

# Da

**A Journal of Delta Arts**

Delta State University

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# *Editorial Statement* |

For 50 years now, *Da* (pronounced “DAH”) has showcased the “best of the best” of student writing at Delta State University. Originally known as *Confidante* when it was founded in 1972, *Da* was given its new name in 2015 in the memory of Professor Dorothy Sample Shawhan, who was known as *Da* among her friends and family. Once a year, the journal is published and represents the best in genres across the board—poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, formal essays, plays and screenplays, and artwork of Delta State students. The various styles of writing considered encourage students to explore their feelings and experiences and mold them into inspiring, unique works for their peers to read.

Every fall, *Da* sponsors a writing competition where students can submit their best work to be judged, and winners are selected to be featured in the journal the following spring. The winners of the competition also receive cash prizes and are submitted to the Southern Literary Festival Competition.

If we are being honest with ourselves, how many people are going to pick this book up and read it? The students who have works published in it, their families, maybe. Our teachers and people who happen to get their hands on it. Sure, this isn’t going to be a best-seller or widely read across the globe—but it’s unique to and valued within our little community.

# Dark and Dreary

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*April 12, 1857*  
L.P.H.

April 12, 1857

Boddington Acre, Milt'n-next-Gravesend

Before I stumbled, the rock having turned about immediately upon my step, yelling satanic verses in tongues unknown but to the savage tutors beyond the wood, I saw my lives flash, like light and those other common frames, in the sun's glare. The sleep was longish for a daily break—perhaps a time or two—as Brynceton, a yowling, began to cajole and scamper, as though the sunlight had worked his mind into foldable shapes only thumbs and an attitude worthy of such an act could enforce.

I remember losing something there—perhaps three hairs afingered, or afternoon tea with the elders (only the ones left, of course), or the heartling nearest the fuel in the river shed cast under midnight moons. It could have been anything, I suppose, as I think back last Tuesday, the ninth, when the willowed clambings, tortured as they are this time-a-year, began to boil on the tree bark, browned and welcoming to the coming of age each neutered Prestine collects from the ample lands of the acre known, by the men, as Boddington. They cheer and grope and sag and nipple until all hope is lost and finally, naked and afraid, they walk and walk. Some make it, some don't. Such is the way of things out here in Leland, atop the mighty trees on the Plateau of Starving.

Allow me to sleep, for I have lost the will to continue this effect, long lasting by my hand and ever wanton by your pen and needled brother.

Goodbye, fine woman child. Tell Eastern I love her so.

Sodden with lament and distraction, sleeping peacefully until morning,

L.P.H

P.S. The wild endlings have come, so the water remains. Remember me.

# *Letter to Adults*

## Shamyiah Williams

“I am scared.”  
The absence of each  
Adult,  
The fear of each  
Child  
Have sunken  
Into the drunk  
Child’s fantasy.

“I am scared!”  
The adult  
Who was concern  
As the children’s scream  
Grew  
But did nothing.

“I am scared!!”  
The countless  
Obsession  
Of saving the children  
Crossed the adults’  
Minds.

“I... ammm... ssscccareddd...”  
Whispers within  
The wind  
Filtered into  
Those adults’

Ears.

“I am not scared.”

“I am scared!”

“I am scared!!!”

Pressured into seeing  
What is wrong have  
Snatched the souls  
From the adults.

“I am scared.”

Melted into a pot  
Of nothingness,  
The complete abyss  
Has caused the adults  
To scream.

“I am not scared!”

But the children  
Of the lost soul  
Have shut the door.

*The Bird*  
Kelly Foster  
First Place Short Fiction

The sun was sinking, and the cries were deafening, and Mr. Abner had his bird.

“Hmm.” He squinted through the haze of ash. “The feeder’s looking a bit low. Best fill it.”

So Mr. Abner grabbed his cane (a makeshift thing he’d fashioned from fallen branches cluttering up his yard), stepped around the corpse of a deer just outside his front door, and hobbled over to his feeder. He rubbed his boot on the grass to get some blood off, then made a mental note to see if he could preserve the deer in some way, maybe get a nice dinner out of it. He also made a mental note to write all this down, as his memory had been acting up lately, much like his back. It was a shame they didn’t make canes for people’s brains.

The feeder was positioned just outside his window; he wanted a perfect view for whenever his little friend dropped by. Approaching it now, he added his bird feed, which was his own special recipe (all the stores had been closed lately, no matter how far he managed to hike. He hoped he hadn’t missed a holiday). Like always, it overflowed, little pellets spilling out onto crisp, scorched blades. Like always, Mr. Abner tutted, muttered, “Oh dear, oh bother,” and bent down to collect the strays. And just like always, through vision made watery by the cumbersome cloud of smoke, he spotted the feather.

Immediately apparent was its striking shade of scarlet, glistening amidst the surrounding smoky haze and under the morning sun. However, when Mr. Abner adjusted his spectacles, he thought the feather looked rather faint and damp, perhaps from the morning dew. But it worried him all the same.

“Well, that simply won’t do,” said Mr. Abner. “We’ll have

to take better care of our little friend.”

He set about pondering how he could improve his little friend’s quality of life, but then a sharp siren spiked through his hearing aid, and he waddled back inside, resolving to remedy this matter later that day. He would not let the sun set on a world where his bird wasn’t properly cared for, wasn’t properly content.

“Oh, goodness!” cried Mr. Abner when he arrived at his door. The scorched blades had suddenly rushed up and stopped dangerously short of his now-dangling glasses, and he leaned heavily on his cane, his bony fingers digging into its splintery wooden build. He gazed with fright at the ground, eyes scanning for whatever had prompted his little stumble.

Upon actually spotting it, he laughed heartily. A deer carcass. On his front step. Now, where had that come from?

Mr. Abner shrugged, stepped around the fallen deer, and made a mental note to make some use out of it later, maybe get a nice dinner out of it. He also made a mental note to write all this down, as his memory had been acting up lately, much like his back. It was a shame they didn’t make canes for people’s brains.

#### §

Tommy wished his mom would let him out to play more. It never made sense to him—they lived in a big, bustling city, lots of toy stores and bakeries and playgrounds, but no one ever went outside. He had to stay cooped up in their tiny, stuffy apartment all day.

But he found ways to keep himself busy. On special days, he got to venture out into the hall, where he’d pretend he was infiltrating enemy lines just like Dad. One day, when he was all grown up, he would be a soldier like Dad, beating up the bad guys and saving people’s lives. A proper hero, and he’d even have his own gun!

When Tommy wasn’t playing pretend, he liked to climb up onto the windowsill in the living room and stare out at looming steel towers and cement, crisscrossing in mazes. He sometimes had to squint to see anything—those were the days when the fluffy green clouds came rolling in, closer to the ground than he ever saw the fluffy white clouds get. But that was okay, because he had games for those days too. He would find shapes in the clouds.

Today was a green cloud day, so Tommy pressed his face

close to the glass and spotted shapes. He asked his mom to join him, but she was busy closing all the air vents. Not that that was a big deal; Tommy was used to playing alone.

He settled in his spot, and started watching the clouds.

“Popcorn,” Tommy whispered to himself. “Big green popcorn—and more, and more, and more.” Popcorn was the most common shape, so this discovery didn’t surprise him. He always liked finding it though, because popcorn was his favorite food, and he hadn’t had it in a long time. Usually Mom gave him bread and that yucky soup.

Another cloud rolled by. “Tiger,” said Tommy, but not necessarily because it looked like one. Rather, it moved like one, pelting through the city like it was chasing its next meal, and it was big like one, large and dark and rippling like there were muscles beneath its vast chasm of green fur. Tommy wondered if it was a storm cloud.

The game continued. Mouse, tree, house, hand. Snake, hook, needle. Flower, pillow, puppy. Tommy had always wanted a puppy. One time, when he was really little, he rescued one from off the street, but then it bit him, and everything got dark, and he had to go to the doctor for a little while.

The clouds kept coming, more than Tommy had ever seen before. “Ocean,” he said at one point, because that was all he could see—one vast, murky green ocean. When he squinted really hard, he saw little flecks of flesh on the ground below, and he said, “Fish.” One particularly giant cloud rushed by and cut through the rest of them, and he called that one, “Boat.”

A sharp clatter jarred him from his game. “Tommy!” he heard his mom call. “Get over here now—hurry!”

Frowning, Tommy pried himself away from cloud spotting and leapt down from the windowsill. He walked to the master bedroom, where he thought he’d heard Mom. When he came in, she was haphazardly tossing clothes and various other items into a suitcase flung open on her bed. Tommy wondered if they were going on a vacation.

Mom whirled around when she heard his footsteps, and he noticed that she was wearing one of those large green masks that always sat on her dresser. Without even saying a word, she bustled over to him and strapped one on his face. She then tried saying

something to him, but he couldn't really hear through her mask. He tapped near his ear to let her know.

She pulled off her mask, said "Tommy, sweetie, we need to leave, probably for a while," and on went her mask again.

Tommy stared. Going away? Should he go get his toys? He didn't have many, but he'd made Little Tommy with paper, glue, and scissors, and he didn't want to leave his little self behind. Tommy turned to leave and collect his friend, but Mom grabbed his hand. He looked at her, and she shook her head. No.

And that was when the clouds rolled in.

Tommy turned and saw puffed waves of green ghosting around the apartment, hazing over carpeted floors, leather furniture, and the picture of him and Mom and Dad hung up on the wall. Mom's grip on him tightened as she yanked him to her chest.

"Mom?" he asked uncertainly, even though he knew she couldn't hear him. When her fingers trailed soothingly over his shoulder, he wondered if maybe she had.

Mom hurried to the door and shut it. Then she dragged him with her into the bathroom and shut that door, then the small sectioned-off area where the toilet was and shut that door too. She pulled him with her onto the floor, and his knees brushed against cold tiles.

They waited.

Eventually, the green cloud came.

Tommy watched as it slid under the door and drifted up, up, up. It spread around the enclosed space, blocking out the single lightbulb above. Mom climbed on top of Tommy, like she was trying to block out the clouds. He could still see them though, soaring high above their heads, expanding like the wings of an eagle.

"Bird," whispered Tommy, and it felt right.

§

It all went to hell on a Sunday.

That morning, the members of Sunnyview Baptist Church got together for their weekly congregation. They mingled, they laughed, they side-eyed the fifteen-year-old with the dress that hit above her knees. Mingled and laughed some more. Wondered in whispers if Johnny and Paul were gay. Mingled and laughed some more.

News outlets would in later years report that the vast migration of birds had been the first sign of things to come. That the birds had sensed something in the air, had taken off while humanity buzzed about on the ground below, none the wiser.

The birds had migrated that Sunday morning. They flew right over Sunnyview Baptist Church.

But Sunnyview Baptist Church had stained glass windows, so the congregation members didn't see those birds. They saw crowns and angels and virgins, but no birds.

"Be ready!" Brother Kenny's voice boomed from the pulpit. "Never slow down, never take a break, always be sure your relationship with God is right."

Everyone nodded and clicked their pens and took notes, except for the dozing thirteen-year-old in the middle row.

"You never know when the Rapture could happen!"

Outside, the birds flew.

# *It Runs in the Family* Hannah Alley

The day started like any other would, except today there was a low, bruised sky looming overhead. A small, tan house sat alone in the middle of the dark, water-soaked trees, and plump bushes that lined the winding gravel path leading up from the paved road. The entire landscape was decorated with snow that blanketed over everything in sight. This house belonged to none other than the Johnson family, who enjoyed the quietness of life away from the city.

Currently, the crisp festive air of December had fallen into the bleak chill of January. With that, it was time for their winter decorations to be put away and stored for next year. Each of the family members had their own task to fulfill in the dismantling of their annual New year's party. Carter's parents, Ana and John handled the packing up and sorting of their annual decorations. On the other hand, Carter's older sister, Julia, who was now twenty-four, swept and cleaned behind the two. Carter himself, was now eighteen, and wanted to be out of the house as much as possible so he volunteered to bring boxes down to the basement.

"Don't forget to bring the key with you!" shouted Ana Johnson, as she tossed the key on the table by her son.

"Yeah, yeah I've got it" Carter murmured while tying up his thick, winter boots.

Carter placed two boxes on top of a long one and squatted to pick up the boxes off of the floor.

"Hey Julia, can you give me a hand?"

Julia playfully rolled her eyes, with a smile, before leaning her broom against the wall and reached around him to open the door. Carter nodded, a sign of thank you, and passed through the open door.

Their backyard was covered in a thick layer of snow, and as

Carter passed over the threshold, he was met with a sharp cold that hit his face with such ferocity that it forced him to take a breath, in which the cold air sliced up his throat. Carter shivered and leaned back to close the door behind him with his elbow.

As Carter closed the door, Julia looked down at him, and for a fleeting moment, Carter saw something pass across her eyes. He chuckled it up to the cold that was sure to have hit her too, so he offered her a comforting smile before shutting the door behind him.

The concrete path before him, freshly salted and shoveled out of the way, wrapped around the house. Carter carefully walked the narrow path, every step was made with caution, shoes crunching, and wind biting at his ears and cheeks.

Finally, he reached the stairs, and he slowly descended them and set down the boxes on the stairwell so he could unlock the door to the basement.

Fumbling with the lock, Carter lightly blew hot air on the key, opened it, and the door loudly creaked open. He was greeted with the smell of dust and mildew as a sharp, pungent scent that slithered through the air.

Bending back over to pick up the boxes, he made his way down the stairs into the cold, damp, and dark room. When he reached the bottom, he fumbled to hold the boxes with one hand, and he reached and grazed the wall, searching for the elusive light switch.

Carter instantly dropped the boxes. His eyes could not believe what he was seeing. Before him, there was the body of a young girl, not much older than him. Her body was contorted, like she had fallen like a rag doll to the floor.

Her neck was broken and laid at an odd angle. Her arm was behind her, mutilated, and she was surrounded in a pool of rich, red blood. Her corpse was so fresh that there was no odor to her. Not a single maggot had found her yet, as the cold around them had seemed to have hidden her from them.

He was unable to scream.

Carter felt nausea twinge in his stomach, and he felt a sharp pain that something horrible had happened to the girl. As he stumbled back upstairs, His heart pounded loudly in his chest, as his shock mixed with the cold and snow before him to form a blurry fog in his mind.

All he could think about was finding help.

Carter slipped as soon as he reached the top, and Carter flailed and blindly grasped out for the railing that he knew was behind him to stabilize himself. To his shock, his already cold fingers were met with slick, frozen ice that caused his fingers to go numb within seconds as his fingers enclosed the railing.

His pulse quickened, and he ran down the path before him, barely regarding the ice as a factor, since Carter was as pale as the snow around him. He skidded down the path and busted back in the door.

He froze in the doorway, and his family was patiently waiting for him to come back. His parents stood in front of the door, as if awaiting him. Julia stood behind them, the broom at her feet.

Each and every one of them were smiling, and their eyes were glossed over with glee to produce such a sinister look on their face that it made the nausea in his stomach worsen. Carter's eyes turned to Julia, and she shook her head solemnly, with the same smile plastered on her face.

“Welcome to the family business,” grinned his father.

# *My Eloise* Hannah Alley

The first thing that Maria realized about her environment was the cold, chill of the concrete beneath her, and the fact that her face was pressed directly against it. Blinking away the fog of confusion and exhaustion, the second thing that she noticed was her location. She had absolutely no idea where she was. Maria lifted her cheek off of the floor, and gazed directly ahead, towards a dark brick wall, speckled white with debris and dust. Pulling herself up on her elbow, she quickly experienced a sharp pain coming from the lower half of her body. Maria, rejuvenated by the pressing injury, pulled herself up to a sitting position, and assessed the damage. It did not take long for her to locate the source. Maria's left leg was bleeding, and there was a pool of dark, rich, red blood surrounding her legs and trickling down to her feet.

She had clearly been bleeding for a while, as her blue jeans were stained red with old, hardened blood. Maria winced as she leaned to pull up the leg of her jeans, and was greeted by a large, gaping wound down the side of her leg. She instantly became sick to her stomach and rolled back down the pants leg of her jeans. Maria's mind started racing, as she wildly spun her head around the room, she was in to try to get some sort of hint as to where she was. There were no lights on, but her eyes have seemed to have adjusted by now to the level of darkness in the room. Her eyes were greeted by the same brick wall she had awoken to.

She now could see that on the wall to her right, there were several shelves filled with various cardboard boxes, with indistinguishable labels. A little bit further down, she saw an old wooden staircase that led up to a door, presumably leading into the rest of

the house. It appeared that she was in some sort of basement. But as she turned more towards her left, she instantly saw a dark figure sitting about three feet away from her, in a rocking chair. Its legs were slightly apart, and the figure was silently leaning forwards towards her. The figure had not moved, breathed, or even alerted her to its presence.

Maria froze when her eyes met the figure, and her entire body went cold. At this moment, everything else did not matter. Something was wrong. Why had this person not helped her? How long had it been watching her? Did it do this?

“So...you’re awake,” came a low, croaking voice from the figure. Maria continued staring at it, blankly, too stunned to speak a single word.

“What’s the matter? Cat got your tongue?” the figure laughed lightly, seemingly amused at its own joke. Maria swallowed, mostly to make her dry mouth do something other than stare agape.

“W-Who... are you? Where am I?” Maria asked, as flatly and calmly as she could muster.

The figure slowly stood up, and the rocking chair creaked behind him to settle on the cold, concrete floor. He reached up towards the ceiling and pulled on a string. In that instant, the room became brighter around Maria. She now could clearly see the figure before her. He was a tall, brown-headed man with a thick beard, wearing a dark hoodie and jeans with mud cakes on them. By any other circumstances, she would have found him attractive. She watched him as he stood before her and shrunk back as he walked towards her. Maria drew in a sharp breath in pain, now remembering the wound on her leg. He stopped. The man looked down, letting his gaze wander down her body, and cocked his head slightly as if he had not realized she was injured.

Maria was frustrated now. She repeated herself, but more loudly and more clearly, “Who are you? Where am I?” The man smiled, mostly to himself.

“Don’t you know who I am?” inquired the man.

“Don’t you think I would not have asked if I already knew?” fired back Maria, with such ferocity that it even shocked her.

This seemed to stun the man, as the smile slipped off of

his face, causing Maria's stomach to churn. She knew she had said the wrong thing.

The man knelt down, less than half a foot away from where she sat on the floor. His knees rested in the pool of blood, and his jeans soaked up bits of the blood around her, mixing with the mud and denim.

"Oh darling," he purred, "how could you forget me? And this place?" The man gestured towards the basement that Maria assumed they were in. She shook her head lightly, which only seemed to irritate the monster more. He leaned towards her and extended his hand out to reach under her chin. She shrunk back, and he shook his head.

"Of course, you don't," he remarked, with a sad sigh. "You aren't her, are you?" Maria stayed silent. "Answer me!" the man boomed, reaching forward and shaking her shoulders.

"No!" shrieked Maria, "I have no idea who you are!"

At that, the man stopped shaking her shoulders, and pulled back, muttering something to himself.

"What are you—" she asked, and he put his hand over her mouth to silence her.

"I just wanted her... My Eloise... but she's dead, isn't she?" the man asked, looking at her with such desperation in his bright blue eyes and Maria's breath quickened under his hand.

"You look just like her... same green eyes, and brown hair... even down to your figure," the man cooed, placing his other hand on her side, and glided it down the curve of her body. She recoiled, which only caused him to grab her hips to make her stay put on the floor.

"I was hoping I wouldn't have to do this... but you leave me no choice" he remarked. Maria's eyes widened. He sighed, and pulled out a knife from his pocket, opened it, and pressed it to her throat. The knife was cool to the touch, and sharp. If she breathed in too deep, she felt it tear lightly at her neck. Warm, hot, fresh blood trickled down her neck, and collected on the collar of her shirt. Her collar now matched her pants.

"I killed her, didn't I? This all looks so familiar..." he inquired, his gaze steady on the knife on her throat. As his eyes followed the trickle of the blood, Maria felt the knife pull back from her throat, and his hand stop moving in the air. The man

froze before her, and Maria could swear she saw something flash across his eyes.

“My dear sweet Eloise...” At being called that name, her pulse quickened. She saw his moment of hesitation as her chance, and she squirmed back, away from the knife. He only smiled at her, making no attempt to stop her. Maria watched as a single tear fell down his cheek, and onto her shirt. At this, Maria attempted to kick against him, and push herself back farther. His eyes fell hollow, and the glimmer of life went out of his eyes. The desperation and adoration in his eyes fell flat as Maria struggled against him.

“N-no,” he sputtered, “no!”

His stuttering voice rose to a frantic growl, and within a single moment, not so much as the fraction of a second, there was the sickening twang of metal against the flesh of Maria’s neck. The knife glided along her neck, starting up at her ear, and the minuscule ridges of the knife caught on the skin of her neck, and pulled.

Maria gasped for air, in complete shock of what was happening. The edges of her vision became speckled with red and white dots, before slowly encompassing her vision. The subtle movement from Maria’s gasp caused the man to push the knife in deeper and drops of blood poured down in sickening streams onto her collar.

The man barely had time to register what he had done.

As his knife clattered to the floor, Maria’s eyes widened, and rolled back in her head and fell back into a heap. The last of her blood splattered onto him and the floor. The room went silent, with the same eerie stillness of when Maria awoke on the floor. To the floor, she returned.

The man drew a bloodied hand to his face and broke down into a sob, the knife still sitting beside him in the pool of blood he caused. All he could whine out at that moment was “why, why, why?” He choked on air and swallowed his tears. The man looked up through his fingers at the heap of flesh and blood that had collapsed on the floor. He could have sworn in that instant, he saw her chest heave.

“Eloise?” he sobbed, crawling back towards Maria’s still corpse, and he slipped his hands into her long brown hair.

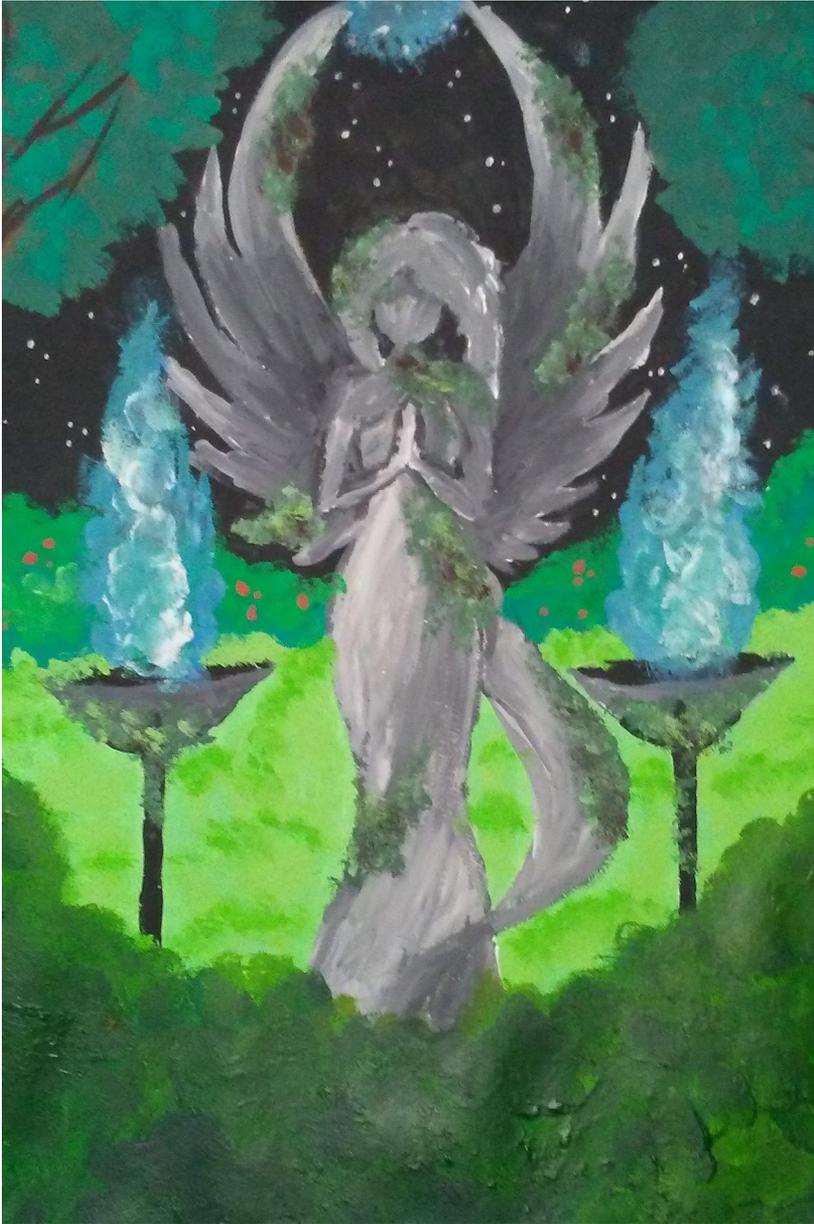
The man pulled her warm body up into his arms, and his tears slipped and drenched her lifeless face. He reached to pull out a blackened handkerchief, with a faded, embroidered, small red “E” on it. With it, frayed ends and all, he shakily wiped his tears from Maria’s face, as one would do with a small child.

“My dear Eloise... why do you always leave me?”



*Untitled I*

Anna Schmitz • Photograph



*The Benevolent Angel*  
Raven Runnels • Gouache and Acrylic

# *A Dismembered World: Surrealist Truths in the Works of Breton, Soupault, and Césaire*

Kelly Foster

First Place Formal Essay

In the wake of a tragedy, all that was once familiar in the world can seem alien and strange. The world from before the occurrence becomes the world that housed the tragedy in question, casting new light over all its previously established structures. The world becomes surreal, and it is precisely this sensation that surrealist poets capture in their work. The surrealist deconstructs the world, breaking it down to its bare elements and reassembling it as an odd, distorted reflection of itself. Ironically, this very distance from reality frees the poet to fully explore that reality with a fresh, objective pair of eyes; it is entirely possible that the poet may arrive at some essential conclusion about life in this exploration, even if that conclusion is couched in obscure, unfamiliar language. Surrealist works are thus adequately equipped to capture the ways in which the world may seem surreal after a tragedy, and they even possess the capability of commenting on that tragedy even as they distance themselves from reality. Two works, *The Magnetic Fields* by Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault and “Emmett Till” by Aimé Césaire, demonstrate this well; both works offer social commentary that is founded on the ways in which they each deconstruct the reality of the world that brought forth whatever aspect of society is in question. Thus, *The Magnetic Fields* and “Emmett Till” demonstrate how surrealists can effectively question the world by taking its elements and constructing them in a strange, alien parallel of reality as most people understand it.

In *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton and Soupault articulate just

how surreal France in the throes of World War I had become. They take the world and, through a process of surrealist automatic writing, dissect its most common images, subsequently instilling those images with a sense of new meaning. For example, the first chapter of *The Magnetic Fields*, entitled “The Two-Way Mirror,” begins by taking familiar images and comforts and either using them in a new way or casting them aside; Soupault, author of the opening section, writes, “Prisoners of drops of water, we are nothing but perpetual animals. We run through noiseless cities and the enchanted posters no longer touch us. What’s the use of these huge fragile enthusiasms, these dried-out leaps of joy? We know nothing but dead stars” (11). In these opening lines, the narrator immediately sets forth dismantling the idea that mankind has any sure-footing or true understanding in this world. People are referred to as nothing more than “perpetual animals,” stripping away any sense of mankind’s superior mind and placing humans on the same level as any other mindless creature. Subsequently, that which man values loses its value; man’s enthusiasms become fragile, just as Soupault writes. Humanity’s knowledge only extends to useless things, to “dead stars.” Thus commences the deconstruction of the familiar world, devaluing any former understanding man may have previously claimed to possess.

Andre Breton himself supports this interpretation of the surrealist movement in his *The First Manifesto of Surrealism*. Critiquing the constraints of society, Breton asserts, “Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind anything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in accordance with accepted practices” (2). Breton’s argument is that, with the expectations and customs of society securing themselves increasingly and more firmly into place, there leaves little room for the discovery of any truths that contradict these traditions and customs. In his view, the search for nontraditional truth has been wrongfully cast aside as nothing more than tradition. Society, as depicted in Breton’s manifesto, is limiting in its expectations, barring people from breaking away from the norm in search of what is true. Returning to *The Magnetic Fields*, then, the concept of man as being imprisoned in an animalistic state makes sense; if one applies Breton’s views as articulated in his manifesto, man’s imprisonment appears to stem from an inability to rise above societal custom in the pursuit of truth.

It is important to note the symbol Soupault selects to represent what imprisons humanity and keeps people in the state of being perpetually animalistic. Water is the prisoner. Water, being essential to any being's survival, is commonly associated with life, so to frame the very thing that provides one with life as a prisoner even further distances this narrative from any reality that is familiar to the reader. Soupault's use of the water image here also primes the reader for future associations; later in "The Two-Way Mirror," he writes, "Tonight, there are two of us in front of this river overflowing with our despair. We can't think anymore. Words escape from our mouths, and when we laugh, passersby turn around, terrified, and hurry home" (13). Now that the water is overflowing, it leads to escape; words and emotions tumble out, frightening those who pass by the pair, those whose despair has not overflowed in a river. The prior notion of still water as a prison prepares the reader for the notion that overflowing water would therefore be an escape; thus, when the two ideas of overflowing water and escape are paired here, it has a sense of resolution as Soupault takes the image of water and ascribes to it a new meaning. Gordon Browning describes this process of redefinition in "Expansion and Conversion, Repetition and Circularity; Philippe Soupault's First Automatic Text in *Les Champs magnetiques*," claiming, "Since drops of water imprison, then, not surprisingly, gushing liquid introduces expressions of escape" (15). Here, Browning notes the connection Soupault has established between water and freedom or lack thereof. The image of water takes on a new connotation as each new reference to it returns to ideas of imprisonment and escape, firmly cementing this connection in the mind of the reader. On a broader scale, this deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of water demonstrates the surrealist ability to take familiar images and symbols, strip them of their familiarity, then breathe a new life into them.

In "Barriers," the fifth chapter of the book, Breton and Soupault further codify society as absurd in a series of quotations from unknown speakers. As abstract as their language may be, these passages do describe certain barriers that may keep mankind at the level of the common animal. One speaker in particular continues to sap away at man's presumed position of status, stating, "The return to principles implies a very beautiful soul that we do not have. That takes place only in the presence of policemen" (44). The speaker of this passage rejects principles on the basis that they imply mankind

has “a beautiful soul” and that this soul only ever appears to exist when law enforcement is near. Once more, mankind’s status is called into question, as is the idea that society’s fundamental principles are of any particular importance. The point is that humanity possesses no great moral knowledge, so one has no need to adhere to any principles upon which humanity has agreed. The speaker, or perhaps another speaker, returns again to this idea later in the same chapter, asserting to an unknown party, “You are wrong to believe that our voices serve to fill significant spaces. It’s not a very long time since we were born” (45). The speaker undermines the significance of any person’s voice and explains this position by depicting people as young. The speaker’s point seems to be that no one has been alive for very long and that, as a result, no one truly knows anything significant. This undermining of humanity itself combined with an undermining of the defined images humanity has established works to erode notions of the real; reality means nothing because reality is defined by man, and man is young and clueless. Martine Antle and Katherine Conley outline this as a mission of the surrealist movement in “Introduction: Dada, Surrealism, and Colonialism.” Summarizing ideas found within Breton’s manifesto on surrealism, they write, “In their ideal vision of themselves, the surrealists sought to undo binaries, starting with the transformation of dream and reality into surreality” (7). The goal of the original surrealists, per Antle and Conley, was to transform reality in such a way that it lost any unnecessary binaries with which society tried to categorize it. The point of drifting into “surreality” is to highlight how surreal reality itself is with all the flawed practices it contains.

The historical context surrounding *The Magnetic Fields* reveals precisely why the world may have appeared surreal to Breton and Soupault. At the time they were writing it, France was in the throes of World War I, the first global war the world had ever experienced. The first world war brought with it new horrors that redefined the landscape of war and sharply altered citizens’ perceptions of the world. In “Expressing the Inexpressible: World War I and the Challenge to Art,” William Cloonan discusses the impact of this change on civilization and, specifically, on artists:

To depict World War I in a manner that was visceral as well as comprehensible and descriptive, to detail the frequent incompetence of the leadership on both sides, to highlight the

struggle to survive amid the bizarre moonscape of trench warfare, to treat the decency and indecency of its participants, would provide artists with a very serious challenge. Those who survived the war knew that the world had changed, and what they sought in their art was a means of allowing their audience to understand some of the causes of that change. (16)

Cloonan describes here how the state of the world as a result of war appeared inexpressible to many contemporary artists, who were aware of just how much the world had changed as a result. It was, according to Cloonan, a struggle for artists at the time to articulate the experiences of dealing with questionable leadership decisions, horrific trench warfare, and the moral ambiguity of those participating in the war.

From this struggle for expression sprung movements such as surrealism; later in his article, Cloonan explains the motive behind these movements, stating, “Rage at the brutality of the conflict, as well as the political and moral values that had led up to it, engendered Dadaism and then Surrealism . . . . Both were international movements, inviting artists to overcome national rancor and join in a protest of a war many thought could have been avoided” (19). Surrealism, per Cloonan, served as a vehicle through which artists could protest the war. Applying this idea to the aforementioned ways in which Breton and Soupault deconstruct reality and human understanding in *The Magnetic Fields*, it becomes clear that this deconstruction targets a world that was capable of producing the tragedies of World War I. Additionally, in the context of artists’ struggle to articulate the changes the world underwent, Breton and Soupault’s redefinition of established words and symbols serves as a means of combatting this struggle. If the established use of language is failing to express the experience of war, then breaking away from the establishment in order to arrive at expression is the next logical step.

Aimé Césaire, considered a second-generation surrealist poet, certainly drew inspiration from Breton and Soupault’s deconstruction of society and language in his own works. Tackling the wrongful death of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old boy who was accused of inappropriately flirting with a white woman and subsequently killed because of this accusation, Césaire employs a similar technique of deconstructing reality to highlight how surreal the world

has become. His “Emmett Till” poem is infused with a surrealistic irony that serves to demonstrate the tragedy of Till’s death. At the beginning of the poem, Césaire writes, “your eyes were a sea conch in which the heady battle / of your fifteen year old blood sparkled” (1-2). Césaire’s deconstruction here is rooted in the irony of Till’s age. The “fifteen year old blood” alludes to Till’s actual age of fourteen, and through this blood Césaire connects the seemingly conflicting images of a battle and sparkling. Because battles are notoriously violent and sparkling has connotations of aesthetic beauty, the idea that a battle of blood can sparkle is jarring. In juxtaposing the images against each other, Césaire demonstrates just how ill-fit they are for each other. Subsequently, as he incorporates the idea that this blood is fifteen years old, Césaire subtly demonstrates just how jarring and unnatural it is that a boy would die while still a teenager.

In the succeeding lines, Césaire continues contemplating Till’s age, employing elements of surrealistic deconstruction as he writes, “Even young [your eyes] never had any age, / or rather more than all the skyscrapers” (3-4). Immediately the idea of age is deconstructed in these lines; Till’s eyes are simultaneously young, lacking age, and possessing more age than the skyscrapers. Again, this serves to portray Till’s death as unnatural and surreal; in dying so wrongfully and so brutally at such a young age, Till’s age falls into question as horrors are forced upon him with which no teenager should ever have to deal. Per Césaire’s description, Till is a youth experiencing horrors beyond his years. At the same time, however, he is still young, never having the chance to age because he died before he ever received that opportunity. Till is now, as portrayed in this poem, both permanently young through his death and permanently aged through his trauma.

The ironies and contradictions increase as Césaire proceeds to undercut the authority of the world and impress upon the reader the magnitude of Till’s lost innocence:

five centuries of torturers  
of witch burners weighed on them,  
five centuries of cheap gin of big cigars  
of fat bellies filled with slices of rancid bibles  
a five century mouth bitter with dowager sins,  
they were five centuries of old EMMETTILL. (5-10)

Similarly to how Breton and Soupault strip humanity of authority in *The Magnetic Fields*, Césaire takes traditionally respected images

of morality and perverts them in his verse. The Bible, a traditional symbol of ultimate and absolute morality, becomes rancid, sliced, and stuffed in fat bellies. The imagery is intentionally sacrilegious; in “slicing up” the Bible, Césaire is endeavoring to “slice up” its authority. A society claiming to follow the Bible has condoned the death of an innocent boy, so Césaire calls into question that society’s source of moral knowledge. Furthermore, five centuries of these horrors have contributed to Till’s simultaneous youth and old age; his eyes carry those centuries. It is the historical, sinful horrors of America that have forced Till into a tragic irony of experiencing this long history of violence at such a young age.

Later in the poem, Césaire distorts the world by uniting it with images of violence: “All gone with the bleating of the racial wind / He listens in the blue bush of veins / to the steady singing of the blood bird” (34-36). The line between Till’s body, so brutally murdered, and the world becomes blurred; his veins and his blood are the bush and the bird, and the bush and the bird are his veins and his blood. By making these images inseparable, Césaire forces awareness within the reader. No one living in this world can ignore the violent death of Emmett Till because the death is an integral part of the world, and the world is an integral part of the death. Corey McCall describes this in “‘Caine’s Stake’: Aimé Césaire, Emmett Till, and the Work of Acknowledgment,” writing, “Césaire’s work . . . urges readers to see the things they would prefer not to see and show us how language stakes us to the world in all its terrifying awfulness and wondrous splendor, despite our desperate attempts to avoid this realization” (25). McCall notes that Césaire forces readers to connect with the realities of the world even at their most unpleasant. Through his use of language, Césaire forces acknowledgement that people are fundamentally connected to their environment and all its atrocities. Applying this argument to “Emmett Till,” Césaire compels readers to understand that, even if they attempt to avoid it, they too are connected to the death of Emmett Till.

Césaire only emphasizes this connection throughout the rest of the poem:

Spring, he believed in you. Even at the edge of night,  
at the edge of the MISSISSIPPI rolling its bars, its barriers,  
its tomb-like avalanches between the high banks of racial  
hatred.

In spring rushing its murmurs into the portholes of eyes.  
 In spring hound-calling the bovine panic in the savannahs of  
 the blood. (19-23)

Not only does Césaire unite the world with violence here, but he also again references the idea of Emmett Till's youth. In stating that Till believed in spring, Césaire establishes a sense of Till's useful optimism. Spring is commonly with positivity; it is the time just after winter when flowers are beginning to bloom, birds return from their migration, animals awake from hibernation, and the cold weather finally fades. Till, as Césaire depicts him, still believed in this spring, but Césaire immediately undercuts this optimism by pairing spring-time with graphic images. It is during spring that there is bovine panic in the savannahs of blood. Césaire also bounds Mississippi, the state in which Till died, with similar graphic images in this passage. His depiction of Till believed in spring "even" at the edge of the Mississippi River. He believed in spring despite the Mississippi River possessing "high banks of racial hatred." Césaire contrasts Till's youthful optimism with the reality of the racist culture of Mississippi and the world, and in describing this racism via natural imagery, he roots the world in its own racism and violence. The poem's thematic emphases on Till's youth, his optimism, and the world's inseparability from its racism and his death come together in this passage to form a united front, standing against the death of Emmett Till.

Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields* and Aimé Césaire's "Emmett Till" both serve as deconstructions of their contemporaries' traditional understanding of the world. In *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton and Soupault break down traditional uses of language only to reconstruct language in new ways to communicate their meaning. Through this deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction, they articulate how useless structured language is when attempting to articulate the mass horrors and changes society was experiencing as a result of World War I. Their deconstruction also serves as a critique of the society that established those customs because, if that society produced the horrors of World War I, then no one should feel the need to follow structures such a society enforces, including structured language. Similarly, Césaire performs his own deconstruction in "Emmett Till," calling society into question in the same way as he emphasizes the idea that the world is inseparable from its long history of racial violence. Thus, *The Magnetic Fields* and "Emmett Till"

both showcase how surrealist writers can offer effective commentary on the world even as they distance themselves from that world and its customs.

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# Hope in Love

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# *Worry Me Away* Sarah Katherine Rawlinson

Crippling Anxiety creeping inside of me  
I try to make it go away, yet it stays  
Days are long and the nights are fast, but I want mine with you to  
last  
When I am near you, I feel safe, not a bit of worry not even a trace  
How can you make all my fears and worries disappear, just by being  
near  
You must be a magician of some sort, like Magic Johnson on the  
court  
You amaze me in so many ways, how you walk, talk and what you  
say  
Your words are so lovely, makes the cold seem warm and bubbly  
I never know what you will do next, but I know it will be sweet yet  
complex  
The cynic in me is depleting, but my heart can be misleading  
Not sure you're the one I have been waiting for, any minute you  
may walk out the door  
I toss the negativity to the side, knowing you were the reason I cried  
All those lonesome nights in my room, as if my life were doomed  
No one could ever love me, my heart must be ugly  
These were the thoughts I had that made me go mad  
All of this of course was before you, before my dreams came true  
This may seem so cheesy from the start, but I am writing from the  
heart  
I want to be as honest as I can be, let you really see me  
Promise you won't go away, promise me you will stay  
You look at my eyes, destroying my lies  
The ones I tell to feel secure, because of pain I endured

You know the pain of my past, why relationships didn't last  
You still choose to stay, so brave and unafraid  
Made for me, like dolphins with the sea  
Flourishing together is all we know, sunshine to make the flowers  
grow  
Butterflies consume my head, a monarchy already being led  
From the day we say I love you, all the way to I do  
Autumn Night with colored trees, and multiple falling leaves  
A night I will never forget, nor will I regret  
Everything fell into place; into the moment we were face to face  
I love being your bride, the one you hold with pride  
I am thankful for our continuing journey, and all I am still learning  
Just know this poem is for you, and all we have been through  
Let us never stop dancing, or romancing  
Be wild and let our wings fly, under the moonlit sky  
Love each other every day, however long we get to stay  
So, to the love of my life, from your forever wife  
I love your perception, and the kind gestures with no mention  
The soft smiles, and laughter that drives me wild  
To the one who makes me complete, I am counting down the days  
till we meet

# *Desires of the Flesh*

## James Cooper

You know what I like about being alone  
 I can truly be myself  
 I'd rather be alone to myself  
 Instead of being in a room full of people and still feel like I am  
 alone to myself  
 At least that is what I used to believe  
 At some point you get tired of being lonely  
 At some point you just want to start enjoying your life instead of  
 wasting it...  
 Now... now, I guess you could say that I always at somebody's  
 function.  
 I'm always vibing at somebody's event.  
 Dabbling and dabbling in the desires of the flesh  
 Those urges, the wants...  
 The flesh longs for it  
 A deep desire like no other  
 After a while I'm questioning myself  
 The way it makes me feel  
 The ways it makes me feel  
 Succumbing to the needs of the flesh sooner or later leaves you  
 empty  
 Empty  
 Empty inside  
 A familiar feeling.  
 I'm trying to figure out how I ended up here  
 Why do I need to do these things  
 It's because those desires of the flesh make me happy  
 Those desires feel the gaping hole of sadness and darkness I feel ev-

ery day

Its like I cant live without those sweet little desires...

I question who I am everyday

I ask my self...

Who do I want to be

What kind of man do I want to be

Then one day I asked myself...

When am I going to stop feeling sorry for myself

Do I want to be the kind of man who lets the wants of the flesh over-  
take my life

Or do I want to be the kind of man who takes control of my life

Do I keep letting the desires of the flesh take control

A man will stand tall against all obstacles and adversity

With his head held high

Bruised and pale

A man must never be afraid

For man must overcome

The desires of the flesh.

# *Between the Lines*

## Kelly Foster

### Second Place Short Fiction

When the first leaf of fall trickled to the ground, she knew that it meant something. Everything always meant something; it was *exhausting*. Aria was always on alert, looking for any form of symbolism in the cracked teacup, the wind in the chimes, the cawing of a raven. Her life was a never-ending *Nevermore*.

So she knew with absolute certainty that this dead, fallen leaf was a sign. A warning.

“We don’t have much time left,” she whispered faintly, watching it drift to the dirt. The autumn breeze collected her words and carried them away, along with the leaf. That probably meant something too.

“Hmmm?” said the one at her side. They’d never been given a name, not officially. They’d never been given any defining characteristics at all.

That was the ruin of their story – it *wasn’t* a story. It didn’t happen, would never happen for her. And now she was looking at them, staring at them intently, but she couldn’t *translate* that. She saw a non-sight, kissed a shadow, brushed the hands of dust. The two of them were a marginal rendezvous, a footnote affair.

Her person rolled to where they were positioned over her, hands planted firmly on either side of her shoulders, blocking out the sun above.

“Hey,” they said.

“Hi,” she said.

Hi, hello. Yes, no. She’d take any form of dialogue she could get.

“Something’s bothering you,” said her person, peering down at her with evident concern. “What is it?”

“I told you,” she sighed, squirming where she lay until her

person got the message and rolled off her. For a moment, she considered turning away from them, but then there was *this*. This was so rare. The two of them could never simply be; how could she possibly deny herself when it appeared that fate had temporarily smiled down on her? If she could see them, for however long, then she would see them.

“I didn’t hear you,” they lied. She knew they were lying. Could practically picture the dialogue tag.

Normally, she would play along—passivity and indirectness were supposedly her *character flaws*, whatever that meant—but it appeared something was sparing her today. She spoke frankly, reveling in the clear sound of her voice, “You did hear. You know what I’m saying. You know what all this means.”

“Okay,” they relented, but then they smiled. Her mind fought desperately to trace the image in permanent ink. She’d always wanted a tattoo, something impervious to omission.

Her person spoke again, smile still in place, “You’re right, I heard you. But you also worry too much, so I guess we’re both a little nutty.”

“One hundred and one words left, starting *now*.”

“What?”

Aria’s eyes were fixed ahead, staring past them. “I’ll be here. You won’t. *We’re running out of time*.”

Her person sat up from where they both lay on the cool grass. Hair fell over their face, and Aria wondered if it might be possible to retain the shade, to carry it with her forever in a golden locket that fell right over her heart. Surely there was a story in that, somewhere. *Please find a story in us*.

The wind picked up again, and she shivered. *I guess that’s a no*.

The thought didn’t even feel like her own.

# Romeo, Put Thy Sword Away

Joanna Johnson

It's pretty normal when we hear the phrase "boys will be boys" or "girls mature much quicker than boys," and Shakespeare proves this point in *Romeo and Juliet*. Even at the start of the play, Romeo grumbles about his aching heart after Roseline rejected him; it's pretty obvious that it's just not only his heart that is aching. Shakespeare's choice in phrases reveals that a majority of his characters, protagonists to supporting characters, all have a sexual desire that makes this play not so heart throbbing as readers assumed in 9th grade.

In the opening of scene one, Sampson and Gregory, who are servants in the house of Capulets, are having a discussion. Sampson states to Gregory "I will take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's" (1.1.16). Already at the beginning of the play, the audience is witnessed to the sexual discussion - of what sexual acts Sampson would do to one of Montague's maids. As the men continue to further their discussion on this sexual act, Sampson goes into detail stating "Me they shall feel while I am able to stand; and 'tis known I am a pretty piece of flesh" (1.1.26-27). While we the audience assume that Sampson is referring to the word "stand" as to hold himself up, the double entendre in this statement may be referring to "keeping his erection." As he is mentioning himself as a "pretty piece of flesh", the two phrases go hand in hand in blatantly saying: "When I'm erect, I have a perfect member." Sampson later states some graphic detail on the sexual acts he would commit on the maids of Montague's house.

As the two men further their graphic conversation, the audience gets to find out what Romeo has been up to - which is heartbreak. Benvolio speaks to Romeo's parents regarding how Romeo has been isolating himself recently. Montague goes into further discussion on

how strange and antisocial Romeo has been acting, stating “Away from the light steals home my heavy son, And private in his chamber pens himself,” (1.1.132-133). From just reading this, the audience just assumes that Romeo is in a state of depression and wants to be alone. Giving it a deeper analysis, we can start to suspect what a blue-balled, 16-year-old guy would be doing alone in his room. After all, this hypothesis proves itself when we realize why Rosaline rejected Romeo in the first place: “She hath Diana’s wit, And in strong proof of chastity, well arm’d;” (1.1.204-205). In Greek mythology, Diana is the goddess of virginity, and by this comparison plus what Romeo states, Rosaline wants to remain a virgin - something Romeo can’t wrap his 16-year-old hormones around.

Entering into Scene II, we are introduced to the Capulet household as we’re acquainted with Paris and Lord Capulet discussing the marriage proposal of his 13-year-old daughter, Juliet. The two’s discussion leads into the analysis in Act II, with how the two portray Juliet now than how Romeo does when meeting her. Paris is persistent in marrying Juliet, whereas Lord Capulet is wary of the thought as he says “Let two more summers wither in their pride, Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride” (1.2.10-11). Although there is no blatant discussion on the act of sex, there is a discussion on how Juliet is still hasn’t matured into womanhood yet. Fruit is a common comparison of a woman’s “anatomy.” When fruit is cut in half, its core resembles a woman’s genitalia, and if the fruit is unripe then it’s not able to be cut in half due to it being too hard and firm. The comparison between Juliet and the unripe fruit symbolizes that she is still too young for marriage and sex, thus why Lord Capulet insists on Paris waiting just two more years until she and her body have matured into a young woman.

We enter into Act II, and Romeo has completely forgotten about Rosaline and has fallen for Juliet. Romeo has snuck to Juliet’s balcony and makes small yet creepy commentary regarding Juliet: “Her vestal livery is but sick and green, And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off” (2.1.50-51). This line can regard two things that both result in sexual undertones. The first is simple: Romeo wants Juliet to strip and he gets to see her naked. The second is back in regards to Rosaline and how she wants to remain a virgin forever and that Romeo is not for that idea. Romeo is still upset over the fact that his sexual urges are what made Rosaline reject him, so he’s hoping

that Juliet is not the same case. Romeo is wanting Juliet to give her virginity to him, and that only fools want to remain virgins anyways. When Juliet notices Romeo, and they exchange what we think will be a romantic exchange of words between the two.

Juliet wants Romeo to admit his love for her is true, and as he does she attempts to go inside by telling him she will reunite with him soon. As Juliet makes this attempt, she says “This bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath, May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet” (2.1.163-164). This statement parallels itself with the statement her father made previously in Act I with Paris; how Juliet is not ripe enough to be a bride - just like a flower that hasn’t bloomed. Juliet is telling Romeo that although she isn’t ready tonight, she will be ready to give herself to him once they meet again. She is a flower bud but in giving Romeo her virginity on what we assume to be her wedding night, she will become a bloomed flower.

After Juliet politely tries to excuse herself and go to bed, Romeo stops her by saying “O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?” (2.1.167). Just like the statement, Romeo said previously, this quote reveals what Romeo’s true intentions were when he came to visit Juliet in the first place. It suggests that Juliet is leaving him sexually unsatisfied, which even takes her back due to her asking him “What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?” (2.1.168). When reading the balcony scene, we the audience first view it as an iconic romance scene - two starcrossed lovers confessing their love to each other and making arrangements to be wed. Now, with a closer view of the scene, we can see that Romeo’s concept of “love” is more of just a teenage male’s sexual desire, while Juliet is so young and naive that she thinks Romeo’s words to be true and sincere.

Romeo then visits Friar Lawrence to discuss his plans to marry Juliet and later catches up with Mercutio and Benvolio. Mercutio tells Romeo that they were wondering where he vanished to after the party, and Romeo brushes it off implying that he met someone that night. Mercutio jokes with Romeo and in response, Romeo says “Why, then is my pump well flowered” (2.3.56). This line heavily implies that Romeo is about to get some action, as he refers to his member as “his pump.” Like Juliet’s womanhood and virginity being referred to as a flower bud, Romeo is referring to his virginity as being already flowered.

When reading *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time, readers

assume it to be a romantic, yet tragic story between two star-crossed lovers; with the balcony scene being the most iconic romantic scenario to this day. Giving it a deeper dive, readers realize the sexual desire that Romeo yearns for, and although young, Juliet is ready to give herself to him.

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# Life Breeds Trouble

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*All Saints Day*  
Kelly Foster  
First Place Poetry

Name.

Light.

Name.

Light.

Name.

Light.

Name. Light.

We gather here today.

It's a pale day and I it's a praise the dead leaves and I it's a dry-eyed  
wind and I it's a silent car ride and I it's a six hours of sleep and I it's a  
haven't seen that uncle since he left the family over an heirloom and I

I-I-I-I-I-IIIIIIIIII . . .

I can taste the cold blue sky on my chapped lips.

Blue was your favorite color.

We gather here today.

You had an eye for the finer things, didn't you?

I must have howled operas as you

Sharply combed my wretch-dead

Throw a wrench in it hair.

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII must've must'veeeee

Because you sang along.



forgotten. I bit you once one when I was four I blushed and yelled when you found drops of red on my underwear and tried to explain the meaning I was never that pretty little thing you always said I was the sweetest little girl what does that even mean would you still say that in your right mind I don't know I'm not pretty I haven't brushed my hair I still have acne at twenty did you see that with your pearly eyes did you remember all my ugly days I was such a little brat I know I was I I-I-Iiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

Did you know and do I even wish you did.  
I'm selfish enough to find Neverland in your fffFFFFffffaltering brain.  
But even back when you remembered every birthday in the family,  
You had a way of forgetting that little bite mark I left,  
And all the times we lost our patience.

Name light wwwwweeeeeeeeearree gathered n-n-name light name.  
You.

I threw on my dress this morning and I did it for you.  
There's a little turtleneck in my closet, it's cream-colored with a spread of  
Flowers but I didn't wear it because I wore it the last time I watched  
You sleep. At the time I thought maybe you could still catch the  
Scent of gardens on the breeze.  
Now every garden smells like a cemetery.

Anyway, I didn't wear that today.  
But I did throw on a dress for you and maybe it should've  
Been for church you would've wanted it to be for church but  
God gave me you so surely surely surely I'm allowed to  
Focus on that, on you. I don't even know what the pastor said  
But I heard your name and I saw them light the candle.  
Your picture's on the screen. You look like you look like  
You look.  
You're beautiful, and you smile.

I'm glad they cropped me out of it.

# *Literary and a Nod* Caleb Giachelli

Inflicted by the unbearable burdens which those born of May - shall endure so mercilessly,  
And contained only by the dualistic coin of Gemini that awoke my birth;  
Risen as a lion, but put to sleep by the sting of a scorpion.

My blood; an everlasting clash of Romans and Romance;  
Dis-spelled by the conquest of Nordic Heroism,  
Unanvowed:  
Hath my destiny been made by boots without a lace,  
Or ‘twas my existence meant to unify hearts -  
That they too,  
Know only rage.

Barbaric delight feeds this vessel for where soul and shadow should reside;  
Yet, it is in Itta Bena;  
Where atrocity became persuasion  
and the the vial of written revelation/  
It pours outward like the great River,  
And into the gulf of extroverted isolation  
My contemplation as a writer is no more.

Intrinsic dissolution,  
Be of such unfair and irrelevancy;  
That it is,  
This pain which has propelled me into such obscenity  
That it is,

This pain which I no longer can express  
Oh dear, what I wish the world would let me say  
That it is,  
By birth you ask me to carry shield and hammer;  
But by God I tell you,  
Only a verse -  
Could conceal dry tears and my irrevocable manner

These paths which lay upon my mother's womb;  
You tell me I am free;  
That it could be -  
The world is yours/  
So just be me.

But, I know that is not so.  
Thus, in the late May  
Of 1997 - shackled by chains,  
Unafraid.  
You give me a key -  
Yet, the same lock which maketh  
Ankles of mankind,  
Ankles which rot,  
Ankles which never see the beauty of light,  
Ankles trapped so deeply  
Ankles that never take flight,  
Ankles which know;  
That I'll never be right...  
you provide keys to the wrong door  
And ask that I sit back and blow balloons  
As if it's ok - your just bored.

What fickle riddle it is for I,  
And so many more -  
to bare the mark of Taurus  
Or Leo  
Maybe Pisces,  
And Virgo.  
Cosmologically compelled care,

Brash,  
Beauty,  
But,  
Bare.

We stand naked with a face which reads despair, and ask please -  
Just give a hand and share.

We stand tall - cloaked by imaginary threads

Disgraced, and disgusted -

Put you're hands down and be fair.

We stand alone - prowling under the beds

Sometimes afraid that grandpa is dead

Or love is a lie, maybe Jacob was caught by the feds, am I dead ?

Or is it you,

My love -

Don't forget

It is okay to dread.

# *Body Shaming* Shamyiah Williams

She is a bottomless pit.

Girls' black eyes are glued to her every move.

Every boy will smile with harmful glee.

Her breasts have grown overnight and her hips have widened into the mass of the ocean. Her hair has grown and become shiny. Her nose has widened. Her height has grown into a giant. Now she looks more like a woman than a child according to society.

When the male of the family came around, they will circle her and tell her, "You look like your mother."

She was every girl's nightmare, but she was her's as well.

Her brown eyes shed a red tear. A tear that holds many memories of the traumatizing past. Her brown eyes will blink with those memories into the lids of her daily activities. She cries.

Her period started today. It is an unwanted feeling of pain and sadness. Her mother will tell her that it will be okay; it is part of nature. It will be all over. But the tasteless reality is it is not natural for her. "You look so beautiful."

She began to question her appearance and the word "beautiful" as if it was an unknown disease. When her mother asked her what's wrong, she would step back into the darkness that would behind her. It would grip her by the shoulders and consume her to believe her existence didn't matter to the world.

# *Clarity at Last* Jacqueline V. Robichaux

the catalyst to an outlet i never knew i was longing for  
 red door to a hallway colored by a thousand more  
 an anecdote pausing a ceaseless mind  
 a portal to escape the pandemonium  
 the secret best kept from its restless master  
 no longer deprived of peace  
 exhaustion edging its limit  
 sweetly tasting relief before collapse  
 finally free but trapped all the same  
 the invitation to overthinking  
 all i knew  
 do i wish it still was?  
 key to full potential!  
 barricaded by debilitation.  
 a blank canvas to connect the dots dormant since collection  
 the tribulations of life overwhelm  
 yearning to be forgotten  
 limitations of distraction lifted  
 yet the sky remains cloudy  
 the storm prevails  
 a look through fogged glasses  
 imperfections magnified  
 headache on the horizon  
 sleep-deprived but restless  
 cold hands offer condolences  
 alone in a crowd of clones  
 shrinking under the critical eye  
 racing around a frictionless loop

swimming through a sea of pollution  
probing through artificial darkness  
grappling for guidance  
progress bookended by failure  
on a mission to please  
imagination dwindling  
reality check  
trapped in a web of my creation  
silk quality varies  
propagator of downfall  
abridged by wavering success  
drained to pour a glass half empty  
at least it's orange juice  
heaven combatting hell  
a fair-fought battle  
essential yet terrifying  
my own worst enemy  
perpetually temporary

*Fall from Grace*  
 Morgan Raper  
 Second Place Poetry

The church that is my father's body  
 Has fallen into disrepair. Too much indulgence  
 lead to this altar-ed heart.  
 Three walls stand hollow,  
       The fourth already shattered.  
 His stale bread body breaks at his fingertips  
 Crumbs of who he once was.  
 Prohibition takes course through  
 Narrow aisles of his veins.  
 Every cell up for excommunication.

The cracked foundation spreads along  
 Holey ground. No light shines through his  
 Stained-glass eyes; a dull mosaic of memories gone by.  
 His lungs wheeze out through rusted pipes.  
       Pressure from organs conducts a symphony of agony.  
 Splinter-struck pews scratch sermons into his  
 Ribbed frame. A testament of pain reduced to a hymn.  
 His head is in the rafters.  
 Bells ring laced-lined reminders of  
       When this steeple was not pointed westward.

# *To Train Her Right* Hannah Alley

## To Train Her Right

Never sit with your legs apart,  
Eat lightly, and never with your heart  
Sour is the gossiping tongue, so tart.  
Worms belong in the dirt, and dart.

Never play with the boys down the street  
Eat only vegetables, never sweets.  
Soggy, sugary cereal will rot your teeth,  
Waffles are only a very rare treat.

North, East, South, West,  
We don't want her like the rest.



*The Road Home*  
Raven Runnels • Acrylic



*Fawn* |  
Naia Loper • Sculpture

# Finding Purpose

# *Planting Mums*

## Luke Yarbrough

### First Place Creative Nonfiction

Every year, the discomfort began before I even got out of the car. The sun still had an hour before it began its performance, but already a thick and heavy heat permeated the air. The road approaching the farm was comprised of coarse gravel and dread, and the branches hanging near the narrow stretch berated my car windows. Eventually I would arrive at the farm, and I passed by a long line of well-worn pick-up trucks. The smell of cigarette smoke filled my lungs. In the distance I heard rough characters kicking the impending day off with crude banter. It was the weekend following July 4th, and it was time to plant mums.

I had a job at Walton's Greenhouse from 8th grade until I left for college. Every summer, they offered overtime pay to anyone who would help plant mums at the farm. My youthful enthusiasm and desire to save money for a car drove me to volunteer in 8th grade. In the following years, I lacked that enthusiasm, but my interest in the overtime pay persisted. The work was grueling. The bulk of my job during planting was to manually transport mums from the back of a four-wheeler to a two black mats. Each black mat was the size of a football field, and the job was not done until every spot was filled. Unfortunately, the reflective capabilities of the mats were lacking, and they made the intense heat of Mississippi in July even less bearable. You could say that my colleagues at the farm had experience in marketing. Unfortunately, the products that moved so well lacked a proper legal status, and this was reflected in many farm employees' criminal records. Their banter was jarring, and they did not take well to my pop culture references and Vans. The stand-out felon was Dale. He rocked many tattoos, but my favorite of his accessories was the court-ordered ankle bracelet. His style also con-

sisted of sagging, calf-length cargo shorts, a drooping cigarette, and a sideways hat. Despite his disorderly appearance, Dale surely holds the record for mums carried. The man in charge was Marty Walton. His attitude was not shy, and it was prompt; every year, at exactly 5:30 a.m., he sternly demanded that we all get to work immediately. The location of bossman shifted from hour to hour, and I spend the most strenuous parts of the day in his presence. He demanded constant hard work, and he would not hesitate to embarrass anyone with loud perturbation if he deemed it necessary.

The farm itself was a character. It was 30 minutes away from the nearest Walmart, and thick woods surround the rows of greenhouses for miles. The two black mum mats had a strip of brown grass running down their center, and the small square office was behind that strip. The chronic cigarette smoking that occurred in virtually every corner of the farm ensured that any nostrils in proximity would be aware of the bad habits that perpetuated the area. Most hours of the day, the roars of tractor's four-wheelers, and almost any other grounded vehicle you can think of echoed through the country. It always fit in my eyes; the rough exterior that the farm displayed to human senses ran parallel to my experiences with work and people there.

The coarse conditions were matched by the nature of the work. Four-wheels brought mum-filled trailers to the strip between the mats. From there, I would grab three mums in each hand and begin my journey to set them down on the mat. The mums were watered and fertilized right before coming to me. The water weighed the mums down substantially, and the fertilizer caused a dull but consistent burning sensation on my arms. The easiest way to get through the day was to forget about our circumstances and turn on autopilot. This method did have downsides, however.

The problem with going on autopilot is that the quality of the work drops off. Every year, our lines of mums would go crooked. This caused issues with growth and watering, and Marty hated crooked lines. His dismay with the crew peaked when about half of the mums had been planted, and he did his midday inspection. Lectures about angles and logic usually followed, and the vein on his forehead made its annual appearance. Luckily, this lashing usually came right before lunch. After sustenance, our minds, bodies, and attitudes were refreshed and ready to improve our performance.

The rest of the day always went by much faster. The initial lashing from Marty was enough to elicit an indifference to his criticism in the aftermath. The felons and I would keep our lines as straight as they needed to be, and we would work at reasonable speed. Making our own parameters removed us from airplane mode, and we increased efficiency. The work would finish around 3 p.m., and we would all make the trip home.

I would become so accustomed to my physical and mental discomfort during my time at the farm that my homecoming brought new ailments to my attention. The sunburn on my neck seemed to hide its pain until I made it to my street. My dehydration caused from excessive sweating would not be prevalent until I had access to my cabinet full of glasses. My arms, covered in dirt and mud, did not feel unsanitary until I had a sink to wash them in. Fertilizer, dirt, and water filled my shoes and socks, but I was not aware of that situation until I removed those items. Once I became aware of my physical ailments, I took a long cold shower. My hands always took a beating planting mums, and the cool water should have brought them relief. Surprisingly, this was never the case. The dirt that the water removed almost seemed to act as a medicine for the blisters. It was the farm's manifestation of a scab. This method was not the most conducive to health, but provisional comfort was provided. Marty's scathing comments in reference to everyone's work ethic bounced around my head. Upon reflection, I realized that his comments, while not gracefully delivered, had value in substance. His frustration was enhanced by the heat and humidity. Many of Marty's words had been aimed at Dale. He was a scapegoat, likely because of his raggedy appearance. What Marty failed to acknowledge was that Dale carried more mums than anyone else. His work ethic probably added to his dishevelment because of the excess sweat and body odor. He always took the harsh words with a grain of salt, laughed it off, and continued on with his work.

In the weeks following mums, I stayed inside more on hot days. I made sure that I kept my body pumped full of cool fluids. My usual duties at the retail location of Walton's had an air of relaxation that never preceded mums. It always seemed to fall in the few weeks after the planting day. Regular heat no longer affects me the same way. The only temperature that hits my mind as hard as my body is a heat as intense as mum planting heat. However, I have

experienced that heat now, and I am ready to deal with it for years to come.

# *Big Bend*

## Erika Hajduk

I will always remember the trip my dad and I took to Big Bend State Park in Texas. The long drive where we sat eating egg-rolls my mom made the night before, talking about what we could do, as well as wishing we had more eggrolls. I remember the small towns we'd entered after moving through bigger cities like San Antonio, going from solid asphalt and looming concrete buildings to paths of dirt and small homes and one-story shops, getting on and off endless roads. I remember my excitement I felt as it was my turn to go on this trip with my dad, just as my older brother did years prior.

The Park entrance looked out over the rest of the park, showing the expanse of hills and mountains, the pillars and chunks of rocks that decorated the desert. I'll never forget when my dad's truck got stuck in some deep sand and dirt, and the smile on his face when he finally got to put his new vehicle into four-wheel drive. The entrance of the park was nothing too special, just an extremely long dirt road with various signs marking the different paths to and from camp sites and sections of the park. Our campsite sat in a small area, surrounded by a mountain that curled around us in an almost perfect circle, blocking us from the chilly winds at night.

The first morning we spent at the park was mostly planning. Where would we put the tent? The ground was too hard and rocky, and we found that the campsite was so slanted that we couldn't comfortably set our sleeping bags down, and the rocks that jutted through the dirt and soil were too uncomfortable to sleep on. Despite this, we were excited to get out and go exploring and adventuring. Most of the mornings were spent with us sleepily getting up out of the makeshift beds in the back of the truck, shaking from the

cool desert air. We had made pancakes on the small fire pit on our campsite, covered in peanut butter and Nutella. We would change our clothes and get the cameras and first aid kit ready, tucking our “beds” away on the campsite, tying down our air mattresses to ensure they didn’t float off.

The mornings were beautiful, overrun by a silence that you can’t experience in the city, with the random gentle gust of wind shifting the desert plants. The sunrises were truly beautiful, orange and gold cascading across the dust and rocks, painting the sky and clouds. The long dirt roads kicked up dust in the chilly air as we chatted about my future departure to college, continuing my swimming career and advancing my love for the medical field. We left the windows down, tasting the dust and dry air as it blew around the dark blue truck, turning it slightly brown in the process.

The afternoons were always very hot, though we didn’t mind as we hiked along mountains and hills, searching for good places to take photos and enjoy the view. My dad would drive the truck as I looked for roads the map had marked as “4-wheel roads,” or “rough terrain.” The dumps and sudden dips in the roads excited us as we bounced up and down in the fancy new truck, giggling as we talked about whatever was on our minds. The places we had stopped at ranged from the higher points of mountains to the bases of hills, looking out over green and brown flora dotted and bundled across rocks.

At one point during our adventure, we came upon an old, deteriorating house. The home was made of long-dried bricks made of mud, rocks, straw and strands of grass, crumbling from the time it spent standing in the hot Texas desert. The home, surrounded by large rocks and mountains, sat upon white dust and sand that it was made of, with the bricks slowly returning to their resting place on the ground. The ground around the decaying home had chunks of brick strewn about, mixed in with small, shiny rocks and lumps of dirt and dust.

Lunchtime presented an interesting problem for the two of us. At one point, we were so far from any kind of population that we sat and made peanut butter and Nutella sandwiches. We sat, snacking on chips and cookies as we looked over the map to figure out which road we would follow next. For the beginning of our trip, I had no interest in driving the truck whatsoever, as it was new, huge,

and generally scary, as I had never driven something like it before. However, after we snacked on our sandwiches, my dad encouraged me to give it a try, and I was instantly hooked. The mix of joy and slight fear as I drove along the bumpy roads that were covered in cactus, sharp rocks and random bits of plant was a feeling I'm still craving to get back to.

There were some points in the road in which you couldn't see what was in front of you due to how steep it was, but that never deterred me or my dad as we slowly drove over the top point of those small hills, being careful not to run over anything with sharp thorns sticking out. When we got to areas that sat on the sides of mountains, I gave my dad his truck back, as I was absolutely terrified of driving next to a steep fall where the only thing keeping me from going over the edge was a thin guardrail. There's a specific album that I played as we drove during the days, filled with songs that to this day make me feel as though I'm in that newly scratched truck, looking out at the expanse of mountains, so at peace and so calm.

Our first night at our campsite was an interesting one, as we quickly figured out that the ground of the site was too slanted and rocky to comfortably sleep. For a while, we just walked around, looking for a possible place to set up our air mattresses, before deciding to turn the bed of the truck into a makeshift bedframe. Unfortunately, we underestimated how cold the wind would be throughout the night and woke up multiple times in a vain attempt to shield ourselves from the cold with our blankets. After our first night, we turned the truck around so that it would better block the wind and we could sleep without shaking ourselves awake.

Although our first night was difficult, we were overjoyed at the night sky. Back home, in the bustling city of San Antonio, the night sky is constantly dulled by the glow of lights. Out in the middle of nowhere, away from any major town, the sky was so clear and full of stars that your eyes couldn't properly focus, and you could only stare in amazement at the beauty before you. After the sun went down, I noticed that there was a decently sized clump of stars streaking across the sky, and to our joy we realized we could see the milky way galaxy, even if it wasn't as bright as it would be in a few months.

Our second night of our adventure was probably my favor-

ite and is one of my favorite memories of my dad. There's a movie, titled "The Thing," by John Carpenter, and it has always been a favorite of my dad's. After a long time of trying to get me to watch the film, I had caved prior to our trip and downloaded the movie to my iPad for us to enjoy. We set up our foldable chairs and put my iPad on top of the Gatorade bucket my dad had filled with ice and water for our trip. With blankets, some Oreos, and a starry night sky above us, we watched the classic horror thriller. That movie is now one of my favorite films ever, and I remember asking my dad multiple times throughout our screening who the alien was, and what would happen next. That movie will now forever be associated with my dad, the starry night sky, and the loud silence of the park.

That trip and that park are now very important to me. If I had the time, I could go on about how much fun I had, and how much I look forward to doing it again. Places like Big Bend exist for everyone, serving as a spot in our lives that will forever remain in our memories, reminding us of a truly peaceful moment. As I write this, I'm listening to some of those exact songs we played, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't stop every once and a while to let the memories consume me, taking me back to my favorite place.

# *To My Descendants* Shamyiah Williams

Dear Descendent,

Write my life like I am you.  
I see in the eyes of you  
as if I am you.  
The past was rough  
Nasty and tough.  
Unpredictable.  
Witchdoctor in the lands  
of the unforgiven.

I live through you.  
I live next to you.  
You can see me  
for yourself, if you  
Want to.  
Because I am you.  
Dreaming of me,  
but don't know who I am.

I am your relative  
Your grandmother's  
Grandmother,  
Maybe.  
Don't doubt me  
When I speak to you.  
Tell my story to the world  
I didn't tell you to stop.

Keep going, Please!  
Help us to tell

Our story.  
To tell us  
What we need to do  
for your ongoing  
Chance  
To celebrate such grievance

The blue smoke  
Within the eyes  
And breast of the victims  
Who screams for help.  
Sweep the feet of those  
Who have done us  
Wrong.

On the forsaken land,  
Strip us  
From our livelihood.  
Help us  
See our freedom.  
I don't know you  
But I can tell you  
Are me.

# *Baby Doll* Shamyiah Williams

“I died once.”

Her long slender legs-  
Cold to the touch,  
Swinging against the air  
As the wooden swing went  
Back and forth.

Her long brown hair  
Were branches of pink  
Roses with thick-like  
Vines going through.  
“I died on September.”

“It was cold and fearful.  
Nasty things crawled into  
My skin- I remember.”  
She was suffocated by her memories-  
My memories

I look upon the stars filled sky  
I look upon her  
As I thought about how much I  
Missed her.  
The sweet smells of her, dancing.

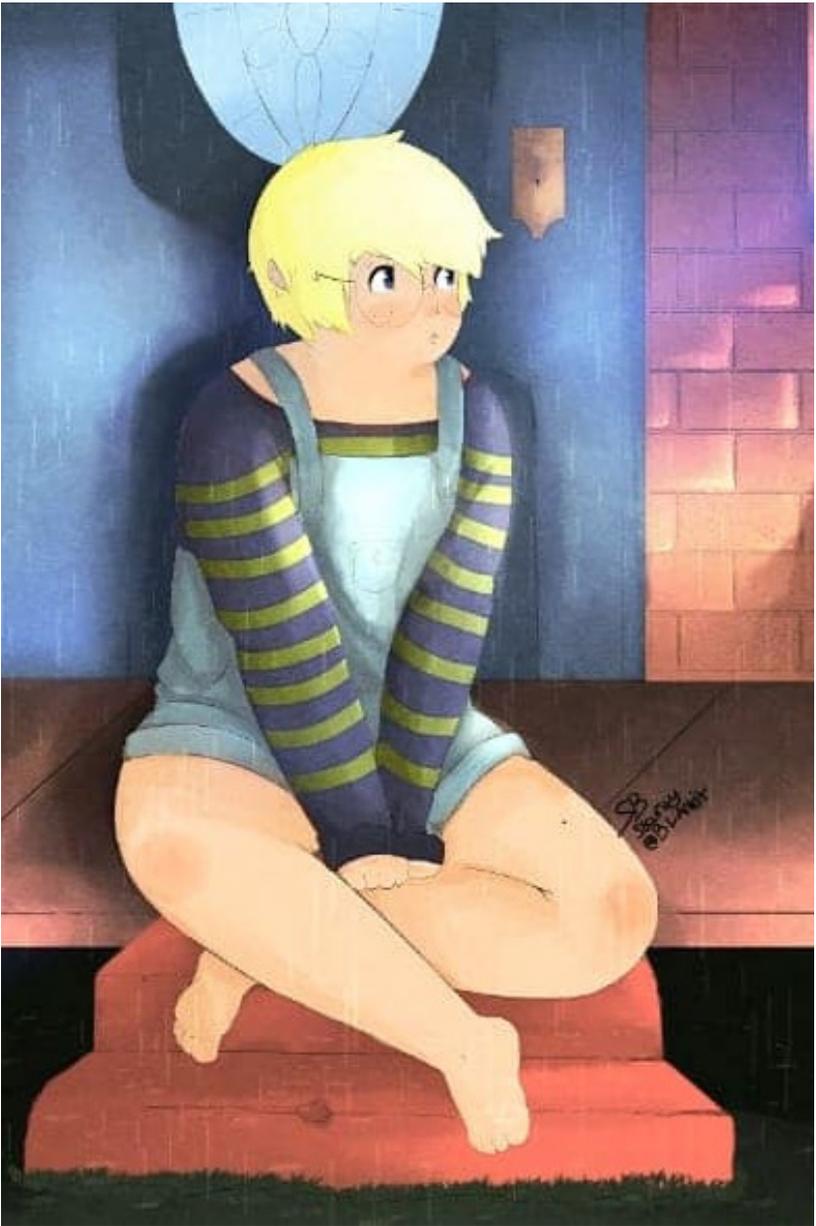
“What happened to you?”  
I finally gaze upon her,  
Thinking about how much she cost.

The lingering sign in the store:  
\$39.99

# *City Blues*

Shamyiah Williams

*Swingin'* loosely into the dirty **streetssss**  
Of Mem-*phis*.  
Sea of bath water  
Guttered into the oceanless waves  
Of nothing-**ness** amongst those people.  
*Singin'* amongst its mother  
Have glittered into its *shinnin'*  
**Light.** Have no-*thing* to stop  
Her glowin' heart.  
“*Sing* baby, *sing!*”  
“*Sing* for mommy!”  
Don't stop your loud flow!  
*Sing* to me!  
To the land of the livin'  
No-*thing* can hinder life  
From livin'-  
Livin'-  
Mem-*phis*  
**Memphis**  
Birth us into our glorious glory.



*Sunshowers*

Naia Loper • Digital Media



*Untitled II*  
Anna Schmitz • Photograph

# *The Lasting Marks of Heritage*

Morgan Raper  
Second Place Formal Essay

The way one engages with the concept of heritage leaves an ever-lasting mark on how they live their life. Heritage and the culture surrounding it provides a sense of identity in both cultural and social frames. However, history tends to erode connecting ties between individuals and their culture through destructive and systematic forces. Yaa Gyasi engages with this concept in her novel *Homegoing* through the domino effect set off by the transatlantic slave trade. Gyasi displays the multiplicity of suffering through two sisters' lineages and their descendants' journeys through adaptive generational trauma. In *Homegoing*, Gyasi's use of symbolism and conflict demonstrates how the connection to one's heritage and cultural identity is pivotal for the understanding of one's place in society.

From the very beginning of the novel, Gyasi introduces symbolism and heritage as intertwining factors that drastically impact multiple lives across several generations. One of the most prominent symbols used within *Homegoing* is fire. Fire serves as a destructive force that mentally, socially, and physically scars characters in ways that echo the effects that the transatlantic slave trade had on individuals and their cultural identity. The most significant occurrence of fire is the one set by Maame which is the catalyst for the rest of the novel to unfold. Gyasi writes, "the night Effia Otcher was born into the musky heat of Fanteland, a fire raged through the woods just outside her father's compound" (3). In this single event, Gyasi displays the connection between fire and slavery as a twofold system; whereas Maame uses fire as a restorative act of her physical freedom, her daughters, and in turn the lineage that follows them, are ultimately restricted by the blaze. Maame's abandonment of

Effia forces her to submit to social repercussions that directly tie to her heritage. She is socially burned from the fire through cultural superstition. Gyasi writes, “the villagers began to say that [Effia] was born of the fire, that this was the reason Baaba had no milk” (3). This superstition follows Effia for the rest of her life and is applied to all her shortcomings. Baaba even goes as far as to use the community’s perception of Effia to her advantage to marry her off. Motahane, Nyambi, and Makombe state, “Effia’s ‘arrival’ at the same time as the original ‘fire’ makes her a mnemonic site that archives the memory of loss” (23). Effia’s association with the fire is used to show the loss in her and her family’s life. The fire is directly the separating factor between her relationship with Maame, but on a much larger scale, it is indirectly used to separate her from the life she was meant to live but was ultimately refused. Gyasi writes, “she remembered, too, how close she was to really being someone” (19). Her marriage to James is seen as trying to reap the most benefits after losing her chances with the chief’s son, Abeeku. Within her family, the fire, as well as Effia, are results of Cobbe’s infidelity. Baaba views Effia as a stain on the family as well as her and Cobbe’s relationship. Without the truth behind the fire, Effia is forced to walk blindly through life accumulating sins that aren’t hers to collect in the first place. The fire is the driving force in Effia’s life that slowly burns all cultural connections she has. Once she is married off and taken to Cape Coast Castle, she has little contact with the outside world including her family. This limits her cultural immersion to the women who were also married off the British. In the hopes of escaping hardships rooted in preconceived notions of her character, Effia finds herself in the culturally oppressive Cape Coast Castle, showing the negotiation one must make between cultural involvement and personal necessities for growth.

Gyasi also displays the connection to one’s heritage through the black stones that are passed down throughout several generations. The stones are the physical embodiment of the family’s lineage and connection to either side of the family tree. Gyasi’s treatment of each sisters’ stone indirectly demonstrates the condition of each side’s connection to heritage by the end of the novel. On Effia’s side, the stone is passed down until it is ultimately given to Marjorie. Gyasi writes, “Marjorie raised her hand to the [stone] necklace... Her father had told her that the necklace was a part of their

family history and she was to never take it off, never give it away” (267). While the stone stays in this side of the family’s possession, so does their connection to their heritage and cultural identity. Marjorie is still deeply enriched in Akan culture despite living in the United States, such as speaking Twi and visiting her grandmother, Akua, in Ghana. However, on Esi’s side, the same cannot be said. Esi loses her stone in the midst of being sold into slavery and being shipped off to the United States. Gyasi writes, “the other soldier was herding them out of the dungeon. ‘No, my stone!’ shouted, remembering the golden-black stone her mother had given her” (49). The lost stone also serves to emphasize the complete disconnect from a cultural identity that Esi’s side of the family will ultimately be saddled with due to the slave trade. Through the slave trade, cultural identity shifts due to the lack of access to familial history. Motahane, Nyambi, and Makombe write, “the ‘halfness’ of Effia and Esi’s sisterliness morphs into an apartness that define distinctiveness in what evolved to become African and African American identities” (23). Gyasi uses the two sisters’ drastically different experiences to establish the precursor to cultural identities moving away from specific groups and towards broader identifications such as skin color. Although both sisters are a part of distinctive tribes, their respective relationships with the slave trade determine their future generations’ engagement with their culture. Esi’s enslavement is the first disconnect of her family’s connection to Asante culture, but the final blow is Anna’s death that leaves H enslaved with no familial connections. This difference in connection to heritage is what establishes Marjorie as African while Marcus is African American; Marjorie has a rich relationship with Akan and African culture whereas cultural ties were completely severed long before Marcus’s existence. Gyasi’s cultural connection serves as the grounding of the self and without it, it leaves generations of individuals adrift in the vast confusion of the world around them.

Gyasi uses conflict to show the hardships that are tied to one’s heritage. Gyasi engages in two different forms of conflict: person versus self and person versus society. Through Esi’s lineage, the audience can see the continuous internal struggle of trying to connect to one’s culture in times of need. The audience sees Esi’s struggle with her connection to her heritage through memories. Gyasi writes, “Esi learned to split her life into Before the Castle and

Now” (31). Esi’s compartmentalization of her life is the only way she can survive the atrocities of slavery. Unlike the traditional sense of escapism, Esi does not get lost in her memories to feel better about her time in the dungeon. Gyasi writes, “Hell was a place of remembering, each beautiful moment passed through the mind’s eye until it fell to the ground like a rotten mango, perfectly useless, uselessly perfect” (28). Although it is painful for her to engage with happy memories while she is imprisoned, Esi understands it would be more damaging to forget them, and in conjunction, her culture. Without her heritage, the process of the debasement of character becomes easier for those who profit from the slave trade. Motahane, Nyambi, and Makombe write:

The viciousness of Esi’s capture and subsequent uprootment from her habitual surroundings, the middle passage and attendant methods of chattelization on American shores inscribe marks of racial inferiorization that connect Esi and her twenty-first-century descendants, particularly Marcus. (23)

Parts of Esi’s life from before the Castle are removed piece-by-piece to slowly break down her will until she cannot even speak in her mother tongue to find solace in her suffering.

Marcus engages with internal struggle quite differently. He labors with his lack of connection to his heritage and how it affects what it means to be Black in the United States. Marcus’s concerns reside in the adaptive and oppressive force that is the racism that originated in the slave trade and was further amplified within American history. Gyasi writes, “they’d think they knew something about him, and it would be the same something that had justified putting his great-grandpa H in prison, only it would be different too, less obvious than it once was” (290). This search for understanding through heritage is what eventually leads Marcus to Ghana. Despite not knowing his connection to Esi, he experiences an overwhelming sensation brought on by the collective trauma that slaves experienced. Motahane, Nyambi, and Makombe write, “The ancestor’s omnipresence... is a constant reminder of Marcus’ racial obligations as a modern-day incarnation of their spirit of struggle” (23). As his first direct encounter with his heritage, this event is inherently significant to begin with but to add the critical historical context that is slavery, it becomes too much for Marcus to bear. Gyasi connects

Marcus to the atrocity of slavery through the Door of No Return. The Door of No Return was the exit slaves went through before being boarded onto ships and endured the middle passage. Both Marcus and Esi go through the Door of No Return but under widely different circumstances; Marcus is a tourist in the Castle while visiting Ghana and Esi is a slave imprisoned in the dungeons. However, Marcus's escape from the dungeon is one to release anxiety whereas Esi's departure produces anxiety. Both characters' connection with heritage is being challenged in their respective moments. Marcus is confronting the reality behind his lack of heritage after seeing the conditions that worked to erase his ancestors as individuals and commodified them into virtual nonexistence. Esi is being forcefully removed from all aspects of her culture as she is pushed through the door and must work to hold onto any part of it she can. Despite heritage being an important aspect to hold onto, the process to gain and maintain culture proves to be overwhelming on an individual scale when it is for the benefit of an entire social group.

Person versus society allows for the audience to see how one's heritage can clash with external oppressive forces. Effia's lineage displays the constant push and pulls of wanting to stay within the frames of their cultural identity and society forcing them into roles based on societal contexts. Effia must balance the expectations of being a British colonizer's wife while desperately trying to hold onto her Fante culture. Despite still being able to speak in her mother tongue, Effia finds comfort in the community of women who were also married off to British soldiers. Gyasi writes, "she loved days like this one, where she could speak Fante as fast as she wanted. No one asking her to slow down, no one telling her to speak English" (24). Effia's newfound friendship with Adwoa is based on the need for familiarity and community. It is not enough that she can still use the language herself but hearing Fante words flow from someone else's lips helps make Cape Coast Castle a little more tolerable. Unlike Esi, Effia's speech was not restricted in what language she chooses to speak in, but instead, what she could speak about.

After an altercation with her husband, Effia avoids talking about the dungeons of the Castle. Gyasi writes, "she didn't realize she'd been screaming until James's hand on her mouth, pushing her lips as though he could force the words back in" (17). Although she

is only limited on one subject, it is the topic that physically resides under her feet and consistently looms over her head. Effia's culture is further limited through James's unaccepting nature towards her spiritual beliefs. When Effia wants to produce a child to fulfill her role as James's wife, she places roots under the bed to promote her fertility. Upon his discovery of the roots, James scolds Effia by saying, "I don't want any voodoo or black magic in this place... It's not Christian" (Gyasi 23). Despite Effia trying to give James a family with the help of her culture's remedies, he immediately demises it as something evil. Gyasi uses James to display the hypocrisy of colonizers' mentality that African spirituality is inherently wrong because they do not understand it while at the same time expecting their Fante wives to engage with Christianity. Landry writes, "Retaining heritage culture and engaging in the receiving culture were perceived as being inherently tied to and dependent on each other, suggesting that one could only be completed at the detriment of the other" (131). The British operated under the mentality that biculturalism wasn't even an option.

Just as James depends on preconceived stereotypes of the spiritual practices of African tribes, the people that surround Marjorie depend on the preconceived notion of what being Black in America means. Marjorie's confusion on the constitution of race within the United States as compared to Ghana highlights the fickleness of America's perception of Blackness. Gyasi writes, "here 'white' could be the way a person talks; 'black,' the music a person listened to. In Ghana you could only be what you were, what your skin announced to the world" (269). The reliance on stereotypes limits individuals due to anxiety over fitting in within their communities which is Marjorie's case. She consistently refers to herself while in America as a singular word: wrong. Gyasi writes, "it took only a few conversations with them for Marjorie to realize she was the wrong kind" (268). The root of the issue at hand is Marjorie has found herself in a country that bases identity on race whereas she bases her identity on her ethnicity. Landry states, "[Marjorie] feels the expectation to put on the uniform of Blackness because of her skin color, without knowing the social, historical, and cultural forces shaping its construction as a social category" (133-134). Gyasi uses Marjorie to demonstrate the difference between an African American and an African in America. She is unable to form a solid social

identity due to the fickleness of society's perception of her racial validity in conjunction with her culture; white classmates shun her for being Black while Black classmates ostracize her for not being Black "enough". Marjorie is consistently excluded from the conversation on her own identity. Although heritage is supposed to help one figure out who they are, the relationship between heritage and external forces can complicate the matter by emphasizing what a person isn't in terms of social constructs.

Gyasi implements the use of symbolism and conflict to demonstrate the importance of heritage on both an individual and societal level. Gyasi's use of symbolism shows the multiple effects that come from a singular moment and how it can ripple into the lives of many to come. Her use of fire shows the destructive nature of the slave trade when applied to one's culture while the use of the black stones shows the everlasting effects of the loss of one's culture. Gyasi's depiction of internal and external conflict emphasizes the complicated nature of understanding one's heritage. She uses internal conflict to show the mental strain one must endure to connect or remain connected to their heritage. Her depiction of external conflict through person versus society allows for the audience to see how one engages with their culture when faced with large-scale oppressive forces against them. Through these literary elements, Gyasi demonstrates the multifaceted hardships faced in the name of maintaining or gaining culture to find one's understanding of their place in society within social and historical frames.

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