

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta

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Grace Until December

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Epsilon Alpha Chapter

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Jody Ragsdale, Northeast Alabama Community College

Purpose of Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing.

ΣΚΔ offers members opportunities for

- Scholarships
- Awards
- Leadership
- Competition
- Publication
- Travel
- National Conferences
- Networking

Visit English2.org for complete eligibility requirements.



Hedera helix — the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of ΣΚΔ, symbolizes 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

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” John Donne

The underlying theme of this year's journal seems to focus on support networks. As students, faculty, and staff, we know that we rely on others to help ease the burdens of everyday life. Whether we receive help in the form of brainstorming, proofreading, mentorship, or just a shoulder to lean on or cry on, our contributors this year express that bleakness of solitude can be tempered by family, friends, servants, a stray dog, or a stuffed rabbit (just to name a few). So as you read this year's entries, I hope you find, as Walter Hogue did, “our minds filled with those things which gave us a sense of home, of belonging, of communion” (17).

It is in that same vein that I encourage everyone to join us in Las Vegas, Nevada March 25-28, 2020, for the Sigma Kappa Delta National Convention. The shared experience with other society members is unlike any other experience I have encountered. Meeting students from around the country, placing faces to names, and listening to the unique experiences of our members and advisors is truly the highlight of my year. I hope many of you will join us in 2020 where next year's winners will be announced at our annual awards luncheon.

Kat Padilla

Kat Padilla

SKD National Office

2019 ΣΚΑ Scholarship Winners

Dr. William C. Johnson Transfer Scholarship

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Illinois Valley Community College, Mu Alpha Chapter

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Northeast Alabama Community College, Epsilon Alpha Chapter

Dr. Susan LeJeune Service Scholarship

Aimee Breeden

Midland College, Zeta Epsilon Chapter

Dr. Sheila H. Byrd Service Scholarship

Melissa Brown

Calhoun Community College, Theta Beta Chapter

Ms. Joan S. Reeves Service Scholarship

Melisha Holcomb

Northeast Alabama Community College, Epsilon Alpha Chapter

2019 ΣΚΑ Chapter Award Winners

Literary Magazine/Journal

Aurora

Northeast Alabama Community College, Epsilon Alpha Chapter

Chapter Activity Award

PioneerCon

Jefferson State Community College, Eta Epsilon Chapter

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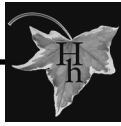
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Little Miss Independent -Stephanie Farrey-

I stand before the mirror—an anxious and eager new college student—pulling my hair into a half-twisted ponytail. The style is not one that I’ve tried before; I am having trouble pinning it correctly. Exasperated, I stand back, staring at my reflection. Bewildered, I realize it is not myself that I see in the mirror. On the other side of the glass is a little girl about to attend a friend’s *American Girl* themed birthday party with her older sister. The party is a role-playing, mystery-themed game, and she is dressed as the character she will be playing.

Scrunching her nose to avoid smelling the distinct thrift-shop scent which, despite her mother’s denial, still lingers in the fabric, she pauses to admire her costume. The delicate design that adorns the front of her dress gently interrupts the otherwise endless folds of soft, maroon velveteen. Barely noticing the wails and screams that echo from down the hallway, she carefully smooths the Victorian-style ruffles before reaching to straighten the large, mismatched, red hair bow that sits like a crown upon her head amidst locks of curling chocolate-brown hair. Now for shoes. Begrudgingly, she picks up her matching shoes and stares distastefully at the brass buckles. These shoes do not have the Velcro straps that her regular dress shoes do, and the buckles hurt her fingers to fasten.

As if becoming aware of the commotion coming from the room she shares with her sister, she cautiously approaches the doorway. The scene before her is utter chaos. Her sister, two years older than she, stands wearing a plain, navy blue dress and crying, complaining hysterically. “It’s itchyyyy!” The exclamation confuses her. Hadn’t they spent hours searching specifically for an outfit that *wasn’t* scratchy? Throwing herself against the wall and punching it repeatedly, her sister continues to cry and shriek. Their mother, clearly distressed, attempts to restrain her, telling her that it will be all right. Patiently, she holds and rocks the girl’s sister, slowly calming her down. Swallowing uncertainly and holding her shoes out towards her mother, a plea for help fills the girl’s sad brown eyes. “Mommy...? I need help.” Looking up, her mother shakes her head—still consoling the girl’s sister—and sternly responds, “you know how to put your shoes on; I

can't help you right now." Nodding agreeably, the girl obediently sits down on the floor and pulls her shoes on, struggling to fasten the bothersome buckles.

Startled, I step back from the mirror, understanding it is myself as a young girl that I see. My sister, in this memory, was in the height of her struggle with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) and often needed my parents' full support and attention. I was a sensitive and quiet child (often mislabeled as shy), but most of all, I was self-sufficient. It's strange to see how similar, and yet different, my life is thirteen years later. Now, the little girl that found herself forced to look out for herself on so many occasions (even if only to buckle her own shoes) finds herself in a place where her former independent attitude simply isn't possible anymore—nor does she wish it to be. It's unsettling to realize that the evolution of my very person can be summarized into so few words. It is not that simple to explain how it happened though.

I was always my parent's "perfect" daughter. Anything that was asked of me, I did, and I did well. Obediently, I would complete my chores or school work and wordlessly move to the next task. I required no extra attention and rarely needed to be disciplined. Always successful, always proud. Too successful, too proud—an ignorant and prideful child. I believe my parents assumed that I didn't need them nearly as much as their other children. They were technically correct; I have always been able to take care of myself.

I have an uncanny ability to understand new concepts and learn things quickly. Truthfully, it's a blessing and a curse. I was the first to learn to tie my shoes, and afterwards, proudly bragged to my older sister and parents over the accomplishment. I was the child that would beg to be taught to vacuum or load the dishwasher; all to add further achievements to my list. I soon learned, however, that my growing "success" only generated jealousy from my AS sister and caused her to further act out. This obviously concerned my parents. They quickly became wary of their bright and talented daughter. No one likes a know-it-all.

I was an intelligent child, and yet I became embarrassed by my own success. No matter how hard I tried or how much I accomplished, I never seemed to earn the same approving smile that my sister received. As I developed an awareness to the disdain that met each of my achievements, I became eager to admit to my short-comings and obscure any spark of accomplishment I might have. I turned to books and other independent activities to fill the gaps, hiding the books

I deemed “hard” under my bed. Although I flourished on my own, I was ever careful not to reveal my strengths and often asked for help that I didn’t truly need. Despite my best efforts, however, I remained fiercely independent. Self-sufficiency is simply my nature. And someone’s nature is something he or she can never truly hide.

The distance I created only worsened my situation though. With each passing year, I became further disconnected from my parents. At family dinners or game nights, I sat watchful and silent, listening to, but never joining in the conversations. Thus, the happy, proud, and outspoken girl I once was began to disappear. In her place evolved the quiet, watchful child that buckled her own shoes whilst wishfully watching her mother care for her older sister. I was—and still am in many ways—a “little miss independent.” Reclusive. Hidden behind a mask of self-sufficiency.

(I could take care of myself.)

It has taken me well over a decade to begin to understand *why* I am caught in such a strange relationship with my parents. The strained relationship I attempt to balance is due to the early-learned survival strategy (concealing my strengths) that I adapted to earn acceptance. It was me who withdrew from my parents’ lives, not vice versa. I was haunted by a deep inner knowledge that I had potential and talent. Full of shame, I lived in denial and never spoke of my fears to anyone. It is only now that I am in my first year of college that I am able to take an honest look at my experiences. The young woman I am now, struggling to understand who I am and who I want to be, is the one who must grasp and confront what that little girl has always known.

When I started college, my professors unknowingly took on the roles of the dedicated teachers and mentors I never had. Because of their enthusiasm, I suddenly see the world in a new, almost terrifying way. It is with my art professor, not my parents, that I can debate whether Sol LeWitt can rightfully take credit for his work “Wall Drawing No. 681” or not. My parents realize this truth; I know it irritates them.

My obsession with academics is not new. For three years, I dreamed of moving out to attend college. I had the perfect school in mind. Finally, I could prove just how well I could take care of myself. Looking back, it’s clear to see how

dangerously narrow my vision had become. The tunnel vision I developed played a part in further damaging my relationship with my parents. Nevertheless, I talked my friends' ears off fantasizing about the idea of living four hours away and tasting the sweet freedom I would surely experience.

At the time, they seemed to be the most caring, supportive friends I had ever had. I recognize now how important those friendships were in helping to shift my priorities from simply wanting to please my parents to wanting to get an education and make a difference. My friends—the most important people in my life at the time—were right there supporting me every next step of the way. Until they weren't. It was only at the last minute that I changed my mind about moving out and applied only to a single, nearby school. I told my mother, "I'll save money if I stay here," but truthfully, I knew I couldn't possibly pick myself up from losing my closest friends and adjust to living on my own at the same time. Besides, a part of me still wanted to please my parents.

I adapted a people-pleasing attitude at an early age. When I was three years old, my parents pulled my older sister out of kindergarten and began educating us both at home. Her emotional outbursts, both at school and at home, had reached uncontrollable levels. I was dismayed to learn that I would *not* in fact be attending preschool the following school year. True to my former outspoken personality, my three-year-old self indignantly demanded to know how I was supposed to learn my alphabet or write my name "like my sister could" (a feat which had recently been demonstrated to me on the living room wall) if I did not go to school. I know now that the desperate expression on my mother's face was one of fear and uncertainty as she simply responded, "I need you to be a big girl." At the time, however, I could not understand why my sister's outrageous behavior was met with so much understanding and love. Although I was displeased by my mother's decision, I knew that doing whatever it took to please my sister and parents was the easiest way to earn approval and praise. Even if that meant withdrawing further from the world around me. I was happy on my own, but a part of me did feel sad and lonely at times. I wanted to be an important part of my parents' lives.

Early childhood was very confusing for me. I remember watching my older sister's repeated emotional outbursts, tantrums, and unrealistic demands be met with patience, gentle correction, or sometimes even submitted to. Even more

confusing were the times she did not act out. My sister has always had an incredible passion for history and can recite names, events, and dates like a history textbook. Regardless of how long she would drone on, my mother always seemed able to hold her attention, smiling and nodding with pride. No such reaction existed when I wanted to talk passionately about a topic. Unfortunately, it's difficult for the parents of a child with AS to successfully straddle such a fence. How could they provide me with the undivided attention I craved when my sister could not hold herself together without them?

Ultimately, the choices my parents made in prioritizing my sister's needs and desires is the most significant reason I became my reclusive, distanced self. It's the reason I still find myself only concerned with pleasing and not inconveniencing my parents as they care for their AS daughter. As an adult, my relationship with my parents is generally unchanged from when I was younger. What has changed, however, is the way I must approach the world. No one can make it through life successfully alone. I cannot be a "little miss independent" any longer.

1st Place Personal Essay 2019

Stephanie Farrey

University of Wisconsin, Whitewater at Rock County
Gamma Delta Chapter



Broly
-Isaac Lopez-

It was raining the day I found Broly. He seemed to be but a few weeks old. I had gotten out of school and had to walk by myself all the way home. My mom knew it would rain, so she gave me the only umbrella we owned. It was peculiar how a fragile umbrella would make me struggle just to open it, but when I did, the wind overpowered me and broke it. That's when I saw Broly for the first

time behind me just outside my school. Shaking with his wet fur that made him look skeletal. Looking at me with his sad eyes.

I speed-walked to pick him up and was able to carry him with just one hand because of how little he was. I walked along the highway that led me home, and many cars would pass by splashing water at us, but I would turn my back to shield Broly. I didn't care how gray the weather was, how cold the wind felt, or how drenched I was, I felt happy coming home with this puppy. My mom was a little hesitant at first, complaining how he'd be another mouth to feed and that I had to be responsible for everything. She would shoo him away in the first weeks he was with us, but after a few months, she would rip off little pieces of tortilla and toss him our leftover chicken bones. I knew she had begun to love and accept him the more time he was with us.

I decided to name him Broly because I had recently seen a *Dragon Ball Z* movie on VHS cassette with my older brother. The character named Broly was this incredibly strong, godlike being that had the potential to destroy planets. However, I would feel pity for him because he grew up isolated and undesired by the planet he grew up on. He gained so much rage that it felt as if his source of power came from his pain. He was the first villain I remember wishing wouldn't be killed.

Broly was one of those mutts that looked like a wild grizzly bear that I've only seen in movies. He had short brown hair that naturally looks dirty—a sort of muddy color. His longish, floppy ears that would sometimes cover half of his eyes were black just like his long muzzle. His eyes looked naturally sad, even when he'd wiggle his skinny tail when he'd see me.

My father would come and visit my mother and me every few months or whenever he could afford a plane ticket from the United States. He was working in the United States sending my mom money to help us, so I would email him at least once a week while he was gone. He only saw Broly two times, but it was like he knew everything about him because my emails to him would mainly focus on Broly. He knew Broly made me feel happy and safe, so I guess he must've felt some form of gratitude towards him.

I never had a dog quite like Broly before. Every other dog would usually just want to leave and return to being a street dog, but Broly was the only one that actually wanted to be with me. Even when he'd see a hole in our yard's

fences and had every chance to run away, he didn't. He preferred to lay down next to me with his nose tucked between his paws in front of him as I'd sit and play with chibolas by myself. He could feel my loneliness from me not being able to invite friends over; I didn't want anyone else to see the living conditions I was in, and I didn't want to invite someone who could potentially become a gang member. He somehow knew exactly when I needed his presence to comfort me from the struggles I went through growing up in El Salvador.

One day, I showered him with a hose that had a weak stream coming out of it because our water supply was running low. The water would reveal just how skinny he still was beneath his fur, and he looked just as I first saw him with his skinny legs shaking. That night, I remember falling asleep in front of him on top of my bed, which my mom was surprisingly okay with since she's never allowed other dogs to get on furniture because of how dirty they can get. I was gently scratching behind his ear, soothing him and watching his eyes start to blink slower until he opened his jaws to let out a mighty yawn and then fell asleep. I kept scratching his ear until I started to blink slower myself and fell asleep with him.

My mother woke me up the next morning, patting my shoulder while calling me by my nickname. "*Ito...Itín, despertáte...mirá...no podemos encontrar a Broly.*" I squinted and rubbed my eyes trying to think of what she meant by Broly not being seen anywhere. Where could he be? He wasn't the kind of dog that would run away.

"*Y eso?*" I asked.

Then she said: "*No sé, pero ya tenés que cambiarte para la escuela, ahí más tarde lo buscamos, okey?*"

To which I simply said, "*Va.*"

I got ready for school, quickly shined my shoes that were worn out with holes by my toes, put on my pants that I forgot to iron the night before, and buttoned up my uniform shirt that was still too big for me, brushed my hair to the side, and took some leftover bean soup from last night as my school lunch. I knew I wasn't going to eat it since it would get cold really fast, but I took it anyway in case of an emergency.

My mom and I left the house and closed the gate behind us. We were then greeted by the highway where we saw, at a short distance, a dog's body lying on the ground. "*Será ése el Broly?*" my mother asked, but I dared not answer. I just started to walk towards it, holding my breath and wishing it wasn't him. It looked like him: short brown hair, black ears and muzzle...but a lot of mutts looked like that, so I got on my knees to take a closer look, ignoring my mother's yelling to get back up. I inspected his head and saw its throat slit. The cut was straight and almost clean, but the blood had already started to dry and was crusted. In his forehead, a hole—obviously caused by a bullet. His tongue was sticking out and touching the ground as if the last thing he tasted was his own blood...with his sad eyes rolled back.

I got up and walked back towards my mom, nodding my head to confirm it was Broly. I did not cry after I saw his body. I didn't want to believe it was him or else I was hoping that I was still dreaming, and I'd wake up and be greeted by his wet nose in front of me. The nature of his death, although bizarre, made perfect sense to me and my family. When an owner's dog is killed in that particular way, it usually means two things: someone young had completed their initiation into a gang, or that gang would come after whoever owned that dog. My family did not want me to go to school that day, but I begged them to let me go because I felt I needed to be away from the house while my family buried him.

It was my last day as a third grader, and my class was to celebrate by watching a movie on an old and small portable DVD player while eating cheap pizza and drinking soda from a small plastic bag with a straw inside it. Everyone seemed to be having a good time, but I was just sitting in the middle of all of it trying to hold back the tears and hide my broken breathing from everyone. At the time, I didn't think about how I didn't hear the gunshot noise while I was asleep or about my safety if someone was coming after me.

All I could think about were the times I'd carry Broly to my bedroom and have him sleep with me. I did that so many times, he eventually started doing it all by himself. I thought about the feeling of his weight on my shoulder; the bristles of his hair on my face; the smell of that muddy, musky odor coming from him; observing his ribs moving up and down from his breathing pattern; and the tingles I'd get when his wet nose would be so close to me I would feel his breathing on my face.

2nd Place Personal Essay 2019

Isaac Lopez

Cerritos College
Pi Zeta Chapter



Out by the Fire -Walter Hogue-

The crackling hiss and pop of the fire echoes through the woods. Warm orange light bathes the faces staring into it, both illuminating and painting dark shadows on them. Sparks dance up from glowing embers and make their way like so many stars into the night sky before disappearing into darkness. We are wrapped in a stillness, a peace that is deep and freeing. It is merely a fragment of our time, but it seems to last longer than all the busy minutes, hours, days, and years of our lives. My experience of camping, or merely sitting around the campfire, has always been something precious to me, a moment that stands out in my memories from a child to an adult. This age-old tradition may not seem that significant or special, but I believe it is. The time I have shared with friends around the campfire has been filled with so many elements of beauty and depth; it has allowed me to taste a sense of community that our culture has largely forgotten.

Just this past week, we spent an evening by the campfire. It had been a long day, and I was worn out in mind and body, but my siblings and I resolved to finish it off with a bonfire. As I stepped away from the house, from the buzzing of cellphones and the obnoxious voices of television newscasters, I felt a sense of relief. We trudged through the dark and dewy pasture until the houselights were swallowed up by looming trees. Feeling our way down a well beaten path, we stumbled careless and free through the grass. Finally, we reached a spot

at the end of the field that we all knew well. My younger brother and I walked by the tree line, squinting into the darkness in search of kindling and wood. We knelt quietly by our stack of lumber as my brother struck a match. The dew-covered sticks put out this little flame with a hiss, and the second match was struck. This time we huddled close to the wood and blew heartily at it until the match's spark slowly grew into a large warm flame. Like a magnet, it drew us close, and we all dropped to the ground, leaning our backs against an old log. The boys and I broke out our pipes and stuffed them with tobacco. As we sat there, we were overwhelmed by beauty. The deep darkness of the sky was filled with innumerable flecks of light as the stars began to come out. The warm firelight danced across our bodies and the trees, creating deep shadows behind us. In the midst of all of this vastness and beauty, I couldn't help but feel small, yet significant and loved, knowing that the Creator of the heavens cares for me. I felt as though I had been holding my breath for a long time, and I could finally exhale.

The fire crackled and the crickets hummed, but we were wrapped in silence—a silence from the deafening sound of this generation, from social media, news alerts, Instagram feeds, and all of the meaningless voices that fill our time and our thoughts. Though we are constantly flooded with information day in and day out, we rarely take time to ponder on things that actually hold meaning and value. As I sat in the stillness of the night, my mind gradually let go of all of the distractions it had been holding on to, and the fog cleared, allowing me to see those things which actually have value. We were all quiet until my youngest brother's voice broke the silence, "What kind of home would you like to build for yourself?" he asked. Instantly our minds filled with those things which gave us a sense of home, of belonging, of communion. We each discussed, with great interest, how we would build our home and why. Then our conversation strayed to the nostalgic desire that we each had for belonging and a home, and in a moment, we were all joined in a bond that seemed alien to our culture. It was as if time froze and we could simply enjoy each other without having to check our watches or scan our phones. We were together, not only sharing space but sharing ourselves, and being vulnerable and honest with each other. As we watched the fire die and its embers softly glow, we felt a sense of true community.

After a little while, we were all up and walking back home, but we were still filled with the wholesomeness of the communion we had. The time I spent by the campfire was short, yet it seemed eternal, outside of time. Through this

experience I tasted true community with the ones I love, and although it was just a passing moment, it was a moment that outweighed all of the days I spend in distraction from what is important in life. This communion is what makes campfires beautiful to me.

3rd Place Personal Essay 2019

Walter Hogue

Bevill State Community College
Phi Alpha Chapter



What You William -Ben Wilson-

In today's society, containing such vast quantities of modern literature, one might wonder why William Shakespeare is still relevant. There are many reasons; these reasons not being limited to the fact that Shakespeare's works are known as world-renowned classics. One of Shakespeare's more well-known works is a play by the name of *Twelfth Night*, a story of a girl named Viola and her brother, Sebastian, who are separated in a shipwreck. After several interesting months of Viola posing as a man, working for a count by the name of Orsino, falling in love with this man who believes her to also be a man, and fending off the advances of a wealthy woman whom she accidentally woos, she and her brother are finally reunited. *Twelfth Night* uses relatable characters, humor, and wit to broach real subjects and issues that are still present in today's society, which is why the famous Shakespearian play is still relevant to this day.

One of the major subjects presented in *Twelfth Night* is "love." It is

written as “love” because the way one sees love portrayed in this play might not match up to the commonly accepted definition of love. This is made apparent by the way in which Orsino claims to “love” Olivia. When reading the play, one can see that they appear to have had little interaction, which leads one to wonder how Orsino could have developed a love as powerful as the one he claims to have for Olivia.

One might call Orsino’s “love” an obsession rather than actual love. One could say the same for Olivia’s “love” for Cesario. There are, however, representations of real love in *Twelfth Night*. An example of which is found in Viola’s love for Orsino. Viola had been working for Orsino for roughly three months and actually had adequate amount of interaction to develop feelings for Orsino. During the climax of the play, when Viola’s true identity is revealed, Orsino realizes the way in which she fawned over him in the previous months, and the feelings become mutual. There is also an example of what one might see as unrequited love. The love which Antonio has for Sebastian appears to be more than that which is returned to him. Sebastian does claim to love Antonio as well, but it does not appear to be to the same degree. In this day and age, obsessing over a person one barely knows, for example celebrities, musicians, and athletes, is a common occurrence. This could be called “love,” but often times when one meets the object of the obsession, it can be underwhelming and lead to disappointment.

Another topic touched on in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* is the concept of bullying. One of the examples of bullying in the play is found in Sir Toby and the way he treats Sir Andrew. The relationship between the two is very passive-aggressive in nature, and oftentimes hard to pick up on, but the rudeness that borders on bullying is noticeable. The primary example is that of the Malvolio subplot. The entire incident of the falsified letter intended to bait Malvolio into making a fool of himself is viewed by many as a malicious act, although not entirely uncalled for, but in the end Olivia says, “[Malvolio] hath been most notoriously abused” (Shakespeare 5.1.402). In this situation, there are many culprits. Sir Toby is still leading the charge, making himself known as the primary mischief maker of the play, but he is also joined by Maria, Sir Andrew, Fabian, and the fool known as Feste. These examples show different types of bullying, both of which are still present to this day, presenting yet another relatable theme which helps to make this Shakespearian classic timeless.

During the bulk of the play, Viola is in the guise of a man, giving her more than a few opportunities to do and say things she wouldn't ordinarily be able to do were she dressed as a woman. One can see this in her dialogue with Orsino. For example, when Orsino asks Viola, who at the time was known to him as the boy Cesario, if she liked anyone, she replied yes and that the person was "Of [Orsino's] complexion" and "About [Orsino's] years" (Shakespeare 2.4.31-33). Viola's being able to speak freely while posing as a man also adds to the comic element of the play, but it is also sad in the fact that, were it known that she is in fact a woman, her expressing herself would be frowned upon. Sadder still is this concept of sexism is still present today. It is not as prevalent anymore, but there is still an underlying stigma in today's society, and women, especially in other cultures, are not always permitted their own opinions or the ability to express themselves.

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is easily one of his most recognizable and beloved works. The themes and characters presented make it extremely relatable, and the humor makes it much more alluring. Each of the themes presented in *Twelfth Night*, whether it be love, bullying, or sexism, are still found in today's society, giving it a timeless essence. These themes, and the genius way in which the characters are portrayed, will ultimately keep Shakespeare's plays, and *Twelfth Night* specifically, on the stage and in the hands of readers around the world for years to come.

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1st Place Literary Analysis 2019

Ben Wilson

Jefferson State Community College
Eta Epsilon Chapter



To Belong -Walter Hogue-

In his short story “Blue Winds Dancing,” Thomas Whitecloud powerfully displays the struggle for identity in the face of opposing cultures. The protagonist in this story is caught between two completely different societies: that of the white man and the Indian. He is torn between two ways of living, thinking, and being, and believes that to accept one culture is to reject the other. The narrator feels out of place, as though he must balance between two ways of life but can never stand firmly in one. He struggles to understand who he is, feeling pressure to conform to white social standards, yet also longing for his native home. This man’s identity crisis finds its root in the constraints and pressures of the white culture, the supposed inferiority of his own culture, and his desire to belong.

In the opening of this story, the narrator sees that everything about the white man, from his behavior to his perception of beauty, is tamed and restricted, and he longs for the peace and freedom of life that define his native home. The narrator describes a street: “Beautiful, yes; there is always beauty in order, in rows of growing things! But it is a beauty of captivity. A pine fighting for existence on a windy knoll is much more beautiful” (Whitecloud 1). The protagonist grows weary of the civilized world; society restricts every native passion he was born with. He can no longer be himself, but must conform to the standards and pursuits of the white man. As the narrator states, “Being civilized means trying to do everything you don’t want to, and never doing anything you want to. It means dancing to the strings of custom and tradition ... These civilized white men want us to be just like them—always dissatisfied—getting a hill and wanting a mountain” (Whitecloud 2). The narrator is disgusted with the materialistic greed and endless pursuits of the white culture, yet this culture has become a part of him. Therefore, he cannot completely forsake it, even if he does leave it.

Another force which tears at the narrator’s identity is the notion that his own people are inferior to white civilization. This man deeply loves and longs for his people, yet he sees a huge gap between the societal progression of the white people and that of his own. As he states, “It is terrible to have to feel inferior; to

have to read reports of intelligence tests, and learn that one's race is behind. It is terrible to sit in class and hear men tell you that your people worship pieces of wood—that your gods are all false" (Whitecloud 2). The narrator is immersed in a culture that demeans and questions every aspect of his own culture. He perceives that everything he loves and all of his values are viewed as primitive, and this affects the way he views his own people. The narrator cannot help but notice this contrast between cultures and it distresses him: "On the boardwalk there are some Indian women in colored sashes selling bits of pottery. The stone age selling its art to the twentieth century" (Whitecloud 3). Despite the attitude of white society toward the Indians, this man is not ashamed of his native culture as he states, "One can never be ashamed of his own people when he knows they have dreams as beautiful as white snow on a tall pine" (Whitecloud 5). Yet, the distance between these two societies and their imprint on the heart of the narrator make it difficult for him to understand who he is.

The uncertainty of belonging drives the crisis in the narrator's sense of identity. This man longs to be at home—body and soul—with his native people, yet he feels that the imprint of white society on his mind will render him an outcast to both cultures. Though the narrator is weary of the civilized world, he cannot reject it completely; thus, he feels he cannot be accepted completely among his own people. As he states, "I am afraid ... Afraid of being looked on as a stranger by my own people. I sit by the fire and think about myself and all other young Indians. We just don't seem to fit anywhere—certainly not among whites, and not among the older people" (Whitecloud 4). The narrator fears that he has no place; he is caught between the swing of two colliding cultures and cannot seem to hold firmly on to either. As he says before entering the lodge, "Afraid, I wonder if my people will remember me. I wonder—'Am I Indian, or am I white?'" (Whitecloud 5). This is the crisis of his identity; more than anything, he yearns to belong to his people, and he fears he will be rejected. Yet, as the narrator's eyes are caught in the gaze of the old men, his fear dies: "I watch eyes, and see how the old people are speaking to me. They nod slightly, imperceptibly, and their eyes laugh into mine. I look around the room. All the eyes are friendly; they all laugh. No one questions me being here....I am happy. It is beautiful. I am home" (Whitecloud 6). The protagonist realizes that no society can strip him of the hearts of his people. The love that binds him to his own is unbroken. He belongs, he is home.

The crisis of the narrator's identity is brought about by the white culture's pressures of conformity, the supposed inferiority of his own culture, and the uncertainty of belonging in his heart. The narrator is marked by the civilized society, and his understanding is forever changed by it. Although he fears that such exposure will isolate him from his own, the narrator's identity as an Indian and the love and acceptance between him and his people is unshaken. Whitecloud finds himself in a changing cultural landscape that challenges the tie of his own native society, yet it cannot break the bonds of his people and home.

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2nd Place Literary Analysis 2019

Walter Hogue

Bevill State Community College
Phi Alpha Chapter



**A Dance between Themes in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*
-Zackary Armstrong-**

In the work *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, one of the most complicated and misunderstood mysteries of life is explored as a man must unexpectedly confront what we all fear to face one day—death. This novella, written by Leo Tolstoy and first published in Russia during the year 1886, centers around a successful middle-aged man, Ivan, who suffers a physical accident that turns out to be far worse than he anticipated. This results in meetings with multiple physicians to figure out what is causing the constant pain along with a growing mystery illness; however, no one seems to take his concern for it seriously or diagnose him correctly. As Ivan's condition continues to deteriorate, he must prepare for death much sooner than he

expected, leading him to evaluate what short life he has lived. By the end of the story, Tolstoy uses the themes of isolation, belief, and family as reliable friction in the mind of Ivan to convert his negative and conflicted view of death.

The theme of isolation inflicts a heavy load on Ivan's diminishing state that stretches over the course of his remaining time to live. At first, it is his fear of dying, along with the suffering accompanied by his critical illness, that causes him to cut himself off from the present world. But in doing so, this just adds more stress to his situation. Making matters worse, his family, friends, and other people in his life whom he would expect to make time to be with him continue to live their lives as if he has already died. Luckily, a good-natured servant, Gerasim, understands what Ivan is going through and comes to comfort Ivan in his disappointing isolation and helps ease his physical suffering. Tolstoy honors this character for his voluntary actions in treating Ivan's isolation and makes his moral intentions clear as he writes, "He even once said directly when Ivan Ilych was dismissing him: 'We'll all die. So why not take a little trouble?' He said this conveying by it that he wasn't bothered by the work precisely because he was doing it for a dying man and hoped that in his time someone would do this work for him" (1468). It is through Gerasim's saintly deeds and manner that Ivan starts to recognize that his sense of isolation is tainting what life he has left and that he doesn't have to deal with it alone.

The theme of belief or religion in Tolstoy's novella is vague in most parts of the story but does play a key role in Ivan's refining concept of death. Ivan has not been a religious man for most of his life figuring if he was good, then there was no point in having to take it seriously. In spite of that, he starts to reflect increasingly about what influence God has had in his life and why he must endure this suffering. As his condition worsens, Ivan decides to question God out loud stating, "Why have you done all this? Why have you brought me here? Why, why do you torment me so horribly?" (Tolstoy 1473). Although he doesn't receive an answer or any divine intervention immediately, Ivan will finally come to realize the answers he has been looking for when he experiences a spiritual awakening at his death.

The theme of family in Tolstoy's work is tangled throughout but ends up being important in Ivan's final moments. Overall, the marriage between Ivan and Praskovya is practically self-seeking and unpassionate, most likely due to the

money-oriented class and society in which they live. This environment, however, also effects their children making them less connected as well. These disconnected and somewhat selfish attitudes of Ivan's family end up bruising his mentality as they try to avoid and reject the idea of his early death as he once did. It's not until Ivan's final hour that his youngest son gives him a weeping kiss on the hand that triggers a revelation in which the author states, "At that very time Ivan Ilych fell through and saw a light, and it was revealed to him that his life had been wrong but that it was still possible to mend things" (Tolstoy 1478). It was through the honest and loving compassion that his son freely gave to him that finally helped set Ivan's suffering mind free from death's haunting presence.

In conclusion, Tolstoy uses the themes of isolation, belief, and family to successfully change Ivan's opposing view of death. Isolation tends to show Ivan the reality in which he lives and how he should focus what energy he has left instead of just suffering alone until his death. The theme of belief or religion was tossed around by Ivan in an ill fashion at first because of his confusion of the tragic situation; however, it happens to vanquish all fears and doubts in the end. The theme of family somewhat went along the same path as belief with parts of Ivan's family being distant and misunderstanding at first, but it also played a valuable and revealing role at Ivan's death. With that being said, Ivan Ilych lived a short, misguided life where he was never truly happy until his final moments when he figured out the truth behind what kind of man he is and why it was his time to move on.

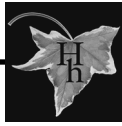
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3rd Place Literary Analysis 2019

Zackary Armstrong

Jefferson State Community College
Eta Epsilon Chapter



Mules Hauling
-Karen Fodere-Gallier-



1st Place Black and White Photography 2019

Karen Fodere-Gallier

Hudson County Community College
Omicron Epsilon Chapter

Gauche
-Karen Fodere-Gallier-



2nd Place Black and White Photography 2019

Karen Fodere-Gallier

Hudson County Community College
Omicron Epsilon Chapter

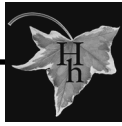


Rising from the Decay
-Paulina Landers-

**3rd Place Black and White
Photography 2019**

Paulina Landers

Northeast Alabama
Community College
Epsilon Alpha Chapter



The Pink Rabbit -Nicole M. Fiorelli-

Do you wish to complete the download?

Press the 1 for YES or the 2 for NO.

Dylan's finger hesitated over the button with the 1 as he stared at the blinking red block-shaped text on the screen. He had waited months for his turn, stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars to afford the procedure, and now he questioned whether or not he could go through with it. It seemed too inhumane, looking at it from this perspective when he was finally forced to make his decision. It did not matter if his only other option was asphyxiation and the all too obvious result of that. He was still not sure if he could go through with the process.

Of course, he had seen what happened to those who followed through with the procedure. Everyone had seen it. Those who could afford to turn into bots breezed through life now. Sure, they looked different, sounded like robots, and certainly didn't need things like food and air, but they seemed to be the same people. Well, for the most part. At least everyone chose to think they were the same people.

The others hated these transformed people. The others could not afford the \$500,000 entrance fee. The others could not breathe enough to think straight. Most of the others were dead now. Dylan was one of the others until he “found” the money.

That was the world now—those who could afford the procedure and those who couldn't. That was how the governments decided who lived and who died.

Money. It seemed so stupid that little green bills of worthless paper decided everyone's fate, decided his sister had to die.

The room Dylan was in was supposed to be empty. At least, that's what it said on the flashy brochure that they hand out. *A private room complete with calming amenities to guarantee a relaxing procedure.* That was the exact wording. However, the scientists were wrong those twelve months ago. They gave the world five years. It had one.

The room Dylan was in was not empty. A hundred anxious faces were glued to their respective screens, hurriedly pressing the buttons to finish the process that Dylan was one push away from completing. The young woman next to him pushed the 1 before he did. He watched as her lithe form slumped forward onto the floor immediately after she pushed the button. The electrodes attached to her head retracted into their unit, leaving the now useless shell of her body to be taken away for a proper burial.

Her life bot lit up with a few quiet beeps and boops. Then, it rolled away, running over her extended hand in the process. Dylan gasped as he heard the crunching of her bones. Whether it was from what he just saw or the contamination slowly leaking into the air, he did not know.

He looked down at the ratty, pink stuffed animal in his shaking hands. His sister loved her bunny, no matter how many holes it had. He couldn't let it go. Having the bunny in his hands was like having a part of her with him.

A message flashed on his screen.

5 minutes of oxygenated air remaining.

Please decide now whether or not to complete the procedure.

Press the 1 for YES or the 2 for NO.

Dylan turned his gaze to the young boy by him who was wearing his private school uniform, and he asked the smiling child, "Aren't you scared?"

A confused expression crossed the boy's face. "I get to be a robot."

"Perhaps, but it will—"

"Look, it's pretty cool."

"I don't know. Something about it doesn't seem safe. What if it doesn't work right and the bots are just artificially intelligent?"

"They guarantee success. It says so on that thing they gave us."

"But... Are we still us?"

"Oh, shut up! I want to finish this." The boy rapidly pushed the buttons, until he noticed that Dylan wasn't. He stared at Dylan's screen. "Why aren't you pressing the 1?"

Dylan lied. “I wanted to see if anyone needed help completing the process.”

“I’m twelve, and I’m flying through it. I think everyone else is fine. Plus, that’s why the bots are here, right?” He gestured his arm around the room without moving his eyes away from his flashing screen.

4 minutes of oxygenated air remaining.

The boy pressed the 1 and collapsed in the same way the woman did before him. His life bot rolled away to join the others. Dylan did not want to stare at his body or any of the bodies, but they were cluttering most of the floor. The bots did not care about the clutter. They rolled right over the corpses. The cracks and crunches of the metal wheels against the worthless flesh echoed in the nearly sealed room for anyone who chose to listen. Dylan chose not to.

3 minutes of oxygenated air remaining.

Dylan closed his eyes and thought of his flower, his little Lily. She was such a sweet girl. Her smile like a ray of sunshine. He thought of her tenth birthday party where they burnt the princess cake they tried to bake. He saw her dancing to the music only her mind could hear. Her toes barely ever touched the ground. Lily was his life. His light. Everything was better when she was alive.

He opened his eyes before he could picture her diagnosis and the treatment their parents could not afford. He just wanted to remember the good things, like her laugh. He would do anything to hear it one more time. Even steal \$500,000 from a bank in New York. If he pushed the 1, he might be able to hear her laughter. He might be able to play those giggles on an endless loop every single day. The memory might be hazy, but maybe it could be retrieved.

2 minutes of oxygenated air remaining.

Dylan pushed the 1.

Bot 5264 pushed the body into the freshly dug hole. The body of a twenty-four-year-old man landed on the dirt below with a dull thud. This man was just one of the hundreds of bodies Bot 5264 had buried today. There were millions more to go. It takes a long time to give an entire population a proper burial. Bot

5264 rolled away to collect the next body while Bot 1843 covered the body with dirt. Bot 2791 etched the man's name into a small headstone as they worked.

Bot 5264's left wheel hopped over something on the ground. The bot bent its camera down to view the object obstructing its pathway. It scanned the item, and its programming displayed a message on its screen.

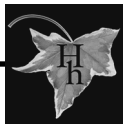
A toy animal made of light pink fabric stuffed with a soft cotton filling. Reminiscent of a plant-eating mammal with floppy ears, long hind legs, and a short tail called a rabbit. The rabbit species is now extinct. Global extinction has occurred. There is no life-sustainable air on the surface of this planet due to the overuse of machinery and fossil fuels. No lifeforms are registering on scanners as of January 27th, 2128. The date is now February 16th, 2128. It is 1:37 PM and the temperature is-

Bot 5264 stopped its repetitive message and retrieved the rabbit with its clamping mechanism. It rolled over to the headstone of the man who had just been buried and gently dropped the stuffed animal next to the text that read: *Dylan Turrell 2104 - 2128*. As Bot 5264 went to continue on with its task, its sensors documented the sound of a little girl laughing from somewhere in its kernel code.

1st Place Short Fiction 2019

Nicole M. Fiorelli

Lakeland Community College
Tau Delta Chapter



Imperfection -Stephanie Farrey-

Only the occasional squeak of a chair or swish of a paintbrush in water disrupted the steady buzz of the air conditioning. I stood, amidst artists of varying skill, admiring my first-ever painting. My formally pristine white canvas was covered in streaks of black, white, and gray paint. In my hand, I fingered a long-handled paintbrush, twirling it in a circular motion. My other brushes lay neatly ordered by size and shape on the palette to my right. My paint, however, was a smeared mess across the clear glass surface. I had given up keeping my paint mixes neat. Sniffing thoughtfully and nodding to myself, I took in the comforting—to me—smell of charcoal dust and the thick stench of acrylic paint.

Despite my forced outward confidence, I found myself feeling unsure of my work. I glanced around at my classmates. We were arranged around a large table—covered with pink paper and scattered with the objects we were painting—in the deepest corner of the room. Each of them remained hard at work behind their easels, welcoming the occasional critique by our professor.

Looking around further, I caught the attention of my professor and, failing to form words, gestured inquisitively towards my piece. I meant to ask for a final critique, but words failed to pass my lips. A flicker of annoyance flashed through me briefly as I struggled, once again, to accept that sometimes I just can't speak the words I'm searching for. I dismissed the thought quickly; negativity would not help me.

My art professor smiled, seemingly unfazed by my silent manner, and gave me a nod. "You're done."

I stared at my painting doubtfully, then turned back to my professor. "Are you sure?" I asked, relieved that words had come out this time.

"Yes. It looks good. Don't mess with it."

That's all it took. "Ok," I said. "Thanks."

"No problem. That's what I'm here for," he said, turning away with a laugh.

He knows me too well, I thought to myself. I was too quiet and too unsure. Allowing myself to smile, I placed my brush on the palette and untied the black apron I wore as a paint smock, uncovering my black jeans and warm blue athletic jacket. Whether I was sure of my work or not, it was done. And that was a decision that I could be proud of.

Nearly a year and a half before, I began my artistic journey with my feet planted squarely on the horrendously green carpet of our family room. My parents sat in front of me on the brown suede couch that my grandparents had gifted us after we had moved. It was one of the only seats in the room not stacked high with boxes of still-packed belongings. I was only telling my parents about the classes I would be taking for my first semester of college, but the whole situation felt absurdly confrontational. Uncomfortable and embarrassed by my choices, I reported my schedule ending with a stuttered "... and drawing 101."

Raising an eyebrow, my mother looked up from her red calendar where she had scribbled my classes into. "Drawing?!? That's going to be hard. Isn't there a prerequisite for that? The people who take classes like that already know what they're doing." After a moment of my indignant silence, she added, "and it would be a waste of time anyways... nine o'clock to eleven forty-five?!? That's six hours of your week!"

Knowing before it even began that I'd never win this argument with cheap ammo, I shook my head with a sigh and played my ace. "My advisor suggested that I take it... for architecture." Not entirely a lie. She had, after all, encouraged me when I had asked how difficult the class would be. I knew my mother would accept an authority figure's opinion, but the (almost) lie cut me deep with guilt. Taking a breath, I dared not meet her disapproving stare and instead examined the peeling floral wallpaper.

"You're not going to be an architect, but whatever." She flipped her calendar shut.

I felt relieved, but also doubtful. My mother had a point, although I'd never admit that to her. I had no idea how to draw. That, however, would not matter as I would soon learn. Summer faded into autumn, and I soon found myself thrust into the life of a college student.

Some days that first semester, I was unsure whether it was colder in the art room or outside in the bleak, snow-covered courtyard. I stood in front of my easel in my dark-colored jeans and a loose, maroon-colored sweatshirt, but I was still cold. The toes of my brown, lace-up boots pointed inwards anxiously. After each smudge of charcoal, I used my fingers to blend the shades of gray together, pressing the tiny particles into the texture of the paper. Every now and then, I took a few nervous steps backwards to evaluate my work. It was only my second project, but maybe I was getting the hang of this? The emerging shapes slightly resembled my reference image.

“It’s been interesting to watch this one come together,” a voice behind me remarked. Startled, I turned to face the speaker and found my professor standing with his arms crossed in thought and nodding towards my drawing. He wore a mostly-red plaid flannel shirt and jeans with black smears of charcoal down the front where he had wiped his hands. “This is really nice,” he said, pointing out the shapes and angles that he liked.

“Oh... Thank you,” I said. I studied my interpretation of “Planes of the Head” proudly. The angular style of the sculpted head made it easy to understand the light values.

Nodding enthusiastically, he continued “It looks like a Native American warrior. There’s a lot of native history in my hometown, so that’s how I interpret it.”

I nodded thoughtfully. He had talked during another class about everyone bringing their own baggage when looking at artwork. To me, my drawing looked like the anime version of Mace Windu from *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. It was cool to see my professor’s philosophy in action.

“Were you nervous about taking this course?” he asked, after a pause. “You said you’ve never taken an art class before.”

Unsure how to respond at first, I stared at the floor for a moment before looking back up. “Yeah... I was pretty nervous. I still am,” I admitted.

“Well,” he gestured to my drawing, “you have nothing to worry about.”

The words filled me with a strange feeling of relief and a rare, genuine smile slowly spread across my face. “Thank you.”

The wind whipped aggressively across the fields and up our driveway, hitting me like a frigid sheet. I trembled in the cold as I unlocked the kitchen door. Wiping the snow from my chunky, black snow-boots, I took in a deep whiff of homemade spaghetti sauce. The warmth and smell of the kitchen was wonderful.

“Oh, you’re home,” my mother said, rushing into the room to stir the pot on the stove. She was barefoot and wore shorts and a t-shirt; that’s how warm she kept the house. I wasn’t about to complain, though; it was freezing out.

“I got my mid-term grades today,” I said, closing the door behind me and hanging my keys on a key-hook with a soft *chink*.

“Oh?” My mother kept her face neutral, but I could tell she was curious to know how I was really doing—despite how often I insisted that I loved college and was doing well in all of my classes.

I nodded. “All ‘A’s and an ‘A’ minus.”

“Oh honey... what did you get the minus in?” she asked, pausing from her cooking and looking up at me. She wrinkled her brow and the corners of her mouth tugged downwards.

Typical. Of course she would want absolute perfection from me. Personally, I was satisfied with those grades. The corners of my own smile dropped, and I simply replied, “Art.”

She continued to frown. I hated that frown. “Well, art is very subjective. I warned you. Is it... the quality of your work?”

“No... I think it’s participation. I don’t usually say anything in critiques,” I said, shaking my head. Only moments before, I had felt proud of my grades and growing artistic ability. But suddenly, I was left feeling ashamed of my own limitations.

My mother sighed and opened the spice cabinet. “Well get your shoes and coat off and help me with dinner.”

I sat at one of the tables in the art room, carefully brushing small lines of black India ink onto thick white paper. This time, the surface of my paper was slowly transforming into a representation of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. I had breezed through my first semester and was now an advanced drawing student.

Laughing along with my classmates, we listened to our professor repeat the lessons he had taught us to a brand-new class of beginning drawers. Just as we had, they sat on drawing horses which were circled around a raised platform with random objects of various shapes and sizes arranged in a triangular composition on whitewashed wooden boxes. The soft sunlight from the angled, skylight-style windows clashed with the harsh beams from the spotlights on the drawing subjects. I missed trying to understand the complicated light patterns when drawing from life. Most of my drawings had become copycat images of photos.

Despite my professor's insistence that my artwork looked fine, the excitement and pride I felt with each success last semester had worn off. I didn't feel like an artist. Scraping another line of ink across the paper, I glanced around at my peers. They were so talented. Most of them had been making art for years. The words "imposter" and "fake" were always on my mind. My feelings of self-doubt and insecurities continued to plague me all semester. Eventually finals week came and went, leaving me to grapple with the decision of whether to take another art class or not.

Like every Sunday, I spent the morning after finals week at Mass. The entryway to the small-town Catholic church was laid out like a long hall with four large square pillars in the center. Where the pillars met the ceiling, the roof extended upwards several more feet, and four sets of windows shed light on the people below. There was not much stained glass, but a massive mosaic, maybe ten feet tall, adorned the wall to the north. The image was an abstracted depiction of Saint Joseph pieced together with bright colored stones and gold-infused glass. Real art. The kind of architecture and artwork I would never be capable of creating. As if by some strange coincidence, my thoughts were interrupted when I saw my art professor standing with his family across the gathering space from me.

With a look of surprise and a wave, he made his way around one of the pillars, meeting my family and I in the middle of the crowd directly beneath the tallest section of the ceiling. Recovering from my own surprise, I quickly introduced him to my parents with an awkward "uh, these are my parents."

Smiling, he shook their hands and said, “your daughter is very talented. It’s been a pleasure to have her in class.”

I stared straight at the floor, face flushed with a mix of embarrassment and pride. Pointing my black Ticks inwards like I do when I’m anxious, I nervously fingered my braid, feeling each strand of long, dark hair. He had no idea how powerful those first five words were. “*Your daughter is very talented...*” I didn’t even hear my parents say thank you or the following conversation—something about me acing the final in his art survey class. I really wasn’t sure.

“Are you going to take another art class?”

Snapping back to reality, I shook my head sadly. “I’m having trouble fitting one in my schedule, but maybe.” A total lie. Of course I could. But drawing had been so hard. Maybe it was time for me to move on from art. I didn’t want to be an architect anymore, anyway. It just wasn’t for me.

“You should take painting,” he said, nodding enthusiastically. Turning back to my parents, he added, “she really is talented.”

There was that T-word again. Blushing, I smiled a “thank you.” He laughed at my embarrassment, and we parted ways.

Later that night, my mother came into my bedroom. I was sitting on the floor with my back against the closet door, staring at nothing and tracing circles on the soft carpet. My head was swirling with thoughts of that morning. *He said I was talented. Twice. Why am I so self-critical when so many others give me nothing but encouragement? Why am I giving up on something I love?*

“You should take painting,” my mother said.

“What?” I was shocked. *Did she just...? Where is this coming from?*

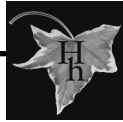
“You should sign-up for the painting class,” she repeated. “I know you’ll have to stay later at school, but it’ll be fine. Five-thirty isn’t that late. Art is important to you.”

Still staring at her like I was seeing a ghost, I shook my head in disbelief. “Um, ok. I think I will.” My mother had finally seen something in me that I wasn’t even entirely sure was there myself.

2nd Place Short Fiction 2019

Stephanie Farrey

University of Wisconsin, Whitewater at Rock County
Gamma Delta Chapter



It was Time -Nicole M. Fiorelli-

She paced back and forth, making soft prints in the deep snow. Her scuffed high heels barely protected her toes from the chilling snow-covered ground. It was cold. Freezing, in fact. Barely twenty degrees. The wind was biting her ears, and the snow was a relentless blur of swirling white, but she was wearing nothing more than the thin gold evening gown that she had cherished in the store no more than two hours ago. Two hours can be a lifetime. A day, eternity.

It was late, the middle of the night, and the sky was so dark not even the trees could etch their way onto its endless surface of deafening black. Shadows enveloped shadows. The stars stayed hidden behind the clouds, and even the moon refused to show its face. The wind froze her in place with a bone-chilling gust. The animals of the forest knew better than most, listening to their sixth sense. They had disappeared hours ago, long before she arrived to wander in their territory. With a fierce gust of wind, their prints that speckled the white blanket on the ground were erased by the air, leaving no trail to chase. Only their ghosts remained.

A fallen twig snapped sharply in the distance, a sound that echoed endlessly in nervous ears on a winter's night. Her footsteps faltered for moment as she cocked her head toward the noise. Squinting as a sliver of the moon appeared, she saw only an endless forest lit ever so slightly by the freshly falling flakes. Her eyes could not see very far into the depths of the darkness that wound its way through the branches and trunks of the towering giants. She could not possibly know who, or worse, what, was lurking in the sudden silence.

To say the snap had startled her is a lie. She was already startled. Or perhaps scared is the more appropriate term. Frightened. Alarmed. Anxious. Any work. All adequately describe the sharp knot tugging in her stomach and pushing her fears against her fragile heart. This was a pain that started up every time she got nervous ever since she was a little girl. She was far from that little girl she once was, but nevertheless, the internal ache remained, serving as a constant warning sign of danger.

Her eyes told her she was alone, but she had learned not to trust her eyes. How things appeared not always how they were. The love of her life could be a pathological liar. Her best friend could easily turn her back on her when she needed her the most. The doctors who swore her disease was treatable could be lying because it was something they have never seen before, and they wanted to offer an ounce of comfort to the inconsolable. It was something no one could save her from, and that was something she had always known. If she had learned anything from her pain, it was that she could not trust anyone.

She cleared her thoughts with a soft shake of her head, silky strands of hair slipping out of graceful bun that gently shaped her face. As she continued her gait at a quicker pace, her shoes found themselves filling the same indents she had made seconds before, deepening the prints with each cycle. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. Turn. Repeat. An endless walk to nowhere, silent in the snow. It took five more hurried cycles before she stopped to pull something out of her beaded clutch.

As her fingers shivered from a sudden gust of icy wind, she grasped a chain and delicately drew out a weathered pocket watch. It was the type of watch that should have belonged in an antique store. In fact, it probably did remain in such a store for years before it was given to her. The gold case glistened in the low light, and if one was standing next to her, they would have been able to read the letters "LC" embossed among the spiraling pattern on the case. Of course, that would be meaningless to most. But not all. Definitely not all.

With a skilled hand, she flicked open the watch and checked the time. The hands read 0:01:53. 0:01:52. 51. 50. The seconds ticked away, thrown into the abyss of lost life. Time is precious. It is the one thing that can never be recovered. Once it's spent, it is nothing, disappearing into the past. She closed the watch with a snap, her body cringing at the sound it made. She shut her eyes and held her breath like a young child hiding in a game, not wanting to be found.

When the watch ticked down to zero, the tall tree behind her shook as the wind increased in intensity. Even Mother Nature was restless now. The snow that was once nestled comfortably on the tree's outstretched branches was now disturbed by another gust of wind. The flakes followed a serpentine pattern in the air before pelting the woman on her nearly bare back. A stream of shivers slid down her spine. She exhaled sharply, her breath leaving her body in a small cloud. She knew what was coming. She had always known.

The man's shadow overlapped hers in the snow so that the two combined to look like a brutal beast. His shadow was much larger. More menacing. She had felt his presence before his shadow confirmed it. Her world was darker, smaller, colder. Much, much colder. She had only ever felt that way once before. A long time ago when the man first appeared in the hospital to hand her a golden pocket watch. One that worked in the peculiar way of counting down time from a starting point of ten years. It was a feeling no one could ever forget. A feeling that stayed in her stomach for years and never quite left.

She hurriedly stuffed the watch back into her clutch and retrieved her silk handkerchief to cover her mouth as she coughed. The raspy sound bounced off the blank quilt beneath her icy toes. Its echo expertly wound itself through the trees but not far enough to reach those at the party who might have finally noticed she was nowhere near them. Even if they heard her, they would not be able to reach her in time. The handkerchief slipped through her rigid fingers and fell to the ground, marring the snow with a deep crimson stain.

She did not turn around to greet the man, nor did he move closer to her. Although she had only ever seen him once before, she did not want to be reminded of his appearance. No one could forget those glowing red eyes that pierce into your soul. Although, no one was usually around long enough to process the image. Before handing her the present ten years ago, he had told her she was the exception, but there would be a time when he would be back. He had told her that she could not cheat him twice.

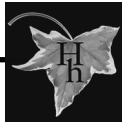
They stayed where they were, as if frozen in time. Her in her gown, and him in his tux. A beautiful picture in other circumstances, but sad in these. In what felt like ages, but what was merely a moment, a breath, she spoke. It was not the long, drawn-out speech or pleading that one might expect. Not by any means. It was only three words.

“You are late.”

3rd Place Short Fiction 2019

Nicole M. Fiorelli

Lakeland Community College
Tau Delta Chapter



Pieces

-Jillian McKenna Oliver-

Time goes by,
So much, so long
Stealing the years from me;
A thief

Framed in light,
You were smiling, reaching,
Just beyond a door, standing on the front porch,
Talking to my mother, sitting in my room,
Handing me flowers, laughing, calling my name,
Dashing for the car after a movie in the rain,
Asking for all the things
I'd never given anyone ever before

Love, trust, you wanted

Pieces of my days,

Dinner, coffee

A smile

I blinked

The light was gone, faded to grey, all the doors closed, locked,

Your voice an echo, distant, dark, carried back so far

You took

I gave

until it was all just –

1st Place Poetry 2019

Jillian McKenna Oliver

Calhoun Community College
Theta Beta Chapter



Cantón Calle Real

-Isaac Lopez-

I never learned how to ride a bike,
never even had the money to buy one.
never knew what it was like to have a sleep over,
or a play date.

Instead, I learned the codes of survival from my father.

Do well in school; dress neatly; iron your school uniform; shine your shoes; comb your hair; don't walk sloppy; don't listen to that music; don't talk that way; don't do that hand gesture; keep to yourself; don't engage with troublemakers or class clowns; don't write on yourself; don't make people think you have markings or tattoos; don't wear these colors; don't walk home without your brother or cousin; don't go to that area; don't tell anyone where you live; never look at them in the eyes.

My father knew the *MS-13*, the *Salvatruchas*, and the *18* started recruiting children of my age.

Blowing out eight candles
suddenly didn't seem much of a happy thing
to celebrate. By then, I already knew the code,
already heard stories: my sister
robbed at gunpoint on the bus,
her eyes looking into the barrel;
my uncle stabbed, beat nearly to death,
his son receiving death threats.
Then, I had a story of my own.

Alone, walking home along the busy highway,
stomach growling, I saw three of them
marching towards me—one
with a spider web inked on his elbow,
another with a devil on his neck,
the other with a "13" on his forehead.
All skinny with shaved heads.
They always come in groups, like most hyena packs.

Don't look at them in the eyes.

They parted and paved a path for me,
their deadly breeze passing the sides of my face.
I sensed their eyes on the back of my neck.

Half a mile later, I saw one of my classmates,
a little boy named Luis,
lying on the street, his life
stolen by a handgun.

I walked slower and slower the closer I got,
but I never stopped walking,
never stopped staring, staring
at those wide eyes that seemed to be still
looking at someone, staring
as the tires of passing cars would use his blood to paint the street.

Like the cars, I never stopped moving.
The world stopping as I walked and thought of the fact
that I just saw him a few hours ago,
alive.

I was just in class with him,
just saw him sitting on his chair, two seats in front of me.

This was somebody's son.
A mother gave birth to him, cared for him,
spent years raising and protecting him.
Now just a contorted body,
knees touching each other,
the back of one hand on his chest, the part of his body

most drenched in blood. Like him, I could feel
a pain in my chest, the absence of air from my lungs.

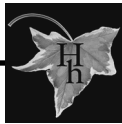
This could've been me.

I thought about how my mother could've been the one
lamenting the loss of her baby,
or what clothes she would decide to bury me with
since I had nothing fancy besides my school uniform.
The rustic, loud clank of my house's gate being shut
broke my trance.

2nd Place Poetry 2019

Isaac Lopez

Cerritos College
Pi Zeta Chapter



Unspoken **-Danita Miniex-**

How brazen to judge me by the hue of my skin.
You presume to know me and the stance I stand in.

Shackled and chained, held captive to a past,
I desperately long to proclaim "free at last."

I'm told, "Fight for the cause!", yet denied to show pain.

I bear the weight of my race, and embody change.

Affirmed through no action, yet marred all the same,

scorned for a silence, generalized and disclaimed.

Afro-ed, straight, or permed, blonde, black, or blue. . .

You profess to see me, but contend I cannot see you.

Two sides of a coin, a divide scarce to be seen.

Yet we toil endlessly, to blur the line in between.

Why does pride for myself negate your pride and truth?

My life matters indeed, as yours does to you.

We hold fast to false truths, afraid to truly see

beyond a mirrored image, shattering fragments to be free.

We are and aren't the same, both wronged and both right.

For I was given no choice, so how dare I be white.

3rd Place Poetry 2019

Danita Miniex

Jefferson State Community College
Eta Epsilon Chapter

