



Hedera helix

2012

Volume X

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta

The National English Honor Society
for Two-Year Colleges



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- Awards
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- Competition
- Publication
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Hedera helix – the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of ΣΚΔ, symbolizing resilience and individual growth. In keeping with the Greek spelling, we use the lower case “h” for helix.

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Editor's Note

This year, we celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the *Hedera helix*. Included in this anniversary issue are winning entries from previous issues as well as the 2012 award winners.

We encourage all ΣΚΔ members to enter the writing and photography contests and/or apply for scholarships. The entry deadline for the 2013 submissions is November 30, 2012. Monetary prizes for all awards have increased over the last couple of years, so don't miss the opportunity to enter. To ensure that you fulfill the most updated entry requirements, visit our website this fall at www.english2.org.

I extend a special thank you to ΣΚΔ alumnae Kat Padilla and Brianna Dye for helping produce the *Hedera helix* this year.

Jan Anderson

Director of Development & Publications





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Writing Awards

Literary Analysis

From Amleth to Hamlet: Just Move the H?
Virginia Campbell
Mu Alpha Chapter
Illinois Valley Community College

Short Fiction

Hay Season
Martha Rose Gragido
Epsilon Alpha Chapter
Northeast Alabama Community College

Essay

Flight
Heather Herbert
Pi Delta Chapter – Darton College

Poetry

Things Change
Nicholas Reich
Phi Alpha Chapter
Bevill State Community College

Photography

First Place

Tumble
Joanna Leath
Psi Gamma Chapter
Tyler Junior College

Second Place

Snowy Winters
Amy Saylor
Theta Beta Chapter
Calhoun Community College

Third Place

Bob Sike's Bridge
Melissa Bennefield
Theta Beta Chapter
Calhoun Community College





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Thank you all for everything you do!

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"Education is not the filling of a pail but
the lighting of a fire."

—William Butler Yeats





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From Amleth to Hamlet: Just Move the H?

/Virginia Campbell

What if *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* ended with the prince burning down the palace? What if there were no Polonius or Laertes? What if Hamlet never contemplated the metaphysical aspects of life and death? Could the play still sustain the wear of time? Would the play be included in a college course curriculum? That altered Hamlet would have been if William Shakespeare did not have a license to create. Shakespeare based his play, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, on the Dutch legend of Amleth. Like Hamlet, Amleth is the son of the murdered king of Denmark and, also like Hamlet, he suspects his uncle of treachery. Although Shakespeare stayed close to the story line of the Dutch legend, he made important changes to the title character.

The legend of Amleth is recorded by Saxo Grammaticus in the 12th century. In Grammaticus' version, the action starts even before the birth of Amleth, when his father and uncle are ambitious lords attempting to prove their worth. His father (Horwendill to Grammaticus, King Hamlet to Shakespeare) tries to defeat Norway's King Koll. The legend of Amleth describes in detail the fight between Horwendill and Koll, including Koll's request that the conqueror give funeral rights to the conquered to "let jealously depart at death, let the feud be buried in the tomb" (Grammaticus 124). After Horwendill kills Koll, the Dutchman receives the favor of the king and people of Denmark and marries the king's daughter, Gerutha (Gertrude in *Hamlet*). Horwendill's brother, Feng (or Claudius) is consumed with jealousy over Horwendill's fortunate fate. Like in *Hamlet*, Feng's jealousy turns deadly, and "when a chance came to murder [Horwendill], [Feng's] bloody hand sated the deadly passion of his soul. Then he took the wife of the brother he had butchered, capping unnatural murder with incest" (124). Amleth, Horwendill and Gerutha's son, suspects his uncle of his father's murder, but because he fears being killed himself, he says nothing. Instead, he "feign[s] dullness, and pretend[s] an utter lack of wits" (124). Despite his best efforts, some of Feng's counselors eventually begin to deduce that Amleth is not as stupid as he pretends to be and therefore set out to trap him. Luckily, Amleth has allies. His foster brother warns him of a trap involving a young maiden in the woods, and because of this, Amleth escapes detection (127). The counselors have not finished, however. They hide a man in the straw on the floor of Gerutha's chamber to hear the conversation between Amleth and his mother. Amleth easily kills the eavesdropper and "then, cutting his body into morsels, he seethed it in boiling water, and flung it through the mouth of an open sewer for the swine to eat, bestrewing the stinking mire with his hapless limbs" (128). Amleth then turns his anger on his mother. He berates her in a fashion very close to the parallel scene in *Hamlet* (Act III, Scene IV). Unlike in the play, however, there is no ghost to rescue her from the searing words of her son. Gerutha is forced to see the error of her ways as it is pointed out to her. After his counselor's death, Feng writes to the king of England to have Amleth executed and sends Amleth, along with "two retainers of Feng," to England. Amleth intercepts the orders and has the two escorts killed instead. He also manages to arrange a union between England and himself by marrying the king's daughter. When he returns home, Amleth finally gets revenge for his father's death. He throws a party, getting all of the lords, courtiers, and counselors so drunk that they fall asleep on the floor of the palace. Amleth then ties them down and





lights the palace on fire. Feng, however, is not part of the blaze, so Amleth goes to his uncle's bedchamber and kills him with his own sword. In the end, Amleth and Gerutha live, confident in their righteousness (128-130).

The Tragedy of Hamlet follows the story line of Grammaticus' Amleth closely. Audiences who were familiar with the legend undoubtedly recognized the basis of Shakespeare's play, but the same audience may well have appreciated the changes the bard made to the story. The Shakespearian play alludes to a strained relationship between Denmark and Norway that has something to do with King Hamlet, but the conflict is never fully explained. Also never fully mentioned is the exchange between Koll and Horwendill (King of Norway and King Hamlet) before Koll's death. That information would perhaps explain the presence of Fortinbras (the nephew of Koll) in Shakespeare's play. It would also explain why Claudius allows the Norwegian troops to move through his country to Poland: a truce has been declared between Denmark and Norway. For these details to make sense to the audience of *Hamlet* in Shakespeare's day, the legend of Amleth, or at least the history of Horwendill and Koll, would have had to be common knowledge.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has more named characters than Grammaticus' Amleth. Grammaticus mentions Amleth's foster-siblings, a brother and sister. The brother warns Amleth of Feng's traps and is the only character who seems to understand Amleth. Because of his allegiance to Amleth, the foster-brother may have been the basis for Shakespeare's character Horatio. Unlike with the foster-brother, however, the audience has a chance to bond with Horatio and fully appreciate his unwavering friendship. The foster-sister is used as the young maiden in the plot to trap Amleth in Grammaticus' legend (127). In *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, Ophelia is used to "seduce" Hamlet (Shakespeare Act III, Scene i). Ophelia and Hamlet are not related, but the encouraged relationship between Amleth and his foster-sister could be considered incestuous. Amleth "lays" with his foster-sister, which confuses the audience about one of the major points of Amleth's and Hamlet's righteous anger: incest in the family. Another character mentioned in Amleth and given new life in *Hamlet* is Polonius. Polonius represents all of Feng's supporters and counselors from Amleth. In *Hamlet*, however, Polonius is given another dimension in his role as a doting father. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's old friends who become his uncle's spies, seem to be based upon the anonymous men who accompanied Amleth to England where they were executed. Amleth's escorts were nameless and without history, making their deaths unimportant. The deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, on the other hand, give the audience a sense of justice because their history reveals their betrayal of their old school friend, Hamlet. Shakespeare gave all of the characters he took from Grammaticus more complexities, which makes them more appealing to audiences from any century.

The most important character Shakespeare added to his *Tragedy of Hamlet* is the ghost of King Hamlet. The ghost inspires Hamlet's search for vengeance and adds mystery to the play that Grammaticus' legend was lacking. The appearance of the ghost also opens the door for an important theme in *Hamlet*: death. Without the ghost, Hamlet's (or Amleth's) hunger for vengeance would feel cold-blooded to the audience. Without the plea from his father, Hamlet's agenda could be seen as selfish. In Amleth, there is no mention of the bond between Amleth and Horwendill. In fact, the reason given for Amleth's feigned idiocy is self-preservation. That also seems to be the reason for taking re-





venge on his uncle. Hamlet is deeply affected by the death of his beloved father and so seeks to help King Hamlet's tortured soul by avenging his death. Without the ghost, Hamlet's detour into insanity would be comical, not moving.

In the title character, Shakespeare made the most important changes to produce out of Amleth the Hamlet audiences have loved for so long. Amleth plays the imbecile but is secretly very cunning, just like Hamlet. However, Amleth is void of any redeeming qualities. Amleth is a legendary hero through and through. He may be smart, but in the end, he seeks cold-blooded vengeance and never questions his own righteousness. He lacks the human characteristics that make Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, so interesting. The most striking instance of this disparity is in the final method of getting revenge. Amleth gets the lords and courtiers sloppy drunk and traps them in the palace. He then sets the whole place on fire. His uncle, however, is not part of the blaze. Amleth seeks out his uncle in his chamber where he sleeps. Taking his uncle's sword, Amleth wakes the man, tells him it is time for vengeance, and kills Claudius/Feng in his own bed (Grammaticus 128-130). Hamlet, however, stabs Claudius after the man had poisoned Gertrude during Hamlet's duel with Laertes (Shakespeare Act V, Scene ii). The stabbing was not only vengeance for his father but also for his mother and himself. The vengeance in *Hamlet* is more righteous than the slaughter in Amleth.

Hamlet still has a dramatic influence on popular culture today. The character of Hamlet has been studied and evaluated by critics, psychoanalysts, and students since the play was first performed. Although many of the conclusions drawn about the character are over-reaching and sensationalized (Freud's Oedipus complex), that the character of Hamlet is still studied illustrates Shakespeare's important changes to Amleth. Shakespeare took a legend and made it human. *The Tragedy of Hamlet* "holds...the mirror up to nature," the nature of humankind (Shakespeare Act III, Scene ii). Truly, what makes literature more fascinating than contemplating what it is to be human? Amleth, however, did not wonder. He did not ask "[t]o be or not to be" (Act III, Scene ii). His father did not come to him as a ghost. Perhaps most importantly, he did not hesitate to kill his uncle. In short, unlike Hamlet, Amleth is not human. Thus, Amleth's story does not resonate with audiences as Hamlet's story has for centuries. Saxo Grammaticus wrote an intriguing Dutch legend, but William Shakespeare wrote a tragic exploration of human nature.

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Virginia Campbell

Illinois Valley Community College

Mu Alpha Chapter

1st Place Literary Analysis 2012





Things Change

/ Nicholas Tyler Reich

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

Where I swing at night –
on my front porch –
is where the herd
would stop to drink
at a small mossy pool
filled with tiny tadpoles
and lined with odorous toadstools
deep in a quiet forest.

The cardinal would sing
at the deer's return
about the same time
I wake in the morning
to watch the fog roll
over my freshly cut yard.

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



Nicholas Tyler Reich
Bevill State Community College
Phi Alpha Chapter
1st Place Poetry 2012





Flight

/Heather Herbert

It's odd that a man and woman I never met stole me from the bar that night, bringing me overseas to my husband. They didn't know they had done so. Indeed, my boyfriend was entirely unaware that I left the bar that Valentine's evening, where he had decided we'd spend the night playing pool with his buddies. He didn't feel me leave until the end of the week, and by that time I was so far gone that only he was unable to see I had been missing.

That night was the beginning of my marriage. No matter that I hadn't yet met my husband in person, we knew each other, but only as words on a screen. There wasn't any romance there. There wasn't any romance in that bar on Valentine's Day either, with my short, squat, Italian boyfriend playing pool, crunching his feet on the spent shells of peanuts and drinking beer. I was the designated driver and not playing, so I sat in a bay window that looked onto the road, watching snow falling as cars slowly slid down the street.

She caught my eye first, with her red beret and scarf. He was somber next to her, wearing a long, black coat, flat cap, and horn-rimmed glasses. They held on to each other as they walked, whether through need or desire I did not know, but as they came closer I could see they were deep in conversation, listening to each other and responding in turn. Their heads were angled towards each other, their bodies leaned together. They passed, and they took something I wanted with them.

I looked at my boyfriend. His head was angled to allow him to drain the last of his beer. He leaned towards the pool table and his hands grasped his cue. I had known at the beginning of the evening I did not want to be at a pool hall with him on Valentine's Day, and now I was not. I was no longer with him. That night, one of his buddies asked me to drop them all off at a strip club. My boyfriend agreed with the idea, but another friend, perhaps less the worse for wear, suggested that Valentine's Day wasn't the night for a guy to leave his girlfriend at home alone while he got lap dances. Instead, I brought them back to our apartment where they all spent the night. It was hardly an improvement to have these snoring, beer-soaked men draped around my home.

Later that week I asked him to leave our apartment. He was shocked. He said he didn't understand, didn't know I had been unhappy. How could I tell him I had barely known I was unhappy myself? Perhaps had I been more forceful with him, he would have left then. But he didn't leave, perhaps thinking he could outwait my decision. He tried to romance me, making sure to invite me to attend each of his bowling league nights, offering to sign up for a mixed league with me. I spent more time away from the house, in a coffee shop he didn't like because it was full of "stuck-up intellectuals." I spent more time online, purportedly doing my programming homework for college, but in reality chatting over the Internet with hundreds of British students and young professionals. I enjoyed my "stuck-up intellectuals." I did not enjoy bowling.

Over the course of two weeks, I moved him from my bed into the second bedroom. I scheduled my day so I was out when he was home. I dated casually, finding companionship with a gentleman who unfortunately was just my type but not progressing through life in the same direction as I. I made plans, now that I was a free woman, to





travel to the UK to meet the hundreds of British people I'd been chatting with. One of them lived near Heathrow and had a spare bedroom he said he would allow me to use, and he planned to pick me up at the airport.

There was romance there, although I didn't know it yet. When I flew out to the UK, I informed my ex-boyfriend that I expected him to be moved out of the apartment when I returned. I informed the gentleman I was dating that I was looking forward to seeing him when I got back. I informed my parents I'd be back in the country in two weeks and not to wait up.

My first impression of the UK was that of uniform grey roofs on red brick houses, all packed tightly together. I was in awe that a few hours had brought me to another part of the world. Heathrow was chaotic, and I worried that I wouldn't be able to find my host. I found him, tall, dark, and handsome, and then promptly fell asleep in his car. He let me sleep off my jetlag. Two weeks later I wept as I boarded the return flight, my last view that of roofs on homes. A week after that I performed what might be one of the cruelest acts of my life and removed my ex from the apartment by leaving a newly developed photograph on the dining room table. The photo was of tall, dark, and handsome and I kissing. He moved immediately, right after asking me to marry him. I avoided the man I was dating for a week, and then met with him to tell him that I was engaged. He laughed at first, and then as I didn't laugh back, he stroked my face and mouth and then left. Another act of cruelty, I later learned he had planned to propose that weekend. He has since died and never married.

My husband and I married a year later, having only met each other four more times. We've been married for fifteen years, two countries, many pregnancies, and three children. I have a red beret. My husband does not wear a flat cap. However, he might if I asked him.



Heather Herbert

Darton College

Pi Delta Chapter

1st Place Essay 2012





Hay Season

/ Martha Rose Gragido

Abby sits on the cracked toilet lid and stares at the two pink lines. Such a small thing really. Just a small plastic stick with dried pee on the side. Strange. Strange that this small thing has the power to dictate the rest of her life.

How odd that it is the omen of such huge, monumental things to come.

She sits in the bathroom of her one-bedroom apartment that she shares with Dan. Dan. The love of her life. She snorts. How ironic. How strange and small and stupid! How could she be so stupid?

She covers her face with her hands and whispers prime numbers. Her breath is hot and a little sour. It sticks to her face as she breathes and whispers. In her mind, she sees Dan, all six-feet of him. She feels his thick blonde hair under her hands and hears his deep voice, tinged with a Texas twang. Her memory goes to her tingling hands from his whiskers and her lips throbbing from the heat of his kiss; she feels love. So much love for him.

When she lowers her hands, the room is surprisingly cool on her face, and her eyes go back to the two pink lines on the plastic stick sitting on the edge of the sink.

A car horn honks outside, and she glances toward the window. The sun is going down. Her gaze goes from the bubble glass to the stained linoleum floor at her feet to the open door and the bed beyond.

There. That's where this happened.

Abby replays the past couple of months in her head as if she can pinpoint the exact moment this travesty occurred. She was always so careful. This is one of those irreversible things that happen a few times in everyone's life.

She stands and drags her feet to the bed and sits on the edge, staring into the bathroom. From this angle, she sees the dim light, the linoleum, and half of the shower. The shower curtain is nauseating in all its floral vomit. Vomit. Her stomach rolls again. She keeps her eyes on the curtain, eases down, and slowly lies on her side, leaving her legs hanging off the side of the bed.

A conversation she had with Dan plays over and over in her mind. And with each showing, she becomes more and more disoriented. Her eyes start to feel tired and strained, like she has looked at an optical illusion too long. The room starts to spin, and she bangs her fist onto the nightstand to make it stop.

She plays the conversation again.

She is sitting at a sidewalk café table with Dan. It's their fifth or sixth date. He leans over the table and says, "I want kids. Lots of them." He is fiddling with his napkin that has a round coffee stain in the bottom corner. His sugar wrappers, three of them, are crumpled up on his coffee saucer, and a soft breeze is about to whisk them away.

"You do?" She asks.

"Yeah. I am an only child, and I always wished I had a partner in crime. What about you?"

Abby leans back against the carved metal backing of her chair and sighs. On the outside, she is smiling softly and appears to be deep in thought. Inside, however, she is cringing. There could never be enough money to cover that many mouths to feed. There would only be long days and long hours spent on her feet. Over and over, year after year, until she finally dropped dead in the storeroom of a small diner.





She jerks her thoughts back to the present and forces her response out through her tight throat.

"I don't know. I guess it depends on how everything adds up. Honestly, I never pictured myself as a mom."

Dan is taken aback, but instead of pulling away, he leans even closer over the table and lowers his voice.

"What do you mean?" He asks.

Abby is uncomfortable with his closeness, and she fights the urge to scoot her chair a little further away from the table, but there is that betraying side of her, the side that made itself known the moment she saw Dan, that won't let her pull away. From the first time she saw him, she was drawn to him. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't stay away from him; and that has not changed. She clears her throat.

"I mean, some women are just born to be mothers, and some aren't. I think I'm one of the aren'ts." She shrugs, self-conscious, and adds more cream to her coffee even though it is about to overflow.

He takes her hand.

"Oh, I don't know."

"You don't?" She grabs onto his hands with hers.

"I think you might surprise yourself. It just comes naturally. It has to. Otherwise, the species wouldn't continue." He smiles and eases a stray hair behind her ear. "Even animals have it."

"Animals?"

He nods. "Yeah." His eyes dart around as he is deep in thought. A frown line appears, and then he says, "It's like when I was a kid. It was hay season, and I was out on a neighboring farm with Dad. I was excited because it was my first time to use the mower. Have you seen one of those? A hay mower?"

Abby shakes her head.

"It's two big arms that hook onto the sides of the tractor," he spreads his arms out, "and fan out. On each of the arms are three big blades that spin about a foot off the ground, then the baler comes behind you, scoops up the cut hay and makes it into bales." He takes her hands again and smooths his thumb over her knuckles.

"Well, I see this doe stand up in the grass, and I'm enjoying seeing her. You know how that is? When you see something like that, you try to watch it frame by frame because you know at any second it's going to take off running?"

Abby nods.

"So I'm watching her and I'm getting closer and closer, but she's just standing there like a statue. She's beautiful. It's early morning, and the sun has just lit her up, all rosy-gold. I'm about thirty feet away, and she starts stomping her front legs. Over and over, just stomping them in one place."

Abby, by now, is transfixed. The doe is colored in her mind. She can see the grass swaying, and she can hear the drone of the blades spinning.

"Well, the closer I came, I thought that she was gonna bolt at any moment. Only she didn't." He clears his throat. "I hesitated in raising that mowing arm. I waited too long, and, well, the blades caught her at the knees and down she went."

The words hit Abby deep in the center of her chest. She schools her expression so he'll keep talking. If he keeps talking, maybe it won't seem as bad.





"I got the tractor stopped and jumped off. I was so mad. Mad at her, mad at myself. Why didn't she run? Why did she stay? I ran over to her and watched her bleed. There was nothing any of us could do. None of us had brought a rifle or pistol. All I could do was pray." He stops and looks away across the street.

Abby leans in and says, "Then what happened?"

Dan looks back at her and jumps when he sees how pale she is.

"I knew I shouldn't have told you."

"It's all right," she says. "I'm okay." She waves his concern away. "Dan, why didn't she run?"

"Well," Dan pushes his cold coffee to the edge of the table. "After a couple minutes, I couldn't stand it anymore. I was going home. I turned around and headed back the way I'd come on the mower and that's when I saw it."

"Saw what?" Abby asks.

"The fawn. It was all curled up on its side. Not a scratch on it." He takes her hands again and looks deep into her eyes. "She wouldn't leave it. She was trying to wake it, trying to get it to stand and run. She knew they were in danger, but she wouldn't leave it behind."

He kisses the top of her hand. "You see what I mean? Even animals have it."

"What did you do?" She asks him.

"I did the only thing I could. I scooped it up and walked all the way home with it in my arms." His eyes glaze over and he chuckles softly. "Mom had a fit when she saw it. It was all wrapped up in my jacket. Then she had an even bigger fit when she saw me. I had blood all over my pants legs and the front of my shirt." He looks away for a second and then looks back. "At the time, I didn't remember kneeling down next to the doe, trying to stop the bleeding, but apparently I had."

Abby is all weak and shaky inside. Sickly. She tries to smile, and then she asks, "So did you keep the fawn?"

"We had it a couple weeks, and then we took it to the ranger's office. Last I heard they'd introduced it back to the wild." He shrugs. "I shouldn't have told you that story."

Abby agrees with him, but she says, "It was a little graphic, but it's still a good story, and you have a good point."

"Ah, you're just bein' polite." He pulls out his wallet and slaps some money down onto the table as he stands and reaches out to her. "Come on. Let's walk it off."

Abby jumps off the bed and wretches into the toilet for the third time that day. She tunes out the sounds. She doesn't want to remember the sounds. Her eyes are squeezed tight, and her mind sees his hand still reaching out to her.

She stands and rinses her mouth out in the sink. Slowly, she looks at herself in the mirror.

"You should run," she whispers to herself. "You should run, or your legs will get chopped off and you'll be stuck here forever."

And that's when she decides what to do in precisely seven months.



Martha Rose Gragido
Northeast Alabama Community College
Epsilon Alpha Chapter
1st Place Short Story 2012





2012 Photography Winners

Tumble

Joanna Leath
Tyler Junior College
Psi Gamma Chapter
Photography 1st Place Winner 2012

Snowy Winters

Amy Saylor
Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter
*Photography
2nd Place Winner 2012*



Bob Sike's Bridge
Melissa Bennefield
Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter
*Photography
3rd Place Winner 2012*





Of the Cloth

/ Diana Sydnor

"Bless me Father for I have sinned," she breathed through the finely woven lace curtain that separated her from him. It had not been his Saturday to have to do Confessions, and he had been planning to go the game, but since Father Joe had a wedding ceremony to perform, he agreed to fill in and miss the Titans playing at home. Since he had made plans to meet the guys after the game to shoot some pool at Kevin's house, and Father Joe had agreed to do the early Mass, this had hopes of being a pretty good trade-off. He might even have time to get in a few miles before meeting the guys. He had been a runner since running cross country and track in high school, and he still had it in his blood to run. It was a crisp fall evening, the leaves were just thinking about turning, and that all-too-familiar October nip had bitten the air – this would be a good evening for a run. He was wondering how many more were waiting in the church when his mind forced him back to the words being spoken through the cloth. "It has been almost four years since my last Confession," and he noticed there was something hauntingly familiar about that voice. It flowed gently through the fabric - thick, sweet, southern, like the sorghum his mother used to buy at the farmer's market, and he found himself holding on to every word she spoke, wondering why this woman was having such an effect on him.

She continued to speak, telling him of the extra-marital affair she had had the year before with a man she had known for several years from the office. She knew it was no excuse, but her husband was never home, she had been desperately lonely, and she just became vulnerable to his advances, even though she knew it was wrong. She felt like she might have been falling in love with him, but she ended it because it seemed like the right thing to do. When she had attempted to tell her husband of her indiscretion, he had stormed out of the house, and he had said he couldn't live with what she'd done. She had come to find out later, of course, that he had been having an affair of his own, and he was just waiting for the right time to leave. That appeared to be the right time.

Once she had separated from her husband and gotten all the legalities taken care of, she had returned home to be near her parents since they were aging. She had found a job with an accounting firm in Chattanooga, and she thought it would be nice to start over and return to the Church. Her mom didn't mean to nag, but she was a constant reminder of the way she had been raised. She reminded Jeanette often that it was her duty as a good Catholic to go to Mass each week. Confession seemed to be the right way to turn over a new leaf and start again. She knew Mom was right.

Father Byron told her that her penance was to add an extra weekday Mass to the regular Sunday Masses. He also wanted her to do weekly confessions to help cleanse her soul and a daily recital of at least one decade of the rosary. He told her then that he had a pair of rosary beads in his car, and it enabled him to recite and reflect on the prayers whenever he was driving. She let out a little giggle, saying that she hoped he was keeping his eyes on the road, but that she guessed God would protect him from harm anyway. A look of remembrance washed over his face, and he felt a boyish glow heat him from the crown of his head to the tips of his toes as he realized this woman with the heavenly voice and the girlish laugh was Jeanette. He wondered if she even would remember him, and he found the long-before buried pain return as he remembered the way she had





broken up with him just a few days after Prom.

Prom night had been a mistake, and he knew it even then. They had gone out to dinner at Café Jordan, and they had had a wonderful evening dancing and laughing with their friends. They had been dating for nearly a year, and they had agreed that they wanted to wait until marriage to have sexual relations with anyone, since it was the right thing to do, whether that marriage was eventually to each other or the result of other relationships. But she was absolutely breathtaking in her lavender dress, and her long, chestnut hair was pulled up with little tendrils curling around her face. He had felt handsome as well, in his black tux he had rented for the evening, and somehow that seemed to give him a little more courage than he had normally. His buddies were all with their dates, with promises of a wild evening. They had gotten hotel rooms, a limo, and had each grabbed a bottle of this and that for the party in the hotel that night. Ronnie decided to book a room, too, just in case, so they would have somewhere to go should they choose to have some time alone.

The party had gotten a little out of hand. Ronnie had brought a bottle of Black Velvet and a bottle of Kahlua from his dad's well-stocked liquor cabinet, and they had filled large cups with milk from the hotel lobby. Jeanette was drinking white Russians all evening, while he sipped on his whiskey straight from the bottle. They were getting pretty heavily intoxicated, and they knew it, but they were having a good time. He couldn't really even remember how they ended up in their hotel room, but it didn't take much to ignite their passion so that they found themselves tangled up with one another over and over again that night. First on the couch in the room where they decided to watch a movie, then on the bed as they began to give in to these new and forbidden desires they were feeling for one another. The third time was in the shower – he had happened to open the door to the bathroom while she was showering, and he saw her silhouette through the steamy room behind the shower curtain. He couldn't help himself and he joined her.

They exhausted themselves and finally lay, spent, on the bed to sleep off the alcohol and activities of the evening. Morning found them each feeling a bit ashamed, her for following through with what she had been determined to wait until marriage to do, and him for having pre-planned the whole thing. He took her home, gave her a kiss, and told her he'd call her later. He did call, but her mom said she wasn't feeling well and couldn't come to the phone. He had tried again a few hours later, and by the next morning, he got in his car and went over to see her. He was getting worried. Her mother had told him that it wasn't the best time right now, and that he needed to go on home. The following day she had agreed to speak to him, finally, and told him that it was over. They passed in the hall a few times at school, but by September they had each gone on to different colleges and had moved on with life without each other.

He could see her kneeling, beads and booklet in hand, stumbling her way through the decades, and looking up the prayers and mysteries as she went along. She kept tucking an annoying lock of her auburn hair behind her ear. He felt a jolt electrify through him as he recalled nibbling on that ear and getting lost in the depth of her dark eyes. He felt that buried desire rise up within him, longing to feel the warmth of her skin against his again. One of the altar servers walked out and lit the candles, forcing him to bring his mind back to the Church and his God, the Crucifix which hung behind the altar, and he





felt an intense degree of shame for allowing his mind to wander in that way. He prayed silently that God would forgive him for being such a weak man. He prepared for the Mass, setting out the vessels, dressing in his vestments, and she still didn't know who he was. He felt a longing to run up behind her and put his hands over her cocoa brown eyes, saying "guess who," but instead he lined up outside the door behind his dear friend, Alice, who carried the Lectionary and followed the procession into the church and up to the altar. He could feel Jeanette's eyes following him up the aisle, as the realization began to strike her that this was her Byron, her Ronnie.

He could feel her watching him as he celebrated the Mass. Alice stood to do the first reading, "The first reading is from the Book of Kings," to which the congregation replied, "Thanks be to God." Alice read flawlessly of Naaman's healing and followed with the Responsorial Psalm "The Lord has revealed to the nations His saving power." Next was the second reading, from the book of 2 Timothy. "But if we deny him he will deny us. If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:8-13). It was then time for the Gospel reading. Ten had been cleansed and only one returned to give thanks to God. He could feel Jeanette's eyes following every move he made, and could imagine her listening intently to the Lord's word as he spoke. He concluded the Gospel reading with "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you" (Luke 17:19).

Byron completed the Gospel reading, said his homily, which he had spent even more time than usual on, and he prepared the Eucharist. He noticed Jeanette in his line for communion. She bowed as she approached, and he held the Eucharist in front of her, saying, "Body of Christ," to which she responded "Amen," with her eyes locked onto his and a knowing grin lighting up her face that he couldn't help but respond to. He gave the final blessing, having lost sight of her, and he made his way through the ocean of parishioners waiting for a handshake or warm Fatherly smile. He walked out the back door of the church that led to the stone path he was so familiar with. This meandered behind the rectory to his private entrance, where he found her waiting beside the ever-blooming roses for him. She reached out to hug him and they embraced, feeling the warmth of an old friendship and the desire of what once was within each other's arms. She let the embrace go first, saying, "Father Ronnie, huh." He smiled sheepishly, and he asked if she'd like to come in for a few minutes and catch up. She said, "I would love to, but I think I'd better not." He nodded his agreement and responded, "well, then, I'll see you at Mass?" And she responded, "Daily."



Diana Sydnor

College of Southern Maryland

Xi Delta Chapter

Short Fiction Winner 2011





My Daddy's Hands

/ Brenda S. Beaver

I can see Daddy sitting in his old chair holding a Camel non-filtered cigarette between his tobacco-stained fingers. I always loved my Daddy's hands. His middle finger would never straighten out because he had been in an accident that cut the tendons in the knuckle. When I was a little girl, I would sit in his lap and try to straighten his fingers, but not too hard because I didn't want to hurt him. When we are born, our hands are soft, pink, and smooth. I have often wondered if my Daddy's hands could have ever been soft. Probably not. He was born into generational poverty. His father died when he was five, leaving his mother to raise nine children alone. As a child he had been farmed out to work with relatives because there were just too many mouths to feed, and that was the way things were done. Perhaps some of the stains on his hands came from carrying a suitcase from one place to the next or from being forced to accept charity.

When Daddy was seventeen, he lied about his age in order to get a job at a mill. The country had just entered its second world war. After working at the mill for about two weeks, he received his draft slip. He joined the U.S Navy, where he became a boiler tech onboard the *U.S.S. Midway*. Some of his fingers had been burned so often by the intense heat of the boilers that they no longer had prints. I used to hold his giant hands in mine and try to see the remains of his fingerprints. Those that hadn't been burned off were buried under stains from years of smoking or from the dirt and oil that comes with working on machinery. The stains of time, having been absorbed into his skin, gave his hands the look and feel of ancient leather.

My Daddy's hands were never clean. He would take out his pocket knife and clean out from under his fingernails, and I would watch him, always fearing that he would cut his hand, adding another scar, like adding a line to a story in a book. Those scars told of battles often fought yet rarely won - battles with poverty, scratching to feed a seemingly endless number of children from a paycheck that was never enough. Battles fought in the cage which held him, forcing him to live a life that had little room for dreams. Battles with time and a world that was moving too fast for him to keep up.

Daddy's hands were a bit like God's hands to me: to be loved and sometimes feared. Having his hand rest upon my narrow shoulders or atop my head was better than the Zero bars he would bring home every Friday afternoon. Daddy hardly ever had to give me and my sisters a whippin'. That chore was usually designated to Mama. She wasn't as good at giving whippin's as Daddy. I bet she must have torn me up a dozen times or more compared to the single whippin' I got from Daddy. I can't say that I recall a single time she whipped me as clearly as the three times I was on the receiving end of Daddy's belt.

As I grew older, I began to try to bend my fingers to look like Daddy's. I would place my still small, soft hands on a flat surface and bend my middle finger in an arch while keeping my index finger as straight as possible. My ring finger had to be bent only a little. By then, I, too, was smoking and had gotten into the habit of getting up early so I could sit with Daddy, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. These were the quiet hours of the morning when the rest of the world was asleep and it was just me and Daddy. He





liked to eat 'sweet cakes' and always offered me half.

It was in these years that I began to suspect that Daddy's hands sometimes caused him pain. My God was becoming mortal. I began to buy him gloves to protect his hands from the cold and injuries, and at night I would rub lotion into them in a vain effort to soften the leather that was his skin. He would sit and talk about his chickens or his dogs, allowing me to ease the aches in his hands because he knew it made me happy to do so.

After my son was born, I awoke one morning to find Daddy holding him. Those large, callused hands gently cradling my tiny, smooth son strengthened my ties to my Daddy. I sat quietly, watching them as they stared into each other's eyes; Daddy passing his ancient knowledge to my newborn son while regaining something precious that he must have lost during his journey through life. When Daddy caught me watching them, he smiled his one-sided smile and told me that I'd "better watch this one."

Later, when I moved away, I clutched Daddy's hands in mine. Fear of the unknown loomed ahead of me while the reality that he was not an immortal God stood starkly in my mind. Never had I been so far away from him. It seems that I had barely left when I was called back home. Daddy was sick. I spent the next week clinging to Daddy's hands as his body was wracked with coughs. I stroked them as he struggled with his fears of the unknown. I felt them stroke my hair, comforting me, as I prayed. I held them gently as he died.

When I was ten I broke two of my fingers and they never grew back straight. My hands aren't pretty or soft. They are scarred from fooling with chickens and often dirty from working in the garden. They are callused and ache in the cold. Over time, the sun and the wind have left their marks on my hands, cracking them in the winter and sprinkling freckles on them in the summer. I still sit and try to bend my hands to make them look like Daddy's. It isn't as hard to do as it once was. I have my Daddy's hands.



Brenda S. Beaver

Darton College

Pi Beta Chapter

Essay Winner 2010





Moment of Love

Cheryl (Gale) Opuszynski
Atlantic Cape
Community College
Sigma Alpha Chapter
Photography 1st Place Winner
2009

Secret

Kathryn McAdams
North Lake
Community College
Omicron Gamma Chapter
Photography 1st Place Winner
2008





Hope is Human

/Christopher Hooie

Hope. What images does the word bring to mind? We might think of a tweenage boy hoping the next popular video game will soon be released to the masses, a lonely young man hoping the young woman he loves will fall for him in return, a grown man hoping that a return to college will change his entire existence for the better, or an old woman sitting beside her dying husband, hoping he will live a bit longer. Each of us could envision images that would define personal hope for us. In his book *Eight Habits of the Heart*, Clifton Taulbert considers hope one of the habits that enhances our lives. Hope is such an ingrained part of our thoughts that often we don't even realize it is there. . . Hope *IS* the essential human emotion. We find hope in our dreams, our futures, our children, and even in nature. We find these examples of hope in literature, sometimes as a central theme, sometimes in the background.

Hope can sometimes be the central theme in a literary work. It is powerful enough to stand alone, and often does. We find it a dominant theme in *Dream Deferred* by Langston Hughes. The *vision* of hope is often illustrated as a *dream*. Our dreams define us; where are we going, what will we be, or what will we do with our lives? Hughes asks us "what happens to a dream deferred?" In essence, what happens when we force that dream to wait? What happens when hope must be deferred or put on hold? Does it "fester," "stink," or "dry up" as Hughes suggests? Of course it does. If the realization of hope or a dream is not achieved, the hope or dream will consume our thoughts to the point of destroying us. This destruction is evidenced by the last line of the poem, "Or does it explode?" This work is a powerful example of what disregarded hope can do to us (732).

Hughes also brings us the idea of hope for a brighter future. In his *Theme for English B*, he speaks as a black student to his white instructor. He hopes to convey that his blackness does not make him different mentally or in his human desires. He states that, "... being colored doesn't make me *not* like/ the same things other folks like who are other races." He also hopes to get the white instructor to understand he likes things just like other people. "I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love. / I like to work, read, learn, and understand life." He wants us to understand that even though we whites are "somewhat more free," we are all Americans (972-3).

One of the things hope is closely associated with is time. We look to the future because we have it in front of us. We cannot go back and change the past however much we would like to do so. We, therefore, wish to make sure we do not repeat mistakes, and we hope to teach our children not to make those same mistakes. In *Ulysses*, Alfred Lord Tennyson tells his version of the mind of the hero Ulysses. Ulysses not only ponders his past and future, he hopes *for* his son. He tells us of him, "This is my son, my own Telemachus, / To whom I leave the scepter and the isle." He wishes for his son to be a good ruler, to "subdue them to the useful and the good." He hopes that Telemachus will be "decent not to fail / In offices of tenderness, and pay / meet adoration to my... gods, /when I am gone." He hopes he has taught his son well (746-7).

Human beings look for, and find, hope all around us. We even seek it out in nature. One beautiful example of where hope can be found is in *Loveliest of Trees* by A.E. Housman. In this poem, Housman talks of the hope he has to see the beauty of spring bloss-





soms for all the springs to come. He sees the “Loveliest of trees, the cherry now / Is hung with bloom along the bough.” He *hopes* to see many more such visions of the beautiful cherry in the future. He is still a young man, “. . . of my threescore years and ten / twenty will not come again.” He knows that given the average seventy year lifespan spoken of in the Bible, he has fifty yet to go. He also believes this too short a time is insufficient to view the beauty of nature and truly see it all. He tells us that “to look at things in bloom / fifty springs are little room,” to reiterate the point that there is never enough time to see enough of the beauty in the world. He hopes to convey that we should seize the moment to view that beauty whenever possible (792-3).

Yes, to *hope* is the essence of being human. Perhaps we can define it for others better on paper than aloud. We often feel the expression of it when we read literature as we imagine ourselves in the story or poem. Emily Dickinson may have said it best in her famous work, “*Hope* is the thing with feathers / that perches in the soul / and sings the tune without the words / and never stops at all.” How can we better illustrate it? Hope resides in our hearts and souls. We may not know what is coming, but we continue on life’s path anyway.

Primary Source

Arp, Thomas, and Greg Johnson, eds. *Perrine’s Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2006.



Christopher Hooie
Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter
Literary Analysis Winner 2009





Crying Bear

/Christopher Hooie

Every four years, the Boy Scouts of America holds a national jamboree for scouts from all over the country to gather in fellowship and camaraderie. The jamboree is most often held at Fort A.P. Hill, a United States Army base located in northern Virginia. Since the base is close to Washington, D.C., many troops at the jamboree also take a trip to our nation's capital and other nearby historical sites.

In 1989, I was lucky enough to attend this event; in addition, my father was scoutmaster of our north Alabama group. Because of the sheer number of boy scouts in the nation, the troops who attend the jamboree are usually made up of boys from various troops located in their own areas. In my case, there were many scouts and leaders from the north Alabama area.

Like many other troops, we toured Washington. Such an experience! The majesty of the city, the monuments, our government, and the historical significance of the capital and surrounding area were not lost on many of us. One evening, after a short driving tour, we visited the Lincoln Memorial. Adjacent to old Abe lies the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, better known as "The Wall."

The Wall lies off the left hand of Abe. Standing in front of Abe's statue and facing the Washington Monument, visitors can glimpse The Wall through a small stand of trees. A small path leads from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to the beginning of The Wall, which first appears as a small black granite triangle recessed into a small hillside. The tiles become more visible as visitors travel along the path, and names begin to appear, listed by the year of the servicemen's deaths. Soon, the growing tiles reach their full height, and The Wall turns slightly to the right at an angle and continues. Each black granite slab is much taller than the average person and holds hundreds of names. The total number of slain servicemen on that wall is 58,195.

I was thirteen years old the year I visited The Wall. I was no longer a boy, but still not quite a man, and this visit had an immeasurable effect on me. I was simply awed by the experience. After a few pictures and a bit of time running my fingers across name after name, I decided to make my way back up to Old Abe and find a seat for the fireworks show we had been told was coming. A friend of mine was standing at the end of the wall, just standing there, looking lost. I gave him the "nod," the old shake of the head acknowledging his presence. He gave me the other "nod" to acknowledge mine, and then he gave me one other "nod," the one that conveys "look over there."

One of our leaders, Mr. Ozzie Clements, was beginning to walk along the wall. Mr. Clements is a Vietnam Veteran. The best description of him is that he looks like a bear: about five feet four, barrel-chested and thick limbed. His jet black hair has long since acquired many gray and silver streaks. His large face sprouts a beard that matches his hair as if it were an extension of it. He wears glasses and walks with a cane, the latter apparently due to bad knees from an old war injury. At the time, he was dressed as we were, his khaki shirt adorned with a few insignia, olive drab shorts, and olive drab knee length socks trimmed red at the top. Mr. Clements sounded a lot like an old bear as well; he inserted many grunts and growls into his replies to oft asked questions of young men. Mr. Clements had a heart of gold, however, as he was always prepared to teach any young





man anything he knew, and he always had time for those many questions.

My friend and I stood watching as he walked along that wall, leaning heavily on that cane. We slowly followed at a distance, quietly, so that we would not disturb him. He appeared as if the whole of the world rested on his shoulders. Occasionally, he reached out his left hand and ran his fingers across a name, similar to a child running extended fingers along a chain-link fence. After several minutes, he came to a particular slab of granite and stopped, staring up at it. When the wall was completed in 1982, there were no computer databases to search for the location of a particular name. Mr. Clements had done so the old fashioned way: he had either looked it up in a book or he had been here before and found it.

Mr. Clements then did an unexpected thing. He leaned the cane he relied on so much against that wall and just stood there, staring, completely unaware of us or the other hundreds of young scouts milling about. I stood in reverence and awe as I watched him silently reach up to a name a few inches above his head and trace that name with his fingers. With one hand on that name, he moved his other to his face, hiding his eyes as tears began to run down his cheeks. He stood that way for an eternity, or so it seemed, for time has a way of fooling the mind. The dozens of people passing around me ceased to exist; all else passed from my mind as I watched solemnly to see what would happen next.

After a moment or two, he lowered both hands. As tears still streamed down his face, I watched a bent and seemingly broken man rise up, straighten those bad knees, and give a perfect salute as crisp and neat as if he had just completed his military training. He held that salute for a moment, finished it, and collected his cane. My friend and I melted into the crowd as he passed, wanting nothing more than to allow him his personal moment in peace.

I have often wondered what passed through his mind. What happened in that jungle all those years ago? Then, as I aged, it dawned on me that those men had, in effect, given their lives for him. That particular name must have been a close friend of his, and Mr. Clements' agony must have been a result of knowing that his friend had died while he had lived. In that jungle, surrounded by death and destruction, they had clung to the only thing they had: friendship. Friendship built by entrusting their own personal survival to those around them on an every-minute-of-the-day basis.

In a moment, I had been able to witness a lifetime worth of education. William Wordsworth says that we have "spots of time, That with distinct pre-eminence retain a *renovating virtue*..." and that by which "...our minds are nourished and invisibly repaired," and that they "lift us up when fallen." I cannot improve upon that statement, but perhaps I have given an additional glimpse of it. I have learned that wisdom is mainly a component of our life's experiences. Snippets of time, recalled again and again, from which we learn anew every day.



Christopher Hooie
Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter
Essay Winner 2009





Things I Need To Do:

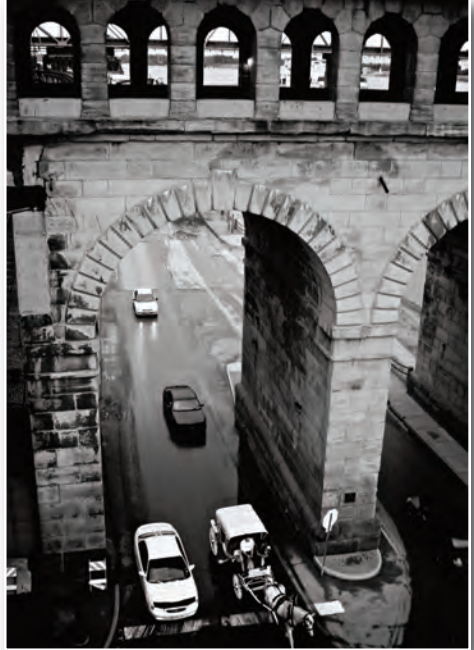
/Lynn McMahan

Water the plants
Wash the dishes
Clean the clothes
Cry
Feed the dogs
Open the bottle
Drink its contents
Dry
Find a realtor
See an attorney
Pay the bills
Cry
Shampoo the carpet
Divide the assets
Tell our children
Why



Lynn McMahan

McLennan Community College
Lambda Beta Chapter
Poetry Winner 2007



Transition in Time

Jordan Theis
Darton College
Pi Delta Chapter
Photography 1ST Place Winner
2011





The Inside

/Amanda Hosey

I walked into the subway car and looked around at all the blank faces. Some pretended to read; others talked loudly on phones. Each face stared off as if no one else existed there. But I could see inside them. I knew what they thought and what they had done.

Sylvia, a woman in a long charcoal trench coat made of leather or vinyl, I'm not sure which, sat in the far right of the car. She turned, and, for a brief moment, met my glance. Quickly she hid her face in hopes of masking the lie that glowed brightly on her face. Had I been someone else, she would have disguised her secret well, but I knew everything she held inside. I could see the love, the affair, the baby that grew within her. She had a wife at home, Martha, who waited all day for her favorite moment, Sylvia's arrival. Sylvia thought of Martha, so loyal, so loving, and wanted to cry. She held it in so that no one could see. I saw; I could feel her pain growing with her thoughts, and I wanted to cry for her. She had cheated on Martha for three months now with her secretary, Mark. "I need to run away," thought Sylvia, but she knew of no place she could run that would let her escape the guilt, the sin, the lies. "I hate myself," she whispered to no one. The man next to her gave a quick look. I knew he had not actually heard what she had said, but Sylvia wasn't sure. Her face, already flushed, grew a deeper shade of crimson. She felt even more ashamed now and was certain he could smell sex on her skin. Sylvia's sadness became too much for my heart. I turned my head and saw a young couple in the corner sweetly staring into each other's eyes.

"I hope he loves me as much as I love him," Maria thought, her golden hair rustling from the breeze of the air vent.

"I hope she doesn't want to meet my mother yet," thought Jason, as he tried to think of anything other than Maria's breasts.

At this I laughed to myself, "Kids."

I turned my head and left the two lovers to themselves. I gave my attention to the man straight ahead. Light cerulean eyes stared back at me, so cool and calm that a chill ran from my hair to my toes. He seemed totally content. Not a thought crossed his mind. I began to wonder; could he have the same talent that I do? Does he know what I'm thinking right now? A silence came from him that I did not understand, a silence more real than any I had ever heard while all the voices around me were clamoring on about bills, lunch, love, everything else running through their brains. Finally, an image flashed through his mind and mine. He was remembering his day's events. A scarlet river ran through his thoughts and wrapped around everything, carrying with it a kind of melancholy beauty. In his memory, I saw him dressed in black, creeping in through an upstairs window, and sitting, smiling, waiting quietly. A woman with long raven hair entered the room, her arms full of freshly washed laundry. His knife ran smoothly across her throat. Her body fell onto the bed, spilling blood over the clean laundry and her dark hair. I looked away. I needed to block him out; his was a mind I had no desire to see inside, but the woman's face made me look back. There was something so familiar about her. How did I know her? Frantically, I glanced back to Sylvia and saw Martha's open face, pale skin, dark eyes, and I knew. I looked back to the man who sat before me. Carl, that was his name; I could see it clearly now. His eyes were glazed over with satisfaction. At this instant, I could see everything. Out of jealousy, Mark had chosen Carl to do what he wished he had the strength to do. Carl had been hired to kill Martha.

I looked over to Sylvia who was replaying the happenings of the day in her head. "I just





can't do it to her anymore, Mark," Sylvia screamed across her desk. "I refuse to go on living a lie; I love Martha."

"Don't you dare say her name to me! You know I despise it," he shouted in return. As she turned to leave, he began to beg, "Please, please. I love you; don't you feel the same for me?"

The truth was she didn't. Sylvia was aware of this fact throughout the affair. She was only looking for a fling, something different from her monotonous routine. "No, I don't love you," she replied, her voice filled with cold distaste. Unbeknownst to Sylvia, all of this, the entire conversation, had been too late. Earlier in the week, Mark had phoned an old friend, an unstable man with light cerulean eyes, to end his obstacles to Sylvia once and for all.

Now Sylvia was on her way home, excited for the first time in months to see Martha. Knowing what she had in store when she reached their bedroom, I felt terribly sorry for her. T-shirts and underwear, stained with her own sin, awaited Sylvia. I looked back to Carl. A rerun-nightmare looped in his head. He watched Martha die over and over again. It turned my stomach, and I wanted to hate him. How could I judge him? After all, I had sold my soul to have the ability to see inside him. How could I judge anyone when I had given up that which makes us human?

My own memory began to play in my head, something that I hate. I could see that day so clearly. Silver clouds blanketed the skyline, letting little light shine down on me. I cried tears of mourning and hummed a dirge for our lost love. "If only," I mouthed. If only I could have seen the problems, if only I could have heard his thoughts, I would have known of his misery with me. I could have stopped it; I could have changed.

"I would give anything, anything at all, to be able to read others' minds," I said aloud, knowing if I could only have that power, I could be everything I was supposed to be.

Then it appeared - a bright ginger light that blinded and enthralled me at the same time. No words were spoken, but I heard every line and every clause of the contract. There would be a trade: my soul in exchange for the ability to see inside everyone around me. Thoughts, cloudy with grief, swirled wildly through my mind. At that moment, I made a decision, maybe not the right one, but the one that seemed right for me at the moment. A quill pen with a razor sharp tip stabbed violently into my flesh. Ruby red ink dripped from my vein as I signed away my soul.

I awoke to bright sunshine. Everything felt fresh and new. I hummed a new song in my head, something peppy and upbeat, and felt more alive than I ever knew I could. I wondered if this could have all been a dream. Looking down at my shirt, I saw dried blood on the sleeve. As days went by, I began to feel hollow. Something was missing inside of me, something I could never get back. I could hear the thoughts of all the people around me, but it was hard to hear my own.

I began to understand. My soul, that which I had given away so easily, housed my love for myself, my love for the people who were most important to me, and any other feelings that make people normal and human, with the exception of empathy. I could feel others' pain and sorrow, and that was all that made me feel alive. All day long, for the rest of my life, I ride the subway, back and forth, taking what I can from the riders who surround me.



Amanda Hosey

Bevill State Community College

Phi Alpha Chapter

Short Fiction Winner 2006





On the Edge of Darkness

/ Josh Dendy

I wonder what it is like to live life
as a fraction of the overall scheme;
to never make a commotion,
to never have a theme.

I wonder what it is like to be an understudy, yet never
act;
to have your infinite impression on the universe
culminate into four words:

Mistah Kurtz –he dead.

And be heard from no more.



Josh Dendy

Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter
Poetry Winner 2005

Serenity

Alisha McFadzen
Northwest Arkansas
Community College
*Photography 1st Place Winner
2010*





Strategic-inflection Points

/Betty Barksdale

*We count our joys not by the things we have,
But by what kept us from the perfect thing.*

-Paul Laurence Dunbar

There are few moments in our lives that are characterized as defining moments. We are all born; we all die. The moments that pass between those two milestones are for the most part nondescript, meaning people can not recall these moments at the drop of a hat. However, there are those moments that we can remember in an instant. These moments are strategic-inflection points. Mundane classes like economics and math teach students about intersecting lines on graphs. If the lines run parallel, there is little meaning. However, if these lines ever cross on the chart, it is notable and usually provides the answer to a question. Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton, and Arthur Miller use strategic-inflection points in their stories to examine these explosive and life-changing moments that forever alter the future.

In the story *The Second Choice* by Theodore Dreiser, Shirley has two notable strategic-inflection points. Mabel Gove invites Shirley to her house for Thanksgiving. She sees Arthur immediately and is infatuated by him. As the night proceeds, she gets the opportunity to dance with Arthur. "Do you like me?" is the question that brings about the strategic-inflection point. Shirley's reaction is momentous: "and from that moment she was almost mad over him, could think of nothing else but his hair and eyes and his smile and his graceful figure." Shirley begins a torturous time in her life at this very moment, throwing Barton and caution to the wind. She begins lying to Barton because she has to find time to get to know the elusive Arthur. Shirley soon learns that the mirror has two faces. Arthur is a deceiving person as he never has any serious intentions toward her. Shirley realizes that she has thrown the faithful Barton aside for Arthur, who will never stand up and be the person that she desires in her life. Shirley approaches the second strategic-inflection point. She is going to repair the relationship with Barton the faithful. He is thrilled at the sight of Shirley, and she extends an invitation for Barton to come visit her. Shirley knows that if she lets Barton come to her home, the relationship will begin again immediately. Suddenly, she remembers the beautiful and exciting Arthur and compares him to the predictable Barton. Barton can see her emotions: "As she meditated, these various moods racing to and fro in her mind, Barton seemed to notice, and now it occurred to him that perhaps he had not pursued her enough—was too easily put off." He decides to take the bull by the horns and press her to set a date for their meeting. Her moment of indecision fades as she makes the final decision to repair the broken relationship with Barton. Her fate is sealed along with her unrequited heart. These strategic-inflection points come so quickly that decisions have to be made without the luxury of time.

In the story *Roman Fever* by Edith Wharton, there are several strategic-inflection points. Alida Slade and Grace Ansley meet by coincidence in Rome "at the same hotel, each of them the modest appendage of a salient daughter." The women have come separately to





Rome with their daughters who have become friends. As Alida and Grace sit in the evening sun, they have a view of the Colosseum, which is symbolic to both women. Their conversation drifts to stories from the past, including the Great-aunt Harriet story. This opens the door for the second strategic-inflection point. As Alida becomes agitated, she unleashes her anger by saying to Grace, “—and I can repeat every word of the letter that took you there.” Alida reveals to Grace that she is the one responsible for writing the letter that tricks Grace into coming to the Colosseum so many years ago. That becomes a fateful night for all three characters. Delphin, Alida’s betrothed, meets Grace in the Colosseum that night. Alida is confused when Grace leaves the country. Not until this very minute does she understand how fate tricks her. She receives the final blow when Grace informs her that in one meeting, which is one of the most powerful strategic-inflection points in Grace’s life, Barbara was conceived. The conception of a child is truly one of the most life altering situations that a person can be involved in. These moments come so quickly that passion can overrule good judgment and change the course of a life.

In the play *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, strategic-inflection points appear again. Willy Loman is toying with the idea of going to Alaska to find his father and settle there when he meets a salesman in the Parker House named Dave Singleman. At the age of eighty-four, Dave is still making a living. Willy changes his life course here: “And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want.” This chance meeting puts Willy on the life-long adventure of trying to be the best salesman ever born. Throughout Willy’s life, selling overrides everything. Willy’s wife and children are alone much of the time. This tragic choice of becoming a salesman costs Willy the respect of his son Biff. Biff fails his math final in high school. He finds his father in a hotel room, and they are making plans to persuade the teacher to raise Biff’s score. He has to pass this math class so he can claim his football scholarship. Just as Willy convinces Biff to go to the car, a noise comes from the bathroom. Eventually, a partially nude woman comes out of Willy’s bathroom. Biff is devastated. Willy tells him, “Now look, Biff, when you grow up you’ll understand about these things.” However, the damage is done, and the relationship is not repaired until just before Willy dies.

In all three stories lives are changed in a few moments. These moments can be re-captured in the mind just like watching a video. These moments are so powerful, yet sometimes they happen without fanfare, and they produce an occasion for a decision that will put people’s lives on a totally separate road than they were on before. Shirley’s dance with Arthur starts her on a journey that will leave her dissatisfied for the rest of her life. She and Barton could have been happy without the memories of Arthur. Alida’s envy over Grace’s meekness and good looks catapults her decision to toy with Grace’s emotions. This brings about a backlash that makes truth stranger than fiction. And finally, Willy’s chance encounter with Dave Singleman starts him on a path that finally destroys him. The Bible states that time and chance happens to us all, and this is true. These three authors use strategic-inflection points to take the fictional characters down paths that alter their lives forever.



Betty Barksdale

Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter
Literary Analysis Winner 2004





The Soldier

/Pat Murphree

Facing the Gulf of Tonkin in east Vietnam, Allen knelt down. His hands trembled, dripping with his Army buddy's blood. As the waves of the crashing tide washed death from Allen's hands, he fought to control his emotions and show the courage expected of an airborne ranger. Nothing remained but the endless wait on the beach for transport back to a carrier that would return his platoon to the mainland. Holding his buddy Charles in his arms, Allen raged inside, asking, "What the hell happened?" Why had his platoon's "routine" reconnaissance and training mission met fierce combat?

Allen remembered parachuting out of the plane into the Vietnam jungle. The excitement of landing somewhere other than a training field elated him. Besides, being new to the airborne infantry, he felt no fear of impending combat. After all, their platoon was merely to use high-tech satellite transponders to signal the carrier regarding possible resistance in the area. Soon after landing, he and his platoon of eleven dedicated soldiers, including Charles with whom he had served since boot camp, trekked toward the area from which they were to send their first transmission. They had traversed a mere three kilometers when a Vietnamese patrol approached them. Suddenly, shocking the entire platoon, the Vietnamese patrol opened fire on them. Allen and his unit fell to the ground, seeking cover in the vegetation, their only chance to escape the patrol's raging bullets. Confusion raced through Allen's veins as he lay frozen to the ground in fear, unable to fathom the firefight. His sergeant began barking orders to return fire; Allen's thoughts shouted in disbelief, "This is war!"

With bullets and shrapnel pounding around him, he faced the fact that he had to engage the enemy. All of the training he had received should have prepared him for this moment. He chambered a round into his M-16 rifle, sighted in his intended target, and began to squeeze the trigger. Then he paused. The target seemed too real, too human. *Is this what I envisioned when I joined the military?* Allen asked himself. Then, among the height of the battle sounds and firing, he lost the human image in his sights, never noticing his weapon's barrel already smoking from the rounds that he had discharged at the enemy, thirteen of whom he had killed. All at once, he turned to search for Charles, his friend since boot camp. From a distance, Allen could see blood gushing from a bullet wound in Charles' chest. Allen began to crawl frantically beneath the highway of lead that sought to take his life. He cradled his fallen friend in his arms and saw the gaping wound that penetrated Charles' body. Allen tried desperately to stop the life pouring from the hole, but to no avail; Charles died in Allen's arms. While Allen held his lifeless friend in his arms, he could only wonder, "Why?" The thought of his young friend dying enraged Allen to the point that he began to fight like a serpent of evil.

Allen and his platoon began to sweep across the remaining Vietnamese like a thunderous storm of destruction. The platoon, after defeating the enemy, reassembled to check for losses. The sergeant of Allen's platoon radioed the carrier and advised the commander of the ambush. While the platoon was assembling for their return, Allen went to retrieve his friend. Knowing he would never fire it again, he dropped his rifle and tenderly picked his friend up. During the hike back to the coast, Allen had an empty feeling in his soul. He knew he could never engage in war again. The thought of holding another brave





soldier while life poured from him was more than Allen bargained for. He decided that he had to do something for the soldiers who would face the unavoidable treachery of war in the future.

Allen and his platoon were picked up and returned to the carrier within a couple of hours, but for Allen, time stood still. After returning to his duty post, Allen requested a transfer to the ministry so that he could comfort soldiers during war. Knowing what Allen had faced in the bloody battle, his commanding officer graciously approved the request.

Allen began his new mission back into the dense jungles of Vietnam. His mission was not only to help the other soldiers but also to help himself deal with the loss of his good friend. He knew the scars of war were permanent, but somehow he knew he had the gift of comfort. His gift would be a great weapon to the weary soldiers returning from the battles that erupted shortly after Allen's platoon was ruthlessly attacked. He started going to war camps, knowing the blood-soaked soldiers would soon return with horrors of their own.

Once the soldiers began to arrive, Allen's presence among the brave warriors made a saint-like impact. He often volunteered to help carry the shattered bodies of wounded soldiers. He even took on the grave task of writing to relatives of the deceased, a task that not too many jumped to complete. His most noticeable service was to the souls of the people of war. He lifted the spirits of the men and women who were forever branded by the tragedies of war.

His stories and visions of home cooked meals and hot apple pie somehow reminded the struggling souls of a better place. His calming voice reminded the soldiers of a kid brother at home or of a fellow soldier lost in the battle. The thought of Allen waiting back in camp provided the weary soldiers with a sense that someone cared. When the battle-beaten troops arrived back from what they called "the forest of death," the soldiers were at peace to see Allen because they knew that they had survived another day.

Years later in Desert Storm, a soldier like Allen, who had suffered similarly to Allen, called him Reverend. Although Allen had not seen himself in this light, he felt honored to be remembered for his role in Vietnam. The respect that he had earned throughout his military career was that of a decorated war hero. Although medals did not drape across his chest like a warm blanket, Allen had the comfort of knowing he would forever be known as a soldier — a soldier of souls.



Pat Murphree

Grayson County College

Tau Alpha Chapter

Short Fiction Winner 2003





Socks Don't Taste So Bad

/ Marty Kellum

My mouth – so much faster than my brain -
Often says the most interesting things.
Old Sam once said

“Better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool...”

But I don't know.
Can I learn when I don't even know I need to?

My mouth – so much faster than my brain –
Often surprises everyone in the room.
How did Sam finish it?

“...than to open it and remove all doubt.”

But I don't fret.
Everything is an opportunity to learn something new.

My mouth – so much faster than my brain –
Often plays host to my foot.
The wise often say,

“Think before you speak.”

But I don't listen.
If I insult a famous poet, that's OK –

Socks don't taste that bad.



Marty Kellum

Calhoun Community College

Theta Beta Chapter

Poetry Winner 2006





Wake Up

/ Nicholas Reich

Lying still
in a corner
of the room
is your eidolon.

It is overgrown with weeds.

So I douse
the thing
in oil.

To the wretch I throw a flame.

Up it goes
like dry timber,
smoking and moaning
heaving and rolling.

Now – at least – it moves.



Nicholas Reich

Bevill State Community College
Phi Alpha Chapter
Poetry Winner 2011

