

Guidelines and Policies

Freelancer is an annual publication of the Amarillo College English Department designed to showcase student, faculty, and staff writing of all kinds. Winning entries from the Amarillo College English Department Writer's Roundup contest are also included. A new issue is published each spring.

Freelancer invites submissions from AC students, faculty, and staff. You may send us original poetry, short stories, essays, reflections, etc. Submissions may be emailed to a staff member, given to a member of the English Department, or delivered to the English Writing Lab in Ordway 101. We **must** receive an electronic copy of each work, either saved on a form of electronic media or emailed as an attachment. Submissions **must** have a name and contact information (student ID number, mailing address, and phone number) on them. To be published in *Freelancer*, submissions **must** be accepted by staff majority vote.

Each submission becomes the property of *Freelancer* until after publication of the issue it appears in, when rights revert to the author. Submissions will not be returned unless accompanied by the author's request and a self-addressed stamped envelope. All submitted works must be original and unpublished.

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Quotation by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, English novelist (1803-73)

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Portrait
By Leia Elgin



The Weight of Words Unsaid

By Lisa M. Freeman

NOTE: On average, one suicide occurs every 17 minutes. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. The local suicide hotline number is 359-6699.

Six Weeks Later

I took our rings off this morning.

With that, I shed your myth. My perception of your perfection took six weeks to fall despite your shooting yourself from your own mighty pedestal.

It was a practical gesture, at first. This was moving day. Years ago, I learned jewelry and physical activity do not cooperate. Yet, I forgot this life lesson in my bleary, morning haze. I stopped my car en route to our apartment and removed them: my commitment ring from my finger and your commitment ring from its chain where it hung over my heart.

Last summer, while in the fit of your absence to a conference in Florida, I found your ring on the internet, and it was perfect. The brushed tungsten with its thin gold lining displayed its single, shining black diamond. I found its perfect tungsten counterpart for me; it was slimmer, and rounded, with three diamonds in their golden inlay. *Past, present, future . . .*

Your excitement rang throughout your hotel room when I told you. We ordered the rings as soon as you returned. You were impatient for their arrival. I wore my white cotton dress as we sat at our old meeting spot in the university hallway. We pledged our eternal commitment to one another before no one but God and the office door to Student Disability Services. You were my hero, I told you that day; you were my phoenix who flew from the flames of adversity.

Every day, your ring graced your slender finger as handsomely as I had envisioned. Relentlessly, the three little diamonds crept toward my palm until setting them right became a mannerism. Your ring gleamed at me from your warm, lifeless hand while I begged 911 for help as you perished on our floor. I retrieved the ring a week later to find your blood so deeply sunk into its setting the black diamond was forever dimmed. I realized the true weight of tungsten when, a few days ago – doubled-over, tears spewing, my soul crying so hard my mouth gaped wide, uncontainable, and open – your ring swung forward on its necklace chain and chipped my front tooth.

The weight of words unsaid . . .

So, with what am I left? I am left with a left ring finger which feels disturbingly light. I am left with the knowledge that, despite all of the daily selflessness your love brought to my table, you blinded me to your capacity to take your life – our life - in one weak, panicked moment. I am left with the sordid mix of grief over the loss of my lifemate, anger at the murderer who took him, and the insanity that they are one in the same.

“Do you know why I call you sunshine?” you texted me one year ago today. “I get

this feeling every time I talk to you. It feels like seeing the sun shining through stormy clouds. It makes me feel really good inside.” The sun shined all day today. And I feel wretched.

Tonight, I returned the rings to their rightful places on my body: on this empty shell of skin and muscle whose heart died with you and burned with your ashes.

The phoenix to which I tied my life has become the albatross around my neck.

Triggers

By Lisa M. Freeman

Four months, two weeks, four days later

Remembering you is becoming easier.

You always washed our dishes. You requested a particular brand which promised to “soften hands after five uses”. It was worth the extra price; you had such beautiful hands. More than anything, your hands were crucial to your survival. You had to touch something to do anything. Your hands were vulnerable to sharp objects each time you extended them into the unknown world.

Yet this did not break your nervous habit of tearing your cuticles to bits. One night, I noticed your hands under the sheets working busily and - you thought - unseen. I jokingly asked what you were doing. Your face fell as if I caught you in a forbidden act. You plopped your hands over the covers and did not move.

Somberly, you replied, “I was just picking.” I looked at your inflamed cuticles tender and spotty with blood. “I always got in trouble for it,” you told me quietly. “I just got in the habit of hiding it.”

“Like the candy wrappers?” I asked, referring to your childhood habit of eating from your father’s secret stash and concealing the evidence.

You nodded your head in your cute, childlike way; never absently in thought, but angled toward me. With everyone, you practiced the habit of facing them in conversation though you could not see them. Your life-skills coach said it put people at ease. You incorporated the gesture into your mannerisms so seamlessly I never noticed the effort until you mentioned it.

How I wish I could see your face again.

How I wish I could reach across the bed to take your soft, cuticle-bitten hand.

It is not as if I refuse to remember you. The inescapable act comes with such sharp pain I have to gently brush your memory away. Each glance is a lightning bolt revealing what I had and what I lost. I feel this loss every waking second. Remembering can be too much to take.

Forgive me. I need more distance from the trigger.

This is why most of my belongings remain packed. Some were a waste to store, though, so we use them. Even they betray me. Every time I scrub a fork or a plate, the smell of you is inescapable. The mix of Degree deodorant, Chrome cologne, and Dawn dishwashing liquid with Oil of Olay moisturizing ingredients was the scent of you. It was

the smell that jumped into bed with me every night. It was the aroma which wrapped its arms around me and surrounded me as I rested my head on your chest. It was the fragrance which met my lips.

You never knew this smell. You never knew my smell. The incident which disfigured you stole both sight and smell from you. You told me that, of the two, you missed your sense of smell the most. I was surprised. I could think of countless things I wished I could not smell. But you longed for the memory, the association, the trigger.

You hated the distance.

The Magic of Roly Polies

By Lisa M. Freeman

Five months later

My subconscious is surprisingly stubborn.

Recently, I dreamt you were stationed with troops in Afghanistan as I anxiously awaited your return. The conscious thought of it is laughable: you, with your pacifist's stance fighting a war; you, who refused to cut your hair - like a modern-day Samson - blindness and all. Dreams, of course, deny logical constraints. Your suicide defies reason in any realm. Comprehending your death while awake is difficult, but in my sleep it must be impossible. I mistakenly believed my psyche knew the truth by now, yet I still dream the dream and live the nightmare.

Repeatedly, I am shocked by the realization that you are truly, unquestionably gone. Each reminder of this cruel truth renders me breathless. I feel the enormity of your absence in every layer of me. I am stunned that I linger in a world without you. Incessantly, I shake my head in disbelief. I mark each day not with a calendar, but in time since your death. For me, it is not simply "Saturday" but the number of months, or weeks, or days, "later".

I fear I was your Delilah; that I was your undoing. I fear I shed your strength. I fear I broke your will to live. It is easier than grasping an ultimate destiny beyond my control. I am the least of my accusers, yet I assure you I purposed my efforts to the contrary. Add them to the sticky, smelly tar which paves the road of good intentions.

I spent the day of Five Months Later guarding my sister's house while plumbers fixed leaks. When the outdoors became cooler than the in, I sat in the shade of the front porch. Beside me, a roly poly wandered along the cement. I delighted in these creatures when I was young. I marveled at the little bugs who rolled into a ball.

My adult strength was no longer accustomed to the tenderness and dexterity required of the tiny crustaceans. Gentleness was instinctual - easy - when I was a child. I reached out to him, but I was a foreign object upon which he refused to crawl. When escape became futile, into his ball he went. Whether this new surface would be a haven or the spot on earth where he breathed his last, he did not know. Yet amazingly, after the prerequisite amount of waiting, the little creature unfolded himself on the creases of my palm. For the first time, I fully understood the gravity of this tiny act of faith. The strength of

roly polies lies in their willingness to be vulnerable. The magic of roly polies denies the right of the strong to conquer the weak.

I returned him to the dirt when it became apparent the cool of the morning would pass quickly but the plumpers were long-suffering. I grabbed a trash bag to gather the debris which wind and elements had littered across the lawn. Under the tree, I found another roly poly. He was in a little divot in the dirt where the soil parted in a shallow, perfectly-formed circle. He lay dead on his back with his hundreds of little legs straight up to the sky. He had wound his way into a tiny hole where he struggled to escape until his life gave out.

I stared at the roly poly in his unintentional grave, but instead, I saw you. I saw you with your characteristically bent posture recoiling in the vulnerability of your fragile life. You found yourself in a hole of your mind's making. You struggled in silence to escape. I would have fought with you. But in solitary battle, you gave out.

Remains

By Lisa M. Freeman

Eight months, one week, three days later

I do not remember when last I kissed you.

When I realized this, I sat at the stoplight and cried. Living in the wake of your suicide is like treading water in the wake of a ship in the ocean. It is groundless. It is boundless. There is no support on which to grip. Forces surround me which choke me and beat me and whip me and starve me and exhaust me. I am struggling to surface. I am fighting to breathe. My head may be above water, but the waves slap my face. My nose may be all that peeks above, but with every breath's draw there is a saltwater wash running through my nostrils rushing to choke my throat.

Were it up to me, I would let it overtake me. I would let my flailing arms go slack; I would stop kicking; I would stop breathing. I would let death wash over me. Over the top of my head it could consume me; my eyes and my forehead and my ratty hair. I could disappear from the plain into the deep where you reside. I could close my eyes to the wondering faces. I could deafen my ears to the pleas of those to whom I made declarations of love and optimistic commitments. I could follow my heart to the depths to which it broke.

Why do I persist? Why continue in this life which has tethered its enormous burden to my ankle for me to trip, to stumble, and to fall; for it to drag me mercilessly as it proceeds at faster paces? While my physical body remains intact, along the rugged course I lost my will, my fight, and – in losing you – my heart. I am no competitor. I have nothing left to win. My perseverance only weakens me with each day. Is it possible I am the ultimate lost cause to which I am too blind to see?

But you promised, the voices would echo in my head, perhaps for eternity – perhaps as mine resounds in yours now – *but you promised not to quit on me*. Yes, I promised. They did not know what they were asking, and I did not foresee the tolls of my

obligations. In an uncharacteristic gesture of confidence, I promised *this time I will* when so many times I had not. What is the difference?

Eight months ago, you told the world with an open mouth and a gun for a microphone that you did not love me as I loved you: more than life itself. What is the difference?

I see the hardships of my ancestors barely two generations ago. They were also choked, beaten, whipped, starved, and exhausted by water in their lack of it. Long have I cursed that they did so, but why did they remain? I could be in California right now. I could not exist at all. Why did they remain? What strength and determination fastened their feet to the dust when your heroic soul surrendered to ashes?

What little of their metal left in me shined only in your light. Without you, it is weathered and worn and weak; a thing left out in the sunshine for much too long. I am a relic too old and thin and broken for use, yet I remain. The earth and sea of my forefathers refuse to take me though I beg them daily. They want me less than you did. So I remain.

I was made; I was molded. I was sharpened by a painful saw to walk the dust of this world with you. Without you, I am unrecognizable and useless.

But I remain.

Glance

By David Golbert



At Fourteen

By Joseph Holmes

It had to happen in August in the loft of my barn—
The fort in Cowboys and Indians in summers past, the fort
Against our stepfathers on Sundays—The world when
We were ourselves. We knew the workings of machines
And horses sucking cold water, and the whispers we gave
One to the other in the vow of our souls.—But at fourteen

In the hay, the breath came to the world that day
On saddle blankets with the firm beat of adolescent pulse
Becoming quick with fear and salt in our eyes—when
It happened easily enough and left as easily, collapsing
The sensational moment I already knew in dreams.

I would have reassured you, my hand moving to,
But you covered yourself quickly and moved away.

From the hayloft, I watched you walk home,
Your head lost in how the heated air moved
Like spirits of snakes writhing above the dust
You shuffled and kicked to the sun. I watched you
Grow small, smaller, until you vanished within their coils.
—And something inside, like new leaves, withered
Before having a chance to unfurl.

In the Augusts since, my barn has been empty,
Slowly folding inward. I see it through my window
When I pass. I went there the other day
Only because I thought I heard children laughing.

Genesis

By Frank Sobey

Once we were embers in the fire that God made
when He hunkered down beneath rough winds
with two thin branches, bowed and crossed—
love's first arrow—to spin time and space
from the tinder of His imagination, all for us.
Yet we who danced around His tangled beard
and flamed within His watchful eyes soon craved
the darkness beyond the shelter of His delight.

Now, we have left that fire on tongues of chilled air,
each to work on his salvation alone, an exodus of ash
kicked mightily across the earth, flickering then gone—
except for the love that speeds through our hearts
enough to stir us once more to blush into His arms.

Utility Work
By Lauren Dennis



Routine

By Kaitlyn Johnson

Early morning assembly time,
A moment to put it in place,
The steps simple and ritual.

Paint glides down the delicate hills,
Rouge covers a blank expression;
Cloth drapes across unsightly swells,
Grooves are hidden from prying eyes.

Metal and gems meet frigid skin,
Sparkles enhance the illusion;
Colored lips turn up to dazzle,
Bright whites flash a pearlescent glow.

Late night the time to dismantle,
A chance to peel off the façade,
The labor harsh and tedious.

Mona Lisa

By Amanda Tomlinson



Philosopher's Stone

By Lauren Dennis

We used to dance without music.

We used to play without our shoes,

Lie in the grass with no blankets,

And we solved puzzles without clues.

What have we done with our Philosopher's Stone?

Did we skip it across the lake?

Or did we leave it at the park?

Is it spinning in the washer?

Is it on a shelf in the dark?

I don't know, but it seems

Our love was only

A stone thrown away.

We used to sing songs without words.

We used to have church in our bed.

We created worlds from the shadows.

We used to make gold from the lead.

What have we done with our Philosopher's Stone?

Was it used to break a window?

Or was it used to cast the blame?

Is it being used as the flint,

Or will it go on as the flame?

I still do not know, but

I hope our love is

Only a stone's throw away.

Two Women
By Randy Thomas



Wandering the Art Museum

By Bethany K. Vogel

I tend to like things that
are angular. Soft, rounded lines
are harder to rearrange;
straight edges can be moved
again
and
again,
changing the picture noticeably
with each try. There is no
room for incongruity with
fluidity. Maybe that's what I
have an aversion to:
perfection.

Expect the Light!

By Gene Shelburne

We awoke that Wednesday to a dark, gray, sloppy day, the pre-dawn darkness dulled by a mix of rain, snow, and dust. Snust, I guess you'd call it. Clouds were low and lowering. Wind-swept fog and mist whipped against our windshield as we hurried to catch a much-too-early flight.

We were glad the plane had spent the night in Amarillo. It could not have landed in this morning's murky soup. Sensible geese were grounded. "Would the pilot try to take off?" we wondered. He did.

Taxiing through puddles, he followed the runway lines and lights in haze that often obscured the hangars and buildings on the airport's fringe.

Finally came the familiar thrust, and we began a dash into the darkness. The plane's nose tilted upward, tugging the frantic wheels loose from the saturated earth, and we hurtled heavenward into the seemingly impenetrable clouds.

The darkness that had cloaked the earth below instantly swallowed the silver plane. As we plunged ever deeper into its entrails, cut off from God above and humanity below, it seemed in that surreal moment, the knotted intestines of the angry cloud bank wallowed past the windows as if it were trying to digest its latest morsel.

Suddenly, however, we escaped its grasp. Out of the gloom we soared into a luminous whiteness that lit the plane's interior brighter than a thousand lights, and then, in a breathtaking instant, we broke free. Into the crystal clarity of open sky with the radiant just-risen sun infusing the endless terrain of cottony cloud tops with indomitable brightness.

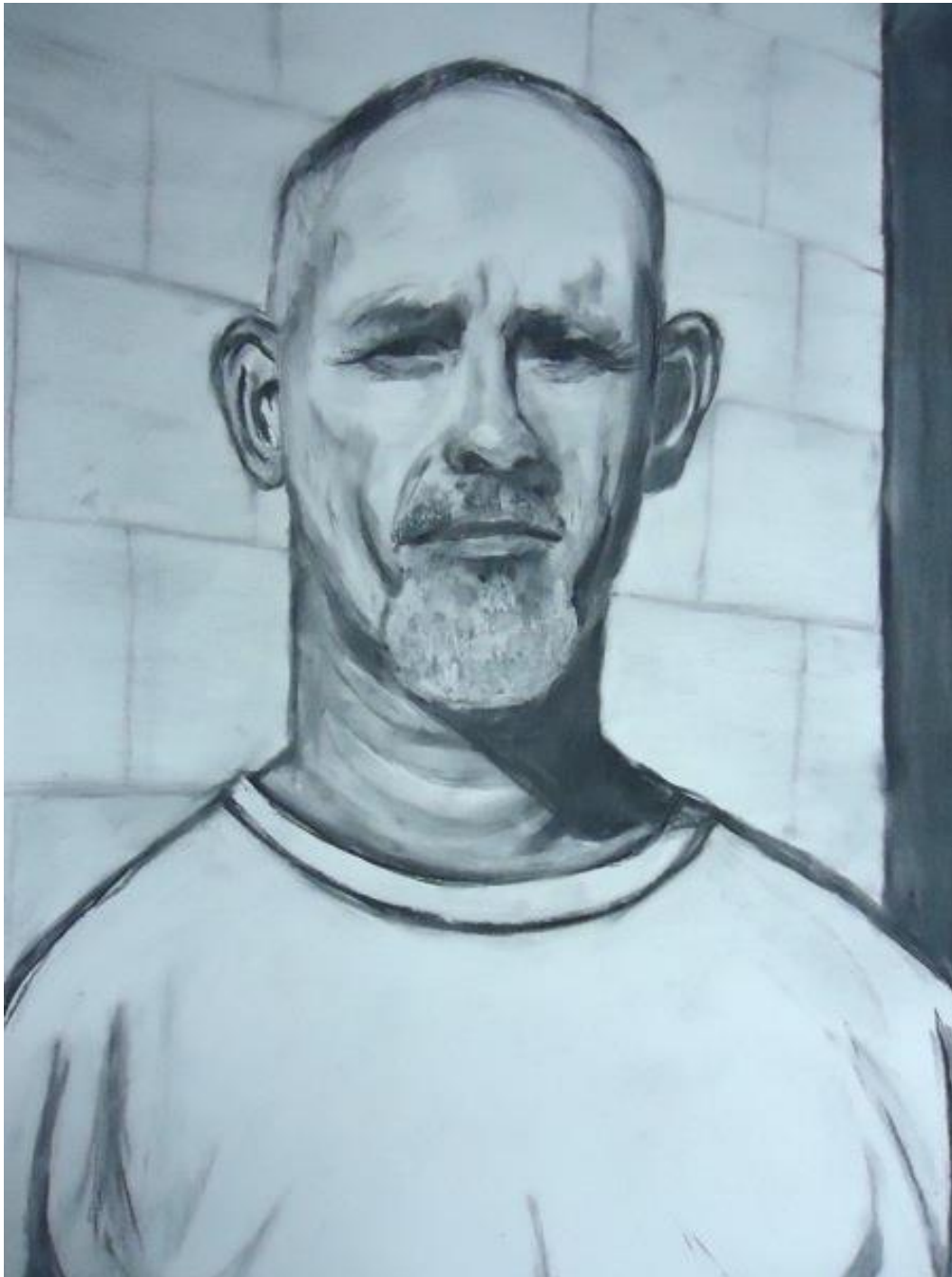
Thus, in an early morning hour, we reenacted the usual cycle of life. The daunting trek through darkness followed, however unexpectedly, by a reemergence into light. Grief gives way to gladness. Death makes way for life. "Sorrow tarries for the night," God says, "but joy comes in the morning."

The secret of survival lies in an unshakable faith that even when the clouds of life are darkest, the sun of God's grace shines undimmed above. And we know at any moment, perhaps soon, we will bask once more in its warmth and glory.

To make it through today, expect the light.

Dad

By Carlie Simpson



In Paradise

By Frank Sobey

*So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden
to work the ground from which he had been taken.*

--Gen. 3:23

He liked to watch the workers scrub
statues in the garden and plant perfect rows—
until the day she came, taking her place
each afternoon at the same window
where she would wait for the sun's late dance
across the lawn. Unable to go,
he kept his eyes on her, his ruined legs
humming with the memory of crossing the world.
Years must have passed in that way.

Then one day he was left at her window
as the sun burst in the fountain's spray
over trees whose mystery had been pruned.
At first she could not bear him
and refused to speak. Mumbling strange words
about a garden he had tended in his youth,
he began to walk her through
its bright expanse. When she turned finally,
with heavy eyes plucked from the same broad trees
he had climbed as a young man,
he knocked his pills to the ground reaching for her hand.

Thereafter, always at their window, they spoke often
about the garden. For her sake he would place her
there, naked and young on top of a hill,
hands on breasts rounded by the sun.
Eventually, he said, a wind would come
lifting the long grass of her hair
as if she were being cast out
like seed over the whole of creation.

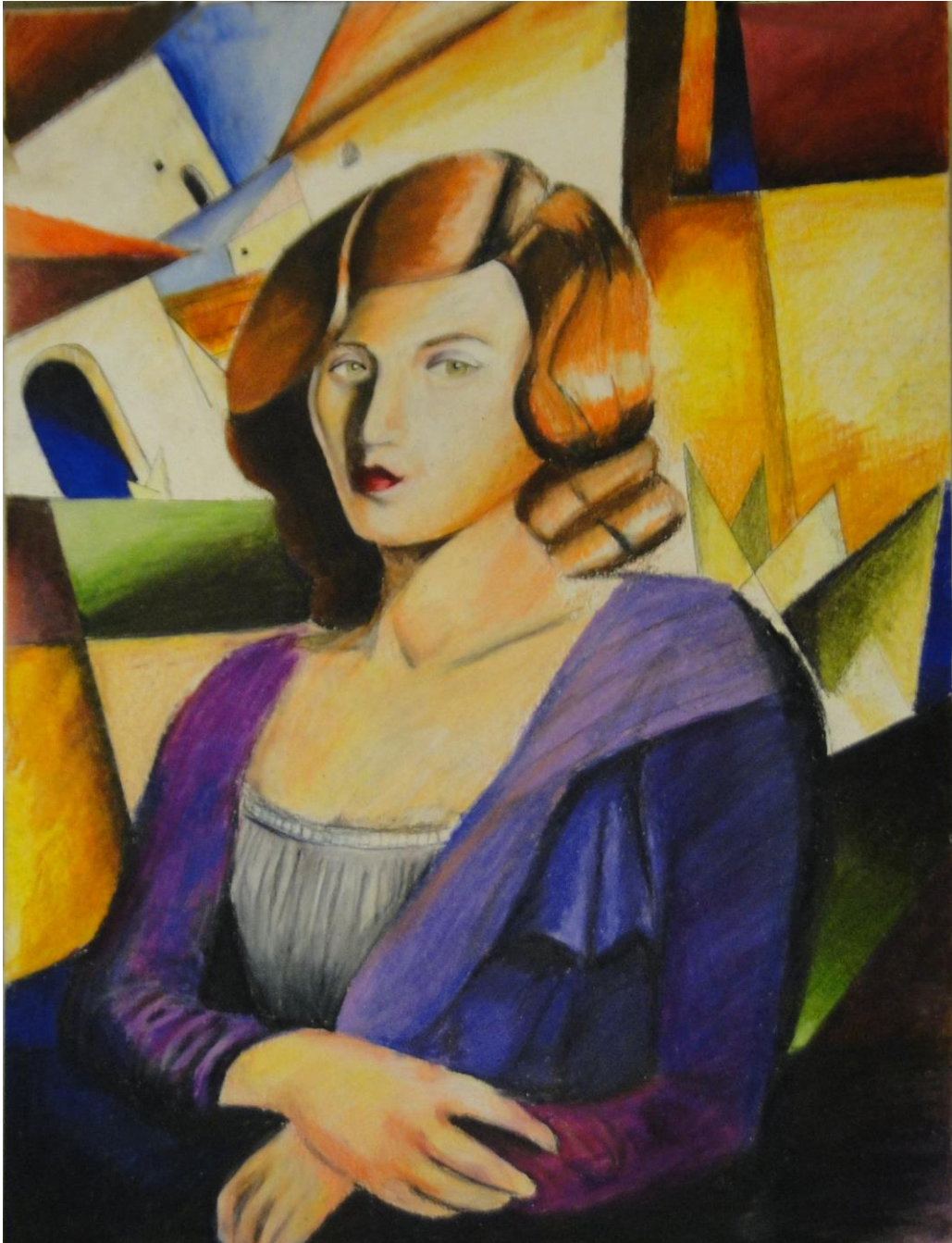
She would take his hand, after each story,

and stay that way into the night. Even at the end
when she would not be moved
from his side, she could close her eyes
and find him breathing deeply after a long run,
with her body's fruit ripe in his eyes.

A gardener too, she must be about her work.

Mona Lisa

By Hannah Overton



How Long?—A Gift

By Joseph Holmes

But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt"

--Gen. 19:26

She turned because the sky rumbled, because
The fire flicked in the corner of her eye
And promised to reveal something dangerous,
Perhaps beautiful. She turned because her divinely
Given nature demanded far more from her
Than the Call of Obedience.

Were we to find her, to scoop away the old
Desert earth from her thick, glassy trunk,
Would her eyes still hold transfixed
On the plane of ash far away? How long
Before rams in the wilderness sought her out
And quenched their thirst for salt?

How long before a waking quest within you
Craves more than your body of water?
How long before your heart warms
To its own center of light raining down?
What if, then, the sky becomes solid
And a familiar stretch of road looks

Somehow new, if only briefly? I hope,
While you look around, wherever you are,
That a gift slips in the corner of your eye,
And you turn—breathless, waiting—
Because the time has come for you
To be transformed into a pillar of miracle.

Jimi

By Jacob Harter



“Everyday Use”: Beyond Maggie’s Looks

By Raege Omar

The story, “Everyday Use,” by Alice Walker starts out to present Maggie as a figure who is neither bright nor attractive, whose qualities were overlooked by her closest relatives. The narrator in the story is her mother who believes that “Maggie will be nervous” during her older sister’s visit to their house and that “she will stand hopelessly, homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eying her sister with a mixture of envy and awe” (256). Unlike Dee who has changed her identity in an attempt to reaffirm her pride in her African roots, Maggie is a round character who has been groomed to carry on both her family’s American history and way of living. Although her mother thinks that Maggie “is not bright,” and “like good looks and money, quickness passed her by” (257), she ultimately chooses Maggie over her older and more beautiful daughter. In “Everyday Use,” Maggie seems to represent a nervous, shy, young girl on the surface, but on a closer look, Maggie is content, knowledgeable, and represents the true embodiment of her cultural heritage.

Maggie is content with her family’s shabby house, and it did not take her long to disregard the idea that her sister wrote to assert that she “will never bring her friends” (257) to the house. When Maggie and her mother thought about this, the young woman instantly took an upbeat attitude, questioned whether her sister had ever had any friends, and apparently knew there is more to see about the house (257). This is a strong reference to Maggie’s acceptance of all aspects of her life and that she sees past the “tin” roofed house with “no real windows” (257). Unlike Dee, she did not feel the need to go off to college and leave her way of life. In the beginning of the story, Walker writes about the yard that Maggie and her mother had “made so clean and wavy” (256). The author explains that “a yard like this is more comfortable than most people think. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room” (256). When Dee comes to visit them at the house, the narrator says that Maggie “attempted to make a dash for the house” (257), and felt “like when you see the wriggling end of a snake in front of your foot on the road” (257). The character’s gestures portray her satisfaction with her family’s tradition and shed light on her disapproval of her sister’s conscious divergence from their way of living. Despite being overwhelmed by her sister and her boyfriend’s well-crafted display of beauty and newly acquired identity, Maggie holds her ground, remains steady on her traditional values and shows no intention to blend.

Maggie clearly demonstrates that she is knowledgeable in her family’s history and tradition. The narrator relates how Maggie elaborated who whittled the dash after her sister’s boyfriend asked if Uncle Buddy whittled it. In a voice “so low you almost couldn’t hear her” (258), the girl stepped in at once and said that “Aunt Dee’s first husband whittled the dash” (258) and she added that “his name was Henry but they called him Stash” (258). Maggie’s low voice directs her audience’s attention to the contents of the information and reinforces her purpose to correct the family history. Maggie’s answer abounds with a wealth of information that includes family members’ names, nicknames and relationship timeline accompanied by some of the things that they have done. In the story, the narrator is not surprised that the girl knows a great deal about her family’s

history. Additionally, when her sister attempts to take the priceless quilts and accuses that Maggie “would probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use” (259), the girl’s mother confronts that assertion by saying that “Maggie knows how to quilt” (259). The fact that the young woman knows how to quilt establishes that she is highly adept and proves that there is more to discover about the character.

Maggie understands the value of her family’s history and represents the true embodiment of her cultural heritage. Like her mother and grandmothers, she has lived in the rural American South and vastly absorbed her African-American values and culture. At the climax of the story, the young woman overcomes any physical frailty that haunted her in the past when she comes close to losing the priceless quilts to her older sister. Maggie courageously says that “she can have them, mama” (260), and confidently asserts that “[she] can remember Grandma Dee without the quilts” (260). In this moment, the young woman risks losing the precious quilts while trying not to alienate her sister and to demonstrate that family matters more than the acquisition of material. Furthermore, she cannot only “always make some more” (259), but “[i]t was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself” (260), an old traditional skill handed down from one generation to another. Maggie knows that “her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt” (260) had acquired something that cannot be taken away: how to quilt.

Maggie’s role as a promising living model for her cultural heritage and unwavering satisfaction with her family roots overrides her outward superficial, frail appearance. When Dee visited with a new name, new language and a rebellious effort to reaffirm their African roots, “[Maggie] looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn’t mad at her” (260). Maggie’s fear represents the loss of family values in her sister’s transformation to belong to a distant culture. However, the young woman’s fear is replaced when her mother “hugged” her, gave her the quilts, and “Maggie smiled, but a real smile, not scared” (260). Walker shows that Dee is the one who does not understand her heritage, despite her accusation: “you just don’t understand your heritage” (260). Unlike Dee who embraced the 70’s African-American sentiments and pride in African cultural roots in a shallow way, the young woman and her mother live as the embodiment of their family history and culture. Maggie is a strong character who inspires us to withstand the ambitious tides of renewed pride in distant cultural roots at the expense of the immediate family history.

Extinguish the Fire

By Tyler Arbuckle

Jack London was a man whose literary work reflected his adventurous life: “[a] sometime tramp, oyster pirate, seaman, Socialist, laundryman, and miner, Jack London is as famous for the life he lived and the myths he wove around it as he is for the short stories and novels he wrote” (Hamilton 4). In the late 1800s, he became part of the Klondike Gold Rush: “London joined the flood of people rushing toward instant riches in the Yukon. He found little gold but returned after the winter of 1897 with a wealth of memories and notes of the North, the gold rush, and the hardships of the trail” (Hamilton 4). “To Build A Fire” recalls the events that happened in the Yukon. It implores readers to extinguish their doltishly burning pride or become a victim to nature’s icy wrath by using setting, imagery, and irony.

The setting is based on the Klondike Gold Rush that took place in the Yukon. It was Canadian territory which is now the present day state of Alaska. London shows the reader how cold the climate can be in the Yukon: “it was not merely colder than fifty below zero; it was colder than sixty below, than seventy below. It was seventy-five below zero. Since the freezing point is thirty-two above zero, it meant that one hundred and seven degrees of frost obtained” (London 2). The exaggeration of the amount of gold led many men toward a climate they were unprepared for: “...unaware that most of the good Klondike claims were already staked, [they] boarded ships [along with] Seattle and other Pacific port cities and headed north toward the vision of riches to be had for the taking” (“Klondike”); “[t]here were murders and suicides, disease and malnutrition, and death from hypothermia, avalanche, and, some said heartbreak. The Chilkoot was the toughest on men because pack animals could not be used easily on the steep slopes leading to the pass” (“Klondike”). The men were as unprepared as the protagonist in “To Build A Fire”: “[h]e was sure to frost his cheeks; he knew that, and experienced a pang of regret that he had not devised a nose strap of the sort Bud wore in cold snaps” (London 2); he had been told that “no man must travel alone in the Klondike...Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone” (4). Being unprepared causes a ripple effect that results in his demise.

London uses all five senses in his story, but sound, touch, and smell give the most detail, making imagery a powerful tool. In the white, gloomy world, sound produced by the man shows the magnitude of the cold surroundings: “[t]he ice crackled and snapped when by a violent effort he opened his mouth” (London 5); and when the cold atmosphere controls the man, fear is heard in his voice: “[h]e spoke to the dog, calling it to him; but in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal” (6). The silent touch of cold air panics the man when he takes off his glove: “[h]e did not expose his fingers more than a minute, and was astonished at the swift numbness that smote them. It was cold. He pulled on the mitten hastily, and beat the hand savagely across his chest” (3). In trying to light the fire, smell played against him: “[b]ut the burning brimstone went up his nostrils and into his lungs, causing him to cough spasmodically. The match fell into the snow and went out” (6) and after lighting all the matches he had left in a last attempt to start a fire “[h]is flesh was burning. He could smell it ... And still he endured it, holding the flame” (6)

These three senses showed the devastation this cold world thrust upon him.

Irony becomes the final blow to the man in the end. The old man warned him of the cold and not to wander alone: “[t]hat man from Sulphur Creek had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in the country. And he laughed at him at the time” (London 3). “The old timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below” (4), but his pride got the better of him: “[t]hose old-timers were rather womanish ... Any man who was a man could travel alone” (4). The man’s voice was a whip and showed no intimacy toward the dog: “there was no keen intimacy between the dog and the man. The one was the toil slave of the other, and the only caresses it had ever received were the caresses of the whip lash and of harsh and menacing throat sounds that threatened the whip lash” (4); thus, they became another ripple, leading to his death: “[h]e would kill the dog and bury his hands in the warm body ... He spoke to the dog, calling it to him; but in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal, who had never known the man to speak in such a way before ... it would not come to the man” (6).

The setting of the Yukon showed the history of desperate men looking for a quick fix for riches and the desperate lengths they were willing to go to get it. London’s use of sensory images gives the reader the result of not being prepared for the worst. Finally, irony conveys to the reader the meaning of stupidity. These combined together allow Jack London to stress an important lesson about one’s own doltish pride. Indeed, “[p]ride costs us more than hunger, thirst, and cold” (Jefferson).

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De'Vante

By Juan Pablo Bernal



In Darkness There is Light

By Meagan Odle

Langston Hughes's short narrative, "Salvation," recounts his experience of "finding" Jesus in his early adolescent years. Hughes grew up in the Harlem Renaissance where he experienced poverty and was a victim of discrimination. Hughes wanted to live the typical "American Dream of freedom and equality only to be denied its realization" ("Langston"). The difficult trials he experienced in his adolescent years are reflected in "Salvation." In this work, Hughes explains his loss of innocence as well as his loss of belief in Jesus. Many individuals can relate to Hughes as he struggles in seeing the "light." One might wonder if he or she will ever see the "light" or, indeed, if there is even a "light" to be seen. Hughes reminisces on those losses through the use of verbal irony, the physical setting, and the internal conflict he battles.

The title, "Salvation," is verbally ironic. After reading the story, the reader learns that Langston does not receive salvation; in fact, he receives the opposite. When Langston was going on thirteen, he was brought to church to be saved in front of his friends, family, and community. The church held a special gathering for this occasion; the reason for gathering was "to bring the young lambs to the fold" (Hughes). Langston, being a lamb in search of his shepherd, Jesus Christ, veered off in a different direction. Before Langston went in front of the church to be saved, his aunt explained to him "that when you [are] saved you [see] a light, and something [happens] to you inside! And Jesus [will come] into your life" (Hughes). As each child was saved in front of the church, Langston grew more and more anxious, wondering why they must have seen the "light," yet he had not. As Langston knelt alone at the altar, he waited and waited to see Jesus, but He did not come. Langston began to grow anxious because everyone in the church was waiting on him to see Jesus. Even the minister questioned him, saying "Why don't you come? My dear child, why don't you come to Jesus? Jesus is waiting for you. He wants you" (Hughes). As Langston continued to wait, and yearned to see Jesus, nothing happened. The night was falling upon the church, and Langston felt ashamed that he still had not seen Jesus, yet he felt as if he was holding everyone up. Being overwhelmed by guilt, Langston stood up to be saved, yet he did not see Jesus as his aunt said he would. Langston did not receive salvation at the time he should have. He felt betrayed by Jesus because He was not there; Langston never saw Him. Langston does not believe what he cannot see, and because Jesus did not appear, he did not believe in Jesus. Langston lost his innocence as well as his belief in God.

The physical setting of the story is in a church, and the church is symbolically described as "salvation." Langston sat in the "hot, crowded church" (Hughes), waiting to be saved. The church being described as hot and crowded reminds the reader of hell. In hell, Jesus will not come and will not be seen. The church being described as "salvation" is ironic because it is described more like hell. Not only was the church hot and crowded, but the people kneeling and praying around the children are described as "old women with jet-black faces and braided hair, old men with work-gnarled hands" (Hughes). The longer Langston knelt at the altar to be saved, the hotter he became. Ironically, such an occurrence happened in the holiest of places. The people that are meant to praise and

lead Langston towards salvation and the light, in fact, led him away from it. The hellish atmosphere and the supposedly wiser elders only added to loss of innocence and loss of faith and did not contribute to any aspect of “salvation.”

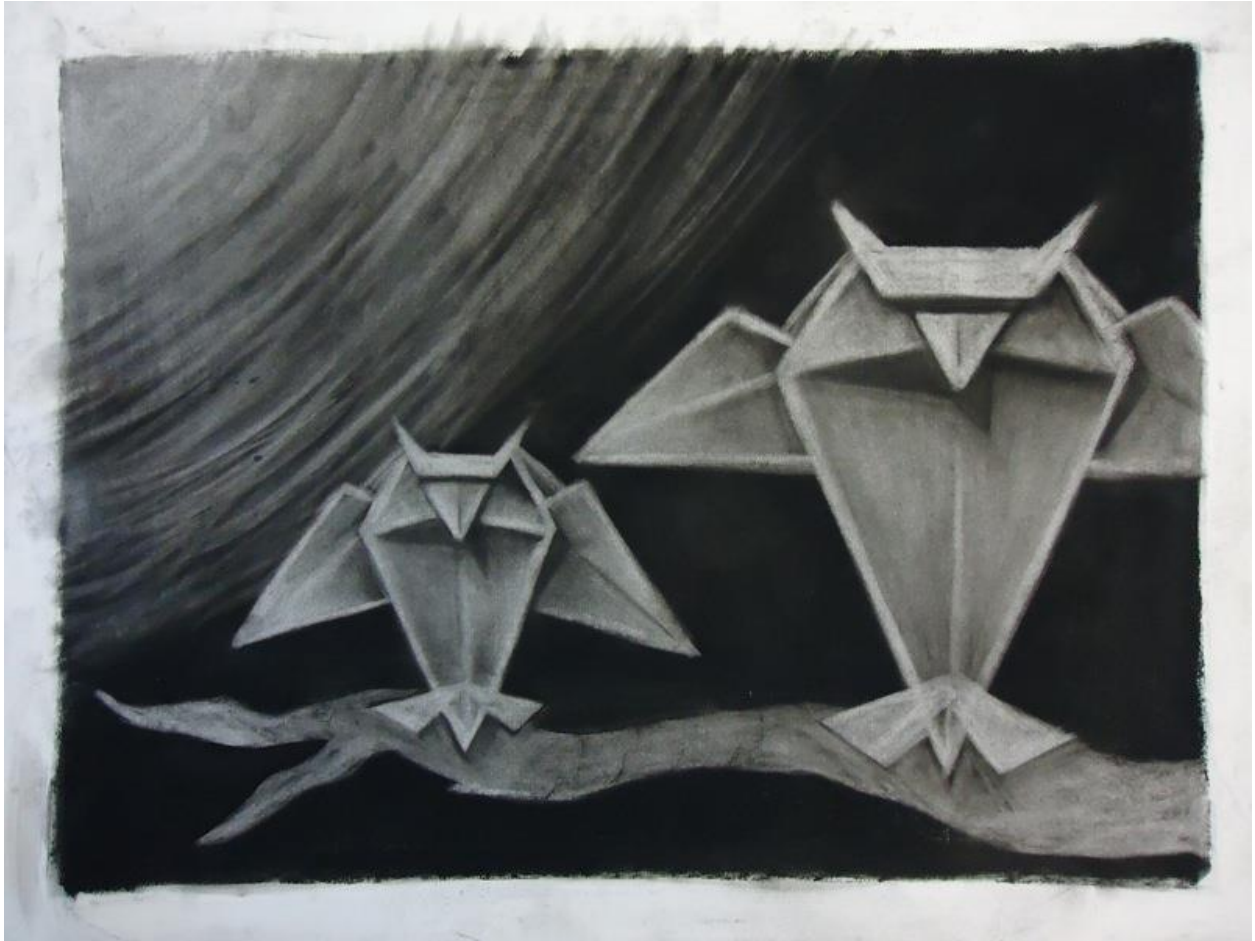
Langston undergoes many struggles internally throughout the story. He is faced with being the only child left at the altar and is very confused as to why he has not seen Jesus like his aunt told him he would. Langston is struggling with the fact that every child before him was saved and “saw the light,” yet the only lights he saw were the ones shining down on him from the ceiling. The pressure he began to feel from the anxious adults led him to stand and say he saw Jesus when, indeed, he did not. Lying to the church was another internal conflict Langston struggled with. The feeling of lies and deceit did not go away once he left the church, but the overwhelming guilt followed Langston to bed later that night. Lying in bed, uncontrollably sobbing, Langston “buried [his] head under the quilts” (Hughes). His aunt heard him crying but believed he was crying because he had been saved by Jesus, but “[he] was really crying because [he] couldn’t bear to tell her that [he] had lied, that [he] had deceived everybody in the church, that [he] hadn’t seen Jesus” (Hughes). As Langston lay in his bed alone crying, he thought of how Jesus abandoned him in his time of need, and it was then that “[he] didn’t believe there was a Jesus anymore, since he didn’t come to help [him]” (Hughes).

The irony of the title, “Salvation,” the physical setting of the story, and the internal conflict Langston dealt with throughout the story lead to readers grasping his loss of innocence and loss of faith in Jesus. Langston waited and waited to see Jesus and under the hellish conditions of the church, he never saw Jesus. It was in the moments he stood alone, and Jesus did not show his face, that Langston lost his faith and did not believe there was a Jesus anymore. Although Jesus was not present with Langston throughout the story, “Salvation,” he did not lose faith in his ability to communicate his thoughts. Ultimately, the experience in church did not hold Langston back, and through many trials and triumphs, he became a very successful author. Regardless of Langston’s spiritual belief, and whether or not he saw the “light” that morning at the church, he did not live in the darkness, his life was very bright.

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Owls
By Sabrina Merritt



Herbert's Crutch

By Matthew McGuire

George Herbert's poem "Easter Wings" is from the collection of poems called *The Temple* (1633). According to Jokinen, Herbert earned a master's degree at the age of twenty and then held prominent positions at Cambridge University and Parliament. When Herbert was near death, he asked Nicholas Ferrar to publish his poems from *The Temple* if, and only if, "he thought they might do [well] to any dejected poor soul" (Jokinen). This dynamic poem is seen through the eyes of a Christian man who addresses the Lord through prayer. Herbert uses diction, symbolism, and allusion to express his need for Jesus Christ.

First, Herbert's well-suited diction lays a foundation for his notions. He capitalized "Thy" (9), "Who" (1), "Thee" (6), and much more to show reverence to the one "[w]ho create[d] man in wealth and store" (1). The dark words "decaying" (3), "sorrow" (11), "sickness" (12), and "shame" (12) are initiated by man's behavior. Quickly, Herbert filters this diction through the "victor[y]" (9) of Jesus and produces positive outcomes. For instance, the speaker states that "[w]ith [t]hee" (6) the "fall" (10) will "further the flight" (10) of man. The Christian theory "Felix Cupla" suggests that God allowed sin to happen in order to pour His grace on mankind. Ironically, a terrible event brought a greater good and benefited man. Last, Herbert uses "[w]ith" (6), "let me" (7), and "combine" (17) to imply that one must surrender and depend on Christ in order to "rise" (7).

Second, Herbert's concrete poem teems with symbolism. The wing-shaped poem correlates with the title "Easter Wings" and connotes spiritual freedom. The shape forms two wings that signify the voice of spiritual truth. Here, Herbert echoes Ezekiel in order to gain credibility. The extended wings sound of great waters like the voice of the Almighty, denoting divine truth (Ezek 1:24). In this poem, both wings are fully-extended, and this suggests that the conveyed message is of divine truth. Moreover, Ezekiel saw an angel that was great in wings and long in feathers, implying the truths of faith. This expression exemplifies an angel that is spiritually wise and has been molded by the truth. Also, man will be covered under His wing and the truth will be his shield, indicating the truth is man's protection (Ps. 91:4). In addition, Herbert outlined a pair of wings because man cannot "rise" (7) on his own. Therefore, mankind must understand the first two stanzas and walk in the light of the truth so that they can fully-spread their wings.

Third, the allusions must be brought to the surface in order to understand this poesy. The first stanza takes the reader to Genesis 1:27 when God created man in His image. Thereupon, he skips to Genesis 3 when Adam rebels against man's creator. Herbert understates that God bought back what man had "lost" (2). The Bible teaches that the Almighty sent his one and only son, Jesus, to serve and die for His creation so that they may escape the prison of sin (Mt 28:5-7). In man's new-found light there is only one thing to do; therefore, the speaker says "let me combine" (17) to show his acceptance of God's free gift. Lastly, this man who has accepted the Lord goes on to say "if I imp my wing on [t]hine" (19) then "[I] will soar on wings like eagles; [I] will run and not grow weary... not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31). Herbert tells the reader this road will not be easy! Nevertheless, there is power in the resurrection and man must understand the truth,

depend on Jesus, and walk as He walked in order to grow.

In conclusion, Herbert valiantly evangelizes his faith to the world. He takes the reader through a summary of the gospel and leaves evidence of his confidence in Christ along the journey. As this poem was separated by two pages, so was Herbert's life. At a young age, he moved quickly along a promising secular career path. However, Herbert's page changed; he abandoned all worldly ambitions and took on holy orders (Jokinen). During the remainder of his life, he humbly sacrificed his finances, time, and mind to his savior.

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“Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been”: Long, Beautiful Hair

By Morgan Blair

In the beginning of Joyce Carol Oates' short story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”, the reader is introduced to a fifteen-year-old girl living in the early 1960s named Connie who, like all teenage girls, is a little vain. At an early age, Connie is taught to value physical beauty above all else. Connie puts so much value in physical traits that Arnold Friend, a complete stranger, is able to trick Connie by wearing a shaggy black wig (327) to look young and entice her. Connie, with her long dark blonde hair that drew anyone's eye (325) is a picture of youth, vitality and naiveté. Arnold's intentions, like his hair, can be described as black, shabby, and anything but good. Hair in “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” reflects the lives of both Connie and Arnold Friend.

Oates centers Connie's being around her hair from the very beginning. In the second paragraph of the short story, Connie's mother is already asking, “What the hell stinks? Hairspray?” (325) in an attempt criticize her daughter and her daughter's choices in hairstyle. Connie's mother is not just criticizing hair in this interaction. To her mother, Connie's life is turning into a disappointment and Connie's hair is a symbol of her vanity. Yet, this is how Connie's mother raised her. Connie “knew she was pretty and that was everything”(325). In reality Connie's mother envies the youth Connie's hair holds in its long, dark blonde strands. Connie's love for her looks and her hair is so great that she forgoes a neighborhood barbeque with her family in favor of washing her hair and letting it dry in the sun all day (326). The cleansing of Connie's hair is a key point in the story. When Connie washes her hair, it's like she is purifying herself. If hair represents Connie's life force, the reader could see this as a kind of baptism. Unbeknownst to Connie, she is purifying herself for the last time before death.

When death comes knocking on Connie's door, he comes in the shape of Arnold Friend. Unlike Connie's long dark blonde hair, Arnold has shaggy black hair that is later found out to be a wig. The description of Arnold's hair evolves slightly throughout Oates' short story. He declines from “A boy with shaggy black hair”(326) to a man treating his hair “as if he indeed were wearing a wig”(329). Arnold's hair represents his life. Arnold, like his wig, is false and meaning to deceive. Beyond this falseness is the color of the wig: black. Black symbolizes the unknown and it can also symbolize evil. To Connie, Arnold is definitely the evil unknown. When she is reluctant to take a ride in his car with him, he says, “Not worried about your hair blowing around in the car, are you?” (328). Since Connie's hair represents her life force, having it tangled and in a mess in Arnold's car is a bit of foreshadowing. Hair blowing in the wind is a struggle of the human body against a force of nature. Connie's force of nature is Arnold. Connie's life, along with her hair, will dramatically change if Connie takes that offer of a ride. When Connie continues to refuse Arnold, he becomes upset and spits, “You had to wash your hair and you washed it for me. It's nice and shining and all for me” (330). Not only is Arnold manipulating Connie into thinking this whole situation is her idea, but he is pointing out her strongest physical trait. Arnold wants Connie to think that he sees her as a young virginal bride, or a princess in a tower. Arnold is really telling Connie that her life is his

now. Though Connie is not perfect, the reader can assume that her life experiences have been fairly innocent. Therefore, Connie's life is nice and shining and all for Arnold. The final piece of proof that Oates is relating hair to life force lies in the second to last paragraph: Connie has an out of body experience and watches her body and her head of long hair move out into the sunlight where Arnold Friend waits (331).

This is the last time Connie's hair is mentioned in the short story. Connie watches her life slip over the threshold and into Arnold's arms. In fact, the sunlight probably hits Connie's hair in just the right way to where it shines brilliantly and clean; maybe as beautiful as it's ever looked. Connie now seems to be like a young virgin sacrifice in the clutches of a man who is looking phonier by the second. To strengthen the idea of virgin sacrifice, Oates uses the numbers painted on Arnold Friend's car to reference a passage in the book of Judges about a father willing to sacrifice his virgin daughter to men. By using hair symbolically, Joyce Carol Oates gives the readers a glance at the life forces of her main characters.

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Girl with Windblown Hair

By Brooke Hendrick



Abstract Self Portrait

By Tarin Tovar



Spring 2013 Writers' Roundup Winners

Each year the Amarillo College English Department holds a Writers' Roundup contest to encourage beginning as well as advanced writers to demonstrate their creative flair. Students are given a prompt and have two hours in which to write. The type of writing is up to the student.

For more information on how to enter this friendly competition, please call (806) 371-5472 or email Dr. Dan Ferguson, English Department Chair, at dwferguson@actx.edu.

A Poison Tree

Grand Prize Winner

By Nathaniel Miller

The sky is torn across
This ragged anniversary
And I lay down to rest
Beneath a poison tree

Once mariners knew
That the earth was flat
And to sail a certain distance
Meant never to come back

So through the ink stains
That spill across my brain
I set sail for the edge of sanity
To hunt for what it is that looks at me

Ponderous islands of marble and glass
Whispered of the saints as I passed,
Into the shoals of heresy
And the shipwrecks of those before me

I met men who say there is no God
Men who say there are many
A man who says every God is the same
And all that ever changes is his name

I met men of science
That put eternity on trial
And Men of letters
Who mock their denial

I met men who say that folly is king
Men who say it's reason
There is no idea I didn't meet
And sound its champion

Finally at long last
I reached the end complete
And found indeed I was again
Where I had gone to sleep

On this ragged anniversary
With empty bottle next to me
I woke again beneath my poison tree

The 28th of June
1st place Sophomore Level

By J. Eric Dennis

It's as if *it* never happened, June 27th.

That day each year

When the fear of the many

Outweigh the screams of the one.

Oh how convenient, how cowardly

Our collective memory can be

On the day after June 27th.

I wish that today was June 26th.

That is the day we are introspective.

That is the day we are apprehensive.

On that day, there is dread

Which fuels our hearts

And strengthens our resolve.

I wish that every day was June 26th.

But it is not June 26th.

It is not that day of dread.

It is not that day of moral furor.

That day dissolves into another,

The day of the desperate deed,

Without debate or discourse.

I wish that every day instead was June 26th.

Yes, I wish that today was June 26th.

Not the day of horror

And not, as well, the day thereafter.

For it is the June 28th's of the world,

The days that pass by with forgetful acceptance,

Those are the days which prove the most dangerous.

No, I wish that every day was June 26th.

But it is not.

It is the 28th of June

And we are not restless.

We are not horrified.

Our hearts are not filled with dread.

We undertake our ordinary lives

And we are ashamed.

Among the Lost

1st Place Freshman Level

By Brandon Keyner

Lightning clashed and thunder roared out from the clouds overhead. Light raced across the skies as rain poured down upon the gathered crowd. Seran hunched forward in the carriage as it creaked to a stop in the courtyard.

He was a small man—never one to be defined by physical prowess. His eyes were bruised, but a small glimmer of green peered behind the swollen mass. No hair rested on his head and his face was littered with cuts. Around his wrists and ankles were iron shackles and on his person he wore a dingy brown shirt that may have well been a potato sack with trousers to match.

Murmuring from the people filled his ears. The horses snorted and stomped on the cobblestone road. He beheld the muddied path before him and looked around the courtyard. The buildings were tall with guards atop each, but still they showed damage from the rebellion. In the back sat the royal house with a balcony, fixed with a throne for the King and seats for all his guests, reaching out into the courtyard. Large red and black banners with the King's emblem hung down from the balcony. Beneath it and centered in the complex stood the stage—the executioner's arena. It was there men, both good and bad, met their end.

When he was a child, trips to the courtyard had always been pleasant ones. The festivities, the songs, he loved it all. Seeing justice unfold before his eyes inspired him. The guards in the towers and the presence of the king himself left a taste of security in his mouth. Now, however, things were different—more complicated. He and Nilam worked tirelessly to ensure peace and prosperity in the islands, but they failed.

His escorts grabbed him by his shoulders and pushed him to the ground. His chains rattled and his bare feet sunk into the mud. Seran looked down to the ground, but felt the eyes of everyone piercing his flesh. Hundreds gathered for this moment. Seran felt himself awash in a lake of torn clothes and dirt ridden faces. Guards lined his path with muskets at the ready. He breathed deeply and treaded forward with fruits and spit cast on him. Streams of rain traveled down his softened exterior. He closed his eyes and could hear the children sloshing around in the mud and singing the Headsman's Song:

*In the snow or in the rain
Traitors meet the Headsman's blade
In the crowds we'll dance and sing
Then toss his body in the sea*

Three years ago, Nilam came to him with an idea, "Let the people rule the islands! Let us end the King!" It all made so much sense back then. They were both noblemen and carried a hefty influence and even heftier wallets. They roused an army, led a revolt, and fought for an unquestionable freedom. They went from island to island and sowed the seeds of revolt. Men and women took their words to heart. Their message spread like wildfire. "King Polem is a tyrant and must be destroyed," Nilam would cry at his rallies. Seran admired his conviction and how staunchly he stood against the King. "There should be a ruler for the people. Not some aristocrat!"

A rock smashed into Seran's head and threw him to the ground. His body wavered as he began to stand with yells and heckles pouring over him. The guards pushed him forward and his eyes rolled across the crowd. He saw faces that had once loved him and looked upon him as a hero filled with hatred and disgust. They were people no longer, however. They were fighters, warriors, and soldiers.

Was it his fault? The war had been long and taxing, but they succeeded. The king was dead and the islands were free, but every man and woman picked a side and did battle. Brothers became enemies, wives became widows, and children became orphans. With every victory Nilam stewed more in his lust for power. It was then that Seran should have seen it—that shadow in his eyes. At the first opportunity, he named himself King, united the warring powers, and named anyone with an opposing view a traitor.

Seran stepped up onto the stage and knelt before the Headsman. Blood covered the stage. He lowered his head into the box and peered up at the king. Nilam, in his golden crown and expensive robing, looked down at his one-time ally—scowling and shaking his head. He stood and walked to the railing of the balcony and bellowed, "Today! We see the end of the traitorous scum who sought to dismantle our great State!" The people screamed with joy—throwing their hands up and parading around in the mud. Thunder boomed from the skies as the Headsman raised his axe. Staring at his friend, a tear formed in the corner of Seran's eye. The crowds wrestled to stand closer to the stage—toppling over each other like suckling pigs. Three years ago the islands were crushed under the boot of a tyrant. Nothing changed. Seran closed his eyes, sighed, and whispered, "All hail the king."

A Ragged Type of Anniversary

1st Place Developmental Level

By Elani Cooper

It always seems like the end of the world when your first love leaves you, and suddenly it's just you and your overstuffed teddy bear (a gift from your eccentric, but very thoughtful, cousin Jen) left alone in your cold, cold apartment, that only seems to be getting colder by the second. Who am I supposed to talk to, you wonder. How did everything fall apart so fast? Who am I supposed to watch *Modern Family* with every Thursday night?!

All these daunting questions and more race through your mind as you sit there staring at a blank TV screen with a ripped and broken heart, and a bowl of cold spaghetti in your hands. "Why, Ben? Why did it have to come to this? All you had to do was just do everything I ever asked you to do for me and love me unconditionally! That's all I wanted..." you sob. And sob. And sob. And continue to sob. Boy is there a lot of sobbing that goes on when two people break up, at least for one party.

But that was me last year. I had just turned twenty, and I thought I had everything that I could possibly need and want. A decent job, with decent people! A Starbucks, right around the corner from my not-too-shabby apartment complex! A loving, completely adorable boyfriend who sometimes, if you looked at his left profile, resembled Bradley Cooper! I had friends, and a social life that I wasn't going to complain about. Ah, yes, life was good. Life was nice. Life hadn't shown me how cruel it could be yet.

And then Ben (the one who resembles Bradley Cooper on the left side of his face), left me. He just looked at me with his oh-so-very-blue eyes and dumped me, on a rainy Thursday evening. "Mina, you know I love you..." he started out. "But I can't do us anymore. I'm moving to Paris with this girl I met on ChristianMingle.com. Sorry things had to end this way." And that was the end of his break-up speech to me. He took one last look at me, standing there with my mouth dangling dangerously close to the linoleum kitchen floor, and walked out my door forever. "Wait, no! Don't leave! What do you mean, Paris? And when did you get a ChristianMingle.com account?!" I yelled at the now shut door. So many feelings were running through me all at once, and not being sure of what to do, I took the best course of action. I sat down on my floor, blinked at the wall, and started crying harder than I had ever cried in my entire, two-decade old life. It felt like every nightmare I had ever had was coming true. What's a girl to do?

Ben and I had been in a relationship with each other since my sophomore year in high school. He was a year older than me, and we met one day as I was running down the hall, in a panic to get to my next class on time, and I suddenly just ran into him. I thought it was a wall I had hit, actually, but was much relieved to discover that it was a guy! A really cute, nice-smelling, not totally obnoxious guy! Who was looking down at me with not utter disgust and annoyance on his face, but with amusement and concern! "Whoa, what's the rush there? And hey, you're Mina Calloway, right?" And that's how our four-year, soon to be doomed relationship began.

Everyone said we made a lovely couple. Ben had straight brown hair and perfect

ocean blue eyes, and a charming smile, and I had my sometimes cooperating jet-black hair, and green eyes that I personally think are my best feature. Sometimes, they sparkle! But that's not the point. We looked good together, we were good together, and I thought I had found my happily ever after. Guess not.

So the day we broke up was very close to being the worst day of my life. The only day that beat that was the Friday afternoon I had gotten stuck in my grandmother's toilet (don't ask), and she had to call in her "very helpful, and reliant!" neighbor, Billy, who was "just the most handsome young man" on the block. While this was all true about dear, sweet Billy, I really didn't want him to see me on the toilet. Or in the toilet, to be more precise. Anyways, I wasn't sure how to deal with this thing called "breaking-up". Ben was my first, on pretty much everything. I didn't think I would ever HAVE to deal with breaking-up with anyone, honestly. I just went to bed that night (after NOT watching *Modern Family*), and cried into my poor pillow, who had to deal with being soggy all night.

The next day, I called my friend Willa and told her the horrible news. She came over within five minutes of my call, with a billy club, crackers, and a book of poetry. "What's the club for? And more importantly, where did you get it?", I asked tearfully. "Don't ask questions Mina! Just sit, and tell me everything. And then let's find Ben, so I can put this club to use," she told me. So I did. It took a good three hours, (sometimes I would just inadvertently sob. I'm not exactly a strong person), but I managed to explain. Willa was quiet, and sympathetic, and just kept looking at me with this sad (but angry) look on her face. "Oh, Mina. You poor thing. It's okay, don't cry ... I can hire a hit man for you and get this whole thing straightened out. He won't live to see next Tuesday!", she said kind of cheerfully. I was grateful for her support, but a little startled at that last statement she had made. Nevertheless, she made feel better, and that's all I cared about at the moment.

We spent all night together, just talking, munching crackers, and coming up with slightly sadistic (but completely justified!) ideas on ways we could get revenge on Ben. Eventually, I turned my attention to the book of poetry Willa had brought with her. I opened it to a random page that had a poem on it by Dylan Thomas.

"The sky is torn across/This ragged anniversary..." was all that I read before Willa snatched it from me. "Don't read that yet!", she exclaimed. "I'm going to read something to you later". "Geez, sorry! I was only looking...", I said, and then, because I was in a delicate state, burst into tears again. We spent the night like that, with me feeling less than pathetic and Willa there with a supporting arm around me.

Well, I survived that break-up, though the first three months were just about unbearable. Fortunately, all my friends were very supporting, and my parents understood. They just hated that I had to experience all this kind of late in life. Or at all. But I did get over Ben (though sometimes I still think about acting on one of those revenge plots Willa and I conjured up all those months ago), and now it's been a whole year to the day in fact. For some reason, I always think about those two lines of that poem by Dylan Thomas. Yes, the anniversary of my break-up from Ben is indeed a ragged memory, and at the time I felt like my sky was torn apart, and my whole world was ripped into shreds, along with my heart, but I'm a new woman now. I'm happy to say things have improved by so much. While I'm not ready to really involve myself with any guy right now (I have a few... trust issues, you might say), I have put myself back together again, and fixed my sky. I'm okay. I'm twenty-one years old, I live a mostly happy life, and I still have green eyes that sparkle! And I'm okay. Even on this ragged anniversary of mine.