

# DA 2020

DELTA ARTS JOURNAL

2020 DELTA ARTS JOURNAL

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# Poetry

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*First Place  
a poem about  
listening to  
the como  
mamas at the  
bolivar county  
courthouse*

*Chris Kalil*

white children standing on top of a monument to the confederate dead to better see the three black women singing about jesus while the plaque screams no land fell so sinless and me and my friends on the edge of the square drinking iced coffee listing to them cracking the concrete listening to them rend the world and all the people in their lawn chairs listening to them chant mantras about the inside of what it feels like to be the ones standing in front of a bunch of white people listening to three black women in the courthouse built after the war and me listening and taking notes and watching my friend listening and taking notes and drinking iced coffee rending the leaves and pushing the little black sugar ants back into the dust and listening to the dog on a heavy chain dragging the whole damn table across the cracked pavement yes lord yes he is he is so good to me



## *Second Place Alliteration*

*Liz Howell*

Asleep. Asymmetrical, assembled like an assassin under the astral  
asphalt  
Bound since birth between blankets and bells but with a body not  
quite  
Covered: the calf exposed to the cold and a cough in the chest of the  
comatose corpse  
Dead to the world but not quite dead—darting in dreams, a deer in  
the dew until the day dries  
Enough to enlighten the expectation of exhaustion—to enliven  
existence  
For Friday is forthcoming, a fallible friend that forgives fears and  
forgets foresight  
Gathering ghosts and gouging out their grievances to feel good—  
Hush. History is hostile and halting is harmonious—hydrate and  
hurry from hebetude to  
Innate imaginative isolation. Inspect the inspiration and ignore the  
illogical;  
Journey in juvenile jurisdictions, just and jocular and joyless. Just  
Keep the kindness, the kryptonite kempt within the king-sized  
kaleidoscope of  
Laughter—laughter—laughter—the lazy, labored laughter lodged in  
the almost-living lexicon  
Made manifest in the dreams of a madman—malignantly  
magnificent, marked, marbled, and  
Not quite covered: nude nose and neck and nipples above the nebula  
of nirvana,  
Of blankets, open mouth offensive to the observer, objectifying the  
owner,  
Painting the player as a pig, picking their pain from the planet like a  
piece from a pizza not

Quite cooled—one quietly questioning its own qualifications until  
they quell the quizzical  
Rambling through rain, through razors, through rationalized  
rapping of rebounds and rants of  
Self, the sacrilegious snoring and stopping of sentient saxophone  
playing—saints and sages  
Try to turn the tables, to tune out the tempo of total traumatic  
translations in twilight  
Until, unacknowledged, unashamed, the uncircumcised uncorking of  
a singular utopia,  
Vilifies the vanilla vandalism on the verge of vehement vulnerability  
and vaccinates the  
Weak against the wasted—wager that wavelike weekend welcome  
upon waking, unless  
Xiphophyllous xenoliths lead to xenic xenia, which brings  
Yearly youthful, yet yellowing yesterdays, the yawning yodeling until  
they yield thexa  
Zealous zodiac to a zillion zestful Zzz's.



*Taken*  
*Saavedra Martin*

I wondered when I would be opened,  
when my letters would be renowned,  
but these thoughts often wondered to a dark place,  
where the ground kept me bound, thickly wound,  
where hopeful dreams would drown,  
their pictures so alight and foreign,  
but mute is their sound.

And So, in-shelved I am,  
wrinkly and old,  
my binds are loose,  
I can barely hold.  
But Oh, how I wish to be awakened,  
for my lips to spread,  
and let out a dusty yawn from years in bed.

But the bookshelf keeps me from unraveling,  
keeps me enclosed, untold,  
but it no longer feels like home.  
Should I feel confined?  
Should I want to let go?

I am often obsessed with the thought of a touch,  
a finger running down my spine,  
or the eyes of someone enjoying what they find,  
eagerly reading what's inside,  
or the taste for more,  
no matter how spotted or torn.

So I wait,  
I will be patient.  
Because maybe one day,  
I will be taken

# *A Strong, Black Woman*

*Jonesha Heller*

Inspired by Nina Simone's "Mississippi Godamn"

I am  
Strong  
I am  
Black  
I am  
A Woman  
Is that Wrong?

I have  
a Voice  
I have  
Anger  
I have  
Confidence, that is all.

You paint me to be misbehavin'  
Is it a crime to be this headstrong?  
My image contorted and tarnished  
I am dismayed, lifelong

I dispel your preconceived notions  
I will avenge my elder sisters blockaded motions  
To find my true Identity  
You picture us all the same  
And that's quite a shame

We are Black  
We are Strong  
We are Women  
We are Strong, Black Women, That is All!

# *Education*

*Tasha Toms*

Parents don't know any better themselves  
They preach what was preached at them when they were 12  
When they were unfocused and thinking about dropping out or  
giving up  
Someone told them to stay in school and that would be enough  
When the going gets tough the tough get going  
Although sometimes it's more than just tough that's showing  
Why force the scientist how to stay on beat  
Or the budding playwright how to dunk at 6 feet  
Let us decide for ourselves our passion  
Let our imagination take over our own creation  
Don't grade our attempts at creativity with a rubric aimed at  
negativity labelling individualistic thinking as  
unconformity  
WHILST enforcing academic uniformity.  
The cure to cancer and more im sure  
Sits inside the mind of a child who has never seen school walls

# *Incarcerated*

## *K'Na Rose*

You want to lock me in a caged box because I've "done wrong" by the rules of society.

Little did you know, I've been done wrong this long,  
Disrupting the golden rule to treat others how you want to be treated.  
This cage became my home overnight.

I closed my eyes and tried to pray my pain away.

Dealing with an abuser whose emotional whips turned to physical rage.

He tried to enforce his dominance over me, tried to use his hands to handle me.

And what I couldn't handle became my downfall and the call was made.

My apartment windows lit up blue and red again, for the third time in the past month.

The blinking barricade of lost hope alerting me of the extent of this fuckery.

I was paralyzed with fear of the unknown and the broken nails at my fingertips became numb.

The blood from my left breast and left ankle stung as I was escorted out.

The clink of the cold clamps that cover my crisscrossed wrists crippled me.

A girly girl who's not a fan of those silver bracelets.

No price, but not free of charge.

No one in this car but the Man at the steering wheel and this emptiness in the backseat with me.

The sweat from an authoritative thumb reminds me where I am,  
The pressure pushing my thumb further in the ink.  
A candid shot of my tears, red eyes and smudged mascara  
documented in the system.  
Thank God they spelled my name wrong.

I caught a case and all they could see was a charge on a piece of paper.  
The black and white ink cannot depict who I am,  
Or how fragile my mental faculties were that night.  
The essence of my youth was worn on my sleeve, the only armor for  
such an adult situation.

I had to readjust my thoughts and not forget where I am:  
“Don’t cry too much, or they will deem you insane.”  
“Don’t resist or they will restrain you.”  
“Keep to yourself and don’t let anyone get too close.”  
“Show no fear or they will devour you.”

As the soap drains past my toes the first night, I think about a shower  
at home.  
As I take another considerable bite of my so-called dinner, I  
remember a home cooked meal.  
As I attempt to go to sleep, I count the white tiles on the wall.  
There’s just enough moonlight coming through my window to lose  
count on purpose and start over.  
I didn’t want to think about where I am.

But when my steps no longer echoed in long corridors,  
And were no longer silenced behind locked doors,  
The air that night revitalized me and I was free.  
The captivity encompassed in my heart disrupted my soul, knowing  
what I lost.

My family treated my trauma like the punch line of a bad joke.  
They asked me if another female inmate flirted with me and if I had  
a girlfriend.  
They asked me if I had my tattoos already, or if I got it in the  
slammer.  
They asked if I dropped the soap, and if it was how it was in the  
movies.

My public defender never answered my phone calls.  
I didn't know anything about legal terms unless it was quoted in Law  
and Order.  
I couldn't google fast enough what I was supposed to do until that  
last call rang my line:  
"Ms. Rose, your case was expunged," was what my angel in disguise  
said.

I took an early flight and my Mom became my lifeline.  
Living life as a felon and a broken woman in this lifetime.  
Occasional visits, pictures, and text messages but by her I wasn't  
raised.  
I closed my eyes and tried to pray the pain away, and hoped she could  
help me thru this phase.

I vowed to listen to her wisdom and try to adhere to her advice.  
Nothing less than what I wanted, anything else would not suffice.  
She said “Peace is like a stream, so if it does not flow, then it is not  
meant to be.”

I do believe, I can concur, I will attest, and will confirm, no second  
guess that, it’s legit.

She looked me in the eyes, and to my surprise, she told me “Take No  
Shit.”

Live in peace, live in private and make your passion a profit.  
Finish school, pay your bills and travel the world.  
Let a motherfucker earn you.

Incarcerated, but no longer locked up.

Broken, but not beyond repair.

Karma doesn’t announce herself, so treat people fairly and always  
beware.

No matter who comes and goes, no matter what blockade evades my  
pursuits, no matter how real this world gets,  
She will always be there.

# Formal Essay

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# *First Place* *Jane Eyre's Religion of* *Love*

*Jonathan Boles*

Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*, is arguably one of the most popular novels written in the 19th century. It speaks to things such as life, love, happiness, marriage, injustice, equality, agency, human will, and freedom. The protagonist of the story, Jane, is both religious and also greatly affected by the religious people she encounters throughout the book. The first overly religious people Jane encounters are Mr. Brocklehurst and Helen Burns. Mr. Brocklehurst is portrayed as a cold, Calvinistic headmaster at the school where Jane is sent for her education. Helen Burns—a young girl Jane meets and befriends while at Lowood school—is portrayed as the foil of Mr. Brocklehurst. Instead of being overly dogmatic, theologically rigorous, and legalistically strict, Helen is portrayed as kind, wise, loving, and almost sage-like. Rochester—the man Jane eventually marries in the end of the novel—is not depicted as overly religious. Instead, he serves as a kind of religious object for Jane in order to increase the tension of the novel. The last overtly religious character Jane meets in St. John, a very sensible, theological, cold, dispassionate, and Calvinistic man who attempts to use his religious convictions to convince Jane to marry him. Throughout the novel, Jane is constantly conflicted between the two different ideologies these characters represent. On one side, Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John represent a more sensible, dispassionate, cold, legalistic, and by-the-book type religion. Whereas Rochester and Helen Burns seem to represent a spiritual life full of love, joy, peace, and freedom. Throughout the novel, Jane is constantly at war within herself between a religion of law based on cold morality and subjection and a religion of love based on freedom and passion, a war that is eventually resolved by fire, love, and Mr. Rochester.

Mr. Brocklehurst is the head of a religious school for young women, but he does not seem to be genuinely religious himself. When Jane first meets Helen—a girl who is depicted as truly religious and pious—and is asking her about Mr. Brocklehurst, she asks if he is a good man to which Helen replies, “He is a clergyman, and is said to do a great deal of good”

(Brontë 48). It is apparent by Helen's vague answer that she has not seen him do any good deeds. For Helen to have been there for some time, and not to have seen him do any good, is indicative of the fact that he did not do much good. In fact, Helen says, "Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god: nor is he even a great and admired man: he is little liked here; he never took steps to make himself liked (Brontë 66). Despite his outward religiosity and strict enforcement of moral laws, it is apparent that no one really respected or liked him.

Mr. Brocklehurst being portrayed as a hypocrite can be interpreted as reflective of Jane's personal feelings about the type of Calvinistic, evangelical religiosity Mr. Brocklehurst represents. Although it is never explicitly stated, there are several allusions to him being a Calvinist—an evangelical Christian who holds to doctrines such as predestination, election, and original sin. While Jane is recalling her instruction at Lowood, she says, "Sunday evening was spent in repeating, by heart, the Church Catechism, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew; and in listening to a long sermon, read by Miss Miller" (Brontë 58). Mr. Brocklehurst choosing passages of the Bible that list out laws given by Jesus and his insistence on the girls knowing the Catechisms are indicative of his being Anglican and Calvinistic. According to J. Jeffrey Franklin, who is an author and is also Professor of English and Associate Vice Chancellor at the University of Colorado Denver, "Brocklehurst is cast stereotypically as the hypocritical Calvinist" (Franklin 462, 463). He goes on to say, "Further evidence of Brocklehurst's Calvinism is his reliance on the doctrines of innate human corruption (or original sin) and of strict body/soul duality, particularly, it seems, in the case of young women..." (Franklin 463). By watching Mr. Brocklehurst lead a hypocritical life full of meanness and cold, superficial religion and morality, Jane learned that such things lead to an undesirable end.

Helen Burns—Jane's first real friend at Lowood—holds a religious belief that is not quite as morally or theologically rigorous and is held in a much higher regard than Mr. Brocklehurst. During a conversation between Jane and Helen, Helen reveals that she does not believe death will be a negative thing for anyone. She says that she cannot believe that the next life will be worse than this one for anyone. While speaking about the topic—in contrast to those who would say that there is a hell and that some go to it—Helen says, "I hold another creed; which no one ever taught me, and

which I seldom mention; but in which I delight. And to which I cling: for it extends hope to all: it makes eternity a rest..." (Brontë 55). This "other creed" Helen mentions seems to be some type of universalism—a branch of theology that says there is no hell and that all people go to heaven. It is no surprise that Helen seldom speaks of it as it was deemed heresy by the church hundreds of years ago. Later in the novel, right before she dies, after Jane asks if she will ever see her again, Helen says, "You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty, universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane" (Brontë 78). Helen's confidence of Jane's entrance into that place with her one day—despite Jane's lack of religious expression or allegiance—is indicative of her universalistic notion of all people going to heaven. Also, her referring to God as a "universal Parent" also seems to indicate that Helen believes all people will eventually be welcomed home by their heavenly parent. Despite her unorthodox view, Helen is depicted as the novel's paragon of Christian faith.

Helen often displays her commitment to the practical doctrines of love and forgiveness which makes her the foil of Mr. Brocklehurst. According to Franklin, "Helen Burns is the foil, or antidote, to Brocklehurst. Her religious philosophy retains the strong Evangelical belief in self-sacrifice and in individual, personal contact between human subject and God..." (Franklin 464). Whereas Brocklehurst is portrayed as harsh, hateful, divisive, and hypocritical, Helen is displayed as loving, kind, thoughtful, and sincere. In contrast to Mr. Brocklehurst's religion of law and service, Helen places emphasis on love and closeness with God. Although Jane continues to struggle with the rigorous moral code impressed upon her by Brocklehurst, Helen's notion of everyone getting to heaven greatly influences Jane's future actions in her relationship with Rochester.

Jane's initial relationship with Mr. Rochester shows her internal conflicts over what she desires and her own moral code. After leaving Lowood school, Jane becomes a governess to a young girl at the estate of Mr. Rochester. Over a period of time, they eventually fall in love, and Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane. Jane eventually learns that he has a wife named Bertha who has been insane for several years. However, Mr. Rochester still begs Jane to stay with him and become his wife, but Jane refuses because he already has a wife. After hearing this, Mr. Rochester says, "I am not married. You shall be Mrs Rochester—both virtually and nominally. I shall keep only you as long as I live" (Brontë 285). Despite his pleas, Jane refuses him

again and says, “[Y]our wife is living...if I lived with you as you desire, I should then be your mistress...” (Brontë 285). Jane finds the idea of being Mr. Rochester’s mistress abhorrent. However, this does not negate the feelings she has for Mr. Rochester.

Jane’s love for Mr. Rochester further complicates her spiritual convictions by becoming a sort of religious object in itself. When Mr. Rochester is about to propose to Jane for the first time, he plays a trick on her and makes her think he is going to propose to Blanche Ingram. Jane asserts that she must leave, but Mr. Rochester asserts in return that she must stay. To which Jane replies, “Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton?—a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup?” (Brontë 238). In this passage, Jane is using extremely religious language, language and imagery used specifically of Jesus in the New Testament. According to Robert James Merrett, who is an author and well-published journal writer, “Her comparison of not being able to love Rochester with having her ‘morsel of bread snatched’ from her lips and her ‘drop of living water dashed’ from her cup is stronger evidence that she subordinates biblical and sacramental to romantic expression” (9). In other words, by referring to Mr. Rochester in religiously symbolic language, she is reflecting her inner conflict between the religion that has been instilled in her and the religion of passion and love—of which she finds Mr. Rochester to be a god-like or savior-like figure based on her application of those terms to Mr. Rochester.

When Jane remains intent on leaving, Mr. Rochester also speaks of Jane in religious language. After Mr. Rochester has the opportunity to fully explain his situation with Bertha, he pleads with Jane to stay. However, Jane refuses again. Mr. Rochester then says, “You will not come? You will not be my comforter, my rescuer? My deep love, my wild woe, my frantic prayer?” (Brontë 297). The term comforter and rescue are constantly applied to God in the Old and New Testaments. Prayer also has religious origins and overtones. Here, Mr. Rochester is reciprocating the idea of a religion of love, of which he sees Jane as savior. After Mr. Rochester says this, Jane reflects, “[W]hile he spoke my very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him” (Brontë 297). Jane expresses here that her inner self was at war. According to the religion she was instructed in at Lowood, it is wrong for her to stay with him, but she is

almost persuaded to forsake that religion. It seems, then, that the love between Mr. Rochester and Jane develops its own kind of religion, a religion whose core tenets are love, passion, emotion, spirit, and freedom—tenets which are in direct contrast to how Jane describes the religion of St. John and Mr. Brocklehurst.

Jane's relationship with St. John proves to be a sharp contrast between her relationship with Mr. Rochester as St. John represents an entirely different form of love. After leaving Mr. Rochester, Jane happens upon some of her long-lost cousins, one of which is St. John, a Christian minister who eventually tries to persuade Jane to marry him. When speaking of St. John's preaching, Jane says, "Throughout there was a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness; stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines—election, predestination, reprobation—were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom" (328). In Jane's assessment of St. John's preaching and Calvinistic leanings, it is clear that she does not find those doctrines to be comforting or even pleasing. In fact, she says the very reference to those doctrines were like sentences of doom. Instead of exciting passion, love, joy, and happiness—as was the case with her love of Mr. Rochester—St. John's religion evokes the exact opposite emotions.

Even though she reacts very strongly to St. John's initial proposal, she expresses several instances where she is almost persuaded. When speaking of their first conversation about the proposal, Jane says, "I felt his influence in my marrow—his hold on my limbs" (Brontë 379). Later, she is almost entirely persuaded by him. Jane says, "My refusals were forgotten—my fears overcome—my wrestlings paralysed. The Impossible—i.e., my marriage with St. John—was fast becoming the Possible...Religion called—Angels beckoned—God commanded..." (Brontë 390). This is one of the most pivotal points in the novel. Here, Jane is battling between the religion of St. John, and her own religion of love. According to Chris R. VandenBossche, who is Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame and is a Victorian literature specialist, "Criticism of the novel has frequently noted the structure defined by the relation between an authentic narrated self—the Jane who rebels against the Reeds—and a narrating self that is repressed by, and succumbs to, cultural norms—the Jane who marries Rochester" (52). According to VandenBossche, Jane is constantly struggling between what he calls the "authentic narrated self" and the "repressed narrating self." In a way, Jane's repressed self is convicted of her need to serve as a missionary and marry St. John for the sake of God's kingdom. However, her narrated self knows that this would lead to a cold and dispassionate life full of many rules and little

love, so she rebels against expectations and follows her passions.

The idea of coldly following convictions impressed by others with little love would have been a sort of return to Lowood for Jane. Jane was very familiar with the notion of cold adherence to moral laws and convictions preached to her at Lowood school, and she had also seen their end. Mr. Brocklehurst shared many of the same traits and convictions as St. John. According to Franklin, “[D]espite the moral integrity and Christian piety with which the novel imbues St. John...he ultimately proves to possess the most negative qualities of Brocklehurst and to lack the essential ingredient that makes Helen Burns the novel’s Christian paragon” (466). Jane eventually discovers that St. John is not the type of person she wants to marry. He is too cold, too rigid, too dispassionate, and too much like Mr. Brocklehurst. When speaking of St. John, Jane says, “He had held me in awe, because he had held me in doubt. How much of him was saint, how much mortal, I could not heretofore tell: but revelations were being made in this conference...I saw his fallibilities: I comprehended them” (Brontë 379). Jane eventually sees the flaws of St. John and that those flaws had led him to be such a cold individual. By seeing St. John as who he was and choosing to reject him, the ideals of love, joy, passion, peace, and religious freedom represented by Helen Burns and Mr. Rochester proved to be the ideals she found most appealing.

Jane is saved from St. John by the symbolic cleansing of Mr. Rochester and marriage to him. Shortly after Jane had been persuaded to marry St. John and go with him, she has a mystical experience of a voice calling out to her for help. She discovers that the voice is Mr. Rochester’s, so she chooses to leave St. John to go and see what has become of Mr. Rochester. When she arrives, she learns that Thornfield has burned down, and that Bertha died in the fire. When speaking of seeing Mr. Rochester for the first time since leaving, she says, “He lifted his hand and opened his eyelids; gazed blank, and with a straining effort, on the sky...one saw that all to him was void darkness. He stretched his right hand (the left arm, the mutilated one, he kept hidden in his bosom)...” (Brontë 405). Mr. Rochester lost his hand and his eyesight in the fire. He had also lost his wife. Now that Bertha is dead, Jane knows that her love for Mr. Rochester is no longer lawless or unconsecrated, as St. John had said (Brontë 386). She also seems to see Mr. Rochester’s injuries as a sort of symbolic cleansing. While Jane was at Lowood, they read Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, every Sunday. It is no

coincidence that in Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus says,

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (ESV)

When speaking of this, Emily Griesinger, who is Professor of English at Azusa Pacific University and a published author, says, “It is the moral law of God after all that constrains Jane from becoming Rochester’s mistress, and it is Rochester’s violation of that law that causes him to lose Jane, and later on...to lose his hand and eye” (53). Even though the moral law had constrained Jane’s love in the past, and Mr. Rochester’s violation of that law caused her to leave, he has now been cleansed of his sin, and, consequently, their marriage has been consecrated by God. Thus, Jane’s inner war is resolved by the merging of her two religions. The religion of law is satisfied by the sacrifice, and the religion of love is satisfied by her passionate marriage to Mr. Rochester.

Throughout the novel, religion’s affect and influence on Jane is very apparent. In her inner battle between the religion of law—represented by Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John—and the religion of love—represented by Helen Burns and Mr. Rochester—, Jane eventually comes to a compromise. Jane finds that the strict, hypocritical religiosity of Mr. Brocklehurst was no good to others or himself, and did not gain him much favor with anyone. She also finds the same type of strict morality—when fully internalized and applied—leads to someone being like St. John, cold, dispassionate, calculating, bound, and self-loathing. In contrast, Jane finds that—even though the religious freedom of Helen and the passionate love of Mr. Rochester are most appealing—her conscience still haunts her. However, as chance or fate would have it, Jane’s two ideologies find a way to coexist. Because of the death of Bertha and Mr. Rochester’s symbolic absolution, she is able to stay true to her strong moral convictions, and she is also able to pursue her passions and marry Mr. Rochester. Although the war of the two religions leaves its scars on their marriage, Jane is finally able to be happy and find that peace she so admired Helen for.

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# *Second Place* *“A Man’s World is Different from a Woman’s World”: Hypocrisy and Double- Standards in Society as Portrayed in Women’s Literature*

*Liz Howell*

Women have long been treated as if they were beneath men. Humanity’s need to protect children and mothers early in its development led to women being seen as “weak” or “fragile” for centuries, and though society and medicine developed to make childbirth and child-carrying safer, feminism has taken a long time to catch up. In fact, arguably, feminine equality still has yet to catch up, despite how much change there has been in the past few years; women still do not make as much as men do, women have yet to hold the same number of positions of power men do, and women are still, often, treated as if their sole purpose in life is to bear and raise children. Because women have worked so hard to escape this oppression, they are often seen as “devious” for getting themselves into a position that some men still don’t believe they belong in, and women are still sometimes accused of using this supposed deviousness for personal gain, even when they are not really being devious at all. Meanwhile, men’s ability to be devious is often overlooked, as they have so long played a role above women, and there remains a double-standard for how a man’s sexuality and exploration thereof is seen versus a woman’s. Several female authors have called attention to this, including Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Ursula K. Le Guin in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and Sylvia Plath in *The Bell Jar*. Each of these novels serves to highlight how women are often seen as walking incubators and how society’s treatment of men versus its treatment of women has been and continues to be unbalanced.

The biological differences between men and woman have allowed for oppression through much of human history. According to Paula M. Cooney, in her essay, “The Word Become Flesh: Woman’s Body, Language, and Value,” “unlike men who are oppressed for being poor, of color, losers in a war, or on the ‘wrong’ side of an ideology, women are oppressed simply for

being women” (17). It does not take much digging to find that this has been the case throughout history. Because of child mortality rates and the dangers of carrying and delivering a child, there was reason, hundreds of years ago, to attempt to protect women from dangerous activities in order to ensure the survival of the species. However, the natural instinct to protect the species by protecting the females eventually led to stereotypes of women being weak, with some of society’s most intelligent men insisting that women were simply designed to be beneath men and that they had little use other than breeding. This is, in fact, the premise for *The Handmaid’s Tale*; throughout this text, women are essentially enslaved as living incubators in order to increase the population and ensure the survival of the species. The concept is summed up early on when Offred, the protagonist, views another Handmaid who has gotten pregnant; she says that “now that [the pregnant Handmaid] is the carrier of life, she is closer to death, and needs special security” (35). When the population shrinks, it becomes necessary to protect new life in any way possible, and it is necessary to do whatever possible to increase the chances of new life’s survival. However, this is taken to extremes in *The Handmaid’s Tale* in order to show both how ridiculous the way women are viewed truly is and to show how close society may be to this sort of dystopia. Based solely on their ability to conceive, women have long been—and continue to be—treated as beneath men.

The fact that women have been so long treated as lesser is the exact reason that people should continue to fight for change, even as things do get better. Though *The Handmaid’s Tale* is an extreme example, it has continued to draw attention in the thirty-plus years since its initial publication, which arguably shows that this dystopia feels far closer to reality than one might like to think. The novel has constant references to how things were before women were oppressed like this and how quickly things changed, which is potentially why it feels so realistic; Offred points out herself, after seeing the Japanese tourists that “seem undressed,” that “it has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this,” and she refers to what women experience throughout the novel as “protection” [sic](38, 32). The complete seizure of women’s finances, property, names, lives, and identity itself leads to a society of women that, despite remembering what life once was, cannot help but feel that the lives they now live are how things “should” be. The women in this novel are in a sort of sociological Stockholm Syndrome, wherein the abuse and manipulation of their society has been so persistent that it now feels like this is how things always were. In the words of Theo Finigan, in his article called “‘Into the Memory Hole:’ Totalitarianism and Mal d’Archive in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” “The Gil-

ead regime's assault on personal and social memory has created an almost unbridgeable chasm between the unstable signifier of Offred's memories and the signified of past reality" (441). Though Offred does, technically, remember (and even daydream about) her past life, this small moment where she feels that the Japanese tourists are immodest, despite admitting that "I used to dress like that" shows how quickly women adjusted and accepted that the regime of Gilead is simply the way things should be (38). Despite the fact that this is a fictional story, this is portrayed as a potential reality, and it does so in such a way that shows that if women do not continue to fight for equality, what progress they have made can be easily stripped away.

As pointed out, however, in the real world, oppression is usually much more subtle than it is in *The Handmaid's Tale*; though it should be acknowledged that the events of said novel are, technically, within the grasp of reality, a larger concern to the modern reader should be the ways that women continue to be subtly viewed as "lesser." Similar to *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Left Hand of Darkness* takes place in a potential future, though the future shown in Le Guin's novel is not dystopian like Atwood's. On the surface, actually, feminine oppression should seem impossible in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, as the natives of the planet that it takes place on are completely androgynous. Le Guin acknowledges the reason behind feminine oppression on Earth; one of the Earth natives that researched Gethen writes in his notes that "the fact that everyone between seventeen and thirty-five or so is liable to be ... 'tied down to childbearing,' implies that no one is quite so thoroughly 'tied down' here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be;" especially notably, they follow this by saying that "burden and privilege are shared out pretty equally; everybody has the same risk to run or choice to make. Therefore nobody here is quite so free as a free man anywhere else" (93-94). This statement alone acknowledges that it is, in fact, men that are the primary oppressors because of women's ability to bear children. The gender of the researcher that made these notes is not revealed, which is perhaps significant; if the researcher is a man, then he is incredibly self-aware, while, if the researcher is a woman, it is arguable that she may be attempting to make a point to any male readers. The lack of revelation here may seem minor, but seeing as the majority of characters in this novel are androgynous, and the protagonist that is gendered is male, the context that this note was made in could be notable to the events of the novel as a whole. The protagonist, Genly Ai, says himself that he "can't really tell you what women are like" because he "never thought about it much;" it is simply that "the heaviest single factor in one's life is whether one's born male or female," adding that "in most societies, it determines ... everything" (235,

234). Ai finds himself entirely incapable of explaining how women are different than men in society because, as a man, he has never had to consider it. While he says that one's sex determines practically every aspect of their life, he has never had to think about it much, which shows the freedom of men that the researcher had been referring to. A female character would have, likely, been able to explain much better how men differ and how, while women are technically equal, they tend to be excluded from certain aspects of society based solely on their ability to bear children. In the words of Rebecca Adams in her essay, "Narrative Voice and Unimaginability of the Utopian 'Feminine' in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and 'The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas,'" Le Guin, as a woman, is conducting a "groundbreaking interrogation of gender" that a man simply has no need to consider (183). It should also not be ignored that this novel takes place far in the future—though the year is not given—showing that Le Guin, despite clearly pushing for change in this novel, imagines a world in which this does not actually change much for Earth; as Le Guin is a woman, this backs up the fact that women are almost forced to think about how they are oppressed throughout their lives and must be the ones to rally for change; men are "free" enough to have no need to concern themselves with it.

Continuing with *The Left Hand of Darkness* and LeGuin's portrayal of gender, Ai's male view of feminine characteristics is, overall, negative. He goes so far as to admit that it is "perhaps this soft, supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted" in Estraven, and he refers to him as having an "effeminate deviousness;" he also refers to very few Gethenians as female, and in regards to the one that he does consistently refer to as such, he says that "I thought of him as my landlady, for he had a fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature" (12, 14, 48). Though Ai has not had to consider what about women makes them different than men, he knows what he believes women are like, and he overall appears to see them as beneath him. Even when he sees someone as having a feminine, "kindly" nature, he refers to them as being suspicious and nosy, also traditionally feminine characteristics. Adams points this out as well, saying that "all the things Genly dislikes about the Gethenians are precisely those qualities historically (and contemporarily) ascribed to women" (185). It does not appear to be a conscious decision on Ai's part to dislike the feminine characteristics of the native peoples, but it is, nevertheless, a constant state of mind for him. Despite the fact that all of the things he openly dislikes are feminine, he also acknowledges that the lack of a constantly male presence has profound effects on society. Wendy Gay Pearson, in her essay, "Postcolonialism/s, Gender/s, Sexuality/ies and the Leg-

acy of ‘The Left Hand of Darkness’: Gwyneth Jones’s Aleutians Talk Back,” describes Gethen as having the “non-violent, non-patriarchal character of a true utopia,” since the aforementioned researcher admits that “there is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protector, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive,” and adds that without a constant male presence, there has been “the elimination of war,” suggesting that war is, perhaps, “a purely masculine displacement-activity, a vast Rape” (Pearson 36; Le Guin 94, 96). It is never fully established if this lack of pure masculinity is what keeps war from existing, but it cannot be ignored that the constant state of peace that Gethen experiences is something that true humanity has never been able to experience so long as men have been a part of society. Arguably, Le Guin intends to make the reader question, by writing this, which of humanity’s halves is truly “strong” or “weak,” but the only consistently male character throughout the novel does not see how he views women as less.

This idea of “effeminate deviousness” returns in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, with Esther being treated as if she is faking her illness when she begins to show signs of depression. In the words of Rosi Smith, in her essay, “Seeing Through the Bell Jar: Distorted Female Identity in Cold War America,” “Plath and her protagonist came of age in an era where women were explicitly told that happiness could only be achieved through the enactment of a biological imperative, in a society in which all deviance was treated with suspicion” (34). Therefore, when Esther insists, throughout the novel, that she does not want to marry and have children, she is force-fed the idea that doing so will make her happy, and that if she wants to be happy, she must do this. However, the more that this ideal is forced upon her, the more Esther falls into a depression. When she finally seeks help, she is treated as women have often been throughout history—as if her ailment were essentially her being “hysterical” and that an orgasm—getting married and having sex—would fix her. She is asked to tell the doctor what she thinks is wrong with her, which, as she points out, “made it sound as if nothing was really wrong, I only thought it was wrong” (137). Because Esther is a woman who has chosen not to fulfill the role society has told her that she must fill, she is treated as if her seeking help is simply her looking for attention; she is, after all, a woman, and, in the minds of those around her, if she would choose to raise a family like every generation of women before her, all would continue to be right in society and in her mind. Childbirth and its use as the key to feminine oppression is nearly as clear in this novel as it is in *The Handmaid’s Tale*; when Esther observes another woman giving birth, Will, a man, tells her that women will “never want to have

a baby” if they see what childbirth looks like, adding that “it’ll be the end of the human race” (67). It almost seems laughable that a man is telling a woman that she should not be allowed to see how a woman’s body works; this is base-level oppression. However, this does not seem to strike even Esther as odd, showing how normalized such oppression is in society at this time. Esther is an intelligent woman, but the pressure for her to settle down and have children is pervasive throughout the novel because that is what is expected of women at this time. Her dreams of getting a degree and becoming a writer are essentially mocked through the entire text; this was normal at this time, though, as Ernest Earnest points out in his essay, “The College Girl, the Gibson Girl, and the Titaness,” that criticizes “argued that women [in colleges] would handicap the progress of men,” adding that “the appropriately named Professor Silliman of Yale ... stated that the best diploma for a woman was a large family and a happy husband” (210). This was a common mindset until relatively recently in history, and this is how Esther is treated throughout the novel; the other characters consistently tell her how happy she will be once she has a husband and children. Even female friends she makes in college seem to assume that she is there to find a potential mate; Doreen suggests early on that “Lenny can get you a nice fellow,” and when Buddy asks her to marry him, she says that she is “never going to get married,” to which he responds that “you’re crazy ... you’ll change your mind” (31, 97). Any purpose she has as a human being is constantly overlooked for her ability to bear children; whether she wants them or not, as a woman, it is assumed that Esther will fulfill her “duty” as a woman to marry and have children.

Meanwhile, the hypocritical nature of men’s sexuality versus women’s is also pervasive in this novel with the idea of Buddy being seduced while Esther receives articles from her mother about why she should not have sex before or outside of marriage. When Buddy admits to Esther that he has had sex in the past, the “effeminate deviousness” that Ai believes Estraven to portray in *The Left Hand of Darkness* returns, as “of course, somebody had seduced Buddy, Buddy hadn’t started it and it wasn’t really his fault” (73). Notably, it is Buddy that claims that he was seduced, and the waitress that he had sex with is not present in the novel to give her side of the story. In other words, whether one believes that Buddy was seduced depends solely on how much they trust him, and he appears to be the one that is actually portraying deviousness by telling Esther this story. It is also, arguably, important that it is a waitress that supposedly seduces Buddy, because, according to Renee Dowbina, in her essay, “Consuming Appetites: Food, Sex, and Freedom in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*,” “food is symbolic of the

expression and tempering of [Esther's] larger desires: the freedom not to know what she wants to be (or to balance more than one role) as an adult, sexual freedom and control over her reproduction" (569). Though this does specifically refer to Esther, if one reads food in *The Bell Jar* as symbolic of one's sexual appetite, then it seems even clearer that Buddy is making up the story about being seduced; since a waitress is one who serves food to one who orders it, the argument would be that Buddy is the one who "ordered," or initiated, the affair, and the waitress served her role as one who provides food (or, in this case, sex) to fulfill someone else's appetite. Though Buddy, as a man, is free to satisfy this sexual appetite, Esther is cautioned not to do so, and she questions the fairness of this sort of society; she says that "I couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not;" this is preceded by her saying that the article her mother sent her said that "even if [men] weren't pure, they wanted to be the ones to teach their wives about sex," saying that men defended refusing to marry non-virgins because although "they would try to persuade a girl to have sex and say they would marry her later ... as soon as she gave in, they would lose all respect for her and [say] that if she did that with them then she would do that with other men" (85, 84-85). Though the men are the ones doing the seducing here and being devious, it is the women who will take the fall in the end. Esther acknowledges this as just part of how society works, and the pervasive nature of how she, as a woman, is oppressed by men makes it so that even when she outright states that it is men who do the majority of this deceptive seducing, she does not acknowledge that this might be the case with Buddy; as in *The Handmaid's Tale*, this treatment of women as beneath men, even in this small way, is so interwoven into society that women have a sort of sociological Stockholm syndrome, making it so that the few that question it, such as Esther, are not taken seriously.

Each of these novels shows how women tend to be looked down upon, from subtle ways such as a man being distrustful of feminine qualities to major ways such as being told that they should not know how their own bodies work for the good of humanity. The idea that women may be as heavily oppressed as they are in *The Handmaid's Tale* seems almost laughable, but it was not so long ago in society that this was, essentially, how women were viewed. The lack of questioning in Esther in *The Bell Jar* shows how women may view society's double-standards as normal, which could, arguably, lead to a society such as Gilead if left unchecked. The goal of humanity in regards to sex and gender should be to work toward a society such as the one on Gethen, where one's sex, gender, or sexuality do not in

any way determine what they can or cannot be in their lives.

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# Honor, Nationalism, and Masculinity: The Triune Recipe for Oppression and Dehumanization

Jonathan Boles

Throughout Shakespeare's plays *Troilus and Cressida* and *Titus Andronicus*, a strong sense of nationalistic honor, conflated with masculinity, is continually displayed, particularly by the male characters. Throughout both of the plays, female characters are often the ones who are injured in the name of this nationalistic honor system. In *Titus Andronicus*, Titus' Daughter, Lavinia, traded by her father for the purpose of marriage, raped and dismembered by two male characters, and finally sacrificed in an attempt to secure her father's honor. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Troilus is portrayed as useless because of qualities deemed effeminate, and Cressida is constantly commodified and used as a trade piece by several male characters in the play. While the swapping of Cressida as a ware for trade is taking place, the same men who are taking part in the swapping are being commodified and judged based on their ability to perform in war in order to uphold their nationalistic honor. During the time these plays were written, society had some particularly abrasive views on nationality, sexuality, and honor which greatly influenced certain aspects of the plays. According to George Taylor, "Narratives of national and communal identity in the early modern period rest firmly on the premise that society is best served when men excise sexuality, sensuality, and passion from their bodies and souls in order to carry out the more demanding and more important business of the nation" (418). In both *Titus Andronicus* and *Troilus and Cressida*, the main male characters forsake their military or social duties in the pursuit of their own pleasure which then effeminizes them and puts the women in their lives in a position to be dishonored and violated so that the nationalistic honor system might be rebalanced.

At the onset of *Titus Andronicus*, Titus has the opportunity to become emperor, but he denies it, which can be seen as a subversion of the nationalistic system and also self-emasculating. The play begins with Titus returning home after leading the conquest of the Goths. Because Titus was the general who was responsible for the great victory, the people of Rome seek to appoint him as emperor, since theirs has recently died. However,

instead of accepting the position, Titus asks them to elect Saturninus. By denying the seat of power and instead seeking his own personal interests over the interests of Rome, Titus is removing himself from that position of nationalistic honor which places an enormous amount of emphasis on military conquest and leadership. Since Titus will no longer be leading the military and will not be leading the nation, he assumes a position that is less honorable and masculine than both his previous position as general and his possible position as emperor. Consequently, Titus becomes an emasculated individual which sets him up for further disrespect and dishonoring.

Just before rejecting the office of emperor, Titus has Tamora's son sacrificed for the sake of nationalistic honor which ultimately brings the most harm upon his daughter. When Titus returns home from war, a ritualistic sacrifice to the gods is required of him, so he decides to sacrifice one of the sons of Tamora, queen of the recently captured Goths. When she sees this, she says, "Stay, Roman brethren! Gracious conqueror, Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed—A mother's tears in passion for her son—And if thy sons were ever dear to thee, O, think my son to be as dear to me!" (1. 1. 104-108). At this point—before Titus has rejected the seat of emperor—he is seen as a victorious conqueror by Tamora. As this figure of grace and victory, Tamora thinks he will be honorable as he seems and spare her son. However, Titus kills her son anyway, and when Tamora becomes queen of Rome, her sons inflict a great deal of harm upon Titus' daughter by raping her in the name of sport and revenge.

The rape and dismemberment of Lavinia proves that women are usually made victims by the masculine honor system and also shows how they are used as a certain type of honor currency. After Tamora's sons, Demetrius and Chiron, have the opportunity to execute their premeditated plan to rape Lavinia, Tamora says to her sons, "Hadst thou in person ne'er offended me, Even for his sake am I pitiless. Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain To save your brother from the sacrifice, But fierce Andronicus would not relent. Therefore away with her, and use her as you will; The worse to her, the better loved of me (2. 3. 161-167)." Here, Tamora no longer speaks of Titus as victorious or gracious. Instead, she sees him as fierce and relentless which are terms removed from the language of honor to the language of barbarism and wild justice. Just a few moments later, she says, "So should I rob my sweet sons of their fee. No, let them satisfy their lust on thee" (2. 3. 179-180). Because Titus chose upholding his nationalistic honor by killing Tamora's son, his honor was then stripped of him by the defilement of his daughter, which hurt Lavinia far more than his sense of dishonor hurt him. According to Brandon Polite, when speaking of Lavinia's ultimate role in

the plot, “[S]he becomes an item of trade within the retaliatory scheme: she gets even with Tamora and, as such, her life can be redeemed for Tamora’s” (6). This act of violence and spite from Tamora set Lavinia up to be instrumental in her demise, but ultimately does not seek any justice for Lavinia.

In an attempt to regain his honor and inflict his ideal of talionic justice, Titus concocts a plan to feed Tamora’s sons to her by the hands of Lavinia. As Titus kills Demetrius and Chiron, he says, “And when that they are dead, Let me go grind their bones to powder small, And with this hateful liquor temper it, And in that paste let their vile heads be baked... So. Now bring them in, for I’ll play the cook And see them ready against their mother comes (5. 2. 197-205). Titus’ use of the phrase “hateful liquor” seems to be reflective of the transition from gracious and victorious Titus, to the now emasculated and blood-crazed Titus who has fallen from honor. When speaking of Titus’ overall plot to maintain and regain honor, Polite explains that “the talionic demand for in-kind retaliation, ‘eye for an eye,’ which re-humanizes victims by licensing them to dehumanize those who wronged them, forcing the wrongdoers to have experiences similar enough to those they caused their victims to rebalance the scales of justice” (4). Since Tamora caused Titus to feel dishonored and hopeless at the mutilation and defilement of his daughter, he seeks to inflict the same type of blow upon Tamora by tricking her into eating her mutilated sons to her defilement. Polite also says, “Titus’s taboo-transgressing act of forcing Tamora to eat her own sons reasserts the Roman code of honor as the dominant moral order” (3). Even though Titus satisfies the Roman code of honor by his violent act, Lavinia still does not receive any justice of her own.

Throughout the play, Lavinia is only used as a type of honor currency that is taken and given for the honor of other people, particularly the men, which is fully shown by her death at her father’s own hand. Titus kills Lavinia at the end of the play for the sake of his own honor and pride. At the banquet where Titus feeds Tamora’s sons to her, Titus asks Saturninus, “Was it well done of rash Virginius To slay his daughter with his own right hand Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered?” (5. 3. 36-38). To which Saturninus responds, “It was, Andronicus” (39). Then Titus asks him what his reasoning is, to which he responds, “Because the girl should not survive her shame, And by her presence still renew his sorrows” (40-41). It is important to note that the primary emphasis in Saturninus’ reasoning behind the murder being justified is not that the girl had been assaulted and could not live with her shame. It was because her father would have to live with that shame, dishonor, and sorrow. The honor of the father was seen as more important than the life of the daughter.

Almost immediately after Saturninus responds, Titus kills Lavinia. By this exchange, it is clear that the honor and feelings of Titus was esteemed more highly than the life of his daughter. According to Polite, “Lavinia’s position in this world is thus revealed to be contradictory: she is worthy of justice, but cannot be made whole by it. While Lavinia may have been reintegrated into the prevailing moral scheme prior to her death, we learn that it is one for which she, as a woman whose chastity has been violated, is no longer fit...” (7). Within the social honor system that was centered around masculine warriors, Lavinia’s life was of little value since she had been defiled causing her to be without the hope of gaining the interest of any “honorable man.” Since she is rendered useless goods—in their eyes—she is better off dead, and that death somehow restores justice and honor to her father.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Troilus is initially displayed as a man who has more desire to prevail in his personal conquests than in the military conquests of his nation. The first thing Titus says in the play is, “Call here my varlet. I’ll unarm again. Why should I war without the walls of Troy That find such a cruel battle here within? Each trojan that is master of his heart, Let him to field—Troilus, alas, hath none” (1. 1. 1-5). Here Troilus expresses that he has no desire to battle when there is a battle raging in himself. By speaking of his conquest for Cressida’s body in warlike terms, Troilus is subverting his military and male responsibilities as a warrior and conflating them with his sexual desires. It is later learned that that battle is a battle of the heart. According to him, he has fallen in love with Cressida, and that is all he can focus on. According to Taylor, “Troilus’s lovesickness exists as the antithesis of manly self-restraint and places the highly individualistic pleasures of sexual desire over and above the manly allegiances of national militaristic bonds. Troilus’s emasculation arises from these two separate but related conditions-his rejection of the manly venture of national defense and his excessive sexual desire for Cressida” (417). In other words, Troilus is rendering himself as less than a man and almost useless to his nation as a warrior by forsaking the pursuit of valor and victory in war for the pursuit of sexual game.

Similar to Titus, one of the first things Troilus says of himself is self-emasculating, which sets up much of the drama that is to unfold later in the play. While speaking to Pandarus, Troilus says, “I am weaker than a woman’s tear, Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance, Less valiant than the virgin in the night, And skillless as unpracticed infancy” (1. 1. 8-12). Here, Troilus is contrasting himself to the valiant fighters within the Greek camp. By likening himself to a virgin and a woman’s tear, he is saying that he is too soft and lacking in the proper masculine ability to carry out his nation’s expectations

on the battlefield. According to Taylor, “He has abandoned his position on the battlefield and thus lies ‘weaker than a woman’s tear,’ completely effeminated by his excessive desire for her, identifying so thoroughly with her that he compares himself to a ‘virgin in the night’” (419-420). In other words, Troilus has acknowledged the fact that he is less valiant and honorable than the other fighters because he is not as masculine as they are. He has his mind set on things that are labeled effeminate and weak. This puts Troilus in a perfect position to be cuckolded by Diomedes, who has been given Cressida as an item for the trade of another Trojan who was in the Greek camp.

When Diomedes steals Troilus’ horse, Diomedes inflicts the ultimate blow upon Troilus by further emasculating him by taking his war steed and also reaffirming his cuckolding. At the beginning of act five, Diomedes says, “Go, go, my servant, take thou Troilus’ horse; Present the fair steed to my Lady Cressid. Fellow, commend my service to her beauty. Tell her I have chastised the amorous Trojan And am her knight by proof” (5. 1. 1-5). In an attempt to win Cressida over in some strange act of chivalrous horse thievery, Diomedes has Troilus’ horse taken—by the hand of another man—in hopes of showing himself to be more masculine and honorable than Troilus. When Troilus finally confronts him, he says “O traitor Diomed! Turn thy false face, thou traitor, And pay the life thou ow’st me for my horse!” (5. 6. 6-7). The act of treachery which Troilus felt demanded Diomedes’ life was not the taking of Cressida, rather it was the taking of his horse. It was not uncommon for Shakespeare to make puns with the word horse, since it sounds so close to the word whore. If that is what is happening here, then Troilus and Diomedes are not fighting over just a horse, they are fighting over Troilus’ masculinity, and his ability to fulfill his nationalistic responsibilities, at Cressida’s expense.

Even though the primary emphasis is placed on Troilus throughout the play, Cressida is the one who is most hurt by the actions of the other individuals. At one point, shortly after Cressida has been traded to the Greeks, many of the main male characters are gathered around Cressida—some secretly—commenting on her in a negative manner. Thersites says, “any man may sing her, if he can take her clef. She’s noted” (5. 2. 10-11). This is a prime example of how Cressida is deemed a whore and given very little worth by the men in the play, even though she is only in her situation because of the actions of the male characters around her. She was given to Troilus by her uncle, Pandarus, in some strange pseudo-wedding type of ceremony, used by Troilus to fulfill his sexual desires, traded to Diomedes in order to have a Trojan man returned, and somehow, even though she has done or said almost nothing herself, she

is deemed a whore. This is a perfect example of the outworking of the conflated idea of national masculinity harming women. The men in the play are operating perfectly within those parameters—at least until Diomedes steals Troilus' horse—yet only when they lapse into some sort of meta-femininity are they looked down upon by the other men in the play.

Throughout both of these plays, the individuals who are deemed effeminate, or that fail to fulfill their militaristic, honorable destinies, are constantly abused by those around them. Because Troilus is portrayed as more effeminate, he is deemed less able to fulfill his nationalistic responsibilities and is blatantly disrespected by other characters in the play. Similarly, because Titus denied his role as general and ruler, he was left in a less honored position. Throughout these two plays, nationalistic honor and masculinity are constantly conflated, and because of this conflation, individuals who are either women themselves or are labeled as being effeminate are valued less. Troilus and Titus were both devalued by their respective countrymen. However, it was the women who were closest to them who suffered the most at their subversion of the already male-centered honor system showing that in each culture, effeminacy was a quality associated with weakness and uselessness. Lavinia was dismembered, raped, and killed, all in the name of some perverted sense of honor and revenge, and Cressida was traded like goods, called a whore by almost every male that knew her, and sent off to live with the Greeks who were assaulting her city. These injustices prove the militaristic focus of their masculine, nationalized honor-system and the absolute devaluation of anything that could not serve to protect, propagate, or preserve it.

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# *The Unseen Wounds of War: WWII's Traumatic Toll on Salinger's Noncombatant Characters*

*Anna Sims*

A commonality among several of J.D. Salinger's short stories is the eerie presence of World War II in the peripheral. The war triggered a widespread upheaval of general normalcy for a large population of American citizens. Thus, many of the characters in these stories, no matter how closely or distantly they mingled with the affairs of war, are attempting to find their bearings after this period of radical change. Though some of Salinger's characters are veterans, most of them were noncombatants during the war and, though they did not take part in the war directly, seem to bear unseen wounds of some form or fashion. These wounds cannot be sutured and healed like the ones obtained on the battlefield. Rather, they are internal; they bleed into the characters' futures no matter how far in distance or time they manage to get from the war. Eloise, of the short story "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," is still wounded by grief years after her sweetheart, Walt, is killed in a freak accident during the war. On the other hand, Franklin of "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," suffers on account of his wounded pride after evading the draft due to a heart condition. Through the lasting trauma that these two characters endure, Salinger portrays the pervasive emotional collateral damage amassed by the noncombatants of post-war America.

As a noncombatant and as a woman, Eloise has little to do with the war, but the course of her life is greatly affected by it. She "left college in the middle of her sophomore year, in 1942, a week after she had been caught with a soldier" (18). She forfeits her educational opportunity—her opportunity to become more than the disgruntled housewife that she eventually becomes—for a soldier. Yet, the most traumatic event from the war, at least in Eloise's eyes, is the accidental death of her sweetheart, Walt. He was also a soldier and was killed overseas while "he and some other boy were putting this little Japanese stove in a package" (30). Walt did, and still does, mean a great deal to Eloise, as he is affectionately described as "the only boy [she] ever knew that could make [her] laugh" (26). When he dies, it is

as if any chance of Eloise having a future with which she would be content dies with him.

With the death of Walt, and thus the death of her happy future, Eloise finds some unhealthy and unpleasant ways to cope with her trauma. Throughout “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut,” Eloise drinks profusely and vehemently urges her friend and former college roommate, Mary Jane, to do so as well. She talks of, and to, her black maid, Grace, in a rude and demeaning manner, complaining about her often and referring to her as “dopey” (20). Eloise even denies Grace’s husband permission to sleep in Grace’s room for a night when the roads are snowy. Eloise tauntingly calls Mary Jane a “career girl,” most likely because she is bitter that Mary Jane has a career when she does not (30). The bulk of the former roommates’ conversation is spent reminiscing about their pasts. This might show that Eloise glorifies the past, especially before the war, because of her discontent with the present. She sees her husband, Lew, only in comparison with Walt, and therefore views him as unfunny, unintelligent, and a liar for conning her into marrying him by telling her “he loved Jane Austen” (29). She doesn’t seem to be close with her daughter, Ramona, either. Eloise comments that Ramona looks just like Lew, which alludes to how disconnected she feels from the people with whom she should be closest (22). These instances allude to how her trauma negatively manifests itself in her day-to-day life.

Eloise’s discontent for her surroundings, her situation in life, and the people she lives with may stem from the fact that the future she would have chosen for herself—one with Walt or one where she has an education and a job—was stripped from her during the war, senselessly and without her permission. In the book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth gives insight into why Eloise’s trauma seems so far-reaching: “The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight—thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing” (92). Though the presence of her husband, of her daughter, and of her life in general are not technically “repetitions of the traumatic event,” to her, they are probably rubbing salt in the wound—unconscious reminders that she is only a spectator of her own life. Years after Walt’s death, Eloise seems only to see her husband, daughter, and life as the painful aftermath of his passing and feels as if she is living out the worst-case scenario. Her emotional wounds keep bleeding into her future, and she cannot see her life clearly because it will always be stained with Walt’s blood.

Likewise, due to his medical condition, Franklin in “Just Before the War with the Eskimos” cannot engage in combat and finds his life to be different than he would have planned. Franklin’s situation seems to be explained deftly in Sigmund Freud’s essay “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” wherein he states that “the individual who is not himself a combatant - and so is a cog in the gigantic machine of war - feels bewildered in his orientation, and inhibited in his powers and activities.” Like Eloise, Franklin was also in college before he “quit” (44). He then goes to work in an airplane factory for thirty-seven months (45). Though Franklin does not go into much detail, it can be assumed that he was working in this airplane factory as part of the war effort. In this way, he is very much “a cog in the gigantic machine of war,” as Freud put it. Franklin puts his life on hold to contribute to the war, but he’s not eligible to participate in the heroic combat duties that men of his age are praised for doing. Although his father wants him to go back to college, Franklin, who is only twenty-four, “says he’s too old” (52). It is as if Franklin’s life passed him by while he was working in the factory, and now he does not have anything to show for it. He emerges from the war “bewildered in his orientation,” and unaware of what to do next.

Franklin’s post-war slump can be seen clearly in his appearance. He is described as a “young man wearing glasses and pajamas...with extremely poor posture” (39). His hair is described as “bed-dishevelled” and he has “a couple of days’ growth of sparse, blond beard” (40). This conjures a pitiful and pitiable image. He is generally quite rude to Ginnie, his little sister’s friend, possibly as a defense mechanism for his low self-esteem. When he makes a remark about “old guys” going to fight the “Eskimos,” Ginnie remarks that Franklin “wouldn’t have to go anyway.” He replies, “I know” (46). This comment might have wounded his pride if he thought she was alluding to his heart condition. This Eskimo passage might have been his subtle commentary on his annoyance at not being able to fight. The fact that the government would send men around sixty years old to fight, but still would not allow him fight, seems senseless. The physical description of Franklin and his attitude solidify the idea that this man is self-conscious and has low self-esteem.

In tow with their emotional wounds, both Eloise and Franklin have physical wounds that mimic their internal strife. In the dramatic and heart-breaking climax of “Uncle Wiggily In Connecticut,” Eloise finally releases some of her pent-up trauma and angst. When she erratically and drunkenly puts her daughter to bed, she purposefully bangs her knee against the foot of Ramona’s bed. In tears, she repeats “Poor Uncle Wiggily,” a phrase Walt

had said when she had twisted her ankle once (35). The sad phrase and her willingness to hurt herself in order to feel how she once did when she was with him, even if the feeling had to be pain, is evidence that she is still suffering all these years later. She has become numb to life and just wants to feel something.

Similarly, Franklin's finger has been sliced open from the beginning of the story (39). He does not even know how to tend to it and relies on Ginnie, who is significantly younger than he is. This wound might mimic his futile position he played in the war. Men of his age fought and died on the battlefield, and Franklin cannot even tend to the cut on his finger. This shows that he's not as much of a "man" as he should be.

Through Eloise and Franklin, Salinger shows that not even the noncombatants came out of the war unscathed. Eloise cannot reconcile her current life with the one she might have had if the war hadn't stolen it from her. For this, she is perpetually miserable. Franklin struggles to rebound after the war because it is as if life has passed him by. When the war is over, he feels too old to pick up where he left off. Thus, he is stuck in a period of stasis. The pain and trauma from the unseen wounds of war are as chronic and visceral as the ones achieved in combat.

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# Fiction

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# *First Place*

## *A Town and A Dead Man*

*Chris Kalil*

It is so hot and the leg is screaming. It will not stop bleeding. I should not be able to walk but I am walking, and I feel every crunch of the gravel in the hole in my leg. Her hair was greasy, but I didn't mind. The flies will not leave it alone and the pavement is hot. The cars, they will not stop. A mother with children in the back. She will not look at me as she yells at a boy and a girl not to look at me and I wave and they wave back and then they are gone far ahead. She always smiled at me. A big white dog barks at me.

"You are near. Come no closer. I will bite."

§

Please, please be okay. I would have stopped, but Danni and Morgan. I am a horrible mother. They will think that it is okay to leave people if it isn't convenient. I'm going to need more cleaning rags soon. Please, be better than your mother. Second shift is soon and I have to get them to Momma's. My poor babies; I'm so sorry. The rags are getting real raggedy. Mrs. Somali gives me the Lemon Pledge so I don't have to use my own. She has her own vacuum, but I hate the uprights, so I will use mine. The first thing that you do when you clean a toilet is to wipe all of it off with a dry paper towel. I used to bathe you in the sink. After you do that you throw it away. Never use a rag that you cleaned a toilet with for anything else. Next you spray the whole thing down and you let it sit for about forty seconds. If you wait too long, it will run, and that is just nasty. He threw up the first time he changed Morgan's diaper. You start with the outside and then you do the lid and under the lid and then the seat and under the seat and then the bottom near the floor. It is always the most dirty near the bottom. These chemicals are going to kill me. My poor babies, you should be with your momma.

§

Every third crack is a chasm that I must step over. Every fourth crack I must step on. The others don't matter as much. If that car turns the corner before I count to five five times then I am gay.

"Onetwothreefourfive onetwothreefourfive onetwothreefourfive onetwothreefourfive onethreefourfive onetwothreefourfive."

If I look up and there are no birds then I am not gay. If I look at the house and there is no one there then I am not gay. McDonalds is a five minute walk and fries sound really good right now. James finally told me about him

and Andrea. He touched my shoulder and pulled his head so close to mine.

“I got it in, bro! I got it in! It was fucking amazing, dude. Your boy isn’t a virgin anymore!”

The third crack is a chasm and I must not step on it or I will fall in. His hands. His eyes. The way he looks at me. He will never look at me the way he looks at her.

“About fucking time, dude.”

Onetwothreefourfive. Please hold my hand. Onetwothreefourfive. Two McDoubles, a large fry, and a Coke

“Welcome to McDonalds, can I help you?”

§

We all go to Robert’s after school and sometimes when Momma picks me up, she buys me a slushee. The trampoline is big, way bigger than my cousins. I have to finish the spelling list for tomorrow. Mrs. Foster gets angry if you don’t finish it. I bounce so high. I jump and then Robert jumps and then Tyler jumps. When you punch someone it makes a \*pow\* sound. I don’t like Robert much, but he has a bigger trampoline and soda. I feel bad sometimes. Pastor David told us that if you say God Damnit than you will burn in hell. Will I burn in hell for not liking Robert but liking his trampoline? Charge. C-H-A-R-G-E. Blink. B-L-I-N-K. Everyone. E-V-E-R-Y-O-N-E. We play until my mom and Tyler’s mom come and pick us up. It’s still warm out so we can still jump. One day, Tyler held the basketball up to his head.

“Look! I got two heads!”

“Yeah it almost like you have a brother now.”

Tyler started screaming and crying and hitting Robert. I stopped jumping and stared at them. Tyler on top of Robert. Robert crying. I couldn’t hear the punches. All I heard was them screaming and the squeaking of the trampoline springs. Spring. S-P-R-I-N-G. Robert’s mom ran out and started screaming and pulling at Tyler.

“Don’t you dare, you little bastard!”

We don’t go over to Robert’s house anymore. Bastard. I don’t know how to spell bastard. Is Tyler going to go to hell for hitting Robert? The sunset always looks so pretty when I lay down and look up from the trampoline. Brother. B-R-O-T-H-E-R. Momma picked me up and she doesn’t talk much.

“Come on, baby. It’s time to go home.”

“Can I get a slushee?”

“No.”

§

It is late and there is a man who fiddles with his radio. He is tired and just wants to get home. He never gets the song that he is looking for when he hits shuffle. He gets sad music when he wants happy music, and he gets happy music when he wants sad music. The traffic goes even slower than it normally does.

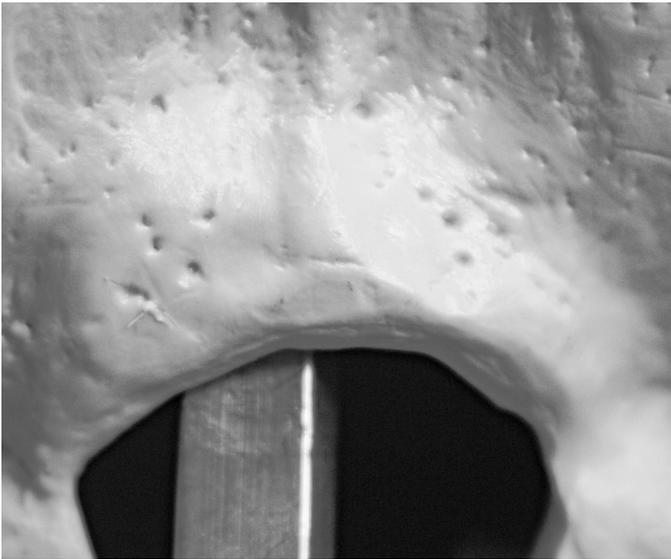
“The speed limit is fifty. Speed the fuck up! God! Move! Shit! Lights! Slow down, slow down, slow down. Damn, is that dude dead. Damn, look at that hole in his leg. Alright, you looked enough you fucking vultures. Oh, come on! Don’t stop!”

The cars stop completely.

“Jesus Christ! God, I just want to go home.”

A song finally came on that he liked.

“A vodka jello a vodka jello, an amaretto an amaretto, all night all night.”



# *Second Place Reoccurring Notes*

*Ericka Coleman*

“Singing the blues is easy—if you have the emotions to go with it.”

John’s eyes are fixated on the musician as he makes his way across the room, taking the time to look all of his small, captivated audience in the eye. He can’t quite remember the man’s name but give him a break. It’s the first day of camp. No one knows anyone’s name at this point.

But he doesn’t need to know the man’s name to know that he has a presence-about-him, as his mama would call it. He makes you want to listen and listen hard. So listen hard he will.

“Now. I’m not here to teach you about emotions. I’m here to teach you about the blues; not only the history behind it but the musicality of it. It’s not a hard subject, but I have found that it does require a certain person to fall in love with it and want to produce their own kind of blues. If you come out of this camp only having fallen in love with it, I’ll still call my job done. This is a camp to educate, more than anything, and if you come away educated enough to appreciate the blues, that’s great.”

John has never been more ready to fall in love in all his 13 years of life.

§

John sprints across the campgrounds with two others trailing after him.

“I’ve never missed one of his classes and I’m not about to start now,” John gets out between labored breaths. “If I’m late because you guys were too dumb to realize that a whole cup of dish soap doesn’t go in a washing machine, I’m gonna hit you so hard your grandkids will wonder why their heads hurt.”

“C’mon, John. It’s not our fault we didn’t know!” Donnell exclaims. “We were trying to help. All those clothes smelled funky and we couldn’t take it anymore.”

“This is only the fourth class. It’s not like Mr. James will be mad at you anyway. You’re his favorite. Just tell him what happened,” David chimes in.

“I shouldn’t have to explain anything—and I’m not his favorite. I just pay attention! You two should try doing the same.” He’s sure he’s not Mr. James’ favorite; he just appreciates that John truly wants to hear what he has to say.

“Nah, Johnny. The classes that you should pay attention to are the instrumental ones. Those are the ones we’re really here for, right? We’re here

to learn to play the blues, not just to go home with facts about it. That's why there's the big performance on the last day of camp, not a big test" Donnell says.

"And that's a good thing, isn't it? Because you would fail 'cause you don't pay attention!" John fires back then pushes his legs harder to increase his pace.

§

"Dude, what have I told you? This is gross, damnit" Donnell groans.

"I'm 21 years old. I'll eat my ice cream how I want, okay?"

"Not that, John—which is still gross, too, by the way—but the dishes! I was gone for a week, man, and they look like they haven't been touched since then. If anything, it looks like you added to the pile" Donnell complains. It's not the first time John has heard this rant, and it likely won't be the last, but that doesn't mean he's actually going to listen to it today, either.

"Sorry. I can't take care of it right now. I have to head out after I finish this bowl. I'm performing tonight at The Barrelhouse. Get David to wash them" John replies with a mouth full of ice cream.

"Ugh, I should've known. You only ever eat ice cream like that when you have a big gig."

"Don't judge my pre-show ritual. At least mine doesn't sometimes make me forget who I am sometimes" John says with a smirk.

"That was one time—just once! Will you and David ever let me forget?" Donnell begs.

"Nope, not even on your deathbed" John returns, overenunciating each word to make them sting just that bit more. He walks over to the sink and has to pause a minute to figure out where to precariously place his bowl and spoon before turning to face Donnell again. "Well, I'm heading out now."

"Don't expect those dishes to be done when you come back. I'm not your mom."

"You nag enough to come close, though" John says right before closing the front door and quickly walking away before Donnell can process what was said.

§

The performance went great. Now, he has the time to just sit back and enjoy a drink and the other performers before going home.

"You know, kid, blues was done a little differently in my day, but I think you were great up there" a man says as John takes a seat at the bar.

"Thanks, sir" John replies.

"Sir? I think you know me well enough to leave that out of our conversation, kid. You learned from me, after all" the stranger says with a laugh.

“What are you talking about? I haven’t had anyone teach me anything in years.” John turns in his seat to see who exactly this stranger is. “Mr. James! I thought you were on the other end of the country. How are you?”

“I’m doing well enough, John. I’m doing even better now that I’ve seen you use what you learned at camp and then some. That was impressive, boy.” The compliment means even more now.

“Thank you. You have no idea how much that means coming from you. Your classes are what really made me take to blues. It was the passion and emotion you had in those lectures that moved me. I’ve been trying to put that emotion in my music ever since camp” John gushes, almost stumbling over his words in his eagerness to tell one of the biggest influences in his life how much his praise means.

“Ever since camp, huh?” Mr. James asks. “Do you think you’ve succeeded?”

“Well, I think in some ways I have, but there’s still a lot I’m missing.”

“That was definitely the right answer. John, I have a lot more I could teach you.”

# *Little Bunnies*

*Jonathan Boles*

I push the glass door open, walk in, and survey the room. The familiar smell of smoke and grease greets me. This place isn't usually too busy. That's why I chose it. There are a few other people here, but they're not worth paying any attention.

As I take my seat in the old booth, I think to myself that all diners must look just like this, cracked vinyl seats, ugly tables, and busted tile floors. It reminds me of the blood under my fingernails that has accumulated from constantly picking at my hangnails. Nervous habit. An elderly couple getting up from their seats breaks the dead stare I am giving the table-top. I notice that the man has his hands in his pockets. His wife places her hand on his back as they walk out of the diner. My grandmother used to touch my grandfather the exact same way. He didn't know what he had. "Must be nice", I say to myself.

I sit there for a few minutes, alone, thinking and looking out the window, watching the cars drive down the street. "Must be nice," I say to myself.

"Want some coffee, darlin'? It's kinda chilly out tonight, huh?" the waitress says with a kind and gentle smile. I don't deserve it, the kindness, but it's better than the looks of pity I've gotten used to.

"Sure," I respond while being extra careful not to make eye contact. If I do, I think, she'll know.

As she walks away, I hear the little cowbell above the door rattle, and a family walks in. They walk past me, headed to the far side of the little diner, a mom and a dad, who both look to be in their mid-twenties, and a little girl holding a stuffed bunny and a pack of those candy eggs you can only get this time of year. Why did she have to be here...of all the people and all the families that could have walked in, why this one? This makes it harder, what I have to do, but it also solidifies my choice.

I remember this time last year my little girl was holding one of those same little candy eggs. I knew how much she loved those things, so I stood real close to where they hid them in hopes that she would look at me and I could give her a soft smile or a wink, something to let her know that I was standing next to the egg she was looking for.

I think every kid should get to experience that. The thrill of looking for the eggs while also being scared of what else you might find in the tall grass. The young mind runs wild, snakes, bears, scorpions, spiders, monsters,

they all live in the tall grass. This time I don't want to be seen. I'm close to the prize, but I hope no one notices.

The waitress walks back up, holding my coffee and wearing that same gorgeous smile. Smiles like that were never meant to last.

"Here's your coffee, sweetie," she says.

"Is Robert working tonight?"

"He is. He's in the back cooking. You know Robert?"

"Yeah, I used to. His wife used to babysit my little girl. Look, don't tell him I asked, alright?"

"Sure thing, darlin'. Let me know if you need anything else."

The family gets their meal, and I decide that it's time. Maybe if they stay over there eating their meal, they won't get hurt. I stand up, and I approach the cash register.

"Coffee is on us, hun," the waitress says with that same stupid smile and soft tone.

I hand her a hundred and tell her to keep it. She can put it to better use than I will.

I make like I am walking to the bathroom before I leave, but instead I walk in the back, pull my gun, and shoot Robert dead in the chest. Four times. One shot for each year.

I think of the girl in the front with the stuffed bunny. It's a little safer now, sweetie. There is one less monster in the grass.



# *The Girl in Blue Skin*

## *Saavedra Martin*

I throw the covers off me in the dark room and sit up in bed, my shirt sticking to the back of my skin. Swinging my legs off to the side, I get up and head to the kitchen for a fresh glass of...something, anything to cool me off and make me feel less sticky. I haven't been sleeping well lately, and I don't know why. I tried taking sleeping tablets, but when those didn't work, I just gave up. Now, I just gaze up at the ceiling until whatever light I see is succumbed by darkness, and I think I may have fallen asleep, but I know I haven't. Everything has just felt off, not just because of my insane case of insomnia or the frequent dizzy spells or light headedness...I feel...different. I open the refrigerator with its scarce contents and find a milk carton, I shrug and pull it out. Reaching into the cabinet, I take out a glass and try to fill it with cold milk, but my arms are shaking so bad it sloshes everywhere. I put the carton down and try to steady myself before I pick up the glass, but it doesn't seem to help. My heart is racing out of my chest now, and my head is pounding. I'll feel better once I drink something, I thought. So, I picked up the glass and put it to my lips, but I suddenly lose my grip and it slips, crashing to the ground and leaving shards of glass and milk puddled around my feet. If I thought it couldn't get any worse; I was mistaken, because now I was leaning on the counter for support. Black dots invaded my vision, and blood rushed through my ears. I remember my energy dwindling, I remember collapsing, I remember the darkness engulfing me, I remember...

I'm running through a forest with a defining darkness, the one with no sound, the one that takes you in...and doesn't give you back. I can't feel anything as my body moves with an alarming speed. The trees go by in shapeless blurs, muddling with the blackness of the night as the sense of danger swells within me, like a being of pure horror lurked behind me. And then I saw him, the boy running ahead of me. It's not until I caught up to him that I could make out his appearance. His clothes hung off his body in threads from the jagged claw marks rippling throughout the material, and the once blue jacket now in rags hanging from his shoulders were stained a muddy red that connected with streaks of blood running down his arm and into the creases of his palm. Then a blue tinged arm lashed out, snagging onto the remnants of the clothing he had left. We started to fall, and all I could make out was the gray moonlit kissed grass and starless sky above as

we tumbled over each other. New gashes had been left all over his face now, as the blood trickled down his cheeks from a wound the size of a branch on his forehead. When I finally caught a glimpse of his eyes in the dim afterglow of the moon, they were stricken with terror as he scrambled to get away from me. I was frozen on the ground, my face unable to show the confusion swirling around in my head, but the moon is what got me first, rippling in a puddle in front of me, as I started to make out a dark figure steadily becoming clearer on the foggy surface. That's when I realized, that blood thirsty being, that flesh ripping monster, that blue tinged skin... was me. The next thing I knew, he was getting away, his tattered and spotted white t-shirt bright in the faint moonlight as I clutched what use to be his jacket.

I was found in the forest in the early morning with what appeared to be a jacket, its remnants scattered all around me in scraps, and what remained of the zipper and hood found folded between my fingers. But of course, I was only told this. I had awoken in a hospital room, its blinding lights seeping through my lids and tearing me away from my dreamless sleep. The doctors were bussing around feeling for broken bones or any signs of injury, but tests came back that I was fine and functioning normally, so I wasn't surprised when the police viewed that as suspicious. I mean, how was it that they found a nearly naked and unconscious girl in a heavily wooded area with blood dotting her entire body without any wounds? And what was up with the shredded jacket? Who's was it? This is what they asked me, but I couldn't offer an answer for their persistent questions because, truly, I didn't know myself. It baffled me as much as it did them. When they weren't getting the answers they were looking for, they finally sent me away telling me that whatever happened is still under investigation, but when I got into the car, I was peppered with another line of questions from my parents. I groaned on the inside. How many times did I have to tell these people that I don't know what the hell happened? I told them exactly what I had told the police, that I was feeling off that night and the next thing I know, I'm passed out cold in the middle of the woods with only scraps of a strangers bloody jacket to cover my privates, which is how the police found, me might I add. The questions finally stopped when we got to the house. It was torn apart. Our front door was smashed open, the bottom half splintered and hanging crookedly on one lone hinge. My eyes then traveled to the windows. Glass littered the front lawn, and when the sunlight hit it just right, you could see the prism of colors sparkling from its green blades. Whatever glass was left in the frame jutted out in sharp jagged points like glass peaks. The look of it was so serene. I honestly couldn't believe this happened just last night.

Where was I when this occurred? Who did this? That's when I remembered. I had gotten up because I couldn't sleep, but that's no surprise, so I had gone to go get...milk, wasn't it? A glass of milk, but I was shaking so bad that I dropped it...and then...what? What happened next?



# One-Act Play

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# *First Place*

## *The Paper Menagerie*

*Hanna Arnold*

Based on Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie*

### Characters

LAILA: a single woman obsessed with literary classics and the adventures they entail

JOAN: Laila's mother, obsessed with the old-fashioned ideals that women must marry to be happy

BRAD: Suitor number 1

TOM: Suitor number 2

JIM: Suitor number 3

### Introduction

*The year is 2018. Women are no longer allowing men to dominate their world, and women no longer believe marriage is the key to happiness. Gone are the days of dreams of simply being a homemaker and having a man provide for every need. Women take charge and responsibility for their own lives and fight for complete gender equality.*

### Scene One: Laila's Living Room

*A cold, dreary November morning in Mississippi. LAILA is sitting on an old fashioned couch in her favorite room, the living room that contains her most prized possessions: her classic novels. She is casually dressed in jeans and an oversized sweatshirt. She appears to be no older than twenty-five. Her books are displayed in a beautiful wooden bookcase and serve as the key focal point in the room. Laila is admiring her books aloud.*

LAILA

Oh! What perfect weather to relax and reread my favorite book! (*Rises. Slowly dances fingers across each spine of the books until she reaches Moby Dick.*) Here we are! Now I wonder how this turns out... For the thirteenth time.

*Enter JOAN, Laila's mother, dressed in her Sunday best.*

JOAN

Laila! Why on God's green earth are you just sitting there reading?! It's almost time to go to church. (*Looks Laila up and down with disapproval.*) Oh my God, you have to change! I can't have the entire congregation see you dressed in a sweater and jeans. And you should at least try to brush your hair! You look so nice with your hair all brushed.

LAILA

What's it to ya, ma? No one is gonna be paying me any attention at church. Their eyes should be on the preacher. Besides, you only want me to dress nice in case we see a "suitable young man." (*Laila rolls her eyes in disgust.*) I don't know how many times I have told you that I have absolutely zero interest in settling down, having a family, and all that crap. This isn't 1944.

JOAN

I'm well aware of that. 1944 was such a golden age, full of love and romance and dating and wholesome family life and...

LAILA

(*Interrupting.*)...And wars and racism and hostile treatment of women. Such a lovely time, I'm sure.

JOAN

In these God-awful times we live in, all we have to cling to is love, and I will never understand how someone can be happy being on their own, without a man. Men give us so many wonderful things like...

LAILA

...Like headaches and sexual assault and cheating scandals and arrogance for being the so-called "dominant sex". It's complete crap. The only men I need in my life are Faulkner, Shakespeare, Whitman, Poe, Melville... I could go on, but I think you get the picture.

JOAN

Well, I was hoping to change your mind...Don't get mad...but I uh...

LAILA

Will you just spit it out, ma?

JOAN

Well, alright. I took the liberty of learning how to best attract a husband nowadays and apparently online dating sites are the new way to attract gentlemen callers! Would you like to see your profile? I tried my best to make it as you as possible but left out your undesirable traits.

LAILA

Dating website? Undesirable traits? C'mon now, ma. You can't be serious. That's low, even for you. And I'm pretty sure that's basically illegal to impersonate someone else over the internet.

JOAN

All you do is read those books over and over all night long. There are far more important things than books!

LAILA

If I weren't meant to read them, father wouldn't have left me them. He encouraged me to go beyond this world with its awfulness and to escape to a different world. (*Dreamily.*) One full of life and adventure.

JOAN

How adventurous can you get if you just sit inside all day and read? Work is no different. You just stare blankly at a computer screen to grade your online lectures.

LAILA

I am quite fine with having my laptop. I happen to enjoy my career as an online professor. I rarely have to deal with people, I can sit at home and read between lectures and grading, and I get to inspire young people to read classics and relate them to their own lives. It's truly the perfect job for me, ma. And the wonderous imagery presented in the novels just transport me into a whole other dimension! I can go anywhere with a book, and that is-

*Joan's phone buzzes.*

LAILA

What was that notification? It didn't sound like a text or email.

JOAN

(*Grinning.*) Why it's your first potential soulmate, Brad! (*Scrolling pro-*

JOAN (Cont'd)

*fusely on phone.*) Ooh! He's quite the guy. Look at all these pictures with animals. That shows that he's caring and handy. *(Glancing up.)* Now, I hate to pull the mom card, but you're going on this date tomorrow night. Oh, I know! I'll bring him here for a family dinner and movie night.

LAILA

Actually, I kinda have other plans to, um...

JOAN

...Nope! You haven't had plans since high school graduation, and even that was required of you. Why my youngest child can't seem to marry and be happy like her sister and brother is beyond me!

LAILA

*(Offended)* Hello! I'm sitting right here, ma!

JOAN

I mean, did I stutter?

*Joan exists offstage to her bedroom.*

LAILA

Geez. *(Opens book.)* Now, where was I?

#### Scene Two: The First Date

*Setting: The kitchen. Joan can be seen humming to the tune of "Morning Train" by Sheena Easton as she is setting the table for three. Laila enters, looking completely annoyed*

LAILA

So, tell me again about this Brad?

JOAN

He is perfect! He is an editor for *Jackson Journal* and quite masculine. He fits all of my requirements for the perfect husband material!

LAILA

*(Groans.)* How delightful.

*Knocking. BRAD enters.*

JOAN

Welcome to our home Brad! I am Ms. Wingfield, and this is my lovely daughter, Laila. She is just thrilled to have you with us!

BRAD

Well, I certainly appreciate you opening your home for me this evening. *(Winks toward Laila.)* And you must be my date for the night? Awesome. Ms. Wingfield, are Laila and I going to have the pleasure of your company? I would prefer some privacy to get acquainted with my date.

JOAN

*(Blushing.)* Well, if you insist on being alone, I guess I could go watch some Bachelor reruns.

BRAD

Excellent.

*Joan exits, leaving Brad and Laila alone.*

BRAD

So, Laila, tell me more about you. What kind of music are you into?

LAILA

Well, I dunno. My mother typically listens to old junk from her era. I prefer to get lost in my literature.

*Brad leans in to Laila's side as she motions them to enter the living room. They sit on the couch beside the bookcase.*

LAILA

So, you work in writing. Surely you have a favorite novel? I'm very proud of my collection. My father left it to me when I was very little and...

BRAD

*(Interrupting.)*...Wow touching story, really. I reminds me of when I was a young fella. My dad was throwing a baseball and teaching me to catch it properly. He was very strict and would often take away supper if I couldn't catch it after a certain amount of time. He drank a lot and got pretty mean

BRAD (Cont'd)  
after a while.

LAILA  
Oh my God!

BRAD  
Yeah, my life was pretty rough. I often find myself admiring how I somehow survived it all. I was able to pull myself out of it. I went to The University of Mississippi, became a well renounced writer, and won countless awards. I am quite the marvel. I have yet to encounter a woman even worth my time. My friends say I should stop being so picky about women, but I know I'm too good for any woman. Still, I try to find someone. I do get lonely being successful with few to share it with. I have six dogs and four cats to try to keep me company. My boss dared me to create an online dating profile, and I have gotten an outstanding amount of gorgeous women practically throwing themselves at me. As a matter of fact, I had to cancel on two of them this evening to take the time to meet you. You truly should feel honored. My schedule stays rather busy, and as I mentioned, I turned down two very easy women to go for more of a challenge.

LAILA  
Oh my. Well I haven't been on a date. Ever.

BRAD  
A fine thing like yourself? I find that hard to believe. Anyways, I enjoy binge watching crime shows. It's incredibly fascinating to see what's going on in the minds of other people. I can't ever seem to figure out what folks around me are thinking. (*Shrugging.*) Eh, anyways, I'd ask if you watch anything, but you seem rather uncultured.

LAILA  
Uncultured?! Why...

BRAD  
...Yes. Uncultured. It means that you don't get out much. My apologies. I shouldn't have used such a big word around you. Do forgive me.

LAILA  
Not that it is any of your business, but I happen to be a literature professor

LAILA (Cont'd)

at Mississippi State and have a doctorate in Classic Literature with a focus on Feminist Theory. I am not an idiot and I will not stand to be insulted in my own damn house! (*Standing and pointing at the door.*) Leave! I don't want to even be in the same room as you! Hope you can fit your gigantic head through my uncultured door!

*Brad storms out.*

LAILA

The absolute nerve of some people. He wasn't gonna let me get a word in.

*Joan enters the room, looking confused.*

JOAN

What was all that yelling about? I missed who got the final rose!

LAILA

Brad will most definitely not be welcome in this house again.

JOAN

Were you polite?

LAILA

He wouldn't be able to tell ya! He was way too busy going on and on and on about his entire life story and how much of a hero and wonder he is to notice me at all.

JOAN

Oh darlin', I'm so sorry. He seemed so nice from his profile.

LAILA

To be fair, no one is gonna call themselves an ass when trying to attract a date.

JOAN

Well, I mean I guess.

LAILA

If you don't mind ma, I'd like to finish my book again now.

JOAN

*(Sighing.)* Child, you're hopeless.

Scene Three: The Next Date

*Joan is sitting beside Laila on the couch in the living room, glancing admirably at her phone. Laila is practically unaware of her mother's presence, as she is lost in her book.*

JOAN

Dear God, child. Didn't you just finish that book yesterday? Do you not get bored with the same book over and over? I guarantee it ends the same, regardless of how many times you read it.

LAILA

*(Rolls eyes.)* Yes, I did finish this book yesterday, but today is new. Each time I reread a book, a different part stands out than the last time, so it feels like a new storyline. Plus, when you've read every book you own at least twice, you tend to only want to reread certain ones. I could go on and on about *Moby Dick*, but it would be a waste of my breath. The literary elements would go right over your Southern little head.

JOAN

I will have you know that I am very well versed in literature...

LAILA

...Ah yes, *People Magazine* and *Entertainment Tonight*, true forms of classic entertainment.

JOAN

*(Insulted.)* Well, I prefer to know what's going on in this time period!

*A knock is heard at the door.*

LAILA

Who's here? Since when do people ever feel the need to come see us?

JOAN

Ya know, I would be insulted, but I am far too excited for this. Go open the door, dear.

*Laila hesitantly rises and opens the door. A man is there holding a bouquet of red roses.*

LAILA

Oh! What on...Who are... Hi.

TOM

You must be Laila! It's real nice to meet ya, ma'am. I'm Tom, your date for the evening. We're going to the movies, remember?

LAILA

Oh...Yes. Just a moment. *(Shuts door slowly.)* Joan, you've got to be kidding me!

JOAN

Well, don't be rude to your potential husband. Invite him in. It's cold out there!

*Laila inhales deeply, surrendering to her mother's plan. She opens the door slowly and smiles.*

LAILA

Well, why don't ya come on in. Tom, right?

TOM

*(Entering.)* Oh, uh, yeah.

JOAN

*(From the couch.)* Laila be a proper hostess and offer the man a drink

LAILA

Are ya thirsty, Tom?

TOM

*(Chuckles.)* You bet.

*Laila goes to the kitchen and grabs a Coke bottle.*

TOM

*(Glances at bouquet.)* These are for you.

LAILA

Aww, you really didn't have to do that.

*Tom hands Laila the bouquet and she places them in a blue vase on the third shelf of her bookcase. Tom notices the vast arrangement of books.*

TOM

That's quite the collection you've got there, miss.

LAILA

*(Beaming with pride.)* Well, thank you! My dad left it to me when I was very little. *(Motioning towards the couch.)* Would you like to see my favorite of all?

TOM

I mean, we really should catch this movie, but what the hell.

*Tom follows Laila to the couch. Awkward pause before Joan realizes she should get up for the others to sit.*

JOAN

Oh! I'll leave you two alone now. *(Hurriedly exits.)*

*Laila walks towards the shelf and picks up a beautiful copy of Moby Dick. She then sits down beside Tom.*

LAILA

This is my favorite book in the whole entire world! *(opens book to a random page with markings in the margins)* My dad hated writing in his books, but for some reason, he decided to annotate the hell out of this one. I constantly try to translate his notes into meaning to figure out why, but I've read it thirteen times now and still can't figure it out.

TOM

That's really cool. Can I look?

*Laila is hesitant, but hands over the book.*

TOM

Geez, your dad had awful handwriting. What does this say?

*Tom goes to point at the page but knocks his soda over onto the book. Laila is frozen, eyes wide.*

TOM

Oh my God! I am so sorry! Is it..Did I...

LAILA

Ruin my most prized possession? Uh yeah, you did.

TOM

C'mon now. Let's not let this minor issue ruin the night. We're just getting started!

LAILA

Alright. But you just lost some major points for that.

TOM

Eh, we'll see.

Scene Four: The Aftermath

*Joan is sitting on the couch, yelling at the television.*

JOAN

No! How can you do that to her?! What on earth did she ever do to deserve that, Dr. Sloane?!

*The door busts open. Laila runs inside looking frightened.*

JOAN

Woah! Hello, Laila. You scared me. I was in the middle of Grey's! You just would not believe what this doctor did...(Notices Laila's apparent distress.)...Darling, what is it?

LAILA

Ma. I am never ever going out with another man again! I swear on Dad's grave!

JOAN

Oh God. What happened now?

LAILA

We were sitting in our seats watching the previews when all of a sudden, Tom placed his hand on my thigh.

JOAN

And?

LAILA

And his hand did not remain on my thigh! It swiftly worked its way up my...

JOAN

(Raises her hands to her head.)...Alright, alright! Please don't be so graphic.

LAILA

Well, I hope you're happy!

JOAN

Excuse me? What kind of mother would wish such a thing on her daughter?

LAILA

The kind who meddles in her daughter's love life! Thanks to you, I not only plan to never marry a man, but also never to speak to one! The male gender has officially lost what little respect I had for them and they have you to thank!

JOAN

Me? I never wanted that to happen! I just wanted you to be happy and settled down. Is that so awful?

LAILA

Yes!

Scene Five: The Colleague

*Several months have passed. The sky is bright outside, and birds can be heard softly chirping in the distance. It's a lovely Mississippi May. Laila is sitting on the couch with her laptop on her lap typing like a madwoman. Joan enters*

JOAN

Laila, what on earth are you typing? You're practically stabbing the keys

JOAN (Cont'd)

with your fingers!

LAILA

What? Oh, I'm just messaging a colleague of mine. He came to me a few days ago asking to collaborate on a paper. You should hear his profound thoughts on the literary elements involved in his choice of work! He's so profound!

JOAN

(Smiling.) Well, that sounds lovely. Someone right up your alley.

LAILA

(Eyes glued to the laptop screen.) Oh, he wants to stop by to talk with me about the work. What should I do? I feel so strange.

JOAN

Oh, I'm sure you're just nervous. You haven't been in the presence of someone as dorky as you since your father.

LAILA

Ma!

JOAN

What? I swear to you, I loved that man! He just enjoyed saying things I could never quite understand.

LAILA

Well, moving on, I guess I can tell him to come here soon? Maybe around lunch? Oh, this is so exciting! Finally, I can have a meaningful conversation!

JOAN

Ya know, I'm just gonna ignore that incredibly mean comment because I'm far too excited for this!

LAILA

What? He's just a new coworker, ma. He's probably married.

JOAN

I don't care. If a guy can get you this riled up, I dare say put on your Sunday

JOAN (Cont'd)

best!

LAILA

Ma, that's just gross to even say. How can you even think about encouraging that kind of disgusting behavior?

JOAN

It was a joke. Jesus!

LAILA

*(Moves eyes back on computer and smiles.)* He lives just a few towns away! He'll be over in an hour!

*Laila dashes up from the couch and rushes to go change.*

JOAN

*(Beaming and looking upwards.)* Well, it's about time. *(Exits.)*

#### Scene Six: The Finale

*Laila is pacing in the living room, glancing anxiously at the door every few seconds. Joan enters the room.*

JOAN

For love of God, girl, chill out!

LAILA

Why am I so nervous about this? I suppose because I've never met with any of my colleagues in person before. None have ever cared this much about collaborating with me.

JOAN

*(Sarcastically.)* Ah, yes. That must be it.

*A soft knock is heard on the door. Laila scurries over and opens it. Jim Parson, a man of no more than twenty is dressed in a college tshirt and jeans standing at the door.*

JIM

Hello Ms. Wingfield. I'm Jim Parsons, your new colleague at the university.

LAILA

Oh, it's such a pleasure to finally meet you! I have enjoyed our discussions online and look forward to hearing your thoughts on Tennessee Williams. Come in? Let's get right to it.

*Joan quietly goes off stage as Laila and Jim go to the couch.*

JIM

*(Noticing the bookshelf.)* Oh my gosh! That's a beautifully diverse set of literature. I see Poe, Faulkner, Williams, Hughes, Bronte, and Hosseini!

LAILA

Well, my dad started collecting and reading classics, and when he died, he left them to me.

JIM

I'm so sorry about your dad, but his taste was rather fantastic.

LAILA

Well thank you. That means a lot. So, what were you wishing to discuss about Williams?

JIM

Ah yes! Can we please talk about the ending of *The Glass Menagerie*? I quite enjoyed how, despite it not ending as it should've, everyone ended up okay.

LAILA

Well, yes, but I would have preferred to be shown a realer side of love besides the rosey aspect and how it doesn't always work out the way one expects it to. As a matter of fact, Williams did another dark ending in *A Streetcar Named Desire* with a more realistic side. It's not the typical lovey happy ending that most wanted, but rather, an accurate account for the truth of love.

JIM

Well, I see your point, but people need to understand that love still does exist. It doesn't always end with insanity or have to be tragic to accurately portray love. Love is a real thing that is incredibly powerful. My heart goes out for Williams, as he couldn't withhold a long-term relationship, and ul

JIM

timately died alone.

LAILA

Ah yes, he was gay, wasn't he?

JIM

Yeah, but it was very frowned upon back then. If he were around today, he'd be more comfortable with being out and proud.

LAILA

That's a solid point. It is amazing how he interpreted love. Even though he ends up with Laura, Jim's still an incredibly insecure man. That shows that love cannot cure all, as most believe. Specifically, my mother.

JIM

Your mother?

LAILA

Oh yes. She's a rather old and traditional bat about love. She thinks all women need a husband to survive.

JIM

Um, has she been in the twenty-first century?

LAILA

(*Laughing.*) It doesn't seem like it at all!

JIM

Well, I am truly sorry for how she must make you feel about it

LAILA

Oh, you don't even know the half of it! She forced me to meet these two awful men. She hoped it would help me be happy or whatever, but it only proved to me that I've got all the men I need right here (*motions towards bookcase*).

JIM

Well, it sounds to me like you're quite happy as you are.

LAILA

I most certainly am! Thank you for noticing. Anyways, do you have any

further questions for the paper?

JIM

Not at the moment, but I have loved discussing literature with you. Could we make this a weekly thing? We can alternate meeting places and just talk about books for hours.

LAILA

I'd like that very much!

LAILA AND JIM

It's so nice to have a meaningful conversation.

*Both of their eyes widen as they stare at each other. Jim suddenly, awkwardly rises.*

JIM

Well, Ms. Wingfield I...

LAILA

Oh! Do call me Laila. Ms. Wingfield sounds like an old hag!

JIM

Alright. Laila, I look forward to seeing you again. I had a grand time this afternoon.

LAILA

Me too! Can't wait to see what else we can discuss at our next lunch.

*Jim exits. Laila closes the door and begins humming to herself "Love Story" by Taylor Swift as she heads back to the couch and begins reading another book.*

# SECOND PLACE SALEM

*Liz Howell*

## Characters

CAT: a mysterious black cat

MARY WARREN: 18-year-old housemaid of the Proctors

JOHN PROCTOR: 60-year-old husband of Elizabeth Proctor

ELIZABETH PROCTOR: 42-year-old third wife of John Proctor

WILLIAM GRIGGS: 77-year-old town doctor & uncle to Elizabeth Hubbard

ELIZABETH HUBBARD: 17-year-old niece & housemaid to William Griggs

PRISON GUARD: Guard for those on trial for witchcraft

*Salem, Massachusetts, April, 1692*

## Scene One

*The front of a lone, faded farmhouse — a door is centered in the wall, and there is a single step down from the door to the ground.*

*The sun is just beginning to set. An owl can be heard in the distance, and crickets are chirping. A black CAT slinks its way onstage, coming around the corner of the house as MARY WARREN enters through the farmhouse door with a broom.*

*The cat sits to watch Mary as she works. Mary frowns and brushes the dirt toward the cat in an attempt to scare it away.*

MARY WARREN

Shoo! Get out of here! We don't need your kind 'round here. This is a respectable home. *(The cat yawns, then blinks at Mary. It makes no attempt to move.)* I said get away! *(Mary swats the cat with the broom. It growls, arches its back, and hisses at her before taking off in the direction it came from.)* This is a respectable, God-fearing home, devil. Do not bring your curses 'round here.

*Mary continues to sweep for a moment before dropping the broom. She begins to convulse before screaming and dropping to the ground.*

*Enter JOHN PROCTOR.*

*John Proctor picks Mary up by her arm.*

JOHN PROCTOR

What did I tell you, girl? This is no place for this foolishness! Get to your feet!

*Mary cries out as she struggles to get her balance, placing a hand against her head.*

MARY WARREN

Please, Master John, please! 'Tis not foolishness! I've another vision; I've seen a witch, I tell you!

JOHN PROCTOR

Quiet! I have said such claims will not be made in my home, and I intend to enforce this. Get back to your work, and stop starting at shadows, or I promise you'll regret it.

*John drags her into the house. They exit through the door. The cat returns and curls into a ball on the straw of the fallen broom.*

## Scene Two

*The Proctor's dining area — a rough, handmade table sits in the middle of the room, surrounded by four chairs. A stove stands in the corner of the room, and the door and window leading to the front of the house is behind them.*

*John Proctor stands, looking out the window, as his wife, ELIZABETH PROCTOR, sits at the table. A single lantern lights the room.*

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

(Concerned.) John, please. I know how you feel about such things, but surely we cannot simply toss the girl into the cold.

JOHN PROCTOR

*(Angry.)* Elizabeth, I have told that girl that I will not allow claims of witchcraft to come into my home. I've done all I can to make her see how foolish she is being, yet she continues to claim that she sees them after these weeks. I will not allow her to continue to work here if she will not stop.

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

But imagine the trouble of hiring another maidservant in the current climate. So many people from the town have already been accused. Most young women fear any change to their lives, for good reason, lest it lead to accusations toward them.

*John turns to face Elizabeth. A light flickers outside the window. He speaks again, raising his voice.*

JOHN PROCTOR

I will not have any mention of witchcraft under my roof! She will be gone by tomorrow evening, and that is final!

*There is a knock on the door. Elizabeth looks away as John opens the door.*

JOHN PROCTOR

Good evening, friends. To what do we owe this honor at such a late hour?

WILLIAM GRIGGS

*(Off.)* I fear I do you no honor, John. Might we come in?

JOHN PROCTOR

Of course.

*John backs up to allow the visitors to enter.*

*ENTER WILLIAM GRIGGS, the local doctor, and ELIZABETH HUBBARD, his niece and house servant, holding a torch.*

WILLIAM GRIGGS

I hear your maidservant has shown signs of demon possession, John.

*Elizabeth Proctor gasps and stands from her chair.*

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

This must be some mistake, Doctor. Mary—Mary has simply been...

JOHN PROCTOR

...William, you accuse us of bringing a witch under our roof? We are God-fearing folk and strive to keep from getting involved in this. We do not accuse others, but you now say that we have been sheltering a witch?

WILLIAM GRIGGS

I do not blame you, nor your wife, John. Witches are skilled at their trickery—you may have been placed under a curse. I do not know that Miss Warren is a witch; I simply want to see the girl for myself.

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

Doctor, please. Mary is no more a witch than your niece is.

JOHN PROCTOR

Hush, wife. Come, William. I will take you to the girl.

*John Proctor and William Griggs exit stage, going further into the house.*

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

You accuse me of witchcraft, ma'am?

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

I did not. I simply said that Mary is no more a witch than you.

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Mary is a witch. I saw so myself.

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

You have had the fits, then? Same as our Mary?

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Your Mary has faked her fits in order to hide, and she has tried to curse me herself. You know that I have been blessed--the Lord himself allows me to see who is a witch, and Mary has attempted to take this from me.

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

If you lose this ability that you claim to have, mayhap that means that there

ELIZABETH PROCTOR (Cont'd)

are no more witches in Salem.

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

I assure you, ma'am, that witches still abide within our town, and I will not rest until they are all put to death.

*ENTER William Griggs and John Proctor, carrying Mary Warren between them. She is crying and struggling to get away.*

MARY WARREN

No! Please, Mrs. Proctor, please tell them I am no witch!

WILLIAM GRIGGS

Hush, girl! Silence! You will not torment these fine people any longer!

MARY WARREN

Please, sir, I implore you! They'll have me hanged! I am not a witch; I am not!

*John and Elizabeth Proctor make eye contact for a moment as he and William Griggs drag Mary out the door.*

*John Proctor, William Griggs, and Mary Warren exit the house.*

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

I believe you should go with your uncle, Miss Hubbard.

*Elizabeth Hubbard narrows her eyes at Elizabeth Proctor.*

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Aye, I can see why you'd want me out of your home, Mrs. Proctor.

ELIZABETH PROCTOR

Miss Hubbard, I will not stand for...

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

...No, Mrs. Proctor. I am sure you will not. Good night.

*EXIT Elizabeth Hubbard.*

Scene Three

*Salem Jail – It is dark, the only light coming from a barred window placed high out of reach in the prison wall. Rats can be heard squeaking from the shadows, and the floor is covered in filth.*

*Mary Warren is chained to the wall.*

MARY WARREN

Ye, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art...

GUARD (*off.*)

Silence, witch!

MARY WARREN

...with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me...

GUARD (*off.*)

I said SILENCE, witch!

*The cell door opens, and the GUARD advances toward Mary. The guard raises his hand as if to strike her, and she braces herself.*

*Another door opens, and lantern light enters the cell.*

*ENTER Elizabeth Hubbard, carrying a lantern.*

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Do not strike her, warder. You do not know how she may be able to curse you. (*The Guard recoils.*) I would like to speak to the witch.

GUARD

Miss, it may curse you if you approach it.

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

I assure you, the witch will not curse me, for I have God on my side.

*The guard spits on Mary before leaving. Elizabeth Hubbard enters the cell, and the door slams shut behind her. She does not react to the sound.*

MARY WARREN

Why do you this, Ellie? I thought us friends! I helped you, and now you accuse me as well! I will tell them--I will!

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

No one will believe you, witch.

MARY WARREN

You know I am no witch!

*Elizabeth smirks as she turns to face the cell door.*

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

You knew not to cross me.

MARY WARREN

He beat me, Ellie! I had to stop; I had no choice!

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

You always had a choice. (*Elizabeth turns to face Mary again and strokes her cheek.*) You simply made the wrong one.

MARY WARREN

Ellie, please! Tell them I am not a witch! They'll have me hanged, Ellie! They'll have me hanged!

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

You should have considered that possibility before changing sides. Now, I suppose I shall have to tell the good doctor that your dear Proctors have been cursed as well.

MARY WARREN

No! Ellie, they are good people! You will ruin them!

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

You said he beat you, Mary. You should be thanking me.

MARY WARREN

Please, Ellie. Mrs. Proctor never harmed me; at least allow her some dignity!

ELIZABETH HUBBARD:

I cannot, Mary. She has come too close already. You know what I must do.

MARY WARREN:

Ellie, please! You don't have to do this!

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Good-bye, Mary. I'll ensure your death is swift. (*Elizabeth walks to the cell door as Mary begins to sob. It opens, and she begins to walk out. She pauses and half-turns back to Mary.*) You could have been one of us, Mary. We would have been good together. We would have been unstoppable.

MARY WARREN

Nay! Ellie, it is not you who is unstoppable! Please, Ellie, please, before it is too late! Please, give the Devil back his power before it consumes you!

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Bold of you to assume that the Devil is a man, Mary.

*EXIT Elizabeth Hubbard.*

*The cell door closes.*

#### Scene Four

*Doctor's Cellar — stairs leading to the rest of the house stands to the side, and barrels and shelves of preserved food line the walls. The room is lit by lamplight.*

*Elizabeth Hubbard checks to make sure no one is around, then pulls an elaborate knife from under the shelf. She sets her lantern on the floor and flips a few pages as she sits down then lets the book lay in her lap.*

*Elizabeth holds her left hand skyward, closes her eyes, and slices her palm open with the knife. Smiling, she begins writing the Proctor's names with her blood in the dirt floor.*

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Now that Mary is out of the picture—Elizabeth Proctor ... John Proctor. You'll be out of my way soon. (A pause.) Aye, Mrs. Proctor. Mary Warren is certainly no more witch than I.

*The door above the stairs opens and light floods the cellar from offstage. Eliz-*

*abeth quickly wipes the names from the dust, extinguishes the lantern, and shoves the knife under the shelf before ducking offstage into the shadows.*

WILLIAM GRIGGS

*(Off.)* Elizabeth? Are you down here, girl?

*ENTER William Griggs.*

*A black cat walks out of the shadows and meows up at William before sitting back, licking its paw and wiping at its ear.*

WILLIAM GRIGGS

How did you get in here? *(William Griggs picks up the cat, which purrs loudly. He frowns and walks toward the cellar door.)* We've no need for your kind around here. I've told you this. You'll only draw attention, and I cannot afford that. I'll take you to the river and get rid of you once and for all. *(William Griggs picks up a burlap sack, and the cat immediately hisses. It scratches him, causing him to drop it, before it darts back into the shadows. It growls for a moment before it goes silent.)* Damned cat! Devil spawn!

*William Griggs goes to the cellar door while muttering to himself. He closes the cellar door behind him, leaving the cellar entirely dark.*

*After a moment, Elizabeth Hubbard reenters stage from the shadows, rekindles her lantern, and stands.*

ELIZABETH HUBBARD

Dearest uncle, if I didn't need you so, I assure you, I'd have gotten rid of you long ago.

*Elizabeth looks at the blood on her hand. She eyes it for a moment before gently licking it off and tucking a stray hair behind her ear.*



# *Difference?*

## *Sykina Butts*

### Characters

NARRATOR

MOTHER JOE: Adonis and Gabriel's mother.

ADONIS: Mother Joe's son.

ABBEY: Gabriel's friend.

GABRIEL: Mother Joe's daughter.

*A shotgun house in rural Mississippi. Morning.*

### Scene One

NARRATOR

War rages in a southern home.

A strong woman battles her mighty son.

He has no joy to hold him.

Only revenge lies in his conscience.

To repay a violent act.

But with vengeance comes self-destruction.

And in hatred we become our worst enemy.

*MOTHER JOE enters the kitchen with a pie and plates. She sets the items on the dining table.*

MOTHER JOE

Thank you God for this day! This is will be a good day. *(Smiles.)*

*Mother Joe starts to cut the pie into slices. ADONIS enters, trembling.*

MOTHER JOE

Hey, baby. Are you alright? What's on your mind?

ADONIS

Just a bad dream.

MOTHER JOE

Must have been one heck of a bad one. You're dripping with sweat.

*Adonis wipes his forehead. His mother bids for him to take a seat across from her.*

ADONIS

Momma, I still can't get that scene out of my mind. I relive it every night.

MOTHER JOE

Adonis, you relive it because you're still afraid. You need to accept that you could not have changed...

*Adonis bangs his fist against the table.*

ADONIS

I am not afraid. I'm frustrated and furious. I feel empty.

MOTHER JOE

Hate can do that to you.

ADONIS

*(Yelling.)* You act as if nothing happened. You walk around like there isn't somebody missing. You act as if your nephew wasn't shot down, Momma.

MOTHER JOE

*(Stands to her feet.)* First, you need to lower your voice. Secondly, you are not the only one grieving. I may not wail at the top of my lungs every time I see his photo, but I miss him, too. However, I refuse to be overwhelmed by tears and hatred. Adonis, you need to forgive the policeman that shot your cousin.

ADONIS

Vengeance is the only thing that will satisfy me.

MOTHER JOE

Adonis, pray about it.

*Mother Joe walks over to her son and pats his hand. Mother Joe exits.*

ADONIS

I tremble in fear every time I step out the door.

ADONIS (Cont'd)

Thinking that the blue ones with badges  
Will end me, too.  
I've tried praying to you.

*Adonis points toward to the sky and shakes his head.*

ADONIS

When I dream, I see my cousin's face.  
He's not smiling with glee.  
But shaking uncontrollably.  
Screaming and pointing at a lifeless body.  
Breathless.

*Adonis exhales.*

ADONIS

I run to the body.  
And it's visage is the mirror image of me.  
Blood streams from the mouth  
Down my cheek and onto the cold ground.  
This persistent nightmare  
The same officer saying shoot on sight.  
Letting every fiber of my being know  
That blackness in this country  
Can sometimes be a plight.  
My revenge and sanity I take it back tonight.

*Adonis exits.*

Scene Two

*ABBEY and GABRIEL enter as Adonis storms out.*

ABBEY

What's wrong with him?

*Abbey takes a seat as she pulls her phone out of her pocket. Gabriel sits in the chair across from Abbey.*

GABRIEL

Crazy? He's been like that since RJ got shot.

ABBEY

They were close. I imagine I would be the same way.

GABRIEL

Yeah, I guess, but it would have never happened if RJ hadn't been involved with those drug dealers.

ABBEY

Drugs or no drugs. You know cops are hunters, and their prey, at the moment, are young black males. They'll take out as many as they can.

GABRIEL

Not all cops are bad cops.

ABBEY

So you're not mad about what happened to RJ? He might have been selling drugs, but he still didn't deserve to die for it.

GABRIEL

I understand that very well. But I keep thinking how Momma says one thread in a quilt. Our lives are all connected, so what one person does is felt by others. That cop shot RJ. His parents, friends, and us are suffering because of it. We cry and demand justice for this wrong. RJ sold drugs to people in our neighborhood making sure they had access to addictive monsters. He helped bring chaos to our streets, yet we didn't weep or seek justice. We idly sought by our windowpanes and shook our heads.

ABBEY

*(Forcefully.)* No matter how much you try to explain it to yourself. An unarmed black boy, *(points her finger)* your cousin, got shot down by some racist peckerwoods.

*Abbey storms out*

GABRIEL

Racism isn't the only theme to this story.  
Greed, silence, ignorance, leeway, and fear.

GABRIEL (Cont'd)

We fail to see how not saying anything  
Allows everything.  
The faces of a generation being represented by  
Gangbangers and drug dealers rather than scholars.  
Our black nation demeaned by stereotypes.  
They can't speak properly.  
Their worth is based on how fast they run  
Or how well they can get a ball through a hoop.  
They'll never have a majority in Congress.  
Because laws are written in books.  
And the truth is they would rather play games  
Than expand their intellect.  
Society has formed its hypothesis about the Negro.  
Made observations and collected data.  
You are nothing to worry about.  
You will cause your downfall.  
Your sons and daughters thirst for guidance.  
Since you do not give it, they seek it.  
And believe in whatever they discover.  
They are unable to discern what advice  
Is the right advice.

*Gabriel exits.*

NARRATOR

Two men clash with bullets.  
One an angry vessel.  
The other freed from by the court.  
A black son pulled out a gun.  
But he wasn't the only one packing.  
Fury in his eyes, he held it up.  
Pointed it at the white man's head.  
But didn't see that a pistol was aiming for him  
Listening to slithering demons  
He pulled that trigger.  
Hit the target.  
Down goes the white man.  
Up comes the devil  
To collect his property.

Two are due.  
 First, he'll take the cold one.  
 Then he'll retrieve the running, bleeding  
 Black son.

Scene Three

*Mother Joe enters the kitchen to clear the table.*

MOTHER JOE

*(Exhales.)* Good Lord, it's been a long day, but a good one. Thank you, Lord.  
*(Mother Joe falls into a chair.)* My help...*(begins humming).*

*Mother Joe sings "My Help."*

ADONIS

*(Entering.)* Momma! Momma!

*Mother Joe turns to see Adonis covered in blood. She rushes to him as he falls to the ground.*

MOTHER JOE

*(Weeping and yelling.)* Call 911! Gabriel!

*Gabriel rushes into the kitchen. She becomes shocked and covers her mouth.*

MOTHER JOE

Call for help! Hurry!

*Gabriel rushes out. Mother Joe squeezes her son's hand and begins to pray. Adonis's eyes close, and his hand falls to the ground. Joe releases a cry of anguish. She hugs him tightly.*

MOTHER JOE

Woe onto my soul.  
 Pain does much for the heart  
 But vengeance does not.

*Mother Joe lowers her head in despair.*

NARRATOR

Two men die this day.  
One rests in the arms of his mother.  
The other yet to be discovered.  
One black.  
One white.  
Indeed, vengeance was fulfilled,  
But at what cost.  
No matter how creamy or dark  
All humans bleed red.  
And that's a fact.  
Unfortunately, mortals fail to understand that.



# *Ballad of the Thin Sage*

## *Jonathan Boles*

### Characters

MAN #1

MAN #2/ZEBRA GUY

### Scene One

*MAN #1 approaches bus stop while looking at cell phone, answers phone call, and sits down.*

MAN #1

Yeah, mom. Yes...Okay...Alright...Sure...I will try my best. I don't know, mom. I'm super busy all the time, so I just don't know...Alright. I love you too, mom...I will.

*MAN #2 Approaches bus stop and looks at Man #1.*

MAN #2

Excuse me, sir. Do you mind if I sit next to you?

MAN #1

Sure.

MAN #2

You know, I can still remember when they built this little bus stop. Never was any room on this bench then. Now, nobody hardly ever uses it.

*Man #1 Looks at Man #2 and nods with bored politeness.*

MAN #2

You know, I've seen a lot of people sit on this bench right here. The people have changed, but the bench just stays the same.

*Man #1 looks at Man #2 but isn't sure what to say, so he takes his phone out to break the awkwardness.*

MAN #2

You know, I used to be able to get a Coke for just a quarter. Not anymore though... You like Coke?

MAN #1

I guess, but I usually choose Dr. Pepper over Coke.

MAN#2

I figured...

*Man #1 nods again*

MAN #2

You ever seen a pony ride on top of an elephant?

MAN #1

Uh...what?

MAN #2

I didn't think so...Back when I was a kid, we had this little circus travel through here every other year. They didn't have much. But they did have this little miniature pony that would get up on top of an elephant and ride it around in circles.

MAN #1

Wow. That sounds pretty amazing. I don't guess I've ever seen anything quite like that.

MAN #2

Yeah...They also had this little zebra that traveled with them...I can still remember the look in its eyes as it watched that majestic little pony mount up on that elephant like a four-legged Bob Dylan.

*Man #1 Raises eyebrows and nods again.*

MAN #2

I tell you, my heart hurts every time I think of the look in that little zebra's eyes. I can relate to that strange resilience of being in the streets to find love in the wrong place. It just wasn't meant to be for the zebra.

MAN #1

So, how much longer do you think until the bus comes?

MAN #2: Never can tell.

*Man #1 anxiously thinks of something to say to break the silence with the zebra guy.*

MAN #1

So, I guess you grew up around here, huh? I just moved here for college last year, myself.

ZEBRA GUY

Yep. I've been here all my life. I've seen things. All of em'. You know what else? I can tell things about people.

MAN #1

What do you mean?

ZEBRA GUY

I know you don't want to hear me because you have been through the deepest darkest cave in your existence, but you have to understand that you can't make homes out of human beings.

MAN #1

Um...Excuse me?

ZEBRA GUY

Listen, son. I know what it's like. I heard to talking to your mom. You look around and see no hope. Nothing seems to bring you joy like it once did. So, what do you do? You look to people. But they don't work either.

MAN #1

I mean...I'm actually doing pretty alright.

ZEBRA GUY

You know, I used to have this little dog when I was a kid...a chocolate lab. Called her Lady. Me and that dog did everything together, and one day, she just left.

*Man #1 Listens intently, hoping that there is some point to this story.*

ZEBRA GUY

You know what I learned that day?

MAN #1

What's that?

ZEBRA GUY

Love never stays if you let it walk away.

MAN #1: What do you mean by that?

ZEBRA GUY

One time, I was at a truck stop up in Virginia using the toilet. I didn't have a phone to look at, so I just read what was written on the stalls. Most of it was the usual stuff, but there was this one line someone had written that stuck me, and I've lived my life by it every day since. "If little by little you stop loving me, I will stop loving you little by little."

MAN #1

Wow. I didn't know stall-poetry was even a thing.

ZEBRA GUY

Yep. And it reminded me of that sweet, sweet little zebra, and it all made sense right then and there. You see, that little zebra wanted to be loved by the elephant like the pony was, but he never got it. As his idea of the elephant loving him died, his love for the elephant was slowly dying as well.

MAN #1

Wow... That's strangely deep.

ZEBRA GUY

Yeah. I haven't been the same since.

MAN #1

Wow...all that from a little zebra. What else you got?

ZEBRA GUY

This isn't about me. It's about you.

MAN #1

Um... How so?

ZEBRA GUY

You'll never be Bob Dylan.

MAN #1

What does he have to do with this?

ZEBRA GUY

You ever seen Bob Dylan on a horse?

MAN #1

No.

ZEBRA GUY

Me neither, but I bet it's a majestic sight.





