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Prose

The Athenian Soldier

by Hailey Murphy

I brandish my flesh to the enemy and am rewarded by the sting of his blade. I smile, knowing it is the last I will allow. Sweat weeps from my brow and into my eyes as I hiss and take the first steps of retreat.

The enemy takes this chance to rest and when I lunge, he is ready. Our blades meet firm, singing the songs of our glory. We fight without shields, only a leather bracer for blocking and I am forced to side-step his blows, swaying like the head of a cobra.

The enemy is younger, faster, and filled with rage. I still hold mine in reserve. He is not sloppy, but I find an opening and bring him to kneel. There is no defiance when he looks at me.

“Yield, Strategos.”

Thoughtful applause comes from the soldiers that circle us. I help Tellius to his feet and he claps my back. His hands are that of a farmer. Thick and calloused. Big enough to match his height. I have seen them hold a child, and choke the life from a man.

“It must be true, what they say. You are a great son of Zeus,” he says teasingly.

“I am afraid not, my friend. I am my father’s son, and a son of Athens just like you.”

Tellius releases me and falls into formation with the other soldiers. I take a deep breath before I address them.

“Brothers! The god of war has come to Attica! Spartans march through our lands! We are all that stands between Athens and the savages of Laconia. When the sun breaks this next day, we offer them to Hades!” My chest heaves as I talk, and I steady myself. “But that is tomorrow, and Apollo’s ride is nearly done.” I turn my eyes to the descending sun. “Go. Fuck your wives if they’re here. Find a hetaera if they’re not. Sing the songs of home.”

I clear my throat and stand as a strategos should. “Glory! Victory! Athens!”

My soldiers repeat the words in heavy chorus, and through them I feel the Gods’ presence. There will be more than one tomorrow, watching and waiting, or giving their hand to turn the battle toward a victor. Ares for certain will try to intervene on behalf of his favorite sons. *Pray, wise Goddess, do not abandon us to these brutes.* If Athena hears me, she offers no answer.

My men disperse into the veins of soldiers flowing around us to return to their tents. I remain still for a moment, in awe of the beast that has swallowed me. At the center of the Athenian war camp, my vision is a field of blue. First the cobalt tents and flags, then the deep navy of the sea shimmering with the sun’s last light. I close my eyes as if to capture it, even if for only just a moment before it is gone.

I am not shocked when my feet bring me first back to my tent. It is where I am needed most. At the table that centers the space inside my wife sits ready for our meal. We have agreed on this as my last campaign. She rightly argued it was long past time for me to retire into politics, serving my people with speech instead of sword. And I am sure there is far more benefit in being the wife of a civil servant.

“How are the men?” she asks. Her fingers calm loose strands of greying hair as I begin to undo the last clasps of my armor. There was a time that she would have helped, and I feel the sting of that loss as if it were new. Before I answer I lean down and place a kiss on her head, then take my seat across from her.

“Their blades cry for the blood of Spartans,” I say. She smiles with thin lips.

“And their mothers and wives cry out for their safe return.” My wife is no stranger to this custom. She has felt the loss of three sons to the Athenian war machines. All she has left is an old karcharías who refuses to stop swimming.

“I miss them too,” I say softly.

She continues as if I hadn't spoke. "Will you find a grove tonight?" The lines are well rehearsed, and I respond in kind.

"It brings me luck."

"You are a good man Ithicus. Honest even when you lie. I should have married a liar." She raises her cup in a toast. "That is for the next life, I suppose."

Later, when she falls asleep in her cups, I carry her to our bed. I lay her down gently and stand as a sentry watching her sleep. I think of the birth of our first son. His small hand in hers. Hardly a first breath in his lungs. Then I think of the fathers, husbands, and sons that I will soon send to die, and it no longer feels right to grieve.

The walk from my tent to the camp's end is long and does nothing to settle my mind. The soldiers at the gate give me no trouble. I tell them to loose an owl and they do not question it. This is what respect has earned me. Privacy and regret.

When I come to the clearing, he is already waiting. Laid back casually in the grass, his golden hair falls in rings around his face. He smiles boyishly. He is love and war made whole in one immortal body. Son of Ares and Aphrodite with no full part of either. When the smile fades there is a sadness there.

"Greetings, Strategos." He stands.

"Greetings, Lord Eros." It is three strides before he is beside me and I am wrapped in his embrace. When he kisses me there are tears in his eyes.

Finally, I ask, "What troubles you, my love? What have you seen? Is it your father? Will he turn the battle for the Spartans?"

"Athens will win. Tomorrow at least. That is not what... that is not what ails me." Eros pulls back and each tear seems to fall heavier than the last. I know then he does not weep for a nation but a man.

I lift my hand to dry his face. "I do not fear the ferryman."

“My father means to kill you. He’s already set aside a blade for it.” He is eons older than me but among the gods Eros is still only young. It is moments like this that I am reminded. “Your life is the price agreed for the Athenian victory.”

“It is a worthy sacrifice.” I do not hesitate when I say it, only after.

Eros’ face hardens, but not to me. His eyes turn towards Olympus. “The gods are changeable. When my mother pushed her Trojan son west, she turned her heart from Greece. Now that land which you call Rome has begun to flourish and more God’s are pulled from this land.”

I can no longer remember my sons at their birth. Only their dying breaths. The last rise and fall of their chests. Their blood. My blood. For this.

Eros looks down and speaks again, “You have noticed Athena’s absence?”

My throat dries. “I have.”

“You were the last of her heroes, and she had sold you off like a bull.” His mouth quivers. “Zeus has spoken. Over the next century Greece will be granted to the gods of war and death. Another century, and they too will be gone. The God’s have abandoned you.”

For several moments there is silence between us. “But you are here, so I am not alone.”

My eyes water, but I allow no tears to fall. Ceremoniously, I bend to retrieve the dagger in my sandal, and lift it up for Eros to see. “Prince of Olympus, bless this blade, that it might find its mark.”

The godling takes from his hip a flask containing the same waters that anointed fair Achilles. He lifts the dagger from my hand, pouring the water on one and kissing the other. This is his blessing. It has saved me countless times before. I allow myself to hope.

Eros returns the dagger and my hand shakes as I take it. With one hand he stables my wrist. The other brings my chin up to face him.

“You are not alone,” he says, and I feel his embrace this time before it is even there. This man, this boy, this god; I would gladly die for him. But I know now I will die for nothing.

Just before dawn, I leave. Eros still sleeps and I cannot bare to wake him. I lay my hand on his chest and whisper the same affections I told him in my youth. That he doesn't hear them hardly matters.

I return to camp, but not to my tent. There is nothing yet to pull me in any direction, so I move aimlessly. In the center of the camp there is a statue for Athena. There are soldiers there, kneeling before her and begging for intercession. The statue is well made. I try to remember the name of the sculptor, but it is lost in the great roaring sea of my mind. In her left hand she holds spear and shield. In her right is Nike, goddess of victory. I wonder if Nike too has abandoned us.

I was barely a boy the first time Athena came to me. The first shield I ever wore was a gift from her. The first battle cry I uttered was in her name.

When I finish reminiscing, I find Tellius. He is already dressed in his armor, all freshly cleaned, doing a young man's exercises. When I die, he will be promoted. I feel I should harbor some hatred towards him, but I cannot find it within myself. He's too good a man to think ill out of spite. Besides it is not his desires that condemn me, and it is not on his sword that I will die.

“Greetings *Hyparchos*.”

“Greeting *Strategos*.”

“Do you have any children Tellius?” He's clearly confused but does not hesitate to answer.

“Two sons and a daughter.”

“I had three sons, but they are with Hades now. Xerces took them all. My eldest son, Balius, died on his sword. When I die, my possessions will go to my wife, but she will not be long without me. You see, I must find someone to inherit my things. And I have grown tired of searching. You

are a good man, and I would like to call you as one of my sons.”

“Strategos...”

“Only speak to accept, and speak as a friend.”

“I cannot repay this kindness.”

“Then thank the gods you will never need to.” The words seem bitter now, but I swallow them down. I take Tellius’ forearm in one hand and clap his back with the other. “Good man. Fight well today.”

Finally, I return to my tent. It is empty. I suspect my wife has already begun the journey back to Athens. She never could be outside the city’s walls for long. Part of me wishes I could say goodbye to her. But part of me is glad she is gone. I do not need a reminder of my cowardice. Not now.

I dress slowly, as if I couldn’t do up the armor in my sleep. I fight against decades of muscle memory to move intently through the process. I am present for every buckle and bend of the soft leather straps. When I tie my belt, I can feel the weight of the sword at my hip. I take the time to clean it. I polish my shield as well and relace my sandals. The ritual of it calms me.

I run exercises in the sand as the sun begins to rise. Again, I pay careful attention to each movement. A thrust, and a turn, and a big arching swing. I don’t allow my body to skip a single step. I feel the privilege of age in my muscles.

It is still not quite dawn by the time I finish so I undo the ties of my armor and take in the ocean. The cool water refreshes me and the salt stings at Tellius’ scratch. I feel weightless and immortal held aloft on the waters surface.

Both armies will wake soon, and death will walk with them in line. Beyond the crashing waves come the first stirrings of wakefulness.

For the last time, I think of the birth of my first son. His small hand in his mother’s palm and her small hand in mine. Cradling him in my arms as I cut him free. The sound of his first cries as he slipped from her womb.

Balius' cries fade into the horns of war, and I allow myself to slip below the waves. Soon I will face the god of war and he will show me death. Soon my city will fall. And then all my people will follow. Athena will watch her chosen one fulfill her bargain. I scream through the waves.

When I come to the surface I'm gasping. The sun has bled purple and orange and red across the sky. I close my eyes to capture it. Even if only for a moment. The image stays in my mind as I walk towards war. As does the sound of the waves and my sons cries. I feel Eros' tears hot against my cheeks as I call my soldiers to march. When we rush forward and break against the enemy, I feel his warm embrace.

We are Athenians, seventeen thousand strong, and we fight like *daimonas*. My blade is possessed, and even my shield tastes Spartan blood. I let my rage flow through me. I fight for my sons. I will not let them take me.

Ares is a large man, bigger than his son. He does not speak, even to taunt me. Through his bull's helm I see eyes black as pitch. He smiles, relishing the violence, and I see my lover's features cruelly twisted.

I don't want to die. The gods do not care. Ares pushes his blade through my chest and blood seeps from my veins Spartan red. If it was not too hard, I would laugh. Instead, I sink into the sand and slump up against a hill. I stop breathing before I close my eyes. The last breath out is the hardest and the easiest. I give every bit of myself away at once. I hold nothing back. There is nothing left to give.

I think of the ferryman, and hope it is not a long way that we have to go. I close my eyes.

The Devil of Deep Hollow

(An Excerpt)

by T.J. Wall

Bandy was a mile off of Hegan Lane, the old cruiser weaving in and out of the broken yellow lines as he headed up the back roads that led to the surrounding hills. He gripped the steering wheel tight with one hand, twenty miles over the speed limit, the bald tires coming dangerously close to each cliff edge before catching grip in the loose gravel and surging on.

At first, Bandy wasn't sure where he was going, only serving the primal need to get away, to clear his head which subsequently, had usually involved copious amounts of alcohol or pills he'd score off the illegal labs in the mountain hills. Maybe this time he wouldn't need it, he thought. But even as the idea passed, a roiling, twisted pain awakened, hungry in his gut. Sweat dripped over his face and cascaded down the crook of his back—body shakes, jaw clenched, teeth grinding. It didn't help that the summer rain clouds had pushed southeast leaving a lazy afternoon sun to intermittently peek out, a slow motion strobe being called in to work.

He continued on up the winding roads, noticing the same landmarks from over the last thirty years: innominate dirt roads, the surrounding trees tacked with 'no trespassing' signs and somewhere out of sight, above the treeline stood lazy, doughy smoke signaling the dug-in encampments of end-of-the-worlders, prospectors of annihilation. Bandy had dealt with them plenty, hell, even been amicable and friendly with a handful.

Elsewhere, he passed McCullough's Dry Goods with its ancient leaning wood structure and lopsided sheet metal sign advertising Rude Boy Root Beer even though the business had bellied up in '74. Bandy slowed down enough to study the old bullet holes that littered the sign and laughed to himself. It was a low chuckle, barely causing his shoulders to

heave, yet it felt good. It felt half a lifetime ago that he had added his own bullet holes to the sign in his wild youth. He thought, perhaps the past isn't always lost to time.

So much has changed now.

The hills continued to unwind before him, a comforting familiarity in the muggy breeze as he drove, an elbow hanging out the window. Up the incline on the right was the pull off for The Overlook, which in surprisingly unoriginal fashion, was merely an overlook to the Hollow below. He supposed creativity hadn't existed for a few generations now.

Still, Bandy jerked the wheel to the right at the last second, a hard jar and scrape as the car bottomed out and traversed from the smooth hill-road to loose gravel chunks. He skirted along, a swirling cloud of dust kicked up behind the police cruiser.

The winding road was a lazy snake for half a mile before opening up into a makeshift lot. The western sun was splashing the open, flat cutout in afternoon gold, a darker tinge. It contrasted naturally with the decoupage of trees huddled around a half crescent circle: Full sugar maples and eastern hemlocks, dogwoods and mountain laurels, all fanning out their bulbous branches, soaking in the heavy sun.

Bandy's eyes widened, his mouth half agape.

God, it's so beautiful.

He pumped the brakes, pushed the lever into park and rubbed his hands together, noticed the rough texture, his dry skin like worn out sandpaper. He looked out the front windshield and noticed the metal cattle fence the city council had installed a few years prior. Cars were still scattered at the base of the cliff edge, and Bandy supposed the fence had to be done. Before the low barrier was installed, there hadn't been a season past that someone hadn't taken the long nosedive over the edge. He wondered now if the fence would actually do its job, at how much speed the cruiser would need to burst through. He didn't think he'd try it, not really. He knew in most ways that mattered, he was a bonafide coward like the rest of them. But he'd accepted long ago that it was

easier to let the dark thoughts play out in your mind than to shut them away. In his mind, the lingering black dogs would always bite at his heels but it was easier to train a dog than it was to take a deep moral inventory.

What was most troubling was that Bandy could easily see the police cruiser joining the wreckage ad memoriam, to see another set of makeshift crosses hammered into the dry dirt, a bouquet of sorrowful flowers that would wilt in a few days after being left exposed to the elements. In his mind, he already imagined the town saying half hearted appeals like ‘Poor boy, he just couldn’t hack it, the job was too hard’ or ‘he must’ve missed his pops too much.’

The sad thing was that they wouldn’t be wrong, not that he missed his father much, not on some deep heartfelt level, but he was a shit sheriff. He hadn’t fooled himself into thinking he deserved the job at all.

*Maybe not, hell, don’t even want it but it’s mine now.
Someone’s got to figure shit out.*

Bandy had read a poem a while back, some book that was dogeared on Claire’s coffee table. It had said that there were different ways to tell the passing of time. He wasn’t sure why he remembered it now, but imagining the jagged, metal remains of cars that were haphazardly stacked at the cliff base, a macabre piece of art, a mountain town Stonehenge, it began to make sense. He remembered them easily, a dozen or more: low bed pickups from the ‘50’s and long-finned Caddies from the ‘60’s, a dirty ‘70’s pepto pink Mustang, Mike Penetti’s ‘85 cherry red, two door Camero—the front end now a crumpled heap.

A Monument of Death Through the Decades.

He smirked, shook his head to dispel any guilt.

That’s what Claire had called it when they were younger.
The longer he sat in the idle car, ignition off, silent save for the mountain wind playing through the evergreens and the off tempo pinging of the engine cooling down, a midwestern storm was picking up steam in his head, half formed thoughts flashing like streaks of lightning against the thin

dark-shield of his eyelids. He thought as if there was some fragmented, mosaic puzzle laid out before him, pieces scattered and broken and how had it all fallen on him? How did he inherit this fuck-all shit show? He fought hard to piece it all together, his brow furrowed, rigid atop a pair of bloodshot eyes.

If only I had a pick-me-up. Just one drink, one pill, one...

No! He pushed everything to the side, pictured Claire the last time they had been together, half a beer in her hand, her sun-kissed body wrapped in the sheets like a Greek goddess that had taken refuge in a hidden mountain town. *Kick the habit, before the habit kicks you. Kick the...*

His eyes opened slowly like an Appalachian sunrise, and he palm-punched the steering wheel in anger. The cruiser door slammed as he stepped out into the clearing, pulling in the afternoon humidity, his lungs aching. God knew he wasn't made for this shit, that each day the badge seemed to sag a bit more, too heavy for his thin frame, the responsibility like an extra dose of gravity.

I can figure this shit out though. I know I can. The Leroux girl is on to something, just need to connect the dots.

The dots were what ate at him the most. It all seemed connected somehow—the missing people. Salinger had mentioned her odd curiosity for Mr. Goodwill weeks ago and he'd followed up on it right? He remembered it, not clearly, definitely not sober, but he'd performed his due diligence. The place had been creepy, and sure, the old man was definitely hiding something but he didn't seem like a killer, or for that matter, Bandy couldn't imagine the old man in his embalming apron and bony figure able to fight for dominance with any 'victim'. Just seeing those wrinkled, weak hands shaking left an uneasy churn in his gut. But now, a zapping clarity revealed things he'd missed before. It was Leroux's body language that bothered him now, the austere, stiff shoulders of distrust, her eyes a hardline, faint teeth marks on her plush bottom lip and had she been crying? Sweat maybe?

But the victims were real. Missing and or presumed dead. *Dead. Fuck... This shits on me. You need to figure out what the bells' happening here.*

His matte-black duty weapon suddenly felt heavy in its holster.

Bandy had read the police reports a few dozen times, lost in the droning tone of indifference. On the page, the victims were little more than words, brief descriptions that did little to paint a picture of their complex lives, lives that were now derailed like a southbound train, and their absence, had left only the lightest imprint on the town.

It was true. Bandy already knew the search for the Baker boy would be called off in a few days and the young woman had been reduced to whispers and small talk. People just lose interest after a while. Perhaps, they lost hope too, but Bandy knew it was more than that. The Hollow had a way of making people forget things. It also had a habit of not letting people go.

He leaned against the cattle fence, a rusty powder staining his palms and the front of his uniform with dirty, van dyke smears of brown. The trip to see the old man had been a bust but right as he was about to mutter what a 'goddamn waste of time it had been', the old man's manic ramblings were replaying in his head, his horribly sober mind a black and white television reel with frenzied static that made some core piece of his head pulsate in a well-timed death beat, a low, painful buh-bah with each ripple of the heart.

What had the old man been rambling about?

Not many things surprised Bandy anymore but something was severely unsettling, a dark shadow that seemed to slither through the town. The trail of thought made him picture the old biblical story he'd learned in Sunday school back when his mother was alive and had made him go, back when he was forced to wear his itchy church clothes, the seams of the shorts too high above his adolescent-dirty knees while mom smoked menthols in the old station wagon, her

thin arms teapotting the ash out the window as she drove. He half remembered the sheep's blood brushed in lazy strokes across the tops of door frames and how it... something, had come for the first borns in the night.

The Hollow had its own boogeyman, he thought.

The notion put a bad taste in his mouth and he frowned, hoping to god he was wrong but also feeling venerated, as if believing this twisted revelation might lead him somewhere closer to figuring it all out.

Everything is different now.

He thought this as he stared absently out over the cliff, the sky a weak periwinkle blue that appeared darker the longer you looked and below, in a cursed valley, the Hollow carried on, downtown in the center of the crooked circle of open land while the abandoned factories stood erect like old headstones, planted along the outside edges, forever eyesores with its crumbling stone structures and jagged smile windows from where kids had barreled rocks through.

Bandy slid his fingers into his pocket, fishing until he felt the folded picture and pulled it out. The picture itself was already dated, faded and folded into fourths, the white paper-like creases acting as hard borders. The edges of the polaroid were indented from the grips of those who had studied it.

There it was, clear as day, his father, the old sheriff, his cheeks flushed from the booze and grinning carelessly with his eyes squinted, the crows feet deep ridges fanning out in threes on each side of his eyes. Why was he in an old photo with Goodwill? And what did Mandow have to do with it? These were questions that he felt were going to be hard to answer, and did he even want to know?

The sun was dipping, beginning its daily dive below the horizon, the colors shifting from golden yellow to a burnt amber as it mixed with the treeline below. He gripped the rusty railing, stepped up on the first cross rung and then the second and peered over. If he closed his eyes, he could nearly imagine himself floating there, hovering in that space of indecision but as with most things, it didn't last. He studied

the mashed heap of metal at the base of the cliff and in the distance—the town he'd sworn to protect. He had driven absently up the mountain to get away, to clear his head and all he was left with were more questions than answers and moreso, a loose mental list of people he needed to see. The town may have been meddling in the dark for decades but it was going to be exposed now. Someway, somehow, he was going to put the broken pieces together.

As with most things, Claire stood once more at attention centerstage in his yearning heart. He loved her. He had never said it to her, not sober but it was easier to process now as he overlooked his small world.

I love you, Claire. I'll go with you. I'll leave everything behind, start something new. Just let me put this puzzle together first.

Bandy shook his head, not because it wasn't true, it all was, but he knew it'd get a hell of a lot worse before it got better. Like the Pharaoh of old, Deep Hollow refused to let its people go.

Paperweights, Losing My Religion, and Other Streams of Consciousness

by Jen Carter

A sage green paperweight sits on my bookshelf. Maybe it's glass? Maybe it's crystal? Maybe I'm clueless, I'm not sure. It doesn't hold down any paper, like it's destined intention. No, instead it collects dust among the works of Austen and Rooney. Only on occasion does it rattle when the train hurdles by, mere feet from my apartment window. There has to be a metaphor in there somewhere, I just know it. I don't quite know how I got this paperweight. It once wasn't mine and then... it was? It always looked so mystical and allusive sitting on Grandma's desk. What did she look like again? Sometimes I forget. I forget that the paperweight is even there. It becomes part of the fixtures of my room, like a light switch or the dresser.

* * *

It is currently 9:50pm on a Sunday and I'm staring at this paperweight, wondering if it will speak to me the way I thought God used to. I was told not to put much faith into inanimate things, like rocks and crystals, but I can't tell the difference between that and what I was doing before.

What's funny is that I went to church today. It was the first time in a long time, actually. As I crossed the threshold of the building, my chest was caught by searing talons. The fight-or-flight was telling me that I didn't belong as the pew-seated gallery fixed their screaming eyes on my trembling hands as they gripped and pulled on each other. Every step felt like a betrayal, and I wasn't sure to whom. Eventually, I found a seat with a minimal amount of sweat and spilled coffee caked in the cushion and eased into it with my shoulders back and eyes glazed. My soul sat inside its vessel, twitching and mangled. A liar in sheep's clothing.

So many people came up to me after the Pastor's sermon about the importance of tithing and told me that they were "so happy" to see me. I hate that I couldn't tell if they were doing this in the name of my soul or in the name of my pocketbook that is already in the negatives. I don't know what is real and what is inanimate anymore. I don't know if I have any more faith in God than I do in this paperweight. I don't know who I am anymore.

Who knows what can finally answer my prayers?

* * *

Paperweight. Weight. Why is everything about me compared to my weight? She's so confident despite her size. She's so pretty, but she could lose some *weight*. *Weight. Weighed.* I feel so *weighed* down by endless nights of restless sleep and papers that won't write themselves that it looks like the tips of my fingers could graze the carpet when I stand up.

I don't know how long I'm going to last until I finally

break.

Do you think I'll splinter into glistening shards of sage green? Or will gravity simply pull me down and collect dust where I lay?

* * *

I almost thought I broke it once, smashed it to bits and pieces. I don't know why I needed to have it in my dorm room. Maybe I thought it would ground me? Hold me to my family? To the friends I had? To who I was before I left?

It didn't.

I only talk to one person that I went to high school with, but we knew each other long before we were 14 and writing our high school's abbreviation and graduation year in our Instagram bios. At seven years old we were thrown into shimmering dresses that were coated in red glitter and shoved onto a stage with the rest of the children's choir. Blinded by the bright stage lights, we sang about a faith that we're not so certain we have anymore.

It ended up being a picture frame that shattered. The paperweight rolled around in the cardboard box and battled the dainty frame on the journey from my parents' car to the nine-story brick building full of health code violations and underage alcoholics, my home for the next ten months. The picture of my friends and I on my sixteenth birthday was shredded in the process.

When was the last time we spoke? I can't remember.

My parents only stayed long enough for them to take a breath after climbing up the dorm hall's stairs and for me to take the paperweight out of the box and slice my finger on a shard of glass as I assessed the damage. The door closed behind them, one they couldn't lose this time as blood dripped down my index finger, tinting the light green paperweight, still clutched in my hand with spots of red. The automatic lock clicked, and their footsteps disappeared down the hallway.

The picture frame was thrown in the trash as the paperweight sat triumphantly on my desk, basking in the sun pouring in from my dorm room window.

Idly, it was waiting to be forgotten.

* * *

It's cracked, but only on the inside. You wouldn't be able to tell by looking at it from a distance. Maybe the weight of gravity is putting too much pressure on it. Maybe it's always been there and no one else was the wiser. Masquerading as pristine and put together, when in reality that couldn't be further from the truth. The fissure will soon branch out with the weight of the world pressing continuously on it. The inner fractures will multiply. At that point the paperweight won't be able to hide it anymore. It's going to eat away at its insides until it breaks through to the surface and leaves the once seemingly solid structure in ruins for everyone to see. Would it even recognize itself if it looked into the mirror?

* * *

When the paperweight wasn't mine, it was positioned next to my grandpa's senior portrait above the clunky desktop computer, adjacent from the Mickey Mouse pen holder, and one shelf below a figurine of the Virgin Mary. The edges of the photograph were frayed and had yellowed over time with age. A signature was neatly tucked into the corner from the colorist, who added the paint to the black and white photo. His bright smile would reflect off the crystal sphere and a green hue would sparkle into the eyes of the desk's inhabitant.

I find myself thinking about how my grandma looked at it every day until she died and how my grandpa couldn't look at it any day after.

Maybe whenever he looked at it, he saw her face in its reflection next to his. Flashes of their trips around the world or the decades they spent together would dance in his irises when his gaze met the weighted material's. Maybe he could hear her laughter that once echoed off the garden terraces when my brother called it a forest, or the songs, I'm told, she sang to me before I went to bed.

When I look upon the polished weight, I only see myself reflecting off the glossy surface with no recollection of the faces that were there before my own. My eyes stare back at me like they're on the cover of a Fitzgerald novel and I am

alone.

* * *

Do you think that if I let it all go, I'd drift off into space?
Like balloons in the night, yearning to be among the stars?
Or are their strings so tightly held down by a weight that it would pull me back to earth?

Hold me down?

Hold me back?

Holden Caulfield leans against it, trapped inside the binding of a paperback cover. Somewhere within those pages I hear echoes of laughter. *Drop it*. He tells me. If it shattered into fifty pieces, it wouldn't have any more weight to it. The discarded shards of green would have no sense of identity. No purpose. I'd probably just

POP

once I reached the end of the atmosphere anyway. Burst rubber falling to the earth.

Would someone else want to save the pieces?

* * *

It sits there on the bookshelf, like it sat on the desk in my grandma's office, like the desk in my freshman dorm room,

Idly.

Alone.

An afterthought.

Poetry

How We Eat Our Words

by Cody Roberts

I will not hesitate to tell you... I've tried,
going pound for pound with each bitter bite,
I gorge myself on pre-prepared pain as it's served
to each of my ears, but I can't keep on this weight
to save my life. I'm being force fed to keep me kicking.

Oh each of these erotically choking
tummy-turning morsels of self starvation,
turn me pale & potent to another serving.

These sugar coated concerns mean nothing,
I've got not one sweet-tooth in my jaws, endlessly
chewing & swallowing just to please public eyes
is agony. I'm laid out on my bent-fork body,
praying some hearty expressions will feed the
picky creatures growling from within, hoping
I can one day fathom stomaching love, without lacing it.
I want to dine on perfectly cooked care, delectable as it is
real,
raw as in nature & seasoned in truth.
I'd elect to eat my pen, before I eat another microwaved lie.

I'll feed you berries, something sweet as it is pure,
I don't want the cake if you can't eat it too.
So if we cannot eat our own words, let us feed each-
-other, the way birds feed their kin, shamelessly
& so dearly. What is hunger besides craving,
desperation for what's denied.

Poison I imagine,
fills us, before it kills us.

Somniloquent

After Sean Hill

by Cody Roberts

People say there are cities that seem to never sleep,
places where the tossings... the turnings, never
cease, movements which pass us by, as we rest
unbothered. I hear echos in slumberous passings,
where voices return to me as if they'd never
left, in dreams I hear whispers warning me.

Your heart is afraid—

Your heart is afraid to relax.

I've always found sleepy eyed mutterings
so tender, connective as threads of shared
blankets. Speaking in subconscious, filterlessly
flailing words, I must wonder how I reply,
while i'm far away in dreamscape,
yet so close in the bedsheet.

I don't have trouble sleeping, not exactly,
the monsters slinking from beneath beds,
dashing into closets never frightened me.
It is lonesome that stirs, knowledge that night
may never end, & I alone with fistfuls of fabric
cannot comprehend what goes bump in the night,
whatever stands in the doorway, whoever watches me
sleeping. I question if my burning eyelids will shut,
never to open up again. What if my last words,
are uttered aimless while I lie.

Ward, 51/50

After Nicole Stellon O'Donnell, *The Black Bear Speaks to
Godzilla*

by Cody Roberts

*They built you of plastic and cloth in the studio, but I was here
first.*

We heard you didn't make it, they
with those hooves tight on your neck, built
the cell before the keyhole, the one that you
peered through to us. Footsteps of
survival shouldn't land us in plastic
bottomed shoes, laces taken and
doors forced to be kept open. I lost the cloth
I'd been cut from when we went in
there, no necklaces on besides the
collars they forced, 25 miles from studio
17 with 2 feet of concrete in between, but
at least we're safe right? I am considered lucky, I
was lucky enough, or at a time I was,
now I am the last aware, you didn't want to go back here.
We were lost the way we were found,
me last, & you first.

They might fear you, but only in velvet seats-

I didn't wear black to your funeral, I didn't go to your funeral,
because they
never invited me. There are many reasons why, why that
might
have happened, invitation lost in the mail, fear
that I may tell the truth of what happened to you,
I may never know why, but
the truth is something I have. Truth is the only
thing i've got left of you, of our time in
there. I still sit out on moist grass, under the sun you'd say

felt like velvet,
I sit there for the both of us,
& you'll never come back,
but you'll always have a seat.

**My Mom Sends Me a Picture of a Chip
in the Shape of a Heart**

by Cody Roberts

My mother sees hearts everywhere she goes,
almost as if they conjure from thin air,
float ever so gently, just as her voice is,
falling to her feet & in her curls,
& I wonder if she calls them in,
or if they already know where
they are destined to land.

I do not know if they
were always hearts,
or if they become heart shaped
in her presence.

Good omens, we tell ourselves,
good things come to good people,
we hope, I hope, she hopes,
so the hearts appear, still now—
after all these years, my moms
gift sheds itself on me. I see hearts
everywhere when I think of her,
think of the good people like her,
see the leaf that's sat across from me.
A good omen, a reminder I am,
or how bad I try to be, good.

Be good when all feels so bad,
when I am sick & tired, & when
I grow tired of being sick,
become so sick of being tired,
a heart dries its shape on my windowsill.
My mother sends me a picture,
it's a rock, just a rock, that is held to
form some nearing shape,
that resembles a heart.

American Wedding

by Cody Roberts

American divorce is a 50% chance,
the tinge of these rings won't ever wash off,
the flower girl despite her age won't forget her first,
because it will not be her last. So what does that say,
what does that say for us, land of the free the
home of the unfaithful, unaccounted
for unfamiliarity of it's just unfair.

She still wears her ring everyday, just to keep everyone
off her ass, off her everything, & because it was real
to her. Beyond that, it stays real, the photobook
time-machine is transtemporal.
There we are frozen,
she says we look beautiful,
I oblige her & agree.

I was the most hopeful, hopeful in thinking
they would revert, join hands again, rewrite those
20-something vows in modern words,
built up on slip of the tongue phrases.
So in love they crossed the country in a two car caravan.
It took me 18 years to finally leave my hometown,
today I look south & still can't help but feel chills.

I can't stomach the 50% chance

phantasmagorical

by Cody Roberts

“I remembered what had been circling in me: I am beautiful.
I am full of love. I am dying.”

-Ada Limon, *Bright Dead Things*

There's a ghosts in my passenger seat,
a disembodied soul calling shotgun,
seatbelts float while I rub my eyes.
I hear a voice barking for the aux, then
whistling song recommendations.
No I can't see them, but I feel them,
they wait for me. They're waiting. I finish
pumping gas, a cold gust taps my left
shoulder, it asks me to charge their phone.

I sustain each request, no matter their
lack of particles. They're Pleasant spirits,
pitching for gas & bearing me singing.
Brushing my shoulder as I whimper,
despite no physical features,
such as fingers. Though the car creaks &
echos, they always listen to sorrow, I offer
my fleshy ear to theirs, wince at pains
of their pasts. Ghosts get it, or got it,
I ask why. Why don't they float, why
instead choose to ride along,
whenever I drive alone.

Between you & me,
I think they're trying to keep me
from becoming a ghost too.
Otherwise, there would be no one
to drive their spirits.

Versification

An Ode to Poetics

by Cody Roberts

To tell you the truth. Every word I spit has bile in it.
Everything I say is the first line of a poem,
some new kind of divinity, I crave death
by a word-slide. So i'll be collecting token phrases
until they kill me, or take me by the hands,
one folding fluid-motion, force my eyes stay-open
& show me the truth. Give me an answer.

I've been told that i'll break for good one day;
my skin graft cigarette burns won't last, i'll split
& there won't be enough twine to scarecrow stitch
my riven body back together.
But I play bloody knuckles against brick walls
in passing, kiss fire-pokers for fun, you can't destroy
a body that calendars history in needle prick tongue
bit tell-all-tales.

To tell you the truth, everything I do ends up twisted here,
flurries of hailstorm lettering, in the mirror, on a countertop,
carving into bones something as beautiful as a poem.
I am subsisting, these are ways to turn pain into beauty,
the only ways I know how, the only way I will now.
Plagued artistics let tears fill their watercolors,
I am the poet who lets you know my blood is in the ink,
only after you've held the page.

Every Forest Burns

A collection of poems that explore trauma and the brutal yet beautiful process of healing from it. The seven poems follow the seven chakras (root to crown) that trauma attacks and that one heals throughout their personal healing process.

the aftermath

by Brooke Kenney

The body remembers before you do.

you hear that sound of a body breaking, when you step into a pile of leaves, when you crack an egg at breakfast. you hear gunshots when you cook bacon in the morning and feel the oil burn your skin.

my feet still try to run when someone makes popcorn in the kitchen. each kernel explodes like a firecracker; nowhere to run.

I look for escape routes everywhere I go, for I still see the gun within that fist. I still hear his screams when I walk by a playground and I still see his face when I close my eyes.

have you ever heard the planet hold its breath before a storm? there is a second of silence before the bullet is released where you only have time to accept.

accept that the air is split in half and anything along the hot wind's path will fall into the cracks.

adrenaline. the worst high of my life. running but not feeling the ground, my heart beating for two.

bodies don't grow back after fires like trees and they don't
explode into a light show like stars do at death. they crumple
like a paper ball in a fire and they wilt like flowers before
winter.

although I try to forget the memory chokes me awake at
night with the image of his face against the pavement, his
eyes seeing without his soul

and the blood: it is forever woven into my clothes

When my forest burned

by Brooke Kenney

I was laid down
Squirring under a single
Hand, like a beetle on its back:
Helpless
That's when my soul detached
From its earth home.
I watched my body wither
Like a carnation thrown
To flames
Flames that outran
The wind, my forest home
Swallowed into hell's hole.

After the fire
Had feasted enough
I watched my body
Sink into the
burned forest floor
As it waited
for its soul
To return with the trees

Monsters

by Brooke Kenney

If hungry enough
Monsters emerge
Before the light is
Turned off.

Even under the sun
I see them lurk
Behind the trees
Hear them hiss
In the wind
Feel them kiss
The tips of my ears.

Every corner of my
Rounded eye
Can see them.
Watching me,
Hunting me,
And plotting for
The kill.

You're safe now
My therapist says.
But I'm not sure
How to tell her
They've made a home
In the shadows of my
Mind, nibbling through
Every comforting memory
And stuffing themselves
Until they're all
That's left.

Sadness that sits

by Brooke Kenney

In the spot
Between
Where the
Mountains meet
Sits the sadness

It is there
In the crease of my neck
I can feel it
Sitting there
Each time I swallow
As if I think
That will remove
The lump in my throat

It seems to just be there
As if on a porch swing
Enjoying each drop
Of grandmas
Sweet tea
Before I have a
chance to pour
A glass

It doesn't seem
To be going anywhere
It's moved right in,
Goes where I go
Like a hovering cloud.
So I cross my legs
Criss cross style
Right up next to it
And I get to know it
Real well.

Choosing freedom

by Brooke Kenney

Spent all the time
That I have ever known
Locked in this climb
Of a castle.
This thick vine of mine
Guards the window
Where the blue sits
And soothes me to sleep
Each night.

There is nothing
more free than the waves
That sway with each sigh
Of the moon, beckoning
To me, a promise of resilience,
A heart of high tides
And the bliss of low.

I am both the princess
And the knight,
A body of shining armor
The only hero
Waiting for me
Is the fleeing sea

With each tip toe
Toward the sand
I see all I've been fearing
Is the dragon's lingering breath—
The door is wide open
And all I've had to do
Is walk right through.

Confronting trauma—a metaphor

by Brooke Kenney

Confronting trauma is being buried alive.

With every inhale the mounds of the past flood your insides and the only way to escape choking on the lingering memories is to claw your way through the earth, through the root system that makes up your dark corners.

To not know which way is up can be the scariest part but tunnel through your soul like a worm after fresh rain and you will see the beautiful sprouts in the deepest parts that will lead you to the arcane of your existence.

Confronting trauma is burning alive.

Every part of your body being exposed until your flaming ego has no choice but to meet your water soul.

Those that rise from the ashes are those ready to be transformed. Give it time and the green will grow back more green that you remembered green to be.

Becoming God

by Brooke Kenney

Oceans at war for
The sky's space
The deepest part
Of the sea
Bends its back, the shiver
Down its spine creates
An eruption beneath
The highest mountains
Bringing them to their knees.
They bow to the mighty oaks
As the sky is turned
on its head . . .
Until—
The clouds pass
And reveal
Her;
Back for the world
That was taken from her.

Round Valley, Ca.

by Jonah Lindsey

My home is where the old oak trees
grow, acorns blanket the ground like
an army preparing for battle. My home
is where blackberries grow, oozing purple
juice when the slightest pressure is applied.
My home is where frybread is made. hot
oil pops wildly when the
dough hits the pan.

My home is a little house on Fairbanks Lane.
The inside is cozy, and welcomes naps
of all lengths. The smell inside belongs solely
to my home: tea, fresh veggies, cloth, roasted
chilis. My home is cool in the summer,
warm in the winter, and just right in the fall.

Berries and Opportunities

by Jonah Lindsey

Opportunities present themselves, like
bundles of dark purple berries. Sweet?
Bitter? Nutritious? Poison? Looks
can be deceiving when foraging
for opportunities. Bundles
of opportunities are braided into
our everyday lives, but,
we often miss them when
taking two steps at a time.
Taking these chances, leaves
us so vulnerable,
like berries on a bush.
We look back on our lives
through time's capsules,
bundles of opportunity
which we can never revive

Squirrel Day

by Jonah Lindsey

He wakes!
On a bright and warm spring day.
He emerges!
From his oak tree to sniff the clean air.
He leaps!
To an apple tree to munch its sweet blossoms.
He scurries!
Across the forest looking for buried acorns.
He chases!
His furry friends through fields and along the treetops.
He chuckles!
At the dog below him, running in crazy circles.
He flees!
Back to his oak, glad to be a squirrel.

Papa's Boat

by Jonah Lindsey

Dedicated to my grandfather, Bob Helme

It was a beautiful day out on the sea,
in the water diamonds sparkling brilliantly.
Out on the ocean in a little big boat, an old man and his
grandson sat
afloat. The old man cracks a slight smile, tastes the salty breeze.
To him, this is heaven: with his grandson at sea.

Their boat was rocking like a rebellious teen,
The boy, only 10, was feeling a bit green.
His papa just laughed, ruffled the boy's hair.
“Don't worry, son, you'll get your sea-legs before
you're aware.” The boy believed what he was told,
for his papa was wise. He was never sick again
when their boat tumbled with the tide.

So there they lived on the little big boat,
swimming in the ocean, telling stories
and jokes. The boy grew up; his
papa grew old. The boy mans the Helme,
his papa sits with ease, still smiling softly,
and tasting the salty breeze.

The Garden of Olives

by Jonah Lindsey

Salad toppings, a fake laugh, entrees.

Going to work, transforming into
my alter ego like a shapeshifter.

To my hungry guests, don't forget,

I perform over and over again the
script branded on my brain.

My false guests

don't forget their pasta.

Please don't joke about not asking me to stop,

when grating cheese. If

I had an olive pit for every time I heard that

joke, I could grow a garden.

Postcard to Bob

by Jonah Lindsey

Cutting through the pine, on a cold fall day.
Gnawing on the salami stick in the dirty back
seat makes me thirsty, but we have no water.
The hot air from the blasting heater burns my face.
We travel up through miles of staggering pines
topped with snow. Your rifle is pressed snugly
between us, ready to sling hot death should
we see a coyote. You say they kill the deer,
but so do you.
Silence surrounds us, until you bring the chainsaw
to life. You shout as you split wide logs with your
heavy yellow maul. So macho, yet so
gentle. On the way home, you drink beer
after beer. I wait for you to finish so I can
watch you throw the empty aluminum
can into the bed of your pickup truck
from the driver-side window. We cheer
when you make it, and are silent when
you miss.

The Year of The Mask

by Jonah Lindsey

I bet you're beautiful under there.

I imagine you have a glowing smile,

a rounded chin, a brushstroke of

mustard in the corner of your mouth.

Do you have freckles? Scars?

A strange year of no new faces has

passed by like a car in the dead of night.

I see only headlights.

I saw you take off your mask today.

Guzzling water like a dying man in the

desert. A shock spread through my body

when you surprised me with your mustache.

Your real face is quite unlike the one my

brain gifted you. But you are, indeed,

beautiful.

Far From Home

by Kayla Kersh

The branches were its foundation
Once it fell to the ground there was no saving the situation

Delicate, semitransparent
The sun shines through exposing its veins
Green like your lustful eyes on a sunny day
What was once home is no longer known

Its elegant luminescence reminds me of your soul
Because with every breath of wind,
I knew you would not stay
Far from home but you haven't gone away

Fragile and incomplete
Soon this leaf will grow old and rotten
Still, its beauty could not compete

I wonder if you ever miss me
Like the leaf misses that tree

Betrayed by time, it lies crisp on the earth
No one notices its beauty anymore
But it hasn't lost its worth

A stomping foot crushes it with a pass
What was once whole and complete is now broken like glass
Murdered by time and destroyed by change
Ruined by mistakes of a single exchange.

Beautiful, Beautiful Thing

by Megan Turner

Beautiful, beautiful thing
Like a vase
Or porcelain
Or the silk sheets imported straight from India that you
consider buying for weeks, all
Beautiful, beautiful things

You want to touch
To caress
To feel in your sweaty palms the weight of something not
yours
Touching and feeling as if the world has gone silent and it is
just you alone with this
Beautiful, beautiful thing

See how it shines?
See how this thing illuminates the room when it enters
All eyes on it now, all eyes devouring hungrily at this
Beautiful, beautiful thing

Kiss it!
Oh please, you must kiss it
You must taste it on your tongue the sweetness of desire and
craving
You must taste it as your own, as it recoils, this
Beautiful, beautiful thing

But buyer, beware
For it was fragile to begin with
And your sweaty palms have only greased it up
And your calloused wants have only left it more dull than
before
Remember, it is not yours but you can make it yours! This
Beautiful, beautiful thing

The vase has a crack now
But you can ignore that! It won't speak up
The porcelain has been used now and holds no value
anymore
But you got to sip from it, so why does it matter?
The silk sheets are bloodied and wet, but it is not a bed you
made for yourself
So you may walk away from this
Beautiful, beautiful thing

It will be okay
No one will know
It is not your responsibility
It is just a thing, remember
It is just an object, this
Beautiful, broken thing

Self-Portrait as a Dirty Towel

by Megan Turner

This is it.

This is the end.

I have sat dampened and molding
On a carpet that is now doing the same
For days.

I am crunching in the middle,
Where my folds and creases
Have created their own mountain ranges.

And you,
My pitiful owner,
Refuse to move me!
Why must you lay in bed,
All day in a cave of me and my brethren —
The laundry keeps for good company, until
It begins to smell.

Will you not rise today?
Surely your shampoo and conditioner miss you,
And the bathroom mat cries out
For feet to dry.
It is day four now, and my stiffness remains fixed. The
mess is still the same, minus the dishes we invited. But
you refused to give out the invitations;
They came
unannounced even, by roommates' hands, And yet,
You refused them.

Owner,
I'm beginning to think you are quite rude.
I'm beginning to think you are quite lazy.
And now, behold this —
What is there to dampen the pillow for?
You mustn't mistreat us all,
Or was it that I am not
Good enough

For your head?
Just the body I take care,
Always the exterior and nothing more
Than a cover.
Your pillow and blanket
Hold more for you.

I guess this is it.
I am beginning to think
That I smell just as bad
As the laundry now.

Born Bare

from "A Collection of Life"

by Michelle Barrett

We are born into a preconceived world of dos and don'ts,
where ideologies are passed from generation to generation,
like an assembly line that is hidden deep within
within the brick and mortar of our psyche.

We march like ants in a line,
heel to heel, on a path that we believe will lead to happiness,
yet it is a fallacy that we cannot truly conceive.
Do we dare step off the path that marches?
on and on, and on?

Because of fear,
we believe we could throw those who remain on the path off
their quest,
which was implanted from generational trauma and
conditioning
over a very long time.

Or is this not the very thing we want to do?
Wake them up and let them see that the path is only an
illusion.
Which will repeat, and repeat, and repeat.

We indoctrinate ourselves and our offspring
into constructs that society preaches will achieve change,
yet never see change happen.
We bury our heads in bottles, bags, and vials that leave us
more confused than before we attempted to numb these
ugly illusions of ignorance.

For others **they are blessed** with the **bliss of ignorance**,
and simply blunder through life
with eyes wide shut.

For many they believe they have found utopia in this vast vortex
of lies and deceit.

Almost none would know utopia if it landed at their feet,
being unrecognizable it would be
trampled and ground into the path,
which we dare not stray.

We dare not, we dare not, we dare not.

We fear the cardboard box
yet are not pleased with the strong walls that can house us.
We buy, and buy, and buy,
only to find that at the end of it all,
we are owned by the items that we purchased,
not the other way around.

We thought this would bring us happiness.
We thought it would bring us
utopia,
but it simply weighed us down,
as we drag, and drag, and drag
the massive pile behind us,
which eventually
breaks our back.

Utopia is perfect and it is in each of us,
if we can imagine it, in its true essence,
we can make it a true reality.
It is not filled with masses of material items
that are sent from assembly lines to our front doors.
It is not, it is not, it is not.

Why can't we take the time to look
within ourselves?
Reverse the damage that was passed to us,
even in the most loving of ways,
still damaging.

Why can't we look in ourselves and realize?

we are our own utopia.

Why do we insist on allowing our minds to be weak,

accepting what is in front of us?

Instead, we should question it.

Challenge it,

push back.

If we want pancakes and all we have are eggs,

then turn eggs to pancakes,

it's all in our mind.

Step back and allow our mind and heart

to work magic together.

They are sister to sister, brother to brother and sister to brother.

They fit together like a perfectly designed

puzzle.

They are molded into each other

effortlessly.

So, leave the path, and allow them to play,

and to play, and to play.

Another Rough Night and Cloudy Day
from "A Collection of Life"
by Michelle Barrett

Today I do not long for hours of research that tell me why
my children are gone,
 or how to cope with it...
or the thought of holidays that are blank and void.
Where the hours wind down from the clock,
while it greets a
 New Year,
that will repeat on the same platform
 over and over.

I do not care if the grass is green,
the sky blue,
or water encapsulates all the many colors of the rainbow.
I only find sorrow in my days,
 dejection beyond comprehension,
and grief stronger than a thousand angry Gods powering
down on the enemy,
 but the enemy is me.
The shadow continues to creep across the floor,
where it marks time.

I am like a broken clock
that goes around and around yet holds a hiccup
in the same place each time the hands meet,
they stick for just a moment,
unable to move,
 like I am every second of every day.
Tick-Tock Tic-Tock

With time my dreams die,
the blackest night devours them,
they plunge into the abyss
 willingly,

where their light will be snuffed,
and they will feel no more.

I see them disappearing slowly,
fading away with the mist of the morning dew
and me with them.

I, solid in mass, yet fragmented from within.

I sit waiting for the strongest of winds
to carry me across the skies,
allowing me to rest my weary head,
and all the faded dreams of tomorrow
will finally sleep forever.

I hear the silent screeching within my heart, like an
ever-turning wheel that will not
lie down to rest—yet will not die.

The screams insistent for me to listen today,
forceful and overbearing.

No tears come to ease my pain,
no phone will ring for me today,
no knock will sound upon my door.

I feel the hope drain from my heart, slipping further from me
all the time.

like day slips into night, effortlessly.

Despair fills the large room that smashes my emotions
against the memories of the past.

There is no tranquility in my ever-harsh existence.

My Lights they shined,
they lite my way and kept me safe.

Where smiles were abundant,
full of all the sustenance that I needed
to be blissfully happy.

Never,
had I felt so complete,
but now there is nothing.

My flint is almost gone,
the darkness closes in on me,
my heart sinks deeper into the solidarity of today,
 the nothingness of tomorrow,
the grief that refuses to leave me alone.

Nothing will ever be as it was,
I am only a memory from long ago,
now forgotten, and devoid.

If I could only reach the clock,
turn the hands back
to the time where we were happy.
But this is fantasy that I entertain, not reality,
 yet it does not stop the yearning.

Reality, is that the clock will continue to turn,
as I sit and look out the same window,
at the same great tree,
just as the clock will hiccup at the same moment each time
the hands meet.

I will sit until the clock runs out,
as my heart slowly starts to skip with each breath,
like the hands on the clock,
 I too will wind down,
I wait for the end of MY time.
Tick-tock—Tick-tock.

Literature
Composition
&
Rhetoric

**"An Angel in the ~~House~~ World":
Villette's Unwonted Ideal of
British Womanhood in Opposition
to Catholic Europe**

by Brady Freitas

Of the same lump (as it is said)
For honour and dishonour made,
Two sister vessels. Here is one.

It makes a goblin of the sun.
("Jenny," Rossetti lines 202-205)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti began writing the poem "Jenny" in 1847, when women's place in the world (in England) was seen to occupy the domestic realm. In 19th-century Britain, womanhood was understood to be tied directly to the private sphere of life, which included the family, home, and ideal domestic traits (e.g. marital fidelity, submissiveness, kindness). The public sphere vis-à-vis was seen as taboo for women and only a place for men to exist; this domain was where men conducted business, worked, participated in politics, or anything outside a domestic setting. A stark example of what womanhood (ostensibly) looked like outside the private sphere is in Rossetti's poem, which is about a London prostitute, narrated by the man who has come to see her. Jenny is perceived by the city as "a fiery serpent," however, the man who visits her is remorseful for the way that she is treated in society; nonetheless, Jenny is unable to escape this shameful image of herself, for she lacks the essential trait of womanhood during 19th-century England—domesticity. This societal doctrine of separate (gendered) spheres of existing, enabled feminine domesticity to take hold across Britain. Establishing the ideal role of women to be in the home created a demarcated space for women in society,

causing women—like Jenny—to be seen as “evil home-wreckers (or even nation-wreckers),” for they were no longer “an angel in the *house*” since they existed in the public sphere (Murfin and Ray 122). This was a common sentiment in 19th-century Britain when it came to describing a woman’s desired place in the world; she must be like an angel, pure. In the poem, the narrator compares Jenny to her opposing image, Nell—a traditional domestic woman, an angel—who is seen as the embodiment of honor, whereas Jenny embodies dishonor; above is the expert that is comparing these two forms of womanhood. Furthermore, Rossetti’s comparison of these two forms of womanhood conclude that Jenny is unable to be compared with “pure” Nell, for it is like comparing “a goblin” to “the sun” (Rossetti). Therefore, when it comes to the binary that Jenny and Nell represent, the only viable option for honor and a sense of place in the world was to be “an angel in the house,” since the alternative option against domesticity was deemed immoral and nefarious. Jenny and Nell are representatives of how British womanhood was perceived in the 19th century; however, this representation of womanhood holds inaccuracies, since *actual* British womanhood was less limited to such an essentialist viewpoint.

This binary of womanhood (sister vessels) of either being honorable (domestic) or dishonorable (public/worldly) is subverted by Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*. Brontë presents a new ideal of womanhood through her character Lucy Snowe, one that does not limit women to an unrealistic binary. To elaborate, Lucy does not fit the paradigm presented in “Jenny” where women (Nell and Jenny) are deemed either domestic and “pure” or wicked and existing in the public sphere; therefore, Lucy’s existence allows for British women to be deemed as “pure” while being in the public sphere (Rossetti). Jenny and Nell on the other hand perpetuate this unrealistic notion that womanhood was defined by its connection to the private sphere and domesticity; however, women have always existed in the public sphere, which

will be discussed in more depth later on in the paper. Even though Brontë presents womanhood atypically of Victorian ideals, her character Lucy Snowe embodies a more typical definition of womanhood, which is supported by historical statistics of women's positions in society at the time; consequently, replacing the harmful binary of British womanhood seen in "Jenny." Below in "Table One" from Brian R. Mitchell's book, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, it becomes clear that poor and bourgeois women were not demarcated to the private sphere, but rather vital to industries like domestic services, clothing, textiles, and professions (e.g. teaching like Lucy).

Occupational Category	Males (thousands)	Female (thousands)	Percent Female
Public Administration	64	3	4.5
Armed Forces	63	0	0.0
Professions	162	103	38.9
Domestic Services	193	1135	85.5
Commercial	91	0	0.0
Transportation & Communications	433	13	2.9
Agriculture	1788	229	11.4
Fishing	36	1	0.2
Mining	383	11	2.8
Metal Manufactures	536	36	6.3
Building & Construction	496	1	0.2
Wood & Furniture	152	8	5.0

Bricks, Cement, Pottery, Glass	75	15	16.7
Chemicals	42	4	8.7
Leather & Skins	55	5	8.3
Paper & Printing	62	16	20.5
Textiles	661	635	49.0
Clothing	418	491	54.0
Food, Drink, Lodging	348	53	13.2
Other	445	75	14.4
Total Occupied	6545	2832	30.2
Total Unoccupied	1060	5294	83.3

(Mitchell 60)

Furthermore, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, it gave women access to more spaces to work in, inevitably integrating womanhood with the public sphere. Contrary to the binary of womanhood presented in “Jenny,” British women were a part of the public sphere in a positive manner, even if their positions were not of equal stature, prominence, or scale to that of their male counterparts. I want to clarify what I mean by positive: it was socially acceptable for women to exist in the public sphere in this way, since it was to support their family, a crucial value for women to have. When it comes to Jenny then, she exemplifies the wretched state women were ostensibly left with if they entered the public sphere; however, this is only in the imagination of 19th-century British culture, whereas in the material world, this notion of wretchedness is invalid, for women worked (in the public sphere) to help their families financially. Mitchell’s statistical work, thus, displays the falsities surrounding the traditional ideal of British womanhood and how entering the public sphere was not only possible, but did not turn women

into evil homewreckers as perceived in the poem “Jenny.” Although working in the public sphere helped women break this notion of being evil homewreckers; this ideology of wretchedness being attached to women in the public sphere nonetheless, still existed, which is also apparent in *Villette*. The difference in Brontë’s novel is that British people were not the ones appalled by Lucy for her existence in the public sphere, rather it was the Roman Catholic people in the novel. Presenting this pious dichotomy between the correct ideal form of womanhood, it enables Charlotte Brontë to create a space where she aids in the unification of British identity, by promoting her unwonted ideal of British womanhood as an act where British people can oppose Catholic sentiments through Protestant Lucy. I would like to signpost the meaning I am using towards the word Catholic throughout my paper: I am referring to Roman Catholics and their religion.

When it comes to *Villette*, Lucy Snowe typifies an unwonted ideal of British womanhood, an ideal that is more accurate with womanhood in the 19th century, one that combines certain parts of Jenny and Nell, a woman in the public sphere who still can keep her purity. Brontë goes beyond merely presenting Lucy Snowe as an accurate depiction of womanhood of 19th-century Britain (a woman in the public sphere who still can keep her purity), for Lucy also becomes an independent, property-owning, unmarried woman who is able to control her own destiny outside the controls of a husband figure. Unfortunately, Lucy Snowe still faces adversity with stereotypical notions of being an “evil homewrecker,” or more so in the case of being “a nation-wrecker” by key Labassecourienne (Catholic) figures in the novel. For example, at the end of the novel Madame Beck does everything in her power to make sure Lucy does not marry M. Emmanuel Paul since she was threatened by her Protestantism protruding into a Catholic nation’s way of life (Labassecour). Thus, Lucy is seen as a “nation-wrecker” in *Villette* because of her British womanhood, which Brontë is

using in order to not only assist in concretizing a new ideal British womanhood, but to help connect it to a unified Protestant, British national identity opposed to Catholic Europe.

Additionally, the town of Villette acts as a setting for Brontë's definition of British womanhood to be in direct opposition with Catholicism. To elucidate, strategically placing Lucy Snowe in Villette put her on the European stage for Brontë's ideal form of womanhood, since at the time Belgium (which Villette is based) was considered to be "the Cock-pit of Europe ... Belgium represented both one of the most culturally diverse and most homely countries in Europe" (Bonfiglio 602). This is significant to note, for it makes Lucy a symbol for Brontë's British womanhood, and by placing her in a cosmopolitan environment—where even Lucy herself says, "Villette is a cosmopolitan city"—puts Britishness in collocation with the rest of Europe, but most importantly with Catholic Europe (Brontë 90). This collocation of Britain with cosmopolitan Belgium subsequently sets up the 19th-century tensions between Protestantism and Catholicism. Furthermore, Richard Bonfiglio mentions in "Cosmopolitan Realism: Portable Domesticity in Brontë's Belgian Novels," that Belgium is not only one of the homeliest countries, but that it resembles a little England (Bonfiglio 602). Connecting cosmopolitan Villette with still resembling home (England), enables Lucy Snowe to become an appropriate and plausible representation of British womanhood, at home in England and in her sister countries of Wales and Scotland. This latter point about being at home in a cosmopolitan world and being connected to Brontë's ideal of British womanhood will be discussed postliminary. The former point about the collocation of Britain with Catholic Europe must be discussed beforehand, in order to get a better understanding of the historical context and significance of the heretic—Lucy Snowe—being in a predominantly Catholic setting.

Before analyzing the relation between Lucy Snowe's womanhood and the tensions of Protestantism and

Catholicism, it is important to understand the historical context of their opposing religious influence on different European national identities. Historically, a majority of Britain has been under Protestant rule since the English Reformation, but since then there have been scares of Catholic invasion or the Catholic ruling class gaining power, like with the Stuart Dynasty. Furthermore, since the Act of Union in 1707, which brought England, Wales, and Scotland under one governmental rule, Great Britain's fundamental unity factor was Protestantism. In *Britons* by Linda Colley, she elaborates on Protestantism influential power and its relation to Catholicism:

From the Act of Union to the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, Great Britain was involved in successive, very dangerous wars with Catholic France ... In these circumstances of regular and violent contact with peoples who could so easily be seen as representing the Other [Catholics], Protestantism was able to become a unifying and distinguishing bond as never before. More than anything else, it was this shared religious allegiance combined with recurrent wars that permitted a sense of British national identity to emerge ... And an uncompromising Protestantism was the foundation on which their state was explicitly and unapologetically based. (Colley 18)

Understanding that Protestantism is what shaped and still influenced British identity in the time of Brontë, it then becomes apparent that Lucy Snowe was not simply a new ideal of womanhood in Britain, but one that could strengthen British nationalism, since at the time of publication (1853) it had only been 146 years since Great Britain became a unified nation. England, Wales, and Scotland did not instantaneously feel united, it took industrialization and the prominence of Protestantism to make these three countries bare a common thread. Establishing Protestantism to be the defining characteristic of these three nations, thereafter lay down the groundwork for detesting the same Otherness,

Catholicism.

Villette adds to this common thread of unity, which consequently bolsters British nationalism, for Lucy's anti-Catholic sentiments (throughout the novel) and resolute Protestantism makes her the antithesis of being British. For instance, in regard to anti-Catholicism in the novel, Lucy uses her Protestant doctrine to justify women being able to exist in the public sphere, whereas Catholicism doctrine does not allow it, for Catholics must abide by the authority of Papism. Michael Clarke in "Charlotte Brontë's 'Villette', Mid-Victorian Anti-Catholicism, and the Turn to Secularism" elaborates on this significance:

Brontë brilliantly portrays Roman Catholicism as existing within a hierarchical, communitarian world in which individual roles are determined by a pre-existing order of things, as opposed to the Protestant vision of a more horizontal, individualistic society in which the self-disciplined agent is endowed by God with reason and free will in order to pursue life, liberty, and happiness according to his or her own lights. (Clarke 969)

Therefore, when it comes to Lucy's anti-Catholic sentiments, she uses the juxtaposition between the two religions doctrines, in order to have women oppressed to the private sphere to be something that is wrongfully Catholic, for at least Protestant women have the liberty to live in the male-dominated world (the public sphere) if it is "her own light" to do it. Viewing Catholicism as a way to demarcate women is the opposite of Brontë's unwonted womanhood seen through Lucy, who controls her "free will" to be in the public sphere, for Protestantism allows for her to do this without abiding by the "pre-existing order" of womanhood. Another example of anti-Catholic beliefs from Lucy is when she tells M. Paul "that the more I saw of Popery the closer I clung to Protestantism;" in addition, the only time Lucy sought solace from Catholicism was when she was mentally ill—the effect is noteworthy (Brontë 466). During the time

of seeking solace, Lucy “had been living for some weeks quite alone; ... [she] had been ill,” which gives the notion that someone who is mentally stable would not willingly seek out Catholicism (Brontë 178). Lucy at this time was in need of solace, yet once Lucy is mentally stable again, she not only rebukes Catholicism, but clings to Protestantism more fiercely than previously practiced. Associating illness with Catholicism, allows for (British) Victorian audiences to believe that Catholics must (all) be mentally incapacitated, in order to continue such a pious practice.

Moreover, having Lucy live in a Catholic country, she was able to come particularly familiar with her nation’s Otherness; the result of “writing this [Protestant] heretic narrative” against Catholicism reaffirmed British sentiments that Catholicism was deplorable (Brontë 180). Lucy notes to the reader that the opposite of experiencing this heretic narrative, is her fall into Catholicism by “counting her beads in the cell of a certain Carmelite convent on the Boulevard of Crécy in Villette” (Brontë 180). Nonetheless, this is not the narrative the reader is given, proving that even seeing “all that was tender, and comforting, and gentle, in the honest popish superstition,” was not enough to make Lucy convert or to even deem Catholicism a respectable alternative to Protestantism (Brontë 180). Lucy’s knowledge and experience with Catholicism makes her a credible source for her British audience, allowing for her readers—to see the light—that even if there was some redemptive quality in being Catholic, she could not find it, for if she did, she might have been left to live in a convent. Lucy being the agent of insight and knowledge of odious Catholicism speaks to the etymology of her name, which means “light” (*BabyCenter* UK). Being the bearer of light, she is a symbol for the rectitude of Protestantism, enabling her to be seen as a heroine in the eyes of British readers. Along with being a devout and proud Protestant, she is also seen as a heroine for exposing the horrendousness of Catholicism, permitting cogency for anti-Catholicism. In consequence, Lucy

Snow's Protestantism and anti-Catholic rhetoric bolsters the common thread of unity between England, Wales, and Scotland (same religion), empowering the strength of British nationalism, and continuing the tradition of opposing their common foe—Catholicism. Hitherto, Brontë's representation of a new ideal paradigm of British womanhood—as an act to oppose Catholic Europe—may have seemed inexplicit, but through the historical significance of Lucy Snowe being a Protestant heretic in Labassecour, it indicates that the way she exists in the world is intentional on the part of Brontë. Lucy's womanhood is directly connected to Protestantism, therefore, anything she does or represents is also a direct reflection of being British.

Furthermore, recursively turning towards Jenny and Nell, the two British women that embody the traditional imagined forms of womanhood during the 19th century, grant us historical understanding why Lucy Snowe's womanhood is unwonted for being perceived as heroic to a British Victorian audience. A woman who aligns more with the honorableness of domesticity in Victorian literature would be a heroine like Amy Dorrit in Charles Dickens novel *Little Dorrit*, where she is described as “the quietest, and weakest of Heaven's creatures” (Dickens 111). In contrast, Lucy Snowe heroism adheres to a different standard of ideals outside of being domestic and submissive, for she speaks forthright about her opposition to Catholicism to characters like M. Paul; thus, Lucy eliminates submissiveness being attached to her heroism. Along with not being submissive, Lucy is not domestic like Amy Dorrit, since by the end of the novel Lucy is living the “happiest years of my [her] life” unmarried, alone, and operating her own school; vis-à-vis, *Little Dorrit* concludes with Amy Dorrit staying true to a domestic heroine by becoming married.

The heroine motif in *Villette* is only seen through the lens of British Victorian audience, for the Catholics in the novel view Lucy as the antagonist to Catholicism, inevitably causing her grief for the way she is perceived by central

Labassecourienne characters; furthermore, Lucy existing in the public sphere is what makes this materialize. For instance, when M. Paul is talking to Lucy about why she is deemed unlikeable, not only by him (ostensibly), but by the other Catholic figures in general:

It is your religion—your strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed, whose influence seems to clothe you in, I know not what, unblessed panoply. You are good—Père Silas calls you good, and loves you—but your terrible, proud, earnest Protestantism, there is the danger. It expresses itself by your eye at times; and again, it gives you certain tones and certain gestures that make my flesh creep. You are not demonstrative, and yet, just now—when you handled that tract—my God! I thought Lucifer smiled.

(Brontë 462)

The Catholic priest, Père Silas, believes Lucy to be good, but her Protestantism is what concludes (Catholic) peoples fear in her existence as being devilish. However, this notion that Lucy is good when she is detached from being Protestant is incongruous and implausible for Lucy (and British Victorian audiences) because “nineteenth-century Britons saw themselves ... bound up with a Protestant world-view which helped men and women make sense of their lives” (Colley 43). In the eyes of Lucy her Protestantism is what makes her good, ergo it was not merely Protestantism that was the danger, but in fact Lucy herself.

Hypothetically, if Lucy Snowe moved to continental Europe because of marriage, to live “an angel in the house” lifestyle, her appearances in the public sphere would be limited. On the contrary to this hypothetical situation is what *actually* happens; Lucy becomes an integral part of the public sphere by working in the industry of domestic services for Madame Beck and as a teacher and headmaster of her own school later on in the novel. Existing in the public sphere in Labassecour, Lucy threatens Catholics notions around the traditional binary of womanhood, as presented

in “Jenny.” Jenny is compared to a goblin, whereas Lucy (being in the public sphere as well) is compared to Lucifer (Brontë 462). The Catholics in the novel abide by Rossetti’s binary of womanhood towards Lucy, viewing her as a threat by existing in the public sphere; moreover, for Miss Snowe she also has to combat with hatred toward her religious doctrine, which makes her appear as a devilish figure. If Lucy Snowe would have been left to the private sphere, her Protestantism would not have been such a prolific concern to the Labassecouriennes since her religion, along with herself, would have been demarcated to a life of domesticity. Therefore, Charlotte Brontë’s promotion of Protestant womanhood being tied to the public sphere (with Lucy) can act as a way to imperialize Protestantism in a predominantly Catholic world. This unusual ideal of womanhood, in comparison to that of the 19th-century British imagination, becomes a benefactor to support Protestantism in opposition with Catholic Europe.

Lucy is the only British woman in the novel who encapsulates all aspects of Brontë’s ideal womanhood; the three other prominent British women are Mrs. Bretton, Ginevra Fanshawe, and Paulina Home. Each one of these characters displays some form of wrongdoing in regard to the binary of womanhood or to religious devotion. Giving textual examples of British women that do not fulfill Brontë’s ideal, further strengthens the claim that Lucy should stand for the new ideal of British womanhood. Even though Mrs. Bretton embodies all the correct aspects in being a proper woman, she lacks the crucial aspect of not being a part of the public sphere, which is critical to Brontë’s ideal womanhood. If Mrs. Bretton had been a part of the public sphere, her time in Labassecour would have been a lot more like Lucy’s; nevertheless, Mrs. Bretton is confined to the private sphere, which restricts her experiences as a Protestant woman in a Catholic nation. By remaining in the private sphere, she is less likely to be labeled as devilish since her Protestantism is not actively participating in the Catholic/Labassecourienne

public sphere, whereas Lucy's lifestyle and Protestantism allows for explicit animosity to take place for she exists in the public sphere. Taking into account Mrs. Bretton's existence in the private sphere, with that of her god daughter's existence in the public sphere, it becomes apparent the reason Lucy received such hatred from the Labassecourienne people was because she was not shrouded in domesticity. Brontë's ideal form of womanhood is not in the private sphere, for if it was, then Protestantism (and Britishness) would not be able to be in opposition with Catholic Europe.

Furthermore, Ginevra and Paulina both share two characteristics that are not in Brontë's ideal womanhood. The first is that they both do not live a life in the public sphere since they become married, which as it has been stated, is a crucial part of Brontë's ideal. The second characteristic that these two women share has to do with the devotion to Protestantism. For instance, when Ginevra and Lucy are on the boat together in the English Channel, Ms. Fanshawe states:

I have quite forgotten my religion; they call me a Protestant, you know, but really I am not sure whether I am one or not: I don't well know the difference between Romanism and Protestantism. However, I don't in the least care for that.

(Brontë 60)

This incompetent and irresolute notion of the Protestant religion makes Ginevra appear like someone who is not truly British. Her inability to care about religion or being able to distinguish between odious Catholicism and Protestantism, warrants the feeling that Ms. Fanshawe's womanhood is not one that should be supported. Lucy's resolute convictions of Protestantism enable her to be the viable option when it comes to an honorable British woman, resulting in Victorian British audiences to empathize with Lucy's womanhood, more so than a domestic one like Ginevra Fanshawe. Along with Ginevra, Paulina Home is considered to not be a viable option of British womanhood, for Lucy saw her "praying like some Catholic or Methodist enthusiast" (Brontë 15).

Even though Miss Home's inconsistency to Protestantism was early on in the novel when she was a child, it is still noteworthy when it comes to comparing her to Lucy's unequivocal devotion to Protestantism. Despite the fact that Miss Home's appears to be Protestant, the reader is never given explicit clarification that she grew out of her "Catholic and Methodist" enthusiasm, whereas with Lucy the reader is aware of her unsuccessful view into Catholicism when she goes to confession; in addition, recalling back to earlier, Lucy's encounter with Catholicism only strengthened her Protestant doctrine. Similar to Ginevra, Paulina is not devoutly Protestant in comparison to Lucy, which further legitimizes Miss Snowe's form of British womanhood. Paulina and Ginevra both display common characteristics of being an exemplary model of traditional womanhood; for instance, in "English Cosmopolitanism and/as Nationalism: The Great Exhibition, the Mid-Victorian Divorce Law Reform, and Brontë's *Villette*," Vlasta Vranjes states, "Paulina is described as an angel in the house, a 'sweet wife'" (Vranjes 341). This idea of being an angel in the house is defamed by Ms. Fanshawe and Ms. Home's connection to Catholicism, allowing Brontë's readers to turn to a woman who can be seen as an angel in the world, for Lucy exists in the public sphere and carries the key component to being British—Protestantism. Undermining old forms of British womanhood by connecting it to Catholicism, grants Brontë the opportunity to promote her unwonted ideal of British womanhood; a womanhood that is still devoutly Protestant, but one that gives women access to the public sphere in a respectable manner.

The only other major female character in *Villette* is Madame Beck, a Catholic woman who acts as the foil to Lucy Snowe. Madame Beck and Miss Snowe share an abundance of important commonalities: they exist in the public sphere, are headmasters (of their own schools by the end of the novel), financially independent from male figures, unmarried, and devoutly religious people. This last point is

the opposing difference between these two women—one being Protestant and the other being Catholic—which acts as a heuristic for British people to oppose Catholicism. Furthermore, Madame Beck’s womanhood enables Brontë’s Victorian audience to deem the public sphere as a place where Catholic women should not exist, for Beck is represented as the antagonist in the novel. To Protestants, Catholicism has historically been their villainous Other and *Villette* is no different in continuing this hostility. Madame Beck was the character that made the love affair between M. Paul and Lucy feel unrelented with Catholic doctrine, which caused the feeling that the villainous figure to Protestant Lucy was Miss Beck (Brontë 538). The resistance to Lucy and M. Paul (in the first place) is caused by the power she holds in the public sphere. If Madame Beck’s womanhood was associated with the private sphere and domesticity, she would not have been deemed as the central antagonist character, for she would have been shrouded in domesticity. Brontë institutes the traditional binary of Jenny and Nell, however, in this case it is negatively used towards a Catholic woman. She uses the effectiveness that this binary of womanhood still has on the British imagination, in order to make Catholic women, like Madame Beck, to be seen as wretched. Therefore, when comparing Beck’s Catholic womanhood to Snowe’s Protestant womanhood, there is one stark difference and beneficiary to Lucy. Miss Snowe is presented as virtuous in the public sphere, whereas Madame Beck is more aligned with the symbol that Jenny represents—wretchedness. For instance, a wretched act she committed was giving Lucy (nonconsensually) “a strong opiate,” for she wanted to make Lucy fall into a “stupor” in order to avoid contact with M. Paul; this is one way Madame Beck tried to stop the love affair between Lucy and M. Paul (Brontë 496). The effect of these two women existing in the public sphere, allows for Beck to be a successful foil to Lucy’s womanhood, for Protestant women can be an angel in the public sphere. Conversely, women like Madame Beck are seen as

nation-wreckers, which acts as a way to strengthen British objection to Catholicism.

Along with Madame Beck being the foil to Lucy, in order to validate the idea of Protestant women being angels in the world, Bonfiglio's mentioning of Belgium being a little England further authenticates Brontë's ideal of womanhood being (respectively) tied to the public sphere. As previously discussed, Belgium's resemblance to England allows for it to be a place where British people can witness the viability of women in the public sphere. Brontë's setting of *Villette* being in Catholic Europe, while still conjuring up a sense of home, acts as the cognizance of the novel. For instance, imagine the setting of *Villette* to solely take place in Great Britain would negate Brontë's unwonted ideal of British womanhood, for she uses anti-Catholic sentiments and the historicism of Britain's Other to appeal to her Protestant audience. By having Lucy Snowe's womanhood exist in a cosmopolitan environment that is majority Catholic, it permits Brontë the space to promote her ideal womanhood through the use of a common thread of opposing Catholicism. Although Catholics existed in Great Britain at the time, it would not be a great space for this heretic narrative to have the substance it invokes when placed in a Catholic setting. Additionally, *Villette* (Belgium) being parallel to England (Great Britain), grants Victorian audiences to recognize the credibility of Brontë's Protestant womanhood in the provincial mindset of the English, Welsh, and Scottish, for they can all connect with Lucy because of her Protestantism. Lucy Snowe's existence in the public sphere displays her honorable quality of opposing Catholicism, for if she was in the private sphere, she would have less opportunity to resist the atrociousness of Catholicism. Brontë's use of Lucy to symbolize her ideal womanhood, enables British audiences to see the benefits of women in the public sphere; thus, the binary of womanhood presented in "Jenny" is subverted since Lucy Snowe exists outside the essentialist viewpoint of British womanhood. However, to the Catholics in the novel like Père Silas and

Madame Beck, Lucy Snowe still abides by the binary of womanhood and appears to them as a nation-wrecker for her public-sphered Protestant womanhood in opposition to their Catholicism. This opposition and notion of being a nation-wrecker to Catholics is the reason Lucy's womanhood is appealing to her audience at home in Great Britain. Consequently, Brontë's ideal womanhood being attached to the public sphere is a beneficial and effective way to be anti-Catholic.

Alas, the binary of womanhood and its subsequent demarcation on British women still existed during Brontë's time. Her novel *Villette* is successful in using "anti-Catholic tropes in her novels as veiled criticism of Protestant England, especially its gender ideologies"; for example, opposing the binary of womanhood with an unwonted ideal of what it should be in Great Britain (Vranjes 327). Through the use of cosmopolitan *Villette* and its Catholic population, I can conclude with Vranjes and other critics that Brontë uses anti-Catholic sentiments to criticize gender ideologies in England. However, with Protestantism being in opposition with Catholicism in *Villette*, Brontë's veiled criticism is not limited to England as Vranjes is claiming. Recalling back to Britons by Linda Colley, it becomes clear Protestantism did not solely affect England and its "world-view," but rather the entirety of Great Britain (i.e. Wales and Scotland) (Colley 43). Therefore, Brontë not only criticizes the essentialist binary of womanhood in England, but in Wales and Scotland also. Being historically mindful of Protestantism's power of unifying England, Wales, and Scotland, it becomes evident that to criticize "Protestant England," one would subsequently be criticizing the two other nations that make up Great Britain. Furthermore, Protestantism evinces nationalistic unity for the three nations in Britain, which allows British (not just English) Victorian audiences to connect with Brontë's unwonted ideal of womanhood that is in opposition to their common Other—Catholicism. Vranjes is correct that Brontë is criticizing Protestant England, but

through the common thread of Britain's shared religion and their common foe, she is also criticizing the binary of womanhood that is present in Protestant Wales and Protestant Scotland. Therefore, Lucy Snowe represents criticism of traditional values of British womanhood and acts as an instrumental alternative to the 19th-century binary that permeates the minds of English, Welsh, and Scottish people.

The desirability for women to be in the private sphere in 19th-century Britain is omitted when British readers encounter *Villette*, for Brontë's criticism of this demarcated space for women, does not only limit them, but Protestant Britain as well. The limitation of women to a domestic life does not underpin Britain's objection to Catholicism. Therefore, Lucy Snowe gives light and agency to an unwonted ideal of womanhood that promotes Protestantism and bolsters opposition to Catholic Europe. Lucy's womanhood acts as a cogent example as to why British womanhood should be connected to the public sphere, for this new ideal of womanhood frees women from a harmful essentialist viewpoint of their existence and gives Protestantism influence in a predominantly Catholic world (Europe). The existence of Lucy Snowe allows for the comparison of Jenny and Nell to the "goblin" and "the sun" in Rossetti's poem to become irrelevant, for the fact that she cannot be compared to either when she exists outside the binary that Jenny and Nell represent, subsequently fostering Brontë's ideal womanhood into a materialized form.

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Emelye's Voice

by Jennifer Turman

Prologue

In Chaucer's epic *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Knight's Tale* is a story of two knights, Palamon and Arcite, who fall in love with the beautiful Emelye. Her stepfather/uncle Theseus decides to hold a great tournament where the victor wins Emelye's hand in marriage. For the tournament, Theseus has three temples built where each character goes to pray before the big day. Saturn's answer to a cosmic conundrum is to grant everyone's prayer (somewhat). He gives Arcite victory in the tournament but dies from a fatal injury, and this answers Palomon's prayer to win Emily's hand. As for Emelye's prayer...

The fair Emelye hardly speaks in the tale, but Chaucer lets us spy on her as she prays aloud in the temple. In this private moment, we hear Emelye's wish for her own life, pleading to turn the hearts of her suitors away from her. She asks that she may remain a maiden who enjoys hunting rather than a mother's life (Chaucer and Mann 86, 2304-2312). I was struck by Emelye's powerful statement to be the hunter and not the hunted. Yet Emelye backs down and says that if she must marry, please let it be to the one who loves her most. This bothered me. I wanted to understand why Emelye would be so strong then, in the next breath, make it a prayer of protection. Since Chaucer wasn't giving me anything more to go on, I decided to look into it further. What is this romantic version of courtly love that is so highly valued? Today, there is an endless supply of oxytocin-inducing media, for example, formulaic Harlequin novels, the Hallmark Channel, Romcom movies, and fanfiction blogging, to name a few. Thousands of dollars are spent for fairytale weddings; almost every song has to do with love, and it even gets its holiday (apart from anniversaries). To understand obsessions with courtly love, we need to first delve into Middle English culture and what courtly love was,

then determine what influences have caused it to evolve, such as personal, social, and global events.

Act I: Global Events

To put it into perspective, I decided to write an adaptation of *The Knight's Tale* from Emelye's perspective with my research as a guide. My Emily surprised me, and she took on her own life. There were things I did not want to write about, but I had given her autonomy, and she blossomed.

Both Emilies were born into a world with many problems such as war, famine, and environmental disasters. When Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, he was dealing with the Black Death. The epidemic was devastating, but studies show that survivors and their offspring had improvements in their health and well-being due to a heartier immune system. Also, a shortage of laborers meant a redistribution of wealth, which meant better housing opportunities and better diets (DeWitte). A better quality of life was on the horizon, and perhaps this is why Emelye felt that she should be exempt from motherhood.

My Emily was born into recent history when there was a massive cultural shift, the dawning of Aquarius if you will. I decided to start my adaptation with Emily's conception in the Summer of Love. I wanted to see what she would do with romantic situations when she was subjected to a time when there was a considerable shift in public morals and boundaries were violated: political upheaval, feminism, a fight for civil rights, and a time when traditional religions were challenged. Unfortunately, this had her growing up in San Francisco in the early 1970s, and she ended up living in one of the many religious communes. Hers followed the Reverend Jim Jones.

Act II: Social Attitudes

Humans are greatly influenced by their culture. Collective opinions shape social beliefs about romance. Middle English is difficult to understand by today's average reader

because the language was still heavily influenced by the romantic languages surrounding areas such as France, Spain, and Italy. A thirteenth-century French poem *Dit du cerf amoureux* expressed the language of love as the spectacle of a stag hunt, which was a popular European sport at the time. The poem's narrator muses that women are the stag, love is the hunter, and love triumphs with its dogs named Thought, Memory, Desire, Will, Humility, and Pity (Bourgeois 360). Aristocrats of the middle ages were preoccupied with the spirit of contest and courtship as males were encouraged to show courage and to bleed for love; they were heroes and the champions of the contest (Boase 31).

Because of the spiritual shift between pagans and Christianity, there are still magical elements at war with Christian virtues. Literature such as *Lo breviari d'amor* by Matfré Ermengaud reflected attributes of courtly love as chaste and eschewed the vileness of the flesh (Boase, 33). Yet *The Knight's Tale* is unmistakably pagan. Chaucer goes into great detail, listing the items within the temples. But what does that have to do with romance? Interestingly enough, the things within the temple reflect the goddesses' limited power; they are more abstract, present within the mind, inward. Meanwhile, the items within Mars' temple are representative of the external and concrete, definitive as bodily senses; they assert his power within the heavens that makes him far more powerful (Roney 144, 171-173).

The broken slespes and the sikes colde,
The sacred teeris, and the waimentinge,
The firy strokes of the desiringe,
That loves servantz in this lif enduren;
The othes that hir convenantz assuren,
Plesance, and Hope, Desir, Foolhardinesse
Beautee and Youthe, Bauderye, Richesse...
With al the gardin and the lustinesse.

(Chaucer and Mann 72-73, 1920-1926, 1939)

Perhaps the goddess' secondary power is why Saturn answered Venus' petitions for Emelye and Palamon but with

an outcome that favored Arcite's prayer to Mars. In addition to Emelye's prayers as chaste, fearful, obedient, and trusting, Chaucer shows that pagan attitudes of women are passive, gentle, and pure (Roney 173). Meanwhile, a knight is chivalrous, honorable, brave, generous, and courteous, "To riden out, he loved chivalrie, / Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie" (Chaucer and Mann 4. 45-46)

In my adaptation, Emily had the misfortune of being raised in a cult where children were physically, sexually, and emotionally abused. While I felt terrible about her misfortune, she showed me the female spirit's strength to survive while submitting to those who impose their power over others. On November 18, 1978, Emily and her father were in the cult's San Francisco headquarters when it came to a screeching halt. Although my Emily was free, the damage was done. It was strange to feel guilty for writing a horrific upbringing for my heroine. Perhaps it is because she is a fictional representative of too many young women who feel dismissed by those who excuse phrases like "Grab 'em by the pussy" as mere locker talk.

Another societal influence on Emily was the recent feminist movement that called for a rejection of romance novels as female bondage by Germaine Greer in 1970 (Regis 4). I wanted to see what would happen to Emily if she was plopped down in the middle of feminism and what influence this would have on her. It isn't prevailing societal notions that drive her actions throughout her young life. I was surprised to find that a more local influence held dominion over Emily. More on that later since it doesn't appear until the end.

Act III: Local Influences

There is another theory about courtly love in the Middle Ages that love is nonexistent. It is very well known that women of Chaucer's time were chattel. First, women were the property of their fathers until an exchange of riches and goods meant that they now belonged to a husband. The women who belonged to families of aristocrats would

likely be married to merge properties or for political gains. This gives a new sense of marriage as a contract. Romance, in this sense, is a bonus (Boase 89). Chaucer opens up the story by pointing out that Theseus is in a strong marriage and concludes with a tournament over beauty (Roney 174). Theseus extols the virtues of taking personal responsibility, but that is because he is accessible by his gender and his station in society (Roney 110). Palamon and Arcite are bound to the knight's code of chivalry, and Emelye is bound to the man who possesses her.

Families tend to pressure young women into marriage, not for love but for procreation. In Chaucer's time, women were pressured to have many children because of the high infant mortality rates, even *before* the Black Death (DeWitte). There was also the desire to see one's bloodline/surname preserved, and it is prevalent in today's society. There is also a strong sense of "traditional values," and unwed mothers are not typically held in high regard. I decided that this preservation of archaic notions would be why *my* Emelye agreed to marry. Her father is a Pentecostal minister and pressures her to marry for his career preservation. Like Chaucer's Emelye, my adaptation wishes for a different life but reluctantly agrees.

Act IV: Personal Values

Psychology is the final influence on romantic attitudes, and my research showed these to be reasonably unchanged over the years. Referring back to the pagan influence in Chaucer's time, he describes the goddess Venus as "Despense, Bisynesse, and Jalousye/That wered of yelewe gooldes a gerland,/And a cokkow sittyng on hir hand;" (Chaucer and Mann 72, 1928), dispensing jealousy that wore a garland of marigolds and a cuckoo/cuckold—the jealous husband (Roney 171). Here, we can infer that Emelye's prayer to Diana is one of protection, asking that her hand is given to the one who loves her most. Let's not forget that these men are willing to die in this endeavor to win the right to marry

her.

English philosopher John Locke would be the one to point out that mundane daily life is where thoughts and judgments are shaped in the minds of every person. Before Locke, Chaucer wrote about this first in the *Canterbury Tales*, that human nature is derived from personal experiences (Roney 127). Romantic love moves beyond the ordinary into fantasy. Courtly love was something that could belong to the aristocrats of Chaucer's time; those further down in the caste system did not have the luxury to play, and it is this fiction that prevails in modern beliefs about courtly love (Boase 101).

However, I mentioned earlier that my Emily was influenced by social attitudes, which shaped her idea about love. It connects with her values. In my story, faced with the demands of her father to marry whoever sired her illegitimate child, she makes a choice that was recently forbidden. Because of the feminist movement, she was emboldened to take control of her body. My adaptation ends when she goes through the phone book and takes down the address of a local Planned Parenthood. This removes her father's reasons for demanding marriage, and therefore, she takes control over her romantic life.

Epilogue

We do not know what the future holds, and therefore, we can only speculate on what forms romantic relationships will take in the future. As events continue to happen, society will adapt to the changes, impacting the already unpredictable nature of love. During COVID-19 lockdowns, there were a significant number of pregnancies. "A baby is God's opinion that life should go on" (Sandburg 7). Perhaps global warming may make it unethical to have any romantic interludes that could cause pregnancy, and there to be more (tiny) carbon footprints. Currently, there is another shift in social attitudes of acceptance with the motto, "Love is love." We cannot

change the past, but we can learn from it to shape the future. Romantic stories of the Middle Ages are echoes that still capture the hearts of today's young lovers. But, why is it then that romance novels have their section in a bookstore when Chaucer's works are typically housed in the literature section next to many other romantic stories such as *Morte Darthur* (King Arthur) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Regis 19)? In terms of local influences, divorce is not stigmatized as it once was. A variety of family dynamics are common and represented in popular media. And as for personal attitudes toward love in the future, who knows what types of drugs will be offered that will render the psychological need for love obsolete.

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**Women as Widows and Property:
A Reflection on
"The Wife of Bath's Tale"**
by Rebekkah Conklin

Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* before his death in 1400. It was not until roughly 1410 that the Ellesmere Manuscript of Chaucer's work was released to the public. *The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of tales dealing with wisdom and morality told by a group of pilgrims travelling to Canterbury to witness the shrine of Thomas Beckett, a saint who was an archbishop and murdered by King Henry I. The group of pilgrims each come from incredibly diverse backgrounds, from swindlers to nobility. Each of the pilgrims is trying to improve their relationship with God. Chaucer sufficiently exercises meticulous care, adequately describing each of the characters in a satirical manner. "The Wife of Bath's Tale" is an example of the freedoms women typically possessed during the late 1300s and how religion, love, and lust go hand in hand. Despite *The Canterbury Tales* containing a great deal of satire, this classic tale nevertheless manages to empower women. "The Wife of Bath's Tale" provides commentary on the presumed desired treatment of women and the social status of a widowed woman in comparison to a non-married woman.

In the general prologue of the text, Chaucer describes the Wife of Bath, Alisoun, as a woman of considerable importance from the red colour and style of her clothes, a clear indicator of her high social status (Chaucer 19). She has married five times and openly admits she has married for money and status on more than one occasion. Alisoun has done multiple pilgrimages, bragging about her religious excursions to her fellow companions. Chaucer shifts emphasis to the size of her hips, ultimately equating them to a high sex drive. Alisoun, as evidenced by her previous marriages and the tale she weaves, does have a high sex drive and does not consider sex as something immoral in the eyes

of God. She is the fundamental dichotomy of what a standard ideal woman was during this time, bolstered by her widow status; she did not have to worry about being virginal to succeed.

The story *Alisoun* tells is about a knight who brutally rapes a young maiden. For the audience during Chaucer's time, the tale is compelling due to its inclusion of Arthurian legends, something every reader or audience member would have been familiar with. Chaucer implements something with a familiar setting to encourage his audience to connect better with the material, regardless of their personal beliefs towards the morals presented. The story involves the knight on a quest to find out what women truly desire within a year in a day. He finds out from an elderly hag that women desire, "Wommen desiren to have soverintee/As wel over hir husband as hit love/And for to been in maistrye him above/This is youre mooste" (Chaucer 247). The knight had amazed the women of the court with his answer, yet as punishment still, he has to marry the old hag. The knight finds execution more favourable than forcibly marrying the hag who had aided him. He does eventually relent and marries the hag. However, in striking contrast to the way women desire men to treat them, the hag ends up becoming an attractive young woman to serve the knight.

This controversial text is challenging due to the aspect that the knight in *Alisoun's* harrowing tale is ultimately rewarded for raping a woman. However, "The Wife of Bath's Tale" demonstrates that during this time women were solely personal property, owned by the men around them unless they were in some position of great power or widowed. The quote from *Alisoun's* tale implies that even when women are subservient to their men or in contrast, have power, it will never be enough to satisfy their needs. *Alisoun* states at the end of her story, she hopes men die young to liberate them from their wives. This section contains a dual meaning. On a first read, the interpretation could cause her audience to believe she is trying to spare the man, yet, it appears to serve

as an encouragement to her fellow woman. The death of a husband means freedom from societal expectations. Today society faces similar struggles, albeit in a more modern form. Modern feminists are asking for fundamental rights. They are asking for exclusive sovereignty over their bodies and love, just as they have been doing for centuries. They want to be at least equal to men and not seen as lesser than their masculine counterparts.

Throughout Alisoun's tale, there is an intriguing idea of feminism and women's rights, despite her never stating her explicit belief in feminism. Women, as previously mentioned, remain property yet were obligated to remain pure and a virgin until marriage. Chaucer involves excellent care in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," utilizing the word "maiden" to describe the woman that the knight brutally raped. Chaucer employs the word "maiden" to symbolize the girl's purity. She was pure and virginal until that was ripped away from her by a man who retains some seat of power. That may be why he allows the ladies of the court, namely Queen Guinevere respond as she does in the beginning. His cruel punishment was comparatively to instruct him what he had done to the maiden and how destructive it was to her. It was not necessary to punish him but to inform him. It was how Chaucer was subtly commenting on the treatment of unmarried women at the time and how their lack of say did not even end after marriage. However, that is why Chaucer writes about Alisoun in a promiscuous yet holy way, to serve as a tool.

Alisoun serves as a goal women should have and, as an extension, views herself in this manner. She has married and enjoyed success. As a wealthy widow, she no longer has to worry about men and society desiring her to be a gentle maiden. Alisoun has achieved her freedom and is living as women truly desire. She knows how to satisfy men to achieve her means. Her fifth husband read a book that Alisoun hated due to its presentation of women. This leads to a fight between the couple. To manipulate him and gain control,

she had pretended to die to terrify him into submission. Her emotional manipulation is similar to that of wicked men who would fake anything to be with a woman. Alisoun knows how to get her way when required and openly accepts a challenging man. She is untimid but, rather, flaunts her wealth and her sexual needs because she can. Pride is one of the Seven Deadly Sins in Christianity, as is lust. Alisoun, a divine woman who has done pilgrimages, sins daily and does not worry about her sinning affecting her relationship with God. Chaucer writes Alisoun as a radical, independent character with no whims or ties to societal norms, allowing some more social freedom in how the audience perceives her.

The harsh treatment of women during the late 1300s to even current times has lessened but has also held on to a sense of familiarity. Women do not have a say over their bodies. They are unfortunate victims of a system that favours men and merely observes women simply as baby-makers and homemakers. Over the last few centuries, conditions for women have received some improvement. Women can currently own a business in their names and no longer have to answer to men or become widowed to own land. They can be promiscuous in most modernized countries and not worry about an intact hymen in place on their marriage bed. However, women in third-world or traditional countries still encounter “medieval” problems. Women still belong to their husbands and have barely any rights, unless their husbands die. They nevertheless can be putting their marriage at risk if they are not foolish virgins. Women are still subject to confronting issues that our ancestors dealt with. Alisoun is one of the independent women in early British Literature who defies societal norms to inadvertently empower other women and her audiences.

Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” adequately provide an excellent example of society, religion, and freedoms women can have and presently do have. Alisoun and her prologue indicate her willingness in being her own master and how she is unwilling to surrender

her freedoms to man. However, Chaucer does not conceal or prevent her erotic desires. He does not force her to sacrifice her independence when she does obtain lust or love. Despite her complex tale and her contrasting personal life, there is still an understanding of maiden ideals versus widow ideals and societal perspectives on them both. The world is unjust to women. Chaucer uses “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” to provide an understanding of how the critical treatment of women changes throughout their life. Women regardless of the era or century desire equitable treatment and to exercise their sovereignty over themselves if not over their husbands.

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Post-Lockdown Challenges in Education

by Christian Vancil

The phrase *this is my first time on campus* is not uncommon to hear in the rooms, hallways, and buildings. At a writing workshop early in the semester, a student said that it was the only interaction they have on campus each week. A soon-to-be graduate said that in the current year, they had only one class in person. The buildings and the people within them are places that mean less than they did before. The first time I asked a cohort to meet at the Arts collaborative space, multiple emails asking what that meant cemented that notion of the unfamiliar. It was hard to realize that students in their last year had never used the building from which their degree would be issued. When a student in a writing workshop said that I was the only face-to-face interaction they have had as a first-year writer, I had to think about what that meant for our time together. I was the point of contact for someone venturing onto campus for the first time whether to attend a one-hour workshop meeting each week or a senior taking their first class on campus. Talk about a lot of pressure. After talking a bit about what the experiences were for them and after the workshop was over, I decided to take a moment to think about the role as a peer mentor in not only writing but in building community, the role of the community after lockdown, and the opportunities to build community on campus at the Department of English in which I have a vested interest in. There are questions about moving forward on college campuses in post lockdown education that includes our writing space and dissecting the peer mentor's role within that space can have an influence on how the college moves forward. Items such as enrollment, attendance, engagement, and motivation are only a few of the concerns that we focus on each week. Questions regarding student engagement and motivation in higher education begin with a focus on the learning environment itself. Peer mentoring situates itself at the forefront of that community

building and could lead to an increase in student engagement in a number of areas. Analyzing the previous 30 years of composition studies alongside peer mentoring begins to inform the research and an attempt to begin to think about the role of peer mentoring on a college campus.

What is Peer Mentoring

Here at Chico State, Peer Mentoring is intrinsically linked to the first-year writing program. Countless peer mentors over the 30 years have taken up the role of a writing mentor. Writing mentors interact with hundreds of students each week in various settings, including, Academic writing regular support sections, Educational Opportunity Programs, and weekly writing workshops. While composition finds its home in the English Department, the student base consists mainly of first-year writers outside of the English major which centers writing mentors in a vital part of the community on campus that expands across all majors serving a unique body of students. Some students, for example, in the current mentorship see their mentor three separate times throughout the week. That is more than some students see their instructor, which puts peer mentors at the forefront of the writing experience in terms of building community. A peer mentor's role is complex and constantly shifting throughout each meeting, as active professors Doctors Kim Jaxon, Laura Sparks, and Chris Fosen speak about in their article "Epic Learning in a "Jumbo" Writing Course" situates mentors as "peers, near-peers, more capable peers, and sometimes as instructors"(125). At times mentors are looking at drafts, talking through reading, or relating to students' struggles which is as vital as looking at student work. A peer mentor's first position is a community builder. That is where they curate the writing space in which the work is done, without a traditional instructor present the mentor decides how that space operates. A mentor's role is not only complex but vital to all stages of writing and community-building. Even more so with the transition from distance learning

to face to face. Mentors engage students on a personal level, advance academic engagement, and act as guides to on-campus communities. Understanding what a peer mentor does, how the writing program operates, and innovations in composition can create insight for community building in a post lockdown educational space that influences upper-division education as programs look to create motivation and engagement.

Innovations in First-Year Writing

The community on campus is built in several ways. First-Year Writing, although looks different on every campus, is critical to that process. Composition at Chico State, has made innovations in how administration, instructors, and students view writing composition. Mainly it's a reimagining of writing remediation and reinventing the model in the early nineties. As Judith Rodby and Tom Fox in their article *Basic Works and Material Acts*, which address the reinvention that describes a program that no longer follows the work for no credit model that prioritized a University economy. It placed writers out of the actual writing process, Fox and Rodby also say that "Writing and reading were neither acts nor actions" but the innovations created a space where writers wrote for a purpose, and those that needed a peer writing mentor were able to work together to facilitate writing through a workshop once a week (86). Those innovations have allowed the department to reinvent the writing process from the ground up, using game theory and composition research to form the writer at the center of their own experiences. The program now reimagines that writers reach their writing identities through a process that is driven in favor of the writer, instead of punishing the writer for a poor test score but also acknowledging that all writers are at different stages. Further consideration according to Rodby and Fox would see all students potentially enrolled in the workshops since according to current success rates the students enrolled in the workshops pass at higher rates (Jaxon). To say some

writers would benefit from a workshop that diagnoses writing would only be useful to writers who test into it is part of the problem of building a community on campus. The separation of the writing experience outside of the classroom to only involve a few students based on a model of remediation is a point of critical thought, one that is not resolved in the innovations. Overall, the program deviates from the standard model of writing, where test scores determine which year of writing you begin in, how much money you pay throughout your writing, and what environment you are allowed to write in. The progression is expansive and serves as a model of dynamic curriculum change.

While researching the program's history and comparing it to the current state of assignments and current syllabi, what was considered basic writing in its redesign is now considered advanced and valuable. As described by Rodby and Fox "Many basic writing faculty worked from the notion that certain modes or types of essays such as the personal narrative or description were simpler than the exposition and argument that were done in first-year writing"(86). Basic writing then was characterized as personal and narrative-based writing, that the self was easier to write. Today's syllabi are packed with research and writing challenges that fluently involve the self and identity. Creative projects span over ten courses that deal with the self at its core. The innovations in writing, mainly what was considered basic writing have transformed, and the writing that you needed to test into is no longer the focus. That situates the first-year writing program not only at the forefront of modeling composition studies but on the view of valued writing.

Benefits of Peer Mentoring on Campus Community

Within those innovations in composition, the peer mentors find their place, nestled within the writing program, trained through the theory of tutoring practices and a weekly meeting to diagnose issues and find solutions to potential problems. The three-unit course in which mentors not only

learn theory but engage in the practice of mentoring by interning in workshops cement a foundation for writing mentors that excel in their work. Those embedded in the classroom find that an activity-heavy course allows them to find the most use out of the experience as a peer. Joining group activities, lending writing insight, or helping start conversations are the main tools that peer mentors bring to the classroom. Filling silence during times when the conversation just needs a starter or letting other students know that answering a question can be a rewarding experience in class. Where the peer mentoring process excels is the direct connection made outside of the classroom with the students who take the academic writing workshop each week. Those spaces allow the writing mentor to take a group of ten students and break down the writing process in a way that the classroom at times cannot. Smaller class sizes, decentralized authority, and a peer space that is friendly to the writing process give students the chance to explore their writing, reading, and research in a place that exists outside of the classroom. The peer mentoring experience that happens in the first-year writing space, as a model, could be applied to a much more extensive place within the department—using the experience of the program’s process as not just a place where students get help but for mentors to develop skills to go on to mentor at a higher level. The mentorship at the upper-division level is an untapped community that is at this moment in need of exploration. The experience that I have had mentoring a section of upper-division literature has been rewarding, and the first-year mentoring that I did previously was the backbone of that success and an experience that informs all future mentoring, future teaching, and scholarship.

Motivated Learning and Higher Education

The term Motivation has an interesting history in education and I do not use the term lightly. What motivates a student in a normal college environment is wildly different

and can be dismissed as unhelpful in diagnosing problems. I want to challenge that definition of motivated and redirect it as motivated student learning, and in conversation with the model of retention that has taken its place. What motivates a student's basic retention in class is not interested in the project of community building. I want to know what motivates a student to step outside of the classroom and attend a club, present at an event, or build active scholarships in the hallways, rooms, and buildings. Peer-Mentoring situates itself to be a stable piece of that motivator. Research on motivation in higher education is well established. However, motivated student learning centers on the relationship between the learner and the learning environment and is focused on community-driven engagement. The motivation of students in distance learning and also returned students is fundamentally connected to the environment in which the learning takes place. Aleksandra Stevanović's studies in distance learning during the pandemic situate the issues in motivation that seem to affect first-year students to a higher degree because of the lack of established routines but upper-division higher educational experiences suffer in a loss of community, the small positives in distance learning in areas such as working on their schedule and saving travel time in the transition back onto campus are not transferable skills or offset the effects (Stevanović). That a focus on upper-division students who aren't seen as lacking motivation in distance learning are experiencing "several negative consequences of the pandemic: students experienced academic stress, fear of failure, feelings of boredom, and depressive thoughts that distracted students from academic creative activities. These findings underscore the importance of paying widespread attention to students' workload, motivation to learn, and providing appropriate pedagogical tools to reduce anxiety and negative academic self-perceptions" (Stevanović). Focusing on retention and enrollment cannot solve those issues, but what motivates a student to step out of the classroom and feel connected to people can. That puts

peer mentors in a unique position to impact those areas of academic concern. The empirical findings and research of Stevanovic over thousands of students, although self-reported, come to valuable conclusions, that students in their first academic year are significantly less motivated to begin academic projects and upper-division students make less effort in coursework and move away from creative projects. These conclusions, although from only a single study in which research is still being produced as the pandemic is still ongoing, point us to areas that are visible on campus to those who are actively involved. It is exactly those academic conclusions on education and questions of motivated student learning that peer mentoring with the successful innovative models of the first-year writing program combined with the creative model of research and upper-division peer mentoring can address.

Peer Mentoring as Part of The Solution

In facing the challenges of student motivated learning and community building peer mentoring plays a vital role. The mission statement of the mentoring program for Course-Based Undergraduate Research & Creative Activities Program (CureCap) is to “developing authentic, hands-on, course-based research and creative activities projects for (re-)engaging students in their academic work to promote retention and academic success following pandemic-related disruptions.” CureCap and the first-year writing program both attempt to capture two separate ideas, going beyond the classroom and creative activities that involve research. Through the process and the experiences over all the writing mentorships the spaces that enlist the most engagement and build community are outside the classroom. For example, the CureCap mentorship that I am a part of created a number of writing groups within that section, working outside of the classroom to extend the material studied to present at events hosted at the college, and working on furthering research projects, and crafting professional materials.

When diagnosing the mentoring process at the English department at Chico state where after the first-year writing program, our peer mentoring inside the classroom begins to fade away. Peer Mentoring in Literature, Creative Writing, and Literacy studies can create environments for more than retention but active community, and the result could impact classroom dynamics, creative assignment planning, and increasing the community at the undergraduate and graduate level. The community in those classrooms can currently be isolated, the writing center is the only place to realistically outsource writing beyond the instructor. With the research that is being done about education during the pandemic and the research that is starting to be done about the post lockdown educational space, two factors are vital to understanding students: motivation and engagement. The processes that are formed in the first-year writing program exemplify a decent community in the classroom where embedded mentors are capable peers, to provide an environment that cares about its student's engagement with the material. Creating an environment that decenters education, and creates spaces that go beyond a single room needs to involve peer mentoring at its core, not only as a realistic way to divide the work that needs to be accomplished but to involve the most students as possible in the places that create learning.

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A Cultural Approach to Defining Horror

by Ben Vandersluis

In November, 2021, writer and director Stephen Karam came out with a movie called *The Humans*. I had never heard of this movie until I listened to a “year-in-review” episode from the *Faculty of Horror* podcast in which the co-hosts reviewed the horror films of 2021 and ranked their top ten of the year. One of the co-hosts, Alex West, named *The Humans* as her number one horror pick of 2021. And not only did she name *The Humans* as her number one horror of the year, but she gave it special praise above any of her other top ten picks. In her own words,

[*The Humans*] poses a really important question for us right now: What does it mean to make a horror film in 2021, or now 2022, with where the world is, with what we are all going through with this collective trauma? What does that mean, what does that yield, and what is horror now? [*The Humans*] is strange, it is inventive, it is small, it is exceptional. ... To me I think this is perfect. (West 00:41:04-00:41:37)

This is high praise coming from Alex West, who has been running the *Faculty of Horror* podcast alongside Andrea Subissati since 2012. To Alex West, *The Humans* is not only the top horror pick of the year, it’s also the first in a new era of horror, the prototype of a brand new horror cycle. At least, that’s the way Alex West sees it.

However, if you’ve ever heard of *The Humans*, or seen it, you probably know that most people don’t consider the movie to be horror at all, let alone the best horror of 2021. Officially, *The Humans* was never marketed as a horror film; the trailer hails the movie as a “masterful family drama,” and IMDb simply labels *The Humans* as “drama” with no other genre labels whatsoever (A24, IMDb). A review of *The Humans* by writer Shirley Li, which appeared in *The Atlantic*,

delivers its punchline in the title: “The Scariest Movie of the Year Isn’t a Horror Movie.” Li’s reasoning? *The Humans* utterly lacks the monsters, supernatural elements, and typical settings associated with horror films. But despite this omission, Li admits, “More than once I caught myself gripping my armrests, terrified.”

These differing accounts leave us in a dilemma when it comes to determining which narratives belong to the horror genre. How is it that an experienced horror veteran like Alex West can name *The Humans* as her top horror film of the year, while multiple other reputable sources don’t consider the film to be a “horror” movie at all?

Part of the problem is that we are accustomed to approaching the horror genre from a perspective that is traditionally criteria-based. For instance, let’s say I were to ask you whether you consider the movie *Jaws* (1975) to be horror. Regardless of your answer, your automatic response to that question probably involves your mental ability to generate a set of criteria which allow you to determine whether *Jaws* fits the generic mold called “horror.” A typical list of horror criteria might include the presence of monsters, supernatural/sci-fi elements, gore, jump scares, or whether the film feels “scary.”

The problem is that the horror genre has significantly evolved and changed over its history to the point that this criteria-based approach doesn’t cover all of horror’s subgenres, not even close. A recent list of horror subgenres, published by Tim Waggoner, includes gothic horror, slashers, creature-features, splatter/“torture porn,” psychological horror, cosmic horror, folk horror, apocalyptic horror, social horror, occult horror, and others (Waggoner 46-54). Perhaps we could use a criteria-based approach to define one of horror’s subgenres by itself—“slasher” movies, for instance, are much easier to define in a bulleted list. But when it comes to horror broadly speaking, we don’t have a reliable set of criteria that adequately encompasses the entire genre.

Philosopher Noël Carroll, one of the foremost thinkers in horror studies, attempted to solve this problem by formulating a more robust definition of horror. He considers “horror” to be a narrative that a) features a monster of supernatural or sci-fi origin, b) depicts that monster as both threatening and impure, c) shows characters responding to that monster with both fear and revulsion, and d) compels the audience to have an embodied response to horror, which means that the audience experiences chills, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, or some other physiological response (Carroll, “Nature” 55, *Philosophy* 27). In all fairness, Noël Carroll’s definition of horror is probably more robust than most people’s mental checklists of the genre. However, while I greatly respect Noël Carroll for his extensive contribution to horror studies, I find that his definition still takes the shape of a criteria-based approach. Carroll’s definition, while intricate, is still a list of boxes to be checked off, and we end up in strange situations when we consider narratives like *Halloween*, where the monster is neither supernatural nor science fiction in origin, and yet most audiences still consider *Halloween* to be horror.

What I propose, instead of a complex formula of bullet points or criteria, is that narratives must only satisfy one criteria to qualify as “horror.” That single criteria, I argue, is that horror must be a narrative that depicts monstrosity, and monstrosity in turn is the distillation of a cultural threat. We are able to recognize this cultural threat because the depiction of monstrosity induces a sense of what Asa Mittman calls “vertigo,” in which audiences “[redefine their] understanding of the world” as the depiction of monstrosity challenges their worldview (Mittman 8). This definition allows horror to be broadly interpreted, not limited to things that are supernatural or sci-fi in origin. Redefining monstrosity in terms of cultural threat allows us to have horror with monsters that are human, like Michael Meyers, or situations that are monstrous, like *The Purge* or *Squid Game*.

I would like to apply this idea to two films that are frequently denied their horror status, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Black Swan* (2010), both of which are categorized as “drama” and “thriller” by IMDb. But I think that if we re-examine these films from a perspective of cultural threat, we can see that these narratives are horror in their own right.

Let’s start with Hannibal Lecter from *Silence of the Lambs*. Hannibal is an intellectual and social elite, traits we normally value in our culture. His intelligence is astronomical and he often has an impeccable taste for manners and formality. However, Hannibal is also completely and utterly amoral to the point that he is willing to literally feed upon those around him. This leaves the audience stuck in a dichotomy where the traits we culturally value are inseparable from a character that is likely to eat our livers with a plate of fava beans and a nice chianti. The tension of this dichotomy leaves the audience in a place of cultural threat.

In *Black Swan*, Nina herself is not a “monster” (or at least I don’t perceive her as such), but the circumstance of the character is monstrous. In this case, the cultural threat surfaces in the way that Nina’s situation diametrically opposes our cultural narratives of the “American Dream.” In *Black Swan*, Nina is working hard to achieve the kind of success that most Americans can only dream of, and achieve it she does. But in the process, Nina sacrifices her body, her sanity, and ultimately her life, and despite that sacrifice she is still abused and controlled at every point in her journey. When we watch a narrative like this, even though few of us are ballerinas like Nina, we begin to see that the unreasonable stresses, demands, and costs that Nina faces are things we are uncomfortably familiar with in our own lives. Once again, the narrative places the audience in a state of tension between a cultural value and an existential fear, and from this tension the audience experiences a feeling of cultural threat.

I want to push this idea of cultural horror even further. I’ve been surveying Twitter users about horror, and one of the questions I ask is this: What movie exemplifies the horror

genre? I usually get responses like *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Shining* (1980), *The Witch* (2015), and other similar movies. One person on Twitter took me by surprise when they responded to this question by naming Disney's recent hit, *Encanto* (2021). They quickly realized that they had misunderstood my question, which made me laugh, but then I reconsidered. I wrote back suggesting that *Encanto* actually holds potential as a horror movie. This Twitter user responded by taking my idea and running with it, and I believe their response is exactly the sort of thing we need to consider as we expand the definition of horror beyond our typical definitions:

Young woman in a house with shifting geometry goes looking into buried family secrets. Everyone thinks that by not talking about [the secrets they] won't be an issue but it doesn't help—that which they repress is figuratively and literally haunting them, living in the walls. ... In the end it turns out that a deep generational trauma replicated itself and grew and mutated to where everyone was hurt by it, and it can only be resolved through the inevitable destruction of the house. Is this Disney's latest hit or a High Gothic Horror Story?

(@JacksonEflin)

When it comes to horror, it's not that we're asking the wrong questions. There's nothing wrong with posing the question, "Is such-and-such movie (book, video game, etc.) horror?" Instead, where we often go wrong is when we answer. When we approach horror from the perspective that the genre is fixed or absolute, we have a tendency to reduce horror to a list of criteria, simultaneously ignoring the fact that we don't all agree on the same criteria. As a result, when someone says, "I watched a thing and it was horror," we often end up dismissing that person and their perspective. By re-evaluating horror as cultural, as subjective, as flexible, what we gain is the ability to walk inside someone's shoes and see their perspectives where we had previously thought

differently. So if someone approaches you and says, “Hey, I watched *The Grey* and I thought it was horror,” we can have one of two responses: we can fall back on old habits, refer to our criteria-based lists and tell that person they’re wrong; alternatively, we can re-examine *The Grey* and consider in what ways the film conveys a cultural threat through the depiction of monstrosity. I argue that the latter response has more intellectual and social merit than the former.

With all of this in mind, is *The Humans* “horror”? I suppose that depends on you. I know I did not experience *The Humans* as horror when I watched it, and neither did Shirley Li, or the IMDb judges, or countless other viewers. And yet, what I cannot deny is that Alex West considers *The Humans* to be horror, no questions asked. Can we follow West’s lead in re-examining *The Humans* as horror? I think we can. And when we do, what we find in *The Humans* is a deep, terrible loneliness that feels far too familiar to us. That loneliness is bound up in our ideas of family and our subsequent vulnerabilities; it is oppressed by the weight of our capitalistic society; it is amplified by the growing pains of a culture that has adopted new values but is still haunted by the old ones. And worst of all is how normal this loneliness is, how utterly common and mundane, how inescapably pervasive. Taken in this light, *The Humans* is horror because we can see a cultural threat forming within it, and that cultural threat is monstrosity, even if that monstrosity is characteristically human. This is, after all, the reason for the film’s title. The film asks us to consider that a story needn’t contain otherworldly “monsters” in order to be scary. The world already has more than its share of monstrosity, lived out in the generations of a single species: the humans. If we want to meet a monster, we need only to find the nearest mirror. And if that’s not horror, I don’t know what is.

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Contributor Bios

Hailey Murphy

Hailey Murphy was born and raised in San Jose, California. She is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in English from the University of California, Chico with a minor in creative writing. She is in the process of editing her first novel.

T.J. Wall

T.J. Wall is a novelist and poet who is currently studying creative writing as a graduate student at California State University Chico. He previously completed his Bachelor's degree in English Studies from CSU Chico. T.J. has previously published two works; a modern day crime-noir novel titled *Under The Street Lights* and a book of poetry titled, *The Drums to which we Marched*. Outside of reading and writing, T.J. enjoys tattoos, conversations about teaching pedagogy, motorcycles, old punk rock albums and being a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu practitioner. Other literary interests include horror fiction, 20th century American novels, Greek/Norse pantheons and activism in literature.

Jen Carter

Jen Carter is an undergraduate student at California State University, Chico and is in the process of earning her bachelor's degree in English Literature with a minor in Creative Writing and a certificate in Literary Editing and Publishing. She has worked as an editor for the school's literary publications, *Watershed Review* and *Flume Press*. She aspires to one day work in a publishing house and help produce bodies of work that give her the same feeling she gets when listening to the *Mama Mia* soundtrack.

Cody Roberts

Cody Roberts is a poet hailing from San Diego California and based out of Chico California. Currently Cody is pursuing his Masters Degree at Chico State University studying creative writing, he hopes to teach Creative Writing with his degree in his future, whether or not he will first obtain his MFA is still up in the air (stay tuned). Cody's focus(es) currently surround the thematic elements of exploring grief, both internally and externally, through

the poetic lens. He writes on account of this focus, “the vastness of this exploration of feeling has projected onto me a dutiful mission to create meaning, – grief is a feeling that resonates with each of us uniformly, yet takes shape and affects our lives in distinctly different ways.” He recently read his poems “Tongue Thrust” and “Coffee from a Travel Mug” alongside a small collection of others at the recent Writers Voice Event at Chico State in the Fall of 2021.

Brooke Kenney

Brooke Kenney is currently an undergraduate student at California State University, Chico on her way to earning an English degree while also absolutely slaying her Barista job by creating exquisite hearts, sometimes a leaf, but mostly blobs in her lattes. Her poetry has recently been published in *The Blue Route* and was also recognized for 1st place in the 2020 Creative writing contest at Chico State. While she is not working toward her goal of publishing her own poetry collection or exploring every national park, she is meditating, walking her sassy husky, Nadia, or indulging in the finest Chico has to offer: Riley’s bar and grill.

Jonah Lindsey

Jonah Lindsey hails from Round Valley, California, a tiny town with no stoplights or fast-food chains. After graduating high school, he moved to Chico to attend Butte College, later transferring to Chico State. Jonah has always been interested in the history of humans all over the world, and literature has always been his passion. Since his first creative writing class, he has been writing poetry and short stories.

Kayla Kersh

Kayla Kersh is a first-year, first-generation undergraduate student at Chico State majoring in English Education and double-minoring in Secondary Language Arts and Creative Writing. She hopes to obtain her teaching credentials and teach high school English locally in Chico. She is originally from Corona, California but moved to Chico in 2018. Ever since she can remember, she has been infatuated with writing and consuming literature. In her free time, she loves to read and write poetry, travel, spend time with

friends and family, and be in nature. Some of her favorite things to read and write about include poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, romance, LGBTQ+ issues, and other social justice issues. She currently works for Chico Area Recreation and Park District as an After School Program Leader/1:1 Aide. This job takes up a large portion of her life and reassures her every day that she is on the right path working in education.

Megan Turner

Megan Turner is currently an Undergraduate at Chico State, pursuing a degree in English Studies with a minor in Creative Writing. She has taken multiple writing classes both at Butte Community College and Chico State, but has yet to submit her work to literary outlets. She hopes to one day become a copyeditor and ghostwriter, and to be able to do so around the world while traveling.

Michelle Barrett

Michelle Barrett lives with her dog Baylee, and cat Nala. She and her husband live a simple life. She love to express herself through many different crafts. While returning to college at 58 years young, she was able to take classes that interested her, not classes to earn a living. She is well-rounded having earned five degrees from Butte College in a variety of subjects. She has been writing poetry for decades, it stems from real-life situations that she has personally been exposed to in her own life. Her poetry has evolved with the times. Therefore, her poetry focuses on the genre of spoken word. It is her greatest hope that her spoken word poetry will open avenues for others to question their own decisions and belief systems. She wants to catch the attention of the reader in a modern way that is relatable to their own lives. Her work explores life, how social norms have twisted some minds to forget the elderly, hate the differences in people instead of embracing them and ignore the fragility and vulnerability of life. She enjoys raising the idea of a solution that allows others to think about their life by making a difference in the world. One person at a time.

Brady Freitas

Brady Freitas is a second-semester graduate student in the English MA program at Chico State, where he is studying Language and Literacy. His current research interests include composition pedagogy, geo rhetoric, and the rhetorics of places and cities. In the future, he hopes to teach FYC courses at Chico State with the goal of implementing spatial rhetorics in the writing classroom. Outside of school he likes to bike, go to the lake, and spend time with his dogs.

Jennifer Turman

Jennifer Turman is a naturally curious student, thirsty for knowledge; the more she learns, the more she wants to know. Her meandering path has led her in a cascade of intriguing experiences, each one helping to shape her into the person she is today. Today she is in her final semester as an English Education major at Chico State. It is her profound hope to share her knowledge and experience with others through teaching and writing. She strives to honestly represent her life experiences and hopes they will serve others in their individual walks of life.

Rebekkah Conklin

As a long time local to the Chico area, Rebekkah Conklin attended Butte College where she earned an AAT in English and an AA in Language Arts. Rebekkah is presently in her final year of education at Chico State for a BA in English with the Literature option. After graduation, Rebekkah will be furthering her academic studies at City University of London with a MA in English. Ultimately, she strives to create advancements in queer and feminist research in the field of literary analysis.

Christian Vancil

Christian Vancil is currently an MA student in the English Department at California State University, Chico, focusing on Early American Literature. Interests in the fields of language, literacy, and composition pedagogy situate Christian in having an active interest in the peer mentoring programs and research. Christian currently acts as an embedded peer mentor in the Academic

writing sections in the Education Opportunity Program, Academic writing workshops, and as a CURECAP Mentor in Chaucer and His Age. Christian's dynamic background in educational-based literacy programs and extensive experience in literature and composition studies create a unique view of mentoring at the Chico State English Department.

Ben Vandersluis

Ben Vandersluis is a grad student in the English MA program at Chico State. He enjoys learning about literary craft, but most of all he's an enthusiast of the horror genre. He plans to complete his thesis in time to graduate in Fall 2022. Ask him about his thesis: it goes "bump" in the night.