The background is a painting. It features a dark, almost black, background. In the upper portion, there are several thick, brown, branching lines that resemble tree limbs. In the center, there is a large, irregular shape with a textured, painterly appearance. This shape is primarily light green and yellowish-green, with a darker, teal-green area on the left side. Below this central shape, there is a dense field of flowers. The flowers are painted in various shades of blue and white, with dark blue centers. The overall style is expressive and somewhat abstract.

athena's web

the journal of the college of arts and sciences

Fall 2014

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athena's web

journal of the college of arts and sciences

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Dr. Bebe Gish Shaw

EDITOR
K. L Riley

EDITORIAL ADVISOR
Tracy Szappan

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Jensie Britt



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Athena's Web is an academic journal dedicated to publishing outstanding student work in the arts and sciences. The journal is sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences of Athens State University. Arts and Sciences students (including secondary education majors) are encouraged to submit academic and creative work to the editors for consideration.

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The Editors
Founders Hall Room 350
300 N. Beaty Street
Athens, AL 35611
Athenas.Web@athens.edu

Dr. Darlene Turner-White,
Director
Building Success through Writing
McCain Hall Room 205

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News and Announcements

Submissions are currently open for the Spring 2015 issue. Submissions received after the dealines listed below will be considered for the Summer 2015 issue.

April 17, 2015

Release date for the Spring 2015 issue (online version).

April 24, 2015

Tentative release date for the Spring 2015 issue print run.

March 25, 2015

Submission deadline for the Spring 2015 issue.

Note that the the above dates can be changed at the discretion of the Editor and the Editor-in-Chief. Changes will be announced on the News and Announcements section of the journal's website.

Poetry

The Dancers
(Miami Beach, 1954)

Mary Teresa Toro



I did not understand the strange people
dancing on the beach that Friday night,
singing and speaking a language
I had never heard before.

They were thin,
their wrinkled skin hung
 like clothes that did not fit.
Their heads seemed big
 their eyes were sunken and sad.
And though they danced
 I saw no joy or happiness.

They joined hands
 raised their arms

 I saw the numbers...

“Why did they write on their wrists?”
“They are Jews,” she hissed, hurrying me along.

They danced in circles, these “Jews,”
 these different ones,
to a music tinny and odd.
The circles would grow and shrink
 as they moved in and out
arms up... in
 arms down... out
in...out
 up... down,

round and round on the sand
 arms rising and falling
 human waves on the shore.

Why are they dancing?
Why don't they smile?”

She grabbed my arm, dragged me down the
path

“They are Jews!” she hissed again...

 as if that explained it all.



Poetry

Building Sand Castles

Kristi Coughlin

I wanted always to live on the beach in a home with sail white curtains
I waited by the sea to see if I could build my dreams
It seems I will have to settle for something lesser than
A house out of sand I will make
My castle tall to glimmer in the sun
My wash away dreams will suffice my need.
I imagine the end before I even begin
The slow destruction of the castle
The way the tide will creep up the edges of the moat
How the turrets will collapse as the carefully
Made ramparts dissolve into the foamy salt water
It comforts me to say that I knew before I even began
That my aim was to simply declare that I could build one
Not that it would last
Not that it would stay
No passersby can stop and remark
“What scantily made archways!”
For I can smile and merely reply
“I am no architect”
Even as I grasp my hand on the shovel
I see the water’s edge in the distance
Even as I cup my fingers and gently pat the wet grains,
Great pains taken to form the edges just so
I know
It’s coming for my beautiful dream
A home fit for a king and his beloved queen
The porcelain figurines
I’ve nestled inside the tower
What a choice place to see the sights
To look upon their loyal subjects
And watch it collapse
My paces quicken as I carve out the fine details in the turrets,
The blinding sun has sunken low in the sky
The broken horizon and the roar of the waves creep in louder and louder
My sweat creased face looks peacefully
Upon my masterpiece
My sweet pile of soon to be nothing
This monument to all that is beautiful and fleeting
I don’t feel as if I’ve wasted my afternoon piling, beating ocean dirt
It is the nature of all things to pass

And I was right in trying to manifest it
Taking on nature and for a moment besting it
When I walk by this place tomorrow I will see an empty place
Where my little house once stood
And I'm glad that I played my hand at making
Sand Castles

Heavenly Galaxy

Bekah Weeks





Poetry

Google Translate Facilitates Zen

Travis Sharp

Translation as act of dual. Duel. Trust Google to lead the way. Begin etymology. Degrade through translate. Sacrificial. Having two scalepans I take in the ability to install fixtures into the factory of Adam in Eden. There is no author. Sculpture is a good block of material. Fluid change. And I did not know lexicography. This body is stupid. No writer. No witness. Do you remember the chains, Don? That wasn't what they meant. They meant ethocentricity threats tipped the scales of our reference library. Sacrifice. Again.

Poetry



Paper Warriors

Mary Toro

The baby boomer boys sat at desks
drawing battleships and airplanes

waging war
with Write Right® blue lined
loose leaf paper in three ring binders,
gnawing #2 yellow pencils
with worn pink erasers

battles raged
with sound effects
the rat-a-tat of machine gun fire
whine of falling bombs
boom-ppshhh of exploding
ships
crashing planes

The Allies always downed the Axis planes
always sank their battleships

There was never any doubt in this game of
Good Guys against bad
the Good Guys always won
(as they should)

evil empires fell before the self-appointed
Guardian of the World
(as it was meant to be)

a battle lost
a new page

a bomb strike
erase the damage

but

when they grew
traded paper and pencils for bullets and
guns

invincible paper warriors fell
in the very real jungles of

Viet Nam

Fiction

How Things Move in the Ocean

Ben Montgomery



Natalie Townsend curled her hands around the damp metal railing on the starboard side of the *Capella*. The orange sun was setting and the dark clouds on the horizon dimmed the glow enough that she could look almost directly at the light. The last glow of the day gave sparkling tops to the thousands of little crests in the dark, choppy sea. This had always been her favorite part of standing on this boat. She checked her phone—no texts from Rudy.

Bear had finished filming for the day and was busy stowing the camera equipment below deck. She was alone up top. The ocean was windy today, and she was thankful for her naturally curly hair. When Natalie's mother would stand on deck, she always had to put her long, straight hair in a ponytail to keep it from lashing her face. Natalie's hair just swayed like a parachute.

Bear came out of the cabin door, clapping his massive hands together to shake off dust that wasn't really there. He looked at Natalie and gave her his sad, awkward smile, then made his way to the helm to start moving closer to the Greenland coastline. They had barely said a word to each other the entire trip, save for a few conversations necessary to run the boat.

Bear's real name was Sanford Gibbs, and it wasn't hard to see how he earned the nickname. Natalie's mother had hired him well before Natalie was born because his six-and-a-half foot frame allowed him to carry the massive equipment needed to film underwater. Sometimes Nat thought he looked as wide across as he was tall.

He was with Natalie's mother when she drowned. Bear didn't tell it that way, though. He said he left her to die, and said no more.

Cori Townsend wasn't a famous oceanographer during her life. At least, she wasn't famous in the way Jacques Cousteau was, or even in the way E. Lee Spence was. But, she was well-known among other undersea explorers and certainly respected in the field. Natalie remembered her mother being interviewed often for niche publications and being excited once for being interviewed by *USA Today*, although she was merely a source for the article and not the subject.

Then, six months ago, everyone suddenly knew who Natalie's mother was.

It trended everywhere—Facebook, Yahoo, cable news—the reputable oceanographer who poetically drowned on one of her excursions in an experimental submersible. People who had never heard the name Cori Townsend in their lives were posting statuses about “how sad” this “great lady's passing” was. Natalie spent a long time feeling bitter about that. She got over it eventually, rationalizing that it was okay for people to fall in love with her mother and her work after Googling her for ten minutes because *who wouldn't?* Her mother was Cori Townsend, the greatest person she ever knew.

Bear's deep, rumbling voice crackled out of the intercom attached to the outside of the helm's cabin.

“I'm done for the day, Nat. You ready for your thing?”

Natalie—Nat—turned to look at the helm. She smiled faintly and nodded at her mother's closest friend. Most of their talking had been in this way, with the glare on the cabin's window hazing her view of Bear. The engines had been idling while Bear stowed the equipment. They roared

louder as he pushed the throttle forward. Natalie turned her back on Bear again. She checked her phone— no texts from Rudy.

Cori's last voyage was here, about 50 miles off the coast of Greenland. The country has a reputation for being dark and cold, but those who actually went there knew it had summers like everywhere else. It was never hot, but it was warm enough now that Natalie could comfortably stand on deck, and Greenland's place high on the planet's tilt meant darkness never completely falls, which would make her night dive safer.

Cori was bundled from head to toe as she got ready to make her dive near there six months ago. Bear had been checking the two-man submersible they had been chosen to test. The corporation that funded it specifically wanted it tested and filmed in cold, icy waters because some demographic junkie said that's the imagery western audiences liked at the time. It didn't matter to Cori, because she had been quivering with energy for six months over jumping into the "big double banana," so named because of its shocking yellow color and the two elongated sections where Bear and Cori would strap themselves in, and now she wouldn't have to wait another six months for the warm weather to come back. Cori hugged her bleary-eyed daughter at 4 a.m. on a chilly Saturday morning, promised to call her every day, and went out the door with the last of her luggage. Natalie went back to bed. She never saw her mother again.

Cori took Natalie to Bermuda once when an expedition lined up perfectly with summer vacation. It was Natalie's favorite memory of her mother. Cori taught her daughter more in that summer than Natalie learned in five years of public school science classes. Natalie closed her eyes and tightened her grip on the railing. She remembered the hot metal of that same railing under the scorching Bermuda sun. An ocean breeze fought the heat. She breathed deeply through her nose, taking in the salty air.

Eight-year-old Natalie leaned over the railing, probably further than she should. She wanted to see the fish swimming in the crystal clear waters of the North Atlantic. She decided it was her favorite ocean. The *Capella* was anchored a ways away from one of the Bermuda reefs. She was so mesmerized by the sunlight dancing on the water and the backs of the silver fish that she didn't notice her mother approaching from behind.

"Nat! You are *too far* over that railing!"

Natalie bristled in surprise and quickly plopped both bare feet onto the warm deck. She turned to face her mother, her expression neutral so she could test and see just how much trouble she was in. Her mother's face was stern for a fraction of a second, then grew into a wide grin. Her mother wasn't especially strict at home, but Natalie suspected could get away with anything on this boat. Her mother was in her element in the water, and it had an obvious effect on her demeanor.

"What are you looking at?" Natalie's mother asked as she peeked over the railing with her daughter.

"Fish!" Natalie exclaimed.

“What kind of fish?”

“Um, blue ones?”

Her mother giggled a giggle she reserved for her daughter. “That’s actually pretty close! That one—” she pointed to a small, skinny fish, “is a Blue Parrotfish and that one—” she moved her finger to another fish shaped like an arrow and moved her daughter’s shoulders slightly so that she was facing it, “is a Blue Angel Fish.”

Suddenly, the colorful fish scrambled away and a shifting form advanced from the sand around the reef. The thing emerged from a dirt cloud and Natalie saw it was an octopus. It closed its tentacles around one of the fish that didn’t dart away quickly enough and shoved it in its beak.

Natalie tried to keep her composure to impress her mother, but she must have been wide-eyed because she felt a calming hand close over her shoulder.

“That’s the way it goes. Big things have to eat small things to survive. It doesn’t make them bad. We do it, too,” her mother said in a calm voice. Natalie kept looking in the water. “And sometimes we do it to each other,” her mother said quieter and with a sigh. Natalie turned and gave her a puzzling look.

Her mother smiled. “Sorry, that’s a little heavy for an eight-year-old, huh? You wanna see something cool that won’t bum you out?”

Natalie nodded her head. Her mother reached into the pocket of a vest she was wearing and pulled out a plastic orange-and-white bobber. She held it between her thumb and forefinger like a party magician and dropped it in the water.

“Look,” she said to her daughter. “See how it moves? It rolls back and forth, back and forth.” Her mother produced a second bobber and held it on her arm with her hand. She moved the arm fluidly up and down, simulating a wave. The bobber advanced toward her hand in a spiral motion. Natalie looked at the bobber in the ocean. The tiny choppy waves scooped the bobber up and rolled it to the top of their apexes. The bobber rolled backwards as it climbed up the steep slopes to the top of the waves, then tumbled quickly over the other side as the waves undulated under it. With each wave, the bobber moved further away from the boat.

“This is how things move in the ocean,” she said with a light in her eyes. “Everything moves back and forth like this, but it always moves one way a little more than the other and it’s usually moving toward the shore. The deeper something is, the slower it moves.”

“Everything moves like that?” Natalie asked skeptically.

“Everything,” her mother confirmed.

“Then what happens when all the stuff is on the shore and the ocean floor is just a big, narrow hole?” Natalie said in her I-stumped-my-genius-Mom voice.

Her mother grinned. She *beamed*.

“I don’t know.”

Of course she knew. At least, she knew the theories of how the ocean would transform over eons or the right follow-up questions that would be needed to give a true answer. But, she got what

she wanted. Her daughter was curious.

“This is where it should be, Nat. I’ll come down and help you suit up.”

Bear’s voice snapped Natalie back to the present. She turned and nodded vigorously and headed to the front of the boat where Bear would help her put on her scuba gear and review all the safety talk with her. Natalie wasn’t completely inexperienced, but she would listen carefully considering what had happened the last time a Townsend jumped into these waters. She checked her phone. No texts from Rudy. Not that it was surprising— she had to be at least 40 miles from a signal. Plus, of course, Rudy hadn’t talked to her since she lost the baby.

Rudy’s real name was Rudyard, but he hated it and barely tolerated Rudy. They met when they were 10 years old and sort of segued into dating sometime after that. Natalie got pregnant eight years later and she and Rudy made plans to get married. The stress was enormous— both their lives were going in completely new directions— but she was excited to marry Rudy and start a family.

When she miscarried they talked all night, with the conversation ending on a notion that maybe they should take some time away from each other. She agreed amicably then, but it was just a brave face to maintain dignity in front of Rudy. She felt like death. A tiny person died inside of her eight months ago, and then everyone else started to disappear, too. Rudy, likely relieved at the weight of responsibility lifted from him, left to go back to his college and career of choice, always responding to texts and calls within a week’s time but never initiating conversation. Her mother jumped into the ocean a few months later and never came back again.

That’s the way it goes, a twisted version of her mother’s voice echoed in her head. Little things die. Big, strong things live.

Bear took her phone and showed her how to use the camera. He tried one more time to talk her out of using the deep-sea diving suit until she had more training, but Natalie just shook her head. He looked at her for a long time, then said “You look like her. You got different hair, but in the wetsuit you look just like her.”

Natalie smiled weakly, “I probably look a lot more scared.”

Bear exhaled a mighty breath. “She was always scared. But, she wanted to get down there and find what she was looking for as bad as you do, so she never needed any convincing’.”

Cori had spent years putting things in a waterproof box on board the *Capella*. On her final voyage she had found the last, perfect shell to put in the box of trinkets and keepsakes and ocean detritus. The most important piece was a letter she had written for her daughter when Natalie was just five years old. Cori wanted to mail it to Natalie, so she and Bear took it with them on a grocery run to the mainland in their little helicopter. Like fools (as Bear told it), they didn’t check the weather report before they left the boat and they hit a squall while they were still over open ocean. Bear’s expert piloting kept them in the air and her mother’s seatbelt held her in place and kept her from tumbling out of the open cockpit. But, she lost her grip on the box and it splashed into the ocean below. Bear said he’d never seen Cori weep like she did then. She died a few days later.

It was assumed that the box was lost until a month ago. Bear was going through some old equipment and found a camera that hadn't been used since Cori's death. He plugged the memory card into a laptop in the hopes that he would have some lost recording of Cori to give to Natalie. It was so much more.

The video was just a dark, grainy blob, probably the back of one of the helicopter seats. But the audio captured every word said between Cori and Bear in the flight to the mainland. Bear must have accidentally hit the record button on the camera when he tossed it in the cockpit and hadn't used it since. The classic banter between the two friends was a treasure in itself, but the real discovery was much more important: Bear's constant verbal acknowledgements of their heading, position, and altitude combined with data on the current patterns on the Arctic and Atlantic ocean floors meant they could pinpoint where the box fell. The bottom in this part of the ocean was rocky and uneven, so it was doubtful that the box strayed far.

Natalie took the big step off the port side and felt the suit lurch when it hit the surface. The water stopped fighting the new mass and displaced around it, absorbing it and pulling it down until Bear could no longer see the neon yellow polymer the suit was made of. Natalie wouldn't be able to move much until her feet met the ocean floor and, despite the power of the halogen lamps built into the suit, couldn't see anything more than the specks of organic ocean *stuff* floating around her. She was thankful she was looking for a box and not the Big Double Banana, which was still at the bottom of the ocean, presumably with her mother still inside.

That's the way it goes. Big things devour little things. And nothing is bigger than the ocean.

Bear's voice came through the speakers in her helmet, accompanied with a metallic tinge to the words. "Nat, your breathin' is too shallow. You're gonna get dizzy, which is pretty dangerous when you're *diving*."

Natalie realized she had been taking sharp, panicked breaths. She concentrated on slowing her breathing, but she could only do so much. "I can't stop thinking about Mom. But, you know, not in a good way."

Bear cleared his throat over the intercom. When he spoke this time, some of the gravel was gone from his voice. "Think about how great your mom was. Think about how much she'd love to be doin' what you're doin' now. Nat, she'd be jumpin' up and down if she got to go on a deep sea dive *with* you."

Natalie's breaths became deep and slow and she felt her heartbeat reduce to a normal level. Bear continued to say nice, poetic things about her mother. Natalie interrupted him after a few minutes.

"Bear," she said in the same tone of voice he had used to calm her. "What happened?"

Bear was quiet for a few minutes, but he exhaled loud and long through his nose a couple of times to let her know he wasn't ignoring her. He finally spoke.

"The Big Double Banana worked fine at first. Better'n fine. I don't know if Cori ever let you go in a submarine, but I doubt it, so you probably don't get just how hard it is to pilot one of those

things. With the Banana we could get near stuff we wanted to film. I guess we got a little full of ourselves and got too close. I heard somethin' scrape an' I heard water start gushin' in an'... an' I ain't never heard a worse sound than that. We turned the thing toward the surface and ran the engine as hard as we could. The water made it get too heavy, but we were close enough to the surface that we could bail without the pressure hurtin' us. I put on a emergency breather and made sure Cori had one too. The water was up to my chest, so it must have been up to her chin, at least. I felt her push a little on my back and..."

He stopped for a moment. When he spoke again, his voice was heavy and strained.

"Nat, I swear I thought that meant she was right behind me."

The speakers were silent for a while. Nat's boots hit the ocean floor. Now that she was at the bottom, the task of finding a package-sized box felt very daunting. The ocean seemed impossibly vast even when limited by the range of her head lamps. Still, she could stay down here for hours and not have to worry about getting lost thanks to the air hose and thick, autoreeling cable attached to the *Capella*. She picked a direction and marched, being sure to thoroughly sweep her lights.

Natalie froze. Her eyes targeted a dark form in the water just above her and at the very edge of the light's range. As it writhed through the darkness, the form gained a shape. It was a lean, blue shark. It hadn't accelerated to attack speed, but even a shark's casual swimming speed can close a distance frighteningly fast.

Bear's voice was in her ear. "Nat, what is it? You're breathing fast again."

"Shark," she whispered as quietly as the microphone could hear.

"Don't do anything, okay? Stay still and stay quiet."

"I am."

"Good. Sharks know they don't eat anything big and yellow. It'll leave you alone if you don't threaten it."

She had forgotten how large she must have appeared in the bulky diving suit. The shark paid Natalie no attention and kept swimming, possibly not even aware that she was a living thing. Her heartbeat slowed, her vision cleared and Natalie looked at the shark with her mother's eyes. It was beautiful. It soared through the water flawlessly, like there was a path set for it in the water that only it could see. It danced past her, and Natalie let out a breathy chuckle of amazement. Two big things saw each other, and both pretended they weren't terrified.

A small, glittery fish swam past her helmet, startling her almost as much as the shark had. She realized there was life all around her here, which was a stark contrast from the dark, empty ocean she saw when she first touched the floor. As she looked around at the jellyfish and eels curling around curiously, her eye caught an angular green shape to her left. She trained her lights on it and tromped towards it as fast as she could. When she reached the shape she saw it was one of the bright green storage boxes on board the *Capella*, covered in hairy mushroom coral. It didn't glow, exactly, but it was obviously designed to easily reflect light. Warm tears flowed out of Natalie's eyes and dripped off her chin. She ripped the box out of the coral, ignoring her mother's voice chastis-

ing her for damaging a reef, and spoke excitedly to Bear through her tears.

“I found it! I found it!”

“*Desdemona*,” Bear sounded like he wanted to swear in amazement, but kept his language kid-friendly like always. “I figured I’d just let you go down in the suit and get this out of your system. I never thought you’d find the blamed thing. Brace yourself, I’m haulin’ you up.”

Natalie tightened her grip on the box, determined not to make the same mistake her mother made on the helicopter six months ago. She felt a mechanical jerk on the back of the suit and began rising rapidly through the water. When she stopped accelerating and settled at a consistent speed, she spoke.

“Bear, I think she knew.” Bear was silent. “She must have been stuck or something, and she pushed on your shoulder because she knew otherwise you’d try to get her out and then you would have both died. Like always, she was thinking about you, and she was thinking about me. And I think she wanted us to take care of each other.”

Bear spoke up. “You know she always wanted you to do your own thing. She never expected you to follow her.”

“I know,” she replied simply and warmly.

“I think you’ll be as big as she was.”

Natalie smiled.

None of the hand-sized souvenirs in the box were irreplaceable. They were just seashells and sand dollars and baubles from island gift shops. But an envelope underneath it all contained something that was one-of-a-kind, and she pushed everything aside to retrieve it. She opened it carefully. Thick pieces of paper spilled out of it. One of the pieces of paper was a letter in her mother’s impeccable handwriting. Some of the words were underlined for emphasis.

There is a diagram in this envelope. Find it.

She picked up the other piece of paper. It was a photocopy of a page from a high school science textbook that diagrammed how matter moves through the ocean. The two illustrations showed the looping motion objects take as they move toward the shore.

This is how things move in the ocean. From the moment they’re dropped by the wind or scraped off the bottom floor, everything moves like this until it reaches shore.

Forward, then back. Back, then forward.

I feel like that’s probably you right now. Well, it’s everyone, really. But, I only care about you. Throughout your life you will suffer setbacks and heartache and loss, and it will feel like you’re being pulled back to the middle of a cold ocean to be lost forever. But, that fear is a lie. Those things are really making you ready to push forward.

I love you. I love you, I love you, I love you. As I write this, you’re a child, and when I tell you this, I think you appreciate it and reciprocate it. But, my love may be the only love you’ve ever felt or ever wanted. And you just

accept it without really understanding it.

As you read this, you're an adult and you've been in the world and you've chased love. I'll bet it got away a few times. So, now you can understand how much I love you.

It's so god-damned much.

It turns my stomach in knots when I think about the waves pulling you back, rolling you mercilessly and helplessly on top. But...I know you pretty well right now, even though you're just a kid. I'll know you a lot better when you read this. And I know you'll choose to live your life on the top of the waves. And when I think of you righting yourself and rolling forward on top of those waves, my heart burns in this beautiful, passionate way. I'm so excited for you, and I hope you are, too.

Everything eventually reaches the shore. It's a rule of the ocean. Eventually, you'll take enough rolls back and enough just slightly longer rolls forward and you'll find yourself on that beach. And every once in the while the tide will come in and hassle you and shake things up, but you'll have peace for the most part. I can't wait for that for you. But, I'm also excited to see how you handle the waves.

The deeper something is in the ocean, the calmer and smaller its little rotations are. Even deep stuff eventually makes it to the shore, but it takes so long. You can do what you want, but I'm so afraid that you won't ride the top of the waves and that you'll take so long to get to the shore that you'll be sad and old and bitter when you get there. But, I also know I have no reason to be afraid, because I can see you standing on the beach with your treasure in your hands.

Nat, I know it sometimes seems like you don't have control over what's happening to you, and that sometimes it seems like you're moving backwards no matter how hard you fight and swim. But, I promise it's never really two steps back and one step forward. The ocean is always moving forward, regardless of what happens in it and around it.

And, though we walk on land, we are all creatures of the ocean.

Solar Blanket

Rachel Monroe





Morning

Mary Teresa Toro

The first indication that something was wrong was when I tried to turn on the coffee maker that morning. I pushed the button, but nothing happened. I pushed it again. Nothing. I couldn't turn on the lights either. I thought the power was out, but the microwave clock was working, and there were no blinking red lights indicating a power failure during the night.

I headed back to the bedroom to wake Daniel up, see if he could figure it out. As I walked into the bedroom, I was startled to see myself lying in bed. I was confused. How could I be in bed and standing here? I walked to my side of the bed and bent down, staring myself in the face. I, or the other me, wasn't breathing. Her... my color looked off, too. I poked the me lying on the bed. No response. She seemed to be dead. But, if she was dead wasn't I dead, too? I sat on the floor next to my dead self, trying to understand what was happening, or had already happened.

Now what? There had been no bright light, no welcome from family members gone before, nothing. No pearly gates or clouds. No smell of sulfur or extreme heat either. This was surprising. Not at all what I expected. I never imagined keeping my dead-self company. Shouldn't there be some sort of instructions, an angel, something or someone? What would come next? Should I just sit here and wait? There didn't seem to be much choice. I couldn't figure out where I would go anyway. I looked at the alarm clock on Daniel's night table. It would wake him in five minutes. Daniel would know what to do. He always did. I sat on the floor next to myself and waited.

I suddenly thought about Daniel. Who wants to wake up with a dead spouse in their bed? And, he had that sales meeting this morning. Major meeting. People flying in from branches all over the country. He is supposed to do a new product presentation. I guess he won't make it. I selfishly hoped that wouldn't be his main concern.

The alarm sounded. Daniel reached over and turned it off. He rolled over and kissed my/her cheek. "Good morning, Sunshine. Time to get up. Go make me some breakfast, wench! Get thee to the kitchen! Your lord desires coffee." This had been his morning salutation for the past three years, since the day after we had returned from our honeymoon. He loved the idea of calling me his wench and himself my lord. He poked me in the ribs. "Come on, kiddo. Rise and shine." He gave me a tender shove and my head rolled to the side at an odd angle that looked like it should hurt, but didn't. "Jen?" He shook me. "Jennifer?" He shook me again, harder. I watched my head bounce off the pillow and headboard. Now he began screaming. "Jen! Jen! Wake up. God, oh God. Jen." He jumped out of bed and ran around to my side, stepping right through the me on the floor. He grabbed my shoulders and shook me. "Oh, God. Jen, wake up. Please wake up." He grabbed the phone on my night table and dialed 911.

"Help. My wife. Oh God. Help. I think she is dead." He dropped the phone and sat with his back against my side of the bed, buried his face in his hands and began to sob.

I could hear the operator, “Sir, sir. Please pick up the phone. Sir, where are you?”

Daniel just sobbed, ignoring the phone and the operator. “Sir, I have your caller ID. Police and rescue are on their way. Sir, open your front door. Mr. Raines, sir, open your door.”

Within moments I heard sirens, then banging on the front door. The operator tried to get his attention again, “Mr. Raines, police and rescue are on your front porch. Open the door, sir. They will force the door if you don’t open it.”

Daniel sat staring at the phone as if he had suddenly lost the ability to understand the spoken word.

I heard the crash of the door frame yielding to force.

“This is the police. Daniel Raines, are you here? Hello?”

The noise seemed to have roused Daniel from his shock. He stood up and staggered to the door. “Here. We are here. Help. Please! My wife.”

I heard the police and EMTs running up the stairs. I realized with horror that Daniel was naked and so was I. Poor Daniel. He would be so mortified to be seen like this. He was always in control, always well dressed. At least I was partially covered by the bed sheet.

The EMTs came through the door first and ran to the bed. A male police officer grabbed a pair of Daniel’s pants off the chair by the closet and handed them to him. “Here, sir, put these on.” One of the EMTs put his hand on my neck, feeling for a pulse. He looked at the officer and shook his head.

Daniel took the pants and stared at them. The officer touched Daniel’s shoulder. “Put them on, sir.” After Daniel struggled into the pants, a female officer put her arm around his shoulder, “Let’s go downstairs, sir.” Daniel turned toward the bed and started to move toward it. The male officer grabbed his other shoulder. “No, sir. Let’s go downstairs. Let them do their job.” They led a sobbing, half-dressed Daniel down the stairs. I followed.

“Sir, was your wife ill? Had she complained of anything yesterday or last night?”

“A headache. She had a headache.”

“What kind of headache? Had she hit her head? Fallen? Did she have some kind of accident?”

“Migraine. She saw the doctor yesterday. It was just a migraine.”

“Do you have the doctor’s name? Phone number?”

“The bottle is on the vanity in the bathroom.”

The male officer headed toward the stairs just as one of the EMTs was coming down.

“She is gone. Nothing we could do. She was already cold. We didn’t see any signs of trauma. Coroner will have to come. Shame. Beautiful woman. Looked healthy.” Oddly, even dead, I still liked being referred to as “beautiful” and “healthy.”

“Husband said she took a new medication last night. Said it’s on the bathroom vanity. I guess a tech will collect it.”

I stood between them, listening, every bit as confused as they seemed to be. I wondered if someone would come get me before I had to watch my own autopsy. I hoped so. I remembered biology class, feeling sorry for the poor frog. Literature was my thing, not anatomy and physiology. I had struggled through those classes. I would have failed them if Daniel, the biology major, hadn't helped me. Daniel! How was he?

I went back down stairs. He was still sitting on the couch. Someone had made the coffee. A half-drunk cup was on the coffee table in front of him.

The female officer had her notebook in hand, "Mr. Raines, is there anyone we can call for you? Family, a friend?"

"Her parents..."

I gasped. "No! Daddy will have another heart attack."

As if Daniel had somehow heard me, he said, "No, not her parents. Her sister, Jessica. God. This is going to kill them all. Jen is the baby of the family."

"Do you have her sister's number, sir?"

Daniel's phone was on the coffee table where he had left it last night. He picked it up and scrolled through his contact list. "Here. Jessica Hobbs. She is in Atlanta."

"Do you want to call her, or would you prefer that I do it, sir?"

"I can't. I just can't. Can you? I don't know what to say."

"Yes, sir, I will call her."

I heard the beeps as the number auto-dialed after the officer tapped Jess' name. Then I heard a loud sound, not at all like a phone, more like an alarm clock, Daniel's alarm clock...

Daniel rolled over, gently brushed the hair out of my face, and kissed my cheek. "Good morning, Sunshine. Did that new medication help with the headache?"

I opened my eyes and stared into Daniel's concerned face, blinking in confusion. "What?"

Reservoir Dogs





Courtney Croxdale

Avery



Brooke Alexander

Fiction
Ghost Stories

Travis Sharp

I used to believe in ghosts. What later turned out to be Binx the Cat was a prior resident rattling pots in the kitchen. He was a ghost who made soup. If this was a movie released on cable, he was there because he didn't get to say goodbye to his wife because her car was totaled by a semi. But because this is in my head instead of in a movie released on cable, he was there because he was recalling something: going to the fridge in search of something covered in chocolate or making soup using Ramen noodles like he learned in college. Metallic pots make noises. A spoon is knocked off the counter. It makes sense that he, being a ghost, was unable to bend over, and so he disappears. I sleep. In the morning, I go to check and find a fork, not a spoon, on the floor. Binx the Cat is curled inside a sauce pan. He is asleep.

.....

When I was 13, my parents allowed me to spend the night at a friend's house. My friend was interrupted from complaining to me about how I eat chips too loudly by a noise in the kitchen.

Do you have a cat?

No. It's a ghost.

Stop being stupid.

I'm not being stupid, stupid. It's a ghost. I seen her.

Really?

Really.

Hmm.

Yeah.

What does she look like?

My grandmother. Let's go see. It could be a new one. They wander in from the fields.

We huddled behind the door and peered into the kitchen, just around the corner. An iron skillet was on the stove.

See? She likes to come back and cook.

She's probably hungry.

You'd be hungry too if you hadn't eaten in 7 years.

.....

Sister, now 16 and still living with her boyfriend, comes over and gets drunk in the living room. I join her. We drink vodka and chase it with pink lemonade. The best chaser is regular lemonade, Sister says, but pink lemonade is 5 cents cheaper. I nod. We are drinking cheap vodka because it is 10 dollars cheaper. She is living with her boyfriend because it is cheaper than living alone. She came over because he choked her. She is considering moving back in with us, but she wants to set some ground rules first. We are making a list while we drink.

1. I can come and go whenever I please.
2. I can smoke in the house.
3. I can have guys over, and we can have sex in the house.
4. I will cook sometimes, but don't expect it.

She is lighting a cigarette.

I just noticed a few days ago that the word cigarette is like cigar, but with -ette, because it's a tiny cigar.

Duh, Sister says.

I thought it was pretty cool.

Hey, what starts with p and ends in orn? Sister and I love these jokes, but the light is hitting her face just wrong and she looks off-put.

Porn?

No. Popcorn.

Of course, Sister says. She smokes and drinks in quick succession.

She's beautiful, Sister says.

Who is?

That woman over on the sofa.

No one is on the sofa.

I can see her, Sister says.

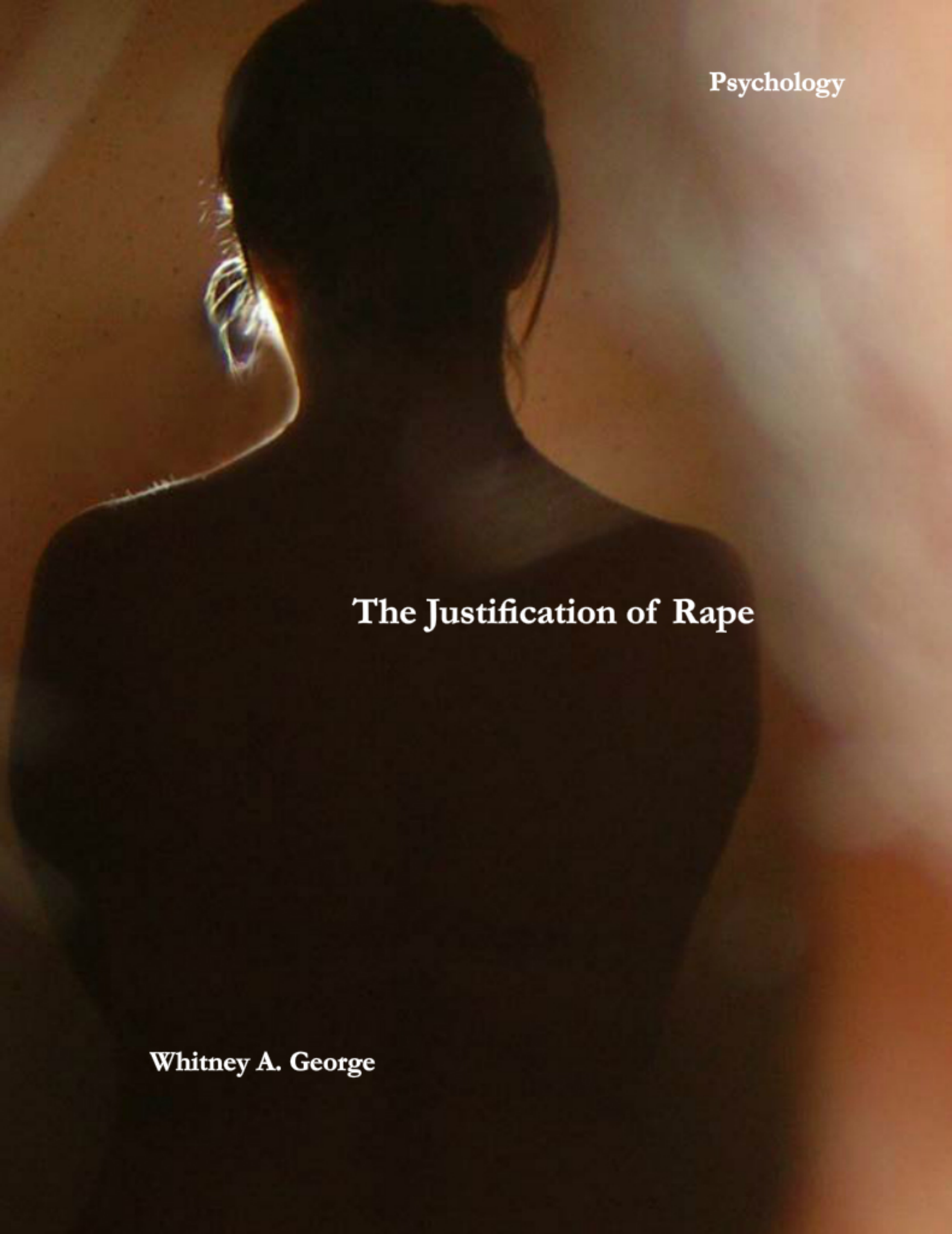
Who is she?

A ghost, or an angel. Something, Sister says.

What does she look like?

She's wearing a big white robe, and her hair is blond and everywhere.

.....



Psychology

The Justification of Rape

Whitney A. George

For as long as history has been recorded, there have been accounts of men raping women (McKibbin, Shackelford, Goetz, & Starratt, 2008). Rape was first considered a criminal act, not because of the injustice toward women, but because it was considered an infringement against men's property rights. The view of women as men's property is part of the foundation of patriarchy, which still continues today. Violence against women is promoted because of a patriarchal need to deny women's rights over their own bodies (Sheffield, 1995). In today's society, feminism has called for more equality for women. Feminists have pointed out what is called "rape culture." Rape culture is a culture in which rape has become prevalent, and sexual violence against women has become rationalized and excused by popular culture ("Rape Culture"). Rape culture is preserved "through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence". This has led to a culture in which women's safety and rights are disregarded. All women are affected by rape culture and most live with a fear of being raped. Therefore, rape and the fear of rape, keep women in a position of subordination and inferiority to men ("Rape Culture"). Some factors that add to the rape culture are rape myths. Rape myths are stereotypes and beliefs that lead to under reporting of rape, blaming of the victim, and justification of male sexual aggression among many other things (Waubert de Puiseau, 2012).

Recent research suggests that as many as one out of every three American women will be sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime ("Rape", 2014). However, there is

no way to know for sure how many rapes will actually occur. Many estimates say that about 80-90% of rapes are not reported ("Rape", 2014). Those rapes may go unreported because of various reasons such as the victim being ashamed, wanting to forget the rape, wanting to avoid the legal system, or having a fear of backlash from their family or the rapist (McGee, 2013). Another reason rape may be left unreported comes from the victim's denial of rape. Some victims' ideas of what a true rape is, may lead them to believe that what happened to them was not true rape. The reason for this comes from the victim's acceptance of rape myths, or false stereotypes about rape. There is also a fear that if they were to report the rape, they would not be believed (Waubert de Puiseau, 2012). Out of all violent crimes, rape has the lowest conviction rate. The likelihood that a perpetrator of rape will be convicted is a mere 2-5% (Sheffield, 1995). This may also account for why women do not report occurrences of rape. The possibility of being labeled at fault for their own rape also accounts for women not reporting rape (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi). Rape victims are treated unfairly by the American justice system. The laws against rape are so marginally defined and allegations of rape are hard to prove. This shows that women's rights are not of major concern within the legal system (Smith, 2004). This is evident in society's tendency to attribute blame to the victim of rape.

Rape myths tend to place responsibility on the victim of rape, focusing on what they did to provoke the rape. Blaming the victim of rape decreases the view that they deserve help and also pardons the male perpetrator as

well as society in general. Many times, women victims are blamed for their own rape if they drank alcohol at the time the rape occurred, flirted with the perpetrator, wore immodest clothing, had past sexual partners, did not resist the rape, or were raped by a person that they knew. There is also a belief that women consistently lie about being raped even though there is evidence showing that most rapes are left unreported. (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi). Men are more likely than women to blame the victim of a rape (Earnshaw, Pitpitan, & Chaudoir, 2011). Past research has pointed at the tendency to blame the victim as men's general hostility towards women. Further research shows that the tendency to blame the victim is a reaction to a perceived threat to the status quo (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010).

Women sometimes support rape myths that keep them in a position of inferiority. An opposition to equality is related to higher levels of conservatism in both men and women which is also related to higher levels of victim blame (Chapleau, & Oswald, 2013). Modern sexism and stereotypes about women are important factors leading to the occurrence of victim blaming. Victim blaming can be seen as an attempt to justify gender inequalities (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010). Rape is often seen as a consequence of women's provocative actions and men's tenacious sexual drive. These rape myths give the idea that men's sexual aggression is desired and enjoyed by women. Those who believe rape myths are more likely to engage in victim blaming and less likely to blame the rapist (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013). Those who believe that society is the cause of rape, also believe that rape will continue until changes in

society occur (Earnshaw, Pitpitan, & Chaudoir, 2011). Victim blaming stems from a need to justify men's action.

The use of rape myths functions as a justification of male sexual aggression (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010). Rape myths also lessen the anxiety men and women feel about rape by allowing them to remove themselves from the idea that they could possibly become victims or rapists. This was more the case for women than men. Men who accept rape myths also use them to justify their tendency towards sexual aggression. Rape myths make it seem justifiable for men to rape women who exhibit provocativeness. Some men even see rape as a punishment for women. Men who are sexually aggressive tend to seek out peer groups that help to justify their behavior as well. They may obtain higher status within the group by being able to sexually coerce women. One of the rape myths that is used in justifying rape is the myth that men cannot stop themselves after they have become aroused, which gives the idea that men cannot control their sexual behavior. This may lead to victims consenting to unwanted sex. Another rape myth used in the justification of men's sexually aggressive behavior is the myth that most rapists have a mental illness, or are crazy. This idea leads to sexual predators being able to deceive women because they may not be seen as a threat. Because the perpetrator may not fit this role, the legal system may react differently towards them, giving them more of a benefit. Media also play a role in justification of sexually aggressive behavior through their portrayals of men and women, especially in pornography (Ryan, 2011). Rape myths may also help in justifying the status quo in which

men are the dominant group and women the subordinate. For the most part, people have a tendency to rationalize how things currently are, which leads to the justice system being perceived as fair (Stahl, Eek, & Kazemi, 2010). Protecting the status quo and lessening anxiety towards rape lead people to create ideas that help in justifying men's dominance and violence towards women. Inequality is maintained in order to benefit the dominant group. Women tend to play a role in justifying male sexual aggression as well. Women support ideologies that their group is inferior to men and are not well suited for power. Overall, rape myths play a part in the justification of male sexual aggression and lower men's inhibitions when it comes to rape (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013).

There is a connection between men's and women's inequalities of power and the acceptance of violence towards women. Violence and discrimination toward women can be explained as the need to uphold the status quo (Earnshaw, Pitpitan, & Chaudoir, 2011). Rape myths are implicit beliefs that lead to the creation of a hostile environment for women victims. These myths lead to rape being rationalized and minimized. They also lead to people placing blame on the victim. Rape goes unreported by victims because rape myths create an environment in which women are not taken seriously or protected (Waubert de Puiseau, 2014). These myths serve to justify the victimization of women by men, and give the idea that women have a hidden need to be victimized. In many instances, it is said that the woman was asking to be raped, or that by saying no, she means yes. Placing the blame on the victim takes away the blame from the

male perpetrator and also from society as a whole. The whole of society is at fault for allowing these false beliefs of rape to continue (Earnshaw, Pitpitan, & Chaudoir, 2011). Crimes against women are not taken seriously by society, including the legal system. Many times the existence and extent of sexual violence is denied. When sexual violence can no longer be repudiated, jokes are made about rape in order to make less of a serious situation. Patriarchy assumes the idea that women have some intrinsic flaw that makes them less than men. A woman's sexuality is powerful and men feel the need to control it through sexual violence. Under patriarchy, sex is an entitlement of men and female sexuality is a product that they must dominate and take as their own. The underlying factor in the use of sexual violence is a hatred of women. This violence stems from the need to have power and without the power to induce fear in women, male domination over women could not exist (Sheffield, 1995).

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Chris Wade

Alcohol Abuse



Literary Studies



Houses and Sameness

Jensie Britt

Literature is a powerful tool that requires effort from the author and the reader. Utilizing the vast resources language has to offer, the author can create a complex story which reflects and communicates many ideas. It is then the responsibility of the reader to look at the separate focal points of the story through different perspectives in order not only to attempt to decipher the author's intended meaning, but also to find certain truths for herself. One perspective in which the reader can analyze literature is in the representation of gender. By paying attention to how gender is represented in a story, the reader can learn many things about how the author views gender, how society views gender, and how the reader herself views gender. Further still, by comparing two pieces of literature with very different representations of gender, the reader can discover a wider range of truth concerning gender and its effects on the individual and society. Through symbols of houses and sameness, *The House on Mango Street* and *The Giver* offer extremely different views of gender roles that demand attention.

Gender plays a significant role in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*. The story focuses on Esperanza Cordero and the people in her community. One of the first stories in the novel, "Boys & Girls," enforces this important aspect by informing the reader that "[t]he boys and the girls live in separate worlds" (Cisneros 8). Although this separation establishes how the genders are different, it is very untrue. Boys and girls occupy the same community, and it is from the metaphorical separation clashing with the literal coexistence that fuels many of the conflicts within the stories. One of the ways in which gender roles are explored is

through the idea of the house.

In the introduction to the book, Sandra Cisneros explains how important having her own house was to her. "As a girl, she dreamed about having a silent home, just to herself, the way other women dreamed of their weddings" (Cisneros xii). For a book that has the word "house" in the title, it certainly makes much sense for the introduction to explain the author's relationship to and feelings for houses. This also introduces the separation of genders. Cisneros' parents react very differently to her wanting her own house. Her father does not approve of her living by herself. He believes that a girl should either live in her father's home and be taken care of by him, or she should live in her husband's home and be taken care of by him. Either way, a woman should not be left to take care of herself. Cisneros recognizes this is a problem. Her father eventually allows her to move out if she lives in her brother's home (again, she must live in a home with a man who will take care of her). When Cisneros finally moves into her own apartment, her father disapprovingly comments on it and continually asks her when she will move back in with him. Contrastingly, her mother is very proud of Cisneros and boasts, "She gets it from me" (Cisneros xiv). As a woman herself, she recognizes and celebrates her daughter's desire to live independently in her own house. Perhaps it is an alternative life she would have chosen for herself. In reading the events that take place in the novel itself, it is not difficult to see why.

Houses continue to play a major role in the novel. As Darlene Pagán clearly states, "The most important symbol in the novel is the titular house which represents young girls'

dreams for their own happy homes but also the prison that many homes are, guarded first by domineering fathers, and second by domineering husbands” (141). This image is first interestingly addressed in Esperanza’s description of the apartment in which her family once lived. In her description she mentions “...wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn’t fall out” (Cisneros 5). While the narrator’s father may very well have nailed the bars there for the children’s safety, the image of bars over windows is very symbolic of a jail. Furthermore, even without the figurative image of a prison, the father is literally barring the windows to keep them in. Even if this is done with the best intentions, it reinforces the idea of the dominating father. Other characters who are imprisoned in their own house include Alicia, *Mamacita*, Rafaela, Sally, and Minerva. Sally has perhaps the most upsetting story. In the beginning, she is imprisoned by her father who beats her and makes her come home immediately after school. Later, she marries a man who does not even let her look out the window or talk on the phone. Her story shows the full cycle of male domination and how women pass from the hands of their fathers to the hands of their husbands. The house can represent a positive ideal, though. When Esperanza talks to the mystic about a house, the mystic tells her she sees a “home in the heart” in her future (Cisneros 64). Based on the life of the author and her desire for independence and her own home, this part was probably included as an alternate to the male-dominated prison-home—one can find peace and a place to belong by looking inside one’s own heart and away from others (especially men).

In telling these stories, Cisneros reflects on gender roles and their negative effects on women. In fact, the most disturbing event of the novel happens when a male sexually assaults Esperanza. David Archard discusses at length the wrongfulness of rape in his aptly titled article, “The Wrong of Rape.” In this article, Archard not only describes the direct harm that rape has on women, but he also describes the indirect harms. He explains that even women who have never been raped experience harm from rape in the form of anxiety and fear of the possibility of rape (Archard 381). Archard goes on to explain that women unfairly experience far greater levels of fear in their lives than do men (381). This is evident throughout Cisneros’ novel in the constant references to fear. Esperanza frequently comments on girls who are not afraid of boys. In the story “Sire,” Esperanza discusses the boys who look at her. She informs the reader, “They didn’t scare me. They did, but I wouldn’t let them know” (Cisneros 72). Unlike the women, none of the men are ever described as being afraid. Unfortunately, this fear is not unfounded. This fear also does not protect Esperanza from the male who assaults her. After the assault, the remainder of the book is different from the first part—the stories get shorter and shorter, and they no longer contain the lighthearted imagery the rest of the book contains. This reflects how Esperanza has changed because of the assault. However, Esperanza does not break down or give up. Pagán praises this, stating:

Despite the occasionally difficult subject matter, the narratives in *The House on Mango Street* are carried primarily by brave women who fight and succeed, and

who love and laugh with an abandon that can inspire. Esperanza's name translates as hope in English; it thus signifies young girls' hopes for womanhood, but expressly for womanhood that represents empowerment as opposed to oppressiveness. (143)

Therefore, even though the novel expresses the negatives aspects of gender roles, it does give the reader hope for a better society.

Lois Lowry's *The Giver* offers a drastically different and more subtle representation of gender. Even though gender is not the main focus of the novel, it should still be studied. Instead of reflecting current society's ideas of gender, it depicts the role of gender in a seemingly perfect, fictional society. In observing the ways the book portrays gender, the reader can compare this expression to her own society's gender roles.

Gender roles in *The Giver* can best be described as and symbolized by the book's theme of sameness. In order to show the main themes of freedom and memory, Lowry introduces a society focused on sameness. Sameness includes climate control, strict enforcement of the rules, similar eye and hair color, and similar individual experiences. This also includes the absence of almost all gender roles and differences. In fact, gender is only mentioned briefly in the entire book. All citizens wear the same tunics, and the only distinction of clothing comes with the distinction of "... different undergarments for the females, whose bodies were beginning to change..." (Lowry 46). Since there is no color, and no other specialization of clothing is mentioned, it is to be assumed that all members of the community wear the same clothing as their peers, regardless of gender. Consistent with the idea of

sameness, each member of the community has virtually the same job opportunities (with the exception of birthmother), as well as the same educational opportunities. There also does not seem to be any differentiation in social hierarchy between members of different genders. Indeed, the only hierarchy seems to come from occupation, which is not determined by gender. Since current society has definite gender distinctions, the sameness of *The Giver* contrasts greatly with the differences in the real world.

The reader can learn about her society's gender roles by contrasting it with the sameness of *The Giver*. In current society, there is still a bias toward genders for certain occupational positions. One obvious position of note is that of President of the United States of America. To date, there has not been a female president in America. However, since the people of *The Giver* are not boxed into gender roles, the "Chief Elder, the leader of the community who was elected every ten years," is a female. Gender roles are not just prevalent on larger scales, but they also affect society in more subtle ways. Dodson and Borders explains that although the workforce is becoming more balanced, there are still male- and female-dominated occupations (283). "Sex type is the first boundary through which occupational preferences are circumscribed; one's gender identity governs the limits of sex-typed occupations that may be considered" (Dodson and Borders 284). Jonas's society does not seem to have these sex-typed occupations, however. In his society, jobs are assigned by the elders based on interest and ability. For example, Jonas's mother holds a high-position in the Department of Justice while his father is a nurturer. These positions

have been traditionally and stereotypically reversed in American society.

The only occupation in Jonas's society that is regulated by gender is, of course, that of a birthmother. Interestingly, birthmothers are the one position that Jonas's mother calls out for its lack of social prestige. She argues, "Three births, that's all. After that they are Laborers for the rest of their adult lives, until the day that they enter the House of the Old. Is that what you want, Lily? Three lazy years, and then hard physical labor until you are old?" (Lowry 22). She does mention the low position of birthmothers, yet she does not directly discuss the position of laborers. There is no negative portrayal of laborers in the book (other than that they perform labor), yet Jonas's mother specifically points out that there is "very little honor" in being a birthmother (Lowry 21). It stands to be acknowledged that the only occupation in the society that is explicitly defined by gender is also the one with the lowest honor in the community.

Since *The Giver* is a dystopian novel, what can the reader learn from its portrayal of gender? One argument can be made that this gender expression is the ideal. According to Joel D. Chaston, "When Lowry began to write the novel, she tried to create a real utopia" (115). It is certainly easy to see how the first part of the novel describes a utopian world. After all, the citizens are all very content and free of pain. Furthermore, they are free of gender oppression. Chaston also discusses this when he comments that "the society seems to value men and women equally, and stereotypical gender roles have evidently disappeared" (116). When the reader is made aware of the actual dystopia in

which the characters live, she is more aware of all the things that are actually wrong with the society. However, the absence of gender roles does not seem to be one of those things. It is easy to assume that the equality in the society is the greatest benefit of the shift to sameness. There is no hunger, there is no violence or fear of violence, there is no racism, and there is no sexism. Of course, the novel serves as a warning against many aspects of the society, but even in the deconstruction of the fictional society, gender equality is never targeted as a negative.

By comparing the representation of gender roles in the two novels, the reader gathers a greater understanding of current and ideal gender. In *The House on Mango Street*, gender plays a significant role in the lives of the characters, and sexism has a huge impact. Blatant, horrific sexism is present in the form of fathers and husbands oppressing and assaulting the women in their lives. However, even in the case of Cisneros' own father, a more subtle form of sexism exists. In "The Perils of Political Correctness: Men's and Women's Responses to Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexist Views," Manuela Barreto and Naomi Ellemers explain how subtle sexism can actually be more harmful, asserting, "With regard to the potential victims (in this case, women), more blatant forms of prejudice make it easier to focus negative responses on those who hold prejudicial views instead of worrying about possible shortcomings of the self" (84). Therefore, since the father did not explicitly state that Cisneros is weak and cannot take care of herself, his constant controlling behavior and attempts to persuade her to live with him or another male

family member could turn her attention from his sexist views toward her perceived weakness. Both through directly abusive or subtly sexist behaviors, the gender roles in *The House on Mango Street* are obviously a part of society that should be done away with, and Cisneros shows the reader this. However, the gender identity in *The Giver* might not be the best option either. Although there is no gender discrimination, there is also no identity, sexuality, or love. Susan G. Lea, while focusing on the absence of race in *The Giver*, states:

Within a framework of literacy that demands close inspection of societal practices and social justice through literature, perhaps the most important aspect of *The Giver's* text is what is absent—not simply the ills of contemporary society, but the value of diversity, the connectedness to humanity, and wisdom derived from historical memory. (51)

In that respect, the things that are absent from *The Giver* are more important to humanity than the absence of social injustices. Therefore, if the reader wishes to eradicate the terrible sexism and gender roles in *The House on Mango Street*, yet understands that sameness can go too far in respect to *The Giver*, a harmonious balance can be achieved.

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Dog Pop Art

Autumn Letson



Girl With the Hat

Rachel Monroe



Dalton V. Scott

Psychology



**Sexual and Reproductive
Health in Adolescents**

At the hormonally-driven core of nearly every adolescent's developing mind is the prospect of engaging in sexual intercourse. An unwanted pregnancy during a time of an individual's life as pivotal as their youth can be a devastating event, in which future aspirations for advancement must either be compensated for or accommodate to the simultaneous rearing of another human being. Perhaps one of the most effective approaches to be considered in preventing this trend from further perpetuation is to evaluate current adolescent awareness and practice regarding sexual and reproductive health so as to encourage safer sexual behaviors; ideally, this may drastically dissipate the prevalence of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Obviously, unintended pregnancies among adolescents are still a recurring issue due to a lack of abstinence, contraceptive misuse, and non-use of any contraceptive methods. The teen pregnancy rate, while lower than it was a few decades ago, is still at a disconcerting high with as many as 900,000 females under the age of twenty becoming pregnant each year (Longmore, Manning, Giordano, & Rudolph, 2003, p. 45). One might suspect that such an occurrence is due to adolescents lacking knowledge of contraception. Yet, Marcell et al. (2012) noted a study in which sexually active male adolescents reported, on average, having used a condom about eight of their last ten intercourses (p. 184). Thus, it appears that adolescents are mindful of contraceptive use, but their inconsistent usage reflects a sporadic attitude towards the practice of safe sex. This could be due to a number of situational factors, such as contraception being unavailable during a particular

occurrence; however, research suggests other possibilities. Views of young mothers were assessed in one study and found that they tended to have contradictory attitudes towards contraception in that while they stressed not wanting to become pregnant, they admitted having general carelessness towards contraception (Baxter, Blank, Guillaume, Squires, & Paine, 2011, p.154).

Notably, several risk factors have been established to predict the incidence of an unwanted pregnancy during adolescence. In the UK, researchers have found associations between deprived living conditions and under-eighteen pregnancies as well as other predictors including the level of adolescent educational attainment and school attendance, their dependence on government care, and being the offspring of a parent who was also an adolescent mother (Baxter et al, 2011, p. 150). Thus, it seems reasonable to surmise that there is a connection between adolescents raised in deprived living conditions and being predisposed to unintended pregnancy. Brown and Guthrie (2010) support this link and assert that young parenthood should be evaluated through the lens of socialization in an environment with little to no emphasis on education along with high rates of unemployment and a low socioeconomic status (p. 198). Though no causation can be inferred between teen pregnancy and social disadvantages, the relationship is certainly plausible and provides investigators with a basis for further inquiry.

A vital component to this matter is the prevailing adolescent mentality of risk-taking behavior. The ability to accept responsibility for one's actions is essential to maintaining a

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strong sense of inhibition. This is exemplified in a study conducted by Brown and Guthrie (2010) in which female participants most commonly stated reasons for not using contraception as forgetting, being “in the moment,” the influence of alcohol, and pressure from their partner (p. 199). In regards to this “moment,” the authors specifically mentioned that respondents often claimed that stopping to put on a condom would spoil it. However, such a notion fails to consider the risk of spoiling “the moment” as a minor trade-off in order to reduce the risk of an unwanted pregnancy or contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Compounded by their already inefficient risk conceptions are the judgment-crippling effects of alcohol consumption. A review by Baxter et al (2011) cited a study where over two-thirds of participants attributed risky sexual behavior to alcohol consumption; they believed this to be due to the alcohol’s effect of lowered inhibitions (p. 154). In addition, Brown and Guthrie (2010) made note of other occasions in which alcohol enabled risky sexual behaviors, such as when adolescent females are taken advantage of when their decision-making capabilities are impaired due to alcohol consumption (p. 201).

Of crucial importance in determining the likelihood of contraceptive use in adolescents is their inclination to perceive themselves as responsible for their behavior; this is also referred to as self-efficacy and higher degrees of this trait in adolescent males and females are associated with higher rates of contraceptive use (Longmore et al, 2003, p. 55). One researcher linked consistency of contraceptive use to high self-esteem and self-efficacy, and highlighted the accompanying ability of these characteristics to enabling one to more effectively com-

Sexual and Reproductive Health in Adoles- communicate and negotiate with their partner about contraception (Baxter et al, 2011, p. 154). This is not particularly surprising considering that these traits should influence an individual to approach most risk-taking behaviors with a rational approach.

A few gender-based factors are also of noteworthy importance when considering this topic. Cultural beliefs about gender roles in sexuality tend to discourage use of contraceptives, especially in terms of masculinity (Pearson, 2006, p. 616). Often, in the context of long-term relationships, adolescent females have a perceived obligation to cease the use of condoms in order to ensure more pleasure for their partner and to avoid conflict (Baxter et al, 2011, p.154). However, whilst ensuring that they are satisfying their partner, they are simultaneously expected to take responsibility for contraceptive measures; yet, they tend to feel incapable of discussing sex with their partner or expressing their wishes to engage in safer sex (Pearson, 2006, pp. 622-624). This power differential between genders is likely mediated to some extent by the passive role imposed on them by normative ideas for sex roles. As a result, adolescent females feel they must submit to the desires of their partner regardless of their own personal values of contraception. Also, though this is a gravely unfortunate expression of some young mentalities, some adolescent males actually perceive pregnancy as evidence of their masculinity, thus swaying them towards engaging in unprotected sex (Pearson, 2006, p.616). A tremendous stigmatic factor exists concerning the role of the adolescent female in taking contraceptive measures. Since females are expected to be socialized and act accordingly to the role of the “nice” girl, an ideally passive and modest

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individual, an adolescent female may not only struggle to address her sexual desires in regards to contraception, but she is also disparaged in the event that she keeps contraception on hand, such as condoms, since the assumption is that she must be seeking a sexual encounter (Pearson, 2006, p. 616).

Unfortunately, not all available methods of contraception are taken advantage of due to an apparent discrepancy in knowledge between adolescent males and females, particularly in regards to emergency contraceptives. When first lines of effort to prevent pregnancy following sexual contact fail, emergency contraception can serve as secondary reinforcement. However, Marcell et al (2012) provided data in which awareness of emergency contraception was reported to be a meager 24% among a sample of adolescent males (p. 185). If adolescents are responsible enough to use a means of contraceptive, then they should be familiarized with alternate options in the event that one form of contraception fails. Depriving teens of this knowledge has no cultural or societal benefit despite the prevalence of foolhardy notions that it will only augment risky sexual activity. In fact, reviews have consistently shown that preparing adolescents early in anticipation of unfavorable sexual outcomes, such as contraceptive failure, with information on emergency contraception does not facilitate to an increased risk of engaging in sexual behavior or increase rates of unprotected sex (Marcell et al, 2012, p. 184). Thus, there is little rationale in obstructing these alternatives from the general awareness of adolescents regardless of their sexual activeness.

Among the most crippling aspects within the issue of adolescent sexual health are the

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inaccurate societal attitudes towards contraception. For instance, a national study revealed that 50% of practitioners at high school health centers reported the belief that students' parents would object to the use of emergency contraception due to the method being mistakenly associated with abortion (Marcell et al, 2012, p. 189). When adolescents are in need of guidance, they have a tendency to turn to either their friends or parents. When there are perceived negative parental attitudes towards contraception, lack of communication regarding sexual health with their parents is often the outcome (Baxter et al, 2011, p. 156). The reluctance by teens to discuss sexual concerns with parents who appear to disapprove of contraception may be due to the fear of being inevitably shut down or scorned for even having the audacity to insinuate that they are sexually active. On the contrary, in a study by Longmore et al (2003), adolescents who reported their mother as approving of contraception concurrently reported having a higher contraceptive efficacy (p. 55). Hence, the parent who expresses attitudes of denunciation towards contraception is only depriving their child of the benefits to discussing how to practice safe sex.

There exists a dire need for health care providers to encourage and educate adolescents in regards to proper usage of contraceptives. It seems that discussion with a professional about contraceptive methods serves to motivate adolescents to use them. For instance, a mixed sex-sample of adolescents yielded that 87% of male adolescents reported that they would recommend emergency contraception to their partner and female adolescents would use it themselves if their primary health care provider had previously discussed this method with

them (Marcell et al, 2012, p. 188). The shame is that a rather negligible number of clinicians are enlightened as to the mechanism of emergency contraception, such as the time frame in which it is the most effective. Another limiting factor is the negative attitudes towards emergency contraception among health care providers; a study observed a number of pharmacies that refused to sell emergency contraception to male customers as well as some pharmacists ascribing their refusal to sell select forms of contraception to moral and religious beliefs (Macell et al, 2012, p. 190). In order to further influence the use of contraception in adolescents, access to them needs not only to be eased, but also should become more confidential. Between males and females, adolescents are concerned about their visibility when acquiring contraception (Brown & Guthrie, 2010, p. 198).

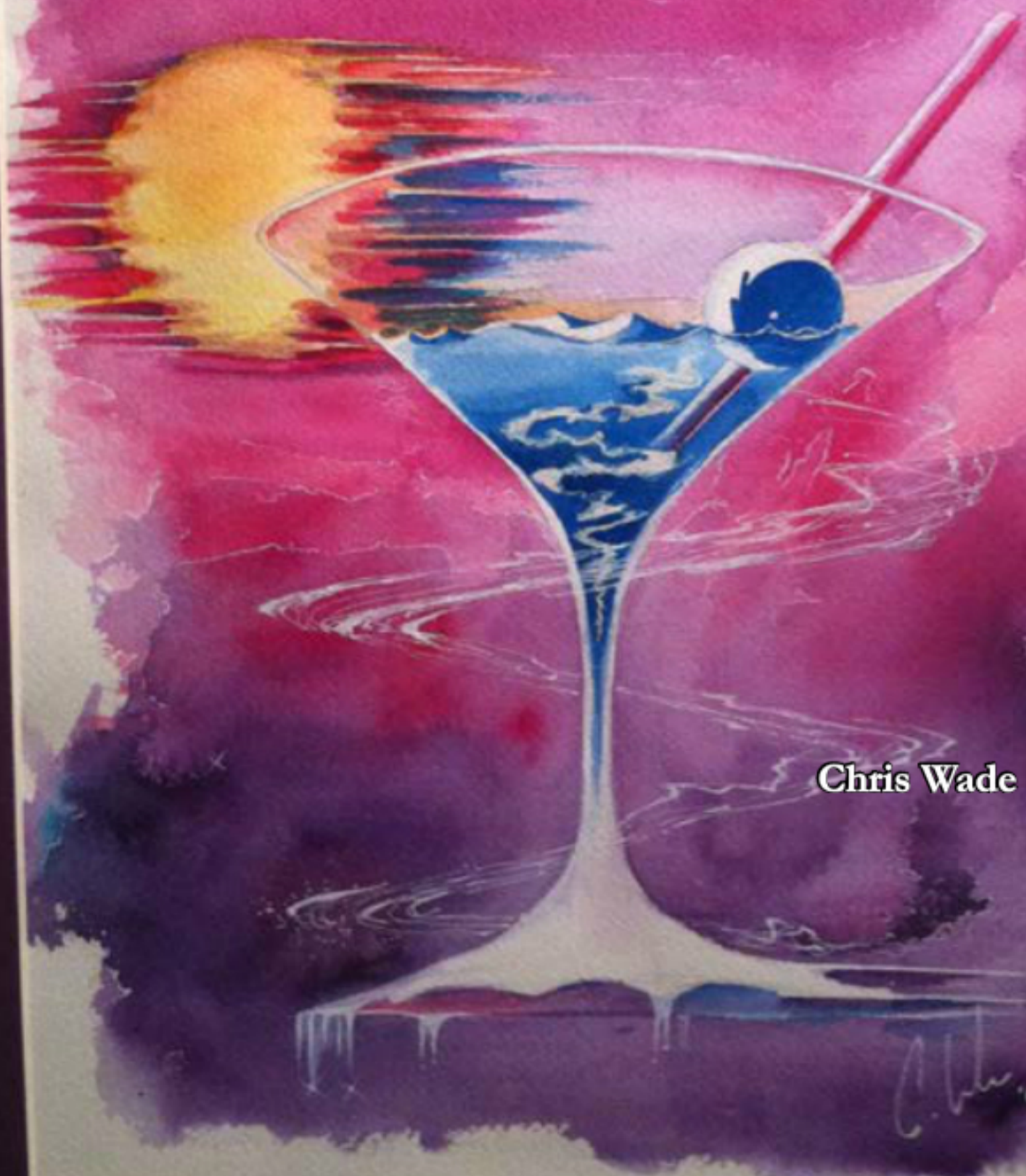
Finally, rather than merely modifying sex education programs, institutions and other adolescent influences should advocate the development of higher self-efficacy. Bandura stated, "The major problem is not teaching people safer sex guidelines, which is easily achievable, but equipping them with skills that enable them to put the guidelines consistently into practice in the face of counteracting influences" (Longmore et al, 2003, p. 56). This is supported by the suggestions of researchers evaluating a study concerning young Italian women, in that lack of contraceptive use was due to a lack of ability to apply knowledge rather than having said knowledge (Brown & Guthrie, 2010, p. 198). In effect, adolescents need to be encouraged to appreciate the weight of their actions since the risk of an unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases when not using

contraception during intercourse is like playing a variation of Russian Roulette in which only a single round is missing from the revolver.

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Solitary Universe ✕



Chris Wade

Chris Wade '03

Piano Organ Dreams



Brooke Alexander

A Cultural Approach to Robert Burns' "Tam o'Shanter"

To begin an analysis of a poetic work, parameters for the analysis must be defined. Entire papers could be written individually on the biographical and historical facts surrounding the poet Robert Burns and his heralded narrative masterpiece, "Tam o'Shanter. A Tale" (henceforth referred to simply as "Tam o'Shanter"). However, the goal of this research is to link the poet in his time and his most celebrated poem to the critical theory of cultural studies.

The field of cultural studies is a contested and controversial one. Many works on literary critical theory place cultural studies under the heading of New Historicism, while others consider it a distinct form of criticism in its own right. In Gallagher and Greenblatt's *Practicing New Historicism*, the reader is encouraged to view whole cultures as text that envelop a literary work (10). In Hogan's examination of literary theory and criticism, the work of French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault is considered the foundational basis for practicing cultural studies (179). In 1991, the field was such a source of confusion that Cary Nelson thought it necessary to publish a cultural studies "manifesto" – explicitly defining what does and does not constitute cultural studies. Her cultural studies manifesto includes a series of fourteen explanatory points (31). A synopsis of her claims, most relevant to Burns and his famous poem, include: 1) cultural studies

is concerned with social and political meaning of its own analyses, 2) culture studies entails examining the historical context in which the work was written and the historical context of the scholar examining it, and 3) cultural studies "conceives culture relationally" (Nelson 31-32). Marianne DeKoven in her critical article, "Cultural Dreaming and Cultural Studies," supports the notion that cultural studies is a contested space by stating:

The predominant issues in debates about literature are determined most immediately by the history of struggle between American academic New Criticism and the range of varying politically and theoretically oriented paradigms opposing it, most importantly, now, cultural studies. As a result of this history of struggle, theorists and practitioners of cultural studies generally understand the literary as pertaining to objects of consumption, and the valorization of the literary as a tool of conservative, elitist cultural hegemony, for which literature is the gatekeeper in civilization's self-defense against barbarism (128-129).

For the specific purpose of approaching Robert Burns' "Tam o'Shanter" from a cultural studies approach, the 224 lines of the poem will be examined as the preservation of a dying vernacular, a historical record of a local Scottish folk tale, and a lyrical "snapshot" of 18th-century life in a rural Scottish village with its convivial, drink-centered, tale-telling lifestyle.

A brief synopsis of the poem itself

is in order before the analysis proceeds. The poem is a lengthy narrative work, told in dramatic monologue, written with the trademark “Burns’ stanza” form. Incidentally, Alan Dent, in his book *Burns in His Time*, remarks that this form (six lines rhyming *a,a,a,b,a,b*, with the *a* lines having four heavy stresses, and the *b* only two) was actually the invention of Burns’ mentor, Robert Fergusson (14). It is the humorous account of a solitary, tipsy farmer, passing a decaying kirk on his way home at midnight, with a witch dance inside at full swing, the Devil himself providing music from the bagpipe. The alcoholic effects induce the farmer to comment on one of the more comely witch’s “cutty sark” (short smock) and when he is found out, a chase to the near-death ensues with his mare losing her tail in the tale.

Walt Whitman provides a fitting entry into a cultural analysis of Burns’ poem in his article, “Robert Burns as Person and Poet,” stating, “perhaps the peculiar coloring of the era of Burns, in the world’s history, biography and civilization, needs always first to be considered. It included the times of the ’76-’83 Revolution in America, of the French Revolution, and the unparalleled chaos-development in Europe and elsewhere” (427). When taking a cultural approach to the language of Burns, Whitman best defines his masterful use of vernacular with “the Scotch idiom was undoubtedly his happiest hit” (428). Thomas Carlyle combines the historical context with Burns’ use of dialect, noting:

In his own art, in the art of Scottish vernacular poetry, he did attain consummate mastery . . . he came just at the propitious moment. Fifty years earlier he would have

lacked the incentive which he found in the political and spiritual ferment of the late eighteenth century. Fifty years later he would no longer have found his native dialect in its full vigor and purity. It would have already have been declining to what it has now become – an accent rather than a dialect. (Dent 11)

Ralph Waldo Emerson spoke of Burns with “it is the only example in history of a language made classic by the genius of a single man” (Dent 75).

Yet a discussion of Burns’ masterful usage of the Scottish vernacular would be remiss without examining some of the actual lines of the poem itself. One of the passages best represented by the Scottish dialect includes this one where Tam is a silent witness to the witch dance in the kirk:

As Tammie glow’rd, amaz’d, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:
The piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew;
They reel’d, they set, they cross’d, they
cleekit,
Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sark! (lines 143 –
150)

Line 148 is so heavily concentrated in thick Scottish that a glossary is required for interpretation into English. The line loosely translates to “until every old woman sweat and smoked,” indicative of the fevered pitch of the dance (Robertson 4). “Tam o’Shanter” yields a fascinating, well-blended look at the English language played against the Scottish dialect of

Burns' time. Robert Crawford, in his book *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, places the near-rebellious achievement of Burns in perspective by noting:

Yet in the Scotland of Burns's day where the leading literary theorists – men like Adam Smith and Hugh Blair – were establishing in print and through academic teaching a culture which insisted on adherence to linguistic propriety according to Anglo-centric norms, Burns's resolute deployment of the Scots vernacular is especially striking. This is the aspect of Burns's poetry that we most admire today. (1)

“Tam o’Shanter,” replete with authentic Scottish vernacular, is a unique cultural piece that preserved an idiom that was soon to become absorbed by modern influences.

Likewise, the narrative poem records a folk tale in danger of extinction without repetition or documentation. Alan Dent produced the book, *Burns in His Time*, from the unique perspective of one born and reared in Burns' own Ayrshire. His knowledge of the native ground, of Burns' vast contribution to national identity, and the importance of folk tales in rural Scotland makes him a singular source on the history of “Tam o’Shanter.” According to Dent, the credit for the production of this Burns' masterpiece belongs to Captain Francis Grose, a well-known author of the antiquities of England and Wales (111). The poet suggested that the ruined Kirk at Alloway be among the subjects for Grose's new book on Scottish antiquities (Dent 112). Grose agreed on the condition that Robert Burns provide a witch-tale to accompany the drawing; interestingly enough, he provided one in unimaginative prose and the second as the humorous mock-

heroic poem that was published as an addendum to Grose's book, *Antiquities of Scotland*, in 1791 (Dent 112). Dent explains that there are actually two versions of the Scottish folk tale recorded in “Tam o’Shanter” where the mare Maggy loses her tail (114). The recorded one, the Ayrshire version, is actually the tamer of the two, for in the Galloway version, the “cutty sark” witch is a young wife who loses her hand in an effort to remove the mare's tail, and is subsequently burnt alive for occult practices (Dent 115). The point being enforced herein is that neither version would be extant and discussed were it not for the publication of “Tam o’Shanter.” James Kinley, in his article on Burns' preservation of folk-songs in “The Music of the Heart,” captures the essence of this place in Scottish history:

The most striking feature of eighteenth-century Scottish culture, philosophy and historiography aside, is the cultivation of folk-song and traditional music. Scotland's passionate concern for her cultural heritage, deepened by her failure to retain political integrity, was reflected in – and in turn nourished by – innumerable gatherings of poetry and airs. (131)

An excerpt from the poem supporting the notion of preserving a piece of Scottish lore includes:

Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane o' the brig;
There at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross.
(lines 205 – 208)

In Scotland, it is a well-known superstition

that a diabolical power cannot pursue beyond the middle of a running stream, a “truth” with which Burns’ audience would have been familiar (Dent 113). Burns’ education regarding superstition and folklore was, in large part, provided by an old friend of his mother’s, Betsy Davidson, whom Burns described later as someone with “the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraipts, enchanted towers, giants and other trumpery” (Duane 9).

Another instance in the poem that reveals the deep-seated beliefs of the Scottish is the following:

The wind blew as ‘twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow’d;
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow’d:
That night, a child might understand,
The Deil had business on his hand.
(lines 73-78)

Certainly, the concept that a storm (and the midnight hour, as stated elsewhere in the work) accompanies the work of the devil was not solely a Scottish belief. However, it suggests the hold that such superstitions and folklore had on the Scottish people in Burns’ day. Burns, a poet plough-man, saw the need to defy the convention of his day and not only write in the language of his people, but the necessity in preserving the tales that would otherwise become a lost art.

“Tam o’Shanter” captures the entertainment and excesses that were prevalent in the

village, and more specifically tavern, life of Burns’ day. The biography of Robert Burns is at least as scandalous as Tam’s crying out “Weel done, Cutty-sark!” (line 189). The father of many illegitimate children and known to imbibe frequently, “Tam o’Shanter” serves as a revealing peek into Burns’ own life. Whitman says of his work, “Burns’s were, before all else, the lyrics of illicit loves and carousing intoxication.” (429). Ian Campbell, in the critical article “Burns’s Poems and their Audience,” examines Burns as poet in the midst of his community:

Burns was the centre of his social community in Ayrshire, a sociable man who loved fun and conviviality. He looked at life, often, from inside such a community and he had the power of adapting his world-view to the values of that community, without limiting it to the values thus expressed. An outstanding example is found . . . in “Tam o’Shanter.” (42)

Campbell explores the camaraderie of the opening scene of the poem when the merry group is gathered by the inn fireside, described with “while we sit bousing at the nappy” (line 5) (43). This snapshot of intimate community, suggests Campbell, is the best position for the reader to experience the poem, placing himself in Tam’s viewpoint and trying to follow his thought-processes (46). From such a position, the reader can almost imagine the poem as Tam’s roaring description of the night’s events to his cronies or wife, Kate, the following day. In Dent’s analysis of Burns’ in his time, he notes “it is because he understands both extremes – that of pleasure [found in his native country] and that of prudence [in Edinburgh society] – that Burns is the national poet of Scotland and its people” (90). Burns’ apprecia-

tion for both may best be demonstrated by the philosophical departure in the poem, providing some of the loveliest lines in poetry:

But pleasure are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white – then melts for ever;
Or like the borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm.—
(lines 59 – 66)

Burns, who could be as rowdy as any Scotsman, could also wear a polish when it was required. Both are represented in this poem, but the cozy fireside revelry seems closest to his heart, as evidenced by the poem that most pleased him (Duane 9).

Cary Nelson concludes that “to do cultural studies is to take a place within that history” (32). “Tam o’Shanter” by the Scottish bard is a striking example of lifting the reader out of the 21st century and placing him in an 18th-century Scottish village. The language, folklore, and atmosphere are evocatively preserved, providing a glimpse into the life and times of the poet himself. David Murison, whose critical essay evaluates “The Language of Burns,” sees elements of Burns’ combined upbringing, influences of his more refined father and down-to-earth mother, in his verse. Murison summarizes this blending and concludes this cultural approach to the Scottish national treasures, Robert Burns and his “Tam o’Shanter,” with the following insightful statement:

...representing the native force in Burns, the element which is of the soil of Scotland, of the folk and their lore, their daily lives, their superstitions, their delight in the fields and woods of Ayrshire, in banks and braes and running water so characteristically Scottish, their shrewd mother-wit, their proverbs, all expressed in their pithy forceful Scots tongue. It is in fact in the blending of the two strains in the Scottish heritage, the intellectual and the traditional, that Burns and his poetry stand out as the voice of Scotland. (57)

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Mushroom

Linda Howe



Shaken Faith

Vincent Christian



Falling Upwards: Deconstruction in Genesis

The Eden story serves as the prelude for the book of Genesis, the Pentateuch, and the entire Bible as we have it today. Much of modern Judeo-Christian theology, spirituality, even societal and family structures are rooted in themes set down in the book of Genesis—or more accurately themes we have perhaps read into the book of Genesis. While traditional interpretations offer firm grounding by which to organize one's beliefs, an uncritical acceptance of such traditions may serve to undermine other actualities, or at least possibilities, which reside unexplored in the text. Critical methods such as Deconstruction can serve to awaken these latent interpretations which have always been present, but not previously observed. Questions of good and bad, female and male, even life and death take on a greater depth of complexity when examined through the deconstructionist lens.

Often criticized as an “unsympathetic approach to reading biblical literature,”¹ Deconstruction tends to provoke hostility from the most conservative of biblical interpreters, as well as confusion or controversy from even the more open-minded biblical scholars.

1. Edward L. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” *Prooftexts* 19, issue 1 (Jan 1989): 43. *Academic Search Premier*, accessed March 21, 2014.

The human drive to seek firmly fixed meaning stands at odds with a philosophy which contends “not only that the present center does not hold; [...but that] no center can hold.”² While this may seem to undermine the foundation of any system based on the pursuit of Truth (many Deconstruction-minded theorists might even question the existence of a capital “T” sort of truth), Deconstruction in and of itself does not necessitate the abandonment of faith. In fact, in many ways, by stripping from its adherent the illusion of stability, Deconstruction demands a greater amount of faith in the mysterious nature of an infinite God, a God profoundly beyond mankind's finite understanding. Jacques Derrida, considered the founder of Deconstruction, marks the distinction between religion and faith. He observes that religious tradition can, and sometimes should, be deconstructed in the name of faith.³ More than any other approach, Deconstruction recognizes that “If there is an objective view, it is that of the ideal observer, it is that of God; and we are none of us, even on our good days,

2. Greenstein, “Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative,” 43.

3. Jacques Derrida, quoted in John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 21.

God.”⁴

Deconstructive reading, then, involves a certain amount of humility on the part of the Deconstructionist reader. By recognizing the limits of one’s own capacity, one can accept the insufficiency of mankind’s ability to understand an inestimable God by reading indeterminate text⁵ in the incomplete medium of language as spoken to the limited understanding of humankind. Fitting an infinite God into the extremely finite confines of both language and human capacity is a goal that can never be completely realized. Here the fluid nature of Deconstructionist interpretation fits nicely, for whenever one element of theological truth is tacked down, another is lost in the interpretation. As John Caputo explains:

The very meaning of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies...—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, they are always more than any mission they would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself...slips away.⁶

4. Edward L. Greenstein, “Presenting Genesis 1, Constructively and Deconstructively,” *Proof-texts* 21, no 1 (2001): 1. *Academic Search Premier*, accessed March 21, 2014.

5. William A. Beardslee, “Poststructuralist Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Hayes (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 253.

6. John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 31.

The goal of Deconstructionist readings is not to destroy all sense of meaning, but rather “to deliver the interpreter from the repression of limits and traditions so that fresh interpretations may take place.”⁷ The very act of interpreting involves not only the drawing meaning from the text, but also the encoding of the text with meaning by readers based on their own background and understanding.⁸ By questioning traditional presumptions regarding the Eden story of Genesis, one can find that such interpretations do not enjoy the unchecked stability that is often assumed of them. A study of Eden readily demonstrates the challenges of claiming a fixed meaning in scripture.

In his Deconstructionist analysis on the Fall, Dmitri M. Slivniak poses a provocative question: “Was it good or bad to eat from the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil?”⁹ Before allowing a hasty answer to this question, Slivniak goes on to describe the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the abstract, as written in Genesis, apart from the prohibition against consumption of its fruit. Genesis 2:9 of the New American Bible says of the planting of Eden, “Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.” In this instance,

7. Beardslee, 254.

8. Greenstein, “Presenting Genesis 1, Constructively and Deconstructively,” 1.

9. Dmitri M. Slivniak, “The Garden of Double Messages: Deconstructing Hierarchical Oppositions in the Garden Story,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27, issue 4 (2003): 443. *Academic Search Premier*, accessed March 21, 2014.

the tree is described admirably amidst the other good trees of the garden. Eve notices these implicit indications of the tree's goodness as well, which is described during her conversation with the serpent. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom," Genesis 3:6 NAB. Slivniak then points out that eating from the tree was good in and of itself, but was bad only to Adam and Eve specifically due to their being forbidden from it.¹⁰ It is a format typically set up in master/pupil, king/subject environment in which that which is forbidden may very well be good, but not intended for the subordinate. While Eve and Adam ignored the audible message from God prohibiting them from eating of the tree of knowledge, they remained well aware of the visual and fragrant message they received from the tree itself.¹¹

While the differentiation between eating from the tree in general versus the specific case of Adam and Eve does little to change the circumstances of the Fall, it does open room for interesting questions regarding the nature of the Fall itself. The question of whether mankind might actually be better off because of the Fall is one that arose in intellectual circles of the Romantic era. Though taking the Gnostic view of the Fall as a "rejection of Eden as a state in which man was to be kept innocent through ignorance" and "an attack on blind reliance on divine revelation"¹² may seem a bit

10. Slivniak, 444.

11. Slivniak, 445.

12. Paul A. Cantor, "Byron's Cain: A Romantic Version of the Fall," *The Kenyan Review* 2, issue 3 (Summer80): 53. *Academic Search Premier*, accessed April 6, 2014.

extreme, a Deconstructionist lens does allow for the reader to wonder if "the knowledge human beings obtained was worth the pain they received as a consequence."¹³ Rather than a fall *from* grace, the Fall was then a fall *to* grace, or as Slivniak describes it: a "falling upwards."¹⁴ This sort of interpretation fits nicely with a Christian reading which would view Genesis as a prologue anticipating the New Testament. From that perspective, the Fall gave humankind not just knowledge, but eventually grace and a deeper restoration of fellowship with the Creator. While the Fall may have been "bad," its outcome could then be considered simultaneously "better" than the alternative.

In addition to the investigation into good and bad (or at least better or worse), a Deconstructive reading of Genesis raises important questions regarding traditionally assumed gender roles. In her analysis of the Creation story, feminist Adrien Bledstein rails against what she views as a chauvinist system set up by a chauvinist creation:

How unattractive woman has been as a human being. For two millennia now the Judeo-Christian tradition has placed man a little lower than the angels and woman a little higher than the demons. Traditionalists have used the Garden of Eden story to say that woman was created as a helpmate to godlike man, as his subordinate and dependent.¹⁵

For proponents of male-dominant tradition,

13. Slivniak, 445.

14. Ibid.

15. Adrien Janis Bledstein, "The Genesis of Humans: The Garden of Eden Revisited," *Judaism* 26.2 (1977): 187. *Academic Search Premier*, accessed November 4, 2012.

several elements of the creation narrative are used to make their case—that man was created first (Gen 2:7), that woman was created from the man (Gen 2:21-22), that woman was created as “helper” to the man (Gen 2:18). At first glance, these arguments seem to favor the argument of male superiority. Closer inspection, however, calls such assumptions seriously into question.

When considering the order of creation as a whole, it seems counter-intuitive to claim primacy based on antecedence. While man was indeed created before woman, so too were dogs, pigs, and cockroaches created before man.¹⁶ Given the ascending order of creation, it stands to reason that the order of Eve’s creation suggests her superiority, rather than a subordinate status. Likewise, some have argued that the medium of Eve’s creation, that is, being made from the man, also works in favor of her superiority. As Slivniak points out, “the Woman is superior to the Man, as the human is superior to the ground s/he is taken from.”¹⁷ Theologians Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton argue that the creation of Eve from Adam points at least to her equality with Adam.¹⁸ Finally, the designation of the woman as man’s “helper” does seem to indicate a certain subordinate status, until one considers the full use of the actual Hebrew word. *Ezer*,¹⁹ the word “helper” as it was applied to Eve,

16. Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton, *Why Not Women? A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 95.

17. Slivniak, 448.

18. Cunningham and Hamilton, 95.

19. Cunningham and Hamilton, 96.

was used many times in the Old Testament. In many of these cases (Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29, et cetera) the word in no way implies secondary status, but it is actually used in reference to God himself.²⁰ In light of this fact, the suggestion that Eve’s designation as a helper to Adam implies her subservience seems dubious at best. Ironically, and this is the point a Deconstructionist would make, the creation story can be used to support diametrically opposing interpretations. Three very different interpretations (Adam as superior, Eve as superior, Eve and Adam as equal) all come from analysis of the same evidence drawn from the same scripture. One could even argue a mutual-servitude between the genders—a relationship in which each is simultaneously lord, servant, and equal to the other.

Finally, the world into which Adam and Eve were exiled simultaneously represents both life and death. In examining this interpretation of the fallen world, Dmitri M. Slivniak considers the creation account as actually ending with the Flood story. He states:

The motive of the ‘curse of the ground’ appearing in chs. 3 and 4 of Genesis reappears in the Flood Story (‘I will never curse again the soil on humankind’s account,’ Gen 8:21). The expression has to be understood here as an abolition of the primeval curse. If so, the rain of the Flood (the first rain mentioned in Genesis since 2:5) destroys not only life, but also death, and the world in which Adam and Eve were exiled is not our present world anymore.²¹

The world after Adam and Eve’s exile therefore

20. Slivniak, 448. And Cunningham and Hamilton, 96.

21. Slivniak, 45.

was one in which life and death comingled. The world which was created to be good still existed, yet was encumbered by the curse, bringing the world to a state of death. Once the initial curse was abolished with the Flood, evil remained, thus death continued, but salvation continued as well. This cycle of life, death, and rebirth remains one of the most recurring themes of Bible, and from a Christian viewpoint, could be foreseen as foreshadowing Christ's triumphant overturning of death by sacrificing his own life unto death. While such interpretation risks being accused of double-speak, it does tie in nicely with a creed which states, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it," Matthew 16:25.

Like much of scripture, the Genesis story indicates understandings of life and death, male and female, and good and bad which seem paradoxical. Yet rather than being confounded or frustrated by such apparent contradictions, a Deconstructionist reader can allow for them, recognizing that it is in the midst of these tensions that truth can best be estimated to lie. The Fall was both good and bad for mankind; women and men are both equal and hierarchical; this world lies within the pull between life and death.

To those who demand secured, fixed answers from scriptural interpretation, Deconstruction can be an unsatisfying methodology. A theory which not only abstains from definite answers, but denies their very existence, does leave an unsettling lack of anchor, especially for those who would use scripture as a mooring line. However, to deem such a system as hostile to the reading of scripture it not an entirely

fair assessment of Deconstruction. It is true that the system does take a certain pride in poking at the sacrosanct. As John Caputo puts it, "deconstruction reserves the right to ask any question, to think any thought, to wonder aloud about any improbability, to impugn the veracity of any of the most venerable verities."²² The purpose of such cheeky scrutiny, however, is not to undermine truth, but to dismantle potential barriers to it. If one has always assumed that certain gender hierarchies are imposed by the book of Genesis, then one might never consider questioning whether or not that may be so. As this paper has demonstrated, such assumptions hardly enjoy the monolithic consensus of the theological community. By attacking such assumptions, Deconstruction does not impugn God or scripture, but merely those assumptions—assumptions that might well deserve dismantling.

Furthermore, Deconstruction, more than any other method, recognizes what it cannot achieve. Deconstruction "confesses that it does not 'know' the 'secret' that sits in the middle and smiles at our ignorance. In other words, deconstructive thinking is a way of affirming the irreducible alterity [sic] of the world we are trying to construe."²³ In other words, Deconstruction recognizes that the infinite cannot be understood or explained in finite terms. The purpose of Deconstructive reading is not to claim that texts have *no* meaning, or that a text can mean *anything*, but that "it has too many meanings so that we can fix meaning only tentatively and only so far."²⁴ By recognizing

22. Caputo, 51.

23. Caputo, 52.

24. Caputo, 59.

human limitations in understanding complete context,²⁵ Deconstructionists take good lesson from the story of the Fall itself. When the serpent whispers “you will be like gods” (Genesis 3:5), the Deconstructionist will recognize this for the impossible lie it is—for we are none of us, not even on our best days, God.

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Tracy Szappan

Divinity



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Contributor Notes

Stephanie Adair is pursuing a second degree in English. She lives in Trinity with her husband and three children, who provide a wealth of material for record and laughter. She enjoys reading and writing (of course), gardening, and trivia.

Brooke Alexander is pursuing a B.A. in Studio Art and a minor in English from Athens State University. She plans to continue her education and achieve an MFA after graduating from ASU. Her hobbies are her major and minor, the products of which are multiplying, consuming, and pushing her out of her room.

Jensie Britt is an English Education student at Athens State University. In addition to her work at editor of *Athena's Web*, Jensie is active in the world of drama. Her past dramatic experience includes troupes such as Players in Progress, The Athenian Players, and Independent Musical Productions.

Kristi Coughlin is an English Major at ASU with a minor in Psychology. She teaches violin/cello with the Center for Lifelong Learning and the Huntsville Symphony. Her love of writing prose and poetry and the performance arts is developing into exploring spoken word as well.

Courtney Croxdale is a senior at Athens State University, where she studies Studio Art and Drama. She has aspirations to pursue graduate studies in Set or Costume Design but is, for the time being, immensely happy devoting her time and artistic energy to the Athenian Players' productions.

Whitney George graduates from Athens State in December 2014 with a Bachelor's in Psychology and Behavioral Science. She plans to further her education and receive a Master's in Social Work. She is a humanitarian and believes that all people are deserving of equality. She wants to advocate for those without a voice, especially children and adolescents, and make a change in the world. The quote that she lives by is a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson that states "... to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded."

Linda Howe grew up in Alabama and then spent twenty years following a handsome soldier around the country, had a mess of kids and a ton of fun, and returned with her family in tow to pursue a life-long dream of playing with paint and glitter while earning a Bachelor of Arts degree at Athens State. One day she would like to read her own children's book to a flock of her own beautiful grandchildren.

Autumn Letson was raised in Decatur, AL, and moved to Hartselle, AL, with her husband in

2011. She is a student at Athens State University where she is majoring in Graphic Design. She took multiple classes in photography, computer graphics, and fine arts. She graduates with a B.A. in Fall of 2014. While she spends most of her time working with graphic design, she loves to do photography and picture editing in her spare time.

Rachel Monroe, a senior at Athens State University, is a photographer, videographer, illustrator, and graphic artist. She has received an Associate's Degree in Arts (Music) from Northeast Alabama Community College and will graduate from Athens State University in December. She is the senior web developer/graphic designer for Southern Torch Media Productions. Heavily inspired by the balance of Earth and life, Rachel adds elements of both into most of her personal artwork. She focuses on presenting a raw and simple form of art with both physical and psychological balance.

Ben Montgomery is a computer science student at Athens State University. He is a former newspaper reporter and currently works as a technical writer. He thinks his writing is the worst kind of emotionally manipulative garbage, but likes it, anyway.

Rachel Elizabeth Quinlivan was born October 29, 1984, and is a native to Alabama. She has always loved to create art since childhood. In 2011, Rachel married her soul mate, Brandon in paradise, and together they have four children. Her husband encouraged her to pursue an oil painting class based on the little drawings she would do for their kids. From that painting class Rachel was encouraged to apply for the Athens art scholarship, which she was granted. Rachel loves to create paintings that stir the imagination and inspire the mind.

K. L. Riley is (still) a senior at Athens State University with majors in English and History and a minor in Philosophy/Religion. Riley is an avid reader, writer, and the finest Deconstructionist that ASU has ever seen.

Dalton Scott graduated from A.P. Brewer High School in May of 2012 and is now completing his undergraduate career by pursuing a B.A. in Psychology with minors in Chemistry and Biology at Athens State University. He has also been working as a part-time certified pharmacy technician for Kroger Pharmacy since January of 2013. He anticipates graduating from Athens State by May of 2015 and intends to go to graduate school for a program in Neuroscience.

Travis A Sharp is a poet, intermedia writer, and book artist. He is co-founder/editor of Small Po[r]tions Journal and is a curator of the text project, bloodofanauthorbox.com. Previous work has appeared with Pacifica Literary Review, Circle Poetry Journal, of/with, Enhance, and Crack the Spine, among others.

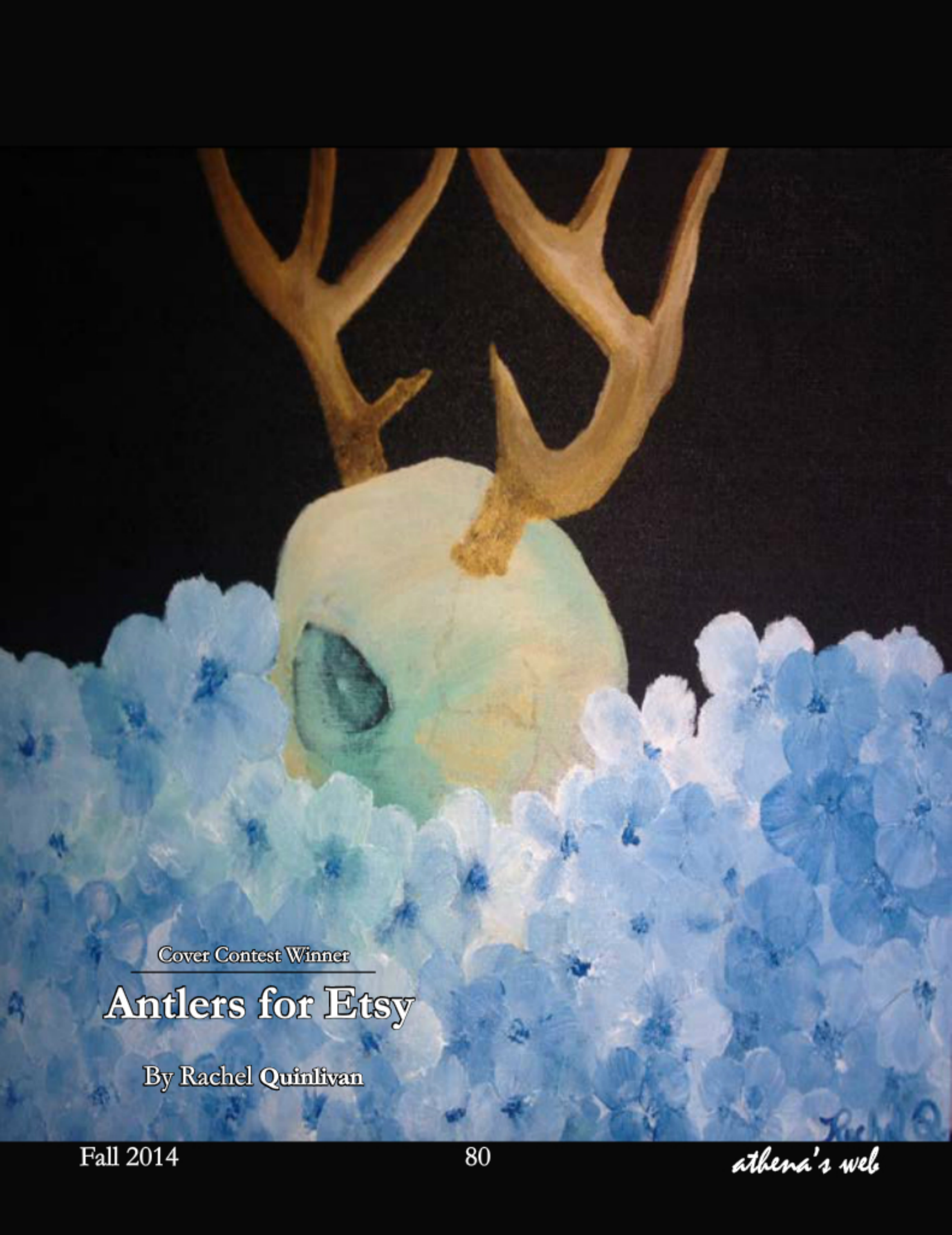
Tracy Szappan is a technical writer and an English major at Athens State University, where she

also works as stage manager for the Athenian Players. In her (increasingly rare) spare time, she enjoys studying language, knitting, and coming up with projects that she may or may not ever have time to complete. She lives in Athens with her amazing husband and two children.

Mary Teresa Toro is a junior at Athens State. After raising a family she decided to pursue the number one item on her Bucket List, a B.A. in English. She lives in Decatur with Frank, her husband of 45 years, and Sarah, their daughter. They share their home with Foxy and Bitsie, two yappy, but loveable little dogs, whose main goal in life is to protect the family from all enemies, real and imagined.

Chris Wade is a senior at Athens State University, studying Graphic Design. He is a guitarist of 15 years and an artist. Chris became very serious about art as one of the primary vehicles for his expression about seven years ago and has been creating surreal, dream-like works centered on spiritual themes and a central theme of self-discovery and the discovery of who we are really meant to be.

Bekah Weeks is a Liberal Arts major. She has always enjoyed painting and writing as a hobby. She enjoys abstract art and art that reveals an artist's inner struggle. Bekah believes there is a sense of freedom in art. She works full time at an OBGYN practice in Huntsville, and been fortunate to work for a physician who allows her to use her creative side as a marketing advantage for the practice.



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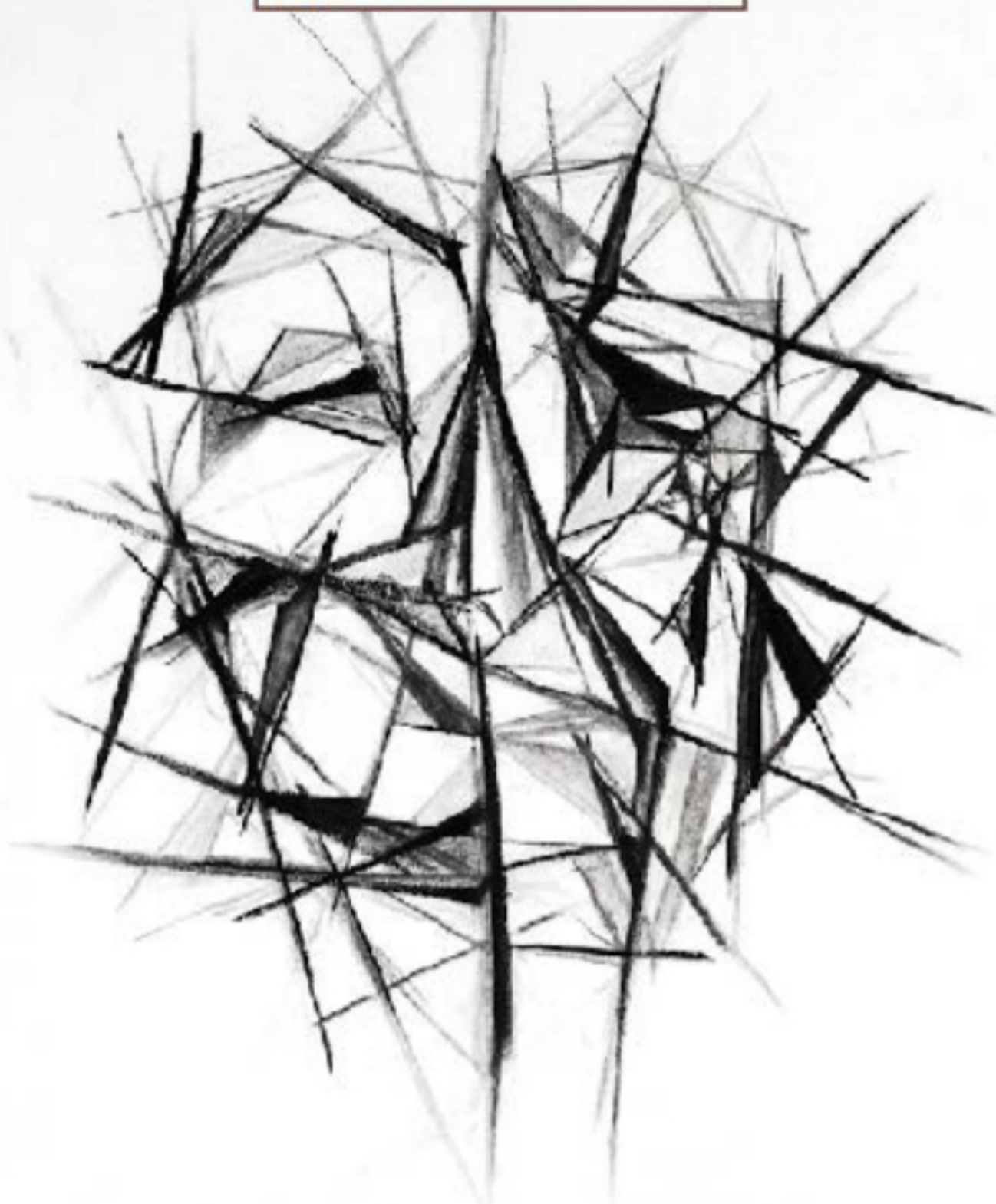
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