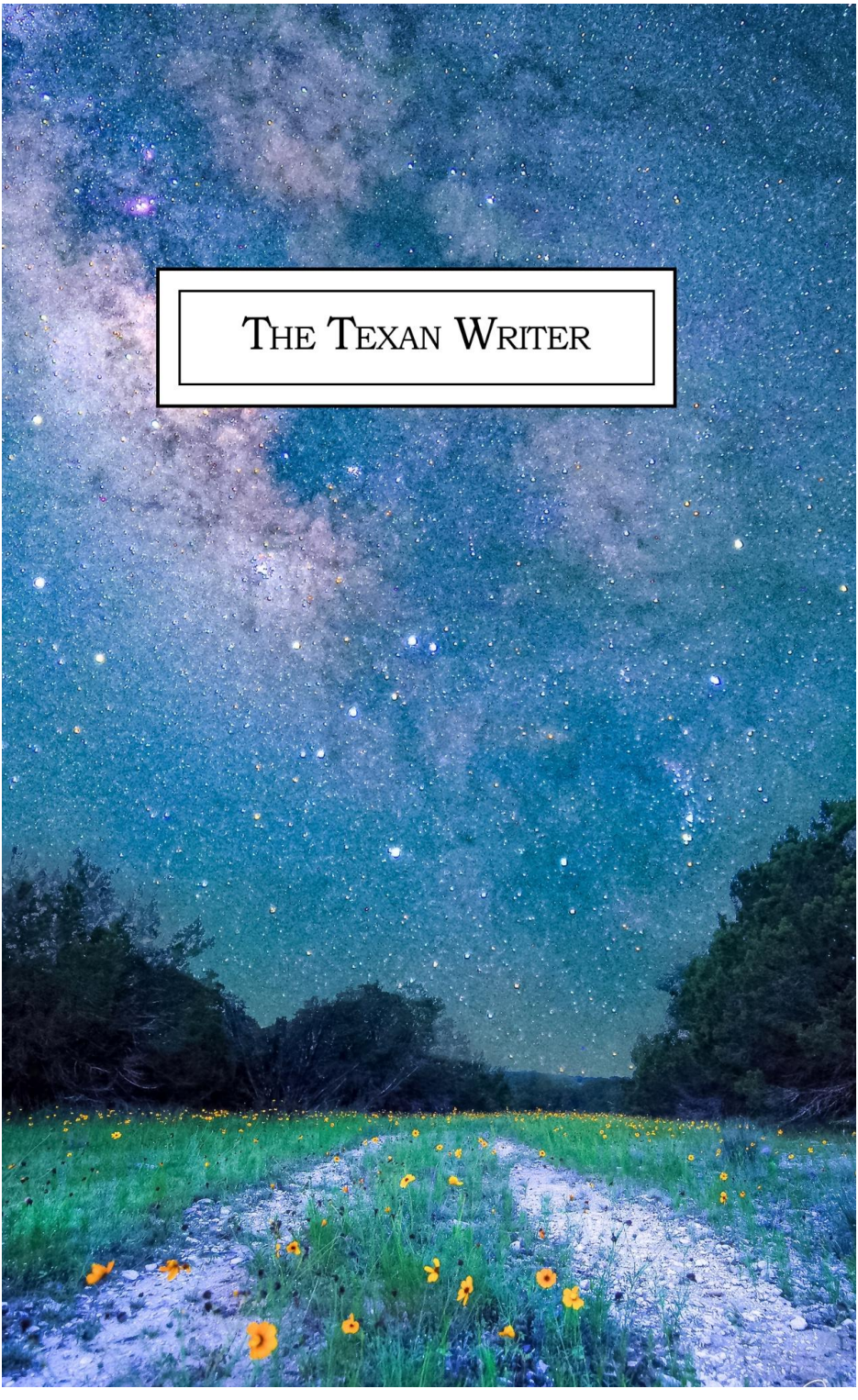
The Texan Writer

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Introduction: Writing Today

by Dr. Dylan Lee Henderson

Why write? Why, specifically, would anyone write an essay? A few years ago, in a moment of candor, a student told me that she had never read an enjoyable essay in her life and could not even imagine what such a thing would be like. Many people, and certainly a great many students, probably feel the same. Why on earth would anyone, in 2026, write an essay?

After all, writing is hard. Composing an essay is like kneading dough: you have to keep working and reworking the text until it is ready. You add words, delete them, add them back, stare at them, and quite frequently delete them again. At times, it feels like you are not making any progress at all, yet you have to keep working the dough, massaging the text until it is perfect.

I say "perfect," but the truth is that few writers are ever satisfied with what they write. Most of us know what good writing sounds like, but the ability to appreciate literature and the ability to produce it are two very different things. Students—and anyone new to the craft—know how frustrating that can be. You have a vision in your mind, but

your clumsy hands cannot reproduce it on the page. What we want to say, what we are really trying to communicate, often eludes us.

Even if writers find some satisfaction in what they have written, opportunities for publication are few in number. Magazines, newspapers, journals, and other periodicals that might publish articles or essays are no longer as common as they once were, and a relatively small number of prolific writers can keep their larders well stocked. Breaking into these markets takes time, and for the beginner, who is still learning the trade, there is little encouragement to be had.

As for readers, they bring writers almost as much pain as pleasure. A great many skim what they read, and even those who read a text word for word do not often devote much time to thinking about it. And yet, readers can be quick to criticize and fixate on the smallest flaw.

Some would argue, too, that the future belongs to video, not the written word. After all, the medium of film, with its fast pace and its vivid images, is far more accessible than text, which requires so much thought and effort. Reading forces you to translate—you have to take someone else's words and turn them into thoughts that make sense to you—but watching a video requires almost no effort at all, and as a result, video can reach those who would prefer not to read or who cannot be bothered to think.

The advent of artificial intelligence has also led many to question the future of writing. Composition, they say, is akin to adding or subtracting large sums in your head—a tiresome and pointless exercise that no one with a calculator bothers to perform. So, I ask again, why bother, in 2026, with writing essays?

The case against them, as you can see, is a strong one. Personally, I would not deny that writing is difficult and often frustrating and sometimes even painful, nor would I deny the usefulness of video or the miraculousness of artificial intelligence, which a decade ago seemed a century away. I would argue, however, that writing an essay is not quite like adding sums in your head.

The truth is that we, and by "we" I mean people everywhere, are poor thinkers. Our thoughts on any subject are usually vague, fragmented, and sometimes even contradictory. We often do not know what we think, and when we talk, we are not always sure what we mean. Writing forces us to focus. It disciplines us, trains us to clarify our thoughts, to develop and justify them. It requires us to think at a deeper level.

Unlike adding or subtracting sums, which teaches us nothing that we did not already know, writing an essay is always a challenge. The writing process begins with a hazy impression and ends with a persuasive argument supported by compelling evidence and vivid examples.

Writing also pushes us to go beyond what we, and others, already know. Every essay, whatever its subject, must tell the reader something new, something that the reader did not already know or had not already heard. This is, from a writer's perspective, the chief limitation of artificial intelligence, specifically large language models: AI recognizes patterns and uses them to generate a consensus. It repeats, in other words, what is already known, which is the one thing a writer must not do. If you want someone to read your work, you must present your reader with new information. You cannot simply repeat what others have said—you must build upon it. Playing it safe will not produce an essay anyone will want to read. And

so, writing an essay forces you to strike out for new territory. You must stake a claim on a new idea, a new perspective, and defend it.

Speaking of new ideas, I would argue that writing teaches us social skills, an assertion that, on its face, might seem silly. Writing is, to be sure, one of the most solitary activities, but that is precisely what makes it such a social challenge. You, as the writer, are trying to speak to a reader who is not present and who will not read what you have written until after it is finished. You must, if you are to write well, learn how to read minds, how to predict what your reader is thinking. If the reader is, you believe, getting confused, you must try to clarify or explain. If the reader is getting bored, you must speed up or try your best to entertain. Writing requires you to ask questions about your subject, yes, but you also ask just as many questions about your reader. Will the reader accept this data or understand this example or appreciate this joke or recognize this word? Will the reader care about this as much as I do, or will he leave what I have tried to say unread?

There is also, believe it or not, a moral dimension to composition: writing essays teaches us to be better people by encouraging us to treat others with respect. You see, when you write a persuasive or argumentative essay, you are writing for people whom you want to convince, which means that you are addressing the very people who disagree with you and your perspective. One of the things that you learn from this is that you cannot wield logic and evidence like a war hammer. Readers will not be cudgeled into agreeing with you. They have their own beliefs, their own values, their own ideas, and if you do not treat these with respect, they will not read what you have to say.

With time, writing essays even changes how you think about the Truth. In our day-to-day lives, it always seems so simple, so obvious. And yet, when you write, when you research other perspectives and respond to opposing views, you begin to see how complex and complicated everything really is. Even the worst ideas often have some merit, and even the strongest argument is rarely without flaw. Writing, and the research that accompanies it, is a deeply humbling activity: it makes you aware of how little you know and how much you still have to learn. It is not that writing teaches you to doubt your own convictions, but it does prompt you to reexamine what you know and what you assume, what you believe and what you can prove.

It is worth thinking about AI in this context. Using AI is, I would argue, an empowering experience. You can, with a keystroke, generate reams of knowledge, whole pages of text. Writing—the sort of writing that takes place in our department—is not like that at all. It challenges you, forces you to improve. As you write, you realize that your perspective is unclear, your evidence weak, your examples and metaphors misleading, your words sloppy and inadequate. I would go so far as to contend that this is the experience *every time* that you sit down to write, and that is because contemplation and casual conversation do not challenge us in the same way. As a result, you are almost always unprepared when you sit down to write, and you quickly learn that your message, whatever it is, needs work. Writing is hard, and those who write are wiser and less cocksure as a result.

Of course, it goes without saying that writing gives you the chance to express yourself. Writing is, if I may employ a half-remembered quote, the most articulate form of self-expression and self-exploration that humanity has ever

devised. You can, sure, express yourself through the clothes that you wear or the car that you drive, but really complex ideas and feelings require language—lots of it—and if they are to be understood, they must be refined and purified through the milling process that is writing.

And yet, while it would be accurate to say that writing offers you the chance to express yourself, that is not quite what I want to say. I asked a large language model why we write, and it said that "we write to make sense of ourselves and our world, and to share that understanding with others." As usual, AI understands the law but struggles with the spirit. I rarely want to share with readers. I want to shake them, to wake them up. Sometimes, I want to throw my arms around readers and weep. Writing is much more than sharing: it is searching for something. When you write, you are broadcasting a signal, hoping that someone out there will receive it and understand it. It is an attempt at a connection. Sometimes, but not often, it works. The signal is received. There are writers, people whom I have never met, who have, through their written works, entered into my life as deeply as anyone I know. The act of writing is akin to giving a gift, one that you hope—but do not know—will be valued.

For all these reasons and more, we continue to write. What you have in your hands is the hard labor that our students have performed. It is, in a literal sense, a series of essays, articles, and letters about literature and other topics, but I would encourage you to think of it metaphorically. This is hours of struggle, of trying, so hard, to find the right word, the right phrase, the right way to clarify that which is still, even to the writer, hazy and unclear. The writing process is a long, painful harvest, and those who write often become weary of the picking, but here is the fruit.

Letters to the Editor

Many people assume that being a music educator is all fun and games. They think that, if you understand music and know how to teach it, you have nothing else to worry about. I know differently, however. There are a number of logistical, personal, and leadership issues that make musical instruction a unique challenge for educators. One of the biggest issues, for instance, is trying to find a balance between life and work, as you are expected to work long hours and weekends. Financing a music program is another issue, and then there is the lack of understanding and support from the administration—an all-too-common problem. People outside of the profession might think that the biggest issue is simply learning how to teach music, but there is much more to the profession than that.

—Ryan D. Chamberlain

The toxic fan culture that surrounds K-pop is usually hidden from the general public, but the departure of Heeseung, one of the most popular singers and a member of Enhypen, has recently drawn attention to this phenomenon.

Those unfamiliar with this fan culture would be amazed by the uproar his departure has caused. For the past month, fans have been protesting in front of the record company's building in South Korea, demanding that Heeseung return. Conspiracy theories have proliferated online, but many believe that the record company has either forced him to leave or mistreated him so badly that he felt compelled to leave. Other fans, equally crazy, are celebrating his departure. Now that his phone number has been leaked to the public, he has been receiving death threats and deranged messages from fanatical "fans." The public needs to understand that this fan culture is no joke: it may sound outrageous, but as K-pop continues to grow in popularity, more and more young people are being exposed to a surprisingly toxic and often hate-filled fan culture.

—Isabella Neathery

IN RECENT YEARS, THERE HAS BEEN GROWING CONCERN about the mental and physical health of American youth, yet many of the solutions being proposed fail to address the root problem. One of the most overlooked factors is the lack of structure and standards in physical education. Decades ago, programs like the PACER test and more rigorous PE expectations pushed students to stay active and accountable. Today those standards have been relaxed, and the results are showing in rising obesity rates and declining fitness levels. At the same time, access to real, whole foods remains limited for many young people. Highly processed foods are cheaper and more convenient, while healthier alternatives are often more expensive or harder to find. This imbalance contributes not only to physical health issues, but also declining energy levels

and focus. Finally, excessive screen time is quietly damaging attention spans and mental well-being. If we want to improve the health of the next generation, we need to reintroduce structured physical activity, improve access to nutritious foods, and set clear boundaries around screen usage.

—James Mckenzie

I WISH THAT EVERY PARENT COULD EXPERIENCE WHAT IT IS like to teach a class. People who have not taught tend to assume that it is easy. What they do not realize is that a teacher's day does not begin when the students arrive, and it does not end when the students go home. Teachers, even though many assume that they work from 8am to 4pm, actually work long hours. Many arrive at 6:30am and leave at 5:30pm, and afterwards, they often have papers to grade. The public knows that there are difficult students out there, but people do not understand how carefully teachers have to manage their classrooms. Some students, for instance, can be either hardworking or disruptive depending on where they are sitting and who they are paired with. As a teacher, you have to tailor your approach to each individual student. Everyone knows that teachers deserve more pay, but I would argue that they also deserve more respect.

—Addyson Thompson

SOME OF US ARE BEGINNING TO DOUBT THE COMPETITIVE-ness of the NBA. This year, there are a number of fantastic college players who will soon be eligible for the draft, specifically Darryn Peterson, Cameron Boozer, and AJ Dybantsa, and many NBA teams, which could be playing at a

high level, seem to be tanking so that they will have a better chance at a top three draft pick. The Dallas Mavericks, for example, have struggled this season for no obvious reason. The Utah Jazz and the Washington Wizards, on the other hand, have been, without a doubt, trying to lose. Why else would they bench their strongest players? For those of us who want to see athletes performing at their best, this sort of strategizing makes the NBA frustrating to watch. The commissioner's plans for the NBA, which include giving each team the same odds during the draft lottery, may help the situation, but they may also make already strong teams unstoppable. It is not clear what the solution is, but if the NBA does not start playing its best, it is going to continue to lose viewers.

—Tyson Weaver

I HAVE BEEN TRYING RECENTLY TO UNDERSTAND QUANTUM entanglement, but it still seems unreal to me. The notion that two particles can become entangled in such a way that the state of one particle immediately determines the state of the other—no matter the distance between them—defies our conventional under-standing of causality. It is not that information is being transmitted faster than light but rather that the particles share a common state until they are observed. That part is especially mind-boggling because it suggests that reality is not completely "decided" until it is witnessed. It is fascinating to think that reality itself is so complex and counterintuitive that we cannot understand it without complicated mathematics, and even then, the math may only apply to a specific scenario within the quantum realm.

—Joshua Menchaca

MARCH 28 MARKED THE OPENING DAY OF TURKEY season here in North Texas. Thousands of eager hunters grabbed their calls and their decoys and headed for the woods. There, they sat quietly and listened for that first gobble, which is so loud and intimidating that it sends chills down your back. But a great many people, unfortunately, will never get to experience this. For many living in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, hunting is a foreign experience, something that they have never tried or even thought of trying. That is a shame because, to me, there is something wonderful about hunting. It gives you a chance to step away from the world and get to know yourself. You feel the wind on your face, the sun on your skin. You hear birds and animals that you did not even know existed. Sitting in the woods, calling back and forth with turkeys, is already a great day, even if you do not bag one. My advice to anyone who is tired of looking at screens is to take the day off, find some public land, and get out in the woods.

—Frank Hazelrigg

WITH SUMMER COMING, I HAVE BEEN GETTING BACK into streaming. Many people, I think, specifically those who have never tried to stream, tend to think of it as a hobby, and most assume that it is easy, but I know from personal experience how hard it can be. I would even argue that streaming is more difficult than most nine-to-five jobs. As a career, streaming requires an always-on lifestyle. You have to keep producing, and if you stop, even for a short time, your audience drifts away. You also have to constantly drum up viewers and tirelessly promote your account. When actually streaming, you have to perform energetically for long periods:

there is no opportunity to relax, to rest or pause. Streaming is a lot of fun—do not get me wrong—but those thinking about getting started in this business should know that it is not easy.

—Wyatt Zipp

The Soul of a Poet: The Character of Hamlet

by K. W. Phelps

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* boldly explores mental health and suicide through Hamlet's words, actions, and overall demeanor. It is important to analyze Hamlet's mental state in order to understand his motivations and actions. Though perhaps more intriguing, and certainly more speculated on, than Hamlet's actions are his inactions. A question that will likely arise in the reader's mind is why would Hamlet wait so long to avenge his father rather than acting sooner? This essay will attempt to answer this question by examining Hamlet's mental state and various interpretations of how his mental state and motivations affect his actions and the outcome of the play.

Hamlet's poor mental state is established early on in the play and emphasized throughout. He is presented as being in mourning over the death of his father. It is understandable that this would have a profound impact on him, but it seems he has taken his mourning process a bit too far. Wearing "suits of solemn black" has become "customary" for Hamlet and he has adopted an attitude exhibiting "all forms, moods, shapes of

grief" (1.2.78, 1.2.82). It appears Hamlet has, rather than mourning for a time and moving forward with his life, integrated his grief over his father's death into his very identity. He is not in mourning; he has embodied the identity of a mourner. This is an incredibly unhealthy response to the death of a loved one. Further evidence to suggest Hamlet is taking his mourning too far is that his own mother expresses concern for him based on the nature of his mourning (1.2.68–73). When his mother tells him to "cast thy nighted color off," it shows that she believes Hamlet's mourning to be inappropriate and out of character (1.2.68). His uncle, who likewise would have known Hamlet since he was born, also

holds this opinion, although he may or may not have different motivations than Gertrude to get his nephew to move on from his father's death. It makes sense Claudius would want Hamlet to forget about his father's death, lest he discover the fratricide involved, but it is never revealed whether his mother had any involvement in his father's murder. Thus, one can reasonably assume Hamlet's mother has his best interests in mind.

However, the fact that Gertrude and Claudius insist Hamlet needs to move on should only encourage Hamlet to continue his mourning. This is because Hamlet believes both of them have greatly disrespected his father's memory and so continues his mourning out of spite for them. This is evidenced in Hamlet's first soliloquy:

> A little month, or e'er those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe all tears, why she—
> O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
> Would have mourned longer—married with my uncle,
> My father's brother, but no more like my father
> Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
> Ere yet the salt of most righteous tears
> Had left the flushing in her galléd eyes,
> She married. Oh, most wicked speed, to post
> With such dexterity to incestuous sheets—
> It is not, nor it cannot come to good. (1.2.147–58)

Hamlet's words demonstrate he had great respect for his father and not only is upset by the speed at which Gertrude moved on from his father's death, but for marrying, of all people, his father's brother. Likewise, he is upset with Claudius for his

lack of grief and for marrying Gertrude. Hamlet considers this insulting to his father's memory. Hamlet does not specifically claim he holds on to his mourning to spite his mother who has become his aunt and his uncle who has become his stepfather, but it is reasonable to suggest that spite may play a part in his new identity as a mourner. Another interesting point to be made is that Hamlet's comparison of himself to Hercules, aside from being an insult to his uncle, implies he feels weak. This weakness seems to stem from his despair and his inability to have any say in the actions of his mother and uncle, as, in regards to their union, Hamlet says, "but break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.159). This indeed demonstrates the helplessness Hamlet feels.

It becomes more apparent Hamlet is deeply disturbed in his mind by all that has happened to him through his repeated contemplation of suicide. The first indication Hamlet is suicidal comes with his expressed desire to "melt / Thaw, and resolve … into dew" (1.2.129–30). Though this could be taken as a mere dramatic expression of his emotions, Hamlet continues on, revealing how he wishes God had not made suicide wrong (1.2.131–2). Another comes when he, ignoring Horatio's protests of possible danger, follows after the Ghost in act 1, scene 4. This lack of self-preservation shows Hamlet places little value upon his own life, a sentiment which is directly proven when Hamlet states, "I do not set my life at a pin's fee" (1.4.65). Hamlet continues to contemplate suicide with the famous words, "to be or not to be: that is the question" (3.1.55).

An idea which explains Hamlet's indecision and offers insight into how he came into his mental state is "that Hamlet has within him the soul of a poet, too sensitive, delicate, and complex to endure the cruel pressures of a coarse world"

(Greenblatt 121–2). One who has "the soul of a poet" is difficult to understand, as Stephen Greenblatt, in reference to the interpretation of John Wolfgang van Goethe, calls this type of person "delicate and complex." This is also a rather subjective concept that is only able to truly be understood by a person who is inclined to the poetic temperament or through the extensive study of art, especially literature and music. Someone who has this quality often acts in a certain way for the sake of being poetic, or in such a way that, in their mind, produces artistic value over other goals. Sometimes, the qualities of a poetic soul manifest themselves in such a way that appears similar to madness, but it is not madness. It is the manifestation of deep longing for art and the answers to the deepest questions of mankind.

The poet's soul reveals itself in Hamlet through both his actions and his words. It is a quality of the poetic soul to be self-destructive and suicidal, which are characteristics Hamlet exhibits throughout the play. An example of Hamlet's poetic tendencies occurs when Hamlet kills Polonius. It is a poetic thing to kill an unknown person. The tragic effects of an easily avoidable death are even more so. It would also be poetic if Hamlet got his revenge against Claudius on accident, as he clearly hopes is the case (3.4.26). Unfortunately, Hamlet receives a bit more poetry through his actions than he perhaps bargained for. Polonius' death directly causes the death of the woman he loves, or, at least once loved, and ultimately causes the bloody end to the play by giving Laertes a reason to get revenge on Hamlet. The words Hamlet uses also lends credit to this theory in that, even more so than the words typically spoken in Shakespeare's writing, his words are richly poetic. This is particularly exemplified by his description of "how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (3.6.29–

30). There is a beauty to the Prince of Denmark's words that indicates his poetic nature. "We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes to the same end," he says before clarifying, "[a] man may fish with the worm that hath ate of a king and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm" (3.6.21–4, 26–7). The very fact that Hamlet has dwelled on the nature of life's futility in this way is also deeply indicative of a poetic mind.

It is Goethe's idea that the poetic nature of Hamlet is essentially what causes Hamlet to delay killing his uncle (Hankins 2). The possibility stands that poetic introspection combined with a deep sensitivity could lead to delayed action. However, John Hankins believes this view paints Hamlet as an inherent coward, stating that in "Goethe's conception, [Hamlet's] hesitance is like that of a lad who cannot wring a chicken's neck because the sight of blood nauseates him" (9). Hamlet's performance in his duel against Laertes certainly does not show cowardice, nor does his following after his father's ghost. It is necessary, therefore, to show Hamlet's poetic nature without painting him as a coward. Levin Schücking presents a view that does exactly this. He describes Hamlet in such a way that demonstrates great understanding of the poetic soul, calling Hamlet "a man of great talents, almost a genius, whose rich imagination, extreme sensitiveness, imitative gifts, and aesthetic interests are those of a great artist, but are combined with a great thirst for knowledge and a predilection for the establishment of general truths" (31). Schücking also provides further insight into Hamlet's mental state in light of his character, asserting that, because of the dominant beliefs during the Elizabethan era, Hamlet "is to be accepted as essentially a melancholic" (27).

Schücking argues Hamlet cannot be understood unless he is viewed in the same way Shakespeare would have viewed him. This argument requires contemporary viewpoints be thrown away in order to examine Hamlet's character. This is a sensible idea, and it does seem to explain much of Hamlet's behavior, as the condition of melancholy "could be traced to a number of causes, especially to overwhelming grief, and would betray itself in definite ways, some of which were physical" (Schücking 27). It also provides insight into Hamlet's introspection, which "is intensified by melancholy into a positive craving for self-dissection" (Schücking 31). Schücking's interpretation of Hamlet preserves his poetic nature while explaining melancholy may make Hamlet seem cowardly but does not imply that Hamlet is inherently a coward.

However, Schücking's explanation not only rejects the value of any contemporary interpretation, but is not completely satisfactory regarding Hamlet's inaction through the play. It is an improvement over Goethe's, but it does not fully justify certain aspects. E. E. Stoll argues that, although Hamlet was indeed melancholic, "melancholy was not considered an impediment to action by the Elizabethans" (Hankins 4). Hamlet's overall mental state may have altered his decision-making in such a way that delayed his actions, but it seems melancholy can only explain Hamlet's behavior in part. Hamlet must, therefore, have been capable of making some rational decisions about when and how to act. This is shown in his clever use of *The Mouse-trap* to get a guilt-ridden reaction from his uncle (3.1.514–24). Hamlet may seem emotionally unstable and rash, but many of his actions are methodical upon reflection. Hankins proposes that Hamlet

must decide what to do with his mother before he kills Claudius:

> The reader may wonder why one of Hamlet's duties needs to wait upon the other, why he cannot kill the King and decide afterward what he shall do with his regard to his mother…. Gertrude's crime appears to him the more horrible and preoccupies his mind, a consideration which stalls his hand. To goad himself into killing Claudius while restraining himself from injuring Gertrude is a psychological feat which Hamlet finds difficult. (21)

Hankins' idea is that Hamlet delays his action in order to make sure he does not harm his mother. This may seem counterproductive to killing Claudius, but it is very important to Hamlet that he not cause any real harm to his mother. Harold Goddard points out it is impossible for the crime of his father's murder and the crime of his mother's marriage to be separated in Hamlet's mind (343). Hankins concludes, "it is this consideration which puzzles the will and gives [Hamlet] pause. It forces him to think before acting, since he must decide what to do" (27). While Hamlet's mental state and melancholy certainly play a role in his inaction, it is ultimately his concern for his mother that prevents him from acting.

In a similar train of thought, yet still quite different, to Hankins' view is Dover Wilson's interpretation of Hamlet's motivations. Wilson views Hamlet as expressing "extreme emotional instability" after his initial encounter with the Ghost (91). Wilson claims, "Hamlet … is conscious that he no longer retains perfect control over himself. What more natural than that he should conceal his nervous breakdown behind a mask which would enable him to let himself go when the fit

is on him?" (92). Wilson believes Hamlet's decision "to put an antic disposition on" was a necessary choice to cover up the fact that he was actually going mad (Shakespeare 1.5.173). This almost fits with Hankins' belief that Hamlet delayed because he was doubtful of his ability to control himself, but is more radical in that it suggests a total lack of control, rather than lack of control in one area. It has also been proposed that Hamlet's antic disposition was merely an excuse to express his internal thoughts that could be offensive to those around him (Jones 110). It seems likely, however, that Hamlet's odd behavior can be attributed to his poetic nature. He has the intention of appearing insane, but his nature shines through this intention.

Another interpretation to be considered for Hamlet's motivation is the Freudian approach presented by Ernest Jones. Jones' idea is essentially that Hamlet has a sexual desire for his mother. He states of Hamlet, "the long 'repressed' desire to take his father's place in his mother's affection is stimulated to unconscious activity by the sight of some one [*sic*] usurping this place exactly as he himself had once longed to do" (99). Jones further suggests the incestuous status of his mother's union to his uncle calls Hamlet's desires even closer to the surface, as the desire Hamlet has for his mother would also be incestuous. This proposal is dismissed immediately by Hankins, who derogatorily calls it an "obvious brainstorm" and considers it unserviceable (1). Goddard also dismisses Jones' interpretation, calling it "superfluous" (343). However, Goddard goes into more detail than does Hankins, showing that the relationships Hamlet has with Horatio and Ophelia render any Oedipal tendencies in Hamlet doubtful and asserting such psychoanalysis of Hamlet reduces the artistic and literary value of the whole play (344, 344–5). The ease of

dismissal from Hankins and Goddard is rather harsh, but does serve to demonstrate the lack of support for a Freudian approach to *Hamlet*.

It would seem the best interpretation from the various arguments that have been presented here is that Hamlet is a poetic soul who is deeply affected by his circumstances and confused in his melancholy. As for the possibility that he is mad, it is reasonable to say that, while he does intend to appear mad, his mental state becomes quite unhealthy as he sinks deeper into his situation. The claim could easily be made that some of Hamlet's words and actions that appear to be part of his antic disposition are in fact signs of his deeply afflicted mind, though this claim does not necessitate agreement with Wilson's claim that Hamlet assumes his antic disposition to directly cover up his madness. There is an inconsistency that needs to be explored with Hamlet's behavior, however. In the final act of the play, Hamlet's behavior does not appear poetic in the same way it did before. His behavior in fact seems very rational. The skill he initially shows in his duel with Laertes, the fast reaction that allows him to finally kill Claudius, and the clarity of mind he possesses to allow him to cast his vote for Fortinbras to become king seem to be the actions of a collected and rational person (5.2.252–80, 300–4, 334). The only thing that could possibly have wrought this change in Hamlet is the death of Ophelia. Understanding that his actions led to her death must have been a very sobering realization for Hamlet. He seems hysterical when he learns of her death in a way that transcends the scope of his antic disposition:

> I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
> Could not with all their quantity of love
> Make up my sum…

> 'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do—
> Wilt weep, wilt fight, wilt fast, wilt tear thyself,
> Wilt drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
> I'll do't. (5.1.248–56)

The claims he makes and the exaggerated language he uses to express his grief over Ophelia's death show that it has affected him deeply. This ultimately reveals itself in his rejection of his nature. Hamlet chooses to forsake his identity as a mourning poet for his ascension to glory as the king he momentarily becomes before his death.

In the analysis of Hamlet's inner being lies the reason for the timeless appeal of *Hamlet*. Goddard very wisely writes, "no one but a dead man can escape projecting himself on the Prince of Denmark" (332). This can be seen in how easily the more literary minds of Hankins and Goddard dismiss Jones' psychoanalysis of Hamlet's character. It may be that the mind of Hamlet will never be fully understood. Perhaps Shakespeare himself did not understand the character he was writing. However, the ease with which one can project himself upon and identify with Hamlet is what makes the play the work of art that it is. It is the purpose of great art to speak personally to the depths of the consumer's soul. That this essay interprets Hamlet as a melancholic poet who realizes the value of rejecting his nature to become what he should be should not devalue the Freudian idea that Hamlet suffers from an Oedipal complex. To do so would be to dismiss the status of *Hamlet* as a great, timeless work of art. The mystery of Hamlet will continue to perplex readers for all time.

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How the Term "Honor" Differs in Meaning Throughout *Julius Caesar*

by Jaylee Wright

Honor, a favored term in William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, lays the foundations for the political nature of the story. The word takes on many meanings and appears in every part of the play. In most situations, honor is something that is earned and fought for—it is not simply given. To have honor is to have great respect. It is a notable accomplishment when someone is deemed "honorable," but honor can go by many names, such as virtue and nobility. Shakespeare uses the word "honor" and its variations repeatedly throughout *Julius Caesar*, allowing the term to shift in meaning depending on who is speaking and whom they are referring to. Through this changing definition, Shakespeare suggests that honor is not an earned truth that it is bestowed upon the worthy, but a performance of manipulation. Brutus, Antony, and Cassius each take the meaning into their own hands and shape it to fit their agendas. This variation in usage allows Shakespeare to explore how honor is used as a rhetorical tool to persuade, persecute, or idolize the subject.

Brutus, Cassius, and Antony all reference honor in distinct ways that reflect their personal motives. Brutus takes the idea of honor very seriously: “For let the gods so speed me as I love / The name of honor more than I fear death” (1.2.95–6). This shows that Brutus values his honor more than his own life and, eventually, Caesar’s life. In contrast, Cassius uses the term in more direct ways: “Well, honor is the subject of my story. / I cannot tell what you and other men / Think of this life” (1.2.99–102). He uses the traditional definition of honor to appeal to Brutus and his sense of virtue, but he does not try to hide his true feelings behind a façade of honor. The idea of honor in this play is dismantled easily. Antony’s speech at

Caesar's funeral is an example of how fragile it can be. With nothing but a few carefully chosen words, he is able to change the minds of all the people who had persecuted Caesar. Antony's rhetorical use of "honorable" during Caesar's funeral—"Yet Brutus says he was ambitious, / And Brutus is an honorable man" (3.2.112–113)—is a tactic to make the audience question whether Brutus truly is honorable. With each repetition, the word loses its meaning and sincerity and becomes a tool to confuse and incite doubt within the crowd. What was once a sacred and carefully upheld ideal unravels into an empty word. This variation highlights how selective language can strip these words of their meaning.

Brutus believes in the meaning of honor and believes that killing Caesar will bring him more honor and integrity because he is doing it for the good of Rome: "It must be by his death. And for my part / I know no personal cause to spurn at him, / But for the general. He would be crowned" (2.1.10–3). He believes he will preserve his honor because he is trying to protect his country and honor his people by bringing revolution to Rome. To him, honor is about moral duty—he believes that sacrificing Caesar is what is truly right for Rome. This belief allows him to frame the murder of Rome's leader as a noble act, and not an act of treason against Rome. However, after Caesar's assassination, his definition of honor begins to unravel. It shifts from being about virtue to being about reputation, appearance, and legacy: "I shall have glory by this losing day / More than Octavius and Mark Antony" (5.5.40–41). He tries to maintain his image as honorable even when things start to fall apart, which shows how fragile the idea of honor can be. Brutus ends up taking his own life so that no other man could claim the honor or glory of killing him, revealing his true feelings about honor.

Cassius speaks of honor more truthfully and bluntly, instead of hiding it behind false words: “Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world / Like a Colossus, and we petty men / Walk under his huge legs and peep about / To find ourselves dishonorable graves” (1.2.142–5). He believes it is dishonorable to do nothing while their empire falls, and that to keep virtue, they must take action. His position of honor is deeply tied to pride and his opinion on Roman freedom. To Cassius, honor is a true virtue, one that is earned, while inaction is equal to dishonor. He uses his belief in honor as a tool to persuade Brutus to join his cause. His definition is virtuous and does not shift much. He treats honor as a weapon to villainize and persuade. He frames honor to fit Brutus’s ego and convinces him to take the lead in killing Caesar. His definition stays consistent—he uses it to fuel his rebellion.

By the last act of the play, Antony’s definition of honor shifts once again as he refers to Brutus as a noble man at his funeral: “This was the noblest Roman of them all” (5.5.68), praising him for acting out of fear for Rome, not out of ambition. Despite Antony’s clear disapproval of the conspirators, he admits that Brutus’s actions were rooted in good morals. Even though he used the concept of honor to dismantle Brutus’s cause earlier, he believes Brutus died with true honor. Antony respects that Brutus put the good of Rome first and did what he thought was right, even if he disagreed. This moment highlights that even Antony can identify and acknowledge integrity. These many shifts in the meaning of honor go to show how fragile the idea is and how it is more of a tool than a moral truth. The play successfully builds up and then deconstructs the idea of honor, showing how it can be constructed, dismantled, and redefined to serve the purposes of those who wield it.

The public's reaction to how the characters talk about and treat honor as a concept shows how easily the people of Rome are manipulated and persuaded. All it takes for them to turn on Brutus is a few carefully chosen words from Antony to dismantle the pedestal on which they had placed him. This shift happens rapidly and aggressively, not because the crowd has realized that they have been manipulated by Brutus, but because they are still being manipulated. Their loyalty is not based on truth, but on whose performance was the best and most compelling. The crowd's reaction shows how honor can be twisted and redefined depending on who is using the term and how effectively they deliver their message. Their constantly shifting opinions show how easy it is to tear apart this seemingly sacred and respected idea. It also highlights a darker truth: the general public in the play is not guided by reason or principle, but by emotion and spectacle. Shakespeare uses this as a way to critique how easy it is to corrupt the idea of honor.

Antony once believed Brutus was an honorable, virtuous man, but this view shifts as Brutus begins plotting against Caesar. During his speech at Caesar's funeral, he claims Brutus is still an honorable man—he repeats this so many times that it becomes sarcastic and mocking. He turns the word honor into a weapon against Brutus, to turn the people who once rooted for him against him: "I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong, / Who, you all know, are honorable men" (3.2.135–136). His careful choice of words and the way he delivers this speech dismantle Brutus's image. Antony never directly accuses Brutus of anything, but allows his words to convince the crowd. Antony's use of honor in this speech becomes his main tool to turn the people against Brutus. He uses rhetorical manipulation to persuade the

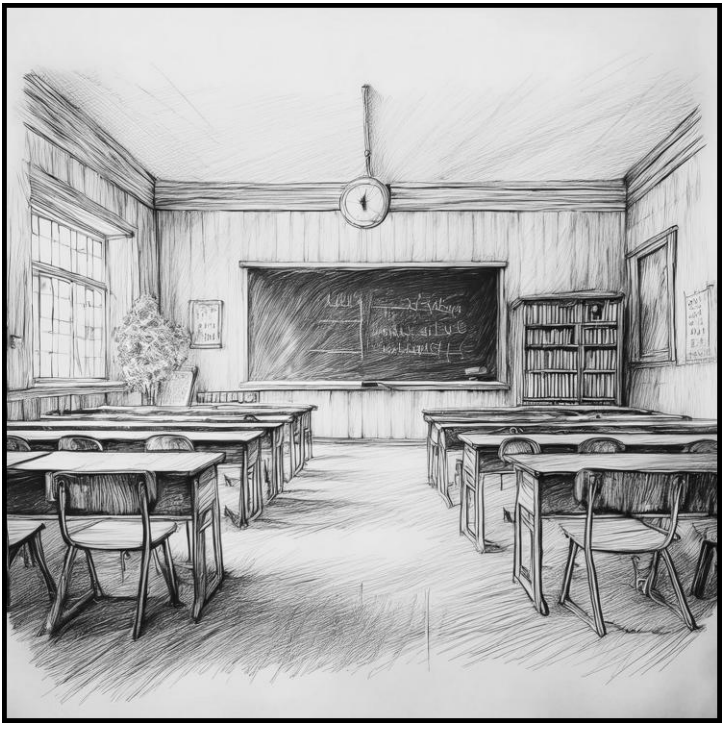
listeners to believe that Brutus has put glory over Rome: "I rather choose / To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you, / Than I will wrong such honorable men" (3.2.137–9). Antony claims he would rather dishonor the freshly fallen leader than Brutus. But his speech does exactly the opposite of what he claims—it turns the crowd against Brutus and honors Caesar instead. Antony's manipulation of the word shows just how fragile and performative the idea of honor is.

Shakespeare challenges the definition of honor by exploring different interpretations of it throughout the play. The word honor shifts in meaning depending on who is speaking and whom they are speaking about. It is used as a tactic for rebellion, as a compliment, and as an insult. Brutus, Antony, and Cassius all take the word and bend it to serve their own purposes. What was once a high compliment becomes a shield to protect self-interest and a tool to manipulate others. Shakespeare shows that honor is not always what it seems, and that words—even those that appear noble—can be used to deceive. In the end, this play is about more than politics and power—it is about manipulation and ambition, and how those forces can lead to disaster.

AI IN THE MODERN WORLD: THE BENEFITS OF CLASSROOM USE

by Laci Castilla

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS A NEW AND RAPIDLY changing technology, and educators, parents, and administrators are understandably concerned about allowing it into the classroom. Recent research suggests, however, that there are benefits to using AI in K-12 schools if it is used in the right manner. Using platforms with certain privacy guidelines is a must, and sensitive student data needs to be protected to ensure they are safe. Also teaching educators how to use AI for themselves and their students is vital: this technology cannot be used if educators don't understand how it works. The potential benefits are many. AI can personalize lesson plans and curate assignment material specific to each student in a way that works for them. Student comprehension rates will increase, which will also increase test scores. This technology is not replacing teachers; it is merely giving them a way to spend more one-on-one time with their students than they could before. Though controversial, AI is a necessary tool to be utilized in K-12 classrooms as it has the power to revolutionize the way that the youth of America are taught.



I. INTRODUCTION

Student test scores and comprehension rates in K-12 schools are at an all-time low across the nation. This systemic problem continues to get worse, and the next generation of children are the ones who are suffering. Educators are struggling to engage their students and motivate them to want to learn. On top of this, teachers are being overloaded with students while simultaneously being expected to perform their administrative tasks. AI can be used as a resource for educators to help them with the mundane, mandatory tasks they have to perform. This raises the question: How can artificial intelligence be safely, responsibly, and effectively

implemented into the classroom? In my research, I have found ways to use the right AI platforms to protect student privacy as well as ways for educators and students to use the technology for good in the classroom.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Testing AI in real classroom settings is crucial to understanding the full extent to which it could work for students and teachers. The article "The Role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Personalized Learning: A Case Study in K-12 Education" (2024) by Zahid Sahito, Farzana Sahito, and Muhammad Imran discusses an experiment involving a class of students, a teacher, and two administrators. The data generated by this test is a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. It includes both assignment scores and the opinions of participants, who explained what they thought of the experiment. The study concludes that students performed better on assignments and had higher comprehension rates with AI, while the teachers enjoyed using it on the students and allowing it to help complete some of their daily tasks. The students who participated in this study were excited and had more motivation to do their schoolwork. AI goes at the students' own pace, uses visuals that students can understand, adapts to learning disabilities, offers writing tools, and has even been seen to raise test scores. Problems, however, remain, such as privacy leaks, the digital divide between schools, and the new role of an educator with AI.

Finding platforms specifically for education is an important step to ensuring student privacy and protecting data. The article "A Review of AI Tools: Definitions, Functions, and Applications for K-12 Education" (2024) by Gina Kwid, Nicole Sarty, and Dazhi Yang dives into the different types of

AI, their uses for K-12 education, specific educational AI platforms, and the way they could be practically implemented in schools. This source involved qualitative data as the researchers analyze the effects of using AI and specific platforms. Some of these platforms have features that allow teachers to manually input content that they are teaching and monitor student comprehension progress. AI can automatically adapt to student progress by slowing the pace down or speeding up content based on student understanding. A limitation is that the platforms given are untested in actual classes, so there is no way of knowing if teachers and students like using them.

Analyzing the benefits and drawbacks of academic aspects for students is vital to see every possible angle. The article "An Inquiry into the Use of Generative AI and Its Implications in Education" (2024) by Eun Ok Baek and Romina Villaflor Wilson researches the benefits and drawbacks of AI and how the technology can be used effectively in the classroom for personalized learning and increased efficiency on assignments. This study involved a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, as the researchers explore data sets from other articles while offering their own input on the use of AI. A limitation of the source is that it only presents surface-level ideas for practical applications for AI, and the ideas are untested in the field. This research found that AI can perform tasks with a human-like feel to it. This means that given the right information about students' educational needs, AI can help with essays and mathematical skills, and can introduce a more creative way to learn. Not every student learns the same way: one student learns effectively by listening to a lecture, while another needs to learn hands-on,

and another needs to be shown visuals. Using AI can introduce and encourage the love of learning back into the classroom.

The article "Introduction to AI Program for Educators" (2024) by Crisianee Berry, Xi Lin, and Phyllis Broughton highlights a plan for setting up professional development courses for educators to learn how to use AI effectively. This source used qualitative data as the researchers rely on the opinions of educators. The only limitation is that the courses are only in theory and haven't been approved for educators yet. The researchers also surveyed educators in their area and found that the majority are open and willing to learn about AI and use it in their classes. AI in the classroom can handle administrative tasks for educators, which allows them to spend more one-on-one time with their students. This may seem like a minuscule amount of time, but in the end, it can make all the difference. If educators are busy worrying about all the other tasks they must get done by the end of the day, then they are not there with their students, giving them their full attention. How can students be expected to learn from educators who are too overwhelmed to teach?

As with every new technology, there are some downsides to AI in some respects. The article "Ethics and AI: Concerns about AI Use in K-12 Education Go Beyond Just 'Cheating'" (2024) by Sonal Patel lays out the ethical concerns about AI regarding data leaks, algorithmic bias, and equitable access to AI. These concerns are then countered with ways to solve them, and the author ultimately supports using AI in schools. This study involves qualitative data as it relied on arguments and counterarguments regarding AI. A limitation is that the solutions given are untested in a classroom, so there is no way of knowing if they are viable. This source acknowledges a

potential counterargument and offers a rebuttal, explaining why the technology is a good thing for students.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

My preliminary research focused on sources found on the Tarleton Library Database, which were supplemented by an online Google Form that I curated and sent to Education majors here at Tarleton. Data collected from the Google Form is all qualitative, as the questions require those who filled out the form to discuss their opinions of AI in the classroom. I asked for participants' names in order to keep the answers straight for each response; their names will not be used for any other purpose. Questions involve their views on using AI in their future classrooms, how AI could effectively be used, the grades/subjects for AI use, and the practical student use of AI. I chose to do a survey rather than an interview because this way I can reach more future teachers to get their point of view on the subject. Unfortunately, my sample pool was not as large as I had hoped it would be, but I was still able to reach a handful of future educators. By the time they enter their own classroom, AI might be a prevalent resource they have to learn to use.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

My initial goal was to get a sample pool of at least 15 people, but I was only able to get eight people to fill out my survey. I used the convenience sampling method by emailing some education majors the survey. When asked if participants thought it was a good idea to use AI in the classroom, 75% answered yes, while 25% answered no. The people who said no reasoned that AI use would be tempting to cheat and decrease critical thinking skills. Those who said yes said that

it could help with brainstorming, studying, understanding content, and helping educators build lesson plans. 62.5% of respondents determined that AI should be used in all subjects, the lowest resulting subject being math at 25%. When asked if they thought students would use AI strictly to cheat, 62.5% said no, while 37.5% said yes. Again, those who disagreed said that AI is tempting, and the students who coast through class would definitely use it to cheat. Those who agreed said that AI can increase comprehension and help students get started on assignments, namely essays.

The next question asked their opinion on how educators could effectively use AI in their classrooms. Answers varied from creating lesson plans, presenting content in a new way, designing more engaging content, and making assignments. Answers ranged from upper-level elementary to high school students when asked what grade levels AI should be used for. The final question asked if they would use AI in their future classrooms; 75% said yes, while 25% said no. The participants who said no reasoned that AI is unacceptable for use in their classrooms, and it feels wrong to use. Those who said yes said AI would help to personalize activities for each student, and it is good for outside-of-class tutoring assignments, brainstorming, and research purposes.

These findings suggest that more future educators are open to using AI than those who are not. There is, however, a real fear that students will continue to use AI only to cheat, but if implemented correctly by administrators, it would be just a learning tool. This sample pool reinforced the consensus, AI has noticeable problems, but more teachers than not are open to using the technology in their classrooms. Doing this survey, I didn't expect to have a 100% success rate for educators being open to using AI in their classes. However,

75% of respondents are open to using AI and feel that there are ways for students to use the technology ethically. This research answers how AI can effectively and responsibly be implemented into classes. Even though AI is not prevalent in schools currently, it would be no surprise if it is a staple in the educational field in the next five years.

V. DISCUSSION

With any survey, there is a risk of people not filling it out, especially if it is online. Eight people are not an ideal sample size; not enough of the population of future educators is being represented. Another weakness of the survey is how I worded some of the questions. Some respondents were confused and answered with "I don't know" or "I'm not sure" to the question of how AI could be effectively implemented. Since the sample pool is so small, the survey results may feel less impactful.

Nevertheless, the results of this survey prove that these future teachers are not scared of using AI to help them in their classrooms. There is a sense of concern about the ethical practice of AI, but there are ways to combat this problem. AI is not just contributing to the downfall of critical thinking; if used properly, it can expand thinking. There are, moreover, specific educational AI programs with safeguards that prevent cheating. I have observed a teacher using an AI program to help students come up with essay topics and research articles. The teacher turned on parameters to stop the program from writing the essay and keep it focused solely on helping with research. AI can even be programmed to accommodate each student's specific learning styles. There is a learning curve for both students and teachers, but the positives to using AI far outweigh the cons.

For further research, I recommend more experiments on how AI operates in actual classroom settings, rather than just theories of how it will perform. There is not enough foolproof evidence that AI does well under classroom pressure scenarios. The academic research I could find focuses on ways or ideas on how AI would function; there are not tests performed to see if these ideas would actually work. The educators surveyed are open to using the technology, but their opinions could change depending on the results of in-class AI experiments. It is imperative that AI can be thoroughly tested and any issues can be resolved before student comprehension and test scores are at risk.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

AI is a necessary and revolutionary tool that should be allowed in K-12 classrooms to boost student comprehension, test scores, and promote a more effective space for educators and students. This technology is not a predator coming to steal jobs away from educators; this is an asset to help them do their work more efficiently and allow them back into the classroom. One-on-one time with students and teachers is rapidly dwindling; this time can make all the difference to a student's understanding or being left behind in the class. There is no reason every student should not have the best education they could have; AI can help educators ensure that is possible. Personalized learning will be a monumental change for students. Gone could be the days of teachers struggling to reach each student. Society as a whole needs to realize that students are struggling in school, and it is not going to go away any time soon. AI is the future for the youth of America. It is time to allow its use in schools.

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The Change Trauma Brings: Understanding Sorrow

by Julia R. Carlton

In Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, readers are introduced to the character Sorrow. Sorrow is a servant who is given to Jacob Vaark by a sawyer, who had taken care of her after he and his family rescued her from a foundered ship. Sorrow is a quiet girl who speaks very little and has few friends. One of her closest friends is an imaginary girl named Twin who looks just like her. In the eyes of Sorrow, Twin is her only true friend, the only one who understands and comforts her. Any reader can appreciate the tragedy and pathos of Sorrow's hard life, but to understand this complicated character fully, one must first understand post-traumatic stress disorder and dissociative identity disorder.

Early in the story, Sorrow suffers a considerable amount of trauma. It is implied that her family, or at least her father, is dead and that she has been raped multiple times since she was eleven years old. Due to this trauma, she is very quiet. Not many people trust her, and she has few friends, if any. Due to how she acts, many of the people she meets treat her as a lesser human being. Sorrow, upon arriving at Jacob Vaark's

farm, is briefly welcomed, but no one offers to help her even after they realize that she is pregnant. They assume that she is an immoral adolescent. When Sorrow seeks the advice of Lina, an American Indian worker on the farm, who is suspicious of Sorrow and how she acts, Lina does not offer any help or wisdom to this eleven-year-old girl, who has been raped by the sawyer's sons. Instead, when Sorrow gives birth to her baby, Lina takes it, puts it in a sack and places it in the widest part of the river. Sorrow is not allowed to hold her baby even though it is probably dead. Her trauma and lack of trust in people increases from this incident alone. Her grief does not get closure due to her being unable to hold her baby and

accept its death, and as a result, "although Lina helped her through childbirth, Sorrow never forgot the baby breathing water every day, every night, down all the streams of the world." From this point onward, Sorrow does not trust Lina, and the few friendships that she has made on the farm deteriorate. To make matters worse, the friendships that Sorrow tries to form are shattered by Lina, who sees Sorrow as a bad omen on the farm because all the Vaark's infants die after Sorrow arrives. Because no one is friends with Sorrow due to the control Lina has on the farm, she relies on her friendship with Twin, thus isolating her further from society and reality.

I would argue that, considering all that Sorrow has experienced, she is likely suffering from what we would call post-traumatic stress disorder, commonly known as PTSD. While on the ship, Sorrow saw many dead bodies floating in the water and suffered feelings of hopelessness. Because her family died on this ship, it is unknown how long she was on it before the sawyer found her. Sorrow, when questioned by the sawyer and his wife, appears to have buried her memories on purpose: "when they asked her name, Twin whispered NO, she shrugged her shoulders and found that a convenient gesture for the other information she could not or pretended not to remember." Sorrow decides that it is better to leave the past behind and follow Twin's advice instead of telling the truth about her circumstances. It may partly be that she does not know how to express what she has seen, or that she has no wish to talk about it. According to Lauren Krouse, one of the symptoms of PTSD is "trying to avoid thinking or talking about the event." Sorrow does not want to revisit the memories that she endured, and there are many that she likely

buried and forgot because of the trauma she endured at such a young age.

Sorrow also seems to be "told" by Twin, her imaginary friend, not to tell the sawyer what occurred. Sorrow possibly has dissociative identity disorder, also known as DID, for Twin seems to be more than an imaginary friend. Twin encapsulates and seemingly controls Sorrow in a way. She appears to be the stronger, easily angered, daredevil version of Sorrow. Early on, Sorrow follows everything that Twin tells her to do and clings to Twin when the people around her talk to her or order her about. When Sorrow tries to touch Florens' braids, for instance, Twin intervenes. "But Twin stopped her, leaning close to Sorrow's face, crying 'Don't! Don't!'" (146). In this one interaction, readers get a glimpse of Twin's jealousy, anger, and her fear of losing Sorrow's attention, which she has had ever since Sorrow's ship foundered. That, crucially, is when the two met. All the people on the ship had been lost at sea or drowned, and Sorrow, at only eleven-years-old, was by herself on the ship. Sorrow was alone, moreover, for a long time before the sawyer found her. She had seen dead bodies and almost died herself. Milissa Kaufman writes that, "in contrast to PTSD stemming from a single event that happened in adulthood, DID is associated with repeated traumatic events during critical developmental periods in early childhood." Sorrow, to be sure, suffered multiple traumatic events when she was young, so she would be at risk of developing DID. Twin first appears underneath the surgeon's hammock on the ship after everyone but Sorrow had gone. Sorrow, seeing and talking to no one for a long time, probably formed this other identity to help her cope with the isolation and trauma that she experienced at a young age.

Throughout the book, Sorrow shows many signs that she could have dissociative identity disorder. Mudit Saxena writes that the main symptoms of dissociative identity disorder include "memory loss, dissociation, changing identities with distinct personalities, memory issues such as amnesia and foreign objects, depersonalization, derealization, unexpected emotional changes, physical sensations without apparent causes, and behaviors such as hearing voices." Many of these symptoms plague Sorrow: she experiences memory loss, for instance, after the sawyer rescues her from the ship. She scarcely remembers parts of her life on the ship, including items and people. At one point, Sorrow even claims that she has never lived on land. However, she mentions that there are memories that she does not remember, so one questions if this fact can be true since she went through so much trauma and likely does not remember living on land. Sorrow mentions hearing the voice of Twin calling her by her real name and asking her to play with her, which shows her inability to trust anyone with anything, including her real name, except for Twin.

At the end of her chapter, Sorrow gives birth to a daughter, and Twin is noticeably absent. It is likely that Sorrow, who names herself Complete, now feels whole and does not need Twin as a friend and personality anymore. Her daughter has healed her by making her feel like a real person, and she is now who she will spend time with and care for. She now wants to be what no one on the farm has been to her: a loving, caring mother.

Sorrow went through a tremendous amount of pain that no eleven-year-old should go through. She developed PTSD and DID but pushed through her misfortunes and survived, never giving up, even when she was mistreated by others and

looked down upon. Although her disorders changed her and caused others to see her as a lesser human being, she chose to continue on and try to heal from the wounds that people and chance inflicted upon her.

Sorrow's diagnosis matters because it turns this story into a cautionary tale: if untreated, PTSD can lead to the downfall of a person's personality and who they are or could be. It is also important to realize that DID is a real disorder that is a result of trauma and a lack of being around people. When readers accept that Sorrow probably has both DID and PTSD, their perception of her changes. While she appears to be mentally insane, she likely has a condition that is familiar to many readers today.

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Can Animal Slaughter Be Humane? A Reply to the Critics

Madilyn Conner

Seth Millstein's recent article, "How Slaughterhouses Work: The Harsh Reality of Meat Production," portrays the meat industry in a negative light. He explains how animals are processed in slaughterhouses and focuses on the suffering that they may experience, along with the hard work conditions that employees may face. Millstein's writing makes slaughter seem inherently cruel, vicious, and unethical. While the concerns that Millstein raises are important, I would argue that slaughter is not automatically inhumane. When strict laws, proper training, and modern technology is used, slaughter can be done in a way that minimizes pain and suffering for animals.

First, it is important to understand what "humane slaughter" actually means. Humane slaughter is the process of killing animals for food while causing the animals little to no pain or fear. In the United States, the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act was put in place by the USDA in 1958. This law requires that animals be made unconscious before they are killed. This is usually done through methods like captive-bolt

stunning or electrical stunning. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), when these methods are done correctly, animals lose consciousness very quickly and do not feel any pain while doing so. This shows that there are scientific standards in place to protect all animals.

Millstein talks about situations in which animals are not treated properly or slaughterhouses move too quickly, causing mistakes. These examples are very serious and should be addressed. However, these problems are in specific facilities with specific workers. With that being said, the videos that he provides do not mean that slaughter itself is cruel. Every

industry has cases in which the rules were broken. That does not mean that the system cannot work correctly. Instead of assuming slaughter is always inhumane, the focus should be on better enforcement of laws and better training for workers.

Modern slaughterhouses have also improved because of research on animal behavior. Temple Grandin, an animal scientist, helped design systems that reduce stress in animals before slaughter. For example, curved chutes and solid white walls help keep animals calm, because "they help prevent distractions and fear" (Grandin). These changes are based on science and have widely been adopted. Reducing stress is not only better for the animals, it also improves the quality of the meat. When animals are extremely stressed before slaughter, their bodies release stress hormones that can negatively affect muscle tissue, leading to tougher meat. This gives producers another reason to handle animals calmly and humanely. Grandin's work shows that humane treatment and product quality can go hand in hand to keep our animals safe and stress free.

In addition to better facility design, there are also inspection systems in place to monitor how animals are treated. Federal inspectors from the USDA are present in slaughterhouses to make sure that humane handling rules are being followed. If animals are not properly stunned or are being handled roughly, facilities can face penalties or even shutdowns. While enforcement is not perfect, these systems show that animal welfare is taken seriously at a legal level. The goal in these facilities is to prevent unnecessary suffering, not ignore it.

I also want to mention that humane slaughter focuses on minimizing suffering at the moment of death. Critics often argue that any killing of animals is wrong, but from a practical

standpoint, the key issue is whether the animal experiences prolonged pain. “When stunning is performed correctly, the animal becomes unconscious almost immediately” (AVMA). This means that it does not feel the cutting or bleeding that follows. If death happens quickly and without awareness, it cannot accurately be described as torture or cruelty. The emphasis should remain on improving these methods and making sure they are consistently applied.

Another issue that Millstein raises is the treatment of workers. Slaughterhouse jobs can be physically and emotionally difficult. This is an important concern, and workers deserve safe conditions and fair pay. I agree with his statement that “better worker treatment can actually improve animal welfare” because less stressed and trained employees are more likely to follow proper procedures. Improving conditions for workers and animals can happen at the same time.

It is also important to look at the bigger picture. Many people rely on meat as a source of protein, iron, and Vitamin B12. While plant-based diets work for some people, they are not realistic or accessible for everyone. Philosopher Peter Singer argues that “reducing suffering is what matters most when thinking about animal ethics.” If slaughter can be done in a way that greatly reduces suffering, then eating meat is not unethical. The key issue is how the animals are treated before slaughter, not after.

And many farms and meat producers are moving toward more ethical practices because consumers are demanding it. Consumers want to see labels such as “Certified Humane” or “Cruelty Free.” There are other welfare certifications that require farms and slaughterhouses to meet specific standards for animal care. When consumers choose products from

companies that follow higher welfare guidelines, it encourages the entire industry to improve. Change often happens gradually, and consumer awareness plays a big part in pushing companies to maintain humane practices.

Eliminating slaughter entirely is simply not a realistic solution in the current food system. Billions of people around the world depend on animal agriculture for income and nutrition. Instead of focusing only on ending meat production, it may be more practical and effective to focus on reform. By improving regulations, investing in technology, and holding facilities accountable, society can reduce suffering in a meaningful way. The system can be improved, and humane slaughter is an example of progress within an existing industry.

In the end, Millstein's article highlights real problems in the meat industry, but it does not prove that slaughter is always inhumane. Laws like the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, scientific guidelines from the AVMA, and innovations from experts like Temple Grandin show that animals can be killed with no pain when proper methods are used. The solution is not to condemn slaughter, a gesture that, in the real world, accomplishes nothing, but to demand stronger enforcement and continued improvements. When done correctly, slaughter can be humane, and society should focus on making sure that those standards are consistently met.

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The Enduring Cost of War: Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives*

by Alexandra Gonzalez

After World War II ended, millions of American servicemen came home, hoping to pick up their lives where they left off. But as director William Wyler shows in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), coming home was sometimes just the start of a whole new set of problems. The movie follows three veterans, Fred Derry, Al Stephenson, and Homer Parrish, who are all dealing with the aftermath of war in different ways. Wyler's story is not really about what happens on the battlefield, but about how tough it is to go back to "normal" life. The film honestly explores the emotional, financial, and relationship struggles these men face, and it still feels relevant today.

During that period, Hollywood usually made war movies that celebrated heroes and happy endings. Wyler's film was one of the first big movies to show how much World War II messed people up on the inside. For example, Fred Derry, who used to be a bomber captain, now has nightmares and feels totally lost trying to find his place in civilian life. Scenes where Fred looks disconnected in crowds or cannot sleep

show how the war sticks with him, making it obvious that coming home doesn't magically fix everything (Cook 16). The supporting characters are used cleverly to expand on these ideas. For instance, Fred's wife, Marie, represents the segment of society that struggled or even refused to understand the realities of returning soldiers. She married Fred during the excitement and glamour of wartime, but she quickly loses patience when confronted with the harsh economic and emotional difficulties he brings home. Their failed marriage sharpens the film's critique of unrealistic expectations placed on veterans and how people, even loved ones, can be unwilling to make necessary adjustments. In

contrast, Al's daughter, Peggy, stands out as a character who truly listens and offers meaningful support to Fred. Her empathy provides him with a sense of validation he cannot find elsewhere, emphasizing how crucial genuine social support is during difficult transitions. His struggles are a reminder that what happens after the fighting ends can be just as hard as the war itself.

The film also talks a lot about what it calls a "financial reality check" for veterans. This is clear in the scenes where Fred is working at the drugstore. It is hard to watch him go from being a decorated captain who flew B-17 bombers to someone who must take orders from customers at a soda fountain. You can see the frustration in his face and the way he carries himself: he looks out of place and almost embarrassed to be there. This shows that even though he had important responsibilities in the air, the civilian world just sees him as an unskilled worker who must start from the bottom again. Fred goes from managing expensive planes to barely making minimum wage. It is a major letdown for him, since the skills that he learned in the military do not seem to count for much at home. This was a real fear for lots of returning soldiers after the war. The idea that the skills and experience they gained would not get them very far in regular jobs (Cook 18). Fred's story shows that the "good life" many veterans expected was a lot harder to find.

Besides emotional and financial problems, the film does not shy away from the physical costs of war. Homer Parrish, played by actual WWII veteran Harold Russell, lost both his hands and now uses hooks instead. The movie does a good job showing that Homer is not just dealing with his injury, he also has to deal with how people look at him and treat him differently, even his girlfriend, Wilma. The scene where

Homer takes off his hooks in front of her is emotionally powerful and gives viewers a real sense of what disabled veterans go through every day (Gerber 555). Wilma's calm acceptance is also powerful; she never looks away, even as Homer braces for rejection. The scene communicates something deeper about what it means to love and support another person: it is about facing uncomfortable truths, not escaping from them (Gerber 562). As one viewer said, Homer's story helps you understand "what disabled veterans must face" (Gerber 561).

The film also shows how hard it is for veterans to fit back into family life. Even though their families are physically there, there is a huge emotional gap because the veterans have seen things their loved ones cannot possibly understand. For example, Al Stephenson comes home to a family that feels changed and distant, while Fred's marriage falls apart because his wife cannot relate to what he has been through. He feels like a stranger in his own house, and he relies on drinking just to get through the social pressure of being "back to normal." It shows that coming home is not just about showing up, it is about trying to belong in a world that did not stop moving while they were gone. Half the struggle for these veterans is figuring out how to reconnect with the people they love, and that can be just as tough as starting a new job (Cook 20).

What makes *The Best Years of Our Lives* stand out from other old war movies is just how honest it is (Cook 19). It does not try to pretend everything was perfect once the war was over. Instead, it focuses on the everyday problems that many veterans faced, things lots of people may have tried to ignore, but were definitely real for those who lived them (Gerber 570). The truth is that challenges like these have not gone

away. Even today, veterans struggle with trauma and finding their place once they leave the military.

In the end, *The Best Years of Our Lives* matters because it does not gloss over the hard parts of coming home. William Wyler shows that the real price of war is not just what happens on the battlefield, but in the long, difficult process of rebuilding your life. By following Fred, Al, and Homer, the film gives an honest look at what veterans deal with and reminds us to have empathy for their struggles. The legacy of *The Best Years of Our Lives* is significant, both culturally and historically. Earning seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, the film was celebrated not just for its artistry but for its social significance. Even today, it is recognized as one of the most honest and moving explorations of life after war ("The Best Years of Our Lives"). Its impact can be seen in the way later films address topics like PTSD, disability, and the complicated process of reintegration. Wyler's focus on the challenges facing ordinary people, not just the celebrated heroes, helped push Hollywood in a more honest, human direction. Ultimately, the film argues that the consequences of war reach far beyond the battlefield, and that real healing requires compassion, patience, and, above all, understanding.

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The Herald of a New Social Order: Chaucer and Meritocracy

by Andrew Kitchens

The Middle English era that readers encounter in Chaucer is a time in which society is being fundamentally reshaped by the emergence of a middle class. Previously, society had consisted of three estates: the nobility, the clergy, and the laborers. However, the Black Death ravaged Europe and led to cracks appearing in the three estates, particularly the nobility. These cracks were soon filled by commoners who had themselves acquired land and capital, paving the way for upward social mobility. Chaucer himself is a product of this mobility, as his father was a successful businessman who could afford to send Chaucer to a noble's estate. During his time there, he would travel extensively and encounter a vast array of people. Given his upbringing, it's no surprise that Chaucer would champion the ideas of a meritocracy in his works. Through his most influential work, *The Canterbury Tales,* Chaucer makes it clear that the three-estate social order should be cleared out to make way for a meritocracy. He does this through the framing of the tales, the character traits of the pilgrims, and the "Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale."

The Canterbury Tales is told from the perspective of a narrator that is a stand-in for Chaucer. In the opening lines of the story, Chaucer heralds both the new era and the start of the pilgrimage by proclaiming, "When that April with his shoures soote / The drought of March hath pierced to the roote" (1-2). Spring is the season of growth and renewal, so it is seemingly deliberate that Chaucer chose to start the tales by using the April showers to wash away the three estates and Spring to usher in the pilgrimage that will lead to meritocracy. Chaucer doubles down on this change from one era to the next by having the pilgrims compete with one another. Where the three estates system would see the twenty-nine pilgrims never

interact with one another, the pilgrimage forces them into proximity to one another. Not only are they in close proximity to each other, they are also being judged in a competition that is based purely on merit, not station. This merit-based competition is already a break from tradition, and having it occur during a pilgrimage where all parties involved are willing to change and are united by a common cause is a signifier of the changing social order. Yet another signifier of this changing order can be found within the number of pilgrims present. There are twenty-nine pilgrims (five of which are part of the new mercantile/middle class), Chaucer's character, and the innkeeper. This brings the total to thirty-one characters total. During Chaucer's era, the power structure was upheld by tradition and the teachings of the church, so numbers would likely have been interpreted according to their biblical significance. In the book of Revelation, the perfect kingdom of the Abrahamic god is said to have twenty-four seats around it. In the book of Genesis, the Abrahamic god was said to have created the world in six days, with one day of rest. If the three estates were the perfect old-world order with their twenty-four pilgrim representatives, then the six middle class characters can be seen as responsible for ushering in a new world, and the one mediating character can be seen as the authority that solidifies the new meritocratic order.

In addition to the narrator and the structure, the traits of the pilgrims as described by Chaucer also suggest that the three estates system is under duress. This can be seen in two ways: Chaucer either describes the characters in terms of their merit, or they appear to be acting in ways unbecoming of their social station. The first character that is introduced is the Knight, and he would be the highest ranked member of the

pilgrimage under the three estates system. However, Chaucer's character refers to the Knight's "Chivalry, / Trouth and home, freedom and courtesy," not his noble birth or social standing (45-46). The second character Chaucer introduces is the Squire, who spends so much time training his skills that "He slept no more than dooth a nightingale" (98). The skills that he chooses to improve are not the warrior skills that spurred his father to prominence however, but they are ones that would gain him favor in court. The contrast between the Knight's skills and the Squire's skills indicate that the priorities have changed from one generation to the next, and the fact that they both have to hone their skills indicates that even those of high birth are now being judged on their merits. In contrast to these noble characters, the members of the church are portrayed as having morals that are maligned with their institutionally given station. The Monk, for example, was "An outrider that loved venerye" or hunting, which was generally a hobby reserved for wealthy noblemen (166). This characterization doubles as an example of a religious character being morally questionable and a character trying to act beyond the limits of their station. Other examples include the Friar that sells indulgences and exploits the poor, the Pardoner that lines his own pockets, and the Nun who imitates the mannerisms of the nobility. The one exception to this ensemble of religious characters who are discontent or disgracing their station is the Parson, who perfectly embodies why meritocracy should be employed because he is simultaneously the lowest ranking religious character in terms of wealth, but he is the most respected and has the most moral merit because he genuinely follows the teachings of Christ. The laborers serve as a middle ground between these two groups, as they are judged on both their merits and their

morals. However, they do not have the same expectation of attaining high skill that the nobility has or the expectation that they be good moral agents like the clergy has. This allows them to truly shine as individuals worthy of respect because of their deeds as opposed to being due respect in spite of their deeds, sharply contrasting the three-estates culture that Chaucer wants to leave behind. A few examples of this are the Manciple, who can't read yet can outsmart lawyers; the Reeve, who manages an estate despite his low birth; and the Wife of Bath, who makes better textiles than the leading textile centers of the time. Additionally, the characters in this three-estate category are given the biggest personalities and the most lines by Chaucer, showing that in a contest of tale telling merit, they would beat out their upper-class counterparts.

The best example of this would be "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale." The opening lines of this tale make the notion that meritocracy is preferable to the three estates impossible to miss: "experience, though no authority / Were in this world, is right enough for me" (1-2). From there, the Wife of Bath criticizes the current societal order by offering a different, arguably more valid interpretation of the teachings of Christ through the lines, "men may divine and glosen up and doun / But well I woot, express, withouten lie / God bade us for to wax and multiply" (26-28). These lines directly challenge the current patriarchal order that is enforced by men who are themselves inexperienced outside of texts and outdated ideologies and are convincing enough to make even the most devout of characters consider that merit may indeed triumph over station. The Wife of Bath continues to criticize harmful interpretations of the Bible that exclusively serve men until she arrives at the topic of her husbands. She then

explains to the pilgrims that her perspective is valuable because her experience with five husbands of varying age, class, and ability in bed gives her authority that unmarried virgins are just not privy to. Chaucer devotes just as many lines to having the Wife of Bath criticize the current social order and establishing her authority as he does the prologue of the entire collection of tales, highlighting just how important these ideas are. Over the course of "The Wife of Bath's Tale," the Wife of Bath sticks to the idea that women should have authority over men and that people should be judged on their merits and not their station. Within the tale, a knight betrays the expected morality of his station by raping a young virgin. He then escapes the expected punishment because the king defers the decision of the knight's punishment to the queen. This is significant because it foreshadows the rest of the tale and reinforces the idea that women know best. The queen ultimately decides that the knight will have a chance to save himself not because he is of a high station, but through his own merits. Over the course of the tale, the knight tries to save himself by asking all sorts of women for the answer to the queen's question, but it's only when he encounters a much older, wiser woman that he gets a satisfactory answer. This reinforces the idea that experience trumps superficial ideas like class and beauty. When the tale finally concludes, it is with the knight learning to surrender authority to women, bringing the theme of the tale back to the idea that women under the three-estates system have no power, but under meritocracy they would thrive. This conclusion also signifies that the times are changing because the royalty is actively endorsing the usage of merit-based punishment and pardons.

The Canterbury Tales is often examined and taught as a kaleidoscopic view of what life was like during the middle era of British literature, but it is unlikely that Chaucer meant his work to be a mere record of daily life. Rather, this work was likely criticizing the current social order imposed by the church and the nobility from the perspective of a man who had risen beyond his own station in life, one who could clearly see the injustices wrought upon him and his fellow citizens by the old order. Indeed, Chaucer viewed himself as an active participant in the overhaul of the three-estate system, as he is represented by a character within *The Canterbury Tales*. Despite his character being written to be more detached than the other characters present, acting almost as a lens to view the story through rather than an active participant, his satirical analysis of the three-estates characters is the primary mechanism by which the social order is criticized in the tales. When readers approach *The Canterbury Tales* with this in mind, Chaucer's work changes from a silly record of daily life to a declaration by a common man that the three estates have outlived their purpose, and meritocracy is the only way forward.

Exposing the Devil: A Rhetorical Analysis

by Katie Reed

Child abuse is one of the most serious and heartbreaking problems affecting children today, and it can leave deep emotional and physical scars that last a lifetime. This abuse, which can also take the form of neglect, can be mental, physical, or emotional, and many cases go unnoticed. The film *Devil in the Family: The Fall of Ruby Franke* (2025) is a documentary about the Franke family, which brings a form of this abuse to light.

The Frankes formed a family blogging group on YouTube named the 8 Passengers. In their YouTube videos they come off as a happy, loving Mormon family that resides in Utah, with a loving mom and dad, but this was not the whole truth. In 2023, the mom, Ruby Franke, and her friend Jodi Hildebrant were arrested for child abuse, some of which is inadvertently documented in their videos. These videos showed the world some of her

young daughter's most personal and private experiences, one being her daughter going to the store and getting training bras for the first time. The daughter, of course, was very embarrassed by this as it was not something she wanted the public to see. Once, Ruby Franke posted a video in which her son Chad Franke gets his bed taken away for seven months, during which he was forced to sleep on a bean-bag chair. She took his bed away because he played a prank on his younger brother, Russell Franke. The film also shows her husband, Kevin Franke, talking about his ex-wife doing the unthinkable with Jodi

Hildebrant. In the film, the filmmakers use pathos through emotional interviews, disturbing footage, and the contrast between Ruby Franke's online person and her real-life actions to reveal the darker side of social media influencers and show how internet fame can hide abuse and manipulation.

The primary audience of the documentary is adults who are interested in true crime, family safety, and the darker side of social media culture. It especially appeals to viewers who followed *8 Passengers* or who are curious about what goes on behind the scenes of influencer families. It also targets people interested in how social media influencers gain power and how followers can be misled by curated content. The purpose of the documentary is to expose the abuse and manipulation behind Ruby Franke's online image and demonstrate how her extreme parenting beliefs led to real harm. *American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* claims that "often the severe emotional damage to abused children does not surface until adolescence or even later, when many abused children become abusing parents." That certainly applies to this case: no one found out about the abuse until Chad Franke and Sheri Franke spoke up about it and had this documentary created. Others, however, have warned about this danger. One recent article argues abusive behavior can be hard to spot, claiming that "neither family-of-origin nor current income was associated with mothers' or fathers' aggressive parenting behaviors"

(Greene et. al). This documentary responds directly to this issue by showing how Ruby Franke's carefully built personality hid a harmful reality. The film addresses how their teachings about obedience, discipline, and "family values" spiraled into child abuse. It provides context for the national outrage that followed Ruby Franke's arrest, which became a major event discussed across news outlets and social media platforms.

The documentary does not, however, fully present both sides of the argument. It focuses heavily on the victims, former viewers, and professionals who criticize Ruby Franke's actions. While this makes the story emotionally powerful, it leaves out Ruby Franke's perspective and the viewpoints of her remaining supporters. Instead of offering her the chance to defend herself, the documentary highlights the harm that she caused, using clips like "I'm not your friend; I'm your mother" (Lambert) to show her harsh parenting style. Because it does not give Ruby Franke or Jodi Hildebrandt any film time to explain themselves, it cannot be considered a fully balanced representation. There is a very clear bias against Ruby Franke, as she is portrayed almost entirely negatively. The documentary uses disturbing footage, emotional interviews, and dramatic narration to emphasize the abuse, which strengthens the message but limits neutrality. For example, the narrator states, "behind every smiling family video was a truth much darker than anyone expected" (Lambert), which frames Ruby Franke as

intentionally misleading. To provide a more complete perspective, the filmmakers could have included more interviews, statements, or documented explanations from Ruby Franke herself. They also could have added expert analysis from psychologists or legal representatives to create a more rounded understanding of the situation.

The primary appeal used to persuade audiences is pathos. This documentary relies heavily on emotional content to make viewers feel sympathy and concern for the children. The filmmakers use pathos through emotional interviews, such as when a former viewer says, “we thought we knew this family. We had no idea what was happening behind the camera” (Lambert). Disturbing footage includes clips of Ruby Franke harshly disciplining her kids, which makes the audience feel discomfort and urgency. The contrast between online perfection and real-life abuse, which is shown when the filmmakers juxtapose bright, cheerful vlog clips with police reports and victim statements, urges viewers to question the authenticity of social media. One expert in the film notes that “the online image became a shield, one that hid everything she didn’t want the world to see” (Lambert). Ethos is also present but is less dominant. The film uses interviews with police officers, reporters, and family safety experts to build credibility. When a detective claims that “what we walked into was far more severe than expected,” (Lambert) it strengthens the film’s authority. Logos reappears in factual evidence,

such as court documents, timelines, and descriptions of how long the abuse went on. The film shows charts and legal records to prove the severity of neglect and manipulation. Even though ethos and logos are used, pathos is the strongest and most memorable appeal. It is effective because it forces the audience to emotionally confront the abuse rather than just hear about it. The emotional weight keeps viewers engaged and encourages them to reflect on the dangers of idealizing influencers.

As a reviewer and watcher of this documentary, and a former viewer of the *8 Passengers* channel on YouTube, I was persuaded by the film's argument. It changed how I view family influencers online and made me more cautious about trusting content that appears to be "perfect." The documentary shows how easily harmful behavior can hide behind edited videos, sponsorships, and fan loyalty. It also made me aware of how important it is to question what we see on social media instead of assuming it represents the full truth. Overall, the documentary strengthened my belief that influencer culture needs more rules, transparency, and protection for children who appear online.

In conclusion, *Devil in the Family: The Fall of Ruby Franke* uses emotional storytelling, disturbing visuals, and the vivid contrast between Ruby Franke's online persona and her real behavior to expose the dangers of influencer culture. The filmmakers' heavy use of pathos makes the audience empathize deeply with the victims

and reconsider how easily social media can hide manipulation. By examining the film's audience, purpose, bias, and rhetorical strategies, it becomes clear that the documentary provides a powerful warning about trusting what we see online. Ultimately, it reveals how internet fame can mask abuse and encourages viewers to think more critically about influencer families.

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Three Poets, One Purpose: Social Reform in Victorian Britain

by Benjamin Norris

During the Victorian era, Great Britain underwent dramatic social and religious change, and this transformation is reflected in the poetry of the era, specifically the verses written by Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. One of the factors involved in this revolution was the growing tension between faith and doubt. It was an age of rapid scientific and industrial advancement, which led to increased skepticism in matters of religion. This would only create further division, and the Victorian era would become a period of questioning and change. In their works, each of the three poets discussed below defy the standards of their time, standing against the injustices that were normalized in their lifetimes.

I. Alfred Lord Tennyson: Wrestling with Loss

Alfred Lord Tennyson, commonly referred to as Tennyson, uses poetry to explore topics of grief and loss and wrestle with the traditional theory of evolution, which was being promoted by the scientists of Victorian Britain,

Tennyson himself being a very religious man. In this way, he was able to contribute to phenomenal social as well as religious change and provide fuel for the spiritual growth of his readers.

Grief is a widely observed topic in Tennyson's writing, especially in his poem entitled "In Memoriam. In fact, grief is specifically mentioned in this poem, and as the author delves into how grief feels, the poem acquires a visual dimension, which transcends emotion. This is most evident in the following lines:

Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.
In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold;
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more. (8-12)

Now, while it may not have contributed to societal change, this poem did indeed contribute to a change within Tennyson's own self, who was coming to terms with his age and his frail body.

Loss, similar to grief, is a very prevalent theme in Tennyson's writing. Tennyson utilizes grief similarly to loss, to find God in his negative emotions. This is backed up by Louis Markos of the Christian Research Institute, who states that Tennyson "shares his emotion-based, rather than reason-based, testimony of how he found God in the midst of grief, and reworks natural selection so that it offers a vision of physical and spiritual progress and perfection" (4). With this in mind, Tennyson is able to reinforce the mindset, despite the troubles and anxieties of the Victorian era, that one can find God even in the direst of circumstances. This is not to say that the Bible does not already state that one should work to find God in direct situations, but this is to say that Tennyson emphasizes that mindset.

In his wrestling with evolution, Tennyson seeks to debunk those already existing theories of evolution. According to PBS.org, "in one of Victorian Britain's most popular poems, Alfred Lord Tennyson envisions a world in which natural laws, rather than God, govern life on Earth. He is appalled by what scientists like Darwin are beginning to see in nature—a relentless struggle between creatures, where individual life is of little value" (1). With this goal in mind, Tennyson is able to

challenge the social norms being established by Charles Darwin.

II. ROBERT BROWNING: AN ACTIVIST OF HIS TIME

Robert Browning was one of the more prominent writers of his age, being influenced by writers who stretched the boundaries of poetry at the time like Mary Shelly. In his writings, Browning often speaks out against the ideologies of Victorian Britain. His realism recreates the urban living conditions of Victorian Britain, denounces the rules and ideologies of modern-day religions, and criticizes the patriarchal society upheld by Victorian-era values. With these aspects of his works, along with his already existing liberal point of view on society in both a moralistic and political aspect, Robert Browning is able to be an advocate for social and religious change in an era when it was needed most.

Browning's integration of the urban living conditions of Victorian Britain is concurrent with his desire to immerse the reader in the art which he was attempting to formulate. This is evident in his poem entitled "Fra Lippo Lippi," in which Lippi, a friar, tells the story of how he became a monk of the church. He also explains his reasons for doing so, these being out of pure desperation. According to an article by jgilliam1411 published through Wordpress, "Lippi explains to the auditors that his parents died and left him on the streets to fend for himself. He lived on the streets for a year or two until a monk found him. Although he was only eight years old and did not understand that he was making a life choice of celibacy, Lippi, desperate for food and shelter, [submits] to the vows of monkhood (1)." Through his depiction of the reality of desperation in the living situation of the time, Browning is able to bring awareness to the decrepit state that many were in

as well as the measures that they would have to take just to find something as essential as their next meal or shelter. In his writings, Browning, being a more progressive writer of the Victorian era, speaks against the mandates and rules that religion, specifically Christianity, puts on people. According to an article on Victorianweb.org, "many of his poems approach the problem of faith and the nature of man's religious aspirations, but whenever we think that he has offered us a resolution, a second reading will show that resolution undercut or made suspect. And on one occasion, much later in life, when he was asked if he considered himself a Christian, Browning is supposed to have answered with 'a thunderous 'NO!'" Browning makes it apparent that he challenged the rules that Christianity establishes for its followers. Challenges of this sort would lead to further questioning of Christianity's rules by its own followers, creating even more of a divide between religion and the scientific advancement of the time.

Coinciding with Browning's progressivism, he actively spoke against the patriarchal norms of his time. His preaching against the patriarchy is especially evident in his poem "Porphyria," which explores controversial topics, such as the autonomy of women, illicit sex, and more. In this poem, he speaks of his partner, a woman named Porphyria, who embodies the very things that the patriarchy stood against. He speaks as if she does not feel any pain, making her into an inanimate object. However, to fully understand the meaning of this poem, the reader needs to realize that Browning chose this poem's name because, according to an article on Medium.com, "Porphyria is the name of a disease which is why Browning considered it to be fit to be used as a symbol of all that society tried to eradicate."

III. ELIZABETH BROWNING: A PUSH FOR REFORM

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was the wife of Robert Browning, though her literary reputation surpassed her husband's. In fact, she held a wide culture of followers in England and the United States, with visitors from Florence even coming to her home. However, like her husband, she had very liberal views, at least for the time. Her writing addresses many social issues and calls for reform, as well as the abolition of the slave trade in America and child labor in the mines and mills of England. In her writings, Elizabeth Browning is able to promote social reform and awaken her readers to what is going on in the world and why they should stand against evil. In particular, Browning criticizes the American slave trade. Her poem "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" gives the impression that Browning is speaking on behalf of all the slave women of America. However, from a modern perspective, the poem raises some concerns, for it seems that Browning does not question the roots of oppression but tries to look at it from the outside. In fact, rather than asserting the right of a slave woman to speak, she aims her speech at the male listeners. However, it is important to realize that, according to jstordaily.org, "in a way, this makes sense—after all, Browning aimed her work at the United States, where women were not allowed to vote until 1920" (3). So, while she does make a move that may seem controversial today, she attempts to make her speech heard. Instead of appealing to women, whose political power was limited, she does her best to reach the men who could actually make a change in that era of American society, pushing for a truly free and equal society in America.

In conjunction with her opinions on slavery, she writes about the injustices of child labor in the mines and mills in

England. In her poem "The Cry of the Children," Browning protests against the child labor laws in the United Kingdom—or rather the lack of them. These child labor laws had become a very prominent issue as more factories opened and the need for cheap labor grew. According to an article on Wordpress.com, "'The Cry of the Children' advocates for child labor reform by utilizing multiple rhetorical appeals, most prominently pathos, to evoke both empathy and sympathy from the reader. Poetic techniques such as point of view and imagery mesh with these persuasive elements to create an aesthetic that complements the content." With these elements, Browning can sway not just her readers, but also those important figures who can make a change in English society by passing child labor laws and saving her nation's future generation.

IV. CONCLUSION

These three Victorian poets were kick starters for social reform in an era that, though comparatively prosperous, tolerated much evil, injustice, and violations of rights that should not have been infringed upon. Although these poems were a small start in their efforts to change the existing system and a society that normalized evil solely for the sake of profit, completely disregarding the fragile entity that is human life, these authors continue to make their poetry contribute to change beyond the grave, as many modern readers still find themselves moved by these works of literature, as they see the world regressing, reverting back to a time when evil and injustice were condoned and life disregarded.

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LAND AND SOUL: SETTING IN *HENRY IV, PART I*

by Lesley Lara

THE SETTING SHAPES A STORY'S TONE AND HOW ITS themes are delivered. An inappropriate setting can cloud the author's message, but an appropriate setting carries the message even further. In Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, the setting, besides creating mood and conflict, reflects the characters' situations and personalities as well as the hierarchal differences between characters.

The separate plots in Eastcheap and the courts, when compared, highlight class differences, demonstrate how those different classes handle certain themes, and produce a sort of situational irony. The most notable division between the two classes is how the dialogue structure changes depending on whether one is in Eastcheap or with nobility. With nobility, the speakers converse in iambic pentameter while those in Eastcheap speak in prose. Language, arguably, is one of the main factors that make all humans equal, but in this case, a syntactic barrier forms between the average person and the wealthy. However, exceptions to this rule in the play raise questions about these inequalities. Hal, for instance, speaks in

iambic pentameter while in Eastcheap. The most significant case is when he addresses the audience about his intentions to "imitate the sun" and restore his reputation with a grand gesture (I.ii.204). Falstaff, on the other hand, speaks in prose despite being among the nobility during the battle between King Henry and Hotspur's forces. A pessimistic reading of these two instances would say that no matter how one has changed, or where one is, there is no forgetting origins: Hal will still be a prince even when lounging around in Eastcheap, and Falstaff will still be a "lowly" thief even if he is on a sacred battlefield with other high-class men. The setting can emphasize those differences—or criticize them. A more

optimistic analysis suggests that nobility and commoners are equal no matter their origins or lineage. Falstaff is speaking prose, yet he is battling on the same field as the iambic pentameter-speaking nobles, and vice versa. Hal is speaking in iambic pentameter but is in prose-speaking Eastcheap. The fluctuation of language and its distribution of authority based on the setting strengthen the symbiotic relationship between the characters and the surrounding world. These same settings can also serve as a mirror.

Similar plotlines repeat in different settings, for example, Hotspur's betrayal of King Henry and Hal's betrayal of Falstaff (it is important to note that both are father-son type relationships). Hotspur, technically, "steals" from King Henry by not giving his prisoners back to the monarchy, and Hal literally steals from Falstaff. The forgiveness in Eastcheap between Hal and Falstaff does not happen in the courts with King Henry and Hotspur, reinforcing the themes of the weakness of these societal constructs between the rich and poor as the poor were more generous with each other than the nobles who are supposed to be honorable. Another key situation, possibly more important than the parallel betrayals, is Falstaff's and Hal's imitation of a court proceeding within Eastcheap. Falstaff, a man with no royal lineage, takes simple objects around him and portrays himself as king: "This chair / shall be my state, this dagger my scepter, and this / cushion my crown" (II. iv.389-91). Wealth is the only observable difference between the real court and this makeshift one. A plain chair and a cushion can become a throne and a crown as it is the wisdom of a man that makes him a worthy king, not the material, and the scepter can only be as dangerous or as helpful as the person wielding it. Then the situation changes again, with Hal imitating his father and Falstaff imitating Hal,

marking Hal as either a truer king than his father or just as material. This scene additionally builds on how Falstaff knows Hal more than the king—giving him more of a right to be Hal's father than the king because, again, actions establish a person's character, not the material. Anyone can act as a king: a drunkard man, a rebellious prince, or a man with the title of king, but titles are not enough to be treated as one. It all returns to personality and will.

The setting frames these differences, but it also shows a character's true nature: how characters speak of the setting and how they treat it tells the reader much about their personality and values. King Henry's tired and guilty speech about England is the first illustration of this: "No more the thirsty entrance of this soil / Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood" (I.i.5-6). To King Henry, England is a feminine figure needing care since "trenching war" has hurt her, which hints at the king's respect for his surroundings or perhaps indicates that he values land more than his fellow people (I.i.7). He sees other lands in much the same way. At one point, he talks about planning a crusade and taking "those holy fields" from the "pagans" (I.i.24). Instead of seeing the setting as something to protect, these lines suggest that he is a sort of protector. The opposite is true with Hotspur, though. For him, the environment is less personal and emotional, and more of a property to rule. During the scene in which Hotspur and his allies plan to split the land after they take it, he speaks casually of changing the river so "it shall not wind with such a deep indent / To rob me of so rich a bottom here" (III.i.108-9). Land is not sacred on its own for Hotspur, it is an object to barter, change, "rob." It is something he does not have to respect if it impedes his goals. Because of these views, the setting characterizes him as a man willing to change the very

Earth for his ambition, showing his domineering attitude. One character simultaneously manifests the respect and ambition displayed King Henry and Hotspur: Glendower. "At my nativity / The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes, / of burning cressets, and at my birth / The frame and huge foundation of the earth / shaked like a coward." Glendower observes the world as spiritual, as a being that supports his powers and goals. For him, the setting is alive. In the exchange between Glendower and Hotspur, their views of the setting emphasize their dissimilarities. Hotspur denies Glendower the spirituality of his environment, therefore, denying his power, and Glendower does the same when he refuses to let Hotspur change the river. They are so intrinsically different in how they frame the world and how they think the world sees them that it is remarkable that they can respect each other's expertise and be united by a greater ambition: their desire to defeat King Henry. Somehow, the ability to have different beliefs and still rally against King Henry deepens the bond of their alliance and cements the rebellion.

The setting carries many messages in *King Henry, Part I*: it highlights differences and similarities between nobles and peasants, draws the reader's attention to themes of betrayal and forgiveness, and urges the reader to question how the world shapes people and is shaped by them. No matter how Shakespeare uses and portrays the setting, whether as a self-fulfilling prophecy, a tool, or a human-like being to work alongside, power and agency ultimately lie in the individual, not in the environment.

El Viento de la Vida: La Tempestad Te Llevará Muy Lejos

by Camilla de Saracho

La primera memoria que tengo cuando era niña chiquita me viene frecuentemente. Acabamos de llegar a nuestra casa en Tejas y tenía tres, casi cuatro años. Me recuerdo de los cuartos vacíos sin vida. El abanico del mío tenía caballos montados en un carrusel, los caballos se miraban delicados y quería ver como corrían, pero no teníamos electricidad todavía. Luego yo estaba afuera explorando lo que iba ser mi nuevo hogar cuando debajo de la casa salió un gato. Siempre me han encantado los animales y al ver este gato me hizo feliz. Lo acariciaba y todavía puedo oír a mi madre diciéndome que ese gato de seguro tenía enfermedades, pero no me importaba me gustó como se dejaba querer. Era como el pobre gato lo necesitaba. Todo eso se acabó cuando nuestro perro de repente empezó a corretear al animalito que me encantó. Me imagino que lloré y gritaba para que mi papá salvará a ese gato.

Venimos desde Riverside, CA, donde nací y nunca conocí. Mi familia consistía de una madre y un padre de Sinaloa, México. Tenía dos hermanos y una hermana, todos

mayores que yo y algunos nacidos en Tijuana o California. Mi infancia fue muy alegre, aunque a veces tuvimos problemas con dinero, siempre había muchas risas y felicidad. Algo que fui entendiendo sobre mi familia era que mi madre cruzó ilegalmente entrando a los Estados Unidos, diciendo que ella no tenía papeles o documentos asegurando su lugar aquí. Eso me pesaba mucho, me recordé del gato y cómo de repente ya no estaba en mis manos chiquillas. Igual que sonrisas y felicidad, también había muchas citas de abogado, y caras de frustración saliendo de allí. Una pesadilla de casi un año pasó cuando mi madre tuvo que regresar a México por un asunto de sus documentos. Esa etapa de mi vida fue difícil, pero estoy

agradecida que finalmente ella logró tenerlos. Unos años después de eso, nació mi hermana. Esto fue un sueño, aunque bien tarde porque yo ya tenía once años. Pero tener una hermana era algo especial. Ella se llama Jaydelene y amé su carita tan perfecta y los dientitos que le salían cada mes.

La primera vez que fui a México fue con mi padre y hermana mayor. Yo estaba muy emocionada, siempre he querido ir a ver a mi familia que todavía estaba en Sinaloa. Había veces que mis hermanos se iban sin mi madre y yo. Esto fue antes de que tenía papeles y hacía rato que mi madre no veía a su familia. Ahora, todos visitamos Sinaloa una o dos veces al año. Nos quedamos con mi abuela en un pueblo pequeño llamado La Cruz, queda entre medio de Culiacán y Mazatlán. Las playas y mariscos siempre eran algo que quería llevar conmigo a Tejas. Pensar en cómo batallamos para llegar a este punto, donde todos podemos viajar y regresar juntos me llena de aprecio. Es un orgullo venir de una cultura tan fuerte y poder visitar un país hermoso. Si pudiera me quedaría meses de vacaciones en Sinaloa aún una parte de mi alma se queda en la espuma de su mar.

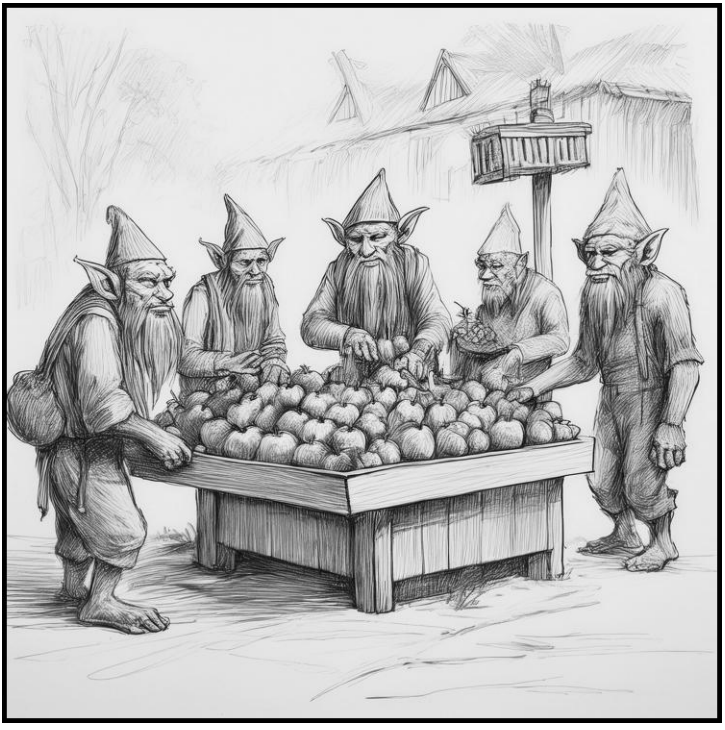
Ahora que ya tengo diecinueve años viviendo en Tejas, que también aprecio mucho, puedo decir que no cambiará nada de lo difícil del pasado. Un pasado difícil no es más que un motivo para obtener lo que quiero en la vida. Todo se ha acumulado a este día, yo en la universidad, como tía de dos sobrinas, como hija de dos padres excelentes, como hermana menor y mayor. Muchas cosas han pasado y cambiado con el viento de vida y siempre será así.

Exploitation in the Victorian Era: An Examination of "Goblin Market"

by Haley E. Souders

Victorian literature often reflects the social and economic realities of the era, exploring the tensions between wealth, power, and the vulnerabilities of the lower classes. Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" might at first appear to be a whimsical fairy tale about temptation and sisterly devotion, but beneath its surface lies a sharp critique of Victorian society. Through the alluring yet dangerous fruits sold by the goblins, the poem illustrates how those with power and resources can manipulate and exploit the weak, while the dangers faced by the sisters highlight the moral and social consequences of such inequalities. In "Goblin Market," Rossetti uses the goblins' predatory trade to symbolize the exploitation of vulnerable classes, critiquing the ways Victorian society allowed wealth and power to profit at the expense of the powerless.

Within the poem, the goblins function as a representation of the wealthy and powerful, exploiting the weak for personal gain. Rossetti emphasizes their predatory nature through their relentless sales tactics by writing, "Morning and evening /



Maids heard the goblins cry / Come buy our orchard fruits" (lines 1–3). By calling out repeatedly at all hours, the goblins convince people to buy their fruits, targeting the unsuspecting. This is further emphasized when the narrator warns, "Their offers should not charm us / Their evil gifts would harm us" (lines 65–66). This is a warning against the goblins' temptations. The word "charm" suggests that their fruit and promises are deliberately attractive and seductive. These lines emphasize that the goblins are not merely innocent sellers, but they are predatory, exploiting the desires and vulnerabilities of their potential victims.

Laura's encounter with the goblins demonstrates how the oppressed are exploited by those with power, reflecting Victorian social inequalities. When she eats the goblins' fruit, she suffers both physically and emotionally. Rossetti writes. "She pined and pined away / Found them no more but dwindled and grew grey" (lines 154–157). Her decline symbolizes the real-world consequences of systemic exploitation, where those without social or economic power often bear the cost of others' profit. The poem also emphasizes the addictive and controlling nature of the goblins' fruit by saying, "She sucked and sucked and sucked the more / Fruits which that unknown orchard bore" (lines 134–135). The goblins deliberately tempt Laura, knowing their fruit will entice and weaken her, demonstrating their control over her vulnerability. Laura's obsession with the fruit shows how desire can be manipulated. The goblins' fruits, while seemingly pleasurable, ultimately harm those who partake. By depicting the addictive and damaging nature of the goblins' fruit, Rossetti underscores the predatory ways that desire can be controlled by the powerful to exploit the weak.

While Laura demonstrates the vulnerability of those exploited by those in authority, Lizzie highlights both the persistence of the goblins' power and the potential to resist it. The goblins attempt to force their fruit upon her, Rossetti writes, "Tore her gown and soiled her stocking / Twitched her hair out by the roots / Stamped upon her tender feet" (lines 403–405). These lines emphasize the goblins' physical power and relentless control, showing that even those who recognize the exploitation are vulnerable to their predation. Despite this, Lizzie refuses to eat the fruit, enduring their attacks: "Lizzie uttered not a word / Would not open lip from lip / Lest they should cram a mouthful in" (lines 430–432). Her restraint

highlights the difficulty of resisting manipulation and the strength required to stand against powerful forces. Lizzie's courage allows her to save Laura, illustrating that while exploitation is systemic and the powerless are often targeted, moral agency and solidarity can challenge those who are seemingly in control. Through Lizzie, Rossetti reinforces her critique of Victorian society, showing how wealth and power can exploit vulnerability while also suggesting that resistance and ethical action can protect the weak.

In "Goblin Market," Christina Rossetti shows the power imbalance between the wealthy and the vulnerable, using the goblins' predatory actions as a symbol of exploitation in Victorian society. Laura's suffering demonstrates how the weak can be controlled and harmed by those in power, while Lizzie's courage shows that it is possible to resist and help others. Through their experiences, Rossetti critiques a society that allows the powerful to profit at the expense of the powerless, highlighting the dangers of inequality and the importance of resisting those in power. The poem reminds readers that exploitation thrives when power is unchecked, but courage and solidarity can protect the vulnerable.

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PRE-SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHERS: PYTHAGORAS AND PARMENIDES

by Mia Bullion

THE TERM PHILOSOPHY STEMS FROM THE GREEK WORDS "philo," meaning beloved one or the love of, and "sophia," meaning wisdom. Thus, philosophy is "the love of wisdom," and a philosopher is a "lover of wisdom." As may now be obvious, the concept of philosophy has been present since ancient Greece, dating back to the sixth century BCE. The philosophers of that period are now referred to as pre-Socratic philosophers, as they predated the famous fifth-century BCE philosopher Socrates. This essay will first examine the defining characteristics of a pre-Socratic philosopher and then explore the lives, characteristics, and contributions to philosophy of the pre-Socratic philosophers Pythagoras and Parmenides.

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO PRE-SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY

Pre-Socratic philosophers are generally characterized and labeled today according to their values and philosophical beliefs. Pre-Socratic philosophy had very specific, determining factors and beliefs associated with it, making it

rather simple to distinguish between pre-Socratic philosophers and those that followed them, such as Socrates, and modern-day philosophers. According to Patricia Curd, pre-Socratic philosophers were "Greek thinkers who introduced a new way of inquiring into the world and the place of human beings in it" (1). This is an excellent description, as this early group of philosophers differed greatly from their fellow Greeks, primarily in the way that they viewed the world and humans' place in it. "Perhaps the fundamental characteristic [of pre-Socratic philosophy] is the commitment to explain the world naturalistically, in terms of its own inherent principles" (Curd). The Pre-Socratics were very focused on rational,

natural thoughts and drew conclusions based on what was in front of them. This marked the transition from believing everything was an act of the gods to basing findings on more rational, fundamental facts. They, like many others, were interested in the origins of the universe and turned to logic to search for the answer. The pre-Socratics were considered pessimistic compared to future philosophers, as their ways of thinking were definite and confined. Despite these characteristics, it is important to note that "the character of Pre-Socratic thought is most thoroughly concealed and misrepresented as a result of the channels through which it has been transmitted" (Cherniss 320). Most primary documentation of pre-Socratic philosophers and their practices has been destroyed, and as a result, their ideas were transmitted to the modern day through the opinions and studies of future philosophers. Thus, though extensive research has been done, many of the aforementioned characteristics can never truly be verified. Lastly, it is crucial to note that these pre-Socratic philosophers did not label themselves as such. It was not until the 18th century that this title was given to them, as many of them did not even self-identify as philosophers. Most of the prominent pre-Socratic philosophers were only considered philosophers later, excluding a select few. Having established that, let us now examine the life of the pre-Socratic philosopher Pythagoras.

II. PYTHAGORAS

Pythagoras was born around 570 BCE on the Greek island of Samos and spent the early years of his life there (Gorman). There is not much evidence relating to the childhood of Pythagoras, but it was known that he travelled extensively with his father as a child, exposing him to different cultures

and ways of life at a very malleable age. He grew up with a strong interest in science, math, and music. These interests persisted into his adulthood, and the conclusions he drew regarding them took root in society as important philosophical discoveries that needed to be preserved. Pythagoras became ingrained in Greek society and gained popularity among the masses, though not as one might think. He was seen as a prominent figure because his "religious teachings flourished with the western Greeks in Magna Graecia" (Angelakis et al. 2). As bizarre as it might sound, before Pythagoras was known for his famous mathematical abilities, he was a religious leader among the Greeks. He was a well-educated, wealthy, and trusted man, and because of this, he rose through the ranks of society relatively quickly. Additionally, Pythagoras was "reputed to be the first person to claim to be a philosopher" (Anyim and Ekefre 1). This made him quite unique: as previously mentioned, most pre-Socratic philosophers were only given that title in the 18th century.

As has been made apparent, Pythagoras was a rather influential and highly esteemed man of his time. However, the concepts and discoveries that he is remembered for today are not what earned him respect in the sixth century BCE. Ultimately, the main philosophy of Pythagoras focused on and was related to mathematics. This was one of his early childhood passions and, arguably, what he is most known for today. Pythagoras, in his philosophical way, believed that everything was mathematics. He "stated that forms and ideas are governed by numbers" (Angelakis et al. 8). In his philosophy, he wanted to combine all aspects of society—religion, wisdom, and mathematics—to obtain answers to the world. From Pythagoras, the common, modern-day math term "Pythagorean theorem" was born. The Pythagorean theorem,

though previously introduced in Babylonian history, was proofed and integrated into mathematical practices by Pythagoras in his self-established school. This math term is still used today to describe and find missing factors of a triangle. Pythagoras focused heavily on geometry and made the subject a formal educational practice. He was "the first to engage in the study of the mathematical sciences, greatly advancing them" with the help of his followers and fellow mathematicians at his school (Zhmud 255). Pythagoras made several other findings, such as the principle of both perfect and abstract numbers. These are both still applied to mathematics today. Finally, though he is not as well-known for it, Pythagoras also made contributions to music theory. He is believed to be the discoverer of the harmonious music intervals. Victor Bennett said that, according to the ideas of Pythagoras, "Every orb is allowed to sing, and to sing of itself. No mouth articulates; it is the motion of the spheres that makes the music of the spheres. The motion and the music are coincident, in fact" (Bennett 197). This quote refers to the harmonious music intervals that Pythagoras found to be governed by number ratios, further asserting the dominance of mathematics over all. In the end, Pythagoras made many important contributions to both mathematical and philosophical thought, both of which persevered into modern society.

III. PARMENIDES

Parmenides was born around 515 BCE in a Greek colony named Elea. This area of land is actually in present-day Italy. He, like Pythagoras, came from a wealthy family and enjoyed many of the perks that came with it. He was properly educated, for instance, which led him into the philosophical

work that he is best known for. In his adulthood, "Parmenides had been strongly influenced by a member of the Pythagorean sect" (Cherniss 336). He never truly interacted with Pythagoras himself, but he built and expanded on the ideas of his followers. This made him a disciple of Pythagoras in a way, although indirectly, as the two never worked together. His mentor was named Aminias, and he, too, was a Pythagorean philosopher. Parmenides founded the Eleatic school of thought, named after the colony where he was born, which will be explored next.

Though Parmenides was influenced by Pythagoras and other Pythagorean philosophers, he is known for insightful philosophical findings of his own. His Eleatic school of thought, whose core beliefs were monoism and permanence, was "a reaction against natural philosophy" (Urueta 141). This reaction stemmed from the fact that other pre-Socratic philosophers had been attempting to attribute the universe to a material substance of some form. Parmenides, in contrast, brought forth monoism, which is the idea that reality is a single, unchanging whole not attributed to a material substance. "Parmenides had reason to believe that 'being' surpassed the principles proposed by Ionian natural philosophers, [as] these principles accounted only for the positive aspect of variation across a polar continuum" (Urueta 142). "Being" in this example refers to the single, ultimate universe that is explored in his idea of monoism. In addition to these beliefs, "Parmenides was the first philosopher to explicitly question whether there is some truth beyond what ordinary sense perception perceives, and its reliability" (Berti 70). This is now referred to as his distinction between appearance and reality. He believed that true knowledge could only come through reason, marking, in addition, the first

historical use of a deductive, logical proof to support his findings and conclusions. He separated knowledge into two distinct parts: the Way of Truth and the Way of Opinion, and as previously mentioned, he only truly trusted reason or truth (Berti). Ultimately, Parmenides had many philosophical views that continue to influence the modern world. He was a significant philosopher who should be highly regarded as a man of great ideas and innovations.

IV. CONCLUSION

In sum up, this essay has explained the defining characteristics of a pre-Socratic philosopher and then introduced the lives, characteristics, and philosophical contributions of the pre-Socratic philosophers Pythagoras and Parmenides. Pre-Socratic philosophers were characterized by their need to describe the world in natural terms. Pythagoras, though a true philosopher, was more focused on math, whereas Parmenides honed in on traditional philosophical ideals and leaned more toward scientific concepts. Both men created systems of beliefs that are integral to society and philosophical advancement, and without their contributions, the world would be far less advanced than it is now. Society should be grateful for these pre-Socratic philosophers, as they paved the way for the greats, such as Socrates, and showed their communities what it meant to be brave, putting their innermost thoughts and beliefs on display for the world to critique.

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Inkpots of Inspiration: Lessons in Worldbuilding

by RaeAnne Conner

"In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit." The first line of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* serves as an archetypal standard of how a single poignant sentence can anchor an entire world—an entire legendarium. It may seem an unconventional way to start a story, but therein lies its appeal. The line evokes curiosity—a hallmark of effective worldbuilding. From the land of Middle-Earth to the ancient foundations of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and to those worlds still in the minds of new authors, worldbuilding is a delicate equilibrium of creativity and familiarity that is the foundation for bringing a fantasy world to life.

The worldbuilding process is a complex one. It involves a variety of critical elements, yet it often begins at a less intuitive place: the protagonist's psyche. In her 2024 article, "The Psychology of Worldbuilding," Gabriela Pereira explores how settings, society, and cultures serve not only as aesthetic backdrops, but as crucial, dynamic reflections of a character's internal state. Pereira asserts that the descriptions of any world in a fictional piece rely heavily on the lens of the

viewpoint character. In other words, what does the character observe about the world? For instance, the perception of a storm is not an objective observation. Through the eyes of one character, it may represent a localized threat—a grey sky that casts the world in shadow—while to another, it could signify restoration, a cleansing of the landscape and the character's soul. By anchoring the environment in a character's perspective, authors can create a more cohesive, organic land that immerses readers in the story.

Beyond the internal views of a character, the human background of an author serves as a vital pillar for relatable worldbuilding. This personal history is the inkpot of

inspiration where an author dips his pen. It allows an author to draw from lived experience to ground high-fantasy concepts. A primary example is J.R.R. Tolkien. In a 1968 interview with the BBC, Tolkien discussed how his creation of Middle-Earth was not a detached exercise, but the result of his lifelong obsession with philology and ancient language. For him, it was the languages that came first: Middle-Earth was the home he built for them.

This same principle remains a vital impetus for contemporary authors who utilize cultural or linguistic roots to establish a sense of hearth and home within their lore. In the world of Alwyd, for instance, which appears in my unpublished manuscript, I used the name itself to tie a fantasy realm to reality. Derived from the Welsh word for 'hearth,' Alwyd is a fantastical world centered on protection and domesticity—for all species of the world. By weaving in elements of Welsh folklore, specifically the symbol of the *Y Ddraig Goch* (the red dragon on the Welsh flag), the narrative uses a recognizable cultural symbol to develop its own draconic mythos. This implementation of a real-world culture sets a foundation for the fictional world to build upon, resulting in an imaginary realm that feels lived-in rather than merely invented.

While physical and personal backgrounds contribute to the setting, it is the internal mythology that serves as the 'soul' of worldbuilding. Real-world influences such as Welsh folklore in Alwyd can provide a base structure, but true worldbuilding twists existing myth to create an enthralling 'new' idea for readers to experience. This process of developing depth through lore is an essential 'trap' for capturing reader attention—a concept that Clair Webb explores. She posits that mythology and lore, much like the

society and culture of a fantasy world, are not mere embellishments, but are a functional toolbox for building narrative weight. By reimagining traditional arche-types as the support beams of a world's roof, authors can transform a static image into a living, momentous entity—a home for their characters.

Ultimately, however, worldbuilding is not simply an architectural feat, but an intricate tapestry woven of psychological depth, personal authenticity, and mythological structure. From the spark of curiosity delivered by Tolkien's hobbit-hole to the cultural roots of the land of Alwyd, compelling fantasy realms rely on the reciprocity of familiar and fantastic, mundane and magical. Through worldbuilding, writers create a home for their characters, a retreat for their readers, and a legendarium that satisfies the timeless human desire for discovery.

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A Two-way Mirror: Dreams in *The House on Mango Street*

by Britney Hallmark

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros is a beautiful, thoughtfully written story following the early life of Esperanza Cordero. In this story, Esperanza tells of another girl, Sally, who also lives on Mango Street. Though Sally is only written about a few times, it is clear that she means something to Esperanza and is not just another girl on her street. Esperanza projects her desire to leave Mango Street onto Sally many times, turning Sally into an important character to the story. Because Esperanza lives vicariously through Sally, whom she views through a "what the future could hold" sort of lens, she also starts to expect more from Sally's life choices. This results in a two-way mirror effect: Esperanza is looking toward Sally, but the mirror shows her herself. This pushes Esperanza to change, and in that way, Sally, though a seemingly minor character in the novel, advances the plot and has a dramatic impact on Esperanza.

In the chapter "Sally," Esperanza is envious of Sally and how she presents herself, but she is also sad for her and aware of the treatment that Sally receives from others. In the last

paragraph of “Sally,” Esperanza projects her hopes for her own future onto the other girl (82-83). This prompts her to ask, “Sally, do you sometimes wish you didn’t have to go home?” Esperanza then imagines Sally’s future and how it could be a happier one. Since Sally’s point of view is never revealed, it is hard to believe that everything written about her inner feelings is true. Esperanza, as the writer, has more ownership over the feelings being expressed in this story. Consider, for instance, the following line: “nobody could make you sad and nobody would think you’re strange because you like to dream and dream.” None of the vignettes about Sally ever disclose her own dreams, only what Esperanza

believes Sally's dreams might be. This specific quote is a perfect example of how Esperanza uses her own feelings in place of Sally's. Esperanza, who notices the stagnated lives of the people around her, dreams of leaving Mango Street for something better, and she assumes that Sally must feel the same way. This paragraph is written like a letter to Sally, almost like a promise for a better future. Because Esperanza has replaced Sally's real feelings, whatever those might be, with her own, this paragraph is really Esperanza promising a better future to herself.

If Cisneros had given Sally her own point of view, she might not be as determined to leave Mango Street as Esperanza makes her seem to be. Although it is clear that Sally experiences abuse from her father and bullying from other kids, she seems tied to that place because that is where she has always been. Leaving somewhere does not happen simply because you want to leave, but when you believe you can. Sally does not have an encouraging figure pushing her for something better, at least not that the reader sees. Esperanza, though, has her mother encouraging her to make a full life for herself and have no regrets. While Esperanza is meant to be speaking to Sally in this paragraph, she is really just reflecting herself onto Sally's actions.

In the chapter "The Monkey Garden," Esperanza tells of a garden, once inhabited by a monkey, that is now a playground for the local kids. One day while she and Sally are there, Sally partakes in a kissing "game" with Tito and his friends. In a passage near the end, Esperanza attempts to save Sally from the boys, but she does not want to be saved. Sally and the boys tell her to leave, shaming her for feeling that what was happening was wrong (97-98). After this interaction, Esperanza reflects on how much she cried and

how hurt she was. While she is not sure why she feels this way, it is clear that it has to do with the way Esperanza views Sally. From the story, the reader can see how much respect and admiration Esperanza has for Sally. This, surely, is partly because of her own dreams being reflected onto Sally, which in turn builds Sally up to be more resilient than she really is. From Esperanza's perspective, it would make sense for Sally to reject the boys, instead of welcoming them with laughter. Esperanza does not understand why Sally welcomes these advances and views her actions in a completely different way. Esperanza sees Sally's acceptance of the boys' behavior as compliance. She is accepting the toxic power dynamics around them, which Esperanza dreams of escaping. To Esperanza, when Sally allows the boys to each get a kiss from her, she is allowing more young men to believe that they can do as they please with women without consequence. In turn, this incident causes Esperanza to pull back, to stop mirroring Sally, as she feels as though she cannot relate to her anymore.

Esperanza's feelings regarding this incident are revealed when Sally responds to hearing about the "game" one of the boys made. "Sally pretended to be mad at first but she said yes. It was that simple" (96). This quote suggests that Esperanza believes that Sally is not really pushing for a better life in the future. This realization hurts Esperanza, not only because she admires Sally, but because she has reflected so many of her own dreams and feelings onto Sally. This interaction also upsets Esperanza because it destroys the reflection of herself that she has created. In this moment, it becomes clear to Esperanza that Sally is not this admirable woman who will end the generational stagnation that the women around her are so accustomed to. Sally is just another young woman who will repeat the cycle of regret in the future,

as the women before them have done. This paragraph ends with this admission: "and the garden that had been such a good place to play didn't seem mine either" (98). While this sentence could be taken literally, I find that it sheds light on how Esperanza has been using Sally. For Esperanza, Sally has been like a playground for possibility. Esperanza reflects one thing onto Sally and sees if it is really possible for her in the future. Once that perfect reflection muddies, it becomes unpleasant and unusable. Esperanza understands that while it was fun to imagine her own future by fantasizing about Sally's hopes and dreams, they were never really Sally's to begin with. Having said that, Sally is a very important character within the story. Esperanza initially admires Sally and wishes to be like her when she is older. As the story continues though, Esperanza grows to realize that Sally is not the person she needs to look up to. Through Sally's story, Esperanza finds herself and her own desire to go somewhere better. Without Sally, Esperanza would not have been as dedicated to leave Mango Street.

Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* tells the story of Esperanza and her journey of maturation and self-discovery. The many people around her help to push her forward in specific ways, either toward change or toward stagnation. Had Esperanza not met Sally, she might have ended up in a doomed marriage, like most of the women around her. While Esperanza dislikes some of the choices that Sally makes, that is because Esperanza is imagining herself in place of Sally. Because she sees the path that Sally is going towards, she makes the changes necessary to escape Mango Street. Although Sally seems like an unimportant character in the beginning, her impact becomes vital to Esperanza's character and her future.

Imagery and Sensory Memory in Flannery O'Connor's "Wildcat"

by Avery Strube

In her short story "Wildcat," Flannery O'Connor's use of imagery gives her audience a clear picture of the events that take place despite the main character, Gabriel, being blind from birth. His other four senses—primarily his sense of smell and hearing—more than make up for his lack of sight. As Sandra Lee Klepp points out in her analysis "Memory, Perception, and Imagination in Flannery O'Connor's 'Wildcat,'" "the sensory verbs hear, smell, and feel are significantly the most frequent in the story. They are employed dozens of times, but not indiscriminately, as each is associated with one of the functions of Gabriel's daydream." This "daydream" Kleppe refers to is the imagined reality that is formed within Gabriel's mind as the traumatic memories of his childhood bleed into present events, confusing his senses and leading him to believe the wildcat is right outside his home, when truly it is half a mile away. Because the story is told from his perspective, the audience only knows as much as he does, and so we are drawn into this "daydream" as well. In spite of her protagonist's blindness, O'Connor's use of

descriptors creates a vivid image in the minds of her readers, and the tension and emotion that she invokes makes the imagined reality feel all the more real.

O'Connor sets a clear scene through the use of Gabriel's four senses and the dialogue between other characters. Though the audience cannot see the cabin, Gabriel leads them from the porch outside, through the door, and to the closed window, while the women's conversation reveals a "cat-hole" that Reba claims the wildcat could enter through. "O'Connor manages to carry the terror of the bestial murder from Hezuh's cabin to Gabriel's through the snarl, shriek, and scream which accompany it," Kleppe states. "In keeping with both the

consistency of the blind point of view and the tension of the event, the scream gets to Gabriel first; Gabriel then identifies it with Nancy." This is one of the best examples of how Gabriel's disability changes how he perceives the world. While someone with functioning sight would see that it was Nancy immediately, Gabriel doesn't recognize her until she enters the cabin. Her scream, like the cry of the cow that's killed in the second wildcat attack, is accompanied by the snarls of the wild beast that this short story is named after. And just as a younger Gabriel recognizes Nancy's scream before Nancy herself, the elder Gabriel identifies the cow's pained cries before he realizes it's a cow.

This is far from the only parallel between the attacks that Gabriel experiences, despite the decades in between. He feels the same indignation at just the thought of being shut up with the women. As a young boy, he proclaims, "'I could er smelled it out. I ain't afraid.'" As an old man, this sentiment is repeated in his internal dialogue. "Lemme go wit you boys an' smell him out for you. I the onliest one kin smell 'round here," he thinks, and he once again claims that he "ain't afraid er no wildcat er no woods neither." Despite this nearly identical line of thought, O'Connor creates a more distinct sense of terror with the elder Gabriel. The trauma of his childhood rears its head as the memories warp, and he remembers the first attack as if he had been in the room with Hezuh. His fear twists his reality in a "juxtaposition between what he remembers and what he imagines, added to what he perceives through his senses of touch, smell, and hearing" (Kleppe 1998).

The house itself has been a refuge up until this point. The younger Gabriel is called in by his mother when the men leave to hunt the wildcat and scolded when he opens the window: "'Don't open that winder, boy. Us don't want no wildcat

jumpin' in here.'" This line turns out to be foreshadowing, as an open window is how the wildcat gets into Hezuh's house and kills him. It is what first upsets the illusion of the house's safety, and that illusion continues to disintegrate as Gabriel's panic spirals. It is after the men leave that the true fragility of that safety is shown to the audience.

> He got out the bed and pushed to the door. He had bolted that ones, the other must be open. A breeze was coming in and he walked in it until he felt the night air full in his face. This one was open. He slammed it shut and pushed the bolt in. What was the use to do that? Ef the cat aimed on comin' in, it could git there. […] By the door there was a hole the hound could git under; that cat could gnaw it through an' be in befo' he got out.

Through this excerpt, Gabriel—and by extension, the audience—begins to realize how futile it is to try to keep the wildcat out. All he can do is slow it down, and even then, he knows it will be too quick for him to escape. Just as he did when he was a boy, Gabriel plans how he will kill the wildcat as the phantom sensations of claws and teeth sink into his skin. But his confidence fades far quicker than when he was younger: "How he gonna do all that? He hadn't been able to wring a chicken's neck for fo' years."

This resignation, this certainty of his impending death, incites a change in the story's tone as Gabriel's terror grows. Despite his awareness that the house will not stop the wildcat, he still turns to it for protection as his imagination convinces him that the cat is right outside, scratching at the cat hole. In his desperation, he tries to climb up onto the shelf, only for it to buckle under his weight and send him crashing back into

his chair. The pace gets quicker here as Gabriel gives into his panic. Before, O'Connor had been using short, simple sentences—giving the text an almost rhythmic feel—now, Gabriel's terror is written in long run-ons.

> He caught hold of the shelf and pulled himself onto the chair and sprang up and backwards and fet the narrow shelf board under him for an instant and then felt it sag and jerked his feet up and felt it crack somewhere from the wall. His stomach flew inside him and stopped hard and the shelf board fell across his feet and the rung of the chair hit against his head and then, after a second of stillness, he heard a low, gasping animal cry wail over two hills and fade past him; then snarls, tearing short, furious, through the pain wails.

This technique of using run-on sentences creates a faster-paced tempo. A period provides a pause, a break in the text, a sense of time passing. But, with long sentences like this, there is no pause between actions, no space for breath, which further conveys just how frantic Gabriel has become. The parallels continue. Just as when he was a boy, Gabriel hears snarls in the distance, the "tearing short, furious, through the pain wails" of an animal. "The snarl of the beast, mingled with Nancy's horrified shriek and scream, is part of Gabriel's childhood memory, and the snarls of the beast, mingled with the pained wails of the cow, are part of his present perception" (Kleppe 1998). As Kleppe points out, his traumatic memories have twisted his current reality so that he believes he, like Hezuh, is the wildcat's next target. It is only after this climax that he fully returns to reality, and with realization comes relief, for both Gabriel and the reader. Limbs still shaking, he

returns to his bed, with the resolve that "Tomorrer night it would come back. Tomorrer night they would stay here an' kill it." As Gabriel shakes off his fear, he reassures himself that now that he has been proven right, they'll listen to him and catch the wildcat the next night. This stubborn belief in the accuracy of both his knowledge and senses, while well-earned, is what worsened his terror in the midst of the attack. If Gabriel was right about the wildcat's planned hunting grounds, then, by logic, he is right about what or *who* it is planning to target next, even if he wishes he could be wrong.

Ashamed of the panicked frenzy his terror had thrown him into and determined to hold onto his dignity around the hunters, Gabriel acts almost nonchalant in the morning, as if he had slept through the night rather than spent it spiraling into despair, certain of his own death. When asked about the broken shelf, he lies. "'Wind to' it down and waked me up in the middle of the night. It been due to fall. You ain't never built nothin' yet stayed together.'" Gabriel brushes the blame off onto the hunters, as he had the night before: "They shouldn't leave old people by theyselves. He done tole 'em they won't gonna ketch nothin' off in no woods."

While blaming the hunters for the wildcat attack is not only understandable, but perfectly logical, lying about how the shelf broke serves to uphold his image of pride, lest the men think even less of him. After all, the audience has already been shown how little these men value Gabriel's advice. In the beginning of the text, during Old Gabriel's first conversation with them, they ask him "'how many wildcats you killed, Gabrul?'" and brush off his fear by teasing him. The next morning, after Gabriel once again advises them that hunting in the woods will be useless, they repeat the question: "how many wildcats you killed, Granpaw?" This allusion to

the beginning of the text signals that the cycle will repeat—the hunters will go out into the woods, the wildcat will return, and something or someone else will fall victim. Whether that victim will be Gabriel remains a mystery: the story ends as "animal cries wail and mingle with the beats pounding in [Gabriel's] throat." Kleppe points out that "the title, the climax, and the concluding lines all foreground the animal cry that stalks and haunts the main character." We, the audience, know that Gabriel is not truly hearing "animal cries" at this moment, but because these sounds are associated with his deepest traumas, he hears them when he realizes he will have to live through those traumas once more.

Repetition and imagery are key themes in Flannery O'Connor's "Wildcat." As dialogue, thoughts, and events mirror each other, they serve as constant but subtle foreshadowing. The risky choice to tell this story through the perspective of a blind main character enhances the smaller details, just as Gabriel's other senses are enhanced because of his lack of sight. His senses of smell and hearing are relied on the most when setting the scene and driving the plot forward, even when the things he smells or hears exist only in his terror-driven imagination. Throughout the text, the author uses a variety of descriptive language, character action, and both internal and external dialogue to create an atmosphere full of tension and fear, and by leaving the ending vague and open, O'Connor ensures that her audience leaves this tale with that fear lingering in their minds.

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KATIE REED. Born in Tyler, Texas, Katie grew up surrounded by small-town roots and strong personal resilience. Despite enduring years of childhood abuse from her father, she remained determined to build a better future for herself. She later moved to Stephenville, Texas, where she attends Tarleton State University. She is majoring in Animal Science–Pre Vet and expects to graduate in 2029. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with friends, exploring new places, and pursuing her passion for working with animals.

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AVERY STRUBE. Born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas, Avery Strube has always had a love for literature. Growing up, she spent every recess with her nose in a book, and most lunches took place in the library. Her time at home, however, was more chaotic: being the eldest of five siblings, she had to learn how to handle kids to survive. With that kind of experience under her belt, it only made sense for her to pursue a career in education. Now she is a third-year English major at Tarleton State University, aiming to earn a teaching certification so that she may share her passion for reading with future students.

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