

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 All submitted works must be original and unpublished.

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Hell Slinks Up

By Nessa Locke

“Are you moving out?”

It seemed like a sensible question, considering the stacks of boxes, but Alicia snapped her head toward me with a scowl. “Why does everyone keep asking me that?” she mumbled and turned back to wrapping a small, ceramic fairy with tissue paper. She placed it gently in a cardboard box before moving to the next figurine. “I’m de-cluttering,” she stated matter-of-factly without meeting my eye. “I have too much crap.”

“Did you watch that show about hoarding again?” I pawed through her box, hoping to score a donation for my shelves at home. Alicia smacked my hand away and closed the flaps.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she said in that tone that really meant, “I certainly did.” Plain, brown boxes lined the walls of the living room. I figured she must have been working for hours. When she had texted me earlier in the day, asking me to help, I hadn’t realized she’d already started.

“I brought refreshments!” I announced happily, raising the six-pack to eye-level. “Girl drinks!” Her eyes widened with delight as she reached for her raspberry beer. We toasted compulsive disorders. One sip into it, she realized she’d forgotten to pick up the pizza.

“Why didn’t you have it delivered?” I asked.

“They charge for that,” she explained as she snapped her helmet on her head. One minute later, she buzzed down the street on her little, pink motor scooter. I watched her all the way to the stop sign, and then popped the trunk of my car so I could start loading boxes to take to our community rummage sale.

When I think back about it, I’d say that’s when the intruders must have slipped into the house. The door had been unguarded for more than a few minutes. They accessed the front door as I looked away—which meant they’d been watching the place for a while. Everybody kept insisting it had always been such a quiet neighborhood.

Of course, the intruders didn’t make much noise when they were doing what they did to me. I toppled boxes and broke things during the struggle, but nobody ever heard me. The bad guys had already wrapped a few layers of packing tape around my mouth by then. I never had the chance to scream for help.

There were two of them.

They took turns.

Alicia never saw them, thank goodness. I kept thinking the whole time, she’d walk in on it, and they’d do it to her, too, but she walked in the front door as they were escaping out the back.

She called out my name several times. She explained how the pizza place had been out of black olives, so I’d have to deal with plain cheese, and she nearly tripped over my leg sticking into the pathway she’d made among the boxes.

She found me lying there, bound with the tape she’d been using, buried under her cardboard boxes, slashed open by one of the broken raspberry beer bottles. She’d never get that vision out of her head. She might push it to the back and let it rest for a while, but

it would come shooting right to the front at the most unexpected moments, for as long as she lived. That's when it finally became "not such a quiet neighborhood." Screams and sirens and sobs filled the rest of the evening.

I hung around as they did their thing with the cops and the cameras and the questions. I'd thought it proved painful to watch Alicia stumble through the night, but when they brought my mom to the morgue, well, I assumed we'd all entered the first level of Hell.

Hell didn't pull me down, though. No cloaked figure appeared beside me to escort me to the other side. No shining light beckoned from the far end of any tunnel. For that matter, no other lost souls roamed nearby to lay down the new rules of anti-body-ness. I wandered completely alone, without the proper training required for after-life success. Church and Hollywood had both failed me.

I became a spirit overwhelmed with heartache. I would say sadness ripped through me, but there was nothing there to be ripped. Sadness was me, and I was sadness. It was a growing force that I collected from each person I visited, and each person contributed a unique brand.

The elderly medical examiner who split my body open and pulled out my guts emitted a sorrowful shame. My friends exuded disbelief and denial. My mom oozed profound defeat. I absorbed these tears into myself and became the gloom of the end of my life. Soon enough, the despair settled into me like a vicious poison.

I tried to outrun it. I raced across the city, into houses, down highways, above trees, and through the sewers. I couldn't escape it. I had a theory: if I got away from the people who were sad because of the bad things that had happened to me, maybe then I could shed it, but that wasn't the answer. Every living person I touched with my soul, every living entity I pushed through left a lingering piece of loneliness inside the melancholy that was me. I gathered and grew and ghosted my way through the city like a screaming banshee on a mission of vengeance.

I'd crossed over into madness. The more misery I collected, the more restless I became. The more restless I became, the more power I had. The more power I had, the more I could do certain things to the world around me. I didn't have lungs to scream; I didn't have a mouth to speak; I didn't have arms to shove, but with my misery, I could make men tremble by entering the room. With my anger, I could short-circuit electric boxes and darken entire complexes. With my madness, I could convince certain rapists to jump from the tops of tall, tall buildings.

There were two of them.

I took turns.

The first one could have been an accident. I wasn't sure he'd recognize me, but his fear felt specific. No guilt, no sorrow, no regret filled him, but he seemed to understand the rules of Karma. There had been a joke among the living that the second one had always been such a follower—that if the first one jumped off a cliff, the other would quickly follow. How very close to the truth that had been.

Looking back, I'd say that's when I became a believer in Hell. I saw Hell slink up and grab them and pull them down kicking and screaming, taking all my fears, all my sorrow, all my anger with them.

For a moment, I felt naked, despite my body-less-ness. The heavy cloak of shame

and desolation fell away, and my joy exposed me for the precious soul I am.

“I’ve been looking for you everywhere.”

It wasn’t so much a voice as a song. Warmth encompassed me and sank into me and became me, and in the absence of my darkness, I finally discovered my Light.

My Mother

By Joseph Holmes

“Lyndon Johnson you sorry son of a b*tch!”
squalled my mother through her lavender cloud
of Marlboro and through lyrical sobbing anguish
and blowing her nose and playing a scratchy Elvis
45 over and over again—maybe ‘All Shook Up,’
maybe ‘Return to Sender,’ which usually made me want to dance.

In the mornings, My Mother sat with me in front of the TV.
We laughed at Captain Kangaroo with his blacknwhite hair
and blacknwhite Captain’s suit and blacknwhite Mr. Moose
and blacknwhite Bunny Rabbit in his Jack Benny glasses.
But today, she slit open an envelope and read a letter.

I do not know where Saigon is. I do not know where
Hanoi is. My Mother buried her face
in her arms folded across the table. My father was
hanging steel in Tulsa. The rest of us were down
the Ouachita River where everyone else was safe
herding horses and cows and mowing Johnson grass.

This morning, I watched the Captain alone and strained to hear
over Elvis, suddenly removed from Mr. Moose who pulled one
over on the Captain, raining down the ping pong balls, which
usually got me every time.—Why, then, did I find my breath
coming in short hitches? Why, then, was I afraid to comfort
My Mother? And why, then, was I suddenly afraid of everything,
my own tears spilling over—my vanquished desire to dance?

About Luck

By Greg Rohloff

Luck is the bright bloom on October's fading stalk
 straining toward autumn's last rays
and poking its head upward among its fading neighbors
whose last act will be to drop their seeds.

That bloom cannot choose when it emerges.
Its time set by some clock it cannot see. The blossom can only rise
 and greet the butterflies making their last round
before their journey away from winter's icy hands.

How long it lasts is anyone's guess. A week, maybe two,
 unless sullen winds carry in a frost
that strips the color from the bloom,
and turns it downward to see its fate in a dormant landscape.

Luck, indeed, sets circumstance
but ours is not to bemoan that narrow window when it presents its view.
Opportunity is limitless, but not occasions for opportunity.
So strain skyward while you can, never fearing the icy end.

Jenbug

By Zack Holmes



Third-Place Winner – Nonfiction

Another Day with My Hero

By Shane Gregory

Cancer only affects fourteen out of every one hundred thousand children in the United States, but what if you are one of those fourteen children? My son, Ian, is the toughest kid in the world and was leading a normal life for a five year old until one fateful day in January.

Ian's story starts with a normal day at daycare. Ian and his sister, Madison, were at daycare while I was at work. Near the end of my day, I received a phone call informing me that Ian had been hurt, and I needed to get to the daycare quickly. I was told weeks later that Ian had hit his sister and when she hit him back, he fell to the floor unconscious. At daycare, there were two ambulances and one fire truck, so I rushed in to see Madison crying and Ian unconscious on the floor. Ian was starting to fade from white to a pale shade of blue while being worked on by the paramedics. In the background, Madison screamed, "Daddy, I killed my brother." Feeling helpless, I turned my attention to my daughter for the moment. With Madison consoled to a point, our attention turned back to Ian as the paramedics were prepared to rush him to the hospital. We followed close behind the ambulance in my vehicle with horrible and frightening thoughts running through my mind. When we got to the hospital, they immediately put Ian on a ventilator and sent him to the pediatric intensive care unit. Five hours later, I was told my son had a mass in his chest; it was t-cell lymphoma, a type of cancer.

After being on a ventilator for twenty-one days, Ian was taken off and woke up from the chemical induced coma he was put in during his first days of treatment. The doctors told me, if Ian would start eating and was able to hold down food, he could go home and begin the long treatment program that would take three-and-one-half years. Ian weighed fifty pounds before he got sick; coming off the ventilator, he weighed nineteen pounds. Along with the weight loss, he also had severe withdrawal symptoms from the narcotics that kept him in a coma. I broke down and laid my head on his bed. Ian patted me on the head as if to tell me it would all be okay.

The treatment program Ian began was an intense program of chemotherapy and ten straight days of radiation therapy. One night at four in the morning, I heard Ian vomiting in the bathroom. I asked him why he did not wake me up, and he said, "Dad you need your rest. I'm okay." With all the therapy and doctors, Ian's spirits were starting to fade. Doctors and nurses tried to reassure both of us that the first year was the worst, and it would get better. We were not convinced.

During a weekly treatment, the Make a Wish Foundation let me know Ian had been granted his wish to meet the Dallas Cowboys. Three days later, an ESPN representative called, and they wanted to include Ian in a new yearly series called One Wish, to be aired the first week of July. I agreed, and our special adventure was about to begin. Ian was presented his wish in a video from Dallas Cowboy tight end, Jason Whitten. One week later, after interviews with ESPN, we were off to Dallas to meet the cowboys.

Ian was to go to Valley Ranch, the Dallas Cowboys practice facility, and meet such Cowboys as Jason Whitten, Tony Romo, DeMarcus Ware, and Marion Barber. Terrance Newman, a cornerback for the Cowboys, put his head on Ian's shoulder and pretended to take a nap. Ian was able to see the locker room, attend and participate in practice, and even ride on the team bus. The highlight of the day was when Marion Barber signed and gave Ian a real Dallas Cowboy football helmet. I even received a signed football from DeMarcus Ware. All this fun and adventure was documented by ESPN on the One Wish series in July of 2009. With Ian's spirits raised and a new lease on life, it was back to Amarillo to work on beating cancer.

It's now five years later and Ian still keeps in touch, by e-mail, with his new-found friends on the Dallas Cowboys. He watches Cowboy games every week and loves football. School is hard, from all the time missed in the hospital, but Ian does not ever think of giving up. Ian's never-give-up attitude has inspired me to go back to school and get my business degree. To answer who is the toughest kid in the world, it has to be Ian because he is cancer free and on the road to a long happy life.

Saving the World at the Cadillac Ranch

By Pamela Kessler

“Are any bulls in there? I don’t want to go in if there are bulls.” Rita looked genuinely concerned. In the distance, inorganic hulks rose from the ground.

I thought it doubtful an actual bull might be charging about, although this was only the third time I’d visited the Cadillac Ranch—in truth, a cow pasture. I reassured my friend then cautiously pushed open the unlocked iron gate that leads to the old upended automobiles, whose noses are buried so that their tails point skyward.

When we’d pulled up to the field and parked along the shoulder of the frontage road, I was acutely aware that we were the only people in the area. That fact made me more nervous than the thought of ornery bulls. The ranch looked lonely and secluded, although it lies just off Interstate 40. I grabbed our plastic bag loaded with clanking spray-paint cans and kept my feelings to myself. After all, the bright blue Amarillo sky made the afternoon seem peaceful and perfect.

As we walked along the wide dirt path toward the evenly-spaced junkers, I noticed something else. Every single one of the ten vehicles had been painted yellow. I told Rita this was unusual, and we wondered about the possible significance. (We later learned that Lance Armstrong’s mother had spoken at a local event to raise money for the Maverick Boys and Girls Club, thus the hue of the winner’s Tour de France jersey welcomed her to the Texas Panhandle.)

At last alongside the sunny behemoths, I opened the sack and offered Rita first choice of color: red, blue, green, white.

Because it’s normal for the Caddies to be visited frequently and probably seldom go less than twenty-four hours without fresh graffiti, I wasn’t surprised to see that the canary canvas was already decorated with messages and drawings. Rita and I began to read the legacy left by the previous artists.

Racial epithets screamed from the metallic monsters. We walked from car to car, seeing vicious slang sully the yellow overcoat. Not a single one was immune from the scourge.

Naively, I had assumed that prejudice didn’t fester on the High Plains. The sight of the hateful slurs sickened me. I was shocked and embarrassed that my friend, visiting from another state, would soon fly home with memories of this unique site tainted by perverse words, such as “Hang the . . . !”

But we had paint and plenty of it. We could make our mark. We could take a stand.

Working with a purpose rather than for our own entertainment, we sprayed over every nasty word on each lemon-colored car. Our hair whipped about in the breeze as we created American flags and hearts and wrote “love” and “peace.” Arms sweeping, we obliterated the abusive phrases and racist remarks and replaced them with all of the positive symbols and expressions we could imagine.

Our mission completed, we bagged the near-empty cans and headed in the direction of my van. Hot and thirsty, we trudged toward the gate while a family—parents and a couple of elementary-age children—arrived and made for the yellow machines. We

greeted them on our way past and learned they were from North Carolina, the same state my friend calls home. They continued on to the famous Cadillacs, and we went through the gate, relieved that we happened to visit the ranch before the children could encounter those obscenities at a well-known West Texas landmark.

Later I thought about the choices made. Bigots, bulls full of snorting malice, made the decision to go to a store, buy paint, drive to the ranch, and pour out their shriveled hearts all over Cadillacs as yellow as their cowardice. Why?

I could only hope that we'd turned one tiny dot on the map into a better place—for a moment at least—and maybe even rescued the day for two impressionable little kids.

'Miss America' Maniac Comics Graphic Novel Cover

By Sean Callahan



Second-Place Winner – Nonfiction

Through the Jungle to Paradise

By Tiffani Ray

I knew spending the winter in Maui would bring me adventure, but I might have gotten more than I bargained for once I stepped off the plane. Being a photographer and a lover of nature, I readied my camera at my side to capture anything and everything that might present itself. My hosts were very gracious and more than willing to show me a wonderful time on the island. Therefore, when I expressed my desire to get a few photos of the Haleakalā volcano for my portfolio, these native pioneers knew exactly where to take me. However, they had no idea what affect it would have on my goal of becoming a nature photographer. The dangerous and miserable journey they dragged me on could not prepare me for the beauty that awaited us at the top of the 2,000 foot volcanic waterfall.

All volcanoes are dangerous; I didn't need to be a geologist to figure that out. Even though Haleakalā has only erupted three times in the past 900 years, it felt unnatural to climb it. Once we got to the mountain, I figured there would be a tourist trail or a sight-seeing path to take our time on, but that was far from what my guides had in mind. We began, to my surprise, simply walking up the side of the mountain. The moss-covered rocks and mud splattered cliffs which we had to sludge upward on were less than stable. With every step I took, leaning forward so as not to roll backward, I held my expensive Nikon DSLR 85 mm camera above my head, throwing off my balance significantly. As if the trek itself wasn't difficult enough, we soon came across a bamboo forest covering the massive base of the volcano. With every breath of wind that swayed the forest, we were forced to bend between the thinly separated bamboo limbs, all while keeping our feet firmly squished in the slippery slope.

I enjoy a challenge as much as the next photographer, but once the horizontal rain kicked in, my enthusiasm was lost. Grabbing ahold of something to steady myself was useless. What trees there were, were rooted in moss, sending me and the tree tipping over at the slightest tug. Vines began to spread across the pathway, creating a 007 scenario, in which we had to loop, bend, and duck our way through half a mile of vertical mazes, camera still in hand. My gracious guides were constantly three or four steps ahead of me, disturbing every last mosquito and pest thriving in the forest, leaving me as their only source of prey as I trudged along, hot, wet, itchy, anxious, and unamused.

There must be a good reason they're taking me through this, I thought. Despite my misery, I bit my tongue the rest of the way and attempted to remain optimistic. After three miles of anxiety, the fog began to lift from the mountain and the entire island became visible underneath us. Everywhere I glanced, there was a photo opportunity. Beauty surrounded us in the purest form of nature, amazing tranquility that only the bravest of explorers are worthy of viewing. "The waterfall is just around the corner!" I heard my guide shout. As I prepared my camera for the grandest of photo-shoots, I turned the corner and found myself in awe. We stood at the top of the waterfall, staring down at 2,000 feet of accomplishment. After snapping one quick picture of the scene, I set my camera down in

a safe spot. Then, I took off my hiking gear and slipped down into the still pool that floated just at the edge of the misty waterfall. This victory was much too sweet to spend behind the lens of a camera. With that first dip into the water and a glass of pineapple wine in my hand, all of the dirt, sweat, and misery washed away.

I knew it would be difficult, and I was assured the finish line would be worth the treacherous journey, but I was not prepared for the extremity of either. Feeling as though one wrong move up the mountain could be fatal and the end of every obstacle being met with an even worse challenge, I wanted to turn around and hop on a plane back to Texas. However, the end result was sweeter than the pineapple wine I was now sipping. This was my own odyssey, as I learned to await the beauty at the end of every struggle.

Epiphany

By Deborah Harding

i have struggled to meet this soul of mine...
to become as naked as the moon and
as strong and fragile as adobe,
baked hard and crumbling in the weather of time.

i have struggled to shine without shame,
to stand face to face with my darkest thought and
to bare my loneliness in the song of a bird,
planted bright against leafless winter trees.

i have struggled to show this soul of mine...
to praise the god of sorrow with waves of deep, round belly laughs and
to illumine the god of joy with the fire of my tears,
burnt white and delicate like pearls on the neck of a child.

and i have struggled to free this soul of mine...
to sail on love moist as hot ice and
to dance with spirals of fog on the morning sea,
vanishing ghosts that curtain and open the sunrise.

i have struggled to live from this soul of mine...
to bravely breathe in the incense of each day's quest and
to sleep at night in the arms of a question,
whispered lullabies like innocent dreams that sing of mystery.

and i will struggle to love this soul of mine...
to take my fill of the blood of the river and the body of rock, and
to find renewing friendship in a freshly plowed field,
turned over and under as the vine surrenders her fruit.

yes, i will struggle to rise each morning as the christ herself...
and to live each day in the glory of failure and the tragedy of hope,
until, in celebration of this soul's epiphany,
i will die as the hero of no one,
wrapped in silence and gently laid in the home of souls,
an unmarked grave.

--To My Dad...who taught me the meaning of paradox and thinking outside the box

Family

By Sabrina Sisneros

I turn over in my bed and feel the sheets have turned cold. It is as though they have been lying outside in the early morning hours. There is a light breeze flowing through my window to kiss me good morning. I welcome it with a deep breath, and the smell of wet earth accompanies the breeze. As I slowly open my eyes, I awaken not to my bedroom, but to my youth.

The morning has made its appearance before the sun has made its way over the horizon. I hear the stray cats rummaging on the front porch, begging for the table scraps. Someone has come through the living room, peeled back the heavy corded drapes, and opened the windows. I roll over carefully, trying not to tip over the narrow green cot that serves as my bed. Through my sleepy haze, I see my sister and two cousins asleep, crowded on the queen-size sofa bed. I see the shadow of a hand moving the edge of the comforter back and forth on her chin, and I know this is my cousin, Misty.

For a moment, I only hear the sounds of the breeze brushing the old metal shades in the window. There is a slight hum coming from the refrigerator, singing along with the ticking of the old wall clock. Soon, I hear the slow dragging of house slippers on the kitchen linoleum. There is a slight grunt, and the window over the kitchen sink is opened and, “thunk,” a small dial radio is plopped on the window sill. “Click” goes the dial and then static from the AM station suddenly awakens with the Spanish DJ singing, “Vive en Monterey, en Monterey, rey, rey.”

From the corner of my eye, I see the kitchen light come on. My grandma is up and I know it is about four-thirty in the morning. The clicking of the gas stove announces to the world that it’s getting ready for a good day’s work. There is a slight commotion with the bowls and pans, but soon all I hear is the rolling pin: “clink...clank....swish...clink...clank.” With five precise movements, grandma has just rolled out her first tortilla for the day. In a few moments, the aroma of the warm tortillas will beckon all to awake. In the background, there is slight creaking of bed springs helping my grandpa out of bed.

Within a few minutes, my grandfather soon joins my grandmother in the kitchen. Before I hear him even pull the kitchen chair out to sit, the smell of coffee brewing hits me. My grandparents never say a word to each other. They just sit, drink their coffee and contemplate the day. Every morning for forty-nine years, this is my grandparents’ routine. I lie there and wonder if my grandfather wishes he would have become something different than a farmer. Does he wonder what would have become of his brothers and sisters if they had made it to adulthood. And my grandmother? Does she miss her sisters who are still living in Mexico? Is she happy with how her life turned out? Did she have dreams for herself that did not revolve around her family?

I roll over from my side and feel the warm tears trail on to my pillow. I realize how truly amazing our senses are and how they help the mind paint a picture of the past. This seemingly insignificant routine of my grandparents has deeply influenced my life. My grandparents were my rock and they provided love and stability. I wish down into the depths of my soul that I would have had the forethought to get up out of that cot and take a cup of coffee with them. Family is important, and we all must remember to enjoy them

for every minute of every day, while they are here with us!

Valentine Peacock

By Troy Cartwright



First-Place Winner – Nonfiction

Journey to Eternity

By Tina Tuell

According to literary critic, Ralph Joly, Emily Dickinson's poem, "Because I could not stop for Death" (1890) is "one of [her] most celebrated" pieces of poetry. Joly continues exploring that Death was a familiar topic in her literary works as "thirty-three of her acquaintances...died between February 1851 and November 1854" (Joly). Also, "[s]he [was] able to grasp the terms of the [Puritan] myth directly...to give them a luminous tension, a kind of drama, among themselves" (Young). In this great piece of poetry, she illuminates Death, Immortality, and Eternity. Dickinson grew up in "a Calvinist household" ("Emily Dickinson and The Church") in an era when many struggled with Christian beliefs and scientific concepts, such as Darwinism. One critic explains that "most Amherst families...held daily religious observances in their home." Additionally the website states that Dickinson "agonized over her relationship to God" and "...[she did] not feel that [she] could give up all for Christ, were [she] called to die" ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). Through this wonderful piece of literary work, Dickinson portrays death in a positive, gentle manner—not fearfully—through familiar imagery, allusions, and personification as though she desired to be reconciled with God. Dickinson's poetry often used the same rhyme schemes and metrical patterns as the hymns sung in her church. These give the poem itself a hymn-like intonation which reflects her religious background.

In Dickinson's poem, she uses many images to express life's journey. These images paint a vivid picture which includes the "school ...children" (9) symbolizing youth, the "fields of gazing grain" (11) symbolizing adulthood, and the passing of the "[s]etting sun" (12) symbolizing the end of life's journey. As the speaker strolls down memory lane, "pass[ing] the school, where children / [are] [a]t recess..." (8-9), Dickinson paints a picture of playtime or leisure, but because the "children strove," (9) readers reflect upon childhood as a time of labor. The word "strove" indicates some children were needed to work the fields at home instead of frolicking at school which would align with the era of the 19th century. "The fields of gazing grain" (10) "depicts [the] grain in a state of maturing" (Joly)—perhaps the middle of life. The reader can picture a gentle breeze blowing the grain, as if the Holy Spirit is comforting the person unprepared for death. The imagery of "passing the setting sun" (Dickinson 12) represents life's journey is nearing the entrance to Eternity. The descriptive words "quivering and chill" (14) can send shivers up one's spine. The speaker is underdressed in "gossamer...tippet... tulle" (15-16), for the late autumn, evening drive has turned much cooler. The coldness, which occurs when the sun sets in the evening, could refer to when the casket was buried into damp, cold ground in the cemetery. Yet, according to Santiago Suárez, the house "provides a coziness that

does not create repulsion to a place that otherwise can have a negative connotation.” In the fifth stanza, the gravesite is described as a house with a roof and a cornice—something pretty, fancy, or intricate which enables to reader to feel warmth instead of coolness. The use of the vivid imagery, allusions, and personification in this poem depicts the different stages of one’s journey of life.

In Dickinson’s poem, she introduces allusions represented by the carriage ride, time, and the horses’ heads. They can be interpreted as having Biblical connotations. The believer can picture Jesus gently reaching for the woman’s hand, helping her into the “carriage” (Dickinson 3) for the ride into eternity (heaven). In the Book of John, Jesus said, “When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am” (NLT, John 14: 3). The last stanza of the poem, “Since...’tis centuries....each / Feels shorter than the day” (Dickinson 21-22) relates to time. Time does not exist upon entering eternity. Imagine, no more watches or no more birthdays in eternity. Eternity alludes to the verse in the Bible: “...A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day” (NLT, 2 Peter 3:8). The allusion regarding the horses’ heads could refer to several interpretations. According to Suárez, the “horses represent travel” which could be classified as a journey. Also, as quoted in the Suárez article, Plato believed “horses are a simile of the soul,” and according to the Greek mythology, “the horse Pegasus flew to heaven” (Suárez) which indicates that the poem is about the journey to eternity possibly heaven. The allusions used in this poem appear to offer hope, as does the personification, to the reader by implying there is more to journey than death in the grave.

The personification of Death, Immortality, and Eternity used in this poem are important aspects of this piece of poetry used to portray courtesy and gentleness in death instead of a frightening, intimidating grim reaper. Death, Immortality, and Eternity can represent the Trinity: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the biblical aspect. When the allusions, images, personification, and poetic techniques are joined together, the essence of this poem is brought into focus. Death is described as “kind” (Dickinson 2) and “civil” (8). Death is personified as a “gentleman taking a lady out for a drive” (Young). Immortality is personified as a “chaperon” and “ironically...everlasting death” (Joly). Joly states that the heart of the poem is the “genteel” driver is ironically [made] to serve the end of Immortality.” According to Young, [Dickinson] has presented a typical Christian theme without...[presenting a] solution to the problem [of death]” (Young). Eternity is personified by taking on the characteristics from Death and Immortality, much like God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Dickinson appears to continue offering peace and hope to readers agonizing over their own relationship with God.

In conclusion, even though the speaker was too busy to “stop for Death,” (Dickinson 1), death is certain to all. Dickinson portrays the everlasting death in a positive, kind, gentle, and peaceful light through imagery, allusions, and personification. Death

does not have to be feared, but to be embraced, especially if one knows the journey continues for eternity in heaven with God.

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Coping with Catastrophe:

A Psychological Analysis of “Miss Brill”

By Connie Holmes

In the short story, “Miss Brill,” by Katherine Mansfield, an unmarried older woman struggles to maintain distance from her feelings of loneliness and isolation in an environment indifferent to suffering. During an afternoon outing, Miss Brill is confronted by people, situations, and ultimately herself (Thorpe 662). “Miss Brill” can be viewed as a social commentary employing the predicament of an older, single woman in Western Europe’s post-war society and the psychological resources she uses to cope with her situation to illustrate society’s departure from emotional empathy in order to rebuild and survive.

The story opens on an ominous note with the word, “Although,” noting the difference between how the world appears and how it is. Appearance is key in a society seeking stability after the upheaval and uncertainty of intense conflict. The pageant of characters with whom Miss Brill intermingles during her outing to the Jardins Puplicues display varying levels of propriety and control, yet there is always an underlying suspicion something is wrong as she reflects upon the “tingling in her hands and arms” (Mansfield 182) and “something sad, no, not sad, exactly” she experiences during her walk to the park (Mansfield 183).

The reader is immediately introduced to the strong presence of the fur necklet Miss Brill so lovingly dons for her outing. Mansfield goes into great detail establishing the fur as a focal point in the story. The reader is drawn into the relationship Miss Brill demonstrates toward the accoutrement, developing more sympathy for the fur than for the main character herself. The fur piece is brought to life as she imbues it with sentiment, giving an imaginary voice to its petition as to why it has remained in storage for so long. The slightly worn condition of the fur is overlooked with the promise of a future touch-up to make it fine once more. Nevertheless, she is pleased to wear it and draws comfort from its embrace. The “little rogue, as she calls it, is there to ward off the ‘faint chill’” (Mansfield 182) in the air. Emotional attachment to an object rather than a person secures Miss Brill’s safe vantage point in a society which is seemingly indifferent to her presence.

Miss Brill finds her “special seat,” a safe place where she is both engaged and aloof, to enjoy her afternoon of people watching. Her loneliness is magnified as she eavesdrops on the people visiting the gardens. Miriam Mandel spotlights Miss Brill’s dilemma most poignantly as she observes that “Miss Brill, an aging spinster, a foreigner (in xenophobic France) without friends or relatives, is almost a parody of the isolated expatriate” (474). The situation is far from humorous as her isolation is made most obvious by the crowds of people and the interchanges they share all around her. She maintains her safe distance by objectifying each encounter by color or clothing (Mandel 474). The conductor in a new coat, the Englishman in his Panama hat with his wife in the button boots, and the woman simply referred to as “the ermine toque” all pass beneath her inspection. Colors come to life as they overtake the people represented by them in

Miss Brill's assessments. The girls in red and the young soldiers in blue meet and laugh and stroll away together (Mansfield 185). Miss Brill keeps them all at a safe distance by labeling them neatly and filing them into orderly places in her mind. She uses these coping mechanisms to separate herself from her loneliness, even to the point of noting how many elderly people are in attendance, never acknowledging herself as a member of that particular group. She pities their mean state without a hint of personal association.

Self-realization makes its first pass as she encounters the woman in the ermine toque with the gentleman in grey. This is the moment when Miss Brill comes closest to empathizing with someone else. Miss Brill gives the impression that she can almost read the spurned woman's mind, imagining her frantic thoughts and feeling her despair. She perceives the entire scene as being suddenly permeated with the hopelessness of rejection, and Miss Brill immediately takes up the accusation along with the band: "The Brute! The Brute!" (Mansfield 186-87). Could this chance encounter remind her of some past experience in her own life? She quickly turns her attention to something and someone else as if to drive away the unpleasant moment before it has a chance to settle into the strange melancholy that is continually present but never fully acknowledged.

Having properly distanced herself from any emotional introspection, she takes flight into imagination. Miss Brill finds order and meaning at last. The insecurity of loneliness and the uncertainty of social structure melt away as the world becomes a play where each of them, Miss Brill included, has a part and a purpose. She seems to experience not only happiness but relief at the revelation that reason and harmony are in place. Joy and sadness, beauty and suffering, all work together in a great cantata in which her part is no less important than any other. Even though the "faint chill" still lurks at the fringes of her mind, she is able to cast off its presence as nothing more than the necessary element that facilitates the libretto.

Inevitably, ill-timed reality breaks through. Miss Brill is forced to encounter herself through the eyes of the young couple who have come to share her bench. The music is not mentioned here as earlier in the story. Unlike the other instances of her afternoon when the music accents the different situations with the various people in the garden, this moment is curiously silent. The whisper of melancholy that she so easily dismisses when she first set out on her way to the gardens has taken up the chorus that she no longer wants to sing. The faint chill that she has tried to ignore has become a bitter wind from which the little fur necklet cannot shield her. She does not break down nor does she break out. There are no judgments or conjectures. Miss Brill resigns herself to her dark cupboard once more. The only self-deception she allows is the misdirected cry which can only come from her own pain, but which she has removed to the object of the worn fur necklet that she hastily puts away as though she is packing away her own feelings. Control must be maintained at all cost. To allow oneself to gaze into the "sad little eyes" of one's lost youth and meaningless life is to give oneself over to an avalanche of despair.

In the years following the Great War, Western Europe was in the grip of massive political, social, and cultural changes. There was a "general feeling of the cruelty of life" (Devi), what Mansfield referred to as "the snail under the leaf" (Devi). This undertone is apparent in "Miss Brill." It creates a subtle anxiety that exists beneath a thin façade of tranquility and order. The reader wants the best for the main character, but in the end has little compassion for her. She practices her self-deception so well as to deceive the whole

world. As an older woman, alone, she has little to sustain her self-worth. As a citizen of her era, she has almost no sympathy from her fellow man. The world she weaves in her mind is the fragile partition that shields her from these stark realities. Death and destruction do not exist solely on the battlefield but in the hearts and minds of the people left to rebuild society. Survivors can neither afford the luxury of feelings nor the time to despair.

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“The Story of an Hour”: An Appeal for Empathy

By Andrew Roberts

The time is April 19, 1894. A society dominated by males yields little liberty to females in America. Women are expected to marry when young. They are expected to obey their husbands and meet their demands. They are not allowed to own property, vote, nor speak out against their suppressors. Women who voice their opinion are fighting a losing battle; men are allowed to beat them with a switch no wider than a thumb. The Civil War has ended and slavery has been abolished. Reconstruction has come and gone, and yet unjust social constructs remain prevalent in society, seldom questioned nor challenged. For these reasons, Kate Chopin uses imagery and irony in “The Story of an Hour” to evoke an emotional response from the reader in an attempt to have the reader empathize with and question the reasons for the plight of Mrs. Mallard, who symbolizes repressed femininity in a patriarchal society.

Early in the story, Chopin exposes Mrs. Mallard's repressed past by subtly describing her: “She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength” (115). Chopin is contrasting the young Mrs. Mallard with the indented lines of repression on her face. This exposes the fact that even though she has much life left in her, the past has taken its toll and left an imprint that cannot be erased. Again, Chopin alludes to the fact that Mrs. Mallard had been repressed by writing, “There would be no powerful will bending her in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a will upon a fellow creature” (116). Chopin uses this to reinforce that Mrs. Mallard has been dominated by her husband and that she indeed symbolizes repressed femininity in a patriarchal society.

The literary device imagery relays the feelings of the protagonist to the reader, allowing the reader to empathize. Once Mrs. Mallard has mourned her husband, she goes away to her room to sit silently. Isolated in the armchair, she looks outside and notices “the trees that were aquiver with the new spring life” (115). She heard the notes of a distant song and noticed that “countless sparrows were” (115) singing in the trees while the “delicious breath” (115) of rain was in the air. The imagery of the story is presented as though something grand is occurring, while ironically juxtaposed with the death of Mrs. Mallard's husband. An all-encompassing emotion falls upon her: “There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully” (115). She eventually recognizes the emotion as freedom, and that a life without her husband may be a blessing in disguise. The esoteric force of the new light of spring shines brightly on the repressed shadow of Mrs. Mallard's soul, illuminating what she had kept dormant throughout her marriage. This helps the reader empathize with Mrs. Mallard, knowing that she is not a revolutionary, just an ordinary housewife who had a glowing epiphany catalyzed through forces that weren't of her own power, forces that were life-giving. She was innocent of any wrongdoing and the manner in which she receives freedom is profound and awe-inspiring—not to be discredited nor marginalized, and evoking empathy.

Another device used by Chopin to have the reader empathize and begin to question is irony. Mrs. Mallard has recognized her emotion of freedom permeating her

existence. However, Chopin expresses this by writing, “A little whispered word escaped from her mouth. Free, free, free” (116), she mutters. The irony of situation is that although Mrs. Mallard realizes she is free, she whispers it to herself, as if to not let anyone know. Chopin expounds upon the scene by revealing that Mrs. Mallard was unaccustomed to freedom when she further writes, “The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes” (116). This proves that, initially, Mrs. Mallard was horrified by the freedom she was given. This is a serious emotional appeal to the reader and it also leads him/her to understand the level of repression that existed during the life of Mrs. Mallard. Once truly free, Mrs. Mallard is afraid to be perceived as free. She is afraid of what society will think and how society will act if she is truly elated with her newly received freedom. She will not even tell her sister how she really feels. As a result of this emotional understanding, it leads the reader to immediately question “In what kind of world would you be afraid to be free?”

The ultimate questions that Chopin leaves us with revolve around the last paragraph. Coming down the stairs, Mrs. Mallard has alleviated herself of the stresses of her husband's death. She has embraced the road of life ahead and is ready for the next chapter. She had prayed that life would be long and longed for the days where she was free to do whatever she chose (117). Simultaneously, her husband, alive and well, opens the door. She is now back exactly where she started, but worse off, as a result of her epiphany. And realizing this, she screams and dies of the “joy that kills” (117). The irony of her dying from her heart trouble, at the “joyous” sight of her husband, invokes catharsis. The reader knows she didn't die of joy; rather, she died from pure surprise and chagrin with the situation. Moreover, it leaves the reader with concerned questions about Mrs. Mallard and what Chopin was attempting to convey to the audience. “Why did she have to die?” “Was it the pressures of society on Chopin that made her kill Mrs. Mallard?” And, most of all, “Is it better to perish than be repressed?”

In an attempt to sway the tide of social injustice, Chopin creates a character, Mrs. Mallard. Early in the story, Mrs. Mallard is established as a symbol for repressed femininity. She is a regular human being dealing with the same problems the majority of people face from the monotony of everyday life. She then experiences something truly earth-shaking: the death of her domineering husband and the new life that has sprung forth out of it. It drastically changes her view on reality. She accepts her husband's death, and is ready to move on. She then suddenly realizes that her husband is actually alive and ends up dying from the shock and surprise of the situation because she can never go back to being who she was, a repressed female. Chopin tries to inspire change from this story. To truly change something, you have to understand why it is not applicable to society. However that is not always as simple as it sounds, and Chopin is aware of that. Chopin takes “baby steps” to relay what she feels were injustices to the audience. She first makes the audience empathize, which through her use of imagery, is quite successful. She then, utilizing irony effectively, creates curiosity in the reader. This fulfills Chopin's objective by making the reader erupt with questions, which is the first step needed to awaken people to the injustices that women experienced during the time period and hopefully create a more liberating environment for women in the future.

Caged

By Karly McCutchan



First-Place Winner – Poetry

Connecting Burnt Bridge

By Michael Dyer

If ever they ask for the soul who can connect burnt bridges,
Seek you me at the crossroads.
Do not fear me, for twenty-eight years now I've resided there,
unaware to that depot's wares.
For I have walled up Lucifer and all of Hell and sentenced him to his cursed little sandbox.

Presiding over all the affairs of trespasses,
I am the comptroller of reprieves and grants,
Father to the dismissals of repetitious invalids.

My lure is the succulent sound of a hollowed gourd,
and my hell on earth is enshrined in replanting Eden
upon the turrets of civilization.
I am but a puppeteer pulling the strings of succession.
Until my beginning hath come.

It was my wholehearted intention to slip through time,
unnoticed and unwelcomed, but omnipresent.
To be that name that couldn't be recounted.
To be nothing more than a shallow unmarked grave.
Yet, here we are on a whim, rolling the spindle for Ladychance.

It wasn't what the world took from me,
but rather it took from itself.
Therefore I must preside over the storm to ensure
that the last tether remains restricted from collapse.
Otherwise this was all chance, another mishap.

To reveal the keyhole, to unravel the wind
which passes by time in the whirling unfurled gaps
engaged in the effervescent bending of sounds.
Until all of time is bound round and unwound.

For blessed is he who is the tailor
of devils, demons, and specters,
fashioning from the arachnid's gossamer's cord.
Till the splendid hour of night has beseeched yet another vessel.

More virtuous hands have constructed a means to mend.

Perilous times call for drastic measures.
That is why the tangled web of spidersilk was hastily fashioned
To ensure all was not lost to circumstance.

For centuries the wind has howled,
almost as if in the most paralytic eyes
dazzled, ravished, ransacked, and defiled.
Those fibers resisted washing away into the ebbs,
clung loosely to the swaying branches which secured that web.

Most things live backwards forwards.
Unnoticed is the one who travels fro and to.
That is; hither tither/ splendid weather/
once more, and all together
forever,
swaying in this solemn sombre slumber.

When the water is but lukewarm;
from the trepid currents the torrents coursed
shall come the littlest of fishies
up from the sanctuary of the stream.
To keel in spoiled soil, to be reclaimed for royal coil.
Yet this one will not be crucified nor sushified.
This one is more than just a sardine in a can.

Swimming against the current.
This seemingly harmless speck
could slip past Eternity Bridge,
backward past the archaic anchor.
That will be the time when the crackling roar of thunder
shall convulse into nothing more than a dampened mewling
of another time which hasn't begun.

J'aime pêcher, voici, c'est un vraimant poison!
I'd hate to infer that that one speck is our only chance for hope of a chance,
but indeed that is the spot that I have fastened chance on time's thread,
twined in a parallel descent of the known.
Cast down in the oubliette, without even a bobber!

Such is the art of remembering what once was.
Such is the life of those destined to be suffocated.
Such is death of those lumped into the ground.
Such inasmuch are these that clutch the foundations to history's holy hutch.
Chance is but history's shanty blowing in the tradewind.
Give and take so that what remains cannot remake what was.

While the world has branched out,
far from the trunk's spout,
never hasten to be forgotten,
for once all the connections have been severed
it will take a Devil, such as myself, to knot the
tresses of tether back together.

And I assure you, I weave one hell of a loom,
from the potentially lethal petals of things once bloomed.

Second-Place Winner – Fiction

Perdition for Love

By Tyler Reno

The repercussion of a snub-nose revolver broke the still silence at 1313 Wilson Street on the night of April 19, 1935. As the barrel still smoldered on the blood-soaked carpet, detective James Carl promptly entered the notoriously rundown West Burrow apartments. The grisly setting of the room gave him a brief flashback from The Great War when he served as an infantryman.

Fifteen years ago, after returning to the states, James slowly assimilated back to the civilian life with his beautiful newly-wed, Caroline. Although the Carls barely scraped by on the money James made as an iron worker, they loved each other and knew one day things would be better for them. One night, James called Caroline and told her he had to work late, but in fact, James wanted to go for a drink with an old military friend. Meanwhile, Caroline went to buy groceries for a special dinner to thank James for providing for her. She made it two blocks from their apartment and was robbed and brutally murdered in the street. James, guilt ridden and mortified for lying to his wife, drank himself into clinical depression in the five years following Caroline's death. He lost his job at the factory due to an accident that he caused by being intoxicated. James felt the need for some kind of justice. He couldn't go on living, knowing someone got away with murdering his Caroline. He sobered up, somewhat, and got a job as a police officer, and by 1930, he became a detective. With every case he closed, he knew there was a small piece of Caroline living in him, and that was the only thing that helped him cling to the life he had left: his job and a quick route to the liquor store.

Silence overpowered the crime scene, except for the occasional drip of water from his leather raincoat, a generous donation from the cold, late-night downpour. As he removed his hat, James took in the gruesome scene before him: a body lay on a coffee table at the center of a gore-ridden, one-bedroom apartment. This was the third suicide victim James dealt with this week, thanks to the economic disaster that ravaged the world. The concept of suicide teetered on the one strand left in James's mind.

"My god, looks like this fella missed a couple of times. How many more of these are we gonna have to do?" Detective Daily Saunders asked. Daily, a thirty-year veteran of NYPD, taught James everything about being a good detective. Although he couldn't alleviate James's emotional scarring, he was always there to drive him home from the bar when he drank a few too many.

James paced alongside a bloody set of footprints saturated into the carpet. "As many as there are until this depression ends."

"It was more of a rhetorical question. Ya know this job used to be more than just figurin' out how people killed themselves." Saunders played with the ends of his peppery mustache.

"I'm just fortunate to have a job." James searched the man and found a wallet. "Mr. Donald McAfee."

"Well, Mr. McAfee, you made quite the mess." Saunders went to pick the revolver

up from the floor with a cloth. As he leaned down to pick it up, he noticed the corner of a piece of paper beneath the body. He nodded toward it. "Looks like he left a note."

James tugged the paper from beneath the body, but what was scrawled on it wasn't a plea for forgiveness or a motive as to why Donald removed himself from existence. It was an inverted, five-point star surrounded by a circle scribbled in charcoal mixed with a crimson stain. James's eyes widened.

"What the hell is that?" Saunders asked.

James inspected the body's fingertips. There were no marks of charcoal. "It looks like some kind of ritual marking. I've never seen anything like this before."

"Neither have I..." Saunders said.

James felt a heavy weight on his chest. He looked towards Saunders. He said something, but James couldn't hear any words. James fell to his knees and dropped the paper. The dim light in the room flickered. James's ears rang, and he gasped for air. He closed his eyes tightly and thought that he must be having a heart attack. When he opened his eyes and the ringing stopped, he was sitting in a large leather recliner in a dark and empty room. James's eyes adjusted to the poor lighting that seemed to be radiating from what he could now see were crimson walls. He stood up as a shadow crept across the floor at the opposite end of the room.

The crimson walls rippled as a suave voice asked, "Hello, James, how's life treating ya these days?"

"What in the hell?" James shouted.

"Not quite but damned close!" The voice was cheerful, almost excited to be talking to James. "Please, sit."

The chair behind James pushed against the back of his legs and forced him to sit. The man-shaped silhouette moved closer and formed a being. He was a very well dressed man, groomed and shaved. His only distinct feature that James noticed was the bright red color in his eyes.

"Are you the devil?"

The being chuckled, "No, I'm simply an associate of his. The name is Mephistopheles."

He grabbed James's hand and shook it. He sat down and a chair moved through the fluid wall and beneath him before he landed softly on it. James rubbed his head. He thought this must be the consequence of drinking in excess, but it felt so real to him.

"I know you're thinking this is all happening in your head right now, but you have to understand why I'm here." The demon reclined in the chair and lit a cigar that wasn't in his hands seconds earlier. "I made a wager with my boss to prove to him I'm a prime candidate for a promotion."

"What kind of wager?" James felt a heavy sinking sensation in the bottom of his gut.

"Well, I told him I could get you to end your friend, Daily Saunders, in exchange for the return of your beautiful fiancée, Caroline."

James felt light headed. "She's been dead for more than ten years! And you can't expect me to kill one of the only friends I've ever trusted!"

"True, but love is a hell of a thing." The demon motioned with his hand to the wall behind him where Caroline glided through to stand next to him. She wore a low-cut white

gown, red leather heels, and jewelry that James bought her before he left for the war: the same jewelry that had cost her her life. "She's a real looker, ain't she?"

"Caroline!" James couldn't contain his emotions and jumped from the chair to run to her. He swept her up in his arms and she vanished. "You devil! Bring her back to me!"

"Now, James, I told you you have to help me get that promotion before I will give you sweet Caroline back. You have to make a blood oath to me; you can't just say you'll do it!"

James recalled all of the times when Saunders took him home, or showed him an investigation technique, or was just there for him when he needed someone to talk to. There was no way James could kill his friend, even if it meant he would once again feel love from his beloved Caroline. "I can't."

"Was that not enough to convince you?" Mephistopheles asked. His voice broke from the calm demeanor he maintained so far to a slightly menacing tone. "How about I show you what will happen if you don't agree to my generous offer, Jimmy?"

The walls poured stale smelling blood from the ceiling. The ringing returned to James's ears, and he realized he was in a different place. He was on a New York street late at night. A beautiful woman walked briskly toward a dimly lit area, her handbag swinging at her side.

"This is what waits for you in your dreams every night when you go to sleep if you won't comply with my reasonable request." The demon crossed his arms.

A shrouded figure brandishing a knife jumped in front of the woman. James knew the woman was Caroline and this was the night she was brutally murdered for a little cash and the matching necklace and earrings he bought for her. Tears ran down his face as he called to her, but she didn't hear him. He ran to her as the man slashed her neck and ran off with her belongings. He cried and ran to pick her up off the ground, but she vanished and he stood next to the demon again. A beautiful woman walked down the street alone in front of them. James shouted, but Caroline didn't hear him as he yelled the second time. He watched this loop reel for what felt like years as she was murdered over and over until he couldn't take anymore.

"I'll do it!" James's tears poured from his blood-shot eyes. "I'll help you! Please just no more!"

He shut his eyes, and they were back in the bloody room again. Mephistopheles grabbed his hand and shook it again. James felt a searing pain in his palm. When the demon released his hand, it was bloody and scorched black. He let his head drop and screamed into his raincoat.

"Thanks for doing business with me, James. I'll be looking forward to seeing you again very soon." He smiled merrily and vanished.

James looked up and the demon was gone. He was back in the one room apartment at 1313 Wilson Street. Saunders stood before him, aiming a snub-nose revolver at his head.

"What are you doing?" He was shocked his partner had him at gun point when he had just made a deal to murder him.

"What have you done, James?" Saunders pulled the hammer back on the gun.

James looked down and saw the murder victim beneath him and a smoking revolver in his hand. His face came to James's mind quickly. He was the man from the

vision that Mephistopheles made him endure, the man that murdered Caroline. Crimson streaks covered James's raincoat. He dropped his empty firearm onto the blood-soaked carpet. Memories flooded his mind until he remembered. He recalled endless nights of searching and investigating. He interrogated at least a hundred people and murdered them if they wouldn't give him the smallest bit of information about where to find the man that killed Caroline.

"You killed them!" Saunders shouted, "You need help, James! You're sick!"

"I'm not sick! I just want Caroline back! I just want her back!" James charged Saunders with the blade.

The repercussion of a snub-nose revolver broke the still silence at 1313 Wilson Street on the night of April 19, 1935.

Third-Place Winner – Fiction

The Significance of Punctuality

By Aric Luedecke

It was as typical a morning as one could possibly be. My phone died while we slept, so my alarm didn't go off. It's crazy how much of our lives are dictated by the sound of a cell phone these days. I rushed through the shower, opting out of a shave, only focusing on my 'dirty parts' to speed the process. I rushed my usual routine and quickly raced for the door, already ten minutes late to work. On the way out the door, I heard my daughter ask for her daddy.

My wife said, "Aren't you going to tell your baby girl goodbye?"

I replied, "I am so late, just tell her I love her, and I will see her at lunch."

I always went to school to have lunch with her, so it would be no big deal if I didn't say goodbye this once. As I backed out of the driveway, one of the neighbor's kids ran out behind me, forcing me to slam the brakes and adding more and more seconds to my inevitable tardiness. I raced down the street, thinking only about the 'shameful' prospect of being late to the office. I knew as soon as I entered the intersection that I wouldn't be making it to work that day. A garbage truck ran the stop sign.

Why today, I thought.

Then...

Blackness.

I awoke to the sounds of my life, playing like a movie reel in a theater. I wasn't hurt at all, but I had no idea where I was. I walked around the bright, white room for what seemed like forever, the whole time hearing remnants of my life in the background. Then I saw her. I had never seen her before, but I felt like I had known her forever. I asked where I was, and she said, "You are in the 'transition.'"

"The transition?" I said, inquisitively.

"Yes. You have died, and this is the transition from life to death."

I must have looked as terrified as I was confused because she said, "It's okay. I will lead you in your journey to your new existence."

"I can't be dead. I have so many things to do...and I didn't tell my baby girl goodbye."

She had a look of somber pity as she said, "She always knew how much you loved her. You must come with me now."

"No!" I proclaimed. "There must be some way I can tell her goodbye! Send me back! Please!"

She turned away and said sternly, "You do not want to do this."

I yelled, almost in pain, but mostly pathetically, "Please let me say goodbye to my daughter."

She said again, "You really do not want to do this."

"So you *can* send me back?!" I said.

"I can, but I fear that you will find the consequences to be worse than your current

situation.”

I said, “I don’t care. I must say goodbye to my baby.”

Then I awoke. Ten minutes after my alarm had been set. I passed ‘my death’ off as a crazy dream and went through the tardy routine as before. As I was leaving the house, I heard my daughter call for me. I stopped and went to her room and hugged her as hard as I have ever hugged her before. I told her how much I loved her and then rushed out the door.

I saw the garbage truck run the stop sign, and then I realized that it hadn’t been a dream. I had somehow gotten a second chance at life.

The work day went as usual: phone calls, paperwork, and obnoxious co-workers...but all I could think about was that I had beaten death. I thought about all the wonderful things I must be meant for to have gotten a second chance at life.

I was on my way to my daughter’s school for lunch when I received a phone call that would destroy my second chance at life. My wife and daughter had been in an accident. My wife was in the O.R., and I sat in the waiting room, bewildered at the circumstances I had found myself entwined in. A nurse came out of the operating room to give me the news. It was her! The girl from my death dream.

“What happened?!” I asked.

“Your wife has suffered severe head trauma and will have to be monitored indefinitely.”

“No!” I said.

“What happened with my ‘second chance’ at life? Did you do this? Why did you take my baby girl?”

She said, “I told you not to do it. Why wouldn’t you listen?”

“Take me back!” I said. “Take me instead of her!”

“It doesn’t work that way,” she said.

“What must I do?” I begged.

“You must take your place in death, but it may be too late.”

“You have to try! Please!”

Then, as though the whole sequence had been a figment of my imagination, I was driving down the street. It was all so familiar. *Déjà vu*. Everything was happening as it should. A strange calmness came over me as the garbage truck slammed into my car, sending me into oblivion.

I awoke one last time in the white room.

I saw her.

We didn’t need to say anything this time. I just followed her through the transition—from life to death. On the other side, to my surprise, I found my daughter. It was a bittersweet reunion as I knew how she had gotten there. It wasn’t a figment of my dead imagination.

My daughter had died, same as I.

Now, we were together in death.

I never got to say goodbye to her,
but somehow,
even better,
I could say 'hello' one last time.

A Poet, Marveling at Psalm 102

By Frank Sobey

“If only some desert owl would roost
among the ruins of my life, to let me know
that I am not alone, then I might”—

What? Look outside your window
and see what’s being done.

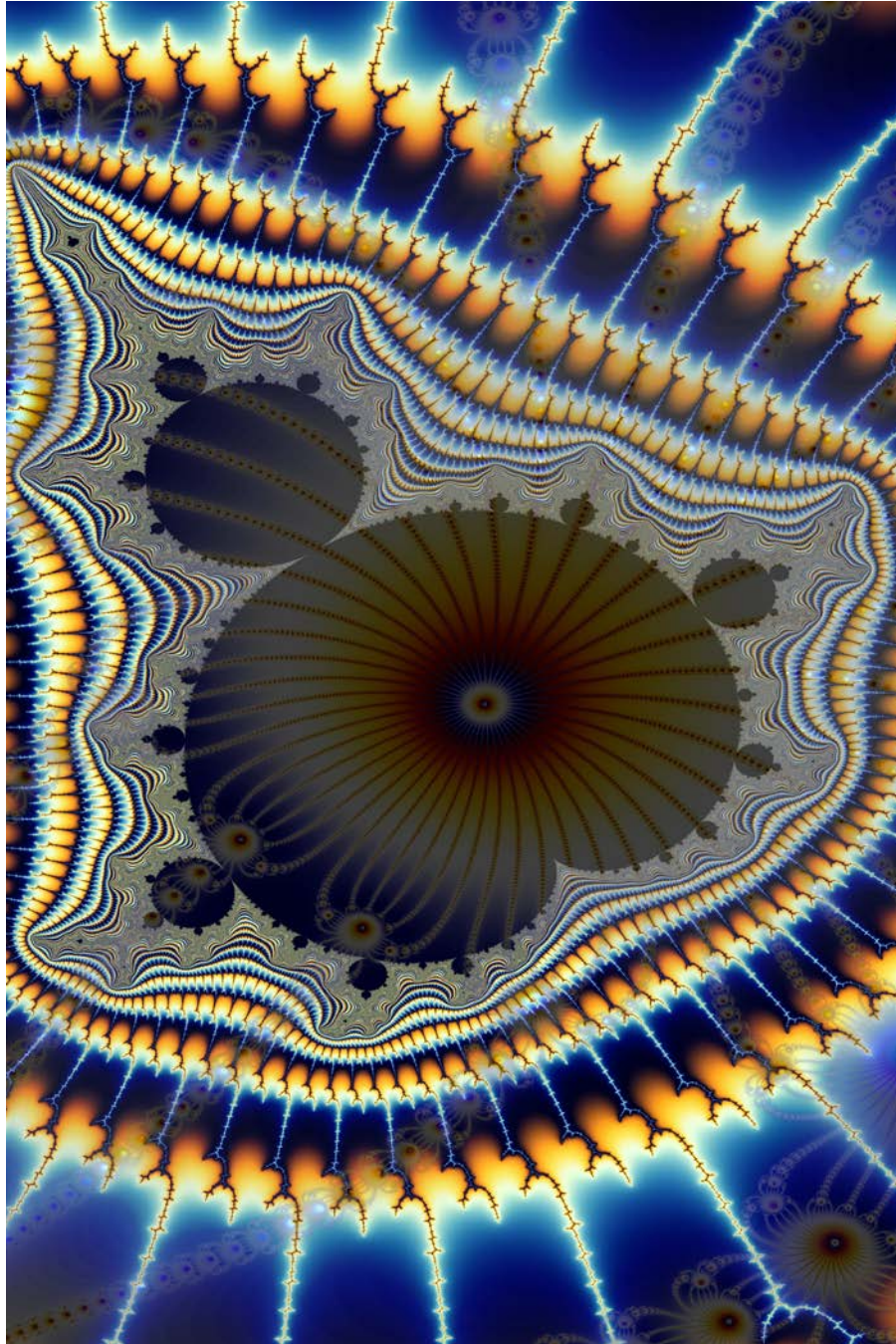
Creation, not this piddling dust
on the page, is shaking the ash from the sky
while you at your pale hoards flush.

Rise from these matters
and light upon the ruined branches of the Christ.

Plunge the talons of your doubt there
and let the wind’s slow pass
through the heart’s soft feathers be enough.

Newton's Ghost and Benoit's Achievement

By Derek Green



I Barely Remember Him

By Emily Reitz

It saddens me so much, but it is true. The things that I do remember about my grandfather are separated into two different categories: before Parkinson's and after. All of my most vivid memories of him fall into the latter category. They are dark-tinged memories that are set in hospitals and nursing homes. They are sad memories of waiting for the inevitable. The memories from before that are foggy with time and have long since escaped their contextual moorings. They come in disjointed flashes that make up a vague silhouette of the man and never quite come into focus.

My grandfather was a reserved man. He was quiet and calm, traits that barely concealed a fierce intelligence. These traits never changed, no matter what Parkinson's did to his body. His personality remained intact. He never complained or otherwise let on he was in pain, not even when he had to be put on a feeding tube because the muscle spasms in his throat didn't allow him to swallow. It was one of the many ways in which he revealed his great strength.

My grandfather told us, during his stay at the nursing home, about his roommate. The doctor had given the man pills for his condition, and the man had sat there sucking on them like they were candy. My grandfather, the pharmacist, managed to inform us the pills were suppositories before succumbing to bouts of laughter. He was able to see the humor in the world even though he was suffering. He taught me that strength does not have one single defining characteristic. It can be expressed through tears at a Thanksgiving dinner that you know will be your last or through a quiet acceptance of deterioration. It can also be expressed through humor during the darkest times.

I remember one Thanksgiving dinner, he had just recently found out about the disease, and the vocal paralysis had already begun. As we sat at the dining room table eating turkey and mashed potatoes, he began to cry. That recollection still haunts me. Aside from Thanksgiving, he never let on, at least not to me, how much pain he was in. His crying that day really shook me up. I didn't understand why he was crying then, but I know now that he knew this would be his last Thanksgiving with us. He cried because he knew it was close to the end. Strength is not often illustrated by a man crying, but for those who contain their emotions, that kind of expression takes a certain mettle. Crying over what is lost shows you have stared reality in the face. You did not lie to yourself or choose to forget.

My grandfather exemplified all of these characteristics. However, one would not guess by looking at him he possessed such fortitude. Tall and lanky, he wasn't exactly the picture of might. His was a different kind of strength, a strength of character. A strength that will never fade. Though I barely remember him before the disease, I remember his character, and that is one memory that will never fade.

My Grandfather Walks Over Me

By Joseph Holmes

My grandfather walks over me.
He walks over me because he is above me.
That is why I lift my face to the sky when I pray.
He wears a blanket of turquoise dust
and a mantle of clean lamb's wool around his neck.
When I sleep, I hear the drumming rain of his voice
and see through his eyes the places I must go.

My grandmother sits near me.
She sits near me, beneath me, around me
and speaks clay and fire and corn into being.
That is why I lower my eyes when I am thankful.
She wraps me in her shawl with green fringe and beadwork.
When I sleep, I smell the clean earth of her skin
and hear with her ears the songs I must sing.

They teach, and my spirit ripens with listening.
I live, and my body grows stronger toward dying.
On the day I am complete, I will rise to embrace
my grandfather and ask him to rest as I walk for him.
I will ask my grandmother along, taking her arm
and lifting her the way the moon rises,
tracing slowly the old path of my grandfather,
my grandmother looking down, her tears falling in joy
and amazement as I show her all that she has made.

Time Spent

By Angel Pilkington



Second-Place Winner – Poetry

Thoughts to the Author

By Ellery Dirickson

You told me to listen to the sound of the wind in the trees
That it would make me miss the ocean less.
That if I would appreciate the gold in the tones of this wasteland
I would see it a fair trade for the mountains in our Graceland.
You wrote me into your life like I was some character of your imagining
You wrote me in dancing to the blues
With ink in my skin and paint in my hair
And wrote me in with cups of coffee and Irish whiskey on snowy nights.
And through each summer we sat with our toes in the grass
When they should have been in the sand
And as mother and child we wreaked havoc on our bodies
Chains of smoke and sangria mixed with lemonade
And dreams of "in ten years"
We whispered to each other our what ifs and our somedays And argued with God in
passing about what we were meant for.
When I lost my first love you held me to your breast
And reminded me that there is no separation between us and the dead
Except those separations that we perceive in our own minds.
You brought me to God with guidance.
In the last months I remember looking at your face
Each line told the story of our lives in a new verse
And every curve in your hips
Every crack in your knuckles
Every beat in your wearing heart
Told the story of how we came to be.
And in the last months I prophesized about the nearing end.
Losing you is the tragedy of my life
That, with all of my guilt, releases me into the universe
Our hatred and love and violence and rejoicing
Taught me the most valuable lessons on what it is to be a mother.
I started to bargain with God on the day your journey began
And found solace in a downtown bar
For the first time in my life I preferred racket to silence.
For the first time in my life I kicked off my shoes
And for the first time in my life I didn't care what the next chapter was.
You weren't there to write it.
Then all of your characters came together.
We drank together.
We smoked together.
We laughed together.

We tore each other apart to understand what was underneath
That week I sat with a warrior who was baptized in water from the Jordan River
And I sat with a man whose love for humanity will surpass time
I saw someone I once looked up to fall from his pedestal.
And I fell in love with your stories.

Entrance

By Ashley Younger



First-Place Winner – Fiction

Disconnected

By Mariah Gilmore

Jan's shoulders tense as the slow thump of feet coming down the stairs alert her that the only other occupant of the house is leaving her sanctuary and heading out. Today will be a hard day. Wiping soapy bubbles from her forearms, the woman shuffles to the archway anxiously. This opens out to the hall where her daughter, Emma, tugs on well-worn sneakers, balancing on one foot and hopping around awkwardly with her hand resting against the wall. Jan cups her elbows and leans against the archway.

"Going to visit Ella?" She asks after clearing her throat. Her mouth has suddenly gone very dry. Successful in getting her shoe on, Emma lowers her foot before looking at the older copy of her own face. A vague sort of smile spreads across her features as she zips up her jacket and rocks back and forth on her feet.

"Yeah, I'm going to stay for a bit." Emma answers, her voice unnaturally lighthearted. Jan swallows hard again, and her expression is pained. She takes a solemn step forward. Everything about her is apprehensive, except the trembling smile fighting to stay on her face.

"Do you want a ride or..." Jan asks softly until she's stopped by Emma shaking her head, her hands buried deep in her pockets.

"No, I'll go alone. I won't be long!" Emma reassures, suddenly intent on leaving as soon as possible. She heads for the door, her hand already outstretched for the handle.

"Emma." Jan says in almost a sigh as her daughter is about to cross the threshold into the chilly autumn air. Emma pauses, turns, and catches her mother's eyes. Jan looks lost and words catch in her throat, choking off any sound or comment she might make. So, she stays silent with her eyes locked on her daughter's.

"I love you mom," Emma says with her eyes going somewhere dark and vacant for a minute before refocusing on her mother again. Finally, she nods to herself and closes the door, not hearing the quiet echo of her mother's own sentiment.

Emma takes a moment to suck in the icy air before exhaling hard. A laugh escapes her at the cloud of her breath appearing before her like a dragon as Ella had always jokingly said. Starting to walk forward, she fishes her phone out of her pocket and thumbs a message.

<Coming to see you. ETA 30 minutes> After pressing send, Emma quickly drops her phone back into her pocket and starts walking quicker, her hands clenched and cheeks already turning pink from the cold. It's quiet outside today, except for the crunch of colored leaves and the slap of her feet against the concrete. The kind of quiet that is simultaneously soothing and unnerving at the same time. Kids are in school today, it's a Wednesday after all, but not Emma. Something from the corner of her eye stops her and sends her kneeling on the ground. With her cold hands she shifts in the leaves for the thing she had seen for only a second.

There, underneath a twig and a wrinkled yellow leaf, is a red one with a rather large hole in the middle. It's like the ones Ella had affixed to her hair at last year's Halloween dance. Her hair full of leaves and a dress of gossamer, a costume for a woodland fairy.

Emma had been a witch that year. She wasn't as creative as Ella. She never had been and probably never would be. Taking her phone out and opening the camera function, Emma poses with the leaf over her face. One blue eye peeks through the hole as the camera flashes, capturing the moment. It's not a great picture with the lighting and her body folded stiffly into frame; however, the leaf is beautiful so Emma saves it and sends the picture to Ella before dropping her phone back in her pocket.

After some fiddling she manages to get the leaf to stick under her headband before she's on her way again. Minutes pass before she reaches a local park. Diverting from her course Emma meanders down the park's walking path to a familiar bench overlooking the manmade lake. Sitting heavily Emma takes out her phone and quickly sends off yet another message.

<Should have brought bread. We always bring bread. Oh, well, the birds are gone anyway> Fingers clenching around her phone, Emma sits staring for what seems hours before finally forcing herself back to the road. On the sidewalk, Emma weaves out of the way for an old couple and listens to their hissing whispers just audible enough to reach her ears as she begins walking faster. She tries to escape the couple and tries to escape their whispers, but now they're in her mind and Emma cannot run from that.

<People still talk too much El>

<Why didn't you answer the phone Ella>

<I could have helped you>

<Just answer please>

<Please>

<I'm here Ella. Sorry I haven't come since then. A year is a long time. I'm here> Emma walks slowly, knowing well her way, though she has only been to the spot once. Her hand clenches her phone so hard, it hurts as she stops before the tidy stone with the name Ella Stanley on it. A birth and death date and the epitaph Emma won't allow herself to read. Instead, she reads the message underneath ones she had been sending for over a year now.

The number you are trying to reach is disconnected or does not exist. Please check the number and try again. If the problem persists please call...

Chloe Moretz

By Karly McCutchan



I Fell

By Joseph Holmes

I fell like that archangel from the I AM.—
The tympanic boom scrawled my face
into rock, then white-hot, watery blood.
Thus bore the concrete-color of brain
and knowledge of this: I cannot rise from
flesh where even a lessened archangel fails.
With a sunless universe washed over him
and a finish he can never reach, he is cursed
to sit in the dark like a spoiled child
conscious of his infinite stupidity.

I am thankful for beauty and nothing.
In the night, I give thanks and see visions.
The lamp in the ceiling drags the air
the way a dying clock-pendulum slows.
I reach in panic, but I am made less-than.
I fall and break something else in my body.
In tears and hammered breathing, I beg 'why?'
high in the wail of a baby who wants to walk now.
The fall pains me, not because something broke
right this second, but rather,
something has always been broken.—

I love great and small. I watch water here
flow in rivulets, and over there, a river. I see
in the ways of a bird, and I say behind my eyes,
'Here marks the way of my love—I flow great
and small.' Powers move me. Young mountains
are moving toward one another with sounds
I know echo my heart, which I have never seen.
I prophesy: The lamp will lead my feet
when I can no longer see, which is soon.

'Though I have eyes, and I hurt, and I grow
into the blindness of death—'though tonight,
as my dusty knees creak with pressing weight
at the brittle oak floor which mourns aloud—
and 'though, my face is scrawled with white-hot,
watery blood where I feel tears fall
into my clasped hands, still I cannot rise.—
Still, a painful love is just out of reach.—
Still, we are meant to fall.—Still,
the breaking is wonderful.

Compos(t)ing Greatness

By Frank Sobey

for Bruce McGinnis

My friend believes in Shakespeare's divinity
because in Sonnet 81 the dead are made
to rise on gentle monuments of verse
from which we poets who follow suck
what breath has been breathed. Well,
in truth he named us dung beetles
scrambling up piles of steaming shit
to roll the refuse into verse. Harsh, I know,
but no one has accused him of kindness
when important things like legacy are at stake.
Still, I suppose he meant that Shakespeare,
a rather large god, who had gone on before us,
crashing through trees and flattening the earth,
on occasion would squat to write and leave
what did not stink on the morning wind. Oh,
that my lungs would be filled with such wit,
but my friend wallows in Shakespeare
enough for us both. After all, he is right—
though the lesson is a hard one.
We mortals
gather round the obelisk of Shakespeare's work
to circle like eunuchs with epitaphs in hand,
waiting in the redundancy of that greatness
for what we might rehearse on our own
into the everlasting heap.

2013 COMMON READER WRITING COMPETITION WINNERS

The Common Reader program is designed to help incoming freshman interact with the larger AC community through the shared experience of reading a book. The 2013 Common Reader was *Wine into Water* by bartender-turned-activist, Doc Hendley.

Hendley traces his extraordinary journey from a biker bar in rural North Carolina to places like Haiti, Uganda and Sudan, where his Wine to Water organization continues to quench the collective thirst of the innumerably impoverished.

The Common Reader Writing Competition asked students to write a personal narrative, short story, or poem in which they explored how they have been affected by one or more of the issues in *Wine into Water*. The following are the first-place winners of that competition.

Heroes are Real

By Marcia R. Daily

The hot wind blows
A dry leaf on the cracked ground
A boy set under a dead tree
Trying to get some rest
After walking miles
To get a couple gallons of dirty water

Oh if a cloud came to cover him
From the ardent and merciless sun
Oh a cup of fresh water would be delightful

Someone is listening
He says wish granted
Clean fresh water flows
Dance and joy overflow

The boy looks at the man
Those big eyes can't hide it
Heroes are real

The man looks down into the water
The man he sees
Has changed the world
Of those big happy eyes

Not So Far Away
By Amethyst Coleman

Once upon a time
In a not so far away land
There was a little girl
Surrounded in pink
When she grew up
She wanted to be a princess
She was
The picture of privilege

Once upon a time
In another land
A little bit farther away
A land that most cannot see
Due to lack of ability
To see
past the end of their own noses

There was another little girl
Afraid
Alone
Hungry
Thirsty

When she grows up

She wants to be

None of those things

Once upon a time

The privileged little girl

Saw all of the hurt in the world

She imagined

That little girl in poverty

And started to ponder

Her purpose

Her privilege

She came to the conclusion

That because she believes

In a God

Who turned water into wine

Poverty into riches

She is called to take her wine

And turn it

Into water