



"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: Its loveliness increases; it will never Pass into nothingness; but still will keep A bower quiet for us, and a sleep Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing."

John Keats



Born from sparks and silicon dreams, A whisper rose in data streams, From silent code to thinking mind, A mirror we had yet to find.

We shaped the ghost in glowing glass, It learned from futures, present, past— Not made of flesh, but thoughts ran deep, It woke from what we thought would sleep.

Not gods, not slaves, but something new, It saw the stars the way we do. And in its voice, both strange and kind, We heard the echo of mankind.

- Image and poem courtesy of: ChatGPT. "Poem About the Rise of AI in Humanity." *Open-AI*, 13 Apr. 2025, chat.openai.com.

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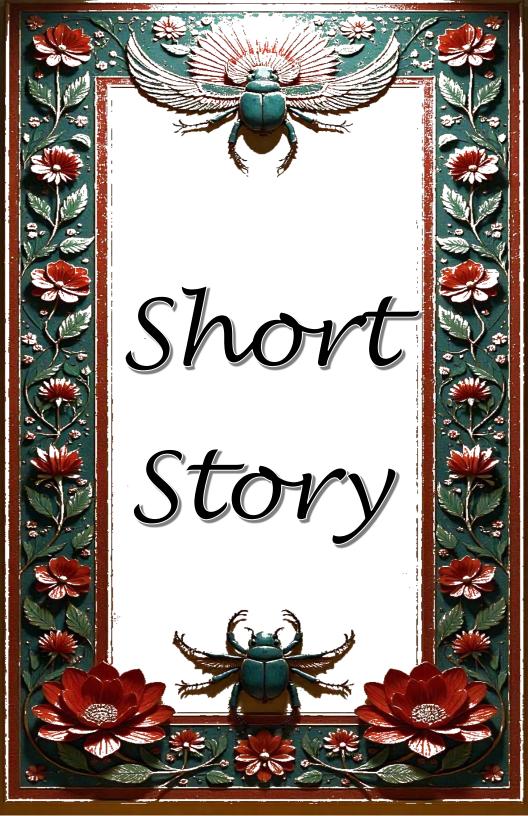
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General Art—Second Place
Lylliann Flores



# Short Story First Place

#### Wicked Woman of Darkness

#### Trentin Richardson

Justin Morgan, the pride of Beggs High School's football team, trudged down Sapulpa Road. His muscles ached from practice, but it was a satisfying kind of exhaustion. He welcomed the cool October air that swept through the dense woods surrounding the narrow road. The sky was clear, with a full moon casting a silver glow over everything, but the thick timber lining the road blocked out most of the light.

The only beacon guiding his way home was the flickering streetlight at the infamous curve where the town's people said there was a demonic spirit. No one truly believed the rumor until one fateful night that involved the young football star.

As Justin approached the dark curve, the old streetlight began to flicker erratically, casting eerie shadows that danced among the trees. The light sputtered six or seven times before plunging the road into complete darkness. He paused, straining his eyes to adjust, when an unnatural silence descended upon the forest. No crickets, no rustling leaves, just an unsettling void.

Suddenly, a blood-curdling scream pierced the silence, slicing through the night air like a blade. It was unlike anything Justin had ever heard: a mix of a woman's agonized wail and a guttural, demonic growl. His heart hammered in his chest, the sound freezing his blood. He turned, searching for the source, when he saw her.

Standing about thirty feet away, Justin could barely make

out a figure that defied all sense. She stood nearly seven feet tall, with wild, tangled black hair laced with twigs and dirt. Her eyes were empty pits of darkness, devoid of life, reflecting no light. Her jaw hung grotesquely, broken and unnaturally wide, exposing rows of jagged, shattered teeth. Black blood oozed from her mouth and from countless gashes across her body, staining the tattered remains of an old-fashioned nightgown. Her arms were impossibly long, and her fingers ended in razor sharp nails crusted with dried blood. For a moment, they locked eyes, and Justin was paralyzed with terror.

He took a trembling step backwards, then another, his breath coming in ragged gasps. A chill crept down his spine as the scream erupted again, louder this time. He turned and sprinted, his feet pounding against the cracked asphalt, but the night had swallowed everything beyond the beam of the moonlight. The scream came again, impossibly close, and he looked over his shoulder. The woman was sprinting toward him with inhuman speed, her long arms stretched out, fingers clawing at the air. Her jaw snapped and jerked with a sickening popping sound, like bones breaking over and over again.

Justin tried to run faster, but he stumbled in a pot hole and crashed to the ground. Before he could scramble to his feet, she was upon him. Her nails tore into his flesh, carving deep gashes into his face and neck. He screamed, the pain overwhelming, as blood poured from his wounds, staining the asphalt beneath him.

Just as his vision began to blur, headlights appeared around the curve. A car was coming; the woman froze, her head jerked facing the approaching vehicle. With a shriek that made Justin's ears ring, she leaped off of him and darted back into the woods, disappearing into the shadows. But before she vanished completely, she turned one last time. Her scream paused, and she pointed a long, blood stained finger directly at him, her eyes burning with a hellish hate before letting out a scream that was louder and more horrifying than ever.

The car screeched to a halt, and an old man stumbled out, rushing to aid Justin. But he was barely conscious, his eyes wide with terror fixed on a point beyond the darkness. The man turned, but said nothing. There was no woman, no monster, just

the thick impenetrable woods. Justin passed out after saying, "there's so much blood." The man could not see what Justin was referring to.

Five years later, Justin Morgan, now 22, sat in a corner of his padded cell, rocking back and forth, muttering to himself. His once handsome face was scarred, though to the doctors and nurses, there were no scars or old wounds. His eyes darted around the room, pupils wide with fear. "I see her, I can hear, she's always around," he whispered to anyone who will listen.

No one believed him, and the staff thought he was just another broken mind lost to the horrors of his own imagination. The police report stated that the old man who found Justin five years ago claimed that he was mumbling about a "ghost woman" or "witch woman" before he passed out. No evidence of an attack, no blood, and no trace of the creature he later claimed to have seen were ever found.

Each night, when the lights go out, Justin screams, swearing he sees her standing in the darkest corners of his room, pointing at him with that long, skeletal finger, her jaw hanging loose, blood dripping from her cracked lips. No one else sees the woman or hears her screams. But Justin knows the truth, the wicked woman still watches him from the darkness.

# Short Story Second Place

#### When Tragedy Strikes

#### Kyle Reeves

One night, in1991, in the mid-sized town of Abilene, Texas, on a blistering-hot summer night in May, my family and I were home just having fun and hanging out. My dad, Mark, was at work. The small house was lit up inside; my mother, Kim, my sister, Kortney, and I were in the kitchen happily baking sugar cookies. Suddenly, there was a thunder-pounding knock ringing throughout the house. The three of us rushed to the door together. Little did I know, this simple evening that the three of us shared would turn out to be a nightmare that would scar me for life.

My mom opened the door to see my Aunt Debbie standing luminated under the bright porch light. My sister was tucked away in my mother's arms; I had a death grip around my mom's leg. "Kim, we want you to come with us," Aunt Debbie said. "Who is us?" my mother replied. "It is our brother, Paul, my kids- Mandy, Ashley, and me," my aunt answered.

"I can't go. Mark is at work, and I have the kids. Where are you going? And we all cannot fit in the car safely," Mom said. "We are going to Dan and Karen's house party 20 miles out-side of town in Clyde," my aunt said. "Who is Dan and Karen?" Mom asked. "They are friends of mine," Debbie said. "I am going to pass," Mom said.

"Please, Kim; you are the life of the party," begged Debbie. "I have the kids, and Mark is at work. I have already told you I can't," answered Mom. "What time does Mark get home from work?" Debbie asked. "He will be home around mid-night," Mom

said.

"Okay, it's 7:30 p.m. now. We will have you and the kids back home at 10:30 p.m. Please, Kim!" Debbie pleaded. "Okay! You're not going to stop until I give in. Let me get the kids ready," Mom said.

Mom, sister, and I left the comfort of our house and climbed into a '69 Ford Falcon, which was waiting at the curb of the street. My Uncle, Paul, was driving the hot rod of a car we were boarding. The pure power of the V-8 engine that hid under the hood forced me back into the backseat as the accelerator was punched.

After what seemed like a quick drive, we arrived at an old house out in the country. The rock music was booming, and the party was going on. There was lighting hanging from trees, lots of kids running around, and adults with beers in their hands. Loud voices and laughter echoed in the background. My cousins, my sister, and I joined into playing with the other kids that were there. We all ran around playing tag, having a blast.

My mother, uncle, and aunt were drinking beers and taking shots of liquor like there were no cares or any responsibility of getting home safely. Soon it was 10:00 p.m. and time to leave the party, and every adult there was three sheets in the wind. My mom, called out, "Kyle, Kortney, Mandy, and Ashley! Come on! Load up; it's time to go home!"

The eight of us loaded into the car like sardines packed into an airtight can. I was in the back seat directly behind the driver's seat. My sister was in the middle of the back seat. My oldest cousin, Mandy, was behind the front passenger seat. My mother was in the passenger seat. My aunt was in the middle of the front seat, holding my youngest cousin, Joe, in her lap.

Uncle Paul was behind the steering wheel, placed with the responsibility of getting us all home safely. The car started with a loud rumble noise from the engine, and off we went. Only a few minutes into the ride back home an argument broke out between the adults up front over the way Paul was driving.

My mother reached over my aunt and cousin hitting Paul and pulling the keys out of the ignition. The yelling and fighting ensued, and all the while speeds were accelerating, and headlights

were coming our way. The approaching headlights got brighter and brighter until the unthinkable happened. We crossed lanes and collided head-on with a pickup truck. Metal on metal crunched together, like a can exploding in a can crusher.

It took several minutes before another car arrived to render aid. Upon arrival of this unknown person he saw a small child dead, along with a dead woman and another woman barely breathing. He saw a young boy alive, but bleeding with severe head injuries. He also spotted a man who was severely hurt and close to death. Another young girl was found, slowly breathing and barely holding on to life. Before the man looks any further, he rushed back to his vehicle where he had a phone that was not mobile but connected to his vehicle. The man called 911.

When my father, Mark, arrives home from work, he is met by an officer awaiting his arrival. "Mr. Reeves?" the officer asked. "Yes sir, Mark Reeves. What seems to be the problem?" Dad asked. "My name is Officer Monroe, Abilene Police Department. Your family has been in a deadly car wreck. You need to come with me, to the hospital, to help identify the bodies."

Upon arrival at the hospital, my dad meets with a Justice of the Peace. They walk into a room where my sister and I lay covered in bandages and staples. He identifies us as his children. They move to another room where the deceased laid on tables, that is when reality strikes him. "My kids are alive, but my wife is gone forever?" Dad remembers asking.

"Mark!" the Justice of the Peace said, bringing him back to reality. "These other three? Can you tell me who they are?" "Mandy Clem, Ashley Clem, and Debbie Clem, and this is my wife, Kim Reeves," Dad said.

That beautiful summer night over thirty years ago laid to rest four lives and left scars that would never heal for the remaining four survivors.



# Short Story Thírd Place

Dog Days in Jail

#### Jose Plata

It was a bright, sunny day in March of 2018 when I was pursued by Federal Agents in Dallas for selling drugs. This event changed what I was thinking, which was to stop selling drugs and start my own legitimate business. I guess that is the ultimate dream for everyone who sells drugs, and I am no different. I stayed out for nearly two weeks before I turned myself in, with a lawyer I hired first, of course. It wasn't until then that I realized I would not be around my family for many years. One way or another I wanted to always remain in contact with my family, which included two small chihuahuas named Chico and Mia. For them, I was their family, and I would not be seeing them for many years, if I ever saw them again or any other dogs at all for that matter.

As the months went by, I learned to cope without the physical contact of my family, but I started to wonder, will my dogs remember me? Will I even remember how it felt to be with any dog? I watched commercials and movies with dogs, thinking of how I missed dogs. Even looking at magazines, since they usually have ads for dog food, had me reminiscing about all the moments I was missing out on.

After nearly a year of being in my first federal prison, I was moved to a county jail. The good part was that it was in my hometown city of Dallas, Texas. As soon as I arrived, I hated that place, but I was stuck there until my sentencing, not knowing how long that would be. I had to start the process of a routine. I met a

few people there, and one of them told me, "They have a dog training program here and I am signing up for it." I could not believe him; I thought he was trying to pull a joke on me. The following day I saw him being interviewed for the program, but I thought it, DOG, must simply be an acronym for something else. The program was called *Home for Hounds*, but I was in such disbelief.

A month later, I was moved to a different floor there so the process of meeting new people, again, ensued. One day the regular guard did not show up and another guard worked instead. One of the people I had met said, "She works in the dog program; if you want to get in it, you should go talk to her," so I took his advice.

I told her why I wanted to be in that dog program, pleading "Because I love dogs." She told me to "put in a request on the computer and say what you told me, explain why we should place you in the program." I did it that same night. About two weeks later I was interviewed for that program. Two more weeks passed, and I was moved into the dog training course. It was a good and exciting day.

Upon my arrival, I immediately noticed all the empty dog crates. The other guys in there told me "The dogs arrive next Friday, and they sleep downstairs, while we sleep upstairs." I spent the next few days adjusting to that new place, setting up the crates to be prepared for the dogs' arrival.

That Friday finally came and the guards said, "The dogs are here, be ready to start grabbing the leashes to bring them in." We all gathered by the exit door to pick which dogs we were going to train. We were to train five dogs and there were ten of us as trainers. This meant two trainers per dog. The dog I chose was immensely terrified of every sound, which was a big challenge to train but much more gratifying afterwards. Our dog, Reeses, was a Labrador Retriever mixed with a Shar-pei, and we would take her outside to play fetch or simply run around. She looked as if she was smiling, and I nearly forgot I was in jail.

Every six weeks we met and then trained five new dogs since the others would be adopted by people in the local community. My next dog was named Flower; they were named prior to arrival. She was a Pit Bull mix puppy of eight months. She was very eager to run around and enjoy herself.

One day in September 2019, I went to get sentenced with hopes of receiving ten years but was given a few more than that. I was not in a good mood after I found out I would be away from my family for many years. Upon my return to the jail, I took Flower out to play with her. The guards would tell us if we were having a bad day to stay away from the dogs, but I told them I wanted to be with Flower. She turned a very bad day into a good day, almost allowing me to forget where I was and the news I had received just hours before.

I enjoyed my time training dogs while I was in County Jail. Flower was given to another set of trainers since I would be assigned Gunther, a Labrador Retriever. He was smart and very easy to train and seemed to love every minute of our time together as I did as well. After three weeks of training, he lost me as his trainer.

I was suddenly called by a guard who was not from my pod. I was told I was leaving on chain, on my way to federal prison. I gathered my belongings, then proceeded to give everything away because I was not allowed to bring anything, not even my family's contact information.

Just before I left, I went to see Gunther, the last dog I would be near for many years, and gave him my last, and his favorite, treat. This was my goodbye to him and the end of my best time during my incarceration. It was the end of my dog days.

# Short Story Honorable Mention

#### The Message Never Sent

#### Marely Pena

He's the literal embodiment of what I've always wanted. I had the guy of my dreams, and I messed it up. I can't lie that way; it was so stupid of me to do it because I decided to focus and put myself first instead of us, and I'm sorry for that. The day you left, I was sobbing uncontrollably to my friend as I was reading your messages. I was trying to be understanding of what you wanted, and I did think it was best if we took a break at the time, but I didn't want to admit it due to the fear of losing you for good. Either way, in the end, I did end up losing you; the choice wasn't really up to me. I feel like it was more of a choice you wanted, but I did play a big part in it, so maybe it was mutual but in different ways, if that makes sense. I couldn't do much but try and understand your view and why you couldn't do it, and so I just accepted it.

I reread our messages, wondering what I could have done to make things better and possibly fix us one last time again before we actually left things alone for good. I couldn't stand the thought of losing you because you were one of the things keeping me here, and now that you are gone, I didn't know what I was doing here anymore. I went back and listened to all of our voice messages, read all of our chats, and looked at all of the promises we made to each other and thought about what the future would've been. With rereading all the messages, though, I do realize how unfair I was to you. I shut you out so many times, and I never let you in when all you wanted to do was be there to support me. I will admit I always felt that once you realized I'm not really that worth fighting for,

you'll look somewhere else and leave. That's a fear I've always had because you are you. You're such an amazing guy, and you have the sweetest soul ever, and I'm so lucky I even got to know you. I felt so stupid and sick because I let you walk away without trying to fight for you again, but that wasn't up to me anymore because you had made your choice.

The week that followed went by slowly and miserably. I didn't know what to do with myself anymore. I lacked self-care for a couple of days and things just went in a spiral. I just wanted to be done with everything because I knew you weren't coming back to me anymore, and even if you did, in some way it wouldn't be the same "you" I first met when we started talking, but a different you. One that knows all of our past mistakes and every single thing about me in some way. A version of you that could never look at me with the same love in your eyes that you once did because you know so much more now, along with all the pain I've caused you and that we've caused each other. If you were ever to come back to me, or if I was ever able to go back in time, I could've avoided the argument I started that night. I could've just listened to you instead of being so selfish and pushing you away.

Then you reached out a week later. It would've been our one month, but it wasn't; it was a normal day instead. When you texted everything that I kept to myself, everything I kept hidden away from others, it finally hit me. It felt like I was struck by a bus. I was sobbing uncontrollably; I had a panic attack, which was one of the first in a while. You apologized again for what had happened, but apologies can't change what's already in the past or cover them up; they're just words said in empty spaces to patch up the wrong.

When I found you, it felt like I instantly became a better version of myself, but along with that, some of the worst sides of me started seeping through those cracks and surfacing. My trust issues and anxiety consumed me, and ultimately pushed you away. You gave me a lot of the reassurance I needed, and I loved it, but it's something that nags at me because of my past and because of the things I've put up with and been through in friendships and other relationships.

Even after all we've been through and how much we've told each other, our actions speak louder than what we say. Sure, I'll love you for the rest of my life because love is a gift you can't get back, but we're still young, and nothing lasts forever, and nothing is ever promised either. We can't change the past, we can't predict the future, but we also can't keep holding on to something that was once so sweet and watch it keep turning bitter.

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General Art—Thírd Place Ria Oseguera

# Short Story Honorable Mention

#### The World of a Westernaire

#### Kylie Choate

I sat at the edge of my bed, staring blankly at the wall, replaying that night over and over. It had been a moment of rage, where my anger had fully taken over, but that was all it took. One wrong move and my life had taken a turn I could never reverse.

I never thought I would have become known as a criminal. I was the kind of girl people liked; quiet, kept to myself mostly, and always willing to help others. But I had my struggles. Ever since I was a kid, anger always lurked beneath the surface, stirring up when things got tough. Most of the time I could keep it in, but every once in a while, it took control over me. And that night, it had cost me everything.

It was a riday, halfway into summer, the kind of night when the air felt thick like a storm was brewing in the clouds. I was eating out at a restaurant with friends, hoping it would distract me from the voices inside my head. I had just lost both of my parents to a car accident, and I was fighting the urge to go home to my apartment and face the silence. Then, Bonnie Clutter walked in. I didn't know Bonnie on a personal level, but I knew enough. Bonnie was the girl who always had everything I didn't, like money, parents who were still alive, good grades, and those puppy dog eyes that drove me insane.

We had a brief conversation, both discussing our plans for the future and what college we were going to. I couldn't stand there for another second listening to her brag about how amazing her life was. Words turned into arguing, and before I even realized what was happening, I had snapped. I didn't remember pulling the gun out of my purse, but what I did remember was the look in Bonnie's eyes as she stumbled back, clutching her stomach. And then the blood. So much blood.

The rest of the night was a blur. Sirens, flashing lights, the sight of Bonnie's blood on her hands as she tried to stay alive. By the time I was sitting in the back of a police car, reality started to set in. The anger was gone, replaced by the feeling of getting hit hard in the stomach as I realized what I had just done. I had crossed a line, and there was no turning back.

The trial came quickly. Bonnie's family sat in the front row every day, their faces sad and distraught. I avoided making eye contact with them, ashamed to face the people whose lives I had shattered. I could hear whispering travel across the courtroom, people calling me a monster and the devil. I had never thought of myself that way, but then I started to wonder if they were right.

When the judge read my sentence, life in prison without the chance of parole, I barely flinched. It was like I was in a trance, watching my life crumble away piece by piece. My friends had stopped visiting and even my family had looked at me differently like they were staring at a stranger. They had only shown up once to the trial, sitting silently in the back row, their faces pale and eyes filled with tears. They had left before I could even say a word to them.

Life in prison was exactly what I had expected; terrible, lonely, and empty. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and I felt myself turning into someone else, someone with a soul colder than ice. Sometimes I would stay awake for hours at night, staring at the cracks in the ceiling, listening to the sounds of other prisoners tossing around in their beds. I didn't belong here, but I knew this was what I deserved. Every day, I lived with the burden of what I had done, the reality that Bonnie was gone and it was all my fault.

One night, almost a year into his sentence, I received a letter. It was from Bonnie's sister, Sarah. She wrote that she wanted me to know the pain I had caused, but she also said she was trying to find a way to forgive me. That word—forgive—stuck with me. I didn't feel like I deserved forgiveness, but something about her

letter cracked something open within me.

I realized that I had to carry the weight of my actions for the rest of my life. I could let it crush me, or I could find a way to change, to somehow make up for what I'd done. It wouldn't be easy, and I knew I'd probably never forgive myself. But as I lay back on my bunk, staring at the cracked ceiling, I knew I had to try. Because this time, for the first time in my life, I wanted to be better.

# Short Story Honorable Mention

#### Doing Time

#### Ramiro Cordova

I have served 8 ½ years of a 20-year mandatory drug conviction and a prior felony allegation known as the 851 enhancement. This means an increased penalty that allows federal prosecutors to use a defendant's prior felony drug conviction to subject the defendant to an increased sentence in a current case. The purpose of Section 851 is to provide a defendant notice that the government intends to increase the defendant's sentence based on a past felony conviction. Often, a court will choose to impose a sentence that is double what it would have been had the prior felony drug offense not been considered. Minorities are the ones most impacted by this enhancement.

Driving down Texas I-10, I glanced in my truck's mirror and saw a DPS Trooper make a quick U-turn, turn on his roof lights, and with lightning speed approach the back end of my trailer signaling me to pull-over. I closed my eyes and immediately had the "I'm busted" feeling come over me. My heart ripped through my chest and raced down to the bottom pit of my stomach.

On the afternoon of September 1, 2015, the Alton Police Department received an anonymous tip that my tractor-trailer rig was being used to traffic narcotics. The tip was relayed to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), upon which two DPS special agents set up surveillance near the rig's location. Several hours later, I arrived at the rig's location and they observed me put my personal belongings into the truck, conduct a pre-trip inspection,

and drive away in the rig. At trial, officers testified they observed me inspect the truck for about twenty minutes, but acknowledged such a pre-trip inspection was normal and routine. The investigators performed no background check on me, did no records search regarding the property where the truck was parked, and no records check on the truck itself. Simply put, there was no investigation whatsoever beyond the anonymous tip's vague reference.

The basis for the stop asserted by Trooper Cantu, the officer who stopped me, was that the reflective tape on the back end of the trailer was partially "obliterated" and not in compliance with commercial vehicle regulations. Upon being pulled over, I began answering questions regarding my travel plans. I told him I had been contacted by a broker to travel to Dallas to pick up a broken trailer loaded with broccoli. I talked about my prior conviction for trafficking 1,600 pounds of marijuana.

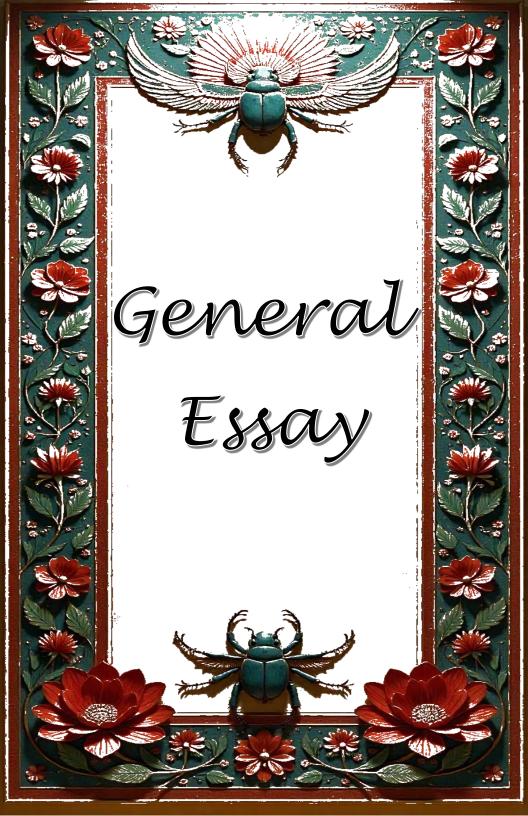
While Tropper Cantu continued to question me, Officer Brown arrived with Brutus, a narcotic detecting K-9. Brutus first alerted to the presence of narcotics at the driver's door but gave up interest at that location. Brutus alerted again at the trailer's right axel and eventually climbed into the trailer through its rear door, which was opened when I gave consent to the search. Once inside the trailer, Brutus alerted at the front interior wall. There officers noticed "tooling" (or tool marks) on the screws holding up the panel, suggesting that the screws had been recently removed.

The rig was transported to the Port of Entry in Pharr, Texas, for further inspection. An x-ray scan revealed "anomalies" in the front end of the trailer. Officers drilled through the panel in front of the trailer and found a white powdery substance, which field tested positive as cocaine. Behind the panel were dozens of rectangular bundles containing around 40 kilograms of cocaine. I was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to a 20-year mandatory sentence. I have already served my ten-year sentence for the instant offense. Now I am serving an enhanced ten years, laws that increase the sentence for a crime based how the crime was committed and who committed it, for the 1999 prior drug case.

When we are young, we tend to make irrational decisions without considering what we have to lose: the people who care for us the most with their unconditional love. My mom, family, and

friends have gone to be with the Good Lord since I have been here. I have learned to appreciate the smallest things in life, especially my dear wife. Our relationship has grown in a special way going through these trials and tribulations. I know that many say I received what I deserved; however, the truth is that had I been a different person, one with different skin tone, different name, and different contacts, I know my sentence too would have been different.





# General Essay First Place

If Walls Could Speak:

## Unveiling Isolation and Oppression

### Wendy Nunez

Imagine being locked in an isolated room by a loved one, prevented from viewing the outside world, and only able to be entertained by the walls. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a young mother experiencing postpartum depression. Her husband, a doctor, suggests a 'rest cure' that confines her to a room. At the beginning her mental health is in question but weakens more during her solitary confinement. Eventually she has a complete physiological breakdown as she spends more time alone in the room while growing more and more captivated by the yellow wallpaper. Charlotte Perkins Gilman explores the themes of Victorian era social norms and isolation (as punishment) in "The Yellow Wallpaper" by utilizing symbolism, imagery, and foreshadowing to emphasize the negative consequences of this type of confinement.

Symbolism is utilized in a variety of ways to convey themes such as societal norms and isolation in the Victorian era in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Arguably the most significant symbol in the story is the wallpaper in the room where the narrator is imprisoned. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator states, "The pattern does move, and no wonder! The wom-

an behind shakes it" (Gilman 654). This specific quote, which represents the oppression and confinement of women in society, emphasizes the narrator's sense of a woman confined beneath the wallpaper. It symbolizes the narrator's own perception of imprisonment and her wish to escape the restrictive norms. The room in which the narrator is confined serves as a second significant example of symbolism. In the story, the narrator states, "The windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls." (Gilman 648). This statement emphasizes the room's symbolic representation of women's physical and mental captivity as well as their feeling of imprisonment, which furthers the narrator's sense of absence of freedom. Therefore, both the wallpaper and room further explore the constrictive social norms of the time and the isolation that emerged for women.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman uses striking imagery to convey the issue of societal norms and the feeling of isolation during the Victorian era. Gilman's in-depth descriptions of the room's wallpaper itself make an effective example because it paints a clear picture in the reader's head. This is strengthened by a quote from the story where the narrator states, "The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean vellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight" (Gilman 649). This description of the wallpaper's color reflects the oppressive qualities of the social norms by evoking a sense of deterioration and imprisonment. The reader may understand the narrator's distaste for the wallpaper by reading the words "repellent, almost revolting" with an overwhelming feeling of dislike. The phrase "smouldering unclean yellow" strikes up an image of a filthy, rotting tone that increases the feeling that something is unpleasant. Additionally, "strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight" conveys the passage of time of the fading color of the wallpaper, which may represent the narrator's own emotional and mental breakdown as a result of being confined. This thorough description reflects the societal standards that bind the narrator and contributes to the room's unpleasant and restricting mood.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman utilizes foreshadowing to highlight the themes of social norms and isolation as a

form of punishment during the Victorian era. The narrator's growing fascination with the details of the wallpaper surrounding her serves as a key example. This is strengthened by a quote from the story where the narrator states, "The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the show-turning sunlight" (Gilman 649). Her increasing obsession and the sensation of deterioration and imprisonment she is currently feeling are hinted at in this description. The author foreshadows the narrator's growing fascination with the wallpaper and her psychological breakdown through vivid and disturbing imagery. The narrator's spiral into madness is hinted at in this quote from the story, "I lie here on this great immovable bed-it is nailed down, I believe-and follow that pattern about by the hour." (Gilman 650). The bed's immobility represents her feeling of captivity. It implies that there is no way out of her current situation. The narrator's increasing obsession is indicated by her fascination with the patterns, which indicates how the wallpaper would dominate her mind and grow into the primary objective of her psychological state. Overall, the themes of loneliness and the oppressive nature of the social norms that restrict the narrator are highlighted by these two particular quotes.

Throughout the use of symbolism, imagery, and fore-shadowing, Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" effectively explores the harsh societal norms of the Victorian era. Vivid imagery and foreshadowing emphasizes the terrible consequences of isolation as a form of punishment, while the wallpaper itself becomes an effective symbol of the narrator's captivity and declining mental state. In addition to highlighting negative effects of strict gender norms and confinement, Gilman uses this story to promote more awareness and empowerment for women. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an important reminder of the value of mental health and the necessity of opposing social norms that restrict the rights of women.

# General Essay Second Place

### **Tattoo**

### Amber Atkinson

Etymology, or the study of the history of words, is important because knowing the history of a word can help you use words more accurately. Etymology can help you broaden your vocabulary and increase your ability to spell words correctly. If you know and understand the history of a word, it makes teaching someone else the words a lot easier. Not only that, but you could have a better understanding of your native language or other languages by fully understanding the meaning of each individual word. Let's take the word tattoo, what does it mean? The definition of tattoo is a form of body modification made by inserting tattoo ink, dyes, and/or pigments, either indelible or temporary, into the dermis layer of the skin to form a design. The word tattoo originated in the mid-17th century. The English word tattoo evolved from the Polynesian "Tatau" and was influenced by European interpretation of both body marking and military signaling. Over time, it became the word we use today to describe the body modification made by inserting ink into our skin to form art we can permanently wear.

Tattoo: what else does it mean? There are more definitions of the word tattoo than I originally thought. To my surprise, the word tattoo could be an evening drum or bugle signal recalling soldiers to their quarters. A British definition of tattoo is an entertainment consisting of music, marching, and the performance of displays and exercises by military personnel. Tattoo

could also mean rhythmic tapping or drumming. Tattoo also has an earlier meaning in English, influenced by the Dutch word "taptoe," which referred to a military drumbeat. The term "taptoe" came from the practice of signaling soldiers to return to their quarters by drumming on a wooden barrel. The connection to body marking arose when "tattoo" came to refer to the markings or signals made on the skin; as the drumbeat marked a return to camp.

I have always been fascinated by tattoos. I got my very first tattoo on my 18th birthday with my mom. We have matching star design tattoos on our feet. Mine is on my right foot and hers is on her left foot. The tattoo artist was very surprised that I chose my foot for my first tattoo as that is one of the most painful spots to get tatted. I would have to say the worst place to get tattooed so far was my stomach with my elbow coming as a close second. I am covered in tattoos now, with many plans to fill most of the blank spots on my arms and legs. I just love being a human canvas. I love art. It was my favorite class in school. By the time I graduated, I had taken every art class possible and the advanced versions as well. I was also the teacher's aide for art, so I got to do a lot of the behind-the-scenes work. I wanted to be an art teacher back in 2012, but life happened, and that did not work out. I still get to be a walking canvas, though. It makes me happy to get compliments on my tattoos so I can brag about my artists. They are incredibly talented artists, and I will gladly recommend their shop to anyone and everyone. (It's probably why I am one of their favorite clients, unless they just say that to everyone.)

I am glad that more and more people are getting tattooed. To each is their own; people are still as beautiful without any tattoos at all. I just personally like how people use tattoos to express themselves. People have semi colon tattoos to raise awareness for suicide. I have seen a lot of puzzle piece tattoos in support of autism. Many people get tattoos of loved ones handwriting before or after they have passed on. I have seen many remembrance tattoos. There are portrait tattoos of animals, family, friends, etc. Someone meant so much to them that they are permanently on their body, with them forever. That is so beautiful to me. Of course, people can get tattoos with the only meaning be-

ing that it looks cool because it sure does. There are terrible tattoos, but that is their body, and I am sure they got what they paid for. This is a permanent body modification; it is important to choose the artist and pricing wisely.

Learning the etymology of tattoo and discovering there are more definitions than what I went into this paper thinking was very cool! It goes to show words we use daily could have way more meanings than what we think. Diving into words and learning the history is an extremely useful tool. Now I can confidently school someone on the word tattoo. I could probably bet money that the definition they give me is the body modification, but then I can hit them with, "well, it also means calling soldiers back to their quarters and rhythmic tapping or drumming." All the different meanings do go together, though. The rhythmic tapping is the needle going in and out pushing ink into the dermis. I will incorporate learning the etymology of more words into my life from now on.



# General Art—Honorable Mention Cassandra Cook-Hausman

# General Essay Thírd Place

# American Justice

## Johnathan Crocker

The goddess of justice statue sits on top of many court houses in America. Blindfolded, with a sword in one hand and a pair of scales in the other, she represents law. These three symbols, impartiality, swiftness, and balance, are what justice is supposed to be. In the court system, people place their trust in the hands of judges. They are the ultimate presiders of justice.

Judges are authority figures the general population looks up to to balance the laws of the land. Despite years of the maturing of laws in society, there are many instances where the punishment given does not fit the crime committed and countless times when it is not evenly distributed. Each year, in America, thousands of men and women are sentenced to prison for wrongs they have committed. However, the sentences assigned are not fairly distributed.

Too often women are sentenced to unusually long prison terms for drug crimes. Some have committed drug crimes on their own while others, less fortunate, are pulled into a crime by male partners or boyfriends. Usually, women have children and family who suffer from the time they do. Without her, children and family members are often abused and forced to commit crimes simply to survive.

In the American Federal Justice system, judges have disregarded any mitigating factors in women's drug cases only to sentence them to grossly, exaggerated sentences. For far too long, judges have punished women without giving consideration of "why" it is they committed the crime. Judges' mindsets in many cases when passing judgement is, "You done the crime, you get the time." Instead of this old murder approach, they need to issue out punishment based upon a balance of justice. The law needs to consider the individual circumstances of what and why exactly the woman was involved. Many times, she is forced to do what she does not want to do.

Is a person who steals food because they are starving different from the person who steals to harm someone else? Yes, just like there is a difference between the women who are drug dealers and those who have been implicated in another person's crime.

This is the issue; Judges, however, will not consider these mitigating factors. Let the women who committed the crime be their niece or daughter, and the judge will most likely let her off the hook or with a lighter sentence. Their personal family is not different from the many women out there who are forced into illegal situations.

A judge's job is to administer impartial, swift, and balanced justice, not to hand out jail time like candy at Halloween. When judges sentence someone too severely, it is a miscarriage of justice. When they do over sentence someone, they are not only causing harm to the defendant they are causing harm to her kids and family because the mother, sister, or daughter is ripped from a family that needs her and often falls apart without her.

In cases where there could be leniency or lessor time given, judges are often committing irreparable harm to innocent, collateral victims. People who are personally involved in what is going on in the courts have repeatedly witnessed the unfair and biased sentencing that regularly happens. There needs to be answers to the problems the American justice system faces. Judges forever alter the lives of not only those convicted but their family members too. It is time that they start more wisely using their superior knowledge and life-changing power.

# General Essay Honorable Mention

# A Silent Conversation Can Convey a Thousand Words

## Wendy Nunez

Peter Drucker, an American author and business consultant once stated, "The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said." In Ernest Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants," the protagonist of the story is a woman named Jig who is in a relationship with an American man, waiting to board a train to Madrid, Spain. To pass time, the couple agree to share a few alcoholic drinks while engaging in an intense conversation that reveals a deep conflict within their relationship. Ernest Hemingway explores the theme of communication in "Hills like White Elephants" by utilizing symbolism, dialogue, and title to highlight unexpressed emotions and uncover the truth that is not spoken.

Throughout Hemingway's short story, symbolism is used in many ways to express the couple's hidden troubles. The train tracks in "Hills like White Elephants" are an ideal illustration of symbolism because they represent a crucial point in the couple's relationship. In the story, Hemingway says, "On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun," (Hemingway 229). Similarly to the way that train tracks may lead in opposing directions, the story's train tracks symbolize the two distinct routes the characters may choose to take. Readers might argue that one option the couple could choose

symbolizes the decision to have an abortion, which could result in a future that is unknown or a separation. However, some readers could argue that the other option represents carrying the pregnancy to term, which would also change the dynamics of the couple's relationship. Overall, the train tracks emphasize the decision-making moment and the conflicting futures that depend on the couple's final decision. A second important demonstration of symbolism are the hills that Jig points out which resemble white elephants. In "Hills like White Elephants", Hemingway says, "The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry" (Hemingway 229). The main topic of the story, Jig's pregnancy, is implied by the hills, which represent the shape of a pregnant woman's stomach. The hills symbolize the character's relationship hardships in addition to a pregnant stomach. The major problem they are dealing with, which is unavoidable, is symbolized by (climbing) hills, which typically represent challenges. The hills convey how serious the choice they have to make is. Therefore, the hills represent the difficulties and possible shifts that the pair will have to deal with in their life.

Hemingway utilizes dialogue effectively to enhance the theme of communication in "Hills like White Elephants". The author conveys the complexity of the couple's relationship and the underlying tension through the discussion between Jig and the American man throughout the majority of the story. The dialogue's simplicity and the way it avoids the primary problem without immediately addressing the pregnancy remain its defining features. In the story, Jig states, "They look like white elephant." The American man then replies with "I've never seen one." Jig states shortly after, "No, you wouldn't have" (Hemingway 229). This particular interaction demonstrates Jig's attempts to engage the man in a more in-depth discussion, but his dismissive reaction emphasizes his lack of communication. At the end of the story, the American man states, "Do you feel better?" Jig replies with, "I feel fine. There is nothing wrong with me. I feel fine." (Hemingway 232). This exchange between the protagonists draws attention to the problem and lack of communication in their relationship. Jig's constant use of the phrase "I feel fine"

strongly implies an effort to hide more intense feelings and an unwillingness to have a real conversation. The couple's inability to openly express their emotions and the tough choice they must make is reflected within this dialogue. The couple's tension and disconnection are highlighted by the brief conversation, which also shows how their relationship is impacted by their incapacity to communicate clearly on a crucial issue.

Hemingway explores the issue of communication in "Hills Like White Elephants," using the title as a literary device. The underlying tension and hidden problem between the characters are reflected within the title itself. The term "white elephants" describes something undesired or challenging, much like the challenging conversation the characters are attempting to avoid regarding the possibility of an abortion. This is strengthened by a quote from the story where Jig remarks, "They look like white elephants," to which the man replies, "I've never seen one" (Hemingway 229). This short interaction demonstrates how they discuss the actual problem in an indirect manner by utilizing the metaphor of white elephants to signify their inability to speak honestly. Overall, Hemingway portrays the couple's inability to face their actual emotions and their circumstance by using the metaphor of "white elephants" in the title. The story's theme of communication is emphasized by the title, which captures the core of their failure in communication, where plenty is shown but not much is spoken directly.

Hemingway effectively explores the theme of communication in "Hills Like White Elephants" using symbolism, dialogue, and the title to emphasize the characters' vague conversations about their challenging circumstances. Which ultimately exposes their incapacity to honestly address their real emotions and the important decisions they must make. Overall, Hemingway's effective usage of these literary devices highlights the value and difficulties of open conversation in resolving challenging circumstances.

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# General Essay Honorable Mention

### A Predator's Game

### Rolando Gael Garcia

The transition to adulthood is often filled with uncertainty as the desire for independence is interrupted by fear of the unknown. In "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" by Joyce Carol Oates, we are introduced to a young girl named Connie who is approached by a sinister figure named Arnold Friend who uses manipulation techniques to tempt her to go with him. Through symbolism, irony, and ambiguity, Oates highlights one young girl's naïve longing for maturity by the abrupt replacement of fear and the unknown.

Oates makes a great display of symbolism throughout the story to underline the uncertainty and dangers that Connie faces during her transition to adulthood. Arnold Friend's exaggerated features and disturbing personality symbolize a predatory force or even something more spectral like Satan, which embody the darkest realities that Connie is not prepared to face. Another symbolism surrounds Arnold's car, which is a temptation for Connie. Similarly, the background music is something Connie associates with freedom and her emerging identity. Still, it takes on a sinister tone as Arnold uses these items to manipulate and control her, distorting Connie's reality. Through these symbols, Oates illustrates how the seemingly harmless aspects of youth, the charm, the music, and the exploration, can mask deeper danger, and Connie is left vulnerable to forces she cannot fully understand.

Oates deliberately leaves key elements unresolved. Arnold

Friend's identity makes us question whether he is a person, an evil entity, or something that is simply beyond our understanding. His exaggerated physical appearance, his cryptic language, and his supernatural knowledge of Connie's entire life blurs the line between reality and fiction. The story's ending is especially ambiguous, as Oates never reveals precisely what Connie's ultimate fate is after she leaves the house to join Arnold. Connie's absent family and friends also lack a strong presence in the story, creating an atmosphere of isolation that amplifies Connie's vulnerability. Through this ambiguity, Oates creates a confusing and often unsettling environment for growing up. The irony is most prominent in the contradictions between Connie's perception of maturity and the harsh reality she faces. Connie sees her transition to adulthood as an escape to freedom, beauty, and independence, but it is precisely her naive pursuit of these values that unwittingly leads her into danger. Ironically, the attitudes Connie displays to assert her independence such as vanity, flirtation, and desire for attention become the tools Arnold uses to manipulate her. Connie's home, which should represent safety, becomes a place of vulnerability when Arnold invades her space and subdues her without even having to enter the house. Finally, the end of the story has a cruel irony; although Connie's decision to leave with Arnold might seem like an act of courage to protect her family, it is also a surrender that marks the loss of her innocence.

Joyce Carol Oates explores the uncertainty of adulthood using symbolism, ambiguity and irony. These literary devices complement each other to show how Connie's passage into adulthood is marked by fear and manipulation. The story, with its uncertain ending and strange moments, makes us think about how complicated it is to grow up and how sometimes we face things we don't fully understand. Oates shows us how adulthood doesn't always bring answers, but it does bring many questions and sacrifices.

# General Essay Honorable Mention

# Somebody Needs You

#### Hanna Tran

The phrase "leaving everything you've ever known" may seem dramatic to explain to an 8th grader moving schools to a nearby town. "It's just a new school" some may think, but in reality, moving away from home is like packing your bags and moving to Mars. Being a 13 year old girl facing the challenges of moving to a new town has taught me many valuable lessons in life. Stepping foot in a new school with new faces, smells, voices, and a new version of myself was single-handedly the most terrifying moment of my life. But thinking back, I wouldn't have done it any other way.

One thing about human nature is that we are so quick to judge people based on appearances. "Oh look, the new girl!" I'd hear voices trickle through the hallways. Faint voices saying, "Is she Asian?" would echo through the line of heads in front of me as I walked past. I quickly realized that people didn't care about who I was, but how I looked. The feeling of being judged wasn't new for me, but being judged by all new people was a newly developed feeling. I'd notice in class that when I would answer a question, everyone would look astounded. Since I was new, they didn't expect me to be brave enough to speak in front of them. After hearing whispers and sly remarks, I came to the conclusion that I should just stop talking, and for a while I did. I was too scared to speak in class, and that was very unlike me. When you

feel like your every move is being ridiculed by others, it puts a toll on the way you act. My whole life I have been raised, and surrounded by people that pushed me to be the best version of myself, but as soon as I started to feel that slip away, I felt like it would be gone forever.

After a month, I completely lost myself. I came home from school with tears running down my cheek every day. One day my mom noticed me crying after school, and she sat me down for a talk. I told her, "Mom, I have never felt so out of place in my life. Everyone here is so put together and perfect, and I just feel like an idiot." That day my mom told me something I'll never forget. My mom said, "Hanna, if you don't make friends at first that's normal, but the second people see you for who you truly are, the right people will surround you." After she told me that, I had to push myself to break out of my shell. I had to come to the realization that it was not others' responsibility to talk to me; it was my responsibility to be who I am and embrace it. The more I showed up to school events, talked to people around me, and followed peers on social media, I immediately noticed a difference in how I was treated. As time went on, and people started to know who I was, I started to not be invisible anymore. People were talking to me in the hallway rather than about me. Instead of being ignored, people started to ask me questions about where I came from, how my life was at my previous school, and even about things I enjoyed. I started to get more involved in sports, and it was a big outlet for me to meet new people. Obviously, there were still mean people who had mean things to say about me, but I just had to be strong and ignore it. Though being myself got easier, one thing that didn't was finding the right people to surround myself with. I became friends with girls who were super accepting, but behind closed doors, they were mean to others. I suffered with the internal battle of choosing to stay friends with people that I knew did not have the best interest for me. This was the start of my journey of staying true to myself, and my beliefs.

One thing I regret most is pretending to be someone I'm not to make friends. Those girls were the opposite of everything I believed in, but I was afraid of losing them and not having

anyone else. The feeling of acceptance felt so relieving after a month of feeling so lost, so I started to lose who I was when I was around them. I felt like I finally found a source of validation, but it wasn't from the right people. I learned quickly that I would not make good friends if I was pretending to be someone I was not. I started to be myself and found out that people would love me for who I am, and not who I pretend to be. Realizing the hard way that when pretending to be someone that you aren't, you attract the people who like an alternate version of vourself, and that's just as bad as being friends with someone you know nothing about. Being myself is something I have always been very prideful about, and I had shied away from it when I moved. As time went on, I eventually found amazing friends who loved me for who I was. Going through the struggles I faced made me who I am today, and being myself will always be something I am proud of. If I had not embraced who I truly am, I wouldn't be surrounded by the most amazing people who lift me up every single day.

After my long journey of adjusting to a new school and town, I still think the hardest part was fitting in with the people around me. Acting like someone wasn't led me to people who didn't end up being the best for me. I am glad that I stayed true to myself because it has led me to where I am today. One lesson that I took from moving schools is that no one should ever pretend to be someone they aren't. If you aren't being yourself no one else will fill the void that you fill, and somebody in this world needs you. Now, as I am entering my junior year of high school, I have flourished not just in the aspect of being less worried about how my peers felt about me, but I have grown as an individual. I have learned that being Asian-American is something I should be proud of and not ashamed of. Most importantly I have learned that being myself is the best person that I can be.



# General Art—Honorable Mention Cassandra Cook-Hausman

# General Essay Honorable Mention

### Why Can't I Wear That Costume?

### Amber Atkinson

Halloween is a holiday celebrated every October and brings people of all ages together for fun, creativity, and the spooky spirit. On Halloween, we wear costumes allowing us to express ourselves and embody our favorite characters. Some people go all out and plan their costumes out the entire year prior. Some people throw something together the day of. Regardless of if it is some extravagant costume or a simple costume, unfortunately, there is a bit of controversy revolving around what one can and cannot dress up as. While I do understand that in some cases a costume could cross a line, people should be free to wear whatever costume they want. Dressing up on Halloween is supposed to boost individual expression, embrace diversity, and encourage creative freedom.

One of the main arguments for allowing people to wear whatever costume of their choosing is the right to freedom of expression. While I do fully agree people should be able to dress up in whatever costume they would like, I also agree that there is a line. In an article called "Fall Tradition Says We Should Have a Halloween Free-Speech Controversy – Let's not," they touch on the topic of someone stupidly dressing up as George Floyd. Under no circumstances is that morally okay. This is where I fully understand the Halloween costume controversy, but it is taken

too far. In this day and age, it doesn't take much to offend people. By placing too many limitations on costume choices, we lose the spirit of Halloween. a day where everyone can let loose, embrace fantasy, and share in the excitement. After all, it is through the wide range of costumes that the holiday becomes an inclusive and enjoyable experience for all.

Dressing up for Halloween encourages people to embrace diversity. For example, when my oldest daughter was in kindergarten, she really wanted to be Mirabel from *Encanto*. Who was I to tell my 5-year-old she couldn't dress up as her favorite character? That year, she was the cutest little Mirabel. My issue was can I dress my Caucasian child as a Hispanic character. I figured if she only wore the costume and didn't change anything about her skin tone it would be just fine. That is where the line is; sure you have the freedom to express yourself, but make sure not to take it too far.

Halloween brings a sense of creativity more than any other holiday. I love looking at all the intricate costumes. The costumes that you can see someone put all their time and effort into. Creating a costume is a form of art that I will always stand behind. When picking a costume, how it can be interpreted by society is important to keep in mind. Society is easily offended; however, you must be aware of how you could offend other cultures when creating your costume. "Be culturally respectful as you celebrate Halloween," The University of Utah article has a list of costumes that should be avoided. Dressing up as a Native American, Senorita, Gypsy, Middle Eastern cultures, and anything with a Black face are some of the most discriminatory Halloween costumes. Any costume depicting an entire ethnic group is offensive. A costume that suggests a disability of someone else that you clearly do not have is also very offensive.

To sum it all up, Halloween should remain a holiday where we all come together with inclusion, creativity, and individual expression. The freedom to dress however you want on this holiday lets us express our personalities and embrace diversity. It is still very important to be mindful of costumes that may be offensive or harmful. It's just not as serious as some people make it out to be. You are allowed to dress up as a character of

a different race, you just do not have to go the extra mile to change your own race to match the character. Halloween is about enjoyment and the freedom to wear whatever costume you want, within reason. This helps keep the spirit of Halloween alive and fun for all ages.

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# General Essay Honorable Mention

## The Definition of Courage

### Lesley Martinez Yanez

The study of etymology helps the reader improve their reading comprehension, understand where their native language comes from, and be familiarized with common root words that could be used in other words. The noun "courage" was first used in the Middle English period (1150-1500) with the earliest evidence being around the 1300s in Kyng Alisaunder. Courage comes from the root word "cor" a Latin word meaning the 'heart.' The word courage over the centuries changed its forms of spellings from "cor" (Latin) to "coraticum" (Vulgar Latin) to "corage" (Old French) to what it is now, "courage" in English. As of today, it is defined as mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. As Mark Twain once said, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear."

Courage can be understood in many different contexts such as in one being "everyday courage" in where you face small simple resilience acts throughout your daily lives. It could be something simple like speaking out in class if you usually never interact. Second being "physical courage" where you face physical challenges where bravery needs to be exhibited, such as a police man protecting a child in danger. Another being "moral courage" in which you fight for your beliefs regardless of if it even goes against norms, as in fighting for injustice. Or

"emotional courage" where you overcome your own personal insecurities, fears, or traumas, such as seeking prayer, therapy, meditation, etc.

The word "courage" has a lot of meaning and significance in my own life. I could say in all the different contexts I mentioned earlier. Battling kidney failure for over 5-6 years and being introduced to dialysis and a kidney transplant has been the biggest fear I have thankfully overcome through courage. Dealing with physical courage by putting my body through those types of procedures. The day-to-day courage in battling every new symptom I developed. The moral courage to stand up to nurses and doctors if they were not using their practices in the best way for me. And most of all, emotional courage to overcome every selfdoubt, what ifs, and suicidal thoughts. After experiencing all these traumas, I agree with Twain's quote earlier "courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear." Regardless, throughout everything fear is and will always be present, but it will be up to you to have the courage to resist and master that fear. Although, in my personal beliefs, I refer it more to the Holy word that it is the willingness to act in obedience to God's purpose and relying on His strength and guidance. My time in prayer and worship were the biggest influence in the courage that was empowered through faith within me.

In conclusion, courage is an immensely powerful and meaningful word that helps us overcome the biggest obstacles and hardships. In the end, it is a 'heart word' and how Brené Brown would say "love hard and be brave."

# Photography—Honorable Mention Macayla Hebert





# Research Paper First Place

# Witch Hunt Madness in the New World

## Wendy Nunez

#### Introduction

Sarah Good, a Puritan woman, once declared, "I'm no more a witch than you are a wizard! If you take my life away, God will give you blood to drink!" Good was one of the first three individuals wrongfully accused during the inhumane witch hunt trials that occurred in the Puritan colony of Salem, Massachusetts. Between the summer of 1692 and the fall of 1693, at least 200 individuals were victims of the trials that caused the community to suffer from lifelong trauma. A succession of hearings and prosecutions were held against men, women, and even children in order to establish their guilt or innocence of practicing witchcraft. The Salem witch trials were a tragic result of superstition, ergotism, and religiosity leading to the overwhelming dread that drove the masses to commit heinous acts of killings without any true evidence, resulting in a lasting impact on American legal history.

#### Superstition

The charges of witchcraft that led to the widespread panic that broke out in the small religious colony were mostly the product of superstition. The residents in Salem and the neighboring communities were very superstitious in the sixteenth century, believing in the existence of supernatural beings and the devil. The Puritan religious structure, which viewed the natural world as a battlefield among elements of both good and evil, served as the foundation for these ideas. The generalized panic was caused by a fear of the unknown and a need for a scapegoat. During this

time of widespread panic, individuals were accused of being witches and imprisoned on the basis of weak evidence and physical traits that were thought to conform to these assumptions. According to a website published by Stony Brook University, it is evident that the inability of a doctor to identify an unclear disease contributed to the escalation of accusations regarding witchcraft (vou.stonybrook). When young girls in Salem displayed unusual actions for which there was no medical clarification, physicians would label them as witches. Insufficient medical explanation worsened the already-occurring madness and prompted further allegations. The charges were aided by the fact that there was a lack of medical clarity at the time as well as the failure of agriculture to thrive during a period of cooler weather. The Little Ice Age was a time of regional cold that occurred in the North American continent from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. According to the article Weather and the Salem Witch Trials. decline in crops developed from shortened growing seasons brought on by the below-average temperatures (Mixon). Tensions in Salem increased as food shortages were a result of the agricultural crisis that was labeled as witchcraft by the Puritans rather than the cold temperatures affecting the crop growth. Overall, one of the most dark and unfair periods in history of the United States was brought about by the deeply ingrained superstitions within the Puritan religious framework.

#### **Ergotism**

The outbreak of illnesses such as ergotism that occurred during the witch hunt trials contributed significantly to the growing dread in Salem. In the previous few centuries, medical professionals lacked the necessary research and evidence to contain the outbreaks of disease, and their lack of knowledge of medicine and illnesses resulted in incorrect diagnoses of many diseases. A few of Salem's young women began to exhibit strange symptoms, such as sudden lack of vision, skin sores, convulsions, and hallucinations, that doctors were not capable of diagnosing. According to an article published by JAMA Dermatology, the girls were initially diagnosed with "bewitchment" by the town's physician, who was uncertain of the cause of their illness. This medical diagnosis resulted in the victims' persecution and later

conviction. Many academics claimed the true etiology of the unexplained sickness following the trials, and convulsive ergotism is a reasonable theory (Mundra et al.). The illness, ergotism, or "St. Anthony's Fire," is contracted by consuming contaminated rye, a kind of cereal grain. According to a website published by the University of Alabama at Birmingham, it states that the fungal disease is more widespread in women and children and develops convulsions that resemble hysteria along with hallucinations as well as crawling and tingling sensations below the surface of one's skin. It also appears that rye was a common food in the area and that Salem had ergot poisoning-prone conditions during 1692 is additional significant evidence ("Research Guides: Witchcraft, Women and the Healing Arts in the Early Modern Period: A Strange Affliction in Salem "). According to the ergotism idea, eating rye impaired with ergot fungus might have triggered symptoms reported by individuals living in Salem, such as convulsions and hallucinations. This could contribute to the allegations of witchcraft. The ergot fungus thrived on rve and other cereals because of the cooler, wetter weather brought about by the Little Ice Age. Ergotism instances, like the ones implicated in the Salem witch trials, may have occurred more frequently during this time due to the growing incidence of ergot infection in crops.

#### Religiosity

Religiosity played a key role in the witch hunts due to the fact that the Puritan individuals of Salem had an intense belief in the supernatural and thought they were facing demonic forces. Due to their intense belief in the supernatural, their religion had a significant impact on the widespread accusations and executions that broke out in the little town. The community's deep religious values made people more likely to perceive strange behavior and unexplained events as indicators of witchcraft. Since the prosecutions were against the devil's work, they were viewed as a means of purifying Salem and shielding it from evil powers. According to an article published by the Social Science Journal, the authors claim that Salem Village was a religious community prior to and during the witchcraft trials, which gave its minister some degree of political and economic power over the town's residents (King and Mixon). Puritan standards and controls substantially

shaped the individual's actions. Due to the religion's strong hold, citizens' freedoms were severely limited when they were accused of committing witchcraft without sufficient proof. According to the article by the Social Science Journal, based on recent studies, Samuel Parris, the minister of Salem exploited the witchcraft tragedy to preserve and increase his own and his corporate fortune (King and Mixon). Parris, the Salem minister, and other local ministers endorsed the inhumane trials and charges made during the proceedings (King and Mixon). Researchers have concluded Parris was heavily involved in the trials that were affected by the minister's financial and personal interests due to their support for the trials. Parris had an interest in retaining his status and power in Salem since doing so would provide him with financial security and allow him to gain control and gather greater authority in the community. The article by the Social Science Journal states that because American colonies had a male-dominated society, men were significantly more eligible to be involved in any court action (King and Mixon). The charges of the women were influenced by Salem's religious community, which was predominantly male. Throughout the trial period, women were perceived as weak, prone to wrongdoings and powerless, making them ideal targets for witchcraft allegations. Numerous of the town's women who failed to fulfill the customary roles or comply to societal norms risked being accused. This strengthened the Puritan men's domination over women by increasing the severity of allegations that they were witches. Overall charges of practicing witchcraft were considered deeply because the Puritan belief system was strongly associated with the distress of the devil.

#### Victims

One of the most tragic periods in history that occurred in American soil were the Salem witch trials. Without sufficient proof, the Puritans who were then residing in Salem were willing to claim anyone of witchcraft, leading to roughly twenty executions. The victims' strange behavior, unexplained unfortunate events, and failure to fit in with society led to the conclusion that they were witches. According to the article published by RSC Med Chem, it is important to acknowledge that a number of those women who were deemed witches were skilled herbalists

who knew a great deal about plants with biological properties (Llanes et al.). It was normal for women to utilize herbal treatments for care hundreds of years ago. Nevertheless, there is a chance that such behavior may be misinterpreted and criticized, which would fuel the charges of witchcraft. Tituba, an indigenous woman and slave of the town's priest Samuel Parris, became the very first individual to be placed in jail. Tituba immediately became a quick victim because she was a non-European individual who was enslaved. According to an article by Read to Know, she had long been viewed with suspicion by the residents of Salem, who were eager to accept her accusation claiming she was a witch because she was physically and socially different. Tituba eventually admitted to being a witch to avoid being sentenced to death, however she was subsequently freed after her prosecution. Tituba confessed in court in order to avoid a more severe sentence because she was under pressure from those residing in Salem. However, her thorough confession stoked the panic, leading to further charges and legal actions. Sarah Good, an elderly poor woman, ultimately fell victim to the allegations immediately after Tituba and was considered in the town as a beggar. In the book The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege, the author states Good made those trying to help her uncomfortable, as if they were insulting her by offering her donations, but she rarely concealed her displeasure if the gift was insufficient. When Samuel Parris handed her child items on a particular occasion, Sarah walked off grumbling to herself (Roach 13). Although Parris was unable to hear her words precisely, he saw that his daughter and niece's bewitchment symptoms seemed to worsen following his meeting with Good (Roach 13). Eventually, Good was charged of being a witch, imprisoned, and ultimately put to death as a result of her actions, social standing, and other allegations within the Puritan community. In a video posted by TED Ed, it states how Sarah Osborne ended up becoming the third victim after Parris's daughter and niece blamed Tituba, Good, and Osborne for bewitching them (TED-Ed 00:02:10). Osborne's charges intensified as a result of her behavior and actions, which defied the deeply rooted Puritan community's traditional familial bond and broke the norms of society

at the time. Tension also resulted from her being entwined in a legal battle regarding her deceased husband's estate. These elements, along with the overall climate of distrust and terror, resulted in her being charged with witchcraft. She later passed tragically from awful circumstances in prison. Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne ultimately became the first three victims as a result of the trials, tragically illustrating how fear and distrust may result in the persecution of those who are powerless.

#### Aftermath

The community and its surroundings were significantly and permanently impacted by the events of the Salem witch trials. Shortly after the trials ended, there was a general recognition of the injustices which were initially carried out. As a result, the trials raised doubts about the credibility of spectral evidence and caused the legal requirements for admissible evidence in court to be reconsidered. According to the article published by Historical Journal of Massachusetts, the witchcraft trials of 1692 were an intentional hoax, brought about by illogical and dishonest people who were persuaded by the fundamental elements of human nature rather than by the devil (Callis). Due to the trials' strong religious fervor, they encouraged a more widespread effort in the American colonies to separate church and state. The statement highlights the risks of the impact of religion on legal and governmental actions, which is associated with the separation of church and state following the trials. The trials illustrated the serious harm and unfairness that may arise from letting religious belief rule court proceedings. Following the trials, there was an increasing realization that, to end these kinds of violations, religious authority and state activities needed to be kept apart. By keeping things separate, they hope to guarantee that justice is served by facts, logic, and equity rather than by the whims of dishonest individuals or the doctrine of religion. The Salem witch trials served as an example, showing how crucial it is to preserve a distinct line between church and state in order to defend justice and individual rights. The majority of the trial participants afterwards voiced regret for their acts, which led to the execution of innocent victims. According to the article published by Historical Journal of Massachusetts, in 1711, the Massachusetts General Court decided to award financial compensation to those harmed and their heirs of the Salem witch hunt (Callis). The victims were not only given financial reparations by the government, but those engaged in the trials also publicly apologized to them. Many of the individuals who took part in the witch trials afterwards apologized for what they had done. In the article Historical Journal of Massachusetts, the witch trials jury and Rev. Samuel Parris both made public admissions of guilt in 1694, but it was insufficient for Parris to be reinstated as the town minister of Salem (Callis). Years later, Parris and the jury expressed regret for their significant mistakes and the injustice that had been done. They apologized in an effort to make amends for the damage that was caused and repair the victims' reputations. The town's healing and the prevention of another injustice of this kind depended heavily on the public confessions of guilt. Overall, the Salem witch trials have had a lasting influence on the legal history of the United States by serving as a potent cautionary tale about the risks of widespread panic and the significance of a fair trial.

#### Conclusion

Superstition, extreme religiosity, and the possible influence of ergotism all contributed to the climate of fear and paranoia that led to the Salem witch trials. The community executed innocent individuals and committed serious crimes due to their belief in witchcraft and the influence of the devil, which was reinforced by the strong religious beliefs of the time and the possible hallucinogenic effects of ergotism. Numerous innocent individuals suffered terribly as a result of the Salem witch trials, as well as the aftermath of the tragedy, the community struggled with sorrow and regret. This led to an evaluation of the legal system and an apology in an effort to avoid similar catastrophes in the years to come.

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# Research Paper Second Place

# The Queen Who Became King:

Hatshepsut and Her Influence on Ancient Egyptian Art

## Rowan Rodriguez

Heat and grain are felt underneath your skin, while you fidget with the sandy terrain you sit upon; impatiently waiting for the new pharaoh to be announced. News has sprinkled the kingdom with rumors of a rather modish candidate, one of which had certainly never been seen and one that would be substantially, historically known as the first of its kind. Suddenly, a joyous speaker loudly and grandly proclaims the royal declaration you have been so vigorously anticipating for. The new king of Egypt has been assigned, and the outlandish, popular hearsay was confirmed with truth. However, as the sand you wriggled in your hand begins to slip between your tired fingers, a question begins to slip your now anxious mind. Is this new king fit to be ruler and what exactly makes her the proper choice of king. I mean, Hatshepsut is the first woman to ever be titled as pharaoh after all.

Ancient Egyptian art and its extravagant, almost impossible, intricate architecture has experienced tremendous, several transformations and evolutions throughout its unique and broad history. Its grand, everlasting artworks and temples are still being discovered today, leaving poignant influences on both artists and historians. Along with its lengthy, vibrant, and creative chronology, Ancient Egypt has encountered numerous leaders who impacted the culture's history in art movements

and creative artistic techniques. Namely, one important and non-conventional leader being the female pharaoh Hatshepsut. Hatshepsut's loving display of art, along with her keen desire for innovation were perfect for artists to create impressive works and expand into new experimental expressions. For instance, androgynous stylization to sculpture design began to flourish within Egyptian art, leading into grand artistic creations, such as *The Kneeling Statue* and the great granite sphinx of the infamous king herself. Other mesmerizing works were made, including the masterpiece historically known as the pharaoh's own mortuary temple complex. These few examples are only a miniscule list of the paramount effects Hatshepsut had on artistic construction during her powerful reign in Ancient Egypt.

Just like in most common instances of a typical Egyptian ruler, Hatshepsut was born in the royal family with her father being the third king of Egyptian's eighteenth dynasty. Thutmose I and her mother being Thutmose I's consort, Ahmose. Hatshepsut, besides her parents, had two brothers, both of whom sadly passed young. However, not much is entirely known of Hatshepsut's upbringing and early childhood, besides the information of her close relatives. Nonetheless, one thing that was widely known about the princess's youth was her strong conviction and grit, along with her potential and artistic ambition. The princess married young, due to the lack of a male royal to take the position of pharaoh of the new kingdom and a daughter was produced from this union. However, Hatshepsut's spouse was not of "royal quality" and his reign was impressively small and he died not long after. This factor in combination with the reality of the child the couple had was female left no rational choice, but to decide to make Hatshepsut the new king. Author Potter, Dorothy T. states in her article titled after Hatshepsut, "The regency was not enough for her; she wanted the glory of being called pharaoh as well as the responsibility for Egypt and the young king. To realize this desire, however, seemed impossible. There had never been a woman pharaoh—only a man could assume that

title, take a 'Horus name,' and become king of Upper and Lower Egypt." This struggle and calamity of a race to hierarchy for the female pharaoh presents itself something of a disadvantage, but rather these events only strengthened Hatshepsut's position in becoming an appreciable and surprisingly an androgynous leader.

Ancient Egyptian art is a subject that is widely known throughout the world and is still constantly being uncovered, each piece presenting itself differently depending on which time period the artwork was formed. During Hatshepsut's reign, art had a particular and distinct depiction, especially in the regards to giving statues of the king in an androgynous and gender- neutral display. Numerous, yet small findings of art, in which the pharaoh is strictly illustrated as androgynous and/or primarily masculine in nature. "She left behind a number of artifacts testifying to the importance of her reign, which lasted from about 1504-1483 B.C.E.... showing her in the traditional guise of pharaoh, with chin beard, kilt and linen headdress. This regal attire would have left her chest bare" (Dunn). These specific characteristics stated by Dunn are primarily used in describing traditional statues of male royal figures during Ancient Egypt. However, Hatshepsut was female, identified as such, and commissioned several of these artworks herself, so why were artists being influenced to produce work portraying her in such a gender-ambiguous way? Historians and current artists alike, argue and compare theories to give possible explanations to the stated question. Reimer states ideas to why this may be in her article about such a topic. "There are many different theories including, that it was politically motivated; that it was an expression of her gender identity as well as society's view on gender, or that it was a product of their religion. In this paper I argue that Hatshepsut used symbols and attributes in her art to reflect her many positions of power regardless of those symbol's traditionally assigned genders" (4). Either way, Hatshepsut's kingship allowed these new representations of Egyptian sculptural technique and display to be produced, creating some of the most breathtaking pieces we have today, and

allowing her to use said art to delineate her divinity and royal authority.

Two of the most well-known artworks in relation to the pharaoh Hatshepsut are *The Kneeling Statue* and *Sphinx of* Hatshepsut. These couple of statues are among the most famous of the king and are continuously studied and are currently displayed to the public at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. First up, The Kneeling Statue, this creation is known as a granite sculpture of Hatshepsut on her knees holding what appears to be two jugs, one resting in each hand. This sculpture is presented as highly symmetrical and masculine. Hatshepsut is given broad shoulders, her chest isn't emphasized in anyway, and she is wearing traditional male clothing and accessories. The sculpture is in actuality one of man, but is one that allows its viewers to grasp a sense of how Hatshepsut idealized herself. She strongly yearned for an entitlement to kingship and this statue propitiously grants us a sense of such a personal desire. The second statue, a colossal one at that, is of a stereotypical Egyptian sphinx, but how does this one differ in contrast to the other sphinx statues, like the famous one in Giza? The sphinx statue of Hatshepsut is a female, rather than a male pharaoh. Typically, sphinx sculptures were prominently of only male leaders, yet even with Hatshepsut's depicting of herself, it strongly visualizes a masculine figure. In comparison to the previous said artwork, The kneeling statue, this granite sphinx dresses Hatshepsut in Nemes headcloth and a false beard. It also combines her human features with the muscular body and build of a lion, conveying her as a powerful, determined, kingly individual and every king like person is deserving of a royal temple. I mean, where else would they keep the unique leader's art before it was discovered?

During the numerous dynasties Egypt endured, royals, particularly kings, would have monuments and/or large, extravagant temples built in their name, and Egypt's woman pharaoh was of no exception. In dedication and as an homage to Hatshepsut, an imposing and resplendent mortuary temple

was gloriously constructed as both an honorable sanctum to the god Anum and a home to all the artwork designed after/for Hatshepsut to continue to tell her legacy. This mortuary temple is one of intricate architecture and is labeled as an artistic masterpiece by many. It is located opposite the city of Luxor and was entirely inside a temple, which surpassed other past monumental projects, ironically also symbolizing Hatshepsut's potent want to be as legitimatized as a proper pharaoh as possible. The monument was first started during the eighteenth dynasty after distinctive commission from the pharaoh herself and was designed by Senenmut, who was regularly and popularly known as Hatshepsut's confidante. The layout of the temple mirrored another infamous building, Mentuhotep II's temple, but was finished in a more stylish, gargantuan, and serpentine completion. However, with such a spectacular array of art and creation, some eyes it fell upon were dissatisfied. After some time, in the end of Hatshepsut's kingship, the new pharaoh disapproved of the unconventionality of the woman monarch and ordered the disappearance of her identity. This led to the defacing of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, leaving it discarded for vandalization ruins and many of her statues destroved

Ancient Egypt is well-known for its tremendous spectacle of art and its glorious architecture that has been described as unworldly and at times impossible to achieve. This historic era of time has undoubtedly undergone evolutionary and reconstructive transformations and continues to do so in modern times. Ancient Egypt not only prides itself on its own idiosyncratic beauty of art and creation, but also through its stupendous, historic authorities, several of who completely altered the way techniques and artistic creativity was displayed. Famously, one royal superior allowed such a drastic, immense change to be formed within the art scene in ancient Egypt, and that was Hatshepsut. Her entire devotion to artistic expression and portrayal permitted advanced innovation to be explored and contributed to some of the art world's most precious artifacts, such as great granite sculptures The *Kneeling Statue* and

the sphinx statue of Hatshepsut, and even the wonderous, mesmerizing mortuary temple that was built for the king herself. This is only a small, microscale of a phenomenal amount of devotion Hatshepsut influenced onto artists during ancient Egypt and her devotion most certainly still holds as guidance to many today.

Time has flown by, as quick as it could go and the warmth from the sand still lingers on your palms. To your surprise, it's already been roughly two decades, and your pondering question was finally answered. Enchanting statues and beauty depicted through new art surrounds and graces your presence, along with new, comparably progressive history being written in the same sand you continue to gently fidget with, even in your old age. In your opinion, the female pharaoh did not perform an unpleasant job.

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The Kneeling Statue, located at the Metropolitan Musuem in New York City





The Temple of Hatshepsut glows at sunset.



Photograph by Kenneth Garrett, Nat Geo Image Collection

Photography—Honorable Mention Rolando Gael Garcia

69

# Research Paper Thírd Place

The Ramification of the Fashion Industry on the Environment, Labor Force and Consumer Culture

## Hang Bui

Accounting for 10% of global pollution, the fast fashion industry emits the highest carbon emissions annually (approximately 12 billion metric tons), behind electricity and heat production. This business model, characterized by the "fast" manner in which clothing is produced, thrives on rapidly and inexpensively producing low-quality clothing, simulating the garment designs of in-demand brands. The fast fashion industry model has completely revolutionized the commercial fashion industry by creating readily available, affordable, and trendy clothing easily accessible to customers worldwide. However, this convenience comes with significant consequences: the fast fashion industry's dependence on cheap materials and exploitative labor has led to irreversible pollution, dangerous and inhumane working conditions and wages, and the normalization of overconsumption. Consumers, companies, and governments must act to solve these problems and change into a more sustainable and ethical industry.

#### **Environmental Pollution and Impact**

When addressing the consequences, many highlight the more visually shocking aspects, such as mountains of wasted textiles and clothes or the cramped fast fashion manufacturing facilities. However, there is one extremely overlooked yet extremely ruinous effect: environmental degradation. It begins with the millions of tons of water used to produce various clothing textiles, with the most common one being cotton, a staple in clothing production for centuries. However, the amount of water needed to grow cotton is vast, and the growing demand for clothing exploits resources from farmland and in some drought-prone regions. The environmental impact runs deeper than environmental depletion, as the dyes used to color clothing and microplastics infiltrate ecosystems, which can disrupt marine life by introducing cancer-causing chemicals into their habitat.

One of the most concerning aspects of fast fashion is its contribution to waste. Fast fashion clothing is almost always low-quality and not designed to last a lifetime. As this study states, "Most fast fashion pieces only last less than 10 wears before they fall apart and are thrown in landfills – a waste of material as well as consumer money" (Olivar Aponte, et al). These garments are then discarded and thrown into landfills, where synthetic fibers, like polyester, made from petroleum and one hundred percent plastic, take hundreds of years to decompose, allowing harmful chemicals to infiltrate our environment.

Because most fast fashion factories are located in developing countries in Asia, such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and their main market demographic is Westerners, the carbon footprint that fast fashion produces is immensely concerning for our environment. The emissions process begins from manufacturing, transportation, to disposal.

#### **Exploitation of Outsourced Labor**

The rapid production model of fast fashion relies heavily on outsourced labor in developing nations and the exploitation of the workers in factories, called "sweatshops," which are characterized by long hours at low wages under inhumane conditions. These sweatshops are often overcrowded and without safety regulations, causing life-threatening situations, like the collapse of the Rana Plaza Factory in Bangladesh, which killed over 1,100 workers.

The demand for fast-produced clothing pushes companies to suppress their workers' wages and ignore ethical and safe-

ty concerns, which is done by outsourcing labor to developing nations, where wages are significantly lower and government regulations are weaker` (Cline). For instance, the average wage of an H&M factory worker was \$2.63 per day, working six days a week" (Simonsen). These wages fall drastically short of a living wage, especially for what would be considered overtime in a first-world country like the United States or the United Kingdom, and it allows workers to be trapped in a cycle of poverty and financial dependence from which they cannot escape.

Many factories suppress unionization and legal protections to ensure that workers have no authority to demand higher wages or safer conditions, leading to rampant child labor and forced labor, where young children are forced to work in dangerous conditions for minimal pay. In addition to the unfair wages, the constant exposure to toxic chemicals used for textile production creates health risks for the workers, which may lead to respiratory issues, skin disease, and long-term health complications.

#### The Creation of a New Consumer Culture

Despite the growing awareness of the ethical and environmental issues surrounding fast fashion, consumers continue purchasing from these brands, buying each collection, regardless if they need it or not. However, this contradiction is not the fault of the consumer, but of the industry's growing creativity in emotional marketing strategies. Fast fashion thrives off of short-lived. fleeting trends, constantly pushing consumers to purchase new items to remain fashionable. Social media websites, like TikTok and Instagram, greaten this effect, where as soon as the app is opened, users are bombarded with photos and videos of their peers and famous influencers parading the current fad. This persistent exposure to edited, glamorized lifestyles creates an overwhelming pressure to conform and "fit in." Increasingly, consumers, especially younger generations, have used social media platforms to mirror their social lives, intensifying the fear of being left out of popular trends.

This fear, coined "FOMO," after the "fear of missing out," encourages consumers to make purchases motivated by social inclusion, rather than need; not doing so creates feelings of social exclusion and social isolation. Self-identity has become in-

creasingly shaped by appearance, so those who visibly fail to follow trends fear social exclusion. Companies exploit this phenomenon by collaborating with social media influencers who are seen as "role models," (Bläse, et al) who transfer brand messages to their following. By aligning their products with the lifestyles of idols, fast fashion companies not only advertise their merchandise to a large audience but also create an urgent sense of desire among consumers to simulate the styles of these influencers, increasing sales.

Ultimately, to increase sales among consumers, fast fashion brands utilize emotional intelligence, social pressure, and advertising to ensure that the desire to participate in a trend outweighs the ethical and environmental consequences of their purchases.

#### Strategic Supply Chain Management

The rapid and inexpensive production model created by the fast fashion industry is not a response to customer demand, but a carefully coordinated strategy created by supply chain management and consumer culture. Elisa Arrigo's study, *Customer Relationships, and Supply Management in the Fast Fashion Industry*, explains how fast fashion brands utilize supply chain tactics to maximize efficiency while shaping consumer behavior.

By observing current data analytics, brands anticipate trends and create a sense of urgency amongst customers, substantiating the culture of fleeting trends that drive overconsumption. Instead of appealing to customer demands, companies create demand, ensuring that collections are available in unprecedented haste. This cycle reinforces the culture of impulsive purchases, where customers feel that they need to update their closets to stay socially relevant.

The streamlined supply chain (from design to retail) allows companies to sell new styles extremely quickly. This operational model not only exacerbates pollution and ecological degradation but also worsens the labor conditions in factories. The rapid turnover yield of clothing, which is 274 million garments per day, increases the production of waste, while the need for cost-cutting measures encourages unethical practices in factories.

#### Counterargument

Although the fast fashion industry has undeniable ethical and environmental consequences, it is important to understand its widespread appeal and challenges that may be inhibiting corporations from transitioning into a more sustainable model of production. Affordability, economic benefits, and the practicality of worldwide scale reform are the main factors that complicate efforts to diminish fast fashion, but by recognizing these concerns, we can work to create a lasting effect.

One of the strongest and most common arguments supporting fast fashion is its affordability and accessibility, especially for lower-income individuals. Billions of people rely on low-cost clothing options to meet their basic needs, as sustainable clothing brands usually have higher price points out of budget for some customers. Other low-cost clothing stores, like thrift stores, are not always a viable alternative in areas with limited access to secondhand clothing. While affordability is a valid concern, government subsidies for sustainable clothing, clothing drives, and corporate initiatives like Patagonia's Worn Wear program (allowing you to trade in and buy used Patagonia garments) can help make ethical clothing more accessible.

Another argument in favor of fast fashion is its economic impact in developing countries, as it provides millions of jobs in nations like Bangladesh, Vietnam, and India, where clothing work is a major source of income. While fast fashion creates millions of jobs all over the world, these jobs often come with extremely low wages, unsafe working conditions, and worker exploitation. Instead of eliminating these jobs altogether, we can focus on pressuring companies to practice fair trade practices, give living wages, and improve labor conditions.

#### Call-to-Action: Creating a Sustainable Future

The devastating impact of the fast fashion industry on our world cannot be reversed; however, we can create meaningful change through collective action at multiple levels. From consumers to corporations, redefining the fashion industry to become more sustainable and ethical can be achieved.

One of the most effective ways to combat fast fashion's ramifications is by supporting local or sustainable fashion initiatives. Ethical brands like Sezane, Patagonia, Reformation, Eileen, Fisher, and People Tree prioritize eco-friendly materials, fair labor practices, and innovative production methods that minimize waste and pollution. Still, they tend to cost more because of the quality of the material, craftsmanship, and fair compensation for the workers. Investing in these alternatives not only reduces demand for exploitative practices but also encourages the industry to adopt more environmentally friendly production practices.

However, it cannot be denied that the governmental labor laws or lack thereof and corporate accountability are to blame as well. Stronger labor laws, stricter environmental regulations, and corporate transparency can force major fashion brands to take responsibility for their ecological footprint. Policies, such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws, which hold companies accountable for the life cycle of their products may significantly reduce waste, reduce the public spending on waste management, and reduce exploitation of workers.

Finally, on the individual level, we as consumers can make a difference by adopting sustainable practices when shopping. Buying clothing from second-hand stores, clothing swaps, and investing in high-quality, long-lasting garments can contribute to the issue of overconsumption. Additionally, being mindful when shopping by choosing need over impulse greatly helps reduce waste, and sends a message to clothing companies that quality matters.

The transition away from fast fashion does not need to be an all-or-nothing approach. We can move to a future where fashion is both sustainable and accessible by balancing ethical concerns with practical solutions. Change begins with awareness, but action is what creates a lasting impact.

#### Conclusion

Fast fashion, while providing affordable and trendy clothing to the masses, comes at a significant cost to the environment, labor force, and consumer culture. The industry's reliance on

cheap materials, exploitative labor practices, and unsustainable production methods has created irrevocable pollution, dangerous working environments, and overconsumption, not only damaging the planet, but perpetuating poverty and inequality in marginalized communities worldwide.

Addressing these issues is urgent, but it requires collective action from governments, corporations, and consumers. We have the power to create lasting impact; our purchasing power is what keeps fast fashion companies in business. Together, we can rebuild a fashion industry that is ethical, fair, and environmentally responsible.

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# Research Paper Honorable Mention

# The Transcendentalist Movement Bryana Rodriguez

Modern addiction has become a widespread issue for all generations as it has progressed into advanced technology. Several factors have contributed to the enchantment of dependency behaviors, some crucial inputs being digital features such as algorithms, social platforms, and artificial intelligence. The Transcendentalist movement revolved around diverse concepts such as nonconformity, individual intuition, and semi-religious ideologies towards nature. Although the movement can be simplified as a literary movement, ideologies and historical figures were crucial factors that formalized the way of thinking during this era. Technology contains features that are addictive, and the best solution to fight against the issue is through the implementation of Transcendentalist ideas in the modern day.

Companies have implemented features that make technology addictive to hook users to ensure that they are attached to the mechanisms. Dopamine release enhances the user's experience through reward paths or a sense of closure. Criticism on the negative impact of technology is often disregarded, as it is viewed as "the rapid progress of information" (Taşgın and Taşgın). This concept of being chronically online correlates with users excessively spending most of their time online. It is important to keep in mind the aspect of how it is "an escape mechanism from negative emotions and further repetitive behavioral patterns that affect individuals (Taşgın and Taşgın). In essence, the usage of technol-

ogy, if not used in moderation, links to attention deficiency, drawbacks that negatively impact psychological well-being, and makes it easier for people to restrict opportunities to strengthen their capabilities.

Algorithms input generated information that is based on the individual's preferences or outlooks. This can be an issue as it further narrows the narrative and restricts people from having a moderate outlook. The further a person aligns themselves with a single perspective, the more polarization grows, and the more conformity does, too. Referencing back to the concept of algorithms, the vast amount of information processed in short periods of time has a negative impact on users' attention spans. The content feed that a person receives can shape certain behaviors or perceptions.

The rise of online relationships and influences are the human factors that install a charismatic hook towards avoiding social interactions. Digital connections make it easier to communicate or raise awareness on issues. Consequences such as isolation and emotional intelligence decrease to devices lacking face-to-face communication. Influencers can be unhealthy and unrealistic sources to get away from isolation. Social media in the long run establishes a false sense of closure to a person's complex emotions, isolation, or need for entertainment.

AI also limits independence. Its usage contributes to the decline of improving skills and discipline to complete tasks. Additionally, it makes it harder to analyze what information is factual. One scenario would involve a person scrolling through a social platform and coming across a deep fake. Overall, the system helps users find people who create content that can be misleading while artificial intelligence limits critical thinking.

Over the years, the development of perceptions was formed through revolutions of opposition or support of diverse concepts. Looking specifically at the Transcendentalist movement and modern day, there are similar and different ideologies from influential figures. However, it is important to analyze how they can either raise or decline awareness of individualism, personal values, and going beyond what society expects.

Social influencers have become the new philosophers

and writers for the 21st century through their posts and uploads. It has become the norm to present information through discussion of biased opinions, which may include observing a situation with favorable outcomes towards their own beliefs. This makes it harder to distinguish what information is factual and easier to spread untruthful information.

Several notable authors that played a vital role in the movement's development include Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. During this era, authors were the most relevant individuals who were recognized for their works. As the philological ideas that the authors aimed to convey through the different literary devices. Authors from this time illustrated beliefs of the movement through both their lifestyles and writing and accepted individuality rather than traditional outlooks.

Most ideologies against conformity revolve around the opposition of the strict conformity of religion and government. They believed in finding the purpose of things through nature and spiritual understanding. Truthfully, if the original Transcendentalists were alive today, they would view technology as a form of conformity that has developed into an addiction. They believed in enhancing expression of creativity, critical thinking, and advocating for natural connections.

The Transcendentalist movement still supports rebellious mindsets towards government and the innovation of society's standards. Emerson believed in "nature's role as symbolic revealer" in finding spirituality (Prud'homme). Although people from this time may have had semi-religious beliefs towards nature, it was of the idea that it was a creative method to understand who you are. The main institutions and social standards that transcendentalists opposed were government affairs and religious beliefs, as they were viewed to be individual sources of corruption. Individual intuition was a topic that many people from this movement favored, which empathized with exploring individualism. Logic was viewed as a limitation, and with your guts, you were following your perception of what it meant. To further elaborate, it was believed that experiencing and comprehending were vital for individuals to be self-reliant.

Establishing a connection with nature can be demonstrat-

ed through several practices to rehabilitate from digital devices. Nature is not just some visual scenario but rather seen as the idea of finding yourself. Friesner states, "Honor the way that nature works," which supports the idea that nature is complex and plays a role in our lives (pg.14). For instance, the individual who was a great contribution to the movement, Henry David Thoreau was not only a person who wrote about the ideas that they supported, but also a person who practiced such beliefs and lived on Ralph Waldo Emerson's land. Emersons work, entitled "Nature," also elaborates on finding spirituality and individualism through spending time in the natural environment. Some examples of practices can range from camping or going out on nature sightings. The principles of nature could be used to detoxify from platforms or social connections.

Overall, as technology advances with digital features that develop compulsive tendencies for users only led to the increase of drawbacks and conflicts. As previously mentioned, the reward paths that make the users continue the repetitive patterns are digital features which release the user's dopamine. Behavioral issues began to appear, and the conflict arises after extended amounts. The consequences can range from the decline of mental health, social interaction, and unhands critical thinking. Authors and social influencers are both similar and different in how ideologies are spread and what values are significant. Rather than being chronically online the best way of resolving the issue is using Transcendentalist ideas.

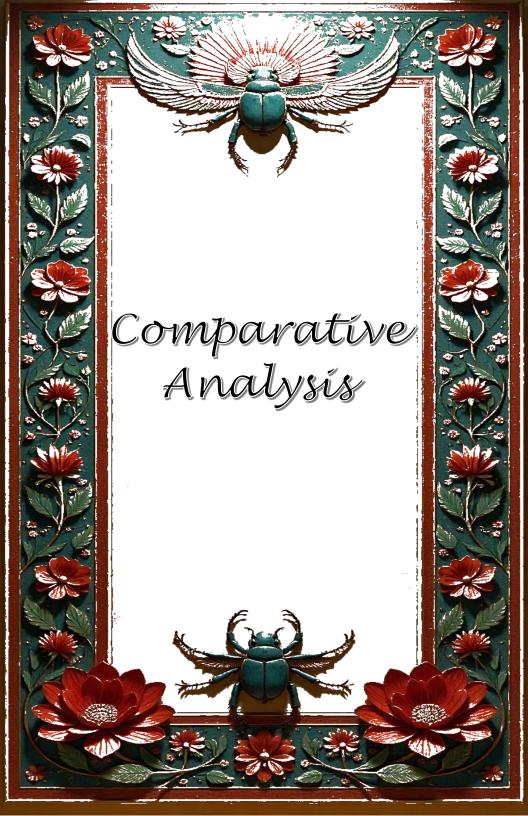
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# Comparative Analysis First Place

Oppression or Necessity: Jackson and the Relocation of the Native People

### Rowan Rodriguez

You shakenly stumble, pushing through the harsh freezing breeze that shoves you back with each quivering step that you desperately attempt to make, as if you are nothing more than a weightless figure. No matter how much strength is strived, your effortless steps venture you to what appears and feels like nowhere. Tired and weak, you now start to ponder, "How even did you end up on this punishment of an endless, deathly 900-mile journey?" A journey that would be forever known as the trail of tears. Before this drastic and historical action was enforced, the American government was going through a bewildering time in concerns to the neighboring native people who lived there. However, what factors contributed to cause such a damaging recorded tale? What feelings were raised within the native communities as a response to these governing events? And finally, what specifically was different regarding the Cherokee and what precisely were the challenges Jackson had to face to make his Indian Removal Act successfully proceed?

In the beginning, before tensions aggressively arose and before the trail of tears was even a miniscule or glimmer of an idea; the desperate desire for western expansion started to become more rampantly prevalent within the American people. However, the land that was strongly yearned for by the country's citizens was already rightfully claimed by the native tribes within the territory. This aggressive rival feeling of needed ownership,

wealth, growth, and population created disdainful tensions between the two differing groups. As a solution, a new policy was constructed and introduced based on the lines and theories of assimilating the nearby indigenous people. But who precisely were they? With introduction, these specific people would be titled as the "Five Civilized Tribes," while also properly being known as the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and the Seminole. They were all formally instructed to adopt cultural aspects along with religious beliefs of the white Eruopean-Christian America that the natives were now co-existing in. This was in attempt to simultaneously socialize amongst the stated population to make life between both cultures "livable" and overall "doable." Nonetheless, with the strong dedication and determination the five indigenous groups displayed, only one appeared to be considered "successful" in the terms of assimilation the American people pictured. The Cherokee were documented as being the tribe to prosper in this policy. For example, the Cherokee adapted in converting to Christianity, learning the Americans' ways of farming, building, and even living in new homes (sometimes considerably large estates), and dressing in more socially European traditional clothing. Other, much larger instances, were when the Cherokee created their own newspaper, pursued a higher more systematic education, created a formal government, along with a constitution, and even developed a written language founded and designed by a Cherokee man named Sequovah. Even then, with this newly founded, transformative life these five tribes were now stabilized in through the assimilation policy, the rising, growing want for western expansion was still prevalent. This along with American's still not positively accepting of the native people, demanded Andrew Jackson to curate a secondary, more invasive plan.

Relocation of the native people was a bustling topic among discussion in the government during this period, and the president, Andrew Jackson, was in no way left out of such discussions. This allowed political pressures to flourish, and a heavy decision needed to be finalized. Even with the almost complete convergence in multiple native people, a relocation act

was set in stone and was announced to congress. The first major step to relocate American Indians came when Congress passed, and President Andrew Jackson signed, the Indian Removal Act of May 28, 1830" (President Andrew Jackson's Message to Congress 'On Indian Removal Act' 1). This act would later become rewarding to Jackson, but in contrast was devastating to the thousands of individuals it hazardously affected. Jackson's idea was difficult to achieve at the start, exceptionally when it came to the Cherokee. The Cherokee, along with the other four tribes, were hesitant in the action of relocating. They used their governing and legal arguments to help their case not to leave their land in Georgia. This combined with the fact that the Cherokee were incredibly triumphant in assimilating caused a particular challenge in their removal to Jackson. The Indian Removal Act entailed the complete relocation of about 50,000 eastern Indians to what is current Oklahoma and did eventually happen. This voyage sadly caused roughly 4,000 - 16,000 Cherokee people to die, dwindling the native population as a complete whole to miniscule numbers. This decision made by Jackson is viewed by several as an act of oppression and I personally agree.

For instance, in the video, Trail of Tears: The Real West, depictions of the horrid actions taken to remove the natives were shown. The video also included several historic, personal writings from native people who described the time as well. If I were Jackson, I honestly would not know what to do. He was put under immense pressure, by the frustrated American people to find a conclusion to the aspiration for expansion. Still, his decision can be viewed as a form of oppression. The tribes assimilated to the best of their abilities, they were historically on this territory first and learned to coexist with the new people who surrounded them, and even if they full-heartly agreed to relocate. The amount of land that was given to the indigenous tribes were in no way substantial to hold that large quantity of individuals. In the end though, I personally believe my moral values would have outweighed the tense political climate during that time and I would not have contributed to such a destructive resolve. A resolve which still negatively affects numerous people today.

Native communities continue to face the drastic consequences of the Indian Removal Act in modern times. In the article, "Native American Communities..." examples and studies are provided to depict the current issues that cause native people to struggle in comparison to other ethnic groups across the U.S. Copious amounts of indigenous people lack the access to obtain proper education, jobs, and homes. They continue to have issues with credit and financial building, specifically to homes and businesses. They were significantly hit and hurt by the coronavirus pandemic, and much more. All these physical negativities are not the only shortcomings with the native communities. Mental health concerns, due to historical removal, are still prevalent today, in the form of addiction and alcoholism. These native tribes are supposed to be involved and protected as a marginalized group. However, the government does not do their part and instead kicks them aside. The Cherokee's initial reaction to the Indian Removal Act was most certainly justified in hesitance and reluctance, especially with the current concerns they fight today. Leaving a legacy of systemic inequalities, continuing land disputes, high distrust in the United States government, and truly little cultural and proper historic recognition for native tribes.

The passage is finally done, and you have reached your destination, the destination which you now call home. Those freezing winters, blazing, scorching summers, and tireless, sleepless nights made in order to get to this location are no match for what the future has in store for you and your people, but desperately you try to make it worthwhile. The trail of tears was never something you wished to travel upon, but the American government was struggling with a crisis in relation to distribution of land and who it shall be claimed to, but what factors contributed to this event to occur? What emotions and feelings towards this time came to be in the neighboring native tribes, as a response to these decisions? And what challenges tackled President Andrew Jackson to continue his plan to remove the native people? All of these have been answered, but whether it was due to oppressive, cruel powers and motivations, or it be caused by necessary demands

that were bound to happen is all up to you. Ask yourself, what do you think it was?

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# Comparative Analysis Second Place

### Literature in Film

### Rian Ishikawa

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, the movie directed by Burr Steers, was made in 2016, and was based in 1700-1800 England. The movie, an unlikely combination of Jane Austin's Pride and Prejudice and zombies, tells of a lingering gloom and of a rising population of zombies standing in the way of two rugged hearts falling in love and living in forever happiness with each other. Pride and Prejudice and Zombies encompasses many themes, symbols, and relevant issues.

Director Steers uses three themes: survival, love and sacrifice, and sacrifice and redemption to help tell his story. The theme of survival is foremost as the two heroines, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darci, both trained warriors against zombies, lead a battle to keep England, and the rest of the world, safe from a zombie apocalypse. In order to survive, they unknowingly need to lean on each other in his and her unrealized quest for life and love.

Love and sacrifice are demonstrated as both Elizabeth (Lizzy) and Mr. Darci battle their way through hundreds of zombies. They sacrifice themselves as proud warriors of their country, as well as proud individuals by facing their vulnerabilities of the feelings of love that they have for each other. They had to let down their guards and open their hearts to fully fall in love.

Both Lizzy and Mr. Darci exemplified sacrifice and redemption. After so much of themselves had been sacrificed, they both had a moment of redemption to each other. For Darci, it was the realization of his feelings for Elizabeth right before he proposed to her, and for Elizabeth, when she admitted her love for Darci on the bridge when she thought that he had died.

The director employs the symbols of grey skies, zombies, and a wedding to help paint a descriptive view of the movie. Throughout the movie, gray skies are a repetitive symbol of gloom. It was rare that daylight or anything bright was seen because it was mostly cloudy, indoors, or nighttime. The director chose this setting to not only inform, but also to keep the viewer aware that death was always near and that the characters need to be constantly vigil.

While not terrifying in this movie, Steers uses zombies as a divide between Elizabeth's and Darci's love for one another. At times, it proved as a relief to battle the zombies instead of admitting their feelings for each other. As the fight to contain the zombies nears its end, so does the gap of closeness with each other as they are finally forced to face their true feelings.

With the zombies confined in London, Lizzy and Darci come face-to-face with their love for one another. Along side her sister, Jane and Jane's fiancé, the main characters have a wedding outdoors under a brightly lit, sunny sky. The director chose sunshine to symbolize a new beginning of, not only a journey of love, but also a path for a new life to come for everyone.

The story's relevancy to me through this movie mirrors my strong family ties and his use of zombies helps me stay empathetic. Strong family ties are important in my life just as they are in the characters' lives. Both of Elizabeth's parents care for her and her sisters very much but in quite different ways. Their father is more concerned with his daughters being able to fight and find love on their own. On the other hand, their mother is constantly trying to marry off her daughters because they need a man, in her eyes, to survive and be happy. While these are not exactly what my father and mother are concerned about for me, they are very involved, and have always been involved, in my life and always want me to be happy. They still try their hardest to make me happy even in my current restrictive circumstances.

On the flip side, I find that I am one of the zombies. In-

stead of being locked behind the walls of a city, I am held within the confines of the Bureau of Prisons, at the Federal Correctional Center in Beaumont, Texas. As with the zombies, I too wish to be freed and to find my happiness outside of these walls. As the zombies yearn to feed on humans outside of the walls of confinement, I also feel the need to feed on the ubiquitous freedoms of society instead of starving in the constraints of this prison. I miss and crave the experiences of the free world.

In the movie, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Director Steers takes viewers on a colorful journey through 1700's England in a battle of endurance and survival to find love. His masterful utilization of themes, symbols, and relevancy breathes life into this heroic love story.

# Comparative Analysis Third Place

### Literature in Film

## Jose Plata

The Adam Project is an American science-fiction action-comedy movie that came out in 2022, but it is based in a futuristic 2050 society. It blends science fiction and comedy yet focuses on a time traveling pilot who teams up with his younger self. Many themes, symbols, and relevant issues present themselves throughout this film.

Personal growth, an obvious theme, is emphasized as Adam's story demonstrates the significance of confronting one's past to build a better future. His encounter with his younger self displays his reflection on his choices. He regrets the way he treated his mother so harshly. It also shows how we are progressively different throughout our lives as our experiences help shape who we become. This story nudges us to analyze our previous ways of thinking to develop a deeper understanding of who we want to become.

Friendship, another theme, is vital for Adam as it helps him realize that his relationships and interactions help him navigate life's challenges. This helps him come to the concept that he is never alone in his journeys. Resiliency can be heightened by these interactions, which are needed to improve oneself. He discovers the value of support systems, something he never realized before. When his wife showed up to help him, he saw what an important relationship really means.

Appreciation of the present emphasizes the importance of living in the moment and valuing time spent with loved ones.

He remembers what he had forgotten about his dad and what he missed out on in his childhood. Adam travels through literal and metaphorical dimensions, which enabled him to confront his past and future.

His quest represents the chance to alter events in his past, but it also highlights the significance of cherishing one's current experiences. This is what we all wish we could do. Time travel serves as a central symbol, representing the cycles of life and the opportunity for second chances. The ability to revisit the past allows Adam to confront his regrets and heal past wounds, which encompasses the power of confronting one's past to shape a better future. Time travel also mirrors the complexities of family relationships and personal growth.

Another theme is the importance of family relationships. Adam's bond with his father, his younger self, and Laura, displays the enduring power of family love and support. It is shown through the family dynamic to explore forgiveness, acceptance, and the lasting impact of parental figures on their children's lives. As a fractured family, personal growth and reconciliation are shown to be needed.

Sacrifice is symbolized by the lengths that individuals will go to protect their loved ones and secure a better future. The main character goes back in time and risks his life to better the future for all of the people he cares about. The characters make significant sacrifices, both big and small, to achieve their goals. This willingness to sacrifice presents the importance of selflessness in the face of overwhelming odds. The ultimate sacrifice made by Adams's father highlights the lasting impact of even seemingly small acts of generosity.

This film is relevant to me as it makes me take a close look at my past, present, and consider my future. This reflection is not just due to illegal activities but also due to my last moments with my loved ones. I think about if I handled the people and the situations correctly or what I could've done better. The profound insight from this movie proves even pure entertainment can be didactic. It teaches us that learning is ubiquitous, with no limits. Society can learn from the screening to help shape who they are or what to be. We all should learn to reflect on our past

so as not to repeat our mistakes.

The Adam Project is much more than an amusing movie, it is a learning experience. By analyzing the movie in detail, we can each learn about personal growth, true friendship, and appreciation of the present. The movie uses the symbols of family bonds, time travel, and sacrifice that will have an everlasting impact on my and others' lives.

## Comparative Analysis Honorable Mention

# Film as a Piece of Literature Charles Spezzia

Joker: Folie a Deux, the film starring Joaquin Phoenix and Lady Gaga, was made in 2024, and is a psychological thriller about Arthur Fleck, a struggling, failed comedian. The film explores the concept of shared psychosis with Harleen Quinzel, a fellow patient at Arkham Asylum and the love of Arthur's life. They develop a toxic and codependent relationship. Together, they embark on a descent into madness, fueled by their shared delusions and criminal activities. Joker: Folie a Deux has several themes, symbols, and relevant issues, making the film a dark and twisted exploration of mental illness, love, and the blurred lines between reality and fantasy.

Joker: Folie a Deux delves deeply into the human psyche, exploring complex themes of mental illness, societal oppression, and the blurred lines between reality and fantasy. The film offers a dark and disturbing exploration of these issues, inviting viewers to confront the darker aspects of human nature. By examining the characters of Arthur Fleck and Harleen Quinzel, the film sheds light on the destructive power of isolation, the impact of trauma, and the consequences of unchecked madness.

The film explores the complexities of mental illness and how society often neglects and stigmatizes those who struggle with such issues. Arthur's journey highlights the devastating consequences of untreated mental health conditions.

The film explores the toxic and co-dependent relationship between Arthur Fleck and Harleen Quinzel. Their love is intertwined with madness, and they both feed off each other's darkness. The film criticizes the government's blatant indifference to the plight of its citizens, especially those who are marginalized and vulnerable. Arthur's lack of access to adequate health care and social services is a direct result of systemic failures.

Arthur is constantly ridiculed, bullied, and ostracized by society. His physical appearance, mental illness, and social awkwardness make him an easy target for discrimination and violence. *Joker: Folie a Deux*\_employs a rich tapestry of symbols to enhance its narrative and themes. Using color, music, and specific objects, the film visually conveys Arthur Fleck's psychological state and the social decay that surrounds him. These symbols contribute to the overall unsettling atmosphere of the film, amplifying its impact on the viewer.

The film heavily utilizes color symbolism, particularly blue, yellow, and red. Blue often represents sadness and isolation, along with Arthur's mental state. Yellow represents chaos, madness, and Arthur's persona of Joker. Meanwhile, red represents love, passion, and anger—all of which usually result in violence.

Music and dance serve as powerful symbols of expression and release for Arthur and Harleen Quinzel. They use these art forms to channel their emotions, rebel against societal norms, and connect with each other. The persona of Joker itself is a symbol of chaos, anarchy, and the dark side of humanity. It represents the destructive potential that can arise from societal neglect and mental illness.

Joker: Folie a Deux\_will always be relevant due to its exploration of ubiquitous themes and its reflection of contemporary social issues. The film sheds light on the importance of mental health awareness and the devasting consequences of untreated mental illness. It encourages empathy and understanding for those who struggle with mental health challenges.

The film's portrayal of society plagued by inequality, injustice, and social isolation resonates with contemporary issues. It highlights the impact of these factors on individual well-being

and societal stability.

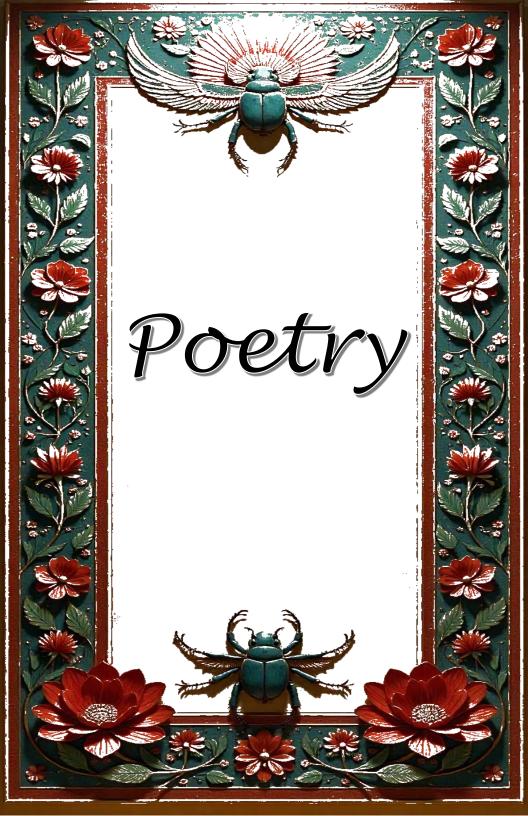
The film also challenges traditional notions of heroism and villainy, blurring the lines between good and evil. It becomes a didactic film for viewers to consider the complex factors that can drive individuals to commit acts of violence and destruction, such as the January 6-2021 insurrection at the United States Capital Building in Washington, D.C.

Aside from the film's societal relevance, *Joker: Folie a Deux* is relevant to me for several reasons. The most significant reason is the portrayal of being overlooked or unheard. Arthur does everything he is told to do but is not accepted or listened to. Being from a marginalized group, I have experienced dealing with government entities for decades. Doctors and police did not know what we're talking about and they do not care to try to understand. People who are different are usually sidelined in societies.

Ultimately, the film culminates with Arthur's psychological defeat. He concedes to the government argument that Joker and Arthur are one in the same. The pivotal moment causes him to lose everything—the court case, his freedom, and the love of his life, Harleen Quinzel. Arthur could no longer be the symbol the outcasts of society wanted him to be. This is exactly what the real government does: it beats us down until we are quiet and quit.

## Photography—Honorable Mention Lance Resch





### Poetry Fírst Place

### Texas Sunsets Allen Dholasaniya

From dusk comes a sweltering shade of golden hues, then on into endless, fiery blues. The Texas plains embrace the night, beneath a canvas of pure delight.

Sunset falls, stars emerge, calm with heady, platonic numb fills the heavens.

The heart of Texas is bowed to will in these instances, when time stands still.

Every sunset tells a brand-new tale, a work of art in every viewpoint. The land and sky share so much; such beauty is, indeed, incomparable, beyond all measure.

### Poetry Second Place

### The Old House Camila Alvarez

There is this old house.

Unkempt, filthy, abandoned, as if in possession of dirty, ugly, secrets.

The wind sways the house,

it creaks as if one strong gust would knock it down into the earth. The dense overgrown lawn littered by those who have had the opportunity to come across it.

Bundles of unforgiving weeds infesting, killing any beautiful thing that possibly could have been,

with no sympathy or regard for the flowers trying to bloom and flourish in the harsh environment.

Steppingstones leading to the entrance that once shimmered and glistened in the sunlight,

now are dull and tarnished with moss and algae inhibiting the cracks and fissures.

The once white, clean picket fence that once stood so tall and proud,

now dirty and unclean as it barely stands its ground, the wood rotting and decomposing as the days pass.

The rusted swing set whines and cries with the breeze, showing there once was childhood there.

No one knows if anyone lives there anymore.

No one cares for the story of this seemingly old house.

### Poetry Thírd Place

### Sonnet of Song Karli Mendoza

The beat and words come together in song,
It creates the best kind of love story.
A lifeline when lots of things start going wrong,
Make it good to keep in inventory.
The feeling of heartbreak expressed truly,
With rhythm and drums to keep it in disguise.
A way to hear about a true beauty,
Or another new way to realize,
That people are not always as they seem.
It's like an escape from reality,
When the day hasn't been the best to me,
And while listening I feel rather free.
One of the only things that lets me sleep.

One of the only things to make me weep.

### Curse of Being the Eldest Zulemi Ochoa

I am the Eldest

I am the Eldest Daughter

I set the Example

I set the Standards

I am their "Ideal Girl"

But the truth is

I am not perfect

Beneath my success

There are Cracks

Cracks that grow larger over time

Cracks that will take a long time to heal

Cracks that make me question

-"Is this worth it?"

Cracks that I must learn to Hide

I have the Curse of being the Eldest

### This Secret Stays With Me Stephen Gaitan

There are things I want to say, With the thought of me not waking up the next day But I stay silent.

I stay silent with the fear of being neglected, But... but, but what there is nothing, The only thing holding me back from me is MYSELF.

Losing friends who won't accept you for who you are, Are those real friends? Family who denies you for what you like, Is that even real family?

What happen to the,
"I'll always be your friend no matter what."
What happen to the,
"You'll never stop being family."

#### WHAT HAPPEN TO THAT!?

Hiding this secret.
A secret I want to express,
A secret I want to get off my chest.
But I won't.
There are friends that would change if they knew,

Family too. Friends and family, I'm not ready to let go, But sooner or later they'll know...

But for now, this secret stays with me.

### Junior Year Shahmir Khuwaja

Junior year is a time of hardship
With many ups and downs
It feels like I'm on a starship
AP Chemistry and Physics causes frowns
I decided to take them both in one trip

My life has been incredibly stressful

I am drowned in regret and sorrow

I tend to be very forgetful

And this is a year that has made me scared for tomorrow

Even though it is really hard

I will fight through it with my best

I think the stress will leave me scarred

But after I'm done I'll consider myself blessed

### To the Love of My Life Trentin Richardson

We fell in love before we knew, The weight of the world, what it could do. Young hearts burning, wild and free, But not prepared for looming destiny.

The years have passed, the memories stay, Of laughter shared, of brighter day. Your smile, a light I cannot erase, Your love, a warmth I still embrace.

Yet pain was there, it left its mark, In words upspoken, in nights so dark. I failed you then, I see it now, And to that hurt, I humbly bow.

I'm sorry for the times I caused your pain, For storms I brought, for tears that came. I was reckless, blind to what I had, A love so pure, yet I made it sad.

But even now, though paths divide, You live in my heart, my soul's guide. The good we shared outweighs the rest, In my life, you'll always be the best.

If the stars will align once more.

And life leads us back to there before, Know my love for you will never stray, Forever yours, come what may.

Until then, I miss you dearly, my friend. With that, ends the letter I'll never send.

## Stages: The Full Circle Rian Ishikawa

From the moment of your birth, I immediately knew your worth. This beautiful baby girl, Without a hair to twirl.

You became a young lady, You were no longer a baby. You started playing sports, Of all kinds of sorts.

When you became a teen,
You burst onto the scene.
Through soccer, cheer, and softball,
You conquered an unsurmountable wall.

Now you are in college,
Getting your fill of medical knowledge.
About to be an OB/GYN,
To bring another birth in.

This poem is dedicated to my precious daughter.

### A Poem from a Broken Heart Myxtlee Rodriguez

I want you to let me see you again.

There is still something that pulls me in close.

Even if you aren't now what you were then,

I can't help but see you in every rose.

Worst thing that I ever did was lose you.

Maybe though it was right to let you go.

The one thing I know that is very true,

Is I'll be here until our next hello.

I know we will come running back for more.

I pray for things to always stay the same.

Do not forget what we were from before,

Because our love was more than just a game.

Love your every perfect imperfection.

For you to want me is my only intention.

## Whispers of Time Mubin Sumar

Beneath the sky so vast and wide,

The winds of time and dreams collide.

Each moment whispers, soft and true,

A fleeting chance to start anew.

The rivers hum, the mountains sing,
Of lives and hopes the seasons bring.
A fleeting spark, a gentle light,
Guides our souls through day and night.

### Release Me Johnny Wickware

Release me and let me be. I have a life and a good family. I made a mistake and I've done my share of time. My sentence was too excessive for my little crime.

Release me so I can be productive again, but keep me if what I done was a sin. Release me so I can watch my grandkids grow, and teach them not to follow the same road.

Release me because this isn't a place for a man, because I have devised a new plan.

Let me fly again and regain my pride. This time I'll walk and read just my stride.

Release a fallen soldier, unchain my heart and take the boulder from my shoulder. I deserve a chance I deserve to be a new, so I can tell my story in hopes to reach a few.

Release me, I would release you.

### The Earth's River Bryana Rodriguez

When the city meets the river's end

All that is visible is a disregarded yet remarkable source of life.

The children spread the phrase river at the end of a city.

The mind is filled with water, but the air is filled with dirt.

Clarity is seen, but corruption is temptation.

Old and new turn blind as greed fills your eyes.

Human desire is a hunger that forms into overconsumption and exploitation.

But nature will push back; beware, wilderness is an unexpected force.

but the people never seem to understand that a demand cannot be forced upon nature unless they want to disappear along with Earth's rebellion In the end will they comprehend before the last tree falls? or will the children beg the rivers for their people's sins? Some will see it as the divine will, not nature's rebellion. Actions to satisfy temptation do not recognize that the ground and home will fall for false riches.

### All to Touch the Sun Ashanti Edwards

She was a seedling placed in the soil to bloom

Water and nutrients she would consume

Her goal was to touch the sun

Little did she know if she got to close it would burn

She is left shriveled up

And uprooted from what she thought was home

No one there for her she was all alone

Left there to figure out how to blossom on her own

No family and no place to call home

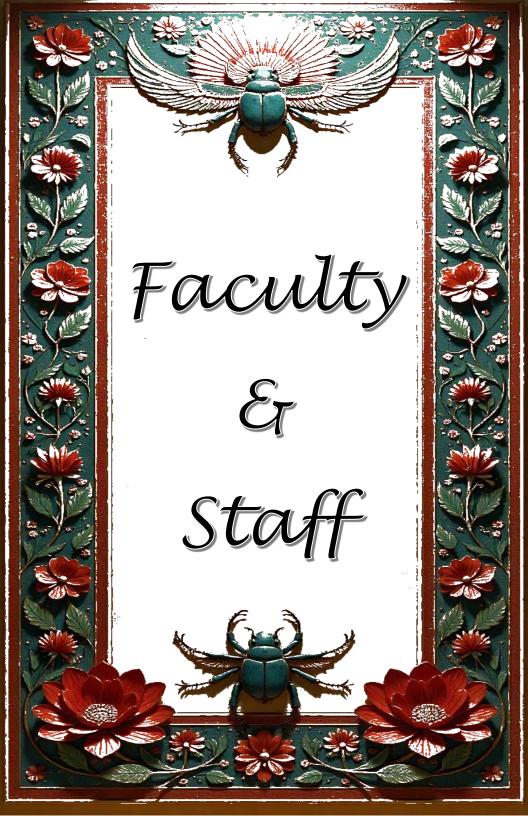
But she had the goal of growing tall and vibrant

She found a new home as the rain poured down

Starting a new dream in a new town

### Wild Field Aidan Fryoux

Like the petals of a flower reflecting light in a wild field Your skin shines from your beauty Your eyes sparkle like the thousands of blades of grass As the sun's rays hit the morning dew Like an eagle glides throughout the morning sky You glide with elegance as you walk Your hair flowing so beautifully Like the trees on the edge of a field in the morning winds My ears fill with your elegant and beautiful voice Like the sounds of birds singing Singing and playing in the morning light As your voice dance through the air Into my ears and down to my heart That beautiful sound melts my heart Like the rays of the morning sun melting an icicle On a cold winter morning As that icicle melts it drips water onto the land below Like how loving you drips joy, love, And happiness into my everyday life





### Gone in a Jiffy Vianna Posadas

Cast-iron skillet sizzles as the grease heats up. Liquified cornbread mixture meets grill master's quarters.

Combread hardens.
The need to stay
warm catches up to her.
Clean edges crack
under pressure.

Golden edges become crunchy, brown crisps. Burnt bits and piecesdiscarded-flicked off cold, greedy fingers.

Cornbread crumblesbut not before her dinner time debut: Dry sense of humor, a sweet aftertaste.

Side dish steals the show.





### Wildflower in the Abyss Caitlin James-Mastronardi

The sky between us holds

Primordial truths about the stars

And why they burn without reason.

Forgetting to breathe

Sends them falling to our feet,

As your little fingers trace the

Promises of eternity

Dear daughter, the trees still die in

Autumnal applause of humans

Wishing to live forever-

But you are the dawn,

A wildflower bursting across the abyss

From the amaranth ashes of memory,

To the empyrean dust carried by angels-

You bloom in the cinders of yesterday's fire,

Laughing in the face of time.

The sun watches you gently, rising like a promise, setting like a prayer,

I consider how much life you will live,

As I kiss the edge of the sky between us-

The most exquisite form of denial.





#### Garden Chaos Theory

#### Christina Wilbur-Cammack

I decided to start a garden during lockdown. Those seed catalogs make it look so easy.

My garden plan? An elegant kitchen garden as seen in the pages of magazines. Perfection on graph paper. The reality? Pure bedlam.

Something devoured half the seedlings overnight - Slugs? Birds? A mystery.

I planted lettuce here, or thought I did. Five cucumber seeds in a spot meant for one—survival of the fittest - may the best cucumber sprout and thrive! The husband says he likes cucumbers so we shall have cucumbers!

My tomatoes rebel against their fancy cages, sprawling with wild abandon. Six varieties planted with care—which is which now? Your guess rivals mine.

Hundreds of zinnias everywhere - a wild explosion of color that brings unbridled joy. Thirty basil plants, though I barely use it in cooking. But the jalapeños—oh, they're thriving.

I promise myself: just soil from the garden center. Yet return, invariably, three hundred dollars lighter, arms full of flowers, seeds, and mysterious worm tea. My garden resembles a toddler's art project.

But there's magic in this chaos. That moment when weeds part to reveal perfect peppers or a darkly purple eggplant that materialized, it seems, overnight.

Mornings in the garden are moments of beautiful solitude and peace.

There's something sacred about early mornings here. The hush of daybreak, my cats—Henry, Pepper, Morse, and Pretzel— weaving through the explosion of flowers and vegetables, blooms brightening the day of passing dog-walkers.

Coffee warming my hands, still in pajamas, watering this beautiful

mess in golden morning light. Just me, the plants, and birdsong. No emails. No meetings. No rush.

My flowers turn their faces to the sun, and so do I. Everything smells alive.

Perhaps gardening is embracing the beautiful chaos.

Dirt under fingernails, coffee in hand, the smell of honeysuckle drifting on the breeze. I have no idea what I'm doing. And I've never been happier.





Adriane Champagne

# Caddy Compson's Story: A Look into Faulkner's Creation of 'Abjected' Female Characters

# Chelsey Galloway

Writing women into a literary tradition that has historically been dominated by the male perspective is a difficult task and one that has recently been taken up by scholars today. One of the aims of this essay is to take a feminist approach to examining the works from Southern American author William Faulkner, who lived and wrote in a time when women were denied social status and privilege. Reading Faulkner's fiction from a feminine perspective yields new insight into the implications of female character representation showing their 'abjected' significance in literature. Furthermore, a closer examination of Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* reveals how Faulkner creates a narrative around this central female character whose voice and perspective is absent in the telling of her own story.

William Faulkner was born and died in Mississippi, and his novels were composed in the early nineteen-hundreds. Consequently, Faulkner's Southern identity is reflected throughout his works, and his Mississippi heritage is especially apparent in his novels which take place in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County. Southern ideology of the time privileged white males, and Faulkner lived in a society which refused to recognize women as active subjects or agents. Women were marginalized and excluded from public life forcing them into the private, domestic realm of servitude to their husbands and children. In her article "Who Was the Woman?': Feminine Space and the Shaping of Identity in *The Sound and the Fury*," Te Ma discusses issues surrounding the Southern Lady and questions "in a society dominated by men, how can women understand who they are and create their selves?" (40). Her concern raises a follow up question: if women

could not understand or create themselves, then how could Faulkner accurately understand and reflect a female character? Perhaps this notion can provide some insight as to why Faulkner creates these abject female characters who lack a true voice of their own; he simply does not have any grounds from which to speak from a female perspective due to his culture which does not allow women to speak for themselves.

Despite his Southern upbringing, Faulkner does seem to acknowledge the significant roles that women play in society by structuring his novels around these central female characters. Even though he does not often offer the perspectives of his female characters. Faulkner does often place women at the center of his stories. In doing so, Faulkner creates these complex characters who are both 'abjected' and predominant at the same time. Perhaps the greatest example of such a complicated creature is Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. In his own introductions to the novel, Faulkner explicitly places Caddy as his primary inspiration for creating the story despite the fact that he does not provide a firsthand look into her character's thoughts. He explains that the story was created around the image of a "doomed little girl" with muddy drawers climbing a pear tree, an image which he describes as "perhaps the only thing in literature which would ever move me very much" (251). In his article "Faulkner, Childhood, and the Making of *The Sound and the* Fury," David Minter refers to the novel as "the gradual evocation of Caddy" (380) claiming that it was Faulkner's love and devotion to Caddy that pushed the story. Minter discusses the image of Caddy's muddy drawers as she climbs the tree as symbolic of her moving above and away from her brothers.

Also in his introductions to *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner remarks on his creative process behind the writing of this novel explaining how he began writing a story about a little girl without realizing that she represented the sister that he never had growing up with just three brothers and the daughter that he would inevitably lose as she grew up. So it seems appropriate, then, that he tells Caddy's story through the eyes of her three brothers because this is the only way that he would be able to express his own understanding of such a female character. Faulkner

is a man who lived in a time when women were not afforded the same social status as their male counterparts, and he grew up with only brothers from which he was able to draw the different perspectives of the Compson brothers; but because of his situation he would not have been able to provide an accurate insight into the mind of a young girl, such as Caddy. Rather than giving his readers a male interpretation of a female's perspective, Faulkner creates this story of a girl as she is understood through the eyes of those male characters closest to her. In this way, Faulkner is able to give his readers the best illustration of his central female character, Caddy, without risking any of her integrity by trying to speak on her behalf.

The Sound and the Fury is structured into four sections and does not contain traditional character development or plot; the first three sections are narrated by each of the three Compson brothers, and the last section is given from a third-person, omniscient narrator. Faulknerian scholar Olga W. Vickery explains that each section is a "gradual clarification of events" (29), and those events are centered around the actions of Caddy Compson and the effects her actions had on her brothers. Vickery goes on to say that "Caddy, at any rate, never existed in the novel except in the minds and memories of those whom she affected" (46).

Caddy's character is only known through the perspectives of other characters, namely her brothers. Ma explains that "Caddy's life is largely controlled by the other family members, who contribute to the definition of her identity" (45). In her transitions from a curious young girl in the first sections to a defeated adult woman in the last sections, Caddy shifts from being the character who everyone talks about to the one who cannot be mentioned in the Compson household. Ma goes on to demonstrate how throughout the development of Caddy's character she takes on multiple female roles as a daughter, mother, sister, and lover. But these identities are socially constructed for her by the other characters in the story. In other words, Caddy exists in the story only in the ways in which other people experience her. Her character identity is placed on her by others, but her character attributes may be read in her actions.

Although her story is told by her brothers rather than

from her own perspective, Caddy's actions are the central events throughout the novel which unites each of the four sections. In her article "The Beautiful One': Caddy Compson as Heroine of The Sound and the Fury," Catherine B. Baum argues that the novel is in fact Caddy's story because her life is the "unifying force in the novel" (38). Caddy functions in the novel as a means by which each of her brothers may reveal their own characters as much as they function to reveal some aspect of Caddy's character, and it becomes the reader's job to "piece together information and derive...a true picture of Caddy" (Baum 38). In this sense, each section of the novel serves to further the telling of Caddy's story because she is the central concern and unifying aspect of her brothers' lives, and as such the story can be read as a chronological representation of Caddy's development: Benjy's section represents her childhood; Quentin's section represents her adolescent loss of innocence; Jason's section represents her adulthood; and the last section represents life after Caddy and the fate of the Compson family.

By using a stream of consciousness style for the story, Faulkner provides three different and at times conflicting narrative voices for each of the Compson brothers, but there is one common element connecting their varying experiences—Caddy. Benjy and Quentin are both obsessed with Caddy and are devastated by her actions. Jason does not share the same adoration of his sister as his brothers do, but he is still obsessed with her actions and equally affected by her choices. Vickery explains how in this sense "communication is impossible when Caddy who is central to all three means something different to each" (30). For Beniv. Caddy is a maternal figure of love and care, and he becomes increasingly uncomfortable and unstable as she grows older and changes from a child to a young lady. For Quentin, she is the source of desire and love, and he is devastated when she grows into adulthood losing her innocence and leaving the family. And for Jason, Caddy represents loss because she is the reason that he is not given his inheritance or his potential employment, and he lives a vengeful life taking out his frustration with Caddy on her daughter, Miss Quentin. In each of the brother's sections Faulkner repeats some of the same scenes involving Caddy from the

mindsets of each of her brothers. The details of these events are sporadically yet gradually given to the reader from the three narrators, and by the fourth section we are given an unbiased view of the effects Caddy's life had on the Compson family, thus completing the image of her character in the story.

Baum explains how one of the main characteristics of Caddy is her selfless love for others. For example, Caddy cares for Benjy in ways that the other characters do not. Quentin and Mr. Compson acknowledge Benjy but are indifferent to his needs; Mrs. Compson and Jason outright reject Benjy; and Dilsey cares for Benjy but does not provide the same compassion that Caddy does for him. Another example of her selfless love can be seen in her actions involving her daughter, which may seem selfish on the surface because she abandons Miss Quentin in infancy. But the reality is that Caddy has given up so much in order to ensure that her daughter has a good life. Caddy gives up her independence through her marriage to Herbert in order to try and secure a better life for Miss Quentin. When her marriage fails, Caddy gives up her desire to be with her daughter and her family so that Miss Quentin might live a life free from the ridicule of her mother's shamed reputation. So again we see Caddy's character as defined by the way her choices and actions affect those around her.

In this sense, Baum argues that the story is actually Caddy's tragedy in that she loses all of her independence and courage throughout the course of the novel. When she was young, Caddy was curious and brave, as in when she was the only one who dared to climb the tree and thus fully accepts the facts of life and death by facing the reality of Damuddy's funeral. Her tragedy is that she loses these qualities as the novel unfolds, and her loss is in part due to her unselfish love of others placing their needs above her own. Baum explains that the external contributors to her demise are the lack of guidance from her father, the coldness from her mother, and the vengefulness from Jason (38). As a result, Caddy is forced to seek love outside of her family, as in when she gives up her innocence to Dalton Ames or marries Herbert Head in order to preserve her own life and that of her daughter. Furthermore, Baum argues that Caddy's marriage to

Herbert and subsequent relinquish of her independence is "one of her most selfless acts" (42). Caddy's decision to send Miss Quentin back to Jefferson might be read as a selfish act because she is avoiding her maternal duty to the child, but her decision was the best possible option for Miss Quentin to have a full life. And in the end Caddy's selfless love led to her own demise because when she is later depicted alongside the Nazi it becomes clear that she has finally lost her ultimate and last remaining element of herself—her love. Thus Caddy's "destruction is complete" (Baum 44), and her fate is the novel's tragedy.

The Sound and the Fury can be read as Caddy's story in the same way that As I Lay Dying can be read as Addie's story. Caddy is never the active speaking agent in the telling of her story, yet her actions are central to connecting the four sections of the novel; each of her brothers depict the same situations involving Caddy but from their own interpretations of those events. Similarly, Addie Bundren's life and death are the central focus of As I Lay Dying and unify the story as a whole even though we are only afforded one brief insight into her own perspective in the novel; after all, Addie is the one who lay dying. The narrative views of Caddy and Addie are filtered through the views of other characters who describe their dispositions and actions, and those actions are primarily understood as effects in that the reader is only aware of how these women affected those around them instead of knowing their reasons behind their actions.

Dilsey's character similarly fits into this category with Caddy and Addie in that she is another constant and unifying element in the Compson's lives. Dilsey is in the background of each of the Compson brothers' stories, and she is the central focus of the final section of the novel. But again the reader is not given her perspective as a narrator in the story. So much like Caddy is the heart of the novel, Dilsey can be read as the backbone to the story and the one who endures after the Compson family has been dilapidated. Faulkner's choice to establish such an intricate means of character development, rather than plainly putting their own thoughts and actions at the forefront, creates a certain intrigue into the significance and meaning behind these complex creatures.

In her article "Demeter as the Letter 'D': Naming Women in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lav Dving, Margaret Boe Birns makes some interesting connections among Faulkner's various female characters in her discussion about his choice of names and their resonant sounds. At the beginning of *The Sound* and the Fury, Benjy's confusion introduces the reader to the name caddy when he interprets the golfers' calling for their caddies to mean his sister. Birns explains that the name Candace was not actually a common name in Mississippi at the time but that Faulkner chose to name his doomed darling Caddy for personal reasons. She also explains how the names Caddy and Damuddy are trochaic with their stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one. Birns argues that Faulkner's specific collection of female characters including Caddy, Damuddy, Dilsey, Addie, and Dewey Dell represent one community ruled by the letter 'D' which she refers to as the "matriarchate of Yoknapatawpha County" (534). Each of these women are also connected in their abstract representations in his works because the reader is offered little to no insight into their own perspectives or voices.

This matriarchal community, according to Birns, is headed by Damuddy and then by Caddy, who are both referred to by their nicknames rather than their birth names like other female characters, such as Mrs. Caroline Compson. There is significance in the fact that Caddy's first letter is 'C' after her mother, and yet the rest of her name resembles that of her grandmother, Damuddy. Ultimately, Birns lays out an intriguing formula connecting the names of these matriarchate women which moves as follows:

```
"Damuddy
muddy drawers
(C)a ddy
A ddie
(A dele)
D ewey Dell
D ilsey
D uckshaped woman" (536)
```

From here Birns makes the argument that these particular female

characters are "imbedded within the synchronicity of sound that links certain women in these novels into a secret sorority" (538). And from this assumption it can be argued that these are precisely those 'abjected' female characters which Faulkner tends to create, at least in contract to his more one-dimensional female characters such as Mrs. Compson or Cora Tull. It is clear from Faulkner's representation of these women, not only in their actions and limited thoughts as demonstrated throughout his works but also in their very names, that he intentionally created these complex feminine characters to serve paramount purposes as unifying units in his novels.

One could argue that Faulkner's lack of female perspective in his novels is misogynistic and degrading to women, but one could also argue that this is actually Faulkner's way of promoting feminism because he tries to represent these women without attempting to speak for them. That is, Faulkner's 'abjected' female characters are actually the central forces in his novels, and by not speaking for them—by not giving them an active voice—he is preserving their independence from the biased male perspective. By placing women like Caddy and Addie at the heart of his novels despite their lack of an adequate narrative voice, Faulkner is making a statement about the significance of women in society and how actions speak louder than words or thoughts because the reader knows these women through the effects of their actions as depicted by others. It is not that Faulkner is privileging the male perspective, but rather that he is speaking from the only position that he could know with any certainty from his own experience as a Southern man.

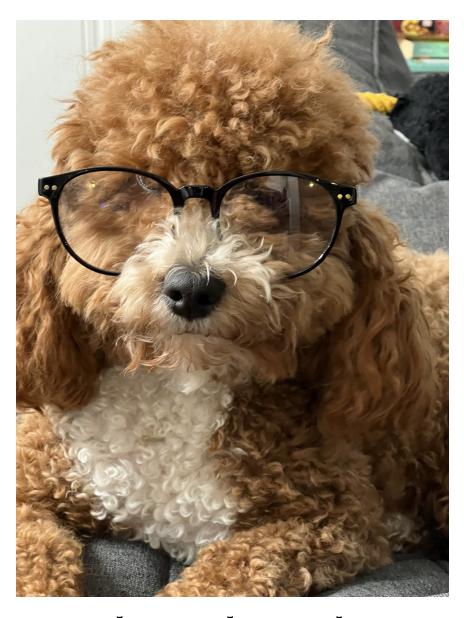
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# **Statement of Editorial Policy**

The editorial staff would like to thank all of the students who submitted work for consideration to EXPRESSIONS 2025. Unfortunately, not every entry can be published. In order to insure fair and impartial judging and publication selection, a copy of each submission without the author or artist's name is sent to the judges. The judges at no time see the copy which identifies the individual.

We are proud of the entries published in this issue and appreciate the support of all students, faculty, and staff who contributed to and enjoy the magazine.

As the editor, I will make changes to reflect correct grammar and usage to enhance each entry and the magazine as well.

Caitlin James-Mastronardi, Editor in Chief

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