "It expires tomorrow."

Margaret picked up the coupon again, almost ripping it this time, gum cracking in her teeth.

"Well why didn't you say something?" Margaret barked, spit spewing from her face. Vivian paid, ran out of the store as fast as her throbbing legs could, and took the long way home.

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Vivian was a statue, not green or torched, but red, boiling with sadness and the blood of the thousands she left behind, begging to be taken along.

*She doesn't know struggle. She doesn't know hunger. She doesn't know my skin.*

*My skin is a dried up raisin that soaked in the tears of my ancestors and shriveled when it could not bear any more. My skin is tough and stained with the color of labor, the color of war, the color of communism. My skin is a passport, leather on the outside, paper within, breaking apart at the edges but riddled with information, stories, and struggles of passage. Your skin is milk, stretched as if about to take off, like a guitar string, plucked too hard and snapping, not moving or yielding. It shows nothing, reveals nothing. Emotion, feelings, empathy, respect? Nothing.*

*My skin is a story, yours is sandpaper. Almost as ugly and abrasive as the word 'alien'. Almost.*

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“And that’s why I didn’t stand,” Sara finished explaining. Principal Titus stared at her a long time, at a loss for words. Sara looked out the window again.

“I told you that you wouldn’t understand,” she said dryly. “Can I go now?”

Sara stood, collected her things, and started for the door. Principal Titus grabbed a few papers and said, “Wait, Sara, th-there are support gr-groups, and, uh, the guid-d-dance office...” he stumbled over his words, at a complete loss.

Sara kept walking, more frustrated than before. She didn’t need a support group, and she certainly didn’t need to waste her time with the Principal. Sara decided she would be damned before standing for the Pledge of Allegiance again.

**Maggie**

February 25, 1992

I wish that I could rip this day off of the calendar. I want to crumple up the page for today and throw it into the trash can. But I won't because then they'll know that something is wrong and I'll have to talk about it (Mom will make me talk about it).

So instead the little flip over inspirational calendar just sits where it's always been, on the ledge above the sink, between Mom's African violets and the clay pot that Johnny made in kindergarten. And the verse of the day stares out at me from the page with just as much irony as it did a year ago today: "And we know that all things work together for good..."

I can hear Mom's voice like she was next to me right now. (But that's what most of that day is like—clearer than life, like I had Dad's binoculars and Mom's hearing aid.) "See, Maggie, it's a sign! It's a sign," she said over and over. I can hear her sobs and feel her throwing her arms around me. "Everything happens for a reason," her watery, muffled voice said into my ear.

I think she's said that to me every day for the past year. She wants it to give me comfort, but it doesn't. She doesn't know what it's like. She's gotten to be married to Dad for almost forty-five years. Mark and I barely had twelve.

He had to fly out two days after our twelfth anniversary. I tried not to think about it because I didn't want to ruin the evening. He'd worked so hard. He made reservations at Villa Berulia, that fancy Italian restaurant we'd always walk past but never visited. (I can hear Mark's voice: "Besides, if we took Johnny, he would order a \$15 hamburger and what's the point of that when we can take him to McDonald's and he can run around in those tubes and then come home and fall asleep?")

I can't get the sound of him out of my head, but it hurts because that's the only way I'll ever hear him again. Mom would say that I'll see him again in heaven. That doesn't annoy me like "Everything happens for a reason." I'm glad to know that he's there. But what am I supposed to do until then? I can't stop thinking about him, and it hurts.

I wasn't going to cry today.

But it all just came back. I remember everything that happened a year ago today. I remember hearing the knock at the door and thinking that Johnny had forgotten his house key. I remember seeing the men in their uniforms out in the hallway. Of course I remember Mom trying (because she really did try) to comfort me. I remember the look on Johnny's face—his mouth crumpled and his eyes welled up. I remember Dad going over to him and holding him, rocking him like he did when Johnny was a baby. And I remember walking around in a daze while the officers explained the arrangements and Mom and Dad made phone calls for me because I just couldn't believe what had happened.

The moment that they told me he was dead is like a hole in that set of memories. I know what happened because Dad told me when I asked him—apparently I reached out to grab the doorframe and put my hand on my face and looked like I couldn't breathe. But I don't remember it at all. Information from my college psychology class gave me an explanation: my brain blocked the memory of that moment to protect me. So it doesn't hurt. But everything else does. It's not just the memories from that day. Somehow the pain has spread to all of our good memories, too, because they are all I have left. They are all I will ever have. And I can't just block them at will.

"It gets better with time," people have told me. Why? Because you're able to let go? I don't want to let go. But otherwise it's like I'm holding on to razors and I'm tired of it.

I suppose I could start by putting away that picture of him that I put on his nightstand. I've been meaning to put it away anyway. The uniform that he's wearing reminds me too much of how and why he died. And anyway, a picture doesn't bring the warmth back to his side of the bed.

Johnny will be home from school soon, and Mom and Dad will be back from their walk. I ought to start dinner. And I really ought to finish filling out that job application that's been lying on the counter for, what, a week now?

By the time I've finished all of that, it ought to be time for bed. Then I can turn over that calendar page (because I can't throw it away, as much as I still want to) and try to forget that this day ever happened.

### **Their Initials**

As Christopher Farren sat in the waiting room, he could not help but think about all the things he had encountered in the past four years. His girlfriend, Jenny, slowly caressed his hand with her thumb, it was a familiar gesture of comfort and relief to Christopher; at least Jenny had been by his side through most of these years. The waiting room was frightening. Countless patients, some with the ominous c-shaped scars still prevalent under their growing hair, were waiting there with him. He wondered how many times surgeons had entered their brains. What parts? All of them were accompanied by a somber but logical accomplice; a person that could ask all the right questions that needed to be answered in the doctor's office. A patient can not ask questions; instead they are distracted by emotions of terror and fear. Questions regarding different facets of the surgery were not concerning. Jenny was Christopher's advocate. She knew exactly what needed to be asked, and she suppressed her emotion when she needed to ask these vital questions. She would break down every time they entered the parking garage, knowing the horrific and frightening surgery that would be inevitable. Jenny and Christopher both knew the underlying fact was that after any surgery a part of Christopher's brain would be compromised, removed, or destroyed. He would no longer be the same person he was before cancer.

Christopher reflected on the small initials that were engraved in his skull. They acted as a timeline, representing each surgeon and exactly where they entered his brain. Christopher always found this fascinating and appalling. He was a branded cow; having two men's initials carved in black ink into his skull made him inhumane. How could a fellow human tattoo their initials into a skull? The practical use is not arguable, of course, seeing the exact location where a surgeon performed a surgery would negate most mal practice lawsuits, but this act also raised an argument of possession. A simple X-ray would negate a patient's and an insurance company's concerns and provide them with whatever information they would need: the printed initials of the surgeon. Christopher yearned to see them. He contemplated if they could be permanent. It seemed that all the blood and skin fibers connected to ones skull would wash the ink away, but they were permanent; each surgeon had their chance to be imprinted close to his mind. Perhaps they added an artistic element to their signatures, to make them unique.

Chris's first surgery was performed by a middle aged doctor who was, and still is, full of promise. He was meticulous. The first time they met, Christopher noticed his clothing, subtle but calculated. He wore a royal blue tie and a crisp white shirt. His hair seemed as if it would never move; it stayed where Mr. Benjamin T. Roth had placed it. The nameplate on his desk was outlined in pure platinum. It was most likely a gift from his wealthy parents after completing his residency, and its shine was astounding. Mr. Roth must have demanded that it be polished every day. As he stared at the nameplate, Christopher's eye caught Roth's middle initial attentively carved into the center of the plate. The initial "T" represented prominence and pride. He was not a kind of man that would accept defeat or a mistake, which was the primary reason that Christopher chose him as his surgeon, but he was not impressed by the elaborate custom nameplate.

When Jenny and Christopher walked into Benjamin Roth's office he greeted them both with a stiff handshake, then motioning them toward two chairs facing his elegant leather desk chair. As Christopher sat down he felt the concrete lines of the chair constrict him. They were made of stiff black leather that had not yet been worn.

The first words that Roth said jolted Jenny. Christopher did not listen, but instead sat in complete silence, disregarding the conversation partaking in the room.

"The tumor is quite progressive. In an ideal situation, I would like to remove as much of the tumor as possible. I will also be taking a biopsy of the tumor to further asses possible post-op treatment plans for Christopher." said Roth.

Jenny sat in silence carefully dictating everything he said in her small moleskin notebook. He continued, after seeing that neither Jenny nor Christopher had any questions, "The surgery needs to be extensive and we need to treat Christopher's tumor aggressively. The post operation treatment will most likely be a combination of radiation and chemotherapy. This is a new diagnosis, and we have many clinical trials that can be chosen. Christopher's prognosis is quite good."

After dictating different surgical methods that he would perform, Roth dismissed Christopher and his devoted girlfriend. Although he was direct, frank and unemotional, Roth would never risk his reputation, and would never use elaborate lettering during his surgery. His initials' would be bold and frank, simple but well

executed. A man of his status would without a doubt include his middle initial, to ensure full recognition for the successful recovery of a patient. Christopher's surgery went successfully, as he knew it would, but he still wondered about the initials B.T. R.

Two years later, Chris received the inevitable news that the tumor had grown. There needed to be a second surgery. Mr. Benjamin T. Roth had found other promising opportunities across the country and was not able to perform Christopher's second surgery. This time, Christopher decided to work with a seasoned veteran, a man who was highly recommended, a man who had done this type of surgery hundreds of times before. He felt fairly confident walking into Walter Dandridge's carpeted office; it seemed far more comfortable than the cold tile floors in Roth's waiting room. The chairs across from his desk were comfortable but supportive, and upholstered with soft brown suede.

Mr. Dandridge was a matter-of-fact. He wore fitted khaki pants, a white shirt, tie, and thin silver framed glasses. One thing that surprised Christopher was that Walter wore a professional lab coat over his attire. He wanted to be seen as a professional by wearing a uniform that resembled the one he was first given in his years in residency.

As they sat down for the routine discussion regarding surgical procedures and precautions, Jenny assumed her role as advocate, stating, "We have been in this situation before, doctor. How advanced is the tumor?"

The first thing Mr. Dandridge said to her was, "I understand this is a difficult time for both you, but I have done this surgery many times before. The tumor is highly aggressive, and it needs to be removed. A precautionary round of chemotherapy will be admitted to Christopher two months after the surgery. I welcome any questions you have, and I will be sure to answer them as best as I can."

"How extensive will this chemotherapy be?" Jenny asked, scribbling down notes.

"There are a few options that are available. One is an oral chemotherapy treatment that is taken once a day. There is a second option that is admitted through intravenous."

"Can you describe the surgery?"

This is the aspect of the conversation that Christopher dreaded. He simply ignored it; he had already spent hours contemplating what this doctor would be doing, and how it would affect his mind. Instead, he noticed the pictures that were strategically placed on Mr. Dandridge's desk. There was one photo that Christopher studied attentively. It was Mr. Dandridge smiling, embracing his wife and children. They were all barefoot, sunk in the white sands of Aruba, the clear blue water crashing against their shins. Clear skies were behind them, and green palm trees were swaying in the breeze. Christopher began to smile. He had traveled to Aruba with Jenny a few months before. The warm sand and gentle breeze had made him feel alive again. He pictured the photograph that was on his bedside table of him and Jenny. They were reclining on beach chairs, holding hands. Their smiles were glistening. It was the best vacation Christopher had ever had. After his first surgery, he and Jenny decided to travel as much as possible. She finally got two week's vacation, and they decided to take a cruise in the Caribbean. Not only did this picture remind Christopher of the comforting beach scene, but it showed Dandridge's passion for his family and their well being. He differed from Roth, who was consumed by surgery; Dandridge had emotions.

As Christopher began to listen to the conversation again, Dandridge moved closer to him and Jenny stating, "I will try to take as much of the tumor out as possible. Clearly you know that it can grow back; this is round two for you, but I will do everything in my power to remove the entire tumor without compensating surrounding brain tissue." Walter provided a sense of empathy that Christopher had never received from other surgeons. He created a slight familial bond with his patients. This is the reason, Christopher assumed, that he and Jenny called him Walt Disney.

Walter Dandridge's initials would not be as whimsical as Walt Disney's. They would not have any curvature or playfulness. Mr. Dandridge would not be bold; he would write simply and succinctly. By being a surgeon who was well known and respected, he would not have to secure his status through a series of letters. Instead he would be the least abrasive as possible. His initials would be thin and simple, simply reading W.D.

While sitting in the waiting room, awaiting the meeting with his third brain surgeon, Christopher was already beginning to analyze his surroundings, disregarding the countless patients and other individuals that surrounded him. The office had hard wood floors that accentuated the doctor's ability to provide comfort and professionalism. Plants filled the empty corners of the waiting room, acting as symbols that would reassure and

comfort the patients, making them think that their life was a priority within this office. "Christopher Farren", called the nurse, as she proceeded to lead Christopher and Jenny to the doctor's office. Jenny took his hand and they walked in unison through the oak doors inlaid with frosted glass. Sitting behind his desk in a handsome armchair was Dr. John Cooper, the third surgeon who would engrave his initials into Christopher Farren's skull.

## **A Portrait**

The father stood in the door frame, his shoulder kissing the moldings he crafted with his own hands. His daughter sat in the next room, perched on the kitchen chair and backlit by the westward sun refracting through the window. She didn't look up despite the disturbance of his feet on the linoleum. She was lost in a spread of scrap paper across the surface of the kitchen table he had recently sanded to be baptized by a stain, to change the color of its skin.

Her eyes focused intently upon whatever she had been drawing on the paper, her hand careful and slow with one of his carpenter's pencils in hand. She insisted on using those flat pencils, and for the few things she ever asked for he figured he could give up one. Just for her. It seemed to fit into her piano fingers better. For being so young, she didn't retain the flesh and fat that most children held lovingly around their limbs. Her features were long and drawn out, slender fingers and bony extremities. It didn't make her look sickly, for she still had a flush of color that glazed her cheek bones, and eyes a shade unlike any other in the family. She just had an air of maturity about her, in every inch of her countenance.

He liked to sketch his daughter, especially when she was sketching. If she was focused and unaware of what he was doing she wouldn't shy away from the attention like she normally would. He desperately tried to capture her youth in quick portraits, afraid it was escaping before him. There were the normal measures of age, like another inch penciled in the doorway fitted to the top of her head, a size up in her canvas sneakers, a growing collection of books on her bedroom floor. But in other ways, she seemed to defy annual progression.

Her features became more aged by the day. Eyes that once softened people with their rare cerulean hue now greyed to translucent marbles. Her nails were bitten to the very tips of her fingers. He desperately worried about her. He saw her shoulders slumping, the skin under her eyes sagging. Young girls should not have as much trouble sleeping as she did. She bore the burden of everyone around her at the age of seven, as if Atlas had passed over the heavens.

She was always such a serious child, and his sketches fought desperately to defy that. Unfortunately, the graphite lines can only betray so much. His hands were made to sculpt the truth, as he mimicked the curves of his wife's body in the wood his shoulder still rested upon, or as he perfected the shade of his son's sun-kissed skin in the wood stain. Unlike them, her countenance could only be translated literally in temporal sketches, and he wanted them to express the flits of youth that passed as quickly as a hummingbird's wings. But he couldn't smudge the worry from her eyes, or erase the tightened corners of her lips. His hand refused to anger the gods with inaccuracy and risk a worsened punishment for his daughter.

If only he let her live her life in color, things might have been different.

## Night Sweats

There were traces of him in the mirror behind the bar – stale handprints, fog etching his shadow each night from the warmth of his body. The Bartender swept up bottles at the end of the night because he liked the sound of glass on glass. It reminded him of chaos and absolution and the prayer books tucked into the pockets of the very worst drinkers. The ones who knew their drinks by name and seemed to swallow the syllables like it mattered. Like speaking an old lover’s name when they still remembered the pain of that first time. Needing more and more of it to drown out the noise that gave them night sweats. There was magic in the way that he treated them, playing doctor each night to those godforsaken souls.

When a woman walked into a bar after closing, the Bartender found it hard to turn her away. She wore her dress like women rarely do anymore – it seemed to embrace wind and gravity and all of the elements, tracing her body in the same beautiful way that it hid what lay underneath. It hinted like it meant something, like she was earth and space and everything in between and all he wanted to do was pour her a drink. She sat down, looking grateful but determined. This was no mistake of a stop – she intended to drink and she knew where she needed to go. She knew when the bars closed, but she also knew how to get what she wanted.

The Bartender respected a woman who liked scotch, who knew how to drink slowly, as if the pace mattered. He knew the value of drink like he knew the value of silence. She would speak when she was ready. The bar was always dark, but he had turned down the lights while he had been preparing to close. Thankfully the bottles had been swept and collected and she could move freely if she so chose. She chose to. Making her way through the room, dim lights leading her to the edges, she eyed the empty chairs and their accompanying tables littered with the night’s leftovers. She fingered peanut shells and business cards and half-empty cans of beer. The jukebox played lightly, barely, teasing their ears with fractured sounds as if it knew it was time to wind down for the night.

“You know why I’m here, don’t you?” she said, both to the Bartender and the souls she believed were still in the room. She eyed him anxiously. She eyed him coolly. He was amazed by the brevity of the moods in her face

and the sound of her voice as it broke the silence and seemed to cling to the hollow walls, the shallow light. He had seen this woman before – in many types of woman, desperate but knowing. They knew their fate like they knew their favorite drink – each night they resigned to one or the other, dreams sitting on the surface and never sinking in. In that moment, he wondered if she could sing. If the sound of her voice was the same when she sang. He thought of his mother’s records, briefly, and the way he chose to set fire to them when she died. After this, after death, he began to swallow time. He shuddered as he watched others swallow time, too. Every night, every night.

The woman sat down in an empty chair, halfway between the bar and the jukebox. She knew, he knew, and they both waited. He brought her another drink but didn’t sit down. He watched the door because he knew what would happen if he didn’t. Once, he was caught by surprise when he went to console a woman. For a split second, he was thinking of wine, which made him think of comfort and what he could do for her. He blushed, ashamed, thinking of this naiveté. He was seasoned enough to like the sound of glass. He was seasoned enough to enjoy silence, too.

The Bartender looked up as the door clicked and the bell above the door chimed. He shifted his eyes to the woman as three men walked in. Knowing their shapes, he bowed his head. He knew like she knew, like every woman ended up knowing in this town after they stayed for a little too long. He struggled against protocol, knowing she was special. He looked up, locking eyes with her for a split second. Mouthing the words, “Thank you,” she looked at him, through him, towards the fog on the mirror. He watched as they slit her throat and he watched as they carried her away. Silent, he exhaled and found his footing over to the place where her blood was still wet. He pressed his thumbprint, warm, against the floor. The Bartender fell asleep in the bar that night - never locked the door, never checking to see if he was safe. He felt the hot, then cold blood on his thumb and forgot the feeling of night sweats. He forgot any feeling at all.

### **The Wandering Hand**

The record spun round and round the turntable, lessening Ruby's heartbeat. She held the newspaper close to her chest, then unfolded the paper and read the title once more, "Bartlett, 38, dies in tragic railway accident," before opening her door and stepping out into the solemn sunset.

The tears were building up in Ruby's eyelids as she entered the dark, dismal train station. Many beggars and homeless lined the walls eyeing up her fur coat and the felt, bell-shaped cloche hat atop her cropped brown curls. Ruby avoided their eyes and continued down the station filled with a new air of economic and emotional depression, which mirrored her own heart. Many travelers passed her, heading home into the twilight, to the little food at their tables.

"One ticket to Brooklyn, please," Ruby told the overseer at the gate. She could just taste the bitter-tasting alcohol on her lips as she received her ticket.

Her husband's body had been severely mangled on the train tracks, and his right hand was never found. Instinctively, Ruby's dark eyes swept the platform in search of the hand. She closed her eyes at the thought that she would never see any part of her husband's body ever again.

Ruby had time before the train's scheduled arrival. As she continued down the murky platform, her crimson-embroidered glove reached in her coat pocket and she felt the cold flask. Her heart beat increased and her senses heightened. The lamplights irregularly flickered around her, creating dancing shadows on the decrepit walls and illuminating gossamer spider's webs. Ruby wondered how many rats scurried under the railroad tracks that may have investigated her beloved before detectives discovered him.

Ruby turned a desolate corner that seemed to be filled with an air of gloom and despondency. Looking over her shoulder to make sure she was completely alone, she drank the remainder of the bitter liquid in the flask. Paranoid, she quickly fled, as penalties of her habit would be severe. She sat on a bench on the platform, as the drink flooded to her brain and exhaustion swept through her body. Her eyes closed . . .

“What the hell is that?” Al whispered to himself in the dimly lit, scarcely populated train platform. Near him, a woman with cranberry-colored lips in a fur coat and a cloche hat was sleeping on a bench. Hands outstretched, intending to steal her wallet and jewelry, his eyes were distracted by a moving lamplight. Even stranger, the sinister lantern seemed to be approaching him. Squinting his eyes, Al nearly screamed when he saw a floating hand was carrying the lamplight, detached from a visible body. Al looked around him, but the platform now appeared empty besides him, the woman, and the specter.

Reaching down to steal the woman’s possessions, he was not fast enough, as the hand angled the lantern to strike him on the shoulder. The man dropped to the floor in utmost fear. When he stood up, he saw the lantern on the floor, and the hand had disappeared. But then he felt the strongest force propelling him from the back. He lost consciousness as his body smacked facedown on the tracks.

Waking from her slumber, Ruby’s head spun as she stood up from the bench. She paced up and down a small section of the platform devoid of travelers, and walked to the edge of the platform out of pure curiosity. Ruby screamed, disbelieving her eyes. There was another body on the tracks, unmoving, his head bent, and his appendages at strange angles.

“Bartlett, 38, dies in tragic railway accident,” she thought and broke down in sobs. She didn’t want to catch the train to Brooklyn. She didn’t want to return to her home with only her records to keep her company. Ruby remembered twirling around the house, listening to her favorite songs, holding her husband’s hand while her other hand rested on his shoulder.

“Who will save me from this despair?” Ruby thought to herself.

Blinking the tears from her eyes, Ruby saw a floating lantern approaching her. She started backing away as she saw in horror that a hand detached from a body carried the lantern. Her eyes and mouth opened wide as an inflating balloon, and she stopped in place watching the spectacle, as she now wondered if she was hallucinating. Ruby heard the clamor of train cars on the track and the shrill train whistle approaching the platform, but her eyes were transfixed on the hand as it set down the lantern.

Now was the night late, and now was the platform very dark. The hand reached out to her, and Ruby took it.

To this day, no one knows the fate of Ruby Bartlett. But a warning to all who take the late trains alone—  
beware being in the path of the lamplight of the wandering hand.

## Her

She lived across the street from me when I was a girl. A definite line separated our two yards. My side of the street was alive and lush with a playful yard and colorful gardens that bloomed pink, yellow, and red in the spring. Outside my home stood a white picket fence, and my Beagle, Danny, guarded the perimeter, as he believed was his divine duty, but was often distracted by the beautiful Collie next door or a passing breeze.

Her yard was still. The green leaves hung from the trees, unchanging, and longing hopelessly to reach the ground and their resting place. The blue paint on the three-story Victorian never chipped or faded, despite decades of bleaching sunshine, wind, and pelting rain. No one ever trimmed the lawn, yet the grass remained perfectly even and edged. It never changed, never grew, never died. And neither did she.

The other kids told stories. They whispered that they had seen her peeking out the window on summer afternoons, watching them play stickball in the street. They said she had golden ringlets that just brushed her shoulders and that her blue eyes looked sad. One little girl with red hair and freckles said that her dress looked funny, that it had puffy sleeves and lace.

No one had ever *really* seen her, though. They'd only caught glimpses of her when she'd pulled back her thick velvet curtains. She was like a doll in a doll house: frozen, unchanging, left alone while life whirred around her. As far as anyone knew, no one lived with her there. No one came or went from that house.

But one warm summer night, that changed. While my parents were having cigarettes and brandy in the sitting room, I slipped out the back door to play with Danny and catch fireflies in the fading dusk. The neighborhood was unusually quiet. No laughter floated through the streets. No cars passed by. I wondered why no one else was out playing on such a magical night. I didn't mind, though. I liked the quiet.

I caught a dozen fireflies and let them go, but then they all must have gone to bed. All of a sudden, it was very late. I called for Danny, but he didn't come. I thought maybe the Collie was out tonight, so I walked beneath the trees along that side of the yard, stepping through the cool grass and calling quietly for Danny.

Then I found him.

She was sitting cross-legged with him in the pile of her full blue skirt. She was small, a kid like me, but she was elegant. The moonlight illuminated her golden ringlets, and the neckline of her gown was edged with intricate lace. She must have heard me calling for Danny because she wasn't surprised when I discovered them there. She sat calmly, running a hand slowly down Danny's back as his eyelids fluttered in and out of a soft, warm sleep, his heavy head resting in the crook of her other arm.

She kept her eyes on Danny as she spoke, and her voice sounded like a gentle rain falling on the trees. "I'm sorry, Miss," she said to me. "I just couldn't make myself say goodnight."

I stood quietly, as if somehow my movement would stir the air and she would float away like precious dust.

"It gets lonely, you know. No one with whom to share your daydreams or your nightmares. No one to hold." She stroked Danny's velvety ears like I did when he snuggled with me in bed. "I'm sorry. I won't keep you any longer." Then she stood swiftly, but with grace. Looking back now, I still wonder that she didn't trip on her hem. She lifted Danny, who remained asleep, and offered him to me, looking at me for the first time.

It was then I noticed her eyes. They were blue and sad, like the other kids had whispered, but there was a quality that they had not described. They looked tired. Like Daddy's eyes whenever he talked about the war and all the bad things he saw in Europe.

She still held Danny out to me, waiting for me to take him. I looked at her weary eyes again. She must have seen a lot.

"That's ok," I told her. "Why don't you keep him tonight."

She looked down at Danny, and her eyes seemed a little less sad.

She thanked me and took him to her house across the street. The next morning, when I awoke, he was back in our front yard, sniffing through the fence with the Collie next door. I looked out my window, past our yard, and saw a curtain pushed aside in one of her upstairs rooms. Stepping into the sunshine, she looked at me with a smile and waved.

Negral



### **A Kingdom of Her Own**

She lounged across her bed, stroking the soft cotton and grinning up at her servants now entering her chambers in their matching attire. "Greetings, my dears. Have you brought me purified water and not that murky filled kind you tried to give me before?"

Her servants stared blankly at her before handing her a clear glass of water. "Ah, much better. You may leave."

They scampered out of her lavish room and closed the door behind them. "Solitude. Every Queen should have it from time to time," she murmured. Not sure what to do, but accustomed to being alone, the Queen decided to play a game she made up. As she grew bored quite frequently, she created a counting game to pass time, counting everything from the floor tiles to the ceiling cracks. She would see how high she could count until her servants interrupted her.

Hours began passing and yet no servants had come. The Queen was running out of things to count and decided she was rather hungry. "Today I think I shall venture outside. I never do get out there much, for as a queen I take no action in the affairs of the King. I wonder how my dear husband is," she spoke allowed.

She sprang from her bed and strode to the door. She gave the handle a twist, but the door would not budge. "This is rather odd," she stated. She turned it again, but the door still would not yield. She hit the door, hoping a passing servant would hear.

A few minutes passed before she grew anxious and an idea started to form in her head. "Someone has breached the palace. They have locked me inside. Oh, what shall I do? My King! Is he safe? Have the intruders committed the ultimate treason? What do they plan on doing with me?" A sob escaped from her throat. She banged the door loud enough to mimic a herd of elephants. "Please! Let me out!" The Queen begged. "I will give you money and jewels, whatever you seek."

The door quivered and suddenly her servants appeared. "Oh, thank goodness! Has the palace been breached? Is my King protected?" Ignoring her questions, the servants brought the Queen to her bed where they

pushed her down and pulled straps across her body. “What is this? I am your Queen and I demand you release me and bring me my husband.”

A servant pulled a needle off a tray, tapped it and brought it down to her arm. “Adelina, please calm down. You are not a queen. You have been in a mental hospital for five months since your husband passed away.”

“Lies! All lies!” She shouted before the imposters around her faded out of view.

The doctors in their matching white coats looked through the mirror at the unconscious Adelina. “Her condition hasn’t improved. We have tried doubling her dosage, but she refuses the medicine in her water when it is too cloudy, claiming it is impure. Her episodes have been coming more frequently and each time a doctor interrupts one she becomes violent and refuses to believe what we tell her. Adelina’s imaginary kingdom has become her only reality now. I am afraid her body is too fragile to handle any more medication. There is nothing more I can do for her.”

The head doctor nodded at his team and walked out of the room. The assistants scribbled away in their notebooks. The Queen was awakening to a new day.

### Almost Nowhere

The car crept up the long gravel driveway, crunching the rocks beneath its tires, as Delani rocked *slowly, slowly* on the porch swing. The deep Mississippi heat rose in blurry waves over by the edge of the yard, where the car made the turn near the apple tree. Delani wondered like the barn owl in the nighttime, her dusty toes reaching for the veranda's baluster, *who, who, who could that be?*

Inside the '75 Deville, tweed sunk into the red velvet seats where the man sat. The bottom of his leather Oxford *tap-tapped* against the gas peddle. He had searched long and hard for a decent radio station this far into Copiah County. In fact, coming across anything but static a hundred miles from Jackson was gold. So he let the rock 'n' roll play, and surprised himself when he started humming along to the tune.

*That'll be the day when you say goodbye*

*Yeah, that'll be the day when you make me cry*

*You say you're gonna leave me, you know it's a lie*

*'Cause that'll be the day when I die*

Not *extremely* heretical, he supposed, while he set the car in park and rolled the window down a crack to keep the inside from getting too hot. It wasn't until then that he noticed a young girl studying him from the far end of the porch. Tangled vines of auburn hair hung in the way of her eyes, but as the lazy wind gave a puff her beetle-black eyes reflected the sun in his direction. He stared from the Deville for a second or two, *hot, hot, hot*, then remembered his business. Grabbing a suede bag from the passenger side, he got out of the car.

"Hello, mister. That's a big car." Delani chirp-chirped at the man.

"It is. It is." He laughed at her ease.

Delani stood up from the swing and flew over to the side of the veranda closest to the man and the Deville. Her bare feet made dull wooden thuds as she ran, *hoomff hoomff hoomff hoomff*. *It's red like a cardinal.*

"Can I take a ride in it?" She asked.

The man studied her now that she was closer. Away from the shade of the porch, under the hard sunlight, she looked like someone he'd met before. *Maybe someone from Jackson.*

"Where would you have it take you?" He asked back.

Delani tried hard to think of a special place, but couldn't. Not quite, anyway. "I guess, maybe on the other side of the tomatoes," She proposed, pointing out toward a dried hedgerow that grew on horizon of the open yard.

The man arranged his tweed jacket and his heavy bag. "What's on the other side of the tomatoes?" *More static*, he thought.

"Maybe nothing. Maybe something," Delani riddled.

"You've never been?"

"I mostly play in the front yard. What's your name, mister?"

With that he seemed to recall why he was there. He stretched a hand out with light hairy knuckles as he approached the girl on the inside of the balcony. "Oh, I'm James Eddings. I'm wondering if your father or mother are home today?"

His outstretched hand appeared to go unnoticed. Delani continued to look out toward the tomato bushes.

The heat sunk further down the man's sweat-stained collar. He fooled inside of his suede bag and pulled a red handkerchief from it, which he used against the beads on his forehead and neck. The girl never answered him, so he said again, "I'm sorry. Is your father home, or your mother?"

Delani's stare turned back to the Deville then.

"I like your car, Mr. E. Mystery." Her stare was deep and wide, like the summer heat. Then she sang.

*Who, who, who could that be?*

*It's a mystery. A Mister-E.*

## **To Speak as Cars**

1.

In elementary school I found relaxation sitting on my porch and watching minivans and Toyota sedans navigate the stop signs at my corner. It was an odd five way intersection between one of the busiest streets in my town, the long avenue that lead to the school, and a minor street. With characteristic New England lack of foresight, only four of the ways had been given stop signs, and cars were constantly having to flash headlights and tap horns to negotiate who could move. There was a beauty in the articulateness of cars. Like animals, they seemed to say just enough. Cars honked and gestured overtly by muscling in on others in the intersection or clearly pulling back to let others pass. They didn't have the words to converse with hidden layers.

2.

My best friend Kaylee and I lay on her bed, which was placed under a precariously overflowing bookshelf, as we poured through her birthday gifts from last night's party. Her pink carpet was covered in toys. Kaylee nudged me and I put down the Mercedes Lackey book I was looking at.

"Check this out."

Kaylee brought over a soft rubber globe filled with a curious light blue gel. Adorable rubber dolphins, turtles, and fish were swimming inside, like a miniature world.

"Can I see?"

She handed the toy over quickly. Its slick surface slipped through my fingers, and the globe fell two feet to land softly on the carpet below.

"Shoot" I leaned over to pick it up.

Kaylee leapt off the bed, "Don't touch it! You broke it!" she cried, scooping it up in a frenzy of motion. At first I was too astounded to tell if she was really upset. Life goes wrong so terrifyingly easily.

"I'm so sorry! Can I see it? Maybe there's a rip in the rubber we can tape."

“You ruined it! You ruined it!” Kaylee kept repeating. Her voice had a sing-song echo to it, like playground teasing, but the words were serious. The globe had looked fine, but I couldn’t tell anymore as she jerked it around. What did “ruined” mean? Did it mean “an understandable mistake” or “not on speaking terms anymore”? Kaylee wouldn’t let me get near the toy.

Hugging the globe to her flat chest Kaylee tore out of the room. Her bare feet slapped against the hallway as she ran into the bathroom. The commotion was so bewildering it felt almost theatrical – I just wanted her to slow down and tell me what would make things right.

“I’m sorry,” I insisted through the bathroom door. “I’ll pay for it.” I had no idea if I could afford it, “Where did your parents get it? I’ll buy you another one.” It was terrifying to think I may have destroyed something beyond my ability to put it right.

“No, it’s ruined.” She wouldn’t tell me what she wanted from me. “You ruined my birthday present.” Each time she said it I felt more helpless.

I still felt nervous the next day when Kaylee walked up to me in front of school.

“Hey,” I said, awkwardly. “I’m sorry about the globe.”

“It wasn’t actually broken,” I couldn’t believe Kaylee said it so breezily, “I wanted to know how you would react.”

Fear melted into uncomprehending hurt. “You couldn’t just ask me?”

It dawned on me then that I would never know if Kaylee was actually upset or if everything she did had a second, hidden layer. As the bell rang, I glanced at the girl walking next to me and longed for the straightforwardness of cars.

3.

It was around this time, while leafing through old books at the library, I found my mentor. Inside one faded hardcover was the black and white photo of a man in a wool jacket standing in front of a blackboard. I was transfixed by his rounded lips and outstretched arm, as if the photo was snapped in the midst of a lecture. This man was Dr. Franz Hernan, I read.

After a string of failed car businesses in his youth, Dr. Hernan left Austria for America, where he would become a doctor of linguistics, and, in 1987 in an effort to trim down language, dedicate himself to popularizing swearing. He published parenting books, advising children be taught swearing from a young age. He advocated on talk shows like *David Letterman* and *Geraldo*, and pumped his own speech full of swears.

Inspired by Orwell's *1984*, which, Dr. Hernan would repeatedly explain to the press crowded outside the TV studios, he had read only half of, the doctor spent late nights in his study, seeking what words he could eliminate from the English language. Dr. Hernan, who always appeared arm out stretched and mid-word in my head, would spend hours scrutinizing the works of Dickens and W.G. Sebald, revising entire sentences down to a few choice phrases. "Very", "really" and any other emphatic he consolidated under "fucking". "Shit" and its variants would cover whole realms of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The biographer A.F. Moore says Dr. Hernan's favorite sentence in the English language was the remarkable, "I would fucking love to fuck, but I'm afraid we're fucked – I'm such a stupid fucker that I fucked up and forgot the condoms."

Debate still abounds on Dr. Hernan's motives. Wikipedia describes Dr. Hernan as an immigrant, striving to make the language simpler to learn by eliminating synonyms. The biographer A. F. Moore claims instead that Dr. Hernan saw himself as perfecting communications. Dr. Hernan saw a future in encouraging English users to craft a few words very well rather than spread themselves thin in efforts to become a jack of all trades. I think Dr. Hernan was trimming down on duplicity and subtle layers with each snip of a word from the dictionary.

4.

Dr. Hernan did not so much invent swear words as invent swearing in its modern form. Before Dr. Hernan, my parents told me, swears were rare and terrifying like lightning. My parents did not seem to realize how terrifying every non-swear word is.

After the globe incident I hadn't wanted to see Kaylee or deal with her overcomplicated methods of communicating with the world. It scared me that every action dragged a hidden meaning with it like a shadow. My dad forced me go to her recital next week. "Kaylee's such a sweet girl," he justified as he penciled her show in on the calendar. By this he meant, "I'm friends with her father," but didn't want to say that's why.

After the stage cleared and the parents and siblings filed out of the small auditorium into the school hallway, Kaylee ran up and grabbed my hand excitedly Her clarinet swung in her other hand. I let my hand lie limp like a dead fish.

I wished I could beep my horn and tell her to stand back, that just because she tosses her braids and acts forgiven doesn't mean she is. My dad's gaze quashed the words in my throat. In his eyes, offering plain honesty while there were still words available to obscure it was as uncalled for as pulling out a gun.

"What did you think of my recital?" Kaylee grinned.

I knew I had to offer praise or cause a scene.

If only I could say "positive!" I had learned in the past that to say "great" meant I did not like it enough as "awesome", "awesome" was over-the-top coddling, "good" meant I did not pay attention, "splendid" was just silly . . . with so many options each one was a trap, with a connotation I would have to answer to.

"Mm!" I smiled and made a positive noise, then quickly turned the conversation to something else.

5.

Translators railed against Dr. Hernan. A few protested outside the TV stations that interviewed him, but most restrained themselves to impassioned newspaper articles. He was, they said, making their job near impossible. For example, the translator Vladimir Alexandrov, pointed to "shit" as a pinnacle of incomprehensibility. The merest twist of inflection distinguished the negative meaning of "shit" in "everything is shit" from the positive "it's the shit!" meaning of the word. Alexandrov couldn't see the magic in this. The word, he said, meant almost nothing either way.

On the right hand side of the page was the photo of Dr. Hernan's office into which one translator, Maria Oliva, famously stormed in 1988, pistol and transcript of Dr. Hernan's latest speech in hand. There was a three-foot statue of Darwin on an end table next to what is either a very small desk or just the bare edge of it, as it was cut off by the photo's frame. At the very least, it seemed to be made of a nice wood, the edge decorated with a leaf pattern. The right wall of the room had a bookshelf full of tomes in nearly identical striped binding. None of these signs of academia and dedication could have calmed Ms. Oliva that Saturday May 21, 1988. Accounts of the event have been pieced together from an interview with Dr. Hernan – the recording now sadly lost – and the testimony

of his personal secretary, a Mr. Jason Tailor. It seems that, shaking the transcript in one hand, Ms. Oliva demanded in a quavering voice that the doctor tell her what, exactly, each of the 44 different “shit” ‘s in his speech were meant to convey.

When trying to explain her motives for the outburst, the *New York Times*, would later note that Ms. Oliva’s entire career had centered around her finding Spanish words that would match the exact shade of connotation and context of English ones. The sentence that was said to have thrown Ms. Oliva over the edge was: “The car I went to see was fucking huge, but it had these really shitty tires and the seller was a real bastard”.

“There is no denotation,” Dr. Hernan himself claimed to have answered the translator, “There is only the *sense* of it.” He told her the sentence was just emphasis, suggested emotion, inflection, intensity. It could not be pinned down. Ms. Oliva had pulled out the 9mm pistol. The police were never sure whether she meant to shoot Dr. Hernan or shoot herself.

6.

As I sat on the porch watching cars who only ever spoken with general gestures, a green minivan trundled around the corner and pulled into my driveway where it sat, glinting in the sun. With a click Kaylee’s father stepped out.

My dad strode out of the garage, “Max! You wouldn’t believe the mess in here.” Kaylee’s father had come by to help my dad clear out the garage before being painted. As my dad started to chat with his friend about brush strokes and Wednesday’s baseball game, Kaylee popped out of the car. I stood up.

“I thought I’d bring her over so the girls don’t get bored while we work,” her father explained. My dad nodded like it was a brilliant idea and they disappeared into the garage.

Kaylee raced over across the grass, “Oh man, I am sooo energetic,” she enthused, putting a gleeful arm around my shoulder. “Let’s get a ball and go to the park!” She moved towards my front door.

I planted my feet, stopping us both from moving. “Maybe.”

I could never tell when what she said was acting and when it was real, and it was exhausting. I did not want to spend my day that way.

Kaylee turned to me in surprise, “Why not?”

“First answer me this – yes or no only- do you like me, as a person?”

“What? I-“ She dropped the arm from my shoulder and turned to face me.

“Yes or no?” I was like a warden sealing her city: If I could close off enough of language’s escape routes, the only option left for Kaylee would be the truth.

“Do you like me, yes or no?”

“Yes.” She blushed a little. Truth has a way of feeling awkward.

“Do you respect me?”

She looked surprised, uncomfortable.

“I mean, I guess. . . “

I stared at her in the afternoon sun, her lips pursed in a mix of skepticism and embarrassment. I kept my eyes hard and body still. Finally, Kaylee’s face relaxed as she seriously contemplated the question.

“Usually.” she answered finally.

“Ok,” I said. We went inside and got a ball.

7.

Until the end of his life, Dr. Hernan championed swearing, teaching those who would listen how to speak in vagueness and exorcise the specificity from words. “Shit” would be turned into a train car that we could fill with whatever cargo we chose.

Dr. Hernan was buried by a tree in what looked like an old church cemetery. The photo was too blurry to read what it said on his thin, flat gravestone. I liked to think it said nothing at all. For the man who preached saying only what is necessary, any writing on a grave would be superfluous.

His philosophy of swearing is the greatest fight I’ve seen against the duplicity of words. It shrinks that awkward chasm between what we say externally, when we speak aloud or write, and the intentions of our words, the

internal emotions they are meant to provoke. It is as close as human kind will get to telepathy. It is as close as we can get to the straightforward muteness of cars.

## Anatomy of the Modern Ages

“One more push,” said the blond-haired nurse in the tight, light-blue scrub uniform unbuttoned just enough to reveal the black lacing of her bra. The thirty-year-old green-eyed doctor with black, spiked hair, flexed every so often to show off his muscles as he manipulated the forceps.

Sarah could not understand how she could be pregnant. Ally Anderson on ABC Family’s *Naughty Little Sophisticated Schoolgirls* had unprotected sex on the show all the time and never got pregnant. Sarah modeled her lifestyle on the basis of living the same glamorous way that Ally did. When Ally threw away her stash of condoms after Dillon told her that she was too beautiful for condoms in one of the show’s most romantic moments, so did Sarah. Like Ally, Sarah saw high school as a chance to explore her sexual horizons, which meant she had slept with all the boys at her school in addition to some of her closest girlfriends.

At first Sarah thought about getting an abortion, but decided not to after watching the hit reality show *The Real Teen Mothers of the Jersey Shore*, in which five promiscuous teen mothers managed to continue an adventurous lifestyle while raising their adorable beauty pageant-winning daughters. While watching the first season of the show, Sarah felt optimistic about her pregnancy. She saw her pregnancy as the official start of a new chapter in her life, a chapter in which she could maintain her carefree teenage lifestyle while also being a responsible, loving mother.

“One more push and you're done,” the nurse said.

The doctor, with his eyes glued to the nurse’s breasts, continued to flex and manipulate the forceps in his attempt to pull out the baby. After several minutes the doctor managed to pull out the crying, bloody, five-pound baby. He held it over his head like an Olympic weightlifter to impress the two girls before he placed the child on the table and cut the umbilical cord.

“Can I see my baby?” asked Sarah impatiently.

“One moment, sweetie,” said the nurse. The nurse wrapped the baby in a blanket and handed the child to

Sarah.  
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“What is this?” asked Sarah, repulsed by the pale, bloodstained, brown-eyed creature staring up at her.

“It’s your baby boy,” replied the nurse.

“It’s bald!” cried Sarah.

“His hair will eventually grow in,” said the nurse. “We can give you some baby hats and wigs to take home, if it makes you so uncomfortable.”

“Why are his eyes brown?”

“Don’t worry. We’ll give you some colored contact lenses to take home.”

“He’s got no muscle tone!”

“We’ll give you baby tone-up clothes to take home.”

“He’s ugly! My child is hideous! He’s a freak of nature!” cried Sarah.

“Oh, sweetie, don’t cry,” said the nurse, “no one is born beautiful. Everyone is born ugly. You’re a mother now. It’s your responsibility to provide your baby with the proper necessities to make him a handsome young man. I know it’s hard now, but trust me, eventually it will get easier. He’ll grow into his looks and you’ll learn to love him.”

Sarah looked down at the boy. “I hope so.”

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Damien and Alexandra sat on the couch watching a new modernized version of a Disney Classic entitled *Winnie the Hooch*. Their mothers sat in the kitchen drinking coffee and discussing the new techniques for raising a healthy and confident child featured in the latest *Mothers Weekly Magazine*. Neither child wanted to watch *Winnie the Hooch*. Damien really wanted to watch *Whora the Explorer* and Alexandra wanted to watch *The Telehubbies*, but since both children failed to agree on which show to watch, their parents ended up choosing the show for them.

“Do you want to play doctor?” asked Damien.

“That sounds boring!” said Alexandra.

“No, it’s not! It will be a lot of fun! My mommy and daddy have millions of doctor magazines under their bed that have tons of pictures of people’s bodies that we could look at to examine each other!” exclaimed Damien.

“Fine. I’ll play your stupid game,” said Alexandra.

They got off the couch and went upstairs to Damien’s parents’ bedroom. Once in the room Damien bent down on the left side of the bed to pull out one of his mother’s magazines, and then went to the right side of the bed to pull out one of his father’s. He handed Alexandra the magazine with the man on it.

“Here,” he said. “You examine me first! You’ll see that I am in excellent shape!”

Alexandra rolled her eyes as Damien began to undress. Damien first took off his gold rings and the gold chain, which read “Ladies Man.” Then he took off his shirt and the semi-plastic undershirt that gave the illusion that he had a six-pack. Finally, he took off his jeans and his underwear with padding in the crotch area and the ass regions. Alexandra opened the magazine and compared the naked man inside of it to the naked boy in front of her. She began to laugh hysterically.

“What are you laughing at!” shouted Damien.

“You’re not normal! You’re a freak!”

“No, I am not! I’m perfect!”

“No, you’re not! Here, look!” said Alexandra, showing the naked man to Damien. Damien looked at the picture and felt ashamed. He quickly put his clothes back on, embarrassed that Alexandra saw his body. Trying to fight back tears, Damien moved towards the door.

“Where are you going? You have to examine me and see what a normal person looks like!” laughed Alexandra.

Damien reluctantly turned away from the door and picked up the magazine. He began examining the women in the magazine as Alexandra began to undress. First Alexandra took off her red training stilettos, her sparkling purple midriff top that read “Hot Stuff,” and her tight leather mini. Finally, she removed her thong and padded bra.

“So, am I perfect or what?” asked Alexandra.

Damien looked up from the magazine and saw the naked Alexandra. His eyes immediately expressed his horror.

“What is it!”

“There is something seriously wrong with you!”

“What? No, there isn’t! You’re wrong!”

“Here, look for yourself.”

Alexandra looked at the magazine and began to cry.

“Don’t worry, Alexandra. You’re not alone. I’m just as ugly and disfigured as you. We’ll stick together.

We’ll be freaks together.”

Alexandra’s cries grew louder.

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Jennifer and Talia examined the male skeleton in the opening room of the Body Exhibit in complete bewilderment.

“I don’t understand. If it’s a male skeleton then where’s the penis bone?” asked Jennifer.

“I don’t think that the penis has a bone. I think it’s made out of that thing that our ears are made out of.

What’s that thing called again? Silicone?” Talia asked.

“No, it’s not silicone, Talia! That’s what our breasts are made out of, which means that the penis cannot be made out of silicone,” said Jennifer.

“Just because our boobs are made out of silicone doesn’t mean that the penis isn’t made out of silicone!”

“Seriously, Talia! I mean, think about it. Is a penis soft like your boob?”

“No.”

“Exactly! Don’t you remember in that episode of *Naughty Little Sophisticated Schoolgirls* where Ally got hurt after Dillon slapped her in the face with his dick? If it was made out silicone then Ally wouldn’t have gotten hurt.”

“Oh my god, you’re totally right! But I don’t know.”

“Just take out your phone and Google search the penis so that we can figure out what the fuck it’s made out of.”

“I still don’t think it’s a bone,” said Talia as she took out her iPhone G19 and began Google searching.

“If it’s not a bone, then why the fuck would they say a guy has a boner? I mean, use some common sense, Talia!”

“Oh my god! You’re totally right. It says in the Wikipedia that it’s made out of a bone.”

“Told you so.”

“Then what happened to the bone of this guy’s skeleton?”

“I don’t know. Maybe the men assembling it lost it.”

“Let’s go to the next room,” said Talia, as she put her phone back into her tight sheer pants. Looking down at the floor while walking, Talia came to an abrupt stop.

“Can you believe this shit? Look at that woman’s body. First of all, I don’t know what the fuck they made her tits out of, but it’s definitely not silicone. And second of all, they’re ridiculously small.”

“Let’s just get out of here. The people assembling these bodies are seriously fucked up.”

“I know! This is completely ridiculous! Total waste of time. Let’s just use the Internet to bullshit our paper. At least we can trust Wikipedia.”

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Gabriel gulped down his Mojo-Growjo pills and headed towards the bathroom. As he walked he felt an instant jolt of pain in his testicles, one of the many side effects of the best-selling over-the-counter pills. Gabriel had been taking Mojo-Growjo pills for five months now. He discovered the male enhancing pills on the CW 10 o’clock news report about an unlicensed physician assistant, Richard Longmen, who created the pill after he discovered that many men suffered from a rare medical dysfunction where their penis was incapable of reaching the average full-length size of twenty-four inches. When Gabriel measured himself and discovered that he had an abnormally small penis, he ordered the pills and started taking them religiously. Unfortunately, the pills were ineffective. If anything, the pills had caused his penis and testicles to shrink and lose all function.

Looking at himself in the bathroom mirror, Gabriel asked himself how anyone could possibly love him. Everything about him was repulsive. At the age of forty-five he was going gray, his skin was no longer wrinkle-free, and hair was sprouting out from all the pores of his body with the lone exception being the hair on his head, which seemed to be thinning. A man my age should not be looking this way, he thought. But someone could fix him.

He had heard of a man who worked behind the back alleys of Va-Jizzel-Me Street who would perform extensive updating surgery for less than twenty dollars. Two of Gabriel's friends had gone to this surgeon and he remembered feeling a little envious about how good they looked in their glass coffins at their funerals. If he was ever going to attain an amazing body, he would have to take drastic actions. He needed to be sliced, diced, chopped, wrapped, sautéed, and seasoned into perfection. If his penis wasn't going to grow, then the Va-Jizzel-Me Street surgeon would cut it off and get him a new one. If his body couldn't work for the muscular physique he craved, then the surgeon would put the muscles in him. If his skin was going to wrinkle, then the surgeon would de-wrinkle it. If the hair on his head was thinning and the hair below his neck kept growing, the surgeon would take the hair from his chest, back, and ass and place it on his head. If God wasn't going to give him the looks he felt he deserved, then the surgeon would.

As Gabriel stood in front of his bathroom mirror, thinking about the body the Va-Jizzel-Me Street surgeon could give him, he saw that for the first time in five months he was smiling.

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Charles Dermick sat at the open bar of the funeral parlor, which was situated right next to his wife Sherrill's open glass coffin. Charles had not yet gone over to his wife's coffin, preferring instead to take advantage of his granddaughter's teenage friends sitting at the bar. In their state of obliteration the girls were freely flirting with the eighty-year-old man. Just as Charles was beginning to enjoy himself, his son Peter approached him.

"Have you seen what they've done with her body?" asked Peter.

"No, not yet. Does she look good?" asked Charles.

"She looks amazing. Her breasts are so huge, I can't believe that she was able to get a size 38Z at her age. I trust you were able to enjoy them before she died?"

"Unfortunately not. She went into surgery on Friday and died Saturday morning."

"That's terrible! Was the doctor able to tell you exactly what the cause of death was?"

"The breasts suffocated her. When she went for surgery the doctor warned me that if she had her ribs removed for the super waist tightening procedure on top of her tummy-tuck and wrinkle-free skin tightening, her body would not be able to sustain the weight of the implants. He said her breasts would most likely suffocate her."

But I asked the son of a bitch, 'what the fuck is the point of having nice breasts if you don't have the figure and skin for it?' Your mother agreed with me, so that doctor had no choice but to do the complete surgery."

"No, I don't blame you. It's just too bad that you weren't able to enjoy them."

"Well, at least I saw how happy she was after the procedure. You should have seen her when she was suffocating. She was smiling. She always said that she wanted to have an amazing figure when she died, and she was so close to achieving it."

"Well she looks great, dad."

"Thanks, son," said Charles. "I think I want to see her now. Can you help take me to her?"

"Of course," said Peter, helping his father get up from the bar stool. The old man gripped his son's arm and proceeded to walk with him to his wife's coffin. When he saw her naked body lying inside he began to cry. The morticians had restructured her face and plastered her body in wax, which was spray-painted giving the skin a nice orange glow. They had removed her brown hair and replaced it with a long, wavy blond wig. Her breasts were hoisted up and stood firmly upright. Her waist was smaller than before and her hips and ass were enlarged. Her legs were stretched to give her an extra five inches of height. Her face was beautifully painted and her lips a vibrant cardinal red.

"What's the matter, dad?"

"She's beautiful! Absolutely beautiful! I've never seen her this beautiful in my entire life."

"I know. It's a shame that she's dead now that she's so beautiful."

"But at least she has attained beauty. Her death wasn't in vain."

"Yes. It was all worth it. Death gave her beauty, and that is what we all live for. That's the meaning of life. The American dream, you might say. To be born ugly and to die beautiful."

The old man bent down and kissed his wife on the lips. "Rest in peace, my beauty. Rest in peace."

A continuation of Dodie Smith's famous opening line of *I Capture the Castle*.

### **The Curious Death of Anita J. Blake**

I write this sitting in the kitchen sink. One may laugh, but it is a most pleasant location. Yes, there is a pole in my back and my bottom is rather wet, but that does matter when one has the ability to call forth buckets of water at a time. Never shall I grow thirsty whilst here. How did I get here, one may ask? It is a most thrilling tale, one that I am not entirely sure where to begin.

But I suppose the important thing is – what is that? There is a shadow outside the door. Yes, my kitchen has a door, a lovely red one with yellow flowers. Yes, it is locked. Because when one sits in a kitchen sink, one must be prepared for anything! What if one's family members were to return home? They would ask, "Why are you sitting in the kitchen sink?" and I would say, "Because I simply am." The sneers that young people seem so enamored of would gleefully cover their faces, and their tones would render me a foolish dog. No, no, that is not a conversation I am eager to partake in.

I have quite a way of distracting myself from my impending doom. Yes, I know that my tone is not fearful (for I do have such a way with words, as many a person has told me, that I can conjure any atmosphere), but that is because fear is like a piece of gum: no matter how large, it can be popped. It is a lovely analogy I created some years ago, and it pleases me to still use it.

Yes, the shadow and the sink. As I was explaining, I am currently sitting in the kitchen sink because it is the only safe place. As I placed my nightly moisturizer over my skin (which, incidentally, has been looking much healthier), I heard the front door open. The door has a horrid creak, almost as though there is a chipmunk wedged between the hinges. That has happened once before, and I am quite certain the chipmunks have labeled me their enemy. Many a night I have discovered droppings in my bedroom or holes in pastry boxes. It cannot be the doings of a mouse or rat, for once, etched on the wooden kitchen floor in flour, were the words "Chippy McMunk will never be forgotten." I at once perused my contact list for the existence of such a person, but after much deliberation, I came to the conclusion that it could only refer to the departed chipmunk (and, as I am so bold, I

would *never* be acquaintanced with, much less friends with, a person of such a name). The fear bubble was quite large at first, I will admit, but as the days passed I found the strength to pop it.

Ah! There is a scratching on the door! It is a combination of nails scratching a blackboard (a most horrid sound if I ever did hear one) and a child wailing (a sound worse than a blackboard, if possible, and one reason my son and daughter-in-law cite for not visiting). It appears the hairs on my arms are standing straight up, but I imagine that is because they are preparing for battle. Little soldiers, ready to protect their mistress. Onward, my comrades! Fight, fight, fight!

Ah, yes, the sink. After I heard the door open but a few hours ago, I crept down the steps to discover who or what had infiltrated my home. While I still detest this horrid ugly red carpet Vincent insisted on plastering the steps with, the carpet proved useful for once as it softened my steps. The spiral banister (which, incidentally, I was able to convince Vincent not to cover in red carpet) grew cold in my hand; it was a chilly winter night, and snow was quietly slipping in through the front door and covering the horrid red carpet that Vincent seemed so taken to. The very rudeness of this intruder! But I could not close the door and alert this intruder of my knowledge that someone was in my house. I kneeled (such a difficult action for a woman of my age, but one does what one must in a crisis) and ran my hand along the floor. There were small dirt specks and a few crumbs. Most interesting. I did not know what to make of it, but I was confident my mind would provide an answer.

It pains me to break the rhythm of my tale, but I have an update on my current situation – the scratching at the door has stopped. A slight smell of excrement is wafting beneath the thin crack between door and floor. If this individual is defecating in my living room, I will be most upset. Getting upset is no good, not with my high blood pressure. Already my hands are shaking slightly. Stop, please, you vile intruder! It is difficult to write when my hands act as though they are samba dancers. But I will carry on.

The trail of dirt and crumbs led to the living room. Around the plush red couch (truly, Vincent loved this hideous color) I crawled, behind the red armchair, near the thin lamp – yet I did not find the intruder. How mysterious! Perhaps it was a ghost, lost and lonely and looking for a home. I cannot support a ghost, but I would be most interested to learn what it is like to be a spectral being. Often have I marveled at the ability to move without walking – what a reward that would be! Although I would never tell my family; those simpletons would

only purchase another cane or, heavens forbid, a chair. Do they truly find me that incapable of the simplest of movements? I may complain all I want, but they should not offer rude insinuations! (One time my granddaughter asked why my hair was like one hundred pieces of chalk. The nerve of children – I ask you!)

Strange – I believe this mysterious being is now attempting to unlock the door. There is a soft clinking sound accompanied by what sounds like the stumbling of many feet – is this assailant a drunkard? That may quite possibly be worse than the possibility of them defecating on my rug. My dear old Vincent, may he rest in peace, loved the drink far too much for my liking. Yet men rarely heed the wise words of women, and see where he is now! Neatly buried beneath five (I counted) feet of dirt and worms. The drink did not impede his construction ability, I will concede that. Our kitchen was positively a wreck when he first moved in – broken cabinets, yellow wallpaper, and a leaky faucet. Now everything is in its proper place: the faucet is of stainless steel, the table of the hardest blackwood, and that horrible yellow paper is probably providing the bedding of some poor individual without a home.

And now to my tale I shall return. When my search of the living room proved futile, I turned towards the kitchen. A most peculiar feeling stole over me: it was as though beady eyes were watching me. I sniffed the air, for what being can disguise their scent, but smelt only the faint odor of petrol and powder. Into the kitchen I went, my short steps precise (long steps would give this mysterious being the chance to trip me). Barely had I bypassed the door when I heard the scurrying of footsteps! I bravely jumped forward, shut the door behind me, and locked it. Into the sink I climbed; if one were to open the door, perhaps their surprise at seeing me would allow me to escape.

And that is the story of how I came to be in the sink. It has gotten more comfortable as time has passed. The metal pole is almost like a massage, albeit one that does not actually soothe the painful knots in my back. All is silent save for the light scratching of my pen. I may be unable to move, but dehydration will not take me. Truly, this is all one can ask for when in a dire predicament. I do not fancy the notion of remaining in the sink for the rest of the night (my son and daughter-in-law, in a rare moment of brilliance, purchased a soft bed for me that is able to recall my favorite sleeping position), and I hope this being becomes uninterested and leaves. It is a good thing I

had the foresight to bring my notebook with me. Staring at the ticking hands of the clock would drive me mad.

Perhaps I will write that poem that has been in my mind, or I will –

My apologies! There was a sudden thud on the door, as though someone has thrown a statue at it! But it is terribly inconsiderate of this being to cause me to tear a hole in my journal. I intended this to be placed in a museum. Ah! Another thud against the door. This being most likely desires a glass of water; I imagine the snow has somehow dehydrated them. Ah! What if they are able to get past the door and try to get to the sink? I am in their way! Surely they will lift me out and allow me to leave. A woman of my stature deserves that.

Oh! It is no use! This accursed sink has trapped me! My damp bottom feels as though it is sticking to the sink, and my poor arms cannot grasp anything in reach. Oh...I knew the sink was a mistake. The counter was the logical location (that, at least, has juice and oatmeal on it); if only I was not so impulsive.

Oh! The door is splintering! The blooming red flowers that Vincent carefully painted are cracked down the middle (I do hope this being will pay for the damage). The doorknob is twitching. Why can I not pop this fear bubble? I have seen worse. Why, once a giraffe –

The door is open! I see no one! All is silent. Silent. Perhaps there was no fear bubble to pop after all. Perhaps –

Beady eyes! Small paws! Droppings! They are here! They are surrounding the sink, climbing on top of one another! They are coming for me! They are coming! Help! Help! Hel –

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*On January 21, 1997, Anita J. Blake's body was found in the sink of her two-story home in Queens, New York. A waterlogged notebook was found on the floor. Cause of death was determined to be a heart attack.*

**Untitled**



Susan Sontag's *On Photography*: A Marxist Contestation to Zoe Strauss's "Ten Years" Exhibit

Although Susan Sontag's polemic *On Photography* does well to harp on the accessibility of the photograph, the underlying strains of a Marxist discourse are clear. Within her essay, there are loud echoes of Karl Marx's diatribe against class division that serve to draw a clear line between photography and exploitation, citing the former as a tool that divides men rather than one that unites them. Though she does not necessarily support the medium, Sontag's argument about the dishonesties and social costs of photography are valuable to a larger Marxist argument about social stratification and exploitation. In this essay, I will attempt to reconcile Sontag's position on photography as a semblance of rape with Karl Marx's civic call to arms to critique Zoe Strauss's "Ten Years" exhibit as a form of privileged and unwelcome bourgeois oppression.

The foundations of Marxist criticism are born of social discontent. In his dissertations, Karl Marx details the godlessness of modern society as a result of industrialization, a development that is at once oppressive and dehumanizing. Western capitalism, he opines, is a bureaucratic institution that perpetuates class division and ultimately leads to civil unrest. Therefore, the Marxist critic is concerned with "the role of class and ideology in reflecting, propagating, and even challenging the prevailing social order" to once again shift the importance from greater social institutions back to the human (Murfin and Ray 282). In his work, Marx also develops the connection between economics and art, describing the former as the primary basis for the latter. He calls these elements the base, or infrastructure, and the superstructure, emphasizing that the economic composition of a society will ultimately inspire its artwork. Although Susan Sontag is not the greatest champion of photography as documentation, her stance on the artistic medium as a form of social rape is consistent with Marx's beliefs about capitalism: the photograph is a tangible manifestation of the passive-aggressive, oppressive nature of capitalism because it observes society from a privileged point of view.

The intersection of Sontag and Marx's respective discourses is evident in *On Photography*, and is key in critiquing the work of photographer Zoe Strauss. Sontag implies photographers use images as a tool to contain

social classes and to capture their distress without having to mire themselves in the mess. Of this dilemma, Sontag says that:

Although the camera is an observation station, the act of photographing is more than passive observing. Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep happening. To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it takes to get a “good” picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing – including, when that is the interest, another person’s pain or misfortune. (12)

Sontag does not approve of Strauss’s work because it is a form of observation that explicitly encourages social inequality by virtue of its elitist detachment. As per Marx’s views, Strauss’s patronizing perspective, captured from high up on her artistic pedestal, only encourages social injustice by maintaining a constant state of non-intervention. Although her images incite sympathy and perhaps even feelings of bourgeois guilt, the images make no effort to overturn the unfortunate circumstances that they so diligently document. In her perversion, she contains the socially ostracized in a literal and metaphorical frame, rendering them unable to break from pervasive and damaging stereotypes.

Through her work, Strauss acts as a proponent of, rather than a vanguard against, social inequality. The museum setting where Sontag places these images further stokes the conflict that is already fraught with questions of morality. The transplanting of these photographs from their origins beneath a section of the I-95 in South Philadelphia to the well-manicured galleries of the Philadelphia Museum of Art only widens the gap between the haves and have-nots. Since people must pay to see the exhibit, it is almost implicit that the people in the photographs themselves literally cannot afford to view their own likenesses. The disenfranchised and the elite are then physically and economically separated, and Marx’s point about class division is realized: the poor, contaminated and lowbrow, are markedly distinct from the privileged.

Despite how the images that Strauss chooses to showcase arouse pity from the viewers, they do not necessarily inspire the onlookers to help. This adds to the sense of entitlement that separates one social class from another: the ability to look on while others suffer, by creating experiential and physical distance. The situation

becomes increasingly convoluted once it is apparent that the economically elite, who perpetually reside in a position of invisibility and financial comfort, support the exhibit. Marx would likely denounce the entire affair as an exercise in capitalist indulgence. To take photographs of the weak is to cement their position at the bottom of the class pyramid, and this rush of provocative, unstable images can only precipitate compassion fatigue.

This reality not only embodies Marx's rhetoric on class division, but it is also crucial in demonstrating Sontag's idea that photography is a semblance of rape. The viewers violate those in the images by assessing their misfortune in terms of artistic value; there is pain, namely at the subject's expense, but it becomes sacred and mystical in the name of art. Sontag is clear in her conviction that this kind of display is unlawful, and she characterizes it as a degrading breach of information that only capitalizes on social ills:

The camera doesn't rape, or even possess, though it may presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and, at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate – all activities that, unlike the sexual push and shove, can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment. (13)

Strauss's images support these claims, particularly the photo *Monique Showing Black Eye*. The brutality of this image is in itself a reflection of violence and desperation; it represents the adversity of the impoverished in American society. The disturbing photograph is very adept at showcasing the very real physical struggle of "undesirables." The woman's black eye is a daunting mark of poverty and social disorientation: it symbolizes the abuses of a capitalist system on the wayward individual. The violence associated with low social status is understood in the woman's swollen lips and nose, acting in perfect opposition against the frivolous, even low-brow, pink tube top. It is also possible that the gore of this image was enhanced by photo-shop to increase the contrast between the black eye and the rest of the face. By altering the image, Strauss can endow it with more shock value, an intriguing prospect to the curious, unassuming viewer. Strauss is content to examine and quantify these poor souls. In Sontag's view, Strauss is a persecutor of her hapless and unsuspecting victims because she puts their tribulations on display for all to see.

In the manifesto of Marxist criticism, economics are the seed from which all artistic critiques are produced. Strauss's "Ten Years" exhibit, then, is the perfect representation of this hypothesis. Although the exhibit does speak to the beauty and struggle of everyday life, both Marx and Sontag would suggest that Strauss's

exhibit is not an exercise in social empathy, but rather an overt exploitation of the disenfranchised. It is apparent that, even by virtue of its location in a prestigious, well-attended museum – an inanimate ‘thing’ that is taken better care of than the people it showcases – Strauss’s attempt at elevating social misfits instead perpetuates Marx’s exact fears: that the material will subsume the living, that concrete will overtake the importance of skin and bone. It highlights the vices of artistic privilege and socially impairs those who it tries to aesthetically portray. This exhibit is not Strauss’s calls to arms and does not hint at any sort of subconscious desire for a class revolt on her part; rather, it is a sad reminder of the privilege and poverty that continue to coexist, albeit uncomfortably, in society.

Perhaps if those impoverished persons within the images can recognize the crimes that Strauss commits against them – firstly, by permanently capturing their misfortune, and secondly, by displaying it – it will incite them to action. They can then begin to develop the means to overthrow the ungodly system that is Western capitalism. If Sontag is correct, and the photographer intentionally “seeks out subjects considered to be disreputable, taboo, [and] marginal,” then Strauss can lay no claim to altruism or sympathy; she is guilty of shameless and shameful exploitation (13). By capitalizing on the gruesome realities of indigent living, as she does in *Monique Showing Black Eye*, Strauss becomes part of a greater framework that continues to drive a wedge between the upper and lower classes, rather than to spark engagement between the two. Eventually, however, the poverty-stricken will come to realize the great and terrible irony of exhibits like these, and will perhaps bring Marx’s prophecy to fruition.



*Monique Showing Black Eye*, 2006, Zoe Strauss, American, born 1970.  
Inkjet print. 18 1/16 x 12 inches (45.9 x 30.5 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art.

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### Honored Apparitions: Political Specters in *Richard II*

What is a ghost? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a ghost as "the supposed apparition of a deceased person or animal; a disembodied spirit," or, "a shadow or mere semblance" (Oxford University Press). Yet what could constitute a spirit or apparition, or, better yet, what signifies a spirit? If a sentence is passive, it means that the doer of the verb is not present, even though the verb is still enacted; therefore, the subject becomes a ghost. Actions all have subjects, but their visibility is what one can have trouble coping with or believing. William Shakespeare's *Richard II* contains no ghosts, specters, or apparitions, but it has deeds done without a visible or present doer; a character in the play may not be the direct cause of action, but rather, their political spirit does the deed. The political spirit, one's honor, land, or reputation, cannot truly die. It can be injured or threatened, but it will remain intact, making nobles socially immortal, for as Bolingbroke states, "Mine honor is my life. Both grow in one. / Take honour from me, and my life is done" (Shakespeare 1.1.182-183). *Richard II* is, implicitly, a political ghost story in which the spirits of nobles haunt King Richard through the "possession" of other characters.

The souls or spirits of nobles in *Richard II* are not literal ghosts, but the juridical subjects of power behind physical bodies. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault suggests that the:

[S]oul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power. (29)

In short, "the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy" because it is the part of the subject composed entirely of political and juridical practices (Foucault 30). For Foucault, there is a pseudo-spectral plane beyond the physical body composed of the political bodies of individuals. These political specters are ghosts created by the bloodline, honor, wealth, land, and associated responsibilities of the upper or royal class in the Middle Ages. In this way, nobles lose their physical bodies, but do not actually die. These ghosts can influence or possess others by enacting the specific juridical practices that produce the living body and the ghost. This means

that upholding the honor of a noble family is also inviting the presence of poltergeists. The living are composed of both the political policies of their social context and the death of those before them. In short, death becomes a political practice that influences corporal bodies. The political drama of *Richard II* does not generate from the actions of the living, but rather on behalf of the specters behind the living.

Although Thomas of Woodstock, or the Duke of Gloucester, never physically appears in the play, he is still the subject of action through his political spirit. As the play opens, "Bolingbroke seemingly knows that Richard secretly ordered Woodstock's death. Since he cannot say so, he picks Richard's agent Mowbray as his target, for Woodstock had been in Mowbray's safekeeping" (Maus 457). This concealed action is a direct action of Gloucester's specter: Richard had him killed, and so his ghost haunts Richard. However, since no one can accuse the king of murder, the ghost has to act through other methods; specifically, through other juridical subjects. The play begins with Bolingbroke accusing Mowbray of murder:

That he did plot the Duke Gloucester's death,  
Suggest his soon-believing adversaries,  
And, consequently, like a traitor-coward,  
Sluiced out his innocent soul through streams of blood." (Shakespeare 1.1.100-104)

Gloucester haunts Richard through the actions of Bolingbroke. The challenge, and subsequent banishment, is committed because of the political anatomy of Gloucester; his political body *does* the action. Since the juridical practices that composed him have no corporal body to work through, they work through the bodies of others.

Gloucester's honor also haunts John of Gaunt because of his inability to avenge his death. Gloucester is the brother of John of Gaunt. This fact requires Gaunt to uphold the honor of the family, to keep alive the spirit of his brother. His political specter exists on the same plane as his brother's. Gloucester's wife suggests this, saying:

By envy's hand and murder's bloody axe.  
Ah, Gaunt, his blood was thine! That bed, that womb,  
That mettle, that self mould that fashioned thee,  
Made him a man; and though thou liv'st and breathest,  
Yet art thou slain in him." (Shakespeare 1.2.21-25)

She then implies that some of the same juridical practices, the cultural laws that made Gloucester a subject, influence Gaunt, saying, "That mettle, that self mould that fashioned thee, / Made him a man" (Shakespeare 1.2.23-24). This means that the codes that made Gloucester a subject influence Gaunt as well. Therefore, it is not necessarily the death of Gloucester, but his political remains that haunt Gaunt and Bolingbroke. Gloucester acts (possesses) through Gaunt's and Bolingbroke's physical bodies to haunt Richard.

Gaunt's death is part of Gloucester's ghostly infestation, and works ultimately to torture Richard. Gaunt dies because of Gloucester's haunting of Richard, making Gloucester out to be a seemingly malevolent spirit. Gloucester influences Bolingbroke, but is unable to exert enough power to harm the king because his political spirit is still below that of Richard's. Gaunt dies because Bolingbroke is banished, "Thy word is current with him for my death, / But dead, thy kingdom cannot buy my breath," but he is banished because of Gloucester's ghost inhabiting him (Shakespeare 1.3.224-225). When Gaunt finally dies, he curses Richard, the one who initiated the sequence of possession. He tells the king to "Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee. / These words hereafter thy tormentors be," which indicates that he wants the shame of the king to outlive the body of the king (Shakespeare 2.1.136-137). This is an allusion to the spiritual, political life beyond bodily death that nobles enjoy, as well as a threat against Richard's own political spirit.

This threat against Richard is manifested when Gaunt curses the king in the name of his brother: "My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaning soul -- / Whom fair befall in heaven 'mongst happy souls -- / May be a precedent," (Shakespeare 2.1.129-131). Gaunt calls Gloucester a "precedent," an event which initiates future actions because his death created his ghost, and the ghost of Gloucester influences the rest of the play. Richard begins to make mistakes in his battle against the phantasmal brothers when he believes Northumberland's words about Gaunt's death: "Nay, nothing: all is said. / His tongue is now a stringless instrument. / Words, life, and all, Old Lancaster hath spent" (Shakespeare 2.1.149-151). His body may be gone, but his political spirit is alive and well. When Richard seizes Gaunt's property, he attacks his honor, and, therefore, the juridical practices associated with his estate. York mourns this attack because this offense against Gaunt's and Gloucester's souls brings Bolingbroke back:

How long shall I be patient? Ah, how long

Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong?

Not Gloucester's death, nor Hereford's banishment,

Nor Gaunt's rebukes, nor England's private wrongs." (Shakespeare 2.1.164-167)

Bolingbroke returns on the behalf of the political spirits of his family, which haunt the juridical practices that made him.

The ghosts of Gaunt and Gloucester inhabit Bolingbroke's juridical body, which directly causes Bolingbroke to return. In the introduction to the play, it is stated that:

For the upper aristocracy, the last straw is Richard's seizure of the duchy of Lancaster upon John of Gaunt's death: the encroachment seems to them worse than homicide, because it directly threatens the social structure upon which their status depends. Inherited property distinguishes noblemen from men of 'no name': in fact, noble names were derived from property. (Greenblatt 460)

This attack, however, is also an attack on the political soul of Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke's bloodline ensures that the lands are his and that this influences the way he acts, thus creating the impetus to return. However, this bloodline is composed of Gaunt and Gloucester as well as their juridical anatomy. Bolingbroke requests that he be called Lancaster, "My lord, my answer is to 'Lancaster,'" because that name represents the land and political power that belong to him (Shakespeare 2.3.70). That name also represents Gaunt, and all the things associated with him. Since they are of the same bloodline, Bolingbroke is susceptible to possession by others in that line; he states, "As I was banished, I was banished Hereford; / But as I come, I come for Lancaster," meaning both the land and the juridical power of Gaunt (Shakespeare 2.3.1112-1113). Similarly, when he returns to revolt against Richard, he invokes Gloucester's name: "I am a stranger here in Gloucestershire" (Shakespeare 2.3.3). Once again, the name signifies the presence of an invisible subject, of Gloucester and his bloodline inhabiting Bolingbroke. The two brothers inhabit him in order to get revenge on, or maliciously haunt, the king.

Gaunt and Gloucester become specters who impede Richard's work as king by possessing Bolingbroke. In doing so, the phantasmal brothers influence Bolingbroke to kill both Bushy and Green. Bolingbroke condemns them to death because they, as he says:

Disparted my parks and felled my forest woods,  
From my own windows torn my household coat,  
Razed out my imprese, leaving me no sign,  
Save men's opinions and my living blood. (Shakespeare 3.1.23-26)

The "coat" and land embody the combined political powers of the brothers. Bushy and Green are no match for the exerted power of three men in the line of Edward, and therefore die because of them. Richard loses his comrades, leaving only Aumerle and Scrope. He becomes worried because it is not his physical body which is under attack, but his political soul:

Let's choose executors and talk of wills –  
And yet not so, for what can we bequeath  
Save or deposed bodies to the ground?  
Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's. (Shakespeare 3.2.144-148)

His land, his spirit, is under attack by the rebels. He asks, "Is the King's name not forty thousand names," because his political body consists of his subjects and his land (Shakespeare 3.2.75). When his comrades are killed, it is his body which is under attack: "Besides its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally because the law represents the will of the sovereign" (Foucault 47). Bolingbroke rebels on behalf of Gaunt and Gloucester. His rebellion breaks the laws of the sovereign, and thus he attacks Richard's juridical body. It is here that Richard finally realizes he is haunted:

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings –  
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,  
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed. (Shakespeare 3.2.151-154)

He is haunted by the juridical ghosts of those he killed, and he will soon join them in that plane.

Exton kills Richard, but not his political soul, which lives on in shame, just as Gaunt wished. As Richard dies, he proclaims, "Mount, mount, my soul; thy seat is up on high, / Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die," meaning that his soul, his political ghost, will remain even after he dies (Shakespeare 5.5.111-112). For all

the ways that Gaunt and Gloucester haunt, attack, and undermine the political soul of the king, it can never die. It can, however, live on in shame: Richard has to give up his kingship. He does not bestow it on Bolingbroke, but rather only relinquishes it:

Now mark me how I undo myself.  
I give this heavy weight from off my head,  
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,  
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart. (Shakespeare 4.1.193-196)

The curse that came from Gaunt's mouth comes true with Richard being the king who abandons his kingdom. Richard's body dies, but his soul outlives him in shame.

Nobles in *Richard II* are immortal; they live on through the juridical practices that make them. Gaunt and Gloucester are present as political specters in the play, acting through Bolingbroke. Their ghosts possess him in order to haunt Richard so they can exact vengeance. However, it is important to note that every action has a cause, even if it is invisible. This is to say that the political spectral plane will always exist for the nobles. They always have the ability to exist here, even if they die, even if they are disgraced. The play is based on haunting, so why would it not end the same way? Bolingbroke, now King Henry, laments, "I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land / To wash the blood off my guilty hand" (Shakespeare 5.6.49-50). Who is doing the haunting now? Although Richard is dead, his soul lives on and drives Bolingbroke to the Crusades. This is accomplished through the change in Bolingbroke's juridical practices: he is now king. In this way, Richard is able to influence, to haunt him. *Richard II* is a ghost story whose political specters haunt England to this day.

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### **The Old Man's Reverse Psychology in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus***

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is a defiant contrarian who will establish his agency at any cost. Throughout Marlowe's play, Faustus argues for argument's sake and never misses an opportunity to contradict those characters that have opinions and suggestions of their own. Faustus' obstinacy is especially evident in Scene Twelve, where the Old Man struggles to convince the doctor to repent for his sins. In the two extant versions of the scene, the Old Man uses competing rhetorical strategies to appeal differently to Faustus' sense of agency. Alterations in language as well as the characterization of blame produce divergent reactions from Faustus, ultimately suggesting wholly different outcomes for the faulted doctor. In the A-text (1604), the Old Man aggressively blames Faustus for his impending damnation and implores him to accept responsibility for his sins. Yet in a predictably stubborn way, Faustus resists the Old Man's pleas and refuses to ask for mercy. Alternatively, in the B-text (1616), a kinder, gentler Old Man absolves Faustus of primary responsibility, but Faustus again takes the opposite tack and asserts his agency. Significantly, Faustus' reaction to the Old Man's plea in the B-text produces some hope that Faustus moves closer to salvation at the end of the play. Unlike in the A-text, the Old Man in the B-text plans on Faustus doing the opposite of what he tells him to do. Using reverse psychology, the Old Man finds a way to use Faustus' fierce obstinacy to his advantage, motivating him to admit responsibility and ultimately bringing about the truly desired consequence of Faustus begging God for forgiveness.

Doctor Faustus is developed as a defiant, argumentative character who takes great pride in his own agency. As a result of Faustus's contrary nature, the Old Man's speeches have different effects based on how he discusses Faustus' ability to control his past transgressions and the fate of his soul. Faustus' obsession with control is established early in the play; when his acquaintances come to visit him, Faustus reveals, "Know that your words have won me at the last / To practice magic and concealed arts; / Yet not your words only, but mine own fantasy" (Marlowe 1.101-03). Faustus has to clarify that it was his choice and own desire, not simply their suggestions, which makes him pursue the dark arts. This shows Faustus's refusal to have anyone control him or influence his actions.

When Faustus summons Mephistophilis, he again takes credit for the act of conjuring a devil even though Mephistophilis tells Faustus that it was not his words that made the devil appear. Additionally, Genevieve Guenther explains that a shift in religious attribution also absolves Faustus of responsibility: “In the late 1580’s and early 1590’s, just before Doctor Faustus premiered, popular Protestant devotional writers...attacked the traditional understanding of conjuration as a tool wielded by the magician himself” (2). Armed with new theological knowledge, the audience in Marlowe’s time would see the foolishness of Faustus taking credit for the arrival of Mephistophilis. After Faustus insists it was his words that are responsible for Mephistophilis’ arrival, the devil replies “That was the cause, but yet *per accidens*, / For when we hear one rack the name of God, /...We fly in hope to get his glorious soul” (Marlowe 3.46-49). This response follows the theological understanding of the time, “that magical language has no intrinsic spiritual efficacy—that it cannot control the devil or any other supernatural being” (Guenther 2). Faustus’ words alone could not produce a spirit as he claims, and Mephistophilis appeared by his own will. Aside from Mephistophilis, popular contemporary theological understanding also proves that Faustus is wrong in his claim that he is responsible for the conjuring. This scene further confirms Faustus’ argumentative and stubborn nature along with his need to retain agency.

Faustus also proves his confrontational personality when he discusses Hell with Mephistophilis. After the devil, who has first-hand experience, describes Hell, Faustus says, “I think Hell’s a fable,” and calls Mephistophilis’ descriptions “trifles and mere old wives’ tales” (Marlowe 5. 126,134). Faustus’ need to argue makes him disregard logic in order to stick to his convictions. Obviously, Mephistophilis would know Hell better than Faustus, but Faustus does not see his folly in sticking to his argument at any cost. Because of his need to feel in control of his decisions and his impulse to argue against even the soundest opinions, Faustus has ironic reactions to the two versions of the Old Man’s speech in Scene Twelve.

The way the Old Man’s lines are changed from the A-text to the B-text shows a different approach to how the speaker tries to persuade Faustus to repent for his sins. However, both texts reinforce Faustus’ defiant character. In the A-text, the Old Man’s speech blames Faustus entirely for his own damnation. The Old Man attributes Faustus’ “most vile and loathsome filthiness” that corrupts his soul to the “flagitious crimes of heinous sins” he has himself committed (Marlowe 12.7, 9). Faustus’ agency has led him to despair, but his ability to control

his destiny can also save him from damnation if he only repents. However, Faustus' argumentative nature again impedes his ability to accept suggestions from other people. The Old Man implores Faustus to "Break heart, drop blood, and mingle it with tears, / Tears falling from repentant heaviness" in order to be forgiven by God and restored to salvation (Marlowe 12.5-6). The Old Man tells Faustus exactly what he has to do in order to be saved, which is a reasonable suggestion when dealing with the ever-forgiving Christian God. However, true to his character, Faustus refuses to take the Old Man's advice and instead resigns himself to his hellish fate. Instead of appealing to God, Faustus exclaims, "Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die!" (Marlowe 12.14). This reaction leaves the audience with very little hope that Faustus will follow the Old Man's advice and repent. Instead of taking the Old Man's suggestion, Faustus instead wallows in self pity. Due to his challenging nature and his need to protect his sense of agency in his decisions, Faustus is unwilling to take the Old Man's advice to save himself.

In the B-text, the Old Man takes a very different approach in order to persuade Faustus to repent for his sins so that Faustus may reach a different end. Though the tone and content of the Old Man's speech is very different from that of the A-text, Faustus' different response further confirms his contrary nature. In the B-text, the Old Man does not attribute Faustus' fate directly to his own sins, but instead threatens Faustus' agency in his present situation. In his opening lines, the Old Man says, "O gentle Faustus, leave this damned art, / This magic that will charm thy soul to Hell" (Marlowe 12.1-2). In this speech, the Old Man attributes the damning of Faustus' soul to dark magic, not necessarily to Faustus directly, as he states in the A-text. It is not Faustus that is doing the damage to his soul, but the magic. The Old Man also refers to Faustus' soul as "amiable" in the B-text (Marlowe 12.6). This is very contradictory to the A-text, which describes the "vile and loathsome" character of Faustus as the reason for his soul's corruption (Marlowe 12.8-9).

To a defiant man like Faustus, who at times seems terribly proud of the blasphemy he has committed, this characterization might seem like an insult, as if the Old Man is belittling all he has accomplished. The Old Man again discounts Faustus' agency by calling Faustus' soul "hapless" in the B-text (Marlowe 12. 31). This word choice implies that what has happened to Faustus is because of chance, not choice. Depicting Faustus as a victim of Lady Luck instead of being the master of his own fate challenges the agency that Faustus is so desperate to claim. With

great variation from the A-text, this version of the Old Man's speech moves Faustus to action not by great pressure to repent that he is sure to defy, but by downplaying his agency and the power that he cares deeply about.

The different versions of the speech and the results it produces in Faustus' actions are paradoxical. However, by studying his character, it is clear why one approach produces a more positive response from the defiant and argumentative Doctor Faustus. In most situations, vehemently berating someone for the sins they have committed would be more likely to produce a repentance than calm advice that takes the blame away from the individual. However, Faustus is so defiant that he refuses to take action after the chastising claim from the Old Man simply because that would appear as if the Old Man is controlling Faustus, and the Doctor must always have authority. Faustus is so argumentative that he will even give up the chance to save his soul from Hell in order to resist conceding to the Old Man's plea. Conversely, when the Old Man removes the blame from him, Faustus jumps at the opportunity to prove his agency. Though the results are not what one would expect from the two speeches, Faustus' responses are directly correlated to his personality he has proven time and again throughout the play.

Further variations between the two texts prove that Faustus does take a more positive step towards redemption as a result of the Old Man's speech in the B-text. In both versions, Faustus asks himself early in the exchange, "what hast thou done?" (Marlowe 12.13, 18). However, after such divergence in the Old Man's speech, Faustus' reaction also changes. In the B-text, Faustus asks himself the same question again in an effort to take on more of the blame in the situation to establish his agency. Yet in the A-text, the line changes into "Accursed Faustus, where is mercy now?" in defiance of the Old Man's explicit instructions (Marlowe 12.28). Whether it is merely a selfish attempt to repossess control in determining his fate, Faustus appears to take on more responsibility for his sins, bringing him closer to repentance instead of merely appealing to a higher power to cast forgiveness upon him freely. During this exchange, Faustus also imagines the devil calling to him, saying in the A-text, "Faustus, come: thine hour is come!" (Marlowe 12.16). In the B-text, the line is changed to "thine hour is almost come" (Marlowe 12.20). This addition of "almost" proves that Faustus is willing to acknowledge that there is still time to prove his agency and repent to save his soul. These textual clues in the variation between the A- and B-texts will be further proven in the change of the ending scene in the B-text.

The B-text provides readers with an extended ending not seen in the A-text, which confirms the clues in the Old Man's speech that hint towards Faustus redeeming himself in the eyes of God. The idea of separating body from soul is introduced early in the play and reappears in the ending of the B-text in order to lead the readers to the conclusion that Faustus did save himself. After the Old Man's speech infuriates Mephistophilis in Scene Twelve, Mephistophilis reveals the punishment he would inflict on the Old Man cannot be complete because "His faith is great, I cannot touch his soul, / But what I may afflict his body with / I will attempt- which is but little worth" (Marlowe 12.69-71). Here, Mephistophilis reveals that a pure, faithful soul who is accepted by God cannot be harmed. Mephistophilis can rip apart his body and cause the Old Man pain, but it has little effect because when the Old Man dies, his soul will be saved by God, not given over to the devil. This separation of body and soul, though not commented on further in the A-text, reappears in the B-text as a possibility that Faustus could die by the hands of the devil, but have his soul delivered to God. In the B-text, the Old Man closes his first lines with "And so have hope that this my kind rebuke, / Checking thy body, may amend thy soul" (Marlowe 12.16-17). Adding these lines to the Old Man's speech creates hope that Faustus, like the Old Man, has a chance to escape the eternal damnation of his soul. The Old Man gives Faustus an avenue to agency by reminding him of the possibility that he can still cleanse his soul through repentance even if the devil will undoubtedly try to destroy his body.

To further this possibility, the B-text also includes a reappearance of the scholars at the close of the play that the A-text does not contain. When the scholars enter the scene, they find "Faustus' limbs, / All torn asunder by the hand of death" (Marlowe 13.337-38). Keeping this altered ending in mind, the distinction the Old Man makes in Scene Twelve between Faustus' body and soul becomes highly important. If Faustus is able to separate his soul from his body as the Old Man suggests in Scene Twelve by repenting, then there is still hope that Faustus' soul can be saved by God even though his body was torn apart by the Devil. In coordination with Faustus' more positive response to the Old Man's speech in order to prove his agency over his salvation, the reiteration of the distinction between body and soul supports the conviction that Faustus does find redemption in the eyes of God at the end of the play.

The paradoxical reactions of Faustus to the two versions of the Old Man's speech not only illustrate the obstinacy of Faustus' character, but also prove that he does not grow or develop throughout the play. When

Faustus was merely a man without the power of the supernatural, he was extremely accomplished as both a philosopher and a doctor. The audience, along with Faustus, expects this great mind to do amazing things with such brilliance. When Faustus does gain great power from his transaction with Mephistophilis, however, he accomplishes little more than world travel and idiocy. This failure to achieve greatness is compounded by Faustus' failure to see the foolishness in his constantly defiant nature, even when the fate of his soul hangs in the balance. The only way to ensure Faustus uses his power is to question his ability to do so. As a result of the fixedness of Faustus' defiant nature, Faustus has to be tricked into saving himself through the Old Man's reverse psychology illustrating that he has not grown throughout the play. As a result of Faustus' lack of development and maturation of his character, the true tragedy of Doctor Faustus lies in his great inability to exercise agency when it matters most.

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### **Slow Down, Slaughter: How Chaucer's Pandarus is a Good Friend, but an Unethical Uncle**

In his article "Chaucer's Pandarus: Virtuous Uncle and Friend," Eugene Slaughter proposes that Pandarus, from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, is a respectable character. As proof, Slaughter studies Pandarus's friendship with Troilus, a prince of Troy, and states that Pandarus fits the criteria of what French author Jean de Meun called "the classical ideal friendship." Slaughter also analyzes Pandarus's relationship with his niece, a widow named Criseyde, to show that Pandarus is a commendable uncle with only good intentions for his niece. However, because the paper has unsupported statements and ignores vital details about Chaucer's characters, Slaughter's arguments are often weakly made. Though Slaughter is successful in some of his literary analyses, his overall arguments about Pandarus's relationships with Troilus and Criseyde are undeveloped and disputable. In this paper, I will examine Pandarus's friendship with Troilus, his unethical relationship with his niece, and his role as a courtly love intermediary.

In his article, Slaughter unconvincingly argues that Pandarus is a good friend because he always acts according to Meun's classical ideal of friendship. Although Slaughter does not completely define Meun's ideal of friendship until the conclusion of his article, Slaughter does state that one of the elements involved is that "'in wrong and right,' the friendship remains intact (186). For Slaughter, *Troilus and Criseyde* demonstrates this "unbreakable friendship" ideal through Pandarus's friendship with Troilus. To support his argument, Slaughter states that Pandarus's decision to be "love's confidant" and an "effective go-between" for Troilus and Criseyde is done with good intentions because his actions are performed "all with [a] clear conscience" to please everyone (187). When Troilus and Criseyde's relationship fails, Pandarus's continuous aid to Troilus exemplifies the idea that "in right and wrong," Pandarus always remains a friend to Troilus (Slaughter 187). Therefore, Slaughter implies that Pandarus's loyalty to Troilus fulfills the classical ideal of friendship because he has a constant intent to help Troilus through sorrow.

While Slaughter's view of Pandarus is not impossible, the issue with his argument lies in his lack of specific

evidence that proves Pandarus's good intentions. When considering the scenes that Slaughter analyzes, the idea that Pandarus's initial intentions are good is a valid interpretation. For example, when Pandarus first finds Troilus in sorrow, Pandarus asks Troilus not to "hiden from thi friend so gret a care" (Chaucer 1.586-87) because "in wrong and right iloved the al my lyve" (Chaucer 1.594). Nevertheless, Slaughter's statement is ill-supported because he neglects these specific examples and does not completely define the classical idea of friendship. Furthermore, when Slaughter does use quotations from the text, they are isolated and ignore vital information about the characters. Moreover, Slaughter's idea that Pandarus's intention is simply to help everyone also overlooks the fact that Pandarus knows the relationship will benefit him. For instance, Chaucer often emphasizes Criseyde's independence, including how she "kept her own estate" and once stood alone at a festival (1.130). If Pandarus knows that Criseyde is a widow who has land and money, and that he can gain her property if he marries her off to Troilus, his role in the relationship becomes darker. Thus, a more selfish Pandarus emerges, making his initial intent in Troilus's love affair not as whole-hearted as Slaughter implies.

To prove that Pandarus is also a loyal and virtuous uncle to Criseyde, Slaughter ineffectively compares Chaucer's *Troilus* to Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, the original poem of which Chaucer's version is based on. One specific scene that Slaughter focuses on derives from Book II, when Pandarus informs Criseyde that Troilus loves her. In Chaucer's version, Slaughter argues that Pandarus foresees Criseyde's reaction to Troilus and then "reasonably" begs her to show Troilus "'better chiere'" (187-88). When Criseyde remains uncertain about her uncle's request, Pandarus then "states his own position" and assures Criseyde that he will be ashamed if her honor were ruined (Slaughter 187). While this scene also exists in Boccaccio's version, Slaughter states that Pandarus and Criseyde's argument is portrayed differently. Instead of stating his position plainly, Boccaccio's Pandarus merely reminds Criseyde of "her fleeting youth" and informs her that he is "offering honor in Troilus's love" until she is "easily convinced that she ought to love" Troilus (Slaughter 188). By highlighting the differences between the texts, Slaughter states that Chaucer's Pandarus is more loyal to Criseyde, is reasonable in his request towards Troilus, and is simply trying to fulfill his role as Troilus's friend.

When comparing Chaucer and Boccaccio's texts, though, Slaughter overlooks other details that Chaucer adds about Pandarus and Criseyde's relationship. For instance, when Criseyde refuses to take a letter from Troilus,

Pandarus “hente hire / faste, / and in her bosom the letter down he thraste,” (Chaucer 2.154-56), and then tells her to leave quickly before “folk may see and gauren on us tweye” (Chaucer 2.157). Pandarus’s persistence and irrational decision to shove the letter between Criseyde’s breasts proves that his relationship with his niece is an unethical one because he is only aiding the lovers for his own self-interest. This type of unethical behavior is also apparent in the scenes that Slaughter refers to; for instance, after Pandarus tells Criseyde how the playful Troilus loves her, he then asks her to “daunce / And cast youre widews habit to mischaunce” (Chaucer 2.221-22). Furthermore, Slaughter’s assertion of Pandarus’ reasonability overlooks the social ramifications encoded within Pandarus’s request. In other words, Criseyde is a widow and a daughter of someone who betrayed Troy, thereby making her relationship with Troilus wrong in an ideal society. Pandarus, however, continues to encourage such behavior, informing her that if she does not act and therefore causes Troilus to die, Pandarus will take a knife and “my throte kerve” (Chaucer 2. 325). Consequently, because Chaucer depicts Pandarus’s relationship with Criseyde as strange, Slaughter’s argument for Pandarus as a virtuous uncle is less credible.

Slaughter continues to unsuccessfully compare Chaucer’s *Troilus* and Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato* as he explores Pandarus’s role as an intermediary of courtly love. According to Slaughter, *Troilus* and *Il Filostrato* show a “radical difference” in Pandarus’s purpose behind urging Troilus to keep his relationship a secret (189). Starting with Boccaccio’s version, Slaughter argues that Pandarus never mentions keeping the relationship a secret to benefit Criseyde’s reputation. Instead, Pandarus is more selfish as he states that a secret relationship is more viable only because if Troilus is not careful, Troilus will “never possess Criseda” (as he soon will) without “great shame” to Pandarus (Slaughter 189). Yet when looking at *Troilus and Criseyde*, Slaughter states that Pandarus’s actions are changed to portray Pandarus more favorably as he states how Criseyde “would be ruined” and Troilus will “gain nothing” if anyone finds out about the lovers’ relationship (Slaughter 190). Slaughter suggests that the differences between *Il Filostrato* and *Troilus and Criseyde* signify that Chaucer wants readers to look more positively upon Pandarus as a protective uncle over Criseyde.

However, though Pandarus’s purpose may vary between *Troilus* and *Filostrato*, it is important to acknowledge that Chaucer’s Pandarus is still cruel because he pressures Criseyde into a secret relationship. When Pandarus informs Criseyde that Troilus is waiting to see her one evening in Book Three, Pandarus lies about

Troilus's health and tells Criseyde that Troilus "is comem in swichpeyne and distresse" (Chaucer 3.292) and "mot falle into wodnesse" (Chaucer 3. 794). When Criseyde tries to convince Pandarus to wait until the next day to give Troilus a token of affection, Pandarus further pressures her by saying "He is youre owen knight," (Chaucer 3. 915) and reminding her how Troilus will suffer "al nyght in this wo" (Chaucer 3.863) if he has to wait. Pandarus's emphasis on Troilus's imaginary state pushes Criseyde to agree with Pandarus's unethical behavior and allow Troilus to enter her bedroom and even lie on her bed. Thus, Slaughter's argument that Pandarus wants to protect Criseyde's reputation is untrue. By pushing Criseyde into the secret relationship, Chaucer portrays Pandarus as an effective intermediary of courtly love, but an awful uncle.

Additionally, Slaughter makes the point that Pandarus's role as the intermediary of courtly love demonstrates his unyielding loyalty toward Troilus. That is to say, Pandarus "risks much for Troilus" and exceeds "the limits of the ideal friendship" by helping Troilus only to "save his life and not hope for reward" (Slaughter 192). When Troilus discovers that Criseyde has been false with him, Pandarus is remorseful for "his friend's grief and ashamed of his niece's falseness" (Slaughter 191). In this instance, Slaughter is correct in his assessment because Pandarus's loyalty to Troilus is evident when Pandarus informs Troilus he is "ful glad to doonhym that servyse-- / Unto Criseyde, in fulsecree ways" (Chaucer 4. 809-810). Yet in Book Five, Pandarus has fewer appearances in the story, which suggests that his loyalty to Troilus is dwindling. For example, after Troilus reads a letter from Criseyde, the narrator notes how Troilus has to "sent after Pandare" (Chaucer 5.280) because Pandarus has been "with the kyng Priam al day" (Chaucer 5. 284). That being said, Slaughter is accurate in saying that Pandarus is a good friend to Troilus, but it is also necessary to acknowledge that Pandarus's loyalty begins to shift over time. Therefore, Troilus eventually dies without Pandarus's instruction because of his sorrow over Criseyde.

Slaughter's viewpoint of Pandarus as a virtuous uncle and friend initially seems to be a plausible analysis. However, Slaughter's argument that Pandarus is a good uncle to Criseyde is not a valid point because of the pressure, lies, and the unethical behavior Pandarus demonstrates. Although clarification could have been made through more specific examples, a clear thesis, and an organized approach, Slaughter's paper fails to add these details and instead makes unsupported statements. Consequently, Slaughter's argument that Chaucer portrays Pandarus as a respectable character becomes ill-supported and overall unsuccessful.

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***A Moveable Feast: Truth and Fiction to Create Hemingway's Paris***

Ernest Hemingway first saw Paris from the window of an ambulance. Beginning his life as an American abroad, Hemingway spent the year 1918 touring France and Italy as an enlisted driver in the ambulance corps of the Red Cross. After his European tour, he returned to the comfort of the north Michigan forests and then journeyed to Chicago, where his Parisian itch was agitated by friend and fellow writer Sherwood Anderson. Anderson prompted Hemingway to return to Paris to write because “the place to go was Paris” (Kennedy, *Imagining Paris* 79). Paris in the twenties had a burgeoning reputation as a hotbed for artists and writers seeking asylum from the artistic conventions of the conservative American mainstream (a characteristic appealing to the young twenty-something Hemingway). A generation of expatriate writers before Hemingway had already settled into Paris’s avant-garde milieu, and they had found solidarity and publication opportunities in the culturally lush and licentious city, and Hemingway hoped the same career would be afforded him. With letters of introduction by Sherwood, Hemingway joined the ranks of other American expatriate writers on the Left Bank in 1921. Osmotic to his city and peers, Hemingway adopted the semi-autobiographical form to write his memoir *A Moveable Feast*. An account of his life from 1921 to 1926, Hemingway’s semi-autobiography blends themes of truth and fiction to create an image of expatriate Paris.

A tension between truth and fiction underscores Hemingway’s writing in *A Moveable Feast*, a feature evinced in the preface to his memoir, in which Hemingway alerts readers that “this book may be regarded as fiction” (xi). Hemingway further asserts his autobiographical ambiguity with his remark that “there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact” (xi). Similar warnings can be found in his “false starts,” or discarded attempts at introduction found in the “Fragments” section of his posthumously published work. Hemingway claimed “no one can write a true fact in reminisces,” claiming that Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, a work seen as largely autobiographical, was in fact fiction (“Fragments” 229). Thus *A Moveable Feast* is predicated on the notion that memoir will be tainted by memory’s alterations, and this memoir by Hemingway’s own literary license exercised in shaping the story he hopes to tell.

Hemingway's claim that no one can write truth in memory because of its arbitrary nature contradicts his own accounts of writing truth in the chapter "Miss Stein Instructs" of *A Moveable Feast*. Hemingway shares the mantra that encourages him during bouts of writer's block: "All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know" (*Moveable* 12). He wrote "the truth" as a discipline because it not only offered him material to write about, but it also affected his style; he eliminated elaborate sentences and cut away excess, leaving only what would become his characteristically simple, swift prose.

Hemingway's capacity to blend fiction and truth was cultivated when he befriended Gertrude Stein. He came to Stein, a first-wave expat who permeated every layer of Parisian Modernism from the comfort of her home at 25 rue de Fleurus, to learn to write. She reviewed his short stories, calling them "*inaccrochable*," or quite literally, unable to be hung up, like a piece of art inadequate for display (*Moveable* 15). As Hemingway goes on to say in the "Miss Stein Instructs" chapter, it seems she implied that while Hemingway wrote simply, his concept of truth was merely writing in common vernacular and thus "dirty" (*Moveable* 15). Stein discouraged this and instead instructed rather abstrusely for him to not write *inaccrochable* stories. Despite her ambiguity, Hemingway learned much about writing from Stein, her experimental writing style being infectious. Similarities between mentor and apprentice can be seen when comparing Stein and Hemingway's memoir texts. Stein's autobiography, albeit from the perspective of her lover Alice B. Toklas, was composed in a fictitious manner and semi-autobiographical mode. Publishing it decades before Hemingway's, her *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was a series of anecdotal sketches, precisely how Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* has since been described.

Stein, through Toklas's perspective, wrote about her and Sherwood Anderson's perception of the young pupil-writer Hemingway:

Hemingway had been formed by the two of them and they were both a little proud and a little ashamed of the work of their minds...But what a book, they both agreed, would be the real story of Hemingway, not those he writes but the confessions of the real Ernest Hemingway. (*The Autobiography* 204)

It seems that Stein had faith in Hemingway's future memoir, granted he heeded her advice about *inaccrochable* writing.

Paris would bring together two men of significant literary rivalry and friendship: F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. Meeting in the Dingo Bar in 1925, the pair created a bond that would last fifteen years, much longer than the fleeting fair-weathered nature of Hemingway and Stein's relationship (Kennedy, *French VII*). The central debate between Fitzgerald and Hemingway was how truth would be preserved in writing. Hemingway explains Fitzgerald's methods in the following passage from *A Moveable Feast*:

He wrote...really good stories for the *Post*, and then changed them for submission, knowing exactly how to make the twists that made them into salable magazine stories...I said I thought it was whoring...Since he wrote the real story first, he said, the destruction and changing of it that he did at the end did no harm. I could not believe this and I wanted to argue him out of it but I needed a novel to back up my faith and to show him and convince him, and I had not written any such novel. (155-156)

The writers worked in opposite modes to achieve the same effect. While Fitzgerald seemingly worked to embellish fact to create fiction, Hemingway strove to strip truth away to make fiction.

Beyond his writing method, readers can observe how Hemingway fictionalizes his memoir on his accounts of his peers. By criticizing the literary figures (often friends) around him, Hemingway effectively distanced himself from the maddening crowd of expatriate writers in order to elevate his own importance as a Modernist writer (Long 71). He painted at times patronizing, caricature-like portraits of his friends and mentors, Stein and Fitzgerald. Hemingway represented Fitzgerald's talents as a writer by describing a butterfly with damaged wings who, once was aware of his damage, could "only remember when [flight] had been effortless" (Pizer 147). Stein, on the other hand, was depicted as a lazy writer who avoided revisions, particularly in her lengthy work *The Making of the Americans*. Hemingway also wrote that he did "not remember Gertrude Stein ever speaking well of any writer who had not written favorably about her work or done something to advance her career" (*Moveable* 27).

Among a handful of other sketches of figures like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, perhaps the most malicious were his descriptions of writer/painter Percy Wyndham Lewis and poet Ernest Walsh. Of Wyndham Lewis, Hemingway writes:

His had a face that reminded me of a frog, not a bullfrog but just any frog, and Paris was too big a puddle for him...I do not think I had ever seen a nastier-looking man. Under the black hat, when I had first seen them, his eyes had been those of an unsuccessful rapist. (*Moveable* 108-109)

As if this slighting description—or perhaps satirically delightful description—were not enough, poor Walsh was, to Hemingway, “dark, intense, faultlessly Irish, poetic, and clearly marked for death” (*Moveable* 123). Hemingway wondered if Walsh “ate the flat oysters in the same way the whores in Kansas City, who were marked for death and practically everything else, always wished to swallow semen as a sovereign remedy” (*Moveable* 126). Only a man striving to distance himself from fellow artists could write with such biting tongue.

In order to understand the trappings of fiction in Hemingway’s memoir, it is worth noting that *A Moveable Feast* was his last written work. Perhaps in the last years of his life, Hemingway blurred the distinctions between himself and his characters, confusing himself for a “Hemingway hero” instead of just Hemingway. Some critics suggest that “the Hemingway of *A Moveable Feast* is the persona that Hemingway tried to live” (O’Connor 789). Hemingway’s persona—the one that could be gathered from a handful of his memoir’s anecdotes—is that of a starving, bohemian artist living abroad to write American novels; a definitively masculine man affected by his culturally vibrant surroundings, yet also seated in an ivory tower above his fellow artists so as to not be confused with their ilk. This image of Hemingway may be accurate, especially if one believes in his distinctly expatriate perspective of “fiction as a way of looking at the world” (Gordimer 94).

For Hemingway, “disillusioned realism was his trademark” (Kennedy, *French* 12). Disillusioned realism, or a reality jaded by fictitious thinking, was a fine approach to make an expatriate image of Paris, and the memoir a perfect medium to balance fiction and truth because of its subjective nature. This literary combination allowed for Hemingway to explore his overarching motifs like poverty and hunger as an artistic discipline to cast a romantic glow on bohemian living.

The central tropes of “the artist’s capacity for productivity in Paris” and “the capacity of Paris to nourish the artist” in Hemingway’s memoir are telling of two things: his work ethic, and his literal and artistic appetites (Pizer 16-17). His life was “a circuit of nourishment and productivity” (Pizer 17). Chapters of *A Moveable Feast* are devoted to his writing process and how he produces work only because he is self-denying. As far as hunger for

food and the artistic sustenance of life, Hemingway spends much time describing the bars and cafes he haunts, as well as affording much detail to the meals he has in Paris. Hemingway is so affected by the motif of hunger and sustenance that he names his memoir *A Moveable Feast*, based on his observations that Paris “stays with you, for it is a moveable feast” (*Moveable* 1). Persistent hunger truly paints Paris for Hemingway, as he tells his wife that in Paris, “there are so many sorts of hunger” (*Moveable* 57). In one sketch, Hemingway describes the different kind of hunger he and his wife feel after a meal at Michaud’s, a fashionable restaurant:

But when we had finished there was no question of hunger any more the feeling that had been like hunger when we were on the bridge was still there when we caught the bus home. It was there when we came in the room and after we had gone to bed and made love in the dark, it was there. (*A Moveable Feast* 57)

The hunger Hemingway describes in this passage is his and his first wife’s innocent, artistic hunger for life itself, piqued by Paris’s cultural offerings. The couple’s bread and butter were the races and art galleries, and for the literal pangs of hunger, the cafes afforded them fine dining and good wine rather cheaply.

Apart from providing possible insight into the glamorized bohemian lifestyles of Americans in Paris, *A Moveable Feast* serves as an experiential travelogue for American readers. With Hemingway as the guide, the perpetual name-dropping of streets and cafes and other European haunts allows for his American expatriate experience to become a tourist experience. Places like the Shakespeare and Company bookstore and his favorite cafe, The Closerie des Lilas, spark wanderlust in kindred expatriate spirits still rooted in American soil. Hemingway’s expatriate writing provides a passport to the Parisian lifestyle, complete with the allure of prohibition-free, licentious, and liberal lifestyles that were also valued by 1920s America. In this way, “Hemingway himself has become a destination of sorts for literary critics and curiosity seekers” (Field 40).

Perhaps greater than Hemingway’s image of Paris is his literary legacy as the quintessential expatriate figure. His expatriate persona is a literary model in the twentieth century not confined to his memoir alone. Works like *The Sun Also Rises*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” feature a distinctly Hemingway-like expatriate spirit. Hemingway’s theme of self-exile throughout his writing has arguably helped to “develop the beginnings of human consciousness beyond nationalistic operatives” (Gordimer 93).

Modernist writer Ernest Hemingway was a pupil to the first generation of American expats in Paris. A student, friend, and rival to Gertrude Stein and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the young, impressionable Hemingway adopted elements of their writing styles to cultivate his own semi-autobiographical form that masters the synthesis of fact and fiction. His caricature-like depictions of individuals in *A Moveable Feast* are among the literary consequences of fictionalizing truth; his image of Paris and the expatriate legacy are literary gifts to the Modernist movement as a whole.

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**Stairs of Greek Theatre**



### **The Struggle with Identity and Sin in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue***

In *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Alison addresses her sexual nature in a confession to the other pilgrims before telling her story. She insists that her physicality has been sexualized since birth, so she considers her astrological sign, Taurus, which is a derivative of Venus, the goddess of love, as the source of her features, not God. Consequently, Alison implies that this had led to her sins of lustfulness, making it difficult to identify herself as a Christian woman. She emphasizes the characteristics of her astrological sign in order to show God and the listeners that she is victim to the sin of lust and to, once and for all, faith. Although Alison insists that it is within her character to be lustful, she also believes that her natural inclinations and urges come from some other power. The Wife of Bath has difficulty admitting and believing that her sins are her own fault; yet despite her struggles, she shows signs of guilt at her words. This essay explores how Alison's diction reveals her struggle between being pious and staying true to her identity and personality. As Alison attempts to confront the root of her sins and change to be more compliant with her religion, she repeatedly blames her constellation for her sexual desires, thus detracting from her own responsibility for her sins. Alison insinuates that, as a woman, she is dominated by forces beyond her control, but she challenges the level of influence that these forces have on her life; thus she depicts herself as innocent when telling her story. Ultimately, the careful reader must admire the Wife's masterful control over her words and wonder to what extent anything is really beyond her control.

During the Wife of Bath's prologue, she claims that she "hadde alway a coltes tooth" (Chaucer 608), or a youthful sexual appetite, which immediately illustrates a lack of accountability for her sexual endeavors. Alison's word choice demonstrates that she has no power over what she "hadde alway," or always had in her lifetime. She was born to be sexualized, and as far as she can remember, she was always acting out her lustful desires, even in her younger years. This signifies that there was, by no means, a choice made towards sinful behavior: she was somehow born with such a desire. The Wife of Bath insists that sexuality is in her blood, as she emphasizes the word "tooth," a possible reference to her gapped front teeth, which was associated with a passionate demeanor at

this time. Thus, Alison is claiming that her gapped teeth have caused her "coltes tooth," or youthful appetite; her destiny was for an inclination to sin. Alison insists that she has no influence over what her creator made her look like, and to be born with gapped teeth has predestined her to have such an interest. The Wife of Bath declares that whatever created her is responsible for her sinful actions. She also confesses that she "hadde the prente" (Chaucer 610) of Venus on her body when she was born. The use of the word "prente," or birthmark, illustrates that she must be Venus' creation, as her body was made in Venus' image through the mark. This goes against Christian ideas, making the reader question who exactly the Wife is confessing to. The Wife's emphasis on her zodiac shows her certainty in the idea that she had no say in her natural inclinations towards sexuality, even though she may try to fight them. However, one must also question why such an independent figure would accept anyone, or anything, having power over her.

Alison emphasizes astrology within the prologue, making it a "theme of unification of the personality of the Wife of Bath" (Hamlin 153). She makes the claim that astrology unifies her own ways with those of her sign as it influences both her personality and appearance, thus enhancing her sexuality. She does not mention that God, her creator according to Christianity, had power over constructing her appearance in these lines. In this way, she insinuates that she is a manifestation of Venus, or her zodiac in general, if her traits are so unholy. She further stresses the traits that she was born with, such as the "prente," so as to identify the root of her lust and support her victimization. Alison's specific horoscope, Taurus, involves "positing the war-like planet Mars on a Venus-ruled ascendant" (Hamlin 153). The rising, or ascending, of a particular zodiac sign directly influences the individual's personality and "rule[s] [over] the physical characteristics" (Hamlin 153). This would give Alison no control over her sexualized exterior, and limited control over her lustful personality. The ascendance of Venus over Mars has predestined her to be created in such a way; astrologically speaking, this would control her personality and physical traits. She struggles to fathom how a sexual woman like herself can also be a holy woman, but the use of the word "have" in the past tense ("hadde") shows that she may be willing to put her overtly sexual nature behind her after the pilgrimage, or that she has been trying to do in the past.

However, her prologue is a "complete astrological portrait of the Wife" (Hamlin 153), and she tries to convey that she is willing to sacrifice her natural urges to fit the role of her religious followers. Overall, Alison's

sexuality makes it difficult to define her as one of God's creations. She relates more to her astrological sign than to her religion, and, therefore, must be more influenced by her zodiac. Nevertheless, the attentive reader cannot help but question why such a strong female figure would emphasize having so little control over her own life. Perhaps she is simply over-exaggerating her astrological sign as the root of her sins for the sake of appearing as a victim to the listeners, thus using her influential words to her advantage to find sympathy. However, one cannot help but be suspicious as of whether she actually believes any of her logic to be true. One can also view Alison's description of her origin as a simple admiration of her sexualized appearance, thus affirming her identity with her astrological sign. In that case, she may not have any desire to change her ways, but may be glorifying and flaunting them instead.

The passage continues with Alison saying, "help me God, I was a lusty oon" (Chaucer 611), which is her way of asking God's forgiveness. She uses the words "help me God" to illustrate that she realizes her lust is a problem, and she thus implores God's aid in purging her old ways. Furthermore, the use of "was" shows that she is willing to change her previous lifestyle. The Wife wants to become closer to God's grace, and she verifies this by saying her lustfulness is behind her, even if the struggles to achieve it are not. However, she admits that "For certes, I am al Venerian / In feeling, and mynherte is Marcien" (Chaucer 615-616). In these lines, Alison changes her verbs to the present tense when saying "I am al Venerian," showing that she still defines herself as a part of Venus. Alison blatantly states who she is, and the power of the words "I am" show the greatest confirmation of her character.

This makes renouncing her old ways even more difficult; she is completely, or "al," under Venus' persuasion, which leaves no room for religious influence. She further insinuates that she was created under Venus' influence with the words "for certes" to exclude any doubt or question in her mind. Alison also says that her heart "is Marcien," or influenced by Venus, and states that it is within her "herte" to be so. In this way, Alison appears to be struggling to give up her sexual behavior, which is vital to her personality; she compares it to a part of her body that will always be with her. The heart is also one's life source, so Alison feels that identifying with her sign is what keeps her alive and individualized. The passage goes on with, "Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse / And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse" (Chaucer 617-618). She holds Venus and Mars responsible for her

indulgences, not herself. She uses the word "yaf," or gave, to illustrate the lack of responsibility she feels in her sinful attributes. In this way, Alison toys with how accountable she appears to the other travelers, thus finding power through experience, not authority. She is masterfully using her words to influence their, and our, opinions of her.

Alison's use of possessive pronouns in the previous passage shows that her sexual qualities are her own; however, one questions whether she implies her responsibility for them or not. Her pronouns also give off a tone that implies that she is literally possessive of her traits, thus making it more difficult to sacrifice them to religion. She uses the word "my" in "my lust" and "my likerousnesse," which asserts a certain sense of belonging in identifying with her astrological sign, as her lust is a trait that defines her. The words "sturdy hardinesse" is meant to exemplify her strength and durability in life, which she finds admirable. However, Alison may believe that this could go against God's will for a woman to have such "hardiness," as she mentions it directly after the sin "likerousnesse," or lecherousness. Alison exemplifies the "physical characteristics and temperament of a person influenced both by Mars and Venus" (Hamlin 153), but she also exemplifies the "antagonism between women and 'clerkes'" (Kitson 200), as with her fifth husband, Jankyn, through her specific sign. To her, any sign under Venus "signiff[ies] women and physical pleasure" (Kitson 200), and she claims that she is lusty because of what it represents.

However, both Mars and Venus have their "exaltation in the sign of the other's fall" (Kitson 200), as each is dominant upon their own ascendance over the other. The Wife's sign not only represents her physical and psychological characteristics, but her opinion of men's prominence over women in that "women always get bad press" (Kitson 200) if they indulge sexually. In this way, Alison is also blaming men, represented by Mars, for having women appear so sinful and ashamed of their sexuality. She sees that there is an ongoing battle of authority between the sexes, just as there is a battle between Venus and Mars for ascendancy. When Venus ascends Mars, this symbolizes that women are free with their sexuality, femininity, and identity. However, the reader cannot help but question why the Wife's personality is an apparent representation of her sign. Perhaps she is fully aware of what a Taurus should be, so she plays with the idea of astrology to fit the situation. She seems more like a victim to everyone so she can get her male listeners thinking about how to treat women. In addition,

one can analyze her words as a validation of her destiny and being proud of it. Her nature was always, figuratively and literally, in the stars.

As the passage comes to a close, Alison exclaims, "Allas, allas, that evere love was sinne" (Chaucer 620). The word "alas" illustrates sorrow and shame over her lust, something the Wife treasures as it is a sin, but it also shows her comprehension of how sinful her actions really were. She regrets her lustful ways, but wishes that God had not deemed it to be a sin, since it comes so naturally to her from her astrological sign. Alison uses the word "love" in place of the word "lust" to describe the sin, which shows that she does not fully see it as a vice. Her kind of "love" is accepted in her constellation, but not in her religion. Alison feels more accepted by her zodiac, for she believes that lust and love are to be admired equally. This struggle with her religion continues when she admits that she "folwed ay [her] inclinacioun / Byvertu of [her] constellacioun" (Chaucer 621-622). The word "inclinacioun" represents that she gave in to her preferences and desires in life, including her sexual urges. It also illustrates that her actions were intentional; it was her "inclination" to sin, not any other force. However, Alison shows responsibility for her actions in the first line as she admits that she willingly sinned by purposefully following her "constellacioun" even though it was against God's will. The word "folwed" supports that there was no higher power responsible for her actions. She chose to act, or "follow," the ways of her zodiac. Alison continues to play with her responsibility, which keeps the listeners and readers wondering about her character.

Alison's struggle with acknowledging her own guilt is a representative of the "duality which we find throughout [her] personality" (Hamlin 153), as her astrological sign is also contradictory: both Mars and Venus, two opposite signs, comprise her zodiac. Alison is the sign "Taurus, which is Venus' dignity and Mars' fall" (Kitson 200), otherwise known as the ascendance of Venus and the fall of Mars. Alison's contradicting words are illustrative of her personality; she enjoys marriage and conforms to certain misogynist standards, but she also challenges her place in society. When she can exert dominance over a man, this is symbolic of Venus' rise over Mars. As Alison concludes her confession, she implores for "God so wis [to] be [her] savacioun" (Chaucer 627). She uses the word "wis," or "wise," to play on God's sensible nature in that God would be wise enough to pardon her sins. Alison coaxes with a kind word, as she does not believe that she has God's grace any longer and must gain some trust.

Alison also believes that she must be rescued from her sinful ways, exemplified by the use of the word "savacioun." The Wife of Bath needs a savior not only to forgive her, but to lead her onto a more righteous path. However, the Wife has great control over her actions, in that she admits to choosing to commit her sins. The careful reader must question why a woman who can illustrate some control over her actions would need any sort of higher power to distinguish right from wrong. Perhaps she is trying to make the listeners and readers feel like God, in that they must judge her, and she says that those who are "wis" will forgive her. Alison's "alternately martial and marital nature" (Hamlin 153) leads to many other inconsistencies in her lifestyle. She tries to return to holiness, but enjoys indulging in her sexuality. However, Alison asks for God to be her "salvation," which depicts Alison as a victim. She implies that she needs to be rescued from the desires that she has grown accustomed to, thus lowering her responsibility for her sins once again. Throughout the passage, Alison focuses on "one defining whole...which would be...a horoscope for her unfortunate moment of birth" (Hamlin 153). Alison finds her horoscope to be the source of what has caused her love of sexuality as she pleads for God's mercy and guidance. Her life holds many contradictions, and she considers herself to be wronged since birth because of her zodiac. However, one can argue that Alison disagrees with the standards of her religion, and insists on living against the prudish behavior of the Christians by following her constellation, thus rebelling against her religion to have ultimate independence in her own beliefs.

Although the Wife of Bath insists that it is within her character to be lustful, she also presents logical reasoning that her natural inclinations and urges come from some other power. She has difficulty admitting that her sins are her own fault, but she struggles with this idea and tends to show signs of guilt in her words. Alison's diction demonstrates that she cannot easily be religious and true to herself at the same time. She claims to have been sexualized at birth; she also claims that, as a woman, there is always another force controlling her life. On the other hand, she gains much control over her listeners through her mastery of word usage and storytelling. Consequently, one must decipher if she truly has been victimized, or if she is only trying to persuade the pilgrims, as well as the readers, to see women in a different light. This prologue is not simply a confession to God, as it is also followed by a story, so Alison may be using her words to address the negative views of women and sexuality just like she does in her tale. She insists that many other factors contribute to women's behaviors, such as men

and astrology, and that she may not be fully at fault. In the end, the Wife's words challenge the reader to question if Alison can ever really be a victim of anything.

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Dostoyevsky's Moral Critique: *Crime and Punishment* and the Case against Utilitarianism

During Dostoyevsky's time in Russia, social and political thought underwent a profound upheaval, demonstrated by radical moral codes and adherence to rigid value systems. Along with his contemporaries, Dostoyevsky noticed an emerging set of normative values that undermined the pervading Romanticism of the middle of the century. We can recognize this shift even in the literary preoccupation. In the early part of the 19th century, writers like Pushkin were interested in conveying the individual and psychological side of characters, and the ritualistic traditions that couched their ideals. Toward the latter end of the century, however, characterization became more complex: readers started noticing value systems being questioned, and they began to analyze literature.

In Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the protagonist, Raskolnikov, embodies a particular movement in moral philosophy—a movement that sought to apply scientific codes to human ethical situations. After much deliberation and calculation, Raskolnikov ruthlessly murders a pawnbroker, Alyona, and suffers a ruthless trial of avoiding arrest. This repugnant, immoral, and unspeakable act falls into a categorical framework for Raskolnikov; Dostoyevsky uses Raskolnikov to symbolize a test case against these Utilitarian moral codes that reduce human lives to mere calculations. Dostoyevsky fears the onset of these value systems and, instead, desires a more organic moral structure—one that does not rely upon rationalism, science, and objectivity, but rather on a broader spiritualism within a broad social system. This paper will examine *Crime and Punishment* against the burgeoning radicalism and Utilitarianism of the 19th century, showing Dostoyevsky's critique against these philosophical movements and how he uses Raskolnikov's egregious murder as a feared by-product of these worldviews.

The social Utilitarianism permeating the radical thought of this time nearly reduced humans to quantifiable entities. For Dostoyevsky, "once human beings and their tragedies can be converted into numerical aggregates, into ciphers in a deterministic table of statistics, they can be erased from conscience" (Thompson 203). In the beginning of *Crime and Punishment*, Marmeladov delineates the movement of scientific trends to Raskolnikov: "only the other day

Mr Lebezatnikov, who follows the latest ideas, was explaining that the science of our day has actually declared compassion a social evil, and that this notion is already being put into practice in England, where they have political economy” (Dostoyevsky 18). Marmeladov’s utterance plants an impressionable seed in Raskolnikov’s mind: Raskolnikov now considers the development of scientific worldviews anchoring moral judgments, and clings to it throughout the novel.

As Diane Oenning Thompson notes, “Raskolnikov falls back into the grip of his idea, and under the same type of calculations, of a particularly lethal combination of Romantic, Utilitarian and nihilistic ideas, he suppresses his moral sensibilities, and goes on ‘mechanically’ to murder two women” (203). Raskolnikov transforms into a utility-maximizing entity, an agent purely operating with the sole task of optimizing flourishing for himself and the beings that he deems fit or worthy. We can nearly anticipate this transformation, as we notice Raskolnikov’s affinity for scientific jargon that seems “comforting”:

A percentage! Nice little words they use, to be sure: they’re so reassuring, so scientific. Just say: ‘percentage,’ and all your troubles are over. Now if one were to choose another word, well, then...then things might look a little less reassuring...And what if Dunechka ends up in the percentage?... If not this year’s then perhaps that of another? (Dostoyevsky 62-3)

For Raskolnikov, quantitative words such as “percentage” provide him a superficial sense of comfort. Raskolnikov aligns himself with these regimented and scientific systems of logical deduction, finding them attractive. It is the “calculations of sociological Utilitarianism” that “overwhelm Raskolnikov” with an “attitude of moral nihilism” (Thompson 203). As Raskolnikov develops, we realize that these formulaic structures inform not only his behavior to commit the murder, but also his incessant attempts at self-justification.

To understand Dostoyevsky’s critique against these rigid moral structures, we must look to his earlier work, *Notes from Underground*, in order to see where his views unfolded. For Dostoyevsky, we can see the development of his scorn against scientific realism that is presenting itself within the ideological narrative: “The Underground Man takes this tendency to its ultimate, logical conclusion: the radical de-personalisation [sic] of the person. Insistently running through the Notes are the questions: who are we, who (or what) are we becoming, and where are we going?” (Thompson 196). For Dostoyevsky, the scientific enterprise

threatens humanity: it contains the power and force of dehumanizing the population, taking away our consciences, and leading us instead to rely solely on reason and rationality. Dostoyevsky's *The Underground Man* laments the conclusion that the laws of science will govern human action: "All human actions, of course, will then be calculated by these laws, mathematically, like a table of logarithms, up to 108,000 and entered into a calendar" (as qtd. in Thompson 196).

From this passage, we can see the start of an indictment that Dostoyevsky finishes in *Crime and Punishment*. Dostoyevsky fears the human condition reducing to mere "logarithms" and calculations, analyzing the cost-benefit of human existence based on a complex system of mathematical equations, rather than an organic, spiritual understanding of our humanity. As his fervent distaste for these values grows, Dostoyevsky's hero in *Crime and Punishment* now becomes a symbolic testament of his derision.

Critic Joseph Frank posits the implication that Dostoyevsky means to articulate: "Why not kill a wretched, rapacious, and 'useless' old moneylender and employ the funds to alleviate the human misery so omnipresent in Raskolnikov's world?" (104). Indeed, Raskolnikov conceives and nearly rationalizes his actions through a Utilitarian ideology. As Frank states, Raskolnikov's rationale suggests "[i]t is the fate of suffering humanity that concerns [Raskolnikov]" (104). To further remark on this point, we must examine a very salient passage that occurs in the tavern scene Raskolnikov recalls—a retrospective account that Raskolnikov imagines drove him to commit the murder:

The traces of superstition were to remain in him for a long time afterwards, and he never really got rid of them. Indeed, in this whole affair he was always subsequently inclined to perceive a certain strangeness and mystery, as if it involved the working of certain peculiar influences and coincidences. (Dostoyevsky 77)

As Raskolnikov is considering these "peculiar influences," he recalls, "at another table...a student whom he did not know at all and whose face he did not remember, and a young officer" (Dostoyevsky 78). The discussion between these two regards Lizaveta, Alyona's younger half-sister (whom Raskolnikov also kills, as she walks in on him committing the murder). The conversation between the student and the officer about Lizaveta takes a profound, salient turn:

“If one were to kill her and take her money, in order with its help to devote oneself to the service of all mankind and the common cause: what do you think...

One death to a hundred lives—I mean, there’s arithmetic for you! And anyway, what does the life of that horrible, stupid, consumptive old woman count for when weighed in the common balance? No more than the life of a louse...the old woman is harmful. She’s wearing another person’s life out. (Dostoyevsky 80-81)

In response to the young student, the officer remarks, “Of course she doesn’t deserve to live...

But then that’s nature” (Dostoyevsky 81). In reply to the officer, the student utters a statement, which lies at the core of Dostoyevsky’s indictment: “Ah, but it’s possible to correct and channel nature, you know, old man”

(Dostoyevsky 81). This quasi-Promethean belief that one can “correct and channel nature” reinforces

Dostoyevsky’s urgent scorn for the scientific, Utilitarian foundation. Dostoyevsky fears the consequences of an individual deciding to take matters into his or her own hands, manipulating human lives, and attempting to dictate the lives of others through self-maximizing preservation seeking.

As *Crime and Punishment* progresses, Raskolnikov makes strides to justify his action. He confesses his murder to Sonya, saying, “If the only reason I’d killed her was because I was hungry...I’d be happy now!...Why should it mean so much to you that I confessed to having done something evil just now?” (Dostoyevsky 494). In an attempt to further explain his motives, Raskolnikov continues: “You see, I wanted to become a Napoleon, and that’s why I killed” (Dostoyevsky 495). As Joseph Frank notes, “Raskolnikov is thus shown, throughout these chapters, falling more and more into the grip of his monomania, and this means into the grip of his desires to prove to himself that he truly belongs to the ‘extraordinary’ category” (111). Donald Fanger adds to the misguided opinion of Raskolnikov: “what is relevant to present concerns the theory on which that self-justification was made to hinge, the theory that superior natures are beyond the morality that binds the mediocre mass of people” (189).

Dostoyevsky presents this air of superiority that Raskolnikov displays to suggest the almost Darwinian nature of Raskolnikov’s disposition: the belief that his fitness as a superior being entitles his actions toward murder. Raskolnikov remarks that he was simply “following the example of an authority on such matters” (Dostoyevsky 495). As we see Sonya’s growing hysterics over Raskolnikov’s confession, Raskolnikov gives the most

significant statement—a testament to his Utilitarian temperament: “Look, Sonya, all I killed was a louse—a loathsome, useless, harmful louse!” (Dostoyevsky 497). Earlier in this essay, I emphasized the use of the words “louse” and “harmful,” regarding the conversation held between the young student and the officer. These words are significant in Raskolnikov’s recounting of their conversation, as these words are now imprinted deep in his own lexicon. He has now taken the impressionable encounter in the tavern, and applied the same views to qualify his position to Sonya. The officer and the student in the novel’s beginning demonstrate the developing radical, Utilitarian philosophy that permeates Raskolnikov’s atmosphere. Dostoyevsky then invites readers to realize how such dispositions are employed in detrimental, morally reprehensible ways, to justify an actual murder. At the center of Dostoyevsky’s narrative, therefore, is the fear that some calculating notions that reduce humans to statistical levels, based on their contributions to, or place within a society, and then applying these analyses to executing moral judgments can justify murder.

Now that we have discussed what Dostoyevsky sees as the profound consequence of Utilitarian philosophy, we can examine the theological position from which he possibly derives his admonition. As Malcolm Jones notes, “all [Dostoyevsky’s] major works revolve around some radical contemporary challenge to Christianity, some expression of unbelief, to which in the course of writing, or planning, Dostoyevsky tries to work out the appropriate Christian response” (160). In *Crime and Punishment*, the burgeoning rationalism poses a threat to Christian doctrine, imposing a rigid system of scientific laws to moral prescriptions. Moreover, the reliance on science as a whole seems to damage the legitimacy of the Christian faith. Jones continues:

“In *Crime and Punishment* the main challenge to religion again comes from an intellectual of the 1860s, who hubristically takes on the role of God (Man-God as Dostoyevsky was later to call him)...Dostoyevsky saw this intellectual hubris exemplified in the young nihilists of the 1860s, inspired not just by Utilitarianism debased by a form of Social Darwinism, but also by the cult of the great man, typified by the achievements of the first Napoleon and the aspirations of the third. (161)

Raskolnikov, for Dostoyevsky, is this hubristic individual to which Jones refers. Raskolnikov assumes the role of a God-like agent who can manipulate and decide who is allowed to live and who is not, based on his hubristic sense

of superiority. Of course, as Raskolnikov realizes, “I’d spent so many days agonizing over the question of whether I was a Napoleon or not meant that I knew beyond a shadow of doubt that I wasn’t one” (Dostoyevsky 500).

Dostoyevsky seeks to preserve his Christian doctrine through *Crime and Punishment*, showing its potential as a governing principle for moral virtue. Throughout the narrative, Dostoyevsky pits Raskolnikov against religious figures who attempt to lead him to a more open, spiritual, and complex moral sentiment. Sonya is a figure through which this ideal manifests. She epitomizes a religious affirmation that Dostoyevsky advocates, one based on an “acceptance of life, rather than on taking up arms against it” (Jones 161-162). As Jones argues, Sonya is the “agent of Raskolnikov’s rebirth, which she sets in motion when she reads to him the story of the Raising of Lazarus from St. John’s Gospel” (162). In relation to Raskolnikov, Sonya represents simply an “alternative form of life” (Jones 162). Yet Jones goes on to say that “Dostoyevsky does not simply juxtapose the alternatives. He causes his characters with their philosophies to interact” (163). In *Crime and Punishment*, the sensibilities of Sonya interweave with Raskolnikov’s nihilism. Dostoyevsky does not purely use Sonya as a means to refute or tear down Raskolnikov; rather, as we soon see at the novel’s conclusion, Sonya’s religious fervor enters as a new seed in his impressionable psyche, just as the student and officer’s radical views did.

The epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* brings us to the prison in which Raskolnikov is contained after publicly admitting to the murder. Enduring his trial, Raskolnikov never fully offers an apology nor a defense for the murder. However, during his time in prison, we see a rebirth occurring within our protagonist. Upon Sonya’s final visit, Raskolnikov has given over to an affirming human emotion: his love for Sonya. He finds himself powerless to his emotions: “How it came to pass he himself did not know, but suddenly it was as though something had snatched him, and he was hurled to her feet” (Dostoyevsky 654). For the first time, Raskolnikov does not attempt to control his own fate; he is no longer the God-like, Promethean entity, mechanically working to intervene in his own fate and the lives of others. Rather, he is compelled by his passions, a force stronger than reason and rational intuition.

For Dostoyevsky, this instance exists as the first step toward Raskolnikov’s redemption. At this point, the protagonist becomes thoroughly human, existing within the cosmic system of spiritual values in which one accepts

another as a human being, rather than reducing him or her to a calculation. After this moment, Raskolnikov's growth as a person becomes quite transparent.

Raskolnikov finally begins to consider how his love for Sonya can be beneficial for the remainder of his life:

He thought about her. He recalled the way he had constantly tormented her, preying upon the emotions of her heart; he remembered her pale, thin little face, but now these memories caused him hardly any pain: he was aware of the infinite love with which he would make up for those sufferings now.

(Dostoyevsky 655)

As he feels the effervescent joy of his love for Sonya, his troubles, worries, torment, and guilt all begin to dissolve, and he accepts the fully spiritual existence that Dostoyevsky advocates. As the novel ends Raskolnikov once again reads from the Resurrection of Lazarus, symbolizing not only his own resurrection, but also the acceptance he has for Sonya's spiritual alternative. As Diane Thompson notes, "Raskolnikov's sympathetic imagination, his ability to forget himself and go spontaneously to the aid of others [such as Sonya], are qualities which guarantee his eventual 'resurrection'" (203).

Attentive to the climate of his time, Dostoyevsky informs his literary works through his understanding of and derision towards the developing worldviews plaguing his society. For Dostoyevsky, the increasing fidelity toward science as a reliable source of truth has serious ethical, social, and psychological ramifications. As Thompson notes, "This was the period of heroic materialism, the heyday of faith in material progress and human improvement driven by scientific discovery. The age-old dream of conquering Nature and perfecting human nature would now, thanks to science be achievable on Earth" (191). While we must understand that Dostoyevsky was not against science, it must be acknowledged that he found that certain enterprises epitomized the 19th century belief "that science was going to solve the world's problems, 'once and for all'" (Thompson 192). Moreover, for Dostoyevsky, science was merely "finite truth," yet truth itself was "only to be sought in Christ, and the search for the truth in Him was a lifelong dialogic quest" (Thompson 192). Our novelist feared, therefore, that science would dissolve our ability to attain infinite truth—that instead, its finite material power was captivating young thinkers, leading them to inform complex values and world issues through a short-reaching scholastic realm.

Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* embodies the inevitable conclusion that at which a Utilitarian philosophy arrives, once one decides to reduce humanity to algorithms, statistics, “percentages,” and utility maximizing entities. Raskolnikov relies on these logical constructions for his moral deliberations; however, when you take away the sense in which someone is an actual human being, Dostoyevsky finds that this could lead one down a dangerous path, seeking to manipulate life and the world in order to suit one’s egoistic pursuits. For Dostoyevsky, humans are more than just cogs in a wheel, and our interactions transcend purely Utilitarian phenomena; instead, we humans must seek a deeper truth in humanity and one another, and lend ourselves to passions, love, and “infinite truth.”

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### His 'Litel Bok' and 'Tragedye': Deceptive Narration in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

According to literary scholar Käte Hamburger, the act of narration "is a function through which the narrated persons, things, events, etc., are created" (qtd. in Spearing 19). The narrator "overhears" or "spies" on the actions of a story and presents these details to the audience through *mimesis* (showing) or *diegesis* (telling) (Chatman 97). Mimesis thrives on the illusion that there is no wall between the story and narrator; in diegesis, the narrator does not attempt to trick the readers, and instead indicates that he will be forthright with them, thus creating an intimate bond between them (Chatman 98).

In the Middle Ages, poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer would retell a "pre-existing story about pre-existing characters, performing actions that have been established at least in outline in previous versions" via mimesis or diegesis (Spearing 22) as a means of creating an intimate relationship between an author and his readers. The narrator's implicit honesty, emphasized by Chaucer's use of diegesis in *Troilus and Criseyde*, allows this bond to be exploited in order to manipulate the readers into accepting his representation of Criseyde's role in the relationship.

As *Troilus* opens, the narrator immediately makes his presence known by stating "My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye" is to recount Troilus's misfortune in love (Chaucer 1.5). Using diegesis, the opening stanza lays the foundation for the narrator's assertion of power by focusing on his relationship with his readers. By telling the readers the poem is specifically told for them, the narrator, through his candid tone, shows he has a prepared plan that the readers should trust.

The narrator further makes his presence known when he invokes higher figures to help properly tell his story. These invocations run through each Book: to Tisiphone, a Fury, in Book I; to Clio, the Greek muse of history, in Book II; to Calliope, the Greek muse of storytelling, in Book III; to the Furies in Book IV; and to God in Book V (Chaucer 1.6-7, 2.8-10, 3.44-45, 4.22, 5.1795). The narrator beseeches each power to stop him from committing any factual or compositional errors. This strengthens the bond between narrator and readers because the narrator explains and reminds them of his devotion towards telling them a satisfactory tale.

These invocations also defend the narrator against criticism from his readers. He assures them that if the story is inadequate based on content or writing style, it is because the higher figures ignored him, and, therefore, he should not be blamed. Diegesis allows the narrator to place himself on the same level as his readers: since he is human, there are things outside his control. With this parallel, the narrator strengthens the narrator-reader bond because he does not consider himself to be superior.

The idea of uncaring higher powers is also evident when the narrator proclaims his wit to be dull. When Criseyde writes to Troilus, the narrator promises to convey the content of the letter “as fer as I kan understonde” (Chaucer 2.1220). By admitting he might be unable to comprehend the original story, he places himself in an inferior position. This acknowledgement casts him as a humble man trying to tell a story, and the higher powers as being unconcerned with the effect the narrator’s unintelligence will have on his storytelling and readers. As a result, readers are made to believe that the narrator is the only one who contemplates whether they understand the story or not.

After assuring the readers of his loyalty, the narrator directly addresses them throughout the poem. In Books I and II, the narrator refers to the readers as “lovenes” when asking them to take pity on Troilus and to remember their own experiences with love (Chaucer 1.22-27, 2.1751-52). He later addresses them as “wise, proude, and worthi folks,” and tells them not to scorn love (Chaucer 1.233). These affectionate terms illustrate the high level of commitment the narrator has towards his readers.

Although the narrator uses these terms to move the story forward, he constantly remarks that it is impossible to tell the entire story. After explaining how Pandarus carries letters between Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator does not specify the content of the letters because “For sothe, I have naught herd it don er this / In story non, ne no man here, I wene; / And though I wolde, I koude nought, ywys” (Chaucer 3.498-500). The narrator chooses not to reveal the content because he cannot break the tradition of authors before him. This is further seen in his refusal to describe events: after Criseyde returns to her father, the narrator says it is difficult to describe Troilus’s woe because “Naught alle the men that han or ben on lyve” would be able to properly convey it (Chaucer 5.269). This strategy allows him to portray his omissions as a commonality between all authors. By willfully informing the reader of these omissions, a layer of sincerity is added to the narrator-reader connection.

In addition to remarking that the story is difficult to tell, the narrator also admits his ignorance. When Criseyde acquiesces to Pandarus's plea to tell Troilus to stop kneeling, the narrator states that he "Kan...naught seyn" whether she does so out of sorrow or to respect her uncle (Chaucer 3.967). Instead of analyzing Criseyde's actions, the narrator lets the readers generate their own interpretation. Had the narrator used mimesis, this detail would have been glossed over because it does not affect the overall story, and readers would not have known of its exclusion. By drawing attention to it through diegesis, the narrator demonstrates his honesty and unwillingness to invent details.

While the narrator allows his readers to interpret certain things, he also references source materials concerning details and craft techniques. He alludes to the fictitious "Lollius," a person considered by medievalists to be an authentic source of the Trojan War (Barney xi). When Pandarus tells Criseyde that Troilus is not at his home, the narrator states "Nought list myn auctour fully to declare / What that she thoughte whan he seyde so" (Chaucer 3.575-76). Aware that a crucial part of the readers' understanding to Criseyde's character is missing, the narrator reiterates that he cannot deviate from his source. Diegesis allows him to demonstrate his commitment to his role as translator. In terms of craft, the narrator tells his readers not to blame him if a word seems lame, "For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I" (Chaucer 2.17-18), indicating that departing from his source would be dishonest. In mimesis, the narrator would be unable to reference the source material because he would tell the story as it occurs. Since diegesis allows these references, the narrator uses them to exempt himself from blame.

Although the narrator states his lack of information stems from Lollius, he also willingly omits details. When Diomedes declares he will serve Criseyde and asks to see her the following day, the narrator asks, "What sholde I telle his wordes that he seyde? / He spak inough for o day at the meeste" (Chaucer 5.946-47). By excluding the entire speech, readers are unaware of what argument Diomedes used to persuade Criseyde. Although withholding information is an example of wielding power, the narrator's insistence that he is doing this for the readers' benefit is meant to prevent them from feeling angered by his presumption of his capacity to answer on their behalf.

To compensate for this lack of information, the narrator reminds his readers of information that he has already disclosed by restating events that happened in previous Books. When Diomedes plots to win Criseyde's

heart in Book V, the narrator introduces him as “This Diomedes, of whom yow telle I gan” (Chaucer 5.771). Diomedes was first mentioned in Book IV, where he had no lines, and this reminder serves to insist on the narrator’s structured foreshadowing, a technique used repeatedly in the text. After the decision to exchange Criseyde for Antenor is finalized, Troilus broods in his bedroom and the narrator states, “To half this wo which that I yow devyse” (Chaucer 4.259). The previous lines describe Troilus’s woe, such as his heart twisting itself and his frantic tears. While it might seem like the narrator lacks faith in his readers’ memory, the diegesis story framing method indicates that these direct addresses are meant to emphasize the narrator’s continued devotion.

The narrator also informs his readers that he will describe future events. As Criseyde is traded for Antenor, the narrator interrupts the action to say “In [Troilus’] woodnesse, as I shal yow devyse” (Chaucer 4.238). He then explains how Troilus strikes his breast and slams his head against the wall (Chaucer 4.243-44). In other cases, statements are unexplained and picked up in the narration much later. When Diomedes goes to Criseyde’s tent under the pretense of wanting to speak to Calchas, the narrator says “But what he mente, I shal yow tellen soone;” Diomedes’ intent is revealed four stanzas later (Chaucer 5.847). By assuring his readers that he will describe future events, the narrator illustrates how he has a carefully constructed plan. Moreover, the use of “yow” serves the same purpose as the descriptions of the past: to stress an intimate connection.

The intimate bond between narrator and reader is tested when Troilus and Criseyde make similar comments after their relationship ends. Troilus claims, “Men myght a book make of it, lik a storie,” and Criseyde believes there “Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge / No good wood, for these bokes wol me shende” (Chaucer 5.585, 5.1059-60). Both characters ask the readers to choose who the victim is. However, this seems like an ineffective question because Book I states that this is a story “In which ye may the double sorwes here / Of Troilus in lovyng of Criseyde, / And how that she forsook hym er she deyde” (Chaucer 1.54-56). While the opening stanza plainly paints Criseyde as the betrayer, the readers are unable to condemn Criseyde because the narrator defends her. According to the narrator, although “Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se,” he would “excuse hire yet for routhe” because she is disturbed by the events surrounding her relationship (Chaucer 5.1095-99, 5.1776). He seeks to convince his readers that outside influences drove Criseyde to pursue a relationship with Troilus, and that her “betrayal” was caused by these same influences (Mehl 77).

In order for readers to agree with the narrator's claim that Criseyde is the true victim, the use of diegesis as the story frame provides the narrator with the best chance to convince them because of the honesty that it entails. Unlike mimesis, which exists on illusions, diegesis' use of "telling" shows that there is no deceit to the narration and, therefore, the narrator is an honest man who is making unbiased judgments. With this mindset, the narrator is comfortable making his claim in Book V that Troilus is the true betrayer. Since the narrator knows Criseyde will be blamed for something he does not believe is her fault, he says "And this comveveth me / To speke, and in effect yow alle I preye, / Beth war of men, and herkneth what I seye!" (Chaucer 5.1783-85). His readers are apt to heed this plea because they have been told from the beginning of the poem that the narrator is an honest man whose goal is to tell a story.

Since the narrator is "open" with his readers, he can remind them of the things he did for them. When the readers recognize this, they are compelled to agree with his claims because they have no reason to doubt him. When the narrator presents Troilus and Criseyde's statements as to who is the victim, readers feel they make their choice based on their observations and the evidence that the narrator has never lied to them. What they do not realize is that their choice was taken from them in Book I: the narrator intended to manipulate them into agreeing with him from the first stanza. He exploits the condition of diegesis story-telling, effectively forcing his readers to agree with him.

By manipulating his readers into agreeing with him, the narrator's hidden agenda becomes clear: to distinguish himself from other authors. Throughout the poem, the narrator informs his readers what the consensus of Criseyde's character is: he "fynde ek in stories elleswhere" that Criseyde wept when Troilus stabbed Diomedes and that "Men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte" (Chaucer 5.1044, 1050). Diegesis allows him to acknowledge these pre-existing attitudes, and to leave his mark on the literary world by providing readers with a different perception of Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. Since medieval poets wrote about pre-existing stories, there is only one way for the narrator to stand apart: to alter the interpretation of Criseyde because she is always considered the betrayer. Without the readers' approval of his claim, he is unable to validate his interpretation, which prevents him from achieving his agenda. Therefore, diegesis becomes necessary for him to become immortalized in the literary world.

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### Pandarus the Trickster

While scholars have explored some of Geoffrey Chaucer's characters in the tradition of the medieval fool or jester, little research has been done regarding the trickster archetype. Although no textual evidence directly links Chaucer to trickster mythology, the archetype's survival in numerous cultures suggests it is part of the human psyche, as argued by C. G. Jung (200). Throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus exhibits a full spectrum of trickster behavior, including his etiological role in forming Troilus and Criseyde's relationship, his manipulative dialogue, and his sexual interactions with Criseyde—traits present in the familiar characters of the Norse legend Loki and the Native American legend Coyote. By applying the trickster archetype to Pandarus, he becomes a representation of mankind's unspoken lusts, and joins a literary tradition first personified by the gods.

Since the trickster figure appears in multiple mythologies, it can be regarded as part of the human psyche. C. G. Jung argues that:

In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels... this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise. He is obviously a 'psychologem,' an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. (200).

While not necessarily a villain, the trickster often expresses the undesirable traits of primal man. Martin S. Day suggests several ways the trickster figure entertains and offers psychological satisfaction as an option, and states that "One may revel deliciously in vicarious enjoyment of tabooed acts" (231). The trickster acts as a deity on par with mankind as he struggles with universal urges, ranging from sexuality to rage. Paul Radin claims that only "if we view it as primarily [a psychological problem], as an attempt by man to solve his problems inward and outward, does the figure of Trickster become intelligible and meaningful" (x). The trickster appears as a universal deity, functioning as a representation of imperfect mankind among the gods.

Due to the universality of the trickster myth, it is not surprising to see the traits appear in the character of Pandarus. He contains the trickster dichotomy by encompassing creative and chaotic forces—a consistent element of the mythology—which forms a spectrum bookended by etiological and eschatological myth, as demonstrated by

the Native American figure, Coyote, and the Norse god, Loki. Coyote offers more etiological stories, as Native American folklore often associates him closely with an ultimate creative force, as described in the prefatory note to Mourning Dove's *Coyote Stories*:

Although each Salishan family, band, and tribe had its own version of these stories, there were generalized plots for the most important of the sagas. For Coyote, there are series that describe how he made the world the way it is today, pronouncing the "commandment" at the end of each episode to "set the law" about some present condition. (Miller xiii)

While Loki does contain etiological elements, such as creating earthquakes, his myths fulfill the eschatological role since he causes the Norse apocalypse—Ragnarök. The trickster's role in creation and destruction cements him as an important figure.

Like Coyote, Pandarus creates more than he destroys. As Edvige Giunta points out, the end of Book I depicts Pandarus as a creator through such lines as:

For everi wight that hath an hous to founde  
Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne  
With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde

.....

Al this Pandare in his herte thought,

And caste his werk ful wisely or he wrought. (Chaucer, "Troilus" 1.1065-67, 1070-71)

To end Book I with Pandarus scheming defines his character as a careful manipulator. Giunta writes, "Accordingly, Pandarus possesses the skill to organize events into the framework of a story in which he chooses to play a role" (172). Pandarus fulfills his etiological role by founding the lovers' relationship. His arrival after Troilus has fallen in love allows him to take control of the relationship, and he says:

Though I be nyce, it happeth often so,  
That oon that excesse doth ful yvele fare  
By good counseil kan kepe his frend therfro.  
I have myself ek seyn a blynd man goo

Ther as he fel that couthe loken wide;

A fool may ek a wis-man ofte gide. (Chaucer, "Troilus" 1.625-30)

Even though he identifies himself as a fool, Pandarus steps in as the leader.

Pandarus's usurpation is similar to Loki's during the myth "Gylfaginning," recorded in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*. A giant offers to rebuild the god's walls for the price of the sun, the moon, and the goddess Freyja as a wife. At first, the gods agreed until "he asked them to let him have the help of his horse, which was called Svaðilfari, and Loki had his way when that was granted him" (Sturluson 66). Instead of the high god Odin taking the lead, Loki speaks among the gods and convinces Odin to agree. He usurps Odin's power by publically dissenting. Similarly, the power between Pandarus and Troilus shifts when Troilus says, "'A, lord! I me consente, / And preye to the my japes thow foryive / And I shal nevere more whyle I live'" (Chaucer, "Troilus" 1.936-38). He gives Pandarus unnatural power that Pandarus uses to push the romance forward since Troilus had considered dying a better option than talking to Criseyde:

Of [Pandarus'] word took hede Troilus,

And thoughte anon what folie he was inne,

And how that soth hym seyde Pandarus,

That for to slen himself might he nat wyne,

But bothe don unmanhod and synne. (Chaucer, "Troilus" 1.820-23)

Not only does Troilus verbally acknowledge the change in power by calling Pandarus "lord," but his thoughts mirror the change. As Loki manipulated the gods, so Pandarus manipulated Troilus.

While Pandarus fulfills the etiological function of the trickster figure by creating romance, he also contains eschatological elements comparable to Loki. Like Pandarus, Loki plans his doings, such as when he kills Odin's son, Baldr. According to the *Prose Edda*, Loki changes his shape to that of an old woman and manipulates information from another god regarding what can kill Baldr—mistletoe. He plans Baldr's subsequent death by tricking Höð:

Loki asked [Höð]: "Why aren't you throwing darts at Baldr?" [Höð] replied: "Because I can't see where Baldr is, and, another thing, I have no weapon." Then Loki said: "You go and do as the others are doing and show Baldr honour like other men. I will show you where he is standing:

throw this twig at him.” Höð took the mistletoe and aimed at Baldr as directed by Loki. The dart went right through him and he fell dead to the ground. (Sturluson 81)

Pandarus’s deceit does not read as a malevolent action, but the relationship causes a negative outcome—Troilus’s death.

Though Pandarus physically tricks Criseyde, much of his manipulation comes through dialogue. Pandarus relies on his tongue in the same way as Reynard the Fox, who uses lies to beguile his future meals. Kenneth Varty provides one of many examples in his book, *Reynard the Fox: A Study of the Fox in Medieval English Art*:

I tell of a cock that stood on a dunghill and sang. A fox came by and called up to him with fair words. “Sir,” he said, “you seem very beautiful to me. I have never seen a bird so finely bred. Your voice is clearer than anything. Except your father, whom I knew well, never did bird sing better. But he did better, because he shut his eyes.” “So can I,” said the cock. He beat his wings and shut his eyes, thinking to sing more clearly still. The fox made a jump and grabbed him... In the middle of the field through which he passed the shepherds all ran after him and the dogs barked all around... “Go on!” said the cock ... “Tell them that I am yours, that you’ll never let me go!” The fox tried to shout at them, and the cock jumped out of his mouth and flew up into a high tree. (33-34)

Pandarus channels Reynard when he plans his trickery during his first visit with Criseyde. His dialogue contains undertones of manipulation brought to the surface by his thoughts:

Than thought he thus: ‘If I my tale endite  
Aught harde, or make a process any whyle,  
She shal no savour have therin but lite  
And I trowe I wolde hire in m wil bigyle;  
For tender wittes wenen al be wyle.’ (Chaucer, “Troilus” 2.267-71)

Chaucer’s inclusion of the interior monologue shows Pandarus planning the following words:

Now, nece myn, the kynges deere sone,  
The goode, wise, worthi, fresshe, and free,

Which alwey for to don wel is his wone,  
The noble Troilus, so loveth the,  
That but ye helpe, it wold his bane be. ("Troilus" 2.316-20)

Pandarus goes on to threaten his own life and continuously reminds Criseyde that Troilus and his life depend on her love:

Yet at the leeste thonketh [Troilus], I preye,  
Of his good wille, and doth hymn at to deye.  
Now, for the love of me, my nece deere,  
Refuseth nat at this tid my prayere. (Chaucer, "Troilus" 2.1208-11)

Instead of flattery, Pandarus threatens Criseyde by foreseeing Troilus's death.

Like the cock, Criseyde recognizes the trap of words and responds to Pandarus's trickery after he forced Troilus into her room at Pandarus' home:

Criseyde answerede, 'Nevere the bet for yow,  
Fox that ye ben!

.....

Ye caused all fare ... for al youre wordes white" (Chaucer, "Troilus" 3.1563-67)

The combination of the emphasis on "fox" and "words" evokes Reynard and his flattering. Since Chaucer references Reynard in the "Nun's Priest's Tale," he had a familiarity with the folklore. As Varty writes, "[The cock] falls for the [fox's] trick and is captured. After digressing on destiny and love, Chaucer completes his tale with a magnificent description of the farmyard in turmoil" (34). Criseyde's allusion to a fox may not be a direct reference to Reynard, but medieval readers would view the fox as a symbol for slyness.

Some of Pandarus's dialogue and actions possess underlying sexuality that deepens his connection with the trickster archetype. The Native American trickster engages in numerous sexual activities, from masturbation to impossible intercourse, such as the in the myth "Coyote and the Mallard Ducks," recorded by Barry Lopez: "Coyote lengthened his penis and let it fall into the river... He sent it across to where the girls were swimming. He began copulating with the oldest girl" (319). Loki's most well-known sexual act occurs in the myth "Gylfaginning," when

he changes into a mare in order to lure away a giant's stallion, and he has "such dealings with [the stallion] that some time later he bore a foal" (Sturluson 68). The subsequent intercourse leads Loki to birth the eight-legged colt, Sleipnir. As a result of the myth's popularity, Gabriele Cocco argues that Chaucer might have referenced Loki's myth in the "General Prologue" of his *Canterbury Tales* when he describes the Pardoner—"I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare" (1.691). Cocco writes, "It is plausible to think that Chaucer might have drawn from a faded mythologema still known and accessible to his readers' understanding" (1). Both the popularity of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, written in 1200 A. D., and Britain's Anglo-Saxon history support Cocco's claim.

Pandarus's sexual activity mirrors the Native American Coyote, who relied on trickery to receive sexual pleasure, such as in the Crow tribe myth "Coyote's Strawberry." Coyote spots some girls picking strawberries, so "he burie[s] himself in the earth among some strawberry bushes and let[s] only the tip of his penis protrude" ("Coyote's" 314). The girls proceed to pluck at his penis, thinking it is a strawberry, and even "nibble at it" (314). Only when they decide to cut the strawberry free does Coyote leave (314). Pandarus does not receive sexual favors due to his trickery, but he does appear to take pleasure from forming Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. After orchestrating their first kiss, he falls

on knees, and up his eyen

To heven threw, and held his hondes highe:

'Immortal god,' quod he, 'that mayst nought deyen,

Cupide I mene, of this mayst glorifie.' (Chaucer, "Troilus" 3.183-85)

This suggests relief, if not gratification, at Troilus and Criseyde's kiss.

Like most of his trickery, Pandarus's sexuality is emphasized through dialogue, specifically with Criseyde. During their first meeting, he says, "Do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare; / Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce, / And lat us don to may som observaunce" (Chaucer, "Troilus" 2.110-12). Her reaction suggests the sexual implication: "Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves" (Chaucer, "Troilus" 2.119). After they talk with "many wordes glade / And friendly tales" (Chaucer, "Troilus" 2.148-49), Pandarus asks again, "But yet, I say, ariseth, lat us daunce, / And cast youre widewes habit to mischaunce" (Chaucer, "Troilus" 2.221-22). Pandarus encourages her to act improperly with him and also with Troilus. When Pandarus forces Criseyde to meet with

Troilus, he not only controls their relationship, but their consummation. He lies and says Troilus left town before asking Criseyde to stay the night: “To don myn herte as now so gret an ese / As for to dwelle here al this nyght with me” (Chaucer, “Troilus” 3.633-34). The next day, Pandarus greets Criseyde and “with that his arm al sodeynly he thriste / Under hire nekke, and at the laste hire kyste” (Chaucer, “Troilus” 3.1574-75). A stanza break occurs, followed by a comment from the narrator—“I passe al that which chargeth naught to seye” (Chaucer, “Troilus” 3.1576). Whether or not Pandarus’ actions suggest incest, the stanza break and commentary add weight to the interaction. Like Coyote, Pandarus’ sexuality provides a connection with the audience through lust and humor.

Defining Pandarus as a trickster enlarges his character by placing him in an older tradition. If Jung calls the trickster “a collective shadow figure, an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals” (209), then Pandarus acts as an unguarded man flanked by characters set in their roles—Troilus the hero and Criseyde the villain. Pandarus provides the audience with unrestricted entertainment.. Martin S. Day suggests that “All men need escape from the mundane world ... Perhaps the Trickster tales were the very early release of the common man, tickling him with the deucedly clever and the outrageously ludicrous in this world” (230). While early man recognized the gods controlling his world, the trickster provided a flawed representation—a relatable deity, neither good nor bad. Pandarus’s trickery functions between Coyote’s hilarity and Loki’s destruction. Some of Pandarus’s dialogue evokes humor, but his manipulation of Criseyde shows a thoughtful plan formed by, as Giunta writes, a character taking pleasure from creativity (171). If Troilus and Criseyde represent inaction and action, Pandarus lounges in the middle. While the relationship remains easily controlled, he builds the romance until Fate separates the lovers, and Pandarus allows the love story to unravel. He encompasses the dichotomy of the trickster—creation and chaos.

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### The Like That Dare Not Speak Its Name

The analysis of *Dracula* has long been fraught with concerns of the just barely covert sexual tones and scenes woven throughout the novel, but the social aspects of the story have not been given the same attention. Examined as such, the supposedly moral, holy forces opposed to Dracula himself are social group and worth being. Specifically, the interplay between all of the males entwined in the anti-Dracula cadre is quite interesting. While their relationships and communally decided deeds may not be the most wholesome, they are a driving point of the story. Without the ritual and posturing common to this homosocial group, and many like them, the novel would not continue and Dracula would not meet his end.

In this paper, I will argue that tropes of male homosociality are key factors in both plot function and movement. To examine these ideas further, I will rely on Michael Kimmel's book *Guyland*, which details many of these ritualistic behaviors as they exist in the culture of young men today. To link Kimmel's rather modern sociological work with the larger body of literary scholarship, I will look to Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, which presents a somewhat less negative and more explorative view of male-male sociality. Examining *Dracula* through the lenses of these two gender critics will reveal a different view of the text than is often seen.

When Jonathan Harker reaches Castle Dracula, he slowly comes to realize that he is trapped, that he is alone with the Count, and that his escape and perhaps survival are very unlikely. One night, he disobeys the Count's direct instructions to stay away from locked doors and never to fall asleep in any room that is not his own. It is then that Jonathan encounters the three brides of Dracula, the three sisters whom he finds so alluring. As he is beset by the women (we as readers can only imagine they are about to feed on him), he is 'rescued' by the Count. Throughout any number of stories and perhaps in everyday life, most men seem to have a friend that follows them like shadows, someone who is always there and is important in a sense beyond any singular situation. Ideally, or perhaps stereotypically, this friend is another man. For one reason or another, whether it be the assumption that a woman cannot relate to a man in the same way another man can, or simply because like attracts like, it seems that

every man needs to have that equal companion to share in his adventures, successes, and failures. In the scene with the Count, the three women, and Jonathan, we get the first glimpse of what this might look like in *Dracula*. Jonathan is obviously in over his head and needs someone to save him, so it comes down to the Count, the only other male in the castle. I will not claim that the Count's motives are entirely altruistic, but I can also not say that this necessarily matters. The Count does still need Jonathan for ambiguous reasons, and as such Dracula will protect him.

Supporting the idea of companionship, the Count keeps Jonathan much longer than he needs to. Their business could be concluded in the space of a few days, but Jonathan is kept at Castle Dracula for nearly a month. Again, other than the possible sadistic joy at playing with his food, there is no reason for this and, as Dracula has no intention of feeding on Jonathan, he is not keeping him for this reason. He may have kept him around for his companionship. It would be easy to believe that the Count, who does not age and who is feared by the local peasantry and keeps only his wives for company, may have some sort of latent longing for the male friendship he lacks. It must also be mentioned here that not only is he keeping Jonathan with him, but the Count is keeping Jonathan away from Mina. While he knows little to nothing about her, Mina is a massive threat to the Count, if we were to assume common homosocial archetypes exist here. A man's significant other is often seen as the only individual who can keep him from his friends, the only one who can turn his attention from the group. Common homosocial archetypes imply that one's loyalty must be to his friends before a significant other, and inherently demean any importance a romantic relationship could have by belittling the woman belonging to it. For the Count, holding Jonathan hostage and not allowing him to communicate in shorthand is effectively the same thing: he is keeping Jonathan away from Mina and belittling the bond they share by preventing the communication method they reserve for each other.

In this instance, we can look at the Count, Mina, and Jonathan as the three parts of a triangular relationship. Girard points out that "in an erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (as qtd. in Sedgwick 23). I believe that these triangles extend beyond just erotic relationships, and include social ones. First, we have the Count, who is keeping Jonathan

from Mina; in this case, the Count and Mina are rivals for Jonathan's attention. Second, there is the Jonathan-Count relationship and their eventual rivalry over Mina, which reinforces the bond they share.

When Van Helsing, Morris, Arthur, and Seward seek to end Lucy's un-death, their motives do not seem wholly holy; on the surface, and very much in Stoker's writing, this glossed-over near gang-rape is supposed to be a positive thing. Lucy's soul is now free from the diabolic vampire's influence and she may rest easy, but closer examination makes it anything but. The men invade the resting place of the sleeping woman, and they then re-murder her with much ritual and inter-group support (it is even accompanied by chanting and congratulatory gestures later on). What is different in this scene than Renfield's story is that there is some organizing consciousness behind it: Van Helsing. However, he is not necessarily the benign mentor the new vampire hunter needs; instead, he is more like the low-ranking military officer who torments new recruits when his superiors are not watching, even encouraging a mild act of necrophilia in instructing Arthur to kiss Lucy's corpse. Unlike a wise elder who guides his young charges in the ways of adulthood, he encourages dangerous, overtly sexual behavior that takes away from the sanctity of this act.

Through this, Van Helsing's role as the initiator to the crew of light is made apparent. Throughout Kimmel's work are several interviews of young men who fulfill this role in their various communities. Most are older fraternity brothers who talk about hazing practices and, while direct parallels are difficult to draw, metaphoric ones abound. Compared to Van Helsing's initiation rites, which seem at least to some degree legitimate, these descriptions seem quite silly. Yet underlying both is a common thread: those being initiated have no idea why they are doing the things they are doing. The initiators deliberately withhold information and trust that the initiates' desire to belong will ensure that their demands are met. Van Helsing does not explain all he knows to the others until very late in the novel, and it is mostly glossed over because by that point, the astonishingly long rising action of the story is over and readers are wrapped in the breakneck paced mid-section of the story. By not explaining his motives he could easily be leading the crew of light down the wrong path. The crew of light has no idea that if what they are doing is the right thing; their actions against Dracula are wholly predicated on their desire for Van Helsing to approve of them, and so their actions are executed with little individual thought.

The crew of light wants to stamp out the so-called evil threatening their world, but is it just that Dracula represents a threat? It could be argued that one man, even one vampire, would never conquer London and therefore poses no real threat. What he does pose a threat to, however, is heteronormative ideals. Many critics argue that there are homosexual tones to the novel, but because Dracula himself never attacks a man, and his feeding is sexual in nature, then it is likely that he is heterosexual. However, what he does is attempt to pervert and destroy the women loved by his adversaries, leaving the men with all their drive to attack him. While this is not a method likely to win him love, he does in a sense promote homosexual desire by leaving the crew of light with a sexual male enemy. Of course, the crew of light, being the heteronormative group that it is, cannot have this.

According to Kimmel, the best way for men to prove they are not homosexual is to appropriate homosexual ideas or actions and make them into overly masculine actions (76). So within *Dracula*, the staking of the Count could perhaps represent a homosexual version of the gang-rape that can be attributed to the scene in Lucy's tomb. The difference of course is that the Count is male and, while Lucy must be staked to find peace, the Count must be staked to stamp out his presence. The crew of light dominates him in a homosexually toned murder scene to prove that they are not like him. They must prove that homosociality is acceptable and homosexuality is not by destroying the Count, and if it were not for the homosocial patterns throughout the novel, this destruction would not have occurred.

Since males have been the dominant power in society for the bulk of human history, their practices have gone largely unexamined. Only recently, with the advent of the study of gender, have we begun to examine the somewhat arcane and clandestine practices that have been associated with masculinity. *Dracula* proves that such ideas have existed for at least two centuries and that they may have been just as, if not more, effective than they are now. Did Stoker invent tales of terror to shock the masses and enthrall the public? Undoubtedly. Yet it is highly unlikely that he fabricated the social interactions that cause his characters to function. More likely he observed these interactions himself, or was even forced to be a part of them, and like any observant author, put them to work in making a story seem uncanny.

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**Wizarding Woes: Exploring the Hierarchies of the *Harry Potter* Series Through the Use of American Africanism and Critical Race Theory**

The darkness blanketed all but the brazen, purple bulk of the Knight Bus as Rosa Parks stepped into the rickety entranceway. Rosa peered about her, looking for an empty seat on which to rest her tired, sore feet which she had been standing on all day. The front of the bus boasted the best of wizarding society, each passenger naturally a pureblood. Rosa spotted several house-elves, a goblin, and Hermione Granger seated in the rear of the bus. Her examination complete, Rosa realized the bus lacked any available seats except for one in the front of the bus. She steadily waddled to the seat, but as she began to slowly lower herself onto the fluorescent plastic, the daunting visage of Draco Malfoy materialized before her. "Get to the back of the bus, mudblood! Dirty half-bloods like you can't sit in the front!"

The biography of Rosa Parks and the popular setting of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series may each appear familiar to young adults, but how does Rosa's mistreatment during the struggle for racial equality parallel a fictional tale about wizards? Beyond the fantastic novelties of the magical world, *Harry Potter* also introduces readers to a deeper plot surrounding the blood status of witches and wizards, just as Park's endeavors for a seat protested the racial prejudice of a nation. As a fervent reader of the *Harry Potter* novels and a student who has studied the critical race theory, I discern a theme of racial struggle throughout Rowling's series. The status labels, assigned according to the extent of magical lineage of each character, greatly influences the novel's plot and subsequent actions of the characters. The designated labels of status then lead to Rowling and critical race theorist Toni Morrison's explorations of the hierarchies created by race. The term "American Africanism," as coined by Morrison, adds a distinctive component to the critical race theory that explores how the presence of a "superior white," or American group, defines and causes the lesser and sub-dominant status of the "African" group. Rowling establishes the pureblood magical characters as the white, superior group, and the not fully magical or magic-free characters as the "African" group that renders the white American group superior. The "American Africanism" concept of critical race theory allows for a configuration in the *Harry Potter* series, where the freedom,

empowerment, and entitled characteristics of the dominant magical characters force the less than purely magical characters into enslavement, disempowerment, and disempowerment.

Critical race theory emphasizes the presence and effect of race in literature. The ethnicity of different characters reveals the effect heritage has on the plot of a literary work (Lynn 156). In Toni Morrison's concept of "American Africanism," she argues that there is a need for a lesser race, usually Africans, in order for whites to rank as "legitimate" Americans. The image of Americans connotes freedom, empowerment, and entitlement, but in order for the image to make sense, white Americans must be compared to or contrasted with a lesser group. Africans provided the sub-dominant group over which white Americans had the possibility of forcing enslavement, disempowerment, and property-less disempowerment. The African group does not actually rank as lesser than the white American group, but the Africans forcibly succumbed to the definition of enslavement that the white Americans gave to the Africans and, as a result, the "Americans" dominated over the "African" creation (Morrison 1791-1800). When applying this theory to *Harry Potter*, the sub-dominant population consists of all sub-par magical beings, but particularly the non-magical "muggles," half-bloods, (part wizard, part muggle), and non-human magical creatures, such as house-elves, giants, and centaurs. The non-pureblood beings embody as much magical prowess and morality as the purebloods, but the labels given to the "lesser" beings define them as less significant than purebloods.

The freedom the purely magical beings enjoy comes at the cost of enslavement for the less-than-pureblood beings, placing magical creatures and muggles at the mercy of the purebloods. The Malfoy family forces the enslaved house-elf Dobby to "iron his hands," and they give the elf "death threats" at least "five times a day" (Rowling, *Chamber* 176-177) if Dobby does not fulfill the mantra "bound to serve one house and one family forever" (Rowling, *Chamber* 14). The Malfoys possess a pure-blood lineage that permits the family to rule over Dobby's life as a lowly non-human, magical creature. Dobby loses the possibility of a free lifestyle while fulfilling the Malfoys' every command, and he also receives severe punishment if his service falls short of the family's dominating specifications.

Prior to the American Civil War, Africans suffered from consequences similar to the loss of freedom and punishment Dobby deals with, but the race still suffers from the inferior label assigned to them. Noted also for having “used giants” (Rowling, *Half-Blood* 13) and for having “treated like vermin” the “lowly, the enslaved... of the magical world,” Voldemort and his minions, the Death Eaters, capture magical creatures for use in the Dark Arts (Rowling, *Chamber* 178). The Death Eaters assign magical creatures the label of tools with which to complete their master’s evil bidding. The harmless behavior of “anti-muggle pranksters” who rig “regurgitating toilets” (Rowling, *Order* 132) escalates to the destructive actions of Death Eaters, who for enjoyment make “a small muggle child spin like a top,” and act as “puppeteers” while forcing muggles to be “marionettes operated by invisible strings that rose from the wands” (Rowling, *Goblet* 119). Thus, muggles also succumb to the enslavement wrought by wizards. Wizards frequently interfere in the daily lives of muggles by playing pranks on the unsuspecting victims, who then depend on the cause of the problems to fix the magical maladies forced upon them. The “harmless” pranks then rise to violence, from which the muggles have to then rely on the wizarding community to defend them against. Enslaved by the need for protection from such pranks, the muggles depend on the dominating wizards to aid in predicaments, which serves to further validate the superior status the wizards claim. The validation forms the magical beings into something like the “superior” American group that can fix anything.

The empowerment the purebloods gain from the treatment of lesser magical beings forces disempowerment upon half-bloods, muggles, and magical creatures. With the pronouncement that Hagrid, a half-giant, “is not a pureblood wizard” and “not even pure human,” reporter Rita Skeeter of the novel “warn[s] about the dangers of associating with part-giants” and manages to greatly maim Hagrid’s social reputation and job prospects (Rowling, *Goblet* 439-440). Skeeter’s image as a reporter becomes empowered through the publication of Hagrid’s half-blood status, but the publication simultaneously oppresses Hagrid through the removal of the part-giant’s confidence. The theory of American Africanism emphasizes a similar scenario as the dominant Americans used the forced sub-dominant characteristics of the Africans to gain personal credit and wealth, like the acts of the plantation owners. The wizards of *Harry Potter* consider the pureblooded status to rank better than that of a giant, and thus the wizards label Hagrid as unworthy and disempowered.

Wizards also gain a sense of empowerment through the disempowerment of muggles. Magical beings learn how to “make... a person’s memory modified” (Rowling, *Goblet* 145), which revokes the muggles’ dignity and permits wizards the satisfaction of control and power gathered from the non-magical beings’ losses. The sense of empowerment commandeered by the wizards’ control over muggles allows the dominant wizards to treat the minority muggles however wizards wish. Wizards further build their strength by removing the power of magical creatures, such as through the mandate that “no non-human creature is permitted to carry or use a wand” (Rowling, *Goblet* 132), or through the Ministry of Magic’s attitudes that the “Ministry permits” magical creatures to live on only “certain areas of land” (Rowling, *Order* 755). The removal of the magical creatures’ rights causes the wizards to overpower and dominate the creatures. The sub-dominant non-human population can no longer own or use wands, and cannot roam freely amongst the magical community. The American-made Jim Crow Law and laws of segregation caused similar effects of disempowerment and sub-dominance for African Americans. The purebloods of the magical world thus enslave creatures of lesser lineage by making the lesser creatures dependent upon them, while they also remove any power the non-purebloods possess by placing the sub-dominant group under staunch laws of restriction.

The purebloods envision magical parentage as providing all purebloods with more entitlement than non-purebloods, by definition then disentiuling the non-purebloods. Half-bloods suffer disentiuling during “blood status” analysis, which involves testing the lineage to discover if a person meets the criteria for a pureblood label (Rowling, *Deathly* 244). Pureblood wizards wield the power to question whether or not witches and wizards are legitimately magical. Meanwhile, those bestowed with the title of legitimately magical bask in the entitlement of proven pure-bloodedness. The entitlement granted with proven pureblood status also permits wizards to remove the privilege of respect from non-purebloods. For example, the Ministry of Magic creates pamphlets exploring the topic of “Mudbloods and the Dangers They Pose to a Peaceful Pureblood Society” (Rowling, *Deathly* 248), while Harry’s nemesis, Draco Malfoy, utilizes his pureblood status to greatly insult and abuse Hermione Granger, a witch whose parents are non-magical, by taunting her with “filthy little mudblood,” amongst other variations (Rowling, *Chamber* 112).

The terms used to taunt and abuse half-bloods and muggles further disempower and remove the characters from the dignity and respect that come from having magical prowess outside of a pureblood family. The wizards of pureblood descent view muggles of no magical prowess as belonging to a hierarchical level far below that of pureblood wizards. The fountain centerpiece at the Ministry of Magic boasts a sculpture of “muggles in their rightful place” as “mounds of carved humans” that “support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards,” which exemplifies how the muggles are considered useful to the magical hierarchy, but nonetheless inferior (Rowling, *Deathly* 242). Wizards enable all purebloods with the right to sit upon thrones balanced on the lower hierarchy’s remains. The placement of muggles at that low level allows wizards to rob non-magical beings of the dignity, respect, and rights they deserve, just as the status of “American” balanced on the necessary presence of Africanism in order to exist.

Rowling’s *Harry Potter* reveals how the oppression of select groups over other groups permeates even the fictitious world of magic. The characters of this series are classified into specific categories with exact labels, according to the character’s blood status. The characters labeled as “pureblood” illustrate the dominant or white, American group, while the characters labeled as “magical creatures,” “muggles,” or “half-bloods” portray the sub-dominant African group, as defined by the dominant group. In accordance with Morrison’s concept of Africanism, critical race theory reveals how the sub-dominant magical creatures, muggles, and half-bloods of the series rank just as equally magical as the purebloods, but because of the purebloods’ dominance, the sub-dominant characters appear to be characterized as lesser than the dominant characters. The purebloods’ “superiority” and “dominance” are arbitrarily determined only by opposition and not by natural forces, which explains the actual equality of the groups’ magical prowess. However, the dominant and white American-like purebloods are still characterized as free, empowered, and entitled, while defining the African-like magical creatures, muggles, and half-bloods as enslaved, disempowered, and disempowered, despite the dishonesty of the forced hierarchy.

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**Untitled**

