

The very best of the
L I N C O L N L A N D **review**

2009 - 2021



L I N C O L N L A N D **review**

*A collection of visual
and written work
by students of
Lincoln Land
Community College*

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Submission Information

We are looking for high quality writing, digital media, and fine art submissions from students of Lincoln Land Community College for next year's edition of the *Lincoln Land Review*. We accept work year round.

Instructors or students may submit students' best artwork, fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, academic nonfiction (properly formatted, cited, and scrupulously proofread) via the *Lincoln Land Review* submission link on the LLCC Press webpage: www.llcc.edu/llcc-press. For each work that is submitted, be sure to also fill out and give permission to publish on the Microsoft Form. Editors reserve the right to make corrections or slight changes in written works accepted. Preference is given to essays, stories, research papers, etc. that are under 20 pages long. Please contact one of the editors at the review email address, LincolnLandReview@llcc.edu, if you have questions.

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Editors' Note

In 2009, Professors Deborah Brothers, John Paul Jaramillo, Alison Stachera, Eric Stachera, and Thom Whalen founded *Lincoln Land Review* as a journal for the best of LLCC student artwork and writing, both academic and creative.

Thirteen years.

In that time, the *Review* has been published yearly through department name changes, administrative changes, editorial personnel changes, three US presidents, and a global pandemic that's changed our world forever.

Thirteen is often gawky, long-legged, awkward. Thirteen is a little sweaty and unsure of itself. Thirteen looks out at those who are in charge and asks why. Thirteen is often considered unlucky.

We're privately calling this "Best of the Best" 2022 retrospective our Lucky Thirteen.

We're lucky to have had the support of our college administrators, staff, and fellow faculty for still believing in and backing the *Lincoln Land Review*. We're lucky to have a departmental dean (Dr. Joel Dykstra) who not only cheers us along but suggests a pathway for growth.

We're lucky to have such talented students, past and present, who continue to be resilient and dedicated to creativity and critical thinking.

And we're lucky to have you, our readers, who understand that education and art save lives by pointing out our societal problems and offering solutions and solace, building empathy and understanding. Thank you for supporting the *Lincoln Land Review*. We have exciting changes planned for upcoming issues and department coursework. Look for updates, information, and submission forms at our webpage, www.llcc.edu/llcc-press.

Please enjoy our special retrospective issue, "The Best of the Best," which features the work of students past who won awards for academic writing, creative nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and artwork in several mediums.

Thirteen years.

Thirteen looks ahead, changed, but still moving forward.

Laura Anderson
Deborah Brothers
Eric Stachera

Faculty Editors

Laura Anderson, Professor of Art
Deborah Brothers, Professor of English
Eric Stachera, Professor of English

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LUIS ANDRADE

He Played with Dolls

2021 Best of Nonfiction Narrative Winner

"I'll give you a real reason to cry!" is what my uncles would say when I showed any sign of fear after they bullied me for being too effeminate. No matter how scared I was or how much something hurt, according to all the Hispanic males in my family, if you cry, you're a girl—and god forbid any boy to be called a girl. In middle school, Alex Gonzales and his buddies made sure that I was familiar with the taste of dry California dirt and the feeling of hot asphalt ripping the flesh off my knees and the palms of my hands. "You like butt-sex, you like butt-sex!" was a song written and sung by Alex that I swore would make Casey Kasem's top 40 since it was the song on everyone's lips.

At that age, I believed that living in constant fear and being bullied was just a part of being gay. If you couldn't hide being gay, you had to learn how to survive with it. I often wondered if maybe there was something about me they were afraid of. Something that made them feel they had to show me how much stronger and more powerful they were. I'd love to say that it all got better when I would finally make it home, but it didn't.

Home should be a place free of fear, a sanctuary for a child. Emotionally, that wasn't always the case for me. Hiding in a closet or in a shed was where I found my safe places. I'd hide and write poetry. Writing scripts for plays and acting them out with my sister's Barbies was a daily ritual. Creativity and imagination were the only ways I knew how to escape real life. It was the only thing that kept me from taking my own.

"You're playing with dolls again! What are you? A fag?" was one of the famous lines my mother would yell when she would find me on one of my imagination retreats.

The abuse went on into my 20s. When I was 18, I got a scholarship from a famous voice teacher in Los Angeles. "What are you giving him or doing to him in return?" was my mother's reaction when I told her because, you know, it couldn't have had anything to do with the fact that I have an amazing voice.

Social science teaches us that fear is a feeling that is triggered by the perception of danger, whether it's real or imagined. Most of us fear the unknown or things we can't understand, making us bullies ourselves—at times. When in danger, our subconscious instincts kick into fight or flight mode to protect



Alone, by Norbert Eder

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ourselves, loved ones, or things we hold dear, such as values and beliefs. The child bullies chose to fight a danger that posed an imagined threat to them, unlike the real physical threat and the danger they actually acted out toward me. My mother knew nothing about gay people aside from the stereotypes she had learned at church and in communities of people who weren't cultured or educated. I never thought my mother would disown me or stop talking to me for coming out. I was afraid; however, I would hurt her or break her heart. At the age of 23, when I finally told her, her response surprised me.

"I know," she said.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew? It would have made it easier. I would have confirmed sooner," I asked, confused.

"I was afraid you would say yes."

"Are you ok with it?" I asked fearfully.

"Of course! You're my son. I love you," her voice broke.

"But you called me names and said horrible things to me. Why?" I could barely talk now. My emotions started to run wild. I was choked up, nervous and scared, but most of all, confused.

"I thought I could scare it out of you," she said. "I didn't know what else to do. I'm sorry."

A few years later, while living in the sunny state of Florida, I got up the courage to quit my job and move to New York City. I had never been to NYC before. In 2009, just three years after moving, the recession had finally caught up to me. The store I was managing had closed, and I had a lot of time on my hands, which I spent mostly on free walks through Central Park. Free. Very important at the time. That spring, while walking my dog Addy through the park, I noticed someone passing out flyers. It was common for people to advertise free art or theater events, so I went over and asked for one.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Broadway Impact is hosting a Marriage Equality rally downtown on Saturday. You should come!"

"I've never been to one. I don't think I even wanna get married."

"Well, that's why you should come to see what other people have to say. Maybe you'll change your mind. Some of the cast of Sex and The City will be there!"

"Well," I chuckled, "in that case, I'm totally there!"

When I got home, I researched Broadway Impact, "the first and only grassroots organization to mobilize the nationwide theater communities in support of marriage equality," and I found information on an opposition rally that was happening just a few hours before. I decided I would take my camera and attend that one as well.

When I arrived at the opposition rally, I could feel the fear in the pit of my stomach. At the entrance, I was greeted by a woman wearing a white robe raising

a Bible in her hand. At that moment, for whatever reason, I looked into her sunglasses, reached into my pocket, and pulled out a rainbow pin I had gotten at a Pride rally the year before. She noticed it and frowned. She was getting angry. I placed it on my chest next to a Human Rights Campaign sticker and walked toward her. I could hear my heart pounding. When I tried to pass her to get in, she was the first but not the last to spit in my face. As I walked through the crowds, people chanted, "Gay sex is a sin. Repent!" and "Don't pervert marriage!" Signs read Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, while Leviticus 20:13: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood upon them" painted the fronts of canvases.

Slowly moving through the crowds, I felt an all too familiar feeling. Here I was again—a 13-year-old boy being pushed and shoved, spat on, and smacked with what had been a notebook in middle school but was now a Bible. This is where my fight or flight instinct would normally have kicked in, but there was no library or bathroom stall I could run to, nor did I want there to be. There was no joke I could tell to keep me safe, and yet it didn't matter. I could fight and hit back, or I could flee and run, but I didn't want to. I kept moving through the crowds, taking pictures, taking the abuse, listening to the hate, wondering—why don't you just get to know me? I'm just like you. I don't pose a threat to you or your beliefs. There's no need for hate. There's no need for suffering.

I kept pushing through, and minutes seemed like an eternity as my vision blurred from what must have been a mixture of spit and tears covering my eyes. The bruises on my arms, forming from all of the physical violence that was inflicted on me by angry people, took their toll. Before I was ready to give up, I was grabbed by a couple on the sidelines opposing the opposition rally.

"What are you doing?!" the woman asked with a look of concern in her eyes and an "are you crazy?!" tone in her voice.

"I don't know," I responded, feeling relieved it was over.

My attendance at the rally lasted for about 30 minutes but felt like a lifetime. The nice couple offered to get me a cab to take me home, but this day wasn't over for me. I invited them to go to the Broadway Impact rally with me, and they did. I'm sure they were just keeping an eye on me to make sure I was fine. When we arrived, the streets seemed as if they were painted by the rainbow. Signs of love and togetherness covered the New York skyline from the ground.





People were singing and joining hands. The fear and anxiety I had felt only moments before had gone. All around me now were beautiful human beings with faces full of hope and love, the total opposite from the opposition rally attendees whose faces were filled with hate and anger, filled with fear.

After that emotional journey, I jumped on the subway and went home to my Central Park North sublet. I ordered a pizza, poured a glass of two-day-old Trader Joe's wine, and turned on the TV. After a couple of unsuccessful channel surfing rounds, I finally gave up clicking and stopped at Star Wars. As I dozed off into a wine-induced coma, I heard Yoda say, "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering." I now understood.

In our current social climate, we have been driven by people in power through media and social outlets to the highest level of polarization this country has seen since the Civil War, and fear is the Death Star. Children are becoming murderers; parents are being killed by those placed in roles to protect us. After attending that opposition rally, not only did I revisit the fear I felt my whole life, but instead of allowing the power of my subconscious to choose fight or flight as a response or defense, I chose neither. What I chose was much harder. I chose courage to sit with the fear and break the cycle of fear, anger, hate, and suffering.

That summer, I became a public speaker for Marriage Equality. I was terrified to speak at my first rally in Queens, New York. When it was my turn to speak, I took my first step toward the podium, and my mother, who was standing off to the side with me, grabbed my hand and walked out as well. For the first time in a long time, I felt safe with her by my side. This bully, who was once motivated by fear, who showered me with anger and what sometimes felt like hatred and caused me suffering, was now motivated by hope because she wasn't afraid anymore. There we stood strong, fearless, and hopeful for change and we eventually won it. I'm now married to a wonderful man and have a strong family base. There have been ups and downs, but one thing is for sure. There is an abundance of love and very little fear here.

MACKENZIE CARNES

Sex and Feminism: The Lines between Objectification, Empowerment, and Pure Distraction

2015 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner

From a feminist standpoint, should the models in fashion magazines serve as role models for young women? Some say yes. For example, Camille Paglia is one of the many influential feminist theorists of the 20th century, and on the subject of the culture of sex and women in modern America she declares, "What happened is that my side won that war. The younger women of the nineties rose up and embraced this" (Patterson). Her side, as Paglia puts it, is the take that women should associate appearance as an avenue to success in their career: "Younger women," she says, "have no problem reconciling beauty with ambitions as a professional woman" (Patterson). Women who are of the empowerment persuasion call themselves sex positive feminists. Lately it seems that feminism has developed numerous extensions from the original schools of thought. A notable divide is between those who see sexualization as objectifying, and those who see it as empowering. This indecision is easily a reflection of the confusing standards put on women in society. For example, women are pressured to have sex, but dress modestly. There are many combinations of provocative dressing and promiscuous behavior—modest versus wild, promiscuous versus prudent—but there is only one combination that society, after everything, idealizes.

Before I even begin this argument, let me start by saying that I am, by this most basic definition, a sex positive feminist. But I am also not, because in a crude way I believe sex has only a small role in modern feminism. The place it has is combating the rampant objectification of women in the media and warding off the dehumanization that comes unnecessarily with almost all sexual television and music. Sex in feminism should serve as a reminder of the way the past was and how the future should not be. But sexual empowerment has been blown so far out of proportion in America that it is misunderstood by young women to mean that power does not come without sexiness. To sum it up, the overemphasis on sexuality as all-encompassing empowerment in American culture is a distraction from feminist goals that revolve around the mind and not the body. Though this is a problem around the world, the reasons from place to place vary. The statements made in this essay are all in regards to American and Western culture.

For most people sex is fun, it is love, and it is a connection, but it can also be acceptance, power, or any number of less noble motives. A study reported by Elaine Hatfield, Cherie Luckhurst, and Richard Rapson found that men are more likely to use sex as a tool for gaining social status and power (184). The same study also found that as time passes, motives for sex between men and women are becoming more alike (187). Feminist theory would suggest that this is in part due to the fact that women are being encouraged to adopt more dominant, status-boosting motives of having sex. Though it may not be the case in reality, in American culture sex is romanticized as validation of attractiveness, personality, even uniqueness. The ability to obtain sex is therefore seen as validation for the person as a whole and internalized in many people as a price tag that determines their social worth. Young adults on social media sites play a re-posting game where a list of various sex acts and drugs are presented alongside a dollar amount. The game player adds the value up of everything on the list they have done, and the resulting number is their “price,” which they then repost along with the list for others to take. It is safe to say most people see this as a victimless game of measuring life experience, but when put on paper it becomes a disturbing reflection of society.

Regardless of the implications behind the fact, it is true that sex leads to feelings of confidence and empowerment for many people (Hatfield, Luckhurst, and Rapson 184). Unfortunately, double standards are placed on women regarding sex. While women are valued based on their attractiveness and ability to land a date, they are also shamed if they flaunt or accentuate this attractiveness, then shamed to a higher degree if they partake in sexual activity without declaring a definite mate. While men are held to the same expectations of sexual activity, they are not subject to the same shame that women receive. Conor Kelly notes an important perspective on the double standards of sexual liberation:

As Freitas observes, female students have to walk a fine line between playing the social games of the hookup culture enough to maintain status while avoiding the “slut” label for participating too much...Unlike women, men in the hookup culture quickly learn that promiscuity on their part is either identified jokingly or for the sake of praise (42).

Most, if not all, feminists argue that sexual confidence is a good thing, and I do not dispute this. It is an idea that should be supported by all feminists: women should under no circumstances be ashamed of their sexual identity. My opinion begins to differ at the degree of importance put on sex as a source of esteem because other issues get lost in translation. Instead of women simply being unashamed sexual beings, women can become nothing more than sexual beings. By some, this dehumanization is unseen and misunderstood as feminism.

This is not to misrepresent the real position of sexual liberation for

women. Feminists who support sex as empowerment argue not that the literal act of sex is empowering, but that the act of *choosing* to have sex or to be sexy is empowering. The problem with that argument is choosing to have sex is such a basic human right that to acknowledge it as somehow special is giving it too much power over women. The right to choose is special because it has been denied to women in the past, but the act of having sex at a person’s own volition is not a skill. Glorifying sex as a power play is supporting the male-dominated view of sex when, really, sex in feminism should only be about equality in the realm of personal choice. Sexual discretion does not determine social value; to argue that sex is professional empowerment is to say that it does. The choice to have sex is focused on to such a degree by many well-intentioned people that it becomes part of the oppression.

There is so little encouragement for women’s pursuits in achieving success that is centered on the right things. Look at Barbie. Not many people might say that Barbie is the epitome of a role model for children. Nonetheless, Barbie and her competitive opponents are among the most popular toys for little girls. People might even argue that Barbie is independent. She has been everything from a nurse to a mermaid. She can be whatever she wants! But what would that be?

According to the lists under the careers section of Barbie’s media site run by Mattel, she has been a pediatrician five out of the twelve times she’s gone into medicine. She’s also been an athlete twelve times, six of which she went to the Olympics. Barbie tried her hand in performing arts fourteen times. Six of those times she was a singer or rock star. Finally, she has been a school teacher equally as much as a performer. She’s taught general studies six times, taught art twice, sign language and preschool once, and understandably, given her history with the Olympics, she’s coached athletics four times for a grand total of fourteen teaching jobs (*Barbie*). That means Barbie dedicated more time to glam and children than anything else. Out of the 52 career ventures listed, Barbie has worked with children 37% of the time and dedicated another 50% of her time to athletics and performance, whereas non-child oriented careers that mandate academic training took up only 13% of her time. Furthermore, Barbie taught fourteen times, but never once was she specified as a math, science, history, or English teacher; instead she was specified as a coach for different athletics. The problem is that Barbie’s education is emphasized a lot less than her value as a caregiver and a performer. Barbie is a great example of the minimization of education that is normalized for women from an early age.

Looking deeper into Barbie’s careers might paint her in a better light. As for high-education positions that are not veterinary, Barbie has been a presidential candidate five times, the executive of her own business four times, an astronaut three times, and a paleontologist twice. On the other hand, she has been a veterinarian seven times and worked with animals for a living four times on top of that. She has tried policing, firefighting, and life guarding all

only once, but to be fair, she's been in the military four times (*Barbie*). So as far as respectable miscellaneous careers, out of 32 ventures Barbie dedicated 34% of her time to animals, 28% of her time to politics and business, 22% to public service, and only 16% of her time to science. If nothing else, Barbie perpetuates the stereotype that women are indecisive, but I shouldn't joke about the most influential woman of the new world.

Of course, some might argue, Barbie is meant to be a glamorous doll! No one says she is supposed to be a role model for little girls to get out into the working world. She is just a tool for imagination and play time. And that argument is simply not true. Barbie was, in fact, meant to be a workforce model for girls. Gaby Wood, author of *Living Dolls: A Magical History Of The Quest For Mechanical Life*, points out Barbie was even designed by admirable working mother Ruth Handler in the 1950s (39). Furthermore she says, "[Handler] wanted girls to have a doll that they could aspire to be like, not aspire to look after" (38). It would be unfair to say that Barbie has no value as a role model for women. She really was revolutionary at the time of her invention. Wood chronicles that Handler said of Barbie, "[she] has always represented the fact that a woman has choices" (39). I would agree with that statement, but I caution not to let assertions like the one made by Handler get out of control. Yes, Barbie represents freedom of choice for women, but she does not really represent it well, in the same way that promiscuity in the media does not represent freedom of choice well.

The point of this is that there is very little encouragement for scholastic success for women in comparison to the encouragement for success in things that involve appearance and fame—aside from child and animal care, that is. As demonstrated by Barbie sales, girls want to be actresses, singers, and Olympic athletes—things they probably will never be. Of course, those careers do involve mental activity. Those are hard jobs which take a lot of work and dedication. But when little girls look at those professions all they see are luxurious, glamorous, beautiful women. And they are supposed to. Jobs like modeling and performing rely on making the profession look glamorous and easy because those jobs serve the purpose of selling things. Then those easily thin, skillfully thoughtless professionals are the role models for women as portrayed in television and magazines. Feminists who have a positive argument for sex as empowerment understand all that, and rarely do they argue this is an ideal world. Instead they say that since it is this way, we should try and take the shame out of sex for women and instead use it as the stepping stone to recognizing inner strength. On the way, they say, we should change the way women's bodies are expected to look.

In a study, Amy Muise, Edward Herold, and Melanie Gillis note that many women described their experience with erotic modeling for their own usage as empowering (139). Over all, the experience boosted their esteem as well as

their sexual confidence (137-138). Often times the women said it made them feel prettier in a world where they were constantly being made to feel they were less than desirable (141). It's great that women who have felt suppressed and un-pretty are able to empower themselves personally through sex; that is an aspect of sexual empowerment I agree with. But personal sexuality and professional success could be viewed as separate characteristics that sometimes come from the same place of strength but are not direct products of each other, or dependant on one another. To say, "If I can be sexy, I can be anything" is a grossly simplified and idealized view of modern feminism. This idea is a manufactured perversion of women's desire to break away from sexual constraints that is slowly, insidiously being sold to women as an end-all road to empowerment.

But for argument's sake, say that sex should be a source of career confidence for women, or that at the very least say there is nothing particularly wrong with those wires being crossed in American culture. How esteem boosting can commercialized sexual content be for women? Porn, for example, is cleverly dehumanizing at best and blatantly violent at worst. The scariest part is its merit as a legitimate form of sexual exposure for a lot of men, as Gail Dines acknowledges in an article for the *Overland Journal*. As an extension she says:

The same men who get off from women being brutalized and called cunts, sluts, and cum-dumpsters are the ones who go on to become politicians, cooperate executives, judges, media professionals, policy makers, and bankers. In other words, they become the economic and cultural elite that shape the material and ideological world that determines how women—and their children—will live (19).

There is an unbelievable amount of empirical evidence that images in the media shape our view of the world. That this fact is so widely dismissed as a myth is baffling, considering the fact that the correlation between violent television and violent behavior is almost as high as the correlation between cigarettes and lung cancer, according to Wayne Weiten in his *Psychology: Themes And Variations* text books (213). Similarly, several studies have shown a positive correlation between the attitudes of young adults about sex in relation to the media they watch. In a study conducted by Melinda Burgess and Sandra Burpo, it was found that after watching music videos where the singer was overly sexualized—almost completely nude washing a car—college students were more likely to blame the victim and sympathize with the perpetrator in a presented case of date rape than students who watched a music video with little to no sexual behavior (754-755). Another study conducted by LeeAnn Kahlor and Matthew Eastin found that students who watched television where rape was often portrayed and unrealistically decriminalized—in this case soap operas—

are more often shown to actually believe “rape myths” that involve victim blaming than students who watch television where rape is discussed but more realistically criminalized—in this case crime dramas (227-228). This goes to show that television and media intake does influence beliefs that extend outside the realm of the immediate subject matter, and that the presentation of the material provided makes a big difference in the results of the viewer’s ideas.

In the same way sexual media affects ideas about rape, it also affects ideas about body image. In the media, sexy, and therefore “empowered,” women are always thinner than average women. On top of that, they are as beautiful as can be on film with makeup and lighting, and more beautiful than can be in magazines with photo retouching. To argue that sex is empowerment is to argue that sex icons should be role models. The state of body standards in media isn’t likely to soon change, because capitalism in America has found its niche in selling to women by promoting a standard they cannot achieve. In the *Wilson Quarterly*, Sarah Courteau critiques the overwhelmingly female-targeted market of self-help books and magazines:

It’s easy for women to believe they need all the help they can get. We’re raised on *Cosmo* and *Seventeen*, both of which are chock-full of tips on how to pluck our eyebrows, choose a lipstick, or have better sex...The line between fighting for equal footing—that elusive sense of “empowerment” that we’re always supposed to be grasping for—and the conviction that we could always be doing more is fine, if it exists at all (58).

The very system of American culture feeds off of keeping women insecure. It’s proven in the fact that 70% of self-help consumers are women (Courteau 58). More research needs to be done on the cause of the conflicting evidence that sexualization for women is, indeed, empowering, and yet sexualized content seems to promote rape acceptance in students and negative body image in women. Obviously something about the commercially conveyed standard for women needs to change, but the inconsistency of the results may also have to do with the lack of education women receive about the need for the sexual liberation movement in the first place.

While they are being bludgeoned in recent years by the reminder that young women in America can have sex if they want to, women are hardly being taught about the ways they are oppressed. Of course they are going to misunderstand the fight for the right to choose when they haven’t been formally taught about the ways they are currently being pushed not to! S.M. Culver and P.L. Burge seem to agree, “Too often, women feel as though they are on the receiving end of an education designed for and by middle-class men” (614-615). Empowerment is seldom fostered with the educational system being the way it is. We have all of this propaganda for sexual liberation in pop culture,

yet at the same time we have almost no literature in school before college that describes the struggles of modern, post millennial women. This applies to many groups of oppressed individuals outside of women as well; there is a plethora of campaigning for change around things that no one will formally learn about before they reach college. Many women might feel like no matter what they do their complaints are being begrudgingly dismissed. If anything about that is going to change, something is going to have to change in the way people are taught before their twenties. Culver and Burge elaborate on this in an analysis of several feminist books: “Any reappraisal of our educational system and methods must take into account the experiences and situations of women” (613). In regards to text-book education they say, “We need to be aware and make others aware that meaning is constructed and that these constructions are affected by historical, personal, social, and cultural contexts” (615). The system of education we have now is often taught as if we are looking at history and literature through rose colored glasses. While these glasses do show the issues, they also color them and make it appear that the atrocities we have faced and committed, and still continue to face, are much less significant than the ends that were produced by these means. Education needs to be made as socially relevant as it claims to be in order for people to believe and see the need for social justice—a transformation that will treat equally those who are at a disadvantage currently, those whose history is colored pink.

As noted earlier, appearance and behavior critiquing is mainly aimed at women in commercial American culture. This leads many women to feel they need to exploit their sexual freedom as validation of worth that often extends to a shallow idea of professional confidence, which can then become a crutch. And it’s all done through the idea that there is just this fundamental difference between the male brain and the female brain that dismisses the responsibility of the oppressors, and puts the responsibility on biology. This separation allows women to be viewed as inherently different, to be paid less, educated differently, and to have their voices dismissed. In reality, gender behavior is taught. Women are not inherently inclined to want to wear mascara. They are naturally inclined to desire attractiveness because they are reproductive mammals, and they are taught that to be found attractive they must wear mascara. There are small—small being the keyword—differences in the female and male brains. But, in neurology, the strength of those differences is no more supported than the argument between nature and nurture is settled, yet America continues to rely upon the fallacy that men and women just are the way they are and should behave accordingly. I’m not judging anyone for being who they are. Embodying the perceived feminine or masculine archetype is fine for someone who wants to. The problem is deviation from this norm causes repercussions for both men and women. In a critique of feminist literature, *The Woman Question And Higher Education: Perspectives On Gender And Knowledge Production In America*—by Ann

May—Lois Joy sums up this same point about anatomy as a weapon: “Women’s biology has been used throughout American history to limit women’s access to higher education. [May’s book shows] claims that women have inferior intelligence have historical precedence” (148). To this day women’s biological rights are being infringed upon in the field of politics and health care. But focusing on sex is the wrong way to approach the problem.

What is suppressed is our mind through our bodies. The way to combat suppression through the body is to feed the mind that runs it. As I said, sex is a choice. It is natural. It is not shameful, but it is also not a weapon. Fighting oppression by arguing that the body is the most important part of feminism is doing nothing more than playing into the idea that the body is the most important part of women. I disagree with the motto of beating them by joining them when it comes to this issue. By playing along with this bodily focus, women are holding the system unaccountable for its flaws. The system, in this case, is the network of powerful men that dominate politics, television, and education. Until it is demanded that better education on women’s issues be introduced by schools at a satisfactory age, the dehumanizing state of women in the media will go unchallenged by generations to come. As a result, the quality of living for women, both financial and social, will continue to be inadequate.

Earlier I discussed an interview with Camille Paglia, a woman at the forefront of the sexual media advocates. In exactly one year since that interview, the influential icon herself has unintentionally revoked her previous stance on pop culture’s sex icons. She inadvertently admits that the sexualized portrayal of women has trickled down the line of mediocrity over the generations and finally begun to show its negative effects in recent years. She attempts to discuss the problem with recently sensationalized Miley Cyrus’s VMA performance being a simple lack of talent, rather than being crude or too provocative. But with excessive description redacted, she says this:

How could American pop have gotten this bad? Sex has been a crucial component of the entertainment industry since the seductive vamps of silent film and the bawdy big mamas of roadhouse blues...The Cyrus fiasco, however, is symptomatic of the still heavy influence of Madonna, who sprang to world fame in the 1980s with sophisticated videos that were...arguably among the best artworks of the decade...Madonna, a trained modern dancer, was originally inspired by work of tremendous quality...today’s aspiring singers, teathed on frenetically edited small-screen videos...are simply aping feeble imitations of Madonna at 10th remove. Pop is suffering from the same malady as the art world, which is stuck on the tired old rubric that shock automatically confers value. But those once powerful avant-

garde gestures have lost their relevance in our diffuse and technology-saturated era, when there is no longer an ossified high-culture establishment to rebel against (Paglia).

Paglia asserts that the heavy influence of not just Madonna, but all of her predecessors has bred a generation of talentless, sex-reliant female artists who attempt to achieve the same level of shock though liberation. Those very same artists will pose in magazines and act on television shows that adolescent girls watch and mould their world around. Yes, accidentally Camille Paglia admits that her once glorified culture of sex has produced something very inglorious in today’s youth.

The need to stop the suppression of women’s behavior and physical freedom is a pressing world-wide crisis. In America, the rights past feminists fought for are slowly being revoked. What’s most alarming about this is the way that women are being taught it is not a problem at all. Women’s sexuality has always been used to keep women in check. Now society uses a completely different packaging of the same weapon. Instead of chastity belts we have g-strings. Instead of pressure to be modest, we are pressured to be provocative. It’s the same thing. It’s all focusing on women as sex and bodies, rather than women as intellectual beings. In a bid to unlock the chastity belt we have become caged in a more deceptive trap that disguises the ball and chain as freedom. While it might be better than having no choice at all, it is not by any means the best we can get. In order to break the idea that our body is the most important thing about us we have to break the emphasis—not perpetuate it, and especially not ignore it. To break the cycle is not to pretend we have no breasts. It is not to ignore the past of suppression women have faced through their bodies. But it is to stand up and say that we will no longer entertain the idea sex is relevant at all, positively or negatively, to our value as human beings who deserve equal treatment, equal pay, and equal education.

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ANNA CRUMBAUGH

Just Black and White?

2020 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner

Do you think of stereotyping when you think of *Peanuts*? Probably that isn't the first thing that comes to mind. However, Charles Schulz did create a comic which spoke to this issue. It first appeared on June 8, 1970 in the funnies pages of newspapers across the nation. Next it was published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston in *You've Come a Long Way Charlie Brown*, and finally by Fawcett Crest in *It's All Your's Snoopy*. Incorporating a subtle reference to the troublemaker Tybalt from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Schulz pits Good ol' Charlie Brown against a self-assured accuser, and the result is a powerful visual. Through this short, black and white comic, Schulz uses even the simplest visual details to demonstrate the difference between the assumptions we make about people and the often-unpredictable reality.

Since *Peanuts* gained such a large and diverse audience, it is hard to determine who Schulz originally intended that audience to be. On one hand, Nicole Rudick of *The New Yorker* claims that "[Schulz] did not consider 'Peanuts' a children's comic," citing the unchildlike characters and Schulz's desire to deal with "hard truths." On the other hand, Bruce Handy of *The Atlantic* points out that, "it is kids who have been among his most avid readers." *Peanuts* as a whole can be assumed to target middle-class whites who read the newspaper since the majority of the characters seem pretty well off and only one, Franklin, is black. However, the blunt honesty of the *Peanuts* gang has overcome socioeconomic barriers so well that Jacob Murel in his "Review of *The Comics of Charles Schulz: The Good Grief of Modern Life*" commented, "Indeed, one question concerning *Peanuts*' success is how a strip so apparently white and middle-class—I daresay, bourgeois—can appeal to such a diverse array of readers." Because of the wide audience, Charles Schulz was able to include characters who might not have been in the same social circle and through this diversity, confront some of the stereotypes that encumber our society even today.

Though the actions and words of the *Peanuts* gang probably provide the most insight into their characters, Schulz also put great thought into the appearance of each character. The characters' clothes help to give readers a general idea of their backgrounds. Since each character wears their own trademark outfit, it is easy to overlook the importance of this. Although it is wrong and cruel to act on the assumptions we make about others based on the way they are dressed, people's clothing choices often reveal much about their personality and socioeconomic status. As a result, it is valuable to analyze the characters' clothing. Charlie Brown wears what looks like a polo, black shorts, and brown shoes. It is a nice outfit and generally fits in well with the kids he

hangs around with. On the other hand, when Charlie interacts with Thibault, his clothing is probably one of the factors which causes Thibault to treat him the way he does. Peppermint Patty's clothes stick out when she is hanging out with Charlie's crowd. The rest of the girls usually wear dresses and even if they don't, they wear pants and nice shoes. Peppermint Patty, on the other hand, perpetually wears athletic shorts and slides. She is a rough-around-the-edges tomboy, but one wonders if that is the only reason she doesn't have as nice clothes. Thibault's shirt is perpetually wrinkled just as his face perpetually carries a frown. His shirt lacks a collar. It's also interesting to note that earlier in the story Charlie Brown had to walk across town to give his baseball mitt to Peppermint Patty's team. Taking all this into account, there is a distinct possibility that Peppermint Patty and Thibault live on the wrong side of the tracks.

Another facet of the characters' appearance is the contrast of black and white which Schulz employs to cut through the outer trappings of his characters and delve into their true natures. Although avid fans of *Peanuts* are accustomed to Charlie Brown's wishy-washiness and Peppermint Patty's unrefined forcefulness, not everyone is so familiar with them. Schulz needs all his readers to instantly recognize and understand his characters, since so much of the strip's humor is based on who they are. In his designs, he ensures that certain attributes are visually apparent in his characters' respective images. Charlie Brown's big, round, blank head catches the reader's eye. It is not symbolic of stupidity, for often Charlie surprises the audience with his intelligence. Rather, the pervasive white of Charlie's appearance creates a lack of emphasis and imposingness, just as the character who carries it. Thin stripes, black shorts, chin-length hair, and freckles all darken Peppermint Patty's presentation, symbolizing her more commanding presence. Thibault is one of Schulz's minor characters. Very few of the readers know him, and he needs to emanate a strong persona to pull off the parts he does play. There is nothing wishy-washy about Thibault. His dark hair is not quietly slicked down into a normal haircut, but grabs the reader with its distinctive style. By dressing him in pants rather than shorts and wrinkling up his shirt, Schulz further darkens the image. Thibault is solid. He is not wishy-washy or unsure of himself, but confident enough to challenge others.

Even more than the design of each character, their body language illuminates the attitudes they entertain toward each other. The way Schulz groups his characters is vastly important. In the first two images, Thibault engages with Charlie, verbally attacking him. Meanwhile, Peppermint Patty stands passively by, and in the second scene disappears altogether. One begins to wonder why she makes no attempt to stop Thibault. Suddenly, in the third frame, she jumps back in yelling at Thibault. Although in one sense one could argue that she is now defending Charlie, her words do not fit that assessment.

Rather, Schulz brings her back simply to occupy Thibault so Charlie can be off in his own world for the last two frames. Schulz has to isolate Charlie by engaging Thibault with Peppermint Patty so that the reader takes time to properly observe this wishy-washy, round-headed kid. All attention must center on this middle-class less-than, as he becomes weak-kneed with the impact of someone even supposing, that he, Charlie Brown, would dare to think himself in any way better than another person.

The characters' actions and facial expressions clearly demonstrate their opinions about each other. Even without words someone could gain a general idea of what was happening to the characters. In the first scene, Peppermint Patty doesn't exactly have a facial expression but seems passively upset. Thibault is obviously angrily accusing or threatening Charlie Brown, who looks like he's a page or two behind. By scene two Charlie is more confused than ever. Peppermint Patty returns in scene three yelling at Thibault with her hands on her hips. He looks over his shoulder at her, surprised and questioning but still frowning. Charlie still has his hands on his chest with the gesture that cries, "Me? You sure you mean me?" His eyes are bulging and his mind is spinning. In the final scene, Peppermint Patty is still berating Thibault, but he has now turned to face her defiantly. Meanwhile, Charlie, with his eyes wide and hands still on his chest, looks about as surprised as if he had been punched in the chest. Charlie's expression is far from hurt though. He's grinning from ear to ear in the same crazy way he does when thinking the Little Red-haired Girl loves him. If the characters' expressions mean anything, Thibault's accusation didn't have the effect he intended.

What the characters say and leave unsaid reveals the truth about their opinions of themselves and others. As in most comic strips, the words explain and add humor to the pictures. Thibault's first accusation, "I know your kind!" cuts to the heart of the matter. He has already classified Charlie based on his clothes, the fact that Charlie lives across town, and possibly past experiences with others similar to him. Charlie Brown is clueless to this whole idea. "**My** kind?" he asks, wondering if Thibault means wishy-washy nobodies, the only group he considers himself a part of. The next words are priceless, "You come around here thinking you're better than us!" Anyone who has ever read *Peanuts* knows Charlie's been laughed in the face a few too many times to go around thinking he is better than anyone, and his disbelieving "**ME?**" is just there to make sure one gets the joke. At first glance Peppermint Patty's lines seem rather unimportant. She's just worried about Charlie, or "Chuck," getting his mitt back, but this creates some interesting implications about how she views Thibault's statement. One could argue that her remark "I'm ashamed of you!" to Thibault refers to his accusation against Charlie, but from the context it seems to refer to the withholding of the mitt. Why doesn't Patty comment on Thibault's assessment of Charlie Brown? Either she is too dense to understand the weight

of the charge, or she agrees with Thibault.

The most fascinating insight comes from Charlie's words. Far from fitting the conception Thibault holds about him, Charlie is accustomed to view everyone as better than himself. In fact, Thibault can hardly have chosen an accusation which is farther from the truth. Charlie's childishness undercuts the absurdity of Thibault's accusation and of his own reaction to it. His words in the last scene, "**Me?** Better than someone else? **Me?!?**" reveal just how surprised and elated he is that someone would even think that he thought he was better than them.

In an article for *ImageText*, Stephen J. Lind says, "Schulz's use of children is similar to a common literary technique that dulls the impact that any particularly heavy statement may hold." Schulz tackled plenty of issues over the years, from riots to commercialism. This specific comic makes the unjustness of stereotypes very relatable. Although we cannot necessarily stop ourselves from classifying others based on their clothes, skin color, and other outward presentation, it is important not to judge someone's beliefs or motivations without interacting with them on a deeper level. In Schulz's comic, Thibault's prejudice ends up encouraging Charlie Brown, but this is an exception. For just about any other character, those words would hurt.

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TIFFANY FENNER

The Exclusion of the Black Female Experience within Mainstream Feminism

2017 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner

Historically and up until the present day, feminism has engaged in exclusivity, the division of women, and the erasure of the unique hardships of minority women. Since the establishment of feminism, women belonging to minority groups have largely gone ignored, in favor of White women in the feminist movement. Yet Black women have maintained an important space within feminism, helping to achieve great accomplishments and evolve the movement. Nevertheless, mainstream feminism does not shed light on this. Looking back on history, America can unfortunately see what little regard White feminism has shown for Black issues; so much so, that Black women have triumphantly paved their own way in the fight for equality. Therefore, the Black female experience has, for years, faced exclusion from mainstream feminism, which puts more of a focus on White female experiences and issues. Modern-day feminists must look at the past invisibility of Black women within feminism and incorporate their struggles with both sexism and racism with feminism's fight for genuine and inclusive equality.

Mainstream feminism, throughout the years of its conception, has primarily managed to serve as a contradiction of itself. According to Stacey Floyd-Thomas, an author and Associate Professor of Ethics and Society, feminism in its purest form calls for "[L]iberation of women from sexist oppression. It opposes, therefore, any ideology, institution, philosophy, movement, or people seeking to discriminate against women" (Floyd-Thomas). Yet in spite of the general meaning behind the term feminism, Black women have exceedingly dealt with both discrimination and exclusion within the movement. This resulted in uneasy tensions between both White and Black feminists throughout the years.

Leah L. Strobel, a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Sheboygan, claims that since its conceptual birth during the mid-1800s and early 1900s, feminism has faced various problems with addressing race. Since its beginnings, Black women's issues have not been seen in the forefront of the women's movement. However, what has been noted shows the outright blatant discrimination toward Black women by White feminists during this time. One such instance occurred during the early movement, made up primarily of educated White women who wanted to acquire the right to vote. These women supported an "educated suffrage," which would create a literacy requirement on

voting (Strobel). This, by and large, disregarded Black women of the time who too supported the movement; however, due to the unlikelihood of receiving a proper education, this prevented Black women from having a visible place within the movement. This went on as intentional on the part of the White feminists of the time, as a result of long held prejudices against the Black race.

There are two well-known examples of this found within the history of feminism. The first involved one of the earliest figures in the fight for women's rights, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton, a White woman, who did not see it as right that the United States would give men of color the right to vote over White women. Stanton felt it "insulting" in "allowing ignorant Negroes and foreigners to make laws for her to obey" (Strobel). Therefore, she essentially demonstrated her perceived superiority, as living within the White race, as a reason that women (although only White and educated) should receive the right to vote. Stanton's words expressed her lack of concern for Black women's inclusion amidst the crusade to achieve equal voting rights. Her own prejudices prevented her from looking past the status of women of her own stature.

The second incident derived from a controversy that involved famous African American suffragist Ida B. Wells and the president of the Women's Temperance Christian Union (WTCU) Frances E. Willard. According to Thomas Dublin and Angela Scheuerer's book, *Why Did African-American Women Join the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1880 to 1900?*, Willard gave an interview in 1890 during which she accepted and defended the actions of White southerners in regards to lynching and the forced prevention against Black males from exercising their right to vote. In her interview, her words did indeed come across as sympathetic towards White southerners. She also held a belief that African Americans during the time, "[Multiply] like the lotus of Egypt," making them an inherent threat to the White southerners (Dublin and Scheuerer, Document 25). Willard's belief of the time continues to be felt within modern-day Feminism. Although White feminists consider themselves progressive, history has proven that long-held racist beliefs have profoundly contributed to the oppressive restraints they enforce upon Black women's involvement within feminism, that they themselves experience from a White male-dominated society.

Wells, also a well-known journalist of her time, publicly accused Willard of standing with southerners and their practices of lynching. In an article entitled "Mr. Moody and Miss Willard," Wells addressed a crucial issue and stood as one of the first to really speak on the divide within the women's movement. Lynching during this time stood as a contentious issue. Yet according to Wells, Willard contradicted her status as a leading abolitionist, Christian, and temperance leader; it was her belief that Willard made light of "condoning fraud, violence, murder, and burning" against African Americans by White southerners (Dublin and Scheuerer, Document 27). Along with other predominantly White

suffrage organizations during this time, Wells believed Willard did not speak out against these brutalities, out of fear of losing the support of White southern women (Dublin and Scheuerer, Document 30). Willard's insensitivity and immediate dismissal of the severity of her words no doubt foreshadowed the handling of race related issues that would follow within the women's movement for years to come. Black women like Wells faced criticism and the threat of ostracism for bringing their exclusion out into the open. This unfortunately left African American women ignored and their issues unsympathetically overlooked in favor of keeping the support of Southern White women. This exclusion caused Black women to not feel as though feminism amid their era was for them, virtually leaving Black women alone to fight their battles with oppression.

It has been argued that this belief was realized far earlier on in the movement by Black female feminists such as one by the name of Sojourner Truth. Truth addressed the often-ignored reality that Black women go unheard within the women's movement. Strobel writes, "[W]ith her proactive question 'ain't I a woman?' Truth affirmed that Black women who had worked all of their lives were just as much women, while also calling attention to the movement's erasure of Black womanhood" (Strobel). Strobel brings to light the idea that many Black women remained sorely aware of their lack of visibility within the movement, allowing Truth's words to ring true through the entirety of the first wave of feminism and well into the second.

As the second wave of feminism hit, the divide between Black and White women seeking liberation within a White male-dominated world became even more complicated. During this time, many of the perceptions that we as a generation currently hold of feminists emerged. For instance, one of these perceptions is the idea of how feminists are perceived: the stereotypical idea of the feminist. Yet it can be said that the movement itself has managed to skew the image of the feminist. Strobel suggests, "By not recognizing differences, the term woman within the dominating women's movement becomes coded as White and middle-class." It can be concluded that this notion led to a perpetuation during the 1960s through the 1970s that Black women needed to find other ways to fight against oppression, not only against an anti-Black government but White women within the women's movement as well.

In 1975, popular opinion pollster Louis Harris conducted a poll addressing support of upgrading women's status in society. Out of 1,579 adults polled across the country, 48% of women said they favored equal rights. However, of those 48%, only 50% of White women favored the equal rights amendment, whereas 65% of Black women expressed favorability of upgrading women's rights (Harris). This shows that the consciousness of the average Black woman throughout the 1960s and 1970s collectively expressed more support in obtaining equal rights for women than their White counterparts. Black female activists came out of this era, leading the conversations between race,

gender, and how they intersected to form the Black woman's experience for the generation. Interestingly, feminism during this time became heavily influenced by the civil rights movement; in spite of this, Black women often found themselves caught in the middle of the two. Feminism became seen as an endangerment to the unity of the African Americans' fight to end racist discrimination and oppression (Strobel). Black men and women had to stand united during this time; if not, the civil rights movement would not have been as effective. This most notably occurred during the rise of the Black Panther Party and the women who led the movement. Kathleen Cleaver, former Black Panther, explained that women within the Black Panthers didn't separate themselves from obtaining race-based rights for all African Americans. Essentially, standing united prevailed as a necessity within the community; this occurred in response to opposition from both the government and law enforcement. Although Black women remained aware of the patriarchal limitations within their community, they felt that "aligning" with feminism would ultimately hurt their goal to end racist oppression as a community (Cleaver). This tension has only grown even more prevalent in today's society. Black women often find themselves caught between fighting the patriarchal controls faced with their own communities and standing united against the confinement of living within a White-dominated society.

Moreover, during this time feminism still failed to both reach out to women of color and properly grasp their unique experiences. Dr. Deborah Brothers, professor of English and self-identified feminist, articulates this point. Dr. Brothers notes that famous feminists such as Betty Freidan could not speak for marginalized women, but rather the White and educated. Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, which exists as an iconic text within the feminist movement, spoke primarily to the discontentment of the average White suburban housewife. Fewer women of color could afford to go to college during this time and cultivate their own voices in order to appear as major figures within the feminist movement. This resulted in a feminist like Freidan standing as the only voice for women's liberation amid this era. Yet it took the voices of Black women writers and activists like Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde to stand up and speak for the community of Black women, who for so long did not have an opportunity to speak for what occurred within their own lives. These iconic Black activists did not feel as though feminism did a proper job of speaking for marginalized Black women, and they also made it clear that they preferred not to have White mainstream feminism speak for them either. Thus this, according to Dr. Brothers, "[W]as exactly what the movement needed" (Brothers). To exclude the experiences of any women of color negates the overall effort of feminism as a whole. For social justice groups calling for inclusion, they must then themselves not exclude other oppressed and marginalized groups from their own agenda for equal standing in society. Otherwise they too add to the crushing hand of oppression.

As acknowledged by Strobel, Black feminism, as an expression, primarily gained popularity in the 1970s. The unique consciousness that lay within the movement brought a voice that, up until that time, remained dwarfed. Now emboldened as a result, Black women often criticized the lack of understanding and knowledge White feminists had for race-related issues. However, while the focus of the women's liberation movement and the civil rights movement both looked to culture, they had an entirely different focus. White feminists focused primarily on gender within culture, while Black feminists focused on how their culture resulted from their experiences due to race. One source of criticism came from the famous activist Angela Davis, who in the mid-1960s stood as a leader in speaking for Black women's issues. Bettina Apthekur writes that one of Davis' written pieces, entitled "Women and Capitalism: Dialects of Oppression and Liberation," stood as a bold critique of White feminists of the time. This relayed the blatant truth that Black women remained wary of White feminists, neither seeing nor feeling any form of inclusion within the movement. Strobel suggests that one major accusation placed on White feminists sprouted from the belief that they desired to ape the behavior of White men in their pursuit of equality. Although this claim appears brash, it offers a harsh insight into how minority women have often felt a battle for equality with not only a male-dominated society, but within the movement of feminism as well, often viewing both opposing groups as one in the same.

However, Rebecca Whisnant, professor and chair of philosophy at the University of Dayton, opposes the validity of this belief. In "Our Blood: Andrea Dworkin on Race, Privileged, and Women's Common Condition" Whisnant cites Andrea Dworkin, a revered "radical" feminist, as a primary source to examine whether race intersects with gender equality. Whisnant explains that White women cannot be grouped with White males when it comes to discussing "White supremacy." White women, by and large, have not benefited from oppressive "systems" as White males have. They too live under the dominance of a society that caters to specifically the White, heterosexual man. Not taking this into account erases the commonality that lies between White women and women of color, thus "intersecting" gender oppression with racial oppression as well (75). Whisnant and Dworkin bring up a good point, especially when considering the oppression White women have often faced, although their marginalization goes unexamined when discussing the dominance of a White-centered society. Comparably, while White feminists often feel that they face similar levels of oppression from a White male-dominated world, Black feminists often see White feminists as not only seeking to escape their own oppression, but also inadvertently mimicking the behavior of their oppressors toward Black women within feminism.

Presently, as scholars look back on the history of feminism, it remains clear to see that race has lingered as one of the least understood and covered

issues within feminism's fight to end oppression. On the other hand, some scholars like Say Burgin, lecturer in American history, argues against this claim. Burgin insists that feminism has, in fact, stood vocal on the issue of race. Yet the fault lies solely with "historians" as to why this remains virtually unrecognized (757). It would stand as unreasonable to suggest that, throughout its entirety, feminism has not shown at least some attempt to be inclusive to the issues of all women, particularly Black women. Burgin explains that it is important to note that feminists did seek to object to "racism" and "sexism" by aligning themselves with other movements such as the "Black Panthers," thus vying for a turnover of the American oppressive system (759). This in fact was well documented throughout the era; feminist groups did work closely with anti-racist movements in order to make larger impacts for their causes. Burgin also finishes her point by writing, "For, in the end, the history of anti-imperialist feminist reveals that the 'master historical narrative has skewed our understanding, not just of the rich histories of feminist organization by Asian American Indian, African American, Chicana and other women of color, but also [W]hite women" (766). It is, therefore, not fair in any analysis of feminism's relationship to race to exclude the attempt, although imprudent, to tackle racist ideologies and systems. Nonetheless, the voices of Black women, as mentioned before, continue to be dwarfed within the movement. Often this occurs unintentionally at the fault of White feminists who naively tackle the issue of race without properly understanding how both race and sexism intersect, as well as the unique and grave effects they both have on marginalized Black women. In explanation, Dr. Brothers asserts that in the connection between race and feminism, "It is the process of trying to not speak for other people and trying to let them speak for themselves" (Brothers). The issue has not fallen upon the lack of White feminists speaking on the racially-fueled disadvantages Black women have; more so, it relates to the scarcity of White feminists not taking the time to listen to the collective voices of Black women, who only seek inclusion. Black women simply express the desire to speak for themselves.

This forces not only scholars but also the growing number of educated Black women to now evaluate how feminism has grown in relation to tackling the topic of race and shining a light on Black women's lived experiences under the oppressive forces of sexism and racism. Marie Watson, Student Engagement Coordinator at Lincoln Land Community College, gives excellent insight into this, as a Black woman (of Haitian decent). In discussing the relationship between race and feminism, Watson explains the importance of acknowledging "intersectionality" with "race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic backgrounds." As a result of how they all in some way link together to form every woman's personal experience, it influences how women of all colors define feminism for themselves. It ties into what stands as important overall to every woman, both individually and as a whole (Watson). Watson's viewpoint

holds even stronger when taking into regard the diversity of Black women. Unfortunately, the tendency to generalize Black women is common among primarily White feminists. Yet this does a disservice to the range of experiences that occurs amongst the Black female community. Mainstream feminism fails to see that not just one Black female experience can speak for the whole. There prevails no clearly set image of what it means to truly live as a Black woman. However, there stands a necessity for authenticity within the community and a need for understanding the various ways in which individual Black women choose to have their Blackness defined.

With regards to Watson's views on intersectionality, Whisnant again looks to Dworkin to give a twist to the role racism plays within feminism. As stated in Whisnant's article, feminism stands representative of "political theory and practice to free all women" no matter their race, class, or physical traits. Therefore, the issue of race inherently persists as a concern to the overall movement (74). Thus, according to both Whisnant and Dworkin, focus does not need to be placed upon race within the feminist movement to the extent that is given to gender-based oppression. Whisnant states, "Feminism exists specifically to confront and dismantle male supremacy [. . .] the aim of feminism as such is not to end all forms of oppression, but specifically to end male supremacy" (74). On the other hand, both Watson and Dr. Brothers disagree with this belief, asserting that they believe race remains an issue that should concern feminism. Dr. Brothers affirms that it remains imperative for everyone, as well as movements, to talk about topics that are uncomfortable or that are disagreeable. This allows the public to stay informed on all issues, which serves prudent to our self-awareness as a society (Brothers). The idea that social justice groups should only concern themselves with their own struggles not only makes their own fight impossible, but it also proves insensitive to the unique hardships that our fellow humans suffer in the same oppressive society.

Whisnant further concludes, like Dworkin, that feminism's primary focus should be on the commonality of gender between women and exclude race. Whisnant writes, "Dworkin's radical feminism is rooted in flesh and blood, in female bodies and what is done to them: and the 'blood' she references is neither just mine nor just yours, but ours" (75). However, this shows the insensitivity and lack of understanding White feminists continue to show to the importance of race and how it affects the lives of all Black women. Watson states this idea perfectly:

[Color Blindness] doesn't exist in our society. We can't ever move into a place where we're color blind, or we don't see color, because at this point, regardless of whether race is a social construction or not, it's part of who we are. . . . If it wasn't . . . something like the Black Lives Matter [movement] would've never formed . . . Anytime we are talking about a movement . . . or feminism, there should always be an aspect of race that is communicated or spoken about

(Watson).

Watson stands correct in her assertion that we do not live in a color blind world. It remains irresponsible for White feminists to exclude the value of race within the movement. Every social movement that stands for equality innately has a responsibility to stand for equality for all oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated people. This stands most notably true for feminism, because of the diversity of women, and to overlook such a fact negates feminism's own fight for equality.

Feminism, as it stands today, remains dominated by White feminists who view themselves and their lived experiences as the representation for the fight against an oppressive, patriarchal society. Yet as previously proven, within womanhood there exists an assortment of voices across the cultural borders that separate us. Further, as mentioned by Cleaver, "Until feminists start recognizing how racism operates, they will not oppose it affectively [. . .] As a rule, the subtleties of entrenched racism remain as misunderstood by Whites, women and men, as sexual harassment is by men, both Black and White" (Cleaver). Thus understandably, racism's impact on sexism remains a more difficult concept for White feminists to grasp due to not bearing both simultaneously.

Looking back at history, scholars and feminists themselves have seen the early exclusion of Black women within feminism, the lack of acknowledgement for the Black woman's experience during the second wave, and more presently the lack of understanding by modern White feminists in the diversity that all women share universally. At the same time, there still remains opportunity for mainstream feminism to grow to be a more inclusive movement. As this occurs, feminism must look to its past history with race in order to develop an understanding that vigorously leads to the inclusion of Black females and their experiences. However, as a Black woman, my concept of mainstream feminism leaves me apprehensive, not about the morality of true feminism but the lack of regard it holds for my unique experience and outlook on gender-specific topics that emerge within my community. As African American women, we experience situations differently from White women; this leads to my perception that while I have been influenced to feel disunited from White women, there lies an alliance with Black men. I see myself as a Black person who exists as a woman, and not as a woman who simply presents as Black. I exist within both groups (Black and woman): marginalized and oppressed. Inclusivity needs to stand as a priority, now more than ever; all victims of oppression need to stand unified against a system that, just recently, has shown us that our common fight for equality faces imminent danger. Once Black women feel included within mainstream feminism, only then will it reach its goal for equality.

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NICK HAGER

Perverseness of the Human Mind

2009 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner

"You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing," says the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" (Poe 705). The narrators of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" are unnamed throughout the story. By not knowing who they are or much about their past, Poe makes the reader delve deep into their minds. The reader's lack of knowledge about the narrator gives the reader better understanding of why and how the narrator justifies his evil actions. The reader can better understand what altered both of the narrators' ways of thinking. The strong recurring motifs in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado" reveal Poe's belief that perverseness lies in everyone and can manifest itself at any provocation.

Both of the unnamed narrators are sure to tell the reader many times that they are not mad or insane. The narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" states six separate times throughout the story that he is not mad. In the opening paragraph, the narrator says, "but why will you say that I am mad" and "[h]ow, then, am I mad?" (705). The narrator of "The Black Cat" also states that he is not mad many times and in the opening paragraph when he says, "[y]et, mad am I not" (223). Before the narrators even tell the story, they want the reader to know that they are normal, sane human beings. The narrators' assertions that they are not mad many times can make the reader skeptical whether or not the narrator is actually sane or actually mad. But, the perverse actions of these two narrators make it easy to believe that they are insane.

Poe relates the unnamed narrators by having them, very briefly, state that they have a disease. The narrators' perverseness was caused by an alteration to their minds, which could have been caused by the diseases each narrator possessed. "The disease has sharpened my senses" (705) says the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart." "For my disease grew on me—for what disease is like Alcohol," (224) says the narrator of "The Black Cat." Both of the narrators in the stories have some sort of a disease that has changed or altered them. The narrator's disease of "The Tell-Tale Heart" is unknown to the reader, but the disease the narrator of "The Black Cat" is clear. He possesses the disease of alcoholism which gives good reason to believe that he has altered his sane way of thinking especially when the narrator states, "during which my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse" (224). The narrator of "The Black Cat" knows he has a problem, "the Fiend Intemperance," that alters his normal way of thinking but still tries to say

he is a completely sane person.

The narrators tried to comfort themselves about their perverseness by justifying why they had murdered. It is easy to see the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” rationalize why he wants to kill the old man when he says, “I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this!” (705). The narrator has talked himself into rejecting what sane people believe to be right and just. The narrator (Montresor) in “The Cask of Amontillado” justifies killing Fortunato because he wronged Montresor and his family. Montresor wanted to get revenge on Fortunato because of the insult he projected at Montresor. This is shown when Montresor says, “The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge” (699). Montresor’s provocation that manifested was his desire to get revenge on Fortunato which is how Montresor justified killing him. In “The Black Cat,” the narrator tries to justify killing the first cat by fixing a wrong with a wrong. One night when the narrator was intoxicated, he cut out the cat’s eye. He believed that the only way to fix his bad deed was to hang the cat. He did this when he was not intoxicated showing that his mad mind was not only caused when he was intoxicated. His altered, perverse mind while he was intoxicated ended up shifting his mind to evil while he is in a normal state. He also hung the cat just for the sake of committing a sin which shows that his perception of right and wrong is being changed. This is shown when he says, “[w]ho has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?” (225).

Also, the two narrators’ sanity could be put in question when looking at the recurring motif of love and hate. They both have love for the person or animal that they end up killing, but that love turns to hate. In “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the narrator states his love to the old man by saying, “I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult” (705). The narrator then goes on to show that he hates the old man’s eye and it is not the old man that vexes the narrator. It is easy to see the hatred he possesses for that eye when he says:

I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees – very gradually – I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever. (705)

His extreme hatred for the old man’s eye overtook him and made him hate the once loved old man.

The narrator of “The Black Cat” has many instances where love progresses to hate. The narrator loved animals ever since he was a child. It is simple to see that the narrator loved his first cat when he says, “Pluto—this was the cat’s

name—was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house” (224). This love eventually turned to hatred and disgust because the narrator’s alcoholism was altering him. The second occurrence of love and hate in “The Black Cat” comes about when the narrator acquires a second cat. The narrator quickly grows fond of this new cat and very shortly after seeing it he knew that cat was what he was in search of. But, this new found love quickly turns to hate. This is shown when the narrator says:

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but—I know not how or why it was—its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. (226)

The narrator’s hatred is not just at animals but also towards his wife. This change happens very drastically and a point when the narrator is very angry. When the narrator was walking down the stairs into his cellar, the cat tripped him which, as he states, “exasperated me into madness” (228). The narrator then grabs an axe and swings it at the cat, but his wife stops him. In doing this, the wife was challenging him so he picked up the axe and in a “rage more than demoniacal” he killed his wife (228). Both of the narrators’ minds are being corrupted causing their perverse feelings. The provocation of the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” was the old man’s eye. The provocations in “The Black Cat” were the narrator’s disease, and the cat tripping him causing his mind to slip into perverseness. The provocations that manifested both the narrators’ actions altered their minds making them reject what is right or wrong.

The narrators also feel guilty about their murders and wrong doings. After the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” buries the old man’s body beneath the floor boards, he sets himself over the body and has the policemen sit around him. After a while, he believes he can start to hear the old man’s heart beating. He believes it is his over acuteness of senses that, which he says does not make him insane, makes him hear the beating of the old man’s heart. This sound kept getting louder and louder until he ended up confessing to the police. His guilty conscience got the best of him and he could not take it anymore. In “The Cask of Amontillado,” Montresor feels some guilt for killing Fortunato. His guilt had turned to an obsession for his murder. Montresor had been obsessed after the murder for about fifty years. This is shown when Montresor says, “[a]gainst the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them” (704). The narrator of “The Black Cat” feels guilty after he took out the eye of his first cat. He then thought the only way to fix the mistake was to kill the cat. That then led the narrator to feel more guilt about his perverse actions. He also feels guilty after killing his wife, but this guilt did not last as long because the cat was missing. This is shown when, that night after he killed his wife, he says, “and thus for one night at least, since its introduction

into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, slept even with the burden of murder upon my soul!" (229). He also says, "The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little" (229). This lack of guilt shows that the narrator's perverseness has gotten worse. It seems like he is getting used to murder which also shows that his state of mind is near, or in, insanity. Although the narrators feel guilty, or at least some guilt from their perverse actions, they are resisting discipline which shows their lack of knowing when they have gone too far.

The narrators become arrogant about their murders. The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" hides the old man's body under the floor boards. The police come to question the narrator about a loud shriek heard and the location of the old man. The narrator calmly talks to them, then sets chairs around in the room where the old man's body was buried. He sets his chair right on top of planks hiding the old man. In "The Cask of Amontillado," Montresor is arrogant right before his murder takes place and not after. He is giving clues about what will happen to Fortunato, but Fortunato does not pick up on them. This is shown many times throughout the story. A few examples are when Montresor says, "[t]he vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre," (700) and "we will go back; your health is precious" (701) and when Montresor talks about his family's crest and motto. The narrator of "The Black Cat" is also very arrogant about his murder. Police come to his house many times wanting to know where his wife was. He takes them through his house multiple times, but on the third or fourth time that the police go into the cellar, he becomes even more arrogant. He says, "By the bye, gentlemen, this—this is a very well-constructed house," and "I may say an excellently well-constructed house. These walls—are you going, gentlemen?—these walls are solidly put together" (230). He then gets caught up in what he was saying and hits the wall with his cane where his wife was buried behind it. The three narrators' arrogance leads them back to their perverseness and to do the opposite of what is normally expected of people. Also, by the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" being arrogant, they end up getting themselves caught.

Dr. Theodore H. Kellogg states, "Much direct light is thrown on the nature of insanity by tracing the close connection between sane and insane phases of the mind" (141). He talks about how people can go through stages of sanity and insanity. People are not always either sane or insane but can go back and forth between them. Some people can go back and forth between being sane and insane, but eventually their minds will stay longer on the insane phase. The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" is, in my opinion, almost past the point of going back to sanity. His disease has pushed him completely to the insane side. The narrator of "The Black Cat" is easily seen as progressing through the stages. He starts out sane, then slips into insanity when he hurts and kills his first cat. He then goes back to sanity in the time between his first and second cat. When he gets his second cat, he starts to slip back to insanity and ends up killing his

wife. The narrator's mind of "The Cask of Amontillado" goes to the insane phase when he murders Fortunato. But, after the murder, it seems that he goes back to the sane side and stays there for the rest of his life.

"The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado" show that perverseness can happen to anyone if the proper provocations occur. The three narrators' obsessions throughout the stories caused them to slip in and out of sanity which had great consequences. If the narrators' provocations did not manifest themselves, then their perverseness would have been greatly reduced, or even never happened. The narrator of "The Black Cat" said exactly Poe's message when he said: "[y]et I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of man" (225).

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AMANDA HAMILTON

Prince of Denmark: Assessing Hamlet's Leadership Potential

2012 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner

Frederick Douglass, an American author and statesman, once said “We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and the future” (“Frederick Douglass”). Hindsight is a view of past events, with all mistakes and successes clearly distinguished. As Douglass says, it is valuable for both the present and the future. We see clearest when we look back rather than ahead. It would be even more valuable to have foresight as clear as hindsight. Evaluating leaders would be easier and more successful with such clear foresight. Yet, hindsight can become foresight if used correctly. Leading business scholars study leaders past and present and use the information to develop strong leaders for the future. They glean information from the past (hindsight) and predict how it will shape the future, creating foresight. When choosing leaders, hindsight and foresight can be invaluable.

In Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, the character Hamlet was a potential king for Denmark if he had not died. However, since Hamlet never became king, we must use hindsight to view the man before he reached leadership and turn this hindsight into foresight of the kind of leader he would become. It is possible to trace the path he walked and guess where it would have led him. When one looks at skills and character traits found in effective business leaders, we see that Hamlet is lacking. By looking at these leadership skills we can look ahead to Hamlet's future and predict that if he had lived to be king and continued with behavior and attitudes displayed in the play, he would have made a poor leader for Denmark.

Hamlet is the prince of Denmark, grieving for his father's death. He is upset over the hasty, incestuous remarriage of his mother to his uncle, Claudius, who is now king. The ghost of Hamlet's father tells Hamlet that Claudius killed him and demands that Hamlet seek revenge for the murder. Hamlet pretends to be insane as a scheme to confuse the court while he tests the truth of the ghost's words and plots his revenge. Hamlet is a man of thought and delays taking action against his uncle for various reasons. When Hamlet kills Polonius, the king's advisor, he flees to England. He returns to find that a former love interest, Polonius' daughter Ophelia, died after going insane from grief over her father's death. Her brother, Laertes, wants revenge against Hamlet and plots with Claudius to kill the prince with a poisoned sword in a duel. During the duel, Gertrude dies by drinking poisoned wine Claudius intended for Hamlet. Hamlet and Laertes are both wounded by the poisoned sword, and before he dies, Hamlet

kills Claudius. The kingdom is left in the hands of Fortinbras, the prince of Norway. Fortinbras ordered an honorable funeral for Hamlet, saying, “For he was likely, had he been put on,/ To have proved most royal” (5.2.380- 81). Fortinbras expected Hamlet to be king and to rule well.

The prince of Norway was not the only one who expected to see Hamlet on the throne. Hamlet himself knew he was likely to be king. He once mentioned to a friend that his uncle “popped in between the/ election and my hopes,” implying that Hamlet anticipated and wanted the throne after his father (5.2.64). According to Shakespearean critic, J. Dover Wilson, Shakespeare intended the government in Hamlet to follow English systems, which meant Hamlet should have inherited the throne after the death of his father and Claudius was not the legal ruler (155). Another critic, Philip Edwards, suggests that Shakespeare intended the king to be elected as was done in Denmark at the time, making Claudius king by the legal choice of the people (3). Either way, Hamlet was a candidate for the kingship of Denmark after the death of his father and would have been again a candidate when his uncle died. Claudius himself expects Hamlet to receive the throne when he dies and tells Hamlet “You are the most immediate to our throne” (1.2.109). By the time we meet Hamlet in the play, he should be well-prepared to lead a country whether he expects to receive the position by inheritance or election. His skills as a leader should be developing—if not already in place. In this light, it is not unfair to evaluate a man's leadership potential before he is king.

Hamlet expects to be a king, but as a future leader, it is also important for Hamlet to know his strengths and weaknesses. In a study of successful leaders, Warren Bennis, an author and educator in leadership studies, found that many leaders could identify their strengths and weaknesses, working to improve their weaknesses and using their strengths to the best advantage of the organization (Managing People 89-90). In his book, *On Becoming a Leader*, Bennis devotes a whole chapter to self- knowledge, reiterating that leaders develop self-knowledge by learning from their mistakes and successes and choosing to change because of this knowledge (56). Kent M. Keith, author and chief executive officer of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership describes why it is important for leaders to have self-knowledge:

They know that they are not perfect, and yet they can perform at a high level; they know they have their own emotions and biases, and yet they can make wise and fair decisions. By building on their strengths and accepting their weaknesses, they are ready to build on the strengths and accept the weaknesses of others. They are less likely to judge, and more likely to encourage. They appreciate the importance of teams, in which each person is encouraged to contribute his or her strengths to the task at hand. They realize that every person and every job counts, and they treat every employee as

a partner and colleague. (35-36)

Possession of self-knowledge is not enough; effective leaders use this knowledge to support others in the organization.

Hamlet exhibits a sensitivity to his weaknesses that shows promise for this trait of self-knowledge. He spends much of his time looking inward: "Am I a coward? . . . This is most brave, / That I, the son of a dear father murdered, / Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, / Must like a whore unpack my heart with words / and fall a-cursing like a very drab" (2.2.510, 521-25). He questions his courage, recognizing that he is thinking overmuch, but needs to take action. Later he contemplates suicide, criticizing himself for not having the courage to do it, yet acknowledging that it is his conscience that keeps him from it (3.1.83). He recognizes that he has enough moral courage to resist the urge to kill himself.

Hamlet identifies weakness in himself, but where does he use this knowledge to enhance the community around him? Keith says such leaders are "less likely to judge and more likely to encourage" (36). Hamlet doesn't make allowances for the weaknesses in others. Of his mother's hasty remarriage, he says, "Frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.146), and several other times sends her verbal jabs to emphasize his displeasure in what he sees as a weakness of character. To his friend Horatio, he speaks disparagingly of Claudius' intemperate drinking (1.4.8-12). When he kills Polonius, he talks as if Polonius got what he deserved for his weakness of interfering: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell! . . . Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger" (3.4.32, 34). There are many incidents that show Hamlet has no respect for Polonius. This does not sound like he is "accepting the weaknesses of others" (Keith 36). Rather, he is frequently scathing toward other people. Hamlet does, indeed, have a keen sense of weaknesses and strengths—especially the weaknesses of others. There is little evidence that he uses his knowledge to make a positive impact. Hamlet belittles and insults Ophelia both in the scene where Polonius and the king are eavesdropping (3.1.90-149) and while the court watches a play (3.2.110-147). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are friends of Hamlet's, yet Hamlet chooses to see them as scheming participants in his uncle's plot, and he orchestrates their death (5.2.57- 58). As members of the court who are not royal, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern all should see Hamlet as a positive leader by this point. Instead, he is superior and judgmental.

Hamlet doesn't learn from the people he judges in order to improve his leadership—something he could do by observing the behavior and actions of people around him, or by listening to their advice and criticism. Not only will good leaders gather information from themselves but, according to Bennis, these leaders also accept information from others and use it to change who they are and how they act. "The trick is getting the best feedback possible, being open to it, and changing for the better because of it" (*Managing People* 90). Similarly,

Keith says that leaders should listen to other people in order to find the best possible way to help them succeed as followers (37). Listening to criticism, seeking advice from knowledgeable sources, and listening to the opinions of others can help leaders see the best way to operate an organization. Hamlet does not like taking advice from other people. When the ghost of old Hamlet wants the prince to come away and speak to it alone, Hamlet's friends try to tell him it is a dangerous idea (1.4.80-81). Hamlet refuses to be guided by them (1.4.82-85). Later, Horatio warns Hamlet not to fight Laertes, "You will lose, my lord," and even offers to help him get out of the duel (5.1.187, 195). Hamlet brushes him aside and will not take his advice. Throughout the play, there is not an instance where Hamlet seeks advice or takes anyone's admonitions seriously. He always keeps his own counsel, infrequently telling even his friends how he intends to get revenge. Literary critic Salvador de Madariaga says that "Hamlet is egocentric" (172). This behavior and aversion toward advice and learning can in part be explained by Hamlet's pride. He is too proud and too self-centered to accept outward criticism. On the other hand, Fortinbras, the prince of Norway, takes the advice of his uncle and does not attack Claudius and Denmark to regain his land (2.2.60-76). In the end, Fortinbras is the one who still lives and rules Denmark, not Hamlet. Fortinbras, as a leader, can see the wisdom of following advice.

This self-knowledge and seeking of advice contribute to an overall necessity for a leader to continue learning. Bennis says that "Almost all leaders have a bias toward change, and they learn from experience that you can't get positive change unless you're open to feedback and look around as you walk through life" (*Managing People* 90). One has to wonder if Hamlet is willing to learn anything in this way. Hamlet's inward focus and refusal to change could be seen as someone who shouldn't be blamed for his mistakes because he is a victim of circumstances. A good leader, according to Bennis, will "learn from adversity" (*Managing People* 91). A leader is constantly choosing to learn from everything—including himself, his experiences, and other people. It may be too soon after Hamlet's unfortunate circumstances to judge his willingness to learn from them—indeed, he is in the middle of his hardships when we first meet him. At this point, however, it appears that Hamlet is not choosing to learn from difficulty. If Hamlet is not willing to seek counsel in his own private affairs, there is little hope that he would take advice when ruling a country. There may be another reason besides pride that explains why Hamlet doesn't accept advice. When one looks at Hamlet's communication style, you see that he not only rejects advice and communication from others, but he himself communicates very little.

Bennis refers to an "open style" of leadership that encourages communication between followers and leaders (*Managing People* 92). Openness means a leader is willing to communicate, answer questions, and make himself approachable and accessible to followers. Hamlet is not approachable, but

perhaps he has good reason. When Hamlet pretends to be insane, Claudius and Gertrude employ his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to spy on him and find out why he acts strangely (2.2.19-26). Polonius tries to see if Hamlet is insane out of denied love for Ophelia by spying on him as well (2.2.156-167). After the queen's early pleas to stop grieving, no one tries to outright talk to Hamlet about the issues at hand (1.2.19-20). Every- one knows that Hamlet will not tell them what is wrong, so they must find out by devious means. Hamlet may hesitate to trust so many people willing to spy on him. He feels betrayed by his mother when she remarries and as a result is embittered toward all women, making him suspicious of Ophelia as well (1.2.146). Claudius has killed his father and tries to kill Hamlet by the end of the play. In light of the betrayal he has experienced, it may be wise that Hamlet doesn't trust most people enough to communicate and accept advice from them. Many have not proven trustworthy. As a result, he doesn't communicate. He tells only a few friends that his madness is feigned (1.5.172-183). When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern talk to him on behalf of the queen and king, he tells them he is depressed, but gives no details because he knows that, ultimately, he is speaking to his parents and not his friends (2.2.263- 278). Neither does he act openly with Ophelia, possibly suspecting (rightly) that she is a tool of her father, Polonius.

Trust is an integral part of open, two-way communication. It is not surprising that this type of communication is scarce in Denmark. In Hamlet's situation, it is difficult to know who is reliable. Hamlet chooses to trust his friend Horatio sometimes, telling him about his feigned madness and how he arranged the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (1.5.168-175, 5.2.48-55). Even so, we have already seen he does not accept Horatio's advice. He also trusts his mother by revealing his father's murder and his fake insanity to her, asking her to keep it a secret from Claudius (4.1.181-88). She keeps this trust. Those he chooses to trust, he chooses carefully and well. Perhaps too carefully, to the extent that he rejects people who could support him. Ophelia might have been loyal to him if given a chance. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were misguided to trust Claudius. They willingly tell Hamlet they are part of a scheme, showing concern for him and a desire to help (2.2.38-39, 261). Like Ophelia, they might have helped if they only knew they were needed.

Hamlet had reason to be cautious when placing his trust, but the same could be said of those around him. Hamlet had an unstable record for trustworthiness. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern trusted Hamlet as a friend and he rashly plotted their deaths instead of testing their reliability and including them in his plans (5.2.39-46). Ophelia seems to have trusted Hamlet in the beginning, but he deceived her with his insanity act and later kills her father. Polonius and Laertes do not trust Hamlet and caution Ophelia to stay away from him (1.3.23-31, 104-108). Polonius also suspects that Hamlet's insanity is not completely true (2.2.204-5). Gertrude trusts her son implicitly—until she thinks

he is going to kill her during a conversation in her room (3.4.21-22). Claudius suspects that Hamlet is a threat and plots to kill him (4.7.59-66). This lack of trust could be a problem for Hamlet as a future leader. According to Bennis, trust "is the one quality that cannot be acquired but must be earned. It is given by co-workers and followers, and without it, the leader can't function" (On Becoming 41). Hamlet could complain that those around him have not earned his trust, but they could say the same of him. Hamlet is not the only victim when it comes to misplaced trust.

A lack of mutual trust between Hamlet and those around him contributes to Hamlet's mental state. It is only fair to remember, Hamlet is dealing with some difficult issues. He summarizes the issues himself in a conversation with Horatio about Claudius: "He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,/ popped in between th' election and my hopes" (5.2.62-64). His father has been murdered by his uncle, his mother is committing incest, and that same uncle has taken his throne. Any one of those issues is enough to cause emotional turmoil in Hamlet. Some critics argue that Hamlet's madness is not an act, but true madness that springs from this turmoil. Shakespearean critic Patrick Crutwell analyzes Hamlet's mental state in relation to his moral choices in his article "The Morality of Hamlet—'Sweet Prince' or 'Arrant Knave'?" According to Crutwell, "If one imagined Hamlet as a real person, outside the theatre and the play, then clearly his moral responsibility would be greatly lessened if he could be thought of as all the time mentally and emotionally disturbed" (235). If Hamlet is going insane, he is not capable of leading a country. Someone so unstable could not be relied upon to govern well. However, Hamlet's insane moments are, Crutwell says, "an extravagance of behavior which could scarcely be overacted" (235). When compared with his moments of sanity, the insanity displayed by Hamlet is too exaggerated to be real. In that case, Hamlet as king is not such an alarming thought. Or is it?

One would rather believe he cannot prevent his actions. Crutwell states, "If, then, we conclude that Hamlet is not a neurotic, he is a normal man in a situation of intense strain, what effect will this have on the moral question? It must clearly make Hamlet a good deal more culpable when he misbehaves" (235). Therefore, Hamlet is aware of his actions and is making decisions based on high stress and emotions. This is nearly as dangerous for a country as a king who is insane. A leader should not be emotionally detached from issues, but dwelling on emotions can interfere with sound decisions. Author and Professor at the Harvard Business School, Joseph L. Badaracco, Jr. says that "Emotions play a complicated role in good reflection. If they are too strong, they can make reflection impossible" (176). Reflection is one of Hamlet's greatest strengths, but he also exhibits strong emotions that may keep him from using his reflection to the best advantage. These emotional thought processes are seen in Hamlet's soliloquies, which frequently end with either a questionable decision or none at

all. At one point he contemplates suicide, pouring out his grief and frustration with his family situation, yet not reaching a decision about what action should be taken (1.2.129-159). In his famous Hecuba speech, Hamlet laments his cowardice and ends by deciding to use a play to trick Claudius into revealing he murdered Hamlet's father (2.1.487-544). When this scheme comes to fruition; the actual proof that his scheme worked is vague. It is convincing to Hamlet, who sees what he wants to see (3.2.261-65). In this light, the decision to test Claudius with a play is not sound; the scheme doesn't work well and is a result of emotional decision. Hamlet later thinks of suicide again, dwelling on his misery (3.1.56-90). In this speech, Hamlet himself sees the problem with his emotional thought devoid of action: "And thus the native hue of resolution/Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,/And enterprises of great pitch and moment / With this regard their currents turn awry/And lose the name of action" (3.1.84-89). He recognizes the problem and once again does nothing about it. Hamlet's emotions get in the way, causing him to think without acting and act without thinking.

Badaracco says that wise leaders think carefully before making decisions. On the other hand, successful leaders often take risks (*Managing People* 90). There is a difference between risky choices and rash choices. A leader taking risks thinks through the consequences of the decision, choosing to do it only when he is convinced the possible result is worth the risk. A rash decision is made when the leader doesn't consider the consequences of the decision. Hamlet makes rash decisions more often than risky ones. On a whim he decides the best way to test the ghost and catch his father's murderer is by acting insane (1.5.174). On impulse, he follows the ghost of his father (1.4.63). In a conversation with his mother, Hamlet suddenly stabs Polonius hiding behind a curtain thinking he is Claudius (3.4.25). When he finds that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern carry a letter from Claudius telling the king of England to kill Hamlet, Hamlet assumes his friends knew the contents of the letter and contrives to have them killed (5.2.38-47). On observing Ophelia's funeral, Hamlet decides to rival Laertes in a display of over-zealous grief (5.2.261-573). Each one is a rash decision. Badaracco says that "Good leaders, even the most confident and accomplished, know how high the stakes are, for themselves and others, when they make important decisions, and they are alone in making the final call" (177). Hamlet does make his decisions alone. He is also unconcerned about the effect upon those around him, or even upon himself.

Being careful while making decisions is important, but just as important is having the right decision at the end of the deliberation. That right decision requires the leader to have sound ethics. Hamlet displays some sense of right and wrong. He agonizes over the question of suicide partially because he believes it to be wrong. His mother's incest bothers him. Crutwell argues that Hamlet seeking revenge is, according to Elizabethan times, a "moral duty" (237).

All of these are strong indications that Hamlet is concerned about right and wrong. These are moral scruples, but what about his treatment of other people? How does Hamlet act out his moral standards? In a book about bad leadership, Barbara Kellerman, Research Director of the Center for Public Leadership, says "Bad leadership falls into two categories: bad as in ineffective and bad as in unethical" (32). Kellerman's definition of callous leadership describes Hamlet: "the leader and at least some followers are uncaring or unkind. Ignored or discounted are the needs, wants, and wishes of most members of the group or organization, especially subordinates" (43).

According to Kellerman's definition, it is especially subordinates who are ignored by callous leaders (43). Hamlet is a prince, outranked only by the king and queen. Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Polonius, and Laertes are all people who could be considered subordinates. By this time in his development toward leadership, Hamlet should see these people as followers for whom he is responsible. Hamlet, however, is insensitive in his treatment of nearly everyone with whom he comes in contact. He chooses to begin his feigned insanity by frightening Ophelia, a girl who has previously seen him as a lover (2.1.76-83). He confronts his mother, revealing that her new husband was his father's murderer and ranting about her infidelity. She begs him to stop: "O, speak to me no more./ These words like daggers enter in my ears./ No more, sweet Hamlet" (3.4.94-96). Hamlet ignores Gertrude's pain while he speaks, only stopping when the ghost appears and tells Hamlet he has deviated from his purpose (1.4.110-115). Hamlet kills Polonius without regret, showing no sympathy for the unfortunate mistake and not sparing a thought for Ophelia, who is now fatherless (1.4.30-31). He is unconcerned about the deaths of his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—deaths he contrived—saying, "They are not near my conscience" (5.2.57). In a desire to be the best at everything, Hamlet ruins Ophelia's funeral by trying to outgrieve her brother Laertes: "Forty thousand brothers/ Could not with all their quantity of love/ Make up my sum" (5.1.258-60). Overall, Hamlet feels no one's pain but his own. This problem alone, regardless of Hamlet's other deficiencies, can make him an ineffective leader.

At the heart of a leader's ethics is his view of other people. That view affects every decision he makes. The decisions made by a leader will have either a positive or a negative impact on the whole community. Many scholars agree that consideration for followers is necessary to make an organization function well. In his essay, "Fairness as Effectiveness: How Leaders Lead," Author and Professor of psychology at New York University, Tom R. Tyler states, "Studies show that people value the respect that others show for their rights and their status within society. More than any other issue, treatment with dignity and respect is something that authorities can give to everyone with whom they deal" (121). If the characters of Hamlet were interviewed, it is not likely that any could say they felt respected by Hamlet.

Good leaders “serve as models and mentors,” creating a learning environment where everyone involved is encouraged to grow and develop (*Managing People* 93). Hamlet as an example to be imitated by others is a frightening concept. Some of his traits, his intelligence and thoughtfulness, would be admirable qualities for a developing leader to imitate. His treatment of people would not be a valuable trait to imitate. Hamlet is, however, so little trusted by those around him, it is possible that no one would consider imitating his actions. He never makes an attempt to deliberately mentor anyone. This trait most likely develops naturally from a leader who practices good leading principles. Like trust, it is a product of good leadership. Hamlet has not yet attempted to develop these qualities for himself, so it is not surprising that he is not serving as a model for others. It is disappointing that Hamlet overlooks this when so many people are looking toward him for direction.

One of the most powerful traits of effective leaders is a desire to serve: “A servant-leader is simply a leader who is focused on serving others. A servant-leader loves people, and wants to help them” (Keith 9). Hamlet lacks this servant-leader mindset. Throughout history, it is not uncommon for leaders to lack this quality when leading through a monarchy. The best leaders, however, whether in a democracy or monarchy, serve the people they lead. We have already seen that Hamlet has little or no concern for the people closest to him. Most disturbing of all is the glaring absence of any concern for the people of Denmark. Hamlet expects to be their king. Why no mention of them? He never argues that he wants to rule better than Claudius. It never occurs to him that the citizens are also struggling with the loss of his father and the subsequent transition between rulers. Buried deep in his own pain and anger, Hamlet never surfaces to look at the many people he seeks to lead. It is lamentable that someone so intent on ruling has not spared a thought for those whom he will impact the most.

Hamlet has many deficiencies as a prospective leader, yet he still has some qualities in common with good leaders. One quality Bennis describes is the ability to concentrate: “These are people who have very few interpersonal skills, but have a concentration that is almost alarming—their caliper eyes focused primarily on their work, on the company, on the goals, on the mission. Offhand, I wouldn’t have expected them to be that effective. But they were extraordinarily effective with their people and within their worlds” (*Managing People* 91). Hamlet may not be good with people, but he shows an intense focus on his goals. He may take a while to decide what those goals are and how he should accomplish them, but once he chooses a path he centers his attention on it, even to his death. There is only one instance where he is distracted from his purpose. He gives a lengthy lecture to Gertrude about his displeasure with her unfaithfulness to his father and remarriage to his uncle (1.4.53-109). The ghost has to return and tell Hamlet he is distracted from the plan of revenge on

Claudius alone (4.1.110-111). If Hamlet channeled this focus to a productive end, it would be a step toward effective leadership.

As already mentioned, Hamlet is not devoid of a moral sense and may not have always been oblivious to the needs of people around him. He shows strong affection for his dead father (1.2.186-87). His concern for his mother shows a love for someone other than himself. Ophelia intimates that Hamlet was once a different man than the insane one she now sees: “O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown! The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword, The expectancy and rose of the fair state, The glass of fashion and the mold of form, Th’ observed of all observers, quite, quite down!” (3.2.150-54). She refers to what we know is false insanity, but it gives us a description of the Hamlet she knew before these times. He was intelligent, an observer, a soldier, scholar, fashionable, and the prospective leader of the country. She thought well of him, and his friends also seem to have a good opinion of him at the beginning of the play. Each of those positive qualities Ophelia saw in Hamlet could have contributed to a good leader. Hamlet had potential to be great. Potential that never develops remains only potential and is wasted. Hamlet is a tragedy, especially when one looks past the literary definition of the word and sees Hamlet for what he could have been.

Ultimately, Hamlet wanted to be king but did not attempt to become a good leader. He doesn’t use self-knowledge and is not willing to listen and learn from experiences and people around him. He carefully chooses to trust a few people, but never attempts to take his trust to a larger circle of people. While he trusts few people, Hamlet himself proves to be untrustworthy. He allows emotions to sway his decisions and often chooses rashly. His questionable ethics surface when one looks at the way he treats people. Leading by serving is never considered. All his admirable traits must be used in tandem with the traits he refuses to develop if Hamlet wishes to be a good leader. Without a changed perspective, he would have been a poor leader for Denmark. He did not need to study leadership point by point. The initial step would have been to look outward and find value in the people around him—both those below his station and those willing to stand next to him for support. The rest would have followed. A good leader is one who humbly learns to see, using clear hindsight and careful foresight to improve the future for those he serves. Any sight at all is indispensable. Hamlet refused to see.

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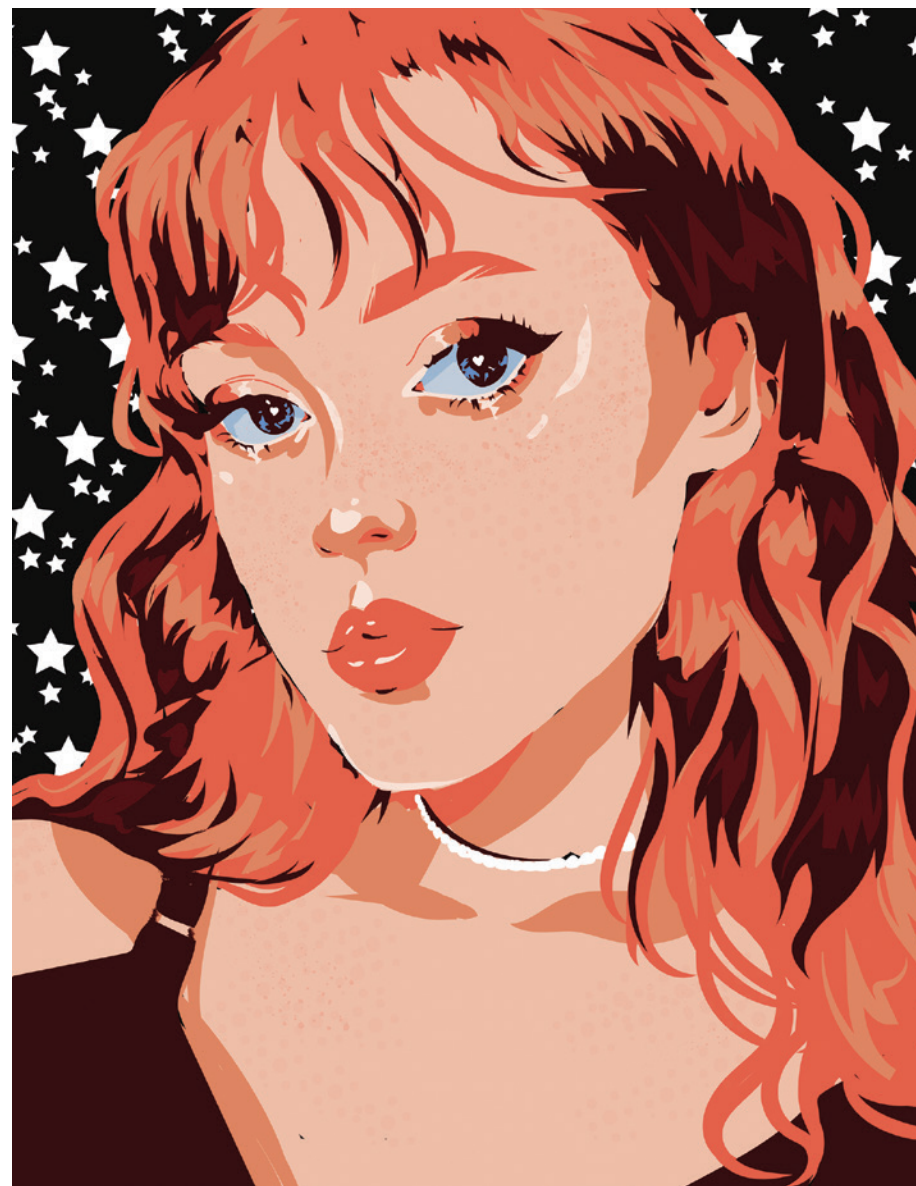
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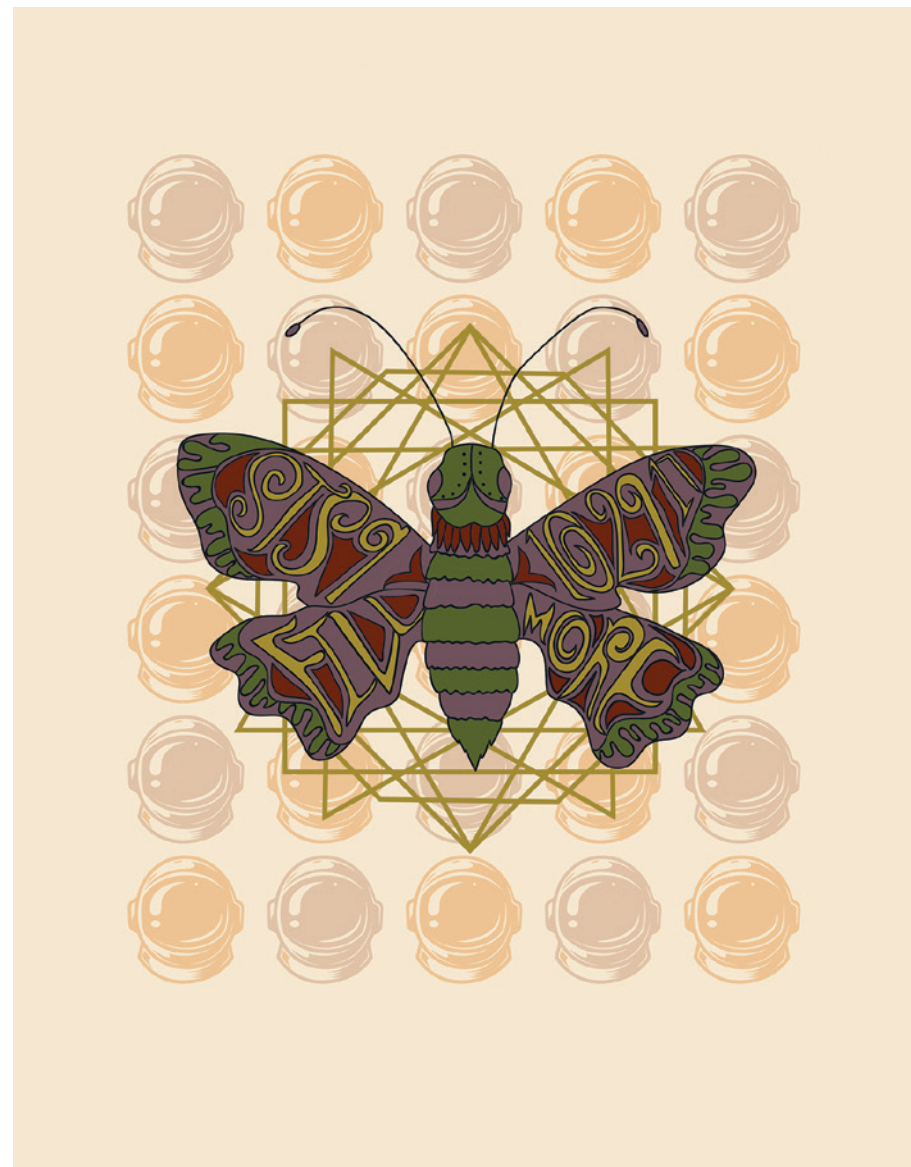
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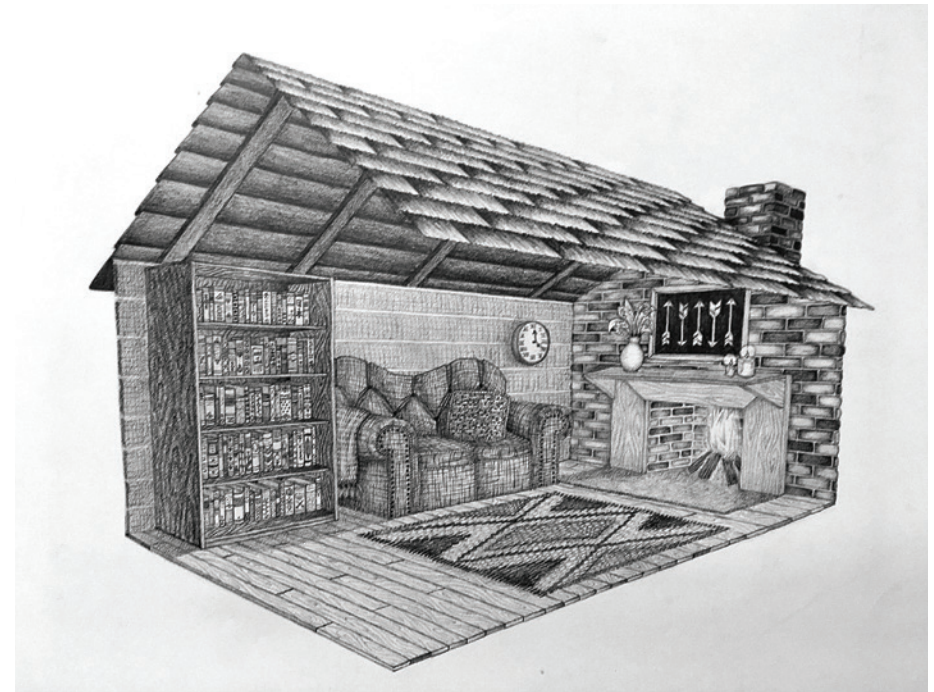
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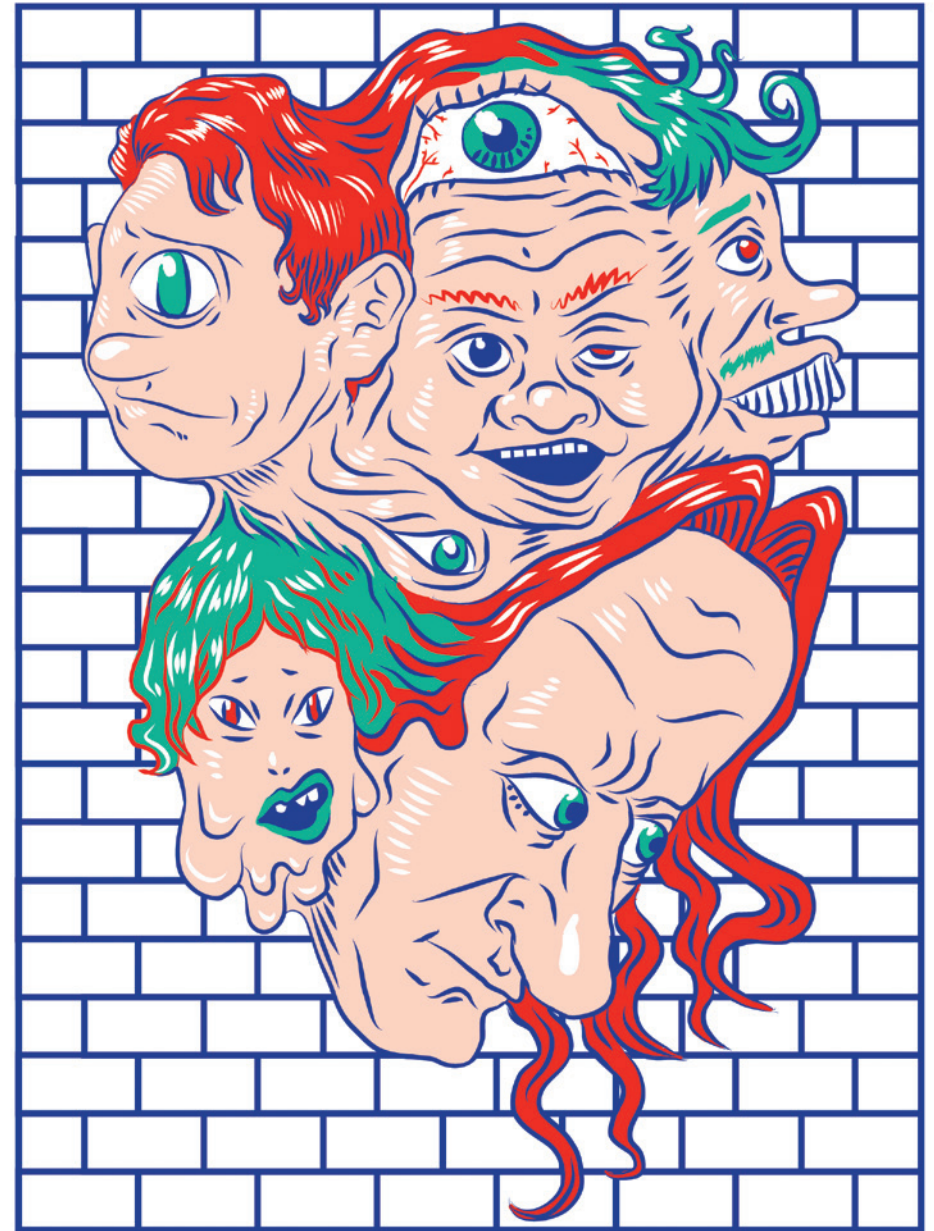
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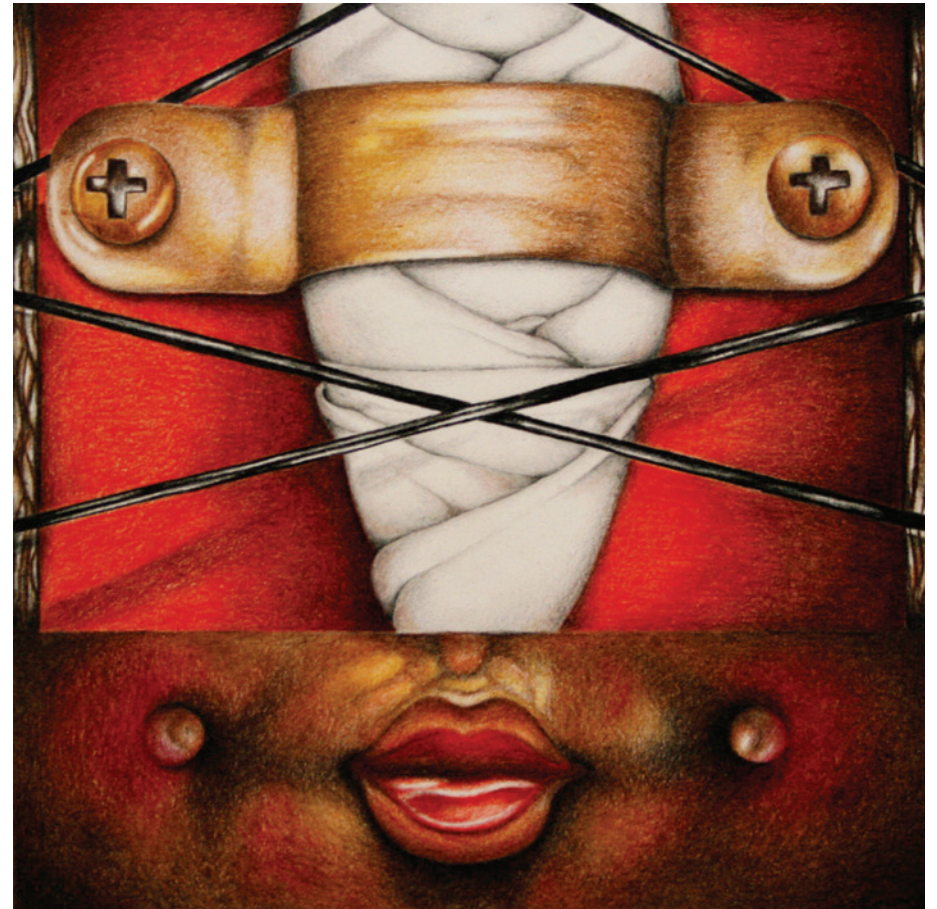


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When many white people think of America, they think of a peaceful, equal, and free place. They do not think about when the colonies were ruled by King George III but rather the people Jefferson was referring to when he expressed the ideal that the United States of America has followed since 1776: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and pursuit of Happiness.” However, this did not pertain to people of color because they were slaves before and after Jefferson’s claim.

Even seventy-six years later, people of color still were not entitled the freedom that white men had. Racism still occurred along with slavery, which angered Frederick Douglass because Jefferson stated all men are created equal. In his speech “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July,” Frederick Douglass pointed out Jefferson’s hypocrisy in the Declaration of Independence when he states that the 4th of July is not a celebration because the day that they were celebrating their freedom, slaves were not free. Douglass presents a valid argument that inequality and discrimination will transfer over to the future, and, indeed, this is proven by the fact that people of color are more frequently victims of violence.

Douglass’ discussion focuses on the many prejudices faced by slaves, and in many ways that remain as part of America society. Douglass concludes that, “What am I to argue that it is wrong ... to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash ... to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, and to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters?” Frederick Douglass’ claim became prophetic 103 years later when a 14-year-old black adolescent named Emmitt Till was brutally beaten and murdered for being accused of whistling at a white, married woman in a grocery store. The woman accused Emmitt Till of flirting with her. Several nights later, white men came to Emmitt Till’s uncle’s house, took him, beat him, shot him in the head, and threw his body in the river. This is comparable because Emmitt Till was beaten and killed so the white men could feel powerful and in control by trying to make an example out of him for something he did not do. Douglass rhetorically questions if he really has to explain that the violence against people of color is wrong. Emmitt Till was innocent, and several decades later the woman who accused him spoke out and admitted she lied. There were no consequences for the men who killed Emmitt Till or for the woman who lied. These men murdered a child to make an example out of him to prove they are in charge and have the power as slave owners used to do.

Douglass condemns those who do not act against injustice, and even

today, we continue to disparage the lives of black men by allowing violence upon them. In “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July” Douglass suggests “... that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just.” In our world today, black men are still paying for perceived crimes with their lives because others are so blinded by their own prejudice that justice is not served. On July 6th, 2016, Philando Castile was killed by an officer after Castile told the officer he had a firearm in his car and the officer asked him to get his license and registration. When Castile put his hand in his pocket to get his license, the officer shot him. This officer ended up shooting Castile seven times in front of Castile’s girlfriend and her four-year-old daughter. The officer was fired as a result of this, but justice was not served after the officer was acquitted despite the recording of the officer’s body camera and Castile’s girlfriend’s Facebook Live video. There are some who would argue that the officer who killed Castile was justified in shooting him. However, only those who are prejudiced cannot see prejudice because they pick a side based on their opinion, no matter if it’s because they do not like the opposite race or if they would have made the same decision as the police officer in the catastrophe of Castile. Despite this being a tragedy, this comes as no surprise in the United States. These actions have been occurring since people of color became slaves; the only difference is now they are free, but they still must deal with inequality, prejudice, and racism.

Not only are people of color mistreated by authorities, but our judicial system also misjudges them. In the text “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” Douglass states that “There are seventy-two crimes in the state of Virginia which, if committed by a black man (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to punishment of death; while only two of these same crimes will subject a white man to like punishment.” In January of 2015, Stanford University swimmer Brock Turner was sentenced to six months in prison and only served three months for sexually assaulting an unconscious woman behind a dumpster. Contrast that to the nineteen-year-old Vanderbilt football player Cory Batey who raped an unconscious female and was caught on video. These athletes did similar crimes, and when looking at the crime and not the person, a just society expects the same punishment. However, Cory Batey was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and had to serve the full sentence. In addition to that, he must register on the sex offender list. Unlike Batey, Brock Turner was sentenced to six months and only served three. While Brock Turner got a lighter sentence, Cory Batey did not. Even though these are horrific crimes, and they both deserve the same punishment, this is the world we live in. Black men and white men will not be equal until we stop using race to judge people.

Some may argue that the United States has progressed in an equitable way since we overcame slavery. It is better from when Douglass spoke because some white people look at black people as equals and black people’s rights are

protected now. Despite the fact that we have progressed a lot since then, we are still not living up to the inalienable rights of equality and freedom. People of color do not get treated the same way white people do. They get called “nigger” and are murdered by authorities. They are sentenced longer when they do the same crime as a white person. Not only do they not get treated equally, but they also do not get the same freedom as white people. White people often get a better education over black people. White people have more job opportunities, are given lighter sentences when arrested and charged, and they often get treated better by police than black people. Some may argue that with the abolition of slavery and the progress we have made as a country since then, we are past the relevance of Douglass’ words, but we are faced with too much inequality in the United States to declare our work done.

Many people are working to undo the progress that has already been made. In fact, our current President seems to be associated with the Alt-Right Movement and others who stand by its principles. Douglass states, “... America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.” Frederick Douglass criticizes our Founding Fathers for celebrating freedom when not all men are free. Just like our Founding Fathers, our current president follows their footsteps on just white people being free. This is not equality, and this trend will not end, especially with the current President, Donald Trump, who is against minority groups as well as helping people in need. Donald Trump ran on the slogan, “Make America Great Again,” implying that America use to be great before we gave minority groups the right to have some freedom. This is supported by his choosing a known supporter of the “alt-right” (which is a code word for white supremacy) Stephen Bannon as Campaign Chief and Adviser. Donald Trump has undone some of the equality legislation that President Obama made, including defunding the Affordable Care Act and repealing DACA. Recently, Trump took days to condemn violent riots by white supremacy groups in Charlottesville, Virginia, who brought weapons to what was supposed to be a “peaceful protest.” Donald Trump states he is for “making America great,” which is leaving people of color behind because he is taking away the things they need to survive. Once again, we have a leader who is, as Frederick Douglass states, “false.”

Despite slavery being over, America is still “false.” People of color are often the target of hate and violence in the United States. From the beginning of their lives, they are targets. Police ride around in their neighborhoods, waiting to jump in the smallest situations to take someone to jail, while in the predominantly white neighborhoods, rarely are police around unless the residents call them. Our officers kill and harass innocent black men with no legal consequences. Our justice system fails them, sending them away for longer than their white counterparts. Our president promotes and stands by these injustices, pushing for the world to be how it used to be before people of color were allowed

to have the same rights as white men.

Sadly, our system has changed very little, and Frederick Douglass’ words have proven to us that our world does not look at every man as being born equal. The only difference is that in the beginning of America we had more people fighting. Now people tend to be more comfortable rather than stand up for what they believe is right. People like Frederick Douglass fought for people of color when they escaped slavery. The United States is not equal, and judging by history, it will never be. People of color will never be anything close to the white man’s level in our society unless we stand up for ourselves as Frederick Douglass did. If we do not stand up for what we believe is right, then we will never be as important as the white men. We cannot just expect change; instead, we must make change, and if we cannot make change, we will just have to get used to our past, present, and future repeating.

MATT LEMASTERS

The Thousand Yard Stare: The Forgotten Struggle of the Greatest Generation

2016 Best of Nonfiction Narrative Winner

Raymond LeMasters was never one to talk about the war much. If there was a war movie on TV, he changed the channel; if the war was brought up, he switched the subject. He never turned to violence or alcoholism, but the war was with him until the day he died. Surely, the names of his comrades, such as Desmet, Maddox, Maczynski, Verbanic, Pope, and Smith stayed with him until the day he died in 2009, even though he suffered from Alzheimer's. Horseshoe Hill, Hill 700, Manila, and Mount Pacawagan, all places that even though his physical self was no longer there, a piece of him still was. Forty-six men from "F" Company had been killed in over three years in the South Pacific, yet he had not. He had survived the war, but life would never be the same. His story, and the stories of other World War II servicemen, is not unlike others from that generation. However, seventy years later, it seems that many in American society have skewed and misunderstood the hardships suffered by those of the World War II generation, and the true side of that story is told in part by Thomas Lea's painting *The 2,000 Yard Stare*.

Lea's painting was one in a series of several painted after the battle for Peleliu in the fall of 1944, in which Lea took part. The foreground shows a Marine stunned by what is often referred to as the "thousand yard stare," the term for the fixed look that one gets when he has been in combat for so long. It is indescribable; other than that, it is the result of everything that one has seen. Peleliu may have just been the perfect battle for this setting, for it was one of extreme error and brutality. As with many battles in the Pacific Theater, Peleliu was one of close quarters fighting that defied any characteristics of a "gentleman's war." It was a war of annihilation, and the Marines and GIs who fought on that island saw it first-hand. Lea's painting is, in essence, the culmination of the sheer brutality of the battle, but it can speak for what any generation experiences in war. It comments on the unexplainable. Although it comments on what the soldier has seen, it also comments on what the viewer is unable to see: not only the soldier's experiences, but what lies inside someone who has experienced combat.

The men of the 145th Infantry Regiment who fought at Mount Pacawagan on Luzon and other areas of the South Pacific, easily fit into the category for the type of message that Lea was conveying with this painting. For LeMasters and the men of "F" Company, the nearly month-long battle on Pacawagan had

resulted in, according to The 37th Infantry Division in World War II, 14 men killed. An additional 73 were likely wounded; and, this was just for one of twelve companies in one regiment of an infantry division that had spent three years



Figure 2: 15 of the 41 survivors in Ray LeMasters' Company after the battle of Mount Pacawagan. The Company took nearly 70% casualties in a little under a month. Author's collection.

overseas. The "Buckeye" Division's official history goes on to say, "The 145th lost 100 killed and 476 wounded," and that "The Japanese suffered 1,300 killed by infantry action alone, and uncounted hundreds were chopped to pieces by artillery and mortar fire [...]" (324). Frank Ward, a Tech Sergeant in LeMasters' Company, told *Yank, the Army Weekly* writer John McLeod, author of the article "The Heavyweight," how he felt about the victory in Europe over-shadowing the horrible battle in which they had taken part: "While we were up there the war in Europe ended. I imagine people at home were too busy celebrating that to read about places with names like Mt. Pacawagan" (4). McLeod prefaces Ward's quotation: "Fox Company was on the mountain for a month. It went in with 128 men and came out with 41" (4). How would the American public ever understand what happened here, or anywhere else they had fought at? How could civilians understand what had happened when they went house to house in Manila three months earlier? How would those back home understand the sacrifice of Frank Petrarca, the company medic, as he had tried to save another comrade two years earlier, an action that made him a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient? It all just happened, and there was no explanation for any of it. The public would never be able to fully comprehend any of the horrors that units just like "F" Company had experienced. One only needs to look into the eyes of the men staring into the camera to understand that freedom and tranquility can come at a cost to not only one's life, but also to one's sanity if he survives. These stares

are not made up; they are real, and they show the true cost of war.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which was commonly referred to at the time as simply “combat stress” or “battle fatigue,” are not new concepts to Americans, or much of the world. Today, the illness is well known given the unfortunate amount of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who have suffered from it. Yet, the World War II generation has, it seems, been left out of the PTSD spotlight in the past several years. America’s undertaking during World War II is often seen as a glorious, worthwhile cause. However worthwhile it was, nonetheless, it was very far from glorious. It seems as if Americans have rarely associated World War II and PTSD with each other: the alcoholism, the divorce, the homelessness, and even how American society dealt with the problem. Many of these problems have never really been associated with this generation, as the 1940s are often seen as a more romanticized time period. Yet, for many World War II veterans like Ray LeMasters, aspects of PTSD were there for one’s whole life. Some dealt with it like he did; it was always there, but one learned to cope and move on. Brotherhoods were formed, but some were stripped away, and it was better to just try and forget about it. Others, unfortunately, fell into alcoholism and severe depression. The public has seemingly never associated the Greatest Generation with divorce, but as Thomas Childers points out in his book *Soldier from the War Returning*, “Americans did marry in record numbers during the war, but they also divorced in record numbers when it ended [...] As the VA duly reported, the divorce rate for veterans was twice as high as that for civilians” (8). Certainly many came home and, even though the war was always a part of their lives, they were able to move past it. But for many others, the story was sadly not the same. Today, with the last of the commemorations approaching that will include veterans who were present, mixed with the quickly fading World War II generation, the problems faced by many from this generation are, it seems, mostly forgotten. For example, a veteran whom I interviewed (whose name is excluded for privacy) said that he cannot forget about a wounded German prisoner that he had to finish off, and the thought is with him every day. However, others came back from the war without as many problems. Sidney Goodkin, 96, who served in “F” Company, 148th Infantry Regiment, says that apart from his leg bothering him because he took some shrapnel in the early days of the battle for Manila, “my war experiences didn’t keep me from enjoying life.” Goodkin did, however, mention how his friend Claude Wright accidentally killed a fellow squad member one night during the battle of Manila: “I visited Wright after the war; he was devastated over the incident.”

Today, one would think that the World War II generation has been praised all of these years. However, what is often also forgotten is that not every World War II veteran experienced the lovely homecoming that is sensationalized and thought about as being the norm. Stanley Frankel, an officer in the 148th

Infantry Regiment, 37th Infantry Division, wrote of his experiences of what it was like to come home in a chapter of his book *Frankely Speaking about World War II* in the South Pacific. He explains, “The war had been over for three months, and the public no longer gave a damn” (150). The author gives numerous instances in his chapter “Return of the Heroes” of American veterans who came home and been slighted for various reasons, such as having a relative in the service, rationing, race, and so forth. It was certainly not what the Vietnam generation experienced, but it is very far from the perceived notion that World War II veterans returned home to a completely thankful public. As Frankel writes, “Here, then, is a description of the way it was: ‘When the devil are you going to take them damn clothes off? I feel a revulsion every time I see a uniform,’ an old friend greeted me” (149). Frankel goes on to tell of a fellow soldier who was trying to get change out of his pocket to pay for a sandwich at a bus stop. “The counterman snapped, ‘War’s over, soldier. You’re not on the gravy train any longer. Better come up with the cash.’ This gravy train GI wore the Purple Heart with two clusters and the Silver Star” (150). Bill Mauldin, the renowned World War II combat cartoonist who created “Willie and Joe,” also shed some light on post-war life for the returning veteran in his book *Back Home*. Similar to the account in Frankel’s book, Mauldin also makes mention of some of the disdain towards returning servicemen. In one account, he mentions a veteran from the 3rd Infantry Division who had just returned to the States, but who had a run-in with a store clerk when he asked for a pack of cigarettes: “In case you haven’t heard, young man, there is a cigarette shortage. Also for your information, the reason for the shortage is that all the cigarettes are in the army” (22). Mauldin goes on to say, “He didn’t expect special treatment because of the ribbons on his chest, but he had not been prepared for manifestations of an attitude we were all conscious of, even then” (22-23). Mauldin’s book comments on the social and political state of America at the time, including the treatment of veterans. The American public just did not understand what these men had gone through, but Thomas Lea’s painting, along with books such as Mauldin’s *Back Home*, shed at least some light in regards to their struggle.

Our World War II generation was, in my opinion, the greatest. Without a doubt they defied odds, assembled the largest military force in our nation’s history, and came back and made this country greater than it already was. But, we as a nation have mostly failed to recognize the problems that many in this generation suffered from. According to the U.S. Veteran’s Administration, roughly 492 World War II veterans are being lost each day. As such, the truth of these problems may soon be lost with them. The war will be relegated to history books and, I am afraid, the notion will continue that this generation went through the war untroubled and that they gloriously defeated the Axis powers.

Even seventy years later, the war still has an effect on those who lived it. Although they are getting fewer, when I see someone with a hat that denotes

that he is a World War II veteran, I will often spark up a conversation with him. One time, a man told me he had been with a Navy beach battalion and was at six amphibious landings in both Europe and the Pacific. His voice took on a certain tone; he gave me a look and moved on. Another veteran, whom I see every so often, was with the 4th Infantry Division on D-Day and later during the horrific fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. Simply put, he does not like to talk about the war. Dr. John Roberts, my history professor, once told me that he had an uncle that was at New Guinea during the war. Assuming he was with the 32nd Infantry Division, there is no doubt that he experienced war's horrors. While he notes that alcoholism has been a problem in his family, he also said that it just got worse for his uncle Barney because of the trauma he had experienced. My grandfather Harold, brother of my great uncle Ray, told me that he hardly even recognized Ray when he returned from serving three years in the Pacific. One night when they were drinking, Ray said that a buddy in the foxhole next to him had been shot in the head. That was the only thing Ray ever said about



Figure 3: Men of "F" Company, 145th Infantry Regiment's weapons platoon on Bougainville in 1944. Ray LeMasters is in the front row and is wearing white socks. In the second row, from left to right, Julian Desmet (6th), Raymond Maddox (7th), and Joseph Maczynski (last) were all killed a year later. Norman Smith, far right in the last row, was also killed. Frank Ward is the 4th man in the back row. Author's collection.

the war to him. I was always saddened that Ray never spoke about the war, for I now focus my studies solely on his unit. But in studying his unit, I have understood why he never did. In his photo album, six of his comrades behind him and to the side of him ended up getting killed. One can go to Camp Butler near Riverton and see rows of graves of Illinoisans who gave their lives during the war, and although that is certainly moving, it has not compared, for me, to seeing photographs of men in the prime of their lives and knowing that they

were cut down in their youth and also knowing that the men next to them had to live with that fact for the rest of their lives. One of those men was Julian Desmet. Of all the men in a photograph of "F" Company's weapons platoon, he probably has the biggest smile on his face out of everyone in the group. That New Jersey draftee was 21 at the time of his death, nearly the same age as I am. I can only think of the grief that his family must have suffered knowing that their 21-year-old son was killed on some mountain in the South Pacific three months before the cessation of hostilities. While Desmet's name and face stick with me, a civilian, I can only imagine how many GIs had, and still have, their own Julian Desmet, whom they knew personally, stick with them for years after they came back. That is the reality of war that we here at home so often forget. We can look at rows of graves and feel terrible for someone we did not know, but for the most part we cannot understand the exacting toll that those deaths inflicted. I would say that Americans have known that what this generation went through was not pretty, but the idea that they all came home and easily moved on with life is, simply put, not very accurate. As Thomas Childers perfectly put it in the introduction to his book, "Now, more than sixty years after the wartime generation began returning to civilian life, the complex, often painful realities of their postwar experiences have been muffled under a blanket of nostalgic adulation, the most prominent expression of which is found in Tom Brokaw's



Figure 4: Ray LeMasters (second from left) and his brother Harold (far right) at a bar with friends after the war. When shown this photo years later, Ray nearly broke down. Author's collection.

best-selling book *The Greatest Generation* [...] this glowing homage has become more than a tribute to a passing generation; it has become our public memory of the war and its aftermath, a quasi-official transcript of events that glides sentimentally over what for many veterans was a deeply troubled reentry into a civilian world that, like themselves, had undergone dramatic change” (4).

Roughly sixteen million Americans served in the military during World War II. Many Americans likely had relatives in the service at the time, and World War II has likely touched many in some way whether it is thought about or not. With this generation fading away by the minute, it is important that we not only get their stories down, but that we understand their stories and what they went through. We must understand the reasons not just for which they fought, but how the war may have affected them. From my experience, many veterans are willing to open up because they know that time is against them and their contribution to history and humanity will soon be forgotten. Others, as I have implied, will take their experiences to the grave with them. Thomas Lea’s painting gives us a closer look into the mentality of what this generation went through and the scars that they lived with for years. We must remember and honor the Greatest Generation, but we must also remember that many of them went through hell to secure our freedom and for some, if not most, that hell has stuck with them for much of their lives.

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KYLE McCARTY

Black Friday Rule

2012 Best of Creative Nonfiction Winner

It’s 11:45 PM on Thanksgiving Day when I check into the emergency room at Memorial Medical Center. The waiting room is surprisingly empty. I expected the barely-stuffed chairs to be packed with prospective patients but there are only three groups of people in line ahead of me: a pregnant lady in a wheelchair, a group of people who haven’t bothered to unzip their heavy winter jackets and two guys in full hunting gear. I don’t question their camouflage. I’m thankful there are so few people because I need to be in and out as quickly as possible.

At this point I am still clinging to the desperate delusion that I might be able to go back to bed before I have to work the first of my two shifts on the sales floor of Best Buy on Black Friday. I check my phone every minute and a half to update my calculations on how much sleep I would get if I made it home in ninety minutes. The number on the right hand side of the equal sign is always “nowhere near enough.”

I woke out of a sleeping pill-induced coma half an hour earlier to root around for something to eat and came up with a granola bar. Half asleep, I bit into it and some evil, demonic oat made a beeline for a cavity I had vainly been fighting off for weeks. That stupid, horrible, awful oat lodged itself perfectly, almost purposefully, so that my next bite would shove it deep inside my tooth with a terrible cracking noise followed by a high-pitched yelp and the dull thunk of one of my knees hitting the hardwood floor of the kitchen.

I poked at the tooth with my forefinger and felt a shard of it give. A dull pain started to fill my jaw. This was going to require trained professionals and I needed to start getting ready for work in four hours.

*

On the sidewalk of the strip mall that Best Buy anchors, between the military recruiters’ office and PetSmart, a group of twenty-somethings is using a portable generator to power a space heater and a karaoke machine. Who knows how early they got there to get a spot so close to the doors. They’re prepared for the cold and welcoming strangers into their tent at midnight to sing.

Another group powers an Xbox 360 and a thirty-two inch tube television with a long power cord running out to the parking lot and into a jacked-up, rusted out Bronco. They have rickety end tables set on either side of their lawn chairs and warm themselves with a couple of Salamander heaters. The guys are huddled around the television and slouched in the familiar gamer’s position like a bad yoga pose. Their makeshift bachelor pad looks the same as any of a thousand others across Springfield but this one is on a sidewalk and missing the

beer cans and bong. Maybe they are out in the Bronco.

The first family in line staked their claim sometime just before midnight on Wednesday when store workers were still pulling stockpiled product and setting up line queues. They've been the first in line for eight years now. It's their Thanksgiving tradition. Other family members bring them a picnic dinner, and they play a football game or two in the parking lot Thursday afternoon.

The line will reach the Factory Card Outlet by the time the doors open at five o'clock. Three years ago it wrapped around the building and to the loading area behind Deals. Now, even with its chief rival Circuit City out of business, Best Buy's line will be half as long as it was before what then-CEO Brian Dunn called "sudden, catastrophic changes in the economy." Catastrophe aside, people are singing—poorly—in the cold, cold night.

*

I sit in the massaging chair at the CVS pharmacy across from the hospital at 1:15. I'm waiting for the lone technician to finish filling the prescriptions for the baby in line ahead of me. Right now I hate that baby. If I fall asleep right now I'll get an hour and forty-five minutes of shut eye. Hopefully the Vicodin will help.

I have a type two tooth fracture. The tooth is cracked (type one,) nerve is exposed (type two,) but no pulp is showing (type three). I can deal with the pain—fantastic pills on the other side of the counter are waiting to be put into little bottles for me—but the lack of sleep seems insurmountable. I text message my boss who is likely still sleeping to complain about the situation but I don't seriously contemplate calling in sick.

You never call in sick on Black Friday. During the lead up to my first one several years back I heard a story about the commission days when a TV salesman skipped his dad's funeral to work the sale. Management would have understood but when the workers were still on commission, Black Friday was a good chunk of their yearly pay. Sorry, Dad.

Old school "doorbusters" were still big that first year. The line outside the store would rush through the doors and ask where the deals were by frantically shouting "DVD player!" or "laptop!" The limited quantity of some insanely priced piece of electronics would be neatly arranged in a pile somewhere in the store waiting to be picked clean by the heathen hordes like a cow thrown into a tank of piranhas. "Stack 'em high and watch 'em fly!" management used to say.

Management at Circuit City forgot about the loading bay doors that year. Adjacent to the main entrance to the store, the loading bay provided easy access for all the people waiting for the store to open in their nice, warm cars. The people who'd been waiting in the cold for hours in the real line didn't like that much. It was interesting.

Crowd control is key. Retail salespeople are trained to respect customers

as individuals with unique needs during the rest of the year but the crowd on Black Friday isn't unique. It's a hive-minded bull in a china shop. It plows through the store spastically in a confused, exhilarated throng. It bucks its heels, twists around and snorts looking for The Deals. You can see that insane glimmer in the people's eyes as they've finally made it into the building after days of waiting in some cases and suddenly wonder "now what?"

Mismanagement of the crowd can destroy you. At best a customer ends up in the wrong department because they shouted "TV!" and went "over there!" Those people just yell at you. At worst the crowd breaks through the door because they can't wait any longer and trample a temporary worker to death.

*

Jdmimytai Damour was the poor man's name. He was a custodian at a Walmart in Long Island, NY. In 2008 he tried to help hold the main doors of the store shut as The Crowd pressed into them. He fell to the ground when the doors busted. The savage masses trampled over his body as they stormed into the store. He died an hour later. Retail workers of the world agreed: "the deals weren't even that good."

*

I arrive at the store a little before four in the morning. Sleep did not come but the Vicodin did. I have a Tylenol with Codeine too, like icing on a psychopharmacological cake. The parking lot is packed. Several cars snake slowly through the aisles on the prowl for a better spot that does not exist. I stop at the first open space I find, which is somewhere in the vicinity of Barnes and Noble. There's just enough time for one more song on the iPod before I have to cross the threshold into that mad world outside. I think it's Flogging Molly's "Devil's Dance Floor," but my memory is a little hazy. Whatever it is, I play it as loud as the radio will go.

I trek through the lot with my last cigarette before the insanity and down my third Starbuck's Double Shot. The morning of my first Black Friday at Best Buy the general manager arranged for free Red Bull. They handed cans to everyone who would take one at the pre-opening meeting. One employee used his to chase the four Rock Star energy drinks he'd already drank. He was vibrating at that point and couldn't maintain eye contact with anyone. He probably could have passed through walls.

I walk to my department toward the back of the store. My boss and the general manager are there checking email and making last minute plans. My boss gamely asks if I'm up for it and I nod. The GM asks how I'm doing and I giggle. The pain pills are doing their job. In three days' time my body will have acclimated to them, the fracture in my tooth will have worsened and I will be unmanageably cranky. Right now I'm full of a "can do" attitude, though, and every joint in my body feels like it's made of cotton. Bossman decides it will be

best if I just work the cash register during the initial push and I agree.

The GM leads a quick morning meeting in which he promises the sea of blue shirts the most fun, exhilarating and frustrating shift we've ever had. "If you've never been through one of these before, you've never seen anything like it." He says every department will be overrun with customers so don't bother to call for help. "Nobody's going to come," he laughs. Every Black Friday veteran in the store laughs too because laughing is preferable to any other reaction we might have.

The local news sets up their camera just inside the doorway to film the seemingly endless stream of shoppers that will file into the store. Some of them will hoot and holler, but the camera won't capture the kinetic energy filling the place. The air is thick with it. Employees are nervous or jacked up on energy drinks. I retreat to my register where I can't see the door. I hear the noise start off in the distance and know that, in the words of Hunter S. Thompson, the pigs are out of the tunnel.

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It takes half an hour for the line outside to make it all the way into the store. The sky beyond the big bay window at the front of the building is still pitch black. The entirety of the store is packed shoulder to shoulder like the Brewhouse on a Friday night and not a bit of this should be happening. Every single one of us should still be in bed right now. The noise of the store is amazing. You can't hear the sound of the TVs, the home theater systems, boom boxes, car stereos, computer speakers or even the overhead music system. There's just the electric din of all those voices drowning out everything else.

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Over in the digital camera section a lady complains about having to wait in line. The salesperson has no idea how to respond: "I apologize, ma'am? It's an extremely busy day." The customer isn't happy with his apology and continues to complain until the gentleman in line behind her interrupts. The salesperson can't explain to the lady how unreasonable it is to not expect a line on Black Friday but another customer can (with more colorful words, too.)

An older lady tells a manager that it's Best Buy's fault she's out shopping. "You shouldn't run sales like this when you know it's going to be so busy." She demands to go to the front of the line and the manager declines.

A gentleman pulls another manager and complains that so many of the items in the ad had limited quantities and he didn't get any of them. He demands a rain check for every item in the ad that has sold out. The manager points out the not-so-fine print in the ad that reads "No rain checks." The gentleman persists and the manager has to walk away.

*

I finally finish with the line of people in front of my register and duck into the break room. It's impossible to make it even to Arby's for food so the company caters meals during Thanksgiving weekend. I try rolling up a piece of turkey cold cut but it's too much for my broken tooth. I jealously watch other employees down Cheetos and Doritos and other hard, crunchy junk food that have suddenly become the most delicious delicacies in the world.

*

The sun is finally up. This is when the day seems winnable. Survivable. Everything up to this point has been a retail aberration. It's a barely-constrained bolt of insanity that jump starts the holiday season. On one Friday the store will do more business than the entire month of July. It's still abnormally busy but the sun is up now. It feels like real time has resumed.

I go back to the sales floor and a shift that, volume aside, will feel like a regular workday. I'll tell people the difference between the types of TVs. I'll tell them what cables they will need. I'll tell them what is involved in hanging their new TV and what we will and will not do with our installations. I will explain to them that the insanely priced items are all gone now but a lot of good prices are still available.

Somehow I survive until ten o'clock and can finally go home. I did it. After three hours of sleep, a trip to the emergency room and an army of shoppers inexplicably "just looking," I can finally clock out. I zip up my jacket and leave the break room while avoiding eye contact with anyone. I breeze past customers who mutter "I think he works here" and don't look back until I make it to my car lest I turn to salt.

I get home at eleven, and the cat is still in bed. I hate her for just a second. She looks at me and yawns. "You have no idea, kid," I say and close the curtains tight. I turn on the space heater and toss everything I'm wearing to the floor. I can root around for the tie clip and name badge later. I lie down in bed and black out for five hours.

I'm due back at the store at four P.M.

ANDREW MORRISON

Understanding the Intricacies in Battle Royal

2011 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner

Human decadence, what drives it, where are its roots? An intriguing question, one that Ralph Ellison brings to life in his literary work, "Battle Royal." Ellison, the main character of his own story, as a young man, is forced to fight a physical "battle" against other young men of his own race. The white men, who are behind the "battle" and all the other degrading events of the evening, are using the young men for entertainment. It is as though the white men don't have any inkling that what they are doing is wrong. Even when all the events are over, the white men continue with their party as if nothing unusual even happened. Ellison shows cannily and descriptively, throughout the story, the reasons why the white men can do the despicable acts that they do, with no regard to morality. He uses phrases that reference war, and animal and circus imagery to help readers identify the root causes of the unjustified racism and sexism that defines the white men's actions.

Early in the story, Ellison's grandfather illustrates life, to his son, as being a "war"; he says that "he has been a traitor all his born days." He goes on to advise his son to teach the children in the family how to win the war. He says, "Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome'em with yeses, undermine'em with grins, agree'em to death and destruction, let'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" (230). The "them" that Ellison's Grandfather is referring to are the white men in the South. The deep message behind Ellison's Grandfather's statement is to teach the young ones in the family to infiltrate the enemy (the Southern white men) by sneak attack, to use the white men's resources to become a lethal weapon and then turn on them. He wants the little ones to learn to play the white men's game, to let them think that they are in control of it, and then, when the time comes, to turn on them to "overcome'em." This message haunts young Ellison all of his life. He is not only caught up in the war for social equality for all races, but also a war within himself. He identifies this war early on by saying, "I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer" (230). Even though his identity is ambiguous to him, he strives to impress the white people. He wants and receives their approval, yet even their approval causes him to battle within himself. He feels as if he is following through with his Grandfather's advice "in spite of himself," and if the white folks knew what he was doing, they would have done the exact opposite than approve of him.

The almost superstitious part is that throughout the story it seems as

though Ellison is following through on his Grandfather's advice. He shows up to the white men's event to give a speech and is forced to fight in the "battle royal" first. In the fight, he battles against other young men of his own race, except he is alienated from them. The other young men don't like young Ellison, and he doesn't really like them either. He shows up for the white men to impress them, and they use him first to fight against his own people. The other young men show up to get paid and could probably care less what the white men think of them. They probably hate the white men and probably hate young Ellison even more because he is much like them. It is remarkable, really. On the surface, it seems as if young Ellison is becoming the puppet of the white men, just as his Grandfather advised him to be. The white men want to use the black people's own kind to help keep the black community subdued and under their control. The white men value the power they have over the African Americans, and they will go to any length to maintain it. They are, after all, in their own minds, superior to the Negroes.

Women were also victims of the white men's prideful actions. They treated the stripper as if she wasn't even human. Ellison exemplified this point by describing the merchant, who was watching the stripper, as a "beast," who, "followed her hungrily, his lips loose and drooling" (233). The woman was like prey waiting to be used to fulfill his lustful pleasure. She was just a part of the night's entertainment, nothing more. This event, with the stripper, reveals to the reader an even deeper evil. These were grown men who, for the most part, are married. The reader can see that the white men don't hold much value for their wives because they are indulging themselves by having a stripper there. The men's wives would have been deeply wounded by their husband's betrayal, but the men don't care because they obviously don't value their wives' feelings or opinions in the first place.

The young black men, along with Ellison, are treated like animals as well. They are herded around from one degrading event to another. They are yelled at, exposed to the white stripper, forced to fight blindfolded, and electrocuted by a blanket holding their supposed money. No one would do any of these treacherous acts to anyone, not if one considered the other persons to be of equal value. The white men, of course, don't think of the blacks as equal. The white men assign the blacks the same status as animals, animals that could be used for any kind of entertainment required for a good time. The ironic message in the story is that the white men are the ones who are reducing themselves to the level of an animal. They are behaving extremely irrationally. One man, Jackson, even threatens to kill Ellison, while Ellison is standing in the boxing ring blindfolded, when he says, "I want at that ginger-colored nigger. [To] tear him limb from limb" (234). Some of the other white men hold him back from following through with his threat. He behaves as if he is a savage. He has no control over his hate for black Americans and he wants to take it out on an innocent, black young man. His behavior reflects the underlying hate that all

the white men in the story have for the African Americans. Therefore, hate and refusal to accept the blacks as equals fuels the fires of the white men's prejudice, causing the white men to be able to administer and enjoy these despicable acts.

Their treachery reaches a higher level when, during the electric rug event, one of the white men picks up one of the black young men and drops him, full body, onto the electric rug. Ellison describes the young man as "glistening with sweat like a circus seal," and after being dropped onto the rug as "literally dancing on his back, his elbows beating a frenzied tattoo upon the floor, his muscles twitching like the flesh of a horse stung by many flies." The electricity in the rug represents the power that the white men have over the blacks, not only in this situation, but also in everyday life during that time. The "glistening sweat" makes the young man have more conductivity for the electricity and, therefore, the sweat represents the political and social mores of the time that make the whole black populace more susceptible to the power of the white people. The even sadder part is that, just as the young, black men work throughout the night to gain the sweat that covers their bodies, so also is the whole black populace having to work for the same social and political norms that make them more susceptible to the white power in the first place. Just as the white man throws the young black man on the rug, so also is the white populace throwing the black populace, as a whole, perpetually onto the enormous, stinging pain of the power the white populace has over them, just like a "horse stung by many flies."

In this story, the white men have showed up to the smoker to be entertained. Since they have the power to use members of the black populace, they choose to do so. Their smoker resembles a circus and, therefore, the term "circus seal" is appropriate when Ellison describes the boy who is about to be thrown on the rug. Also, Ellison is living out his Grandfather's advice by "living with his head in the lion's mouth." He is risking incredible danger, just like a man putting his head in a lion's mouth at the circus to entertain the white men—the white men that he feels he will betray someday. The connection between the smoker and the circus continues when young Ellison dreams of himself and his late Grandfather going to the circus, and his Grandfather will not find any humor in anything that the clowns do. The clowns represent the young black men who are being used to amuse the white men, and Ellison's Grandfather doesn't find it funny at all. The clowns also represent the view reversal that will occur in the future, when the American populace will look back and decry the terrible acts done by the white men in the South. They will be the ones who are made to look the fool. The American populace, just like Ellison's Grandfather, will look at the acts the white men found so amusing and not laugh at all. The irony is that the white men cling to their false sense of superiority over the black populace and, in posterity, they will be the ones looked down upon as barbaric and inferior.

In the case of this story, along with any other related case, human

decadence is driven by hate, by arrogance, by prejudice and by fear. Yes, fear. The white men didn't want to lose the power and sense of superiority they had held for centuries over the black populace and also the female populace. Events, such as the smoker in the story, existed for more than just entertainment; they existed to keep the black populace and female populace believing they are inferior and the white male populace believing they are superior. Both the African Americans and the female stripper are outnumbered and overpowered in the "Battle Royal" by the white men. The two minority entities certainly lost the underlying battle for equality in this instance, but we all know who ended up winning the war.

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JANNA POTTS

Keeping on Nodding Terms with America in the 1960s

2013 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner

Throughout the essays “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” and “On Keeping a Notebook,” the persona of Joan Didion slowly peers out through her subtle white spaces, sincere voice, and unique organization to meet the realizations and connections of the reader slowly forming between her sharp glimpses into the past. These white spaces are gaps left for the reader to fill in as Didion reveals her inseparable relationship with honesty and neurotic concerns that carry over to the infamous Haight-Ashbury scene of the 1960s. Combined, these elements fuse together to communicate the idea of a disintegrating American society while at the same time further establishing Didion’s persona of raw honesty and insightful subjectivity.

Pinpointing Didion’s top priorities as a writer fails to be a difficult search, as her essays are saturated and interwoven with them. This is particularly true in “Keeping a Notebook,” as the whole essay is practically centered around discussing how she writes and for what purposes. The reader sits directly in her mind, seeing how the process works as she weaves her way through a series of memories and then stops in the middle to admit something few writers would – that she participates in “what some would call lies.” However, after some explaining, the reader sees that they’re really not lies in a sense of being harmful statements that reduce the integrity of her writing as much as they are natural flaws in the human memory and details that strengthen the memory. What Didion “lies” about are small, obscure details she includes only to convey exactly how that moment felt to her at the time, such as eating cracked crab or looking outside at snowflakes. This is illustrated best by her statements “And yet it is precisely that fictitious crab that makes me see the afternoon all over again” and later, “but that was how it felt to me, and it might as well have snowed, could have snowed, did snow.” When she says this in “On Keeping a Notebook,” she drives the point home that although these details do not matter in the sense of actual existence, they are incredibly crucial to preserving the precise feeling and sincere tone of a memory. In her own piece, Katherine Henderson includes Didion’s comment on the importance of this technique, which states, “style and artifice are not the enemies of truth, but the means to approach it” (144). Mark Muggli also positively embraces this technique of Didion’s, remarking that her writing is not read for facts and “figuralty gives her journalism much its interest” (406). In turn, these techniques reveal two key components of Didion’s persona. By admitting such a nontraditional technique many could violently

criticize her for, as well her other many faults and imperfections as a person, she reveals her high value in honesty and integrity within writing. Katherine Henderson comments that this is implicit to Didion because for her, “however multiple and ambiguous it may be, truth exists and can be approached by the writer with the courage and skill to project a coherent, realistic, vision” (144). Alongside this necessity for truth, she also exposes her fixation on capturing the moment exactly as it was felt and perceived without altering the true idea behind the event.

These infatuations with truth and capturing the moment make sense for a persona like Didion’s, especially when considering the rest of “On Keeping a Notebook.” The entire idea of the essay illustrates Didion’s compulsion to have the opportunity to analyze and know herself through her memories, shown most obviously by her overall habit of keeping notebooks. In fact, self-analysis seems to also lie as an implicit notion in Didion’s eyes as Henderson describes her basis of integrity being “based on rigorous and continual self-scrutiny” (144). She is almost consumed with the act of recording her thoughts and experiences to ensure she keeps track of who she’s been – an idea she recommends and describes as keeping “on nodding terms with the people we used to be.” This is where the source of the neurotic, anxious side of her starts to become unearthed; “On Keeping a Notebook” reveals she is terrified of forgetting who she was, losing track of her identity and becoming forever misguided. In fact, she even touches upon this concept herself early in the essay saying keepers of notebooks are a unique breed and “children afflicted apparently at birth with some presentiment of loss.” Sharing all this, Didion somehow transforms herself into a paradox of sorts; she is neurotic, unstable, and fearful and includes details of her imagination, yet her obsession and honesty that stem from these grounds her writing and gives it a certain integrity, stability, genuineness, and balanced wholeness between subjectivity and objectivity. Henderson comments upon this as well in her work, remarking that Didion “violates the convention of traditional journalism whenever it suits her purpose, fusing the public and the personal, frequently placing herself in an otherwise objective essay” (144). This notion is the settling foundation of Didion’s credibility and trust, and helps the reader see exactly how Didion’s persona, when interwoven with her writing, communicates and reinforces the structure of her messages.

This is seen particularly in “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” where Didion’s foundation of credibility and trust is further built upon, mainly through her organization of the essay. Even though it is impossible to remain completely objective when documenting something, Didion gives off the impression of remaining objective enough to allow the reader to form his or her own opinions before she offers her subjective conclusion of things. This is exemplified best by her use of white space within her essays, especially “Slouching Towards Bethlehem.” There are frequent breaks of white space within the essay

conveying a break or transition from scene to scene or time itself. While it may appear that "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" lacks smooth transitions or chronology because of this, the truth is that the breaks are transitions themselves and without them the essay would have scenes and characters running into each other and overlapping in an unflattering way. Instead, they reflect the chaotic nature of the time itself, and more importantly, they serve quite literally as gaps or spaces that allow the reader to form connections in his or her mind while reading the content. Muggli comments upon this same idea, saying part of the success of her writing is from being "given a white space in which to echo" (408). This is what contributes to Didion's trust and credibility. She does not give off the feeling that she is trying to force her agenda down one's throat or convince the reader that she is the only person fit to judge. Instead, she provides a diversity of illustrations that the reader can experience firsthand, and then she merely leaves white space to signal a change in scene and let the reader make inferences in between.

Didion's trust as a writer is enhanced by this diversity she includes between these white spaces; she includes not just her own viewpoint and opinion but the observations and opinions of the police, a San Francisco psychiatrist, and large number of the hippies themselves. She takes the reader into the interrogation room itself and lets the reader hear Officer Gerrans comment, "I would say the major problems are narcotics and juveniles. Juveniles and narcotics, those are your main problems." A few paragraphs later, she leaves a chunk of white space and lets the reader witness a different scene, stating "Norris and I are standing around the Panhandle" and then, "Norris says it would be a lot easier if I'd take some acid." Some pages later, she includes the comments of a psychiatrist, who begins saying "Anyone who thinks this is all about drugs has his head in a bag." To try and do anything but leave white space between these contrasting scenes would be overwhelming and unnatural to the true chaotic nature behind the whole setting. Not only this, but it would cause the writing to fail in having any room for the reader's interpretation, which is a key part of any literature. The white space combined with Didion's choice of diverse viewpoints and statements establish her essay as credible as a journalism piece. Mark Muggli reiterates Didion's role as a journalist saying, "Didion and the news reporter share the crucial assumption that they present objects and events as documents that recreate history" (404).

The organization and content of "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" not only reveals how Didion's organization reveals and strengthens her credibility, but also mirrors the disintegration of American society. Didion's splicing of various scenes and characters with white space creates a feeling of disarray and commotion, much like the environment of Haight-Ashbury. In fact, she opens up her essay saying, "The center was not holding," referencing the poem "The Second Coming" that is full of dread and uneasiness and contains a line

that inspires her essay's title. Most of Didion's concerns become obvious as she finally offers her particular insight on Haight-Ashbury near the end of her essay, commenting on the new generations, saying they are "an army of children waiting to be given the words," and that they are "less in rebellion against the society than ignorant of it." After patiently searching for answers and reasons behind the controversial movement taking place on Haight-Ashbury, Didion at last concludes that these young generations have no purpose other than to rebel for the sake of rebelling and to look for the next best drug. Their ignorance is epitomized by people such as Jeff and Debbie, who marvel to Didion about the fact that their parents dare give them chores and restrict the way they dress and act. It is then further darkened by scenes such as the one featuring a little boy named Michael who burns his arm and goes unnoticed due to the adults' fixation on retrieving some hash. Muggli includes a comment by Mark Winchell who says this scene reflects "the pathological self-absorption and moral disorder which pervade Haight-Ashbury" (411). After all this, Didion's conclusion seems fitting as she expresses her disturbance over this generation who chooses to embrace drugs and running away instead of responsibility and maturity. What makes her theme of disintegration tied to America as a whole, however, are her remarks on the older generation's contribution to the chaos such as "we had somehow neglected to tell these children the rules of the game we happened to be playing." She continues "to render the moral complexity of contemporary American experience," as Henderson puts it, through the notion that these generations grew up cut loose from family members and role models who used to be responsible for enforcing society's morals and values. Didion's words trail off and the reader is left with an unsettling image of a little five-year-old girl on acid, and all of a sudden all the chaos, white space, and spliced scenes and characters come together to shatter the illusion of the 1960s happy flower power movement, and communicate the message that the American society is disintegrating.

This is a powerful theme; one that arises gradually and successfully thanks to the components of Didion's persona. Her high regard to honesty, both in admitting her faults and external portrayals of the world, allows the reader to see a side of America in the 1960s usually hidden and disregarded, while at the same time establishing Didion's credibility and trust as a writer. In addition, her unique methods of organization, content, and structures such as white space, help reiterate and reflect her themes such as the growing disillusionment of America.

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PETER STEENHUIS

Salty Ocean Breeze*2011 Best of Academic Nonfiction Winner*

My German hometown is actually closer to the Netherlands than to Germany. Since I can remember, I have lived on the small but beautiful German island called Borkum. Some people don't like to live in such a place, which you sometimes can't leave in the dark and freezing winter months, because of hard storms and a frozen harbor. I love it. Since I have been here in the United States, there has been one thing I miss the most about my lovely island: the beach. Growing up in a place where people usually pay money to visit is a fantastic thing. Tourists come here to go to the lightly tan-colored sand beaches and swim in the mild and salty ocean water or just to relax in the hot summer sun from all the troubles they face in their everyday lives. I would simply go to the beach to enjoy my life, mostly with my friends who think about this place the same way I do. I love the beaches in the summer on the beautiful island called Borkum at every time of the day.

I love the slightly chilly, yet heartwarming summer mornings on Borkum. One early morning after a night I didn't sleep that well, I woke up and just couldn't fall back asleep. It was just around 5:40 a.m. and still dark outside. I got out of my sweaty bed and opened my not very clean window. A fresh and salty ocean breeze came into my room, and instantly I day-dreamed about sitting on the beach to enjoy the morning air on a lazy Sunday. I put on my black Adidas running boots, the Porsche of all shoes, with their three white stripes on each side. I walked out the door and started racing towards the ocean. After about five minutes of running on the empty streets, I reached the beach. I stopped for no longer than ten seconds to watch the horizon, where the orange sun was rising to start another warm summer Sunday. I kept on running. Close to the foam line, which the calm waves were making, the cool water almost touched my shoes with the rising tide of this restful morning. As I took heavy steps through the wet sand, I left the first foot prints in the soft sand of this not yet busy Sunday. Only a few more hours and the beaches would be filled with annoying, loud tourists, screaming kids, and the ringing of the bikes, with topless, old, sweaty dudes. There was this uniqueness on this particular day, with things that usually happen every day, but still left me wondering why this place is so special to me. This is not the only thing so special about this place. About two weeks after that sleepless night on a Monday, before I had to go to work at 10 a.m., I thought I might as well go for a little swim in the chilly waters of the North Sea on this calm, warm morning. It was right before 9 a.m. I remember the time because the morning comedy shows just started with *Two and a Half Men*. I stepped on my red mountain bike, which is kind of ironic, because we have no mountains here, and rode to the beach. The streets started to get busy like every day of

the summer season. The tourists walked all over the streets like they owned the place and nobody else is there. I loved it though. After a short drive on my bike, which is way too small for me, I arrived at the ocean. The beach started to fill with people, who I mostly ignored. I stepped off my bike, no need to lock it, because here nobody gets away with stealing, and I walked down to the sand. I already had my swimming shorts on; I wear them all the time, because you never know when you will end up on the beach again. I walked on the concrete blocks, which were lined up into the ocean, like arms, to keep the mighty waves from taking all the weak sand into the depths of the sea. After about fifty meters into the ocean, I took the jump into the cool, murky waters of the North Sea. My head went into the water first. The first jump is always the most refreshing one. It was like a slap of a wet, watery hand right onto my forehead, which killed all the tiredness I had. It felt like I swam for hours, but when I came out of the water, refreshed, I looked at my watch and it told me that I only swam for nineteen minutes. I love those morning refreshments in the cool, but pleasant and lovely waters. There is one more event, which is special to me and I want to share with you. On the next day, a buddy and I decided to do some exercise on the beach. At 8 a.m., on my day off from work, I went on my bike, to pick him up. Here, on Borkum, everybody owns at least one bike, so we went to everybody's favorite place: the beach. We took an orange glowing ball with us; it was a little bit flat, but that was enough to play some beach soccer. With the ball in one hand and the handlebar of the bike in the other, we drove fast, very fast, to the beach. And there it was again, the sound of the waves and the strong smell of the salty air. We threw our bikes on the side, and I somehow simultaneously kicked the ball as far as I could. We went down to the sand and started wildly running to the ball and kicking it randomly around. People walking on the sides were staring at us, but we kept on running and kicking. The feeling of sand between my bare toes was amazing. My feet got red and hurt from kicking the slightly flat ball around on the beach, but we went on. I love this random, but controlled rage of kicking the ball on a nice and warm morning here on the beautiful beach of Borkum.

Afternoons on the beach with friends are a precious thing to me. After a kind of cloudy morning, the sun started to look through the clouds and it seemed like the sun would scare them away. It was Saturday, the day of a friend's birthday. He invited a whole bunch of my old classmates and me. He told everybody to come to this particular place on the beach this early afternoon. He was afraid that the mean clouds were going to stay for the day to ruin his birthday, but the sun was his savior. We arrived with all of our swimming stuff, which is like a regular thing here: everybody always brings their swimming stuff everywhere. He didn't really plan anything, but everybody enjoyed themselves. Drinking here is legal at age sixteen, that's all I am going to say about that. We all had a great time. Two of my best friends and I went into the nice and warm afternoon water. We mostly don't really swim into the water, and we didn't on this day, either. We went in there and just did stuff little kids would do, like

throwing sand at each other and wrestle around or throwing the ball. It seems like the water makes the mind young, even the minds of girls, who think all this kid's stuff is stupid. It ended up to be a great day at the beach with my friends. Even if it was a birthday, it seemed like a normal day on this beautiful beach on a great, sunny, cloudless afternoon. Normal days can also turn out very special; the next day did. After work, at about 4 p.m., some buddies and I swam to "the tower," right in the water about ten minutes of swimming away from the beach. This is one of the most memorable moments I have from an afternoon on the beach of Borkum. With a group of five people, we went to "the tower," which is about 30 feet high and yellow colored all around. It is used for warning huge freight ships not to come too close to the beach. The difficulty of swimming against the streamline of the ocean to the tower tired out our muscles, and we really hoped it would go faster, or that the tower would be closer. As we arrived, we stepped on the ladder which was full of shells and mussels. As we climbed up, my foot started bleeding from the hard shells slicing up the soft skin under my foot. At the top of the high tower, the smell of salt and algae was amazingly strong. Seagulls were flying around us making loud cawing noises. There was a railing all around the platform on top of the tower. The wind was strong, and it made our wet bodies freezing cold after the long swim in the streaming water. Two guys jumped first into the deep, dark waters of the North Sea. After that, it was my turn. Many thoughts went through my head. I felt chained against the cold rail after I climbed over it to get ready to jump. I took the leap. My body was full of adrenalin while dropping about 28 feet down into the deep, mystic ocean. I had always been afraid of what would be down there, but I didn't think about it at that moment. The jump only took milliseconds, and I splashed into the streaming, cool water. I felt like a new person. That moment welded me and my friends more together. Even writing about this event gets me out of air; I still feel the moment. It was a great afternoon. Another example of those lovely days is from last year, when there was the soccer world cup in Africa. The mayor of Borkum ordered to put up a huge, white tent right on the beach for all people to come and watch the matches of the German national team. I met there with my friends right before the 4 p.m. match against Argentina. We bought ourselves some ice cold German beers on this beautiful afternoon and sat down on a green colored, old wooden bench. We really enjoyed ourselves seeing our successful national team win this exciting match by four goals. Many people were going barefoot, but I don't remember why I went in there with shoes. I only know that after watching that match, which had people jumping and celebrating after every goal, my shoes were full of sand, and everybody knows that if you have sand in your shoes once, you never get it all out. It was still a great afternoon with my friends seeing our team win on the sandy beaches of Borkum.

Summer nights on the beach are always fantastic. After a two day stretch of doing nothing at night, a friend called me and told me there would be a party on Saturday night right on the beach. I got ready to go out and, at about 9 p.m.,

I jumped on my bike and drove by some friends' houses to pick them up so we could all go together. It wasn't dark yet; the sun usually doesn't go down till about ten, maybe a little later. We arrived just as the bright sunset made the whole ocean sparkle like stars in the water or an ocean of millions of people taking photos of us. One of my buddies brought a brand new charcoal grill. He lighted it up and after a few minutes, it was hot enough to put the fresh, great seasoned meats on it. We were about thirty hungry people, but somehow everybody got a good satisfying amount of meat. The smoky, sweet smell of meat in the air drew a lot of hungry, loud seagulls to the place. Everybody was relaxed and happy, and some were active playing soccer on the side in the soft cool sand of this summer night. It was getting dark quickly; you could see the sun move down with your bare eyes within less than one minute. Great nights like this happen week after week. There was another night which was great: in the amazing summer of 2010, on a cloudless, star-filled Friday night, my friends and I went out to get some cold drinks at a modern, but cozy local bar. After about three hours at that bar, we decided to walk to the beach, which is only about two minutes away. What we didn't know was that this was a special night. Something was happening that I'd never seen before. It is called marine luminescence, which is algae in the water that glows in the light of the moon. We saw no greater thing than to jump into the calm shallow waters to enjoy this unique event of this great mystical night. We jumped in the water the same way we went into the bar—with clothes. We just stood in this magical liquid and watched the glowing for about an hour; it just drew our gazes deep into the shallow, blazing waters. It was amazing. On the next day, I heard from a friend that even his grandma, who is a native from this island, had never seen this before. I call myself very lucky that we decided to go to the beach that night. You don't always have to be lucky to experience nights like the following, however. Recently, on a night with a full moon in the summer, it seemed impossible for me to sleep in my bedroom filled with the heat of that long summer day. I only saw one thing I could do about this annoying problem. I wanted to get some fresh air. I put some shorts on and stepped outside. It was close to two o'clock on this breezy almost-morning and the night was lit up by the full moon. I went to the beach to take a relaxing stroll along the water side to enjoy the fresh, salty ocean breeze. That helped me to get my mind cleared and cooled me off a little bit. When I went home to get into my soft bed, I finally could sleep.

After many years of living on this beautiful island, I have made many more unique experiences, but there are too many to tell. My time on this island was the best time I ever had. The summer is the most memorable time there. There are parties every week in the summer months, and the beach is beautiful and amazing every single day. Sunny days, a warm ocean, slightly cooling winds, vital roaming of tourists, salty air, wild parties, relaxing on the beach, and the quiet movements of seagulls in the calm winds all belong to my daily life there on this paradise-like island called Borkum. Summers on this beautiful island

are fantastic at every time of the day. If you would ask me which time of the day I like it there the most, I would say, all of them. I just love everything that happens on this beach. It's hard to imagine that you can be in paradise after an only two hour drive from the German harbor on the local ferryboat, while it takes only one hour from the Netherlands. This hidden paradise is just a little trip away.

GERRY KOKE RISHEL

Chopping Down the Tree, the River and the Memory Book

2013 Best of Fiction Winner

Chopping Down the Tree

Mom didn't like it when I was alone with Dad. She was afraid we were talking about her . . . plotting against her. Even when she lay dying, unconscious from the drugs to make it all easier, we maintained her boundaries. Dad sat in an adjoining room watching television. I waited. Mom's tortured breathing was like fingernails scraping down the blackboard of her lungs. We beat the sun to the hospital. As the day went on, intervals between breaths grew longer.

I went next door and found Dad laughing at "America's Funniest Game Show Bloopers." He tried to share his favorite with me but remembering it started him laughing so hard that tears ran down his cheeks. He couldn't get the words out.

I could see that the hours of waiting were wearing him down. The strain showed in his eyes and he rubbed his hairless scalp often to erase the fatigue. When I went back to Mom, the room was silent.

After the funeral, Dad said, "Go home. I need to get used to being on my own." We stood in the driveway, saying goodbye. He looked at a straggly pine growing beside the house. "I wanted to chop that down but your mom wouldn't let me. I guess now I can cut it down if I want to."

The River

Dad and I go to visit Mom in the hospital. In addition to the emphysema, she's been diagnosed with pneumonia. The oxygen snakes that have trapped her at home for so long have followed her here and surround her on the bed. The machine hisses in the background. She wears a clip on her finger to measure oxygen in her blood. Red, digital numbers constantly update on the readout beside the bed. No alarm sounds. Mom used to be afraid of snakes.

She has scabs on her nose and forehead from falling forward out of the bedside chair. How does that happen? The doctor has ordered her to stay in bed. I'm awkward around this woman I've known all my life. Are there safe questions to ask? "How are you feeling? What do the doctors say? Will you be coming home soon?" These don't feel safe.

We look at each other across the starched expanse of white sheets. I try to fill the silence. I talk about her grandson. "He's doing well in school. Straight A's on the last report card. There's a band concert coming up. He has a solo." I tell

her everything I can think of, including news that isn't new to either of us. She tells me again that he is her heart.

Dad is antsy. He hangs back by the door and doesn't say anything but I can tell. Probably, Mom can too. Soon he leaves for the cafeteria. I stay with Mom. I keep trying to scale the conversational wall between us.

"There's a lot of traffic on the river," I say. I try to describe it; to give it some life. I tell her about the barges shoving their cargo downstream and the pleasure boaters going full throttle across the flat expanse of muddy brown water. I try to keep it light. Below the bank outside their living room windows, Old Man River just keeps on rolling along. But she's heard this tune many times and it's not her favorite. She's afraid of the water.

"Have you had many visitors?" I ask. She perks up a little. She had a nice visit with some old friends yesterday. She tells me about it. Finally, she is contributing words to fill some of the empty space between us.

Then Dad is back. It feels like he just left. "Well, I guess we'd better get going," he says. He's poised by the door, ready to flee down the hall.

Mom looks stricken but she won't ask. She turns and faces away from us. I lean over the bed and hug her goodbye. Dad says from the doorway, "We'll be back tomorrow."

The phone call comes in the middle of the night.

The Memory Book

The call comes from the hospital. Dr. Somebody from Emergency, an aspiring pugilist, punches her in the gut. She asks how. He says heart. She hangs up. She tries to hide behind her hands but her fingers are washed aside by the flood. Within the hour she leaves for Dad's house, a few days earlier than they'd originally planned. His birthday isn't for another week.

The quiet house hurts her ears. Ghosts are living there now.

The little girl has a birthday. She sits in the place of honor at the dining room table in her crisply ironed dress, her blond hair curled and held back with plastic barrettes the same color as her glasses. What she gets is not what she wanted. Her Mom says, "Dad wanted to buy your presents this year." Dad notices her trying so hard to be polite. He tells Mom, "I'll never buy her anything again."

The bigger girl sits at the piano. She's been practicing for hours to get the song just right. He stands behind her, his thin frame casting a shadow on the music. She plays for him but her sweaty fingers slip off the keys. He pulls the newspaper from under his arm and settles in the living room.

The grown-up woman visits her Dad. As she's leaving, he says, "I love

you.” The words don’t quite fit his mouth but she doesn’t care. She’s been waiting a long time. She says, “I love you too, Dad.”

The woman has a child of her own. She’s written a story about a stuffed dog that protects little boys from monsters under the bed. Dad reads the story. He is surprised. He tells her it’s a good story. She is surprised.

The woman foxtrots with Dad at the 40th anniversary party. He compliments her on her dancing. She reminds him. “Remember when you and Mom dragged me to The Arthur Murray Dance Studio so you wouldn’t have to pay a sitter? You danced together while I danced by myself in the corner.” He’s surprised she still remembers. She’s glad she still remembers.

The phone call comes in the middle of the night. It’s about Mom. They have to leave right away. Dad has been the driver her whole life. Tonight, they’re both tired and raw. The woman says, “Dad, I’ll drive to the hospital.” She thinks he might argue. Instead he says, “I’m glad you’re here.”

The next morning, she goes to the funeral home. The funeral director asks her what Dad would want. To not be dead? Otherwise, she has no idea. But she makes arrangements, just like a grown-up.

People come to the visitation and funeral, pulling sympathy out of their pockets like Kleenex. She talks to the next-door neighbor who sat with Dad while they waited for the ambulance that came too late. The neighbor kept calling while Dad kept dying. She wants to ask the neighbor a question but she’s too afraid of the answer.

At the gravesite, the funeral director plays Amazing Grace on the bagpipes, and an American Legion honor guard fires a 9-gun salute for a member of the Greatest Generation.

The funeral director hands her the memory book that stood on the podium by the door to the viewing room. She holds it like the last canteen of water in the desert. The memories of her Dad are precious but, right now, the important ones are hers. She strokes the smooth leather binding but the book stays closed.

Afterward, she goes back to Dad’s house. “I’m here for the party, Dad,” she says to empty air. “What have I missed?”

SARAH SKORCZEWSKI

Sto Lat, Sto Lat

2010 Best of Fiction Winner

It took seventy-two hours of constant deliberation before a name was decided, and it took ten seconds after the papers were signed and an announcement was made before the boy’s Grandmother, Morta Korzybski, was cursing in her ancient Lithuanian tongue.

Tomasz. A fine name, easily Americanized by future classmates and employers. A strong name, consonants at either end acting like pillars between which a sturdy life might be built. A Polish name, after the arrogant, simple-minded man she had to look at, cook for, and sleep next to for as many years as her kids lived at home before she escaped into the land of the single. As the bottle of vodka flowed more and more freely, her voice bellowed higher and shouted louder both complaints on the origin of Tomasz’s name and blessings for his birth.

“Mykolas Korzybski,” Morta cried between shots. “A good Lithuanian name. Do you see? Do you see how it keeps your tongue moving as you say it? Do you know why that is?”

They all knew but said nothing. All attention was on little Tomasz who was, at the moment, looking around at the commotion, wondering what he had gotten himself into.

The old woman continued, taking the child into her leathery, drunken arms.

“It is because Lithuanian children are not lazy like Polish children. They do their chores and honor their parents. And they have a name that keeps them disciplined as they are too busy learning how to spell it!” she said, tapping Tomasz on the nose. The room smiled as Morta’s mood swung back to jovial.

Jane Korzybski, Morta’s American daughter-in-law with as much culture as a paper clip, sighed, reaching her arms out to take her first-born prize. Her face held unease, as if Morta was a drunk old lady holding her hours-old child loosely in her arms. Perhaps, many would say if seeing the situation for themselves, she had reason.

Her reach went ignored.

Instead, Morta continued to lay affections on the child.

“Tomasz, Tomasz. My little Tomasz. It could be worse, I am sure. Even if it is Polish.”

Her son Mekas, named after great Lithuanian filmmaker Jonas Mekas, prodded his Mother’s pride with a smirk.

“Yes, we thought about naming him Dmitri,” he said.

Morta’s eyebrows, recently drawn on that very morning, attempted to rise

in distress.

“And I suppose you’d add a “Y” at the end of Korzybski and be done with it! No, no Tomasz,” she said, channeling her energy back to her Grandson. “Even a Polish name is better than Russian. A Polish toast to my Polish Tomasz.”

Shifting the baby to one arm, she poured herself another shot.

“Be careful, Morta,” Jane warned, her eyes never leaving her son.

“Oh shut-up. I raised three sons and had seven dogs in my life. Do you think I did that without vodka? Anyway, no baby can live a good life without a toast from his Babcia.”

She raised the shot glass like a fine wine glass, allowing anybody running on empty to refill with the proper amount of alcohol.

In a thick, wavy voice and without any sense of key or tune, Morta began:

**“Sto lat, sto lat,
Niech zyje, zyje nam.
Sto lat, sto lat,
Niech zyje, zyje nam,
Jeszcze raz, jeszcze raz, niech zyje, zyje nam,
Niech zyje nam!”**

Downing the drinks, the family clapped happily. Morta was forgiven for her crazy antics, and, after relinquishing the child to his rightful owner, she soon began the walk to her home.

This was the way Tomasz Korzybski entered the world.

The walk from St. Stanislaw’s to his small brick home took only fifteen minutes at a stroll. The run, however, took only eight minutes and made for a much more abstract view of the scenery. The orange fall leaves melted into a fiery ball of molten lava swirling atop brown trunks, occasionally spitting out an obstacle course of flaming comets into the pools of lava already coating the sidewalk. Picket fences became the ash remnants of structures long forgotten, and cars were monsters swimming through the maze of grey lakes, taking passengers to wherever they might need.

Crisp fall air makes for happy little boys, and at nine years old on one of October’s giddy Fridays, Tomasz raced through his tiny neighborhood to the quaint run-down movie theatre owned by his parents. Opening the door with the ease of monotonous recurrence, he ran up the stairs of the projection room, each step thundering under his feet as a warning to whoever lay behind the door that he was not to be kept any longer than an instant.

The projection room had but two lights, one above the projectors which allowed for films to be threaded with the precision and accuracy that old machines needed and one taking up the slack, spreading through the rest of the

room in the hopes that no one would fall over the boxes stacked five high full of reels of useless film as well as screws, bolts, and random tools organized in no particular way but always available if a person had enough patience. This light was partially obstructed by his tall Father whose hands held two loose strips of film above his head in an attempt to find a matching picture.

“I’m going to Babcia’s,” Tomasz said as both a greeting and a goodbye, and before his Father had time to respond he was thundering back down the stairs, his only trace being the swoosh of the door as it closed slowly behind him.

“Lucky her,” said Mekas before splicing the two strips together and winding them upon the reel for the night’s show.

Upon entering his grandmother’s house, he was greeted by an Airedale named Lady who protected the house by running to find her owner whenever anyone broke into the house. Some things, Lady knew, were best kept to those with opposable thumbs. Morta named her dog Lady for one reason: it was English for Morta, and she and her dog were one in the same. Had her dog not been a damned coward so easily startled that her tail wagging sent her into a panic, she would have named her Morta as well.

Tomasz followed Lady through the hallway and into the eggshell colored kitchen in which he had spent his childhood watching the old ladies of his family peeling potatoes for hours the night before any social get-together involving food. Such gatherings included weddings, births, reunions, birthdays, holidays, and, most of all, funerals. Though tomorrow held no special function for the family, a pot of potatoes boiled on the stove as the smell of already rotting peels permeated the air, its perfume a mixture of salt and earthy soil.

“Babcia, Babcia,” Tomasz cried, shaking in excitement. He put his pile of books on the counter but did not let go of the black handled box he held in his other hand.

“Hello Tomasz, did you bring school work to do?” Morta asked, scooping the potato peels into the trash as she had done so many times before.

“Yes, Babcia. And we got our band assignments today. Ms. Lamsargas said I was really good. Look what she gave me,” he said. Each word acted as a propeller for the next until the sentences were so fast that Morta had to sit down just to listen.

He opened the box and pulled a tarnished golden trumpet from inside the hidden depths. As he placed it on his lips, the loudest, most foul noise punctured the air. Morta drew back at the sound, her drawn-on eyebrows raising as only Tomasz could make them, and she hushed her grandson with a string of incomprehensible words.

“What is this that you brought into my house? What is that ugly thing?” she asked, irritated.

“It’s a trumpet. It is a musical instrument you play,” he explained, his voice still trying to hold the excitement that flourished in it a moment

previously.

"I know that, you silly little boy. But it is not an instrument that you play. Others might, but a Korzybski never plays such a brassy little noisemaker. No, no, no. Nonsense. Tomorrow we will go get you a proper instrument, and you can take that back to your teacher with a note from your Babcia, okay?"

Completely deflated, Tomasz nodded. Morta muttered to herself as she stood to mash the boiled potatoes, and Lady stood valiantly by, waiting for any scraps that might fall.

This was the moment his future was decided for him.

The boredom in his voice as he told his story was met only by the fluid drone with which he told it. He felt as he did in high school when he used to record the answering machine's message at his parent's theatre—always the same information told in words changed a miniscule amount from week to week in an effort to stir excitement for that particular show. The shows he talked about now, however, were his own, and the information conveyed tilted more toward music and meaning rather than show times and plots.

Some days he didn't know which he preferred.

The bar was the same as every other bar in any other town. Gruff barmen took orders from twenty-somethings in too-tight clothing while straggling thirty-somethings attempted to blend in. The décor attempted to file itself under "vintage" with booths lining the walls, each getting its own pinned-up pin-up who gave a coy smile from beyond the framed glass protecting them. A waitress who was too smart to be dealing with the drunken idiots who tipped her after every round but too savvy to pass up the hundreds of dollars each night brought in placed a plain white napkin in front of him, topping it with a curved glass of vodka tonic.

The bill was tabbed by the woman across from him, and he nodded out of grateful habit in her direction. A moment passed as the pair took a sip from their respective drinks, and he couldn't help but wince as the taste of vodka was overpowered by the smell of whatever whiskey concoction she had ordered.

She noticed his eyes narrow.

"What is it?" she asked, her voice jumping pitches with the excitement that only a reporter discovering a possible angle to her story could manage.

He thought of the possible ways to approach his answer.

"My Babcia told me that a woman who drinks whiskey is never to be trusted."

She wrote the quote in her notepad, the writing so immaculate that he could read it upside-down by the small light coming from overhead. Tomasz studied the woman as she did so. She wore an over-pieced outfit that probably took her three hours to put together, and the notebook she wrote in was an expensive journal bought at some book store in anticipation for the meeting.

He thought back to the beginning of the conversation, trying to remember what local paper she was writing for. Some blog, he recalled. "Good for instant promotion," his tour manager had said.

He shook his head in silent disagreement with his manager and drank a few sips from his tonic.

"Now," the reporter continued, "this is the Grandma you were talking about earlier, right?"

"Of course. My other grandma is American and far too politically correct to make such a comment."

"Politically correct? How do you mean?" Tomasz smirked, finally having fun.

"Well, Babcia Morta would then go on to explain that a woman who drinks whiskey must be Scottish and probably just wants your money."

Opening her mouth in protest, the reporter returned to the usual path of questions, her voice forcibly professional. In all actuality, Tomasz knew the woman wanted to throw the said beverage at him, glass and all, and was disappointed at her for not falling into his attempt to stir up trouble. He yearned to tell Babcia Morta about the woman just to watch her rise to the occasion and spew out her opinion, entertaining him for a few minutes.

The interview continued: "Are you enjoying your stay in Maine?" "Any specific songs we can look forward to you playing?" "Any new songs?" "How's the tour with your fellow Monsters of the Accordion bands?" "Any animosity? Romances?"

He checked each one off, falling back into his answering machine voice. "Tonight's movie is... It starts at seven o'clock and ends at... Tickets are five dollars... Hope to see you soon..."

Sometimes he wondered why reporters didn't just read old interviews and paraphrase. The answers to the questions are always the same, and since the questions never changed, one could make an easy leap to what the article should say. He had dreamed of an interview of offbeat, thought-provoking questions that would start a conversation worth the cost of the tour. He had no idea a whiskey-drinker might deliver this to him.

As Tomasz's attention flat-lined, the question hung in mid-air, and it took a moment for him to even notice it. Unexpected. Unprompted. In a little bar in Maine during an interview with a local blogger, the question came:

"Who do you play for?"

After a moment of thought, Tomasz continued his story.

She had been conscious when he arrived, but it was clear that she was holding on in the stubborn way she did everything. She did nothing without a fight, dying being no exception. Visiting hours had nearly passed, but the nurse had given him a quiet nod when he entered the hospital. His parents had left the

room, giving him time to talk to her, but they warned him that the stroke made her go in and out of lucidity.

Her first words were her own, and he smiled as they passed her lips. “Do you have any vodka?”

He shook his head.

“Sorry Babcia, it was all confiscated.”

“They want me to die so they can have a good dinner this weekend. I already saw the receipt for the potatoes. Ten pounds...,” she said, her voice hoarse.

“I did bring my accordion, Babcia. I came straight from a show to visit. Can I play for you?”

She nodded, and started to hum her preferred song as he sat down on the bed next to her so that he might play quietly and for her alone to enjoy.

The song started, a blessing.

“*Sto lat, sto lat,
Niech zyje, zyje nam.
Sto lat, sto lat,
Niech zyje, zyje nam,
Jeszcze raz, jeszcze raz, niech zyje, zyje nam,
Niech zyje nam!*”

He played it again for her and again, her lips mouthing the words softer and slower. As she listened, she swayed her head back and forth as the bellows of the accordion matched the rise and fall of her chest. Up and down. Up and down. Back and forth. Watching, the memories of playing in drunken frat bars and coffee shops full of stoned hippies fell away, the time spent worth it if only for the single moment. This was who he had been playing for his entire life, the answer to all questions.

“*Sto lat, sto lat,
Niech zyje, zyje nam...*”

“A hundred years, a hundred years,
May she live for us...”

This was the way Morta Korzybski left this world.

REBECCA EVANS

Sparks Joy

2019 Best of Poetry Winner

My favorite shirt was

Once someone else's favorite shirt

The loose button sewn back with care in a

Different thread and

The ink stains on the front pocket

Half washed out

The sleeves too stretched, but

Just enough anyway

The shirt feels

Safe, like it always wanted to live

In my closet and be worn often

As if it's first wearer was just

Borrowing it

Until I came around for it.

JESSICA LARSON

Hope in a Morning's Bloom

2012 Best of Poetry Winner

I remember the rain and its humble song
undulating down to coax the floras

to open and be nourished by the morning light
that glows in the people's hearts.

Their eyes stare into the bright, golden sky
that glosses light onto the Mayan Mountains.

I watch the radiant sun dissolve the hazy scene,
cleansing the droplets from a butterfly's wings,

freeing it from the dew's burdensome weight
while I think of the people's courage in Belize.

Under the shade the people flourish despite
poverty gripping their shoulders,

faithful to live with what little they have
as the early sun shines on their children.

Then two parrots glide amidst the bright sky,
their silhouettes passing in front of the rising sun,

free to soar over miles of jungle
as the pair advance west along the river.

Then a spirited breeze rustles the fronds of a palm
that acquires their freedom from a tangled mesh.

Belize now free from Britain's rule
sways in liberty like these graceful fronds.

This land of green transforms into life.
And I see the hope in a morning's bloom.

TRICIA OWSLEY

So, this is how it is

2015 Best of Poetry Winner

So, this is how it is
Littered outside the thrift shop and
offered For Sale.

Four-wheeled children's riding toys
with dirt smudged into the cracks and crevices.
Highchairs with graying cushions.
Wheelchairs with rusting wheels.
Bicycles without tires, their chains sagging.

Land of the forgotten,
the discarded, and the unwanted.

Right inside the doors, a well-lit area.
Tables, chairs, and dusty couches.
Further back, TVs, electronic devices.
Maternity wear, children's clothing,
booster seats and crib mobiles.

Bunk beds. Toys.
Cheerleader skirts and lettermen jackets.
Ice skates, roller blades, skiis.
Wedding dresses and suits.
Red glittered high heels and zebra-printed flats.

The ceiling lowers and the lights dim.
The hallway narrows.

Red-and-purple hats accumulate dust in the corner
with their feathered boas and purple flowers.
The Red Hat ladies have been here,
or, perhaps,
their daughters and sons.

The Last Stand against aging.
The ceiling gets lower, the light grows dimmer.

Orthopedic shoes.
 Bedpans and commodes.
 A wire basket filled with eyeglasses.
 Blood glucose monitors, blood pressure cuffs.
 Canes and walkers.

In the back, beneath the cobwebs,
 the darkest point.

A box of photos.
 The old kind, black and white, square shaped,
 with the date crawling up the side,
 capturing the smiles, the moments,
 the successes, the love, the joys.
 Oh, the youth of it all.

Lifetimes of memories.
 For sale.
 For all to rummage through.
 Voyeurs and
 Vultures.

So,
 this
 is
 how
 it
 ends.

APRIL ULINSKI
2009 Best of Poetry Winner

Fireflies

Fireflies blink on and off in the dusk.
 The grass is sweet.
 My cat, my night-maniac,
 is leaping at them, her tail wild.
 She misses the first six times.
 But not the seventh.

Reverie

Damp black earth
 On my clean shoulders:
 I watch the stars spin closer:

Deep night blooms—
 My favorite fragrance.

For Justin, 9.24.2007

Deep and boundless as the sea,
 You turn from me.
 And draw me closer still.

PAUL WATSON

A Rope or a Thread

2020 Best of Poetry Winner

You try your best, but you can't get ahead.
A life of hopes and dreams begin to fade.
Are you hanging by a rope or a thread?

Exhausted, you feel like the walking dead.
Your paycheck is spent before you get paid.
You try your best, but you can't get ahead.

Only bad news when the tea leaves are read.
You face the future alone and afraid.
Are you hanging by a rope or a thread?

You look down the rough road and where it's led.
There's nothing left for you to buy or trade.
You tried your best, but you can't get ahead.

After everything is done and said,
You're haunted by the choices you have made.
Are you hanging by a rope or a thread?

You face your bad fortune with grief and dread.
Nobody you love can come to your aide.
You try your best, but you can't get ahead.
Are you hanging by a rope or a thread?

PAUL WATSON

I Think of Giraffes

2021 Best of Poetry Winner

I hardly ever think in terms of power.
I don't think of the majestic giraffe.
I overlook salvation in sunlight.
I'm freer when I give away freedom.
It's not from a lack of useful knowledge
nor a lack of the capacity to love.

In ancient times, to express royal love
and to demonstrate national power,
emperors would gift kings, who had knowledge
of but had never seen, creatures called giraffes,
savannah mammals with joyful freedom
to run in the hot African sunlight.

Running in the shining savannah sunlight,
they expressed life, fleetingly filled with love
of the wild kingdom, and mortal freedom.
With eight-foot necks and a silent power,
wisdom became incarnate in the giraffes
when they asked the gods for secret knowledge.

Who are we to divine their great knowledge;
we, who'd kill a world by spurning sunlight;
we, who'd hunt to extinction the giraffe;
all for vanity and nothing for love?
What use is awesome destructive power
if it slowly drains us of our freedom?

Does the giraffe have more life and freedom
than I? What good is extensive knowledge
if it is ignored? What use is power
if it only destroys? Shining sunlight
on all the things in nature to love
may save us, the planet and the giraffe.

On vacation, I once met a giraffe
in a zoo and he had no freedom.
I stared, awestruck, mixed with a bit of love.
The tall animal was hungry; I knew
by the arc his head made in the sunlight
towards my straw hat with all his neck's power.

I think of giraffes and ignored knowledge.
I think of freedom in any sunlight.
I think of how love can control power.

