

*2023 Southern Literary Festival
Anthology*

April 20 - 23, 2023

Designed and Edited at the University of Mississippi,
Oxford, Mississippi

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Contents

Poetry

“Crystallization,” Ashley Tunnell	2
“Phobos, the Bastard Daughter,” Adele Cardwell	3
“An Ode To The Girl I Never Once Was,” Ethan Tatom	6

Fiction

“Hair,” Ashley Barrientos	9
“Before the Sea Foam is Gone ,” Chelsea Panameno	18
“Ships that Pass in the Night,” Ethan Holtzclaw.....	26

One-Act Play

“The Last Moment,”Michael Moon	35
“Guess I Won’t Miss You: A Monologue in One Act,” Alaina Wilder	67
“They Gave Her A Bear ,” K. Corley Taylor	72

Creative Nonfiction

“Fragments (ver. 2) ,” Jude Keef	79
“Funeral for a Tongue: A creative nonfiction essay,” Ashley Barrientos	85
“How Sundays Became Sabbath,” Savannah Brouwer	88

Formal Essay

“ <i>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</i> Then and Now: A New Historicist Reading,”	93
“Women with Time: Female Perceptions of Place in “Eveline” and “Mayday”	105
“A Personal Mirror: Cinder’s Individual Development Through Cyborg Technology in Marissa Meyer’s Lunar Chronicles	116

Print Journal

“The Dilettanti ,” Mississippi University for Women	127
“Aonian,” Hendrix College.....	128
“Sequoya Review ,” Universtiy of Tennessee-Chattanooga	129

2023 Southern Literacy Festival Judges

Sheryl St. Germain - Poetry

A native of New Orleans, Sheryl St. Germain has taught at The University of Texas at Dallas, The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Knox College, Iowa State University and Chatham University, where she served as Director of the MFA in Creative Writing for 14 years. Sheryl's poetry books include *The Small Door of Your Death*, *Let it Be a Dark Roux: New and Selected Poems* (both from Autumn House Press), *Making Bread at Midnight*, and *How Heavy the Breath of God and The Journals of Scheherazade*. She has published three chapbooks of her own poetry, *Going Home*, *The Mask of Medusa* and a chapbook of translations of the Cajun poet Jean Arceneaux, *Je Suis Cadien*. Sheryl currently lives in Savannah, GA.

Erica Wright - Fiction

Erica Wright's essay collection *Snake* was recently released as a part of Bloomsbury's *Object Lessons* series. Her latest crime novel, *Famous in Cedarville*, received a starred review from Publishers Weekly. She is the author of three previous novels including *The Red Chameleon*, which was named one of O, The Oprah Magazine's Best Books for the Summer of 2014. She lives in Knoxville, TN with her family.

Brent Griffin - One-Act Play

Brent Griffin is the artistic director of Resurgens Theatre Company. A past member of the research staff at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, as well as a keynote speaker for the SLF, he holds a Ph.D. in Renaissance drama and performance studies from FSU, and serves as the founder and chair of Resurgens' biennial academic conference on the verse dramas of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

Sarah Wigal - Creative Nonfiction

Sara Wigal is an Assistant Professor of Cinema, Television and Media and Director of Publishing at Belmont University. Through the Publishing program, she equips students with necessary skills and knowledge to enter the ever-changing world of book and magazine

publishing. Wigal has been published by Library Journal, The Tennessean, Publishers Weekly, and Writer's Digest, and was a featured interview in the Writer's Digest "Guide to Literary Agents" 2019 and 2020 editions. She has also published creative non-fiction in several literary journals, including The Chaffin Journal, Miracle Monocle, New Plains Review, and Variant Literature. Wigal is the Editor of Belmont Story Review, a literary journal recognized by Best American, and for which she received a 2021 Tennessee Arts Commission Grant.

Leslie LaChance - Formal Essay

Leslie LaChance is a poet, essayist, and teacher who makes her home in East Nashville, Tennessee. Leslie's poems are lyrical cartographies of every place she's ever been or wanted to be, real or imagined. Some of her poems and stories have appeared in Still: The Journal, Mead, Quiddity, Apple Valley Review, The Birmingham Poetry Review, The Greensboro Review, Juked, and other journals. How She Got That Way, her poetry chapbook, was published in the quartet edition Mend & Hone from Toadlily Press in 2013. Three of her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She blogs about living with metastatic cancer at Sojourn & Stardust, and she is a regular contributor to The East Nashvillian magazine.

Bob McCranie - Print Journal

Bob McCranie is the former editor of Red River Review, The Dallas Review and the UT-Dallas student journal, Sojourn. He is also one of the founding members of the Dallas Poets Community. In January of 1994 Bob received his Master of Fine Arts in Writing from Vermont College where he studied under Mark Doty and the late Lynda Hull. He has published poetry in New Texas 2002, Bay Windows and the anthology New Dudes – Gents, Badboys, and Barbarians II (Windstorm Creative Press). He has previously published work in A&U -America's AIDS Magazine, RFD, Bay Windows, MindPurge, Nightfire, Contexas, the University of Southwestern Louisiana Chapbook, PIF Magazine, CleanSheets and The James White Review. Bob won the 1992 John Z. Bennett Award for Poetry from the University of Southwestern Louisiana and was a finalist in the 2002 Inkwell Press poetry prize.

2023 Southern Literary Festival

Hosted by Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Keynote Speaker

MARGARET RENKL

Margaret Renkl is the author of *Late Migrations: A Natural History of Love and Loss* (Milkweed Editions, 2019) and *Graceland, At Last: Notes on Hope and Heartache From the American South* (Milkweed Editions, 2021). Renkl is a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*, where her essays appear each Monday. A graduate of Auburn University and the University of South Carolina, she lives in Nashville.



Poetry

FIRST PLACE

Ashley Tunnell

University of North Georgia

Crystallization

Winter's first snowflake fell
Standing out against
The darkness of my cardigan
I marveled at the crystallized
Intricacies weaving themselves
Into one-of-a-kind designs
Before turning to a teardrop
Under a hot exhale
In that moment
I was not a girl in a black sweater
But dragon's breath to fragile things
And I wondered
How many teardrops
What other destruction
Might have been carried
On a sigh emitted
So carelessly from my lungs

Judge's Comments: *A powerful poem built on succinct and suggestive imagery and metaphor. The poet places us at the scene immediately with precise details and moves through the poem with not an extra word or image to distract. I admire the economical, balanced tone, and the meditative, questioning nature of the poem. I'll never watch a snowflake melt again without thinking of this poem.*

SECOND PLACE

Adele Cardwell

University of Mississippi

Phobos, the Bastard Daughter

Tell me
about my parents,
I ask Grandpa, who won't
meet his granddaughter's
eye, nursing a plastic mug
of vodka sprite. We are waiting
for the hurricane in the backyard
while the windchimes blow
like jellyfish. Grandpa lives
here with all his grandchildren,
but it's just us two, outside.

Your father is a deadbeat
and could have had his brains
blown to ashes in the war
for all I know. He was mean,
and he made you this way. Scared,
I mean. You've never asked this before.

A bullfrog whines as I realize
that I don't remember my dad at all.
Grandpa scrapes the concrete
with the iron seat, ice cubes clinking,
and walks into the centipede grass
stopping on a deadened yellow circle.

One day I caught a legion of fish—
crappie, bluegill, bigmouth bass—
and took 'em home to fry
for my kids. We all got big

and full stomachs
that night so I asked your uncle
to help his mother clean
up the mess. Well he took
the cast iron pot from the fryer
and carried it out back here
with a red oven mitt and dumped
the hot fish-frying grease in the yard.
Right here. And while everyone hollered
at him for killing the grass,
something started to happen
as the fat congealed. Your mother
floated up out of the foam and fatty
oil, a fully-grown woman, naked
as a newborn baby. She cast
a buttery strand of canola yellow hair
from her face, peered out with wet
eyes like fish scales, and said,
Hello, I'm Aphrodite.

Grandpa says nothing
for a moment, pensive. A warm
breeze confronts us, moving
the windchimes; he sips his liquor.
Sweetie, do you remember her at all?

I remember her palms
that stung my cheek,
her femoral vein with the needle
attached, her smile glittering gold
and dope-ripe with tenderness.
No, I say, I don't remember her.

That's for the best,
says Grandpa. You know,
your mom is the goddess
of love, sex, and heroin—
she was beautiful.
Grandpa finally looks at me

while I fidget underneath the flood
light. So I stare at him, too, dusk
and rain now dusting
his backside and diluting his drink.
When the storm unravels
over the lawn, Grandpa says,
You don't resemble her, though.

Judge's comments: *This poem is notable for the way it weaves a narrative of familial betrayal and tragedy with myth. The conversational tone belies the horror of the narrative's import. The mix of precise details with powerful imagery, such as the smile that is "dope-ripe with tenderness" is also remarkable.*

THIRD PLACE

*Ethan Tatom
Christian Brother University*

An Ode To The Girl I Never Once Was

May she rest in peace
Her head tucked in her arms
Drooling on her desk.

May she outrun all the boys
Who told her she couldn't run as fast as them
Because they are boys.

May she remember
To hop over
All the
Cracks on the
Sidewalk
On her
way home
Lest her mom
break her back.

May she bask in the afternoon warmth
As the sun sets beyond the trees at the edge of the backyard
She is not due to come in
Until the shadows grow longer
Than the trees are tall

May she stare up at the sky
And see endless stars
the milky way spilling across the darkness
Instead of streetlamps larger than the moon

May she never love the color pink

Until her mother paints her room in blue and pink stripes
Saying she is girly,
While her sister is
A bit of a tomboy

May she never be called
The sun to her sister's moon,
Or she will scrawl her initials
On each blue stripe
Until she is stopped
Because the blue stripes are not hers.

May she never need to frown at the pastor
Who says men are the leaders of the household.
She doesn't know why she hates that,
But she does.

May she never feel alone
when she decries the preaching,
and her parents tell her
That to think that way is a sin.

May she never forget to lock the bathroom door
when she takes a shower,
because the sound of the door rattling
is better than it being wrenched open.

May she never have a good sense of smell
so that she will never be forced to breathe
acid, bile, and shit
clinging to her skin like the sweat and blood
that is painted on her thighs
as she lies on the tile of the bathroom floor
of the church she was baptized in

May she never be afraid
Of the dark.
Of slamming doors.
Of bathtubs and showers.

Of telling the truth.

May the girl I never once was
Play freeze tag with her friends.
Love her smile.
Hold hands with her mother.
Free the snakes and lizards she has captured.

And if she goes to sleep one afternoon,
And dreams of being a husband and father,
And of kissing a girl-
May the girl I never once was
Dream forever.

Judge's comment: *This poem's innovative reimagining of a past that "never was" is admirable. The lines capture, with elemental, straightforward speech, the speaker's feeling of not quite fitting into their culture's expected sexual role. The surprise of the final stanza gives the poem an additional depth that invites the reader to enter into the poem anew and reread it.*

Fiction

FIRST PLACE

Ashley Barrientos

Middle Tennessee State University

Hair

I am sitting naked on the bathroom floor while I watch my arm hair circle the drain for the fifth time this week. Half of my body is hunched over the rim of the bathtub while a faucet of scalding hot water rinses away the white, strawberry-scented foam from my forearms. A plate of half-eaten fried chicken sits on the floor beside me, next to a Big Gulp styrofoam cup of soda from the 7-Eleven down the street. A pack of birth control pills, a stick of deodorant, green metallic hair clips, a purple tube of mascara, a small bottle of hand soap, and a worn Bukowski paperback all clutter the sink counter.

On average, shaving the entire surface area of my body can range from 25 to 30 minutes, depending on how much patience I have. Tonight, I take my time: 43 minutes. Julie is hosting a housewarming at her new place later. I want to be extra smooth tonight.

I usually start in the shower first, working from the bottom up: toes, shins, thighs, kneecaps, the back of my knees, bikini line, lower back, stomach, armpits. I will turn the silver knob in the shower as far to the left as it will go until I can feel my skin turning red and the air gets so foggy that I can hardly breathe. Allure and Elle Magazine say that when you shave, the water needs to be as hot as possible. The steam relaxes the skin, makes it easier to run a razor over it, opens your pores, prevents rashes, and—most importantly— reduces the likelihood of sharp, coarse hair growing back.

When I'm done, I pull on a little knob so that the water comes out of the faucet instead of the shower head. I climb out of the tub, which is usually covered in a thin layer of body hair by then, sit on the floor, and get to work on my arms. I start at my elbows and work my way up to my wrists, then my knuckles. My arms are more visible than my legs, and more likely to rub up against somebody— so I have to be extra attentive when shaving them, making sure to not even miss the hair on my small knuckles. If I don't shave my arms as frequently as I do, they start to feel stubbly and rough. Like sandpaper.

I also read something on the internet about how shaving in the evening is better for you. How, after a long night of sleep, blood

and other fluids accumulate in your head and other parts of your body, which push against your skin and cause it to puff up in the mornings. This prevents hair from fully protruding through the skin, so when you shave, the razor only cuts the pieces of hair that are able to stick out past your skin. You won't get a close shave and, even worse, according to Healthline, Bustle, and Cosmopolitan, you'll end up with ingrown hairs and razor bumps.

It's not uncommon for my razors to dull over time, given how frequently I use them. But I continue to use the same brand without fail. Last month, I called the quality assurance number on the back of the plastic packaging and spoke with a middle-aged woman named Clarissa who assured me that their razors were only meant to be used for five to seven shaves before being disposed of. For the best results, I need to use a new razor for each shave. At the beginning of every week now, I go to the Publix down the street and purchase six individually packaged Venus razors. I would estimate that I spend about \$140 on razors each month.

But the feeling I get after I shave is what makes it all worth the trouble. When I finish, my skin always feels hot, wet, and shiny. Smooth like the inside of a seashell. Red. Raw. Clean.

I shut off the faucet and get up to dry myself. The towels hanging on the back of my door are damp and smell faintly of mildew. I stand naked in front of the mirror after I shave so that I can fully take in my new skin, my rebirth. The mirror is flecked with sink water and toothpaste, dripping with heat. I like the way it clouds up afterward, a tangible indication of my hard work, the air hot and heavy with the smell of soap.

The last step in my ritual is shaving my face. Still naked and sneaking glimpses at my reflection, I dip my hands into a glass jar of organic, unrefined coconut oil (always from Whole Foods or Publix. That Great Value shit doesn't cut it), scoop out a handful, and slather it over my face. I take another razor and shave the black fuzz from my sideburns, my forehead, my upper lip, my chin. I watch the fuzz pile up in my hands and fall to the counter. Some of it falls on the unfinished plate of chicken that was sitting beside me earlier.

What I enjoy most about shaving is the disconnect I experience. It's the same feeling I get when I am sitting in the passenger seat of a car while I watch trees and houses and people pass by. I'm not really naked and hunched over my bathtub and shaving my arms until the white foam starts to turn pink— I'm watching someone else do it. I am merely passive. A bystander.

In the kitchen, I pull out a box of pizza from the freezer. My hair is still wrapped in a towel. Small drops of water drip down my

back and onto the fake hardwood floor.

I thought you made chicken? Rachel asks from the living room.

I tell her that I actually didn't make the chicken, that I bought it from the deli at Publix. It's cold now, I say. I don't tell her about how it's inedible now and covered in a thin layer of squiggly facial hair. I think about how hot and fresh it was just a couple of hours ago, leaking with so much grease that it stained the paper box it came neatly packaged in. My stomach growls.

Microwaves exist, you know, she says, her voice slightly distorted. She's making a face in the mirror while she applies mascara. Her mouth is O-shaped, her lips puckered, her chin slightly tilted up so she can get the right angle.

I don't say anything to this. I just carefully remove the plastic wrap from the pizza. God, is it just me, or does this place smell? Rachel wrinkles her nose.

We met last spring in Dr. Rhea's English 4600 course, Feminist Rhetoric. I was immediately drawn to her stylized, insufferable persona for those first few weeks of the semester. She often arrived to class a few minutes late, always dressed like a leading female character in a Greta Gerwig film. She sat just a few rows in front of me for a while, her blonde hair always pinned up with the same tortoise shell hair claw. I started noticing how smooth and hairless her exposed back was, which could only mean that her arms were hairless as well. I started sitting next to her after that, even if it meant disrupting the unofficially assigned seats we had already established for ourselves at that point in the semester. It was as if by approximating myself to her, I could somehow absorb her physical traits. Like osmosis.

One week, in the middle of a discussion about the role of Western media rhetoric in feminism— we had moved to the subject of the protests in Iran— she blurted out that the Western world had an obligation to portray Muslim women who wore the hijab as automatically oppressed. It's just a threat to democracy! she said, chewing on a wad of gum. I didn't really speak to her after that, except to ask for an extra pencil or sheet of paper.

After sitting next to her for the rest of the semester in silence— although I was still regularly in awe of her thin blonde hair and hairless arms— I spoke to her on the last day of classes and found that we were both looking for new roommates for the next school semester. Contact information was exchanged, and two months later, we signed the lease on a tiny two-bedroom unit in a crumbling building just across the street from the university. It was the height of summer. Knees sticky with films of sweat. Mouths wrapped around blue popsicle sticks. Swimming pools filled with band-aids and chlorine. A lazy blanket of heat baked

into the leather seats of our cars.

We didn't spend much time together after classes ended, with the exception of a few meetups at Bed Bath & Beyond and the Container Store in preparation for our move-in day, which was just a few weeks ago.

When we signed the lease, the price and location seemed to outweigh the shitty Google Reviews at the time. But she hasn't stopped complaining since we moved in. The dryer machine makes a loud noise if you put too many clothes in it. The A/C stops working every now and then. The fridge always smells like rotting fruits when you open it.

She stands in the living room now, applying makeup in front of a mirror and fussing over her bangs. A fuzzy blue bathrobe is wrapped around her body. Next to her pale feet is a glass of wine, the rim smudged with a deep red lipstick.

It does smell a little bit, I say. I open the oven to take out the pots and pans I had stored in there earlier that week. I had moved them in there to make more cabinet space— something my mom always did. When I open it, I see that it's empty.

Sensing my silence from the other room, Rachel says, Oh, I moved all of that from the oven. She is smudging something glittery on her eyelids now. I don't know why you put those there, she adds.

I don't respond. I preheat the oven to 475 degrees and wait. While it warms up, I think about my mom. Some time passes, and I start feeling something heavy in my chest. My arms still feel hot and satiny. I make a note to myself to apply more lotion once I finish eating.

Were you planning on going to the store again tonight? Rachel calls again from the living room. We still need limes and cake, she adds.

I say yes and rub my arms.

Can you get me some Benadryl too, please? I'll Venmo you.

The oven dings. I place the pizza in the oven and shut it.

I'm reading the back of a yogurt cup at Publix. The long list of ingredients names all kinds of active bacteria: *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactococcus lactis*, *Bifidobacterium lactis*. I think about the chicken I purchased from here earlier and the bacteria moving inside me right now, and I feel the sudden urge to shave my stomach lining, my intestines. Carefully, I place the yogurt back on the refrigerated shelf.

I always think about dying whenever I come here. There are too many options to choose from, too many ingredient lists to scan through, too many pretty people in green vests walking around and asking if I

need help with anything (I think Rachel would be good at this). I think about how it would be so much easier to just not exist than be faced with the 30 kinds of crackers and 20 types of coffee and 10 types of frozen pizzas to choose from. But at least everything is always neatly organized on the shelves, illuminated under the clean, white ceiling lights. Usually, I try to go towards the end of the day— just an hour before they close— so that it's more desolate and the tile floors smell of floor cleaner, enhancing the sterility of it all. There is something sacred about a grocery store at 9 p.m. on a weeknight.

There is one section I will always go to great lengths to avoid. Especially tonight. It's located at the end of aisle 7— tucked away deep enough in the store so that if I stick to my usual path, I don't have to look at it. I walk through the dairy section— past the yogurts, the string cheese, the tubs of butter— and keep walking past the cereal, the bread, the canned sauces. The boxes of pasta lining the shelves are a warning signal for me, a landmark. As soon as I see them, I dip into that aisle and come out on the other side, near a section stocked with eye drops, over-the-counter painkillers, and tampons.

I don't want to think about my mom tonight. Her styrofoam cups of coffee, her almond-scented perfume, her pots of red rice.

After I get Rachel's Benadryl, I roll my cart over to the Feminine Care aisle, sandwiched right between the cleaning supplies and pet food. As I'm scanning the shelves for more body lotion, my eyes register the wall of hair products directly adjacent to the lotion. My hand subconsciously flutters to my scalp, and I think about the last time I dyed my hair. Two years ago, during my first week of college, I attended a tailgating event. After a few hours of drinking alongside packs of sorority women, I returned to my apartment with a visceral feeling coagulating in my stomach. My brain pulsed with the urge to dye my hair blonde— a feat that can be expensive and time-consuming, especially if you have dark virgin hair. I didn't have the money or energy to go to a salon, so I drove to the nearest beauty supply store that week and purchased an at-home bleaching kit. I had to go to the emergency room that night after my old roommate came home from work to find me clawing at my face and rolling around on the floor of our shared bathroom. The bleach had accidentally seeped into my eyes.

I sift through all the different little boxes of bleach toner and hair dye, picking up each one and reading the back. My heart starts beating too fast, so I settle on the ones with the prettiest woman on the front and toss them into my cart.

As I make my way toward the cashier, I pass by the produce section for a handful of limes, and then I pursue through the bakery. I pick out a white box of sheet cake from the fridge, a \$9 bottle of wine,

and a bouquet of flowers wrapped in cellophane near the front. The flowers are bright pink. I know they are artificially colored.

The cashier is a short, plump Latina woman. Her name tag says “Jessica.”

She looks up at me when she scans the box of hair dye. When she scans the wine, she asks me for my ID in Spanish. At this, I feel myself grow uncomfortable. I fish for my wallet and brand the photo of 16-year-old me from high school. In this photo, I am smiling with all my teeth and dark-skinned from the June sun. My hair— still black— frames my face. She stops to look at it for a moment, and I recognize the look on her mouth, her eyes. I know she is trying to piece everything together. I know is trying to figure me out.

When I return to the apartment, Rachel is in the kitchen warming up leftover spaghetti from the night before.

I’m not hungry, but I can’t drink on an empty stomach, she feels the need to explain to me. A stack of dishes is piled in the sink. I set down the plastic bags hanging on my forearms and walk over to the kitchen. I squirt out a small drop of dish soap into the dirty yellow sponge— but when I pick up a mug and start scrubbing, she asks me why I’m not using the dishwasher instead.

What do you mean? I ask.

The dishwasher, she repeats over the hum of the microwave. You always hand-wash the dishes. Use the dishwasher. It’s a lot faster, and it cleans them better. Plus it saves water.

I look at the dishwasher and tell her I don’t know how to use it.

How do you not know how to use it? Her head jerks back and forth, making her earrings dangle. It’s so easy, she says. The microwave beeps.

With the same exasperation one might express when dealing with a small child throwing a tantrum or an abhorrently drunk person, she walks towards me and snatches the mug I’m washing from my hand. She opens the dishwasher and hurriedly places all the dishes into racks like she’s trying to prove just how fast it really is. She reaches under the sink and fumbles for the bag of dish pods that I didn’t even know existed. After popping a plastic square of blue liquid into a tiny compartment, she shuts the door and pushes a few buttons with her manicured nails. The machine begins to whirl.

I stand still beside her, my hands still wet and sudsy.

Hurry up and get ready, she says. Or we’re gonna be late.

People are filing in and out of Julie’s apartment. A drop of lime stings a razor cut on my knuckle. My throat burns as I wince as suck the soft white meat of the dimpled, green flesh. Something evil is spinning inside me. Like a hot cone of meat you see at the state fair.

I'm wearing the tight black dress that I bought for myself last month. A birthday gift. I remember opening the paper bag it came in and imagining myself dancing in it— freshly 21, all dressed up, and ready to flash my ID at bouncers.

Someone places a glass of the Publix wine in my hand, and I'm trying to follow the thread of conversation unraveling in front of me.

Someone is showing a TikTok they made. My phone buzzes and I instinctively reach for it. 12:13 am.

I don't remember how many drinks I've had at this point. I check my Notes app, where I was supposed to be keeping track since we started drinking back at the apartment. A document titled "Don't overdo it tonight" was supposed to be helping me keep track. For every shot or glass of wine my body consumed, I would tally it with a hyphen. There were only three little dashes, which I knew was egregiously incorrect.

I'm thumbing through a bulky, expensive-looking coffee table book when someone pulls me from the couch, and we migrate toward the kitchen. Someone hands me a shot of Vodka in a tiny white espresso cup that says "Hot Stuff." I end up in a windowless room, watching Julie show us her new closet. I observe the yellowing mattress on the floor, a pile of books stacked haphazardly beside it. Her blonde hair falls onto her face, and I feel stars coming out of my chest. Someone calls my name, and I feel myself being passed off again into the hallway. I accidentally step on a plastic cup. Someone shows me another video on their phone. I end up in the bathroom.

With one hand, I'm scooping back a fistful of blonde hair from a girl in my Literary Theory class while she vomits into the toilet. I think her name is Danielle. Maybe. My other hand is rubbing her back in big, slow circles. Her hair smells like peaches. I tell her she's doing a great job, and she moans, her cheek pressed against the cold, white toilet seat. She's wearing a blue tank top with an exposed back, her skin cool and remarkably smooth.

Someone bangs loudly on the door, and I glance up from Maybe Danielle's back. Towels hang limply over the shower curtain rod. The linoleum floor is sticky and littered with crushed aluminum cans. A lone cell phone and a set of keys lie abandoned by the door. There are four other girls in the bathroom, including Rachel. I shift uncomfortably as my knees start to ache from kneeling for so long. The floor squelches as I shift my balance from one leg to another.

JUST A SECOND, I yell. I try making my voice loud enough so that people can hear me over the music. SOMEONE IS THROWING UP. I glance in the toilet bowl and see little chunks of food swimming around. I reach over Maybe Danielle and fumble with the silver toilet

knob.

The door opens, and two more girls file in. They are smoothing their shiny hair and laughing about something.

They approach me while Maybe Danielle gets up and mumbles something under her breath while she hobbles over to the sink. I hear the faucet turn on.

You're so pretty, the one in the red dress says. She has sparkly eyeshadow and purple lipstick on. I feel something in my heart flutter.

Oh my god, really? I say. My words are slurred. I can feel the words slurring out of my mouth like drool.

Yeah, Red Dress says, turning to her friend. Molly, doesn't she look so pretty? She kind of reminds me of someone. Who am I thinking of?

Molly gives me a once-over that lasts about half a second and says, she looks like that girl from our organic chem class. What's her name? Maria? Monica? Something like that.

They both look at me for a few seconds after and I start to wipe my sweaty palms on my dress. I try looking for Maybe Danielle, but she has already slipped out the door, along with the other girls in the bathroom, except for Rachel.

And then she begins to ask me that question.

And before she asks me what she's going to ask, what everyone always ends up asking me, no matter how many times I shave my arms until they burn red or dye my hair with shitty box dye from Publix or learn how to use the dishwasher or learn that pots and pans don't belong in the oven, I already know what it is.

I know because she already asked me. She asked me when she looked at me and then at Rachel. When she looked at my curved nose and my skin and my rounded jawline. When she looked at my arms and saw that I was a fraud. I recognize this question like I recognize when someone's about to ask me what my name is.

Where are you from?

She asks me this and I can feel something in my chest splinter off and away into the night. It slips outside this bathroom that smells like vomit, through the sweating bodies in the living room, out the window of the kitchen where the linoleum floors are sticky from the Jack Daniels lemonade and Trulys sloshing out of peoples' cups, and into the sky above a town I've grown up in but have never really been from.

She asks me this, and suddenly, I'm 12 and shopping at Hollister with my parents, surrounded by blown-up pictures of pretty girls on a nameless beach in Southern California. I'm ten and pretending I don't hear my mom calling after me when she drops me off at school, her accent thick with the country she left behind when she was only

17. I'm seven and in Ms. Reeves' classroom, trying not to cry when the substitute teacher pronounces my last name wrong and wishing it was something like Smith or Johnson. I'm 21 and in a bathroom at Julie's housewarming and trying not to feel alien, trying not to cry at this very simple question that a very pretty white girl has just asked me.

I was born here, I say. Something feels dislodged in me.

No, but like where are you really from? Red Dress asks in between hiccups. She sees the look on my face. I'm just asking because you're just so pretty! she adds, a bit nervously this time. Like exotic.

Rachel pulls out a makeup bag from her purse and hops onto the sink counter, seemingly unaware of what's happening. I stare at Red Dress blankly, and she starts looking around the room once it becomes clear that I am not going to answer her question. She sways back and forth and then drops her phone. When she bends to pick it up, her shirt dips down low enough to where I can see her nipple. Red Dress and Molly leave. Motionless, I stare at my shoes, my eyes growing hot.

My bones hurt, I say to nobody in particular.

What? Rachel looks up from the mirror. She's applying another coat of mascara. The little purple wand in her hand is poised just above her lashes, mid-brush. Her eyes look extra blue that night. Maybe it's the wallpaper or the lighting. Why? she asks.

I'm just tired, I say, closing my eyes.

All she asked was where you were from, Elena. People ask me that all the time, she says before walking out.

I notice that she left behind her tube of lipstick on the counter. In my hands, it feels like a museum artifact. Sacred. Elegant. With one swift move, I flush it down the toilet.

Judge's comment: *From its searing opening to its rebellious ending, this story captures the intensity of wanting to belong. The pacing is particularly strong, creating suspense while trusting readers. "Hair" uses a classic short story structure to evoke the complicated pain of microaggressions.*

SECOND PLACE

*Chelsea Panameno
Christian Brothers University*

Before the Sea Foam is Gone

Most people outside the island didn't believe in selkies, but those of us who lived by the water – not the tourist's beaches with their blinding blue and child-proofed waves, but the ocean in all its salt and spit and shifting tides – knew when they were coming. When we pulled the fish up, squirming, still teeming with life, we could feel the change in the wind and the sea itself. When us younger ones cut the heads and scraped the scales off, careful with the blades, the meat was whiter, and the taste was always better. The smell of fresh fish filled our nostrils and lingered long after we locked our doors.

It wasn't every year they came, not since the tourists started coming in droves and scared them off with their ships and pollution, but when the tides started to change, and the skies thundered overhead, it wasn't long before one could appear. They always followed storms.

I didn't know what a selkie was like, not up close. I imagined soft skin and dark eyes, wide hips and long limbs better suited for the deep. I imagined long hair that floated above them as they dived below the surface, and kept swimming until the light that dappled the surface of the water could no longer be seen. I imagined they were better versions of girls like me.

By nightfall, the storm howled and screeched around us, rattling the windows and seeping in through the roof. Raindrops dripped into an old pot in the corner of the kitchen. My father was fast asleep in the next room, unaware of the way the world went grey and hazy.

If I closed my eyes and listened, I could hear a sound like voices in the distance. Like someone laughing, or someone sobbing.

I found her by one of the tide pools on the east side of the island the day after the storm. I didn't mean to find her, because I wasn't dumb enough to chase after seals who turned into girls. But I needed something to do with myself, and my aunts had shooed my cousins and I away for the afternoon so they could gossip in peace. The younger ones ran off to play, while the older ones left for the town not far from the village, to eat snacks and meet up with schoolfriends. They whispered behind my back about me, about my "heritage," when they

thought I couldn't hear them. I'd learned to leave them alone, grabbing a small bag and heading out to wander if nothing else. I knew the area better than any of them, so it wasn't hard to find somewhere quiet. Being alone was easier. There were less expectations.

The selkie lay back with her head resting on a rock, arms and legs splayed out starfish-style, naked except for some kind of sheet she must have found discarded somewhere, the white fabric having faded into an ivory with bits of grey. She couldn't have been older than me, but that could have been a lie. My father liked to say girls are born liars, no matter what form they were in, and that was supposed to include me. Some days, I didn't feel like a girl at all, and I didn't want to be a liar either way. But she was too pretty to be a liar. Her hair was long and dark and still damp, and when she opened her eyes, they were all shadow and void, with no clear boundary between the pupil and the iris.

Lying next to her was a pile of something grey glinting in the sun.

Her skin. The real one, that was.

She scrambled into a sitting position, turning to face me, shifting her body to hide the caul.

"I don't want it." I took a step back, hands up, palms facing her in a maybe-universal symbol of not being a threat. Did they do that underwater? They didn't have hands, so perhaps not. I put my arms down. I tried to look relaxed.

She squinted at me, eyeing me up and down. She hadn't moved. "I don't think I've seen you before."

"I've never seen you either." I wanted to help her up, but that felt invasive, somehow. "Do you need help?"

"No." She started to stand, grabbing the caul in the process, then paused. "Maybe."

She gathered up her caul in her arms, took one step forward and almost fell right over. I stifled a laugh as she righted herself, brushing some of the sand off of her sheet-dress.

She scrunched her nose a little as she made a face. "Don't laugh. I'm not used to legs. Everything hurts when you take off your skin." She frowned. "Does it always hurt to do everything? Why do you all do things like dance if you're going to be in pain?"

"It doesn't hurt me." The closest I'd ever gotten was spraining my ankle once years ago while climbing some rocks, and that pain felt disconnected now. I frowned. "If it hurts, why do you do it?"

"Because I heard shifting can be fun." She turned in the general direction toward the town. "We watch you all, sometimes. Me and some of the others. We like the music." She turned back to face me.

"Though I've heard humans are fond of kidnapping us. If you try, I'll run."

"I'm not going to kidnap you."

She clutched her caul to her chest. We stayed there for a moment, the silence hanging in the air, waiting.

The space between the seal-girl and I felt fragile, as though one small movement could shatter it and leave the pieces stinging my palms.

"In that case," she said, her words slow and still heavy, "you can be my tour guide. What's over there?"

The village felt too much like sacred ground for a seal-girl, and too much of a risk with so many people who would know the truth. But there was no way to hide her while she was walking around wearing a sheet-dress and carrying her sealskin, and I didn't bring spare clothes with me everywhere I went.

"What are we doing?" She stood behind me, close enough that I could feel a hint of her warm breath. She didn't smell quite like fish, but like seagrass and the morning breeze coming out from the waves. It reminded me of what people liked to say the ocean smelled like, the ones they made candles out of and sold at overpriced stores in the larger cities. The caul, however, still smelled like fish, but it was muted almost. Like it had changed along with her.

"Sneaking into my house." I shoved the key in the lock, trying to push just slow enough that it wouldn't squeak. "I can take you to the town, but you can't go looking like that. You can't have your caul out, either. People will try to take it. You can borrow some of my clothes, and we can get a bag to put your caul in."

I could hear the frown in her tone. "Do humans not understand the concept of not taking other people's things? Even we know that much."

"We do." I stepped inside the house. "But people do it anyways. It's called stealing."

It was quiet, which was good, the lights off and the curtains drawn. I shoved off my shoes to not track sand inside and made my way to my room at the end of the hall. I could hear the soft steps of bare feet behind me. I made a mental note to grab her some sandals, too; no wonder she said she was in pain.

My room wasn't much beyond a bed and a dresser, a few shelves where I kept most of my things (a few books, some small mementos from over the years), and a table where I dumped anything else that didn't have a place to go. The walls were bare, the plaster cracked, with tiny bits of sunlight poking in through the blinds. I made a point of not looking at the mess. Were seals particular about being clean? I

could almost hear my aunt snapping at me not to be rude to guests.

"You can borrow anything in the drawers that fit you." I tried not to stare at her, but it was hard not to notice how similar our body types were, except her features were more refined, something unnatural to it. It was something in the way she carried herself, like she wasn't quite sure what to do. My tiny imperfections – the scar on my left thumb, the choppy ends of my hair – if nothing else, made me human.

"It's nice in here." Her voice was soft and light. I stayed turned around as she went through my things, keeping my eyes on the floor, the tangle of blankets, anything. I wasn't used to this level of intimacy, of trust that I wouldn't somehow hurt her in this moment. I grabbed a spare bag I kept that was big enough to hide the caul in. I didn't want to risk hiding it somewhere or ask her to part with it.

"How's this?"

I turned around to see her in one of my longer dresses, the fabric worn but still retaining its original blues, a pattern of white flowers dotting the waist.

"You look –" and I stopped myself, because the first word I thought of was beautiful, and that felt wrong now, forbidden. I shouldn't find her beautiful. It was normal to think girls were pretty, sure, because why wouldn't it be normal? But this felt different. This wasn't someone from afar who I'd seen in passing, or someone who it was easy to keep their distance from me. She was here, right in front of me, in my room and wearing my clothes. We were close enough to touch if we wanted to.

"You look nice," I settled on. "Sorry. We should go before someone sees us. Here, you can put your caul in this so no one sees it."

I caught the tiniest glimpse of her expression as I passed her to grab some sandals to lessen the pain on her feet. There was a faint hint of confusion, and her face fell in what could have been disappointment. I shoved down the guilt in my chest and walked back down the hall, out of the front door.

The village wasn't as isolated as it seemed to be. It wasn't a long walk to the closest town, still not as big as other places I'd heard of, but it had far more options for entertainment than anything the village did. Here, tourists mingled with the locals, hoping to get a "more authentic experience" in the country. The houses were taller, with rows of windows like teeth and souvenir shops that sold what was normal for us for five times the price. But it was colorful. There weren't many people out at this hour – the sky still clouded over from the recent storm, the air thick with the smell of rain instead of fish and sea – but the ones who were out wore fashions I didn't recognize, had a mix of dyed hairs and accents I couldn't place. I liked to people-watch when

they weren't calling me exotic, walking around farmer's markets or near coffee shops. Here, they paid less attention to the old myths, with people coming to and from countless other places. Dark hair and eyes didn't mean a selkie. But I was cautious nonetheless.

Her eyes went wide again at the sight, but with a brightness to them that was unlike the initial fear. She walked a few steps ahead of me, sending a thin spindle of panic through me. She didn't try to speak to anyone, which was a relief, because I had a hard enough time speaking without having to do it for two people. Some people turned as we walked past, staring first at me, then their eyes slid over to her. Some looked closer than others, but no one tried to stop us, to ask any questions. The caul was hidden. To them, we could be normal teenage girls, maybe neighbors, maybe schoolfriends, wandering town on a bored afternoon. If they stared at her, it was because she was beautiful, and nothing else.

Something foul rose in my mouth at that thought, and I made sure to stay as close as possible. Not that she seemed to notice. Part of me wanted to reach out and grab her hand, but that felt childish, so I kept them at my sides, fidgeting with whatever possible.

"What's that?" she'd ask. She knew about most things we saw, either from observing humans herself or from what others had told her, but this was her first time up close.

"Keep your voice down, we don't want to draw attention."

She made a face, lips turned almost into a pout. "Fine
What's that?"

And I told her, every time. It was the longest time I'd spent this close to another person in my entire life, and it was exhilarating.

If I saw anyone who would recognize me, I ducked away and found excuses to go down a different street. I didn't need any suspicions about me confirmed, and she didn't need to know they existed at all. She was in awe of the surface in all its details, and I refused to ruin that.

What I didn't want to tell her was that there hadn't been a selkie in the village since I was an infant, and that was because the last selkie was my mother. My father had found her lying on the rocks, naked with her caul beside her, asleep and bathed in the sunlight, and claimed he loved her.

(At this point in the story, my aunt would snort and say that he loved her breasts. My grandmother would not comment on this.)

In his love and lust, he hid the caul beneath a floorboard in the bedroom while she was still asleep. He told her the waves must have washed it out to sea, and he offered her a warm bed and a meal. She tried to go back out into the water, but human limbs are not the same

as a seal's body, their designs different in so many ways, and she was forced to go back to shore. She stayed because my father had shown her kindness. She didn't run because there weren't many places to go. To her, the water seemed to have betrayed her.

(I asked once if they ever asked my mother if she loved him back. My aunt said, "Of course we did. At the time, she seemed interested in him." She narrowed her eyes at me. "But I don't think it was in her nature to be a wife. She would sit at the window for hours and stare out towards the sea. I don't think she ever believed your father about the caul. She must have known he took it. When we weren't watching, she'd tear the place apart looking for it, and when we returned, she was always cleaning up the mess.")

A lesson most children learn is that the sea can only be loyal for so long before the tides change, sometimes without warning.)

Every time she got close to finding her caul, my father would move it. Sometimes, it would be nestled in the thatching of the roof. Other times, it was tucked behind a dresser or cabinet, pressed against the wall. Any crack or crevice could be useful to him, and he was careful not to use the same places too often just in case. He never told anyone where it was, including his sisters, who didn't even entertain the idea of a formal marriage ceremony.

I was born in the middle of a storm. My mother's water wouldn't break, her body refusing to let go of something so close to her despite her human form. I was still caught in the caul that kept me alive inside my mother's body, submerged in a bubble of fluid. The midwife tried to break it, but the caul wouldn't puncture, so I was delivered still nestled inside of it. It didn't let me go until she cut umbilical cord, the caul opening on its own after I was offered to my mother, who accepted me with a far-off look in her eyes.

"It's good luck," the midwife had said. "It means she'll never drown."

It wasn't the blessing as it should have been. I had webbing between my fingers and lungs that screamed louder than most infants could. My father buried the caul in the back garden after the rain stopped, while I lay fast asleep inside. Just in case. He never buried my mother's caul there because it was too beautiful, and he didn't want to stain it with mud and dirt. But mine wasn't a sealskin, and no one wanted me to follow my mother out to sea.

(Years later, when my aunt first told me this story, I tried to dig it up. But it was far too late, the soil having soaked it up, and any magic it could have had was gone.)

Days passed, and my father did not move my mother's caul as he had in the past. Perhaps he thought that, now that they had a child,

she would never leave him. Perhaps he'd nestled that thought into his head, comforted by the ideal of motherhood, of domesticity, ignoring what had come before him. He was careless. Just this once.

On the fifth day after my birth, my mother was gone, the caul pulled from a different floorboard, leaving me napping alone in the dark. My father returned to a quiet house with only me waiting for him.

He never remarried, as he was convinced that women were not to be trusted, and that wives would only bring further trouble. My aunts took the burden of caring for me until I could do it myself, because my father knew nothing of caring for children, human or otherwise, and wanted little to do with it. I was the only one with no siblings. The other adults warned their children not to get too close to me, and they heeded that warning regardless of what I did. I learned to be quiet and useful, because girls who were quiet and useful were left alone, and they said my dark eyes were unsettling, my tanned skin unnatural.

The webbing sank and merged with my fingers by the time I was ten years old. Sometimes, I held them close to my face, wiggling each one, trying to conjure up the feel of them. Other times, I forced them to remain straight and pressed close to each other, hiding any evidence that something was ever wrong. If I pretended hard enough, there would be nothing left to hide at all.

We headed back to the rocks where I first found her, hoping to be there before sunset.

"Why do you come up and then leave again so soon?" I hadn't meant to bring it up, but we hadn't spoken much except to explain the various customs and constructions in the town, and it was my turn to ask the questions.

"We don't tend to stay for long. We have lives outside of this." She shrugged. "Besides, I don't want to be anyone's wife or mother."

"How come?" I thought about my aunts, my cousins, the familial routine. I thought of my mother, how she longed for the sea. "It doesn't seem so bad, being a wife or a mother."

She thought about it. "I don't like the thought of belonging to someone else."

I wouldn't mind it at all, sat somewhere in the back of my mouth.

"Do you have to go back?"

She nodded. "We can't be girls forever. People get suspicious of us. They expect things. Then, they get upset when we don't live up to that." She looked up at the sun. "It's not bad, being a selkie. I think you'd make a nice one, if you could."

"My mother was a selkie." It was the first time I had said the words out loud. "I used to want to be like her."

There was a pause on her end, where the only sound was the breeze. I wondered if she'd already guessed it, or was putting the pieces together.

"Why'd you change your mind?" was all she asked.

"I started hating her for leaving me."

Without looking at me, she pressed something into my hands. It was a seashell, the grooves on the front still rough, the back smooth and hollow and cold.

Her fingers brushed against mine. They weren't as soft as I imagined, but they were still smooth and warm. Something tugged at my chest.

For a moment, I held her fingers in mine, clutching the shell and her, until she pulled away, and it felt like I'd lost something.

"I can't tell you she'll come back," she said, staring out at the waves. It felt like an old song at that point. "But maybe that's for the best."

"Will you come back?"

"Maybe." She thought about it for a moment. "Seven is a good number. Maybe I'll come back in seven summers. Being a human is tiring, you know."

There was nothing I could say against that.

I turned away again as she took off my clothes, slipping off the sandals and leaving them in a pile in the sand. I glanced behind me just to see, not to see her body but to say goodbye.

There was a moment between the shift in which I saw both at once, the skin embracing her as she slipped into it, becoming both seal and girl at once, before she let herself fall back into the water. Sea foam burst from where she had stood, as she vanished beneath the waves, the only proof of her existence being the seashell clutched in my hand hard enough to hurt.

The foam rushed to meet me, and I sat in the sand, letting the water drip from my fingers, before slipping her shell into my bag, gathering up my things, and walking back home to a quiet house where nothing was waiting for me.

Judge's comment: *This magical, creative tale feels like a dirge as much as a story. It's musical and elegiac, introducing a character who longs for her mother as much as she longs for the surprising new arrival in town. "Before the Sea Foam Is Gone" is a unique addition to Selkie mythology.*

THIRD PLACE

Ethan Holtzclaw

University of North Georgia

Ships that Pass in the Night

I met a most peculiar man the other day. It was the first time I met him and, in a way of speaking, it was the last time as well. It was Monday, 6:07 PM, and I was waiting at Wadsworth Station for my train home. The train was late. The train was never late. I was looking up at the timetable overhead for the third time when he sat down on the bench next to me.

"Morning, Artie," he said, casually. "How are we today?" I looked over to see a man that might have walked straight off a vaudeville stage and onto the train platform. He wore a crooked boater hat high on his head, with a frayed tweed jacket and light beige trousers. His hair was slicked back, though a large fringe in front had fallen into his left eye, and his waistcoat was of a red tartan pattern that was so gaudy it made me dizzy. But the defining feature of the whole ensemble was the widest grin I had ever seen, placed squarely in the middle of a prominent, angular chin. He looked like exactly the sort of man who would rest his arm on a stranger's shoulder, which of course he was now doing.

"It isn't morning," I managed to say. "It's past six in the afternoon."

"Is it?" he replied. He took his arm off my shoulder long enough to reach into his waistcoat pocket and produce an ornate golden pocket watch. He compared his watch with the time on the station clock, then shook his head in bewilderment. "What do you know, so it is. Ain't that a surprise?" He removed his hat and hung it on the end of the large black umbrella he was carrying, then leaned in closer.

"So, where you off to, Artie? Somewhere exciting? New York? Bombay?" He looked around quickly, then continued in a conspiratorial tone: "Blackpool?"

"Erm... home, I suppose" I replied. "Same as always."

At this, he laughed as if I had just told the funniest joke in the world. In fact he continued to laugh for a good fifteen seconds, which gave me ample time to wipe off the spittle which he had just sprayed

on my face.

"Same as always!" he said, when he had finally regained composure. "Ain't that the truth? Good old Artie! Classic Artie!" It was when he patted me on the back with enough force to fell a grown rhinoceros that my confusion reached an extreme.

"I'm terribly sorry," I started, careful not to upset this clearly very mistaken gentleman. "But do I know you?"

With that, his face suddenly fell. This man, who merely a moment ago had been so jovial and full of life, now looked as if I had just told him his oldest friend had died. He fixed his eyes on me for a moment, then waited as though to make sure I wasn't telling another hilarious joke.

"You really don't recognize me, do you?" he asked me. But it didn't sound like a question. I tried to assure him that I must have simply forgotten, because after all, I do meet many people in my line of work, but he had already ceased to pay attention to me. "I knew this was coming. I should've had more time..." he muttered to himself, looking forlornly at nothing in particular. I would have stayed to ask him what he meant, but at that moment my train finally arrived. I glanced at the station clock again. 6:10. The train was a full 10 minutes late this time. Had I really spent three whole minutes in this man's company? Making up my mind to think no more about it, I stepped towards the open door of the train carriage. Before I could get on board, I was stopped by a tugging on my jacket sleeve. I turned and saw the stranger standing there, a pleading look in his eyes. He looked like he wanted to ask me not to leave, but instead he reached back into his waistcoat pocket and pulled out the pocket watch.

"This watch was a gift to me from a good friend of mine" he said, holding it out to me. "I think—no, I know—that he would want you to have it." Not sure what else to do, I politely took it from him.

"Thank you," I said. "I will keep good care of it."

"Yes. Yes you will" he said with a faint smile, like he was telling a joke only he understood. "I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is William, but you can call me Bill." I started to introduce myself as well, but realized he already knew my name. I simply told him it was nice to meet him, and got on the train as quickly as I could. I very much doubted I would ever get the chance to call him "Bill" in the future, anyway.

I took my seat in the nearest available compartment and took in the view of the countryside outside my window. The countryside never changes, but I always take the time to look at it regardless. Eventually, I remembered the watch. I took it out to examine it. It was indeed a fine gold watch, if a little weathered and tarnished from a long period

of use. The backside was engraved with a baroque pattern, and on the front cover was an inscription which read:

“Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing, only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness.”

A line by Longfellow, I believe. I opened the cover to read the time, and was met with a surprise. No wonder Bill had had such trouble with the time of day—this watch was running backwards. “Of course it is,” I mused to myself, as I slipped the watch into my jacket pocket. I quickly learned that there was nothing about this man that could surprise me.

I met him again, despite my best efforts, the next day. Tuesday found me in the same spot, waiting for the belated train once more, and so did Bill. He sat himself down beside me much like the day before, only this time I kept a safe distance in case of spittle or unwanted elbows.

“How’s work down at the bank treatin’ you, Artie?” he asked me, doing his familiar trick of inserting me into a conversation against my will.

I, being a good sport and ever the conversationalist, replied with, “How did you know I work at the bank?”

I even found myself engaging in the discussion on occasion, which surprised me. I don’t do that often. I suppose it helped somewhat that he already knew a great deal about me, though how he knew all this I still couldn’t say. I considered asking him just that, but then decided that one question of that variety was already enough. Instead I asked a simpler question.

“Why do you always call me Artie?” I asked him. “My name is Arthur.” He looked at me for a moment, mirth dancing behind his eyes, like he was deciding whether or not to tell me a brilliant joke.

“Because you told me to,” he replied. To say I did not understand would be an understatement. Then again, he didn’t give the impression that he really expected me to understand, so I left it at that. We talked some more then: I about my work and the tedious parts of being a banker, he about his own personal life. Apparently he works at an advertising firm in Leeds, and he lives alone, the same as me. It seems that neither of us had anything really interesting to say in that regard. But it’s nice to be heard, regardless. Everyone likes to be heard.

Before I knew it, my train had arrived. A glance at the clock told me it was slightly less late this time, only eight minutes now. As I took my seat in the compartment, I couldn’t help but wish it had been a little later this time. One often has unwelcome thoughts such as these, I suppose. Some things just can’t be helped.

Against all odds I found him on Wednesday as well, and

against all odds I was happy to see him. I saw him standing under the station clock, and we greeted each other like old friends. I suppose we were old friends by that point, to my standards at least. We remarked on our matching hats, though he seemed quite disappointed to find my new waistcoat wasn't quite as loud as his. I even went out on a limb and began the day's conversation.

"How've you been, Bill? Banking's been like hell for me today," I started, for lack of a better thing to say.

"Oh, you work at a bank?" replied Bill. I looked at him closely then. It did not seem like he was joking, and I know when Bill is joking. It really seemed as though this was new information to him. I had never had the pleasure of delivering new information to my friend, and certainly never new information which he had already heard. I brought up several subjects—my hobbies, my favorite foods, my marital status—all things he had known before, and yet here he was taking all of it in as though it were the first time. Bill was my closest friend, indeed my only friend, if only because I happened to be as lonely in my life as he was in his. For him to suddenly be un-remembering things about me was absurd. Perhaps he was simply forgetful, that must be it. I mustn't expect him to remember every minute detail about me. That would be unreasonable. That is what I told myself, anyway. In reality, I just hoped he wouldn't forget anything more.

The train was six minutes late this time, only just barely. I hardly noticed when it arrived. Whether I was lost in thought or in conversation I cannot say; all I know is I would have missed the train entirely had it not been for Bill. I wish I had.

On Thursday, I saw him sitting on the bench, waiting for the train. Something was odd about that. The Bill I knew never simply waited. He did what he had to do in the here and now. Even his clothes had changed. His jaunty boater hat had been replaced by a sensible bowler. The tartan waistcoat, once so offending to passersby, was gone, and in its place was a similar one in a drab, unassuming maroon. Eager to show off my budding conversation skills, and to take my mind off this new development, I sat myself down beside him and said what I had been practicing since this morning.

"Evening, Bill," I said. "How's work at the advertising firm?" He looked at me with a puzzled look that sent a chill down my spine.

"How did you know I work at an advertising firm?" That was it. This could not be chalked up to simple forgetfulness. He had told me that himself just the other day, for God's sake! The thought of losing my one true friend terrified me, and yet there he was, slipping through my fingers like fine sand. As I slowly became more confident in my social skills, it was like he became less so in his. It was maddening, it was im-

possible, and suddenly it made sense. As we went deeper into conversation, everything we said seemed familiar to me somehow. As though it had happened before, in some other time, on the other side of a bench. I felt the familiar shape of the pocket watch in my jacket pocket, and I knew. It was impossible, it was insane, but I knew it all the same. He turned to me.

"Why do you keep calling me Bill?" he asked, plainly. "My name is William." There it was. The question. I remembered the way Bill had looked when he answered it, all that time ago. I remembered the mirth in his eyes, as though he were about to tell a particularly brilliant joke. A joke indeed, old friend. The cruelest joke of all, and one that I had to tell.

"Because you told me to," I replied. And it was the truth. The terrible truth.

Four minutes late. The train arrived even earlier this time. Too early. It was strange, walking in the footsteps of my old friend. And yet, I felt as though I had been preparing for this from the moment I met him. As I waved to Bill from the carriage door, I thought about how long it would take to adjust to this new way of things. I told myself I would have plenty of time. After all, a city cannot be built in a day. And yet, another part of me thought, it could fall in a day. I tried not to think about this as I closed the compartment door.

I saw him on that bench again, on Friday. He was looking up at the timetable, waiting for the train. That appeared to be the new way of things, but I was determined to make the best of it.

"Morning, Bill," I said, taking my seat on the bench beside him. "How are we today?" This seemed to startle him more than I expected. In fact, it took him quite a while to form a response. Every second that passed served to remind me of how far removed this Bill was from the man I knew.

"It isn't morning," he replied, somewhat timidly. "It's past six in the afternoon."

"Is it?" I replied. I knew it was. Still, I made a show of checking to be sure. I scrutinized the station clock with an almost comical closeness, then compared it to my pocket watch. The hands were still running backwards. So there truly was no way out. Still, I had to put on a brave face. Bill needed me, even if he didn't know it yet. "What do you know, so it is! Ain't that a surprise?" I took off my boater hat and hung it on the end of the large black umbrella I was carrying. The movement was so familiar, so full of the memory of Bill, I nearly broke down right then. But I couldn't. I changed the subject to avoid thinking about it. "So where you off to, Bill? Somewhere exciting? New York? Bombay?" I leaned in at just the right angle, with a quick glance around

for emphasis. "Blackpool?"

"Erm... home, I suppose," he replied. "Same as always." I really did old Bill proud on that one. I laughed like my life depended on it. I made sure to deposit as much spittle on poor Bill's face as possible, then doubled over in throes of laughter. I even got in a knee slap here or there, just for show. I suppose, in a way, the laughter wasn't an act. The reality of the bizarre situation I was in set upon me, and I was left with no other choice but to laugh—to laugh at myself, at the cleverness of old Bill, of the cruel twist of impossible fate that had put me here.

"Same as always!" I said when I had finally recovered. "Ain't that the truth? Good old Bill! Classic Bill!" I slapped him on the back with a little more force than necessary. If I had to suffer, I was determined to make him suffer too. That's what friends are for.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said, turning slowly to me as if he might offend me. "But do I know you?"

To say I had not been expecting this would be a lie. I had known our time together would be brief for quite some time now. And yet, hearing him say those words made it all too real for me. I studied his face, just to see how different he looked. Just to see what time had done to old Bill. What it would do.

"You really don't recognize me, do you?" came the words from my lips. It was not a question. I already knew the answer.

The train arrived then. I looked one more time at the station clock. 6:03. Three minutes late. Just enough time. I got up to board, but I couldn't get on. Not yet. I turned and looked back at Bill. I looked him in the eyes, then. Hoping it would not be the last time. Knowing it would be. I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out the old pocket watch.

"This watch was a gift to me from a good friend of mine" I said, holding it out to him. "I think—no, I know—that he would want you to have it." He took it from me, though he hardly seemed glad to have it. That would change.

"Thank you," he replied. "I will keep good care of it." "Yes, you will," I said. I finally got the joke.

Our time was coming to an end. The train wouldn't stay put much longer. I considered waiting for the next one, but no—I couldn't. This had to be done now. "I suppose I should introduce myself," I said, locking eyes with him for one final moment. "My name is Arthur—but you can call me Artie."

Judge's comment: *While this works as a short story, it also feels like the beginning of a literary mystery novel. Jude is a memorable narrator, a sort of Nick Carraway swept up in the tumultuous life of his larger-than-life friend. The attention to detail—to the rats and that mysterious smell—are superb.*

One-Act Play

FIRST PLACE
Michael Moon
The University of Mississippi

The Last Moment

SCENE ONE

A BLANK STAGE

SEATED AT CENTER A MAN IN A CLOWN OUTFIT, RED NOSE,
FUNNY

HAIR, WHITE MAKE-UP IF POSSIBLE

THE CLOWN IS HOLDING A LARGE BOOK

HE IS STARING AT AN OPEN PAGE

CLOWN

Laughing

He turns the page

He begins to weep

He turns the page

He stops crying and begins to laugh

He turns the page

He begins to weep again

A young girl enters licking a large lollipop

She stops when she sees the clown weeping

The clown turns the page and begins to laugh

The girl looks at the audience

GIRL

A clown. Weeping, then laughing, and then weeping again. What a curious sort of thing.

She licks the lollipop

The clown turns the page and begins to weep again.
He pulls a long continuous, multicolored handkerchief from his
sleeve and blows his nose

The girl laughs

CLOWN

Do not laugh at a crying clown, don't you know what will happen?

GIRL

No? Why?

CLOWN

Your arms will fall off and your feet will explode.
Your eyes will turn back in your head.
The thing on your face that you call a mouth
will snap closed without a sound ever said.
And never a word ever eeck out again
'till you're laying, dying in bed.

That's what will happen if you laugh at a clown
while he sits and cries out his eyes,
or if you choose to do the other side of the coin
Or you cry as a clown's laugh does arise.

GIRL

I don't believe it's true.

CLOWN

Tempt fate if you will,
but these things are all true,
I promise you and I never do lie.

GIRL

But why are you crying?

CLOWN

These pictures I see, do trouble me,
and leave a hole in my mind.
The pictures I see are of you and of me,
and all the others that walk of our kind.
They are stuffed full of horror,
of anguish, of pain,
The ultimate price we all pay.
The things that I see are of death and its ways
And the silence that lies just within

GIRL

But if you see pictures of death, then why do you laugh?

CLOWN

Because death is an instant and forever is next
and the sweet release is all that we'll know.
Then the pain and the sorrow, the distress of tomorrow will melt away
as the fresh fallen snow.

GIRL

But I don't want to die.

CLOWN

No one does little girl.
No one wishes to leave,
their family, their loved ones, their homes.
But death comes to all things whether great or ungreat,
whether fancy or plain or unknown.
Each must cross o'er the river into the unspoken place.
The place where time it has gathered no bounds.
A place where the moment lasts an eon or more
and years pass in the drop of a stone.

GIRL

I am sad. You frighten me with this talk of death and forever. I am just
a little girl with so much of my life ahead. So much for me to explore

and visit. And now with this talk of yours, I feel as if there's no point.

CLOWN

Do not fear the coming of the gathering gloom.
Or the darkness that comes to your eyes.
Rejoice in the knowledge that a life that is lived
is better than a life left untried.
If you fill each of your days with a reach to the stars
Or the warmth of a hand intertwined,
then you need not to fear the coming of night or the missing of things
left behind.

He stands and brushes off his pants

I have left more behind than a thousand lost souls.
And prayed every day for the end.
And yet here I reside between heaven and hell,
In this rift that I cannot amend.

CLOWN (cont'd)

For you see I deserve a place in the flames.
A place where I cannot see hope.
A place where eternity laps at my skin,
Burning muscle, the sinew, the bone.
I'm a taker and user, a scourge to mankind,
that most reprehensible soul.
For I am the one that believes only in self
and the wealth and the power I hold.
I have trampled on many and left dust only behind.
I have caused pain and suffering unborn.
I am the willer of death to the innocent hordes.
A bringer of famines forlorn.
Those that have cursed me call me "Angel of Death"
and yet to the privileged I am mourned.
And now in this place,
I'm a clown, and buffoon,
an object of scorn and worse things.

So, cry not for yourself or the future beyond,
your happiness within is secure.
If pity be in your heart for a humbled, chastened old clown,
pat my head, give a smile, and begone.

The clown sits, opens the book and begins to cry
The girl reaches to touch him, and pulls her hand back

GIRL

Is there no hope of a release for you? Penitence completed or prayers
of others lifted to above so you may move on.

The clown closes the book

CLOWN

I am without the hope that you speak softly of.
I am without the morsel of dreams of release.
I'm destined to live 'tween my sins and my soul,
Between morning and the evening complete.
Others, they do not offer their prays for me.
They remember only the fiend.
When mentioned they sneer, turn eyes to below,
Spit on the ground
And rejoice that from the world I've been gleaned.

The girl begins to cry

CLOWN (cont'd)

Do not cry tender flower
Do not weep tears for me
I deserve this castigation and pain
I deserve to live with no future to hold
No love, no pity, just shame.
You however can leave this derelict place
And find your way along to the sun.
And there among the joy and the love of your life
You can thrive and grow and be always young.
I release you from pity, or sorrow or pain

I give you the path to your bliss
I take your tender face in my hands
And on its unwrinkled brow
Place a gentle, unfettered kiss.
The clown takes her face and kisses her brow

CLOWN (cont'd)

No go my dear, tender, sweetness
Before the quiet sun starts to fall into night
Before the darkness envelopes this unpleasant world
Before all good is extinguished from life
Leave me here in my prison
of worlds that might surely have been
Had my heart become unknotted, unfurled.
Leave me here to suffer my penance and pain
Go now, my dear loving girl.

GIRL

I wish I had known you before. Before all of this. Maybe all you
needed was someone to love. Maybe all you needed was someone to
care about you and then you would have seen all the hurt you caused.
Maybe I could have been that someone.

CLOWN

Your words cause me pause and tear at my heart
Filling me with rue and regret.
I wish too, I had known the love you can give
Then perhaps my torment, would be less.
But you, your life, must go on from here
You must find the joy of your time
And if, in the quiet of a morning or night

CLOWN (cont'd)

You feel the brush of a hand on your arm,
It is I in the shadows come to bid you hello

Between the tick of a clock and it's chime.

GIRL

I shall never forget you. I shall pray for you, to God or whatever you wish. Perhaps sometime in the forever of tomorrow, we can meet again and go walking along the strand and enjoy and laugh an hour or too.

CLOWN

I await that moment,
held now in my heart
Forever a blessing to this clown that is cursed.
I will hold it warm to my breast
as the cold winters blow
and the rains raise their violent tempest.
Perhaps my salvation lies in your sweet smile,
As you leave and crossover this place.
Perhaps my future is better for you
Having come to my aid, given solace and love to this face.

She goes to him and hugs him
Then begins to leave, stopping before walking offstage to turn
and wave
She walks into a bright light and disappears

CLOWN (cont'd)

And into the rising sun she did run,
Into the enveloping light.
Leaving behind the wonder that only love can bestow
And a clown whose heart is contrite.

He walks back to the book on the floor

Sits in the same spot as start

He opens the book and begins to cry.

Blackout

SCENE TWO

THE CLOWN IS SEATED CENTERSTAGE

HE IS BOUNCING A BALL, AS IF PLAYING JACKS

CLOWN

On is one

He bounces the ball again

CLOWN

Two is two

He bounces the ball again

CLOWN

Three was never here

He bounces again

CLOWN

Four is more than five or six

He bounces again

CLOWN

The rest can never be here

A man walks in

He is dressed in an aviator hat and large coat

He is holding a large, unfolded map

He takes deliberate steps counting out loud

MAN

1,432 (he steps) 1,433, (he steps) 1,434

He stops
Looks around

MAN

This is not right, this is not right at all

He turns the map once and then again in the same direction

MAN

Ahhhh. Thee we go.
He starts stepping again.

MAN

1,435 (he steps), 1,436 (he steps) 1,437(he steps)

CLOWN

Excuse me
The man steps

CLOWN

Excuse me. Can I help you?

The clown gets up from the ground
The man stops

MAN

I don't know. Can you?

CLOWN

I believe I can

The man turns towards the clown

MAN

You see... I have a problem. It seems that I've taken a wrong turn somewhere, and I'm all turned around and can't tell my way back

The man spins the map again

CLOWN

Perhaps, you are where you need to be.

MAN

I don't think so

The man takes down his goggles and looks around

MAN

No, No, No. I'm sure I'm meant to be somewhere else

CLOWN

Do you know where?

MAN

Well of course I do. I mean really. I wouldn't be stomping around aimlessly, would I?

CLOWN

Well, I guess not

MAN

Well of course not, of course not, of course not. This map is all wrong, all wrong.

The man turns the map again

MAN

I just need to find another way

CLOWN

Another way to do what?

The man folds the map and puts it in his pocket
He pulls a sextant from his pocket and puts it to his eyes

CLOWN

Will that help?

MAN

It always has before

CLOWN

So, you've been lost before?

MAN

Oh yes, yes, yes. Many times, before

CLOWN

And you always find your way?

The man pulls down the sextant

MAN

No. Come to think of it, I never have.

CLOWN

Maybe you should try something different.

MAN

Different? Different? But this is what I've always done. It's what I know to do.

CLOWN

Maybe it's time to learn something new.

MAN

What? And give this all up? The adventure, the anticipation, the seeking that which is not known.

CLOWN

The loneliness, the hunger never filled, the fear.

MAN

I'm not afraid.

CLOWN

No, no, no of course not.

MAN

Of course, not...

He pauses

MAN

It might be interesting to try something different, as an experiment.
Do you have a suggestion?

CLOWN

Perhaps listen to yourself.

MAN

Listen to myself? Listen to myself? That's ridiculous. Listen to myself

He pauses scratching his chin

MAN

What would I hear?

CLOWN

I don't know. I've never listened for you.

MAN

Well...I'm willing to try. If you think it might help

CLOWN

Could it hurt?

MAN

Of course, it could. Of course, it could. But still... I will try

The man puts away the sextant
He stands straight with his hands at his sides

MAN

Is this good?

CLOWN

As good as any

MAN

And I just listen?

CLOWN

Just listen

The man closes his eyes
The man stands motionless
The clown holds out his hands and begins raising fingers as if
counting
He stops at ten
The man opens his eyes, he looks around

MAN

No. No. No. Didn't work. Thought it might, but no. Fool's errand I
suppose

CLOWN

There are no fools that listen to their own hearts

MAN

Yes...well...Must be on my way

He pats his pockets to make sure he has everything

MAN

Goodbye then

He steps and begins to count towards offstage

MAN

7,438 (he steps) 7,439 (he steps)

He stops

MAN

I'll try that listening thing again. Might work in a different place. Never know. Never know.

He begins stepping and counting as many as needed to be offstage

The clown takes the ball from his pocket and sits

He bounces the ball and counts out loud with the next number in sequence from the man

He stops

CLOWN

I hope he listens

He bounces the ball and counts

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE

A BLANK PLACE

WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF WIND HOWLING

AND THEN THE SOUNDS OF TINKLING GLASS

LIGHTS UP ON A MAN STANDING AT CENTER, DRESSED IN A
CLOWN COSTUME, NOT UNLIKE CLOWN

HE RAISES HIS HEAD AND LOOKS UP

CLOWN

By the time I finished unpacking things
I had forgotten who I was.
By the time I remembered just who I was,
It was time to go again.

The clown begins running or skipping in place.

There was a little turtle.
He lived inside a box.
He swam inside a puddle.
He climbed upon the rocks.

He snapped at a mosquito.
He snapped at a small flea.
He snapped once at a minnow.
And then he snapped at me.

He caught the flying mosquito.
He caught the jumping flea.
He caught the swimming minnow.

(he stops running)

But he never did catch me. (Vachel Lindsay)

The clown starts to do jumping jacks
After several jumps, he begins counting

CLOWN (cont'd)

One hundred-thirty-seven, one hundred-thirty-eight, one hundred thirty-nine, Two Thousand.

The clown stops and bends over breathing heavily

CLOWN (cont'd)

To think this costume once fit me like a glove.

A young woman in a gas mask, respirator or simply a dust mask.

She is wearing a stained dress and no shoes.

She enters dragging behind her a computer keyboard.

She stops when she sees the clown, and then continues to walk

Hello?

The woman stops and sits on the ground

She pulls the keyboard onto her lap

She begins to tap at the keys, slowly first, and then with great fever

Can you hear me? I said hello.

The woman stops typing and looks at the clown.

She removes her mask or respirator

She stares at the clown for a moment before speaking

SUMMER

Hello.

She returns to typing

CLOWN

What are you typing?

SUMMMER

My memoirs.

CLOWN

Oh really. How interesting. How long have you been writing?

SUMMER

My whole life, silly.

CLOWN

Why of course you have. How stupid of me.

She becomes agitated

SUMMER

Don't say that word! Don't ever say that word!

CLOWN

What word? Do you mean stupid?

SUMMER

She gets up and runs to him excited
AHHHH! Don't say it. They'll hear you! They'll come and get you and
take you away! Just like they did Mommy and Daddy.

CLOWN

(calming her down)

All right. All right. I won't say it again. I promise.

The young woman goes back to her keyboard and continues to
type

CLOWN

Are you from around here?

SUMMER

(not looking up from the keyboard)

From over there.

She points offstage

CLOWN

You mean from the mountains?

SUMMER

No. From over the mountains and thru the woods. To grandmother's
house we go.

CLOWN

The horse knows the way.

SUMMER

No. (she shakes her head violently) No, it didn't. That's why I'm here. Because it didn't know the way, and we got lost.

CLOWN

Who's we?

SUMMER

(realizing she's said something she shouldn't)

No one.

CLOWN

Are there more of you?

SUMMER

No, just me. Me and my shadow.

CLOWN

Where are the others?

SUMMER

There's no one else, I'm alone.

(she is avoiding something)

I need to get going.

She wraps the cord of the keyboard around the board

SUMMER

(standing up)

Miles to go before I sleep.

CLOWN

It hasn't snowed in forever here. I miss the snow. Do you miss snow?

SUMMER

(she starts to go and then stops)

What's snow?

CLOWN

(he reaches out and stops her)

Where were you? When it happened?

SUMMER

When what happened?

CLOWN

You know... The end.

She sits back down on the floor and stares out into space

SUMMER

I was taking classes to be a secretary. My teacher sent me to the basement for some paper. All the paper was in the basement, you see. I

went down the steps and into this room. It was stacked to the ceiling with boxes and boxes of paper. There were all kinds of paper, big paper, small paper, white paper, colored paper. Then

SUMMER (cont'd)

there was this loud noise. A huge stack of the boxes fell on me, they must have hit my head. When I woke up I was covered in dust, it was dark and I was scared. I felt my way out of the room and onto the steps and up from the basement. To my surprise, all the people were gone. All of them, gone. All my classmates, all of the teachers, even the people on the street, gone. I was scared. I walked for blocks and blocks thru the town looking for someone, anyone, but everyone had disappeared. I took my keyboard, and I started walking. Until I found you, here.

She wipes a tear from her eye and then unwraps the cord of the keyboard and types something. The clown stares out into the sky

CLOWN

Weep not, child, Weep not, my darling, let me remove your tears, The ravening clouds shall not long be victorious, They shall not long possess the sky. (Walt Whitman)

SUMMER

That's pretty. What is it?

CLOWN

I learned it, what seems like a million years ago.

SUMMER

It was only yesterday.

CLOWN

You're right. How silly of me.

SUMMER

What about you?

CLOWN

What about me?

SUMMER

What happened to you? How did you get here? Where did you come from?

CLOWN

I have always been here. I will always be here. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. They are all the same to me. It's been so long, that sometimes I forget my name. Funny, hunh?

SUMMER

You're a Clown.

CLOWN

Yes, yes, that's it. Clown. That's right. I'm a clown.

SUMMER

A sad clown.

CLOWN

A clown that cries. Tears streak down my face and fade away my make-up until I can cry no more and then I laugh for not being able to cry.

He laughs

But the laughter is hollow because I'm still crying on the inside.
The young woman turns to him

SUMMER

Tell me a story.

CLOWN

(turning away from her)

I don't know any stories

SUMMER

(goes to him pulling on his coat)

Yes you do. Please? Please? Please tell me a story. Please?

CLOWN

Oh. Very well. Go and sit.

The girl jumps about in excitement and finally goes to sit facing upstage towards the clown

CLOWN

There once was a bird. The most beautiful bird in the world. This bird had feathers of gold and silver and a beak carved from alabaster pearl.

The clown preens itself as if the bird

Its eyes were the color of sapphires, and he could see for thousands of miles in every direction from his perch atop the tallest tree in the forest.

The clown strains his neck looking around

One fine and sun-filled day the bird spied a commotion far away from his perch. He looked closely to see the reason for the flurry, but it was just out of his sight. His curiosity overtook him, so he spread his magnificent wings of gold and silver and flew off towards the dust and shaking of trees.

The clown pretends he is the bird flying
The young woman claps silently in excitement

The bird flew and flew to reach the place of the disturbance. There in a clearing was a boy, holding to a large haunch of meat. Holding fast to the other end was a tiger. Large and striped, snarling and growling at the boy.

The boy struggled to pull against the tiger, bracing himself on the ground as the tiger pulled and pulled.

The clown reenacts the struggle as first the boy and then the tiger, complete with snarling and growling

He switches sides as he acts the parts

CLOWN
(as boy)

Let go of my supper you thief, you stealer, you cat!

CLOWN
(as tiger)

The meat is mine man-child. I chased this doe for hours and hours until she disappeared into the thick of the forest. When I came upon this clearing, I found the meat unprotected. It is mine to take.

CLOWN
(as boy)

The meat is mine. I killed the doe with my blade, and I slaughtered the meat. I left the clearing to wash the blood from my hands. This is to go to my family who are hungry and poor. Let go and I will tell you where the hunting is easy and you will have much meat to fill your belly.

CLOWN
(as tiger)

Why should I work to catch the meat of another animal, when I have all, I need right here. Let go manchild or you may become another mouthful that I will have to swallow.

CLOWN
(raising his wings again)

The boy and the tiger continued to struggle pulling one way and then another. The beautiful bird grew tired of their angry words and the commotion they raised.

CLOWN

So he flew high above them, as high as the sun was in the sky and then he turned back to them. Folding his wings close to his body, Moving faster and faster right at the two struggling in the clearing.

The clown folds his arms against his side and makes himself into a rocket

CLOWN

Like a rocket the beautiful bird plummeted to earth. When he had nearly reached the tiger and the boy, he raised his head and swooped between them snatching the large hunk of meat from both their grasps.

The clown mimics the actions of the story

CLOWN

The bird flew above them, just out of reach, holding the piece of meat in its talons, he spoke to the two below him.

CLOWN
(as bird)

You foolish child and silly tiger. See how easily I took what you both fought so hard for. See how quickly you both have nothing, instead of the meat that could have filled your belly. Now neither will taste the sweet release of hungry as it is sated by this prize. I will take it far away and drop it in on top of the mountains. So none can have it.

CLOWN
(as boy)

But that meat is mine. I killed the doe, and then slaughtered the meat for my family.

CLOWN
(as tiger)

I have chased the doe for hours. It is mine to have. Give us the meat!

CLOWN
(as bird)

You should have shared the bounty and then both would have benefited from the doe giving its life. Now the doe's death means nothing, and you both will grow hungry.

CLOWN
(as tiger)

Perhaps then I will take the manchild as my prize.

CLOWN
(as boy)

The meat of a tiger is as good as the meat of a doe when your belly is empty.

The clown squares off against himself The tiger snarls and swipes with his claws The boy jabs with his blade.

The clown acts the fight as the jump on each other with snarling and yelling

Until there is a great scream of pain and aloud snarl of pain from both

The clown collapses onto the ground

Then the clown becomes the bird again

CLOWN
(as bird)

From the pain of selfishness, you have brought this upon yourself. Neither needed all they had and surely could have shared with the other. But now both lie dead and give food to the small things that scurry about he ground. This meat will be your gravestone, the marker for your foolishness. Let others learn from your mistake. Let others give, so that they may not end as you.

The clown opens his talons and drops the meat, then opens his arms to fly

CLOWN

The beautiful bird lifted its head to the setting sun as he flew back towards home in the trees far away. The sun shone off the gold and silver in his wings. His eyes glowed in the coming darkness. Tears dropped from his eyes, small diamonds catching the last rays of sunlight. He

wept, wishing the world knew beauty and love instead of ugliness and hate.

The clown folds his arms at his side and bows his head
The young woman claps and stands running to the clown

SUMMER

I love that story.

CLOWN

How could you? I only just now created it.

SUMMER

I know a story just like it then, and I love it. Only it doesn't end that way.

CLOWN

How does it end?

SUMMER

The boy and the tiger share the meat and they all live happily ever after.

CLOWN

That only happens in fairy tales.

SUMMER

I thought that's what this was.

CLOWN

No. This is real. This is life.

SUMMER

I don't like life. Life like this, I mean.

CLOWN

Nor do I, but it is all we have.

She gathers her keyboard and mask

SUMMER

I suppose I need to get going. It was a pleasure to see you. I hope to see you again.

CLOWN

I am always here. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow, they're all the same to me.

SUMMER

Goodbye.

A bright, blinding light shines from offstage

She leaves crossing into the light

CLOWN

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes.
(Lord Byron)

The clown bends his head down

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE FOUR

THE CLOWN STANDS CENTER STAGE IN A SPOT

CLOWN

I've no special words to say to you before you go. I will simply say this. I live here between and betwixt and will never leave. I have known the joy of existence and unbearable sadness of death. I have laughed and loved and cried with the best of them for millennium, and found only this.....

Without each other we walk in a darkness that consumes all we may be. It is within each other that we can truly say we are alive.

So reach out to those beside you. Reach further to others who now seem too far. For all you may touch are your salvation and hope

The clown walks downstage as far as possible an additional spot lights him

CLOWN

I give you blessings and joy,
I give happiness and peace.
I give you life ever eternal in the hearts and minds of those you love.
But mostly.
Yes mostly.
I give you life.

The clown throws handfuls of glitter into the audience.
Lights quickly blackout while glitter is still in the air.

Judge's comment: This selection addresses family matters, but on a universal scale that gives voice to the awful burden of morality. Building on the cheerful/fearful binary of contemporary clown imagery, the work delivers evocative, worldly-wise commentary through the pulsating rhythms of its verse. A deft hand drives the dexterous metrics and anaphoric patterns that produce the play's apocalyptic carny, who understands wearily that "death is an instant and forever is next / and the sweet release is all that we'll know. / Then the pain and the sorrow, the distress of tomorrow / will melt away as the fresh fallen snow." This play is in a class by itself for its length, breadth, and scope.

SECOND PLACE

Alaina Wilder
Blue Mountain College

Guess I Won't Miss You
A Monologue in One Act

Cast of Characters

Thomas: Young man of 18.

Scene

A kitchen table at the family home.

Time

Wartime 1942. U.S.A.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: The homey kitchen of a run-down farmhouse on the outskirts of a tiny southern town. A tin wash pan sits on a table, around which are stacked piles of dirty supper dishes. Three kerosene lamps are the only light for the kitchen, illuminating a sparse room with a table set, chairs, and a rocking chair with a homemade quilt laying over the arm. A back bench has a pile of tiny clothes which need mending, a large pitcher of water and a radio, which is playing a wartime song. It is evening, and cicadas chirp gently in the background.

AT RISE: Thomas slouches at the kitchen table alone, wearing work clothes, and huge work boots, which he has propped up on a chair next to him. He fingers an embroidered dish cloth that sits on the edge of the table on which his other hand is drumming. He is looking into the distance, listening to the cicadas sing. Sounds of several children laughing flit by, then a storm door slams, and the sounds fade.

THOMAS

(He stares for a minute, then wipes tears from his eyes roughly, sitting up straight in his chair. He looks deeply at the dish cloth now clutched in his hand.

He speaks with tears in his voice.

Guess I won't miss all that banging and shrieking. All those little wormy fingers looking for prizes, and so many mouths to feed.

He stands slowly. The radio tune turns to an announcer reading a war bond advertisement. He moves to the bench and turns it off angrily. He turns to the pile of dishes and speaks with a bit more feeling.)

And all these dishes! Guess I won't miss them at all!

Quieter, fingering each dish

Not this little cup and saucer. Or this one with the blue print and a chunk missing too.

He walks to the back counter, and picks up the pitcher of water. Moving back to the table, he pours it into the wash pan. Picking up the plates, he begins to wash them slowly and methodically, and speaks in a quicker tone.

Yes sir. I'll be proud to leave all this clutter behind me. Pick up Germany's mess instead of this family's. Guess by this time tomorrow I'll be cleaning my gun instead of leftovers.

(Picks up a plate with a half-eaten piece of pie. Pinches a bite from it, and speaks with mouth full.)

Guess I won't miss choosing apple or pecan pie for after Sunday dinner.

Speaking loudly into the room Stage.

Why can we never have a piece of both mamma? Just once I'd like to have apple and pecan in my mouth at the same time! (Shaking his head and smiling, he

turns to put a plate on the back counter and drops it. It shatters. He grunts angrily.)

Guess I won't miss mending everythin' 'till it dies of old age.

(As he picks up the shards, he cuts himself. Hissing, he drops the shard and holds his hand to his mouth, sucking the blood.)

Guess I won't miss you always trying to sew me up mamma.

(Smiling.)

It always hurts worse after you try to fix it.

(Standing he brushes the pieces under the counter. Moving back to the dishes he picks up again.)

You'll never see me in ratty shoes again. No sir. I'll be wearing spit shined spanking new ones by the end of the week. And you'll never find me without a smoke to spare. Uncle Sam has a pack waiting with my name on it.

(Picking up a child's cup, he holds it up to examine it. Speaking softly.)

Guess I won't miss turning jump rope for those hooligans 'till my arms fall off.

(Slowly putting the cup back in the water, he stares off into the distance.)

Or fishing all those drowned sailboats out of the swimming hole. Or waiting for 12 pairs of hands to fold before every meal. (Coming to himself, he splashes the

water, then starts to stack up the clean dishes. He begins to wipe them dry with the embroidered towel.)

Guess I won't miss having flowers on all my towels.

(Tears start to well in his eyes, and he holds the towel to his chest. Crying, he kisses the towel several times.)

Guess I won't miss all your crying watching me go. Or all those times I find you watching, like I'm already in a box. Guess I'd rather be gone. (Setting down the towel, he paces to the other end of the kitchen. Turning sharply back, he points at the dish towel.)

I promise you'll be happy to have me as a son. Guess you won't miss me when I start winning medals and honors. Guess you'll be glad enough I went after all.

(Walking back to the table, he picks up the towel and wipes his own tears with it.)

Guess soon you'll have so many proud tears you'll have to wipe them with the fanciest towels.

(He begins to stack clean dishes on the counter. Turning back for another pile, he finds the stack of children's clothes that need mending.)

Guess I won't miss having every kind of hand-me-down. Or mending every pair of jeans 'till they're more patch than denim. Guess I won't miss sitting with you at night while you do it.

(Sinking to the floor, he holds the towel in one hand and picks up a broken shard from the shattered plate in the other hand.)

Guess I won't miss all the June bugs singing before it's close to June. No sir. Tomorrow I'll have other things to ponder on. (Putting the towel to his chest, he speaks very softly. It sounds like he is quoting something - not a person, but an idea.)

Nothing's more important than making sure good ole Uncle Sam has enough boys to get rid 'a them bullies.

(He stands and looks around)

And if I'm that important, then I can't miss this tiny place. There's nothing here important enough for me to miss. Guess I won't even think of a nook or cranny.

(The storm door slams open and shut again. The sound of bare feet on hardwood echoes.)

You'd better not bring those dirty feet in here! Guess I won't miss all your mess when I'm out of here!

(Thomas walks to the middle of the room, towards the storm door. Stopping, he looks at the embroidered towel in his hands, then tucks it into the back pocket of his pants. He pauses for a moment, turns the radio back on, then he slowly leaves the room.)

(Blackout)

(End Scene)

Judge's comment: *This play is a heartfelt soliloquy reflecting an abiding love for home and hearth, which is seemingly rejected by a speaker bound for the uncertainties of war. Swimming holes, saying grace before supper, "June bugs singing," embroidered towels with flowers—all function as poignant reminders of a beautiful clarity deep-rooted within his native environs, a clarity underscored nicely through the monologue's use of repetitive utterances to convince otherwise.*

THIRD PLACE
K. Corley Taylor
The University of Mississippi

They Gave Her A Bear

Act One

Scene 1

Mama B's House, Ripley, MS.

MAMA B, an elderly woman with Alzheimer's, peeks her head in the doorway to the bedroom from the kitchen. In the bed, A life-sized teddy bear wearing pajamas is tucked under the sheets. MAMA B sees the bear and enters the room.

MAMA B

There you are! I didn't realize you were still asleep. Do you need any extra blankets? Do you need any water?

MAMA B continues to tuck in the bear. EMILY walks into the scene, standing a few steps ahead of the bed. She watched her grandmother with sorrow in her eyes. Emily turns to look at us.

EMILY

They gave her a bear. It's as big as he was. They dressed him up in my Papa's old clothes. When she sees the bear lying in her bed, tucked under the blankets, she thinks her husband is sleeping. She thinks my grandpa has gone ahead of her and gone to sleep. He has. He isn't in this house though.

EMILY walks over and wraps an arm around MAMA B.

EMILY

I think Papa is still sleeping. Why don't we go make some breakfast?

MAMA B

Okay, sugar. I'll make your Papa some biscuits. I think I still have some pear preserves in the fridge.

EMILY

That sounds wonderful.

EMILY and MAMA B go to the kitchen. MAMA B starts making breakfast. EMILY looks back at us and sits down at the kitchen table.

EMILY

He won't eat her homemade biscuits in the morning. His ice-blue eyes won't peer out the window, seeing what birds decided to visit their back porch. He won't read over the obituaries, seeing which of their friends in town have passed on.

MAMA B starts pacing. She walks over to EMILY. EMILY smiles at her.

MAMA B

Now I'm trying to get my head wrapped around what's going on. Do you know where my husband is?

EMILY

He's at the store.

MAMA B

Oh! That's right. I wonder if we should head over there. He might need some help.

EMILY

We can go check on him about six.

MAMA B

Yeah. I reckon he'll be wanting something to eat. Alright, I'll do some cleaning until then.

EMILY

Sounds good.

MAMA B starts doing the dishes. EMILY turns back to us.

EMILY

Time changes things. It isn't like it used to be. They won't ride over to the guitar store that they ran together for over 50 years. He won't be working in the back, fixing an amplifier for some church in town. He won't greet the teenagers who come to see what it is like to hold a guitar for the first time. He won't talk with those same kids about following their dreams and discovering a love of music. He won't stretch on his stool behind the counter as he looks at the clock. He won't go to his office and figure out how they are going to keep their business running on tight finances. He won't smile as he wraps an arm around his wife. He won't lock the door and shut the lights off. He won't drive home. He does still take care of her though. He built the table she eats on. He helped raise the kids that make her breakfast now. He put everything he worked for in her name, so she would have the money to live out the rest of her years. He still loves her. He still loves all of us.

From her place by the sink, MAMA B starts crying. EMILY gets up and wraps her arms around her.

EMILY

What's wrong?

MAMA B

I don't know where my people are.

EMILY

What do you mean?

MAMA B

I haven't seen my brothers or my sister. I haven't seen my mama or my daddy. Do you know where they are? Are they out picking cotton?

EMILY

Yea, they're probably out in the field. I'm here with you. I'm your granddaughter Emily, remember?

MAMA B

Yes, you're my sweet girl.

EMILY

Thank you. How do you feel about getting a nap? I think Papa is in the bed. Would you like to join him?

MAMA B

Well, I would, but I have so much to do.

EMILY

I'll tell you what. I'll take care of the housework and you can go get some rest.

MAMA B

Alright. I didn't realize my husband was sleepin'.

EMILY walks MAMA B to the bed. She tucks her in by the bear.

MAMA B pats the bear as she lays down.

EMILY

I love you Mama B.

MAMA B

I love you too, honey.

EMILY turns off the light and turns back to us.

EMILY

She grew up with seven brothers and one sister. She got married at 19. She had two boys and one girl. She has always lived in a loud house. The house is too quiet for her now. My grandmother still smiles though. She smiles when I tell her my name and she recognizes me again. She smiles when I tell her how much I love her. She smiles when someone tells her a joke like my Papa used to. She smiles at night when she crawls into bed with her bear.

Judge's comment: *This play offers a subtle indictment of societies that turn their back on the elderly. Partly a lament to a bygone era, the piece skillfully employs direct address to contrast the communal connections of the past (mom and pop stores, churches, biscuits and back porches) with the present-day disconnect and confusion of a grandmother suffering from Alzheimer's (the life-sized Teddy Bear of the title serving as an empty substitute for an absent family's flesh and blood affection).*

Creative Non-Fiction

FIRST PLACE

Jude Keef

University of Tennessee-Chattanooga

Fragments (ver. 2)

I can't tell you much about the bench. I don't remember much about the bench. I only remember fragments. I remember a simple wooden slab held up by two columns of bricks. I remember taking photos on it in our backyard. I remember years later, when it was moved to the front yard. And I remember my mom stacking up the bricks. When the old pillars were starting to slip and crumble, she would lift and move the heavy slab making up the seat, knock over the two legs made of loose bricks, and rebuild them. She'd place the base of the new columns, two squares of eight bricks a piece. Afterward, the heavy wooden slab would get replaced. There's no way I saw my mom do this more than once or twice, but still, in remembering, that one image has latched itself to me. There's nothing between them, and thus, so often a brick would fall down from the edge of the pillar, then two, then three before a slouch of the whole thing. Such a careful placement of bricks—not just clean new hardware-store bricks, but dirty, dusty, chipped-on-the-corner bricks; two-halves-which-don't-belong-together bricks; edges-lined-in-mortar bricks; bricks where all the pieces were there, but where you knew, you just did, that it was going to fall apart from either an extreme of neglect and weather, or the strain of heavy use, but not something in between.

By now, the bench hasn't been used or moved in years. Both my sister and I have moved away for college, and my mom is a back porch user anyway. The front one is too small to fit a chair, a table, and an ashtray, and too public on that note. Sitting on the front porch is an invitation that has been lost. The Stoics were named so from the Greek stoa, a porch, because Zeno would stand (for the English stand and the Greek stoa come from the same Indo-European root *sta-) on the Painted Porch and call fellow learners over to be taught. But my mom has no reason to call anyone over, so now the bench sits in ruin. The center of the slab, where the pith of the trunk that made it into the plank has now

completely decayed. A crack caused by this decay runs from the open end of the slab and makes its way more than halfway down the top of the plank.

The slab comes from the Walnut Street Bridge, if I believe everything my parents have told me. It is a fragment of an old version. I don't believe everything my parents have told me. My father once told me that the tread in tires were there so that you wouldn't crush ants when you drove. This seems like the little lies you tell your kids where they are overly curious, but they aren't little if you weave everything he's said together. I was way too old when I started tearing down that wall of false knowledge. I don't know why he didn't just tell me it was to grip the road. But it's funnier to him this way.

But I believe this hard fact. The slab is too beautiful to come from anywhere else. It is a beautiful shade, naturally dark from the source, but deepened by age, or by chemical additives, probably by pressure treatment. The story I remember is that it was foraged, like so many other things, in the time of my father. Most of his belongings that were inside the house are now long gone, but the remnants of his hand in the front yard were the last to go. One day, he brought in this chunk of pipe. It was probably over a foot in diameter. A muddy rusty red, and then red-orange in the places where the rust itself had seemed to rust. He dug a hole in the front garden. It was no garden but an area in front of the house enclosed by the driveway, sidewalk and porch—where a garden should be, and where a garden now is, ever since my mom remarried to Curtis, someone who shares her pattern of suburban aesthetics. After my father dug the hole, he placed the pipe in vertically. On the top of the pipe, he took the lid of one of our nice thrifted candy dishes and turned it upside-down, creating a wide shallow saucer from it, and then, in his finishing touches, added a handful of garden pebbles and the centimeter of water it could hold. Now, it was a birdbath. Charming, perhaps, if anyone could have found him and his handiwork charming. Charming, if you didn't live with him. Charming, if you didn't have half his genes. Charming, if you got to drive by it maybe, if you didn't have to stare past it every time you looked out the dining room window, every time you looked at the neighbors' houses from within yours, every time you looked at Richard's proper concrete birdbath, surround by butterfly bushes and other flowers, and therefore surrounded by butterflies and birds and bees. Alive, in one word.

I don't want to use this rotting slab of wood as a metaphor for a house in disrepair, but it would be neglect to act like it wasn't a symptom.

The Walnut Street Bridge is at the heart of Chattanooga's identity. Or that is what the tourism board has latched onto. It is one of the world's longest and oldest pedestrian bridges. It's an iconic part of the skyline. And I will admit that I like having a fragment of history in my childhood yard. Early 2021, while working on a short podcast, I was tasked with writing the introductory fluff that will paint the broad strokes of what that history was.

It's Chattanooga's own Statue of Liberty, nothing more than a pleasant tourist attraction to most. Many tourist sites will tell you the story of a bridge that was once in a state of disrepair in the 1980s, and was almost demolished before a community effort raised enough funds to revive it into the central attraction it is today. Many have heard about the bridge that holds community events every year, or seen the bridge in the background of wedding photos and postcards.

And yet, this bench is not a fragment of history itself. It is a part of the bridge, which itself is the fragment. The podcast I worked on, *We Care Now*, was commissioned by the Ed Johnson Project, seeking to share with a broad audience the rest of the history. The project itself is named after the man who was lynched on the bridge in 1906, leading to the only criminal trial the Supreme Court has ever judged. Growing up in this city, I will tell you that the Hamilton County curriculum dedicated 30 seconds of one class period in 12th grade to go over this fact.

In an effort to scrub and reconstruct the memory of my childhood, I have spent time staring at the past using Google Maps. Through grainy captures I see the slight movement of the bricks and the slab every five or so years as it alternates its location in front of the porch, after it was moved the front yard, after the tornado in April of 2011 knocked down the largest oak in our backyard, taking with it a few yards of dirt in the roots and physically destroying the resting place of the bench. I see other things in these captures. The birdbath; a mailbox nailed to a large decorative post he also made, in the shape of a cross, with a thrift-store lantern glued on top; The verdant shrubs he cut down marking the property line; the broke down cars from a time before my memory, neglected passion projects, which filled the property before they were sold to feed the kids. What is the point of this capture, being

held in large servers, with millions of pictures of other houses, of other childhoods. Do I feel more connected to the moments of myself when I see things I once saw with my eyes? Why do I attempt to pick up the fragments of past still available to me and glue them to my present?

The act of observation here raises the questions itself. Knowing that I'm writing a piece trying to preserve the memory, the idea of this bench, causes me to ask about it at Thanksgiving. While sitting, for once, on the front porch as everyone takes a smoke break, I raise the question as casually as possible. I am sitting on the bench now, and I point at it. Where did the slab come from again? I am worried that I was wrong. If it didn't come from the bridge, my piece is ruined. I am ashamed to be writing about something so insignificant as the bench. At the same time, I am ashamed to be writing about something so important. When Maggie Nelson writes her *Bluets*, she knows that she's not really talking about the color blue. I can tell myself I am attempting such innocence as capturing this bench on the page, but we are never just talking about what we're saying. Our brains merely cast shadows on our tongue.

I push further than I usually do when I, for the first time, ask how we got the slab, not where. When my parents first moved in together, they lived on the other side of town, in Northshore, right next to the bridge, in the late 80s. My mom tells me that their neighbor Scott had the slab. He told them he just took it from a pile on the construction site years earlier. The restoration of the bridge had stalled, and surely, when it kicked back up in a few months, all that beautiful wood was going to the dump. Besides, Scott needed something heavy to tie his dog when he put him in the yard. Eventually it traded hands, and then it was my father's.

My mom tells me that walking the bridge was my father's idea of a first date. I didn't realize why she didn't think so too, until she reminded me that when he first asked her out, the date would have involved breaking into a construction site and making sure you didn't step through the missing planks.

I still come to my work as an amateur archivist with a numb desperation. The work I attempt to do in my writing, the work committees do in creating memorials, the work servers do in preserving: what is the reason for it? Historically, people have only ever wanted pieces. The Colosseum is not in disrepair just because time did that. We didn't

want to keep it in repair. After an earthquake shattered it, we plundered the bricks. We cared less about the whole picture, but about one part. One of my professors tells the story of how his son-in-law's restaurant in Rome has an old Colosseum brick framed above the door to the bathroom. He owns a fragment of the past. Only a fragment? Or is a fragment something great and powerful itself?

The porch-standing Stoics had an answer. Marcus Aurelius, the last of Rome's "Five Good Emperors," wrote in Book V of his *Mediations* that "the integrity of the whole is mutilated, if thou cuttest off anything whatever from the conjunction and the continuity either of the parts or of the causes." Fragments don't exist, and to act like they do is a mutilation of the world as we know it. Rarely is the act of nature as passive as we claim it is. Humans are in the whole of nature too. The National Parks often look as sublime as they do because of centuries of an indigenous population tending to the brush and wildlife, hands on. It is the white conservationist's view that true nature is something untouched, removed from humans, that is causing parks to fall into disrepair. What we have done to the world, and what we haven't done to the world, is part of the history.

The British Museum collects fragments of the world too and puts them in one place. There is something to be said of the looting it has done in its lifespan, but we must also ask what we think about attempting to reduce the world into one building, shattering it to condense it. What story does it tell? When I see the *Lonely Sister* in the British Museum, I can see what the fragment speaks of: a skilled craftsmanship removed from any context worth talking about. And I can quickly walk room to room and say the same about a myriad of pieces. What is important here is when you look at the white space around each object. I only care about the *Lonely Sister* because I have seen pictures of the five Caryatids in Athens, with one empty spot for their sixth. I do not care about that brick above the bathroom in a restaurant in Rome. I care about the whole—or the unwhole—of the Colosseum.

The bench is a fragment. It is a mutilation of something I keep reaching for. But in reaching for it, I am attempting to reconnect it. A meditation on the bench is an unmutilation. I see the bench, and I see my mom cleaning up what my father has handed her, restacking the pillars so it won't fall completely. I see the remnants of my father rotting

through the center, and years later, my mom and Curtis continuing to rejuvenate the house in his decade-long absence.

When asking about the slab at Thanksgiving, Curtis tells my mom and I his dream plans for it. He would take it to a woodshop, run it through a planer, and pressure wash all the moss and rot out the center. After that, he would fill all the voids with resin, and make it into the countertop for a little bar table that could go in the kitchen. I take quick mental offense at the idea of destroying the bench, but it would be the last restoration it needed. Before I can say anything, my mind is changed. Let the bench fall now. The artifacts have ran their course in our yard. There is no need for a fragment if I have no need for the remembering of the whole. I wouldn't mind eventually being handed down a nice handmade table.

Judge's comment: *This is a beautifully woven braided essay that shares the speaker's concern for ecological preservation, paternal relationships, and local Chattanooga development with the running motif of the problem of what to do with an old bench. Each thread carries the reader through time (the speaker's childhood, to Ancient Rome, and to a modern time in Tennessee) as it laces together our final destination's key message. A mature cry for letting go of memories that do not serve any longer, and a hope that preservation of the past can happen with greater impact through transformation.*

SECOND PLACE

Ashley Barrientos

Middle Tennessee State University

Funeral for a Tongue

A creative nonfiction essay

I stop speaking Spanish when I am five years old.

Or, more accurately, my parents stop speaking Spanish to me when I am five years old.

It doesn't happen gradually, like how many formative events often unravel in one's life. It happens suddenly, decisively, affirmatively. Like a spurt of hot oil stinging your skin. A thin branch snapping off a tree. A door slamming shut in your face. It is the kind of decision you look back on and think— no, you know— that nothing could have been done to alter it.

This unbecoming decision— which would later become a toilsome root of several identity crises I'd experience in my late teenage and early adulthood years— is made by my father, after a chance encounter between a five-year-old me and a young American girl at a McDonald's in Antioch, Tennessee. It's not a messy decision either, but quick and neat. Calculated. Like slicing an apple in half or cutting through wrapping paper with an Exacto knife. It is a decision that feels justified when he enrolls me in a magnet school where I am largely in the minority, being the only Latina in my grade and one of the only girls of color for nine years. It is the right decision in his eyes, because we are in America, and Americans— true Americans— speak English. It's a decision for my own good because he knows what it's like to be ridiculed and not taken seriously for speaking a language that isn't English.

"So you can fit in," my dad would always say to me.

But nobody really cares to hear that story when I try to explain to them that this cultural impasse is not entirely my fault. How do you tell that story to someone who walks up to you at Kroger and begins to ask you in Spanish if you could help them speak to an employee? How do you surmise a 21-year-long history of cultural grievances when all

they can see is you, your undoubtedly Mexican features, and your painfully obvious inability to fluently speak a language that you're supposed to be proud of?

When I tell Americans that I cannot fluently speak Spanish, I am met with several variations of the same looks, phrases, sentences phrased as questions: But you're Mexican? But you look like you should speak Spanish? But your parents' native language is Spanish? Within my own community, I am usually met with more hostile responses: No te da vergüenza? they will say with a tsk, a shake of the head. Why didn't you ever learn? Are you ashamed of us?

Admitting this fault of mine is something that I dance around until the very last second. Oftentimes, people will instinctively recognize me as one of their own and think, yes, she is Latina. She is one of us. They will begin speaking to me in Spanish, not even thinking twice about it. As someone who has long craved cultural reassurance (from both Mexicans and Americans), this appearance-based validation reaffirms me every time. I look Mexican enough, so maybe I am qualified to call myself a Mexican American. And then I will try— and God, do I try— to stumble my way through a conversation with the cashier at the super mercado or someone I happen to meet while waiting in line for something. I always fail miserably. I am always compelled to tell over-explain myself. There are the usual justifications: I can speak some Spanish, my accent is just bad! I can understand it, I just can't speak it! I didn't grow up speaking it! My parents never taught me, it's not my fault! But it's never enough to convince them— I am usually just left trying to convince myself.

This moment of truth, of confession, results in an awkward stalemate, where we both know I am only faking it. I can sense the disappointment in their body language, their inability to look me in the eyes, the slight frown at the corner of their lips. I know this look like the back of my hand now. While I saunter away with my head hung low, I leave them with a wrinkle in their brow as they try to figure me out.

This ill-kept secret haunts me in the most mundane moments of life. I am 20 and perusing through a grocery store, and there is a lady trying to communicate with the cashier, a swath of children clinging to her skirt. I am 16 and meeting my first boyfriend's parents in their little white trailer home. I am 18 and canvassing apartments in a neighborhood in Nashville. The lie is always first— the taste of my mother's

language feels metallic and foreign on my tongue. As if I am chewing on something too big for my mouth. The confession always follows.

But there is a moment above all of these that invokes a feeling worse than shame, worse than humiliation. I feel it when I am 21 and calling my mom from my apartment to tell her about an award I win at school. I explain everything in English perfectly, the only language I can speak now— but her Congratulations sound confused and foggy, as if she understands that what I am saying is important, but she doesn't quite know why.

Each encounter in which my linguistic fraudulence is revealed leaves me feeling ashamed, pathetic, and drained, like a dog that just peed on the carpet. A hot, heavy feeling ossifies in my stomach, my chest, my bones, crystalizing into a thick layer of everlasting shame. There is a tremendous amount of guilt and shame that comes with admitting that you, a Mexican American with two immigrant parents fresh from the motherland, cannot speak fluent Spanish. It has always been a fraudulent mark on me, a signal to others that I am an imposter in my own community.

But what many people fail to understand is that my inability to speak Spanish is not a product of my laziness or unwillingness to learn. My inability to speak Spanish stems from a parent's desire for their children to assimilate better than they ever could upon first migrating here. It stems from the trauma that comes with being the only Latina in my grade from kindergarten to eighth grade. It stems from having an immigrant father who was so desperate for his American-born daughter to excel in a system that values proximity to whiteness and American-ness over everything else.

Judge's comment: *The compelling narrative here shares the situation of a young woman who doesn't have the language skills of her ancestors or even her parents. She finds herself "othered" by both cultures she navigates, and the speaker shares with poised prose how she struggles to reconcile herself in a cultural context where externally placed expectations of how her identity should present itself don't meet up with her own sense of self and values. The essay is written with beautiful metaphorical language as well as simple truths that make it a pleasure to read, and a thought-provoking exploration of immigrant experiences here in Tennessee.*

THIRD PLACE
Savannah Brouwer
Lipscomb University

How Sundays Became Sabbath

For the first time in years, I do not wake up to an alarm. I wake up to my roommate sorting through her closet, pulling on a dress, and grabbing her Bible on the way out the door. It is a strange thing to still be in bed on a Sunday morning.

If it were 10 years ago, I would be pulling on lace-trimmed socks and knocking on my mom's bathroom door, the slight fruitiness of her hairspray encompassing me as I am invited in. I clutch my Beginner's Bible in the car, anticipating what casseroles the old ladies would bring to the potluck. I try to join my mom's harmony as we follow along the Methodist Hymnal. Eight-year-old me loved kneeling on the ancient cushions for communion and plopping a few quarters from my allowance into the offering plate.

But it is not 10 years ago, and my Beginner's Bible is tattered and in a box that lives in my mom's closet. I have no lace socks to pull on, no allowance to give. And communion is about more than musty cushions or a tart shot of juice.

I sit up in my dorm bed, the shifting of sheets the only reprieve from the silence. When I stop moving, silence is all that's left. I am not sure if it is like a pool I am floating in or an ocean I am drowning in. Either way, it engulfs me.

If it were 5 years ago, I would be walking into Sunday school at the small Baptist church in the neighboring town. I would cross my ankles in a fold-out chair, sitting in an awkward circle with the other adolescents whose parents were willing to get to church early. I learn about who is called to lead and who is called to tend the children. Afterwards, I go to the bathroom with my friends and pull mascara from the teal purse around my shoulder, obsessively applying a fresh coat. At 13, we know that our value in that church comes from the way we look. I know my whispered calling to ministry must be laid at the altar beside all the other women's discarded dreams.

But it is not 5 years ago. I do not wear mascara anymore. That small country church had no place for my mother after her divorce. When we left, I picked up my fragile hope for a life of ministry, but I carried other things with me as well. Anger, hurt, fear, and the parasitic belief that even God did not hold women in high regard.

I climb out of the elevated bed. Pictures from my most recent church still cover my wall, a grid of squares I taped meticulously on the day I moved in—not two months ago. Hesitant, funeral-like, I peel off the pictures from that church one-by-one, each taking a little piece of paint with them. Each taking a little piece of me with them. Only a random spattering of pictures remains, not a grid but a scatter plot of the few people I have left.

If it were a year ago, their pictures would still be on my wall. I would be practicing for children's worship, performing a secret handshake with the middle schooler I "adopted" as my little brother. At 17, I thought I had shed the pain I picked up at the small country church, healed by a new community that welcomed women in ministry. Welcomed me into ministry. A year ago, I believed that church could do nothing wrong. Back then I believed I was happy.

But it is not a year ago. I do not believe that anymore. I learned the hard way that I was still judged on my appearance, even at a place with women on staff. It took losing pieces of myself to realize that I only swapped one performance with another. Babysitter to mouthpiece, I was still a puppet for a man who claimed authority over me.

I drop the photos into my trash can, wondering if I was happy in them. Perhaps I did have good days while I was there, not corrupted by the constant fear of slipping up. But perhaps it was all a mask put on to please those who would accept nothing less than perfection. I walk to the sink, toes pressed against the slippers I got right before college. I grab my toothbrush and squeeze out the last remnants of toothpaste.

If it were a month ago, I would be throwing up in this sink, my stomach churning with anxiety. A warning. At 18, my body was telling me to leave the church, the stress, the impossible expectations. But I did not listen. I called my racing heart excitement. I wrote off panic attacks as a fluke.

But it is not a month ago. I have to face the truth. 143 beats per minute means that something was wrong. Something is wrong. For

the first time in years, I do not have somewhere to be before 8 am on Sunday mornings. I have nowhere to be at all.

I push open the big window, letting in a morning breeze. I grab my Bible from my desk. These are the same words they quoted to convince me I was rebellious. I was delusional. I was no longer welcome to work there.

But that is not what this Bible says. I know the voice of my Shepherd. I step on my footstool, back into my dorm bed. I look for something on my phone, anything to fill the silent space where loud, rehearsed worship would normally rise on this day. I turn on soft music that sounds sad, but the lyrics are a sweet melody of hope, an ode of honor to my King.

I open my Bible, but before I can finish a verse my eyes are too full of tears for me to see. They pour onto the thin pages of my Bible like oil spilling from an alabaster jar. There is no point in acting like I am reading anymore. Instead, I am weeping, reeling from the whiplash of being a Daughter-of-the-House one minute and a disgrace the next. I am angry, confused how such terrible things could be done under the guise of ministry. I am tired. After years of trying to earn their love, it is difficult to rest in His.

In a year this day will seem more natural, this quiet morning alone with God. I will find joy in putting on a dress, waking up when my body wishes, and lavishing the Lord with my time and song. I will print out new pictures to cover the splashes of missing paint on my wall. I will be 19 and beginning to unlearn everything I believed while I was there. I will still occasionally cry over what happened in that place, but I will be free.

And I will be glad.

Judge's comment: *A surprising look at how a woman's faith evolved--and is ultimately strengthened-- by the sexism she experiences at the hands of church leaders. Strong parallel structure guides the reader to walk a maze into the layers of religious trauma the speaker reveals, and yet where many would expect a conclusion laced with agnosticism at the center of this journey, instead we find a compelling argument for a religion straight from the writer's heart, unhindered by the power structures that challenged her progress in religious vocation.*

Formal Essay

FIRST PLACE

*Samantha Luchtefeld
Lipscomb University*

Uncle Tom's Cabin Then and Now: A New Historicist Reading

Writing in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act and during a time of contentious political debate, Harriet Beecher Stowe hoped *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would spark social change through an appeal to each individual's conscience. On this side of history, her idea is not inconceivable. However, what reason did she have in 1852 to hope that a sentimental novel could bring about action to end slavery? Positions on the "peculiar institution" in Stowe's day were deeply entrenched, and both sides claimed the moral high ground. Supporters of slavery and abolitionists both appealed to the Bible as support for their positions, and both sides believed the Constitution settled the slavery issue in their favor (O'Connell 18–29). As debates over slavery became more heated and less productive, Stowe reports that her "heart was bursting with the anguish excited by the cruelty and injustice our nation was showing to the slave" (C. E. Stowe 149). She recalls spending many nights weeping at her son's bedside while thinking of the child she lost in infancy and imagining something of the anguish slave mothers felt when their babies were torn from them (Ammons, "Heroines in Uncle Tom's Cabin" 161). From the incessant urging of her own conscience, Stowe believed an appeal to the "heart" of Americans might do more for the slave than appeals to "head" had done. Despite the immediate success of her work, Stowe's use of sentimentality would later be criticized, along with many other aspects of the novel that most resonated with antebellum readers. Shifting cultural assumptions have obscured Stowe's rhetorical skill and socio-political insight, leading to unfair conclusions about her work. This paper will examine criticisms of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in light of its changing cultural context and will demonstrate how contextualizing the work offers modern readers a better way to understand and appreciate it. What follows is a brief history of the

reception and cultural appropriations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a consideration of its criticisms, and an argument for its enduring relevance.

I. A Brief History of the Reception and Cultural Appropriations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

The initial response to Stowe's heartfelt plea exceeded her wildest dreams. One historian describes the national sentiment, saying, "White northerners wept and could not put the book down; they neglected work and other obligations to finish it. Southerners often went to some lengths to obtain the novel, and read it surreptitiously" (Hochman 2). The international success was even more surprising. An early reviewer captures the reaction in France saying, "This book is in all hands and in all journals...people devour it, they cover it with their tears. It is no longer permissible to those who can read not to have read it..." (Sand 509). Pirated copies of Stowe's work circulated throughout Britain, and the Westminster Review of January 1853 recorded their impact, saying, "A few months ago [*Uncle Tom's Cabin*] was appearing in the feuilleton of a weekly newspaper in the States... now it is part of the history of two mighty nations, influencing their feelings, and through them surely, though indirectly, their actions" (Nicholas 146). Reviews such as these demonstrate how Stowe's appeal went far beyond her intended audience and that her sentimental approach to the subject of slavery resonated with her audience to the degree that they believed her novel inspired real social change.

However, the function of the novel's sentiment changed over time. Forty years later, many people took evolutionary theory as scientific support for viewing Blacks as inferior to other races. Likewise, anxiety among whites about the influx of freed Blacks into white society led to new editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that promoted the inferiority of Blacks and the separation of races. For example, antebellum editions of the novel contained images of Eva and Uncle Tom sitting together and reading, but E.W. Kemble's illustrations in an 1891 edition removed all scenes of slaves reading and omitted all physical contact across the color line (Hochman 71). A few years after Stowe's death in 1896, publishers released a children's version of Tom's story called *Young Folks Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They significantly revised Stowe's narrative in hopes of casting the slave era in more favorable light. Southerners aimed to teach their children that the Old South was a place of grand chivalry, populated by benevolent masters and their loyal "servants"

(Spingarn 95). The story was culturally appropriated to influence future perspectives about the institution of slavery and about the societal roles of Black Americans.

At the same time, theatrical versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were shaping the American perspective of Blackness. Early adaptations stayed true to Stowe's text, portraying a serious and moving drama about the plight of slaves, the little white girl who loved them, and the Black hero who died so others could go free. However, later adaptations exaggerated the mannerisms of slave characters to create comedy and enhance their performative value. Over time, "Tom Shows" became increasingly elaborate spectacles that ended with a spectacular plantation scene, featuring singing, dancing, and playing instruments. But an unexpected twist occurred when Tom Shows began featuring Black performers. For the first time, white audiences were paying to watch Black actors and actresses. Tom Shows were cultivating and popularizing Black performing arts, building on and adding to the success of groups like the Fisk Jubilee Singers (Spingarn 91). Maintaining widespread popularity, Tom Shows ran annually for over ninety years, and historians think more people eventually saw them than read Stowe's book.

A resurgence in the popularity of the novel arose as Black Americans became readers. Because freed slaves had desired to "move past" slavery, they often refused to discuss their lives as slaves with their children and grandchildren. These descendants of former slaves began seeking information about the past, but the entire nation also wanted to "forget" about slavery, so historical slave narratives were virtually non-existent (Hochman 232). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the few accessible sources of information about slavery. Hochman explains that during the segregation era African Americans viewed Stowe's novel as a kind of background for understanding their contemporary cultural context. She writes, "Some African Americans read Stowe's fiction for knowledge of historical facts and attitudes that continued to affect the reader personally but that were not much discussed in public—or even in private" (Hochman 237–38). This new generation of Black American readers used *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to get their cultural bearings during a period of relative silence about their near past.

Uncle Tom's cultural image plummeted in the early 1900s. Former slaves and Northern Blacks disagreed over political issues, and

they began using Uncle Tom as a framework for their debates. Uncle Tom became synonymous with the idea of the simple and submissive “Old Negro,” who was a foil for the educated and refined “New Negro” endorsed by Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington (Spingarn 135). Advocates of the New Negro emphasized bettering oneself through education and moral cultivation. However, frustration over the failures of Reconstruction and the subsequent national regression into segregation led young Blacks to reject the self-cultivated New Negro as merely rebranded Old Negro. Instead, they advocated for a manly and assertive New Negro, one who demanded rights, rather than earned them. Harnessing the desire to move past the Old Negro, advocates for the manly and assertive New Negro began referring to Washington and proponents of the self-cultivated New Negro as “Uncle Toms” (Spingarn 146). Blacks saw Uncle Tom as the embodiment of several negative qualities: an attitude of acceptance and submission to the dictates of whites, an image of submissive Black manhood, a strategy of submission to racial injustice, a performance for personal advancement, or simply, a traitor to fellow Blacks (Spingarn 147,154). At this point, the cultural image of Blackness fractured in the minds of Blacks and whites. Because Black writers wanted the image of Uncle Tom to “die,” they wrote Black characters through a modern realist lens. They aimed to show that Black men were nothing like the Uncle Tom of old, and they succeeded in creating a new literary “type” of Blackness that was more angry and less morally pure. Despite their strong desire to “move past” Uncle Tom, Blacks of this time continued invoking his name in their political and literary debates.

The cultural function of the novel shifted again when the Federal Writers’ Project of 1944 gave scholars access to a vast collection of interviews with former slaves (Hochman 234). Slave narratives began to be published again, and professional readers turned their attention toward evaluating meaning, merits, and failures of Stowe’s supposed “classic.” More and more Black academics weighed in on the cultural significance of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and many saw more to blame than to praise.

II. Common Criticisms of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

The first common objection to Stowe’s novel is its use of sentimentalism. Denouncing the sentimentality in Stowe’s work, James Baldwin writes, “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is a very bad novel, having, in

its self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality...the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion" (Baldwin 548). Baldwin thinks sentimentalism allows readers to congratulate themselves for reading a sad novel about slavery while actually masking their violent inhumanity toward the slave. Ann Douglas agrees and accuses Stowe and other sentimental writers of being "manipulators of a gullible public who ke[pt] their readers imprisoned in a dream world of self-justifying clichés" (Douglas 9). Douglas sees rhetorical sentimentality as a form of emotional manipulation, rather than an ethical means of persuasion. A recurring theme in these criticisms is that sentimentality involves overt moral pleas based on untruths. Likewise, both critics assert that Stowe's sentimentality only elicits fake or harmful reactions. Despite the fact that effective emotional pleas can work to mobilize people toward causes, many critics believe using sentimental persuasion is dishonest; the only honest means of persuasion is through logic and reason.

What critics of Stowe's sentimentality overlook is that she chose sentimentality intentionally in order to reach a desensitized audience. Readers in the North were being inundated with news about slavery through the explosion of print culture. Abolitionist newspapers circulated accounts of slavery given by former slaves themselves. Frederick Douglass's narrative, for example, had been published by the Boston Anti-Slavery Society ten years earlier, and his abolitionist paper *The North Star* had been informing the public about slave-related issues for five years. William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* ran weekly stories of slaves enduring the most violent "punishments" and the most shocking sexual abuses. Stories like these effectively desensitized Stowe's intended audience. Garrison himself lamented that the antebellum reader's response to the worst atrocities of slavery was generally only apathy (Hochman 26). Antebellum readers were either convinced already of the need for abolition, calloused to the injustice, or resigned that there was nothing doable to be done about slavery. Stowe had to find a way to make the slave's story "new" for an all too familiar audience. She had to find a way to wake them from apathetic slumber, and mobilize them to take action. She chose sentimentality to do so.

There are several reasons why Stowe's sentimentality succeeded in moving antebellum readers when it falls flat for modern readers. First, sentimentality closed the emotional space between the slaves'

suffering and her white readers' suffering in a way that intensified their reading experience and destabilized their certainties about otherness. Historian Barbara Hochman explains how most antebellum readers truly did not believe slaves were anything like themselves. Even those fighting for abolition also believed in racial essentialism, or the idea that biological race determines one's mental capacities and disposition as much race determines one's outward appearance. Hochman writes, "Stowe's own racial essentialism was a deeply rooted, unexamined, and culturally typical assumption" (Hochman 19). Modern readers cannot experience the power of sentimentalism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the way antebellum readers did because we do not share their faulty cultural assumptions. In the same way we cannot imagine what it would be like to think that skin pigment is related to lower and higher forms of humanity, Stowe and her readers had never before imagined that slaves were just like them.

To appreciate exactly what Stowe achieved with a sentimental appeal, one of Stowe's sons offers an illustration of how her work brought slaves' suffering emotionally "closer" to her readers. He says: Someone rushes into your dining-room while you are at breakfast and cries out, "Terrible accident, forty killed and wounded, six were burned alive." "Oh, shocking! dreadful!" you exclaim, and yet go quietly on with your rolls and coffee. But suppose you stood at that instant by the wreck, and saw the mangled dead, and heard the piercing shrieks of the wounded, you would be faint and dizzy with the intolerable spectacle. (Ammons, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Casebook* 8)

Stowe's son argues that being physically present to witness suffering or injustice makes the harm more immediate and more emotionally impactful. In other words, an eyewitness feels a strong desire to act.

Picking up this theme, Catherine O'Connell believes Stowe aims to produce a textual effect as intense as being in the physical presence of slavery's evils. She argues that Stowe places "emphasis on the (white) reader's emotional history that frequently shifts the narrative focus from slavery to white family tragedies," which, "ultimately makes slavery emotionally comprehensible to white readers" (O'Connell 15). O'Connell is noticing instances in the novel such as when Tom looks at his children for the last time before he is permanently separated from them. Stowe writes:

Sobs, heavy, hoarse and loud, shook the chair, and great tears fell through his fingers on the floor: just such tears, sir, as you dropped into the coffin where lay your first-born son; such tears, woman, as you shed when you heard the cries of your dying babe. For sir, he was a man,- and you are but another man. And woman, though dressed in silk and jewels, you are but a woman, and, in life's great straits and mighty griefs, ye feel but one sorrow!" (H. B. Stowe 46)

Stowe calls her readers' attention to Tom's physical expression of suffering and then to remembrance of their own painful experiences in hopes that the powerful memory will help them identify with Tom's suffering. Her choice of the "dying babe" might be lost on modern readers who do not remember that the child mortality rate in the 1850s was nearly fifty percent, ensuring that most antebellum readers had experienced the loss of a child either directly or indirectly.

Through her own experience losing a son, Stowe had imagined what the slave mother or father may feel, and she intended to help her readers make the same connection. Stowe's informed use of sentimentality enables her to do what logic and reason could never do, namely, to close the emotional distance between her white readers and the slaves' unjust suffering.

Sentimentality also allows Stowe to overcome the apathy that results from believing one is powerless to remedy an unjust situation. Hochman suggests that antebellum apathy toward slavery is comparable to today's incessant media cycles. She believes both generate apathy because "outrages that cannot be easily remedied can often be ignored" (Hochman 27). If Hochman is correct that humans tend to dismiss everything we believe we cannot change, Stowe's sentimentality was needed to overcome the challenges of writing a fictional slave narrative in a market flooded with genuine slave narratives that brings the slaves' suffering into the white reader's immediate presence while at the same time offering hope that the reader can do something to change the situation. If one cannot force the release of the slaves, what she can do, according to Stowe, is feel right about slavery. Stowe believed that feeling rightly would lead to thinking rightly and acting rightly. Her sentimental appeal gave antebellum readers an actionable call.

Another thing modern readers have found distasteful in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Stowe's heavy emphasis on Christianity. Ann Douglas

finds particular disgust with Stowe's religiously infused narrative. She explains:

The more religious a work, the more elaborately its religious piety is expressed, and the more public and conventional its religious rhetoric becomes, the more it turns into an irrelevant display of religious values, its only purpose, to serve the interests of the dominant class. (Douglas 4,12)

Douglas basically argues that Stowe's overuse of religious rhetoric renders the novel irrelevant, especially to those who do not share those religious values. Echoing her thoughts, Thomas Joswick asserts, "Thus, perhaps we ought to say simply that those who share the beliefs of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will find it a complex masterpiece, and those who do not, will not" (Joswick 256).

The charges of Douglas and Joswick summarize contemporary complaints about Stowe's scripture-laden, sermonic style. They believe Stowe's overt Christianity fixes the novel in the antiquated past, and renders it irrelevant for non-Christians.

Acknowledging the partial truth of such assertions, it is important to remember that Stowe's work could not have had such widespread success apart from her overt Christianity. First, in Stowe's day there was a widespread cultural resistance to reading fictional novels. Many people regarded fiction as an inferior literary form which led to idleness, unbridled fantasy, and self-indulgence (Hochman 79). Although Stowe herself read and enjoyed fiction, she described how a stock theme assigned to youths for writing practice was "On the disadvantages of novel-reading" (Hochman 102). Furthermore, novels were seen by some groups, such as the Shakers, as dangerous enough to ban reading them. While quietly growing in popularity among men, fiction in 1850s America was generally only acceptable for women and children (Hochman 78). Stowe's use of Christianity legitimized the novel, and gave it safe passage into many hands that would have rejected it otherwise. Many "pious" antebellum readers would never have read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had it lacked the Christian component.

III. An Argument for the Enduring Relevance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Nonetheless, what is the modern reader to do with a book that speaks to obsolete mindsets in obsolete ideologies? A number of critics have offered suggestions. First, there is the obvious historical

value. While modern readers do not share the cultural assumptions and ideologies of the 1850s, those assumptions and ideologies are a part of where American culture is today. Reading and studying authentic slave narratives illuminates the reality of slavery from the perspective of the victim. What Stowe's novel offers that slave narratives do not is the exact thing James Baldwin wanted, but failed to see in her account. He wanted an answer to "what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds" (Baldwin 548). Stowe's novel presents several factors that led whites to commit such egregious evils. One example is racial essentialism that holds Blacks as inferior beings whom "nature" or God equipped to do physical labor rather than mental labor. She establishes this thought clearly through slaver Haley's comments in first chapter. Haley refers to slaves as "niggers," "critters," and "articles" of property. Referring to slave mothers whose children are taken from them, Haley says they "screech" and "scream" and go mad, which is "a clear waste thousand dollars, just for want of management" (H. B. Stowe 15). The animal-like terminology culminates in an unambiguous declaration of Black inferiority from Haley. Trying to calm Shelby's qualms about selling Eliza's son, Haley says, "These critters ain't like white folks, you know; they gets over things" and "they naturally gets used to it" (H. B. Stowe 15, 17). Through the words and actions of every white character, Stowe presents another reason why they advocated for, passively allowed, or advocated against slavery.

In Joel Johnson's chapter on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Damned if You Do: Dilemmas of Action in Literature*, he explains how Stowe purposefully presented different "types" to reveal the broad spectrum of white viewpoints, their whys, regarding slavery. Johnson writes, "Stowe makes clear that there is much variation among perpetrators of injustice and their accomplices...nearly everyone is implicated with the institution of slavery in some way, either actively advancing its cause or doing too little to undermine it" (Johnson 118). He lays out how "[m]ore than seventy characters appear in the novel, ... and remarkably few characters react to slavery in the same way" (Johnson 114). Unlike any other novel of its time, Stowe exposes viewpoints in the middle between the extremes of advancing and opposing slavery. Johnson argues that the novel's chief value lies in how Stowe shows why some people unwittingly and others unwillingly supported slavery. Much like understanding how the Holocaust happened in a highly advanced society,

Americans should wrestle with understanding how and why slavery persisted for so long, and why things did not immediately improve after the Emancipation Proclamation. Stowe's work is certainly valuable as a historical novel.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is also valuable in the ongoing fight for social justice. Writing for the National Council for Teachers of English, Mark Bracher makes a case that Stowe's novel is uniquely qualified to establish more effective social justice pedagogy. He uses contemporary cognitive science to analyze Stowe's sentimentality and discover how it accomplished social change. He describes how Stowe helped her readers make certain cognitive appraisals, which led to their aiding subaltern slaves. He believes paying attention to those appraisals while reading the novel can help modern students learn to make the same appraisals toward contemporary subalterns. Stowe's work was highly consequential for subalterns of her time, but Bracher argues that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* still has untapped potential to bring about positive change.

Stowe's novel speaks into a cultural context not unlike the current polarized political climate. She faced the challenges of deeply ingrained ideological divides, emotional disconnect from the suffering other, and skepticism about the role of literature in the pursuit of social justice. Before Stowe could enter the contentious conversation about slavery, she first had to understand and articulate opposing positions. Johnson's work lays out the extent to which Stowe understood the complex interplay of factors affecting her readers' actions. Her work offers many points for discussing responses to trauma, options in the face of unjust laws, and the affects of injustice on perpetrators, accomplices, and bystanders. While Stowe's work is in one sense frozen in her time, in many other ways it has shifted with the times to fulfill new functions.

I have attempted to show how some critics have judged *Uncle Tom's Cabin* according to their historically limited contemporary ideologies, and that disregarding Stowe's context leads to misreading rather than understanding Stowe's work. If modern readers consider *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its historical context, they might learn more about the harms of slavery on everyone, the use of emotional persuasion, and the function of literature in society. Most importantly, perhaps offers a way forward in the fight for social justice.

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Judge's comment: *This essay offers a thoughtful and convincing per-spective on the continuing relevance of the text as part of American literary history. The essay gives the reader a good sense of the novel's historical context, the role adaptations have had in influencing audience perceptions, and how cultural shifts led to shifts in critical regard and various audience perspectives over time. In sum, it makes a thoughtful argument in favor of continued study and teaching of this work and points the reader in a direction of doing both well.*

SECOND PLACE

*Annathea Elliott
Hendrix College*

Women with Time: Female Perceptions of Place in “Eveline” and “Mayday”

Introduction: The Feminization of Ireland

Ireland, like all nation states, is an imagined place. The realness of the land where it sits transforms as humans assign identity and boundaries to it—as they say, “This is Ireland. This is where it begins. This is where it ends.” Or, even, “This is where it splits in two.” Terrence Brown’s introduction to the centennial edition of James Joyce’s *Dubliners* posits that the imposition of human meaning onto this particular island does not end with it becoming a nation. The Irish make a country out of their sea trapped landscape, and then proceed to burrow deeper in their collective imagination as they anthropomorphize the country as woman. According to Brown, “(there is) an image of Ireland as a wronged woman” (Joyce xxxi). With hills and shores given a name and then turned to maiden beauty and breasts, Ireland is imagined, and then imagined again.

This nation is not unique in its feminization. Many countries, including the United States (where I am from), do the same thing. Yet Ireland’s somewhat singular positioning within colonial history establishes the terms of its feminization as rare. As Ireland sits at the strange intersection of “western hegemonic nation” and “colonized country,” its imposed womanhood takes on a sort of dualism. This dualism is evident in the earliest literary traces of Irish feminization, the *Aisling* (Irish for “dream”) poems (Hirsch). A famous *Aisling*, “Gile na Gile” by Ó Rathaille, ends as follows:

My loss, my misfortune, my sorrow, my woe, my grief
The fairest of maids so gentle, affectionate, sweet
In thrall to a horned clown and his doleful breed
Without rescue until our heroes come over the sea (Ó Rathaille,
lines 33-36).

This final stanza illustrates the two modes of feminization that Irish literary tradition simultaneously engages. In one sense, the colonial eye easily replicated in Ireland's whiteness draws focus to the natural land's beauty and character, giving "fairness" and girl-like "sweetness" to an organic beast that never asked to be called such things. At the same time, Ireland's experience of being colonized translates into identification of the conceptual space's (the political state's) feminine experience as a "wronged woman." Like a woman, this place is exploited and taken advantage of by a Union Jack bearing "horned clown." Thus, at all layers (the real and the socially imagined), and for all purposes (concurrent claims of paradise and of externally-imposed destruction) the dominant Irish imagination forces the land to be female.

For me, the compound feminization of Ireland smoothly evolves into a question of what it is like for actual human women to live there. How does it feel to inhabit a place that supposedly reflects you? To what degree does your location's mirroring of your body forge an expectation that you must internalize, or reflect back, the physical properties of that place?

Similar questions have been asked of Irish literature. In her essay "'Deposited Elsewhere': The Sexualized Female Body and the Modern Irish Landscape," Cara Delay argues that the feminized landscape has historically made way for easy policing of women's bodies, and particularly their expressions of sexuality. Delay's work shows that the conflation of female body with landscape makes language like "polluted" available for substitution of "sexually impure" (Delay 72). Essentially, feminized land allows for the use of palatable environmental metaphor in lieu of overt slut shaming, which, in turn, permits the Irish demonization of sexually active or sexually assaulted women to persist insidiously. My interests differ from Delay's, however, in that I am less focused on how "Ireland as woman" leaks out into cultural attitudes and reimagines the women who live there. Instead, I aim to understand how this literary and social trope facilitates interaction between individual women and Irish place.

James Joyce's "Eveline" (1914) and Lucy Caldwell's "Mayday" (2018) are both prominent Irish short stories about women alone in space. Through each, time emerges as an ideal focal point for my wonder about the contact between Irish women and land. On a conceptual level, time makes human imaginings of the land legible since it is a construction of one of place's many physical properties—an abstraction

of a given space's changing orientation relative to the sun. Within the specific context of these stories, as each female protagonist dwells on a choice she has made or is about to make, time functions as an expression of her interiority, demonstrating an ease of exchange between her body and place.

Protagonists' Relationships with Time

Each of these short pieces open up on a woman kneading at a significant life decision. In Eveline's case, she has decided to leave her home in Ireland where she is overworked, grieving, a mediator for her family's financial quarrels, and vulnerable to her father's violence. Joyce's opening pulls us into this woman's gaze, while also maintaining third person perspective, as she takes in the home space she is about to abandon for Argentina and a lover named Frank. Ultimately, however, Eveline decides to stay in Ireland. As for the unnamed protagonist in "Mayday," this college-aged woman performs an illegal, at-home abortion at the beginning of her story. After taking abortion pills that have arrived in the mail, sent from the Netherlands, she spends the rest of the story with us inside her head (a head also narrated to us through the third person perspective), anticipating the abortive experience, and meandering through the nuances of her decision. For these two women, the decisions they confront and the contexts they live in breed radically different attitudes toward the past. Fascinatingly, each woman's feelings about time bleed out into the most logistical elements of her story's telling. The protagonists' attitudes become the stories' attitudes as they determine the temporal direction each story faces .

In "Eveline," the past is well-liked. As Eveline sits at the precipice of leaving the place where she grew up, nostalgia rushes through the story, rendering its temporal fabric a current that continually pulls toward the past. Eveline's memories, which float into the story without even breaking the paragraphs they interrupt, paint her past as a lovely alternative to how life has ended up. On the very first page, her looking out the window of her childhood home brings her to remember how the street used to be populated with fields as opposed to monuments of British-borne gentrification (Joyce 25). This remembering of how the space used to be then evolves into a recollection of how she used to fill it. Joyce writes,

The children of the avenue used to play together in that field—

the Devines, the Waters...she and her brothers and sisters... They seemed to have been rather happy then. Her father was not so bad then and besides, her mother was alive. That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up; her mother was dead. Tizzie Dunn was dead, too, and the Waters had gone back to England. Everything changes (Joyce 25).

From this passage, we can deduce Eveline's feelings about time. The past pops up through her memory, and she labels it as happy. Her positive identification of the past immediately morphs into an abnegation of her present. To substantiate her claim that the past was "happy," she names the ways her life has changed for the worse. As in, the past was good because it was a time not characterized by the features of the way life is now—the deadness of her mother, of the neighbor child, the abusiveness of her father, the British overtaking of her community.

Eveline's attachment to the familiar also testifies to her preference for the past. Joyce gives us an image of Eveline taking inventory of her home in the hour of her departure. He writes, "Home! She looked round the room, reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years...Perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided" (Joyce 25). Without blatantly telling us that his protagonist is woeful and anxious about leaving the past behind, Joyce uses her attachment to objects that evoke her personal history to communicate the emotional difficulty of her leaving. This attachment is extreme as the language "objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided" signifies the sectioning of parts from a singular whole. "Divided" invites the idea that Eveline and the items of her youth are complementary factors of a whole, and for her to abandon those objects operates like a parting out of the self. In this right, Eveline's choice to leave amplifies her understanding of her relationship with these symbolic representations of the past, and even leads her to drum up small reasons to stay, such as solving the mystery of "the name of the priest whose yellowing photograph hung on the wall above the broken harmonium" (Joyce 26).

Eveline's positive feeling toward the past, as told through attachment and memory, manifests in the tenses and temporal phrases Joyce continually utilizes. For one, he tells the story wholly in the past tense. But the magnetism of the past in this piece becomes particularly visible when Joyce tries to and does not quite succeed in showing us

the present or the future. Throughout "Eveline" he writes sentences that are structured like the following: "Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home" (Joyce 25). To demonstrate a pattern: "Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence" (Joyce). Both these sentences, and the rest that are like them, begin with Joyce directly signaling the present. The "now" indicates that this story does occur somewhere in time—that it is not only remembered. However, even as his word choice forces the present into view, the remainder of the sentence fights off that pull, bringing the past in heavily through use of the imperfect tense, which points to not one historical occasion, but the culmination of multiple, repeated pasts.

As this text cherishes the past, it fails to imagine a future for itself (as is also true of Eveline herself). The story ends with Eveline suddenly refusing to leave with Frank. While we can reasonably assume that she returns home and continues on living in Ireland, Joyce never explicitly puts that choice on the page. Moreover, his conclusion does not invite thoughts of Eveline's future. His final line reads, "She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (Joyce 29). This closing feels like a containment, as if it is translating Eveline into portraiture, and thereby sealing her off from time. Joyce snaps us out of Eveline's story by suspending her in time, not by launching her into a future that exists beyond our knowledge.

"Mayday," on the other hand, revolves around a protagonist who resents the past. Her situation demands that she eschew the past and favor progress. At the time of its publication, abortion was not legal in Ireland. The woman in "Mayday" observes the absurdity of this political reality: "If you were in England, the GP would have prescribed it to you, the exact same thing. You'd have taken it already, under medical supervision" (Caldwell 358). Here, she highlights how the world around Ireland has progressed. In a nation that Ireland is partially a piece of, her hypothetical abortive experience would be very different. This line casts Ireland as stuck in the past, and identifies its temporal immobility—its resistance of progress toward reproductive rights—as the thing that is endangering her body. The protagonist's hopes and priorities are fundamentally at odds with Ireland's fidelity to "what was."

This young woman's attitude toward the past exists on the

conceptual level above, but it also draws from the role of her personal history in her present moment. We can analyze the content of her memories, which run rampant throughout this story, in order to tease out her personal relationship with the past. The first memory contains a story of our protagonist and her friends sneaking into a Catholic mass and taking the communion, then being damned to hell by the priest, and forgiven by a cello teacher (Caldwell 356). The second recalls a peer handing out pictures of fetuses during a high school debate (358). The third opens with a beautiful walk to grandmother's front door in the windy sunset, but ends with grandmother turning away from her new haircut after the priest calls her vain (361). The fourth focuses on her attempting to tell the fetus' father that she is planning on having an abortion, but these attempts failing as he does not respond to her texts or extend any kindness to her (361). Each of these memories has to do with shame. Shame ebbing from religious guilt, from familial relationships, from abortion itself, and from the way that women are often sexually demeaned and treated as expendable by male sexual partners. Thus, our protagonist sets up "Mayday" to dislike the past since, for her, and in this moment, the past is bound up with a guilt and self-hatred that only muddies what is already a complicated and difficult choice.

The text reflects the young woman's preference in several key ways. First, it attempts to ward off memory. The sense that memory is vital to this story is solidified through the recurring format through which it is introduced. The first memory appears ten lines after the young woman swallows her first pill. Preceded by a section break, this block paragraph begins, "A memory: aged eleven a Junior Strings weekend away in Carnlough" (355). Throughout the story, three dense memories appear, and the format is always the same: a section break, an identification of what is about to happen in the form of a clause that begins with "a" or "an," and then a colon. Caldwell minces her short story into sections to communicate jumps in time or scene. In other words, these section breaks are sharp transitions that represent a lack of continuity in the story. For every memory to necessitate this block formatting, as if turning from the woman's exterior world to her interior is the same as a change in time or place, signifies that the memories and the story do not fit naturally together. The story with its aforementioned prejudices does not seem to enjoy coexisting with memory.

Then, I am interested in both the second and third key formatting markers of memory. The introductory clause and the colon have

an interesting effect on Caldwell's reader. Instead of describing the process of recollection in writer-ly, meandering terms, she adopts a more taxonomical approach to bringing memory in. Out of nowhere, the protagonist's memories are labeled and then shared. This formatting furthers our sense of discontinuity between future-oriented story and past in "Mayday," since the presentation of memory serves as a disruption in style, and it also lends a sort of assertiveness to the memories themselves. These memories push through, announce themselves, and then take over the textual space. They are not invited, for they do not need invitation, nor do they conform to the rules of proper sentence structure. Even without these formalities, the story yields to them. Like a sickness, these memories aim to disrupt the normal rhythms of the piece, and they, over and over again, win.

Then, "Mayday" also resists the past by excluding it from its tenses. Opposite to Joyce's struggle to get the present onto the page, Caldwell's temporal telling of this woman's memories tries to focus on the past, but the tenses revert back to the present. As an example: "A memory:...On Sunday morning the Catholic children go to Mass in the big church on the Bay Road" (Caldwell 355). The only exception is the woman's memory of trying to tell the man she slept with that she was pregnant, which uses the past tense registers less as a full-blown, playing out in her head memory and more as the recitation of facts. Ideally, memories would be written in the past tense, since the past is where they exist. Yet Caldwell runs memories through with present verbiage, making them read like laundry lists.

Where the conclusion of "Eveline" does not leave much room for the possibility of a future, "Mayday" has no past to its beginning. Caldwell opens, "Ten days later, the package finally comes" (Caldwell 355). These very first words reference a past that does not exist for us. "Later" suggests that something did come before, but we have no way of knowing what that something was. If we try to look back to find the "earlier" that matches this "later," all we see is the receding whiteness of the page, and a block of text about our author. If we were to try this, we'd fall off the edge of the earth. All first words engender new worlds, but Caldwell's opening feels uncannily like a big bang as it rips open a future that has no past. In this way, the story immediately identifies itself as a thing with a future-oriented motor. The past, implied but not specified, is immaterial.

Time as Emotional Expression

I do not want to sell time short. In “Mayday” and “Eveline” time does more than simply mirror the way the protagonists feel about it. Certainly, Joyce and Caldwell give time a wider emotional range than that. The texture of time in each story reflects emotions that have nothing to do with its own passing or suspension.

Eveline comes to us clearly feeling stuck. She is living in a way she knows does not fulfill her, and yet she, for some reason, cannot choose another path. Much like the body blazes with anger, or the heart accelerates alongside excitement, time thickens in response to Eveline’s sense of entrapment. Time in this story is like looking into my mother’s blue, pinstriped Kitchen Aid, watching Nana’s yellow cake recipe loop through the white blade—a metamorphosis from yolk intact with white to the batter that falls slowly, enticingly from the mixer’s raised head. With reflection I realize this simile feels available to me because time in “Eveline” is mixed and thereby thickened. Joyce stirs time with more time.

I return to his earliest description of the field outside Eveline’s home. About that changed space, he writes, “One time there used to be a field there” (24). If I were drafting this sentence, the nagging voice inside my head would tell me that it is clunky. In this single line, there are too many words that mean time. Indeed, two tenses exist here: the preterit “one time” and, as noted before, the imperfect “used to be.” These tenses appear side by side, and even more nonsensically, one exists inside the other. First, Joyce points us to a particular, single moment in the past. However, when we go to look at that moment, we find an indeterminate timeline made up of habitual, continuous past. Mixed together, the preterit and imperfect form a gloopy kind of time. This thickness does not invite Joyce’s reader to experience Eveline’s world as easy to move through. We must trudge through this story’s time. We must attempt to pull apart pieces already melded into one to find where (or, rather, when) we are. Through Joyce’s construction of time, we feel what Eveline feels: the difficulty of finding a way through.

Time in “Mayday” feels quite the opposite. This time is not thick, or confusing, or an obstacle to forward motion, but quick, precise, and slipping through our fingers. In the wake of the protagonist’s swallowing of the first pill, Caldwell writes, “11:11 is the time. Tomorrow, at this time exactly, the other pills, all four of them at once. There is still time today, if she hurries, to make the midday seminar...So she

goes up to her room now and sits at her desk” (Caldwell 356). This passage’s first line specifies the location of the protagonist’s present in exact, surgical terms. Here, and in many other spots throughout the story, time brings the dryness of numbers into our reading experience. Then, after naming the present, we shoot off into the next time, the future. Urgency plagues this second line. Caldwell gives us the somewhat-general “tomorrow” and then immediately revises this signaling to be more specific. The woman doesn’t just need to take these pills tomorrow. She needs to take them at this time exactly. The pills themselves are sensitive to exact time. They do not just demand to be ingested tomorrow, at this time. They must all be ingested tomorrow, at this time, at the same time. The woman’s urgency affects the completeness of Caldwell’s sentence. Caldwell seems to be rushing through, cutting out all the time-wasting verbs from this line. Before we have even fully processed this line we are on to the next time: the present, where the protagonist is trying to maximize her time. Then, the final line unnecessarily brings urgent time in. “Now” bursts into the middle of the sentence as if it is being shouted. She does not just go up to her room to study, she does so now. Time bears this tone on every page of “Mayday,” constantly revealing its exact identity and expressing its own scarcity. For the reader, time drives our stress in this story as it reflects the protagonist’s anxiety.

In addition to embodying (to the extent that time can “embody” anything given that it has no body) this young woman’s anxiety around the abortion she both depends on and is jeopardized by, time’s mood in “Mayday” mirrors the way time is functioning inside this character’s body. All our bodies have time. Time lands on us and sticks as we age. Our bodies count in seven-year intervals—how long it takes for all our cells to be new again. Women supposedly creep by with a biological clock, which is both true and a sexistly imposed expiration date on our worth. All our bodies have time, but this person’s body, in particular, carries it.

Her body is like an hourglass. No, I do not mean that she has amassed flesh in “all the right places” above and below a small-circumferenced waist. I mean that with the introduction of an unwanted fetus to her womb, her body now contains a set amount of time—a certain amount of sand—and that time exists for the sole purpose of running out. She says so herself: “What if it’s too late? The thing is you find out and you think, OK, nine weeks, that’s ages. But then you do the online calculator and realise with a horrible rush that it’s already more than

six weeks, coming up to seven" (Caldwell 357). Her body holds nine weeks, and it is every second chipping away at those nine weeks. The exactness and urgency of time in this story is also the exactness and urgency of time in her uterus. Her environment imitates what's happening inside her body.

As a final note, these two stories share a bizarre pacing. Counter to the usual laws of creative writing, they do not pass time through action and climax. Rather, we read about women reflecting. Linear plot does not propel us through, or distract us from, the time of our own lives. Joyce and Caldwell make us comfortable reading slow stories, where time is not just the distance between events. As a further testimony to the emotionality of time in "Eveline" and "Mayday," I argue that these works have the ability to slow down and focus on mundane time because their writers effectively place our emotional investment in the protagonists. Our empathy acts as a precursor to these authors' artistic license when it comes to timing.

Feminine Creation of Ireland

In both of these stories, time blows through the protagonist and picks up debris from her interiority. From there, it pollinates the outside world with her sense of ideal time, her strongest emotions, her body's ticking. To propose an answer to my earlier question of what it feels like for women to live here, in the place that conjoins these stories even as they are born a century apart: the feminization of Irish land—the assertion that this place and its women are one and the same—means a hard border does not run between women's bodies and physical Ireland. In "Mayday" and "Eveline," bits of an Irish woman's internal self move freely across her skin and into the landscape.

We can think about this ease of exchange in another way. For women's interiorities to flow out into place means that the landscape changes as women feel. In stories such as these, female Irish characters shape their environment. This power defies our typical and historical understanding of what it means for a place to be feminized. I envision colonial men looking out at the greenery, the varying height of the earth beneath it and finding women's shapes there. If not women's shapes, then their stories. Stories of abuse that we call "intrinsic to femininity," but really are just stories that patriarchal society keeps on manufacturing. When I hear "feminization of the land," I think of men weaponizing notions of femininity to make the world meaningful. However, Caldwell and Joyce offer an alternative. In their writing, Ireland is femi-

nized because women are creating it. That is, while the “land as woman” trope seemingly originates with masculinity, here it endures and is redefined through feminine creation. Caldwell and Joyce show us that Ireland would not be Ireland if women were not there to perceive it, or, better yet, to live in it.

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THIRD PLACE

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A Personal Mirror: Cinder's Individual Development Through Cyborg Technology in Marissa Meyer's Lunar Chronicles

As it is with much YA literature, technology is a central force in the world of Marissa Meyer's Lunar Chronicles series. Meyer's main protagonist, Cinder, is a Cinderella-like figure who deals with everyday life as a cyborg. A cyborg is defined by Donna J. Haraway as, "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* 3). This definition of a cyborg is central to the understanding of Cinder as both fully human, and yet, altered in a way which labels her in society as 'other'. As Bringley states when speaking of Haraway's work, "the cyborg breaches boundaries that have previously defined what it is to be human" (Bringley, *Replication, Regeneration or Organic Birth: The Clone in Deryn Rees-Jones' 'Quiver' and Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto.'*" 18). Cinder's status as somewhat human has caused her to be an outcast in society, per the usual Cinderella trope (Meyer *Cinder* 4). However, Meyer uses the abilities of Cinder's technology to showcase the importance of differences in society, and how they can be used for the greater good. As Cinder slowly comes to understand her place in the world, and ultimately how she needs to use her unique position to create change, Meyer uses technology to mirror her journey as a metaphor about the importance of a society which allows and encourages differences for positive transformation to occur. Marissa Meyer's Lunar Chronicles uses technology to emphasize Cinder's set apartness from those around her, illustrate her journey from an Earthen to Lunar Queen, and emphasize the necessity of individuality in society.

Cinder's needs and differences as a cyborg set her apart from her family and her surroundings. Most of the people around her have

an inherent dislike of her simply because she is a cyborg. Her family is equally as disgusted with her technology and use it as an excuse to misuse her. They do their best to deny her the rights of a full daughter in the family, (per the Cinderella storyline), even begrudging her the things she needs as a cyborg (Meyer, Cinder 15). Yet even as it causes her to have trouble fitting into society and into her family, Cinder uses the gifts being a cyborg provides to take care of her family and to serve her kingdom. This willingness to aid others with her differences foreshadows her destiny to be set apart to save the society which dislikes her and shows the importance of using life to help others even after tragedy.

One of the first examples of this can be seen early in the book, when Cinder is working in the marketplace. Her family uses the money she makes as a mechanic in the market for themselves, and Cinder must hide the fact that she has used some of the money she earned there to buy a new foot, as her old metal foot was far too small (Meyer, Cinder 24). She knows that her family would not be happy if they were aware that she had spent the money. Saying of her stepmother, "She'd murder me if she knew I'd spent 600 unvis on a foot." (Meyer, Cinder 15) This treatment from her family and from society at large has been a great part of Cinder's mental processes up until the beginning of the book. The understanding that she is a lesser member of society could have been tied to many things, such as being an orphan, having little to no memory of her past, being poor or even simply being female. But without a doubt the thing that her adopted family and society hold against her is the fact that she is a cyborg. Her technology pushes her into a category which is considered untouchable by most of society and is viewed as an excuse by her family (specifically her stepmother) to use her and exclude her from the family's inner circle (Meyer, Cinder 32). Cinder is very aware of this fact, and reminds herself of it, saying, "[I am a] cyborg, and [I will] never to the ball." (Meyer, Cinder 33) Yet even as she processes the many ways her culture has rejected her, Cinder still uses technology to help her family, and her society. When Prince Kai (a member of the ruling family) asks for her help to fix an android of his, she offers to do it free of charge, saying "It would be [her] honor" to fix the device (Meyer, Cinder 13). Cinder's abilities as a mechanic come from her cybernetic ability to download schematics of machines into her mind (Meyers, Stars Above 73). She chooses to use these skills to help the prince and does not ask to be compensated,

although his family's rule has encouraged much of societies unkind views of cyborgs. This act of service is an example of how Cinder is willing to aid others with her differences and skills, and her willingness to do so without thought for who she is helping. Meyer uses technology to show Cinder's differences from those around her as an important part of establishing and developing her character and uses it to show how important it is to use those differences to help others.

Cinder's care of her own needs while still helping others is an important part of her personality to note. She does not buy into society's expectations of herself simply because she has been bombarded with them. Meyer uses technology to create a new and unique setting for Cinder to explore the idea of becoming her own person and creates Cinder as a person who takes care of others, while also looking after her own needs. Cinder uses her cyborg abilities to help Prince Kai and help her family gain money, while also acknowledging her own needs. This is an important aspect of Meyer's use of technology in the character arc of Cinder and breaks from the traditional Cinderella story by allowing Cinder to take care of herself. Daley-Carey mentions how authors (much like Meyer) have moved more towards a new type of thinking when considering character growth in adolescent literature, saying, "By questioning normative assumptions about adolescent growth, these fictions provide a complex interrogation of the conditions that have commonly enabled adolescent subjects to attain agency within the genre of YA fiction." (Daley-Carey, "Testing the Limits: Postmodern Adolescent Identities in Contemporary Coming-of-Age Stories." 469) After all, one could argue that the Cinderella story on which Cinder's tale is based needed some reconsiderations. The setting of a future society where technology is an essential element is an excellent place for Cinderella to gain "agency" and create a new and more modern role model for young readers of YA fiction. Meyer's use of technology in Cinder illuminates the ways in which she has stretched and pushed the typical Cinderella character to contain both a respect for herself and other people.

Another way that Meyer uses technology in the Lunar Chronicles is to show how Cinder grows from a simple Earthen girl to the Queen of Luna, and the changes in situation and person required to make that change. In this journey, technology becomes so much a part of Cinder's character, that as her cyborg technology and her understanding and awareness of it visibly changes, it becomes a window in

which to investigate the inner heart and mind of Cinder, and see similar changes mirrored there. This is an especially useful tool for adolescent fiction, where some readers may still be learning how to peer into the inner depths of a character, and a mirror device such as cyborg technology to substitute for a character arc is a welcome secondary guide with which to understand a character and their motivations.

Specifically in the Lunar Chronicles, Meyer uses Cinder's discovery of the amount of and purpose of her cyborg technology to show how a central part of her life is caught up in her Lunar heritage, and has always been a hidden part of her, just as the technology she was not aware of was a hidden part of her. The transition this understanding promotes in Cinder is a way Meyer uses technology to show the importance of finding a personal place in the world which fits into one's personal history.

Cinder's cyborg abilities change and grow several times throughout the arc of the Lunar Chronicles. As she discovers her history, she finds that her hazy past is a consequence of a fire in the royal household, and the medical procedures which are required to save her life and change her into a cyborg after she is taken to Earth for protection. She is the long-lost princess of the mysterious and powerful Lunar kingdom, niece of the powerful and evil reigning queen, and like most Lunars, she has the gift of mental manipulation of those around her (Meyer, *Scarlet* 316-19, 323). Eventually, she comes to the laboratory where the surgeries took place and looks at the surrounding that held her damaged body throughout those young childhood years, thinking that "There [is] no memory of the suffering those burns must have caused her. She [can't] connect the child with herself." (Meyer, *Scarlet* 324-325) Although she struggles to connect herself to the child who came from the palace of Luna so badly damaged, her understanding of the technology which saved her life continues to grow her understanding of how she fits into a space in society between the Lunar and Earthen peoples – a space which she now occupies for the first time.

Specifically, one piece of technology which physically sits in between the two races is the bioelectricity block on her spine, changing the way the Lunar gift of affecting thoughts and feelings works on a person, and promoting again the idea that Cinder's identity and personal place must be a balance between the Lunar heritage she has forgotten and the Earthen life she remembers all too well (Meyer, *Scarlet* 323).

Speaking to a friend, Cinder explains the technology, saying, "This [is a bioelectricity security block]. I had one implanted too, so I wouldn't accidentally use my Lunar gift when I was growing up. In an Earthen, it makes it so you can't be brainwashed by Lunars." (Meyer, *Scarlet* 323) This technology is an important reminder that she has always been Lunar, no matter how unconnected she feels to the young and injured version of herself. This aspect of Cinder's nature is imperative to the arc of the story, and Meyer uses it to show how important it is to consider personal history when finding a personal place in the world, and how such history can change the role in which a person may have previously viewed themselves.

Technology's ability to change a person's perception of themselves, and therefore the place they make for themselves in fictional writing is an important aspect of its role in Young Adult literature. Specifically, the technology associated with that of a cyborg seems particularly useful in the metaphor of a joining between an old and new life and history, and a use of that new mixed persona to create a new space for change and growth. The physical melting of a person into something new, which has never before been part of their history lends itself to the discovery of a new space to occupy and new roles to acquire in a society. One such story which deals with the concept of cyborgs and the aftermath of their creation is Daniel H. Wilson's *Robocalypse*. In this story as Grech states, many cyborgs are created, and begin the experience of discovering how their history affects who they are and how their new bodies change that history and grow it into something new, which in turn creates new needs and desires, and pushes forward a new space for these characters in society. Mathilda is one of these characters- a woman who has become a cyborg (Grech, "Technological Appendages and Organic Prostheses: Robo-Human Appropriation and Cyborgian Becoming in Daniel H. Wilson's *Robocalypse*." 91). Grech says, "Mathilda experiences the world through a joint human-technological interface that extends far beyond mere corporeality, affecting the very core of her being" (Grech, "Technological Appendages and Organic Prostheses: Robo-Human Appropriation and Cyborgian Becoming in Daniel H. Wilson's *Robocalypse*." 91). Her experience with technology as part of her body changes her, and by changing her it gives her a new understanding of her place and her role in society. Mathilda's experience with cyborg technology is not a singular one in fiction. Grech's observations about the impact that technology has on

Mathilda make an important connection about the way cyborg technology affects its host. To become a cyborg is the in-between of human and machine, and as such it by its very nature it calls into consideration the history, the parts of the whole which made up the individual before becoming cyborg, or in Cinder's case, also before knowing about the technology which hid her Lunar gift, and thus her Lunar history from her. The consideration of this history which the technology prompts is one way Meyer uses technology to ask the reader to consider the importance of personal history and its use in finding a personal place in society.

Finally, a pivotal way in which Meyer uses technology in *The Lunar Chronicles* is to emphasize the ways people with unique perspectives can see problems in a society which others may not be able to see. Cinder's cyborg brain contains a lie detector, which allows her to know when her aunt the Lunar Queen is lying to her by using her mind control abilities, or glamour (Meyer, *Scarlet* 351). Few others are immune to the Queen's impressive power except Cinder, who's technology keeps her from being controlled by allowing her to know when the queen is lying, and also by seeing through the glamour the Queen projects with her cyborg-aided sensing abilities (Meyer, *Cinder* 323, 361). This puts Cinder in a unique position of power over the Queen and allows her to quickly enact change in her society by pointing out the lies no one else can see. Meyer uses this technology to pinpoint how important it is in any society to have people of many perspectives in some areas, which allow for new vantage points with which to see the unchanging truth, and to consider truths which may be universally accepted in a new light as needed.

The Cinderella trope which Cinder follows naturally ends with Cinder at a royal ball, with a royal prince thrown in for good measure. However, with her cyborg appendages and an evil Queen on the loose, there are some divergences from the traditional pumpkin and fairy

godmother. At the ball, Cinder comes face to face with the Queen, and finds her as beautiful as all rumors says she is. Beautiful, and yet something is off. The lie detector software in Cinder's brain refuses to accept the picture of beauty which the Queen displays. "The orange light blinked beside Cinder's vision. The queen's glamour, the endless lie." (Meyer, *Cinder* 351). This "endless lie" was one which only Cinder could see, and only then because of the technology which pushed

her into the grey area between human and machine, forcing her not conform to society's standards of acceptable- yet here she is able to do what no one else can do. And again, at the royal ball, Cinder's scanning technology begins to deconstruct the mind controlling power of glamour which the Lunar Queen has over all those near her- allowing her to make everyone think she is the most beautiful person they have ever seen. Viewing the Queen through her scanner, Cinder is able to see the truth. She watches this happen, as "[h]er scanner was seeing beyond the illusion. Unscathed by the Lunar glamour, it knew where the true boundaries of the queen's face were, the imperfections, the inconsistencies." (Meyer, Cinder 361) Again Cinder's differences give her the power of truth, both over the Queen and over those around her. Although her culture does not have much value for her differences, Cinder clearly has a role to play in the understanding of the Lunar Queen, and the relations to the Earthens. This becomes obvious even before her knowledge of her Lunar heritage, which further cements her role as a bridge between two cultures, fueled by her technological abilities. Her cyborg power to see beyond the Lunar glamour is a direct result of the technology which her culture despises, and yet her ability is one many Earthens would desire above all others and find highly valuable.

The service of truth is one which could be called the gift above all others. Cinder's technology gives her this gift which she can then give back to her society. The truth about the Lunar gift, and eventually the truth about many other events, including her own birth and the situations which causes her to become a cyborg- leading to her eventual overthrow of her aunt and ascension to the throne of Luna. This ability which her technology allows her is one which many Earthens would dearly love to have for themselves- the ability to protect and empower themselves, to see beyond the Lunar gift's lies into the true heart of a matter. Yet even in this desire, the society still refuses to accept the very ones who have this gift- those with technology like the cyborg technology in Cinder. Their personal and collective prejudices and desire for control over cyborgs keep them from experiencing their desire to have control over those who would try to rule them by manipulation. The abilities beyond those of the average human are one of the main advantages to the technology which Meyer places in her story. Another story which deals with the idea and place of a cyborg is Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang*. The novel tells the story of a young girl who becomes a cyborg ship. Her life is much different than much of society,

but she is rewarded, if not with respect, then with powers which no ordinary human could have (Cheyne, "'She Was Born a Thing': Disability, the Cyborg and the Posthuman in Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang*." 139). Says Cheyne, "Helva [the cyborg girl] comes to possess abilities and senses vastly beyond those of "normal" humans. As a cyborg, Helva has fantastic adventures, travels the galaxy, and saves lives." (Cheyne, "'She Was Born a Thing': Disability, the Cyborg and the Posthuman in Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang*." 139). These abilities which were "vastly beyond" those of the average population give her a special vantage point to see the unchanging truth, similar to Cinder's position in the gap between Lunar and Earthen societies.

Technology is a pivotal character in Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*. Specifically, the greatly enhanced cyborg technology which gives Cinder abilities far beyond those of a normal human. All these traits allow her to do more for her society and her family than she would have been able to do without these changes to her make-up. Meyer uses this technology to emphasize the importance of using differences to better and aid society and to understand both others and oneself better. This technology weaves its way throughout the stories of *The Lunar Chronicles*, a mirror reflection into the lives of the characters, and the values which Meyer portrays in her writing. This also allows younger reader of the Young Adult genre to find a secondary arc with which to track a character's growth and development.

Meyer uses technology to emphasize Cinder's set apartness from those around her, illustrate her journey from an Earthen to Lunar Queen, and emphasize the necessity of individuality in society. All these points are pushed forward using cyborg technology within Cinder throughout the novel to accentuate these roles. The idea of technology as a character in daily life is not a thought only for fiction, however. Just as Meyer uses technology to make points about society and the social structure it is made of, so does technology today help shine light on the types of social structures we ascribe to, as well as the amount we use our differences to aid those in society around us. It can be used to help us recognize what areas of society we may have decided to turn a blind eye to, and to give accountability for choices made. Just as Meyer uses technology to emphasize individuality's important role in a culture, technology today allows us to create new spaces for individuality and differences, both in physical traits such as Cinder's cyborg limbs, and

cultural differences. Technology continues to be a mirror in which one may look in and see reflected the human condition and ideals.

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Judge's comment: *This essay is a compelling reading of character development in Young Adult fiction.*

Literary Magazine

FIRST PLACE

The Dilettanti

Mississippi University for Women

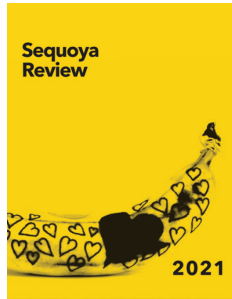
Ali Glasgow, Editor



Judge's comment: *I think the writing is really strong, and I love the fact that the first three or four pieces just capture the reader. "An Atheist Praise to a Southern Baptist God" is an amazing piece of poetry, "97%" is another great poem and so is "Flowers." I read it cover to cover and enjoyed so much of it. The construction of the journal is perfect bound and the font size is easy to read. This looks very professional. One minor suggestion would be the cover art, which is a tree that prints blurry. Also the lettering of the title is white with a blue line to the left and a red line to the right, which makes it look like it's supposed to be three-dimensional but also, for those of us who have visual issues, makes it hard to read. But in all other respects, this is very nicely done.*

SECOND PLACE

Aonian
Hendrix College
Annemarie Bennett, Editor



Judge's comment: *The writing is also strong in this one, although I found more pieces in here that were uneven. Some of the best pieces were by Hannah Samuel and Hannah Diggs. The poem "Even the Ancients Had Ancients," by Drew Skelton, was especially well done. The artwork in this one is also superior. I thought it was a very strong journal. On a personal note, "The Sun Still Rises," by Annie Crouch, was calling me.*

THIRD PLACE

Sequoia Review
University of Tennessee-Chattanooga
Lucas Thompson, Editor



The artwork in this is stunning. I'm especially gravitating to the work of Chase Williamson. I did find this journal physically hard to read because the font size is smaller and those of us who have visual issues need to have a print that is larger. I think this is a 10-point font and most of the journals are publishing in 12 point. I would suggest that as a future change although that may mess up the stylistic size of the physical book.