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Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society Anthology

From the Founding Editor

It is with a great sense of pride that we present the 18th edition of *Nota Bene*, the literary anthology of Phi Theta Kappa. We delight in the words of these outstanding Phi Theta Kappa members and are honored to showcase their efforts.

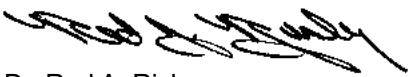
In 1994 we embarked on a bold new venture to publish literary works by Phi Theta Kappa members, promoting the ideal of excellence in writing. Our initial efforts were rewarded with a gratifying response, both from our members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and by the audience who enthusiastically read the printed book. After 18 years we continue to see increased results as the number of manuscripts received escalates.

One of Phi Theta Kappa's oldest traditions is to encourage, promote and reward excellence in writing. We believe the writings contained herein not only showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members, but also affirm the commitment to academic excellence displayed by the community college arena. In more than 1,700 libraries nationwide and abroad, *Nota Bene* carries its banner of literary excellence to an ever-increasing audience. We are also pleased to offer the Citation and Reynolds scholarships to four outstanding *Nota Bene* authors.

Nota Bene takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We are hoping you will take note and be inspired to join us in our scholarly obligation to nourish good writing and exceptional authors.

We thank you for your continued support over the past 18 years. Without our members, chapter advisors, college presidents, librarians and friends, *Nota Bene* would not be possible. As we move forward, we encourage your continued patronage.

Sincerely,



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Founding Editor, *Nota Bene*

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Citation Scholarship

Elizabeth Vasquez

Beta Iota Sigma Chapter
Front Range Community College
Boulder County Campus
Longmont, Colorado

The Rwandan Genocide: A Tragedy Born From Colonialism

The genocide that rocked Rwanda in 1994 will forever leave a gruesome stain on Rwandan history. One hundred years prior to the genocide perpetrated by Hutu against Tutsi, the African country of Rwanda was first colonized (Melvern, 2000). According to Susanne Buckley-Zistel, a Professor at the University of Marburg, Center for Conflict Studies, prior to colonization, the Rwandan people cohabitated peacefully without ethnic identities (Buckley-Zistel, 2009). Buckley-Zistel argues that all modern day ethnic divisions between the groups are a product of European colonial policies (Buckley-Zistel, 2006). Colonization by Germany and Belgium had a dramatic impact on race division between the Hutu and Tutsi people of Rwanda. Early colonial policies in Rwanda, such as history writing, ethnic categorizing and divide-and-rule strategies instituted a psychological disease on the Rwandan people, which would later culminate into a genocide.

The Rwanda-Burundi region was first colonized by Germany prior to World War I. With a total land area of only 26,338 square miles, the Germans encountered one of the smallest countries in Africa, with an incredibly dense population (Kubai, 2007). As World War I came to a close, the area known as Rwanda-Burundi was entrusted to the Country of Belgium in 1916 through an agreement with the League of Nations (Badru, 2010). When Belgian colonizers made initial contact with their newly entrusted colony, they found a society divided into three distinct groups: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, which led them to erroneously assume that the region was already divided into self-evident ethnic categories between the three (Eltringham, 2006). The incorrect and immediate assumptions made by the Belgians would serve as the basis for many future decisions regarding the colonization of Rwanda.

Prior to colonization, the Banyarwanda people, the inhabitants of Rwanda, shared a common language, religion and other collective social organizations, including intermarriage (Gatwa, 2000). For instance, according to Gerard Prunier, a journalist and African scholar, the Banyarwanda people shared the common religious cult of Kubandwa, which offered added cultural cohesion to Banyarwanda society (Prunier, 1995). While Belgian colonizers may have come to hasty assumptions regarding the divisions between the groups, a closer examination

into the pre-colonial social hierarchy in Rwanda will reveal divisions based more akin to a feudal system as opposed to ethnic division.

Prior to colonization, Rwandan society was by all accounts well ordered and relatively peaceful. According to Paul Kagame, the current president of Rwanda, when German and later Belgian colonizers, first came to the region, “they found an organized state with well-established institutions, such as the military, a judicial system, and an elaborate administration that dated from the 15th century” (Kagame, 2002). The elaborate administration Kagame refers to included the king and, under the king, appointed chiefs, which acted in his capacity to help run Rwandan society (Prunier, 1995). The chiefs included the *mutwale wa buttaka*, the chief of landholdings, the *mutwale wa ingabo*, the chief of men, and the *mutwale wa inka*, the chief of pastures (Prunier, 1995). The chiefs were to oversee agricultural society, taxation, military recruiting, and oversee grazing lands for cattle (Prunier, 1995). While the majority of chiefs were Tutsi, Rwandan Hutu were also appointed to chief positions (Prunier, 1995). The inclusion of both Tutsi and Hutu in chief positions was an essential part of peaceful Rwandan society, as it allowed for avenues to voice grievances and to reconcile differences amongst the Rwandan people.

Preceding colonization by the Belgians, separation of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa were separations not based on ethnicity, but instead on class. According to Mahmood Mamdani, author of *When Victims Become Killers*, agricultural and pastoral activities in Rwanda were carried out by Hutu and Tutsi alike (Mamdani, 2001). While the word Hutu means servant and the Tutsi means those rich in cattle, the words were not an identification of ethnicity but more akin to wealth and class, as many Hutu had cattle and many Tutsi were peasants. (Melvern, 2000). In fact, Canon de Lacger, an ethnological researcher on Rwanda, has found that the terms Hutu, Tutsi and Twa never referred to ethnicity but referred to implied social classes of the Rwandan people (Gatwa, 2000). Prior to colonization, it seems the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa of Rwanda lived in relative harmony and were satisfied with the social hierarchy and administration systems that existed. When Belgian colonizers first encountered the intricate administration systems of Rwanda, they were unable to believe that ordinary Africans could have orchestrated such an organized system.

Whether the Belgian government was unable or unwilling to believe native Africans developed the system in place in Rwanda is of no consequence; the Belgians came to their own conclusions as to their origins and embarked on a campaign to write history in a way that best suited their objectives. According to author L.R. Melvern, the Belgian administration felt that since initially there would be no direct administration by the Belgians themselves, the use of an existing Rwandan administration would serve in an agreeable capacity to their objectives in the region (Melvern, 2000). Early Belgian colonizers and missionaries in Rwanda were quite smitten with what they saw as the clear superiority of the Tutsi of Rwanda. Since according to the Belgian colonizers, the Tutsi were the clear leaders of the country, some explanation had to be made as to how the Tutsi were so refined and clearly superior to the Hutu and Twa.

John Hanning Speke, an early English colonial explorer, came to the conclusion that examples of civilized society, as was found in Rwanda, must have been the direct result of settlers who migrated from outside the region (Langford, 2005). In *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Speke developed what he called the “theory of conquest of inferior by superior races” (qtd. in Prunier, 1995: 7). Speke’s early writings and theories on Africa are attributed to what later became known as the Hamitic Hypothesis. The Hamitic Theory argued the Tutsi people were not natives of Rwanda but instead emigrated from Northern Africa, primarily from Ethiopia (Buckley-Zistel, 2006). The Hamitic Hypothesis, which categorized Hutu and Twa as indigenous, and Tutsi as settler, led the Belgian colonizers to anoint the Tutsi the superior leaders of Rwanda and the Hutu and Twa the indigenous peasants (Buckley-Zistel, 2006). According to Buckley-Zistel, categorizing Tutsi as immigrants and conquerors in Rwanda shifted accepted class divisions into separations based on ethnicity and would later have a profound impact on events leading to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (Buckley-Zistel, 2009).

During the time of early colonization in Rwanda, many theories developed to account for the exact origin of the Tutsi people. Count Renaud de Briey, an early Belgian administrator to the Rwandan colony, even speculated the Tutsi may have been the last survivors of the lost continent of Atlantis (Prunier, 1995). However the origins were portrayed, the Tutsi were always presented as superior, and closer in physicality and demeanor to the white man than to the native Africans. According to author Nigel Eltringham, the Tutsi realized the significance

of developing Belgian theories regarding their origins and readily embraced such assumptions (Eltringham, 2006). Once Belgian colonizers had succeeded in reaching their own conclusions for accounting for the origins of the Tutsi leaders in Rwanda, they shifted their attentions to categorizing the people of Rwanda through legal bureaucratic channels.

In the years of 1933 and 1934, the Belgian colony administrators in Rwanda conducted the first official census (Mamdani, 2001). During this time, the entire population of Rwanda was categorized as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa (Melvern, 2000). Classification of each Rwandan was based primarily on physical appearance. Each Rwandan was counted, their height was determined, the length of their nose was measured, eye shape was taken into account, as well as numerous other physical characteristics, such as shape and thickness of lips (Melvern, 2000). Unfortunately, since each group had a history of intermarriage, the exact origins of each particular Rwandan was largely unknown (Melvern, 2000). Tall, thin and wealthier Rwandans were labeled as Tutsi; medium built, heavier Rwandans as Hutu, and the small in stature Rwandans as Twa (Melvern, 2000). Upon completion of the census, each Rwandan was issued an identity card stating their identity in terms as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa (Langford, 2005). Each Rwandan was required to carry the identity card beginning at age 16 and thus began an increased awareness of separate ethnicities between each group (Langford, 2005). According to Mamdani, the official Belgian census taken in Rwanda solidified the impression of Hutu and Twa as native and the Tutsi as foreign settlers in Rwanda (Mamdani, 2001).

It was crucial for Belgian colonizers to successfully secure control over Rwandan society. A primary means for Belgians to assure their authority was to groom the Tutsi elite and place them in key administration positions in Rwanda. During the period of early colonization, the educational system was quite poor and controlled entirely by church missionaries in Rwanda (Prunier, 1995). Since the Tutsi already held leadership positions in society and were well liked by the Belgian administration and the church missionaries alike, priority for educational opportunities was given mainly to Tutsi and sons of Tutsi chiefs (Prunier, 1995). In rare instances where Hutu and Tutsi children were both offered education, Tutsi children were provided with superior instruction taught in French, as a way of preparing them for future administrative positions (Mamdani, 2001). The primary objective of the schools was to produce a Tutsi elite who later serve as experts in agriculture and medicine, as veterinarians and administration leaders in colonialized Rwanda (Melvern, 2000). One such school, the Groupe Scolaire in Astrida, produced 447 students between 1945 and 1954 (Melvern, 2000). Of these 447 students, only 16 students were Hutu (Melvern, 2000).

As the Tutsi elite received education, the Belgian administrators continued with a divide-and-rule policy in Rwanda. An African Civil Service was soon created by the Belgian administration, composed solely of Rwandan Tutsi. Also, Hutu chiefs throughout Rwanda were systematically removed and replaced by newly educated Tutsi chiefs (Mamdani, 2001). For instance, by the end of Belgian colonization in Rwanda, 43 chiefs out of 45 were Tutsi; and of the 559 sub-chiefs in the region, 549 were Rwanda's Tutsi elite (Prunier, 1995). As a consequence, Hutu no longer had access to Hutu chiefs to air grievances and receive fair resolution to their disputes. The ramifications of Belgian policies were substantial. The colonized Hutu of Rwanda had little access to education and economic resources and were almost completely excluded from administrative positions (Buckley-Zistel, 2009).

As Belgian colonial policies of favoritism towards Tutsi continued, feelings of resentment and hatred spread amongst the Hutu majority. According to author Gerard Prunier, the Hutu people were now being dually exploited by their Belgian colonizers, as well as Rwandan Tutsi; and as a consequence, Hutu began to hate all Tutsi, including those who were as economically disadvantaged as they were (Prunier, 1995). Overtime, hostile feelings towards Rwandan Tutsi only intensified amongst Hutu. In 1959, Gregoire Kayibanda, contributor to the Bahutu Manifesto who would later become the first president of Rwanda, stated, "Our movement aims at the Hutu group. It has been offended, humiliated and despised by the Tutsi invader...We are here to return the country to its owners. It is the country of the Bahutus" (qtd. in Buckley-Zistel, 2006). In 1994, 35 years after this statement was made, the movement to oust the Tutsi invader and return the country to Hutu participated in a systematic annihilation of Tutsi in Rwanda.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 lasted a brief 100 days. During the genocide, between 800,000 and 1 million people were brutally slaughtered (Caplan, 2009). On average, there were 333 individual lives taken per hour (Kubai, 2007). Mahmood Mamdani explains the Rwandan genocide as 'native' vs. 'settler' violence (Mamdani, 2001). As German and later

Belgian colonists in Rwanda required control over the population, they systematically instituted policies that created the 'native' vs. 'settler' mindset amongst the Hutu population. Employing a combination of history writing, ethnic categorizing and divide-and-rule strategies left the Hutu majority feeling psychologically inferior and vengeful. As a consequence of Belgian colonial policies in the region, vengeful feelings stemming from decades of Hutu notions of inferiority erupted in the most horrifying capacity imaginable in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

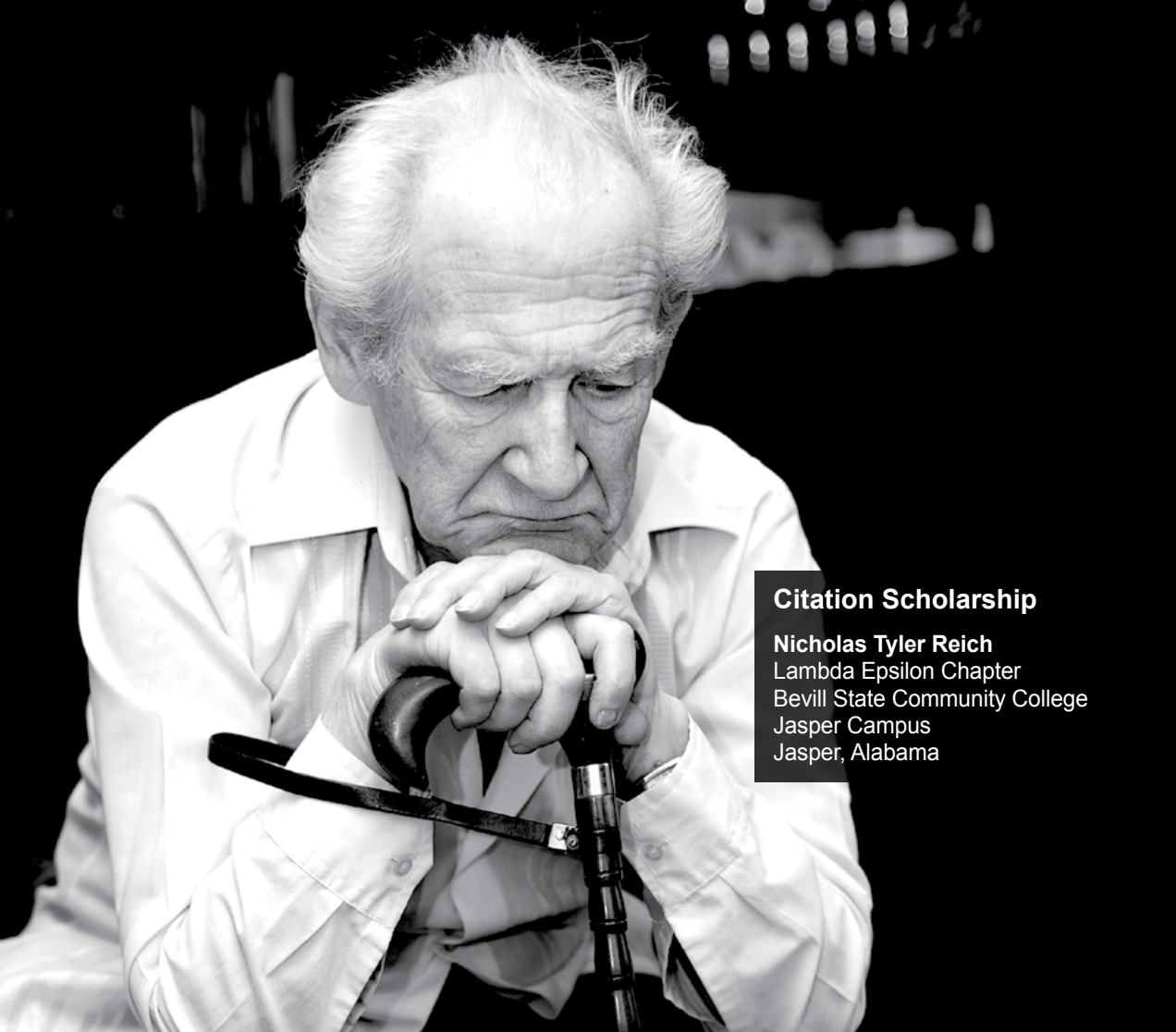
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Citation Scholarship

Nicholas Tyler Reich
Lambda Epsilon Chapter
Bevill State Community College
Jasper Campus
Jasper, Alabama

Editor's note: Nicholas is being honored with the Citation Scholarship for the body of work. This is the first time such an honor has been given for a body of work.

Bad News

When I was a little boy,
I watched an old man pick up a newspaper,
taking the time to steady himself on the mailbox
and plant his cane firmly in the ground
before attempting the arduous task of reaching
down.

I remember being overcome with sadness
at the sight of his thin, weak, trembling hands,
the way he groaned on the descent,
the cracking of bones in his back
and the leaves swirling around his face —
blown up by a passing car
oblivious to his struggle.

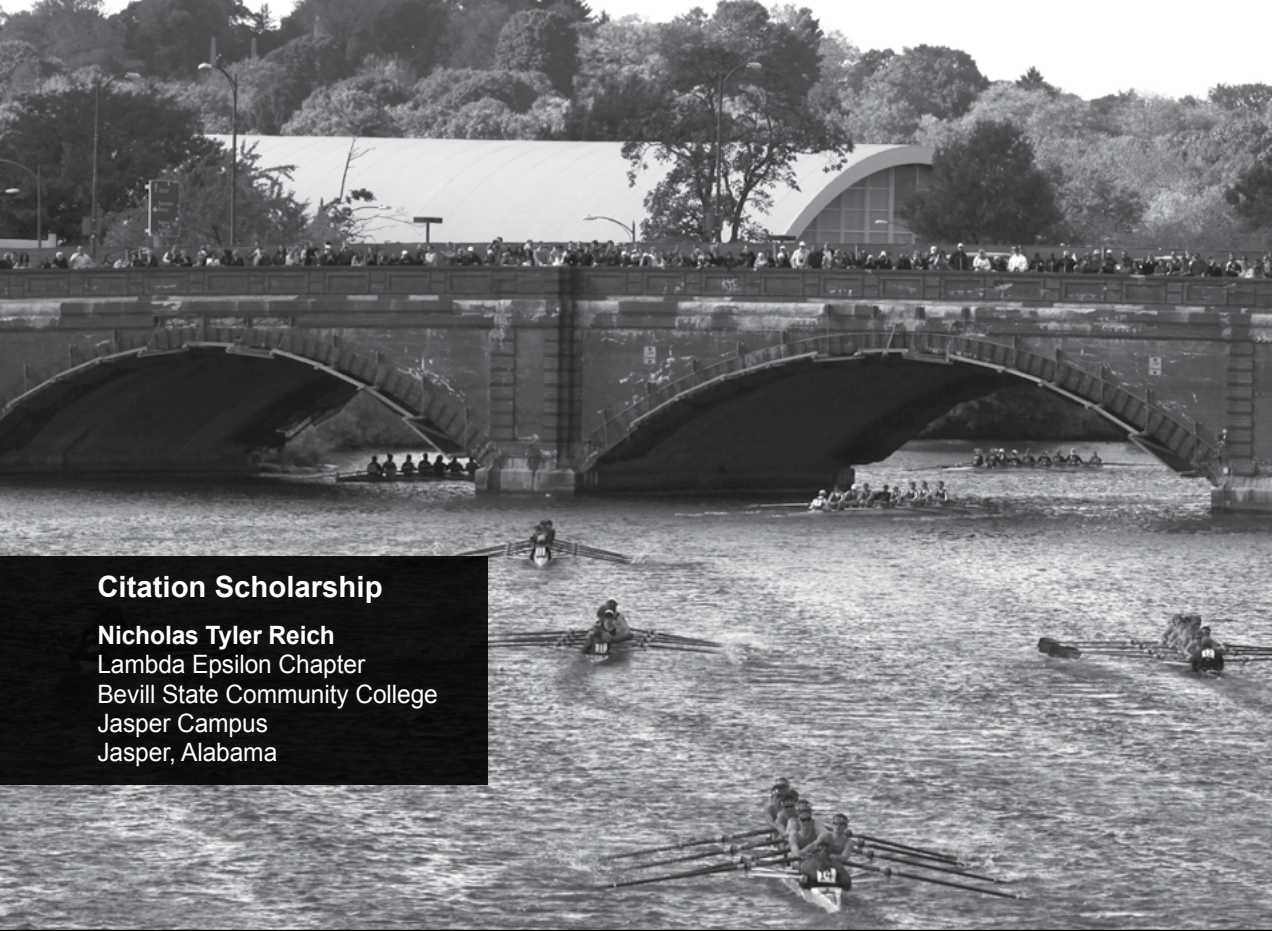
Now, having grown older, I watch another old man
bending down in the same way to pick up a paper,
and I am overcome with a different sadness.

Not for the way his sighs are silent,
blown, without resistance, away by the wind
or the shape of his spine
or his purple, translucent skin;

just his will to read the paper at all,
to allow a new wave of bad news
tear and gnaw at the many scars
left from the bad news of his generation.

Why can't he seek a life of solitude,
far back in a hazy forest,
raising a modest family of goats
and fishing in a clear, musical stream?

Why can't he cover his eyes
and hum away the sweeping sorrows
that threaten to strip him of moisture
and turn him into dust?



Citation Scholarship

Nicholas Tyler Reich
Lambda Epsilon Chapter
Bevill State Community College
Jasper Campus
Jasper, Alabama

Boston

When I went across Anderson Bridge today,
I realized it was not the light breeze,
the smoldering June sun or my tired feet
that made me want to slow down
and lean against the thick stone side.

It was the murky waters of Charles River,
where the goslings, swooned over by many passers-by,
swam fiercely after the tail feathers of their goose,
afraid of being left alone with all of the ghosts.

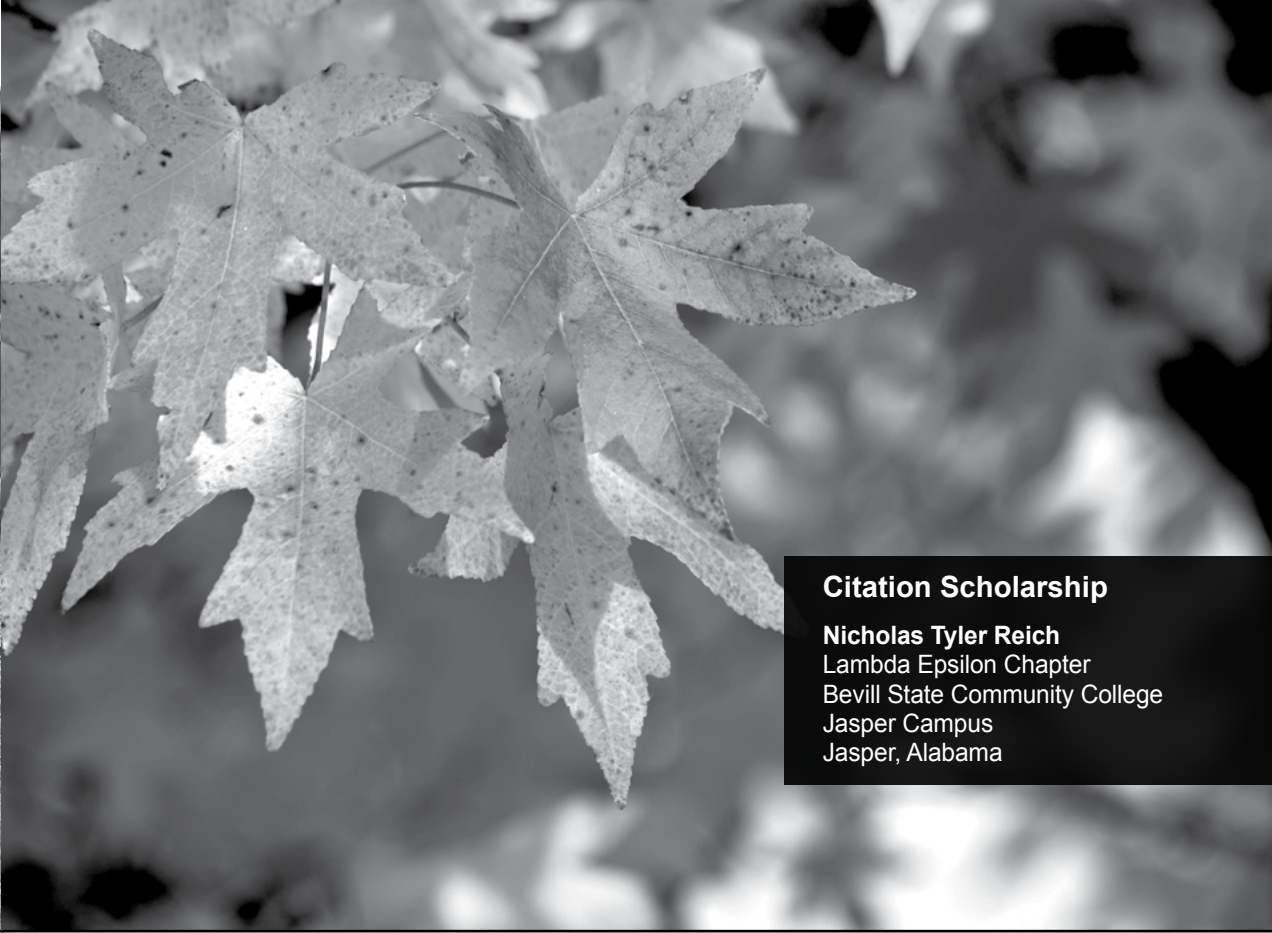
The pale, thin ghost of Quentin Compson,
pacing along the cold, clouded bottoms
with the shoe-maker's weights still in pocket,
a burning lung full of water
and the sweet smell of honeysuckle
still tingling his nose.

The portly, possibly bearded, ghost of Paul Revere,
bearing the weight of an important message
while he rowed a small wooden boat
toward sleeping friends and compatriots,
the wind casting him and his frantic screams
back into the center.

Apparitions of Franklin, Alcott, Thoreau
and the proud, stately figure of John Hancock,
sitting on a bench by the shore,
waving a feathered quill around in the air,
tracing his signature on the sky.

Not to mention the thousands of others,
stone-masons and railroad workers,
day and night laborers,
floating near the children who were learning
to sail.

It was the wrinkled, transparent hands of history,
reaching up at me, fingers curled and stubbed,
desperate for someone to speak with,
someone to share the days' changes with,
a break from the solitude of death
and immortality of ink on a page,
that made me want to drift down
and join them in the brown and oily water.



Citation Scholarship

Nicholas Tyler Reich

Lambda Epsilon Chapter

Bevill State Community College

Jasper Campus

Jasper, Alabama

Getting Older

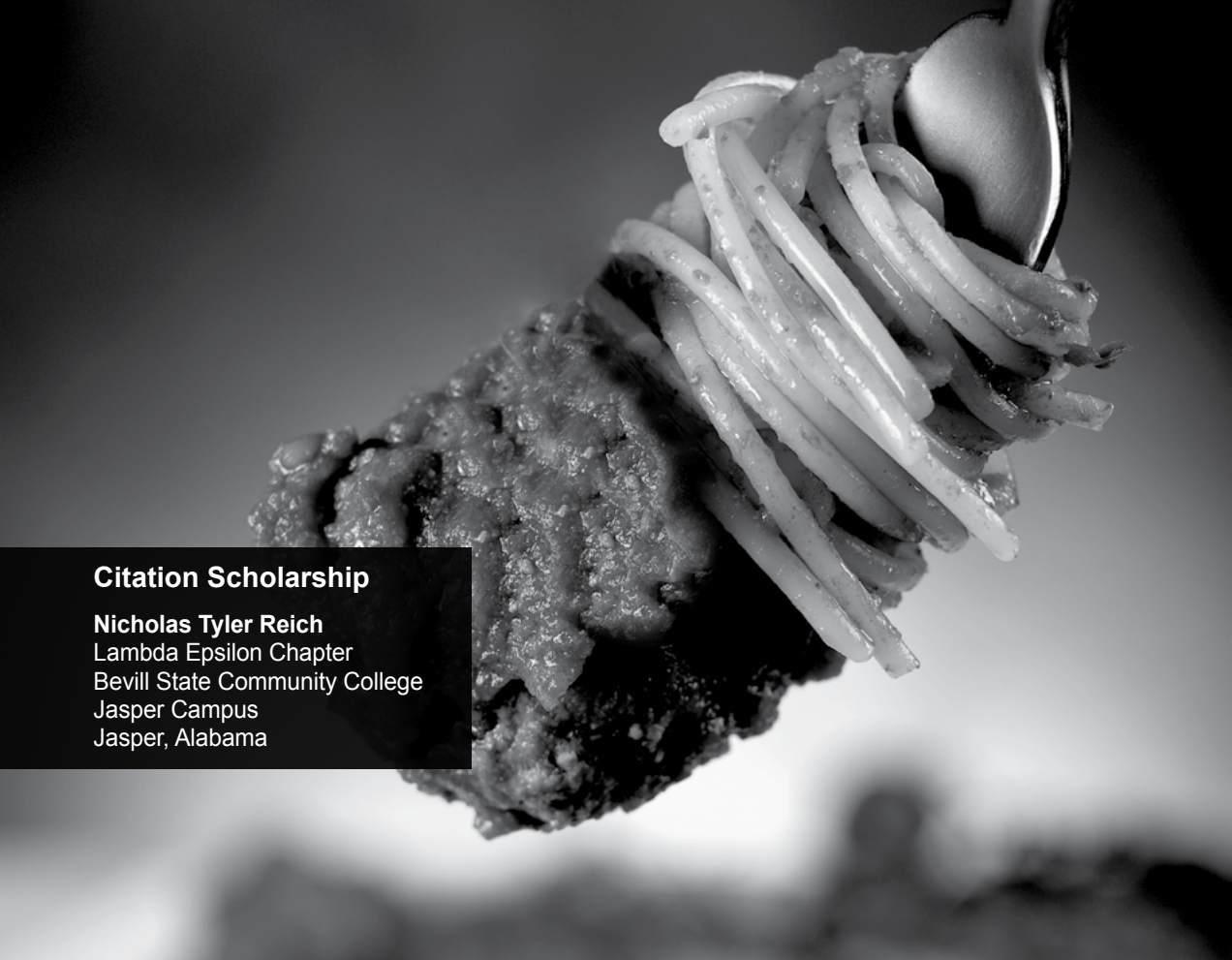
A tree's shaggy head of leaves,
plump from a recent rain storm,
shook and rattled with vigor
as a large procession of squirrels
jumped limb to limb.

Seemingly playing a game,
taunting one another with wild acrobatics,
one would make a daring leap
and look back to challenge the others —
follow me if you think you can.

I bet if one ball of fur fell,
even at the height of competitive ecstasy,
another would be quick to catch him,
tug him up by the bushy tail
while chirping some harsh criticism.

An interesting thing happened, though,
in the midst of their frolic.

A leaf, tinted slightly yellow,
unhooked itself from a twig
and all the squirrels stopped
to watch it tumble,
a symbol of time passing,
a beacon for the winter coming,
warning them all to stop their silliness
and start collecting acorns.



Citation Scholarship

Nicholas Tyler Reich

Lambda Epsilon Chapter
Bevill State Community College
Jasper Campus
Jasper, Alabama

The Table

I have never worried about the strength
of my kitchen table until now,
during this spaghetti dinner,
when it seems the slender oak legs
may collapse under the weight of it all:

endless fruit bowls and flower arrangements,
like the bunch of honeysuckle and clover
I prepared in a small glass for my mother
(leaving a trail of water from the sink),
each petal plump with affection,
on some Mother's Day from my childhood.

being hung on countless museum walls
as the object holding up a still life,
the boar's skull, the overflowing cornucopia,
a knife jammed in its surface
next to a bloody fish head.

absorbing a multitude of light tears from a child
struggling to finish a bowl of hot cereal
while he watches friends play in the snow,
or the few ten ton tears of a poet
touched by the contrast of strawberries
against a white plate

resting on the table's scarred surface.

And now it must bear a large pot of spaghetti,
prepared special by the hands of my grandmother,
for she has lived, like the table,
long enough to understand the spice measurements
and how many onions to chop
(making invisible cuts on the table's top).

But, I suppose, the table was built for this,
to hold up our lives on oak legs,
never giving voice to its strain,
to be sturdy and full of purpose
while we move around like wisps of smoke.



Citation Scholarship

Nicholas Tyler Reich

Lambda Epsilon Chapter
Bevill State Community College
Jasper Campus
Jasper, Alabama

Things Change

I am sure, at one time,
there were trees here
where my house sits,
and I would be displaced
by the leader stag.

Where I swing at night —
on my front porch —
is where the herd
would stop to drink
at a small mossy pool
filled with tiny tadpoles
and lined with odorous toadstools
deep in a quiet forest.
The cardinal would sing
at the deer's return

about the same time
I wake in the morning
to watch the fog roll
over my freshly cut yard.

And the sun would rise
not on my pale face,
the cars in the drive,
the smelly dog house,
or the potted fern,
but on a small brown rabbit
bending toward an onion,
intently watching for the hawk.



Reynolds Scholarship

Heather Herbert
Chi Xi Chapter
Darton State College
Albany, Georgia

The Place of Women in Society, from the Romantic Period to the Victorian Age

If the Romantic Period ushered in revolution in the form of the dawn of industrialism, urbanism, and huge societal change, the Victorian Age saw the pace of change move from that of a horse-drawn carriage to the speed of a transatlantic telegraph, traversing the oceans in less time than it took previously to span a farmer's field. This enormous technological shift, moving the population inexorably from agrarian to industrial, from pastoral to urban, led to inevitable social transformation. A new order, advanced by science and comprised of man working with machine, led to alterations in all facets of society, impacting every aspect from the daily conditions of life to reorganizations of social structure and stricture. Despite the initial conservative influence following the turbulence of the French Revolution, it seems inescapable that society's views of women should begin to change, at times prompted by women themselves who sought a new equality within the emerging social order (Johnston).

In assessing the status and position of women of the two eras, it is possible that the most compelling accounts may be gained directly from the words of women writers of the time. These authors, who gained the forum of publication despite their sex, would have likely formed the literary and societal outliers of their ages, imploring and agitating in turn towards the improvements of the lot of the female within society. Two such authors, Mary Wollstonecraft, writer of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* from the Romantic Period, and Mona Caird, writer of *Marriage* from the Victorian Age, both held the cause of female equality, education and opportunity dear to their hearts. In comparing the two works, it is possible to ascertain the progress, or lack thereof, made towards women's equality in the century between the pieces.

Both Wollstonecraft's and Caird's essays emphasize the absolute necessity of educational reform for the women of the ages. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft advocates for a comprehensive reform in the sphere of education for females, stating that the current state of education is to blame for the intellectual inferiority of women; she describes "a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who,

considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers" (171). Bemoaning the state of women further, Wollstonecraft likens to hothouse flowers those who have suffered the lack of rigorous intellectual stimulation, observing that "planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty" (171). The effects of this neglect served to create a breed of woman who seeks only to establish herself through matrimonial jointure rather than through individual accomplishment; and in doing so, she further limits herself within societal strictures, "making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act: — they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures. — Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio!" (Wollstonecraft 173).

Wollstonecraft's recommendation to counteract this creation of simpering, delicate, limited women is to encourage the institution of education that "is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent" (176). Wollstonecraft draws particular attention to the need to develop the mind in an orderly fashion, with emphasis on "serious scientific study" (177), designed, no doubt, to engender a precision of thought and observation heretofore undeveloped in women's common education. In such a manner, Wollstonecraft desires to encourage women to achieve a form of education that would be "best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart" (176). It seems entirely reasonable that in offering women the opportunities of education and exposure to rigorous scientific thought, that they would benefit greatly from increased powers of deduction and logic. Furthermore, to encourage women to attain a level of physical robustness might encourage them to engage in the pursuits of the natural world, something considered by most to be healthy for mind and body.

One hundred years later, Mona Caird expressed similar sentiments regarding the improvement of educational prospects for women, stating that to reform the scholastic mechanisms of society would be to bring about a "general rise in health, physical and moral...We should have to deal with healthier, better equipped, more reasonable men and women, possessing well-developed minds, and hearts kindly disposed towards their fellow creatures" (1603-1604). Yet, while the objectives of the two authors remained comparable, it is possible to discern the improvement women had enjoyed in the intervening century, as Caird, rather than simply agitating for any educational availability, places emphasis upon the importance of co-educational pursuits designed to allow the sexes to interact in a more natural fashion. Caird states:

When girls and boys are educated together, when the unwholesome atmosphere of social life becomes fresher and nobler, when the pressure of existence slackens (as it will and must do), and when the whole nature has thus a chance to expand, such additions to the scope and interest of life will cease to be thought marvelous or 'unnatural' (1603).

Caird further asserts that this mingling of the sexes during the educational process is critical to the development of both the masculine and feminine minds and that "No man has a right to consider himself educated until he has been under the influence of cultivated women, and the same may be said of women as regards men" (1604).

Indeed the precepts set forth by Caird form the crux of the mechanism by which she wishes to encourage the formation of suitable marriages between men and women: unions based upon intellectual companionship and understanding of self and spouse, rather than the declared "vexatious failure" (Richardson 179) created by the unhealthy machinations of society that led to a state of quasi-prostitution that "equated to 'united degeneration' in its most positive aspect and 'the degradation of womanhood' in its most negative" (Brackett 58). Caird appears to believe that knowledge and understanding will lead to the elevation of marriage beyond the mere trade of stature and name for blind adoration as expressed by Brackett and Richardson. Caird posits that mutual insights between the sexes gained during the educational process will offer the "opportunity for forming reasonable judgments of character, for making friendships irrespective of sex, and for giving and receiving that inspiring influence, which apparently can only be given by one sex to the other" (1603). In this, Wollstonecraft is in agreement, emphasizing the needs for women to advance beyond the superficial requirements to be decorative, facile and delicate, when they instead "ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by

their abilities and virtues exact respect" (171).

A further point of agreement between Wollstonecraft and Caird is found within their opinions on the legal status for women during both the Romantic Period and the Victorian Age, to wit, that women had very little legal protection or opportunity to further their own aims economically if they chose not to barter the constraints of matrimony for fiscal sanctuary. Wollstonecraft paints a particularly bleak outlook of the spinster's lot:

Girls who have been thus weakly educated, are often cruelly left by their parents without any provision; and of course, are dependent on, not only reason, but the bounty of their brothers. These brothers are, to view the fairest side of the question, good sort of men, and give as a favor, what children of the same parents had an equal right to. In this equivocal humiliating situation, a docile female may remain some time, with a tolerable degree of comfort. But, when the brother marries, a probable circumstance, from being considered as the mistress of the family, she is viewed with averted looks as an intruder, an unnecessary burden on the benevolence of the master of the house, and his new partner (193).

In such a manner, a woman could find herself bereft of filial benevolence, without recourse or maintenance. Without other alternatives it could be understood why the acceptance of an unsuitable marital prospect might rate more highly than genteel starvation. Caird, conscious of the persistence of this issue in her era, states, "The economical independence of woman is the first condition of free marriage. She ought not to be tempted to marry, or to remain married, for the sake of bread and butter" (1602). However, without education comparable to that of her masculine counterpart, how could a woman hope to find the wherewithal by which to support herself?

While the outlook remained bleak for the feminine sex during the Victorian Age, progress had been made; where Wollstonecraft agitated for any systemic form of education for women, Caird demanded co-educational opportunities to mimic those in practice in America (1603). Wollstonecraft pontificated upon the need for women to behave as partners, with their own virtues and strengths upon which to call as wives and mothers. Caird, reflecting a boldness Wollstonecraft might have found insupportable, went further to suggest that:

The ideal marriage then, despite all dangers and difficulties, should be free. So long as love and trust and friendship remain, no bonds are necessary to bind two people together; life apart will be empty and colourless; but whenever these cease, the tie becomes false and iniquitous, and no one ought to have power to enforce it (1602).

In these attitudes, we are able to see the conceptual growth of women from that of mere decorative chattel to persons with their own innate needs, abilities and rights. Of further interest is the contrast between the tenor of Wollstonecraft's and Caird's arguments for education, independence and legal status. While Wollstonecraft advocates for rights which would, today, be considered very basic in many western aspects of the world, she does so stridently, responding to a statement that obedience should be impressed upon women with "unrelenting vigor" by saying, "What nonsense! When will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes, which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject!" (Wollstonecraft 179). She continues to cast derision at a poet, who inferred that women were no more able to chart their own course than the stars by saying, "The poet then should have dropped his sneer when he says 'If weak women go astray/The stars are more in fault than they' " (187). In these, and countless other ways, Wollstonecraft trumpets her views unrelentingly and vociferously. In contrast, though Caird's arguments are far more radical, espousing as they do co-educational reform and free marriage outside of the constraints of law or society, she finishes in a hopeful vein as if she feels her vision of the future will come to pass:

Far-seeing we ought to be, but we know in our hearts right well that fear will never lead us to the height of our ever-growing possibility. Evolution has ceased to be a power driving us like dead leaves on a gale; thanks to science, we are no longer entirely blind, and we aspire to direct that mighty force for the good of humanity. We see limitless field of possibility opening out before us; the

adventurous spirit in us might leap up at the wonderful romance of life!...We shall begin, slowly but surely, to see the folly of permitting the forces of one sex to pull against and neutralize the workings of the other, to the confusion of our efforts and the checking of our progress...we look forward steadily, hoping and working for the day when men and women shall be comrades and fellow-workers as well as lovers and husbands and wives (Caird 1604-1605).

For Wollstonecraft, the eventuality of equality was a long-distant dream; for Caird, perhaps equality fell nearly within her grasp, and as such she was able to perceive hope for the future.

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Reynolds Scholarship

Danielle Tate-Maccaroni
Alpha Rho Upsilon Chapter
Blue Ridge Community College
Flat Rock, North Carolina

Of Pagans and Puritans: the Nuances of Anne Bradstreet

The first American poet of consequence, Anne Bradstreet is often esteemed for her Puritan virtue and piety. Although these characteristics are initially evident in her works, a closer and more thoughtful reading reveals depths of conflict with Puritan theology, concerns over preordination, and above all an utter lack of enthusiasm, the sense of divine inspiration; “her pious poems often betrayed more struggle than resignation” (Fisher 11). This ambivalent and detached tone and absence of divine ecstasy can be clearly seen in Bradstreet’s poem “Before the Birth of One of Her Children,” which confirms her continued “doubts about salvation and eternal life” (Martin 21). In this poem, while covering grave subject matter, which many would presume to be closely intertwined with theology and faith, Bradstreet makes very little mention of the role of the Divine in death and eternal life. More specifically, God is portrayed as somewhat impotent, deferring to the more dominant forces of nature, and seems mentioned only as an afterthought, impetuously added to mitigate the near-pagan atmosphere created through the poet’s pragmatic tone and nature-centered diction. As Wendy Martin notes, Bradstreet’s “secular concerns take precedence over spiritual ends,” which is evidenced in both the poet’s structure of verse and abundance of passive language in regards to God (Martin 33).

In “Before the Birth of One of Her Children” Bradstreet voices what Avery Fisher maintains is her “wish for eternal life” (Fisher 13). However, this “wish” is secondary in importance to the overriding tone of the work, which is one of conflict between self-determinism and the inevitability of a death beyond her control. Bradstreet seems distraught by the uncontrollable forces in her life and her fruitless attempts to have any sway over them. Yet her god, for all his omnipotence, seems to play only a cursory role in these considerations.

As the poem opens, Bradstreet lays out “this fading world” as she sees it, brimming with “adversity” and ending for each of us, without impunity, by “death’s parting blow” (1-4). It is important to note the lack of a deity in this synoptic worldview. Bradstreet instead laments the sorrows wrought by “adversity” and “death,” almost suggesting them to be free agents operating beyond the scope of God. Bradstreet goes on to lament the “irrevocable” and “inevitable” nature of death, again with omission of God (5-6). More conservatively, one may assume she speaks only of mortality, however, it is no great leap to expand this “common thing” to include God and his role in death, as surely Bradstreet must have believed he exercised some authority over human demise.

After she has outlined her parameters of existence, Bradstreet begins to prematurely mourn her own passing, cautioning her husband Simon that they know not “how soon, my Dear, death may my steps attend” (7). She states that the possibility of her untimely death may be her “lot,”

again suggesting possibly random chance, possessing inevitability but lacking divinity (8). More passive language is seen a few lines later, as Bradstreet marks the time of her death as the point at which the “knot’s untied that made us one” (11). Again the poet ties no perpetrator to the action; the knot is simply “untied.” If Bradstreet feels that God plays any role in her death, she does not feel compelled to make that connection in verse, possibly diminishing further the role of the Divine in her final undoing.

Tucked quietly and unassumingly mid-stanza one finds a dangerous juxtaposition between nature and God. Bradstreet reasons that “if I see not half my days that’s due,/What nature would, God grant to yours and you,” possibly meaning that God “grants” and acts according to “what nature would” dictate (13-14). This line of course gives preeminence to nature and natural laws and places the Divine in a reactionary role as he exercises control only under the dominion of the higher laws of nature. This subservience is insinuated in the placement of “nature” before “God” in the line, yet Bradstreet did soften this blow by keeping “nature” lowercase.

The poet then beseeches her husband to remember her kindly for “worth and virtue” and forgive her faults as she is “interred in [her] oblivious grave” (16-17). Here one gets a sense of Bradstreet’s perspective of death as unawareness. She seems not to subscribe to the notion of everlasting life in God’s presence but instead implies death to be an empty, anesthetized void. Bradstreet goes on to exhort Simon to watch over their children. Bradstreet’s “concerns are not of her spiritual fate, but for the well being of her children as well as the continued devotion of Simon Bradstreet. Clearly her passion for her husband and her love for her children supersede her considerations of eternal life” (Martin 33). This is the case not because Bradstreet has abandoned God in any traditional sense or lost her faith but because she sees little value in anything beyond her existence and takes no solace in eternal life with a god she has no real passion for nor who stirs any enthusiasm within her. As the poem closes, Bradstreet again defers to “chance” to “bring this verse” to her husband, reasoning that God, who has been so ineffectual throughout the poem, shall remain so in regards to her last wishes (25). The poet implores her husband “for thy love’s dear sake” to honor her memory and comply with her final requests to care for their children (27). Here she seems to take it upon herself to ensure that her children are well cared for in her absence, as she possibly assumes the God has neither the power nor inclination to guarantee their well being. The final line of the poem reaffirms her pragmatic and natural, almost pagan spirit as she “with salty tears this last farewell [does] take” (28). And so Bradstreet intends to leave this world not aglow in the Glory of God but awash in her own corporeal humanity, upon which she places the utmost importance.


Anne Bradstreet may be seen then as something of a spiritual pragmatist on the verge of paganism as she holds the forces of nature in high regard and greatly esteems her mortal existence. Her ambiguous diction has helped preserve her pious image and, although she was often seen as “an exemplar of Puritan piety” (Fisher 11), some have argued that Bradstreet’s “spiritual reflections remain at the level of obligatory exercises rather than passionate expressions of regeneration” (Martin 36). This can easily be said of her minute reference to the Divine in “Before the Birth of One of Her Children.” In verse, Bradstreet’s detached handling of her religion mirrors her pragmatic and distanced relationship with God, and her categorization as Puritan poet belies the true nature of her faith. For one to truly understand her highly nuance concepts of faith and religious obligation and to distinguish between the two, one must read carefully and without contextual bias. It is imperative that her work is examined not out of but beyond the context of Puritanism, for that is surely where Bradstreet’s spirit itself resides.

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Samantha Hulatt
Psi Upsilon Chapter
Tidewater Community College
Virginia Beach Campus
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Editor's Note: The author is writing from the perspective of the time in which the story is set and means no offense with the language used.

A Spectacular Growing Season

The hydrangea bush was crying. Its soft sobs echoed off the surrounding trees as its multi-colored heads swayed and shook with a sorrow quite out of place in such a manicured and pastoral setting as a flower garden. My garden had been featured in *The Georgia Gardener* since 1959. With divine providence, Griffin Farms would make the cover this year. I did not need two 8-year-olds traipsing through my flowers. The heels of my pumps sunk in the dark earth as I weaved through various plants to reach the pastel hues of the hydrangea.

The bush was easily twice as wide as I am tall and almost as deep since it had grown in the same spot for five generations of Griffins. My Nana used to say the spot was perfect for the dense mophead; not too sunny under the white oak, and good loam mixed with sand from the nearby riverbank. I remembered summers lugging water with my mother and brothers to save Nana's garden from various heat waves. While the other plants had wilted to the ground, the hydrangea had handled the heat with all the grace of a true Southern lady.

I bent over and peered past the bright green leaves and the pink and blue flowers to see my daughter's tear-filled eyes. In Caroline's despair, her eyes almost matched the blue blooms as her pale face stood out from the shadows despite its speckling of dirt. In contrast, Ester's dark skin could have blended into the deep shade, except for the pink dress and shoes she favored. I noticed with a mother's dismay that the colored girl's frilly white socks were streaked with dirt. I had a passing relief that the child's clothes weren't my responsibility. I cleared my throat in an effort to break through the girls' weeping. "Caroline, Ester's family is waiting on her. You girls come on out of there now."

My proclamation was met with renewed bawling as the children clutched each other tighter. I sighed back my impatience and tried to hold my temper. I reached into the bush and tapped Caroline on the nose, "Stop that noise right now, young lady. What would your grandmother say about you hiding in her flowers and carrying on so?"

Caroline glared up at me. "I don't care, Mama. I don't want her to go! I'll never see her again!" My daughter's wails got louder as she closed her eyes and collapsed against Ester, sobbing into the other girl's hair. The colored girl held her friend close in abject misery. Ester's stoicism somehow tore at my heart worse than my daughter's prostrations.

I sighed again. "Caroline, you're going to ruin poor Ester's outfit. She's supposed to look pretty for her trip." I held out my hands to each of them "Come on now," I pleaded softly. "You both need to get cleaned up." I heard someone walking up the gravel path. I stood up, dropped my hands and turned to see Ester's father approaching.

Elijah was lanky and tall and looked a bit out of place in his Sunday finery, since I had only ever seen him in mechanic's overall covered in grime and grease from the engines he fixed. His eyes carefully avoided mine as he walked over to stand a couple of feet away from me next to the bush. Then he knelt in the dirt, unmindful of his clothes and held out his arms. "Come on young'ens, you ain't gonna grow no roots so you might as well come on out of there," he said, keeping his deep voice soft. His smile widened some. "And your throats have gotta be hurtin' with all that wailin' you've been doin'. Come on out and I'll get y'all sugars some lemonade." Both of the children responded to his cajoling and crawled out to take his hand. I took Caroline's hand from Elijah's and brushed off the worst of the dirt while he did the same for Ester.

Caroline dashed over and flung her arms around the two, almost knocking Elijah off his feet. "I don't want you to go Mr. Elijah," she said, starting to weep anew. "Ester's my friend."

Elijah glanced at me as I tried to get over my shock from Caroline's outburst. He patted her shoulder, awkward about my watching him, and then carefully pulled her away so he could look at her face. Ester nestled into his side as she glanced up at me and quickly looked away as her father spoke to Caroline. "Be mad and sad at the sun for shinin' and the birds a'singin', but being mad won't stop any of it — it has ta be." Elijah took Caroline's hand into his own as though he were holding spun glass. "Sugar-baby, I'd take ya if we could, but your Ma and Pa need you here," he said softly with another glance at me. Then he carefully untangled himself from the foliage and stood up holding Ester tightly in his arms. "You're welcome to come down for some lemonade too, Ma'am."

Elijah's small cottage was further from the river so we walked the shortcut through my family's yard to reach it. My husband had been reluctant to rent to a colored family, but their treatment of the old carriage house had bore up their references. A beat-up brown station wagon was loaded for the Jones's trip to their new house up north. I knew through Caroline that they were moving to Chicago to a colored neighborhood there.

Elijah's wife had set out a small snack to eat before her family started their journey to their new life. Grace's eyes also carefully avoided mine in a dance of humility well learned by most coloreds in the South. She offered the small plate of cookies first, which I declined with tight politeness, citing my dirty hands. Grace smiled slightly and offered me a small damp cloth similar to the one Elijah was using on Ester to scrub off some of the dirt. I thanked her and began to clean Caroline's hands to cover my embarrassment over my daughter's appearance. Ester looked as if the hydrangeas had been her only hiding spot. Caroline seemed to have rolled in half the garden and then some. I had to admit I was going to miss Ester's prim influence over my child, who would rather climb a tree than sit quietly under one.

The mason jars were covered with beads of condensation and filled with pale yellow lemonade. Its tart sweetness belied its humble container. After we had all finished, Grace quietly collected our empty glasses and went back into the house to wash them before stowing them in a small picnic basket. Elijah continued to check over the car and kept the girls busy fetching last minute things from the house. At last there were only a few odds and ends including a few small potted plants carefully packed for the trip.

Suddenly, Ester cried out, "Wait, where's mine?" The girl dashed to the side of the house and tried to pick up a large pot of green leaves. Her father rushed over to steady the armload and then took it from Ester's thin arms. Ester hovered until her father carefully placed the pot close to the front porch. Grace smiled as she helped her daughter check over the plant. Caroline dragged me over to the porch, "Look, Mama. Ester's plant is going to look just like mine, just not as big." Caroline clambered onto the porch and embraced her friend, "The flowers will be all different colors, just like mine. That way we both get our favorite colors plus the pretty one you get when they mix together." I remembered that Caroline had begged for clippings from my hydrangea this spring as an Easter present for Ester. I had given my child the stems content in

the knowledge that such cuttings were difficult to propagate. Somehow, Ester and her family had found a way to make them flourish.

Grace laughed and put an arm around Caroline. "Like I tell ya, Sugar-baby. You're blue, Ester's pink and together ya make one of the prettiest colors I know." The woman stiffened as she caught sight of me and carefully took her arm away from Caroline's shoulders.

Elijah called that he now had made more room in the car for Ester's flowers. Grace and the girls carefully loaded the mini hydrangea into the cleared spot on the floorboard below Ester's seat. Caroline stood on her tiptoes to study the plant and turned around to the Joneses. Tears started to trickle down her cheeks as she gathered Ester and her parents into her arms. I felt like an intruder spying on my daughter and the family she loved so much, finally understanding that Caroline thought of them as kin and that they were as dear to her as her blood relations.

I walked over as quietly as I could. The elder Jones patted and rubbed the backs of our sobbing offspring with tear-stained faces. Grace looked at me and met my eyes with surprise when she saw my tears. Elijah also look confused as he carefully separated the girls and turned Caroline towards me before scooping up Ester. I gently lifted Caroline into my arms, stroked her hair and began humming her favorite song in her ear.

I had once prayed that God would find a way to separate my child from the one shaking with sobs against her father's chest but now was not positive in my regard for the graciousness of divine providence. The family I thought so beneath me and mine did more than tolerate my daughter with hidden disdain as I had so often done unto them. They loved her as one of their own, which made my neglect of Caroline's feelings all the more devastating to me.

I found myself shifting my weeping burden and holding out my hand to Elijah. His weathered face soon forgot its shock as he gripped my hand while his eyes met and held mine. "I count on you to write us once you get settled some," I said, pitching my voice over our offspring's distress. Elijah nodded and smiled tentatively at me. "That I will, Ma'am."

I looked at Grace next and held out my hand. She took it warily, unsure of my dereliction of custom. "The hydrangea came up beautifully. Won't it be too cold in Chicago to transplant it?" I asked solicitously.

Grace's eyes sparked and warmed. "My Grandma has a greenhouse I can winter it in since it can't set roots before the first frost. Hydrangeas grow fast, but not that fast." I found myself smiling deeper since her manner so reminded me of Ester's quiet dignity. Caroline's crying slowly melted into sniffles as she quieted in order to listen to the conversation.

Elijah chuckled. "Please don't get her started talkin' plants, Ma'am," he pleaded with a teasing look at his wife. "She'll get goin' and we'll never get on the road." The tall man shifted Ester to reach in his pocket to fish out his watch. "Oh Gracious, we need ta get."

Caroline started crying softly at his announcement. I cuddled her closer and stepped back so the Jones family could get into their car. Caroline held my neck tightly and buried her face into my neck. I whispered in her ear, "Do you want Ester to remember you all crying and sad and keep your tears in her heart instead of your smile?" My tender-hearted daughter shook her head. "Then dry your eyes, baby. She's watching you." Ester's mother turned in her seat and joined her daughter as they waved at the back window while the car made its way down the dirt road to the highway. We waved back until the car vanished in a cloud of dust and sunshine.



Elizabeth Vasquez
Beta Iota Sigma Chapter
Front Range Community College
Boulder County Campus
Longmont, Colorado

Vietnam

“Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.” - Ho Chi Minh

The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was based less on the supposed threat of communism in the region and more substantially on alternate, less-discussed contributing factors. This essay will endeavor to shed light on the widely spread misconception of America's chief interest of stifling communism surrounding the Vietnam region during the Vietnam War era and America's true interest in Vietnam. Several critically important factors have been minimized through the progression of history. First and foremost, establishing America's version of stability in Vietnam was crucial in creating the U.S. version of a stable world economy.

Second, America's prestige and credibility had been called into question, and the United States had little choice but to see the Vietnam situation resolved in America's desired outcome. Lastly, and quite importantly, this essay will examine whether there was a true threat of communism in Vietnam and whether Ho Chi Minh's vision for Vietnam independence was so substantially different from America's own principles and values of freedom and independence. While quelling the spread of communism in the Vietnam region was the widely publicized reasoning behind America's involvement in the Vietnam War, a more thorough examination of the above factors will more clearly articulate the United States' complex interest in the Vietnam conflict.

In 1954, the Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference on Indochina was finalized. As a participant, the U.S. asserted that they “shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by the democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections,” and that the United States would “refrain from any interference in their internal affairs” (Merrill 417). At this point, the United States was funding 80 percent of France's military costs associated with fighting the nationalistic uprising in Vietnam, which could be seen

as a clear violation of this commitment (Davis 464). After the devastation of World War II, it was imperative for the United States to assist in the rebuilding efforts of weakened nations such as Japan and France. France in particular was partially dependent on revenue and resources generated in the region, and the United States strongly held “a post-World War II ambition to make the world safe for markets, capital investment, and military bases” (Merrill 414). The United States was committed to establishing a stable world economy but was also interested in reshaping it according to American interests (Merrill). Richard Saull, author and lecturer on International Politics, identified the U.S. interests in Vietnam as it “necessitated the dismantling of (political) restrictions on open international exchange, trade and investment” (Saull 53). To allow for such access to emerging Asian markets, it was in the U.S. interest to support the success of the French in Vietnam. Future access to Asian economic markets was indeed an American concern. However, more immediate economic considerations were beginning to loom for the United States.

Another driving force behind the U.S. commitment to a satisfactory resolution in Vietnam was something called the Dollar Gap. After World War II, the United States was the only power that emerged from the war more powerful than when it had entered. The United States was now producing more tangible goods than the world’s markets could purchase, and the European countries “lacked adequate dollars to purchase the U.S. surplus” (Merrill 429). This was a complicated economic situation that not only involved the U.S. and France but also Japan as well as several other European countries. To support the growth of the U.S. economy, America needed to find a way for these struggling countries to purchase U.S. products. “Vietnam was crucial to this process for two reasons. First, it too could provide raw materials and become a source of dollars for the French and could become a market for and offer materials to Japan” (Merrill 429). A French victory in Vietnam would help facilitate closing America’s Dollar Gap after World War II. While economics played a paramount role in the U.S. decision-making in Indochina, questions of American prestige also played a critical factor.

The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War would eventually lead to the deaths of 58,000 American soldiers (Davis 479). As the deaths mounted, U.S. credibility and prestige on the world stage would be called into question. In 1966, U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright declared America’s “Arrogance of Power” had led to its involvement and eventual escalation in the Vietnam conflict (Merrill 424). This “Arrogance of Power” may have led the United States on an unsavory path to engage in Vietnam less to stifle the potential spread of communism and more to defend its credibility. When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, it became apparent almost immediately that the United States would increase its presence in the Vietnam region. President Lyndon Johnson “vowed only hours after the Dallas assassination that he would not be the president who lost Vietnam,” and President Johnson would soon endeavor to find a way to flex American muscle in the Vietnam region (Merrill 442).

The official catalyst that inserted the United States into the Vietnam War was the Gulf of Tonkin incident. According to author Kenneth C. Davis, “an incident was needed to pull American firepower into the war with at least a glimmer of legitimacy” (Davis 462). The Tonkin incident involved two U.S. destroyers, the *Turner Joy* and the *Maddox*. In 1964, the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* was supposedly fired upon in the Gulf of Tonkin by the North Vietnamese (Davis 462). There was never any firm confirmation that the attack had actually occurred; but Johnson, eager for any excuse to engage, “ordered an air strike against North Vietnam in ‘retaliation’ for the ‘attacks’ on the U.S. ships” (Davis 463). Also, the eventual leak of the Pentagon Papers would show that the U.S. involvement in Vietnam lacked substantial credibility and honorable conduct. The Papers showed that the Tonkin Resolution had actually been drafted months before the incident had even occurred (Davis 492). The Pentagon Papers also revealed that the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem “was ousted with CIA encouragement and then executed” (Davis 492). The Pentagon Papers publicized a serious lack of credibility by the U.S. government to the American people and the larger international community.

On January 31, 1968, the Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive against the U.S.-occupied South Vietnam (Davis 471). This sneak attack by the North Vietnamese Army occurred during an official cease-fire and would amount to a major psychological and public opinion blow to the U.S. With nearly 2,000 American soldiers killed and another 3,000 wounded, anti-war sentiment at home reached a fever pitch among American citizens (Duiker 558). Support at

home was dwindling rapidly; and after the Tet Offensive, “78 percent of the American public told opinion pollsters that they did not think the United States was making progress in the war” (Schulzinger 263). According to the North Vietnamese fighters and possibly the rest of the world, the success of the Tet Offensive demonstrated U.S. military weakness in the region and “compelled the White House to offer new concessions to bring about a peaceful settlement to the war” (Duiker 558). In 1965, Chinese leader Mao Zedong had predicted American defeat by proclaiming, “the Americans can be fought and can be defeated. We should demolish the myth that the Americans cannot be fought and cannot be defeated” (Merrill 424). Although the U.S. government presented the Tet Offensive as a definitive American victory to the world, and the public at home, the incident clearly showed American military weakness in the region.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which was passed in 1964, states, “the United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia” (Merrill 419). As the world’s most powerful nation, the United States had come to view itself as the peacekeeper for the world. In Vietnam, America’s credibility and strength had been called into question on the world’s stage; and to protect our international reputation, it was imperative to see a positive resolution to the volatile situation in Vietnam. America’s obsession with a positive resolution in Vietnam may have even included the discrediting of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s leader, Ho Chi Minh.

Ho Chi Minh was born in 1890 in a small Vietnamese village (Schulzinger 7). As the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), history has labeled Minh a staunch and inflexible Communist. While this is the prevailing view held by many, a closer examination of Minh’s statements reveal a thoughtful man, more passionate about Vietnam independence than about Communist ideals. One of Minh’s most famous slogans remains prevalent in Vietnam to this day and exemplifies Minh’s deepest core value: “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom” (Duiker 3). Minh spearheaded the Vietnamese resistance to the French and later to the United States less as a Communist dictator and more akin to a National Resistance leader. After Japan was forced to leave Indochina in 1945, Ho Chi Minh read aloud the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence to 1 million celebratory Vietnamese (Zinn 469). The Declaration of Independence Minh outlined was modeled after the United States’ own Declaration of Independence and began “All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” (Zinn 469). In 1776, when Americans voiced their outrage to the English, the same terminology was used. Over 150 years later, the Vietnamese people, led by Minh, cried out for exactly the same rights to be recognized” (Zinn 469).

The Vietnamese Declaration of Independence outlined by Minh highlighted the objections the Vietnamese people held about French rule. Included were such statements as, “They have enforced inhuman laws...they have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots, they have drowned uprisings in rivers of blood” (Zinn 470). Minh also stated, “The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to re-conquer their country” (Zinn 470). Ho Chi Minh was more thoroughly committed to Vietnamese independence than he was to Communist ideals. In the five months from October 1945 to February 1946, Minh wrote eight letters to U.S. President Truman, reminding him of his commitment to self-determination and pleaded for the recognition of their cause; all eight letters were ignored (Zinn 470). When World War II ended, Minh declared the country of Vietnam independent and asked for recognition from the Allied Powers who had acknowledged the principles of self-determination; again his pleas fell on deaf ears (Schulzinger 19). France initially recognized Vietnam as a whole and free state, and Minh proceeded to dissolve the Communist Party and formed a coalition government with other Nationalists. Unfortunately, this recognition soon faltered, and France and the DRV began to battle for control over Vietnam.

On several occasions, Minh was quite willing to demolish any ties to the Communist Party if it meant a peaceful and unified free Vietnam. On one such occasion, Minh met with American Major Allison Thomas and pleaded for U.S. support. Minh stated, “Forget the Communist Body, the Vietminh is not Communist” (Schulzinger 18). Ho Chi Minh also made many notable efforts to avoid war. Prior to war breaking out in 1946, the French and Vietnamese leaders held negotiations to avoid the ensuing conflict. During these negotiations, the French had signed an accord in which the French had promised to “recognize the Government of Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a free state within the French Union. Vietnam would have its own

parliament, army and finances and would be part of an Indochinese Federation” (Schulzinger 26). On the dawn of war in 1946, Minh pleaded with the French Parliament to honor the commitments it had made. Minh’s pleas for recognition by the French were ignored and war would soon break out in Vietnam. At this time, Minh strongly valued the avoidance of war and told the French government that war would “only end in hatred and bitterness between our two peoples.” He again asked for French recognition and promised to “respect French economic and cultural interests” (Schulzinger 31). The French were either unwilling or unable to accept Minh’s promises. Either way, war commenced and would later involve the United States, and Minh’s revolutionary ways for Vietnamese independence continued.

The sad and sordid story of the Vietnam War remains with many Americans to this day. Perhaps if the American government had been less concerned with obtaining an economic foothold in Indochina and solidifying its image on the international stage, the deaths of many innocent U.S. soldiers and Vietnamese may have been avoided. Ho Chi Minh bravely proclaimed, “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom” (Duiker 3). If America had valued the independence and freedom of the Vietnamese people as much as it had its own interests, perhaps there would not have been a Vietnam War leaving a gruesome stain on American history.

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James E. Hodges

Beta Tau Gamma Chapter
Pearl River Community College
Forrest County Center
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

My Books Are Vets


The ground shook and pulled my attention from my book again. The loud booms and choking heat made escaping reality rather difficult. The day seemed to drag on without an end in sight. I never thought I would be turning 21 in a bunker in Iraq, and my gift wish list definitely did not consist of an abundance of mortar rounds. The locals must have had some idea of the importance of the day, because they had been sending me “presents” all day. Thankfully, with only a few hours left, my birthday was nearing its end. In only a few short hours, I could continue living out the rest of my nightmare one year older and a lifetime wiser. I looked down at my book and tried desperately once again to lose myself in the story. The light from my flashlight seemed on the verge of being swallowed by the thick darkness. The battle raging between light and dark paralleled the battle in the book that I held desperately in my hands. A normal random boy was being set up as a hero to fight none other than the Devil himself. A seemingly impossible feat, but he fought on anyway. After only a few minutes of escape, another mortar boomed home a little closer, pushing a nice new cloud of dust in the bunker. The unmistakable smell of gunpowder wafted in the air. I was instantly reminded of the smell of fireworks on the Fourth of July. After realizing that my efforts were futile, I began to think back on how I got to be in this situation.

I always took reading for granted. I enjoyed it a little, but I never realized that it would save my life one day. How could I, when it was truly introduced to me for the first time at the age of 7 as a punishment. Ms. Jan (my dad’s live-in girlfriend at the time) sentenced me to my room for two weeks. I could not play with my toys or watch television. She handed me a copy of *Charlotte’s Web*. Forcing a 7-year-old to read is punishment enough, but forcing a 7-year-old to read *Charlotte’s Web* is just plain cruelty, especially for a kid with arachnophobia. A spider that could read and write gave me many sleepless nights. From that day on, when I would get into trouble, I was handed a copy of *Charlotte’s Web* as punishment. I must have read that book a million times. I read many books throughout my childhood, but none that I truly enjoyed. And so my life went until reading revealed its magic not long after I turned 15.

While hanging out in front of the school with my friends, as I did every morning, my friend Hank marched up to me, shoved a book in my hands, and ordered me to read it. I read the title, *Dragon Wing*, book one of the *Death Gate Cycle*, and declared I would not. After a few minutes

of hearing my friends urge me to do so as well, I agreed and put it away in my book bag. Later that night, curiosity finally got the better of me, and I grabbed the book. I soon found myself entranced. I had just opened a door to a world I never knew existed; and that worn, old book, with its aged, yellow pages, was the key. I could not get enough. I would go on one adventure after another. Mrs. Dell (my step-mom, not to be mistaken with Ms. Jan) told me to stop spending so much time reading in my room. I can't say that I didn't find irony in the situation. Reading in my room used to be a form of punishment, and now I found myself in trouble for doing just that. As soon as I finished the book, I hurried to Hank and asked for the next book. I connected with Haplo, the protagonist, and his mission to fix the world. I found myself wanting to leave my mark on the world as well. I quickly read all seven books of *The Death Gate Cycle* by Margaret Weis and Tracey Hickman. After finishing all seven books, I felt like half a person. I had become addicted to a new drug, and I needed my fix daily. After reading everything my friends owned, I soon moved on to the library and the bookstore. Life after that seemed so much clearer and brighter. I saw the beauty in the world from that point on. Each book had a new hero and a new villain, but they all struggled against "evil." The heroes' struggle to make the world better is what drove me to join the army after graduation a few years later. I wanted to do something good with my life and embark on my own adventure to save the world.


When the war in Iraq started a couple of years after graduating, I found myself following the front line across the border. My deployments proved to be a difficult time for me. Not only for the constant threat of death, but also because of my run-ins with Charlotte's buffed up cousins, the camel spiders. Reading saved my life during this time. It did not save my life in the literal sense, but in the mental sense. Reading helped me escape from reality and kept me sane. When the bombs and mortars were coming in and the missiles were flying overhead, I would put my nose in a book and get lost. Instead of worrying about living or dying, I would step through the doorway to fight dragons and save kingdoms. I needed any escape I could get from such a horrifying reality. During my first deployment, I lost myself in *The Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan. I then lost myself in the *Sword of Truth* novels by Terry Goodkind during my second deployment and the *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series by Steven Erikson during my last deployment. Reading helped me through all three deployments and helps me to this day. I can always count on reading for a rescue.



Mary Wolff
Pi Lambda Chapter
Seminole State College of Florida
Stanford, Florida

A Case of Her

Bottle me up for sale
Stamp me with an expiration date
A case of profitable goods
Stock me on cold metal shelves
Assign a price to my worth
Not too much or I won't sell
Never too little or I won't be valuable
I watch the passing ones who do not see me
Ignore the ones who do
This thing inside me that pops and fizzes
Is silent when the lights of the store are off
I sit and I wait
Wait....
I do not sleep because I do not know how
What is this that collects around my mouth?
It is dry and powder light
It is dust
I am past my prime.



Steven James Beto
Beta Theta Tau Chapter
Dakota County Technical College
Rosemount, Minnesota

Plain Folk

I arrived in Cando, North Dakota, a day late for my sister's gallbladder operation but in time to be excused from the hospital room for her first dressing change. Her husband Bob braved the cold to pick me up from the Devil's Lake train station the morning after my family had put together the money and saw me to the station. Since my service as a medic in Vietnam, whenever there has been an emergency with kin, my family would send me to see who did it and what for.

"Couple days rest she'll be fine," said Bob.

"Good to hear. What's the temp hereabouts?"

"Ten below. Next week, thirty below, maybe."

"And you guys like it up here?"

On the way out of Devil's Lake we passed a Wal-Mart at the edge of town, which, like the U.S. Army forts of old, is the last bastion of civilization, and the tallest building for its size on the prairie. People leave their trucks running and unlocked in winter when they pull in to shop, Bob told me, or take the chance on frozen doors and dead batteries. A hatless woman in skin-tight jeans and cowboy boots clutched the fur collar of a waist-length jacket as she walked through a door held open by a bearded man in an unbuttoned leather coat. The frozen exhaust of several trucks fogged the lot.

"Getting any hunting in?" I asked.

"Freezers full: Deer, pheasant, grouse sometimes."

"What do they get for a license up here?"

"No clue."

Bob had spent some time in jail back home for poaching. It had been one of the reasons for the move north. (I got dogged," he had said. "Just trying to feed my family," he pleaded. "Thirty days!" said the judge.) We left the main highway and turned north onto the treeless flats. On a clear day, you could see 20 miles or better, it seemed. You might not be able to hide from God in this country, but you could see him coming from a long way off.

"How far up is Cando?"

"Hour, hour-and-a-half."

There were no highway signs, no “Cando 15 Miles,” no “Welcome to Cando,” that foreshadowed our arrival. Squat, colorless trailer homes, sun-bleached and unpainted, with broken and mismatched shingles, butted up against dried and matted grasses packed in snow. The ancient Greeks defined the atom as the smallest possible bit of something. If you cut a piece of paper in half, then in half again, and then again, you would eventually arrive at a point where if you made one more cut you would no longer have paper. Cando, North Dakota, precedes that final cut, and it is where you discover that American civilization boils down to just three elements: electricity, paved roads, and alcohol.

According to the “1992 Devil’s Lake Area Recreation Guide” still on display back at the train station, the city of Cando is located at the intersection of North Dakota Highway 17 and U.S. 281. Cando, it goes on to say, is the home of “Noodles by Leonard,” where my sister Cathy works. Folks hereabouts are so proud of their industry they give away free samples at City Hall. The same guide says the local newspaper’s name is *The Cando Reocrd*. With spelling like that even I could get a job there. Cathy told me she had to beg them not to print the story of her hospital stay. Apparently the editor thought her operation was front-page news. Next week’s edition will no doubt mention that her brother came up from St. Paul to have a look at her incision and provoke the ordinarily peace-loving citizens.

It doesn’t take much to have fun in Cando. The local boys carry loose cans of beer in plastic grocery bags. “We don’t have a town drunk,” one of them told me. “We all take turns.” The preferred driving vehicle has an automatic transmission because, as another says, “I don’t like to interrupt my drinking while I’m driving.” The people around here are stiff and unwelcoming, as though a man my size is viewed as competition for limited resources. Bob and I visited a neighbor’s garage the other night. The door opened onto two hanging deer carcasses gutted and skinned, still steaming from the hollowed out abdominal cavities. Two other deer lay on cardboard on the floor.

“Never lay them on plastic,” said Bob. “They’d rot five minutes ago.”

Several of the good-ol’-boys stood around, red-handed, pounding Old Milwaukees. The men addressed each other by their last names, as we did in the military, as though unwilling to get too familiar. No one tells you their name when first introduced. “Hello. My name is Steven. I am Cathy’s brother.” A deadpan, “Howdy,” is all you get, and you return your empty hand to your glove. In contrast, there is the 25-year-old mortician’s assistant who talks in sentences without periods and who seems to have mastered the art of verbal communication on the inhale. He feeds the sparrows out in the yard, he said, gets a good population going, and then cuts off the food supply. He collects the dead birds to practice his embalming and for use as cat food. The garage was about as friendly as Jeffrey Dahmer’s kitchen, and not the kind of environment where you would want to make an issue of such things.

Bob and I stepped into a local bar last night for a bump. The citizen, who must have been taking his turn as the town drunk, stumbled to his feet.

“Who is the fat idiot?” he said. “I’m gonna kick his ass.”

A woman sitting to his right grabbed him by the arm, spun him back around and thrust a “Shut up!” in his face. Most of the good-ol’-boys had a designated woman sitting next to them. Bob and I didn’t have the chance to order our first beer before an out-of-breath friend of his burst through the door in a cloud of snowflakes.

“Bob! Need...help! Billy...got...a deer! Out...to....the....refuge. Big sucker. Needs...help dragging...out.”

The five-mile drive out to the refuge could have been made without headlights. A full moon, clearing skies, and six inches of fresh snow made it easy to find the beer cans on the floorboards. Bob’s friend said we were heading into primitive country. All I could see was treeless, table-flat prairie covered in snow.

“What makes the refuge more primitive than the rest of the country?” I asked.

“Can’t drive your truck in there,” was the reply.

Bob stood on the edge of the preserve and hollered in. A faint reply floated back on the howls of coyotes.

“I see him,” said Bob. I couldn’t see a thing. “About a mile out. See him waving?” No, Bob, I thought, but, I heard those coyotes, and hanging out at the Tom Thumb on St. Clair Avenue back home seemed like a safer thing to be doing. Six inches of recent snow made a good dozen or more to have to wade through. Knee-high snow dropped into my boots, burned my

skin and melted down into my socks. Bob's friend had suffered a mild heart attack the week before and stayed with the truck. Any excuse.

"Just follow his tracks out," he said. "You'll find him."

I began wheezing and overheating about a hundred feet in. No need to ask what Bob's friend was doing when his heart blinked. The cigarettes in my pocket felt heavier, the hard-pack corners felt sharper. The headlights on the truck grew dimmer. I figured I could get a free pizza from Domino's in a place like this. I could be pizza if the coyotes find us, delivered hot and free, if not on time.

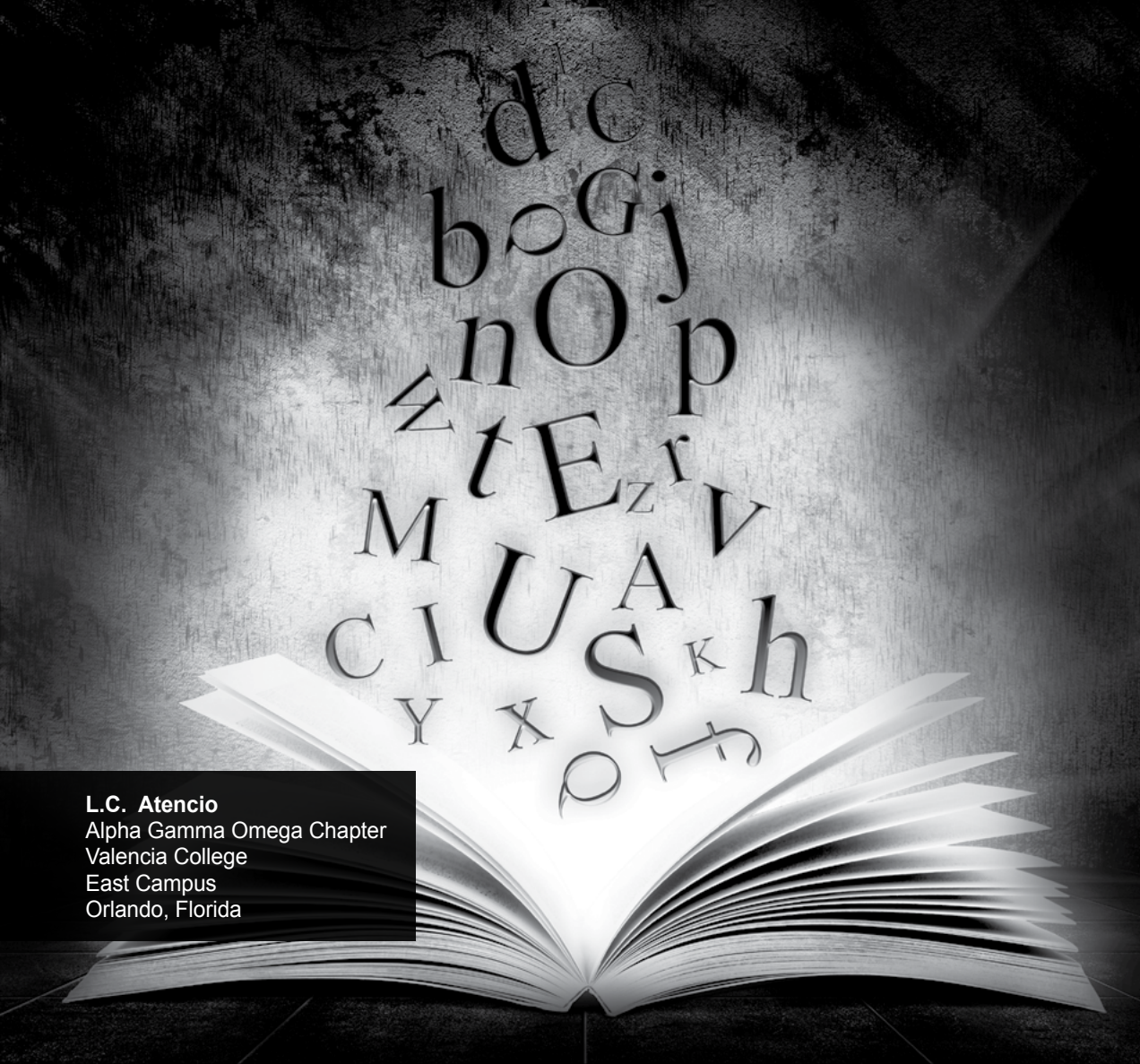
The tracks we followed didn't cut a straight path. Shadowy prints wound through the deepest snow on the flats, down into the reeds along the creek, and back up onto the prairie. Larger indentations marked where a man had stumbled or had stopped to rest. Standing exposed under the spotlight of the moon, one feels insignificant and weak in the knee. You feel squashed by so many stars, and it is fearful to look upon them. It is fear or failure, I think that creates bonds of grief between men, and no amount of wool or cotton can warm a troubled soul. A sudden, old panic burned through the back of my neck: Where's my medical bag?

The trail ran through the darkness into the past where a lone silhouette stood featureless, cradling a rifle in his arms with a body steaming at his feet. The current frozen circumstances were different, but after several decades the fear was the same. Vietnam was sometimes black and white like this. The thousand-yard stare was cold like this. The man in front of me, however, had a first name, Billy, and the body at his feet had antlers. Coyotes yipped in the near background. Billy looked over his shoulder.

"They must've found the gut pile," said Billy. "Quickest field dressing I ever done." Billy had done his part. He had shot, cleaned and dragged the buck a half mile. "I'm sure glad two of you come. My legs are gone."

There was something prideful yet sad in Billy's paunchy, reddened face. A countenance once described by Dylan Thomas as that of an excommunicated cherub. I could see the truck off in the distance, the headlights on, the exhaust streaming out of the tailpipe, millions of stars twinkling in the blackness of space. Later, on the truck ride back to the bar and for the rest of the evening, there would be jokes and stories about Billy's triumph told and retold, and when Billy grew quiet, there would be other stories of hunts told, none quite as great as Billy's, no deer quite as large.

When our breath came back to us, Bob and I each grabbed an antler and pulled the carcass over the snow. Billy took the point and guided us out of the refuge. The tragedy isn't that American men hunt, but that having killed they are not allowed to grieve. Saying grace might be enough for store-bought meat, but when you pull the trigger yourself a part of your soul is left behind for the coyotes.



L.C. Atencio

Alpha Gamma Omega Chapter
Valencia College
East Campus
Orlando, Florida

Believing in words, not in whoever

How to create a world of perfection
In a world so imperfect...?
To build words with every breath I take.
To reach for the stars, scrape them,
And land back on Earth.

Pages are only pages, and nothing more.
They cannot feed you, or kiss you,
But their love is immortal, and bigger than all
The understanding that we still hold
In humanity.

I cannot pretend to ever comprehend,
Nor see myself, accepting the fact that words-
Precious friends of authors and admirers-
Shall not hold me, and physically take my hand
In this cold, so very cruel world.

Time and time again, I find myself
Within these books, and all the letters; each curve
Of every bowel is like ecstasy in my vein.
O forgive me, Literature! For I've been married
To your words, but I cannot deny,
Where there is passion's hearty love.

To a man, and to a woman, I say:
Do not stop writing, because there are
Books on your shelf.
Do not ignore the messages contained in the volumes
For current trends - which shall not last.
Look at me, look at yourself, look back and say,
"I hope Literature forgives me;
I married words without permission."



Kaitlin Browne
Alpha Rho Lambda Chapter
Jackson Community College
Jackson, Michigan

And Sometimes Y: A Cinderella Story

Once upon a time, in a land called second grade, I stood reading a story off the flashcards my teacher Mrs. Hess held in front of me. At first I felt like Cinderella, passing as a princess, and dancing my way through the words while my tongue nimbly spun sounds of key phrases like “rabbit” and “hop.” Suddenly, I stumbled. Then I stalled. It was if I had danced to the edge of the world, and I was left staring into the mind-numbing abyss. “The” stuck in my throat, and no matter how hard I tried I couldn’t push it out. Mrs. Hess sat with her stern lips pressed so tight she could flatten a penny, spreading Lincoln’s copper plated nose until it was an inch wide. I kept reading and she kept tightening.

“Tell me your ABC’s,” she demanded.

I started but then the words began to stick in my mouth. My mind went blank. *ABC’s? A...B...what ABC’s?* She looked at me and her eyes glazed over in disgust, the same way my mother’s would when I reminded her of my father. I froze. I stared over her gray tufts of hair, searching the wall behind us. She had deliberately sat us away from the alphabet that bordered the blackboard. *I had known this once, hadn’t I?* I choked. *I started to panic: Who took my words? It must have been the rabbit we were reading about! He probably took my voice, and my brain, and stuck it in a briar patch where I couldn’t reach it.* Mrs. Hess looked at me as if the clock struck midnight, revealing my rags to the world.

At parent-teacher conferences, Queen Hess banished me to the Chapter One program, otherwise known as remedial reading. Then one day, her minions led me away as I watched my classmates fade from view.

Where this fairy tale really began was in a land before I was born, where boy meets girl while they were both working for Book Inventory in Ann Arbor. Both were twenty-something’s who left their own small communities for the swirling excitement of a growing city; a city so magical that it could make them believe perhaps fairy tales could come true and Jimmy Carter could win re-election.

They discussed books when they were falling in love, and they argued over books when they were divorcing, specifically which book belonged to whom. I don't know why they fell in love, whether it was my Mother's mini skirts and love of the printed page, or if she fell for my father at one of his concerts where he was outfitted in glam and partial drag, reciting Ginsberg or Burroughs into a microphone, waving his silver sleeved arms in the air, and revving up the crowd. However it happened, I happened. First came Reagan, and then me, and I spent most of my early years looking for space to grow in our trailer, where every corner was crammed with books and discontent. My father put most of his dreams away and never finished community college, or a great novel, or a worldwide tour, and so he took a job in medical supplies where he worked third shift in the dingy basement of the Veteran's Affairs hospital. He fell for another woman, an educated woman, and together they conceived a child while he and my mother still lived under the same metal roof. My mother was merely a high school-educated clerk at an independent bookstore who had grown depressed as she put on weight after the birth of my sister. Their marriage had no fairy godmother, no magic dress, and no heel high enough to change things. Soon doors were kicked in, nightly shrieking became a regular event, books were hidden, and boxes were packed.

While life was no fairy tale, Cinderella was my favorite babysitter. I fell head over heels in love with her story when I was too young to read the words. Instead, I watched the movie; I opened the book and stared at the illustrations. I listened to the story on a Disney record, which I nearly wore out on my plastic *Cabbage Patch Kids* record player. Sometimes, when my parents fought, I'd hide behind the paper-thin walls of my bedroom, looking at and listening to the Cinderella story, while the screaming and crying faded into the background of the royal ball. I escaped to a world where there were fairy godmothers, happy endings, and glass slippers made especially for me.

Knowing my love for Cinderella, my parents argued over what I should read. They both wanted me to expand my horizons, and they both saw my education as a weapon that they could wield against each other. My father believed a five-year-old should read adult novels; my mother preferred award-winning literature for children, books that won the Caldecott and the Newberry. I ran my finger over the medals' raised impression of horses and pages, circling their golden edges, allowing each book to tease me with the promise of hearing my parents read me to sleep before waking me with their screams.

After much begging, my mother finally brought home an illustrated collection of 365 fairy tales that I had coveted since spotting it months before. There were hundreds of illustrated pages all bursting with good and evil, princesses and paupers, and rich rewards, all goblins, gingerbread, and gold. Even though I couldn't read the words, I could look at the pictures and try to imagine the story. Whatever they preferred me to read, they had very little time to read it to me.

I brought my book of fairy tales with me the day I waved goodbye to my father. Feeling myself split into two, I watched all of what I knew of the world fade from the view.

So, when my parents heard the news that their damaged daughter — conceived in literary lust — couldn't read, they relayed to me Queen Hess' decree as if I had a terminal illness and they were running through the different stages of grief. My father favored anger, first turning on the teacher, then my mother. After the divorce my mother had been cursed, locked in an invisible tower of anger and anguish, vipers falling from her lips every time she'd speak to me, yet she tried to stay kind and calm, finally accepting me as a sacrifice to appease the gods of elementary education.

Soon after the decision was announced, I was banished to a tiny room, where I met a new teacher: a nerdy thirty-something brunette with printed turtlenecks and thick-knitted sweaters. We sat at a small round table with the only two children who stuck out enough to already be outcasts in the second grade. There was another Chapter One group, a larger group, with children like me, children who had friends, children who were invited to birthday parties, but somehow I ended up in a group with social misfits like Danny and Rosemary.

Danny was a round, heavy boy, and short, with short fingers, and an even shorter fuse. He stuttered and stammered his way through each sentence before exploding at the most minor of irritations. Rosemary was adopted, a year older than me, and she had hair as out of place as I felt. She wore thick glasses and looked like an elderly teacher dressed her. In Mrs. Hess' class, Danny would scream his way into the principal's office while Rosemary would sit in

the back, oblivious to our lessons, making crafts of her own, spilling paint on her desk, and peeling long strips of glue from her hands before flicking them to the floor.

I didn't belong in there, I believed, but I didn't belong in Mrs. Hess' class either. The ball was over, and Chapter One reminded me of my station in life. I was not a princess after all; just a girl who now lived with her mother and sister in a rental property in the woods where there was no phone, frequent power outages for nonpayment, and rodents were regular guests. Peasant living wasn't nearly as glamorous as Cinderella's singing mice made it out to be.

Despite my fears, I found that my new teacher did not judge me for my flaws. Instead, she taught us about vowels. We mouthed the sounds of a crisp long A, went diaphragm deep for a short U, and puzzled over the enigmatic bisexuality of the "sometimes Y."

Everyday we returned to the sounds, forming words with our hands, opening invisible umbrellas. "Uhhh—mmm—brell—ah," we repeated in unison.

As time went on we became better at sounding out our vowels, and we began to read books; the three of us took turns reading aloud as our teacher listened. "Sound it out," was her constant refrain when a word challenged our tongues.

As I learned new words, I read more at home, flipping through the pages of my fairy tale book, ignoring the pictures, ignoring my mother's rage, the wicked stepmother, my spoiled siblings, ignoring the whole world, and instead focusing on the words. I moved beyond the stories made famous by Disney into the lesser-known tales of heroism and revenge. The more I read the more something inside me changed, as if my teacher had waved a magic wand and made me over from the inside out. Words like "the," "through," and "though" flowed from my lips like gems from a poor girl's enchanted tongue.

In our small group, my teacher controlled Rosemary's attention, calmed Danny's fire, and instead of escaping the room I reveled in being there. I had become a quick reader and, although my peers struggled, we forged on, grunting and pushing the words from our mouths. Together we sweated, we bled, we read. I rooted for Danny to get past every tricky "S" and waited eagerly for my turn to read at our little round table.

At school we read about snow days, holidays, and trips through the woods, but at home I returned to my fairy tales, finding new doors open after every Chapter One lesson. Soon a new world was open to me, a world where I wasn't a helpless princess, a world where I replaced my glass slipper for the iron-plated boot of a heroic prince. With books I wielded the weapon, carried the steel shield, and prepared myself to battle dragons, slash through thorn-covered vines, and scale steep towers, or climb long locks of hair. Reading bridged the stories together until I could walk through them, trying on different clothes of different characters, collecting their strengths for my own. I could be the princess, I could be the prince, and I could beat back the witches and warlocks. They were strong. I was stronger. I could be the shape-shifting "Y," a consonant, then a vowel, mysterious and adaptable at the same time. I came to look beyond the happy endings and recognize the value in the fight, in the never-ending struggle against all odds.

Stories of triumph over adversity gave me hope, while the constantly changing "Y" gave me an understanding of how to survive the tornado of childhood. I looked to it and understood how to blend in or stand out, depending on the occasion. Even without a costume I felt empowered, no longer at the whim and will of fate, but an active participant in my life, writing my destiny and reciting the words. With my new powers I envisioned a happier future. I loosened Queen Hess' stern lips. I wrote stories and cards for my mother, temporarily breaking her spell and reaching into the woman distorted by the curse of rage and sorrow. A few years later, I used my abilities to pass on stories to a new baby brother.

Life changes, and life is incomprehensible. Living is an attempt to suss out meaning, to pluck the right words from a murky narrative, to open our hearts to what comes, and to articulate our own stories. Being able to read gave me the words I needed to write my own ending and to plot my own journeys. Stories inspired me and reading empowered me to see myself as a character of multitudes, with the ability to write myself any life I choose.

This is not a story that ends with "happily ever after" because I don't write happily ever after's quite so simply. Instead, I prefer ambiguity, complexity, and endings with possibility, and I don't favor brevity. I stopped seeing my life as a close-ended fairy tale, but my life is still a story I enjoy writing, and I enjoy the journey more than I want to consider the end.

Although I did not need a prince to rescue me, I am forever grateful for the fairy godmother, the teacher who patiently waited as I grasped the elusive “th” sound, who cheered me on through literary scavenger hunts, and who made reading one of my greatest pleasures. The day I came to her my reflection was shattered, but she pieced together my looking glass and enchanted it with the power of a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y. When I gazed upon my new reflection I saw not only who I was, but also who I could be.

After completing my year with Chapter One, my reading improved enough that I spent the third grade reading with most of the other children, children oblivious to my accomplishments and ignorant to the wonders that went on down the hall in that tiny, once terrifying room. I devoured books with obese ambition, and eventually test scores would place me in an advanced reading class. These scores were irrelevant to me because I knew what I had learned was something too magical and abstract to be tested; it could not be measured, and no pattern of bubbles filled in with Number 2 pencils could illustrate what reading had given to me.

Reading transformed me and empowered me to transform myself. While I won’t write a “happy ever after,” I will say this: I may have worn rags on the outside, but inside I was royalty. Inside, I was whole.



Trevor Neil White
Iota Omega Chapter
Centralia College
Centralia, Washington

Ovid
Plastering
17

Plastics
Razin
18

Razor
Schurz
19

Schütz
Speke
20

Spelman
Timmons
21

Timoleon
Vieta
22

Vietnam
Zwoykin
23

[Citation Not Needed]

I go there every day. Who doesn't?

You have to wonder whose idea it was, originally. An online encyclopedia. Makes sense, doesn't it? But no, it's more than that — encyclopedias didn't have sound, didn't have video, sometimes not even pictures...and they didn't change. Used to be, you'd pick up a book, or a dictionary, and the pages would just sit there, all dry and quiet and slow, like a dying desert. And they cost money! Who wants to pay to hear what used to be true?

Not here, though. I just type in the address, and there it is. Everything's so clean, so uniform... and in so many different languages! See, it's educational even before you leave the front page.

There's the little white rectangle, right below that big and scholarly logo. A click, and my cursor flashes eagerly.

People used to use it for school, for work. I can see why, but those must have been some tough times. Sure, you could copy and paste, maybe change a few words if you were that worried about being original, but they still expected you to write papers yourself! And for what? To prove you knew something? What does it matter who knows the truth, as long as somebody does? It's a good thing you can trust people these days, because they obviously didn't back then. That's probably why they had schools to begin with: too many dumb liars running around.

I'll bet it was all those distractions, choking everybody's brains. TV, radio, magazines...it's a good thing everything finally converged into one big network.

And it's with you wherever you go — that's the best part. Whether I'm at the mall, in a coffee

shop, or sitting in the car, I can pull out my phone, start up the browser, and resolve anything. Not that there's much arguing — everyone else has access to it, so chances are they'll look up whatever they're confused about well before a debate starts.

But at home, on the computer...oh, that's the best. I can sit in my comfy desk chair for hours, basking in the glow of the monitor, and just learn and learn and learn. Always something new, something unexpected. It's a journey, almost, like Louis and Clark traversing the Louisiana Deal. You can type in "Trees," and then find your way to "Telephone Poles," and then "Thomas Edison" (light bulb inventor, naturally) and before you know it, you're all the way to "Laser Technology." And news all the way, facts all the way.

So free. New words, old books, history: names, dates, times, places, quotes. All strung together into a shining web of knowledge.

It's...well, it's beautiful, really. A modern-day Alexandria Library.

And there are links! Always good to back up your information. I could go to the original sites if I wanted, but what's the point? They wouldn't put a reference in there if it didn't go somewhere. And even if I try, and the link doesn't work, that's okay — it's probably just broken for now.

Every once in a while, though, there's a little message here, a little note there. There are editors, of course — they're smart, but that's a given because I could never run a thing like this (at least not yet — I haven't read the pages on Web Design and HTML yet). But I'll be researching "Heart Attacks" or "Ancient Egypt," and then the moment comes that it catches my eye:

Verification?

In baby blue, bracketed, hovering at the sentence's end like a lingering thought bubble. No one bothers to check, but that's okay. Somebody will fix it eventually, assuming it's not already right. Why wouldn't it be? Something simple, something small like that...It's hardly worth messing up, is it?

It's just so hard to imagine what we'd do without it. It helps everyone: kids, adults, authors, scientists, gardeners, doctors, blue-collar and white-collar. There's no uncertainty, no questions — just hit "Search," and there it is. For example, a friend of mine was having some mild breathing problems, so he did some investigation into the matter. Turns out, he probably has Chronic Pulmonary Distress (or CPD)! Fortunately, Pfizer made a new prescription drug to cure it, and there's a link to purchase it at the top of the page. And last week, I was browsing "Macular Degeneration," and it said a connection had recently been found between retinal damage and non-Sony-brand TVs. Now, if that's not helpful information, I don't know what is.

And there's so many fascinating things happening in the world, all ripe for the discovering. Just the other day, I was checking the entry for the Amazonian Rainforest, and there's been multiple sighting of 100-foot snakes! It said "Verification?" next to it again, but I'm sure they'll come up with a source. I could change it, but what do I know about jungles and snakes? Best to leave it to the experts.

The discussion pages? Oh, we never look at those. They're pretty boring, all disjointed blurbs about this point or that angle. But they figure it out eventually. They always do, or there wouldn't be a site.

Everyone's grateful, so glad there's people out there to help us make sense of life. Yesterday, someone said the President had cheated the election, that his Cabinet was taking corporate bribes, that platoons were invading France and China. But I checked out the pages for "World Politics," for "International Relations"...and it looks like everything's fine. What's the deal? Where do people get off spreading panic like that? And even if we were doing all that, so what? They said China tried to take over the world in the 1990s, so then it's only fair.

Talk like that just freaks me out, and so I do some more searching. “Top-Grossing Films of 2002.” “List of Freeware Programs for Windows 7.” “Species of Lemur.” “Paracelsus.” “The Flat Earth Movement.” “Interpretive Dance.” “Cubism.” And I feel better.

It’s been getting strange lately, though. I could’ve sworn the gas prices weren’t so high last week — \$12 a gallon, at the most — but I checked the pages for all the Major Oil companies, and it says they’ve been steady for the whole year. We go to the store and see empty shelves, the aisles dusty and cold, but the “Food Shortages Throughout History” hasn’t been updated in a long time. I must not be paying enough attention. Maybe I’ll read the section on “Memory,” or “Freud’s Theory of Psychoanalysis.”

The sky’s been seeming darker lately, almost like the sun is revolving around the Earth slower than usual. I swear I can hear explosions as I go to bed at night, distant and shaky echoes that make the gray horizon tremble. I checked up on “War” earlier today, scanned down the heavenly white pages, past big black titles and shiny blue hyperlinks. “Planes,” “Bombs,” “Martial Law,” “Government Camps,” “Military-Industrial Complex,” “Corporate Monopoly.”

It must be my imagination, then, because they all ended with a single line:

The country is currently at peace. [Verification?]

I scroll down to check the edit date. It’s recent, but that’s not odd. They’re just fixing typos, is all. Of course, it needs a citation, but I can always check the sources if I want.

I’m sure it’s right.



L.C. Atencio
Alpha Gamma Omega Chapter
Valencia College
East Campus
Orlando, Florida

Staring through the cracks of reality

No matter how bizarre this may sound
There is no way I can shut my mouth,

The television is *watching* me.

My flabby wounds drip bloody drops
That drench my wool trench coat,

It's horrendous! I've been stabbed!

Pools of red solution, like discolored acid
Make up the irregular spots on the wooden floors,

Damn! I will have to mop the floor later!

The burglar smirked in high spirits,
Admiring the accomplishment of the jagged knife.

He kicked me around and left!

The shaded couch is a feather fest,
While my eyes are closing for good.

The television enjoyed my drama,

As we so very often enjoy hers.



James E. Hodges
Beta Tau Gamma Chapter
Pearl River Community College
Forrest County Center
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Worst Day of His Life

Bus rides smooth.

Young man, barely a boy, broods in the back.

And wonders how he came to this.

Bus eases to a stop.

Soldiers, a.k.a. drill sergeants, storm the bus like the beach of Normandy.

The weapon of choice, their voice.

Shooting insults that strike center mass.

The young man rushes off the bus as ordered.

Thinking to himself this is the worst day of his life.

All trace of boy disappears, never to appear again.

The young man journeys to become a warrior.


Later, the young man is gone.

A soldier remains.

He broods in the back of the plane.

This is the worst day of his life.

Outside this quiet plane begins his nightmare.
Never ending desert of people who want him dead.
Days later, soldier gives way to something else.
He broods as he drives a truck.
How did it come to this?
This ride may be his last.
Seen so much on this ride.
So much death, so much carnage.
How do you come back from this?
He knows he's losing another part of him.
The boy fades, so the young man could live.
The young man fell, so the soldier might survive.
The soldier dies, so the veteran can be born.
He can't go back.
M16 in hand, he fights the enemy in front of him,
This is the worst day of his life, but also the proudest.



Stephanie Goss

Alpha Omicron Omega Chapter
Hinds Community College
Rankin Campus
Pearl, Mississippi

Road Trip

“Let’s go!” My sister turned to me with contagious excitement.

“Go where?” I asked suspiciously.

“To Orlando!”

I stuck my fingers in my ears to try and dull the aching she had caused. “For...?” I had no idea where she was going with this.

“To try out for ‘The Biggest Loser!’” She began jumping up and down and gyrating in an unflattering dance.

“Ha!” I busted out laughing. She wanted to go out for a television show where they help you to lose weight. “Are you off your rocker?” I smiled at her silly tooth-filled grin. Not only was she my sister, she was my best friend as well. “You do realize they make you wear a two-piece something or other when you are weighing...not to mention you will be showing all your business on NATIONAL TELEVISION. Besides, James will never agree to this.” She stopped dancing and grabbed my hands in hers. Her eyes were pleading with mine.

“Come on, Stephanie. I need you to go with me.” I sighed. What could I do with those big ol’ puppy dog eyes staring at me?

“Aghhh...I’ll see what I can do. When are the tryouts?” She let go of my hands and backed up. Eyeing her with distrust as she turned from me, I heard her muttering something incoherently. “What?”

“This weekend...” My mouth dropped and I gaped at her for a few seconds. Clearing my throat I tried again. “No, really, when do you want to go?”

“This weekend...” She repeated, beaming. As I continued to stare at her, my disbelief turned to a fit of giggles.

"Tanya es loco," I said when I finally recovered.

"Come on, Stephanie," She insisted. "How many times in our lives will we have an opportunity like this? You know I need this. *We* need this. Please..." I contemplated her offer. Suddenly a thought occurred to me.

"It's a 12-hour drive!" I exclaimed.

"Yeah...so?"

"So, you want to drive 12 hours, get in a line for probably 12 hours more with NO SLEEP and then drive back home 12 more hours, once again with NO SLEEP?!"

"Exactly," she confirmed.

"Where's your phone book?"

"In the cabinet over the stove," she looked puzzled. "Why?"

"Cause I'm callin' Whitfield (Mississippi's psychiatric hospital). They need to get your room ready." I started rifling through the phonebook. "Wait...have you been drinking?"

"Stephanie!" she said, exasperated.

I grinned. I loved messing with her. I gave in. "Okay."

"Okay?" She ran over and engulfed me in a bear hug. When almost all the breath had been expelled from my lungs, I squeaked out a request.

"You can let go of me now."

Two days later, too thrilled to sleep, we were on our way to Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. I popped in some Rascal Flatts, and we sang at the top of our lungs. Pondering who would watch our children while we were on the Biggest Loser Ranch — and of course, we *would* get picked — is how we spent the first few hours. Who wouldn't want us? We're fun people, or at least we think we are. Still surrounded by a buzz of exhilaration and adrenaline, we decide to stop at O'Charley's for dinner. Our anticipation continued to hang over us throughout dinner; it was a high that seemed incapable of letting up. The waiter liked me...a lot. Go figure. On my way to try out for a weight loss show and the waiter actually tries to flirt with me. How ironic is that? Happily married to James, I wasn't biting, so we left and struck the open road with vigor.

Soon after we left the restaurant, my sister began dozing off. Lonely and drowsy, I began singing again. Although I love Rascal Flatts, I decided that I needed something with a little more pep so I switched to Third Day. After I started rocking out, if that's what you want to call it, I looked up at the road. Immediately I realized that I was in a strange lane that was divided from the rest of the highway. On each side of me there were bright orange dividers and I panicked. "Tanya! Wake up!" Tanya, in no apparent hurry, lazily opened one eye.

"What is wrong with you?"

"What do I do? What do I do?"

Tanya sat up and surveyed the situation. Turning to me she grinned. "Did you fall asleep?"

"No...I was just...well I was..." I dropped my head — no excuse.

"Well, you'll be fine. it ends up here. See. It's just leading to a weigh station. Just go through there and get back on the interstate." I sighed with relief. As we neared the scales she spoke up again, "We may as well weigh-in while we're here." I ignored her smile.

"Well, I have never seen anything like that in my life," I stated matter-of-factly.

"Do I need to drive?"

"Nah...I'm good to go," and with that Tanya proceeded to recline her seat and resume resting.

After limited stops for potty breaks, we arrived at our destination early the next morning. Cars lined the sides of the road for miles. "Oh wow," I said. People were everywhere. Fat people, obese people, semi-fat people, chunky people...whatever you want to call them, they littered the grounds outside of Universal Studios like beads at a Mardi Gras parade.

"Let's go," she said jumping out of the car.

"We don't even know where to go," I said grouchy.

"We'll follow the herd," she quipped

"You'd better watch your mouth," I stated seriously, "'cause you don't want a stampede on that trail." We laughed and jumped in line like ants on their way to a picnic.

Although there were thousands of chubbies like ourselves, we were fairly close to the entrance of the building where the interviews were being held. In front of us, a man bordering 400 pounds opened a weak looking, lime green lawn chair outlined in neon orange and settled into it. Groaning under the weight of his oversized figure, the chair finally seemed to accept his presence and quieted. I didn't voice my thoughts but gave him a bright and friendly smile.

You've been here before, haven't you?

"Hi, I'm Stephanie, and this is my sister Tanya."

"Hello. My name is Eric. Where are the two of you from?" His voice had the traces of an accent that was either Boston or New Orleans; I wasn't sure.

"Oh...we're from Mississippi. What about you?"

"I'm your neighbor. I'm from Metairie, Louisiana. Nice to meet you."

"Same here," we chimed. The excitement was regenerating, and we were getting our second wind. Cameras followed people with clipboards through the line.

"They must be interviewing people," I whispered excitedly.

"What they're looking for is personality," Tanya whispered back. As they neared us my heart leapt in my throat and I quietly gasped for air. When they passed us by without even a glance, my heart dropped back into place. A ball formed in the pit of my stomach. Feeling nauseated and defeated, I tried not to cry. Neither of us spoke for the next hour. We tried to be supportive of each other with encouraging smiles, but we both felt like failures. Later, we chatted politely with Eric; and when our portion of the line came to the building entrance, we found out that we would be interviewed in groups of 20 and that we would have to answer two questions. Rushing us into the room, they made us feel unimportant. Even on "American Idol" you get one-on-one time. We both knew this wasn't looking good. I flashed what I thought to be a winning smile at the lone interviewer. Like the previous interviewer from the line, this interviewer's eyes did not even settle on me. Like I have every diet I've ever been on, I quit. What was the point in trying to win the approval of these people? Automatically I went into depression mode.

I'm not even good enough for a fat show.

Answering their questions like a robot, I knew I was a loser but not *the* loser they were wanting.

"What's the first thing you'll wear when you lose weight?" She peered over her clipboard at me.

"A wedding dress..." I could tell she didn't like my answer so I continued, "...because I got married when I was overweight. I would like to get remarried in my dream gown."

"What's the first thing you'll *do* when you lose weight?" She tapped her pen on the clipboard, waiting impatiently.

"Uhhh...play with my children. I love sports but I'm too big to play. I get out of breath easily..." I trailed off and she moved on, never glancing back at me. I didn't listen to anyone else's answers, not even Tanya's or Eric's. Pushing us out as quickly as they had led us in, the interviewers closed the door and it was over. I could tell Tanya was as sad as I was, and we slowly made our way to the car. Shrugging her shoulders, Tanya turned to me when we reached our destination.

"I would have picked you," she said as the tears shimmered in her eyes.

"I would have picked you too." I jumped toward her, giving her a gigantic hug.

After a moment, I backed up and she skipped away from me and dove into the driver's seat. Following her lead, I popped into the passenger seat. She turned on the radio, Rascal Flatts again.

Ahh...my boys...

"Let's go eat!" With that, she revved the engine and raced onto the road. The oncoming traffic didn't faze me and I grinned, putting on my sunglasses.

Here we go again.



Heather Herbert
Chi Xi Chapter
Darton State College
Albany, Georgia

T. S. Eliot: Bringing Sex, Death, and Desolation to Tea

One of the most original poets of the early 20th century, T.S. Eliot considerably influenced literature in general and poetry in particular. As a leading voice reflecting the pessimism of the post-war youth, Eliot's early works were a profound departure from the more moralistic and idealistic Victorian poetry that preceded them. The themes Eliot explored in these initial pieces included the balances between love, sex and procreativity, aging, death and civilization versus desolation. While Eliot's themes did in some ways change after his conversion to the Anglican church, it is the earlier motifs found in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Gerontion*, and *The Waste Land* that will be addressed herein.

Beginning with the seminal piece *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot addresses the themes of love and sexuality, loneliness and isolation, and aging and death. Told from the vantage point of J. Alfred Prufrock, a forward taken from Dante's *Inferno* sets the tone of the work as painfully honest and acknowledging personal faults and inadequacies. As Prufrock's story is told in the form of an internal monologue, he is in effect confessing to himself, rather than directly to the reader.

In the opening stanza, Prufrock speaks of his progression through the evening streets as if he were following the thread of a thought that leads to the question of a relationship, asked of his female companion who does not purport to understand his intentions. As he wends his way through the streets, he encounters hotels where meaningless sexual encounters occur only to pass them by, instead continuing his path, to a room where "women come and go, Talking of Michelangelo" (Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* 4). While it could be assumed that the women are discussing something particularly erudite, it seems more likely that the women's conversation is noteworthy because it discusses Michelangelo's *David*, considered by some to idealize the male form. Prufrock's

observations of the scene continue with the fog and smoke that shroud the house, making them as enclosed and inconspicuous as Prufrock himself feels.

In the next stanzas, we see the growth of Prufrock's feeling of inadequacy, and his indecision becomes more apparent as he considers whether he dare make his approach despite his faults of appearance due to age; thinning hair and spindly limbs. He feels that to put himself forward would disturb the universe and views his world as mundane, being measured in cups of coffee taken while observing others at a distance as they experience life.

Prufrock made steps towards explaining his unassuming demeanor, having justified to himself that there is time "to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* 4). It seems that Prufrock felt a need to put on a good face for acquaintances as well as the need to put on a brave face in the face of their rejection. Prufrock's feeling of isolation from women in general appears to make him anticipate that neither he nor his approaches will be well received; and as such he vacillates, questioning whether action is worth the risk and deferring the indignity of attempting to form an intimate relationship to choose the safety of loneliness instead. While Prufrock devoutly desires a relationship, his lack of confidence causes him to anticipate that to express his feelings to his intended would be akin to dissection, with the depths of his emotions and motives laid bare before her. Instead he is torn by his inability to act on his attraction and tells himself that he should instead be content to merely scavenge what he can from his life or accept a supporting role, rather than the role of Prince Charming. In the aftermath of these questions he finds himself unable to act decisively, questioning the most mundane aspects of his life. Finally, he consigns himself to loneliness in his old age, assuming that he will even be denied the siren's call that might drown him.

Speaking to the same themes of love, isolation, age and death, *Gerontion* could be read as if Prufrock were continuing to speak, 20 years after the fateful decision to embrace seclusion and sterility over fulfillment. Here the speaker is "an old man in a dry month," (Eliot, *Gerontion* 21) who has let life's battles pass him without engagement. Now he is left with senses dulled, past even the point of *torschlusspanik* as the gates have long since closed. In his history he sees only lost opportunities and missed passions, in his present only decay, and in his future the last final moments of terrifying spirituality and death. His loom has no warp of experience to weave upon and he recognizes that Atropos holds "th' abhorred shears" (Milton) in her hands.

While *The Waste Land* also addresses the themes of isolation and love, sexuality and generativity, and aging and time, it does so using many voices and within the framework of the balance between civilization and degradation. In *The Burial of the Dead*, the first of its five parts, we see the passage of time through the eyes of an older woman. In her life, winter's dulled desires are kinder than the now unobtainable burstings of spring's passion and life. Now in the winter of her own life, she goes south in retreat to the warmer, younger memories of summer breaking over her unexpectedly. She is not alone in her desolation, as the next stanza addresses the ruin of the lands to the east post-World War I as "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, and the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* 38). Thus is described a land where the physical destruction mirrors the waste laid upon the population who fought thereon, and the ocean does not carry loved ones home.

The next voice that speaks to us does so on behalf of Madame Sosostris, who looks to the future to give a reading to a party unknown. She is able to provide an accurate accounting of what will befall the voices of *The Waste Land*, foretelling the painted façade and poison in womanly form, the long wait looking over the sea^[1] coupled with fate^[2], fire^[3] and blindness^[4], and death by water. Lastly, Madame Sosostris speaks of "crowds walking round in a ring," (Eliot, *The Waste Land* 38) and these are the crowds of the dead seen in the next stanza, crossing the Thames as if it were the Acheron, progressing to circle the first ring of Hell. The voice in this stanza must be dead himself, as he greets a long-dead passerby as if he were a contemporary to ask him if the corpse he has planted has sprouted yet. Thus we see the veneer of civilization placed over the degradation of war, with death making comrades of all men.

In the second part of *The Waste Land*, Madame Sosostris' reading is borne out again,

with the Belladonna raising the themes of love, loneliness, procreation, and its associations with death. Initially shown in the form of a woman waiting for her lover, cosmetics and unguents, presumably used to fend off aging and to increase attractiveness, are shown strewn about carelessly. Despite all at her means, she is as uncertain of her attentions as the woman Lil, who has suffered from her husband's intentions. Despite having submitted dutifully to his needs, Lil has been punished by near death during procreation and by poisoning in trying to avoid it. Now she has been told, "Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart. ... He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* 41). If she does not take pains to remedy her appearance so that she is still attractive to him, he will go elsewhere, but to make these improvements invites the continuation of the problem. Here, sexuality is linked directly to aging and death, with a choice to be made between the two. The nightingale shows that in reality it is no choice at all, and that the women trade on sexuality and offer it regardless of their own desires and must accept the inevitable consequences.

Madame Sosostris' predictions of fire and blindness come to fruition in *The Fire Sermon* in the themes of non-procreative sexuality and the passage of time. The young men and women who have coupled illicitly along the Thames in the summer have quit the river, leaving behind only their detritus and the change of seasons. The contents of the cardboard boxes have done their work, and no life springs forth from the banks of the river. Similarly, Tiresias' activities at the Metropole are not progenitive, nor are those he observes between the resigned typist and her visitor, who takes advantage of her lassitude, "Exploring hands encounter no defense; His vanity requires no response, And makes a welcome of indifference" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* 44). She, much as Lil, accepts the sexual demand of another as a matter of course and something to be tolerated. However, in her situation we are unaware of what compensation she receives from the exchange, other than perhaps a brief respite for loneliness. Regardless, she seems alone even during congress and is relieved when he exits. For these parties, the fires of sexuality do not kindle to warmth and life without burning.

Blind Tiresias' observations continue after his study of the typist, carrying him along the length of the river through the song of the Thames-daughters. Carried up from the Thames estuary, the song traverses past the Greenwich meridian and as it does so goes back in time to Elizabeth, the apparently Virgin Queen, and her famously non-procreative relationship with the Earl of Leicester. As the journey progresses, the song wends its way up river with a canoe, the occupants of which are engaged in a seduction. Completed, the canoe drifts back downstream with the unhappy couple, him weeping, and her resigned. The poem travels back down the river to its estuarial beginnings, where again loneliness is found, love abandoned in another place, and the water joins the sea.

In *Death by Water*, Madame Sosostris' warning to fear death by water comes true, with the drowned Phoenician sailor stripped clean by the passing of time and current. He has managed to escape the conflicts of civilization in the desolation of death.

As the final piece in *The Waste Land*, *What the Thunder Said* circles back to the near apocalyptic setting of *The Burial of the Dead*. Yet this time Christ is the character entombed, rather than desire and youth. Thunder sounds repeatedly, and still the benediction of rain is withheld from the desolate environment. The quest for water continues, and the pilgrims walk with a companion that they are unable to identify. (Luke 24:13) The lines "Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel, there is the empty chapel, only the wind's home" taken with the earlier lines "And upside down in the air were towers, tolling reminiscent bells" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* 48) are reminiscent of the ordeals of the Chapel Perilous (Malory). Having finally traversed the trials of the landscape, the travelers are at last rewarded with rain, and with it the wisdom of the thunder, speaking of charity, mercy, and self-restraint: the things that bring civilization to humanity. Thus they have reached their grail, and find the Fisher King waiting, anticipating his own end and with it that of civilization, which collapses into flames and madness with a final blessing.

While Eliot's enormous pool of reference makes analysis of his poetry extraordinarily challenging, the repeated themes of sex, love, procreation, aging, death and desolation versus civilization are identifiable in his early works, suggesting both a personal and cultural preoccupation with the motifs. While Eliot was undoubtedly addressing issues in

his own life, he was also one of the leading poetic voices dealing with the widespread destruction and death that followed World War I. As such, the themes of his work could be considered a view into the collective psyche of the survivors of the Great War, as well as that of the man himself.

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[1] The Three of Wands, a figure standing on a cliff looking out over the sea.

[2] The Wheel of Fate

[3] The Ace of Coins, signifying fire.

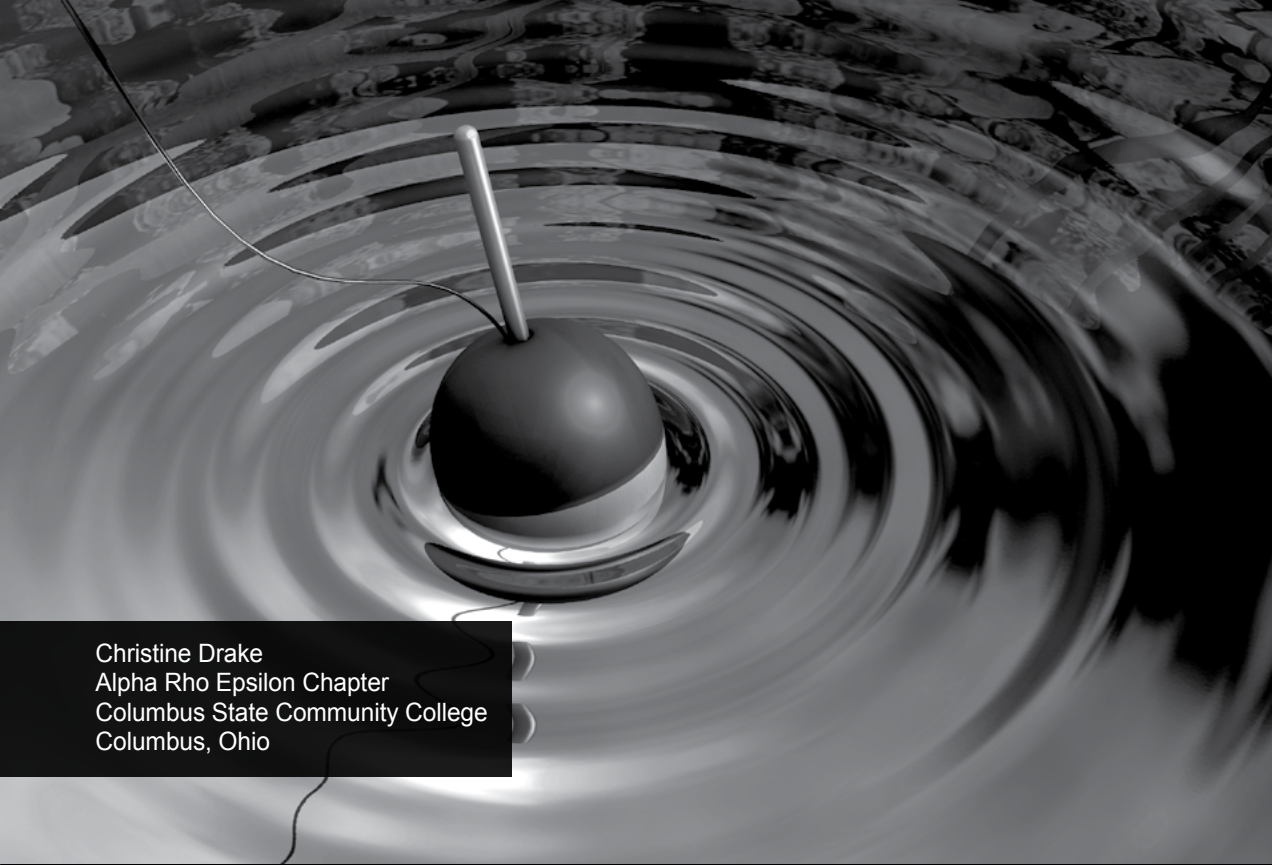
[4] The Fool, suggestive of blindness or unawareness.



Danielle Tate-Maccaroni
Alpha Rho Upsilon Chapter
Blue Ridge Community College
Flat Rock, North Carolina

On Receiving the Collected Works of W.B. Yeats

And we poor poets measure our worth in pages, volumes
But where do we receive credit for those things we've seen
Of which we can never write?
Our darkneses
Our hallows
Our midnight angels
And with credit, would it be imparted to us
The power to sketch our beings
Our very essences
In tiny, precise letters
Against the lines



Christine Drake
Alpha Rho Epsilon Chapter
Columbus State Community College
Columbus, Ohio

Not Everything is Black and White

May 1984

Glancing at the water, I counted. One, two, three, four...four...ummm...what came after four?

"Nonnie, what comes 'ter four?" I looked up from my fingers into kind black eyes.

"Five, baby. Five comes after four."

That's right.

Staring hard at the water I counted. One, two, three, four, five. Yup, another gooey lump of white stuff had joined the others.

Plopping my rump into the wet grass, Nonnie handed me my pole and I began cranking the wheel.

I liked my pole. It was the color of cotton candy I'd gotten at the fair, and I'd made it even prettier with purple and silver butterfly stickers.

"Slowly, baby sweet. Turn the reel slow now. I don't want you getting hurt."

I saw the red and yellow bobber come up. It dragged across the mud and into the grass. Stopping the crank, I watched as he picked it up. He brought over our bait and threaded my hook with another marshmallow.

"Nonnie, you sure this is how you'd catch all them fish?"

He was an expert fisherman. I know because Mawmaw showed me the place in the ice chest that was full of the fish Nonnie had caught. There had been big ones and small ones, ones with yellow stripes, ones with big mouths and even a couple of large ones that had whiskers.

Chuckling, "Yeah I'm sure. Come on now, and let's get this back in the water."

I stood up and pulled my shorts away from my bottom. They'd stuck again.

"Okay now, roll that line in the rest of the way baby sweet. That's a girl."

I cranked the wheel again, only this time I cranked as far as it would go. His hands held mine. They felt rough and bumpy against my skin, just like the old warty toad that I found in the creek last time we came fishing. Only difference was Nonnie's hands weren't wet or sticky.

I smelt the 'neat butter on his breath we had for lunch. Mawmaw packed us our favorite fishing lunch. 'Neat butter and jelly sandmiches, chippies, and the long sweet pickles still in the jar. Only difference was Mawmaw put bananas on my sandmich cause Nonnie didn't like them.

"Press your button and there we goooo..."

The hook flew through the air and landed with a plop next to the floating marshmallows. I laid the fishing pole next to his amongst the rocks.

Nonnie only had one marshmallow floating next to his bobber. He hadn't put any more on his hook when that one floated to the top.

"Nonnie, you gonna put another piece of bait on?" I pointed to the little lump.

Shaking his head, "No, not right now. We'll get a bite eventually."

He toed off his sneakers and took my hand. "Now let's see if we can find any of old warty toads' babies in the water."

I grabbed on and walked with him to the edge of the creek away from our poles. We laughed as the gushy, mushy mud squeezed up between our toes and tried to guess which one of the taddiepoles was warty toad's baby.

May 1995

Knock, knock.

"Baby sweet, you ready?" Nonnie's gravelly voice came through the door as I gazed at myself in Mawmaw's full-length mirror.

My hair was worn long, down my back with no curl. My lightly applied make-up made me look younger somehow, and I checked my wrists to make sure I misted on my perfume.

I had been so excited about this night for months. Now that it was finally here my knees and teeth were chattering like a cold winter day and yet, my palms sweated.

"Baby sweet?"

Hearing concern in his voice, I grasped the doorknob with my damp palm. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath, and then opened my bedroom door.

Nonnie held a camera in his hand and backed up for me as I came into the hallway. He looked at the top of my head to the tip of my strappy black heels then, taking my hand, he brought it up to his lips. With his gentle kiss, I felt a lump form in my throat.

His eyes closed, just for a second.

"For a moment...I...you look like your mother." His lips turned up, almost in a smile.

"You look beautiful, Catherine."

My eyes began to sting. "Thank you Nonnie."

Shaking his head, he moved further against the wall and allowed me to pass. I heard laughter coming from my two best friends and our dates.

Megan was wearing a lime-green sequined dress that made her impossibly blond hair appear even lighter, and Nicole was in a raspberry dress that floated about her ankles, detailed with metallic thread embroidery.

My dress was simple by comparison.

It was white satin with black trim. The only adornment on the simple sheath was two small satin bows at the bust line. I fell in love with it the moment Nonnie showed me my "surprise."

He had even bought the right size.

Megan and Nicole were giggling by Nonnie's bookshelves, while Justin, Corey, and Sean looked hot and uncomfortable in their tuxes. Sean held a clear, plastic box.

Corey nudged Sean in the ribs and jerked his head towards the stairs. Sean, smiling with that goofy lopsided grin of his thrust the corsage into my hands.

Looking down to the box I saw it was a gardenia.

"Sean, it's....thank you. How did you know that gardenias are..."

Nonnie cleared his throat quite loudly. "Baby sweet, these old bones need to come down the rest of the stairs."

"Okay Nonnie." I whispered.

Megan and Nicole laughed as Sean took my hand and moved me the rest of the way into the living room. I heard Nonnie's laughter then, thick and rich, as if it were pulled from the center of his being.

With laughter still dancing in his dark eyes, he looked from Sean to me.
“Ahhh...young love.”

May 2006

“Mommy, we ‘ear for Nonnie?”

The voice of my daughter was thick with sleep. A smile overtook my face as I glanced down at her. I could not resist touching the silk of her hair. Her eyes were drooping, only for her to jerk them open again.

Smiling down at her, I used a soft voice, “Yes, baby sweet. We’re here for Nonnie.”

Pushing the stroller up the handicapped ramp caused my thighs to burn and my side to cramp.

That’s it. No more Oreos, and I’m going to clean off and start using that stupid exercise bike I bought last year.

After paying a museum clerk with a fuchsia ponytail, I walked through a set of large glass doors and was almost mowed down by a frazzled mother chasing identical twin blurs. People were standing, sitting, talking in small groups, and in some cases yelling at each other. I snaked my way to the elevators that were marked for the Shoah exhibit.

“We see Nonnie?” She turned to look at me with her sleepy eyes and a single curl twirled around a chubby finger.

It had been several months since Nonnie had passed away. Even with the passage of time, an off-handed remark from someone I hadn’t seen in a while or a simple question posed by my daughter could rob the air from my lungs.

I forced a soft smile down to her and shook my head. “No, not today...baby sweet.”

Blank, sightless eyes stared at me and anyone else who passed by. Eyes that belonged to a living skeleton captured in a photograph. The child could not be older than five, and I could count every single one of his ribs. He stood barefoot, completely naked with snow at his feet. He did not even have hair to keep his skull warm.

My stomach tightened, but I could not tear my eyes away from his. How could someone do this to a child?

I glanced at my daughter. Her eyes were closed, but her finger was rubbing at the curl wrapped around her finger. My daughter was almost the same age as the boy in the picture.

I must have been staring at her for a while because I heard a cough from behind me. A man with gray hair stood next to me. The white shirt across his aged bowed shoulders smelled of starch, and the gray hat was tilted at an angle on his head. His eyes were a soft chocolate brown but seemed to hold no life. He nodded in a single gesture when I smiled halfheartedly and moved away.

Picture after picture passed, hung on blank walls, framed in sturdy black frames. Only whispered voices surrounded me. My own breathing sounded loud, as I advanced through the exhibit with slow careful steps.

Ginny’s head began to loll.

I adjusted the stroller so that she could lay as flat as possible. Her eyes opened and then drifted back down. I kissed the softness of her cheek, inhaling the baby powder scent of her skin.

Still crouched down beside the stroller, I noticed a woman. Her hair was white as the untouched snows of winter, and in her wrinkled hand she held a gold locket that she fingered absentmindedly.

Her gaze was directed at the face of a man standing full length before her. In the picture, his hair was cropped close to his head, and he reached with a single arm that held no muscle; only bone covered by withering flesh.

I could not tear my eyes away from this woman. As I watched, she took a single step back and tears fell noiseless down heavy cheeks.

As I moved along, the faces that looked into the depths of the pictures began to interest me more than the ones in the pictures. I began to notice the difference of the ones who came to look at the pictures, from the ones who lived through the Holocaust. After many years their eyes held that same stare, blank and sightless, never looking down, but straight ahead and through another person.

As I approached the entrance for testimonies, a black trench coat covered arm caught mine.

"Catherine?"

"Mr. McConnell? Is that you?" Staring in wonderment for a moment, he was quick to pull me into a hug.

"For God's sake, it's been a while." He grabbed my arms and looked me over from head to foot. "A long while. Look you've gone and grown up." Just then he noticed Ginny, "Jesus, Mary 'n' Joseph, Catherine. You're a mother."

"Yeah, I'm a mommy alright. Her name's Genevieve." I pulled the stroller around for him to get a good look.

Squatting down, he touched the curls that framed my daughter's face. "Yup, she's yours alright. She has your curls and everything."

He stood, awkwardly, maneuvering his back to get his legs to cooperate. "What are you doing here?"

"Nonnie received a letter about three weeks ago, about the Shoah testimonies being included in this exhibit. It said that this series would also include his testimony along with video footage he provided. He never said anything..." looking away I added softly, "I needed to come."

The camera moved in black and white shorts with no sound; it was not needed as the scene of horror unfolded.

A loose circle was formed by the American soldiers and detainees. A face caught my attention. I knew that face, but the mask it wore was snarled with disgust, and his eyes were filled with rage.

It was Nonnie.

The soldiers stopped talking as an opening formed. Nonnie yelled, and a soldier dressed in the uniform of the Third Reich was pushed into the tightening ring. Several of the walking corpses approached him with caution.

He looked young, this man who backed away from his own future.

I watched as he was ripped to pieces. It took less than three minutes.

Six men. My grandfather showed none mercy, including the man who begged on his hands and knees. With this, my grandfather picked him up under his arms and physically threw him into the ring.

My stomach began to seize. I covered my mouth, stood up and moved through the hall to the exhibit outside. Pushing the stroller, I moved to a bench at the entrance.

I sat down, pulling the stroller closer. Ginny was still asleep, and I fought the need to pick her up, hold her, and breathe her smell.

How could he have done that?

He was no killer. He was the man who taught me the pleasure of fishing with marshmallows and how good red soda pop with White Castles tasted.

I sat staring at the child he named when a slight cough startled me.

The nameless man with the gray hat sat next to me. The smell of starch was still strong on his white shirt, and his dark gray trousers had a clean straight line etched into the front.

We sat together for a while, not moving nor talking.

We sat together; an old man and a mother. I felt the tears sliding down my cheeks, making them wet.

"Sorry."

He never moved his face toward mine, but his hand rose and in it was a white handkerchief folded in a perfect square. He jerked his hand toward me and I took his offering. I held it tight in my hand, afraid. I did not want to use it, but I did not want to let it go.

"Thank you."

Bowing his head was his only acknowledgement.

"War changes people," his voice was hoarse. He raised his hand and coughed slightly. "As a young child, I would spend long nights waiting in bread lines only to come home with no bread. One night, while waiting with thousands of other Poles, I saw an old friend of my father. I got excited...I called out to him..." his head turned toward mine, "I called out happily, and I called him by name. He came over, beating me, as he shoved me out of

line. It was then I noticed the uniform. I went hungry, again, that night.”

I met his gaze. His eyes were still blank when he stood up and walked back into the testimonies.

I started to call after him, that he left his handkerchief, when I saw embroidered around the edge with pink and purple flowers, was the name Genevieve.



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