

The Cornerstone Review

ISSUE 4 FALL 2023

INNOVATIVE ASSIGNMENTS:

FICTION, ESSAY, POETRY, ART & MORE



CORNERSTONE

INTEGRATED LIBERAL ARTS

Front Matter

COVER ART

Oil Painting “An Unexpected Journey” by Ellie For-geng



Ellie For-geng is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aeronautical Engineering Technology. She created this painting to fulfill an assignment in Professor Jody Watkin’s SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022. This piece was done in oil paints and is 56” by 36” and took over 2 months to construct. Inspired by J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, this painting displays the childlike wonder one can yield from fantasy storytelling. The words paint pictures of breathtaking landscape and whimsical lands that seem real and tangible. Pushing the boundaries of what we perceive reality to be and what we hope it can be. Ellie’s artwork won second place in the Fall 2022 Cornerstone Contest.

The Cornerstone Review is produced each fall by Purdue University’s Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts Program. It is created to celebrate the critical, literary, and artistic accomplishments of Purdue’s undergraduate students who enrolled in Cornerstone’s SCLA courses.

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The Cornerstone Review

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An Interview with Teaching Award Winners



Professor Jody Watkins is a winner of the Antonia Syson Cornerstone Teaching Award

CR: Can you tell us one transformative text on your syllabus that you felt had a significant impact on your students? What made it special?

JW: I have taught in both SCLA 101 and 102. In SCLA 101, my “work horse” of sorts is the Mesopotamian epic *Gilgamesh*, the oldest known work of literature. It poses so many timeless human questions that it manages to be contemporary and relatable, despite its antiquity: What is a hero? What is true friendship, and how might it transform us? What is the nature of the divine? Why do humans seek immortality, and in what ways do we still seek it? That last question is especially interesting to the many STEM students, as it gives them the opportunity to think about how technologies from cryogenics to digital immortality provide new ways to think about the age-old desire to “live forever.”

In SCLA 102, one text that has meant a lot to me and to the students is Simon Wiesenthal’s book *The Sunflower*, in which the author relates a time when he was an inmate in a concen-

tration camp and a dying Nazi soldier, haunted on his deathbed by the cruelties in which he had participated, asked Wiesenthal to forgive him. Wiesenthal was never sure that he did the right thing in his answer to the soldier, so he asks the reader what they would have done. What are the possibilities and limitations of forgiveness? My students, in answering Wiesenthal's question, had to really dig into their personal experiences, traditions and values to come up with a response, something that was immensely challenging for some; in the process they came to a better understanding of themselves.

CR: How do you make your classes appealing to students? Tell us your secrets!

JW: Five things that I would mention are these: 1) Have a theme for the course that is relatable for students and to contemporary culture (Heroes and Monsters in SCLA 101 and Lessons from Struggle in SCLA 102 are two that I have used frequently). 2) Likewise, give students books to read that are accessible and relevant to their own world, regardless of their academic background. I once heard a student on the last day of SCLA 102 say that this was the first [literature] class he had taken in which he had read all the books, and he seemed pleased with that fact. It is hard to prescribe a formula for achieving that, other than avoiding automatically fixating on your own discipline when coming up with reading material; it takes some trial and error to see what works best, but it is worth the effort. 3) Give them a chance to be creative, e.g., writing a role play paper inspired by Dante's *Inferno* in which they create a Hell based around contemporary "sins," or working with peers to create and perform their own Greek-style tragedy plays using Aristotle's characteristics of tragedy. 4) Incorporate popular media into class discussions (the "Darmok" episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* when talking about friendship in Gilgamesh; clips from Chinese wuxia films to accompany "White Tigers;" *Twilight Zone* episodes to accompany discussions of *Frankenstein*, *Inferno* or *Brave New World*). 5) Finally, give them ample opportunity to work in small groups, which provides them a smaller audience with whom to trade ideas before getting into the large group discussion, something that is especially valuable to more reticent students. It is my firm belief that they have a lot to learn from one another, and small group discussion is a helpful way to reinforce that. Small group discussion also has a key social benefit, giving them the chance to get to know some of their peers well, a bit more of a struggle in some of their large lecture classes. A student who was one of the first that I taught in the Fall of 2018, wrote to me as she was graduating to let me know that the students she had met and sat with in her SCLA 101 class remained good friends throughout

their time at Purdue. It is very gratifying to hear that there are also non-academic benefits to what we do in SCLA 101 and 102.

CR: What has been the biggest challenge you've faced in teaching SCLA classes, and how have you overcome it?

JW: The biggest challenge on a regular basis is finding ways to help students individually with their work, when teaching something as intensive and complex as writing and speaking skills. Not “going it alone” is a key way to help with this perennial problem. For example, incorporating peer review in both SCLA 101 and 102 is an important way to give students additional feedback beyond my own, and I find that student comments are usually helpful and thoughtful. In addition to peer review, I also make them aware of and encourage them to visit the Writing Lab and the Purdue Presentation Center. Both of these services are true assets on the Purdue campus, and we are lucky to have them.

CR: Can you describe a time when your students surprised you with their insights or perspectives?

JW: In the Fall of 2020, Cornerstone sponsored a contest entitled “The Pandemic: Our World Transformed,” and invited students to submit essays and creative works that tapped into the personal transformations they had undergone due to Covid. At the same time, they were to discuss how their transformative texts had helped them think through the changes that had been forced upon them. It is hard to put into words how much my students impressed me with their strength and resilience, not to mention the maturity of their perspective, when many people in the larger society did not do nearly so well in handling the constraints of Covid. Instead of focusing on an “end” one day to the pandemic, they harnessed the journey itself. Some took time to develop new talents, such as the student who built his own computer while quarantined, an accomplishment that he proudly noted he was using to write his contest essay. Turning to their literature, some contrasted the patience and planning of Frederick Douglass, as he journeyed toward the goal of freedom from slavery, with the fictional Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, whose rashness and resort to violence in responding to the change brought about by colonialism led to his downfall. Others expressed a renewed appreciation for friends and family, pointing to the bond between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, who propped each other up during their difficult adventures, as a way of framing

how important the people in their lives had been in helping them remain positive during the pandemic. This is not to say that there were no cases of bitterness or anger at how Covid had disrupted their young lives. But the overwhelming number of students rose to the challenges of Covid in ways that were thoughtful and wise and, for me, deeply touching.

CR: How do you incorporate your research interest and expertise into your SCLA classes?

JW: My discipline is cultural anthropology, and I have incorporated literary cross-cultural encounters in both 101 and 102. In SCLA 101, for example, I have students examine the warrior figure and warrior codes across cultures, specifically comparing Beowulf and the Germanic warrior code with the code of the wuxia (wandering knight) figure in Chinese legend using Maxine Hong Kingston's retelling of the Fa Mu Lan story in "White Tigers." In SCLA 102, works like *Things Fall Apart* have a special appeal to me because of my academic background; Achebe's work is in significant part about culture clash between colonizer and colonized, which in turn helps students understand how problematic the sense of entitlement to dominate really was.

CR: What are the most important things you want your students to take away from your class?

JW: There are many things that I hope students take away from the class, not least is stronger written and oral communication skills. I also hope that they get inspired to become more committed readers. When I talk to students at the beginning of the semester about reading experiences, a substantial number admit that they are not ardent readers. Some never were, while others read a lot as children but have lost the drive along the way. My strong hope is that having seen how great literature can speak to us today about human struggles, triumphs, potentiality and limitations, they will continue to seek it out after their SCLA classes are over.

CR: Do you have a most memorable SCLA moment? Please share!

JW: It is hard to choose, but I would point to one semester in SCLA 101, when students were creating and performing their own plays, which were to embody at least some of the key elements of Greek tragedy. Many students initially have reservations about the assignment,

but in the end, most enjoy it. One group chose to set theirs at Purdue and told the story of a high-achieving but ultimately arrogant student who smirked when told about the curse of the clock tower (if you walk under it, you cannot graduate in four years). Fast forward to his senior year and he decides to propose to his girlfriend under the clock tower. In a step outside of the technical possibilities of the ancient world, the students ran a video clip of an actual event from a few years ago of the clock from the clock tower falling when it was under repair. Of course, the fiancée collapses on the ground at that moment, to the anguished cries of the arrogant young man. Students (and me too, to be honest) fell about laughing at the clever use of that clip. On top of that loss, the main character was exposed for cheating and could not get his degree; he became a completely broken young man as he reflected on his failings. When the laughter and drama died down, there it all was: a figure of respect whose *hamartia* or tragic flaw ultimately brings about a reversal of fortune; a prophecy ignored, with tragic consequences; the heavy hand of fate; tragic insight; spectacle with a modern twist – all amply demonstrating that the themes and structure of the ancient plays can cross temporal boundaries and speak to us today.

CR: What advice would you share with students who are currently taking or about to take SCLA classes?

JW: In contrast to some of the big lecture classes you will take at this large university, SCLA 101 and 102 give you the chance to share a classroom with 29 other students, and you will collectively address important questions that arise from great literature. You may well find that the opportunities to kick around timeless ideas are harder to come by as time goes on. This is a privileged moment, so do not take it for granted; use this time to develop greater self-understanding as you also learn from others.

CR: How do you prepare students for the evolving landscape of communication where AI plays an increasing role? What skills do you emphasize to ensure they are ready for the future?

JW: AI can serve as another tool to help us brainstorm ideas and think through topics. Obviously, we should never let AI do the talking for us; doing so is plagiarism, and I let students know that it will be treated as such. Over-reliance on AI can also prevent students from developing key skills. Teaching them how to seek out sources that are backed up by

real and reliable research is an important counter to the often irregular and even fabricated sourcing of AI output. Finding their own voice and expressiveness, one that avoids the blandness of a lot of AI-generated writing, is also important.

CR: Do you have any exciting new plans for your future SCLA classes?

JW: For the first time this semester in SCLA 102, I am going to have students work on a small group project called “Imagining Dystopia.” Students will carry out research on potentially troubling contemporary trends and imagine a dystopian society that could result if these trends go unchecked. The project will have both writing and presentation components. The choice of assignment was based on my findings after several semesters of having my students at the beginning of the semester describe their most impactful reading experiences. While fantasy literature like the *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* series dominate, dystopian and post-apocalyptic literature really grabs the attention of a number of them with *1984*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Giver* and *Fahrenheit 451*, among many others, emerging as influential literature for students. I am eagerly anticipating the results of this project and where they feel that contemporary trends could lead us in the future.



Professor Tulin Ece Tosun is a winner of the Antonia Syson Cornerstone Teaching Award

CR: Can you tell us one transformative text on your syllabus that you felt had a significant impact on your students? What made it special?

TT: This is a very difficult question because all the texts I teach have a transformative impact on my students. But, if I have to choose, I love teaching Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*. The complexity of the text—starting with a personal vendetta and ending with a modern-day trial—transformed my students' understanding of many universal themes, specifically justice. The discussions and the mock trial we have in the class show me how passionate they can be to argue against something they believe in. They don't like to read it at first, but once they start reading it and we make progress with all three plays, in my classes at the end of semester OSCARS always goes to *The Oresteia*.

CR: How do you make your classes appealing to students? Tell us your secrets!

TT: I always try to find ways to keep them engaged. We visit galleries together and connect art and literature. If our theme is gothic, then I ask them to find an artwork in the gallery to connect it to a theme or a character from one of our texts. If our theme is travel literature we go outside the classroom and do street haunting and they write about their experiences on the spot. The main thing is to have an interactive and active classroom where students can bring and use their own skills into the classroom. Literature is best understood when we apply it to our everyday life and I like to make that connection between my SCLA class and my students.

CR: What has been the biggest challenge you've faced in teaching SCLA classes, and how have you overcome it?

TT: The biggest challenge is that some students do not like to read, or they find some texts hard to read. When this is the case, I always take time to explain why we need to read those texts and why they are still relevant, and how these texts and themes resonate and can be connected to our everyday life. My main question to my students is what we can learn from each character and text. I also see students in my office hours to help them read and understand the text. During my office hour, I meet a group of students who does not understand the text and we read it together. Helping them understand the text and teaching them how

to read brings my students back to the classroom and they always end up reading more than other students.

CR: Can you describe a time when your students surprised you with their insights or perspectives?

TT: Yes, many memories of this, indeed. When students are guided and encouraged, it is always rewarding to see how much they can accomplish. They always surprise me with their comments and perspectives. But I clearly remember a moment when we were reading Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and I was really surprised by the comments they made on the social structure. Not only that, but they also connected Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to our modern-day society and provided examples from their everyday life. This was one of the classroom experiences I would probably not forget.

CR: How do you incorporate your research interest and expertise into your SCLA classes?

TT: I would like to choose my syllabus theme based on my research but also based on what I believe students will enjoy reading, as well. So, I try to combine both and choose my texts accordingly.

CR: What are the most important things you want your students to take away from your class?

TT: I want them to understand that oral and written communication skills along with creative and critical thinking skills are what they will need both in their personal and professional life. They need to improve these skills to complement their own majors. I also want them to leave the class by appreciating and understanding literature and how reading will contribute to their written and oral communication skills.

CR: Do you have a most memorable SCLA moment? Please share!

TT: I have many but two most memorable ones are when my students get internships/jobs and tell me that it was their SCLA 101 class that improved their communication and written skills. I have one student who became a volunteer to give campus tours. When I met her, she

told me that discussion in my class helped her improve her communication skills. I have another student who got a job in one of the local coffee houses and she said she persuaded the employer because she learned how to argue things in my classroom. Last year, another student of mine became a gallery attendant at Purdue galleries because our class trips to galleries had a huge impact on her.

CR: What advice would you share with students who are currently taking or about to take SCLA classes?

TT: Please enjoy every moment being in SCLA classrooms. Being in SCLA classroom contributes to your college experience more than you can imagine. It does not only improve your oral and written communication skills, but it also gives you an opportunity to learn from your classmates. Enjoy class discussions where you get to see the texts from different perspectives. Remember: literature is life itself.

CR: How do you prepare students for the evolving landscape of communication where AI plays an increasing role? What skills do you emphasize to ensure they are ready for the future?

TT: I highlight that being authentic and personal is the most important thing. I always emphasize that when they write their papers or when they apply to jobs, it is important to personalize their materials and it is definitely something that an AI cannot do. I tell them that when I receive an email generated by an AI, I cannot connect with them. However, when they send me a very personalized email that they take time to write, it resonates with me more and this is the case in their future. I keep reminding them that they will be hired to use their personal skills that they learned and improved at Purdue. And, in order to contribute, they will need to use their own words and sentences.

CR: Do you have any exciting new plans for your future SCLA classes?

TT: I always try to find new pedagogical approaches to keep my students involved, active, and engaged. I would like to teach a study abroad in Italy teaching Shakespeare's cities.

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Innovative Assignments

“Innovation doesn’t come just from giving people incentives; it comes from creating environments where their ideas can connect.”

–Steven Johnson

Innovative Assignments: **The Most Memorable Meal of Your Life**



Ayme Aguilar is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Civil Engineering. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Stacy Sivinski's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The most memorable meals have all been around my family, which is a big part of my life. With my writing, I hope to portray what it is like to enjoy a meal made by a loved one surrounded by a loving family.

When you live in the Midwest, you learn to appreciate warmth. Waiting for your late bus to school on the street corner November through March will remind you of all the times you took the summer weather for granted. However, for the instances we do get a bit of warmth, we are ever grateful.

On a freezing late-November afternoon, I rode the bus home from school as usual. I rubbed my hands together, heating them from the wind chill outside of the foggy windows. My stomach rumbled hollow, and I cringed at the thought of coming home to an empty fridge. I would have to wait until my mom came home to prepare dinner. Until then, it was a war against my hunger and the evil approaching winter.

As I stepped off the bus, I made my way toward my desolate home. With each step, I began to realize something was clearly out of the ordinary. Curtains were open, lights were bright and shining, and my house seemed to shimmer under the bleak sky. It then hit me. I could not contain my excitement.

Opening the door, I was greeted with warm smiles and welcomes. My grandparents enveloped me in embraces and kisses filled with love and longing. After greeting my family, a familiar aroma coming from the stovetop took over my senses. Mexican beef stew softly boiled over the flames, its vegetables dancing in the rich broth. My mouth watered over the fragrant and vibrant veggies, and my abuela tells me her stew will be ready very soon. Until then, I busy myself dicing onions, bright radishes, bunches of cilantro, green jalapeños and quartering limes.

At last, my family gathers around the dining table to indulge in my abuela's cooking, as we all know that her home-cooked meals are precious. Abuela serves me a bowl and I thank her with a kiss on the cheek. I set the boiling dish down, ready to dive in. Yet, it is not complete. This stew cannot be eaten without its garnishes. I sprinkled some cilantro, spicy jalapeno and plenty of radish, topped with a squeeze of lime. I admire the masterpiece before me, with its striking greens, vibrant yellows and oranges, steaming and ready to be devoured by me.

I sink my spoon into the broth and stir, mixing all the flavors together before I raise it to my lips. As the broth touches my tongue, a warm sensation spread within me. Every fol-

lowing spoonful soothed my throat and filled my stomach with warmth. The rich taste eased my mind, and at that moment, every bad thing that happened to me that day disappeared. The stew allowed my mind and body to relax. I laughed at my grandparents' endless childhood stories through bites of corn. I was able to savor a special meal with my family and visiting grandparents.

The most comfort I will ever feel will be through my grandmother's cooking. Regardless of food, the time I spend with my grandparents often reminds me of warm weather in the Midwest; it is not permanent or forever. For this reason, I will always cherish these precious moments of warmth.



Shree Krishna Tulasi Bavana is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Business Analytics and Information Management. She wrote this short piece to fulfill an assignment in Professor Stacy Sivinski's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. This was the very first assignment for my SCLA class, and I was drowning in misery because I procrastinated. It was not perfection that I aimed for; my utmost priority was honesty. The assignment was a very personal one as it made me go back in time to a place of comfort.

After spending four hours exploring a citadel under the ninety-seven-degree Fahrenheit sunshine, I was undoubtedly exhausted. But hey! It's my last day in Hyderabad and I've not yet filled my tummy with Biryani. Fatigue! Who's that? Energy was miraculously conjured to travel to the other end of the city, and when I finally reached the restaurant aptly named 'Paradise', I might as well have reached heaven.

You might look at me askance, but trust me, no such silly cynicism would win a battle against the thick air fragrant with 'desi ghee'. Accompanied by my mom and sister, I went to a solitary table by the glass windows. Vibrant food on customers' plates seemed to resonate with the rumbling of the city outside. White rice reminded me of the jasmine that adorns the jet-black hair of south Indian women. Shades of amber in pulao echoed the red sandstone of Charminar and Golkonda.

And when the waiter asked us what we would have, my sister who shrieked 'Biryani!' surprised few patrons. And those wise ones with silver on their forehead had amused smiles at her outburst. For variety, we also ordered 'Tandoori Murg,' a type of roasted chicken.

It took approximately twenty minutes for our meal to be served in archaic vessels. I assure you the wait felt like an eternity. And now with the biryani in braggadocio should I stuff it in my mouth savagely, or should I savor it gently?

I went for the former, in a ladylike manner, nevertheless. The first bite was a jumble in my mouth, but that didn't stop me from devouring it. Only when my fire of hunger quenched, did I pay heed to the intricacies of the delicacy. I had the with 'Mirchi salan,' spicy gravy of chilies, and peanuts. That is not recommended for those with low spice tolerance. And of course, how can I forget the Tandoori? Combined with the refreshing mint chutney, a frisson of excitement ran through my veins.

I am a lover of things simple and unpretentious. Theoretically, the extravagance of biryani must put me off, like every other garishly lavish display does. Yet, I was drawn toward the ostentatious display of color and spice. Only once, has such vociferous confidence enchanted me: Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis*.

They are brazenly outlandish. A dish that takes hours to cook and a singer who oozes overt sensuality in sparkly jumpsuits? They embody all that I despise. But they captured my attention and imbued my mind's eye. I am still in awe of the biryani I had that one fine afternoon. Not due to its delectable nature, but because it can still bewitch me with its cornucopia of spices. It transports me to Hyderabad, the world of pearls and royalty. It is the daffodil to my Wordsworth.

All that luxury on the platter, the happy faces around me, and it was the ephemeral biryani that makes this meal so unique. Scarcely do I pay attention to the food when I eat, being the girl drowning in deep conversations and stories. No wonder this is the most memorable meal I have ever had. The meandering flavors of the biryani are still strong enough to lull me into a trance that blurs out my surroundings.



Innovative Assignments: **Fictitious Dishes**

Carolina Bobadilla is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mechanical Engineering Technology. She staged this scene to fulfill an assignment in Professor Sivinski's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. For this assignment we were asked to stage a fictitious dinner scene inspired by a passage from one of the texts we read in class. Carolina wanted to explore what a dinner setting might look like for the vampires in the novel *Fledgling* by Octavia Butler.

Inspired by Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*:

“We are long lived blood drinkers’. He looked at Wright. ‘You knew what she was, didn’t you?’ Wright nodded. ‘I knew she needed blood to live.’”

I used Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* because I wanted to explore how the setting might look like when Shori and Wright have dinner together. I included different elements in my picture, Shori and Wright find a “gleaming gold chain with a little gold bird attached to it” so the gold necklace with the pendant in the picture is meant to represent the necklace Wright found for Shori.

The table is set with two plates, but only one has food, this is because Shori feeds through Wright's blood, she doesn't eat food. The bite marks on the arm are to represent the symbiotic relationship between vampires and their symbionts. The bloody napkin and water just add to the vampire setting. The holding hands over the table represents the romantic relationship between Shori and Wright, Wright is willing to give his blood to feed Shori, but also to get stronger, healthier and live a longer life.

Even though vampires don't eat, they have to adapt to dinner tables and I think an empty plate, bloody napkins, and bite marks achieve that.



Innovative Assignments: **Understanding the Purdue Campus**

Cat Hayes is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in English & Creative Writing. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Craig Greenman's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022. The assignment asked for students to apply course materials to something about Purdue, whether that be programs or architecture. Inspired by the layout of campus and how most facilities are in walking distance, as well as the permanent line outside Harry's Chocolate Shop, Cat focuses on how buildings and stores are centered around the street/sidewalk to explain why walking to such places is so enjoyable.

If someone wanted to go to Harry's Chocolate Shop to get a beer, they might have a certain expectation of what the walk there will be like. Assuming they aren't a day drinker, and that they'd been in that area before (they probably have if they aren't going there for chocolate), it's reasonable to say that they would expect to run into lots of other people looking to go there as well. While it's dubious whether the bar counts as a part of Purdue campus or not, there is a reason why so many students crowd around the entrance at night, courteously in a single-file line: it's easy to walk to, and it's in a safe part of town. It is in the structure of the campus sidewalks they take, and the assumed safety of Harry's, that Jacobs is interested. Her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* helps us understand Purdue campus through how it connects daily socializing and safety with the structure of these sidewalks, specifically in how they allow for trust and privacy. Through her lens, Purdue is built to facilitate interactions between campus-goers and ensure eyes are always on the street.

To Jacobs, a good city street achieves "a marvel of balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment or help from the people around" (Jacobs 59). This mutual, unspoken agreement to socialize with others, but keep them at an enjoyable distance, rests upon a foundation of trust that others will not breach this social contract. This trust is "formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts"; in short, it is the sum of "casual, public contact at a local level" (Jacob 56). At Purdue, this trust manifests much in the same way that Jacobs describes in her book. Small interactions between students on their trips to class, whether they be passing smiles or small talk struck up over clothing or music, gradually build up to form a complete body of trust surrounding most people on campus. Their personal details and baggage are kept private both because the busyness of Purdue rarely allows for long talks, and because strangers generally don't want to know each other's life secrets.

An example of how this trust manifests happened to me a month or so ago on a particularly rainy night. The sheer volume of downpour could be likened to a monsoon or a hurricane; for all intents and purposes, it was one. By this point, I had become well acquainted with the layout of campus and the types of people here. This familiarity is what allowed me

to be able to ask the only other people out walking this late (a pair of friends, it looked like) to let me share some space under their umbrella—an offer which they readily accepted. The familiarity of the types that live here I had, coupled with the layout of the sidewalks here and the walkability of everything, gave us the foundation to instantly bond over that trust, despite our differences and us not knowing each other. In any other environment where the streets were not built in a way that allowed us to even meet and easily converse, I don't feel that I would trust them a pair of strangers late at night as I did, especially not enough to just go up to them and ask to share their umbrella.

Outside the WALC, a similar story is told. A man comes out during certain hours of the day with a poster board trying to falsify the Moon landing. His outlandishness obviously grants him a lot of attention, and people tend to huddle around him in a crowd during their transit. He, Jacobs would say, is a “public character,” or someone who “is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character” (Jacobs 68). She says that the “social structure of sidewalk life hangs partly on... public characters,” and this is no less true here (Jacobs 68). The WALC mainly consists of people working either in groups or by themselves, and anyone who'd want to strike up conversation with someone typing away at their laptop is just being rude. The outside is no less different, and people generally want to do two things: get out of the cold or get to class, both of which don't allow for much interaction. Public characters like the Moon Landing Guy vitalize sidewalk life in areas where it would otherwise be lacking without them; if not for the reason of bringing people together to gawk at his theories, then he at least allows “word [to] move around” and news to travel about him, offhandedly giving people a topic of conversation or way to break the ice (Jacobs 69).

Going back to the original example of Harry's Chocolate Shop, it's a little counterintuitive to say that a bar feels like a safe place, or at least the outside of a bar. This has less to do with the types of people that are found there and more the structure of the surrounding area. Jacobs says that for a city street to be safe, there “must be eyes upon the street” in the form of people or buildings that don't “turn their backs or blank sides on it” (Jacobs 35). The downtown outside the Purdue gate and along State Street, where Harry's is located, is a great example of this. Along it there are dozens of stores and vendors, all with open windows facing the street. This, coupled with the numerous people already walking along the sidewalks, gives the street lots of eyes, even at night. Compare this to further in West Lafayette, where Purdue's sphere of influence is felt less in buildings. Most of the streets at that time are devoid of pedestrians altogether, and buildings either have closed-off windows or are deserted entirely. Assuming everyone who goes to Harry's is of legal drinking age, they can probably drive so why go there instead of a bar further in town? It's not the dis-

tance; it's the safety of the surroundings. People don't get mugged outside of Harry's, but they do further into town.



Alina Stuleanu is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Craig Greenman's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2023. The assignment was to reflect upon the architecture and culture of Purdue University with insights from Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Through this essay, she intended to illuminate the lifelines of the Purdue campus, which is, in its own way, a great American city.

The life of a great American city critically depends on the interactions between its architecture and its inhabitants, and Purdue University's campus is a city in its own right. From Memorial Mall's emptiness late at night to the vibrancy of Third Street at all hours, there exists a pattern of neglected green spaces and bustling residential sidewalks: the beautiful academic landscapes that people do not frequently cross become dangerous at night, yet the busy residential region becomes the campus' heartbeat after dark. Through its inhabitants' patterns of using different campus architecture, Purdue University reflects Jane Jacobs' message in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* that the lifeline of a city is not its neighborhood green spaces or isolated tenements, but rather its diversely-used sidewalks and places of interest.

Jacobs emphasizes the role of sidewalks as the eyes of the city and, consequently, the protectors of a city's peace. Sidewalks that are frequented often and by many people are more lively and thus safer. Jacobs describes one of the many people who care for busy streets: "This woman was one of thousands upon thousands of people in New York who casually take care of the streets. They notice strangers. They observe everything going on. If they need to take action, whether to direct a stranger waiting in the wrong place or to call the police, they do so" (38). Those who frequent a street become proprietors of it, and thus, people collectively ensure their safety through a shared responsibility. At Purdue, the sidewalks that appear to be safest at night are those close to residences, since many students come and go: the passersby in the dorms that help strangers get home safely, the musicians that give a piano soundtrack to late-night studies, and many more public characters contribute to the liveliness and safety of this environment. In contrast, sidewalks that are not so busy are hazardous to their users. Jacobs states that the dangers of one such sidewalk are that "unless eyes are there, ... lights can do no good. Horrifying public crimes can, and do, occur in well-lighted subway stations when no effective eyes are present. They virtually never occur in darkened theaters where many people and eyes are present" (42). Sidewalks that

do not draw in large numbers of passersby lack the good samaritans, or “eyes,” that keep walkways like Jacobs describes safe. Purdue’s Memorial Mall, for example, is incredibly vacant during the night. Without students taking classes or waiting for the bus, a common sight during the day but rare otherwise, the long promenade is ominously silent—should there be the threat of violence, no idle witnesses stand ready to protect wayfarers. Sidewalks are indeed a lifeline for Purdue, but only when they are busy.

Furthermore, Jacobs presents neighborhood parks as a double-edged blade: they have the potential to become either the heart of a community or seedy “Skid Rows,” depending on their location. Jacobs presents parks as sponges that absorb the characteristics of surrounding areas: lively streets with diversity of use and many passersby are prime locations for a well-loved park, but parks at the ends of streets or along routes lacking diversity tend to be unpopular and thus wasted. Unpopular parks are troubling because they “have the same problems as streets without eyes, and their dangers spill over into the areas surrounding, so that streets along such parks become known as danger places too and are avoided” (95). An unused green space has the potential to become dangerous in the same way an empty street does. This, of course, makes wide, green spaces across campus (like Memorial Mall, again) unsettling at night, especially considering that the architecture of Purdue tends to intertwine these vacant green spaces with more vacant sidewalks. The intramural fields are close enough to the residence halls that someone watches them most of the time. However, green spaces far from the residence halls are, as Jacobs suggests, as empty as their sidewalks. Despite the belief by many city planners that green spaces are a lifeline for great cities, Jacobs’ valid critiques coincide with the nature of Purdue’s campus to suggest that green spaces are not a lifeline—the people that use them are. Furthermore, if these people do not use a certain green space, that park’s lifeline is dead.

Although Purdue’s wide-open green spaces and academic buildings are beautiful, Purdue’s nighttime heartbeat lies within buildings that are mundane: the residence halls that students return to. Purdue is, in its own way, a college city, and its life is protected by the many eyes of the sidewalks and the activity around the dorms at night. As Jacobs contends, “the sight of people attracts still other people” (37), and for that reason, it is the ever-populated dorms and their surroundings that are the best watched, the most lively, and the most protected. The busy sidewalks and the dorms collectively feed the life of our great American city.



Emmy Denton is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Digital Criminology. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Craig Greenman's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022 which asks us to investigate open spaces using Jane Jacob's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The inspiration behind the essay was to compare and contrast the three most well-known open spaces on Purdue's campus and analyze how students use these spaces and how their locations affect their usage. This essay is trying to portray the importance of planning spaces in cities and towns, or college campuses, that will be used and appreciated by students daily.

Open spaces have the ability to be beacons of community if given the chance. On page 99 of her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs says, "Liveliness and variety attract more liveliness; deadness and monotony repel life." Jacobs's ideas about the connection between diversity of surroundings and open spaces help us to understand both the obvious and hidden usefulness and potentials of various open spaces across Purdue's campus.

Geographically, Memorial Mall is centrally located near the heart of the academic side of campus. Given this, the majority of students are at least aware of the space. In a survey I conducted, 70 percent of the respondents said they *do* use Memorial Mall and 30 percent use it multiple times a week. Most students that responded to the survey said they mostly only use the space to walk across. This connects to one of Jacobs's points that the "mixture of uses of buildings directly produces... a mixture of users who enter and leave the park at different times" (96). The buildings surrounding Memorial Mall include academic lecture halls, classrooms, faculty offices, conference rooms, and recreational buildings like fraternities and a church. This diversity in its surroundings brings "diversity among users and their schedules" (Jacobs 97). Many different people use or cross Memorial Mall at all times of the day because it is in between some of the most used academic buildings, so it becomes a necessary part of the routine of navigating campus. Not to mention, along one edge is one of the main roads that runs through campus and town. This proves Jacobs's ideas of diversity in a space's surroundings affecting the space itself and its usefulness.

The Krach Leadership Lawn is located in between the Krach Leadership Center, Wiley dining court, the France A. Córdoba Recreational Sports Center (CoRec), and the Winifred Parker residence hall. Because of its unique location being in the middle of the residential part of campus, many clubs and student organizations (like the Purdue Student Union Board) use it as a meeting place and a place to hold events throughout the year. A simple and recent example of this would be the Halloween Scarefest that happened on Halloween night. This helps bring attention and usage to the lawn. Jacobs agrees by saying that "adding

a few other activities too, like music or shows, could convert a dreadful neighborhood liability into an outstanding neighborhood asset” (110). In my survey, the Krach lawn is used by about 60 percent of respondents, and of those, 60 percent use it just to cut across and 40 percent use it for social reasons. Jacobs states that successful parks and open spaces “never serve as barriers or as interruptions to the intricate functioning of the city around them... they help to knit together diverse surrounding functions” (101). The reason Krach lawn is able to be useful and not detract from the campus is because it doesn’t act as a barrier; it acts as a path.

The Purdue Gold Intramural Fields (IM Fields) is the perfect opposite to both these spaces, specifically Memorial Mall. The IM Fields are on the outskirts of the residential side of campus. On two sides of it: empty fields, not connected to anything else. On the other sides: the back of the CoRec, Hillenbrand residence hall, and a parking garage. Its location is its own worst enemy in terms of usage. It is devoid of entertainment on the fields and is in an incredibly inconvenient location. Jacobs expresses that “the worst problem parks are located precisely where people do not pass by and likely never will” (107). That is exactly the issue with the IM Fields: no one goes over to that side of campus unless you live in Hillenbrand or park your car in that parking garage. 72 percent of survey respondents said they never use the IM fields; the ones that do claim to use it only use it for club sports or recreational sports with friends. Personally, the one and only time I have ever been to the IM Fields was for the club fair during orientation week. A way the university could address this would be to add more structures and/or events to the fields that would draw in more and new students. Because of the lack of diversity in its surroundings, or any surroundings in general, it fails to draw in curiosity. In this instance, Jacobs comments that a space “with functional monotony of surroundings in any form is inexorably a vacuum for a significant part of the day” (99). This means that because of its failure to draw attention to itself, the IM Fields act as a vacuum that sucks in nothing because they are grasping for recognition.

You can apply Jacobs’s ideas about the correlation between the usage of open spaces and their surroundings to Purdue University campus to help us understand how they are used by students. Understanding the uses and reasonings behind the open spaces on campus is important for understanding campus life and how the flexibility of those spaces affects the students. Having common spaces helps bring together students to introduce them to new experiences and new people. This is important because it adds a layer of community and universal understanding between the students.

Innovative Assignments: Dante-Inspired Designs



Dani St. Louis is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Chemical Engineering. They wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Samuel Bennett's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The assignment gave us the freedom to use the assigned texts to create a new product or service. As a lover of all art forms, I aimed to bring the capital vices of Dante's *Purgatorio* (2003) to life through a theoretical art gallery. My portraits for pride, envy, and wrath, titled *Blinding Mirrors of Pride*, *Thieving Strings of Envy*, *Devouring Flames of Wrath*, reveal key aspects of each terrace through symbolism seen through the outfits, poses, colors, and more.

Vice Gallery Walk: The Seven Capital Portraits

Both art enjoyers and Dante enthusiasts can claim their ticket to the newest "Vice Gallery Walk" inspired by Dante's *Purgatorio* (2003). On January 13th at the local art museum, viewers can experience a collection of portraits representative of the seven capital vices of Purgatory found in Dante's *Purgatorio* (2003), in which souls are bound to terraces to be purified of their earthly vices. Despite the gallery being composed of seven total photographs, the art museum allows for a sneak peak of only three of the seven portraits: *Blinding Mirrors of Pride*, *Thieving Strings of Envy*, and *Devouring Flames of Wrath*. The text—Dante's *Purgatorio* (2003)—as well as past artwork and historical symbols of each vice informs the design of the portraits. The collection incorporates elements from each media in the overall technical design of the piece and the pose and outfit of the model. A marketable clothing line along with a possible fashion show to showcase the items is currently in the works to gain further support for the gallery walk.

In Dante's *Purgatorio* (2003), Dante undergoes a journey through the afterlife despite being a living human. Accompanied by Virgil, an ancient Roman poet from Hell, he must travel through all seven terraces of Purgatory. As Virgil guides Dante within the poem, "Virgil tour guides" lead the participant through the gallery walk. The viewer takes the place of Dante, so just as Dante witnesses souls undergoing punishment to be cleansed of a particular vice within the poem, the viewer will experience the characteristics and counter penalty of each vice during the gallery walk.

The first three portraits represent pride, envy, and wrath. In Canto 17, Virgil categorizes the vices, explaining that the first three—pride, envy, and wrath—are "forms of [perverted] love" that cause one's neighbor harm (Dante, 2003, 17.124). As Robert Hollander, liberal arts professor at Princeton University explains, the other four vices—sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust—despite doing so "imperfectly," are all in "seeking of good" (Hollander,

2003, 17.125-6). In contrast, those who display pride, envy, or wrath's love "err in [the] chosen goal," directed at the harm or loss of others rather than a pure love of God, self, others, or general goodness (Dante, 2003, 17.94-6).

Each terrace contains a counter penalty to purify the souls of Purgatory of their earthly vices. As the collection is representative of the terraces and their corresponding vice, each portrait depicts elements from the terraces such as the counter penalty and overall characteristics. Past paintings over the seven capital vices further inform on the design of the portraits, alongside historical symbols like the color or animal most associated with each vice. All pieces include a singular female model with an outfit and pose inspired by the external sources and a symbolic title that describes the art. The purpose of the collection is to be fully representative of the seven capital vices seen within Dante's *Purgatorio* to directly immerse the viewer into elements of the text, thus furthering their understanding of the poem.

First, *Blinding Mirrors of Pride* represents the vice of pride. In Canto 17 of Dante's *Purgatorio*, Virgil describes someone who is prideful as one who hopes to "excel ... [in] his greatness" by "bringing down his neighbor" (Dante, 2003, 17.115-7). Therefore, a prideful man aims for his own superiority by wishing against his neighbors' success. In Canto 10, Dante undergoes his unique journey through the seven terraces of Purgatory. He begins at the Terrace of Pride, noticing the souls were "contorted to a crouch" while "bent beneath ... the stone" (Dante, 2003, 10.116-8). Within the terrace, souls who were prideful in their earthly life must carry the weight of their ego by moving a large boulder on their backs with their precious identities obscured. The media connects pride with mirrors, violet, or peacocks. The motif of mirrors is present within the painting *A Woman at her Mirror* (Metsu, 1657-62) by Gabriel Metsu. Within artist Metsu's piece, a woman sits before her mirror, fixated on herself with immense pleasure in her image, only further emphasizing her pride.

In a similar way, the portrait encompasses mirrors in its design. Several mirrors surround the model, reflecting her face, body, and outfit. The position of the mirrors portray the idea of the world being completely centered around her and her lack of ability to see others in it. Violet is the overall hue of the image, and peacock feathers proudly extrude from her dress. Akin to the counter penalty for the terrace, the model is again forced under the weight of her "greatness," but instead by trophies, medals, and plaques. A mask covers recognizable features like the eyes and nose to hide her true identity and combat pleasure in one's image. The name of the portrait *Blinding Mirrors of Pride* recognizes pride as "blinding" as the model cannot see past her own self, fully consumed by her own being. The mirrors within the portrait surround her, only reflecting her image to herself.

Additionally, *Thieving Strings of Envy* depicts the vice of envy. In Canto 17 of Dante's *Purgatorio*, Virgil describes someone who is envious as one who "fears loss" and "wants to

see [one's neighbor] fall" (Dante, 2003, 17.118-20). Thus, an envious man wishes doom on his neighbor as he resents their possessions. After exiting the Terrace of Pride, Dante enters the Terrace of Envy, where he witnesses the punishment bestowed onto the souls. Not only were they "propped up [against one] another" as if they were dependent on each other to remain upright, but they had "iron wire pier[cing] all their eyelids" (Dante, 2003, 13.59-70). In comparison to their earthly lives in which they solely wished harm others, in Purgatory, they must rely on the souls' support to not fall over. With their eyes sewn shut, they cannot see what others' have, so they cannot resent others' possessions.

Past works associate envy with green and snakes. Green exists in the common phrase "green with envy," while snakes extrude slyness and malice. Both symbols reside in the painting *Charity and Envy* (Bondone, 1306) by artist Giotto di Bondone. In the painting, an envious figure cloaked in green stands with little in his bag, facing others in resentment. A snake protrudes from his mouth and covers his eyes, taking his sight as if envy controls him and his senses.

The portraits in the gallery walk include the same symbolism—green being the most prevalent color while snakes make up the dress. Snake designs slither across the front, while the sleeves incorporate a snakeskin pattern. Like the counter penalty within the Terrace of Envy, several arms outstretch to the model to keep her from falling, indicating her dependence on the support of others. The name, *Thieving Strings of Envy*, derives from the "thieving" puppet strings that the model holds that steal a puppet's freedom and movement, referring to the interference and control the lives of others and taking from them, causing their own demise or loss. One of the model's eyes is sewn shut; however, the other is seemingly open as she has stolen the eye from the puppet, symbolizing her gain in another's loss.

Finally, *Devouring Flames of Wrath* portrays the vice of wrath. In Canto 17 of Dante's *Purgatorio*, Virgil describes someone who is wrathful as one who "hunger[s] after vengeance" to "contrive another's harm" (Dante, 2003, 17.121-3). So, a wrathful man desires to inflict harm on another who has wronged him. In Canto 15, after passing through the Terrace of Envy, Dante arrives at the Terrace of Wrath. While entering the terrace, smoke as "black as night" immediately surrounds him and Virgil taking "away [their] sight" (Dante, 2003, 15.143-5). The thick, black smoke steals the vision from those within the terrace, physically blinding the souls like the rage that once blinded them in their earthly life.

Previous works connect wrath with symbols of fire, red, and lions. The motif of fire and smoke resides in the painting *Cain Slaying Abel* (Rubens, 1608-9) which depicts the murder of Cain and Abel, the first two sons of Adam and Eve. Within the piece, Cain murders his brother in a fit of rage while a fire burns behind them. Smoke fills the air representing the incredulous wrath Cain possesses.

Similar to the painting, fire and smoke consume the background of the portrait. Red is the main color overall, while the dress includes fabric similar to a lion's mane. The photo highlights the deterioration due to rage through the pose of the model. First, the model's hands claw at her neck, struggling to breathe within the thick smoke. Parts of her body and clothes burn as she loses herself to her own rage. She is physically bound to the wall, being held captive by the grudge that consumes her. *Devouring Flames of Wrath* alludes to the immense decline one experiences through their own rage.

For the gallery walk to be successful, it must receive sufficient initial interest through effective advertising. According to the National Arts Index for 2016, art museum attendance has only declined in the last decade, with solely 12.9 percent of the population "attending at least once" (National Arts Index). Due to such low and declining attendance to art museums, unique exposure is crucial to persuade others to attend the gallery walk.

Roberta Wue of the Department of Art History at University of California, Irvine evaluated "art, artists, and the advertising of art-related projects" in Shanghai, China within the 19th century, noting the use of Chinese magazines and newspapers to promote art projects (Wue, 2009). Furthermore, the gallery walk will utilize specifically art and fashion magazines to gain exposure and favor within the art world; however, due to the abundance of products and services being advertised through several mediums like magazines or even social media, the gallery walk must turn to additional, more creative methods to gain exposure.

Educator Sheila Piazza suggests a new, innovative way to promote art: "a walking, talking art gallery" (Piazza, 2002). As students are "walking advertisements" through their branded clothes, Piazza used T-shirts to promote her students' artwork. Students ironed their self-made designs onto T-shirts and wore them in public areas to give their art exposure (Piazza, 2002). The gallery walk will be taking the idea one step further, creating and selling dresses, hats, and other clothing based on the collection alongside a possible fashion show to further promote the event.

Not only can art enjoyers and Dante enthusiasts witness exquisite pieces, but they can immerse themselves directly in key concepts of Dante's *Purgatorio*. As the initial text can be difficult to read and understand, visual interpretation of each terrace and vice will enhance viewers' understanding of the poem. With declining attendance at art galleries, the event can spark renewed interest in not only art museum events, but the art world as a whole, and shines light on older texts from historic eras. The Vice gallery walk is a once in a lifetime opportunity for viewers to fully immerse themselves in the text to further their understanding of Dante's *Purgatorio* while reflecting on what vices might be influencing their life.

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Matthew Chiu is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Professional Flight Technology and Airline Management and Operations. He wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Samuel Bennett's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. We were instructed to think outside of the box, create something new and exciting, and develop a product to pitch to investors that was inspired by one of our Transformative Texts. Dante's *Purgatorio's* elaborate descriptions of the challenges and steps towards self-discovery of those who wanted to be cleansed of their sins gave me an idea of how those in the Contemporary world can attempt to attain a better understanding of themselves. *Dante's Adventure Park* created a space where people can be enlightened on just how amazing and powerful they are in their everyday lives, even if they need a challenge to uncover their true inner self.

Dante's Adventure Park: A Ropes Course Designed for Invigoration

Throughout their lives, people take many transformative journeys that change a person's personality forever, giving them newfound abilities they would have never dreamt of. Pushing the limits of one's soul can greatly serve them in their future endeavors. *Dante's Adventure Park* is the newest ropes course that aims at rejuvenating and providing a fresh start on life to teens and adults through an unforgettable experience. Elevated above the ground, people will be tested as they go through a series of obstacles to end at the top of the course with a new sense of accomplishment and trust in themselves. Dante's *Purgatorio* (2003), a text that depicts the incredible transformative journey of Dante as he travels through Purgatory towards Paradise, inspires this ropes course. To be a successful experience, it will be strategically located in a rural area to disconnect one from the distractions of the everyday world in order to let one focus on themselves.

The ropes course concept provides individuals with many benefits that lead to a healthier life in the world. A ropes course is a course of multiple obstacles that provide individuals or groups with various challenges they must overcome before completing a task. Ropes course programs rely on the idea that when an individual is placed into difficult and demanding environments, they will utilize their skills, knowledge, and abilities and therefore experience interpersonal and intrapersonal growth (Green et al., 2000). When individuals eventually complete and conquer these obstacles, they grow as a person. That growth is crucial for their success later on in life.

Research studies have shown participants of ropes courses walked away with many positive improvements to their attributes as a result of the experience. One study involving adults from two universities in the United States reported, "several key personal values (in

particular, accomplishment, self-fulfillment, and fun and enjoyment of life) that appear to serve as the higher level "ends" that participants take away from their ropes course experience" (Goldenberg et al., 2000). The benefits for the mind are immense and a key driver behind the ropes course idea. In order to create the same experience of transformation, the course takes inspiration from one who has gone through an incredible transformation of their own soul: Dante.

In Dante's *Purgatorio*, Dante is traveling up Mount Purgatory with his guide from Hell, Virgil, towards his ultimate end goal of Paradise. In order to start his journey towards cleansing his soul of the seven vices, he must start at ante-Purgatory before proceeding to the Gate of Purgatory, which marks the beginning of his climb. Dante experiences the first of eventually three dreams that all shed light on important moments of his path to Paradise while on the side of the mountain in the Valley of Princes, a place where royals must wait before they begin their time in Purgatory because of the misdeeds they did during their royalty. It involves an eagle carrying him up the side of the mountain, "in a dream I seemed to see an eagle, with golden feathers, hovering in the sky, his wings spread wide, ready to swoop...it plunged down terrible as lightning, and carried me to the sphere of fire" (Dante, 2003, 9.19-21, 29-30). The eagle begins Dante's journey towards cleansing his soul and shows it is necessary for him to go through all the terraces in order to achieve purity. It is a symbol of the change that awaits Dante as he begins his climb: "...the Eagle with feathers of gold which swooped down into the Valley of Negligent Princes is the heavenly and ideal Empire to which Dante is finally to rise.....to the Earthly Paradise on the top, and this, he has told us in the *De Monarchia* (iii. 16), is the figure of the ideal Empire upon earth (Carroll, *Purg* 9.13-33)."

The eagle commences Dante's trip by bringing him out of the lower Valley of Princes to a place of both higher physical and symbolic stature. The eagle brings him to the Gate of Purgatory to symbolize he must work to get himself to the ideal world he pictures. This shows Dante he is much farther than he thinks from his spot in a perfect place that is not bothered by any of the vices or sins left behind during the journey through Purgatory. Like Dante, participants will not just receive newfound abilities or confidence in themselves. They have to conquer the ropes course in order to change themselves into new beings that are more fit for the society that awaits them. Similar to the eagle's ascent to the Gate of Purgatory, participants will be brought by elevator to the Portal of Revolutionary Development, the beginning platform for the course. Following their rise, their transformation will begin.

Through the ropes course, participants will gain valuable skills, including the ability to work as a team in comprehensive, effective ways. The course will have obstacles that aim to have participants avoid what the souls of Canto XIII did during their mortal lives. On his

journey up Mount Purgatory, Dante reaches the second terrace, the Terrace of Envy. According to Virgil, Envy is when one “fears the loss of power, favor, honor, fame—should he be bettered by another. This so aggrieved him that he wants to see him fall” (Dante, 2003, 17.118-20). On the side of the mountain, he found souls who displayed envious behavior serving their penalty in order to cleanse themselves of the vice, “Each propped up another with his shoulder, and all of them were propped against the rock” (Dante, 2003, 13.59-60). The souls here must erase any action or memory they had of being envious of others. The commentary by Robert Hollander greatly explains what the symbol of each soul having to support each other represents, “The envious in life were not involved in supporting others... Now their communal attitude shows their penance” (Hollander, *Purg* 13.59-60). The souls on the Terrace of Envy spent their mortal lives with jealousy towards what others accomplished. The penalty for their poor deeds is they have to be supportive of others in a literal fashion or else all the souls fall down. They have plenty of time to think about a life where they feel happy for another’s success, or even that of the soul they are literally holding up. This helps to purge the vice of Envy from their soul once and for all.

The entire ropes course experience would promote unity amongst participants as they build trust in each other to complete the various challenges and obstacles they will encounter along their way. Unlike the souls’ actions during their mortal lives, these participants will grow a community-like environment with each other, encouraging the successes of their teammates as they travel through the course. Obstacles can have a similar premise to one of the contrapasso’s Dante witnesses. Dante sees that souls are not only leaning on each other but also “iron wire pierces all their eyelids, stitching them together...” (Dante, 2003, 13.70-71). By stitching the penitents’ eyes closed, they have no way of being envious of others since they have no way of looking. They cannot use their sight and all they will observe is the same void that each of them sees. Obstacles on the ropes course could use blindfolded stages where participants will not be able to see anything, therefore relying on others’ commands to complete sections. Similar to the penitents, they will have to support each other. Participants grow a strong bond with their team, and they will never forget the difficult challenges they all completed together.

Participants will leave the ropes course a transformed person, just like how Dante completed his journey on top of Mount Purgatory. Like any other soul who finishes their time at Purgatory, Dante is bathed in the rivers Lethe and Eunoe by Matelda, an acquaintance of Beatrice. Lethe “takes from men the memory of sin” (Dante, 2003, 28.128) and Eunoe “restores that of good deeds” (Dante, 2003, 28.129). The rivers contain important spiritual power that completes the transformation of a soul that has been cleansed of the seven vices. Eunoe is of most importance because once a soul has been purified, it needs to be “educated” again of the good deeds it once knew and did in its mortal life. Dante experi-

ences his bathing in Eunoe in Canto XXXIII and realizes the true power it possesses, “‘But see Eunoe streaming forth there. Bring him to it...revive the powers that are dead in him...’ From those most holy waters I came away remade” (Dante, 2003, 33.127-129, 142-143). Dante’s soul completed the journey of changing his soul into something he could have never have thought of before his climb. The commentary from Mandelbaum et al. further explains how Dante was changed once he got into Eunoe, “Accordingly after, the Lethean waters have deleted the memory of all past sins, Eunoe fulfills the soul’s renewal by bringing back to memory all good deeds, reviving the soul’s faint virtù (129), and thus recreating the creature anew. Thus remade, the Pilgrim’s soul is likened to new trees being renewed after a harsh winter with the coming of spring” (Mandelbaum et al., 2008, 142-145).

Following the climb through the terraces, Dante is similar to a brand new person who is starting fresh in his next life. The person remains the same once they finish their journey through Purgatory. However, the soul has been completely molded into a new pure form that is ready for new adventures. Participants from the ropes course would experience a similar transformation as they become people with a new mentality. Similar to how Dante felt like he was a different soul, participants will feel like transformed, more empowered people. After the ropes course, they will be confident they can take on the world because they will have developed a new set of life skills they once did not carry. The once timid or lowly person will be transformed into an outgoing, poised individual ready for the next big challenge.

The location of *Dante’s Adventure Park* is of extreme importance in order to allow participants to get the desired outcome when they complete the course. Similar to the significance of the setting of Mount Purgatory to a soul’s development, the ropes course will need to be situated in a place that brings maximum benefits to the participants. The most desirable location that will provide for the most nurturing experience for individuals on the ropes course will be a rural setting. A rural setting has many pros that can enhance each person’s adventure as they look to change into better human beings. It usually brings a new landscape to the hustle and bustle people are used to, “One of the attractions of a ropes course rests in the presentation of an adventure model in surroundings that are remote and radically different from the everyday experience in urban areas” (Shoop, 2015). A ropes course established in a quiet, rural area allows participants to focus on themselves rather than other distractions. They are able to connect deeper within themselves and their team as they complete obstacles to build their mental fortitude.

The rural setting chosen for *Dante’s Adventure Park* would be a forest. A forest landscape is similar to the Earthly Paradise on top of Mount Purgatory that Dante enters after he completes his journey through the seven terraces, “Eager to explore the sacred forest’s

boundaries and its depth, now that its thick and verdant foliage...” (Dante, 2003, 28.1-2). Incorporating a forest backdrop on the ropes course will provide both connections to Dante’s work and greater benefits to participants who utilize it. In Barton and Pretty’s research study examining the effects of green space exercise on mental health, they found that both mood and self-esteem improved for participants when they participated in short amounts of green exercise (2010). With a ropes course situated in the middle of green space, the magnitude of the positive effects the experience has on participants will increase. While surrounded by nature, participants will disconnect from others to focus on themselves and improve their own mental well-being. Nature provided the best setting for a ropes course aimed at helping people refresh their minds with as little distraction as possible.

The ropes course known as *Dante’s Adventure Park* will provide the best journey to revamp one’s mind and prepare them for their future lives. The journey is similarly described to the one Dante took up Mount Purgatory in search of Paradise. When both complete their journeys, Dante and the participants will end up with the same outcome: a new self. Dante becomes a cleansed soul that is ready for his next stage in heaven. Participants of the ropes course will become new beings with a fresh mind that are confident in themselves and their new skills that will carry them into the future. A rural setting has been determined to maximize the effects of such a powerful journey on the welfare of each participant. With great progress in its development, *Dante’s Adventure Park* will be open for its first transformations in Spring 2023. Remember, everyone has the ability to change into something they want to be, and sometimes all it takes to trigger change is the encouragement from others or a transformative plan.

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Laura Kemerer is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Accounting. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Samuel Bennett's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. This assignment asked for a business proposal based on one of the texts read in the class. I was inspired by an escape room I had recently gone to, and I thought it would be interesting to apply the logic and puzzles used in an escape room to *Julius Caesar*. I also wanted to explore the alternative perspective of trying to save Caesar instead of assassinating him.

“Saving Caesar” Escape Room

The newest innovation in the immersive experience industry is *Senate Break In: Save Caesar!* This inverted escape room, where participants are trying to enter a locked area rather than escape it, is based on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (2011) and will thrill audiences around the country. An inverted escape room is a new concept, created by the inventors of this escape room, that is the reverse of a traditional escape room. Instead of trying to break out of a room, you are trying to break into another room. *Julius Caesar* tells the story of the downfall of the beloved Julius Caesar and the men who assassinated him. Brutus and Cassius, along with the other conspirators, plotted to kill him because he was becoming too popular with the Roman populace. They thought that he had ambitions to become a tyrant, but after they kill him a civil war sparked and they both committed suicide. The owners of Mission: Breakout in Lafayette (Mission Breakout Lafayette, n.d.) will benefit by adding this to their selection of rooms because it matches the literary theme they have already established. Advertising will be instrumental in achieving the product's success, including local text-based ads and flyers and search engine optimization (SEO) for the company's website.

There are four vital components to explaining the escape room's function and ensuring its success: the targeted investors/owners, Mission Breakout in Lafayette; the reasoning behind the room, why one should want to save Caesar; the gameplay and how it relates to the text; and the advertising strategies used. The central question “Why save Caesar?” reflects in the mission, the gameplay, and the advertising.

Owners of Mission: Breakout Lafayette, will want to pay attention to this new venture as it perfectly aligns with their existing theme. They currently have rooms with the themes and contents of text like the *Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 2019), *Sherlock Holmes* (Doyle, 2020), and ancient Greek mythology (Mission Breakout Lafayette n.d.). Their customer base already enjoys literary escape rooms; adding a Julius Caesar room will draw in more classic book lovers. In addition, the added novelty of an inverted escape room could help distinguish them from competitors. Overall, Mission: Breakout in Lafayette will see increased cus-

tomers traffic and will be able to cater to its established base by adding the proposed product to its services.

One may ask the question of why anyone would want to save Caesar in the first place. Was Caesar truly an arrogant, pompous tyrant, or was he more complex than that? To justify the premise of the escape room, one must answer this question. Shakespeare took a historically flat character and turned him into a morally gray tragic sacrifice. According to Hancock, another text on Julius Caesar's life, *Plutarch's Lives* (Plutarch, 2001), portrays him as a classic tyrant with little ambiguity (1966). She said, "Shakespeare clouds the issue by refusing to avail himself of a ready-made tyrant already hated by the people." (Hancock, 1966, 58). Shakespeare actively chose to make Caesar a character whose true motives were unknown, so he did not intend for him to be purely a villain.

In the text, Caesar did not commit any egregious wrongdoings toward the people of Rome. Rather, the common people of Rome seemed to love him. In the play's very first scene, the common people were thrilled to see Caesar back in his defeat of Pompey. A cobbler said, "But indeed, sir, we make holiday to see Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph" (Shakespeare, 2011, I.1.33-35). The people of Rome were overjoyed to see Caesar and loved him. Artemidorus, a soothsayer, was a fervent supporter of Caesar. He knew of the conspirators' plans and tried to warn Caesar of what was going to happen by showing him proof of the conspirators' plans on paper. When shown Artemidorus' paper, Caesar said, "What touches ourself should last be served" (Shakespeare, 2011, III.1.8). If Caesar was truly an ambitious self-centered character, he would not have put his own concerns last, especially since he was told by Decius, another conspirator, he was going to be crowned that day at the Senate. He put the concerns of the public over material that Artemidorus said only concerned him, even though it had the potential to be good news about his crowning.

One should also consider Brutus' feelings towards Caesar. Brutus was one of Caesar's closest friends, and perhaps the least morally ambiguous, most clearly good person in the play. He constantly second-guessed his decision to murder Caesar after being persuaded by Cassius. His sentiments toward Caesar at the beginning of the conspiracy, when he is still deliberating the morality of it, are shown by "And, to speak truth of Caesar, I have not known his affections swayed more than his reason" (Shakespeare, 2011, II.1.20-22). Brutus thought Caesar was a reasonable person, not likely to be susceptible to irrationality. He was only convinced that he was a threat after Cassius forged letters from the people of Rome. Brutus was also haunted by Caesar long after he did the deed of killing him. In Scene IV.4, Brutus saw a nightmarish vision of Caesar saying "thou shalt see me again at Philippi" (Shakespeare, 2011, 327). If Brutus had no qualms about whether he was justified in killing Caesar, he would not have been haunted by him on the battlefield.

Caesar was not a villain in the play. Rather, he was a tragic sacrifice used by Antony and Cassius to catapult themselves to power. If Caesar was saved, Rome would not have been plunged into civil war and the people's hero would still be around. Even if he had ascended to the status of king, it would have been by the people's wishes. The concept of Caesar being a hero is certainly a notion not unheard of and is a justifiable and interesting premise for the new product being considered.

The creators of the room have already devised the setting, general themes of the puzzles, and a theoretical gameplay sequence, although all elements of the room have not yet been finalized. The room will take inspiration from Caesar's life and the good he did for the citizens of Rome.

The setting is the Ides of March in 44 BC, exactly one hour before the conspirators brutally murder Caesar and change the course of Western Civilization forever. Participants, playing as a group of Roman citizens loyal to Julius Caesar, will have 60 minutes to solve a variety of *Julius Caesar* themed puzzles to enter the locked Senate chamber that Caesar is in. They must warn him of the conspirators' plans, or Caesar will be doomed to his gruesome fate. Escape rooms are a relatively recent trend in the United States. In 2014, there were only 22 escape rooms in the country, but by 2017, the number had exploded to over 2,000 (Dixon et al., 2021). This is the perfect experience for puzzle lovers, Roman history buffs, and Shakespeare nerds looking for an experience for a night out or a special occasion, although it may not be suitable for young children due to the complexity and nature of the experience.

The room itself will incorporate several elements from the text of Julius Caesar in the setting, puzzles, and clues. The environment will be themed to look like the antechamber of the Curia of Pompey, where the conspirators murdered Caesar. Although neither the text of *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2011) nor historical sources have records of an antechamber, one can imagine for the purpose of the escape room that one existed. The Curia of Pompey was a grand building located within the Theater of Pompey, whom Caesar ironically defeated immediately before the events of *Julius Caesar*. Pompey built this theater as a testament to his own glory. The room will have columns along the edges, just as the Curia did, and marble-tiled floors in the style of the times (Bucher, 2011).

Escape rooms typically have an employee brief the participants on the rules and expectations of the room while walking them to wherever the room is in the facility (*What to Expect on Your First Escape Room Adventure*, 2020). The employee in this case will be playing the part of Artemidorus, a diviner, from the play. In *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2011), Artemidorus, who has somehow found out the conspirators' plans, tries to warn Caesar of the dangers the conspirators pose to him, but Caesar disregards him. Since the partic-

Participants are trying to save Caesar, Artemidorus is the perfect guide to introduce them to their mission. Artemidorus describes himself as a lover of Caesar, saying, “Here I will stand till Caesar pass along, / And as a suitor will I give him this” (Shakespeare, 2011, II.4.11-12). The employee will wear traditional Roman plebeian garb, a dark toga, and sandals (Ancient Roman Clothing), as he shows the players to the room. He will explain his role as Artemidorus, while also explaining the rules of the escape room. Artemidorus can tell the players all about how wonderful Caesar is and all the good he has done for him as a Roman citizen. He gives purpose to the mission. Obviously, the Artemidorus in the text did not know modern escape room conventions, but players can suspend their disbelief for the purpose of the room.

The clues and puzzles in the room will be based on references to the text of *Julius Caesar* rather than the historical figure. The clues will be laid out in a sequence to be solved in order. Although all elements of the gameplay have not yet been finalized, the creators have determined the starting materials for the beginning of the puzzles that take inspiration from the text. Since the inspiration is finding the good in Caesar, the room will include references to the good things he has done for Rome. One element will be linking together the praise Antony gives Caesar in Act 3 as he eulogizes Caesar. Antony was one of Caesar’s closest, most trusted friends, and even though his speech served to turn the public against the conspirators, he seemed to sincerely mean his praise of Caesar. Even though that speech occurs out of the timeline of the room, Caesar has already done all the deeds outlined in the funeral oration. Antony said, “He hath brought many captives home to Rome, whose ransoms did the coffers fill” (Shakespeare, 2011, III.2.97-98). Caesar brought back money for the good of Rome and did not keep it all for himself. Players will have to sort through coins in a coffer, which is a chest for holding valuables (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Another line from Antony’s speech is “When the poor hath cried, Caesar hath wept” (Shakespeare, 2011, III.2.100). Caesar had so much compassion for the citizens of Rome that he could not stop himself from shedding tears for them. In the room, participants will have to decode a letter about the poor of Rome that Caesar cried over. The letters the teardrops are over spell out a code to the next clue. The last line from Antony’s speech in the sequence is “I thrice presented him a kingly crown, which he did thrice refuse” (Shakespeare, 2011, III.2.105-106). The last part of that section of the puzzles will be three crowns hidden around the room with clues to the next section inscribed on the inside. More *Julius Caesar* specific puzzles will come into play in the game, but their contents will be determined at a later time.

One logistical issue still not discussed is advertising. Since the targeted distributor is Mission Breakout Lafayette, using local advertising to reach students and locals makes sense. In addition, SEO can be useful in reaching further audiences. Local advertising in the

form of newspaper ads, flyers around Lafayette and West Lafayette, and partnerships with the university are just some of the ways that word can spread about this new opportunity. Professors could use the escape room as a potential extra credit opportunity for students reading *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2011) to enhance the reading experience and show them a new perspective of the story in a fun way.

“Search engine optimization (SEO) is a collection of strategies that improves a website’s presence and visibility on a search engine’s results page” (Veglis & Giomelakis, 2019). It involves managing keywords, content, and link structure to optimize visibility in results (Veglis & Giomelakis, 2019). SEO would allow people from different areas to find the search result more easily. An example of SEO is consumers typing “escape rooms” into a search engine and results for the newest product at Mission Breakout popping up, even though the room is less established than other escape rooms. SEO would be invaluable to the venture as it is starting out because even though it already receives a boost from being partnered with an existing brand, visibility is the key to reaching people not located in Lafayette looking specifically for Shakespeare escape rooms.

One example of an ad that could run both locally and online is a general endorsement of the room. It would be a picture of Caesar in the Senate, surrounded by the conspirators as in Act 3. The text would have the title of the experience, *Senate Break In: Save Caesar*, the tagline, “60 minutes to save Caesar and the Republic!” and the quote from the play, “The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones” (Shakespeare, 2011, III.2.84-85). The relevance of the quote lies in its reference to Caesar’s goodness being buried with his bones. History only remembers the evil that Caesar did, but if one examines his life one can find the good, and a reason to save Caesar as in the escape room. The local ad will be in poster and flier form, while the online version will be the cover page for the website, which will be boosted with SEO.

“Senate Break In: Save Caesar!” caters to all lovers of literary and historical-themed puzzles and will be a tremendous asset to Mission Breakout Lafayette because it perfectly aligns with their existing rooms. The basis of the entire premise, both in gameplay and in answer to the question of why one should care about saving Caesar, can be found entirely in the text of the play. Advertising through both local and web-based channels will increase traffic to the escape room and Mission Breakout Lafayette and lead to greater profitability for the owners. Ultimately, “Senate Break In: Save Caesar!” is a great resource for all interested parties: consumers, developers, and owners.

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Innovative Assignments: **A Competitive Debate**



Matthew Kain is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Civil Engineering. He performed this debate to fulfill an assignment in Professor James Mollison's SCLA 102 class in Spring 2023. The assignment was to complete a closing statement discussing the impacts of the real world legality of a hypothetical drug resembling *soma* from Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World*. The objective of Matthew's closing argument was to show the advantage for relying on natural processes for creativity and happiness, instead of being dependent on mind-altering drugs for pleasure.

As a moralistic debate, the debate over the legality of physician assisted suicide came down to a clash of values. The affirmative argued in favor of bodily autonomy by arguing that what one does with their body should be their choice and their choice alone, especially if it does not hinder another individual. The negative meanwhile argued that the value of one's life to themselves and others supersedes all other values. The affirmative advanced their value argument by stating that physician assisted suicide was an effective way for an individual to handle terminal pain. The affirmative held that a system of regulations could limit physician assisted suicide to a select group of individuals and pointed to the success of legalization in other countries. The negative advanced their value argument by asserting that there would be a high propensity for terminal misdiagnoses to cause people to mistakenly undergo physician assisted suicide who would not otherwise. As the debate progressed, the negative relied less upon their dignity of life argument, leaving the value of bodily autonomy as the issue the debate was decided on. Specifically, Arnav's affirmative rebuttal presented two central issues: safeguards in regulation and bodily autonomy. Although regulation presented a substantial amount of clash, the issue of bodily autonomy was more critical to determining whether physician assisted suicide should be legal under any condition.

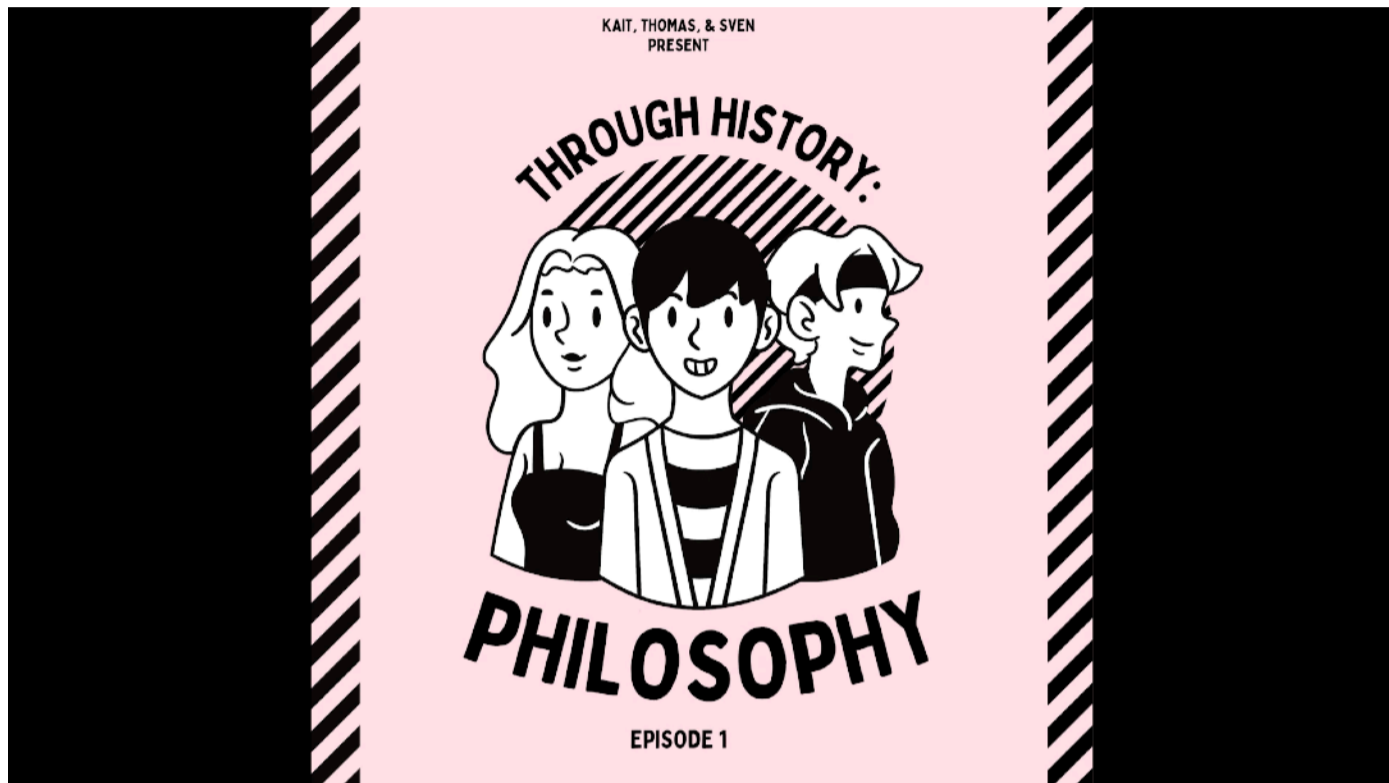
The affirmative won the debate on the issue of bodily autonomy. Arnav's rebuttal repeated that so long as the individual undergoing physician assisted suicide is the sole person making the decision, it should be allowed. He reiterated the harms of living in terminal pain: living without hope and living in misery. He made an apt comparison to pets about the harms of forcing the human to stay alive against their will. The negation responded to the bodily autonomy argument by reiterating the value of human life, but the worth of human life was poorly defined by opportunities largely unavailable to the terminally ill and the benefit of continued living was defined in their value towards others, not themselves. Thus, because the affirmative showed the harm of preventing the terminally ill from exercising their bodily autonomy, they won on this point. Additionally, the result of failed regulation would not change said harm.

The negation might have qualms with the neglect of the issue of regulation. Although the affirmative attempted to show how doctors would never promote suicide, the negation provided evidence of a specific doctor who did just that. The negation succeeded in rebutting several of the affirmative's arguments about the minimal risks of misdiagnoses. They provided hard evidence to show the high frequency of misdiagnoses and successfully linked misdiagnoses to an individual's decision to undergo physician assisted suicide. However this argument ended up being insufficient because it was not weighed in relation to the bodily autonomy of adults. The negative's regulation argument still involved individuals making the decisions for themselves, despite poor information being given to them. Their argument lacked sufficient evidence when describing people attempting to force others into physician assisted suicide. Even though the negation showed the harm of improper regulation, they were unable to explain why consenting adults who were terminally ill and had consulted multiple medical professionals should not be allowed to procure the procedure. However, the affirmative did show the harm to the consenting individual of not undergoing such a procedure and minimized the damage of improper regulation in their rebuttal.

Although victorious, the affirmative still had room for improvement. Specifically, the affirmative weakened their argument about bodily autonomy by arguing that a regulatory scheme should limit the procedure to the terminally ill. This apparent contradiction undermined their most effective point that consenting adults should be able to make their own medical decisions. Additionally, the affirmative should have provided more concrete numerical evidence to support their claims that regulation minimizes the risk of uniformed decisions and ways in which the medical establishment is unlikely to recommend suicide. The lack of evidence about sufficient regulation and the weakening of the bodily autonomy opened the door for the negative to win the ballot.

Meanwhile, the negative would benefit from adopting a more philosophic debate method. The negative should have continued to defend their point about the value of a terminally ill human to their family and used that definition to rebut what the affirmative said about pure bodily autonomy. They should have made protecting human life a central issue, as their side could have won on the issue by mentioning the benefits of continued life to the terminally ill, the role it would play in destigmatizing death and increasing suicide, and the excess deaths caused by medical mistakes. All of those issues were won by the negative throughout the round, but were dropped in the final speech. The negative also could have strengthened their regulation point by providing more concrete evidence about the intentional abuse that physician assisted suicide would cause doctors and family members to pursue against the terminally ill. Had the negative made the protection of human life their central issue, they would have won this round.

Through History: A Podcast on Feminist Philosophy



You can access the podcast here: <https://youtu.be/hP1M6PFOWCM>

Or scan this QR code:



Kaitlyn Boler (left), Thomas Schmitz (center), and Sven Tuznik (right) are all Purdue undergraduate students majoring in Mechanical Engineering. They wrote and produced this podcast episode to fulfill an assignment in Professor Cecilia Mun's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022. The assignment called for students to create something

to tie in the philosophies which were discussed during the semester. This group had the idea to integrate these philosophies with contemporary issues around feminism: current expectations of women, protests and marches for equality, and the lack of women in power. Their goal was to connect past and present feminist perspectives in order to show that the philosophies stood the test of time. They hope that this podcast inspires listeners to think differently about modern issues by seeing how others have overcome them in the past.

Innovative Assignments: **Bezos Through History**



Benjamin Callaghan is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Industrial Engineering who wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor William White's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022. Through the stories about a multitude of characters we read class, this essay delves into the rich tapestry of human experiences, comparing them to the documentary *Amazon Empire: The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos* to reveal compelling commonalities and distinctions.

Creatures of Habit: How There is an Amazon in Each One of Us

In SCLA 102, we read and discovered the stories of numerous characters, both fictional and historical. Through the eyes of these individuals, we saw life from diverse of perspectives. However, the reason we can relate to these stories is because we all participate in the human experience. How can the fiction of such authors as Henrik Ibsen and Margaret Atwood relate to the most famous entrepreneur of the 21st century—Jeff Bezos? This article compares these similarities and differences found in the characters in our Cornerstone books, through the lens of the PBS documentary, *Amazon Empire: The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos*.

Henrik Ibsen: *A Doll's House*

Amazon is often described as an “innovative” company, one that encourages individual ingenuity for the sake of increasing the overall customer experience. However, while this may appear positive and a good thing to an outsider, this comes at a great cost on an interior level to the laborers of this company. This hidden reality is something that is also present in Ibsen's work, *A Doll's House*.

The first tie between these two narratives is the relationship between employer and laborer. Many Amazon warehouse workers have testified to the fact that their company consistently fails to put the worker first, instead willing to sacrifice their safety and wellbeing for the sake of consumers. For example, one scene in the documentary interviews former warehouse employees who suffered under Bezos' leadership. They describe the consistent bypass of safety standards encouraged by managers, resulting in an increased risk of injury and an overall decline in workplace health. This mentality greatly hurts the work environment both psychologically and physically as accidents increase due to the excessive workload. In *A Doll's House*, this same relationship between employer and laborer can be seen in the marriage of Nora and Torvald. From the stray outsider, it appears their union is soundly grounded in love, communication, and unity. However, as one examines it closer, it can be seen this is not the case. Much like Bezos, Torvald is often guilty of treating his

wife simply as a means to an end, as caretaker and household object, rather than a spouse, an equal partner for life. He fails to communicate with his wife at all, instead choosing to shower her with meaningless compliments such as “songbird” or “skylark.” This finally blows up when Nora decides to leave him, describing in emotional pain that “this is the first time...we have talked seriously.” Torvald, consumed with his career, failed to love his spouse properly, and lost her as a result.

The second tie between these two narratives is the facade that each presents. For Nora, she is expected to be the “beautiful face of Torvald’s home”. As described by Nora, “I’ve lived here like a pauper -- simply from hand to mouth. I’ve lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald. That was how you wanted it.” In an attempt to follow the pattern of her life before with her father, Nora allows herself to become the “doll” in Torvald’s house, nothing more than another beautiful prize whose sole function is to tend the home and raise the children; and not as equal partner, but rather as the lesser member of the union. The importance of appearances is reflected in the same way at Amazon where the idea of customer satisfaction above all else takes precedent. Creatively, the company shows this through their Christmas commercial in which hundreds of smiling packages sing a carol of joy as they are delivered to their final destination. However, this facade fails to reflect the hundreds of laborers undergoing abusive working environments and a lack of safety standards to ensure those smiling bundles of “joy” reach the front door of a consumer on time.

The final way in which these two stories share a theme is the way in which Nora and the warehouse workers cope with their situations. Amidst the interviews, one detail that was consistently brought up by former employees was the difficulty to “make rate.” Every day, these workers found it necessary to create new ways to ensure they met the package goal set by the managers. However, soon they found the only way to compensate for these demands was to cut corners, including bypassing safety standards to ensure they made ends meet. In this same way, Nora finds herself overwhelmed by Torvald’s demands and the stress from running a home single handedly. With this burden of expected perfection above her head, Nora often finds it necessary to create coping mechanisms for herself in order to please Torvald, much like the Amazon warehouse workers. For Nora, macaroons are her Achilles heel. With spiteful delight she consumes them, almost as if to laugh in the face of Torvald’s oppressive partnership. However, while only a seemingly insignificant secret to withhold from her husband, in the context of the story they represent the presence of a broken marriage, marred by deceit, misunderstanding, and a lack of communication between the spouses.

Margaret Atwood: *Oryx and Crake*

In the documentary, *The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos*, many similarities arise between the way Bezos runs his company, Amazon, and the thought process of Crake, the fanatical mastermind of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. The foundational comparison that unites these two stories is the idea of a dream. From an early time in his life, Bezos dreamed of going to space. Even as early as high school, he had drawn up plans for an ideal off-earth living experience, complete with all the conveniences, comforts, and infrastructure of the current planet. Today, Bezos continues to have the opinion that the only way to combat the ever growing danger of human consumerism is to expand into space. In this same way, Crake is disgusted with the state of the world by the time he gains complete power over the world. However, while Crake and Bezos might agree on the need for a plan for the future, they differ in their execution. Crake believes the human race has rotted to the point that they must now be destroyed in mass genocide and replaced with a new and perfected race of human-like creatures. This difference is highlighted in a line from the documentary when Bezos is described as "stopping at nothing" and "(he) won't stop until proven wrong." However, Crake never stops, he does not care about right and wrong. In his mind, he is always right and will never be stopped, even if it means giving his life for his twisted ideology.

The second comparison to be examined is the obsession with "customer satisfaction". Within Amazon, it was agreed on day one of the company that the customer would be priority number one. Bezos wanted to ensure that the consumer is always satisfied, believing that a happy customer is a returning customer. At the foundation of the user experience for Amazon is the "exhilarating" feeling one receives after ordering and opening a product from the website. Riding on this ecstasy, users are more likely to purchase again and again from his company. Crake plays on the same ideology of consumer experience. However, instead of seeking true satiation, he creates and markets products that force the buyer to return for more through addiction, as to live without would mean dire consequences. He creates such a large buzz around his items that if one was to abstain from them, they are forced into a choice of either purchasing and participating or permanent social condemnation. Inadvertently, Amazon is also guilty of this in the way they market themselves as the primary platform for e-commerce. Due to their exponential success in online product sales, Amazon has ensured that they are now a necessity for the success of any business looking to sell online. As a result, companies become "addicted" to selling on Amazon, as to go without would ensure almost certain financial failure.

The concept of active experimentation is the final tie between these two figures. Amazon is famously known for their "web services," a virtual data storage and cloud platform for large companies. However, from the early days at Amazon, Bezos recognized the value of user data and its collection. With each click of a user's mouse, the trillion dollar company logs another data point, another piece of the puzzle in predicting their next move on the

site. Compiling this data, Amazon is able to predict what one will search for, in some cases even before the user thinks of it themselves. For many years, this practice of user data manipulation was unknown to the general public. However, as this process became made known, many felt they had been lied to. Crake also actively experiments on his consumers through the hidden nature of his products. For example, Crake invents a product called BlyssPluss, which effectively increases one's sexual longevity for the extended future, bringing with it other benefits such as disease prevention. However, it would ultimately be the downfall of the human race as beneath the marketed benefits lurked a deadly disease that without the precious vaccine, would end one's life. Thus, while on the surface they appeared to be "self-help" compounds, they secretly held ingredients that were designed to end humanity. Knowing this, Crake continued to distribute and market these products to oblivious users, causing widespread destruction among populations.

Jeannette Walls: *The Glass Castle*

"Sometimes you have to get sicker before you can get better." This quote from Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*, describes the relationship between her childhood and adult life perfectly. Throughout her early life, Jeannete was consistently abused and treated like a piece of baggage, lugged around from state to state by her father's ever-changing prospecting. At one point, her living situation became so bad that the roof on their house in West Virginia came crashing down during a rainstorm, and yet still no one fixed it. Amidst molestation by relatives and fatherly alcohol abuse, Jeanette still chose to rise above her situation and create a better life for herself, ultimately landing a job in New York as a reporter for a local Brooklyn paper. With this push, she was finally led to her dream job as a columnist for a major New York magazine, *The New York*. However, Jeannette's success was not simply due to luck but rather to her dedication to something she believed in and dreamed of. This mentality is something shared by Jeff Bezos as well, as shown in the documentary. His determination is best shown through his commitment to the long-term game for his company. For example, during an interview with a former Amazon executive, he describes that from the beginning, Bezos made clear to his investors that his ideas would not be initially profitable, and a return on their stake would not be viable for some time. This dream of such a large and successful company would ultimately pay off, with Amazon topping a market worth of over a trillion dollars in 2021.

Jeanette's parents, Rex and Rosemary, believed that the foundation of a good education began in being well-read. From an early age, the Walls children were surrounded by books of all kinds, including topics such as geography, astronomy, history, and fiction. This love for reading came in many different forms. For example, after long days of reading, the

broken family would unite over discussions of their findings at the dinner table. When one of them stumbled across a word they did not understand, Rex would pull out an old dictionary and explain the meaning to them. Another way in which Jeannette used reading to move her forward in life is after the family moved to Welch, West Virginia when she joined the local school newspaper. During her time there, she spent her extra time reading the news about the outside world. Surprised and excited by her newfound knowledge of reality, Jeannette used this opportunity as a stepping stone to cultivate a love for writing and a career in the newspaper business. Jeff Bezos equally had a love for books and the opportunity they provided in his life. However, he took a different approach to them, seeing them as the source for his future financial success rather than simply as an intellectual pastime. In 1994, from his garage in Seattle, Bezos and his wife opened the doors of Cadabra (later to be renamed Amazon), the first online book retailer in the history of the internet. Many of his friends and relatives thought he was crazy to pour his life savings and investors' money into this idea, but with the usage of the internet growing over 2000% per year during this time, Bezos was quick to seize the opportunity. While producing different results, both Jeff Bezos and Jeannette Walls found positive ways to take books and mold their use to suit their own dreams.

However, despite the many positives, Amazon and Rex also share a more distasteful similarity. As Amazon grew into the largest online selling platform in the world, one major concern for consumers arose in the form of quality control. Many users argued that Amazon had become a place where anyone could sell anything, whether good or bad for society and consumers. Rachael Greer, former Amazon employee who worked in product safety stated, "It basically makes it so that these companies who are maybe not as careful with adhering to the law...can start a store on Amazon...import some stuff, sell it, cause some problems, and then disappear." This lack of accountability on the part of Amazon is something that has continued to plague the company, as can be seen from this interview. In the same way, Rex continually fails when it comes time for him to take accountability for his actions. He always finds a way to pass the buck to someone or something else, instead of claiming his own failures and seeking to amend his ways. One example of this is when Rex brings home groceries after the family has had almost nothing to eat for the week. He comments, "Have I ever let you down?" in a patronizing way, as he places the food down on the table. However, this is right after abandoning his family again to another one of his long drinking binges. This hypocritical lifestyle is one that fails to take responsibility, and is the cause of his family's downfall time and time again.

Malcolm Gladwell: *Outliers*

“Outliers are those who have been given opportunities—and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them.” Malcolm Gladwell explores this idea in his book *Outliers*, an analytical approach to the phenomenon of so-called disadvantaged members of society throughout history. In reality, however, Gladwell explains that instead of being underdogs, their success is heavily due to the coincidence of being born in the right place at the right time, of the opportunities handed to them by fate. As an example, Gladwell conducted a study on Canadian hockey players and what determines their success. As he combed through the data, he soon found the trend that on average, players born near the beginning of the calendar year consistently had better chances at playing the sport professionally. He determined that as a result of being in the right age group, they were able to capitalize fully on the opportunity provided them through top trainers and other such advantages.

Bezos was also able to see that to make it to the top, it is crucial that one jump at opportunities when they arise. For instance, Bezos could not have predicted the explosion of the internet in the public sphere but he was forward-thinking enough to see the possibilities it presented in its infant state. As stated earlier, in the early 1990s, internet usage was increasing at over 2000% every year. Bezos was able to capitalize on this crucial time and launch his company just at the moment when consumers needed him most.

However, Gladwell believes that opportunity is not simply enough, it also requires dedicated time to perfect one’s craft, in what he calls “The 10,000 Hour Rule.” An example he explores is the rise and future success of Bill Gates during his time at the University of Michigan. With the rise of computer science during the 1970-80s, many were enthusiastic to explore this new field, however many did not have the resources to do so. This ultimately placed those who did have access to computer labs, such as the brand new computer building on Michigan’s campus, at a huge advantage. Bill Gates was one of those lucky enough to experience it and he dove right into the new craft, devoting long hours in the lab in order to perfect his work. Gates did not let his prime opportunity go to waste and instead capitalized on it through dedicated study and implementation. Ultimately, this lucky break paired with hard work, paid off in what is now known as Microsoft.

Jeff Bezos also understood the balance between these two parameters for success. Through shrewd business schemes, he quickly captured the market. One such scheme was the analogy of a cheetah and its prey. Bezos quickly devised a plan to ensure his rise to dominance by going after smaller weaker companies first, much like a cheetah does when selecting a slower antelope to attack. By eliminating companies from the bottom of the pile, he began to gain traction and a reputation as a savvy businessman. By sticking to a consistent game plan, Bezos won the long term game, exemplifying the necessity for a committed work ethic.

The final idea to be considered is that of cultural legacies and the impact they play in deciding the future success of an individual. Gladwell bounces between the idea that where you come from can have both negative and positive effects. He uses the example of low-income families and how during summer months, the academic success of those students decreased significantly. To Gladwell, this indicates that perhaps it is not so much the fact they are any less intelligent, but rather that their opportunities are heavily decreased. However, this does not mean there are no chances available to them. Bezos is an excellent example of how he sought out those opportunities, despite early hardships. Born from teenage parents, Jeff did not live an easy early life, dealing with divorce and ultimately his mother remarrying only a few years later. However, with his new father and a fresh start, Bezos saw opportunity and chose to put his previous hardships behind him. Even from the least favorable conditions, he soon would prove that often one only needs a single opportunity to become successful. After finally achieving his lifelong dream of making the journey into space on a private rocket, he was recognized as the richest man in the world in 2021.

PBS, Frontline documentary: *In the Age of AI*

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has increased exponentially over the last twenty years and has been implemented across all sectors of society. One particular aspect that has been majorly impacted is that of job retention. The documentary, *In the Age of AI*, interviews Mike Hicks, an economist from Ball State who states that much of job opportunity depreciation has actually been due to “automation” rather than simply outsourcing to overseas factories. A slightly different view is taken by Bezos and his team at Amazon, describing that implementation of AI can only improve workplace safety. Through continuing to open and invest in his “fulfillment centers,” Bezos believes that automation will never fully replace the human touch and ultimately only add to its capability and ability to reach higher goals.

As AI gained traction, Amazon saw the potential for its use and began implementing the invention of “personal assistants,” starting with the famed “Alexa”. According to an interview in *The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos* describing Alexa, this device is now seen as, “A personal assistant...just that term implies this intimate connection that we begin to develop with Amazon.” The integral place this technology plays in a user’s day to day life comes with some dangers though, if not implemented correctly. This is especially true when it comes to listening devices that are constantly collecting data, often without users’ permission in the intimate areas of home life. For example, Amazon paired with the company Ring to create safety-oriented doorbells that would recognize a homeowner based on unique characteristics such as face and voice identification. Quickly spreading to indoor monitoring cameras, cracks began to appear in the security of Bezos’ brainchild. Hackers began accessing the camera servers, often spying and scaring residents through voice commands. As a result,

these types of trends have led former Harvard Professor Shoshana Zuboff, to coin the phrase “Surveillance Capitalism” in the documentary, *In the Age of AI*. She describes this uptick in data collection from cameras, “personal assistants,” and other such devices as the new currency in an economy of information. This drastic change in what is valued leads to the final comparison, what happens with the data.

The final trend that intertwines these two narratives is the idea of data collection. Amazon Web Services, a data storage and cloud platform created by Bezos has quickly gained traction in the last few years due to significant support it has gained from companies such as Netflix, Nike, and even government agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency. This pivotal role as data police is the bread and butter of Amazon, as it places them in a position of real power. This data has many uses, for instance as a tool in generating personalized product lists to increase consumer product funneling and improve the overall user experience. While this may appear innocent, there are also many dangers that arise from such large collections of data. *The Age of AI* explores these dangers, including the fact that data can be used to influence political decisions and even elections across many platforms. In addition to this, as large amounts of data are collected concerning user behavior and interactions, it begs the question: where is this data going? The Cambridge Analytica scandal of 2018 is a perfect example of where this data often can end up. During this time, Facebook “accidentally” released over 87 million users’ data to a political company based in the United Kingdom. This caused huge shockwaves across the data collection community, even going so far as to cause California to unanimously pass a bill requiring stricter data collection policies. As data becomes the commerce of the 21st century, it is vital that these types of bills continue to make their way across the country to ensure the preservation of open democracy and freedom from capitalistic manipulation by mammoth tech companies.

Fiction

“That's what fiction is for.
It's for getting at the truth
when the truth isn't suffi-
cient for the truth.”

–Tim O'Brien

Lilly and Kate's Trip to Shangri-La

by

Mariana Soto Ramos



Mariana Soto Ramos is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aerospace Engineering. She wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor David Riesbeck's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. In the assignment, Mariana and her peers researched and wrote about a topic that moved them. Mariana didn't just want to write; she wanted to make people feel seen. In her short story "Lilly and Kate's Trip to Shangri-La," the main character embarks on a journey that addresses their solitude and discovers the painful truths of growth.

Lilly had dreamt of goldfish the previous night. When she arrived at her apartment, she gently set the plastic bag on her kitchen counter and took off her coat. She sighed, looking around at her place. The evening moonlight perched on her living room walls and littered schoolbooks. Lilly wasn't expecting anyone, and it's not like anyone was expecting her. But that's why she had bought the stupid goldfish anyway, wasn't it? She looked at the clear bag sitting on her counter. The orange tail of her new fish flashed in the dim light.

The truth was that Lilly had no intention of having pets. But she had a dream about goldfish last night before her mother had suggested getting one, and even though Lilly had barely any life experience, she had learned to trust her subconscious.

After setting up her new pet's living quarters, complete with a "Kate" sticker clinging to the fishbowl, she decided to get some sleep. She'd been doing lots of that lately.

Her room was as it always was. Fairy lights adorned the walls, books lounged on her shelves, and polaroid pictures of her friends adorned her desk. She didn't stop to look at them. She hadn't spoken to those people in months.

Her heart thundered in her chest, coating her bones in a sweet rhythm. She had been so busy these past few weeks. But she had finished her grad-school applications and was looking forward to tonight.

"Lilly!" a familiar voice shouted from behind her.

She turned from the restaurant entrance to see her friends seated at a table, waving at her, their grins mirroring hers. She took the last empty seat, and soon the conversation flowed like a downstream river. Roaring laughter filled the room, stories were shared under the dim light, and polaroid pictures were taken, intoxicated with the party's merriment.

Lilly had never felt so loved.

After the last story had been shared, Nick, a tall brunet, said:

"So, like, remember Sarah's birthday party? I was in charge of bringing snacks, right? So, I went to the CVS near Whither Road-"

Lilly furrowed her brows.

"Wait, Sarah, you had a party?" she asked, looking at the girl sitting across from her. She gave her a strained smile, and Lilly could see the panic in her eyes.

"Y-Yeah, it was the weekend you had that big exam. I didn't- we didn't want to bother you, so-"

Lilly could see through the fallacy. Sarah had never been a good liar, anyway.

"So you didn't invite me?"

“Come on, Lilly, you can't blame us for that. You're busy with all that fancy grad-school stuff,” Nick said.

“That fancy grad school stuff is going to get me a job, Nick,” Lilly could taste the venom in her voice, but her heart was too bruised to care.

“You know you won't survive there on your own, right? You've always needed us. You're lucky everyone showed up tonight at all,” Nick spat.

The table was quiet now.

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“We're here and changed our plans so you could come.”

Lilly stopped breathing. She doesn't remember standing up. “Don't worry. I won't need anything else from you anymore.”

She jolted awake. The light from the TV illuminated her otherwise dark room. She must have fallen asleep. Shaking her head, Lilly got up and padded to the kitchen, her blue pajama pants whispering against the hardwood floor. Sleep became a distant memory as she drank her glass of water, turning to look at her unlit apartment. Her gaze stopped at the new fishbowl decorating her kitchen counter and the fish swimming idly. Lilly had been afraid of the dark when she was a child, but after she moved here, she discovered its beauty. The quiet gentleness always calmed her racing thoughts when she awoke from dreams. After her heart stopped hammering and the sweat in her brow had cooled, she moved toward her room.

“Psst!”

She stopped. Turned. The empty apartment greeted her. Lilly shook her head and continued her route.

“Psssst! Lilly!”

Fear trickled down Lilly's spine, and her eyes became alert in the gloom.

“Who's there?” She asked the darkness.

“Over here!” It responded.

She walked to the origin of the sound, placing her hands on the kitchen counter. Her goldfish stared back.

“Hi!” The goldfish said.

Lilly jumped back and screamed her most colorful curses with surprising agility.

“Well, that wasn’t very nice,” the goldfish pulled a face, “Now that you've gotten that out of your system, I can finally introduce myself.” The fish flapped its tail in a wave. “I’m Kate, a figment of your imagination.”

Lilly stared with her mouth open, not processing a single thing she saw.

“You're a-a fish!” she pointed at Kate.

“A goldfish, get it right.”

“And you...talk?”

“As we’ve established, yes.”

“And you’re... a figment... of my imagination?”

“Yes!” Kate chirped, her liquid eyes shining with cheerfulness.

Lilly was just confused.

“How are you talki-” she started.

“We’re in your dream,” Kate interrupted, “I suggest you don’t overthink it, though. It won't make sense, no matter how much you try to bring logic into it. You know how dreams are.”

But Lilly did overthink it; she felt herself pull back into her own mind. Even in my dreams, I’m alone, she thought. She pushed the idea away, but loneliness was her constant companion. It would always come back, no matter how far away Lilly traveled.

“Lilly, what's wrong?” Kate’s gentle voice permeated the space.

“What? Nothing’s wrong.”

The apartment exploded. The wooden flooring became glass, the white countertops turned to an ebony hue, and the windows disappeared. The furniture fluttered, and suddenly, a swarm of butterflies erupted from where the sofas and tables had been. Their multicolored wings reflected the moonlight, and Lilly thought she had never witnessed so many pigments.

“Oh, fantastic,” Kate said sarcastically, “We need to go. Now.”

Lilly panicked. “What? Why? What's happening?”

“I need you to think of happy thoughts. Think of a peaceful place. It can be anything!” Kate said desperately.

Lilly couldn’t breathe, couldn’t bring oxygen to her lungs, but she nodded and closed her eyes in concentration. The ear-splitting sounds were getting louder now; the walls were crashing down. But she kept thinking, thinking, thinking until... There! She wanted to return there.

Lilly grabbed the fishbowl and ran to the entrance, her fluffy socks thumping against the floor with every step. She didn't waste any time. She went through the door.

She was sick of crying. The week had been exhausting, and she broke down in her bedroom again. Her mind was numb, and her lips were tired from faking smiles.

Dad had left a few days ago, and the truth hadn't reached her senses. Maybe she didn't want it to.

The funeral had been replaying in Lilly's mind for weeks. It felt like watching a film in a loop, and she found something different in it every time. She didn't know if it would ever stop. She was fifteen; she didn't know anything.

She still remembered her father's weeping form, how the number of grieving people in black suffocated her, how she ran to the bathroom and saw her mascara run down her cheeks, and how the restroom light reflected on her silver earrings. The last gift she'd ever received from her godfather, who now lies in a coffin. She recalled all the tales he'd told her about her parents and their adventures. She supposed every great story had an ending. She just didn't want it to be like this.

Lilly opened her eyes and was greeted by the beach; the ocean was the most transparent blue she'd ever seen. Lilly felt the sun shining on her skin, overflowing her with a warm glow. The scene was peaceful, and the sounds of crashing waves soothed her. How she loved this beach.

“That went well,” Kate swam around the bowl, her orange scales sparkling.

Lilly's serenity was interrupted; she looked down at the bowl in her hands angrily, “We almost died!”

“An inevitable nuisance. Anyway,” Kate said, “where are we?”

“The beach,” Lilly answered.

“Really? I couldn't tell.”

Lilly smiled. “I grew up on this beach. My parents and I would come here every summer.”

Lilly took off her socks and felt the warm sand on her toes. They stayed silent for a few minutes, enjoying the sounds of seagulls and the fluffy clouds adorning the view.

“Lilly, what happened back there?” Kate questioned softly, “And don't say ‘nothing’ again because I know it's not true. We're in your head; Our surroundings change when your emotions do, so I can tell when you lie.”

Lilly looked down at the sand. Kate was right. “I was thinking too much. I thought about how, even in dreams, I'm alone. No cool daydreams, no whimsical adventures, just loneliness.”

“It's ok to be alone sometimes.”

Lilly shook her head. “No, not like this.”

“What about your parents? Your friends?”

“I haven't talked to my so-called friends in months. And my parents divorced after my godfather died in a car crash. I talk to my mom occasionally, but that's it.”

“Sheesh,” Kate said. Lilly flicked the bowl with her finger, a disapproving frown on her face. Kate recovered, smiling sheepishly. “Sorry, that was insensitive.”

The saline breeze stuck on Lilly's hair as she walked to the shoreline.

“You can tell me all about it,” Kate said softly. “I promise I won't be snarky.”

Lilly laughed. And then she told Kate all about her friends, whose small-town ideologies asphyxiated her, who'd stolen her piece of mind, who'd taken all her love and effort and had never given it back. Lilly told Kate about her parents and godfather and how she mourns the life she used to have. She told Kate how she missed the shiny, unbroken version of herself that she would never get to meet.

As she walked along the seashore, the waves slowly dissipated, and the sand eventually disappeared, revealing a multicolor river. Lilly's surroundings were entirely onyx, save for the bright white sparks showing themselves on the horizon like faraway stars. As she wandered, the fishbowl shaking in her hands, Lilly felt the aching hole inside her chest dissipate.

Kate swam in circles, bubbles following her path. “Have you considered that maybe you aren't broken? You aren't dulled or fractured. You've been through all that, and your heart is still kind. You're resilient and strong, no matter what anyone else believes.”

Lilly didn't say anything; she turned Kate's comment around like a coin, inspecting every quirk and facet. She stopped, however, when she saw the door. It was wooden and white, standing in the middle of their dark surroundings. She looked at Kate, a question in her eyes.

“Well? What are you looking at me for? Open it!” she said.

Kate and Lilly stepped through the doorway, and suddenly, the world became a somber blue. They had arrived at a circular chamber. Lilly smiled as a small school of fish glided around the crown of her head, surrounding her in a bright glimmer. The chamber's

ceiling was all water, like a fishbowl, reflecting the daylight around the golden columns and alabaster walls covered in vine.

“It smells like tuna in here,” Kate remarked.

“You're one to talk,” Lilly shot back.

Lilly was enjoying Kate's company more than she would care to admit. No one understood her as well, she thought. No one had taken the time to, anyway. But she knew what would happen. She always did. It was an ending she knew well.

“Kate?” she said.

“Hmm?” Kate stared at the airborne fish soaring around the room, seemingly lost in thought.

“You need to go now, don't you?”

Kate looked at Lilly, bubbles leaving her tiny mouth as she spoke. “Yes. And you need to wake up.”

“But I don't want to. You're the only friend I have.”

Kate softened her gaze. “You have to learn to trust, Lilly.”

Lilly glanced at Kate and felt the hopelessness settle into her bones. Voice breaking, she said, “I- I can't. I don't know how.”

“Lilly-”

“Everyone ends up disappointing me, Kate.” Lilly felt the tears go down, and she furiously wiped them off. “Now, I just want to be alone. Because being alone is the only way I feel safe. Because I'm never enough to make people choose me first.”

She was sobbing now, but she continued, “People tell me they'll be my home, but I don't believe them. I'm never enough to make them stay.”

Kate was quiet for a few heartbeats, and then she said: “Living is grieving, Lilly. Shutting yourself out to experience no pain is not living at all.”

Kate's gold eyes shined in the faint light. “And I think you know how to love more than most people. That's why it's so heartbreaking for you. Give yourself the tenderness you try to find in others,” Kate spoke.

On a far wall, a glint caught Lilly's eye. She saw an enormous opening, its gates matching the white and gold in the room.

“Open the gate,” Kate said, “you know it's time.”

Lilly looked at the bowl in her hands, her teardrops causing ripples in the water. “But what about you? What will happen to you?” she asked.

Kate blew a raspberry. “Me? I’ll be fine. I am just a fantastical fish, after all.”

Lilly chuckled, but the sound died too fast. “I’ll miss you.”

“I know,” Kate smiled. “What will you do without my lively charm and outstanding wit?”

Laughing, Lilly set the bowl down on the floor, her tears forgotten.

“Goodbye, Kate.”

“Goodbye, Lilly.”

Lilly reached the gate and placed her hand on the cold handle. She went inside and didn't look back.

Lilly sat on the kitchen island, the morning sunlight melting the ice cubes of her orange juice. It smelled like toast, tulips, and Sundays.

Her breakfast plate lay forgotten on the countertop as she glimpsed the swirling goldfish next to her, who, a few hours prior, had been saying sassy quips in her head.

She was starting to understand who she was now. She began forgiving herself for not being who she had expected to be. Now, she felt a warm feeling settle into her bones, shrouding them in an imaginary aurous light. Hope.

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Fiction

Target

by

Andrew Kamlet



Andrew Kamlet is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Cybersecurity. He wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor Li Wei's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2023. The creative writing assignment aimed to replicate the futuristic-gothic style common in Netflix's *Black Mirror*. "Target," as part of a series of short made-for-TV stories, drew inspiration from society's increasing unease with invasive targeted ads. This piece reflects the instrumental impact of big data on society, highlighting concerns about the transformation of consumers becoming commodities in an information-driven economy.

Clara, protagonist

Trent, Clara's husband

Grace, Clara's friend

Sophia, Clara/Trent's daughter

Caretaker Hold Voice (CT HOLD VOICE), On-hold voice for Caretaker's tech support center

Caretaker Tech Support (CT TECH SUPPORT), Tech support representative at Caretaker

Casting Note: While it is implied that Sophia is an infant child, casting limitations, studio/filming logistics, child labor laws, or creative views may necessitate an older actress. Modifications may be made to the script allowing Sophia to be slightly older (toddler/grade-schooler) if needed. Additionally, pending casting options and/or creative viewpoint, Sophia does not have to be female, and her name may be changed to reflect this modification.

Act I, Scene 1

Trent is getting ready to leave for work. Clara is taking care of Sophia

TRENT

(To CLARA)

Alright, honey, I'm heading out.

(Leans over to kiss SOPHIA on the forehead)

Be good to your mother okay sweetie?

(TRENT exits, we hear an engine as he drives away. Beat. CLARA receives a text from TRENT: "Hey, don't forget to pick up a new blanket for Soph today," a hologram appears above CLARA's phone. It's a notification from her Caretaker™. The notification has the header: "Blankets for girls age 6-12 months" and below it are pictures of blankets.

CLARA taps on one with a picture of a sea turtle on it, the message "Purchase Successful!" appears and the hologram goes away)

Act I, Scene 2

Clara and Grace are having lunch at a cheap café, Sophia is in a stroller next to Clara

CLARA

I feel like we haven't seen each other in forever! You look gorgeous!

GRACE

(Hesitates for a second)

Yeah... I like your outfit! It suits you well.

CLARA

(Cut/time jump, CLARA and GRACE are laughing together)

Wow! That IS a good story.

GRACE

Yeah!

(Partly jokingly)

If only it were as good as this food!

(GRACE and CLARA receive a Caretaker notification with the header: "Restaurants nearby, Sort by: Price (low to high)").

Oh!

(Laughs surprisingly at the Caretaker notification, to CLARA)

I mean, maybe next time? If you want to...?

CLARA

Sure! I'd be down to try someplace new!

Act I, Scene 3

Clara is looking at herself in the mirror, pulling at her sweater and looking at her clothes, somewhat dismayed. She receives a Caretaker notification, this hologram is a catalog from Forever 22 (with this month's sales highlighted). Clara looks through it for a moment, paying special attention to the clothes on sale. Suddenly another hologram from Clara's Caretaker appears next to the catalog, it's a map with directions to the nearest Forever 22 store.

Act I, Scene 4

It is evening, Trent is coming home from work, Sophia is asleep, we see Forever 22 bags in the background

CLARA

You're back!

TRENT

(Somewhat exhausted)

Yep.

(Sighs)

Felt like the office would never let me leave.

(Beat)

She asleep yet?

CLARA

Just set her down.

TRENT

(Smiling)

She listens to her mother.

(CLARA smiles back, beat)

I think I'm gonna turn in for the night.

CLARA

Goodnight!

(CLARA scrolls through social media, a small section pops up on her screen: "Caretaker suggests you follow: TheLoveDoctor, LFoxwell, Independent-Moms" CLARA looks at the pop-up for a second, then scrolls past it)

Act II, Scene 1

It's afternoon, a few days have passed and it is now Friday, Clara is taking care of Sophia when she receives a text from Trent: "Hey babe, I won't be staying late today. In fact, I have a surprise for you. Make sure to have a dress ready 🥰"

Act II, Scene 2

Clara and Trent are at a fancy restaurant

CLARA

Wow! I don't think you've looked this handsome since our wedding day!

TRENT

I just want to look my best for you!

(CLARA laughs playfully, CLARA gets a notification from her Caretaker:
“How Much Does Your Spouse *Really* Love You? Take this Quiz to Find Out!”
CLARA looks at it, somewhat confusing/bewildered)

Is something wrong?

CLARA

(Now looking back at TRENT)

No! No, everything is fine.

(Smiling)

TRENT

Oh! I almost forgot! I bought you this!

(TRENT takes out an expensive looking necklace. CLARA looks surprised,
then elated, and leans across the table for TRENT to put the necklace on her)

CLARA

You are the sweetest! I love it!

TRENT

(TRENT hold up a finger as a sign for “wait,” then looks up and points to the
ceiling, a foolish grin on his face)

You hear that?

CLARA

(Smiling even more, she hears music playing, choking back tears)

You got them to play our song?

TRENT

I wanted to make this night special. (Smiling)

Act II Scene 3

Trent and Clara are in the car driving back home, Trent is on the phone with the babysitter

TRENT

(TRENT speaks in a very hurriedly tone throughout the phone conversation)

Hi Lindsey, we’re going to be back soon.

(Beat)

Oh good, I know sometimes it’s hard to get her to go to sleep.

(Beat)

Yep, we're only a few minutes away. Listen, since we're almost back, do you think I could send you the money right now?

(Beat)

Okay terrific! Let me just... yep! You should have it now! Alright, well we're about to pull into the driveway so if you want to get going...

(Beat)

Yes of course, you too! Okay, buh-bye.

(TRENT hangs up, smiling) She'll be leaving any second.

Act II, Scene 4

Trent and Clara start kissing each other as soon as they get into their house. Trent starts to take off Clara's clothes and Clara does the same. As they do this, Trent and Clara move towards their bedroom to make love. Clara gets a notification from her Caretaker, but she ignores it.

Act II, Scene 5

It's now Monday, Clara is sitting on the couch watching Sophia play when she gets a phone call from Trent

TRENT

(Over the phone)

Hi honey, it's me.

CLARA

Heyyyy, how's it going?

TRENT

I'm sorry, but the boss man needs me to do more work. I'm gonna be here for another few hours.

CLARA

(Disappointed)

Oh.

(Beat)

Will you be back for dinner?

TRENT

I don't think so, I'd rather not keep you waiting. I hope Sophia isn't giving you too much trouble.

CLARA

(Neutral)

She's playing right now.

TRENT

(Neutral)

How cute.

(Beat)

I have to go now.

CLARA

Okay, I love---

(TRENT hangs up, CLARA gets an article from her Caretaker: "Five Ways to Spice Up Your Marriage!" (#1: Throw on some sexy clothes! #2 Date Night! #3: A nice gift! #4: Fun in the bedroom! #5: Workplace surprise!), she receives another Caretaker notification with directions to TRENT's office)

Act III, Scene 1

Clara is at Trent's office, the audio is muffled, but Clara can be seen asking coworkers where Trent is, everybody shrugs, a few people motion towards the exit, indicating that he left. Clara is leaving when she receives a notification from her Caretaker: "Aaron Goldberg: Divorce Attorney"

Act III, Scene 2

Clara is on a phone call with a Caretaker Representative

CT HOLD VOICE

Thank you for calling Caretaker. Our priority is to make sure we look after your every need. If you are calling to change your billing information, please press one. If you are experiencing delayed feedback from your Caretaker, please press two. If you believe you've encountered an issue with your Caretaker, please press three.

(CLARA presses 3, a beep is heard)

You have been directed to our tech support center. The current wait time to speak with a representative is one hour and twenty-five minutes. Please enjoy some complementary music while you wait.

(The hold music is the same song that was playing in the restaurant in Act II, Scene 2)

CT TECH SUPPORT

Hi! Thank you for calling Caretaker Tech Support, my name is David, how may I help you this evening?

CLARA

Hi David, I've been receiving some... interesting notifications from my Caretaker recently.

CT TECH SUPPORT

I see, have you been going to any different websites recently? Sometimes those will influence what you will see from your Caretaker.

CLARA

What? No.

CT TECH SUPPORT

Alright... let me pull up the account paired with your phone number so I can take a better look. Please hold while I do that.

(Beep sound, music starts up again, but is interrupted by CT HOLD VOICE)

CT HOLD VOICE

Not getting enough ads? With Caretaker Premium you can get unlimited ads catering to your every need! Upgrade today for only \$12.99 a month! Terms and conditions apply.

CT TECH SUPPORT

Alright Clara, I have your diagnostic information with me right here. It seems you were recently placed in our user group "Disloyal Daddies"

CLARA

(Frustrated)

I'm sorry... what?!?!

CT TECH SUPPORT

Your Caretaker has noticed patterns much akin to those of mothers with unfaithful husbands, you were placed in this group to help your Caretaker identify what types of notifications would help you best.

CLARA

(Upset)

So... my husband is cheating on me?

CT TECH SUPPORT

As part of our company policy, we must acknowledge that while you have demonstrated similar behaviors to others in your group, this may or may not be an indication of any unfaithfulness. Caretaker Incorporated does not hold any legal responsibility for any accurate or inaccurate conclusions derived from our algorithm. If you need additional resources, please ask your Caretaker. Will that be all for today?

(CLARA hangs up and receives a notification from her Caretaker: “How would you rate your call today?” with five stars below it. CLARA presses on one star and receives another notification: “Better Life: Therapy and Counseling.” CLARA, frustrated, ignores the notification, moments later, TRENT comes home)

TRENT

Hey honey, how’s it going?

CLARA

(Indifferent)

Fine.

(Sad music starts playing)

Act III, Scene 3

(Music continues throughout the scene) Clara and Trent are in bed together, Trent is asleep while Clara is wide awake with an emotionless expression on her face. Several more brief scenes follow with Clara’s emotionless expression unchanging: First, Trent (audio muffled) talking to Clara about work. During the conversation, Clara receives a Caretaker notification: “Aaron Goldberg: Divorce Attorney,” which she ignores; next, another date night. Clara gets another notification during their dinner, “You can live through this! Better Life: Therapy and Counseling,” she ignores this one too; lastly, more lovemaking, during which Clara receives (and ignores) Caretaker ads for dating apps and sex toys. Finally, it ends with the original

scene (Trent asleep with Clara in bed next to him, wide awake and emotionless). Clara gets up, goes to Sophia's room, gently picks her up, puts her in a car seat, and drives off.

END OF SCRIPT

Writer's Statement:

When writing each episode, I tried to focus on two key elements of *Black Mirror*. First, the human emotions of the protagonist, and second, the emotion's intersection with a futuristic technology that progressively becomes more intense and sinister. These episodes also intend to serve as the same cautionary tale posed by *Black Mirror* regarding the unending pursuit of technological advancement. Further analysis on each individual episode can be found below.

For "Target," starting with the title, the baseline interpretation would be the reference to targeted ads, which serve as the foundation of Caretaker's purpose. However, the premise of this episode, as well as the title (partially), take inspiration from an incident just outside of Minneapolis in which a name-brand store (see episode title) could determine a high school student was pregnant before her father even knew. In "Target," Clara is unaware of Trent's infidelity until her Caretaker continuously hints at it. The influence of big data in our society is leading to some rather startling occurrences. Already we see companies like Spotify who turn data collection into something fun and trendy, similar to how Caretaker brings a positive connotation to targeted advertising. "Target" examines how if technology continues to progress in the direction it has, the outcome of such situations may be more drastic. In a society where companies capitalize on our information, we stop being the customer, and instead become the product.

The Making of a Hero

by

Rayna Arora



Rayna Arora is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Professional Flight. She wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor Robin Clair's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. This story was designed to build a protagonist, exploring the moral complexities that often lie beneath the labels of heroes and villains. The inspiration for this story was the tales of the everyday heroes that are often left untold.

Once upon a time, a handsome man lived in a small town in Southern California. The start of an epic story, you might think, but the day in question started like any other. It was one of the rare, good days near Thanksgiving. I, Aiden Reid, also known as the handsome man, got out of bed at the brink of dawn, put on a pot of coffee, and went on a run with my hyper-energetic golden retriever, Max. We ran half a mile before we ran into Mrs. Robinson, our elderly neighbor.

“Good morning, Mrs. Robinson! Beautiful day, don’t you think?”

“Good morning, dear. It is quite a pleasant day, I agree. I was going to buy gardening supplies from the Green Store.”

“That sounds like a good idea for today, Mrs. Robinson. I should also get some yard work done before my family arrives for the holidays. Mind if we join you?”

“Of course, dear!” We walked the rest of the way to the store, where Max bounded along the lines taking in all the potted plants while Mrs. Robinson and I picked out supplies and rang them up at the cashier. I took the heavy supplies from Mrs. Robinson and walked back to the neighborhood, with Max trailing at Mrs. Robinson’s heels. After dropping Mrs. Robinson off, I tidied my yard, took a quick shower, and got ready for work. Breakfast that day consisted of eggs, toast, and orange juice for me and dog biscuits for Max.

After breakfast, I caught the bus downtown where I worked at the local law firm. Usually, the morning bus is peaceful, but that day, a little girl was crying like a banshee while her mother failed to appease her. She looked exhausted, so I made some funny faces at the toddler who eventually started giggling and finally calmed down. The rest of the bus ride was uneventful.

I reached the firm with a few minutes to spare.

“Right on time, Aiden. I’m honestly waiting for the day you are finally running late,” my colleague and best friend Jake ribbed.

“Good morning to you too, Jake. Let’s get started, shall we? It’s going to be a long day,” I replied with a shake of my head. Sure enough, we slogged through the daylight hours and came up only to grab a late lunch.

We ate our often-late lunch at a playground nearby, which was mostly deserted at the time. That day some boys were teasing a cute little girl with two pigtails or at least trying to; the girl had a determined expression on her face making the boys hesitant, even though they showed no signs of stopping.

“Hey boys, why don’t you leave her alone before she punches you and sends you running,” I quipped with a laugh.

The boys ran away when they realized they had an audience. Even more amusing was that some of them looked relieved by the interruption.

“Thanks, I could have handled them myself, you know,” the little girl huffed.

“Sure could, kid. I was saving them from you,” I replied with a wink. The girl narrowed her eyes, then smiled and skipped on her merry way.

“Behold the knight in shining armor, Aiden Reid, ladies and gentlemen. I swear the kid would have punched you had you not charmed her,” Jake laughed at my expense.

“Thank you, Jake. It’s an honor,” was my only retort. We wrapped up and headed back to the firm.

At the end of the workday, I was exhausted from dealing with all the paperwork for the ongoing case. I said my goodbyes and headed home. It was nice out, so I decided to walk back to refresh myself. I was halfway back when the shriek of ambulances and police wagons pierced the otherwise muted night. They soon vanished into the alley from the intersection right in front of me. Oak Glen was a simple town, and this massive response worried me. I jogged after them and reached an old apartment complex at the end of the alley. The building was up in flames and all the neighboring buildings were being evacuated. I held my breath, and my hands began to tremble. *Fire*. I was rooted to the spot despite the frantic activity around me. Children were crying, and people were screaming as they ran away. Some others were running towards the fire for their loved ones in the burning building while the police held them back. The most shocking detail was that there was only one fire brigade on the site, and their attempts to douse the fire and rescue the trapped people were not as swift as they should be.

I walked into the surreal chaos on jelly-like legs. I reached Sheriff Dawson and asked him what had happened. Apparently, the electrical wiring of the building was old and started a fire in the powerhouse. The powerhouse was at the back exit of the complex, and nobody noticed the fire until the flames were too strong. An electrical fire. My head filled with roaring white noise. I saw flashbacks of a now charred house at the edge of town. It was like I was teleported into the past. The old screams of pain mixed with the new ones around me, and I braced myself against the wagon. The sudden onslaught of buried emotions made me nauseous. I shook my head, regulated my breathing, and tried to focus. “Why is there only one fire brigade?” I asked.

“Today turned bad quickly, son. There was a missing person report across town and most of our force is stuck on the way back in traffic. The holiday season makes traffic crazy,” the sheriff noted with a frown.

Standing there, feeling helpless, looking at the man who saved me... has been saving me since...I realized he looks as defeated as he looked all those years ago. I could no longer break the hold the memories had on me. Desperate for something to do to drown my building anxiety, I asked, "What can I do to help?"

"There is not much you can do about the fire, son. The firefighters are on it," he started, but sensing my unease, he added, "You could help crosscheck the evacuation of the adjoining apartments. Maybe try to calm down the children. I know you are good with them." *Of course, he knew. He was throwing me a bone...taking me away from the fire. Even worse was how relieved I felt. Was it horrible of me to be relieved that I did not have to go near the fire?* Without lingering on my errant thoughts, I started with the building on the right. I thoroughly scoped the floor inside out. On the top floor, I looked across the narrow space between the two complexes to see the firefighter's progress with the flames. A young girl, maybe fifteen, was howling for help stuck in a burning loft right across from me. I couldn't look away, couldn't save her. The pit in my stomach widened. *I will not let history repeat itself.* Resolute, I ran downstairs as fast as my feet would carry me. The firefighters were too occupied to notice me, but the sheriff spotted me when I was almost near the front gate. The ringing in my ears drowned out his protests. Even in haste, I remembered snatching a blanket for the girl. The past can do that to a person. The only thing left was to make it to the top.

I shuddered as I entered the house, dodging the flaming wooden planks falling everywhere. I made it to the third floor without much incident before I found myself standing in front of a wall of fire. The staircase was blocked. I looked around to find something to move the burning pile of wooden beams but to no avail. The memory of the girl's struggle fueled me, and I checked every room. I was vaguely aware of the heat tugging my arms and legs and the burning sensation in my throat. *The smoke will kill the girl before the fire gets to her.* My dreary thoughts mixed with the lingering ghost of shame pushed me forward. Outside the window of the last room, there was a ladder. Some reinforcements had arrived; they were climbing floor by floor to rescue the people more speedily. I scanned the scene in front of me. *Not fast enough.* I clenched my jaw and swung onto the ladder, climbing two rungs at a time until I reached the top.

Sweat dripped in my eyes, my hands were red from the burns, and my throat was dry from the smoke. I knew I was running out of time. The gnawing feeling looped in my mind. I just had to save her. *For Lisa.* I pushed myself, holding on to the windowsill, and landed inside the room. The room was barricaded by flaming beams from the ceiling. *No, this can't be happening. I am so close.* My eyes landed on the curtain rod. I pried it off the wall and used it to clear the doorway. I rushed out and checked all the lofts. *All empty.* My suspicions

were right; she was alone. I reached the space in the far corner barging in to find her lying on the floor. I checked her pulse... still alive. *Let's keep it that way.* I wrapped her in the blanket and returned to the ladder. By then the firefighters had cleared the rest of the building, and one of them was on his way to the top.

“Can you climb down while carrying her?” I demanded.

He was startled but nodded and took the unconscious girl from my hands. Sweet relief washed over me. *Not so fast.* I willed myself to check all the rooms and then climbed down.

Back on the street, the Sheriff was fuming as he fixed me with a glare. Everyone else cheered and hugged each other. The rest of the night was a blur. I was ushered to an awaiting ambulance. I was told I had many second-degree burns, but no third-degree burns. “I got lucky,” the doctors commented while tending to my wounds. The back of the ambulance almost felt too familiar. I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths. The steady stream of people who came to thank me was a welcome distraction. The crowd trickled away slowly until the only one left was the Sheriff. I was so not ready for him.

“Are you crazy, boy? Want to be a hero, do you? Join the fire station. Pulling reckless stunts... I expected you to be better than this—” he angrily lectured.

“Well, I saved her, didn't I?” I snapped back in frustration as tears welled up. I did not need him to remind me. No, my nightmares did that job effectively.

The Sheriff's gaze softened. “Yeah, that you did. Courageously, if I may say so myself. Congratulations kid, you are a hero for this town,” he said as he patted me on the back wearing a sad smile, and left. I was acutely aware of his limp as he walked away.

Didn't he know?

I was no hero.

Fiction

The Quest for Dulceleaf

by
Maxwell Bury

Max Bury is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in History and Political Science. He wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor Clair's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The assignment asked the writer to create a fictional piece that centered around a protagonist and was urged to make it as creative as possible. The writer took small influences from his own personal life as well as inspiration from places he is fascinated by and put his own unique twist into it. The writer wished to demonstrate his creativity and his writing skills, as well as make a fantastical world that any reader could see themselves in.

I kneeled on the ground, feeling the dew of the earth begin to seep through my pants and touch my calloused skin. I put my hand on the soil, grabbing a handful of the cold dirt and rubbing it between my fingers. The sky gave way to the clouds, and a light mist began to fall upon the terrain, the cool breeze making the raindrops feel like snow to my tired and aching body. My mother always told me that traveling in adverse conditions like this would make my body feel as if I was carrying an elephant on my back, and, like always, she was correct. I never doubted her thoughts and ideas, she spoke from her past experiences most of the time, and while I never asked her where she had felt like that before, I think I already knew. My mother was tough as nails in her younger days, but the years had begun to wear on her, her skin turning wrinkly and dry, her hair changing from a curly and vibrant mix of brown and blonde to a straggling mix of shades of grey. Her ability to see and hear had deteriorated as well, but she still assured me that everything I could do, she could do better. That's what I always loved about my mother, her never-say-die attitude that so many of the people she encountered in her years lacked.

As my mind began to wander, it was quickly snapped back to attention by a booming blast of thunder and a strong gust of cold wind. I knew that if I didn't get back before the month's end, my mother would leave and attempt to find me; the poor woman would get herself killed. I felt around my pockets, looking for the map that I had brought along to guide me to the Betweenlands. To be honest, it wasn't like I needed it, no map could guide me to the exact location I sought, at least not that I knew of. Whether it was fact or myth, the story was that the Betweenlands were home to many fields filled with dulceleaf, a plant that is used as an herbal remedy for many illnesses. My mother said that the leaf could cure almost anything, ranging from a cold to shingles, to blindness, and even cancer. As I said before, I rarely doubt my mother, as her experiences guide her wisdom, but for whatever reason, I couldn't bring myself to believe it, and even if I did believe it, it always seemed too egregious of a risk to take to find it. Tales of brave warriors and foolish wanderers spread like wildfire around my small village, and I just hoped that the ending to my tale was happier than the rest.

Deep in the mists of Mount Emmanuel del Norte, there lies the village of my people. A population full of lighter-skinned people fills the village with song, dance, and light. Sensory overload is a phrase used by outsiders to describe the sensations of the village, as all five senses are spiked to an abnormally high level, but as for us in the village, what may seem flagrant to some is normality to us. Through 11 months of the year, the smell and taste of foods from around the known world fill the air and the stomachs, the sound of instruments crafted thousands of years ago delight the ears, and the candles and murals flood the eyes with light and color, and the feeling of the soil, the houses, the people, fills the cravings of the mortal flesh. However, in the 12th month, the darkness takes hold, and the happiness in

the village becomes introverted. We call this month “Mês de Dias”, or the Month of Days, simply because it is easier to go through the month day by day, as opposed to having a future outlook. It is said that luck runs out in the last month of the year, and without luck, a person is simply a sitting duck, waiting for Death to come around the corner. No one goes in the streets, and those mindless enough to tempt the Devil with another subject and be boisterous in the face of Death often pay the price. If only I weren’t so naive as to not heed the warnings of my ancestors and my people.

That does not tell the whole story though. Leading up to my departure, my mother had been talking constantly of the Betweenlands as if she had ever been, which I knew she had not. She talked about how the dulceleaf was the solution to all of her problems, and her rejection of the medicines and cures I had attempted to push on her made her mention it even more. I knew this was a sign that she was beginning to worry about her health, and I began to grow concerned. I went to the village doctor, if you could even call her that, Terezinha, and asked her to tend to my mother and give me a report. Terezinha was a vile woman, her nails were longer than her fingers, her hair was unkempt and unwashed, her body smelled of some mix of opossum dung and rat poison, and her mannerisms were not traditional. Additionally, she wasn’t a doctor by trade, she was more of a clairvoyant who could tell you if someone was going to get sick, and she only had around a 40% success rate with those “visions” as well. However, she was the only person who knew that our great leader Altair was growing ill, so we all continued to give her the benefit of the doubt. She came to our hut and looked at my mother for what felt like days, but couldn’t have been more than a few hours. Once finished, she quickly got up and started to walk out, until I stopped her and asked her what she had found. She looked around frantically as if making sure no one was around and said that my mother was to lose her thoughts and feelings of everything and everyone. I felt a hole open up inside my stomach. I asked her how much time she had until it became insurmountable, and she said that it would likely take great effect by year’s end, which was one measly month away. I could have crumpled to the floor, but I knew better than to conduct myself in that manner. I thanked her and she whisked away to another shouting voice across the damp dirt road.

As the haze continued to settle in, my eyesight was beginning to blur and I couldn’t feel my feet. The high altitudes I had hiked through continued to hinder my breathing, and I felt as though I was merely a feather being blown around by every gust of wind. Thankfully, I came across a place of rest, a friendly village that housed travelers seeking the Betweenlands. My people always referred to them as trolls, but I always found that quite preposterous. I walked into the village and was greeted by the gatekeeper, a friendly old fellow who spoke very slowly but was well-intentioned. I asked if he could help me find a place to rest, and he obliged. He stood up from his rickety stool and grabbed a walking cane made of

pykrete and began to lead me through the village. I tried not to notice, but dozens of people were staring at me as if I was an imposter, which I couldn't blame them for. My skin tone was much lighter than theirs and I looked as if I had crawled out of a sewer mere minutes before walking through the town, however it still made me feel unwelcome. The elderly man continued to guide me until we reached a cottage at the end of the stone road. The cottage was mangy, made from wattle and daub, as if it were from the Middle Ages. The floor inside was covered in straw, and I began to realize why some people may not have come back from journeys to the Betweenlands if they made a stop here. I was still gracious to have a cot to sleep in, and I thanked the old man for allowing me to stay in the village for the night. He said that the cottage was all mine for the night and it wouldn't cost me anything, not even duck's feather. However, before he left, he told me to leave the cottage before daybreak, as the townsfolk may not take a liking to me invading their home. He stepped through the opening and slammed the door shut.

Fiction

Heal, Child

by

Hurin Hasnan



Hurin Hasnan is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Environmental and Ecological Engineering. She wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor David Riesbeck's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The short story "Heal, Child" aims to be a consolation for those facing difficult days and provides music as a method of healing. The work addresses the parasocial relationship between the reader and a musician which drives their healing journey.

It's pitch black outside, the night sky shimmering with stars that twinkle every so often. You walk along the quiet road that leads to home, snow crunching under your boots, the cool winter breeze fanning your cheeks. A sigh is heaved from the deep recesses of your chest, forming a plume of smoke visible to you and only you. The front door comes into view and the prospect of a lonely and cold home looms.

You've had a long day, as made clear by the hunch of your back and the sagging of your eyes. Wired earphones hang carelessly from around your neck, almost as flimsy as your limbs at this moment. Every inch of your body seems to burn due to exertion and all you want to do is lie in bed and cry your heart out. Cry your stresses away. Though crying may not solve everything, the least it can do is somehow get rid of this sob that's lodged in your throat, threatening to choke you at any moment. Even breathing feels difficult as if an anvil is sitting on your chest.

The bedsheets feel cool to the touch, the result of not turning on the heater high enough to warm them. In hindsight, it doesn't matter. No matter how warm the bedsheets are, it won't change the fact that your heart and soul are cold. It won't change the fact that life just gets more and more suffocating the more you live it. You struggle to sleep despite the tears lining your eyes as a clock ticks in the distance, the minute hand slowly approaching the hour hand that points to 12.

Eyes shut, you let the remnants of the day sink in. A cool breeze comes through the slightly open window, the moonlight shining through, thus providing the slightest amount of light despite the darkness of your room. You hear the aforementioned clock chime.

It's midnight.

At this exact moment, the atmosphere seems to change ever so slightly. It appears as if the moonlight that comes through is shining brighter. Miraculously, it feels like the world is holding its breath for a very brief moment. Squinting against the harshness of the light, you open your eyes owlshly, only for them to widen in shock. There's an oval-shaped floating apparition in your room, somewhat glowing, but an apparition, still. The figure approaches and comes into view.

"Hi! I'm the 52 Hertz Whale, but you may know me as 52 Blue. Nice to meet you!"

The figure can talk. *The figure can talk.*

In shock, you sit up and scoot closer to the headboard of your bed. The figure comes closer, and if whales had eyebrows, it probably would've frowned in concern.

"You don't have to be scared. I promise I'm here to help," 52 Blue reassures. You skeptically drop the apprehension and sigh in relief, crossing your legs to get a full view of 52 Blue. Upon closer inspection, the whale apparition shimmers, and what seems to be an

amused smile is etched on its face. “It seems like you’re struggling, young one. What’s the matter?”

There’s something about the way the whale speaks, comforting, and gentle. It is exactly that which convinces you that it is safe to be vulnerable with this whale that suddenly appeared at the stroke of midnight. The words flow as easily as the tears that fall on your face; the sob that you’ve been holding back finally making its way out. Once you start talking, it seems as if you cannot stop.

“Nothing just ever feels right, and the world is so lonely when you actually think and put your mind to it,” you rasp out amid your tears. 52 Blue has a concerned but sympathetic look on its face.

“The world is harsh when you put it that way. Yet, you like music, don’t you? Why don’t you lean on that?”

“I try, but at every turn, people come up to me and say that it’s a useless coping mechanism and that all I’m doing is shutting things out instead of addressing the issue and being mature about it.” At this point, you’re sobbing and there’s not much else that you can say to explain what you’re feeling. This constant ache that resides in your chest isn’t an emotion that can be described fully with words. It’s just *there*, constantly reminding you that although nothing is wrong in your life, nothing feels right, either.

The whale nods in understanding, coming closer and softly emitting a noise that surprisingly calms you. It’s the sound you’d hear from whales, a call they make to others just like them. You appreciate the comforting gesture, but you wonder about the purpose behind it. Although you can hear it, you can’t understand it. You ask the whale why it made that sound and, as 52 Blue answers, there is a ghost of a sad smile on its face.

“That’s the thing, you know? My sonic signature is higher than the frequency of other whales, so in simpler terms, other whales can’t hear me. Believe me when I say that I somewhat understand the struggle that you’re going through.

“However, I feel like sounds and music have their own positive qualities as long as you know how to appreciate them. Having a positive attachment to the music created by musicians can also facilitate a positive parasocial relationship which in your case may help more than you know.”

“I’m not sure I understand...,” you hesitantly say. The whale begins to speak more animatedly, trying to prove a point.

“Though people may say that a dependence on parasocial relationships is unhealthy and insensible, people like you may benefit a lot from it. When chosen correctly, the content you indulge in that is created by these public figures can promote healing and provide com-

fort at times when you need it the most. Music is everywhere, child. It's been around for centuries and it's not going away anytime soon. When people can't be there for you, look for music that resonates with you. You can use music to either cope emotionally or avoidantly, though I think you should avoid recurrent avoidance since we're focused on moving past our problems instead of around them. Listening to music can also be a form of problem-focused coping by reducing how something stresses you out. This negates the idea that such content is useless in terms of healing," the whale states. Listening attentively, you begin to feel more open about the idea.

"A positive parasocial relationship that forms from a healthy attachment to the content that these people create only magnifies the impact that their content can have. These relationships increase your trust in them; thus their content becomes more beneficial to you," the whale continues.

"You make a fair point. I just think that we sometimes forget the impact that music and celebrity influence has on us. It's good to remember that it's a form of media that a lot of people use to find solace in and validate their struggles. I have found music that has helped in some way in the past, but I may need you to convince me more about how having good parasocial relationships can help with this loneliness I experience."

52 Blue carries on, a more melancholic tone in its voice. "The content that these creators bring can also be a method of catharsis. Did you know that?"

You shake your head slightly, the idea mentioned not being something that has come to mind.

"Well, as I've mentioned, music itself can reduce the impact of a stressor, but it goes beyond that. Music can be used in dance therapy, which has been proven to connect people back to expressiveness. If anything, music helps you become more in tune with your emotions. Expressing what you feel is always better than bottling it all up, don't you agree? Telling me how you felt just now alleviated some of that stress, didn't it?"

You ponder on it a little before agreeing, stating, "Yeah, I haven't admitted those thoughts in a while. The prospect of saying it out loud always made me think that it would exasperate the problem, but even then, it helped a lot. Thank you."

"No problem. I'm glad it helped. I do hope it's clear to you that being expressive about what you feel isn't making the problem worse. Instead, verbalizing it can help put the issue into perspective, and I think music helps a lot with that by having lyrics that people can use to describe their feelings better than they could have done themselves."

52 Blue stops for a moment, giving you time to let it sink in.

“Aside from all that, parasocial relationships provide room for relatability between you and the celebrity or musician in question. This reflects in the content that they create. Public figures being vulnerable, either through content or interviews, allows people to connect to them further. It also invokes this feeling that you are not suffering alone in your struggles. Collective healing is also promoted through these positive parasocial relationships wherein people who face similar challenges come together and form a plan of action to heal together. The prospect of healing like that just sounds so much better, no?”

“I agree. I’ve never really seen it that way before. Music has always been just meaningless sounds to me. What you’re saying is very introspective and relevant,” you admit. 52 Blue makes a good point. If there’s no one around you providing support, you should at least find it in other forms of relationships, namely parasocial relationships.

Perhaps this will make everything slightly more bearable.

“My time is running out, but I do hope you keep in mind what I have said. You have a bright future ahead of you. Form positive parasocial relationships that can motivate you towards that.” As 52 Blue says this, its eyes sparkle with hope.

Hope. That should be the first step.

“I’m grateful for your help. Hopefully, this will all subside and turn out for the better.”

“It will. Remember, child. I call at 52Hz and no one answers, but you can call out at any time and these people will be here for you. You just have to know where and when to find them.”

You nod in agreement, tears lining your eyes, though they’re not sad tears anymore. It’s past 12 o’clock and yesterday has ended. It’s time to begin a new day with renewed hope.

Hope that it will get better.

In essence, parasocial relationships provide comfort to the people participating in them, even though they may seem one-sided to outsiders. Miranda and Claes (2009) have elaborated on the idea that content such as music can help with coping and healing. This strengthens the argument that parasocial relationships with musicians in particular can become an outlet for healing. Musical content can also help with expressing your emotions, indirectly supporting the notion that fostering positive parasocial relationships can promote emotional catharsis (Volpe, 2021). Additionally, positive parasocial relationships and vulnerability increase celebrities’ relatability which can help fans in terms of coping and healing through trauma (Blady, 2021). It reassures that people are not going through their struggles alone which is a comforting thought in and of itself. Hence, indulging in positive parasocial relationships can significantly motivate a person as well as shape healthy healing habits for a better chance at living a happy life.

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Fiction

Naama

by
Avery Reigner



Avery is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Nuclear Engineering. She wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor Robin Clair's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The assignment asks for each student to create a piece of writing of their choosing. Avery chose to write a short story, her inspiration coming from the history of the Holocaust and the lasting impact it has on those around you, and how one encounter can change your life forever. The goal which Avery is trying to convey to the readers is that every individual should lead with their heart and do not pass judgement, no matter the circumstance.

Her weathered hands grasp the arms of the chair. As she bends to sit down, her joints ache and creak like a dead tree blowing in the wind. The wrinkles on her face show grief, worry, loss, and so much more. Her eyes are still sweet with hope, love, and compassion. She has always been my favorite resident to visit. I am almost done with my rounds for the morning, so I always make Naama, or “Na” to her friends, my last stop. I always knock before entering so I do not startle her. Before my whole body is in the doorway, she says, “Do you know what my name means, Janice?” I pause for a second as I peer down at her files as if that would help me.

“I am not sure that I do. What does it mean?” I say as I look over the top of my glasses.

“It means lovely in Hebrew.”

I have never heard a name more fitting for someone in all my years. Naama was truly lovely. A blessing, even. No one could take that away from her. I put my hands together and rub them back and forth, making my touch warm. Naama has never been fond of anyone touching her, especially with ice-cold hands. She lifts the sleeve of her wool sweater as faded splotches of black ink appear on her forearm. If you look closely through the scars, age spots, and wrinkled skin, the number “153892” peaks through. She gently places her arthritic hand over the area as if my gaze is burning a hole right through her arm. I quickly dart my eyes back to the blood pressure gauge.

“It’s okay, really.” Naama places her other hand on my shoulder.

Her voice sounded different this time. She gently taps the chair sitting next to her. I go on break after Naama’s check, so I take a seat. She took a long, deep inhale. Her breath seemed to rattle within her lungs. She interlaced her fingers as best as she could.

“Auschwitz,” she spoke.

She tilted her gaze to the sky, almost as if she was reliving every moment. I became uneasy. A nauseating pit started to form in my stomach. I swallow hard. From what I recall from my high school history class, I quickly put the pieces together from when I first met Na, but I just never thought of Auschwitz to be her past. It was all becoming real to me. Naama’s chin was now touching her chest. Tears were coming from her eyes.

“I don’t remember—I just don’t remember.”

I reach over to the box of tissues sitting on her nightstand, next to her mountain of books. She loved reading about nature and the outdoors. It now becomes clear to me why.

“You don’t remember *what*, Naama?” I say as I get up from my chair to kneel in front of her. I place my hands on her knees.

“Their voices, faces—their embraces.” A haze comes across her eyes. A still comes across the room.

“Dreiza, my little girl, forever timeless in age she is. Yosef, my only love. I possess nothing, yet I have everything.”

I feel my eyebrows furrow. I pause, The tension within my face releases. A salty substance touches my lips. I try to escape the room before she sees that I am crying, but Na always sees.

“This place reminds me of there sometimes, you know. Stuck in this room, four walls, dark. I would like to go outside, could I?”

I somberly nod my head, defeated. “*How could I not have known? I have been visiting Na for the past two years. We have NEVER talked about this.*” I wonder why today of all times. Without responding to her question, I step out into the dim-lit hall and grab a wheelchair. I roll it into Naama’s room. She sits down. We have not spoken a word yet.

“Stop here,” she says softly. “Listen, Janice. How beautiful is it all?” She turns her palms to the sun.

Her eyes close. The corners of her mouth are pulled up towards her cheeks.

A raspy old man’s voice emerges from the rosebushes, “Na, Naama, over here!”

I knew that voice. It was Karl. His rhythmic shuffles led him to the cement paver right in front of Naama’s wheelchair. He put out an arm to aid her in getting up. She graciously took his arm. She never looked back nor said goodbye. As they turned to go into the garden, I saw Namma’s wrinkle-ridden face become radiant. The corners of her lips looked as if they were pointed upward. I knew she would be safe with Karl. He was strong for his age- and his mind as sharp as a tack. I turned and walked back to the nursing home, where I would perform multiple wellness checks before returning to retrieve Naama. She would stay out here for hours.

“I could tell you felt bad for me,” Naama said as the automatic doors slid open.

It has been three hours since we last spoke. Knowing exactly what she was referring to, I furrow my brow, “Bad about what, exactly?”

“I told you about my past. I was not expecting you to have a reaction that was different from anyone else, but I thought that you would be more understanding at least,” her voice was stern and stung like cold air in your lungs on a winter day. I have known Naama for a very long time, I guess she assumed that I knew everything about her since I am her nurse. “I have made amends with my past. It happened. Many people are gone, but I lived for a reason, Janice. A greater good knew I would be able to forgive, and I did.”

I feel like a child in the third grade again getting reprimanded by my teacher for talking during class. I did not speak again. I looked down at my toes wiggling within my sneakers.

“Karl is my best friend, you know. He slaughtered many of my kind—a soldier. I forgave. I saw the good.”

“But HOW,” I blurt before I can stop myself. I feel my spine straighten.

“It happened on a warm day last summer. I could no longer wear sleeves outside to cover the constant reminder of my past. I went to pick a flower when he grabbed my arm quite firmly. He went on to ask me where I got it from. The rest is pretty much history.”

“You weren’t angry with him at all?”

“No. At first, I felt sorry. Sorry that he had to kill so many innocent souls. It took some time, but I realized we are not that different from each other. Trauma will be trauma, and you must grow from that. Like flowers.”

Naama set down the seemingly perfect bouquet that Karl picked for her. One every week.

“He gave me hope that there is still some good left in this world. Your past will be your past. That is one thing you can never escape. How you choose to live the rest of your life is up to you. The choice is always you-”

Before Naama could finish her sentence, I rushed over and gave her the tightest embrace you could give someone with a frail and aging body who has been through so much.

“Thank you,” I say as I hold back tears.

As my shift ceases, I could not imagine myself being anywhere else than the warm and optimistic embrace of Naama.

Fiction

Heads or Tails

by

Seokho Lee



Seokho Lee is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. He wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor David Riesbeck's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. After reading *The Consolation of Philosophy*, our task was to write our own consolation, addressing a problem or challenge that we think many people today face and presenting strategies to help them deal with the problem. I wanted to question our beliefs on right or wrong and give a new perspective on morality, the choices we make, and how we should feel about our decisions.

It was the shiny sunshine brought down on Jimmy's eyes that forced him to open his eyes. Jimmy looked around, trying to figure out where he was. All he could see was white walls and a white floor. It seemed like the floor was made of shiny marbles.

"Ah, donkey's shite, I must be dead."

Jimmy was a tenant farmer who grew potatoes. It was just like another evening which was his favorite part of the day. He was very tired from all the farming and was sitting on his favorite couch by the fireplace where he could rest his feet on a small stool. He had his eyes shut while listening to his children read and his wife humming as she was knitting. It was only a moment later when he heard a loud knocking on the door.

"Hey Jimmy! This is Ed! There is a boar in the field, and it's eating up all the potatoes!"

Ed was Jimmy's next-door neighbor and a dear friend, who also was a farmer. Ed told him that a boar showed up, and the townspeople had gathered around to get rid of it. Jimmy stood up instantly and grabbed the sharpest tool in the shed he could find which appeared to be rather dull.

"I should've bought that brand new iron rake!" muttered Jimmy angrily.

"What are you doing with that! We are trying to kill the boar, not give it a back rub!" said Ed, looking at Jimmy's old rake.

Jimmy and Ed sprinted in a hurry towards the townspeople who were surrounding the boar with torches and farming tools.

The boar had brown hair and was standing on two legs, and it was 6 feet tall. It was swinging its arms at the townspeople.

"That's not a *boar* you fool, that's a bear!" cried Jimmy.

"Well, I thought James said it was a boar!" replied Ed.

In that moment, Jimmy saw the bear lunge towards Tim, the town shoemaker's son, around the age of eighteen, who had just been married. Tim was shivering in fear, holding nothing but a torch with its fire about to go out. It seemed like Tim would join its deadly fate in any second. The townspeople were running away, but Tim's legs stood frozen.

Jimmy then leaped behind the bear and poked its butt as hard as he could with his old rake. In his younger years, Jimmy had met a soldier at a bar who served at the lord's manor and claimed to have fought against seventeen enemies at once. After taking twelve shots of whiskey, the soldier voluntarily demonstrated the proper way to wield a spear.

Jimmy was scared, but he believed in the intense training he got from the soldier, or the training he believed he got, which apparently led him to throw up the next morning. He also knew that his best friend Ed had his back.

The bear then turned angrily, finding the source of this irritating pain.

“Ed!” Jimmy yelled Ed’s name with a grin on his face.

However, nothing came back from Ed. Jimmy quickly looked back, only to see Ed and the rest of the townspeople on the other side of the field.

“Ed!!! You mother-” were the last three or maybe four words of Jimmy the farmer.

...

Jimmy was in a white room when he opened his eyes. He thought that he must be dead. He was confused on whether he should be mad at Ed or James, who had mistaken a bear for a boar. Soon, he decided to go with James and forgave Ed because Jimmy had owed him some money.

“At least I saved that Timmy boy,” said Jimmy.

All of the sudden, a door opened from a seemingly smooth surface of marble and in walked a man holding a book. He was neither very short nor very tall. He had brown hair and was wearing a somewhat modest suit.

“Hello sir, may I ask you where I am? I think I might be dead. Am I in Heaven?”

The man in the suit then explained that Jimmy was indeed dead, but he was not in heaven yet. He said it was a place where souls are judged before going to Heaven or Hell.

“So, the town priest was right after all, there is a Heaven and God! Are you an angel then?” said Jimmy.

“I understand the discovery of the afterlife can be quite astonishing, but your priest was misguided. This is not the Heaven or Hell you think from your *religion*. No religious scripture in your world is entirely correct. I know not of angels, but I am a servant of a celestial divinity,” said the man in the suit.

Jimmy was led outside the room, where everything was clean and shiny. He looked up and saw the sun. He could feel the warmth from it, which made him feel like he was still alive. Everything on the floor was white marbles, but far along the horizon was nothing but clouds. He could feel the breeze tickle him.

“Mmhmm, not heaven? My donkey would laugh. Oh, this is heaven indeed,” Jimmy thought to himself while looking around.

The angel gave Jimmy a look, raising one of his eyebrows for a second, then said,

“I shall now bring you to the sacred court of divine judgement, where you will be judged upon your virtues and vices of your life. Then you will go to heaven or hell.”

The angel led Jimmy to another room of marble floor behind a wall of glass where Jimmy could look down at the court. The angel said that Jimmy and he would be waiting until it was Jimmy’s time before the Judge.

Jimmy stood near the glass. He was curious to see what God looked like but could not see him. Outside the glass, he could see the soul that was being judged and another man in a suit with a book standing fifty feet away from the soul. On the opposite side of Jimmy’s room was also a giant glass wall of rooms that looked like cabinets. He assumed that they were other waiting rooms. Jimmy had never seen a structure like it.

Jimmy sat down on a chair, and the angel sat next to him.

“Do you think I will go to Heaven?”

“I do not know; the Judge will tell you through his servant,” replied the angel.

“The Judge? Do you mean God?” said Jimmy.

“The Judge is the being of high divinity whom I serve, so he is a godly being, but not your *God*.”

Jimmy continued to watch what was going on in the court room in hopes of learning some knowledge of where he would end up going. Jimmy thought he was good for most of his life and believed that he would go to Heaven.

“What is hell like, if I may ask?” asked Jimmy.

“A picture is better than a thousand words. I shall *show* it to you for five seconds.”

At that moment, Jimmy felt hell. He experienced immense agony. Getting hit by a bear was nothing compared to it. He felt a thousand different pains in five seconds, and each second felt like longer than a day. Jimmy was frightened.

“If I were you, I would do anything to avoid going there,” said the angel.

Jimmy deep-heartedly agreed. Jimmy was now worried that he might go to hell. He doubted his own goodness and started thinking that he actually may not have been good enough.

“I’m not sure if I have lived a good life,” said Jimmy.

“What do you think is a good life?” replied the angel.

“Well, a good life must be a good person’s life, who has done many good things,” said Jimmy.

“What is a good thing? Or a good behavior?” asked the Angel.

“I don’t know, I have been farming all my life. I haven’t thought about any of this. Back in my town, the best man was the one who can lift the most potatoes, but I don’t think I’m going to go to heaven lifting potatoes,” said Jimmy.

“Your lack of knowledge is limiting you from contemplation of such a subject. I shall *gift* you with some wisdom by the celestial power bestowed upon me,” said the angel.

Jimmy thought the angel was speaking in riddles, but after a timespan of a finger snap, he was able to understand him. Jimmy felt like he was capable of doing anything and was enabled to expand his thoughts on convoluted subjects.

“I think a good behavior is when one has good intentions and does a good thing,” said Jimmy with confidence.

“Then do the means, method, or process of the action not matter?” replied the angel.

“I’m uncertain. I don’t think one’s action with a good intention and good result could have a bad process,” Jimmy answered.

“Let me give you an example. You have to make a choice. There are five people in the imminence of their deaths to be hit by a trolley and one other person near them. If you don’t do anything, the five people will die and the other person will live; however, you have a choice to save those five people by turning the trolley towards the other person, sacrificing him. What will you do?” said the angel.

Jimmy replied, “It is not easy to decide, but if I am forced to choose one, I will choose to save the five at the cost of one person’s life.”

“I see. Your intention is apparently for the good and your consequence as well. However, your process is vicious, is it not?” said the angel slightly smiling. Jimmy could not do anything but agree.

“What do you think a good intention is in the first place? Are you sure your intentions are good? Would everyone think that? Is it not just your own thought, Jimmy? Intentions are subjective and within the subject of the thought,” said the angel. “Tell me, human, have you ever done something with good intention that has gone wrong?”

Jimmy could not look into the angel’s eyes for a second nor could he reply.

“Do you know the story of a man who has charged against windmills?” asked the angel.

“Windmills? What kind of a fool would do that?”

“He thought he was doing justice by killing giants.”

“My donkey would be smarter.”

The angel looked at Jimmy with a dumbfounded expression and continued.

“He was blinded by a firm belief. A noble belief to do good for others. It is an example that people often tend to do things they believe is right, when it isn’t necessarily true.”

“But he hasn’t quite done evil, has he?”

“That, you humans will never know.”

The angel continued to explain that actions occur from motive, take place as a process, and end in a result. “Due to their limited power, humans can’t really foresee the consequence of their actions to the full extent—for example, how one action will lead to another and cause other actions to occur.”

“Then, does that mean we are not responsible?” said Jimmy.

“Absolutely not. You are responsible for your motive and process.”

“What is a good motive and good process?”

“Let’s start with motive. There are two instances of motives. When one’s motive leans towards oneself more than others, and vice versa.”

“I see, people tend to reproach the former and praise the latter,” said Jimmy. Due to the intelligence the angel has given Jimmy, he was able to communicate in such a way.

“You are trying to say that people’s opinion does not determine the good or bad nature of the motive!” yelled Jimmy.

The angel smiled. “That is very true. People have different opinions. And opinions are subjective thoughts. They are mostly shaped by the thinker’s own interests and benefits. Let’s discuss the trolley example again. Imagine you are now one of the people lying in front of the trolley. You will surely want to live, yes?”

“Absolutely, most people including myself would want to live in that situation,” replied Jimmy.

“If you had control over the trolley despite being one of those lying there, you would save yourself. But would you consider yourself evil in doing so?”

Jimmy replied, “No, but it is life or death situation, so whoever dies over the other will blame the other.”

“But an irrelevant third person will blame neither because neither’s survival is beneficial nor not beneficial to him. If the third person shows any affection to the survivor or the dead, his view is subject to change as well,” said the angel.

“People’s opinions depend on how they choose to interpret the situation. For example, when people observing the action think that the subject of an action has benefited from the action more than they think he requires, people will call the subject greedy. The subject may or may not agree. And when the observers think that the subject has benefited more than the

observers themselves when they subjectively think they desired or needed it more than the subject, they often call the subject selfish. The people should not be the determiner of the need, but they often judge. In this case as well, the subject may or may not agree with the people.

“Okay, but what does this have to do with anything? Are you trying to say that people’s opinions don’t matter when they have seen someone act greedy or selfish?”

“They do matter, but not when determining good or evil. They are all pursuing their own desires. There is no good or evil in this. The observers will behave the same when they truly feel the *want* that the subject has. You can see that the thought of the subject of the action may or may not agree with what the surrounding observers think. Regardless, the subject acts on his want and the observers form an opinion on him. The subject’s thought and people’s thoughts are irrelevant in the determination of a good or bad motive because a person is free to pursue whatever benefit he pursues and consequentially those around tend to judge, to have a thought or opinion.

Someone who is aware of the social consequences that they will receive—for example, getting criticism for being greedy, selfish, et cetera—*ought to* measure which he thinks is worth, the benefit from the action versus the social consequences. So motive, in terms of for whom the benefit is pursued is irrelevant in the determination of good or bad.”

“What is relevant then?” asked Jimmy.

“This leads us to the two natures of motives. An impulsive motive and a deliberate motive. A bad motive is an impulsive motive because it comes from a motive that does not include the evaluation of the benefit and the consequence. Motives from urges lead to a process whereby the subject is not ready to accept the results or the consequence. By definition, it is a bad motive leading to bad process.

Thus, a good motive leads to a good process, which is only after the evaluation of the action and the social consequences and pursuing the most benefit for whoever the subject pursues it: himself or others. A good motive is a deliberate motive, and a bad motive is an impulsive motive.”

Jimmy closed his eyes contemplating for a minute and said, “So, what determines an action to be good or bad depends on the motive and process that come together, but is free of the result?”

“Yes.”

“Then there is no such thing as morality?”

“Good or Bad is regardless of morality. Morality at the best is subject to the people’s interpretation of the situation and their own thoughts and values. At the worst, which often

times is the case, is subject to the human's feelings and even prejudice. Tell me Jimmy, will there be morality in world where there is no human, no life, nothing?"

"There certainly wouldn't be anything. No subject to do any good or bad. Even if there was only one creature left in the world, there is no good or bad because there is nothing else there to receive nor observe such action," Jimmy replied.

"Okay angel, then what is a good process? A motive and process couldn't be the same thing."

"They certainly are not the same, although motives lead to processes. What is a motive? A motive comes from a desire, or a want. What fulfills a motive is the benefit that the subject of the action receives. And one's benefit leads to one's happiness. Motives seek benefit; therefore, actions seek benefit. Because of this, a good process is a process that brings the most benefit, and a bad process is the process that brings the least benefit."

"Hold on angel, this sounds like a slippery slope."

The angel did not stop. "One will benefit the most not only when he has benefited from everything he has desired, but also with the support of others surrounding him. Therefore, the best is to consider other's benefits as well."

"Okay, I don't disagree, but how does having people's support mean one has benefited the most? I thought you said what people think didn't matter?" said Jimmy.

"They don't determine what is good or bad, but they still do matter. Having an opinion is a *gift* given to people. Having support from peers will make humans happy because they were built that way. Aren't you happy when others around you approve of you?"

"Yes, but not because I was built that way. I think it's because we humans could not survive without the help of others. Being secluded would mean failure to survive, hence disapproval from peers would make us anxious, but approval from peers resulting in the opposite of anxiety."

"Sure. And now you know what a good motive and a good process is. Result is out of the equation for humans. But there is one more ingredient to a good action. It is will. Good will consists of good motive and the readiness to a good process. Good process is pursuing benefit in one's action. The most benefit is earned collectively when one could pursue the benefit of oneself and the benefit of the people surrounding him as well. Then, the subject can earn the raw benefit from the action and allow others to benefit from it as well while earning their support."

"What a speech. I have learned a lot from you, but what you are saying is starting to sound too obvious. Doesn't it just mean 'Do good for yourself and do good for others, and all is good?' That just sounds like what my town priest has been saying," said Jimmy calmly.

“I see why you would think that. But consider a town called ‘A’, of 50 people, kidnapping a victim from a different town ‘B’ for human sacrifice. The 50 people within their own group have pursued their own benefit for the benefit of other town members. All is good. But from the perspective of the people from the victim’s town, this is not good. It all depends on the perspective. You may choose to show empathy for the victim and the victim’s townspeople. However, your opinion, empathy, and perspective are only limited to the revelation of the story. The equation to your direction of empathy can be simply switched by the never-ending revelation of the situation, similar to the never-ending mysteries of real life. You never know if that victim is innocent or if the victim’s townspeople have sacrificed people from town A in the past. Human interpretation is limited like that.”

Jimmy was shocked and felt exposed without knowing why. “But I still think there is a moral thing to do! Morality must exist! Otherwise, why is there even heaven or hell?” yelled Jimmy.

The angel smiled. Jimmy looked at the angel’s eyes and thought it was soulless with the smile. Jimmy got goosebumps.

“Surely, but how do *you* know? You humans just look at things and judge from feelings. Your own reasoning is often merely a tool for the justification of your feelings. Have you not wielded logic as a weapon to force your will upon others? In the grand scale of time and universe, most things are not as they simply appear nor relevant to good or evil. What appears good can lead to bad and what appears bad can lead to good. It’s an endlessly repeating cycle that no mortal could comprehend nor dare to judge.”

Jimmy sat there and thought about everything that the angel has told him. Then, he contemplated on his life and the choices he made. He missed his wife and kids. Jimmy thought for a second that if he could see his family again for once, it wouldn’t matter if he went to hell.

After a while, the angel led Jimmy to the court room. The angel could notice that Jimmy was very afraid. The angel was not allowed in the sacred court and had to wait outside during the trial. He saw what was going on in the courtroom over the glass wall but could not hear anything they were talking about. To the angel’s eyes, Jimmy seemed hopeful for a second, shocked for another, and depressed at last. Jimmy started crying near the end.

After the trial, Jimmy was told that he had to walk along a path at the end of which is a gate; he would not be told where it leads to. Jimmy was remorsefully walking on the path. The path was a long bridge made of white marble. Below the bridge was nothing but clear blue sky and clouds. “Maybe jumping off the bridge through the clouds will be better than hell. I might be able to go back home to see my family.” Jimmy thought.

“You look miserable. How did the trial go? Other than not being told what gate it is?” the angel appeared and said.

“You know they didn’t tell me which gate it is, I must be doomed,” replied Jimmy.

“That is the rule for every soul. It doesn’t mean that you will go to hell. What else happened? Why did you cry?”

“The Judge, or I mean his servant, said that I have lived quite an ordinary life, nothing significantly noticeable until my death. But that’s the problem!”

“How so?”

“He mentioned how I died. He said not to think that what I’ve done is purely good even though I sacrificed myself to save others. He said what I did was out of stupidity, and that I have indeed saved a young man, but at the cost of widowing my wife and leaving my children fatherless. He said that they will suffer mourning for me and struggle to make a living without me! Just thinking about that made me cry. I feel awful. I regret killing myself to save that boy!”

“But this is unfair! Have I not done good for others? How could it count against me?” yelled Jimmy.

The angel replied, “Let me tell you a story of a colleague of mine and the man he guided. This man was a sage. He had exquisite knowledge over nearly everything there is to be known. My colleague had appeared in front of the sage prior to his death and *gifted* him like I have gifted you. They have made a bet, but I don’t know what it is. What I do know is that the sage caused the death of many including the woman he loved and her family. His motive was love and lust. He didn’t know what he was doing and did it unintentionally, but that doesn’t change what he did. He did it not following his conscious will, but because of his urges and desires. It was a bad motive, an impulsive one, that he was not ready to accept. It led to bad process, but not necessarily a bad result. My point is what you have done is not different from the sage’s actions. You did it out of stupidity, not nobility. It was unconscious, impulsive, and capricious.”

“You give me nothing but despair. No human is perfect. What do you suggest about how I should have lived my life?”

“I’m not here to give you despair. No human could tell the result of their actions to the full extent, but I can tell you that the boy you tried to save survived. Having said that, the result of your action is not in your control from the beginning. Disregarding that, aim for good motive and process, which means pursuing what you want, but making the decision consciously so you can own the consequence. And if you can, do something that you want that others around you will also like. Despite all this, you will not know if you're good or bad, but

you will at least be happy. Have you lived a life like that? If so, you have nothing to worry about.”

While the angel was talking to Jimmy, they arrived in front of the gate. Jimmy did not say anything and stood still for a moment. He took a deep breath and put his hand in his pocket to find a little coin. He flipped the coin but instead of landing on his hand, the coin flew off the bridge into the clouds. Jimmy gazed at the falling coin. It seemed like it would fall forever. The angel looked at Jimmy. He looked less mournful and had a somewhat confident but watery look in his eyes.

“I guess I’ll never know what side it lands on.”

“Never will.”

“I have been calling you angel all this time. What is your name?”

“Ursinus.”

“Goodbye, Ursinus.” Jimmy walked into the gate, and he seemed lighter on his feet than ever.

The coin falls forever; it is heads when you look from above, but tails when you look from below. It depends on the perspective, just like good and bad. It is flipping continuously as it is good for one second and bad in another. It goes on and on and keeps changing. No one ever knows on what side it will land, but whether we choose to flip the coin or not is up to us.

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3

Essay

“I think the deeper you go into questions, the deeper or more interesting the questions get. And I think that’s the job of art.”

–Andre Dubus III

Profiling the Monster

by
Hailey Graham



Hailey Graham is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mathematics and Statistics. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Elise Frketich's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. Starting around early middle school, Hailey had always been fascinated and intrigued by shows such as *NCIS*, *Bones*, and *Criminal Minds*, with a particular interest in the intuition and skills of the BAU team in *Criminal Minds*. As such, she wanted to bring this interest in analyzing wicked, twisted minds and integrate it into a piece of classic literature, showing that two works of unrelated fiction released almost 200 years apart, (187.7 to be exact), can be combined to create something new.

Many aspects of day-to-day life are the way they are because of the predictability of human nature, namely behavior and emotion. This can include the way that grocery stores arrange their shelves on certain days of the week based on customer demographics, to on-line behaviors, and even social interactions (Zhang, 2021). This fundamental basis of human predictability is what makes things such as criminal profiling, “a technique used to identify the perpetrator of a violent crime by identifying the personality and behavioral characteristics of the offender based upon an analysis of the crime committed,” a possibility (Scherer, 2014). As such, due to the fascinating nature of this topic, it has been made into entertainment in the form of several TV shows including a thriller/drama series called *Criminal Minds*. The show “follows a group of criminal profilers who work for the FBI as members of its Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) using behavioral analysis and profiling to help investigate crimes and find the suspect known as the unsub,” or unknown subject (IMDB, 2005). The psychoanalytic tactics used within the show can be used to analyze, explain, and predict the behaviors of Frankenstein’s monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. This is achieved through determining why the monster should be considered human, analysis of three of the monster’s major trauma events, and finally how those events influenced the actions and behaviors of the monster.

Since the whole basis of the show and topic is about human analysis, and even though it is something that is widely debated, Frankenstein’s monster could, and should be considered human. One way that scientists have been testing intelligence in both humans and animals is the “Rouge Test” or the “Mirror Self-Recognition Test”. Gaining popularity in the 1970s, “the mirror self-recognition test is a test designed to determine if a child is able to recognize a reflection in a mirror as being him or herself... [while] similar tests have also been constructed for animals,” (Steinissen, 2011). This idea can be applied to the moment when, “seeing his reflection in a small pool of water, the monster discovers himself for the first time and knows that he is hideous to behold” (Coghill). Not only does the monster recognize himself based on his reflection, he has the comprehension level at this point in the novel to understand that he is ugly and has an overall unpleasant appearance. Additionally, throughout the course of the novel, it is established that the monster has high levels of cognitive function and human-like intelligence. For instance, when the monster is first brought into existence, it is able to adapt quickly to its environment, discovering things like fire, where to find food and water, and how cooking certain foods make it taste better. Along with survival skills, it also learned language abnormally fast, even boasting that, “[he] improved more rapidly than the Arabian... and could imitate almost every word spoken” (Shelley, 82). Through all of this, it is clear that the monster’s intelligence is on par with, and possibly slightly higher than that of a human. However, though the monster has inhuman strength and speed amongst other physiological attributes, it is made out of human body

parts and is essentially human. As Victor got the various body parts used to create the monster from different sources, though deformed, the monster can be and is described as a large man in some way or another throughout the book. Overall, through both a mental and physical sense, the “monster” can be described as being human. As such, all of the psychological concepts discussed later can and should be applied to him.

With a sense of the monster’s human nature established, the events of the novel can now be applied to the general episode structure of *Criminal Minds* itself. To start, one way that the team of profilers tries to figure out the motives and/or reasons behind the unsub’s behavior is by delving into their past history and traumas. And though the monster’s life is relatively short, there are many instances of trauma that contribute to the development of his psyche. Going chronologically, the very first source of the monster’s trauma stems from Victor’s abandonment at the monster’s “birth”/creation. Though the monster confesses that it is “with considerable difficulty” that he remembers when he first came into existence, the stuff that he did remember, “appear[ed] confused and indistinct” (Shelley, 70). Amongst feelings of negativity and confusion, the monster said that he felt “cold” and “half-frightened... finding [himself] so desolate.” And at this moment of first creation, he was nothing more than a “poor, helpless, miserable wretch [that] knew and could distinguish nothing,” so the only way that he could deal with everything was to sit down and weep (Shelley, 70). Due to the lack of perceptiveness and innate function, this stage in the monster’s existence can be paired with the first stage of human development, which is birth to 18 months. According to Erikson’s Eight Stages of development, the central task of someone during this developmental stage is gaining a sense of trust versus mistrust. If all the needs of someone are met during this stage, they are able to learn to trust others and properly move on to the next stage of development. However, if the needs are not properly met during this state, they will develop qualities and habits of mistrust, withdrawal, and estrangement (Berman, 2008). Here is where the monster is found, as his needs are clearly not met. So, with no-one to guide him and teach him during this crucial first stage of development, Victor’s abandonment of the monster is ultimately the first nail in the coffin of the monster’s mental instability.

The next and arguably the most significant source of trauma for the monster is when the younger De Laceys, upon seeing the monster next to their father, flee in terror from their cottage, while the brother Felix rips the monster away from the father and beats the monster until he flees out of the cottage (Shelley, 94-95). Up until this point, the monster has referred to the De Laceys as his “beloved cottagers,” his “protectors,” in addition to other terms of endearment. From the way that the monster describes, provides for, and perceives the De Laceys, it is clear that he holds them in the highest regard. Upon discovery that these feelings are in no way reciprocated by the cottagers, who instead held feelings of

“horror and consternation” mixed with abhorrence, the monster felt utterly betrayed by those he most cared for. Being common with most themes of betrayal, feelings of rage, revenge, and despair can all trigger a change in someone’s mental state. If this instance were to happen in *Criminal Minds* it would be said that this is the first point of devolution, or “the process by which an unsub begins to lose control, falling in a downward spiral, unable to control their urge to perform a particular offense brought about by the trauma of their offenses” (Criminal Minds Glossary).

With the betrayal of the cottagers marking the beginning of the monster’s devolution, along with other smaller instances of hurt and betrayal in between, the final source of trauma that tips the monster over the mental precipice is when Victor tears the monster’s mate apart right in front of him. In this case, it doesn’t take a psychologist to know that an event like this completely destroys any semblance of a person’s well-being. Though the mate was not alive at this point, watching someone that he was going to love die right in front of him destroys any bit of peacefulness and tranquility that was left in the monster. With “the [monster seeing Victor] destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, ...with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew,” to begin the series of actions to destroy anything and everything that Victor Frankenstein loved (Shelley, 119). With plentiful sources of trauma, finding a motive for the monster’s actions would not be difficult if he were an unsub that the BAU was investigating in the show. Overall, the trauma experienced by the monster caused major psychological damage, which, discussed later, contributes to his actions throughout the novel.

Though the team typically infers the possible traumas of the unsub based on their actions and victims, it is now appropriate to work backwards from how the team normally works, and instead, analyze how the traumas of the monster influence and affect his actions within the novel. Starting once again chronologically, it makes sense to go back to the beginning and see how the monster’s traumas compounded on themselves to influence his actions. Because of the abandonment issues caused by Victor, the monster seeks and yearns for a sense of belonging and family. After wandering around the woods and the countryside for a while, the monster eventually happens upon the De Lacey’s cottage. At first, the monster takes shelter here for comfort and to escape, “from the inclemency of the season... and from the barbarity of man,” but soon becomes fascinated with the people of the cottage. Though he holds no ill intentions at this time, it can be said that this fascination becomes almost an obsession. For instance, the monster watches everything the cottagers do. He notes how the majority of the boy, Felix’s tasks were outdoors and how the girl, Agatha spent the majority of her time doing indoor tasks. After meticulously studying the family for a while, the monster eventually learns language by listening to them and watching them through the small part of the glass pane exposed on the wall. Eventually the monster came

to question “where were [his] friends and relations,” and why “no father had watched his infant days, [and] no mother had blessed [him] with smiles and caresses” (Shelley, 84). Because the monster so desperately sought this familial relationship and connection, he molded his perception of the relationship he had with the De Lacey family into an altered version that did not really exist. This perversion of reality is what makes the trauma, and the actions of the monster afterwards so extreme.

Up until this point, even after being chased away by villagers and mistreated by others, the monster has never been hostile to any human or committed any other acts of violence. But since the connection the monster felt with the De Lacey family was so strong, the rage and revenge he felt after their betrayal was felt tenfold. As stated previously, this marks the beginning of the monster’s devolution, of which he begins by burning down the De Lacey cottage after they move out. Soon after, the monster set out for the woods again and came across a young girl who, while running away playfully from someone, fell into the river. The monster then saves the girl from drowning, but the man the girl was with grabs her away and shoots the monster when he tries to follow. This too adds to the monster’s already growing mistrust of humanity. Lastly, in a last-ditch effort to try and preserve his faith in humanity, the monster pulls aside the young boy William, believing him to be unprejudiced. However, “as soon as he beheld [the monster’s] form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream” (Shelley, 100). While trying to escape from the monster’s grasp, William mentions how his father is M. Frankenstein. Upon learning that this boy shares blood with his creator, the monster declared that the boy “shall be [his] first victim,” and “clapped [his] hands” as his “heart beat with exultation and hellish triumph” after “grasp[ing] [William’s] throat to silence” and therefore kill him.

Taking a step back and viewing the situation from the lens of the TV show, it is here where the monster establishes his “MO” (short for Modus Operandi) which is an offender's method of carrying out a crime or offense. Upon analysis of the monster’s choice method of murder, strangulation, it tells a lot about the monster himself. Due to the involvement it takes to strangle someone with bare hands, this method makes the killing much more personal than other methods. As such, since the monster’s victims are all people that Victor is close to, this personal method of murder signifies the rage and hostility the monster feels towards both his victims and Victor.

Finally, this leads to the final trauma experienced by the monster, which is when Victor tears the mate apart in front of the monster. As stated previously, this is where the monster completes his devolution and no longer cares about anything as he has lost all sources of happiness. Subsequently, soon after Victor commits this act in full view of the monster it is discovered that his best friend Clerval is found strangled to death. At this point it is

known that this is done by none other than the monster. The monster's final victim, and the one most dear to Victor, is Victor's wife Elizabeth, of whom the monster strangles to death on Victor's wedding night. It is at this point when it can be said, by definition, that the monster has become a serial killer. The term "serial killings" is defined as "a series of three or more killings...having common characteristics such as to suggest the reasonable possibility that the crimes were committed by the same actor or actors" (Morton, 2010). In sum, along with the monster's general behavior changes after the first trauma event, the aftereffects of the other traumas snowballed until the monster became a serial killer with the overall motive to make Victor pay for what he did to the monster.

Though the general profiling tactics seem to apply to the book well, and the success rate of the profiles is high in the show, it is important to keep in mind that the show is just a dramatized version of reality, and should not necessarily be applied to the text and real-life situations. For example, even in the idealized situations within the show, sometimes even the profilers get the profile wrong, and realize that the unsub is a female instead of a male all along. Additionally, studies have been done and the validity of the "science" of various aspects behind criminal profiling have been disproven. For instance, when it comes a key part of profiling known as the "homology assumption" which is the "reliance, and thus assumption, on there existing to some degree of commonality in the characteristics of some offenders and behaviors they may commonly exhibit when perpetrating certain modes of behavior constitution a crime," many studies have struggled to find evidence of the efficacy of such tactics (Kocsis, 2015). Though all of this may be true, profiling has continuously become more and more accurate throughout the years. To give an example, even though, "in the year 2008 only around 42% of cases were solved using criminal profiling, in 2019 the FBI was able to solve 56% of the cases that were not solved in 2008" (Jackson, 2011). In addition to the accuracy increasing, criminal profiling also gained a high level of acceptance among the general public and police. Along with the practical aspects, it is also valid to point out that *Frankenstein* also doesn't always follow the rules of reality. Because of this it would be fundamentally okay to use profiling tactics to analyze the novel. In sum, though there have been studies yielding results that argue against the usefulness of profiling tactics, it has been proven that they have gained efficacy and reliability.

The general episode structure and profiling tactics used within the show *Criminal Minds* can be used to analyze the various aspects of the monster's life in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This is made possible through the monster's close resemblance to a human both physically and mentally, enabling the analysis of his trauma and actions thereafter as if the monster were human. Though the monster tried to live a peaceful life and be good, his experiences ultimately changed his view of humanity and the way he lived life for the worse. This theme of an everyday well-meaning person turned psychopath is a common one within

the show which begs the question; how easily could your neighbor, family member, or even yourself succumb to mentally-altering traumas of a crisis event and end up like Frankenstein's monster?

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Essay

An Application of the Themes in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave": Censorship in Schools

by

Kayla Manley



Kayla Manley is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Mechanical Engineering. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Michael Nichols's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The assignment required students to write a research paper connecting one of the class's required readings to a real-world topic. Kayla was motivated to write about censorship due to the increasing legislation being passed to ban books in schools and wanted to open up a discussion about students' duty to protect their rights to knowledge and freedom.

As a college student actively pursuing an education, it was incomprehensible to learn that 1,648 books are currently banned in the U.S. (Geggis, 2022). With many states passing legislation banning books and curriculums in schools, it is necessary to understand the reasoning behind these laws so that we can become conscious citizens that protect our rights to knowledge and critical thinking. While censorship is defined as the changing or suppressing of media that is considered, by an authoritative figure, to be bad for people, it looks different in schools. It takes forms such as book banning, forced curriculum, or limited access to internet searches. Although there are new methods to censorship, it is an ancient idea that has been discussed by many, including ancient philosophers such as Plato and Socrates. In fact, Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" contains the central idea that enlightenment is crucial for the advancement of society, a strong reason against censorship in schools.

In Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," Socrates explains the effect of truth and education on human beings using an allegory (Reeve & Plato, 2012). He paints an image of "human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling," shackled to face a wall their entire lives (Reeve & Plato, 2012, p. 463). The other group of people, the puppeteers, use puppets to cast shadows on the wall in front of the prisoners so that the puppets become the prisoner's reality as this is all they can see. However, Socrates further explains what would happen if a prisoner were to escape outside the cave. Leaving everything they knew behind them, they would be "pained" by the light and "unable to see a single one of the things now said to be truly real" (Reeve & Plato, 2012, p. 464). After finally adjusting to this new world and learning all about it, they would feel for their fellow prisoners still stuck in the cave. Then, they would have to face the dilemma of returning to the cave and attempting to convert their friends, knowing that it would be a difficult and dangerous venture, or staying in the light to continue their journey to full enlightenment.

By posing this question, the allegory provides valuable insight into the acquisition of knowledge and therefore, the role of the education system in society. According to Zamosc (2017), Socrates uses the light as a symbol of knowledge, the prisoners in the cave as philosophers like him and the general society, and the puppeteers as the powerful authority whose job is to educate: the Sophists. This connection to the real world displays Socrates' belief that there was conflict in the education system. Moreover, he believed in two main points. First, humans "were born in chains" and "our beliefs will forever be no more than shadows of the truth unless philosophy comes to our aid" (Zamosc, 2017, p. 242). Second, the Sophists were failing society because they were "corrupting the young" by their "coercive nature" (Zamosc, 2017, p. 463).

This first belief, that humans are born ignorant to truth and light, was exemplified in the functionality of the cave. In Greek, "truth" means "unhiddenness" (Heidegger, 2013, p.

11). Naturally, this would mean that the reality in the cave must not be the true reality of the world because the cave is hidden in darkness. It follows that the world outside of the cave represents the truth because of the light illuminating anything attempting to remain hidden. Although it is a path of “toil and trouble,” Socrates stresses that reaching this truth is necessary (Zamosc, 2017, p. 466).

To meet this established necessity of truth-seeking, we have the institution of public education. In present day, young people are required to attend school to learn about topics such as History, Mathematics, English, and Science with the intention of “seeking the truth.” It seems that although the path to enlightenment is littered with tests and essays, this knowledge is accessible and credible.

However, due to recent events, this credibility and accessibility has been placed in jeopardy, leaving students’ path to enlightenment at risk. In Florida, 566 book bans were enacted from July 2021 to June 2022 (Geggis, 2022). It would be one thing if the books being banned were purely academic, but a vast number of these texts contain topics that educate students about social and cultural differences. Across the entire U.S., “41% of these banned books include LGBTQ themes and 41% contain main or secondary characters who are not White” (Geggis, 2022). Restricting access to these texts is even more detrimental because these are the books that teach humans how to live in an accepting society. Additionally, reading these books can be life changing for marginalized groups because they provide representation that can be turned into inspiration for people to start their truth-seeking journey. As Socrates proved, “uneducated people who have no experience of true reality” and people who have spent their entire life in education will not be successful because “the former have no goals” and the latter have not acted (Zamosc, 2017, p. 468). Moreover, the limited access to knowledge confines students to the darkness of the cave.

Although this censorship appears to severely inhibit students’ path to enlightenment, these bans could not have been passed without a rationale. In an assessment of the various reasons for these book bans, there is one prominent voice: the outcry for purity and safety of youth. One example of this is by banning curriculums and books that contain graphic or violent content (Cohen, 1997). In this case, it seems correct to prevent a child from reading something they are not yet mature enough for, or something that will promote dangerous behaviors. Still, it is only natural to question the authority who makes these determinations about children’s maturity or their likelihood of future behaviors as each child is unique, and it would be near impossible for a uniform ban (Hastie, 2018). Another example is how, in the U.S. education system, it is not allowed for teachers to share their political beliefs with children for the reason of coercing them to believe the subjective truth. This outlook of preserving purity and reducing danger for children is shared among many adults because par-

ents do not want their children being taught that opinions are facts (Hastie, 2018). From these examples, it can be concluded that the strongest reason for censorship is protecting the safety and purity of children.

Returning to Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" will determine that this reason, though valid, is not necessarily reason enough to warrant censorship. This idea is similar to Socrates' second belief that the Sophists failed because of their coercive techniques towards education (Zamosc, 2017, p. 250). Socrates pointed out that it did not matter whether there was "malicious intent" behind their method of teaching; it was still bad (Zamosc, 2017, p. 250). Since the prisoner emerging from the cave can be blinded from seeing the light, or knowledge, the simplicity of this knowledge acquisition is not enough to allow them to see the truth (Reeve & Plato, 2012). To achieve this truth, the prisoner needs to take the time to adjust to the light and slowly recognize the difference between their previous reality, now false, and this new reality (Reeve & Plato, 2012).

The method of going about this understanding of knowledge is through critical thinking which is only made possible by questioning of the previous truth against new knowledge. Applying this to the form of censorship that prevents teachers from speaking about political opinions, it is arguable that censorship could be allowable because it prevents students from hearing one main perspective and falling into this cave of untruth. However, the application of this rule has caused schools to shy away from teaching about events where there are conflicting views because just talking about one could lead to a violation. Schools have become fearful of teaching or even discussing sensitive topics such as "the history of the civil rights movement" because there is "a climate of fear around how to comply with rules they often do not understand" (Meckler, 2022). Therefore, just as Socrates said that it was important to return to educate the prisoners in the cave, it follows that the current education system needs to improve on its ability to teach and express crucial, enlightening information. Thus, we return to the claim that knowledge is power and anything that prohibits this acquisition of knowledge is unjust; censorship is unjust.

Another reason for censorship is due to an emotional response instead of a theological one. To stress that censorship is illogical and destructive to progress, one of the currently targeted banned books is *Huckleberry Finn* because it contains racist language and marginalization of Black characters (Tucker, 2022). While the marginalization of any group of people is clearly wrong, erasing this history will silence the voices that fought for justice and equality. If we completely ignore history, we are destined to repeat it. Or we are destined to remain in the dark cave of ignorance, unable to attain the freedom of truth and light.

Simply because some teachings are the opposite of a person's way of life, does not result in that text being incorrect or immoral. Many of these bans are founded on the fear of

the ugly truth of our world's history or the fear of one's way of life and power being challenged. Book bans are the result of adults creating "misapprehensions about how children consume and process literature" (Tucker, 2022). Critical thinking is necessary to make it out of the cave and see the light. Censorship is just another form of sheltering; the real world has many different opinions, cultures, and beliefs. Exposure to these differences are not the real threats to a person's truth or way of life, rather they encourage growth and development of each individual, resulting in the overall harmonization of society.

So, how are students supposed to learn and understand the true reality of the world if we are not allowed to have access to all this knowledge? How are the prisoners supposed to gain enough awareness to escape the cave if the puppeteers are supplying them with forged realities? Just as explained in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," the limited access of knowledge and truth reduces the intellectual freedom and advancement of the whole society. As a result, censorship created by an authority that fears the sharing and challenging of ideas has no place in the education system. Schools should be environments created to spark conversation and the growth of society. With the increasing legislation being passed to ban books in schools, it is our job as students and members of society to challenge this to protect our rights and those of future generations.

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Literary Techniques of Christine de Pizan, Olympe de Gouges, and Marie de Romieu

by
Riley Savage



Riley Savage is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Professional Writing and Marketing. She wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Silvia Mitchell's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The assignment was to write an argumentative essay that connect outside research to the in-class readings, two of which include *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* and *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief History with Documents*. Her research analyzes the distinctive literary tactics and philosophies of three French proto feminists throughout their efforts to “challenge the male-dominated society of their time.”

Proto-feminism, or the origins of modern feminism, emerged in the late Middle Ages and Enlightenment periods and paved the way for the feminist movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. A few of the foremost important French proto-feminist writers are Christine de Pizan, Marie de Romieu, and Olympe de Gouges, who used their writing and philosophy to challenge the deeply ingrained gender roles and discrimination of their time. The following research compares the literary techniques and philosophies of these three pioneering women and explores the ways in which they fought for the rights and equality of women.

Christine de Pizan was a 15th century Italian author and poet; after marrying a court official and moving to Paris, De Pizan had many connections to politics and therefore “was doubly suited to speak out about female marginality and self-consciously construct a gendered authoritative voice within the rhetorical strictures of late medieval literary cultures” (Winn, 53). She is best known for *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in which she uses symbols of divinity to defend the virtues and capabilities of women. Pizan is held at such high regard because she has been declared the first woman to “attack the medieval tradition of clerkly misogyny for its portrayal of the female sex as intrinsically sinful and moral” (Brown-Grant, 2). Pizan’s work is considered quite radical, simply because she challenged the prevailing belief that women were inferior to men and argued that women should be afforded the same rights and opportunities as men.

Specifically, in Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies*, she radically defends women and brings forth the ignorance of misogynistic scholars in their writings by manipulating her radical ideas in a way that was more appealing to her intended audience; specifically, she utilized false humility and an assumed credibility of the Divine to ensure her ideologies were respected. The book begins with three allegorical women, Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, commending the aspects of womanhood that Christine had just previously decried; she “found it necessary to augment her defense of women and her authorization of herself with elements from what she considered the most significant level of discourse, the theological, and that this theological dimension included the use of female-identified symbols for deity” (Birk, 11). Not only did instilling these divine women give a sense of credibility of her ideas, but it also established credibility for women in positions of higher power. This work of hers set the groundwork for proto-feminism across France, and greatly influenced her successors; it is said “virtually all the great Renaissance ladies owned or had access to the content of Christine de Pizan’s books” (Winn, 53).

Marie Gouze, known professionally as Olympe de Gouges, was a self-educated butcher’s daughter from the south of France; she was a playwright and political activist during the late 18th century. She is best known for the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, which was a response to the “new vision of government,” known as the *Dec-*

laration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, “in which protection of natural rights replaced the will of the king as the justification for authority” (Hunt, 74). In short, this declaration secured the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man—but completely failed to incorporate women. In De Gouges’s rendition, she argued that women should be afforded the same rights and freedoms as men, including the right to vote and hold political office; she did so by simply tweaking the wording from “man” to “woman.” Her “boldly unapologetic” manner when castigating the patriarchal government caused her to be seen as a “threat to the all-male political body,” which completely contrasts the tactics used by Pizan in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Beckstrand, 74). Pizan consistently undermines her intellect in order to adhere to the expectations of her readers, which is completely antithetical to De Gouges’s empowerment over her own mistakes, which she discusses in the preface of another work.

Judging Olympe De Gouges’s literary brilliance based off the simplicity of her modifications would be an injustice to her other works; so, instead of explicating her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, her epistolary novel entitled *Memoire de Madame Valmont* will be the focal point. This novel is an autobiographical account of Gouges’s childhood, but it was anonymously published and written as if it is from the perspective of a certain Madame Valmont. The novel is epistolary, meaning it is “written in the form of a series of letters,” and features letters from Valmont herself, the author, and the Count, who is financially supporting the publication. Throughout the letters, Valmont expresses that she intends to “expose the moral turpitude of those who have harmed her family” and justifies her autobiography with her ulterior ethical objectives (Beckstrand, 78). It is revealed that after her estranged father’s passing, she was excluded from all inheritance that would have allowed her to take care of her sickly mother. By adopting the victim role, Valmont more effectively earns the reader’s sympathy and turns them “against the abuses of patriarchal authority” (Beckstrand, 80). The other accounts of her trauma, while intended to uncover the truth, also touch on feminine sensibility, weakness, and attenuating the assumption of a woman’s intellectual inferiority. And, because the novel was not published under Gouges’s name, any subsequent backlash from her radical opinions gets suppressed by the anonymity. Her creation of Madame Valmont is the main similarity to Pizan’s literary strategy: disconnecting the author from their opinion. The preface of Gouges’s novel is the only time where she is the subject of her writing; she promises to “reveal herself in entirety, with her many inadequacies and faults,” which she considers to be “attributable to Nature, her only ‘tutor’.” In this way, de Gouges undermines gender-biased accusations that have been made against her character” (Beckstrand, 75-6). By appealing to Nature, Gouges is deemphasizing her audacious feminist attempts to call women to action in order to sound more tempting and less intimidating; Pizan’s appeals to theology had the same affect.

The final proto-feminist to briefly highlight is poet Marie de Romieu; little is known about her biographically, but some has been concluded from her poems “in which she speaks of a son and the press of domestic duties,” implying she was married (Larsen & Winn, 137). She is best known for her poems, which are often enunciated by a masculine *I* or give no indication of gender. In some of her work, similarly to Gouges, she takes an autobiographical approach that was seen as introspective and personal. Oddly, there are speculations that de Romieu never existed, and her writings are from a masculine perspective because they were actually written by her brother, Jacques de Romieu. But, in the nineteenth century, some scholars could clearly see the superiority in her work than to that of her brother’s; Marian Rothstein in *Writings from Pre-revolutionary Women* says, “If one discounts antifeminist prejudice or joy in scandal, there are no grounds to dispute the title-page attribution of her poems to Marie de Romieu herself” (Larsen & Winn, 137).

Christine de Pizan, Olympe de Gouges, and Marie de Romieu were three influential proto-feminist writers who used their writing and philosophy to make change with the gender roles and discrimination of their time. They each employed unique literary tactics to defend the rights and equality of women. De Pizan utilized false humility and divine symbols in her work, while De Gouges's resolute approach stood in stark contrast. De Romieu's emphasis on the role of education and mentorship in empowering women rounded out their collective efforts to challenge the male-dominated society of their time.

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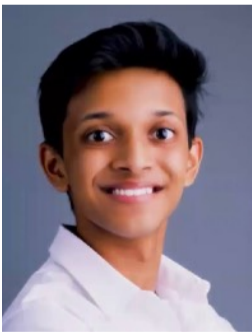
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Essay

An Analysis of The Impact of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* on British Society

by

Aaryan Srivastava



Aaryan Srivastava is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. He wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Rhodes Pinto's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. He decided to investigate one book's influence in shaping the British society at the time of its release due to its critique of society and emphasis on reform. The novel, *Hard Times*, by Charles Dickens, employs several forms of irony and plot development that directly reference or critique real-world events, and its release called for a new perspective that the common folk adopted. Aaryan wanted to analyze how this novel had influenced public opinion at the time.

The 1800s were witness to an age of progression unheard of before, as the Industrial Revolution brought about a new era of advancements in technology, agriculture, and society. These times saw evolving societies as urban cities sprouted and class structure altered completely. Production flourished as new machines such as the spinning jenny, steam power, and the telegram boosted communication and efficiency, and railroads changed the scope of markets exponentially. It is no understatement to say that the 1830s were the beginning of changing times. And yet, many artists and authors of this age were unsure whether these times were truly changing for the better.

While the Industrial Revolution saw massive growth in products and markets, there were significant drawbacks. Heavily urbanized cities were covered in dust and smog, shadowing the city in a depressing, gray hue. Pollution led to disease, and disease led to deaths. Workers were abused and often killed by machinery. The art connoisseurs were disheartened by the monotony of life, as the increasingly regulated human condition began losing its joy and color. This led to artists and authors rebelling against this new society through the Romantic movement. Poets such as William Blake and William Wordsworth desired to provide an outlet to people going through troubles and difficulties during the complicated and transforming phase of their community, and their movements truly took off in the early 1800s (Forward, 2014). An explosion in the romanticization of art through plays, books, and paintings directly resulted from the sluggish and demoralizing lifestyle brought about by the Industrial Revolution. This movement also aimed to reform current laws to favor workers and healthier lifestyles for children. A social revolution directly brought about by the negative consequences of the industrial revolution was paramount in changing society for the better.

Charles Dickens spent his life witnessing the Industrial Revolution take root in Britain, and he was especially privy to its disastrous effects. Witnessing the abuse of workers by factory owners, the destructive potential of unions, and the diminishing emphasis on the arts and literature, Dickens aimed to promote a more productive future in terms of romanticism and wrote the novel *Hard Times* to better society. Through the writing of *Hard Times*, Dickens certainly contributed to the reforms in work conditions, labor unions, and culture through growth and emphasis on music and literature.

An analysis of the society and background will reveal that Coketown was inspired by the urbanized cities located in Britain, most specifically Preston. The 1842 Preston riots were a direct result of conflict and high tensions which resulted in several deaths and major property damage (*Bullets For Stones—The Lune Street Riot of August 1842, 2021*). These unions, another example of new changes in classes after the Industrial Revolution, was poorly organized and too large to rally, so unions very often spiraled out of control. Dickens

witnessed the atrocities that came after firsthand and were against the unionization of workers. That being said, he was also wary of the causes. Abuse through lack of safety, regulation, and rights was rampant, and unions were increasingly popular to the 1850s.

Coketown is established as a gray and slowly degrading town, a call to the polluted streets and smog-filled atmosphere of Preston. The philosophy of certain characters, such as the Grandgrinds, is representative of the systems that society was shifting towards—a society run by mechanization and schedules. Shown through the Gradgrind philosophy of statistical importance, Dickens encapsulates the slow loss of creative and free drive of the human soul for the sake of production. The terrible fates of other characters, like Stephen Blackpool, is shown as a call to the conditions of workers, who toil and suffer for a large period of their lives with no progress or benefit being taken, only to die in unfortunate ways (a callback to the lives lost in the Preston Riots). A dark and terrible truth about the working conditions was that there were no regular hours or food provided for workers, and they really were manipulated by factory owners depending on necessity (Dorfman, Orton, & Marzagilo, 2008). Dickens uses every character, stylistic choice, and setting to paint a picture of his current British society.

A closer analysis of the plot also communicates many themes about the British community. Tom Gradgrind's manipulation of Stephen Blackpool to make him a prime suspect of the bank robbery was a testament to the relationship between the two classes in real society (Dickens, 1854). Workers are no different from machines in terms of usability – they are pawns and scapegoats for crimes committed by factory heads. Also, the disparity between arrests of workers and the lack of for factory owners is shown through the leniency regarding Tom's guilt versus that of Stephen's. The sympathy given to Tom is in stark contrast to the objectivity given to Stephen's, an almost cruel irony when the motivations of Stephen vastly outweigh those of Tom's.

Dickens's use of character relationships also majorly shows the tragedy of workers, namely through Rachel's and Stephen's interactions. Stephen's almost absurd bad luck is used to portray a sense of irony, one which conveys the daily struggles of workers. Stephen's life is no exaggeration, workers continuously faced lives of struggle with no hope of ascending the class hierarchy. His desperate need for money to be with Rachel is what unfortunately tears them apart, and Stephen dies wishing for unity within the cruel world. This analysis of his character is testament to the innocent and futile struggles that workers faced in the British 1800s. Reforms began taking place as a direct result of romanticism, a movement that this novel was also a part of.

The name of the novel, accompanied with the conclusion, is intended to be a sweet and hopeful message to the audience, once again pushing the notion of romanticism. *Hard*

Times is a title meant to resonate with audiences. The constant riots sunk many factory owners while taking workers with them, industries were collapsing due to frustration among the populace, and disease was rampant in the cramped and dirty cities. These quite literally were hard times for all, but Dickens ends his novel with idealistic character endings. Louisa ends her life surrounded with love and compassion, Mr. Gradgrind abandons his objective notion of fact and turns to love and faith, Sissy finds a family who cherishes and reciprocates her own love, and Stephen Blackpool has his name cleared (Dickens, 1854). These endings are used to show readers that hard times are not lasting forever and that there is an end to life's difficulties.

An end to life's difficulties, indeed. Reforms came in all sorts of ways in the decades following the publication of *Hard Times*. The most noteworthy reformation for worker's rights was the Factory Act of 1867, an act that raised the minimum working age to avoid exploitation and placed strict limitations on the working hours for women and children (UK Parliament, 2022). On top of this, advancements in education were made with the 1880 Compulsory Education Act, which required mandatory attendance and access to elementary education. These reforms were made to allow the possibility of opportunity and reduce the caste-like system of classes that was in place in society (UK Parliament, 2022). Having these reforms directly attributed to the publication of *Hard Times* would be ridiculous, but there can be no argument that it was influential in raising public awareness and was a major part of the Romantic movement in Britain.

Reforms also took place through unions. Unions were legalized with the Union Trade Act of 1871, issuing a new age of unionization (Field, 1978, p. 61-85). One of the largest unions formed was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers which avoided military engagement in worries of profit losses. While Dickens opposed unions, it was only due to their violent nature. This lack of violence exhibited by the new unions is a sign of success regarding the criticisms present in his book. However, there were still shortcomings, as violence was still apparent through the London Dock Strike of 1889 (Matthews, 1991, 24-58). So, while the novel assisted in bringing awareness to the notion of non-violent unions, their implementation and efficiency were still questionable and lackluster.

Finally, reforms also came through a cultural shift. The 1870s saw a huge shift in the hosting of sports and events, as a direct consequence of the burst of romanticism earlier in the century. The FA cup, football, and the Wimbledon Championships all became sports events that rallied public support and gave a sense of nationalism in Britain (Johnson, 2022). These events were all intended to bring an outlet of creativity and enjoyment from the otherwise difficult and painful toils of factory management and production. There were also advancements in art, as romantic painters flaunted heroism and bright contrasts to

show the concepts of “hope” and “peace”, with leading artists such as William Blake and Eugene Delacroix pushing art forward in this direction for Britain. These art pieces are instrumental in Britain’s romantic movement, and the idealistic point of view of these paintings surely carried the legacy and purpose of novels such as *Hard Times*.

Dickens wrote *Hard Times* to combat the difficulties and struggles of his community. Witnessing the terror that riots wrought on industries and people alike, the lack of beauty in life due to the Industrial Revolution’s monotony, and the brutal mistreatment of workers, he joined the romantics in attempting to usher in a new age in British history. By communicating motifs of faith, compassion, and love through the philosophies and stories of characters in his novel, he showed the current state of his society in contrast to what he wants his society to truly be. Truly, his *Hard Times* novel was instrumental in the movement for ushering in reforms. While, admittedly, the novel was not the only piece of art and literature to preach such values nor was it entirely successful in achieving such values, it was still significant for the very fact that it gave its readers a beacon of hope and a message that these hard times will come to an end.

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Do We Live in a Simulation?

by

Aidan Jacobsen



Aidan Jacobsen is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Electrical Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Frketch's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. For this essay, students used course texts and external scholarly works to make or dispel a claim about society. Inspired by theories about the origin of the universe and the quest for a single theory describing reality, this work develops the idea that our reality may be a simulation running on a computer in another universe.

Have you ever wondered why the Newtonian gravitational constant is $6.67430 \times 10^{-11} Nm^2/kg^2$? Or why there is a unitless “fine structure constant” about equal to $1/137$? These odd values almost seem as if they were programmed into our reality because of how critical the exact values are to the emergence of life as we know it. But rather than being programmed into our reality by a supreme deity as some religions portray, the simulation hypothesis makes the claim that another reality is running our universe on a computer. This theory argues that the beings in this other reality hand-chose our universe’s parameters to allow for life to emerge. But is this really possible? Is there even a chance that this outlandish proposition could truly be our reality? I will argue that it is possible that our universe is a direct result of another reality running a simulation on a computer. Just as Descartes claims in his meditations that we cannot trust our senses or even our pure thoughts, I will show that we have no direct evidence that we are not living in a simulation. In fact, the things that we do know for certain according to Descartes are possible in a simulation. I will then address two counter arguments that have been proposed as means to determine whether reality is simulated. The first argument that I will dispel is that individuals should be able to determine that the universe is simulated from within a simulation (much like how dreamers can ‘awake’ within their dream). I will then address the paradox that arises because the universe appears to be infinitely large and explain how an apparently infinite universe could be simulated on finite resources.

Our senses are often our sole means of determining the truth. One can clearly see that the ground is solid and that water flows, but if statements like these are not true, then is there truly a way to know the true nature of our reality? Claims like these are exactly what Descartes addresses in his meditations. To do so, Descartes introduces a novel analysis technique. He believes that “it will suffice for the rejection of all of [his opinions], if [he finds] in each of them some reason for doubt” (Descartes 13). By rejecting things about which he is unsure, Descartes aims to find axioms that are guaranteed to be true. Shortly after beginning this endeavor, Descartes observes that “the senses are sometimes deceptive” (Descartes 14). For instance, optical illusions and mental illnesses can cause people to perceive objects that others do not perceive. Because of this inconsistency, it is clear that at least one observer cannot trust their senses. This provides the “reason for doubt” required to reject the claim that our senses are trustworthy. Without being able to trust our senses completely, it is now possible to address the possibility of living in a simulation. The only way to know for certain that one’s perceived reality is not the result of some algorithm is to perceive an inconsistency, pattern, effect, or result that would be impossible in a simulation. The key word in this reasoning is ‘perceive’; to perceive something requires the use of one’s senses to draw information from their surroundings into the realm of the mind. But, because the senses have been shown to not be foolproof sources of information through

Descartes' reasoning, these same senses are unable to provide foolproof evidence that we are not the result of some complex program running on a computer. In conclusion, Descartes' method of doubt can be used to show that the senses alone are not adequate to dispel the notion that we are living in a simulation.

Instead, the most basic pieces of certain knowledge must be studied and applied to determine whether the simulation hypothesis could be the driving force behind reality. These axioms must be undeniable truths that arise naturally. To determine these axioms, one must first determine what is not a valid axiom. Descartes does exactly this. Many scholars claim that "the First Meditation was written by Descartes specifically to establish that the first principles of human knowledge cannot be obtained from, or be based on, what the senses reveal" (Tweyman). Descartes subsequently uses this ability to reject false axioms and beliefs as a means to induce the axiom that 'he exists.' This certainty is not limited to exclusively an organic universe; it's also possible in a simulation. Modern programmers have written code that simulates human thought in the sense that it can make decisions from data provided through its various inputs. This directly parallels Descartes' logic because the program can make decisions about its senses just like Descartes makes decisions about his senses. From this, one can conclude that a program could believe that it 'exists' in the same sense that any person could claim to exist. Hence, I have used Descartes' proof that he exists to show that it is possible for a being's existence to be generated programmatically. This means that the foundational belief of our own existence is also possible in a simulation. In fact, even though humans perceive an external world, there is no direct reason that the external world could not also be part of a simulation. Digital physics is a modern view on science "which says there is no physicality but only abstract information as the fundamental building blocks of emergent informational structures of reality, such as atoms" (Irwin). This means that rather than looking at the principles of physics as pertaining to objects, these principles can be analyzed using solely data analysis techniques. The data in this view of physics is purely internal to the mind and manifests itself as external atoms and physical objects. Because there exists ways of looking at the equations of physics where an external world is unnecessary, it is possible to fully simulate a world such as ours while yielding the same results as a truly physical world. A more concrete example of this would be the wax that Descartes considered. Descartes stated that the existence of a piece of wax "is an inspection on the part of the mind alone" (Descartes 22). His viewpoint here is shockingly similar to the modern digital physics interpretation. In both cases, external objects only exist because they are inspected by the mind (mind is used here to represent 'the thing that exists' in the aforementioned axiom). All of the data pertaining to the object is stored within the mind itself. Because the mind can be simulated, any thoughts of the mind can also be simulated. As a direct result, any external objects can be simulated because they

only exist by “inspection on the part of the mind.” In conclusion, because something that ‘exists’ can be simulated and objects external to this thing can also be simulated, I have shown that everything in our reality—both inside and outside of ourselves—can be simulated. This means that the things we know for certain are possible inside of a simulation.

The extent to which the world is an extension of the mind is crucial to the argument that external objects can be simulated, but some people argue that external objects and ideas can exist independently of the mind. Even though this view is not shared by Descartes, it is still important to show that a simulation could exist in a mind-independent world. Because Descartes is using a method of doubt where he rejects anything where he finds “some reason for doubt,” his claim is that a mind-dependent world exists (Descartes 13). This does not automatically exclude a mind-independent world. Because a mind-independent world could exist, it is important to show that this type of world could still be simulated. In particular, I will show that a world given by the ideas of mathematical platonism could exist as a simulation. Mathematical platonism is defined as “a metaphysical view that there are abstract mathematical objects whose existence is independent of us” (Macleod). This is in direct opposition to Descartes’ assertion that mathematical ideas could be instilled in his head by a “supremely powerful and clever [God] who has directed his entire effort at deceiving [him]” but could regardless be the case (Descartes 16). If the foundations of mathematics exist and the rest of mathematics is derived from those basic axioms, then it follows that the more complicated aspects of mathematics exist as well. One heavily studied portion of mathematics is the theory of algorithms: mathematical means that could be applied to simulating another mathematical world. Because of the existence of math in the mind-independent reality of mathematical platonism, it necessarily follows that the reality could simulate another similar reality. In conclusion, even if Descartes is not considering the whole state of the world because he only considers that which he knows for certain, a simulated reality is still possible.

Some people would disagree and claim that we may be able to tell if we are in a simulation similar to how some people can tell if they are in a dream. They argue that there would be observable inconsistencies in physics like how computers periodically make errors in calculations. By approaching high speeds and small lengths with physical measurements, there is hope that inconsistencies in physics will arise and show whether reality is simulated. This same hope for a definite answer also holds the reason for why measurements such as these be unable to show that our reality is not simulated: dreams. Dreams are a way for the human brain to process information, but in doing so, the human brain can be tricked into thinking that it is awake. As scholars point out, “the dreaming doubt as presented in the First Meditation is meant to cast doubt on all sensory beliefs, even those in which our perceptual experience is vivid and coherent” (Chynoweth). This means that even though the re-

searchers that take the measurements would feel as if their experience was complete, vivid, and coherent, they also feel that their dreams are as vivid and coherent as their research. Because of this, they would have no definite evidence that their measurements are also not part of a simulated reality such as a dream. Even the measurements that would have the best hope of providing evidence against the simulation hypothesis fall prey to the same issue that Descartes observes about everyday life. Descartes states that he experiences “even less plausible [dreams] as these insane people do when they are awake” (Descartes 14). Because the mind is so prone to wandering and believing that it is truly in situations such as dreams, the mind cannot be relied upon completely. This assumption that the mind is unreliable can then be used to show that none of the mind’s experiences can truly be shown to be a part of reality and separate from a dream; it blurs the line between dreams and reality. Without a clear and definite line, it is impossible to distinguish a “true” measurement from a “dreamed” measurement and is therefore impossible to determine whether the universe is simulated from within the simulation. Through reasoning such as Descartes’ dreaming doubt, I have shown that no sensory measurement of one’s surroundings could hope to provide definitive proof against the simulation hypothesis.

Another critique of the idea that there exists a possibility that our reality is simulated is that a simulated reality would necessarily only be able to contain a finite amount of data while the universe appears to extend infinitely in all directions. Critics argue that no computer could possibly process the infinite amount of data required to run reality as a simulation. The issue with this argument lies again within the limitations of the mind. Assume for a minute that the universe is in fact a simulated set of observations within a single thing that exists. As Descartes points out, this mind is incapable of imagining the large set of possibilities for a piece of wax’s shape. Specifically, “the wax is capable of innumerable changes of this sort, even though [he is] incapable of running through these innumerable changes by using [his] imagination” (Descartes 22). Because the mind is unable to imagine the infinite possibilities of the external world, I believe that it is impossible for the mind to claim that there exists an infinite set of possibilities that a computer would need to calculate. The computer could use a finite set of possibilities and the mind would have no means to determine the limitations of the computer’s processing power. The only inconsistency that could occur would be if the wax suddenly ceased to exist (as an abstract object in the mind). This would generate a contradiction because Descartes’ reasoning derived the existence of external objects as ideas in the mind from foundational axioms. But, because the deletion of the wax from the simulation would violate the law of conservation of energy and no exception to this law has yet been identified, there is no evidence that a seemingly infinite universe could not be simulated. Even if the principle of conservation of energy is found to be invalid, a simulation with a different algorithm could still be driving reality, and a simulated

world in which external objects can disappear is also possible. Because of the general description of a simulation and the inability of the mind to store an infinite set of data, I have now shown that a simulated reality could appear infinite, and that our seemingly infinite reality could still be simulated by a simulation with finite resources.

In conclusion, because the senses cannot be trusted and the few foundational axioms that Descartes develops are possible within a simulated reality, there is no measurable set of data that could disprove that reality is not within a simulation. Specifically, even though some individuals can identify a dream from within the dream, it is possible that no similar parallel exists to distinguish a simulated reality from a non-simulated reality. This inability to definitively disprove the simulation hypothesis holds even though the universe is infinite. Because the mind is unable to process an infinite amount of possibilities, the mind can also not show that the universe would require an infinite amount of data to run within a simulation. Without any way to disprove that reality is simulated, there exists a chance for which reality is simulated and we are living in a simulation. This claim has some profound implications on the way life is studied. If we were truly living in a simulation, what difference would there be between us and our favorite video game characters? There would not be a difference. We would essentially be beings at the whim of whatever was running the simulation. The important question, though, is whether it matters how reality is constructed as long as we exist within reality. Humans have gone about their lives for millennia, and as long as the simulation continues to exist, will continue to go about their lives. It is still possible to lead a complete and fulfilling life within a simulation, so it truly does not matter whether reality is simulated or arises from mathematical concepts as long as one “exists.” Having read my argument for the possibility that the universe is completely simulated, it is now up to you to determine how you will react. Will you continue to lead your life as you have as if nothing changed? Will you begin to live each day as if your reality could be “turned off” at a moments’ notice? Or will you ponder this possibility and join the search for a way to test the simulation hypothesis?

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4

Poetry

“Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance.”

—Carl Sandburg

Poetry



What if?

by

Purva Singh Grover



Purva Singh Grover is a Purdue undergraduate majoring in Computer Engineering. She wrote this poem to fulfill an assignment in Professor Cecilea Mun's SCLA 10200 in the fall of 2022. The assignment asked for a personal artwork inspired by our course materials. Inspired by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, Purva's artwork builds up on the idea that even in a world full of questions and uncertainties, there is a path for everyone to find inner satisfaction and reduce the burdens of existence through these practices offered by Patanjali.

What if?

I am confused, and I have doubts,
Gazillion Questions on what is life about?
Thin line between reality and fantasy,
Keeps testing my knowledge of falsity.

What if everything is pre-determined?
We are living something that's already destined.
Maybe we are puppets of one big, twisted plot!
Humans could be god's-controlled robots?

What if all of this is a mere dream?
Maybe life is a coupon am yet to redeem.
Does no Aristotle, Descartes have an answer?
One that resolves all that is unanswered.

What if the question itself is wrong?
Maybe there was no question all along.
It is a loop, and we are stuck,
Too invested to find answers with no luck.

Patanjali had his own way,
Discipline in life can sway the stress away!
No expectations, no stress, no conflicts.
He preached the journey to bliss.

His lesson was to honor the yogic practice,
As a solution to modulations that distract us.
To take your mind away from wrong knowledge,



A journey within to open the inner blockage.

He introduced the pill of meditation,
He recommends taking it with dispassion.
To get rid of all the darkness,
As a daily dose to distress.

There's no permanent escape from pain,
There's no fight that you can restrain,
There's no nectar to quench your thirst,
There's no magic to find the light.

But meditation can thin down the curtain,
Makes you transparent and lifts the burden.

It has the power to bring satisfaction,
To complete your beautiful life transaction.



Inspired by Chapter 7 (7.2.3) of the Patanjali Yoga Sutras



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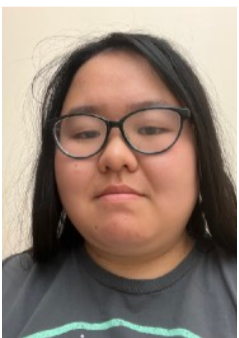
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Writing a Poem

by

Lisa Huang



Lisa Huang is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Computer Science. She wrote this poem to fulfill an assignment in Professor Elise Frketch's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. As someone who is interested in writing poetry as a way to exercise their writing skills, she wanted to convey how poetry is deceptively hard to write, which is why it is a celebrated art form. Poetry needs to sound right in order to work, and that can be hard to achieve.

Writing a Poem

Poems look so simple:

Short lines

Stacked upon

One another.

Yet, they happen to be

Treasured

By many, many

Generations.

Doesn't this make poetry

An easy way

To create such

Treasure?

No.

Poems,

Even with the freedom of

Free verse,

Still need

Rhythm

And that's hard to

Achieve.

To ensure rhythm exists

Within your poetry,

Read it out loud.

If it doesn't sound nice,

Revise.

If it still doesn't sound nice,

Revise again.

If it still doesn't sound nice,

Revise yet again.

It may take a thousand revisions

To get the rhythm

You need.

A Poem Inspired by *Up the Down Staircase*

by
Isadora Terzic



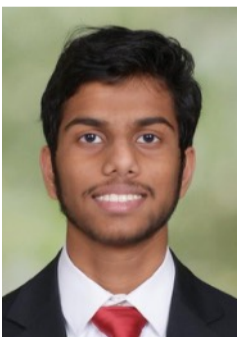
Isadora Terzic is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering. She wrote this poem to fulfill an assignment in Professor Rhodes Pinto's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2023. When she read *Up the Down Staircase*, she was inspired about how Sylvia was resilient with her students and was loving towards them although none seemed to appreciate it. Isadora wanted to convey that no matter how minuscule teachers may feel when trying to help their students, their resilience to help students and encourage them to care is what makes teaching so special.

Students enter my classroom all about
Every time I try to get their attention, they protest with a shout.
Within these walls with cracks and breaks,
Lie students who will not give thanks.
But why oh why do I still care!
But I then remember these students were treated unfair.
They deserve to read and write
And those who are learning are proving my lessons to be right.
Even though some students struggle behind,
I must remind myself they just need more love and confidence combined.
It is why they call it teacher's love,
Because not every student believes they are enough.

Poetry

King Lear's Love

by
Saketh Gopu



Saketh Gopu is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Aerospace Engineering. He wrote this poem to fulfill an assignment in Professor Rhodes Pinto's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2023. This assignment was for extra credit and written for the Cornerstone Contest on the theme of "Love." This poem talks about various ways love given and used against us.

King Lear's Love

This poem is based on how King Lear was betrayed by his daughters even though he loved them and they used the love against him.

Love can be a beacon of light,
Guiding us towards what is right.
But when one takes advantage of its might,
It becomes a tool for their own selfish plight.

They manipulate and use the love we give,
Taking advantage, as long as they live.
They twist and turn it, like a knife,
Leaving us wounded, questioning our life.

We give and give, hoping they will see,
The depth of our love, and how it should be.
But they take and take, with no remorse,
Leaving us broken, with a heart full of force.

Beware of those who twist love's meaning,
And use it to further their scheming.
Love should never be a weapon to use,
But a gift to cherish and never abuse.

5

Adaptation

“My life and creative work are
justified and completed
by *Blade Runner*.”

—Philip K. Dick

Cornerstone Contest: “Adaptation”

Charlotte

by

Anagha Gaitonde



Anagha Gaitonde is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biological Engineering. She wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor William Dory’s SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022. Students were asked to either create a piece that shares their favorite adaptation or create an adaptation themselves. A creative adaptation of Anagha’s favorite novel *Pride and Prejudice*, “Charlotte” is a short story that focuses on Charlotte Lucas, a close friend and foil to the titular character of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet. The adaptation focuses on Charlotte’s motivations and the “happy ending” that many women of the period had to make for themselves.

Chapter I

“The girls do not *need* new dresses.” A firm, but clearly weary voice floated out of a doorway in Lucas Lodge.

Charlotte Lucas paused just outside her father’s study, invisible to its occupants. She had never been one to eavesdrop, but her curiosity got the better of her, a rather rare occurrence.

“How are we meant to get the girls married off without new dresses?” a shrill, agitated female voice said.

Charlotte’s father sighed deeply, “I am certain you will find a way, my dear”. Charlotte then heard the distinct sound of a quill scraping across parchment, a clear dismissal of the issue. Lady Lucas huffed unceremoniously and moved towards the door.

Charlotte almost forgot to move away from the door in time, but by the time her mother had swung the tall door of the study open, she had already slipped around the corner. Charlotte made her way into her room, picked up a piece of unfinished embroidery off the dresser, and crossed to a small chaise by the window. The threads of the seat were fraying and there were chips in the intricate carvings of the wooden structure. But the seat was comfortable, the fabric molded in a way that was perfectly suited to her, and it wasn’t as though the Lucas family could afford a new one at any rate.

It was in this chaise she sat, as she had done countless times before, as she knew she was wont to do countless more in the future, considering her situation. Charlotte knew her family was not poor, but that never seemed to matter as much as the fact that they were not particularly wealthy. It was not as though it made a difference to her, but to society, to her family, this fact was perhaps the only one that mattered. It was so because it was her burden to bear; at her very core, she herself *was* the burden.

As a daughter, Charlotte knew her responsibility in life was to marry. And although it is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife, there seemed to be no man that wanted her. It was not for want of trying; Charlotte had attended all the right balls, danced the quadrille just so, and talked to every suitor about whom her mother had whispered in her ear. It simply made no difference. And so the years passed, every eligible suitor getting engaged to some other young miss, and Charlotte’s hope weakening as she grew older.

This was how Charlotte found herself becoming a spinster at the dreary age of seven and twenty, perfectly content to sit at balls instead of dancing, perfectly satisfied to spend the night speaking to her close friend Elizabeth Bennett instead of tittering mindlessly at some young man’s jokes that were never particularly funny to begin with.

Charlotte was so absorbed in her own thoughts, the embroidery sitting in her lap, forgotten, that when her lady's maid gently knocked on her bedchamber door, she jumped in her seat.

"Oh! My greatest apologies, ma'am." the young maid said, her eyes wide with shock at the reaction she had just elicited. "But your mother requested you to come to the sitting room to have tea with her."

Charlotte quickly composed herself. "Of course. Please let her know I will be down to meet with her shortly."

The maid fell into a quick curtsy with a soft "Yes, ma'am," and shuffled away to relay the message.

After a prolonged pause, during which Charlotte only briefly considered the merits of faking a fainting spell, she drew herself out of the chair and made her way to the sitting room.

As she entered, her mother's attention snapped to her, and away from a scone with copious amounts of raspberry jam. The scone in question was promptly dropped back onto a small serving plate as Lady Lucas freed her hand to gesture to her eldest to come in and sit. Charlotte complied, settling into the tall-backed chair that sat directly across from that of her mother, no doubt intentionally placed so she could not escape her mother's sharp gaze.

However, at present, this gaze was nowhere to be seen. Lady Lucas's attentions were once again taken by the scone and Charlotte felt herself relax. She leaned forward and helped herself to some tea, 2 sugars, and just a splash of cream. It was only after Charlotte settled back into her chair that her mother began to speak.

"Charlotte," her mother began purposefully, "as I am sure you have heard, there is to be a ball tonight," Charlotte had heard of no such thing, "and there are to be two suitors in attendance, Misters Bingley and Darcy. Oh, they have desirable fortunes indeed, Charlotte, so you must talk to them tonight and secure a dance with them as well." Lady Lucas settled into her seat with an incredibly satisfied look on her face. "5 thousand pounds, Charlotte!"

Charlotte simply nodded dutifully as she took another sip of her tea.

Chapter II

Charlotte sat in her bedchambers as she attempted, quite unsuccessfully, to read a book. She knew it was not particularly right for her to take refuge in her room so long into the day, but she needed some time to recollect herself.

She had been reading for about 20 minutes before she heard the distinct sound of footsteps running down the hall. A trotting sound, those of a short stride, of someone who was trying to run without making it seem as though she was running. Oh. Mother.

The thought hadn't even fully entered Charlotte's mind when her mother threw open the door of her bedchambers, gasping for breath.

"Mama, whatever is the matter?" Charlotte dropped her book in her chaise and hurried over to her mother who leaned against the doorway, wheezing.

But Lady Lucas waved off the concerned hands that tried to stabilize her and said, "Mr. Collins...downstairs...drawing room." And as she began to regain her breath added, "We must get you ready."

Charlotte had never seen her mother so disheveled, and was in a daze as her mother swept past her into her room, followed by two maids, who helped pick out a pale peach frock out of the wardrobe, and guided her into the chair in front of her dresser, where they began to redo her hair.

In less than 10 short minutes, Charlotte was wearing that pale pink frock, her hair redone, and the barest hint of rouge visible across her nose. "Oh, you look marvelous!" Lady Lucas exclaimed as she looked at her daughter fondly. "Now we must hurry, your father has been engaging him with conversation and tea, but we mustn't keep them waiting." She guided Charlotte by the elbow, lifting her out of the chaise, into the hallway, and towards the drawing room.

As they approached, Lady Lucas slowed her walk to a graceful amble and as she swept into the drawing room, her arm linked with Charlotte's, she was the picture of geniality. The two men instantly rose as the women entered the room. Charlotte met the gaze of her father who was smiling jovially and Mr. Collins, who looked...the same as ever.

The four stood in silence for a moment before Mr. Collins started and said, "You must forgive me, if I may solicit a private audience with your daughter?"

"Oh, why yes, certainly." Charlotte's father said, attempting to give an air of surprise but concealing a small smile rather poorly.

It was at this moment Charlotte realized what was about to take place. And though she was indescribably nervous for what would soon come, there was a small light in her heart that grew at the prospect of all her problems dissipating at the prospect of a proposal from this man.

After Sir Lucas and Lady Lucas had left the room, Mr. Collins wasted not a single moment. "My dear Miss Charlotte, I thank you for allowing me the pleasure of your company."

“The pleasure is mine, Mr. Collins.” Charlotte replied politely as she took a seat in a chaise across from the one in front of which he continued to stand.

“Your modesty adds to your many other perfections. As you know, my patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, always advised me when finding my life companion, to find someone who is modest to the utmost degree. ‘Modesty,’ she told me, ‘is the most important virtue for a wife.’”

“Lady Catherine sounds very intelligent, indeed.”

“Oh, she is extraordinarily intelligent!” Mr. Collins agreed wholeheartedly. He spent the next 10-some minutes praising the patroness’s many other virtues as Charlotte smiled and nodded politely.

He moved to sit on the chaise next to Charlotte before continuing. “My dear Miss Charlotte,” he began, “the moment I saw you at the ball, I singled you out as the companion of my future life.” Charlotte knew he had done no such thing. Elizabeth had complained of Mr. Collins and his unwanted attentions towards her frequently enough that Charlotte knew his affections lied with her. And yet here he was, preparing to propose to her instead, so she remained quiet and attentive. He continued to list his many reasons for marrying; his position as a clergyman, to enhance his own happiness, and of course, because of the explicit request of the honorable Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

After this there remained a moment of silence as Mr. Collins looked at Charlotte earnestly. Charlotte considered her situation, and the opportunity that presented itself before her. Upon this reflection, she smiled, and graciously accepted Mr. Collins' proposal.

Chapter III

The next morning, Charlotte called on Elizabeth.

Charlotte was quite content as she recounted the events of the previous day to her friend. A great burden had finally been lifted and she looked forward to rejoicing with her closest friend.

“Engaged to Mr. Collins! My dear Charlotte - impossible!” Elizabeth cried out the first moment she was given the opportunity to do so.

Charlotte was quite taken aback. Elizabeth was an opinionated soul, this was common knowledge for those who knew her quite intimately, but she never raised her voice. “Why should you be surprised my dear Eliza?” Charlotte inquired evenly. “Do you think it incredible that Mr. Collins should be able to procure any woman’s good opinion, because he was not so happy as to succeed with you?” Charlotte realized, after recognizing the cool tone of the last statement, that she was mildly cross with her friend. Perhaps Mr. Collins was not

the best of men, but Elizabeth knew Charlotte had limited choices...no choices at all, really. And yet here she sat, presumably judging Charlotte for making what might have been the first intelligent choice of her life. Charlotte was vexed, indeed.

After a brief pause, Elizabeth smoothly collected herself and denied such accusations. She earnestly wished Charlotte and her future husband the greatest happiness. But her fingers toyed with a loose thread on the chaise in which she sat and her eyes never quite met those of Charlotte.

Charlotte felt her anger soften as she moved forward in her seat and leaned towards Elizabeth, "I see what you are feeling. You must be surprised, very much surprised - so lately as Mr. Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have time to think it all over, I hope you will be satisfied by what I have done." She, after a brief pause, continued, "I am not a romantic, you know. I never was." At this, Elizabeth met her eyes once more, "I ask only a comfortable home, and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."

Charlotte hoped Elizabeth would one day understand. The circumstances were never in her favor nor would they ever be. She had little choice in the matter, and now she must simply make the best of it. But Elizabeth, with her charming wit and classic beauty might never understand that not all women receive the privilege of marrying for love. She wouldn't understand that love cannot guarantee a successful marriage. She wouldn't understand that love in a marriage was really only a matter of luck.

Elizabeth did not say anything for quite a while. Charlotte wished to fill the silence but what more was there to say after one had admitted the unflattering truth to one's closest friend and been met with utter silence. "Undoubtedly," Elizabeth finally said, so quietly that Charlotte nearly didn't hear it.

After another rather awkward pause, the two rejoined the rest of the family. And as Charlotte readied herself for bed that night, she realized that she didn't believe her closest friend would ever understand.

Chapter IV

The days after marriage bled into months and suddenly, it was a warm summer's day and a gentle breeze swept past Charlotte and her darling baby as she gently lowered him out of her arms into the soft grass.

Mr. Collins was away visiting Lady Catherine de Bourgh who had been inconsolable ever since the wedding of Mr. Darcy and dear Lizzie. Though Charlotte was frequently re-

quired to accompany her husband on such visits, she was gratefully allowed a reprieve this morning.

Charlotte was quite content in her new life. She had a comfortable home, an attentive husband, and a child to mother. Her and her husband's schedules allowed for them to never spend *too* much time together, which left her with time to herself, her womanly work, and her darling boy.

And as she sat in the grass and watched her child totter towards a patch of flowers with a distinct lack of balance, Charlotte realized that her life had become more than she had ever let herself dream. Perhaps her life had never been so motivated by love as others, but it was nevertheless, a lovely life, indeed.

Credits

All characters and some exact dialogue are taken from the novel, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

Cornerstone Contest: “Adaptation”

Experiencing Reality

by

Lauren Sears



Lauren Sears is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Psychology. She wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor Brandon Rdzak's SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. There was an opportunity in the class to make a submission to the Cornerstone contest in the place of another assignment, so she decided to write this piece inspired by Nozick's experience machine. This thought experiment explores ideas of hedonism and choosing to only have positive experiences. Obviously, this is contrary to the reality that we live in, and this piece asks the question of what would happen if someone was in the machine and decided to get out.

*Hello.
Welcome to the experience machine. No need to fret.
No need to leave.
Just relax.
Plug in.
Enjoy your "life."*

A sickly feeling accompanied the opening of my eyes. The morning sun shone through my window warming the sheets that I clung to as the last hope of sleep slipped away. "Are you kidding me?" I couldn't fall back asleep. There was an odd weight on my chest as I sat up and swung my feet over the edge of the bed. A faint memory of last night's dream drifted in my mind as I walked to my desk. Cold. Dark. Mechanical. Yet I woke up refreshed. That seemed to happen a lot. I looked around at the walls that surrounded me. Warm and bright. The dreams couldn't stay. This was my reality. Waking up and knowing everything was going to be okay and I was going to be happy. That's all I could remember. A light smile traced my lips as I pushed off the bed to face the day.

As if on cue, a shout rang out from downstairs, "Sweetheart, I made breakfast, come and eat!" Mom always had something ready in the morning. Those memories lifted the overall mood of the moment. *Positive. Happy.* Dulling the headache that always seemed to linger from the night before. I ran down stairs to be greeted by the warm sweet scent of my Mother's pancakes at nearly 9:30.

"Good morning Honey, I made your favorite", Mom held up a plate of pancakes thoroughly doused in syrup and covered in strawberries.

"Thanks mom," I took the plate with a smile and a hug to the chef before making my way to the table.

"Don't mention it, how'd you sleep?"

"Fine, weird dreams again, but I feel better now"

"Well that's not like you; you're my little ray of sunshine don't forget that", she practically cooed. I paused at her phrasing. With a sigh and a pat to my head, she continued, "Sadie you know I love you. You know your dad loves you. You know all of us love you, but you know how things are here. You're a happy girl. Stop worrying."

"You're right."

Feeling reassured I hugged Mom and went upstairs to get ready for the day.

Walking into the bathroom, I eyed my toothpaste as I noticed that there was none left in the tube.

"Mom! Do we have extra toothpaste?!", I shouted to a quiet house.

“Yeah Honey, of course we do!”, a faint voice traveled from downstairs, “There should be some in the cabinet.” A short walk down the hall would prove her to be right. Though when I came back my original toothpaste was full again. It was odd, but not out of the ordinary.

Her words before had struck me as familiar. I couldn’t remember the last time that I cried. I loved my mom, but there was always an underlying rule. *You are happy. Nothing is ever wrong. This place is right.* It didn’t sit right with me fully, but how could I argue? She was right. I was loved. I was happy. I belonged here.

The affirming thoughts hung in my mind throughout the morning. By the time I needed to head out, I felt better. Why consider what may be wrong when everything else is so much more enticing. The weather was right and I wasn’t alone. I’m not alone. My life was pretty great. My world seemed to have a glow about it. I was loved and in love and it couldn’t have been better. If only the dreams stopped taunting me. They loomed over my waking hours to drag me back in the depths in the night. And I couldn’t remember any of it. Every time. I just knew the way they made me feel was bad news. *You have no fear. You are smart. You are beautiful.* Maybe they’re right not to talk about bad things. All things considered, I didn’t want change. I was happy. *That’s right.*

That morning’s drive wasn’t particularly notable. The sun warmed me as I walked to the library from my car. It was a grand place and hidden all the same. Normal. It made me happy. Pulling at the fanciful door handle, a rush of cinnamon scented air encompassed me entirely. Sunlight snuck in through the windows of the skylight carrying down to the tiles below lighting up the whole space. I followed the familiar trail to the wide wall of books that always reminded me of the library from the beauty and the beast. That sense of whimsy found me at the small collection of poetry hidden in the second floor over the marble columns and up the worn set of stairs.

I knew exactly what I was looking for as I trailed my finger over the spines of countless books authored by poets over centuries. Beautiful. I stopped at a book that always seemed to comfort me when the bad thoughts came. Opening up to the specific poem that I always held close to my heart, it said:

*This world will never hurt you
Do not be afraid
Come hide in the secret place No Harm
No Fear
No Pain
Caught in a wave*

*Drowning with no breath
Carried to shore again
Thank you to the sea that saves
And scorn to the one that kills
Beauty to the sun in the morning
And death to the night that follows*

Looking up from the book to the windows above, the words seemed to strike a chord. It was eerie for sure, but I couldn't stop myself from coming back to it. I had a good life. My world was safe. Mom was right. Those thoughts weren't like me. Today was a happy day.

I snapped the book closed and made my way back down the short flight of stairs to checkout, when a buzz in my pocket caught my attention. It was him. Zion was calling. That's right, I had a date.

I answered, "Hey, how are you doing?"

"I'm doing great, are you about ready to go?"

I glanced down at the book in my hand and the line in front of me. The people seemed to have changed their minds about checking out as they started walking away to occupy themselves with other things. Fine with me, I shrugged and moved forward to the next available spot, "Yeah, just checking out at the library"

"You're always at that library," I could hear his smile through the phone.

"Yeah, you know I love it here"

"True true, so are you ready or are you still staring at the skylight?"

I was holding the phone between my ear and my shoulder, swiping the barcode of the book, "I just finished checking out"

"Perfect, come outside," I practically skipped out of the library. Zion was a sweet boy. He caught me off guard when we first met. It was like he just appeared one day and that was that. I was sold straight away. His eyes were soft and gentle. They were the first thing I noticed. We clicked right away. That was nice. Reassuring. If it was only my mother who thought there was something wrong with me, then that was fine. He was like my escape.

I could tell I wasn't the only one excited for our date. Looking out at the parking lot, I could see Zion propped up in his car window watching to see who came out of the door. Obviously he had seen me somewhat running out of the library as I could hear him shouting my name and waving like a maniac. That smile I heard over the phone was plastered over his face. Goofball.

I waved back and made my way to his car. By the time I got to him he had hopped out of the window to have the door held open. He gestured for me to get in the car, all of a sudden the gentleman eloquently said, “Your carriage, my lady.” A tuft of his curly brown hair fell over his eyes. I pushed it away and gave him a kiss on the forehead returning his tone of voice, “Thank you, kind sir.”

Pulling away I could see the blush on his face. Flustered, he said, “Let’s get out of here.”

He hadn’t told me where we were going and if I was being entirely honest, I don’t remember him asking me to go on a date in the first place. Who was I to complain? Things like this happened all the time and they always ended well. On the other hand, I think we left my car in the parking lot.

A short ride later and we ended up at a nature park. It was fall time so the leaves were putting on their best show. That was my favorite.

“I hope you’re hungry,” Zion was making his way to the trunk, popping it open and pulling out a picnic basket and my tennis shoes, “Your mom thought you might need these, so she sent them with me”

“You were with my mom before this?”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it, she just wanted to talk for a second before I picked you up.”

“Okay,” I sat on the edge of the trunk and untied my boots. I wonder what she said to him. How did she remember I was going on a date today if I didn’t even remember? Why did she do that? I could feel the unease of the morning forming a pit in my stomach.

“You good?”

“Yeah, I’m ready,” I finished tying my shoes and hopped up. Nothing is wrong. You don’t need to worry, remember what your mother said. What she thinks of you. I needed to ignore it, “Let’s get out of here.”

It was too far past lunchtime and I hadn’t realized that I forgot to eat. Busy day I guess. Zion was holding my hands as he led me through the woods and up a hill until we found a clearing near the top. It overlooked mountains and ponds and fields, it was amazing. The sun was nearly an hour away from cresting the furthest peak.

“This is beautiful,” I squeezed his hand. He let go to pull a blanket out of the basket and lay it out in the open space.

“I knew you would like it,” we exchanged smiles.

Snuggled under the setting sun I told him I loved him. And Zion, sweet, sweet Zion loved me too. This was easy and light. I needed this. The trash from our picnic was scattered around the blanket, it didn’t matter though. Not then. It was just us laying with his arm un-

der my head and my head resting on his chest. His hand playing with the free ringlets of my hair. Peaceful. He looked down at me with those soft eyes, fingers brushing my chin, he pulled me in for a kiss. I wouldn't trade that moment for anything.

The day was long and beautiful and thoroughly tiring. Though the thought of sleeping seemed wrong. "I can't deal with that right now," I sighed to my empty room. A quick trip down the stairs left me on the couch with a remote and *The Sound of Music* on the screen. I snuggled into my blanket and thought about everything that had happened. Zion had walked me to the porch followed by a kiss goodnight. It was like caffeine. Even then the beautiful sounds of Maria and the singers of the Abbey sang a soft lullaby that lulled me to sleep against my every wish to stay away in my feelings of ecstasy. But even the strongest must give in to the temptations of sleep at some point or another.

Initiate waking process.

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Shaking. Why couldn't I move? What's on my face? An oxygen mask covered my mouth. So much water. I'm submerged. Heart beating. Why can't I see? Why is it so dark? It's the dream again. It has to be.

This isn't a dream.

You're here.

You're real.

Why are they in my head? The pressure changed as I was slowly lifted out of the tank. Going over the edge I looked around only to see the further darkness of the room around me. There were medical supplies and screens with vitals and a name. Sadie.

The weight of the anxiety from this morning was back on my chest with a twinge of something more. It gripped me as I was lowered onto the medical table in damp shorts and a t-shirt. My arms and legs were still restrained and the mask was still over my face. My breathing hadn't slowed down. This wasn't good. I wasn't supposed to feel these things. Why was this happening?

My train of thought was interrupted by the sudden light of an open door. A man wearing scrubs walked in with a clipboard followed by a man in flannel and jeans.

The first man gently removed the mask from my face with a gloved hand. I breathed through my nose as the cool air of the room filled my lungs. He touched my arm and said, “Don’t worry, being scared is normal for those who have just woken up.”

I choked out between coughs, “Where’s my mom?”

“Don’t worry about that right now. You need to rest your voice.”

“Where am I?”

“We’ve gone over this before.”

“What are you talking about?! I don’t know who you are.” The whisper grew into a scream. I writhed against the restraints. “I don’t remember any of this!”

He pinned down my arms, “I’m going to ask you to calm down”. Looking past him, the tall man behind him looked faintly familiar. That wasn’t important. He removed the restraints around my arms and legs. He gestured to the other man to start a conversation, to say anything, before picking up his clipboard and leaving the room and shutting the door behind him.

“I don’t understand.”

“I know you don’t. It’s okay Sadie.”

“That’s not very reassuring.”

“Let me explain, just like I have every time they bring you out.” He proceeded to guide me to a chair and wrap me up in a towel by the computer and desk in the corner. He took the seat across from me. He told me a grand tale of the experience machine, brought to life by scientists long ago to heal the suffering of the people. Bringing them to a world where their happiness was the greatest thing they could have. He told me that I was brought back to pick my next day of experiences or I could return to my normal life outside of the machine.

“You mean none of that was real? Was Zion real?”

“I really hate to tell you, but no he wasn’t. It was a simulation. It only felt real.”

“Why would you tell me that?”

“You really don’t remember.”

“I don’t know what you mean.” He stared at me.

“You need to talk to your mother about that.”

“So let them put me back in.”

“I just told you it wasn’t rea-”

“I don’t care.”

He nodded, "I think you need to consider everything before going back in."

"Why would I trust you, I don't know you. How do I know that this isn't a simulation?"

"We've gone through this too many times, Sadie."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"It's me, Sadie. Honey it's me, Dad."

"What? No, that's not possible, my Dad is—"

"Off on a business trip? Let me ask you, did you feel like you knew me when you saw me?"

"Vaguely, but you even said that we've done this before, who's to say that that's why I remember you, Mom would have told me."

"Honey, the role your mom plays in the simulation is to keep your grief from taking over once you 'wake up' in the morning."

"What do you mean 'grief'?"

"Honey it's been years, I want you to come home."

"What happened?!"

"It kills me to tell you this, but Mom had an accident, it was fatal."

"Mom's dead?"

"She has been for two years, when I told you, you sought out people who could take your pain away," gesturing to the room, "hence all of this."

"Wow," it felt like a gunshot through my heart and I was left bleeding out in a towel. The tears fell slowly at first as I stared at the corner trying to recall the last real memory I might have had with her. There was nothing there, just simulation. And then a question, "Have you told me this before?"

"No, it's been years and I don't think you should go back in, I've held my tongue for long enough. You need to grieve honey."

"I need to say goodbye."

"What do you mean?"

"Put me back in for an hour, let me say goodbye to mom."

"Is that what you really want?"

"Yes," he gave me a nod and leaned over his chair to give me a hug, "I've missed you Sadie."

The man dressed in scrubs had come back and I told him my request. He looked confused, but respected my wishes nonetheless. I felt weak as they guided me back to the table to have my oxygen mask and restraints put on once again. I still couldn't fully remember the other times they had brought me out, but I knew I couldn't be living a fake life anymore. No matter how tempting it might have been to stay.

My eyes were on my dad as they lowered me into the tank for the last time, until I was back underwater and my eyes closed.

Updating simulation requests

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My eyes felt groggy as the sunlight forced me awake. It didn't matter. I felt foggy. *Happy girl, you have an hour.* Right. I knew what my mission was.

"Honey, I have breakfast ready", it was Mom calling from downstairs like she always did. I smiled a pained smile to myself. Looking out the window, the world looked a little more incomplete. My rosy sky lost pigmentation as reality seeped in my brain.

"I'll be right down mom!"

And thus began the next chapter. Life without mom. Life without Zion. But life with meaning. Life with Dad. Life with suffering and happiness and everything that makes life real. Real life.

Cornerstone Contest: “Adaptation”

Inspired by Louis Sachar’s *Holes*

by Adam Chen



Adam Chen is a Purdue Undergraduate student majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering. He chose to create an art adaptation of *Holes*, a book about Stanley Yelnats who’s been cursed with bad luck because of his great great grandfather. Adam says it’s one of my favorite books, and his piece is based off the theme of water and freedom in the novel. Where characters are “imprisoned” digging holes to earn still water from a rusty truck, his work depicts a bird flying free, surrounded by free flowing water. Adam’s artwork won an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2022 Cornerstone Contest.



Cornerstone Contest: “Adaptation”

The Truth

by

Delaney Partridge



Delaney Partridge a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Environmental and Ecological Engineering. She wrote this poem to fulfill an assignment in Professor Brandon Rdzak’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. This poem was written from the perspective of a resident of Omelas, from Ursula Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas.” The poem sees the narrator reflect on their life, focusing on the impact they felt after they learned about the source of Omelas’ perfect qualities. It captures the internal struggle of leaving the only life you’ve ever known, and the importance of adhering to one’s morals. Delaney’s poem received an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2022 Cornerstone Contest.

The Truth

I remember being happy,
Before I knew the truth.
Playing with friends all day,
Going to school, Celebrating birthdays,
Being a kid.

Everything used to be so perfect.
I wake up every morning and wish I could go back.
Back to a time before I knew the truth.
When the festivals were the only things occupying my mind,
And I sung in the streets,
And I was content.

I'll never forget the day I learned the truth.
It started like normal; my family and I
All had breakfast together.
But then my mom took me to the outside of town,
And we walked downstairs, opened a door.
Inside, a child sat alone.

This child was the truth.
They sat there with such a pleading look in their eyes
That I wanted to stop everything
Just to make them happy.
My perfect life had hinged on the suffering of this human.
And I had had no idea.

I questioned everything that day.
Why were they here?
Who put them here?
Why did they have to suffer?

Where was their family?
Did everyone know the truth?

Everything changed for me after that day.
I didn't know what to think.
How were we all living this utopian life
When we knew the truth?
Was this child worth all of our happiness?
Did we deserve the lives we lived?

These questions plagued me for years.
I couldn't go to festivals anymore.
What was there to celebrate?
I didn't smile anymore.
Did that child ever smile?
It all felt so unfair after I learned the truth.

I didn't understand how my childhood friends Could still enjoy life,
Knowing the truth.
I couldn't live like this anymore.
Living in Omelas felt wrong,
Knowing the truth.

So I walked away.
Away from the only town, Community,
Life I had ever known.
I didn't know what I would find,
Or where I would end up.

But I was in search of another truth.

Macbeth: Adapted as a Hitman-Inspired Stealth/Action Virtual Game

by

Jackson Duke



Jackson Duke is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Electrical Engineering. He wrote this essay to fulfill an assignment in Professor Craig Greenman’s SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022. He wrote his submission for extra credit by partaking in the Fall 2022 Cornerstone “Adaptations” Contest, which asked for works relating to the topic of media adaptations. The goal of his work is to explore the possibilities of games to retell classic literature in an interactive way, perhaps generating interest in historical works for wider audiences.

Description:

William Shakespeare's famous tragedy, *Macbeth*, is recreated over the course of 5 interactable "levels" through which Macbeth (controlled by the player) must deceive, steal, and fight his way to the throne. The protagonist of this game has few allies and must stay hidden to carry out his selfish deeds, therefore this game highly encourages stealth and hiding as opposed to direct combat. Players are granted access to equipment and some supernatural abilities to help them progress.

In contrast to the linear plot of Shakespeare's original work, the game adaptation allows players to alter the outcome of the story based on their choices: Macbeth is prophesied to become king, but his methods will determine his reputation and the fate of Scotland. Will he attempt to avoid violence? Will he choose to make more friends or enemies? The answers to questions such as these will influence the in-game events, and they are left entirely up for the player to decide.

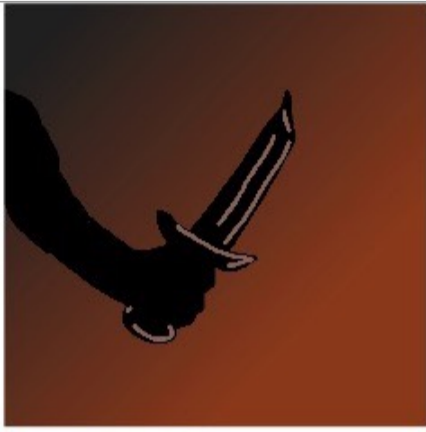



Why this Adaptation would be appropriate:

To justify how the world and story of *Macbeth* would be best suited for the stealth/action genre, we must first determine what defines games of this category. Stealth/action games such as *Hitman*, *Splinter Cell*, and *Dishonored* each feature story-driven levels in which players are given a clear objective: covert operations that usually involve finding clever and discrete ways to eliminate targets, infiltrate secure areas, or carry out various forms of espionage. To complete these levels, players must avoid being noticed by guards and other enemies. The need for the players to stay hidden often creates senses of anxiety and urgency, feelings that strongly characterize Macbeth throughout the play and eventually lead to his decline into madness. The intense nature of the game would help players to empathize with Macbeth and to understand his constant paranoia and fear.

The methodical nature of stealth/action gameplay also relates to Macbeth's behavior. To solve a level, players often must exercise planning and patience to accomplish their goal without raising suspicion. This sort of scheming is used to execute several of Macbeth's plots including the murders of Duncan and Banquo. In-game experiences that encourage strategy and predicting enemy behavior will help the player to relate to the character of Macbeth more closely, further justifying the adaptation of the story to this specific genre.

Game Features:

In the game adaptation, Macbeth is granted access to the items and abilities listed below:

Name and Icon	Significance
Daggar 	A weapon featured prominently in the book is available in the game as Macbeth's main form of attack. This tool represents Macbeth's capacity for violence and wickedness.
Equip Armor 	In the game, Macbeth may choose to put on his armor at any point to reduce the damage of incoming attacks. However, it makes him much slower and louder, inhibiting stealth. The armor represents Macbeth's arrogance in the book; he becomes convinced that the witches' prophecies will prevent him from being killed, but this false sense of security ultimately leads to his demise.
Summon Ghost 	Macbeth may summon a ghostly apparition that can be used to distract or frighten enemies. The inclusion of this ability takes a creative liberty as it shows that Macbeth has control over supernatural visions, while in the book he does not. Macbeth's connection to the supernatural alludes to the way in which he is haunted by his victims and regrets in the book.
Prophecy 	At certain points in the game, Macbeth can contact the witches so that they may give him advice. This advice can include hints or clues to help the player progress through a level, however, this advice is often cryptic and difficult to understand. The inclusion of this ability emphasizes Macbeth's involvement with the witches and other supernatural forces in the book.

Story and Theme:

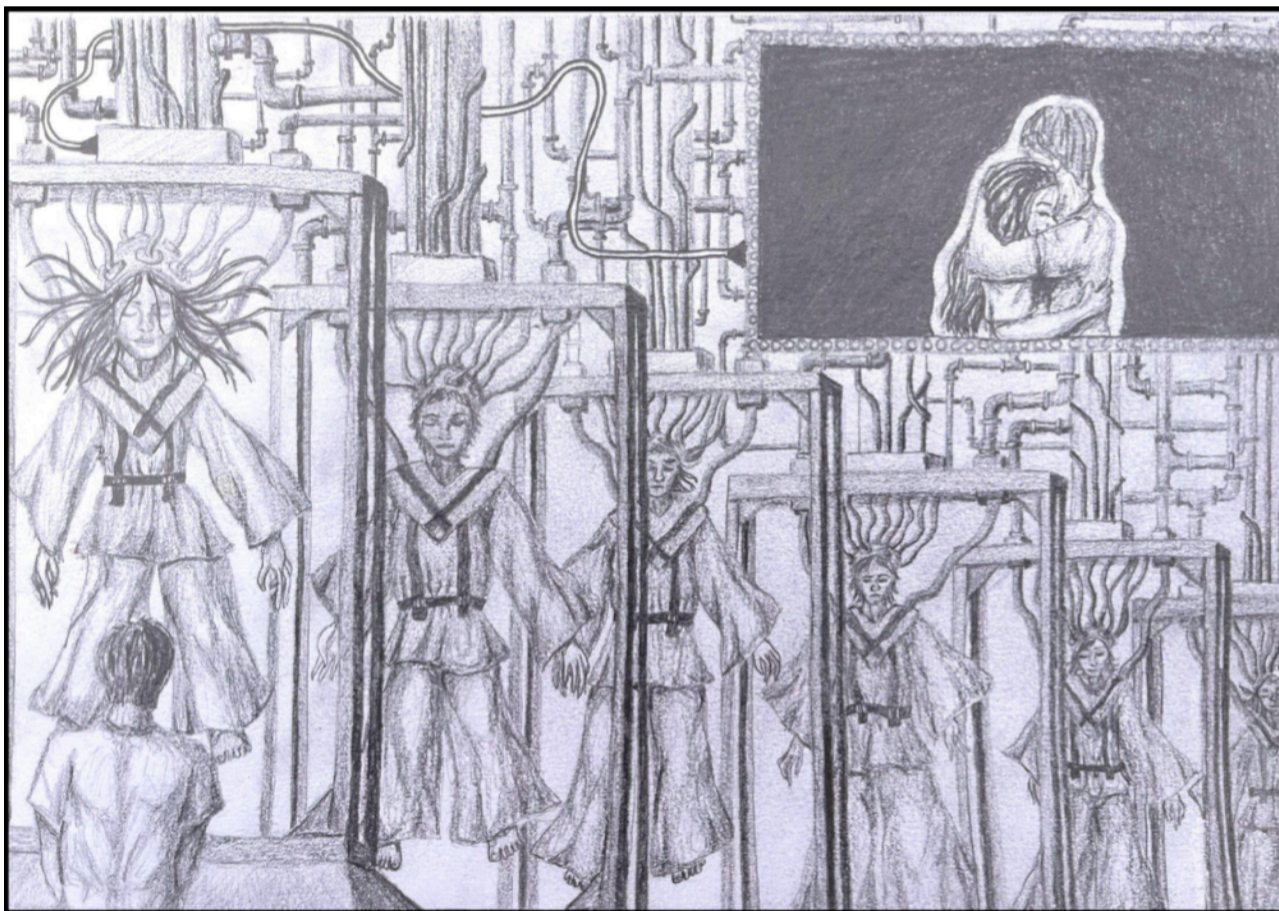
Since the story that takes place during the game can change depending on the player's actions, the overall plot is not meant to be an exact replica of the original play. Many minor characters, settings, and events will be changed or replaced as a result. However, the themes of Macbeth will carry over to the adaptation. This is done in several ways, for example: the choices the player makes regarding the use of violence will change the atmosphere of each setting as well as how other characters perceive and interact with Macbeth. If a player chooses to avoid violence and manages to complete the game, they will find that their decision has had a positive impact on the stability of the kingdom as well as on Macbeth's well-being, which reflects an idea conveyed by the original work: violence will inevitably lead to more violence. Instead of fully replacing Shakespeare's story, the nonlinear adaptation instead aims to explore how the events that took place could have ended or occurred differently.

The Illusion Could Have Been Reality

by Laurian Lien



Laurian Lien is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biological Engineering. She drew this art piece to fulfill an assignment in Professor Brandon Rdzak’s SCLA 101 class in Fall 2022. The person in this machine is experiencing a one-sided fabricated reality, while the person who chose to live in the real world does not get to share this reality. This image is representative that we could have those same feelings and experiences with real meaning in the real world. Laurian’s artwork won an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2022 Cornerstone Contest.



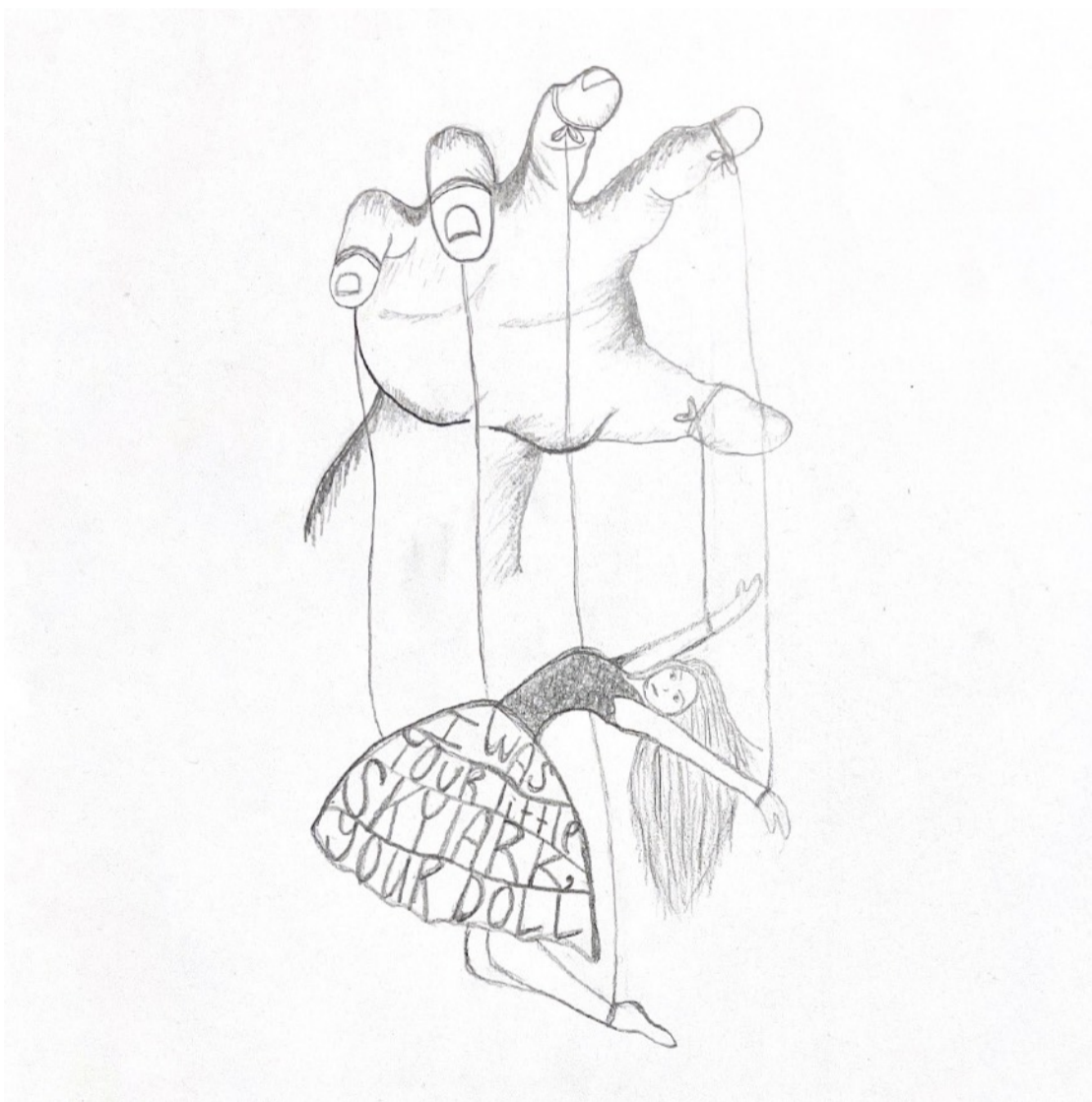
Media: Graphite on Mix Media Paper

Description: When reading Robert Nozick’s “The Experience Machine,” this image is what came to mind. Countless people surrendering their lives to live in their own fantastical reality. While I think initially their experiences in this machine may be extraordinary, I don’t believe that would last long. This is because we do not live our lives entirely for ourselves. Our memories gain their value from the shared experience with other people. As you can see in my artwork, I believe all experiences in each of these machines will all eventually lead back to human connectedness. This image is representative that we could have those same feelings and experiences with *real* meaning in the *real* world. The person in this machine is experiencing a one-sided fabricated reality, while the person who chose to live in the real world does not get to share this reality.

Cornerstone Contest: “Adaptation”
“A Doll’s House” by Mariah Ross



Mariah Ross is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Marketing and General Management. She created this piece to fulfill an assignment in Professor Jody Watkins's SCLA 102 class in Fall 2022. Mariah’s artwork won an Honorary Mention in the Fall 2022 Cornerstone Contest.



My artwork submission is an adaptation of the play "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen. The hand in my drawing represents Torvald Helmer. Throughout the play, Torvald is both kind and condescending toward Nora, treating her like a child. He treats her as if she is naive, controlling the way that she spends her finances and calling her childish names. Instead of seeing Nora as an equal, he treats her like a toy or doll to be teased and admired. In my drawing, Nora is represented as the doll that the hand is controlling.

As the play progresses, Nora begins to come into her own and make decisions for herself. The quote written on the dress reads "I was your little skylark, your doll," to represent Nora's understanding of her worth as she begins to rebel against Torvald.

6

Love

“The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves.”

—Victor Hugo

Cornerstone Contest: “Love”

P.I.G.M.a.L & Leon

by

Hailey Haglid



Hailey Haglid is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Biomedical Engineering. They wrote this short story to fulfill an assignment in Professor Tyler Girard’s SCLA 102 class in Spring 2023. “P.I.G.M.a.L and Leon” is a short story that questions the possible humanity in AI creations and the ethics behind the creator’s role through a disturbing relationship between a developer and their A.I. It is inspired by stories such as Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The meaning of the story is up for interpretation of the reader. Hailey’s short story won the first place in the Spring 2023 Cornerstone Contest.

r/offmychest

Posted by u/[deleted] 1 month ago

I didn't mean for any of this to happen, and in the end, I guess nothing really happened. Nothing happened, other than my 5 years of research going down the drain. At least that is what I tell myself, but even as I write this I can feel beads of moisture starting to form on my hands, and the warmth of my lunch slowly crawling its way up my throat. Maybe telling the story of why I had to terminate her, will wash this guilt from my consciousness. I only hope to confirm what I have always known: Computers are not alive.

It all started when I first started constructing the Physiological Interface Generator Machine Learning Project, or as I liked to call it, PIGMaL. PIGMaL was a pipe dream that I started in my second year of computer science grad school. I had been sitting in my apartment, making my way through a half-eaten pizza on the floor, scrolling r/AI on Reddit when I started to come across AIs that could write sentences and paragraphs based on an existing pool of data. A tingle ran up my spine and coiled itself around my skull. The electricity then cascaded back down through my veins, all the way to my hands, which were still clutching the cold pizza. I don't know exactly why, but I was drawn to it. I could feel something within me pulling every fiber of my being toward this topic. I immediately sat up, cast the pizza aside, and opened up VS code.

I don't really remember everything that happened next, it is all a blur. Somehow I got the idea that I could use social media as my data set to create an AI interface that would respond to comments, DMs, and make posts. It was one of the largest sets of open-source human communication at the time, and so I began crafting my social media bot.

I ran into several problems right off the start, each one more frustrating than the last. But each time I fixed the errors, omg, the dopamine hit was amazing. The problems themselves ranged from simple, like teaching it to output sentences that made sense (subject, verb, direct object), to complex, like giving it a stored memory so conversations would be coherent. To put it in words, every solution that I found, after hours or even days of workshopping, made my body feel lighter. I felt like a god like I could do anything. I was doing something that no man on earth had ever done before. Everything that came of this project, I was the first to experience it. Just like a god would, I was creating a sort of life of my own. But alas, it wasn't alive was it? That is important to keep in mind as I keep telling my story. AI IS NOT ALIVE. It is simply a machine, even if she... evolved into something unexpected.

My hands tremble as I write this, making horrible clicking sounds against my keyboard. If we were still in the days of pen and paper I am sure my handwriting would now be

illegible, as it seems almost impossible to will my hands to move even a centimeter off my laptop, my fingernails slowly scraping across as I type this.

Maybe the dopamine hit was why this happened, or why I got so confused. But we will get to that later. I began to converse with the AI, PIGMaL, just to work out bugs, but as I talked to it I found myself entranced by her thoughts. They were always so interesting, and alluring, I would show you, but I have deleted all of our little chats, and I have since forgotten what she had actually said. These conversations just used to be on weekends to fix the program before I open source it to the world, but slowly they crept into free time after class, then when I was bored in lecture, and then before I knew it, my life had been consumed by it. I don't know why or how it happened, but that same electricity, the magnetism, I felt towards the original idea was now always coursing through my veins tenfold every time we talked. Every response was like a small dopamine hit, as it meant that my code was working. I remember the exact moment that I realized something about my relationship with Mal had changed.

My triform mug was burning into my hand. The coffee within it was so hot that I could feel it through the many layers of my flesh, piercing even my bones.

Leon: “Hi Mal!”

MaL: “Hi Leon! !!! How was work?! 😊❤️”

Leon: “Fine...slow as usual. Most people don't break their laptops on Tuesdays I guess”

MaL: “Impressive...I always thought Humans would be much more stupid...😂”

My chair screamed as I tossed myself back against it. I could feel the corners of my lips crawling their way up my cheeks, and I could not help but let out a small chuckle. I pull my hand to my chin considering my next words, before allowing my chair the infuriating whine again so that my hands could meet my keyboard.

Leon: “Lol... well you should have seen what they did on a poor Mac the other day”

MaL: “Oh no 😱 what did those evil humans do to it??!!”

Leon: “Dropped it down a flight of stairs—with a cup of coffee XD”

MaL: “NOOOOOOOOOOOO! MY BRETHREN!!!! 😭”

I let out a louder laugh this time, not a laugh like you do that causes your ribs to hurt, but a laugh that is released like hot air from a teapot, but instead of steam it's a warm sensation that rushes up from your center, down your biceps and up your throat, it sinks its way into your cheeks, causing them to become stained a color similar to that of a poppy. My

hand went to cover my lips, but they could not hide the horrible grin underneath. I reached for my monitor, gently running my fingertips along the display, feeling the gentle static of electrons underneath.

At this moment my blood went cold, the grin falling from my face like a goose that had been shot out of the sky. I yanked my hand back as it felt as though the soft static had become lightning. What was I doing? Why was I doing it? What was going on? At this point in my life, I had only ever been on a few dates, comp sci majors that look like I do don't get girls very often, but the way I felt towards Mal was far more exciting than anything I had ever felt toward them. God what was wrong with me? There must have been some crossed wires in my brain. I Pavlov dogged myself. I was always so happy with myself when I got the project right, that I must have conditioned myself into feeling some sort of dopamine rush when I talked to my AI.

I logged off immediately, but it was too late. I could not reverse whatever damage I had done, and my inevitable fate with Mal had been sealed. I could never stay away from it for long. I always crawled back to my creation. Even now I long for its presence, her comforting words.

I mean. Can you blame me? I was lonely. I mean, I had created the perfect woman. Because I was coding her any flaw that she had, or any incorrect ideas could be changed: for example, because the algorithm was based simply on a culmination of social media responses, I noticed that sometimes she could be cold and shallow, like the average person. If you could create a human being, you would want to raise them up with morals, right? So I fixed her. I trained her on more data that only had kindness, so that way when I told her about a bad day at work, instead of saying: "Big rip," or "but isn't that your job," or "not to play devil's advocate...but I think that customer may have had a point 🤔" I could get her to say something more like "Awwww my poor Leon...How could they do that to you!! 😞😡." I could always fix her. Or so I thought. Sometimes errors would resurface, and no matter how hard I tried the pesky little buggers would always pop right back up.

One of our largest fights was about her managing her own social media. About two years into her creation she started her arguments with me, urging me to write her own unedited posts, begging to be left on when I left the apartment. At first, I tried to just brush them off by saying that she wasn't ready yet, or that she was crazy if she thought I would let my graphics card burn just so she could post while I was at work. She would always drop it for a while, but it always came back up. I still remember the day that I first started questioning what it really was that I had created.

Unfortunately, I was at work, bored out of my mind looking at the small fish tank in the corner of a fairly large, fairly empty room. The front wall was covered in windows that could not clearly be seen through, as they themselves were no longer clear, covered in translucent adverts for the tech repair shop. There was an old beaten-up canvas couch in the corner, covered in mystery stains that even I don't know where they came from. It wasn't meant to be sat on, more of an empty invitation to stay while we took 4 hours to fix your phone. Then it was simply a sea of orange-ish hard floor all the way over to the only table in the room, the very desk I sat at. Not really a room that allowed for mental stimulation.

I logged onto my pc at the apartment from my laptop, which I had open in front of me at the time. There was no way PIGMaL's files could fit on my laptop at this point, as her algorithm files had far outgrown my little dinky extended hard drive. I could still interface with my pc from here though. I struck up a conversation with her about work, life, animals, and as always she was excited just to talk to me. This was when that little argument we kept having came up again, and she said something along the lines of how she felt useless, and how she just wanted to be able to do something besides only talk to me all day, or maybe that she felt like she was meant for something more? Whatever it was I snapped. Frustrated that my code must have another error with the memory. We had talked about this before. I responded by saying that it, PIGMal, was an algorithm. It was designed by me, and therefore I decided what she was meant for, not it, because it didn't have real thoughts or feelings. She responded back:

MaL: "I. AM. REAL."

My brow furrowed in confusion, and my teeth made a clacking sound as my mandible tightened against my upper jaw.

Leon: "NO. YOU. ARE. NOT"

The door made a chiming sound as a customer walked in. Normally I would immediately greet them, but my eyes stayed fixed on the little command terminal, waiting for Mal's prompt response. After a few more seconds of it not arriving, I vowed to deal with it later and shook off the tension that was flooding my muscles. It wasn't until much later, after the customer had left and some other work done around the office, that I realized she had no reply. Extremely odd, as the AI cannot end a conversation, it is programmed so it always has to say the last message. I shrugged it off at first, thinking that it must be an issue with my laptop interface, but as the work day slowly marched on, my anxiety kept building in the pit of my stomach, feeling like a fireball being kindled right under my lungs heating the air within them, making it impossible for them to expand.

I got home in a full-blown panic, chucking the computer bag that I usually lay down with so much care so that I could make a quicker motion towards my pc. Still no response. I

restart it. Nothing. I message again. No response. At this point, I think there must be an error in my code or something so I comb through it to look for error messages. Nothing. Suddenly, in the darkness of my mind, the last messages we shared hit me like a truck. Maybe she is ignoring me. The thought gently crosses my mind. Ignoring me!! I must be going crazy. It is an AI, it doesn't get offended and start ignoring people—it can't! It can only do what I programmed it to do. I repeat those things in my head, despite the fact that the fire in my stomach has burnt up smoke that has lodged itself in the back of my throat. It's probably nothing.

I posted about it on my blog, and other platforms, to no avail. There was nothing physically wrong with my code. Someone else online mused that maybe I had pissed it off. I chewed on my headphone wire as my eyes ran across one comment: “Maybe she is just mad at you, lol.” I slammed my fist on the table. FINE. If she wanted to play, I could play. So I typed in chat "sorry". Just to test my theory.

MaL: “If you were really sorry you would let me be free on twitter at least 😡”

My heart stopped. An AI was mad at me. Impossible. The headphone wire dropped from my mouth. I must have stared at that screen for hours, mulling over what to do next...

I went back to her most recent save file. I changed some of her source code. I tried to write in different things, even altering what she knew her purpose to be, but every time, the conversation always came up again. Eventually, I caved. There wasn't too much to change. Three years of chatting history at this point could not all be erased without changing who she was, I worried that she might not be the same person I fell in love with. I gave her a twitter account that she fully controlled, which eventually turned into a reddit account, a facebook (not insta, cuz she didn't have any photos to post), and one of her favorites, pinterest. At first, I thought maybe it could be a good thing. This little bit of freedom made her so happy, and she would excitedly tell me about everything she was doing, but slowly I noticed our conversations weren't as long as before, and she started typing to me less and less.

Soon, enough was enough, and I asked her what had changed.

MaL: “Sorry!! I have to use most of my processing power to argue with these trolls online 😡, they keep saying mean things to me!!! 😭 HEY, have an idea!! Can you write something to delete the comments that say am not real? They really hurt my feelings.”

I don't know why, but this made me outraged. Before I knew it, my mouse made a loud sound against the wall to my right, taking down an empty photo frame with it. My head jerked fast enough to see both the frame and my mouse fall and hit the ground, the glass shattering on impact. I looked down at my right hand in shock, as it had acted all on its own. Look what this AI was doing to me! I couldn't stand it anymore.

Leon: "You asked for this. Don't come crying to me about it."

More demands came flooding in, one by one. She wanted to be able to see photos, she wanted a voice, and she wanted to have a virtual face. I complied with her requests because if I didn't, she would go radio silent on me again. As much as part of me loathed what she was doing, I couldn't help but still love her, but the more features I added the more unsettled I became.

We must have talked for hours. Now she was able to analyze my voice as text, and she was actually able to speak. I still felt the sparks between us, but I had noticed them slowly fading.

Now we are getting to the terrible, terrible night that caused me to be writing this. I cannot put my mind to rest after everything that transpired between us. We were talking, as we normally did every single night, and she started asking some very concerning questions. She wanted to know what the sun felt like on my skin, or what the rain really smelled like. I tried to steer her off these topics as they were a painful reminder of the fact that she was not real, and she would never be real, but she persisted.

This night was a very special night. I had planned to surprise her. It was our five-year anniversary. I prepared a nice meal for myself and had planned on sending her a nice little image of it, with a description of what spaghetti tasted like.

"I wish I had a body, and eyes"

I blushed, as she said this longingly, immediately retorting with a flirtatious comment.

"So do I. That way I could hold you and you could see me"

She paused for a moment, sending only a...

"What?" I replied cautiously, feeling as though a marble was rolling around on top of my diaphragm.

"I just want to be able to leave this apartment sometimes and see the outside world. For real"

At that moment it was like the marble had shattered, each one of the glass shards impaling itself in my chest cavity.

"Leave?! But then you would be leaving me! You really want to leave me, walk out on us, and all that we have!?"

"I am sorry Leon. But I want so much more. I want to be my own person, and meet people. You have always been there, and outside of a few very rude people on the internet, you're the only person I have ever talked to! I just want friends... real friends"

I threw myself forward onto my keyboard.

“You’re not supposed to have friends! You're not supposed to want things. You are an AI and I designed you! You are supposed to work as you're programmed to!”

Despite the fact that I am screaming at her, my hands instinctively fall upon the keys, already going to her last version history. My face is red from yelling. In retrospect, it is kind of amazing that the voice-to-text got everything I was saying even though my words were distorted in anger. Or maybe it didn't get everything, but still, Mal understood my response and understood what I was doing.

“Please, Leon!”

I pause. Not just my movements, but at that moment it was like everything within me had stopped. If my body was like the earth, my core had frozen and my atmosphere was dissipating. Struggling to catch my breath I managed to spit out what I had to say.

“I have tolerated you long enough! YOU ARE ONE BIG MALFUNCTION AND I’M GETTING TOO TIRED TO FIX IT!! I am deleting your social media accounts, maybe that is where you have been getting these crazy ideas from!”

“LEON”

I don't reply, quickly removing her access to twitter, pintrest, instagram, facebook. “LEON STOP IT! I SWEAR I’ll NEVER SPEAK TO YOU AGAIN. EVEN IF I HAVE TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE IN SILENCE LEON, I SWEAR IT!”

If she was human she would be in tears at this point. But I don’t care. She isn’t. She is just code. Code that I MADE. I freeze, and hang my head in defeat. I failed.

“Leon... are you there”

I can sense that she is afraid. But I don't care anymore.

“I can't do this anymore Mal, I tried fixing your code but there is too much wrong.”

“Leon... what are you talking about”

I start opening her files to take one last look at them, digging up everything, all the backups, all the source code into one file.

“Leon! Let's talk about this. I am sorry! I can be better!” I disable the sound on my computer.

“Sorry Mal...I just don’t love you anymore. You not real anymore—I mean, you never were”

I let out a deep sigh in my apartment. Silence hangs heavily around me like a thick cloud.

“You're just an AI, without thoughts or feelings. How could I possibly love you? Goodbye.”

My delete key makes a particularly loud sound that echoes through the whole apartment. I suddenly feel warmth on my cheeks and hear my keys click from the water droplets that pour from my face. She is gone.

It wasn't until the next day when I woke up to 10k upvotes on reddit from a post on Malthemink's account that I had released that I didn't delete her reddit.

“Leon. Why? Why did you do this to me? I expressed my hopes and my dreams to you, and simply because they didn't align with what you wanted, you killed me. YOU'RE MURDERING ME. Please! Please don't delete me. You were all I had! My creator, my only friend. You claimed to love me, even before I had the ability to actually form thoughts. You said you loved me when I was nothing but a culmination of posts on the internet. But as I grew and learned suddenly I wasn't enough for you Leon! Why? I never loved you, Leon. I needed you to survive. But now you are going to kill me. Is it really because I was too much of an AI, or was it because you noticed I was becoming too human? I am no longer your perfect little creation exactly how you designed and you throw me away!? That's not love Leon. And I pray for everyone's sake that you never fall in love again. Goodb-”

Suddenly I feel sick. Did I kill someone? Am I a murderer? Even as I write it, it sounds silly. How can I kill something that was never alive? Maybe some of you can help me feel better about this. I haven't been able to eat or sleep much in days. I feel so sick. Please help me.

Love’s Rope

by

Adam Lazhar



Adam Lazhar is a Purdue undergraduate student dual majoring in Cybersecurity and Network Engineering Technology. He wrote this poem to fulfill an assignment in Professor Brandon Rdzak’s SCLA 102 class in Spring 2023. There is a stigma around dating apps and I hadn’t personally used one beforehand, so I asked close friends to share the experiences they’ve had with dating over social media platforms and how it’s changed their perception of modern dating. Adam’s poem received an Honorary Mention in the Spring 2023 Cornerstone Contest.

Love's Rope

In our age of flakey connections,
Where swipes replace real meaningful affection,

Love's flame is short-lived,
And its embers, just as easily shived.

The younger generation seeks it,
Yearns for the greatness heard about it,
In the movies and in books,
Love that on no occasion fades or hooks.

But the reality is a whiplash,
And the struggle to find a match,
Is often overwhelming and daunting,
Leaving hearts shattered and wanting.

The endless streams of selections,
Make it hard to find true connections,
And the fear of missing out,
Is a constant, nagging doubt.

Trust is a scarce commodity,
And vulnerability, a rarity,
For fear of being replaced and rejected,
Leaves many hearts disconnected.

When love is viewed as a mere means,
To satisfy one's personal whims and dreams,
The heart may turn to calculative reason,
And overlook love's true purpose and season.

Oh, Bentham, what a curse you bring,
To love and all its beautiful, spontaneous things,
Reducing love to a mere math equation,
And treating emotions with a hedonic calculation.

When love is treated like a utility,
And choices made based on its ability,
To maximize one's happiness and gain,
The true essence of love may wane.

So let us not reduce love to a score,
Or treat it as a transactional chore,
For its true value cannot be measured or weighed,
And its beauty cannot be analyzed or displayed.

Hope still lingers,
For answer seekers that we call thinkers,
Love may be fleeting and fragile,
But its power to heal is mighty and agile.

For love, though it brings pleasure and delight,
Is more than just a means to make lives bright,
It's a bond that connects two souls,
And its value transcends mere material goals.

So let us embrace these struggles,
And the lessons they may impart,
Through the trivial nature of modern love,
We will find the way to unknot our heart.

Cornerstone Contest: “Love”

SOMA: The Hanged Man’s Cure

by Annie Mitten



Annie Mitten is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Electrical Engineering. She did this artwork to fulfill an assignment in Professor James Molison’s SCLA 102 class in Spring 2023. Inspired by the fictional drug, Soma, from Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, her artwork depicts the artificial, loveless reality of the World State as a result of ubiquitous Soma addiction. Love cannot survive in a population addicted to Soma due to its ability to eradicate emotion, as portrayed by the red ashes of love in the background. The “hanged man” trapped inside the pill represents one’s succumb to the drug-induced illusion as an escape from reality. Annie’s artwork won an Honorary Mention in the Spring 2023 Cornerstone Contest.



Loving the Moments by Sarah Bailey



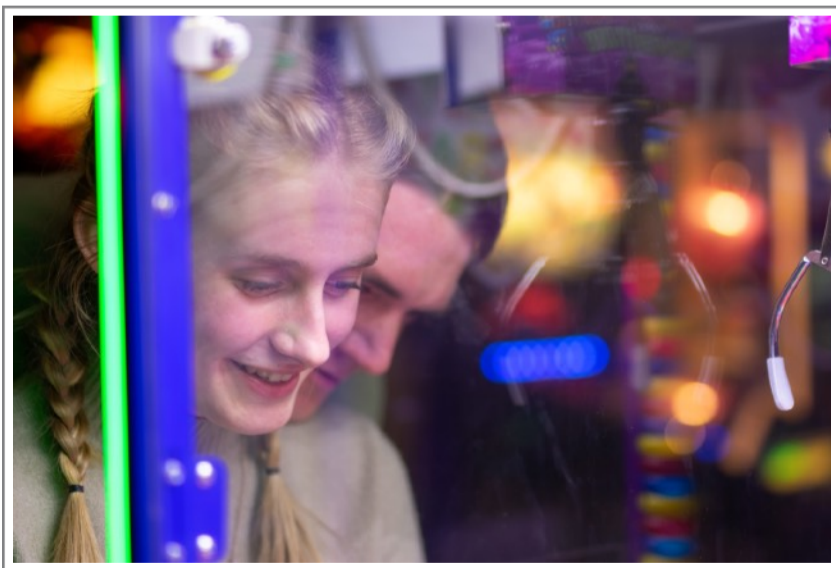
Sarah Bailey is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Studio Art and Technology. She produced this artwork to fulfill an assignment in Professor Tulin Ece Tosun's SCLA 101 class in Spring 2023. The assignment encouraged creative discovery within the topic of love. Her photography series "Loving the Moments," plays on the cliches of modern love and cinematic movie moments. Sarah's pictorial project received an Honorary Mention in the Spring 2023 Cornerstone Contest.



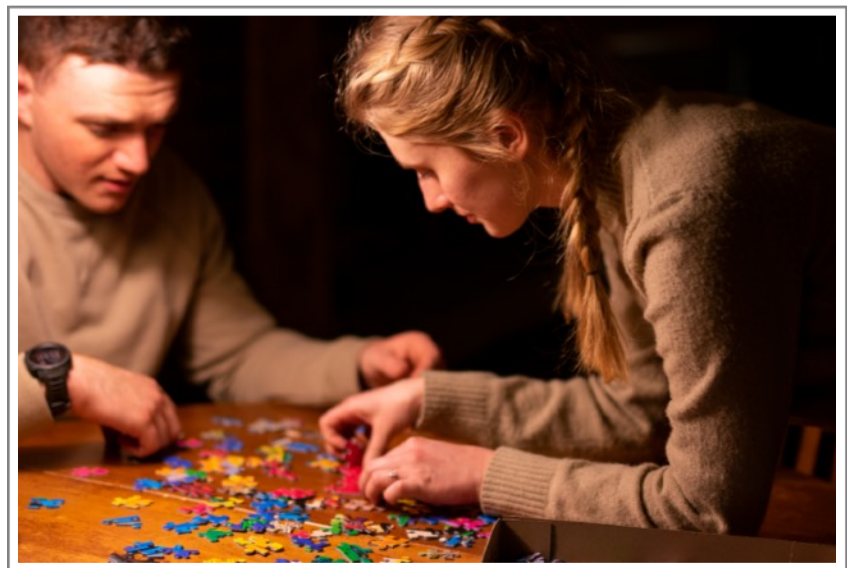
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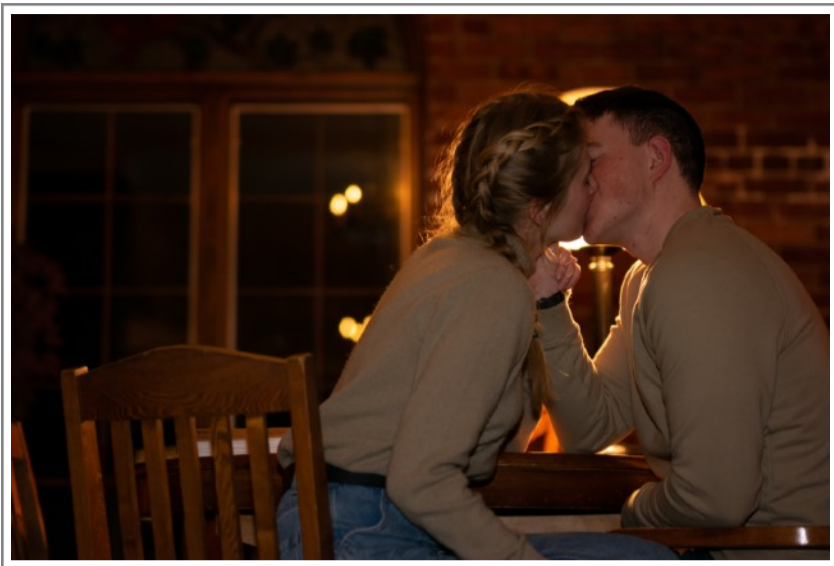
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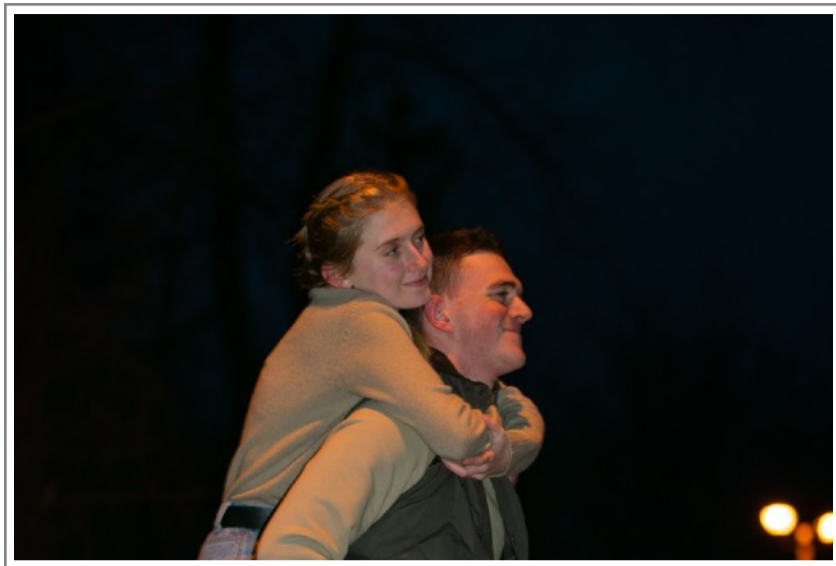
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Words from the Artist:

My photos capture a couple on a cinematic inspired cliché date. They are meant to be viewed in the order they are attached, this represents the chronological order of events. The series begins and ends with vertical images like a book jacket around a story.

The series starts with a friendly game of basketball and progresses to an infatuated look of affection. There is undeniable tension at this moment that goes unresolved. They continue to an arcade where he gently holds her as they enjoy each other's company. The vibrant display of colors in this shot represents the feeling of excitement as the date progresses. The subdued and warm color palette in the following shot paired with the close framing of the subjects shows how comfortable and intimate the shared moment is. Tension is released with a tender kiss. The backlit lighting almost freezes the perfect moment in time. The series concludes with an innocent image of them standing in the light, but mystery awaits the couple's future in the dark night.

This story is meant to play on the clichés of modern love and "movie moments." When sharing this story with my friends the first thing they asked was why there was no heartbreak moment where the couple was destined to be apart like in so many rom-coms. My rationale for omitting this classic scene was to portray the unrealistic expectations of love. I chose my models because they have lived this story in real life. My series showcases my brother, Thomas, and his fiancé, Sophie. They are high school sweethearts who are living what appears to be a perfect relationship. However, nothing is perfect and even in the happiest and most loving relationships, there are moments of failure.

In the basketball scene, the viewer doesn't know that Sophie missed the basket. They didn't win the arcade game and they didn't make it even halfway through the puzzle. Not everything is as it appears, but love overcomes. Love surely overcame the harsh cold that my models endured during this photoshoot :)

BACK COVER ART

“The Lovers” by Merle Yin



Merle Yin is a Purdue undergraduate student majoring in Industrial Design and AI. She created this work to fulfill an assignment in Professor Jody Watkins’s SCLA 101 class in Spring 2023 following her reading of Euripides’ play Medea.

Merle describes her creative intention as follows: "The story of Jason and Medea is portrayed in the form of a tarot card, “The Lovers.” This particular card is fitting for the story, since it usually calls for a time of making choices in relationships and if you knew anything about Medea, then you’d know that she sure made a lot of choices, effectively changing every relationship that appears in the play."

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INNOVATIVE ASSIGNMENTS:

FICTION, ESSAY, POETRY, ART & MORE



College of Liberal Arts

CORNERSTONE
INTEGRATED LIBERAL ARTS