



Tapestries

SFU's Literary and Visual Arts Magazine

2014-15

Each year the School of Arts & Letters hosts the Gunard Berry Carlson Creative Writing and Visual Arts Contest, a competition open to all Saint Francis undergraduates. Students may submit written entries of up to 3,000 words in the following categories: (1) fiction, (2) creative nonfiction, including personal narratives and memoirs, (3) essay writing, and (4) poetry, with a minimum of five poems per submission. Students also may submit works of visual art, such as photographs, sculptures, paintings (oil, water, and acrylic), sketches, and collages.

The contest begins in the late fall and ends in the early spring, during which time students may submit as many entries as they wish. Entries must be either e-mailed to Dr. Brennan Thomas at bthomas@francis.edu or personally delivered to Room 307 Scotus Hall before the announced contest deadline.

The 2014-2015 contest winners and honorable mentions were published in the fourth volume of Saint Francis University's literary and visual arts magazine, *Tapestries*. Opinions expressed in this magazine do not reflect those of the contest judges and magazine editors or those of the Saint Francis community.

For more information about the Gunard Berry Carlson Creative Writing and Visual Arts Contest, please contact:

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Tapestries

Weaving the Threads of Creativity and Innovation

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“Stairway to Heaven” (1st Place Winner in the Visual Arts Category)

Acknowledgements

The sponsorship and coordination of the Gunard Berry Carlson Creative Writing and Visual Arts Contest would not be possible without the support and dedication of the following individuals.

Mrs. Barbara C. Travaglini and her son, Frederick C. Travaglini, directors of the Gunard B. Carlson Memorial Foundation, have funded the contest for many years, ensuring that all winners and honorable mention recipients are properly recognized.

The contest's seven-member judging panel—Angela Balog, Roxana Cazan, Lauri Chose, Bradley Coffield, Patrick Farabaugh, Heather Gides, and J. Nathan Scott—worked tirelessly to read and score every one of the 73 written entries submitted for the 2014-15 contest. To put into perspective how many hours they spent doing this, the total word count of the 60 electronically submitted entries exceeds 84,000 words, with the remaining print submissions adding thousands more.

Charles Olson critically examined each of the 202 entries submitted for the visual arts category before finally selecting an overall winner for the magazine's cover image and 21 honorable mentions. He had no outside assistance with this behemoth task, yet performed it beautifully.

Dr. Wayne Powel, Dr. Timothy Whisler and Ms. Donna Menis have continued to support the contest's administration and coordination, as has Ms. Laurie Madison, who has overseen that each winner and honorable mention recipient receives his or her award.

The assemblage and publication of *Tapestries* also is the work of many patient and talented individuals.

Our three student editors—Tara Fritz, Jordan Gorsuch, and April Taylor—carefully proofread this collection's essays and stories.

Members of the Marketing and IT teams uploaded the magazine's contents to our university website.

Beth Bellock, Michael Kutchman, and the print shop staff have made certain that every copy of *Tapestries* looks just as sharp and colorful in print form as it does in digital form.

Finally, those students who submitted writing and artwork for the Gunard B. Carlson Contest have ensured the contest's success and the publication of *Tapestries*.

We thank each and every one of you.

Editor's Note

In an intriguing scene from a mystery film I saw many years ago, a celebrated poet and his photographer partner mull over what they do as artists. The photographer explains to her partner that to become successful in her profession, she has learned to narrow her focus to a fixed point that yields an image worth looking at and remembering. She then tells the poet that he does the same with words: he also creates fixed points upon fine details with the words he chooses and the order and manner in which he presents them. The film's title has escaped me, but the potency of this dialogic exchange has not. It expresses two truths about those who create with their paintbrushes and camera lenses, their keyboards and computer screens: one, that artists use whatever medium they operate within to make something that both utilizes and transcends that medium's constraints, and, two, that artists distinguish themselves not only by their remarkable ability to create, but by their ability to *perceive*. They see the world as it is as well as what it could be and ought to be.

How do the storytellers, essayists, and photographers whose work comprise this latest volume of *Tapestries* see the world? What snapshots of present, past, and possibility have their writings and artwork preserved?

One writer capture the feelings and sensory experiences of sipping coffee in a garden, looking quizzically at a relative she knows so little about. Another challenges readers to reconsider Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead," while another critically examines the social constructs that make up our understanding of cultural identity and self-awareness. Their works direct the reader's gaze to a comfortable stroll through Paris's bohemian district, the somber scene of a family funeral, a gentle friendship between two Best Buddies, the ethical dilemmas of the death penalty, the panic of a procrastinating student, and a struggle for survival in an unforgiving wilderness. Similarly, those who have contributed artwork to *Tapestries* have captured snapshots of nature—sunrises and sunsets, a timorous deer, snow-covered pines and dew-coated flowers, a web of spidery branches—and of human creation—a church, a bridge, a stop sign, a truck.

These texts and photographs show the world as others see it. They comfort and provoke, delight and startle. With their chosen media, the writers and artists of *Tapestries* have fixed our attention upon images for us to pontificate on and remember. Each essay, story, and photograph, in the words of Dylan Thomas, "helps to change the shape of the universe, helps to extend everyone's knowledge of himself and the world around him."

Please enjoy.

Best,

Dr. Brennan Thomas

Writing Judges

Ms. Angela Balog, Instructor of Business Management

Dr. Roxana Cazan, Assistant Professor of English

Dr. Lauri Chose, Associate Professor of English

Mr. Bradley Coffield, Assistant Information Services Librarian

Dr. Patrick Farabaugh, Associate Professor of Communication Arts

Ms. Heather Gides, Clinical Coordinator and Instructor of Physician Assistance Science

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"Timekeepers" by Tara Fritz

It Can Wait Until Tomorrow (Essay)

Dallas Mosier

At 7:30 one morning, I groggily climbed out of bed, walked to the other side of the dorm room, and turned off my alarm clock. Then I walked over to my roommate's bed to wake her up. It did not take me long to realize that not only was she not in bed, she was nowhere in the room. I hurriedly put on my slippers and ran downstairs to the lounge; I assumed she had fallen asleep at the table while working on her homework last night. I opened the lounge door, expecting to see my roommate face down in her biology textbook, but that was not the case. My roommate was sitting upright in her chair, typing away on her laptop. She informed me that she didn't start her biology lab report until 5:00 that morning, so she had been awake all night. My roommate had fallen victim to procrastination.

David S. Ackerman and Barbara L. Gross, Associate Professors of Marketing at California State University, define procrastination as "the delay of a task or assignment that is under one's control" (5). Procrastination is estimated to be approximately 2.5 million years old; famous military leaders like Hammurabi and Marcus Aurelius went so far as to caution their people against waiting to take action (Wilson and Nguyen 211). Even though the idea of procrastination has been known for centuries, it gained very little recognition in the United States until the 1970s (Wilson and Nguyen 211). Research done by psychologists since the late twentieth century has unveiled an interesting fact: procrastination is most prevalent among college students. According to Brian A. Wilson and Tuyen D. Nguyen, "80-95% of college students engage in procrastination" (212). This overwhelmingly large percentage leads individuals to wonder what could possibly cause so many students to wait until the last minute to complete their assignments. Studies on procrastination resulted in fear of failure and lack of self-motivation as two of the most common causes; however, some researchers feel these two causes have faults that hinder their plausibility. That being noted, there is one cause of procrastination that seems to rise above the rest: task aversion.

No matter the cause, procrastination has been known to have seriously negative effects. Christopher Orpen of Bournemouth University in the United Kingdom argues that "it is not surprising that academic procrastination should be negatively related to performance on college and university scores" (Beswick et al. qtd. in Orpen 73). In other words, lower grades are usually a result of procrastination. Ackerman and Gross would agree with this point, adding that procrastination "leads to lowered academic performance" (5). Also, writer Eric Hoover states that procrastination can sometimes lead to more serious situations, like plagiarism or anxiety. It is evident that these consequences of procrastination can have a harsh impact on students' lives. Many students who are chronic procrastinators create more stress for themselves. Their ability to function daily is

also impacted due to lack of sleep. Knowing the risks, why is it that college students continue to put off the completion of tasks, even when they know they will have to finish them eventually?

One potential cause of procrastination is fear of failure. In her dissertation on the varying dimensions of procrastination, Joanna Sokolowska, a doctoral student at Fordham University, found that fear of failure is the “fear of under-performance: of not meeting standards and expectations of self and others” (12). Put differently, if people are afraid their work may not be at the level their professors expect, they may not begin the assignment until the last minute and spend the time they should be working on the project worrying about how their work will be judged. Similarly to Sokolowska, Hoover observes that procrastinators “tend to postpone tasks because they worry about performing inadequately, or because they fear their success may raise others’ expectations of them.” Often times, students who procrastinate because they are afraid to fail are worried about making the wrong decision. Therefore, they choose to hesitate even though they know a choice ultimately will have to be made.

Although a few experts name fear of failure as a leading cause of procrastination, not all studies yield similar results. Extensive research on procrastination was done by Henri C. Schouwenberg of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands; his results determined that “fear of failure as a reason for procrastination is either of only secondary importance or practically absent” (Schouwenberg qtd. in Wilson and Nguyen 215). Schouwenberg dismisses the idea that fear of failure is a leading cause of procrastination. Comparably to Schouwenberg’s study, David Ackerman and Barbara Gross conducted a study on the causes of procrastination. For this study, they divided a large class of students into two groups: students who rarely procrastinate and students who usually procrastinate. One important conclusion was that “no differences were found between the two groups based on fear about the assignment” (Ackerman and Gross 8). If procrastinators and non-procrastinators have the same results for fear of failure, there must be another reason for the high percentage of procrastinating college students. With research disproving fear of failure as the primary cause of procrastination, it is unreasonable to deem it the most probable cause.

A more plausible cause for procrastination is a lack of self-motivation. Students can be motivated for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons. If a student is taking a class because the subject matter is of personal interest or because it pertains to her major, she is more likely to pay attention during class and put effort into her coursework. This student is learning for herself, not for anyone else (Orpen 74). Those students who are involved in tasks only as a result of external factors are much more likely to procrastinate; these students usually do not place high value on the classes in which they are enrolled. Orpen theorizes that these “extrinsically motivated” (74) students have one objective in mind: to pass the class so they can obtain some form of a reward. That is, if students are only taking a class because they must complete it, they do not place the class high on their priority lists. Then,

students spend more time studying and completing assignments for the classes they see as necessary and more important to their future successes. Also, students who are motivated by external factors, such as rewards from others, are even more willing to procrastinate if they discover the rewards they thought they were receiving are no longer available or the rewards will not be given to them as soon as they originally thought (Sokolowska 27). For example, imagine that a student is studying for a test only because his father tells him that he will give him ten dollars if he gets an A. Yet the night before the test, the student learns his father was lying. He most likely is not going to continue studying since he now knows his reward is no longer obtainable. Once the object of their desire is gone, students no longer have the drive to complete the work necessary for the course.

While lack of self-motivation is a more plausible cause than fear of failure, this theory does not consider one important factor. Overall, students motivated by internal reasons will procrastinate less often than students motivated by external reasons. However, the precluding statement is only a general statement concluded from studies done by psychologists. Even though this theory can be considered true in most cases, not all students are the same. It is possible that students who are intrinsically motivated will engage in procrastination even when the class they are enrolled in is important to them. Joanna Sokolowska describes the procrastination in these students as “so strong that it outweighs the value placed on the task, no matter how strong” (17). There are some students who will inevitably procrastinate, regardless of the situation or the motivation. Even though lack of motivation is a more probable cause of procrastination, the refutation leaves room for lack of motivation to be debated. Therefore, there must be an even more plausible cause: task aversion.

Task aversion is described by Lisa M. Zarick and Robert Stonebraker as follows: “in general, we are less willing to do something we do not want to do, so we delay taking action.” There are many reasons that students who admit to task aversion as a reason for procrastination might give for waiting until it is almost too late in order to finish their tasks. Task aversion is noted by many researchers to be a top reason for procrastination. Students who admitted to procrastinating often said they thought the homework was uninteresting, boring, tedious, or too long (Wilson and Nguyen 215). In addition, Ackerman and Gross also note that “aversiveness of the task has been identified as a primary motivator of procrastination” and “students procrastinate more on academic tasks they find unpleasant than those they characterize as pleasant” (6). Once again, students choose to do the work they feel is easy or fun.

Although procrastination is prevalent throughout all universities and colleges, there are ways to reduce the overwhelming numbers of procrastinators. The most efficient way to curb procrastination is to alter class assignments to fit students’ interests. When students have personal interest in the subject matter, learning and completion of projects become much higher priorities. David Ackerman and Barbara Gross write that if professors assign “real and realistic projects, assignments that develop practical

professional skills, and projects chosen because of their personal relevance to students” (8), then the percentage of procrastination may greatly decline. That being said, it is the responsibility of students to ensure their work is complete, despite whether or not they enjoy the course. Students could listen to enjoyable music while doing homework or study while they are working out at the gym. In addition, students could get involved in more campus activities, which would mean they would no longer have time to procrastinate; they would have to structure their schedules to allow time for the completion of assignments. Students could also seek help from professionals on campus, who are trained to help students become more organized and efficient with their time. Whether the reason for students’ procrastination is fear of failure, lack of motivation, or task aversion, they can overcome this obstacle and its negative effects with hard work and determination.

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"Crossroad" by Breanna Kochinsky



What's for Dinner: Is Food Killing America? (Essay)

Julie Horner

The following research paper outlines the obesity epidemic and the food that is making America unhealthy. Consumers can help reverse this epidemic by making healthier choices. In order to do this, consumers must demand more organic natural food that is not contaminated with chemicals and drugs. This paper will touch on the negative consequences of eating processed and non-organic foods and will describe an eating plan that can detox the body and teach a person to eat for fuel and nourishment, not simply for pleasure.

Food is what fuels a human's body; without it, we would not survive. Choosing the right fuel is becoming more of a challenge, as the food industry is over processing food and adding countless chemicals and drugs to get the most yields from crops and to produce food at the lowest cost. Farming is no longer the picture perfect image of cows grazing in the field and amber waves of grain. Farming has become a factory operation, factories where grains contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to resist disease and produce the highest yield and where animals live in filth while they are pumped full of antibiotics and hormones to fatten them up.

Certain additives and ingredients are being added to our food, not for nutritional value, but rather to make the food more appealing to consumers. Mouth feel, flavor, smell, and texture are all part of the marketing efforts to entice consumers to buy products. Sugar, salt, and fat are added in astonishingly large quantities to please the pallet and seduce consumers to come back for more. According to *Food, Inc.*, a documentary about farm factories and GMO crops, "the industry doesn't want you to know the truth about what you're eating because if you knew, you might not want to eat it" (Krenner, 2009). The truth is that the food that we use as fuel has led to an epidemic in America, which is obesity.

Former Surgeon General Richard Carmona shared concern for this epidemic during a press conference when referencing obesity as the most pressing issue facing our nation. Carmona stated that "obesity is a terror within; it's destroying our society from within and unless we do something about it, the magnitude of the dilemma will dwarf 9/11 or any other terrorist event that you can point out" (as qtd. in Greenstreet, 2008). According to the documentary *Killer at Large*, "Obesity rates in the United States are climbing at an unprecedented rate across all ages and ethnic groups, and leading to the first generation of children whose life expectancy is shorter than that of their parents" (Greenstreet, 2008). More than one-third of Americans are obese, based on statistics gathered by the Centers for Disease Control ("*Overweight*," 2014). Obesity leads to chronic illness and disease and it is costing Americans billions of dollars each year.

Consumers are confused about what to eat thanks to contradicting research. One study will show that something once thought to be unhealthy is now good for us ... or vice versa. One study says wheat is detrimental to our health; another says it is beneficial. The same goes with coffee, wine, red meat, eggs, fats, and many other foods. The majority of the food many Americans are fueling their bodies with is in the form of fast food, junk food, processed food, foods containing GMOs, insecticide-laced produce, and antibiotic and hormone-tainted meat.

The Whole30 Program

The Whole30 program was designed by two certified sports nutritionists whose theory is that “the food you eat either makes you more healthy or less healthy. Those are your options” (“Hartwig and Hartwig,” 2012, p. 12). In their book *It Starts with Food*, they outline four good food standards: “The food that we eat should 1) promote a healthy psychological response; 2) promote a healthy hormonal response; 3) support a healthy gut; and 4) support immune function and minimize inflammation” (p. 24). The book is full of testimonials from people who have tried the Whole30 program and have had remarkable results, not only with losing weight, but also with improvements in their overall health. They touted increased energy, improvement in or elimination of irritable bowel syndrome, fewer migraine headaches, less severe arthritic symptoms, and improvement in biometrics such as lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and controlled glucose levels.

The premise of the program is that for thirty days we eat only whole healthy foods that are minimally processed, and we exclude certain foods that do not make us healthier. This thirty-day time frame serves as a “detox” period to rid our bodies of toxins and withdraw from any food addictions we might have.

At the end of the thirty-day period, we can slowly begin introducing various foods back to our diets. Hartwig and Hartwig (2014) call this part of the program “reintroduction.” The idea is to reintroduce one food at a time to determine how it affects our bodies. If we get a headache after drinking red wine, we can decide if the headache is worth it or we can choose not to drink red wine in the future. If we get intestinal distress after eating dairy products or legumes, we can choose to eliminate or minimize these foods from our diets moving forward. The Whole30 program teaches us to listen to our bodies in order to recognize how our bodies respond to different foods.

Whole30 Prohibited Foods

Foods that are prohibited on the Whole30 program include the following:

- Sugar, sweeteners, honey, and anything that contains added sugar
- Alcohol
- Any type of grains, such as pasta, bread, and rice
- Any type of legumes, such as beans, lentils, soy, and peanuts

- Any food that contains dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, ice cream, cheese, and butter (“Hartwig and Hartwig,” 2012, p. 208)

Why should we avoid these foods?

Sugar: America is addicted to sugar. The receptor in the brain that causes addiction to drugs and alcohol is the same receptor that causes us to become addicted to sugar. The more sugar we consume, the more we want (Greenstreet, 2008). Equally as addicting are the artificial sweeteners such as sucralose (found in Splenda) and aspartame (found in NutraSweet and Equal). To illustrate the addictive nature of sugar, “in studies of rats who were exposed to cocaine, then given a choice between intravenous cocaine or oral saccharine, most chose saccharine” (Strawbridge, 2012).

Alcohol: This beverage fails all four of the good food standards outlined by Hartwig and Hartwig (2014), not to mention it is addictive and can impair our judgment. Some studies show that there are some nutritional benefits from consuming alcohol in moderation. Red wine, for example, contains an antioxidant called resveratrol: “Research shows that resveratrol could be linked to a reduced risk of inflammation and blood clotting, both of which can lead to heart disease” (“Diseases,” 2014). The resveratrol comes from the skin of grapes, which means we can get the same cardiovascular benefits by simply eating the grapes.

Grains: Grains are just as addictive as sugar. Grains, whether refined into white or wheat flour, 12-grain bread, cereal, pasta, or graham crackers, are all converted to sugar in our bodies. Also, the protein that binds the grains, known as gluten, leads to inflammation in the body and causes allergic reactions in some people. The addictive properties of grains are similar to drugs such as cocaine and heroin, as Dr. Davis (2011) notes in the book *Wheat Belly*:

So this is your brain on wheat. Digestion yields morphine-like compounds that bind to the brain’s opiate receptors. It induces a form of reward, a mild euphoria. When the effect is blocked or no exorphin-yielding foods are consumed, some people experience a distinctly unpleasant withdrawal. (Davis, 2011)

This withdrawal causes us to want more. Food marketers know which buttons to push when advertising their products. Labels such as sugar-free, low-fat, low-salt, and so forth make us think we are eating healthier, leading us to consume more of those products.

Another problem with grains is that when they are refined (processed), there are unhealthy additives in the products, such as preservatives, sugar, salt, artificial coloring, and even residue of pesticides. Many of the additives are known carcinogens, which are agents that can cause cancer. One study stated that “certain herbicides and pesticides have been shown to stimulate the growth of breast cancer cells or cause mammary cancer in rats” (“Chemicals,” n.d.). Also, many of the grains we eat contain GMOs. The two largest food crops in the U.S., corn and soybeans, are genetically altered, as well as the majority of

sugar beets, accounting for 55 percent of total domestic sugar production. The FDA does not require GMO commodities to be tested for safety (Bouffard, 2013). These GMO foods are then added to many processed foods. There is great debate in the U.S. as to whether GMO crops have any negative health impacts. There are no regulations at this time to require producers in the U.S. to include GMOs on their labels.

Legumes: Legumes are a source of protein as well as fiber, and according to the Whole30 program, they are not a terrible choice of food. They do not, however, meet all of the healthy food standards. They may lead to intestinal distress and promote inflammation.

Dairy: We do not need to drink milk to get the protein, vitamins, and calcium we need. There are other foods that provide the same nutrients such as dark leafy green vegetables. There are also calcium fortified juices and calcium supplements. Farm factory dairy cows are pumped with antibiotics to prevent disease and hormones to promote more milk. When we consume this milk, we are consuming the drugs as well.

Whole30 Promoted Foods

If we eliminate all of these foods, what remains? There are plenty of delicious foods available to please our pallets and to satisfy us. Foods that make a person healthier are lean organic meats, poultry, fish, eggs, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and healthy fats. Healthy fats may sound like an oxymoron, but our bodies need a certain amount of fat for optimum health. There are certain fats that will provide health benefits, and other fats that we should avoid, which are explained in *It Starts with Food*.

It is important to choose organic grass-fed beef and pork and free-range poultry and eggs. Farm factory meat, poultry, and eggs are tainted with antibiotics and hormones, and there is a higher risk of consuming meat contaminated with harmful bacteria, such as *E.coli*, not to mention that factory farming is controversial because of the unethical treatment of the animals. Because of the conditions the factory farmed animals must endure, they are more subject to diseases, which the farmers counteract by pumping the animals with antibiotics. The overuse of antibiotics is concerning because of the bacteria that become immune to the antibiotics, resulting in “superbugs,” which are very difficult to treat and can be deadly (“Meat,” 2012). The good news is that many supermarkets are accommodating consumers who are demanding healthier organic food choices. A survey conducted by *Consumer Reports* (2012) identified antibiotic-free meat and poultry in thirteen of the largest grocery retailer companies across the country. Some of the chains include Giant, Martin’s, Trader Joe’s, Sam’s Club, Walmart, and Whole Foods (“Meat,” 2012).

Unlimited vegetables may be consumed on the Whole30 program, with the exception of corn and peas. Fruits may be consumed in moderation, but because they contain natural sugars, it is recommended that we limit fruits to three or fewer servings per day. Nuts, such as almonds, pecans, walnuts, and pistachios, may be eaten in small

quantities. Healthy fats such as olive oil and coconut oil are necessary for optimum health. Each meal should include protein, vegetables, and fat in order to feel satisfied (“Hartwig and Hartwig,” 2012).

The Whole30 program promotes healthy “clean” eating. We need to choose foods that are in their most natural form. We need to shop the perimeters of the grocery stores and stay away from the processed packaged foods that contain unwanted ingredients (Felesky-Hunt, 2009). We need to focus on eating to fuel and nourish our bodies, not just because it tastes good.

Tainted Food

If the above information isn’t enough food for thought to sway us toward the produce aisle, consider the following additives that are hidden in our foods. This abbreviated list was compiled from the Center for Science in the Public Interest (“Chemical Cuisine,” 2014):

- Aspartame, an artificial sweetener: Three independent studies have shown that aspartame causes cancer in rodents.
- Azodicarbonamide, a bleaching agent in flour: Chemicals that are released when baked are carcinogens.
- Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA), an antioxidant added to cereals, chewing gum and vegetable oil: Studies show it causes cancer in rats, mice, and hamsters. This additive can also be found in rubber and petroleum products (Wilson and Christensen, 2014).
- Propyl gallate, an antioxidant preservative in vegetable oil, meat products, and chewing gum: This preservative is thought to be a carcinogen, but not enough research has been conducted. This additive can also be found in hair-grooming products and adhesives (Wilson and Christensen, 2014).
- TBHQ (tert-Butylhydroquinone), a preservative to prevent rancidity in cereals, snack foods, and vegetable oil: Studies show an increase in the risk of tumors in rats. This additive can also be found in varnish, lacquer and resin (Wilson and Christensen, 2014).

There are many more chemicals that are added to our foods; some we know about and others may be surprising. Some are relatively safe and necessary in order to preserve our food. Some are toxic and should not be consumed. It is up to us as consumers to educate ourselves on what is in our food and what could be making us sick.

Whole30 Personal Results

My husband and I faithfully adhered to the Whole30 plan for thirty days. The results were amazing. We changed nothing else in our daily regimes except what we were eating. In thirty days, my husband lost seventeen pounds, and I lost twelve pounds. My husband’s fasting blood sugar dropped 41 points, and his once high blood pressure is now in the

normal range. He also has experienced less fibromyalgia pain. We are both sleeping more soundly, have more energy during the day, think more clearly, and generally have an overall feeling of wellbeing. Other than the first few days of the program when we literally went through withdrawal symptoms, I have not experienced a headache or an upset stomach. The downside is that I have spent more time shopping for groceries and preparing our food, but it has been worth it. The key to success with this program is to plan ahead. Winging it is a sure way to fail. I prepare food on Sundays to get us through the week, such as soup, grilled chicken for salads, and chopped fresh vegetables for snacks. Every night I prepare our breakfast and pack our lunches for the next day. We are one week beyond the thirty-day detox, and we are slowly reintroducing some foods into our diets. We have had wine, rice, oatmeal, cheese, and even a piece of wedding cake at a family wedding. The day after eating the wedding cake, my head felt foggy, which I attribute to the sugar shock that my body was no longer used to. We no longer crave sugar, bread, or pasta. This does not mean we will never eat these foods again; it means we are more in control of what we choose to eat. I can walk away from a tray of cookies and not be tempted to eat one (or two or three). I was very skeptical about this program in the beginning, but I am now a believer. It is very gratifying to say that food no longer controls me. I am now in control of what goes into my body, and I know exactly what's for dinner.

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"Spring Dew" by Lindsey Miller



A Special Kind of Friendship (Essay)

April Taylor

For many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), their greatest desire is simply to feel “normal.” Valerie Kohr’s developmentally delayed grandson is no exception. According to Valerie, her grandson was badly bullied throughout middle school. When the time came to attend high school, he was extremely worried about what new struggles would await him. He was not able to communicate with his peers, and he was not confident in himself (“Your Stories”). This is the plight of many people, children or adults, with IDD.

A person with an intellectual disability has low intellectual functioning (an IQ below 70-75) and limitations in at least two skill areas, including communication, self-care, leisure, health and safety, functional academics, and community participation and employment. Intellectual disabilities are present at birth (“Intellectual”). Developmental disabilities, on the other hand, are not necessarily present at birth and may appear any time before the age of 22. However, the effects are usually lifelong (“Intellectual”). These disabilities are attributed to cognitive or physical impairments that result in limitations in three or more of these areas: comprehension and language skills, learning, mobility, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. Nearly five million Americans have IDD (“Intellectual”).

While having IDD limits the activities that people can independently perform, the very existence of IDD is not the largest problem. It is possible for a person with IDD to live a happy, fulfilling, and relatively independent life. Unfortunately, many of these people are not able to reach this potential. According to the Best Buddies International website, middle and high school students with IDD are often excluded from social activities, and adults with IDD are isolated at home and at work, if they are lucky enough to be employed (“Our Programs”). A study conducted by Julie Taylor and Robert Hodapp of Vanderbilt University corroborated these claims, finding that nearly thirteen percent of adults with IDD lack substantial daytime activities. As a result, these adults have more emotional and behavioral problems than those with daytime activities. Another study performed by psychologist Micah Mazurek of the University of Missouri’s Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders found that children with autism spectrum disorders have high rates of loneliness and isolation (224). This loneliness is also associated with lowered self-esteem and increased social anxiety. According to the study, only 34% of children with autism spectrum disorders have at least one good friend, as reported by the parents (Mazurek 224).

Some people assume that individuals with IDD are not capable of, or even don’t desire, social interaction. On the contrary, people with IDD crave quality friendships and benefit from them perhaps more than people without IDD. According to Mazurek, having a

close friendship can mitigate the negative effects of social difficulties among adults with autism spectrum disorders (225). She also found that children with autism spectrum disorders who have quality friendships are less lonely and have a higher sense of self-worth than those who don't (Mazurek 225). In addition, Taylor and Hodapp suggest that employment and relationships with coworkers help give people with IDD structure and purpose in life. Given these facts, the obvious solution to the problem of social isolation is to provide social interaction and employment opportunities to people with IDD.

An organization called Best Buddies International does just that, as made evident in their mission statement: "To establish a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)" ("Milestones"). With the help of volunteers, many of whom are college students, Best Buddies helps people with IDD all over the world lead healthier and more fulfilling lives as a result of increased social interaction.

Best Buddies was founded in 1989 by Anthony K. Shriver. In founding this organization, Shriver added to an already impressive list of accomplishments made by his uncle and former United States president, John F. Kennedy; his father and founder of the Peace Corps, Robert Sargent Shriver; and his mother and founder of the Special Olympics, Eunice Kennedy Shriver (Salfen). Shriver began Best Buddies as a school project while he attended Georgetown University ("Best Buddies High Schools"). His inspiration came in part from the values of service and hard work instilled in him by his parents and family (Salfen).

Best Buddies' original mission was to provide one-on-one friendships between college students and adults with IDD. Slowly, this mission expanded to include a wider range of ages and an additional focus on employment support and leadership training. This expansion happened rapidly after Shriver founded the original chapter at Georgetown. By 1991, thirty-two colleges had Best Buddies chapters ("Best Buddies High Schools"). By this time, the program served high school students and adults and would later be expanded to serve middle school students as well.

While friendship is very important for people with IDD of all ages, employment is especially important for adults. After leaving high school, about twenty percent of people with IDD are unemployed, resulting in a low sense of self-worth (Taylor and Hodapp). In 1994, Best Buddies began to provide employment support for its members. The employment program develops partnerships with employers and assists Buddies through the hiring process ("Best Buddies"). Best Buddies employment coaches not only help the Buddies acquire jobs, but also train them in the skills necessary for the job and introduce them to coworkers so that they are not isolated in the workplace (Alexis). Kenton Chin, 43, who was placed by Best Buddies Jobs in the human resources department of a clothing manufacturer, says, "The job is good. It's a challenge, but I like a challenge. I don't want to

sit and do nothing” (qtd. in Alexis). Clearly, people with IDD long for a sense of productivity, and Best Buddies Jobs is helping provide that for many people with IDD.

In 1999, Best Buddies added another program that allowed an even larger number of people with IDD to gain social interaction: e-Buddies (Alexis). E-Buddies is a program that allows volunteers to form friendships with people with IDD while communicating solely through e-mail (Alexis). This program can be especially beneficial for those who have trouble communicating in person. For example, Denise LaFlamme, 36, of New Haven, Connecticut, suffers from cerebral palsy, which gives her a severe speech impediment. Because of this, she sadly admits, she doesn’t have many friends. With the e-Buddy program, Denise enjoys frequent e-mail correspondence with her e-Buddy Margaret Nee, 38, of Miami, Florida (Alexis). Through this program, people with IDD who would otherwise have little to no hope of forming friendships are able to connect with others.

Today Best Buddies contains eight different programs: Best Buddies Middle Schools, Best Buddies High Schools, Best Buddies Colleges, Best Buddies Promoters, Best Buddies Citizens, e-Buddies, Best Buddies Ambassadors, and Best Buddies Jobs. The middle school and high school programs address the problem of social isolation in school (Mazurek 224) by pairing students with IDD with non-disabled students for one-on-one friendships (“Our Programs”). To address the issue of adult social isolation (Taylor and Hodapp), the Colleges and Citizens programs pair adults with IDD with college students and adult citizens respectively (“Our Programs”). The Best Buddies Promoters program primarily serves to raise awareness of the disability rights movement, and the Best Buddies Ambassadors program serves to educate people with IDD about this movement so that they have the skills they need to self-advocate (“Our Programs”).

Through all of these programs, Best Buddies positively impacts about 800,000 individuals worldwide. The organization has grown from its original chapter in Georgetown to almost 1,700 chapters encompassing all fifty states, fifty countries, and six continents (“Best Buddies”). Despite its growth, founder Anthony Shriver ultimately hopes that his organization will become outdated. All of these programs work toward a common goal: creating a “world where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are so successfully integrated into our schools, our workplaces and our general communities that our current efforts and services will be unnecessary” (“Best Buddies”). Hopefully, with the help of organizations like Best Buddies, this world in which people with IDD are given the rights and respect they deserve will be realized.

College students definitely have a part to play in achieving this goal. Best Buddies began on a college campus, and now there are over 250 college chapters (McKenna). In the College Buddies program, college students are paired with adults with IDD from the community. Organized activities for the Buddies usually take place on campus once a month, but Buddies are encouraged to spend time together or contact each other about once a week (Alexis). Weekly activities can include anything from bowling or seeing a movie to running errands such as grocery shopping. College students help the cause by

forming close relationships with people with IDD. These relationships positively contribute to the happiness and overall well-being of both the college students and the Buddies, but ultimately, volunteers are supposed to stay with the program because they want to form true friendships, not because they feel like they're doing a good deed (Hagar).

For students of the 250 colleges that already have Best Buddies chapters, getting involved is very simple. At Saint Francis University, students simply must sign up, take a training session or two, and agree to attend monthly parties and keep regular contact with their Buddies. If a student's college does not already have a Best Buddies program, the student can apply to start a new chapter on the organization's official website.

Once a chapter is started, there are different ways to get involved. In the Saint Francis University chapter of Best Buddies, there are two types of College Buddies: Peer Buddies and Associate Buddies. Peer Buddies are matched with a particular individual with IDD, which means this volunteer must commit to all monthly parties. Associate Buddies are those who cannot guarantee attendance at all events but still want to be involved with the program. These Buddies are not paired with an individual with IDD, but they attend as many events as possible and mingle with all the guests, occasionally filling in for an absent Peer Buddy. This system guarantees that a busy schedule will not be a preventative factor for a person interested in Best Buddies.

Scheduling issues aside, there are several reasons that college students should be involved with this organization. Participating in Best Buddies is bound to improve college students' understanding of people with IDD, help them feel a sense of purpose, and give them a true friend. Many members of Best Buddies note a transformation in the way they perceive and react to people with IDD. Gabriel Carnes, an eighteen-year-old Peer Buddy, says, "I used to look at kids with disabilities and think, 'That's so sad. Look at what they don't have.' Now I see what they do have" (qtd. in Alexis). Gabriel joined Best Buddies as a required community service project, but continues to participate because it "keeps [him] honest and humble, and shows [him] how one person can help another" (qtd. in Alexis). When college students realize how much they have to give to adults with IDD, their lives become more purposeful. In fact, Anthony Shriver founded Best Buddies partly because he felt that it gave his life purpose. He believes that life is short, so people have to be certain that they are making a difference and enjoying what they do while they have the time (Salfen). However, based on the organization's mission statement, the most important benefit college students gain from Best Buddies is a true friendship that will last for a lifetime.

A major concern of any college student when faced with a potential commitment is time. Fortunately, Best Buddies is not a tremendous time commitment, although it does require a person who is committed to being a true friend. Again, the only time commitments are monthly parties and weekly correspondence with the Buddies, and this commitment is reduced if one chooses to be an Associate Buddy. While spending time

with someone once a week may seem like a lot, think about how many people you already spend time with at least once a week. The beauty of having a Best Buddy is that it is not a major inconvenience to spend time with him or her. Joe Columbus, a forty-five-year-old Citizen Buddy in Orlando, Florida, explains that one way he spends time with his Buddy is simply by incorporating him into everyday activities. His Buddy enjoys grocery shopping just as much as he enjoys parties. Joe says, "What's ordinary to me is memorable to him."

Perhaps the most threatening aspect of joining Best Buddies is the fear that the relationship will be awkward. Gabriel Carnes recognizes this fear, saying, "Kids hesitate to join Best Buddies because they think they won't know how to act. I tell them to act just like they would with any friend" (qtd. in Alexis). No matter how threatening the situation may seem at first, the majority of volunteers describe their experience with Best Buddies in positive terms, and some even refer to it as life changing (Alexis).

Even with the reassuring testimonies of volunteers, some people may simply not be the right fit for a College Buddy relationship. Perhaps their schedules are too busy for even a monthly party. Maybe they know from experience that they are not capable of interacting in person with people with IDD. In this case, students can still get involved through the e-Buddies program. In order to join the e-Buddies program, interested students need only fill out an application online after agreeing to the terms and conditions of the program. Members must maintain weekly correspondence with Buddies, maintain confidentiality, and refrain from arranging to meet the Buddy in person. Margaret Nee, previously mentioned participant in the e-Buddy program, says, "This has added some real happiness to my day and a new friendship to my life" (qtd. in Alexis). No college students can say that they don't have time to send an extra e-mail once a week, and an e-Buddy relationship will transform the daily routine of checking e-mail into a more exciting and fulfilling task.

Through its eight programs, Best Buddies is able to provide people with IDD the support they need to lead healthier and happier lives by combatting the negative effects of social isolation. In the case of Valerie's grandson, Best Buddies International came to the rescue. Valerie speaks very highly of her experience with Best Buddies:

Best Buddies has been an outstanding situation for my developmentally delayed grandson....He was made to feel like he had value, brought out of his shell, and he became comfortable with his peers. One of the young men graduated and is in college, but he still communicates with my grandson....What an organization! With our income and debts, we could have never come up with such a program. ("Your Stories")

Clearly, Best Buddies was able to offer assistance to Valerie's family when no other help was available, and most importantly, Valerie's grandson finally feels "normal" ("Your Stories").

The impact that Buddy relationships have on people with IDD is hard for people without disabilities to imagine. The Buddies truly appreciate everything that is done for them, and what sometimes starts as an awkward, obligatory relationship flourishes into a true friendship. For a small time commitment and a wide open mind, college students have a chance to enrich their lives and change the way they perceive people with IDD, while helping people with IDD see themselves as what they truly are—people of value who deserve to have and to be a Best Buddy.

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"Hand in Hand, We Are Part of One Race . . . The Human Race"
by Lindsey Miller



"Yellow in Focus" by Christopher Evans

Life Goes On (Essay)

Julie Horner

As the sun began to descend behind the mountains and the air became crisp, I walked across the parking lot, my heels clicking on the pavement. Several children were playing in front of the building, tossing a football and chasing it. Their laughter filled the cool air. It was a scene I did not expect as the funeral director politely opened the door for me. He gave me a warm smile and lowered his head as if to offer his condolences. I did not know the deceased well, but I wanted to pay my respects to him and his family.

I walked into the entry way and heard the soft whisper of visitors. I hung my jacket on a wooden hanger and slowly walked into the room, scanning for familiar faces, but saw none. The bereaved family and friends sat on folding chairs, talking softly and holding hands, some crying and some smiling as they reminisced. The air was pungent with the sweet perfume of spider mums, lilies, and carnations. The lights were bright, but not harshly so. They illuminated the room with a soft rose hue, creating an unnatural aura.

I introduced myself to his mother and his brother and wished them my sincere condolences. "He was such a great employee and a great person," I said. "We could always count on him to get the job done, and he will be missed." It sounded lame to me, but it was true. What else could I say to comfort them?

He was a youthful man of fifty, short in stature, with wavy chestnut hair, a thick beard, and round wire-rimmed spectacles. As he lay in the satin lined casket with a spray of fresh flowers above him, I noticed how thin he had become. The cancer had erased him. He once was a burly man, and what remained was a skeleton. His cheeks and eyes were sunken, and his jawbone was sharp. He wore a baseball cap with our employer's logo on it. His mother told me he always wore that hat so proudly, and he just didn't look like himself without it. I wanted to say he still didn't look like himself, but I bit my tongue.

He wore short sleeves, something I didn't recall ever seeing a deceased person wearing. My memory told me that all of the dead people I had seen had been covered completely, except for the hands and the head, but not this time. The hair on his arms was dark, and his skin looked synthetic. His coloring was unnatural. In fact, he had too much color, resembling an imitation orange-tinted tan one would get from a bottle. His hands were not folded on his chest like one often sees. They rested on the tops of his legs, but not in a natural pose. They almost appeared to be suspended, like they might fall from his legs any moment. As I gazed at his hands, I noticed that they no longer resembled the working hands of a machinist. They were clean and smooth, and the calluses he had earned over the years seemed to have disappeared. In some ways, death made him look hard, but not so his hands. His hands looked soft and youthful. Between his hands was a long slender

model of a drag racing car, sapphire in color. He loved drag racing, and his mother thought he would like to take this car with him into eternity.

His father sat in the opposite corner of the room, secluded from the crowd. I walked toward him, and he looked down at his hands. I knelt down to his level, took his hand, and told him how very sorry I was. He mumbled something that I could not comprehend, and I simply nodded my head.

As I walked out of the building, the kids were still playing in the illuminated parking lot, the traffic was moving, a couple was walking their dog on the sidewalk, and the breeze blew gently. I was comforted by the thought of returning home to my family and relaxing for the evening, which for a moment gave me a feeling of guilt. The family I just mourned with would not have a peaceful night, and it would be a long time before they would feel like living again. I recalled something somebody told me when my father passed away many years ago: "You can choose to die with him, or you can choose to live. Which will it be?" At that moment, I prayed that this family would choose to live.



"The Calm Before the Storm" by Taylor McKnight



"Rusty Bridge" by Hannah Cole

Rain (Fiction)

Luke Maffei

Sod awoke to the familiar sound of his uncle's voice. Supper was finally ready, and Uncle Ted could certainly use the company.

"Hurry, hurry!" screamed Ted. "It's only a matter of time before I eat yours, too! Heh heh!"

Sod nearly slammed his head on top of the concrete pipe he called his room. It was confined living quarters, but it suited him well. He had all his possessions close by, as well as a magnificent view of the forest from his circular window. He kicked the small wooded door with his barefoot and tumbled out of the tube. He quickly threw on his homemade boots, since he didn't want to track the mud from the kitchen floor back to his little cave.

"Sod! For the love of all things holy! Hurry up! I'm starving here!" his uncle screamed.

"Just gimme a minute!" Sod bellowed back. "I nearly gave myself a concussion getting outta the pipe!" Sod sprinted down the hallway, kicking up mud with every step he took.

"Bout time you got here! I was about to take seconds!" joked Ted. "Anyways, the soup is fine. Just avoid the meat. It's still kinda raw." Ted was no master chef; in fact, he wasn't a chef at all. The poor old man did what he could to tend to his nephew, who was only a few days short of eighteen. He knew Sod probably couldn't cook well on his own, given the fact that it had been tradition for Sod's father to prepare meals in the fort. "Well, whaddya think? Too much blood?"

"The soup's fine, thank you," replied Sod. He was obviously lying. Truth be told, his uncle's cooking usually resulted in diarrhea, dysentery, or a combination of both. As Sod attempted to choke down his soup, Uncle Ted was busy messing with an unusual box welded to his back. "Is your backpack bugging you again?"

"Nah," responded Ted. "It's just hard to get comfortable in this crappy seat."

"Well, just don't break your backpack," said Sod. "You need that thing to live."

"Heh heh! Yeah, right, I'm sure my lungs would function fine without the damn thing," joked Ted.

"You wouldn't last a minute," teased Sod. "When was the last time you charged it?"

"I slept with it charging last night," said Ted. "You know I can go a good five days with a full charge, right?"

"I know," said Sod. "I just don't want you to forget." He tried to take another bite of soup, but gagged instantly at its rotten stench. He coughed a little to try to hide his nausea from his uncle.

"Don't die on me, kid," said Ted. "You're all I got."

Sod felt a bittersweet feeling. He was thankful for his uncle's love, but the subject of death made him feel uneasy. "So, uh, how's the kite?"

"I tightened the chain a bit," replied Ted. "Since it's been so damn windy lately, I figured it was a good idea. It can still pick up energy at its new altitude, and I reckon it's glowing brighter than ever before!" The kite was their only source of energy. If there was no kite, there were no lights, heaters, or any other electronics.

"Good thing you took care of it when you did. I started getting worried after I saw a kite fall in the east. Those poor folks are all probably either starving or freezing right now."

"Or dead," remarked Ted.

"Yeah, or dead," whispered Sod. "I think maybe I'll hike out there, you know, just to check on them."

"If you insist. Just bring some flares with you, in case you get lost," said Ted, a bit annoyed. Sod left the dinner table and headed to his concrete pipe. He grabbed his green knapsack, already filled with some water, chips, rope, and his dagger. Sod darted toward the exit pipe, when suddenly, his uncle interrupted.

"Hey, you're not going to find him."

Silence filled the air. Sod had no response.

"It's been two months," said Ted. "You're not going to find him."

"You don't know that," replied Sod, softly.

"Kid, we've been over this. There was only one thing your old man asked of me, and it was for your safety," Ted said. "I don't want to risk losing you, too. You're not going to find him."

Sod continued to stare outside into the cloudy sky over the forest. He had nothing to say to his uncle. He knew he had to try once more. It had been at least two weeks since his last search. He slowly turned back and faced his uncle. "Dead or alive, I will find him."

"Very well, kid," sighed Ted. "You'll just run away anyway if I tell you no. At least let me give you something before you leave. The last thing I want is for you to get sick in the woods again." Ted strolled to his pipe and came back with what looked like a blanket. "It's a sleeping bag," stated Ted. "I was going to give it to you in a few days, when you turned eighteen, but I guess this is as good a time as any. If you're going to sleep outside, you need

to stay warm." Sod accepted his uncle's gift. He grabbed a piece of rope and tied it to his bag.

"Thank you," said Sod

"Just don't die on me," sobbed Ted as he hugged his nephew. "You're all I have left. Just stay warm at night and watch out for rain!"

"I'll be fine," Sod replied. "I promise." He escaped his uncle's bear hug and climbed down the ladder outside the exit tube. The fort was built with one tube facing each direction; Sod's tube faced east, his uncle's faced south, a third faced west, and the exit faced north. Sod began his descent down the mountain on which the fort was situated. He began to get close to what he called "The Moss Forest." It wasn't much of a forest. The trees had no leaves. Actually, they weren't even trees at all, more like fungi than anything else. Sure, they were tall and towering like trees, but they had no branches and were covered in fuzz. Sod realized that the trees were darker than normal today and most of the grass around them was dead.

"Huh," he said to himself. "I guess it rained last night." As he was about to enter the forest, he turned around to look at the fort one last time. He noticed that his uncle had lowered the kite far lower than usual, probably due to the strong wind. After a good minute or two of looking back, Sod turned toward the forest and marched forward. He wasn't coming back until he found his dad.

The dry ground made hiking all the easier for Sod. It helped improve his traction, since his homemade shoes did not fare well in mud. He figured he would head north this time around, since he had already checked the western plains and the east valley on his last two searches. The north was a mysterious place. Sod had heard stories of people heading south to try to make livings in the kite cities, but those folks never managed too well. The north was the exact opposite. Due to the colder temperatures and the dense forests, the north wasn't home to many people. It was not only a wilderness but an unknown wilderness. Aside from the northern trading village of Owiniwaki, Sod didn't know much about the lay of the land in the north. Sod recalled his uncle stating that some people used to believe that bigger game, such as raccoons and beavers, lived up north. Sod wondered what these creatures looked like; he had never seen anything larger than a rabbit.

Sod had been walking for a solid two and a half hours when he reached the peak of a small mountain. From this height, he could make out his fort's location by looking at his kite in the distance. Though it was not too high in the sky, the green light it emitted shone for miles and was visible even on the cloudiest of days. Sod sat on a rock and watched the light. He figured that he had hiked at least nine miles, so he thought it would be best to set camp here. It was getting dark anyway; plus, he didn't want to lose sight of the kite.

Sod started a small fire and his new sleeping bag was nearly rolled out. He wanted to get warm quickly, since the wind was really getting to him. He looked back once more at the kite to see if it was all right. It looked a bit shaky, but Sod figured it would be fine since his uncle had just tended to it. He slid into his sleeping bag and yawned loudly. "Everything will be fine," he assured himself. "I'll find Dad and be back in a week, tops."

As Sod drifted to sleep, the wind only got stronger. It grew to the point that a small tree crashed down onto Sod's makeshift campsite. Sod shot up as soon as he heard the tree snap. He observed his surroundings and saw that all the trees were bending toward the north and that his knapsack was being dragged away from him. He quickly rolled up his sleeping bag and grabbed his knapsack. He tried to stand, but was immediately slammed face down by the powerful gusts of wind. He lay motionless for a few moments, trying to wrap his head around what was going. Suddenly, it hit him. "The kite!"

Sod looked south just in time to see the shimmering green light plunge to the ground. The chain had broken, causing the shiny metal kite to plummet and smash into hundreds of pieces. "No," murmured Sod. "No." The kite was most likely in a state beyond repair. Sod immediately thought of heading back to the fort, but then he saw what the wind was blowing northbound. Rain.

Heading back home was no longer an option. "What the hell," said Sod under his breathe. He saw the rain coming closer and closer. Sod quickly tied his sleeping bag and darted down the north side of the mountain. He glanced back only to see a flash of lightning fill the sky, and he heard a mighty roar of thunder.

"Oh God, no," he gasped. "This can't be happening." He sprinted down the mountain, hurdling over rocks and diving under fallen trees. He kept tripping, but would continually get up, despite the pain he endured from each fall. It got to the point that Sod not only saw the clouds but began to hear the rain. Epinephrine coursed through his veins as he began sprinting even faster. As he neared the mountain's bottom, he ran into even more trouble. There was a gorge at the bottom. It was much too steep to scale down and there was no bridge that crossed it. It was the end.

Sod could hear the sound of the burning trees and shriveling grass behind him as the rain came closer. Using his wits, he rapidly took out his sleeping bag and leapt inside. He yanked the zipper sealed and slammed his eyes shut. As the rain approached, all he could do was wait.

The shower was fierce. It left a path of death behind its menacing tail. Sod could hear the grass shrinking and the ground sizzling. He figured it was probably only a category two downpour, at least he hoped. He was just thankful it wasn't a three or stronger; a mere sleeping bag could not withstand a shower that had the strength to melt solid rock. He could hear the raindrops creating small incisions in the sleeping bag's top layer. He was upset that his new gift was being ruined, but also glad it had saved his life. After twenty minutes or so, the rain had passed. Sod emerged from the sack like a

newborn baby. He had never been caught in a rain storm on his own before. He carefully observed the area surrounding the sleeping bag. "Puddles. Great," said Sod, sarcastically. Given the fact that they were freshly formed, the puddles were still probably highly acidic. Sod sunk into his sleeping bag, figuring there was no use trying to move now. The ground was a bit rocky and the surface was highly unlevelled, but it would have to do. Sod closed his eyes and fell into a deep slumber. He was too tired to care.



"The Traveler" by Emily Heckman

All That Is Left (Fiction)

Jordan Gorsuch

*"I'd like to get away from earth awhile.
And then come back to it and begin over." –Robert Frost*

The man she committed her entire life to was making eggs over easy in his oversized and tattered apron. He had bought the apron before deciding to stop "testing" the meals he prepared at his restaurant. That man could cook a mean egg. His back was turned, smooth jazz filling the modest kitchen of their New York apartment. Three thousand a month plus utilities never sounded better than when she was sharing the space with him. He was about to turn around; she could almost hear him begin to speak...then she was thrown into the cruel reality of her existence.

I can see you. But I can never reach you.

She awoke, sweating and clutching at the pendent on her chest. The harsh cold found its way to her skin despite the ten blankets wrapped around her. She heard a young boy's voice whispering adjacent to her bed. Her hair stuck to her cheek as she softly guided it out of her eyes. Her vision could make out small feet kicking in the air; the sound of rapidly turned pages filled her ears. She used the back of her knuckles to rub her eyes from her sleepless stupor.

It had been fourteen years.

Fourteen painful years since the world had become a frozen wasteland and the husks began to dominate what remained. Modern medicine had succeeded in theory, but nobody was prepared for the outcome. Humans were like moths fluttering around an uncontrollable flame, angels soaring too close to the sun. It was only a matter of time. When dust tries to collect itself and play at being God, the results are bound to be disastrous.

"Oliver, what in blazes are you doing in here?" she asked groggily.

His head rocketed over in her direction and the look on his face was humorous, she observed.

"Oh gosh. I'm so sorry, Miss Tess! You always get the best reading light in here, and I had to find out what happened to Wolverine. It kept me up all night," he said while looking down at the brightly colored comic book.

"You're a fast reader," she quipped.

"Actually, I have to speak when I read...and it just got unbearable. I started skipping pages and pages because no one was talking about Wolverine and I got worried."

“Well, is he all right?”

He looked at her curiously and slowly adjusted himself upright from the decaying green couch. “I don’t know. The issue I have stopped right before I could find out. That’s the only thing about these comic books. Why did they split them up like this? The people from your time were weird, huh?” he asked as he straightened out his plaid skirt. “Dennis was making fun of me again for wearing girl clothes. I still don’t know why anyone cares. It is way more comfortable than the type of pants he wears,” he said, digging a fork into the arm of the couch.

“Next time it’s safe to go outside, we can go to Meltdown a couple blocks over and try and score you the next few issues,” she offered. His eyes light up at the proposal. “Speaking of Dennis, where is he? I don’t hear his violin for once. What time is it, anyway?”

“Oh, he wouldn’t be back yet. He went outside a couple hours ago,” Oliver said as he motioned toward the window.

Everything crumbled in that instant.

“Ollie, this is not the time for your comic book scenarios. Where is Dennis?” she asked, her voice rising in decibels.

“I’m not joking around. I heard the door shut when I couldn’t sleep last night. He’s not in his bed. His bag and tarp are gone,” he explained.

She was already out of bed, slipping on a dirty pair of blue denim jeans, socks following soon after. *We weren’t supposed to leave this house for another couple of days. It’s already a whiteout.* She looked out the window and cursed Dennis and this cruel existence in the same breath.

“Miss Tess, everything will be okay,” Oliver told her as he patted her leg.

She wanted to believe him. Yet she had been alive longer than he had. There were no heroes in this life anymore, just survivors.

* * *

“I cannot fix life any more than I can fix a river.” – Jane Adams

Tess decided the only reasonable action to take would be to pretend that nothing was amiss about Dennis’s departure.

“Shoot—I cannot believe I forgot about Dennis bitching about needing more rosin—or is it resin? Anyway, he said his violin was just whispering these days and he wanted to go for a supply run. He will be back in no time.”

Oliver eyed Tess for a while after she gave her excuse. His eyes drifted across her boney cheeks and tangled knots of brown wispy hair curling down across her amber eyes.

She had a constant look of indignation, but in this instance her features were soft—or rather, attempting to be soft.

“Sure thing. Now don’t you forget about taking me to the comic store,” he said with enthusiasm.

“I keep my promises.”

Before Oliver could respond, there was a staccato of rifle fire northwest of their room. Tess instinctively grabbed Oliver and huddled close with him. He did not shake like he used to; the sounds were becoming tragically customary to his young ears. The sharp punctuations of fire were bridged by absolute silence. Neither of them spoke for what seemed to be eternity. Oliver was lightly humming a melody that resembled some scale runs that Dennis had practiced a few nights prior with his violin. Tess had focused in on the sound while they were crouching; she could see the muzzle flash from a few buildings over. It sounded like six men, maybe seven, an entire squad emptying rounds fresh in the morning. *Hell of a way to start my birthday.* Tess absent-mindedly brushed her hand through Oliver’s messy blonde hair, tracing her fingertips over the healed scar from about five years back. No husk was to blame for that one; he just wrestled too hard with some girl—Katie or Kaley or some variation of the sort. Tess didn’t remember names likes she used to. The brain adapts in mysterious ways when every day is marked by survival. Names seem pretty trivial in the grand scheme of things, or at least, that was what she told herself. What mattered was being able to identify the number of humans wasting ammo on the frozen bodies of the dead, the types of weapons they were carrying, the distance of their gunshots, and the possible threat these unknown humans posed.

“Miss Tess, I think they’re done shooting,” said Oliver with a sense of boredom.

“Don’t sound so excited. I can’t hardly take it,” she remarked with a chuckle.

Tess let go of Oliver and approached the window cautiously. She could not see the men in the apartment building a few streets over, but she thought she made out a collage of bullet holes and a few corpse-like arms hanging from the building’s broken windows. Her eyes struggled up the height of the building and rested on the rooftop. The snowstorm was waning a bit and gave a brief reprieve for her to see the building clearly. She spotted a man with his feet dangling off the side of the building, apparently unfazed by the severe cold, taking nips from a flask. His buddies joined him soon after and dragged a white corpse carelessly behind them. One of the men deadlifted the husk and impaled it on the frozen radio tower gleaming on top of the building. The husk let open its mouth as if it were in extraordinary pain, but no sound escaped. Its arms flailed randomly and without purpose until they were removed forcefully from its body; legs followed soon after.

The husk looked desperate and feral, screaming silently at the men’s solemn faces as they broke each limb. It was even worse than being pulled apart by horses; these were logical men pushed into something disturbing. The mercenaries worked methodically. It

disturbed Tess even more that they seemingly were not enjoying themselves; she had seen many men work husks over like a pack of coyotes. These men appeared to be on some sort of holy mission, as if forcing this husk apart piece by piece were some sort of divine duty. Tess pulled the curtains shut when the scene became too horrific. She let Oliver watch the entire ordeal. Innocence was a lost ideal, a relic of a previous world.

“Listen, what we just witnessed was dark as tar and I should’ve never—”

“No, Miss Tess, it’s okay. Sometimes you need to remember the damage that regular people can end up doing,” Oliver said while reaching for his shiv and carving a new hatch mark into the rotting wood siding. “I think that’s the sixtieth husk I’ve seen get killed since we moved in here.”

“Did you record the one that tripped off the balcony after slipping on a patch of ice? Or, how about the big one that wandered onto the lake near Harmony Drive and fell clean through the ice?” Tess asked, trying to lighten the mood.

“Yes, ma’am, I got the first one but you know I didn’t get to see the big one get swallowed by the ice water.”

“Aw darn, that was the kind of sight that makes you think about life and the grand order of things. One moment, the oaf was there; the next minute he just vanished. He was just gone,” Tess said as she gripped at her pendent. She was thinking of her husband, who disappeared like the oaf. Yet only, when he vanished, Tess was the one who fell through the ice and had been drowning ever since.

And one day I’ll be gone like a magic trick. We made this bed. Time to lie in it.

Oliver stared at Tess, who was lost in another daydream. He knew that he had to be strong for them both. Oliver was born into a world of disorder; no memories haunted him like a ghost. No idealized world was taken from his grasp, no normal days; these were the “gone days.” This dystopia was his world; he had no refrain for his mind to keep returning to, no chorus that kept him hopeful or hopeless. Oliver just kept moving forward, nothing held him back.

* * *

*“I realize there’s something incredibly honest about trees in winter,
how they’re experts at letting things go.” –Jeffrey McDaniel*

Tess fried a few eggs they had traded for when passing through Hulett. Someone had suggested Wyoming because of the windmill farms and the vast fields for agriculture. Sadly, nothing was worth growing in this climate. Tess found that she missed tomatoes a lot since the Earth had frozen over. She looked longingly at the little tomato plant growing by the kitchen window. She found a dead tomato crop somewhere near Cheyenne and took a few cuttings with her in hopes of raising her own personal plant indoors. She had

found a small trellis for the tomato vines to climb as they grew; she even read that the plants self-pollenate with small vibrations as they were watered. She just wanted Ollie to taste those tangy, sweet red tomatoes that reminded Tess of her husband and his famous spaghetti sauce.

Tess began to daydream about the time Robert (the name sounded foreign to her nowadays) surprised her with a personal dinner after closing the restaurant. He purchased a bottle of Château Le Pin for roughly what his kidney would fetch on the black market. Robert crafted an original spaghetti sauce in her name; spaghetti always reminded her of home and his sophisticated pallet always made him a bit of a snob when it came to the dish. However, they enjoyed the sauce so much that it became a staple of the restaurant. That was the night they decided to try for kids. She arranged their lives around sex in hopes of getting pregnant. They stopped trying after the first stillbirth.

The eggs began to sizzle harshly on the rusty black pan sitting on the space heater. Tess added a couple dashes of pepper and turned off the heat. She sighed as she served them to Oliver, who was busy drawing a superhero carrying the sun on his back.

Oliver was too busy to notice Tess breaking from reality yet again. His attention was devoted entirely to Apollo Invictus, the deity who would bring the sun back to the Earth. Oliver's hero did not use a golden chariot like Helios of Greek mythology; Invictus bore the weight of the sun on his own shoulders. Invictus could not rely on others to help him save the world. The sun weighed greatly on his massive shoulders, burning him; he was aware that this responsibility would turn him to ash. However, Oliver drew a slight smile on this hero's face, because death could be its own form of redemption. Comic books gave him windows into worlds where there was always a new dawn, a new chance around the corner. Helping Tess was his very own window to a new world.

"Hey, eat your eggs before they get chillier than a husk's ass," Tess said while cleaning off her own plate.

"Oh, sorry, Miss Tess! I was working on our hero. He is going to bring the sun back. Maybe he can even get Dennis while he's at it," said Oliver, picking up the scrambled eggs and eating hastily.

Tess ignored that Oliver was not using a fork yet again and entertained his childlike creativity. "So he's going to help melt all the ice and snow away? Well, I'm glad the sun doesn't burn him to the bone," she remarked with a chuckle.

"Well, it will eventually. He isn't invincible. He has to sacrifice himself for the world," Oliver said with a tone of confidence.

Tess's eyes narrowed into thin slits that hid their dullness. She sat and watched him eat his eggs silently for a short while and ran a hand through her tangle of hair. *Where is he getting all of this? He needs to be practical. I can't have him getting himself killed for some sort of greater good.* Tess took out her own shiv and started to run it along her fingers.

"I ever tell you about my old group?" Oliver stopped eating his eggs and set down his crayon. "The group I was with before we found each other, I mean. Well, I traveled with a brother and sister and a gaggle of other folks I can't recall because I kept to myself. Anyway, the brother got drunk while we took up shelter in a supermarket. They had lost their parents recently and his girlfriend took a header off Golden Gate Bridge when everything went to shit. He had his reasons, I suppose. He almost drank the entire wine selection," Tess said while tracing circles with her shiv across the wooden table. "The fool splattered paint all over the floor and goaded husks toward him. He treated them like they were jokes. They ripped him apart, his scream..."

Tess took a sip of water and continued. "When we got to him, he was long dead. Most of him was indistinguishable from the purple and red paint that he spread around earlier. After we shot the distracted husks to hell, I was struck by the surreal feeling that this grotesque scene was sort of beautiful. The way the husks formed outlines in the colorful puddles of paint, they almost looked like fallen angels," Tess said as Oliver looked at her with wide-eyed curiosity.

"The sister took it the hardest, of course. She was hardly eating. She would break down if too many people were speaking at the same time; our simultaneous voices made her think of the husks tearing her brother apart. One time we holed up in a museum and she snuck around tearing all the faces out of the paintings. Then she gathered them in a great big pile and lit them on fire. No one said anything until the smell of rotting flesh smacked us in the face. The poor thing put her entire arm in the fire. We didn't have the supplies to treat her wounds, and the cruel cold ravaged her burns. She died a few weeks later."

Oliver rubbed the right side of his cheek hard as he cut Tess a serious stare. He stopped rubbing his cheek and gave Tess a soft smile. "That's an awful story, but I don't see what it has to do with my hero."

"I didn't say it did. However, the rest of my group went out of that museum with the mindset that they were going to be heroes. They wanted to avenge this shared tragedy. I held our campsite while they investigated a husk den nearby. The husks were sleeping in a school bus not too far from our camp. The fools lit the bus on fire, a no less foolish endeavor than what that boy tried doing with the paint. The husks ravaged their bodies and feasted on their flesh by the burning bus. All of these sacrifices and acts of valor served no greater purpose. They are dead and the world keeps on spinning. After that, I just needed a break, set out on my own for a few lost years," Tess concluded miserably.

"After all that, why did you ever join another group?" Oliver asked.

"I got lonely."

Oliver nodded gravely at Tess and pushed the rest of his plate toward the center of the table. No one spoke for a long time and Oliver noticed the fresh snow that covered the

trees near their hideout. He marveled at the strength of tree branches: all of that weight, all of that pure coldness striving to bring down the branches and snap the limbs from the trees. However, the trees stand for years; they never succumb to the weight.

“Why do you think the snow is white?” Oliver asked.

“That’s just the way it is, I suppose,” Tess said while cleaning up the table.

“Sometimes I think it’s because it forgot what it was supposed to be. Like it can’t remember its purpose. The snow is nothing and everything. Without death, life would just be a series of random events...memories without any meaning. Snow is disorder and chaos, but it’s also pure and innocent.”

Oliver crumpled up his drawing.

“Do you think we can ever be happy?” he asked with tears in his eyes. Tess dumped the paper plates in the trash and kept her back turned for a great while.

“There’s no going back. We haven’t been living for a long time now,” Tess responded.

“How can you think like that? I’ve heard you and Dennis talking on late nights. You guys miss the old days, always talking about Robert or Dennis’s family. Movies, restaurants, music shows, you just talk about *life*.”

“I don’t know how to live anymore, Oliver. What we’re doing is just surviving. Plain and simple. You don’t even know what that life was. You’re too young. How can you miss anything?” Tess said, her voice as sharp as her shiv.

“There just has to be more than this, Tess. There has to be,” said Oliver desperately.

Tess dropped to the ground and cupped Oliver’s face as he struggled back the tears. His eyes searched for her; he needed her. She grabbed him and held her boy for a long time.

She whispered comforts in his ear, nuzzling his head in the nape of her neck. She never held Oliver in this way, didn’t want to get too attached. She always felt like she was replacing that baby who was once inside her. She realized that she wasn’t replacing that child, and she wasn’t replacing Oliver’s mother.

“I can’t remember what my parents look like anymore. Why can’t I remember?” Oliver asked through wet sobs and heavy breaths.

“Because you’re learning to live without them. You don’t need to remember.”

“Do you remember what your mother looked like?”

“She was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I was so jealous of her,” Tess said as she shared the story of the union of Leslie and Rick Rhodes. She made him laugh

about the lengths they went to convince her that her father was a part-time masked vigilante.

“Doesn’t that make you feel better? Remembering your parents, reaching them in the window of your mind?” asked Oliver.

“My, you sure ask a lot of questions,” Tess said while adjusting Oliver’s floral patterned skirt. “This pattern is beautiful. This has always been my favorite of yours,” she said.

“Thank you.”

That small, strained voice let out his gratitude and he drifted to sleep in her arms. She looked down at him with admiration and she felt less cold. Perhaps everything could be all right. *Even if we’re not, she thought, we have this moment.* A seed was planted within her by a little boy who wore skirts and read comic books.

A knock on the door made Oliver jerk out of Tess’s arms. He ran over to the kitchen drawer and quietly withdrew a 9 mm pistol.

“It’s me. Sorry I took off without telling you,” Dennis said from outside the door.

“Where have you been?” Tess called out.

“Well, I couldn’t just be empty-handed on your fortieth birthday. Now let me in already. I’m freezing out here,” said Dennis with a laugh.

Tess stared with a soft smile on her lips as she gripped at her pendent around her neck. She didn’t know if she could ever be truly happy again, but this was a start. She watched Oliver skip over to the door, his beautiful skirt flowing up and down.

Then the door opened.



"Nostalgia" by Taylor McKnight

Our Own Wars (Fiction)

Tara Fritz

He's lived in the apartment for all of a week when he first hears the sound of shattering glass from the other side of the wall.

He's trying to sleep, but somehow he still hasn't gotten used to the sounds of the city that always drift into his window like stray ghosts—car horns, footsteps, fragments of conversations. This is how he ends up wide awake at midnight, eyes tracing nonexistent patterns on the ceiling until his eyelids get heavy.

Then there comes a faint yell, the sound of breaking glass from the other side of his thin bedroom wall, so close that he jumps and sits up. Part of him almost expects the wall to crash down around him, as fragile as it is, but it remains upright.

The silence afterwards is like a sudden void; even the street is quiet. His heart feels like it's trying to escape from his chest. He tries to remember who his neighbor is, if they're violent, if he should call his landlord or maybe the police, or—

Someone passing on the sidewalk lets out a laugh, and the world begins to turn again.

* * *

It takes him a few more weeks of misplaced encounters and awkward greetings to find his mystery neighbor.

She's the only one on their floor who hasn't talked to him yet. Half of the others offer him a gentle, polite *Hello* when he passes, but she gives him only a fleeting smile, like she's distracted. The only way he knows she lives next door is that he once chanced to look back as he was leaving and as she was ducking into her apartment, her little blonde head bent over a cup of takeout coffee. She's small but wide-eyed, like a wary housecat, and quiet in some misanthropic way. She wears silver wire-rimmed glasses and long sweaters and her hair is jaw-length, honey colored. Out of only so many encounters, that's all he can ascertain.

She doesn't *seem* like a violent person. Not like someone who would throw things at walls. In fact, he's beginning to think he imagined it.

Until one night less than a month after the first. It's midnight when he hears a resounding crash from the other side of the wall. Then another.

The silence afterwards is heavier this time.

The headlights of a car dance in patterns around the ceiling as he waits for the air to return to the room. A couple, chatting quietly, walk beneath his window, but it still doesn't relieve the tension. He's waiting for the other glass to drop.

Nothing comes. Before the tension has fully abated, he falls into a fitful sleep.

* * *

"You all right?"

The question jolts him out of his stupor, and he realizes he's been staring at his sandwich for the past half-minute like it contains the secrets of the universe. He glances over at his coworker, Dan, who looks concerned. "Yeah," he says, clears his throat, "fine."

Dan laughs a little. "You look like you need a few more hours of sleep, man."

"Probably." He takes a bite of his sandwich. "I've got a loud neighbor."

Dan's eyebrows are raised this time. "Like, what kind of loud?"

He frowns. "Like, throws-things-against-the-wall kind of loud."

"That sounds like a problem, man." Dan scoffs a little. "Maybe you should tell your landlord or something."

"Yeah," he replies, playing with the crust of his sandwich, already far away again. The lack of sleep is really getting to him, making his bones feel leaden. "Maybe."

* * *

He runs into her by accident that evening. He has plans to go to the pizza place across the street, grab a lonely dinner; he's rubbing off a smudge on his glasses when he runs into her carrying groceries.

"Oh, shit—" He can barely see her face over the paper bags in her arms. One of them has already tumbled out of her embrace. "Sorry. Couldn't see."

"Me, neither. That was my fault." He slides his glasses back onto his face and bends to pick up her grocery bag. To his disappointment, it's filled with normal things—a carton of milk, two frozen dinners. "Here, let me help you."

He takes the key from her hand and unlocks the door, letting her go inside ahead of him. As he follows behind, he has one eye on the left wall, the one he knows is adjacent to his. Her kitchen is strangely bare; the counters are clean, empty. The fridge is blank. The only piece of decoration is next to the fridge, an empty space where a dining table should go. On the wall hangs a painting, huge and abstract, looking like a stray animal that wandered in and made its chaos comfortable amongst such order.

“Thanks for the help,” she says, fully visible now that she’s set the groceries on the counter. He places the bag in his arms next to the rest. She adjusts her glasses and adds, “I guess we’ve never actually been introduced. I’m Megan.”

“Evan,” he says, shakes her outstretched hand. It seems oddly formal, a handshake in her small, bare kitchen, illuminated only by the light over the sink.

“Huh. Look at that.” She smiles a little as she reaches for the bags, pulling open the fridge. “Our names almost rhyme.”

He hums a little in agreement. Hands her the milk.

“So, Evan,” she begins, rooting around in the bag for something that’s fallen to the very bottom, “how long have you been living here again?”

He shrugs, leans against the counter as she shuts the fridge door with the jut of her hip. “About two months, now.”

“Nice.” She mirrors his shrug. “It’s not so bad around here, I guess.”

“Took some getting used to,” he replies, clearing his throat, feeling awkward. “I’m a country boy. The city is a whole new world for me.”

Suddenly she’s grinning at him with white, white teeth; he can’t tell if the smile is pleased or predatory. “Look at you. Small town boy.” She sighs a bit as she crumples up the empty paper bags, smile fading. “Must have been a big change. Why?”

He just shrugs again, at a loss for how to describe something so simple. It seems almost like common sense at this point. “I needed a job. Figured the only way to get one was to put myself here.”

There’s a lull, then a silence. He desperately wants to know about her tendency to throw things at walls, but there’s something—a sense of decency, maybe, or just a lingering awkwardness between them, still strangers—so he doesn’t dare to ask.

Instead he clears his throat, says, “I should, uh, go.”

“Right.” She nods. Shows him to the door like he’s forgotten where it is in the past ten minutes. Gracelessly, she adds, “See you around.”

The door closes before he can reply. He stares at it for a long moment, hesitating, the question pressing behind the closed line of his mouth. He may have just wasted his only chance to ask, his only way in. It only takes a moment before curiosity consumes him.

He knocks on the door.

It’s a few more moments before she opens it to see him rooted to the same spot she left him in. “Still here?”

“I just wanted to know—” And the words spill out like a downpour, “if you’ve broken any glasses lately.”

She blinks at him. There’s a pause. Then she shakes her head. “Not one,” she replies, dead serious, and offers him a tentative smile. “You must be thinking of someone else.”

He feels too embarrassed to push the issue further. She shuts the door in his face again, and this time he lets her.

* * *

It happens again a few nights later, the shatter against the wall. Alone in his bed, reading a book by lamplight to try to lull himself to sleep, he jumps as if the impact was just over his head instead of on the other side of a desperately thin wall.

“That’s enough,” he mutters to the empty room, not even bothering to mark his page as he swings his legs out of bed. He slips out into the hallway barefoot, hardly noticing. It takes a minute for her to open the door.

When she does, she is strangely straight-faced. “Can I help you?”

The half-constructed rant he composed on the way over has vanished, leaving him with only his disbelief. “Are you—? I mean, did you—” He clears his throat. His face is going red, he just knows it. “Is there a reason you’re throwing things at walls?”

Amazingly enough, she laughs and it’s like the tinkle of glass shards, sharp. “What are you talking about?” The smile fades from her face but she still looks amused. “Go back to bed.”

He anticipates the slam of the door in his face and wedges his foot between it and the doorframe. She stops just short of breaking his ankle, glaring at him for his audacity. “I—no,” he stammers. “I heard you. Multiple times. You can’t—no.”

She fixes him with a sharp glance and says, “So you’ve heard... what, exactly?”

He fidgets under her stare. “You... you keep *throwing* things at the walls.”

“And you have irrefutable evidence of this?”

“Yes.” He frowns, tries to return her glare. “I’ve *heard* it.”

For a few moments, it’s a staring contest between them, each waiting for the other to give in. He won’t back down, not this time. Her eyes are very green. He doesn’t dare to blink.

In the end, she is the one who finally breaks eye contact, steps aside to let him through. He’s so shocked he can barely move. “Fine. Come in,” she says, voice low, defeated. “Can’t sleep? I’ll make you some tea.”

The kitchen is dark except for that single light over the sink. He's not quite sure what he's expecting, but everything looks normal—that is, until he sees the glittering, violent shards of white porcelain littering the floor.

She ignores it all, instead ducking into the cabinet furthest away from the wreckage to grab a tea pot; it's red, well worn, the only thing in the whole kitchen that looks vaguely used. As she fills it up with tap water and settles it onto the stove, he notices the box on the floor beside the fridge, lying among the fragments of porcelain.

He crouches next to it, fingering the delicate plates nestled inside: white, clean, never used. There's a gold trim around the edge that speaks to some sort of simple elegance, a destiny that should add up to more than pieces across the floor. He stands to find her staring at him, though this time her expression is more open, more afraid.

"Why?" he asks. If she can demand the same of him, he thinks, then he can ask this.

She shrugs and the openness on her face vanishes. She turns back to the stove. "Sometimes I get frustrated."

It seems too simple an explanation for such destruction. He moves to the wall, pockmarked with impact points that had previously been hidden by the painting hanging there. Tracing his fingers over the marks in the plaster, he knows this must be more than frustration.

He jumps when she nudges his side, her head only reaching to his shoulder as she hands him the cup of tea. He takes a sip and nearly recoils at the sharp burn of whiskey in his throat. Coughing a little to clear the air of his awkwardness, he tells her, "Thanks."

They drink in silence, standing among the fragments that litter the floor. She finishes first, sets her mug down and before he can move to help she's grabbed a broom, swept up the plate shards, put away the box of fine china like the whole ordeal never happened.

When he sets his empty mug in the sink, she doesn't look at him when she says, "You know where the door is."

He leaves quietly, with the feeling that something other than a plate has been broken.

* * *

He doesn't talk to her much after that. The plate against the wall doesn't come for weeks, and when it finally does, he rolls over in bed and ignores it.

But one day, as he's leaving his apartment and she is entering hers, he can't help the words that spill out: "What's the story behind it all? Why do you really do it?"

She has the audacity to laugh. "Some secrets are mine to keep," she tells him, slips inside her door and that's that.

As the days and weeks go on, he misses more and more the ease of home. The quiet streets, the still evenings, the familiarity of it all. He misses his house, the warmth of it, the smell of his mother's cooking. Talking on the phone with her isn't the same as actually seeing her face light up when he's around.

One night, when he can't sleep for the heartache, he simply gives up. Tracing patterns on the ceiling isn't working anymore; nothing is working anymore. He abandons his bed, rummages around in his kitchen cabinet for his only bottle of whiskey, and goes next door.

"I'm frustrated," he says before she can ask. He holds up the whiskey, a peace offering. "Can I borrow a plate or two?"

She eyes him for a moment—curious, appraising—before stepping aside to let him in.

Her kitchen is the same as it always is: clean, empty, dark. As she leads him inside, she flips on the light above the sink, takes two shot glasses out of the cabinet before she reaches for the box of china. He's looking at the wall, staring at the painting that hides the impact marks as though he can burn it away just with the force of his gaze. She takes the bottle from his hand, pours them shots. It's only when they've both knocked them back that she removes the painting from the wall, hands him a plate and says, "Have at it."

His arm's not the strongest, but the plate shatters on impact with the wall anyway, littering the kitchen floor with bright fragments. It feels surprisingly good—the impact, the noise, the destruction.

He turns to her. She half-smiles, pours him another shot, hands him another plate.

This time she grabs one herself, and they both throw at once, one grand explosion. He lets out a bark of a laugh and she answers with a giggle, a surprising display of emotion from her, but he understands it—it's an addiction, his unease melting away with each impact.

They end up drunk and throwing china with reckless abandon. He dares to ask again: "Why? And, I mean, answer me honestly. Why do you do it?"

She stiffens next to him, fingering one golden-framed edge of the still-whole plate in her hand. "Fine," she says eventually and throws it with half a mind. It breaks evenly into quarters. "I'll tell you, only you can't laugh."

"I won't," he replies, has never felt further from laughing. "I promise."

In lieu of answering, she sweeps the shards near her foot into a pile. He waits. He'll keep waiting.

"I was stupid," she says eventually. She won't look up at him. "I lied to someone I cared about."

He gives her a moment to think before prompting, “And then?”

She shrugs and reaches for another plate, one of the last. “It was stupid. It was so agonizingly stupid.” She looks at him then, her face open, vulnerable. “My mother. She was—she bothered me, all the time, about getting married. Finding true love. Having kids and moving into a house with a white picket fence. *Do you have a boyfriend yet? Talked to any boys lately?* The whole shebang.” Her face screws up in disgust. “That’s never been anything I’ve wanted—only what she wanted.”

“Isn’t that what every mother wants for their child?” he asks, tentative, kicking at a few broken pieces just to give his body something to do.

She doesn’t answer. The silence is heavy until she suddenly laughs, high and humorless; when it fades, it leaves an empty space twice as large as the one it filled. “I told her I was getting married,” she whispers. With a swing of her arm, the plate explodes against the wall. “It was so *stupid*. It was just a joke. I didn’t think she’d—” She huffs out a breath, frustrated. “Didn’t think she’d take it seriously. Then people started sending me engagement gifts.”

“Someone sent you a set of dishes,” he finishes, regarding with awe the final plate left in the box. He picks it up and traces the gilded edge with his fingers.

“When I finally told her the truth,” she’s saying, “she stopped talking to me. I haven’t spoken to her since.”

He thinks of *his* mother, of her warmth and the tears in her eyes on the day he’d moved into the apartment. He wishes he hadn’t left her. The job, the apartment, the city life—it isn’t worth it.

“I miss my mother,” he admits. Wordlessly, he offers her the final plate.

“Me, too,” she responds. “That’s why I do it. Every time I get the urge to call her, I throw something. It’s my stupid way of coping.”

“You could always apologize,” he says as she takes the plate from his fingers. It shatters against the wall in one last, resounding crash, and then it’s over. The pieces of the final plate are identical to the rest, like they never even mattered.

“Look at that,” she says, holding up the box to show that it’s empty. When he doesn’t respond, she goes a bit soft around the eyes. Puts the box down, presses a sloppy kiss against his cheek. “Go home to your mama, small town boy.”

He sighs, nods. Maybe he will.

* * *

“Hey, man.” Dan has taken to bugging him lately in a way that no one else in the office seems to do. Then again, Dan is the only one in the office who ever gives him more

than a perfunctory *Hello*. "Wanna come out for drinks on Saturday? A couple guys are going. It'll be fun."

It sounds like a sales pitch rather than a proposition of a night out. He knows the offer is only half-hearted anyway, one last-ditch effort to include him in something. He shakes his head. "No, thanks." He doesn't deign to give Dan an explanation, doesn't think he'd care.

By that afternoon, the homesickness feels like a toothache, eating away at him until he has no choice but to escape his cubicle. He takes his jacket from the back of his chair and, without a word to anyone, escapes into the damp autumn air to clear his head.

Ten steps onto the pavement, he realizes that no one would even notice if he was gone.

He does a quick turn and, fingering the sharp metal edge of the keys in his pocket, starts walking to his car. A drizzle starts up as he gets in, pulls away from the office building. He's not usually prone to rash decisions, but after getting drunk and throwing plates at a wall at two in the morning, one tends to reevaluate some things.

He doesn't see her when the elevator arrives at their floor, when he slips into his apartment unnoticed, but the ghost of her lips on his cheek is enough to keep his feet moving, keep his brain focused. If he doesn't do this now, he knows he never will.

He packs a duffel bag with three days' worth of necessities, gets back into his car and sets his sights on home.



"Beautifully Broken" by Breanna Kochinsky



"Criminal" by Breanna Kochinsky

Making the Invisible Visible (Essay)

Samantha Dilling

(1st Place Winner)

Introduction

*"If I can't be beautiful, I want to be invisible" (93).
- Invisible Monsters Remix, Chuck Palahniuk*

Kim Kardashian just shot herself in the face. The Internet is abuzz with articles speculating on the reasons behind this violent act as the blood-sucking paparazzi crowd the front gates of her Calabasas estate. In a culture focused on the self and the development of identity, driven by crass consumerism, and defined by overt materialism, every A-list celebrity is just one bullet away from shattering social norms and the hope of ever having a career again.

Chuck Palahniuk, author of the best-selling novel *Fight Club*, highlights post-modern culture and ruptures said social norms. Many of Palahniuk's works are reminiscent of his personal experiences, particularly the unusual events surrounding his family members. According to a brief biography of Palahniuk, "[Palahniuk's] grandfather shot and killed his grandmother after an argument over the cost of a sewing machine. Palahniuk's father, who was three at the time, watched from under a bed as Nick Palahniuk searched the house for additional victims, before turning the gun on himself" (Chaplinsky). This event is depicted on the cover of his non-fiction book *Stranger than Fiction*, a collection of short stories, essays, and interviews. Palahniuk also uses his works as a coping mechanism, crediting his novel *Lullaby* to the tragic death of his father, "who was murdered in 1999 by the jealous ex of a woman met through a personal ad" (Chaplinsky).

Fight Club, his best-selling novel to date, is also infused with many autobiographical components. As Palahniuk explained in an interview, "*Fight Club* was about finding a game that would allow the impossible thing to be explored. I was so confronted by violence that I thought if there was a consensual, structured way that I could explore violence, experience violence, inflict violence, then I could develop a greater understanding and mastery and I wouldn't have that fear" (Interview by Kevin Perry). Palahniuk's graphic use of violence has transcended his best-selling novel and permeated those which have followed, such as *Invisible Monsters*, a novel about a high-fashion model who is left disfigured and incapable of speech after a freeway accident.

The plot is enticing but the arrangement of the novel is also noteworthy. Palahniuk structured the book to be, as he says in the introduction, "a little unknowable" (vi). He goes on to explain, "The story would not unspool as a continuous linear series of 'and then, and then, and then's . . .' At the end of the first chapter, the reader would be directed to jump to, for example, Chapter Thirty" (vii). In writing *Invisible Monsters*, Palahniuk was inspired by the fashion magazines he found at the laundromat. He clarifies, "They were the

only reading material [. . .] The pages were seldom numbered. The pages were chockablock with artsy photos and quotes, enlarged and lifted out of context. [. . .] Trying to read a story was like trying to navigate through a Las Vegas Casino. It was designed to entice and seduce you. It was designed to trap you. I got lost. I loved it" (vii).

Palahniuk also wanted the story to resonate with the reader, going on to say, "Even after the reader reached the words 'The End' she'd still sense she hadn't read it all. [Yes, he used "she" as the generic pronoun.] The book would still hold some lingering secrets. You could open it again and find something—as with the Sears catalogue or *Vogue* magazine or anyone you love—something that you'd never seen before" (viii). With *Invisible Monsters*, Palahniuk found a way to challenge the culture that teaches people to read in a linear fashion, from left to right, page one to page two, and then, and then, and then. He also found a way to challenge the linear fashion in which people viewed the world around them. He correlates the book to life when he writes, "No matter how careful you are, there's going to be the sense you missed something, the collapsed feeling under your skin that you didn't experience at all. There's that fallen-heart feeling that you rushed right through the moments where you should've been paying attention. Well, get used to that feeling. That's how your whole life will feel someday" (Palahniuk 3). He calls society into question, particularly the people existing in it, by challenging them to assess the way they live their own lives.

According to Stephen Greenblatt, "[If] an exploration of a particular culture will lead to a heightened understanding of a work of literature produced within that culture, so too a careful reading of a work of literature will lead to a heightened understanding of the culture within which it was produced" (438). By reading and analyzing a work of literature born from a certain culture, one will be better equipped to understand said culture. Palahniuk gives readers a vehicle for this type of cultural analysis with *Invisible Monsters*, accurately portraying the vapid culture that is the twenty-first century, in which artificial industries such as high fashion and reality television reign.

The Interpretation of Culture and the Technology of the Self

"Nothing of me is original. I am the combined effort of everybody I've ever known" (39).

- Invisible Monsters Remix, Chuck Palahniuk

Greenblatt goes beyond just making a connection between culture and literature. He explains, "Something happens to objects, beliefs, and practices when they are represented, reimagined, and performed in literary texts, something often unpredictable and disturbing. That 'something' is the sign both of the power of art and of the embeddedness of culture in the contingencies of history" (440). Greenblatt identifies culture as though it has a presence, as if it is something tangible that can be seen and heard throughout history. He goes on to insist, "I have written at moments as if art always reinforces the dominant beliefs and social structures of its culture" (440). In this scenario, art would refer to works of literature; he essentially repeats his earlier point, that one is able to use

literature as a means to analyze culture and vice versa. He then brings the author into the light, declaring, “The ability of artists to assemble and shape the forces of their culture in novel ways so that elements powerfully interact that rarely have commerce with one another in the general economy has the potential to unsettle this affirmative relation” (440). In other words, those who produce art do so in a way that ties two seemingly mutually exclusive elements together. Those who desire to either see their culture in a new light or completely separate from said culture would find an appeal in the art.

Those who enjoy Palahniuk’s work most likely belong to one of these two categories. *Invisible Monsters* has a unique way of highlighting the culture to which it belongs while also uncovering that which lies beneath the surface. Clifford Geertz illustrates this in *The Interpretation of Cultures* by theorizing, “A good interpretation of anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation” (18). Palahniuk does exactly this by immersing the reader into characters who are considered to be *monsters* in society: the disfigured, handicapped, gay, transsexual, and so forth. Geertz then makes it a point to analyze the actual act of interpretation. He goes on to summarize, “The besetting sin of interpretive approaches to anything—literature, dreams, symptoms, culture—is that they tend to resist, or to be permitted to resist, conceptual articulation and thus to escape systematic modes of assessment. You either grasp an interpretation or you do not, see the point of it or you do not, accept it or you do not” (24). Although interpretation can often be lost in translation, there is no denying that many of Palahniuk’s works possess an underlying philosophy. *Invisible Monsters*, for example, essentially demonstrates that a person’s individuality is born when he or she ruptures social norms. Brandy Alexander, one of the book’s main characters, goes through the process of getting a sex change even though she does not really want one. She claims, “I’m only doing this because it’s the biggest mistake I can think to make” (Palahniuk 110). By stripping away the identity imposed upon her by society, she is finally able to uncover her individuality.

There is much to learn from those who choose to break away from social norms and redefine themselves according to their own rules. Raymond Williams addresses this in “Culture and Society” when he establishes, “The only equality that is important, or indeed conceivable, is equality of being” (317). According to Williams, all people truly are created equal. The disadvantage of inequality, he explains, “is evil [. . .] which denies the essential equality of being. Such inequality, in any of its forms, in practice rejects, depersonalizes, degrades in grading, other human beings. On such practice a structure of cruelty, exploitation and the crippling of human energy is easily raised” (317). There is no doubt that going against social norms comes with consequences, especially from society as a whole. Those who rebel are likely to face discrimination, rejection, and humiliation, as well as other forms of cruelty and exploitation, as Williams notes. Williams offers a solution to this, suggesting society should aim “[t]o rid [itself] of the illusion of the objective existence of ‘the masses,’ and to move toward a more actual and more active conception of human beings and relationships, [which] is in fact to realize a new freedom.

Where this can be experienced, the whole substance of one's thinking is transformed" (335).

"The masses" being referred to are the majority of people who make up society. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and social theorist, speculated on everything from culture to the technology of the self. In an interview for *Village Voice*, Palahniuk cites Foucault as a source of inspiration. The notable quote Palahniuk references in the interview is Foucault's: "We really have no freedom about creating our identities, because we are trained to want what we want. What is it going to take to break out and establish some modicum of freedom, despite all the cultural training that's been our entire existence? It's about doing the things that are completely forbidden, that we are trained not to want to do" (qtd. in Palahniuk, Interview by Emily Jenkins). These ideas come through in *Invisible Monsters* when Brandy Alexander, who is undergoing a sex change, says, "Don't do what you want. [. . .] Do what you don't want. Do what you're trained not to want. [. . .] Do the things that scare you the most" (Palahniuk 183). It is this central theme around which the entire novel revolves. As the story unravels, the reader sees numerous ways in which the main characters rebel against social norms and what they were "trained to want" in an effort to establish their own identities. Palahniuk, in his creative minimalist way, peels the layers away from the characters in a fashion that keeps readers guessing and turning the pages (from Chapter 1 to Chapter 30 and back to Chapter 2, and so on) as they cross the country together in search of prescription drugs and themselves.

God and Keeping Up with the Kardashians

"All God does is watch us and kill us when we get boring. We must never, ever be boring."
- *Invisible Monsters Remix*, Chuck Palahniuk

Another theme that can be found throughout the novel is the notion that people are gods. Seth Thomas, the driver on the cross-country road trip and another main character, blathers, "My point [. . .] is that maybe TV makes you God. [. . .] And it could be that all we are is God's television" (Palahniuk 23). He continues rambling, "When you watch daytime dramas, you can look in on anybody. There's a different life on every channel, and almost every hour the lives change" (22). Throughout the story, the characters seem to emulate this idea, but Foucault speaks against holding oneself to such an ideal. "By not supposing oneself to be a god," he infers, "a person naturally assumes a greater sense of responsibility toward the other, and this underscores the significance of the technology of the self. The gods, after all, need only to be true to themselves. The human condition is a fragile construction made up of a myriad of individual contribution" (Foucault qtd. in Urbanski 8). Here Foucault argues that by supposing oneself to be a god, one is unable to connect to others or to be affected by the human condition. This is a sound way to avoid egoism, which is very prevalent in society today.

When a person is not supposing himself or herself to be a god, he or she is most likely emulating celebrities as such. Kim Kardashian is just one of these A-list celebrities

who are constantly in the spotlight of society. Married to rapper Kanye West, daughter of OJ Simpson's lawyer, and star of a hit television show, Kardashian is used to smiling for the cameras. She is described by Emma Brokes in an interview for the *Guardian* as "a woman of above average looks, seemingly rather nice, who along with the rest of her family—emotionally speaking—strips on TV for tips." Brokes describes the show, *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, as "contrived, sensationalist, repetitive and witless, but no more so than a lot of things one enjoys without accusing them of spiritual corruption." No matter how "contrived" and "witless" it may be, the show continues to pull in over three million viewers after nearly eight seasons (O'Connell). Since their show first aired, the Kardashian sisters have expanded their celestial reach and opened a fashion boutique called Dash. Most of the products found in the flagship store in Beverly Hills, however, are out of the price range of the Kardashians' primarily teenage fan base. Kim proclaims in the interview with Brokes that the store has become somewhat of a "tourist attraction." "After taking photos of themselves in front of a giant Kardashian family montage," she explains, "the adolescents buy one of several items within their price-range; a \$20 compact mirror; pencils for a few dollars; or a \$10 bottle of water with the Kardashian sisters' photo on one side." According to Kardashian, the water bottles sell out quickly because each bottle features a different picture, and they have become collectable among the teenagers.

The Kardashians are a hot commodity to more than just their girly-girl fan base; like many celebrities, they also are their own biggest fans. This theme is reflected in *Invisible Monsters* when the narrator, Shannon McFarland, describes a scene in which she is watching herself on television: "What's happening is the folks are staring at themselves in the monitor staring at themselves in the monitor staring at themselves in the monitor, on and on, completely trapped in a reality loop that never ends" (Palahniuk 46). Essentially, those on television are doing nothing more than getting lost in themselves and their own ideas of who they are.

Foucault, like Greenblatt, argues that in order to analyze an abstract concept such as identity, one must make the concept object and maintain an objective point of view. Foucault refers to this point of view as the "gaze" in his book *The Birth of the Clinic*, in which he theorizes, "By acquiring the status of object, its particular quality, its impalpable colour, its unique, transitory form took on weight and solidity. [. . .] But the gaze directed upon them would, in turn, awaken them and make them stand out against a background of objectivity. The gaze is no longer reductive, it is, rather, that which establishes the individual in his irreducible quality" (xiv). He goes on to describe how the object becomes the subject: "The *object* of discourse may equally well be a *subject*, without the figures of objectivity being in any way altered" (xiv). In the status of object, identity takes on properties of substance, which then allows it to be analyzed.

In a society that is defined by consumerism and materialism, an individual's identity is often lost. Brandy Alexander, the transgendered character, goes as far as to say that identity is out of the individual's hands. She explains, "The same way a compact disk isn't

responsible for what's recorded on it, that's how we are. You're about as free to act as a programmed computer. You're about as one-of-a-kind as a dollar bill. There isn't any real *you* in *you*. . . . Even your physical body, all your cells will be replaced within eight years. . . . All of you is inherited. . . . All of you is a cooperative effort" (Palahniuk 181). She continues, "You're a product of our language [. . .] [a]nd how our laws are and how we believe our God wants us. [. . .] You're safe because you're so trapped inside your culture. [. . .] You can't imagine any way to escape. There's no way you can get out [. . .] The world, is your cradle and your trap" (182). She concludes, "If you can find any way out of our culture, then that's a trap, too. Just wanting to get out of the trap reinforces the trap" (Palahniuk 183). The only way to find one's identity within the trap that is culture is to rebel against and rupture the social norms society defines, which is exactly what the characters do.

How Talking Like a Woman Is Like Talking Without a Jaw

*"I want out of the labels. I don't want my whole life crammed into a single word" (112).
- Invisible Monsters Remix, Chuck Palahniuk*

The only real way to break away from social norms is in the most extreme way possible. Brandy Alexander believes the most extreme way is to go through a sex change; Shannon believes the most extreme way is to shoot herself in the face. As a model, she claims she was addicted to the attention she received when she was beautiful. "Being addicted to all that attention," she explains, "I had to quit cold turkey" (Palahniuk 135). After pulling over on the freeway and using a rifle to blow off her own jaw, Shannon must learn how to speak all over again. While in the hospital for her speech therapy sessions, she meets Brandy Alexander, who is learning how to speak like a woman. In one scene, Alexander's speech therapist instructs her: "Keep your glottis partially open as you speak. [. . .] It makes your breath bypass your vocal chords for a more feminine, helpless quality" (Palahniuk 270). In this sentence, and in society, feminine is synonymous with helpless. Alexander's therapist then tells her, "Men [. . .] stress the adjective when they speak. [. . .] For instance, a man would say, 'You are so *attractive*, today.' [. . .] A woman would say, 'You are so *attractive*, today.' [. . .] Stress the modifier, not the adjective" (Palahniuk 279). Women tend to adapt to a more passive voice, while men tend to take on a more active one.

A parallel is evident between learning how to speak like a woman and learning how to speak without a jaw. Shannon describes her experience when she juxtaposes, "[The speech therapist] teaches me how a ventriloquist makes a dummy talk. You see, the ventriloquist can't let you see his mouth move. He can't move his lips, so he presses his tongue against the roof of his mouth to make words" (Palahniuk 274). It is this passive voice, this unwillingness to be seen speaking, that prohibits people, especially women, from finding or creating their own identities.

When one struggles to develop his or her own voice, he or she is more likely to feel the need to fit into a category assigned by society. These categories are called labels, and Brandy Alexander refuses to be defined by them. She declares, “I’m not straight and I’m not gay [. . .] I’m not bisexual. I want out of the labels. I don’t want my whole life crammed into a single word. A story. I want to find something else, unknowable, someplace to be that’s not on the map. A real adventure. [. . .] Not just a story that goes and then, and then, and then, and then until you die” (Palahniuk 112). Brandy Alexander is not the only one who is rebelling against the idea of putting individuals into categories defined by the culture to which they belong.

Laverne Cox, an actress who stars in the hit comedy-drama series *Orange is the New Black*, speaks on her experience of being transgender in an interview done for *Time* magazine. When asked why she thinks her being transgender makes people uncomfortable, she replied, “We live in an uncertain world and we want to believe what a man is and what a woman is—I know that. And people don’t want to critically interrogate the world around them.” Cox explains that she attempted to compromise her own gender in high school in an effort to fit in. She continues, “We want to just coast along in a belief system that makes us feel secure, because we are a culture [. . .] that is intolerant to vulnerability. And if we are in a position where we have to begin to question this very basic idea of ‘A man has a penis and a woman has a vagina,’ then that’s a lot of vulnerability.” Society as a whole seems unwilling to examine its preconceived notions of gender and identity and would rather consider transgender a sexual orientation.

Greenblatt addresses society’s need to establish these categories, or labels, when he states, “The ensemble of beliefs and practices that form a given culture function as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained, a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform” (437). Those unwilling to conform to the limits set for them will be cast out in an indirect manner. Greenblatt continues, “The most effective disciplinary techniques practiced against those who stray beyond the limits of a given culture are probably not the spectacular punishments reserved for serious offenders [. . .] but seemingly innocuous responses: a condescending smile, laughter poised between the genial and the sarcastic, a small dose of indulgent pity laced with contempt, cool silence” (437). He then speaks on society’s tendency to positively reinforce those who do choose to conform. He claims that the reinforcement appears in the form of a system of rewards that range from “[t]he spectacular (grand public honors, glittering prizes) to the apparently modest (a gaze of admiration, a respectful nod, a few words of gratitude)” (437). Society may seem to be “innocuous” in its response to outcasts, but this innocuous response is detrimental to those individuals who, like the main characters in *Invisible Monsters*, do not choose to conform to social norms.

Conclusion

*"Don't do what you want . . . Do what you don't want. Do what you're trained not to want . . .
Do the things that scare you the most" (183).
- Invisible Monsters Remix, Chuck Palahniuk*

Kim Kardashian just shot herself in the face. Her jaw is dangling by a single flap of skin and she is making a tweet. She momentarily reflects upon the idea that no publicity is bad publicity before opening her camera app and taking a selfie. The flash illuminates the chunks of meat and teeth that have splattered across the car's leather interior. Just as the paramedics arrive, she posts the picture to her Instagram, hoping it boosts her ratings by the time she gets out of the hospital.

Shannon McFarland correlates beauty to a loaded gun when she deliberates, "Beauty is power the way money is power the way a loaded gun is power" (Palahniuk 168). In a society that emphasizes materialism and suppresses individuality, shooting one's own face off is as tragic as being beautiful. Shannon even goes as far as to claim, "[Being] mutilated can work to your advantage. All those people now with piercings and tattoos and brandings and scarification . . . What I mean is, attention is attention" (Palahniuk 276). Even those who attempt to disrupt social norms end up fitting right in.

A culture that revolves around such self-centeredness can only be described in one way: diseased. Foucault turns the abstract concept of disease into an object to be analyzed when he deduces, "[disease] has a land, a mappable territory, a subterranean, but secure place where its kinships and its consequences are formed" (149). He argues that the only way to deal with such an abstract concept is to give it solidity. The only way to cure a diseased society is to make the invisible visible, with a *bang*.

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"Solo Harmony" by Taylor McKnight



"Lone Sunflower" by Hannah Cole



The Savage's Inevitable Demise in Huxley's Brave New World

(Essay)

April Taylor

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is an unusual novel. On the surface, it is a story about a futuristic society in which people are hatched in a factory and conditioned to fit into a social class. However, when examined more closely, the novel contains characteristics that make it different from other dystopian fiction. Huxley's inventive use of language to create two contrasting dystopian societies sets the novel apart. In a story with no hero, John the Savage comes closer than any other character to winning over the hearts of readers. However, because of the two worlds Huxley created, John's fate is tragic. His demise is inevitable because he cannot find a middle ground between the World State and the Savage Reservation, neither of which allows individuals to survive.

Huxley effectively creates a strong sense of place in both the World State and the Savage Reservation. In his initial description of the Hatchery, the building in which citizens of the World State are "decanted," Huxley uses words like "grey," "cold," "harsh," "frozen," and "dead" (1). This immediately alerts readers that the place being described should not be viewed in a favorable light. The sense of place being created is one of a highly mechanized and emotionally detached society. The original description of the Savage Reservation also creates a strong sense of place. This description focuses not on a dark, cold building, but on a natural landscape, including a valley, a river, and fields. The houses that make up the pueblo of Malpais are described as "small" and "ill-formed" (Huxley 107). This description alerts readers that they have entered a more natural and primitive world.

Although these descriptions help the reader understand the two worlds, they are very brief and only scratch the surface of two masterfully developed settings. In avoiding long descriptive passages of both scenery and characters, Huxley conveys the shallow and detached sense of place. In many chapters, especially chapter three, the dialogue skips quickly from scene to scene, and the reader gets the impression that he or she is "overhearing" the conversations rather than "hearing" them (Firchow 145-160). This technique does more to convey the frenzied nature of living in the World State than a lengthy description could. Some critics of Huxley's writing complain that the characters are not fully developed, but the very nature of the World State precludes fully developed characters (Firchow 145-160). By forcing his characters to be shallow, Huxley begins to create a setting in which individuality is impossible.

Huxley also makes careful use of language when developing his sense of place. He portrays a world in which language is deteriorating and devoid of meaning (Sisk 124). For example, the word *love* has been reduced to a sexual connotation. Huxley also effectively

introduces numerous terms, such as *Violent Passion Surrogate*, *boiling caffeine solution*, and *Feelies*, without providing a narrative explanation of their meaning. This gives a sense of artificiality and helps the reader understand that these terms are taken for granted by World State citizens (Sisk 127). This deterioration of language will eventually contribute to John's inability to function in the World State. When he quotes Shakespeare to Lenina, she rebukes him, saying, "For Ford's sake, John, talk sense. I can't understand a word you say!" (Huxley 124).

While the World State and Savage Reservation are drastically different, they also mirror each other (Baker 114). For example, members of both worlds are in search of happiness. However, happiness in the World State results from conditioning and could be described as childlike contentment. In contrast, the happiness John experiences when learning how to make pottery in the reservation is described as an "intense, absorbing happiness" (Huxley 136). Later, John seeks the latter form of happiness in the World State, but it is impossible to find. Another comparison can be found in the religious services of the two worlds. When Lenina views the snake dance ritual at the reservation, she finds the drum beat very similar to that of her Solidarity Services. While the nature of these two services seem to have nothing in common (one involving a sacrifice to the gods, the other a giant orgy), both involve an atmosphere of blind conformity.

While it may be tempting to examine these two worlds and try to discern which is more favorable, this was not Huxley's intention. In fact, both worlds are meant to be equally unattractive (Baker 107). It is fairly obvious that the totalitarian society of the World State is dystopian, but the dystopia in the Savage Reservation may be more difficult to identify. Huxley has created two dystopias: a technological dystopia and a retrospective dystopia (Baker 112). The technological dystopia of the World State involves the familiar scenario of people reduced to machines because of government control and advances in technology. The retrospective dystopia is more unique. The name of the pueblo in which John lives, Malpais, means "bad place" in Spanish (Baker 113). This is another example of Huxley's manipulation of language to convey sense of place.

Huxley's retrospective or primitive utopia is in part a satire of ethnological tourism, a practice in which travelers visit sites such as reservations in order to observe traditional customs and ceremonies (Snyder 664). Huxley believed that people idealize the past and that the more advanced technology becomes, the more people appreciate primitivism (Snyder 677). However, Huxley does not describe the Reservation as ideal. Rather, he describes it as harsh, dirty, and barbaric. Although the savages practice religion, this religion is portrayed as arbitrary and illegitimate. The religious ceremony that Lenina and Bernard witness combines Indian and Christian elements, suggesting that the savages blindly cling to traditions without truly understanding why they practice them (Baker 114).

John, being the son of a World State citizen born into the Savage Reservation, is a product of both worlds and, as a consequence, is accepted in neither. Because of his

unique circumstances, John seems to be destined to be different. Even amongst the savages, John has unique thoughts and beliefs. For example, he enjoys the readings of William Shakespeare, even though the other children at the reservation do not read, and the members of the World State do not have the capacity to understand the topics about which Shakespeare wrote.

The reason John, as an individual, cannot survive in either of the two worlds is that they both force conformity. The World State literally conditions every person from before birth to fit into and be content with a certain social class, so nonconformity is virtually impossible. The Savage Reservation forces conformity in a different way. John, having a lighter complexion than the rest of the savages, is rejected and even excluded from participating in the snake dance ritual (Huxley 138). When Bernard takes John to the World State, John is treated by the citizens, at best, as a scientific experiment and, at worst, as entertainment. In short, John is rejected by the savages and objectified by the World State citizens because of his individuality.

The inevitability of John's suicide is due to the fact that he was given only two choices. After the novel was published, Huxley actually remarked that he regretted offering the Savage only two alternatives: "an insane life in Utopia, or the life of a primitive in an Indian village" (Miller 13-24). In order for John to have survived, he needed a third option, a mixture of both worlds. One might wonder, then, why the other two "individuals" in the book, Bernard and Helmholtz, did not meet a similar fate. Their situations were different because they were both given that third option—banishment to remote islands full of people like themselves. Unfortunately, the Savage was not given this option because he was needed for further experiments (Huxley 250).

John was raised to cling to misguided primitive values that could not possibly be upheld in the brave new world of infantile happiness (May 121). His final act of suicide was the only option. John's breaking point occurs after he attempts to isolate himself from the World State. He is performing self-flagellation when a group of citizens appears to watch and laugh at him. When Lenina arrives, he is overcome with longing for her and tries to suppress this longing by whipping her as well. The shallow citizens of the World State are unable to understand John's complex emotions, so instead they interpret this frenzied atmosphere in the only way they know. An orgy ensues (Huxley 266).

When John awakens and realizes that he has betrayed his morals, he is overcome with guilt. Coming from a society in which self-denial is strongly emphasized, his actions are inexcusable. Not being permitted to return to the reservation (where he would be excluded anyway), not desiring to fit into the World State, and not permitted to go to a remote island, John's strong individualistic character leaves him no choice. His suicide is more than a punishment for his participation in a spontaneous orgy; it is an escape from a society in which he could never find fulfillment.

Through his subtle development of a strong sense of place, Huxley guides readers to understand John's delicate situation. Huxley creates two worlds in which the only way to be "happy" (in either interpretation of the word) is to conform. John, a product of both worlds, is accepted in neither. His strong morality and individuality makes life in either world impossible, and suicide is the only escape.

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"Mud, Sweat, and Tears" by Julie Horner



"Desolation" by Tara Fritz

Evil in Our Name: A Condemnation of Capital Punishment (Essay)

Mark Frank

Whenever the elected representatives of the United States pass legislation, engage in diplomacy, or provide funds for a cause, they act on behalf of the American people. Likewise, when our elected representatives foster hostility, declare war, or deny sanctuary, they act on our behalf. This principle eloquently demonstrates the importance of political activism and discourse. It also demonstrates why we should undertake careful, diligent introspection when a penalty such as death can be administered by the government on behalf of the people.

Since the government acts on behalf of the people in the dispensing of justice, the government also assumes the role of executioner on our behalf. Do you support the death penalty? If not, are you accepting of this action taken on your behalf?

I oppose the death penalty under all circumstances. I cannot accept evil being carried out in my name, under the pretext of an archaic sense of justice. I do not believe that the interests of our society are served when fellow human beings, my brethren, are put to death. Advocates of the death penalty like making the argument that if a human life has value, its expunging demands a price, a penalty—more specifically, a price equal to that of which was taken: a life for a life, a tooth for a tooth. Unfortunately, the act of taking a life is equivalent regardless of context. Murder remains murder, regardless of whether or not the murder is sanctioned by the state. If the effect remains the same, is it not logical that we treat the executioner the same as the murderer whom he executes? The obvious problem with this system is that it creates an endless chain of murderers, an endless river of blood that stains many hands. Since the executioner practices state-sanctioned homicide, he has committed the same crime as many of those on death row previously committed. Since it is ridiculous to execute the executioner, capital punishment is an immoral practice that can never be administered with any sense of equality. The logical, fair, and moral alternative is to cease the practice entirely, to abolish the death penalty.

Another argument is made in the case of serial murderers, who, through illness or insanity, extinguish more than one life. Must these murderers be executed out of necessity, to protect society? The answer to this question is straightforward. Life imprisonment also removes a prisoner from society, but does not deny the criminal the opportunity to atone for his or her crimes as capital punishment does. Some argue that these criminals have lost their right to live, that in denying another person's right to life, they deny themselves that right as well. The ultimate problem with the life-for-a-life mentality is that it takes a position where human lives can be quantified, that the aggregate of a man's strengths, weaknesses, hopes, and dreams can be weighed against those of another. This is problematic. Is the guerilla fighter more valuable than the pacifist who resists through non-violence? Though they fight the same battle, many would judge

the guerilla fighter more harshly. I, too, would judge him harshly for his use of violence; however, to say one deserves a harsher penalty seems arrogant. Furthermore, every human being has something to contribute to our species. If all human beings were pacifists, tyrants would run unopposed. If all humans were war-like, peace could never take root. I do not know any person's story, his or her sorrows, or his or her victories. I ergo submit that human worth cannot be objectively quantified and, because of this variable, no human being is in a position of merit to determine at what point the destruction of a human life becomes justifiable. To claim otherwise assumes a position of arrogance and a belief that one has achieved a level of wisdom to justify seizing the role of the arbiter of life and death; such thinking is inherently dangerous because it brings with it the risk that our prejudices will corrupt us into condemning those who are different from us. We must not fool ourselves into thinking that we are in a position to judge the destiny of others.

Oftentimes we are driven to punish those who violate the norms of our society, and the mistake is often made that, to save the society, the individual violator must be destroyed. I reject this notion entirely. The ultimate principle is the one that preserves both the individual and the society. For this reason, life sentences for juveniles are unjustified. Why should their lives be destroyed? What possible benefit is gained from this waste of human potential? In the absolute worst of situations, if a juvenile has killed, what purpose is served in destroying a second life? If the justification is revenge and retribution, then it is improper to consider such a punishment justice. If retribution is justice, then justice must be done away with entirely and begun anew. To allow our society to hinder any human being's future is unacceptable. The goal of juvenile justice ergo should be one that does not punish, but rehabilitates the youth, so that he or she may rejoin society and lead a fruitful life. My personal position is that a juvenile should serve no more than a ten-year prison term, regardless of his or her offense. No purpose is served in denying the human family of its fruits. Human advancement and empowerment are the primary concerns of any progressive society; all other concerns are secondary. If the human family is deprived of a young mind for the sake of vengeance, then the practice in question must be discontinued. Our society has come not only to fear the transgression, but to hate the transgressor, viewing him or her as an afflicted soul incapable of atonement. In such a society, dominion in matters of life and death becomes a power beyond the wisdom of those who wield it. Such abuses will lead inevitably to innocents being condemned to death; therefore, our society cannot be trusted to fairly implement capital punishment.

Ultimately, the destruction of human life is profoundly tragic because no life is comparable to another; each is an expression of a personal journey of self-discovery. Similar to how our planet is the result of countless events that have transpired throughout the course of 4.5 billion years of evolution, our lives are the aggregate of relationships, joys, sorrows, dreams, hopes, nightmares, and despairs. Like this world we humbly inhabit, we are finite and subject to inevitable death. In order to preserve the human

species, a planetary family, it becomes necessary to reject practices that limit its growth, progress, and unity. I deem the practice of capital punishment one of these practices. I am not an apologist for criminals, as many of my critics claim, but humbly believe that there are better ways to reconcile acts of violence and the demands of justice. Instead of seeking retribution out of vengeance, our judicial system should seek to salvage lost potential and rehabilitate all who have perpetrated crimes against our society. Only if our brothers and sisters cannot rejoin our union should we resort to such dismal solutions as life imprisonment. Juvenile offenders under the age of sixteen are still at a position in their lives where they can be rehabilitated and assimilated back into society. Some of them have the potential to turn around their lives. When the cost of the American prison system is becoming a burden on the taxpayer, rehabilitation becomes a logical solution.

In the wake of Governor Tom Wolf's February 13th moratorium on the death penalty, the citizens of Pennsylvania have a momentous opportunity to end this unjust system. As citizens of a democratic society, we have the ability to facilitate meaningful change in our society. We, the people, have a choice to make. We can choose to turn a blind eye to a system that disproportionately affects the poor or we can select a system in which all citizens are given an equal chance at justice. We have an obligation as human persons to uphold the dignity of all human lives, regardless of the transgressions made. Human rights are not forsaken when we stumble. Our rights are not surrendered to the state upon conviction; they are endowed upon us by virtue of our humanity and the dignity that comes with said condition. As a human being, I elect to abolish this obscene penalty, which has condemned our brethren to premature death. Where does your vote stand?



"Locked Away" by Breanna Kochinsky



"A Different Perspective" by Kimberly Elter

The Passion of the Superman: Reconciling Friedrich Nietzsche with Christianity (Essay)

(2nd Place Winner)

Nicholas Astle

God is dead. There is not a single sentence in all of modern philosophy that is more widely known and, perhaps more importantly, widely misunderstood. This hard-hitting statement was proclaimed by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* with his “Parable of the Madman”¹ and made famous by his quasi-Biblical narrative *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.² At first glance, the statement is as shocking as it is controversial. However, many fail to realize that Nietzsche was not saying that the god of the Judeo-Christian religions was literally dead. Nietzsche would argue that the Judeo-Christian god never existed at all. Rather, “God is dead” alludes to the “death” of objective truth and the rise of relativism. The possibility of a world devoid of objective truth carries with it far-reaching consequences, not the least of which being the invalidity of any organized religion. Many of Nietzsche’s writings condemn Christianity especially as a scourge upon humanity. However, the two are not as irreconcilable as many (including Nietzsche himself) presume; there are many ideas shared by both Christianity and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

The largest, most obvious conflict between Nietzscheism and Christianity is their respective views on objective truth. The world of Nietzsche is one of confusion, hopelessness and a complete lack of stability. It is a world that has become “unchained from its sun,” its “horizon wiped away” as it “plunges continually...through an infinite nothing”³ following the death of God. Without the possibility of grounding truth in objectivity, everyone is left to create his or her own set of values. This stands in contrast with Christianity⁴, which recognizes moral and metaphysical truth to be objective, rooted in God and transmitted by Scripture rather than originating within the individual. This difference is perhaps the largest obstacle standing in the way of the Nietzschean Christian. If the dogma of Christianity is validated entirely in the objective, and Nietzsche rejects objective truth, he must therefore reject the doctrine of Christianity since it does not spring entirely from the individual.

This difference would be irreconcilable if nihilism (the rejection of existential meaning and truth) was a valid philosophical perspective. However, Nietzsche’s claim that

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. qtd. in “Modern History Sourcebook: Nietzsche: The Madman.” *Internet History Sourcebooks*. Fordham University, n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/nietzsche-madman.asp>>.

² Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” p. 139

³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “The Madman.”

⁴ Author’s Note: Due to the varied and often de-centralized nature of various Christian denominations, all perspectives not taken directly from the Bible (which all denominations recognize as valid) are taken from the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, as it is the largest centralized Christian theological body.

there is no objective truth is fundamentally flawed. At the most basic level, it is impossible to demonstrate the subjectivity of reality without relying on objective practices. Nietzsche, like all philosophers, uses logic to prove his arguments. If logic is not objective (which, in a world without objective truth, must be the case) then using logic is a futile endeavor—logic might operate differently from different viewpoints. Since subjective logic is meaningless, yet Nietzsche is willing to use logic to prove a point, he recognizes (perhaps unconsciously) that objectivity is not only possible, but necessary.

Even if the “necessary objectivity of logic” is rejected, Nietzsche’s own arguments demonstrate that he believes in some form of objective truth. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche says the soul and the spirit are merely the “toy of your great intelligence.”⁵ Only one of two truths can be accurate: either Nietzsche can be speaking from his own subjective values or he can be recognizing an objective truth about the nature of the soul. If he is speaking subjectively, then his statement is rooted in his personal perception of spirit, which may be lacking, inaccurate or flawed (and therefore not a suitable definition of the composition of the self). If that is not the case, then by default Nietzsche affirms objectivity by stating an objective truth.

Once the possibility of objective truth is established, the largest obstacle to reconciling Nietzsche and Christianity is removed. Even so, many of Nietzsche’s writings vehemently speak against Christianity, saying it is “essentially and fundamentally the embodiment of disgust and antipathy for life.”⁶ However, if Nietzsche’s criticisms of Christianity are closely examined, they begin to fall apart. It is possible to distill Nietzsche’s problems with Christianity into three basic arguments: Christianity is wrong because it is imposed, Christianity stands against the beauty of life, and Christianity is the religion of weakness.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche describes the life of the soul with a parable: the spirit is like a camel going into the desert. It “wants to be well laden”⁷ with the heaviest things. These “heavy things” represent the burdens of religion. Then, in “the loneliest desert” the camel metamorphoses into a lion that “wants to capture freedom”⁸ and thus casts off the burdens of the camel. It is then left to create its own value. To do so, it must have the “innocence and forgetfulness”⁹ of a child. The lion then morphs into a child.

The symbolism in “Of the Three Metamorphoses” equates religion and imposed value with the burdens of the camel. There is a still deeper meaning behind Nietzsche’s choice to call the soul a camel, as opposed to a more common pack animal such as a mule or horse. Unlike the mule, the camel must kneel to accept its burden. The “weight-bearing spirit...kneels down like the camel.”¹⁰ Likewise, the spirit does not passively carry its

⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” p. 141

⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. London: Penguin, 1993. Print. pp. 8-9

⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” p. 140

⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” p. 140

⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” p. 141

¹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” p. 140

burdens. It willingly accepts them until the point in which the soul cries for freedom. We also cannot ignore the parallel between the kneeling camel and the ardent Christian kneeling in prayer.

To Nietzsche, the calling of the true man is to create his own value. Like an infant, he must begin from nothing except that which is within himself. While this idea is nice in theory, in practice it is impossible even if we are literally children. If our values came solely from institutionalized religion, then it would be possible to cast it off as Nietzsche commands. However, this completely ignores the fact that our values are not *just* the sum of our religious education. Our values are imprinted on us from infancy by our families. Some specialists even postulate that some values and tendencies carry a genetic predisposition. Value is deeper than an old book, and that makes attempting to cast it off a completely futile venture.

If, then, we cannot ever fully cast off values and start anew, we must be willing to accept some preconceived values as our own. This still does not mean they are imposed, however. Even if we cannot create every value by ourselves, we still must choose which values to accept; which values to take on as our own. In this way, values can be personal even if they are not created by the self. If they are burdens, they are burdens willingly taken up, not placed upon backs like pack animals.

Accepting that values can (and must) come from outside the self, there is no reason that Christianity is invalid as a set of values. As long as it is willingly accepted—as long as the spirit consciously chooses to accept what the Bible teaches—it is not an imposition. It is not a burden. Not only is Christianity *able* to be chosen, in order to be genuine it *must* be freely chosen. One of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the most recent ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, affirmed that “[o]nly in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness.”¹¹ Christianity cannot be imposed, but must be chosen.

Nietzsche’s second major argument against Christianity criticizes it as denying of the truths of life. He views Christians as hating the body by restricting sex, hating curiosity by emphasizing faith, and hating strength by extolling pity for the weak. In many ways, though, his views of Christianity are misguided and misinformed.

First, an honest examination of Christian beliefs must be made, free of bias or assumption. With regard to sexuality, the Church is anything *but* “despisers of the body.” In fact, the late Pope John Paul II wrote an entire treatise on sexuality, appropriately titled *The Theology of the Body*. In it, he claims that “the body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God [God’s love for man], and thus to be a sign of it.”¹² This is hardly the “hatred of the body” Nietzsche

¹¹ *Gaudium et Spes* 17

¹² Paul, John, II. *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Boston, MA: Pauline & Media, 1997. Print. p. 76

claimed Christians teach. Even the Christian tendency to limit sexual intercourse to marriage is not out of hatred for the act, but rather the exact opposite. Christians see sex as *so important* that it should not be lessened by haphazard or irresponsible practice.

Further, Nietzsche criticizes faith as a crime against curiosity. He claims that we are naturally inclined toward reason, curiosity and the search for knowledge and faith impedes that by requiring our blind trust. However, Nietzsche fails to consider the possibility that the two are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to rely on faith without abandoning reason. Not only that, our faith naturally leads us to curiosity, and reason becomes the tool of that curiosity. One only has to briefly consider Christianity's long history of theologians to find one common factor: their use of reason and emphasis on curiosity. Perhaps the greatest example of this is Thomas Aquinas, who used pure logic to argue for not only the existence of God but also the importance of faith as an addition to (not a replacement of) the use of reason.

In the final case, Nietzsche separates "strong" values from "weak" values. He lists traits such as ambition and egoism among the characteristics of the strong, calling pity, generosity, love, and selflessness the prerogative of the weak. Since Christianity commands its followers to live those "weak traits," Christianity is the religion of the weak.

It cannot be denied that Christianity teaches its adherents to be peaceful,¹³ loving¹⁴ people. It also cannot be denied that Nietzsche considered those values to be weakness. This, however, is not a simple case of the transitive property. Just because Christianity teaches love, and (according to Nietzsche) love weakness, Christianity is not "ergo" weak. That conclusion, which Nietzsche argues repeatedly, hinges on the presupposition that Nietzsche is correct when he says that love and pity are the epitome of feebleness.

This examination calls into question the origins of Nietzsche's presumption that selflessness is the antithesis of strength. Many philosophers and historians note Nietzsche's affinity for Charles Darwin, the father of evolution. According to Darwinism, the creatures that thrive are the ones that are capable of reproducing. Certain traits, particularly those beneficial for survival, give the creature a statistical edge in this regard. For example, the animals with the most physical strength are less likely to be killed by predators, giving them a greater chance of reproducing. Nietzsche admired this "natural order" and noted that the traits most likely to be passed on were largely self-centered. Evolution favored the strongest, the fastest, those capable of getting what they want. Humans, as part of the same natural order, should strive for the same. It is the strong man, the "master," who serves himself and thus survives. It is the weak man, the "slave," who gives to others and allows himself to be taken advantage of.

¹³ Psalm 34:14 – "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."

¹⁴ Mark 12: 31 – "The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Christianity, then, represents the “slave revolt”—the demonization of ambition and the rise of generosity. It can be argued, however, that the values of Christianity are *not* weaknesses. In fact, they require more strength than anything self-centered.

By insisting that humanity must obey the same urges and structures as the animal kingdom, Nietzsche lowers the human person to the level of beast. It completely rejects all that humanity has done to rise above—it rejects our unprecedented abilities, our world-changing achievements, and everything that has proven us to be different from the rest of the animal kingdom. The naturalism of Nietzsche denies fundamental properties of the human race. There is immense irony in this, as one of Nietzsche’s most vehement arguments against Christianity is its rejection of what makes human beings special (specifically their ability to create and appreciate beauty and art). With one breath, Nietzsche condemns anything that squelches the vitality of humanity, but with another he is guilty of the same on account of his narrow view of human behavior.

By this, we are no longer bound to admit that strength is found in selfishness. This does not necessarily prove the opposite, but it provides the opportunity to consider other traits as sources of strength. Once ambition and egoism have been deposed from the throne of strength, we can contemplate which other traits are suitable successors.

According to Nietzsche, strength is found in selfishness. The strongest are those who provide for themselves and excel. However, it may be more accurate to say that the converse is true: selfishness is weakness, and it takes strength to become generous. Our natural impulses favor those who look out for themselves. But, if the fullness of humanity is overcoming ourselves and our nature (which Nietzsche himself would agree with by his principle of self-overcoming), then our true purpose lies in overcoming the natural impulse toward selfishness and embracing pity for the weak. It requires strength precisely because it goes against the animalistic within us.

In this way, Nietzsche’s criticisms of Christianity can be shown to be largely hyperbolic, misinformed falsehood. With the supposed differences between Nietzsche and Christianity explained, it can be shown that the two bear several key similarities. Most significantly, both Nietzsche and Christianity embrace the idea of self-overcoming through self-mastery and the will to power.

One of Nietzsche’s most famous concepts is that of the *Übermensch*, or the Superman. He believed that humanity in its present state is the middle ground between animal and the Superman. We have advanced beyond the ways of beast, but not so far as to be what we are meant to be, the Superman. The Superman is what will come after us; therefore, it is our responsibility to strive for it, to reach for it. That requires purifying ourselves of the animal within us. It requires overcoming that within ourselves which is

not as it should be. We, as humans, are incomplete and each of us “is that which must overcome itself again and again.”¹⁵

This is remarkably similar to the Christian theory of inclination to sin. According to Christian metaphysics, humanity represents the middle ground between beast and angel, just as Nietzschean humanity is the fulcrum between beast and *Übermensch*. (Unlike Nietzsche, Christianity does not wish its followers strive to become angels.) Further, the original sin of Adam and Eve carried with it lasting effects, including the burden of labor, pain at childbirth and, most significantly in this context, the permanent tendency to sin. Simply put, it means that all humans are, as a result of sin, pulled toward further sin. Holiness, then, is the overcoming of those inclinations. It is the overcoming of the self in pursuit of something greater. For Nietzsche, this meant the *Übermensch*. For the Christian, this means the saints.

Nietzsche advocated self-overcoming by way of the will to power. Essentially, he claimed that the self is made up of competing wills, such as the will to live, the will to sex and, most importantly to Nietzsche, the will to power. The will to power is the desire to have control, particularly over ourselves. Nietzsche even insisted that the will to power is the strongest of the wills. It overcomes the will to sex in the form of celibate priests. It overcomes the will to live in the form of martyrs. The will to power desires mastery of the self, in order to orient the self toward the attainment of the Superman.

Ultimately, this is the meeting point of Nietzsche and Christianity. Although they are not entirely reconcilable, and they disagree on many points, they have common ground in one of the most practical areas: how we conduct ourselves. Despite their differences, Nietzsche and Christianity agree that an important purpose of life is to overcome the self. Whether it is the animalistic urges within us or the effects of sin, it is our duty to master ourselves in order to become better. It is our prerogative to reach above our current station in the hope of something better. We work for something that we will not participate in in this life: heaven for the Christians, the Superman for Nietzsche.

In very many ways, Nietzsche was mistaken about Christianity. His views of their beliefs were skewed at best, flat-out wrong at worst. From the other side, many Christians perceive Nietzsche incorrectly, especially by misunderstanding the infamous “God is dead.” While they cannot be said to agree on everything by a long shot, there is more common ground than either side would like to admit. The Nietzschean Christian is a man focused on overcoming the negative within him. He is a lover of the world around him, a connoisseur of the pleasures of life. He is a man who looks at the world with the curiosity of a child, the reason of a scholar and the passion of the Superman.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” p. 147



"Sunset Reflections" by Christopher Evans

Travel Addiction (Multi-genre Project)

(4th Place Winner)

Kimberly Homolak

*~Leaving Home~
What was once my home
Is now unknown.*

*Concrete of the airport sidewalk,
I squint my eyes, looking for a clock,
Whisked away from the metal, the conveyer belts, the contemporary.*

*Stone of the crumbling homes,
Lead way to rolling mountains where stories of the past roam,
Surrender to the unknown, beauty, history.*

*Gravel of the monastery driveway,
Crunching of excited footsteps gives way,
Embrace strangers, smiles, potentiality.*

*What was once my home
Is now unknown.*

Sitting on the bus, I found myself jet-lagged and unsatisfied from mediocre airplane food, all the while wide-eyed, unable to fall asleep, simply awestruck. This was the first time I had set foot on European soil, and I was baffled by the soft mountains, quintessential stone homes, and utter beauty of the French countryside. Our charter bus, holding twenty-two study abroad students, whizzed through the narrow and windy streets, inducing anxiety every time a car passed going the opposite direction.

"There it is. There's your new home," Eric, our twenty-six-year-old assistant director, delighted.

Sitting on top of a mountain, surrounded by the quaint village of Ambialet and tucked into the crook of the windy Tarn River, was the renovated twelfth-century monastery in which we would be living for the next three and a half months. After the bus climbed the mountain to the monastery, my swollen feet stepped off the bus, crunching the gravel beneath as I was greeted by dogs and people who would soon become my second family. I was euphoric. I had an inkling that these would be the greatest months of my life, but little did I know the sweet danger it would hold. My life would be radically changed forever with every cobblestone street I roamed, mountain I hiked, and local I conversed with. Not only was my life on the verge of being more fulfilled than it ever had

been, but an insatiable need to continue wandering was also on the verge of forming. My travel addiction had taken root among the stones of France.

Flash forward three and a half months. My eyes are no longer wide-eyed, yet I am still unable to fall asleep with swollen feet and an unsatisfied stomach from the same mediocre airplane food. Pathetically, I rest my head against the airplane window with tear-filled and bloodshot eyes as Sebastian sings “Kiss the Girl” from *The Little Mermaid*, which is playing on my seat’s television screen. I have quite possibly entered into a clinical depression over the conclusion of my study abroad experience. The tears have been chronic for about the past two weeks at this point. What has gotten into me? I didn’t even cry this much over breaking up with my last boyfriend.

In the words of Lin Yutang, Chinese writer, linguist, and inventor, “No one realizes how beautiful it is to travel until he comes home and rests his head on his old, familiar pillow.” As I lie in bed, now back in Small Town, USA, I reminisce on the days spent exploring Europe, fantasizing when next I might sit on a plane with swollen feet, mediocre airplane food in one hand and a ticket to some far away location in the other. It’s a curious affliction, being addicted to leaving, traveling into the unknown. It’s also a tale as old as time. Sixteenth-century explorers roamed to uncharted parts of the globe. The Allman Brothers Band and Lynyrd Skynyrd sang of the rambling men and free birds of the world. Authors have composed countless books attempting to put the restless soul into words.

To understand my newfound need to incessantly explore, I delved into three such books: *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer, *Tales of a Female Nomad: Living at Large in the World* by Rita Golden Gelman, and *The Geography of Bliss: One Grump’s Search for the Happiest Places in the World* by Eric Weiner. Each book told of a wanderer who found himself or herself addicted to travel, albeit the individual’s types of travel and superficial motives for travel varied greatly. The tales of these three drifters reveal that an addiction to travel equates to an addiction to discovery. Because discovery reveals truths, is exhilarating, is empowering, and most of all, causes one to fall in love, travel leads to a more genuine lifestyle that almost anyone could become addicted to, given the proper exposure.

I began my exploration of this mysterious condition with the even more mysterious Chris McCandless, the main character in Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*. Addictions are generally thought of as dangerous—an obsession so extreme that health is compromised, family and friends are pushed away—and addicts are deemed as outcasts. Chris McCandless (also known as Alexander Supertramp, his self-given nickname) went to this extreme. Growing up in an affluent home, Chris graduated from Emory University with grades good enough to reserve him a seat in Harvard Law School’s lecture halls. His future was set. He could have very easily lived a life many only dream of—a sizeable home, a nice car, and frequent trips to tropical locations. Chris’s ideal life, though, differed greatly from this.

Inspired by the words of Jack London, Chris sought the great outdoors—a solo adventure through Alaska with only his backpack and books to guide him through the unknown. What he was looking for, I do not know. Perhaps he was not seeking an answer or destination but rather simply living life in the way he believed to be most worthwhile. Even so, powerful motives must have spurred Chris's strong desire for such a radical lifestyle that led to his demise. A culmination of McCandless's life events and biological makeup caused him to question the world. This inquisitiveness, mixed with undeniable intelligence, unwavering stubbornness, and strong morals and sprinkled with just the right amount of impracticality, ultimately pushed Christopher Johnson McCandless "into the wild."

Several internal traits contributed to this push. Unsurprisingly, Chris McCandless was about as much of an idealist as they come; his picture might as well be placed next to the word "idealist" in the dictionary. As Jon Krakauer put it, McCandless "seemed to have great difficulty seeing the trees, as it were, for the forest" (63). This impracticality predisposed and further fueled Chris's travel addiction. In addition, McCandless was stubborn and extremely driven. I do not doubt that a majority of us have at least a little Alexander Supertramp in us. Most at one point or another have fantasized of rebelling against social norms for a more wholesome and fulfilling lifestyle, yet many are too afraid to act upon such impulses. McCandless, though, was confident (perhaps to a point of stupidity) and motivated to live out his ideas, and so he did. In his final letter to his good friend Ron Franz, McCandless writes the following:

So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. (Krakauer 56-57)

McCandless was infatuated with ceaseless adventure, living out his idealist dreams by testing his limits, dropping society's baggage, and embracing autonomy.

Influences that pushed Chris McCandless to become Alexander Supertramp were not limited to internal factors but also included several external factors. One life event in particular seemed to shape Chris McCandless and drive him into the wild: his father's infidelity. From the outside, the McCandless family was happy and successful with an abundance of finances reaped from both parents' hard work. Previous to discovering this information, McCandless viewed his parents as overbearing but respected their hard work in emerging from impoverished situations. When McCandless unearthed that his father was secretly married to two women even after McCandless had been born, his trust and view of his father shattered. In my opinion, this drove McCandless to demand that the world be even more black and white than before, to rebel against his family's expectations for him, and to search for the ultimate truth.

Backlashing against a parent's rule in the form of dangerous and extreme behavior is not unique to Chris McCandless. Young adults, especially those with troubled pasts, want to make something of themselves and prove they can break from their parents' mishaps and are not enslaved to their genes. Twenty-somethings are searching—perhaps unknowingly. Reaching my twenties, I felt unstoppable while abroad. I was constantly being challenged by unknown customs and continually humbled by the vastness of the world with each city I explored. After two months in Ambialet, my travel experience was about to change dramatically. From the unpretentious streets of Southern France, I boarded the train to the most glamorous city in the world, Paris.

~Paris~

*Fluorescent lights illuminating faces in transit,
Les Champs-Élysées flooded by store lights,
Sparkling bulbs romanticizing the Eiffel Tower,
Moon reflected off the Seine River by night,
Mesmerized by the City of Lights.*

Arriving in Paris is a blur. Metro cars and well-dressed women whiz by, staying only long enough to leave the lingering scent of public transportation and expensive perfume. The City of Lights was filled with contradictions. While ever bustling and in transit, street corners were filled with outdoor cafés where Parisians would spend relaxed afternoons over croissants and espresso after meandering through obscure art museums. The city spans ten kilometers from east to west, yet each arrondissement feels like its own small community. It is a city in which one feels both powerful and powerless.

It is difficult for me to describe the wonder I felt in Paris. As I ventured through the insanely massive Louvre, climbed the steps of the Eiffel Tower under the moonlit sky, gawked at the impressively ornate architecture, and fell in love with the bohemian and progressive feel the most authentic parts of Paris display, I felt I was in a fantasy. Every corner of Paris was unique and unknown; there was constant opportunity for discovery. As previously mentioned, to travel is to discover. Chris McCandless sought to discover a simpler life in the Alaskan wilderness. The author and main character in *Tales of a Female Nomad: Living at Large in the World*, Rita Golden Gelman, had a passion for people and sought to discover these people's stories.

As a newly divorced, forty-eight-year-old woman, Rita Golden Gelman completely transformed her life. She exchanged glamorous galas with the ritziest of socialites for fellowship around an open fire with strangers, a beautiful home for various mud huts with thatched roofs, and a sedentary life with a nomadic one. Over the first half of the book, Rita ventured through Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Israel, and the Galapagos Islands, always staying in one location just long enough to discover the culture and make connections with the people. Throughout the second half of the novel, Rita journeyed through Indonesia, Canada, New Zealand, and Thailand with trips to the U.S. throughout

her travels to these countries. At nearly fifty, much older than most other restless souls, Rita surrendered to her travel addiction. Her nomadic life was driven by the desire to fulfill her sense of discovery.

It is no secret that false prejudices of other cultures are integrated into our own society. More often than not, we blindly buy into what the newscasters retell of warfronts in supposedly oppressed countries. Under the Reagan administration, the U.S. government provided troops and weapons for Nicaraguan rebels to help overthrow what was portrayed to be an oppressive and communist government. Upon Rita's trip to Nicaragua, though, she learned that Nicaraguan people were content with their government and, in fact, prideful of the revolution that had sparked the genesis of their allegedly evil government regime. Truthfully, they felt that they were treated well. Further, Rita relayed that Nicaraguans were some of the most welcoming and friendly people she had ever encountered, despite her belonging to the country that had provided rebels weapons and cut off essential daily supplies. She conveys, "I have learned from these people how to explode with laughter and dance with joy" (Gelman 76). Rita found fellowship and created lasting bonds with locals who proved to be the source of her discovery.

During my semester abroad, I found this to be true. Parisians are thought to be snotty, pretentious, and standoffish. While there are people who do not exactly qualify as particularly friendly or welcoming in any city, most Parisians I interacted with were extremely friendly, polite, and eager to share their beautiful city in exchange for tales of the United States. All the while, I stumbled through their beautiful, romantic language as they good-naturedly helped me and forgave my mistakes. One woman in particular struck me as remarkably patient. My study abroad group had the amazing opportunity to meet many successful Parisian artists, one of whom was Jean Serole. As we entered into Jean's eclectic art studio, a random Parisian entered with us. Upon striking up a conversation with her after Jean spoke to us, I learned that she used to be an English teacher, although she did not reveal this until late in the conversation, allowing me to practice my French—which, quite frankly, needed much practice—rather than impatiently switching to English. For the remainder of the night, she guided us to obscure yet absolutely enchanting sections of Paris, particularly the bohemian area, which ended up being my favorite part of that magical city. Any prejudices of Parisians were shattered as I discovered that their patience, meekness, and politeness are often wrongly mistaken for pretention.

Discovery is not limited to external findings: *self*-discovery is just as much a result of traveling. Like Chris McCandless, Rita Gelman perpetually felt empowered throughout her adventures. A static, monotonous life can become habitual, causing one to forget all he or she is capable of. As Rita reminisces on her independent travels, she states, "I feel good about myself. During these last two months, I have discovered parts of me I didn't know were there: the part that can embrace strangers and enrich my life knowing them, the part that enjoys making independent decisions, and the part that adores living spontaneously" (Gelman 32). For Rita, self-discovery occurred through meeting strangers, being

empowered by making independent decisions, and seeking spontaneity and opportunity. A recurring theme I have been seeing with travel is the euphoria that arises from breaking societal chains and making one's own rules or decisions. My gut reaction is to deem this selfish and a bit prideful, which it may be. Another perspective, though, would view this as the purest and most mature sense of rebellion. Avid travelers will not buy into societal standards simply because it is expected or the norm; they seek a more real, pure, truthful, and fulfilling version of life. Truly, having to adapt to an ever-changing environment and seeking people and landscapes for truths humble an ego that can arise with complacency.

By the end of my ten enchanting days journeying through Paris, I found myself sitting on an airport floor—exhausted, hair in a ratty mess, feet blistered from miles of walking, but nonetheless still high on the majesty of the City of Lights. I had never felt so empowered yet humbled by the world. Ten days prior, I hadn't a clue how to navigate through the huge city but now rode the metro with ease, even being mistaken for Parisian when a man asked which stop he needed. I marveled at the grandeur of Versailles Palace, was captivated by the thousands of paintings in the Louvre, connected with local Parisians in picturesque cafés, and was swept away by the moon's reflection off the Seine River. Still basking in my Paris-induced rapture, I boarded my next flight. The next time I woke, I was groggy and confused, trying to understand the voice over the intercom but unable to manage, given her thick accent. Where was I traveling to again? I glanced out the airplane window to witness the greenest landscape I had ever seen. Oh yes, Ireland, that was it.

~Dublin~

*Fiddle streaming through the night,
Laughter and cheers stumbling through the streets,
Friendly accents welcoming conversation to all in sight,
Rain dancing against the window,
Enchanted by the comfort of the country of green and smiles.*

Is there anything more addictive than happiness? Society's obsession with finding the key to happiness has filled bookshelves with self-help books and given careers to motivational speakers. Eric Weiner, author of *The Geography of Bliss*, had a different view of happiness. Rather than searching for the key to happiness, he sought the *location* of happiness. Traveling to ten countries around the globe, Weiner studied cultures and lifestyles of each country to peg what exactly happiness meant to its inhabitants. Stressing both the physical and cultural impact of our environment on achieving happiness, Weiner states, "culture is the sea we swim in—so pervasive, so all-consuming, that we fail to notice its existence until we step out of it." In his eyes, the external environment and internal environment are interconnected and dependent on each other.

As I transitioned from Paris to Dublin, my mood adapted with my environment. Dublin, in great contrast to Paris, is in a sense more modern yet much more humble and down-to-earth. The grandeur of ornate buildings is swapped for brick roads and Irish

pubs with fiddles streaming out of them. The people were extremely open and gregarious, unlike the reserved and dainty French. In Paris, I was in a dream—dazzled by the history of an unknown, mysterious, and enchanting place. In Dublin, I felt at home—comfortable, welcomed, and happy. I really did not have time to miss Paris. I was too busy adapting to my new environment, challenging myself in new ways. In other words, I was too busy discovering new truths, feeling exhilarated, becoming empowered with each challenge, and falling in love with this unfamiliar city. I was on the hunt for a new adventure once again.

In this sense, each city was a new me. A different personal and internal aspect was elicited with each culture. Eric Weiner took a visit to Iceland, one of the happiest countries in the world, which openly embraces this idea of being a multi-dimensional human being. Larus, a native Icelander who throughout his life has been a chess player, journalist, construction company executive, theologian, and music producer, reflected on the Icelandic trend to have such a colorful résumé: “Having multiple identities (though not multiple personalities) is, he believes conducive to happiness” (Weiner 161). Contrasting greatly with the Western beliefs, this philosophy sheds light on such an addictive aspect of travel. With each place one travels, he or she is able to redefine himself or herself. All humans are amazing, multi-dimensional beings whose aspects of intelligence are numerous and varied. As one walks the streets of a new country, meeting natives and discovering their traditions and culture, that person will have to draw from different parts of his or her personality to adjust. To be a good traveler is to be culturally open. To be culturally open, one must actively engage himself or herself in another’s situation. Again, this circles back to the idea of living a more genuine life through travel because one is actively creating his or her life. When in a completely foreign location, nothing is done out of habit. I was actively living my life. I truly never have felt more alive than when I was traveling. By discovering beauty and truths throughout Europe, I fell in love with each city I visited. How much more addictive or genuine could that be—perpetually falling in love as one challenges herself to see the beauty of the world?

~Returning Home~
What was once unknown
Is now home.
Stone of our crumbling home,
Laughter reverberates as hearts become whole,
Quick, capture the friendship, comfort, family.
Stone of the mountain side,
Adventuring the ascent not knowing what we will find,
Alas, empowered by the climb, peak, journey.
Rock formations create a bed for star-gazing,
Reminiscing on four months of wandering,
Assuredly, humbled by the vastness, tranquility, clarity.

*What was once unknown
Is now home.*

After seeing the beauty, one must realize the beauty that was seen. Reminiscing on travel experiences is where the real danger to becoming addicted lies. Eric Weiner states, “The thing about paradise, though, is we don’t always recognize it immediately. Its paradiseness takes time to sink in” (51). According to a study completed by Peggy O. Shields analyzing behavior and attitudes related to college students’ travel experiences, when asked by researchers to describe previous excursions, “respondents expressed overwhelmingly favorable recollection of their past vacation travel experiences” (376). This nostalgia would encourage future travel. While still in Europe, I knew I was going to devote the rest of my life to traveling, but the extent to which I would need that next travel experience like an addict needs his or her drug would not be revealed until my return home. So, as I drove back to the monastery in Ambialet from the airport, singing along to blaring pop French music with the people who have now become my family, I realized Ambialet had become my home.

As I lie in bed each night back in my real home, I dream of my other home. I find myself daydreaming every moment my mind is not occupied with other thoughts, my mind always drifting to the breathtaking mountains of Ambialet and the bustling sidewalks of European cities. Overall, it seems constant discovering is falling in love again and again. Rita Gelman fell in love with the children she read books to, the women she cooked with over open fires, and the beautiful Galapagos Islands, where she slept three feet from sea lions. Chris McCandless fell in love with western landscapes, adventures through uncharted territories, and the simplicity of his new lifestyle. Eric Weiner fell in love with finding joy in unexpected places and being everywhere yet nowhere among airport terminals. I fell in love with the rolling mountains of Southern France, the people I met as I wandered street markets, and the traditions of other cultures. To travel is to discover, and to discover is to fulfill humans’ innate need to experience love. Chris’s, Rita’s, and Eric’s tales of their nomadic lives suggest that each corner of the world holds a new opportunity to fulfill this need. What was sparked by a troubled past, a divorce, a search for happiness, and an unforeseen opportunity to study abroad was later driven by a relentless passion for discovering and falling in love with people and places all over the globe.

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"Sunrise" by Nicholas Pyo



"Full Bloom" by Chelsie Adams

Where These Boots Have Been (Fiction)

(3rd Place Winner)

Tara Fritz

(Translated from the original French)

She was bored.

Really, she was always bored. Her mother worried constantly, but Amelia liked the routine of her life: she got out of bed, she looked for a job, she ate, and then she climbed back into bed to start the whole cycle over again. Her life wasn't full of adventure but she liked it that way. She had no other choice but to like it; there wasn't much to do in a small town.

"But you have to do *something*," her mother always said. "You want to do something with your life, don't you?"

With a shrug, she responded, "But I'm happy here."

It was true that she didn't have a lot of friends, that she didn't do much except read, talk to her mother, and look for a job that might somehow satisfy her. But she was happy—why would she bother changing?

* * *

It was the end of summer; that particular weekend, it was raining, a steady downpour. Amelia liked to sit on the front porch, listening to the rain as she buried herself in a novel. Lost in the words on the pages, she could travel to otherwise unknowable places without ever moving from her seat, her own brand of adventure.

That afternoon, her mother found her in her usual spot amongst the rain and a stack of books. She handed her daughter a post card. "Do you remember your great uncle?" she asked. "He sends just one postcard every year. You remember him."

"Of course," she responded, picking up the card. "I remember."

She began to think her mother wanted a better response, but she didn't know what else to say. Yes, she remembered her great uncle—he lived in France, he never called; he sent a postcard every year but never more.

The card in her hand was beautiful, a picture of a winding river from above as it snaked through valleys and between hills. On the back, her uncle had written a short note: *Bonjour to all. I hope you are well. As for me, I am well also. France is lovely as always. Much love, Henry.*

"He's really not a big fan of words," Amelia observed. Looking up at her mother, who was still hovering over her, she asked, "Why did you give me this?"

With a certain hesitation, her mother replied, “Well, I don’t know.” After a pause, she added, “I miss him. But you, you’ve never even met him. I thought you could go visit him. Maybe. What do you think?”

“But why? He lives in France. It’s too far.” She frowned. “And I need to keep looking for a job. I can’t go on vacation in a whole other country.”

Her mother’s pleasant smile disappeared. Amelia tried not to feel guilty; she hated to disappoint her mother. The storm began to slow. She looked out over the garden, green and damp with the rain.

“I guess I’ll think about it,” she said after a long moment.

“Okay,” her mother said, her smile returning. “Good. You can think about it.”

And then she left, leaving Amelia with her thoughts. She looked at the postcard again and traced her uncle’s words with a finger. She knew a little French from what she had studied in high school—but still, France was too far. She shouldn’t waste her time crossing an ocean to see an uncle she had never met.

She watched the rain, the still garden. It was a familiar view that she did not really want to leave. She couldn’t imagine leaving her house, her town. France was a place in stories, not in the real world—a world that, to her, admittedly did not extend far past the limits of her front porch.

A weak ray of sunshine slipped from behind a cloud and illuminated the garden as she slipped the postcard between the pages of her book.

* * *

Charles de Gaulle Airport was bigger than she imagined. She was already lost but determined to not ask for help. She could do this—her mother had said that she could do this.

It took a while to figure out where she could get on her connecting flight from Paris to Toulouse, but she finally managed to find her plane after only making it on by a slim margin, the last passenger to board. When the plane landed an hour later, she was still lost but followed the other passengers; eventually, they led her to the baggage claim where she waited a long hour to retrieve her bag.

At the exit, she could see through the large windows that the sun was shining. Back home, it would be cold with the arrival of winter, but here it seemed mild still.

She was surprised to find her uncle waiting for her already at the doors. He was gruff; she could see it just in the way he was standing. He was short, his face covered in a scruffy gray beard, and in his hands he carried a worn brown hat. When he saw her, he didn’t smile; he simply nodded and reached for her suitcase.

“I am your great uncle,” he said, thankfully speaking in English.

“*Enchantée*,” she responded with a hesitant smile.

He didn’t seem impressed at her attempt. Lifting her suitcase, he began walking in the direction of the exit; she had no choice but to follow. Once outside, he led her to an old gray car of an indeterminable age. It looked fragile, and she was almost afraid to sit in it, lest it fall apart.

“Come!” Her uncle put her suitcase into the trunk. “It will take two hours to get home and I want to be out of the city before dark.”

With hesitation, Amelia opened the car door and finally took her place in the front seat. Her uncle sat next to her without saying a word, and with a jolt they pulled out of the parking lot.

The old car lurched with every change of gear. Her uncle barely spoke; when she tried to ask questions—about the village, about France—he replied with only one or two words, promising to explain everything once they had arrived.

As the car wound its way through farmlands and mountains alike, night began to fall around them. When they finally made it to the small town, Amelia could see only the lights in houses, small beacons in the night. The car did not stop in the village but continued outside the village limits until they were in the countryside once again. The night was heavy with the fog that lay on the road, lending the quiet scene an air of mystery. It was only a few minutes before the car finally stopped in front of a small farmhouse. Without a word, her uncle got out and took her suitcase from the trunk as she looked up at the house looming out of the darkness. It was two stories tall, constructed of many stones; behind the house, she could see a garden enveloped in shadow.

“Come,” her uncle said again. “I can cook dinner, but I’m sure you are tired, no?”

“Very tired,” she responded as she followed him into the house, up to the second floor. Her uncle dragged her suitcase behind him with some difficulty as they mounted the narrow staircase. Once at the top, she could see only three doors: two bedrooms and a bathroom. Her uncle guided her toward one bedroom.

“I will call you when dinner is ready,” he said, leaving without allowing her to respond. Alone in the room, she regarded the sparse decorations: a bed covered in a gray comforter that seemed old but soft, a nightstand with an ornate lamp, a small dresser, and a chair in the corner. Through the window, she could just make out the garden below.

She sighed and sat down on the bed. Before she even realized, she was asleep.

* * *

She was awakened by the morning sun streaming through her window. In the night, her uncle had covered her with a blanket, rough to the touch but warm all the same.

Turning over, she shut the blinds with a hand, hoping to fall back to sleep. After ten minutes she found that she couldn't, so she got up, changed out of the clothes she had worn yesterday, and brushed her teeth in the bathroom next door. After that, she had no choice but to go downstairs.

On the first floor, everything was silent. The sun streamed into the kitchen, a sparsely-decorated room but clearly well used. Through the window above the sink, Amelia could see her uncle watering plants in the garden.

After a minute, she found a mug and filled it with coffee already made in the pot. On the counter lay a fresh baguette; with a little difficulty, she cut herself a slice and placed it on a plate.

She couldn't bear to sit inside when she could be outside in the sun and the warmth. In the backyard, there was a bench placed against the house; she sat there and, resting the mug of coffee on her knee, she took a bite of bread—the middle was perfectly soft, the crust hard. She sighed happily and looked out over the garden.

"Did you sleep well?" her uncle asked suddenly. No longer watering the plants, he had approached her and was awaiting her reply. He didn't seem quite as unfriendly as the day before.

"Yes, of course," she responded. "Sorry—I fell asleep before dinner."

"*C'est pas grave.*" He waved away her apology. "It is fine."

There was a pause. She began to think they were too different, so different that they didn't know how to talk to each other.

"You can relax this weekend," he said eventually. "But this week, we must go to the market."

She didn't respond except to nod and watch as he returned to his plants; she was beginning to think it was easier if she simply did not reply. Her uncle watered his vegetables, and she drank her coffee, enveloped in the silence of the garden.

* * *

During the first week, Amelia became less tired; her body finally began to realize that it was in another country, a place quite different from the one she had left behind. In the south of France, it was warm for the season, the food was more natural, the wine was better than she had ever tasted. Little by little, she became more comfortable with her life overseas; she thought that she had almost adapted too quickly but, in some ways, life was not so different. Small towns she knew; she knew their silence, their peace.

Like home, she read a lot. She couldn't search for a job here, so that weight, at least, was lifted from her shoulders. For the first time in a long time, she allowed herself to relax.

Often, she sat on the bench in the backyard and read a book while her uncle worked in the garden or read the paper. Sometimes, she thought she saw a smile on her uncle's face.

The Monday after her arrival, her uncle interrupted her as she took a mug from the cabinet for her usual coffee.

"This morning," he said, "we're going to the market. You should come. It's a good experience."

She didn't think she had a choice. After a week, the small house had become almost boring. She took walks around the village when she wasn't reading, but she didn't know more than the village and its surroundings.

So they drove twenty minutes in the rickety old car along the bumpy village roads until they arrived at the market. The square was packed with people; several greeted her uncle with a *Bonjour*, looking at Amelia with curiosity. Her uncle, lingering at the stalls, spoke with the farmers about the particularly warm autumn and the plants in his garden. He bought the things they didn't have at the house—apples, eggs, flour and meat. Amelia watched their animated exchanges with interest.

On their way back to the house, her uncle took a detour around the countryside. "It's very beautiful here," he said. "Maybe as beautiful as your home."

"More beautiful," she replied with a nod, watching the countryside that passed beyond her window. "The hills are bigger than I imagined. And the sky is bluer."

"Really?" Her uncle's brow furrowed. "I don't really remember the sky at your home—well, my home, in another time."

Here the conversation stopped. The rest of the trip was silent, but not in an entirely uncomfortable way. There was the ghost of a smile on her uncle's face. Amelia braced herself for the bumps in the road and watched the landscape passing by, the sky so blue.

* * *

After the first visit to the market, Amelia felt full of a new energy. Suddenly, the small house was not enough; she couldn't seem to stop the energy vibrating beneath her skin.

The journeys she took into books no longer enchanted her; she was beginning to think that she now lived in a real fairy tale, her own story. The walks she often took became longer. She took small paths far from the road, paths in the woods where the silence became comfortable. She always came back to the house before sunset, tired and hungry, and her uncle would smile softly and make her dinner.

"It's good that you are happy here," he said one morning in the garden, as he read the paper and she sat on the bench.

“Really?” she asked, taking a sip of coffee.

“If I had been happy in America, I wouldn’t have come here, you know.”

Amelia didn’t respond, but her thoughts wandered. If her mother had never pushed her to come to France, well... she would never know, now.

“It was my mother,” she said after a moment. Her uncle set down his paper and made for the garden, but he stopped when she added, “I have to thank my mother.”

“There’s a phone booth a little ways down the road,” her uncle said, “next to the café. You could call her.”

With a nod, Amelia decided that, yes, she should call her mother—after her coffee, of course.

That afternoon, she shut herself in the small telephone booth, coins in hand. She picked up the phone, slid the coins into the slot, and dialed the number of her home across the Atlantic.

It was a few anticipatory seconds before her mother picked up. “Amelia!” she exclaimed. “What a surprise! How are you?”

“I’m great.” Amelia couldn’t stop the wide grin from spreading across her face. “And you?”

It was like opening floodgates; they talked endlessly, using almost all their remaining minutes. With thirty seconds left, all Amelia knew was that she didn’t want to hang up, already missing the old, easy conversations with her mother.

“When do you think you’ll want to come back to the States?” her mother asked in those last few seconds.

“I don’t know,” Amelia replied. “Well—I don’t have the time to think about it right now. Whenever I want, I guess.”

“Okay.” Her mother let out a soft sigh. “Have fun, darling.”

Their time was up. Amelia mirrored her mother’s sigh as she stepped out of the telephone booth, but her smile lingered.

* * *

After a second visit to the market, her uncle said that he had a surprise for her. She was almost confused; it wasn’t in his nature to plan surprises. There was a small smile on his face as they returned to the car.

“Now,” he said, “we’re going elsewhere.”

She didn't ask where, knowing her question would go unanswered; she just slid into the passenger seat and braced herself as the car lurched out of the lot. Her uncle didn't drive far, pulling up in front of a small store whose sign Amelia could not read. When she finally stepped out of the car, she saw it: *L'Esperluette*. The Ampersand.

"It's a bookstore!" her uncle exclaimed, seeming proud of himself. "*C'est bien*, no? I know that you have read all the books you brought with you."

She hadn't thought he had noticed, and her heart warmed at the thought. With enthusiasm, she followed her uncle into the store, which was small and dark but full of books in all shapes and sizes, spread everywhere on every available surface. It smelled like old pages, a scent she had always liked.

"*Bonjour!*" said the shopkeeper. "Are you looking for something specific today?"

"English books," her uncle said, "for my niece."

Amelia gave an awkward wave; the shopkeeper smiled, nodded, and guided them to a corner of the store where there was a small shelf reserved for books written in English.

"*Voilà,*" she said, and left them.

"There," her uncle added. "Now you can look for whatever books you want. I'll be looking around."

And then he, too, left her. Inching closer to the shelf, she scanned the titles of the books—unfortunately, the selection was minimal, mostly classics that she had already read numerous times. She chose a few novels at random, tracing her fingers over the covers. But, in the end, none seemed very interesting.

Her uncle was occupied in the French history section. Amelia browsed through the other sections, glancing at the strange titles. When she arrived at the section she thought must be called Regional Literature, judging by her rough interpretation of the sign, a book caught her eye. The cover was a brilliant red, depicting a smiling woman, entitled *Les Chapeaux d'Amélie*.

"*Amélie's Hats*. A French book," her uncle observed, appearing suddenly behind her.

"Yes, I know," she replied. Gesturing to the title, she continued, "That's my name. Amélie. Like Amelia, right?"

Her uncle nodded and picked up the book, reading the title and then turning it over to read the summary. He seemed a little hesitant, perhaps because the book was evidently a long one and written entirely in French.

After a moment he sighed. "This is the book you want?"

She nodded. "This is it. I know it's a French book, but maybe we could read it together."

Finally, he smiled a little. "Yes, I suppose that's a good idea. We could do that."

Amelia watched over the shoulder of her uncle as he bought the book and a few others for himself. The shopkeeper thanked them, and they exited the store into the sunny day. For the rest of the car ride home, Amelia held the book in her hands, elated.

That night after dinner, her uncle made tea for both of them. They sat in the living room lit only by a lamp behind the couch. Amelia blew on her hot tea as her uncle opened the book on his knees, pausing.

"I will probably read slowly," he said after a moment. "I must translate the words in my head, and then..."

"Yes, uncle," Amelia said with a gentle smile. "I know. Take your time."

He took a deep breath and silently read over the first page. Then, he began.



"Peek-a-Boo Deer" by Mary Holtz