Aelurus was created to recognize work of the highest caliber from graduate-level English students and Weber State University alumni in the fields of fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and scholarly criticism.

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To Dr. Vicki Ramirez and other Weber State Master of Arts in English program faculty who helped *Aelurus* find its voice.
Editor’s Note

There is something to be said for the moment a mental flame sparks an idea in a writer’s mind. Some call it their muse, others, inspiration. It feels more like fire to me—fire because of the momentum that builds when we know the stories we want to tell and somehow manage to find the words to share them in perfect understanding—with a sense of knowing.

I was fortunate to serve on Aelurus’ staff last year and contribute to its first issue. I vividly recall sitting around a classroom table in Elizabeth Hall one summer evening with the journal’s founding editor, Ryan Evans, and other students of Weber State’s Master of Arts in English program. We talked about what we wanted Aelurus to become. We formulated a vision for a publication dedicated to graduate students and their work, a publication that celebrated literary scholarship and invited students and alumni from other graduate of English programs to contribute to our vision. On that evening, our journal didn’t even know its name.

Today, two years later, Aelurus has found its voice. This issue represents a culmination of efforts across our second year. We invite you to celebrate the fire with us.

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Acknowledgments

Aelurus would not be published without the ongoing support and dedication of its volunteer-only staff. I would like to express special appreciation to our editors and staff members who spent countless hours working to bring Aelurus’ vision to fruition in its second publication year. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Victoria Ramirez for her efforts in supporting the journal through its infancy and for guiding us in our weekly efforts to advance as a credible literary presence.

As a relatively new journal, our vision is executed solely through a true passion for literature and the camaraderie that develops between contributors and staff members. Thank you.

Lindee Anderson
Editor-in-Chief
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Shaun Conner is working on his Master of Arts in English degree at Weber State University and hopes to teach high school English. He is a fan of Latin-American magical realism and is currently working on a collection of short stories in that genre. He would like to thank his boyfriend, Matthew McKinley, who was a major inspiration for this story.
She jerked back her hand in surprise. With the last brush stroke, the oil and charcoal had burst to life. The painting was finished. She leaned her face in close to breathe in the canvas. Sweet abomination. It was not what she had set out to paint. She had planned a chubby cherub with soft white wings and a heart-shaped arrow poised in a golden bow. But the God trapped in the canvas now was as frightening as he was beautiful. Not Cupid at all, but Eros. He was asleep on a jumbled stack of papers, sonnets, poems, pages torn from her own diary, but his sleep was not the quiet sleep of childhood nor the exhausted sleep of maturity. She had painted him in the wild and restless sleep of youth, his head thrown back, his breath fluttering at his throat, his mouth open like a fish’s.

His skin, which she had planned to make a soft ivory with a gentle rosy blush at the cheeks, was a golden crimson, the color of sunburn on virgin skin, the color of cinnamon swirling in a bowl of spiced wine. His lips were stained with the blood of berries from the mountains, and his wings, spread wide beneath him, burned...
orange and yellow. His chestnut hair hung in loose curls around his face. 
He was young, but not a child. His arms were strong, his shoulders broad, 
his waist lean and firm, and although he was small, his size did not make 

him seem young, only far away.

His golden bow lay loosely in his hand. His quiver was where he had 
dropped it, and the arrows spilled over the ground. She 

had expected to paint the arrows with short shafts and large heart shaped 
tips. But these arrows, with dark barbs and gleaming edges, were undoubt-
edly weapons. She could see names written on the shafts, names of doomed 
princes, lonely widows, warrior kings, and school girls, lover after lover, 
martyr after martyr, names she knew though she could not explain how 
she knew.

She reached out and ran her fingers down one dark shaft. The name 
etched in gold appeared beneath her fingertips. Mother.

“Mother?” The child at her side tugged on her pant leg.

“Mom, who did you paint? Is he naked?”

She pulled away from the canvas.

“What? No?” she stammered and stood up. She looked around at the 
cluttered apartment. Toys were scattered across the floor, laundry piled 
high on the couch, her husband’s robe draped over the La-Z-Boy™. Pupp-
eets danced on the TV screen.

“Mom. I’m hungry. I wanna tuna sandwich. Mom?”

“Sure, clean up your toys, while I get it ready.”

“But…”

“No buts, clean up your toys.”

In the kitchen she reached over the cluttered dishes and took hold of 
the Clorox High Efficiency Bleach Gel™. She went back to the TV room 
and, without the slightest hesitation, soaked the canvas. The colors ran 
together and bled off the canvas onto the carpet.
A soccer ball for the boy. Three Barbies with one change of Barbie clothes for the girl. Eight shirts and two pants for the boy. One pair of dress shoes, one pair of cleats, one pair of sneakers and a half-dozen white socks. Two dresses for the girl and a pair of tights and white shoes to match. Play clothes, school clothes, and one precious article of dress-up clothes all rolled up tightly in her pink princess back-pack.

Two coolers. Four refillable bottles of water. Three loaves of bread, two jars of peanut butter, and two kinds of jelly. Three boxes of cereal and one container of dry oatmeal. Three bowls, three spoons, one butter knife, and one large dispenser of hand sanitizer. One bag of apples and two pounds of carrot sticks.

One map. Two children. Three suitcases. No husband. She looked at her purse on the empty passenger seat beside her. One cell phone, one charger, one key ring that no longer held a house key, one bottle of chewable motion sickness medication to help the kids get through the drive.
Three—the number of days it would take to drive from New York to Utah. One—the number of people she knew in Salt Lake. Two—the number of jobs she’d had that she could put on a résumé.

She glanced in the rearview mirror—first at the two children wrapped in blankets and snuggled with pillows, then at the road behind her. Fourteen years of marriage were on that road. As were two disappointed parents, two confused siblings, all her friends, a kind-hearted minister, and all the dreams of what might have been.

Five—the number of hours she’d driven already tonight. Two thousand ninety-seven—the number of miles to go.
I’m not naïve enough to think that love can heal all wounds, but I know it soothes wounds that will never heal.

The bird’s arrival in my front yard four months previous was a merciful distraction. With a battered body and wings that couldn’t fly, the bird needed healing. His wings were matted together with sticky, half-dried blood. His body was quivering and he was vomiting on his beautiful inky feathers. I carefully picked him up and took him inside, placing him gently in a white bowl, washing his black feathers. The water turned to a murky pink as it trickled off his body. I found a cut under the bird’s wing and wrapped him tightly in a clean towel. I held him close to my chest until his quivering subsided while I ran my fingers over his glistening head.

Over the weeks that followed, the bird grew stronger. I fed him worms and sat on the porch with him in the morning hours. Watching the sunrise with the beautiful bird sitting on my hand was like watching a miracle day after day, even if it wasn’t the
miracle I wanted. Some mornings he would look at me with his dark eyes and tilt his head, and I wondered what question he wanted to ask. Other mornings my emotions got the better of me, and I would break down, crying, wishing for my own sunrise during a period of perpetual night. One of those mornings, he began to sing, giving voice to a part of my soul that I had forgotten ever existed, and I knew was twisted and dead.

It was a crisp fall morning when the bird stretched out his wings and fluttered. He cocked his head at me and suddenly took flight. He flew around the porch and out onto a current in the air. He circled back and landed once more on my hand, looking at me with his tilted head. I imagined he was asking if I would be fine without him. I raised my hand into the air and watched as he took to the sky, understanding how beautiful a creature in its natural state can be. He flew off towards the sunrise and was gone in minutes; I was acutely aware of my loss.

I went inside and walked into my young daughter’s room. It was filled with the hallowed patience of suffering. I sat on the bed next to her and ran my hand over her waxy, yellow head where gorgeous black hair had grown only six months earlier. Her eyes fluttered as she fought off the drug-induced sleep that was her savior. She opened her eyes wide and was lucid for the first time in days. She smiled as a shiver ran through her.

She whispered, “Momma, I love you.”

“I know,” I said, hugging her gingerly to my chest. She squeezed my hand with what strength she had and closed her eyes.
Noah pulled up the blinds, squinting into the sun glaring off the windows of the building across the street. Traffic didn’t obscure his view of the sky yet, but within the hour the pale blue would be blocked out by commuters. He put on a grey suit that matched his grey eyes and combed his slightly brown hair that matched his slightly brown skin, accepting that altogether he was a thirty-year-old monochromatic sack of yawn-inducing dullness. Ten minutes later he was out the glass balcony door on his carpark.

Noah input data and filed electronic reports about wind patterns and locations in his cream colored cubicle on the sixty-second floor of the Slone-Stevens Company, though he was not sure what the company did. He took the job when he moved to the city last year, and his immediate supervisor still called him David. Long after everyone else left, Noah typed in data because he had nothing better to do.
Clicking off his computer, Noah rubbed his eyes, put on his jacket, and went to the dark carpark, where he vaguely recognized the woman at his car.

“Hi,” she said.
Noah’s mouth twitched, but words didn’t come out.
She held out her hand. “My name is Rebekah.”
He didn’t shake it but knew he should. “Am I in trouble?”
“No.” She smiled, withdrawing her hand. “You’ve been here a while. I thought we should meet.”
He took a small step backward. “Why would you want to meet me?”
She smiled again like he was funny. “My dad said you work hard, but don’t talk much.”

He remembered her now. This was Rebekah Stevens, daughter of the co-owner of Sloan-Stevens.

“Do you want to get coffee?” she asked.
Noah didn’t know what was going on but nodded slightly.
“Hop in,” she said, pointing to the car next to his.
Noah stared out the front window, teeth clenched, while Rebekah sped without the autodrive, cutting people off, and zipping upward into faster traffic. He watched a guy with a large tattoo covering half his face and neck wave an angry gesture at her, but she didn’t notice. Seconds later she dove through slower traffic and stopped on the carpark of a third level coffee shop with a grin he couldn’t figure out.

Noah didn’t know if he should buy hers or not, but Rebekah slapped down a black card before he could figure it out.

“Company’s buying,” she said.

“The company doesn’t keep anyone in your job position long, but they don’t want anyone new,” she continued at a corner table. “Would you be interested in keeping on?”

“Sure.”

“Good. Tomorrow we’ll fill you in. What you do is important, and the information you’ll receive is . . . confidential.”

“So you’re meeting with me to find out if I can be trusted?”
Her smile made him feel like he was back in the car with her, darting through traffic.

“Yes. You’ll learn things that might change your perspective.”

Agreeing might bring something besides cream colored monotony, though he didn’t know how much time he could spend near Rebekah before having a stroke.

Noah felt ill waiting on the eightieth level of the company to meet with Slone and Stevens. His foot tapped the clean floor, a heartbeat in the silent hallway. In the bright conference room, Noah slouched next to Rebekah already warm under his collar and arms.

“This division of the company searches for people,” Stevens said.

“It’s important to find them.” Slone made short eye contact with Stevens before continuing. “We need you to search the locations you’ve re-searched. Company vehicle, all expenses paid, and a phone to contact us once you have, or haven’t, found them.”

“What do you say?” Stevens asked.

It seemed they wanted an answer now. “Yes.” What was he doing? His mouth answered before his brain gave it permission.

“We’ll upload all of the information to you,” Stevens said. “You leave tomorrow morning.”

Noah squinted into the glare coming through his window, bag packed on his bed, watching for the company car. He didn’t make rash decisions. He was comfortable with his cream and grey life.

Once the shiny black car arrived on his carpark he took off west toward the first location. Endless hills and plains below him showed no signs of habitation. Finally the navigation informed him he was nearing his destination: north-eastern Montana. When the car sat down in an open brush area, Noah saw nothing. Rocks and bushes and dirt, and no sign of people. He took out the company detection gear, set it up near the car, and scanned a circle, tracing the horizons.

Nothing.
He turned on the large underground seismograph, stepped on its platform, and pressed the detect button.

Nothing.

Finally, he clicked on a heat identifier and squinted at the screen for the slightest signal. What was he looking for? Why were these people important?

Noah got in the car and pressed 1 on the phone.

“What have you found?” Slone’s voice answered.

“There isn’t anything here.”

A slight sigh reached his ear. “Continue to the next location.”

After visiting eight other vacant locations, Noah dreaded calling the company, and Slone and Stevens sounded less and less encouraged.

Noah set the car down in the forested mountains of Colorado. Outside he sucked in the thin, crisp air and blew out a wispy cloud. Squiggly green lines appeared on the seismograph, indicating vibrations nearby. Quickly he pointed the heat identifier up the mountainside where a large orange shape blazed on the screen, hidden partially by cool tree trunks. Through the binocular lens he saw her clearly, watching him through the waving yellow leaves of an Aspen tree, flipping her large ears toward him. Noah had never seen a deer, or anything like it. She disappeared up the mountainside.

He called the company.

“Alright Noah, come back,” Stevens said. “Meet in my office tomorrow morning.”

Noah waited in a coffee colored chair that matched the pattern on the rug, gazing out the panoramic windows at the morning rising around the buildings. What more could he do? These mysterious people Slone and Stevens wanted to find didn’t exist.

Rebekah came in, her lips a vibrant red. He watched them while she spoke.

“Noah,” she closed the door, “my father and Eli apologize, but didn’t want to leave what they’re working on just now. They’ll meet with you later today.”

Noah nodded.
“I want to tell you something,” she said, sitting in her father’s high-backed chair. “Do you know why they’re searching for these people?”

“No.”

“I think you should know,” she paused, looking into a picture frame on the desk, “they are searching for real humans.”

What was that supposed to mean? Real humans?

“They think real humans could have survived in those places, but they don’t see what’s right in front of them. If any exist, we would have found them by now.”

She turned the frame around to show Noah a little girl. He supposed the faded and worn photo was Rebekah, but the eyes seemed a little different.

“What do you mean real humans?”

“They’re not real humans Noah,” she gestured out the window to the city, “none of them. They’re androids. Like us.”

Androids? Was Rebekah joking?

“There used to be real humans, they were like us, but not exactly. They created us to be like them—but we aren’t them.”

“Rebekah, we’re not androids.”

She pulled a screen from the desk and sat in the chair next to him. “Look. Noah didn’t understand. The video showed people designing rubber-like faces and stretching them over mechanical heads, people watching half-finished robots walk around a room, people covered head to toe in white cloth, lying in a parking lot, others piling the bodies in trucks. It didn’t prove they weren’t human. It proved she was crazy.

“Noah, humans died out around a hundred years ago. There aren’t real humans anymore.” She took the screen back. “Wind patterns and underground shelters didn’t save anyone.”

Rebekah pulled her short dark hair away from her left ear and turned it to Noah. “See.”

A thin white line behind her ear did nothing to convince him. “A scar?”

“Every few years we need an upgrade. You haven’t had one yet, but everyone over two years old has one.”

An odd feeling crept over him. Adam, who sat in the cubicle next to Noah, had the same scar. Suddenly memories of playing baseball and learn-
ing to swim felt unreal, like dreams. He needed to know the truth, why Rebekah thought these things. “What happened to the humans?”

“A plague. They kept dying; they couldn’t reproduce if they’d been near the sickness. They reproduced biologically like we think we do. This company builds androids. It built me and you. My grandfather worked here his entire life to find humans, so has my father. They want me to take over, but I can’t. Why hope for something we won’t find.”

“What do you mean it ‘built’ us?”

“You saw the video. They weren’t as sophisticated then, more mechanical than biological. Over time the humans figured it out. Now we build new androids when the old ones wear out.”

“I remember growing up, having a mom, going to school.”

“But you didn’t. We’re given memories.”

“My memories were downloaded into my brain?”

“Exactly. When the plague hit, humans relied on androids to help them. They made us as close to human as possible so they wouldn’t see how hopeless it was. Over time they forgot we weren’t like them. They died holding the hands of androids telling them they’d meet them on the other side. Androids couldn’t save them. My father thinks there’s a way to bring them back. I don’t know when the last of them died, but most of us don’t remember they even existed. We’ve forgotten this isn’t how it always was. We think we are humans.”

For a moment they sat in silence.

“What happens when we wear out?” she asked. “When we die. What happens to us?”

As Noah contemplated his escape from the office, Mr. Stevens came in.

“Hello Noah. Didn’t Rebekah tell you we needed to reschedule?”

“Dad, I told him.” Rebekah snapped out of her trance.

Mr. Stevens flickered between them. “You told him. . . .”

“Everything.”

“I don’t think he was ready.” Mr. Stevens looked hard into Noah’s eyes.

“What do you think about what Rebekah has told you?”

“The truth? She’s confused.”

“She isn’t confused. This is the truth. I will answer all of your questions, but this is the truth. We sent you to look for signs of humans.” Mr. Stevens
took a breath. “You are not a human. None of us are. We created you in this building last year.”

Mr. Stevens took a small flashlight from his pocket. “May I see your arm?”

Noah hesitated but gave his arm to Mr. Stevens. Gripping Noah’s wrist, Mr. Stevens slid Noah’s sleeve up and clicked the flashlight on. Under the concentrated blue beam the serial number G61-G917 was clearly printed on the inside of Noah’s forearm.

This was impossible. Yet, Noah had never felt quite as he should. His heart had never raced like hearts are supposed to. It’s too regular thump thump, the dreamlike quality of his past, and the invisible code on his skin told him this was real. All of this was more than any human—person—could take in. I’m not human, Noah thought. If I’m an android, am I alive? I was real, but what am I now? Am I still real?

He studied Rebekah, her brown eyes holding a depth he only understood now. Somehow he thought she still had some hope of finding humans. Mr. Stevens watched Noah, waiting for him to speak, translating his expressions. “I’ll find them,” Noah said. “Somewhere humans still exist. I’ll help you find a way to bring humans back.”
Sir? The Boss will be with you in a moment.” A moment, he sniffed. *A moment could seem like an eternity around here.*

Seated at a desk perfectly positioned to provide interference with anyone trying to enter the Boss’ office, the secretary did her job admirably. She had a slightly round face and figure that was not at all unattractive on her. Shoulder length blonde curls and piercing blue eyes did nothing to hurt that assessment either.

“Thank you, Cherry,” he called her by name. Of course he knew her name—he was second only to the Boss around here; he knew everyone.

However, it seemed like the Boss had been getting more out of touch with day-to-day operations. They had been losing their target audience to their chief competitor, and Michael could not convince the Boss they needed to move aggressively to counter those losses.

He was getting worried—and impatient.

He stared at the office doors: perfectly matched and mirrored wood grain with delicate iridescent scrollwork, like the entryway up front. All part of the grand
design of the place. *That’s what we do; we create things.* ‘*Loadstar Pisé: a Guiding Light in Construction,*’ he thought, *from mud—from nothing—we create.*

He paced, the immaculate white carpet crushing softly beneath his feet, like a cloud. The view from the wall of windows reminded Michael of flying, with the earth far below and the clouds drifting by.

An eternity later, the doors opened to expel a wormy little figure clutching some papers. He moved quickly, headed back to whatever rock he had crawled out from under. *Lawyer,* Michael thought.

Cherry smiled her perpetual smile. “You can go in now, Sir.”

The doors closed behind him, and the light from outside silhouetted the Boss at his desk. Michael could just make out the vaguest details of his appearance, even though he knew exactly what he looked like. The full head of white hair haloed in the light, dimming the face enough to where the beard—once full, though nowadays neatly groomed—was barely visible. Michael could feel the Boss’ eyes on him. Those eyes saw everything.

“Luc proposed a settlement,” the Boss said.

“What? He wants out?”

“He wants me out of the game.”

“He wants us to quit? That’s insane!”

“If you’ll recall, Luc has a history of irrational acts when it comes to me.”

“Then why was that lawyer in here so long?”

“I proposed a … counter-offer.”

“What kind of offer?”

The Boss’ hand settled on some papers. “That’s not important right now. Let’s see how he responds first.”

The Boss spun his chair and faced the afternoon light. Michael glanced quickly at the stack of papers on the desk. He only had an instant, but what he saw was shocking.

*Loadstar Pisé, Inc … Transom Ring, LLC … fixed market shares…no new acquisitions … zero expansion …*

Michael snapped upright before the Boss’ chair completed its revolution.

“That will be all, Michael. We’ll address this later.”

The double doors swung open behind him. Collecting himself, Michael moved quickly to his office.
He had been there from the beginning—well, almost the beginning. In the beginning, it had just been the Boss. Then everything exploded. There wasn’t a major city in the world that didn’t show his influence.

That was when Michael had come on board. Just after Luc, now that he thought about it. Those were good times. The Boss had really been involved back then. He was always around, talking to people, passing on bits of knowledge about how things were supposed to work. Some of the younger people would have called the whole thing Awesome; to Michael, it was simply natural.

It hadn’t all been good, though. Sometimes, when things got rough, the Boss had come down hard, but Michael still really missed those days.

*When had it all started to go wrong?*

*Luc.* That’s when it seemed like the Boss had started to lose it. He hadn’t seen the threat. He tried to see the good in everyone but had nearly lost everything. In the end, Luc was thrown out—with Michael’s help—but now he was the competition. Luc had slowly gained over the years, but the Boss was still on top.

*I can’t believe the Boss would even consider a settlement. There has to be something else. What is he up to?*

As much as he wanted to have faith that the Boss knew what was going on, Michael knew better. More out of touch than ever, the Boss had been slowly fading from the public consciousness, and the organization and its influence with him.

He called his secretary. “Get me Records. I need the APoC.”

*Alternate Premises of Corporation—Eyes Only.* Michael knew that no one had looked at these for a long time. Dust and grime coated the cover. *I don’t know why the Boss even kept these things.* Written shortly after the organization had taken off, they were a different history than the one the public knew. No more or less valid than the published Loadstar Pişé history, but some of it was controversial and difficult to explain away, to say the least. *I suppose even the Boss needs to remember, warts and all.*

Michael skimmed the sections, titled by the authors who had put them together. Those names were meaningless now, unless you knew the people.
Michael had known them all, and moved past those he didn’t need.

Mary …. Paul …. Philip …. Matthew …. Thomas …. Milton.

Michael stopped and began to read … and remember.

Luc’s takeover attempt. What a bloodbath. Luc thought that he should run the place, even though the Boss was on top of his game. Michael was the Boss’ strongest supporter, and led those loyal to the Boss to force Luc out.

It hadn’t been easy.

Luc failed but had ended up with his own piece of turf and taken a good portion of the Boss’ people with him. Luc had slowly eroded the Boss’ power base ever since.

The following day, Michael sat with Gabe, another long-time company man, and shared his concerns.

“I don’t know. It just seems like this time he’s not making any sense. In the old days, when he’d do something I didn’t understand, I still believed. Remember the S&G demo project?”

“Yeah. Nobody really understood that one at the time, but it all worked out.”

“That’s what I’m saying. I don’t know if it is going to work out. I mean, a deal with Luc? That’s insane.”

“You’re treading dangerous ground, Mike. You’re talking about replacing the Boss. Look what it got Luc.”

“I’ve been going through the APoC, and Luc wanted control. I’m trying to save what we’ve built.”

“Try convincing the board.”

“If I have you, I should be able to sway enough of the others once I expose the deal with Luc.”

“I hope you’re right. Otherwise, you could end up like Luc, and I don’t think you’ll get the opportunity he got. He won’t want the competition any more than the Boss will.”

“I’ll call the meeting for tomorrow afternoon.”

“Hey, good luck.” Gabe shook his hand. “No matter how this turns out, you’re going to need it.”
The room was quiet as a church. Michael stood at one end of the table facing down its length in silence, past the six other board members. The Boss sat in his customary position by the window. Moments passed, and as the light began to dim behind the Boss, Michael thought he recognized an expression he hadn’t seen for a long time—when was it?—on the Boss’ face: uncertainty?

“Would you like to tell everyone why we are here, Michael?”

The question seemed to shake the others out of their stillness. The shuffling of feet and barely audible throat-clearings only heightened the tension. Michael and the Boss were opposing magnetic poles with the world caught in flux between them.

Michael felt their questions: *How could the Boss not know? He always knows.* Michael smiled, knowing that the Boss had given him the opening he needed.

Now he remembered the only other time he had seen that expression on the Boss’ face: when Luc had made his own play.

“You are negotiating a settlement with Luc. You want to surrender,” Michael said calmly.

Michael leaned forward, hands on the table, putting his full weight on them. “I cannot allow that. I have been here too long. I have been with you for too long. I have stood with you against Luc for too long!”

*My lot is cast. Now to bring the others on board.*

“I believe it is time that this organization moved decisively against Transom Ring,” he paused, “under new leadership. I call for a vote.”

“There isn’t going to be any vote, Michael,” the Boss said.

Michael leaned back, standing erect, the majesty of his figure contrasting the Boss, sitting in his chair with the light fading behind him. The others didn’t know who to look at. Finally, a voice pierced the quiet from Michael’s left.

“Michael, are you sure? A settlement? With Luc?”

“Yes, Ray,” Michael said. “I saw it. He sent it with Luc’s lawyer. Fixed market share, no expansion—it was all there. He—” Michael gestured towards the Boss, “—is just waiting for an answer.” The momentum of the
room shifted in his direction.
  “Do you deny it?”
  The Boss’ exhalation sounded like thunder as his hands found the edge of the table and he pushed his chair back, rising to his feet to face Michael.
  “I don’t deny things.”
  A shudder rippled like a seismic event. The Boss looked around the table, and the murmur died.
  *He’s not going down without a fight.*
  “Did you ever stop to ask, ‘Why?’ Michael? Why would I do this, after spending all these years opposing Luc?”
  *What am I missing? What’s his game?* Doubt began to scratch at the back of his mind.
  “It doesn’t matter. You’re quitting. You’re surrendering. You don’t deserve that seat if you aren’t willing to defend it!”
  “What did you see, Michael?”
  Michael’s confidence slipped away.
  “I don’t deny that I sent an offer. I told you that.”
  “I saw it.”
  “Have faith.”
  “I saw it…” his voice a whisper.
  “You saw Luc’s offer, Michael.”
  Another shudder rippled the boardroom.
  “Then what—?”
  “A counter-offer, Michael. I told you.” The Boss sat down, no longer faded and frail.
  Michael’s support was gone. He should have known better. The Boss always knew.
  “I don’t understand …”
  “Of course you do, Michael. It’s about choice. You chose to come in here and undermine me and usurp my position. I chose to counter Luc’s offer. People choose to support Luc or me. Everyone has a choice.”
  The Boss turned and faced the window. The light outside revived itself, casting a warm glow around him.
  “You remember how it was when Luc tried this? Recall how devastating it was? How many good people did I lose? Choices, Michael. Luc
made his, and you were there. Yet here we are again, with you making the
same choice and expecting a different result.”

The Boss turned silently back to the table.
“What was your offer? Please, I need to know.”
“No, Michael. What you needed was to believe in me. I don’t know
when I lost you, Michael, I really don’t.”

The Boss captured Michael’s eyes, and Michael could see he had over-
reached, overestimated his importance, thought himself better.

There could only be one Boss. Luc had learned that. Michael hadn’t.
Pride. Luc’s sin. Again.
“Please …”
“You know I can’t resist a wager, don’t you, Michael? Well, that was my
counter to Luc.”
“A bet?”
“I bet him that you would betray me just as he had. It seems I won.”
He turned to the board.
“You may go.”
As they moved toward the door the Boss added, “And don’t forget who
is in charge here.”
They stopped, but did not turn.
“I am.”
Twenty-two years,” the old guard said. The prisoner shifted to accommodate the weight of the shackles as he left his cell. “We have seen more of each other than most wives see of their husbands,” he said with a slight smile, his voice rich with a southern gentleman’s accent.

Nodding, the old guard said, “Know a few wives who wouldn’t mind locking the cell door on their husbands.”

“Perhaps it would be distasteful to mention those spouses who would not be opposed to seeing their partners receive the death penalty.”

“I’ll miss your jokes, Tom.”

Four guards and the prisoner began the walk in a silent procession, the quiet shuffle of shoes contrasting sharply with the clink of the prisoner’s shackles.

After several minutes the prisoner said, “There are twenty-six graves in the Virginia City cemetery.”

The old guard looked over. “Pardon?”

“Virginia City,” the man said, “The Nevada Territory. Twenty-six graves lie in the cemetery there.”

“Heard from the trial you got ancestors from those parts.”

“Yes, I do. The town is for tourists now. But the ceme-
tery is there—and the only twenty-six graves to occupy it were the result of my great-great-granddaddy.”

The guard said, “Got something on your mind Tom?”

The prisoner said nothing while the procession continued down the hall. Then, “My great-great-granddaddy put them there with a Colt Army Model 1860—a .44 caliber six-shot revolver that was preferred by the Union Army. It has been passed from father to son in our family for four generations.”

“You got some feelings about how you ended the tradition?”

The prisoner shook his head. “It was a mercy that I did. My father and myself have been spoken of in the news coverage, but the legacy began in Virginia City—great-great-granddaddy Samuel killed those twenty-six men, then his oldest son killed four men. That man’s oldest son killed seven. His oldest son was my daddy—you’ve heard tell of him. Then it came to me.” He paused, then added, “A superstitious mind might say that when the piece comes to a man, a man must fulfill his destiny with it.”

“Family curse?”

“So some would say,” came the answer. “No son should inherit such a legacy.”

“Mind me asking how a Yankee piece and a graveyard in Nevada started a family of murderers?”

“It would be my honor.”

Samuel Wilson Baker stumbled out of the carriage and onto Virginia City’s desert dust.

“Welcome to the Nevada Territory, gentlemen,” the stagecoach driver drawled as he climbed to the top of the carriage to loosen the ropes holding the luggage. “May the remainder of your lives be as long as the Good Lord sees fit to grant and not as short as the Nevadans will most likely make it.”

Jonathon Wilson Baker, Jr., Samuel’s senior by eight years, looked up at the stagecoach driver. “If the territory is as murderous as you seem inclined to believe, sir, how is it a town appears before my eyes and not an old and forgotten cemetery?”

“Ask me how many of the newcomers I deliver are here when I return, Mr. Baker, and there you may find your answer.” He dropped another piece of luggage from the roof. “In Virginia City, if you were to say, ‘There goes
the man that killed Bill Adams,’ it would be higher praise and a sweeter sound in the ears of this sort than any other speech that admiring lips could utter.”

Samuel turned to his brother. “I want to go home,” he said.

“We have no home,” Jonathon said.

“I’ll go to Philadelphia and live with—”

“I warned you not to speak of that place.”

Indeed he had, and when the warning had been given it had come with a smart blow to Samuel’s jaw. Samuel changed tactics, “We’ll be killed, Jonathon.”

“I carry the Yankee piece.”

“You cannot think to use it! Think of what Papa would say if we murdered men.”

“Kill them all, he’d say,” a man’s rumbling voice interrupted.

Jonathon and Samuel looked around to see the tall, broad shouldered man who had come out of the general store and now stood on the wooden porch.

“Welcome to Virginia City,” the man said. “Ulysses’ the name. Ulysses K. Jefferson. Killed me four men myself. Only fair to warn you I’m on the shoot these days—got Farmer Pease aspiring to take my place in the town and a man such as myself has got influence to maintain.” He spit tobacco, then nodded at Jonathon. “You say your father died in the war?”

“Yes, sir.”

“A man might ask what a boy’s doing in Nevada when his father died in Yankee territory.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“If somebody killed your father, why’re you here and not there? The war’s still on. A Southern gentleman ought to be fighting for his cause.”

“If you mean to imply cowardice, sir, I resent your words, though I’ll make no further issue of them in exchange for a departure from the topic.”

“Can’t say that we care too much about cowardice here in Virginia City,” Ulysses said. “What we do care about is if you’ve killed your man.”

“Excuse me, sir?” Jonathon said.

“Ever killed a man?”

“I certainly have not.”

Ulysses spit tobacco, then lifted a large arm to wipe his mouth with his sleeve. “Can’t say I like the looks of you,” he said. “Would have to say my thoughts are that it would be better if you weren’t here.”
“At present we have not the means to afford transportation beyond this town.”

“No need for that. We’ll keep the boy. Always needing fresh blood here in Virginia City, and we can raise him up right.” He took the single shot pistol from his hip, lifted it and aimed it at Jonathon’s chest. Jonathon flew backward, driven by the force of the explosion. His body convulsed as Samuel dropped to his knees beside him, screaming.

Ulysses sniffed and spit, looking at his revolver before starting to reload. “Take his piece, boy,” he said. “In Virginia City, a man keeps his private graveyard and no small-fry rough is going to survive without it.”

“Could’ve let them go home,” the old guard said.

“The South had very little by way of homes to return to. Their daddy was killed by Yanks at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. Momma was killed in Atlanta. The plantation was burned. Their sister married a businessman from Philadelphia that had been a friend of the family ‘fore the war.”

“What about the boy?”

“There was a trial,” the prisoner said.

“I wouldn’t have thought Nevada had much of a judicial system at the time.”

“It was a farce, I assure you. Justice depended on the whims of influential men—Mr. Jefferson, in our case. He held a trial for the death of Jonathon Wilson Junior in his saloon one afternoon when business was slow. Picked twelve men to pretend to be jurors and put on a right good performance of a show. The lawyers bought each other a round of drinks and life in Virginia City returned to what it had been.”

“What did Samuel do?”

“Swore vengeance on every man connected to the event. Then he lit out and wasn’t seen by town residents for nearly fifteen years.”

Inside his saloon, Ulysses K. Jefferson watched the sun blazing hot over Virginia City, its vicious rays searing the burnt desert sand, which then radiated fiery heat back up at the town’s sweltering citizens.

“Damn near dead out there,” he said.
“My old saddle says we see a dead man ‘fore noon today,” a second man says.
“My Smith and Wesson says we see one in the next hour,” said a third.
“My Starr revolver says we make one,” Ulysses said, reaching for his vest.
“Ulysses!” a man shouted from the street outside of the saloon.
Two sets of eyebrows went up. Ulysses’ did not.

Ulysses finished shrugging on his vest and hitched up his belt. “Sounds like little Samuel Wilson has come.”
“Sounds like it,” the second agreed.
“He’ll shoot you dead,” the third said.

Ulysses smiled and pushed through the saloon’s swinging doors. “Gentleman, Ulysses K. Jefferson did not come west to live a life of ease and yellow-bellied cowardice. I earned my right to conquer this small piece of the great Nevada Territory and I earned my right to face the next frontier with no less confidence.”

“No coming back from this, Ulysses.”
“I should hope not.”

Ulysses stepped out of the saloon and inhaled deeply against the suffocating heat of the burning desert afternoon. Exhaling, he spit tobacco, wiped his mouth, and then let his black eyes wander over to the young man standing in the street beyond the saloon’s porch.

“Expected you nigh on a year ago.”
“Had business to tend to.”
“Made quite a graveyard for yourself,” Ulysses said.

“One stagecoach driver who witnessed it, twelve jurymen, two lawyers, one judge, one justice of the peace, two lawmen, and six men of influence involved in the collaboration of a false trial and the dismissal of justice.”

“Twenty-five in all,” Ulysses said.
“Plus the murderer I’ll shoot today,” Samuel said, retrieving his Colt Army Model 1860 from the holster at his hip. “That’s twenty-six.”
“Reckon so,” Ulysses agreed.

The men stopped at the end of the corridor.
“This is it,” the old guard said as the door opened.
“Very well then, though it would seem impolite of me to leave you
without the conclusion of the tale. Allow me a moment to outline events and excuse me for the exclusion of details.”

“Alright if we start the preparations?”

“Of course. Where was I?”

“Ulysses and your great-great-grandfather outside the saloon.”

“Ah, yes.” The man crossed the threshold and walked towards the middle of the room. “As you can guess, Samuel used the revolver that he’d taken from his brother and killed every man involved in the farce trial after his brother’s murder. Then he went for Ulysses.”

“Ulysses must have been old by then,” the guard commented.

“I presume that he was and that the murder was no more impressive an event than a young farmer shooting an old dog.”

“And so then there were twenty-six graves in Samuel’s graveyard.”

“After the burial, great-great-granddaddy donated the land to the town. No burial has taken place there since.”

“The straps have to be tight,” the guard said, “but shouldn’t cut off circulation.”

“Samuel rode out of town at dawn the next day. Family legend suggests he moved to Montana and started a new life.”

“Lived off his gun?”

“Married a native woman who spoke no English. Three surviving children. The oldest inherited a single item from his father—a Colt Army Model 1860.”

“The warden is ready,” the guard said.

“Of course. I thank you for your attentive ear.” He turned to face the middle-aged man in the warden’s uniform.

“You can make your statement.”

“No final statement, sir,” the man said. “I put an end to that which needed ending. There will be no more descendants of the Baker family to carry on the inheritance of murder. The Colt revolver is in the hands of law enforcement and will be destroyed. My children sleep peacefully now, and I am confident that if I have done anything, I have wiped clean the slates of destiny and allowed for a new future for those who are as yet untouched by our curse.”

“The firing squad is ready.”

“I thank you.”
The pulsing beat of some nameless Europarty-pop pounded in his ears as he made his way along the bland cinderblock hallway, eggshell white, with its acoustic ceiling tiles—also eggshell—stretching ahead of him. The hallway screamed cheap-motel, except for the doors lining it at regular intervals on both sides. Six-panel, woodcore, steel doors separated the hallway from whatever was beyond them. No light came from underneath, and any sound was drowned out by the beat of the music in his ears.

Reaching the end of the hall, he wrenched open a smaller door that hid a janitorial closet. He removed a mop and bucket, filling the latter with hot water from the basin sink.

The steam from the bucket started to fog his small, round-framed glasses. Reaching up, he sloppily tried to clear them with a finger, but the mess on his hands only smeared the lenses.

Shutting the water off, he shoved the bucket back down the hallway and around the corner. He didn’t even have to look at the room numbers to know where he was going, but his brain counted them off anyway.
He stopped at the door and stabbed his iPod to silence the music. As the thumping stopped in his ears, his fist thumped on the door. A muted voice allowed his entry, and he punched at the iPod and opened the door. The music resumed its assault on his eardrums.

The small, concrete room reeked of feces and urine. The single light bulb dangling from the ceiling barely lit the corners of the room, even a room as small as this. The small chair in the center of room was the only thing well-lit in here, and he could clearly see that he had his work cut out for him tonight.

Two large men hoisted a black plastic bag onto their shoulders and moved past him through the door and down the hall. He knew where they were going, but didn’t care. He didn’t have to clean up that mess.

He couldn’t hear the glopping sound as the mop struck the bare concrete floor. The hot water made it easier to get the blood stains up, but the stench was tremendous. He almost preferred the shit and piss to the blood. Then he looked at the bare wooden chair and its new brown and yellow upholstery and decided: almost.

Oh, well. He had to get this room cleaned up. The next interview was scheduled to start in the morning, and the bosses liked to have a clean slate to work with.
Natalie Johansen, BYU

Dear Customers

Come see *Broadway in the Desert* in sunny Southern Utah. Imagine your favorite musicals performed on an outdoor stage surrounded by 1,500-foot cliffs of beautiful red rock—a magnificent experience you will not soon forget! Call the Box Office for more information about tickets ...

And more information about anything else, really. As a Box Office Ticket Agent, I am a veritable wealth of knowledge. I have an incredible array of talents and attributes which allow me to serve you; I have the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, and the voice of Idina Menzel. I am relentlessly prepared to make your day.

I arrive on the scene of the job, clock in, turn on the computer, pull the blinds up, and log on my phone. Good day, this is the Box Office, how can I help you? Got a question? I have an answer. No, ma’am, we don’t provide lodging, but I can give you the number for any local hotel. No sir, we don’t have a daycare for dogs, but I can do a Google search and immediately
find you the nearest kennel to accommodate your teacup Chihuahua. Hmm, I'm not sure how many appetizers Scaldoni's has; I've only been there once, but I'm sure they have a delicious selection to suit your taste. You're welcome.

As a Box Office Ticket Agent, I should be able to tell you at any moment, without the slightest hesitation, the rates at all the hotels in the area within a fifty mile radius and the entire menu for every restaurant in the county. I can book your flight to Southern Utah, find out why your credit card was declined, and tell you the weather forecast for the next three months. Thus, I will be personally responsible if it rains on a day I said it wouldn't, if the hotel is full on the day you booked your tickets, if coconut shrimp is no longer served at Red Lobster, if you get taken to collections, and if your plane crashes (I might even be able to pull a few strings and take care of the funeral arrangements). As a Sales Representative and Assistant Manager of the Box Office, I can do just about anything short of walk on water. However, if our theater's special effects team can make it rain on Don Lockwood in our production of *Singin’ in the Rain*, I might even be able to manage walking on water.

After I successfully answer your inquisitive onslaught, you are now ready to order tickets. Selecting a date to come see the show might be the hardest thing you've ever done, but I'll get you through it; I'm a pro decision maker. I have the patience to check every single performance date from June 15th to August 4th to see when Row O seats 104 and 105 are available, because they are your favorite seats. If, coincidentally, Row O seats 104 and 105 are everyone else’s favorite seats and thus not available, I will find your new favorite seats—instinctively. And when you quip, “Row F is by Row G? Isn’t that unusual?” I will refrain from singing the alphabet to the tune of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” and simply say that Row F is by Row G because the rows are in alphabetical order. Show date, check. Favorite seats, check check. Now to the prices.

Yes, I completely understand that you expect to see a Broadway-quality musical at a movie theater ticket price. I feel your pain in my soul when your sale total comes to a hefty $200, and I shed a hypothetical tear when you exclaim, “Oh my butt!” after I tell you the ticket prices. I do not receive the slightest satisfaction when the board of directors raises ticket
prices, because I know how it aggravates your already-festering ulcers. I’m sorry; I can’t give you a handsome discount. However, if you are a man wanting to dress like a woman in order to get the ladies’ night discount, I’ll go for that. Sure, why not. If you don’t want to humiliate yourself like that, I’m sure you qualify for some sort of discount; affiliation with IHC, Skywest, Merit Medical, AAA, the military, or any hotel in the county will win you a good-sized price cut. If you’re a local resident you can even get a 25% discount Monday through Thursday nights. If you qualify for all of these discounts, I lament the fact that we can’t give them all to you at the same time; unfortunately we can’t pay you to come see the show. Oh, and by all means, don’t have your credit card handy when you call to order tickets; I love to wait while you track it down.

When you receive your tickets in the mail and immediately call to say, “These tickets say ‘West Side’ and I ordered the CENTER SECTION,” I will remain unruffled and explain that it’s because you are seeing West Side Story. As a Box Office Ticket Agent, I’m here to make you happy, even if you shout at me, swear at me, complain to me, interrupt me, put me on hold to answer another call, and eat lasagna in my ear. My favorite is when you let me know that you are unable to write down your confirmation number because you are in the bathroom. I have no concept of “too much information,” because I am a Box Office Sales Associate (even when you exclaim, “My seats are on row DD? That’s my sister’s bra size!” or “Can I get tickets on the back row so my wife and I can make out?”).

I am thrilled to my fingertips when our theater decides to produce Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat for the third time in six years, especially when I hear things like, “I’ve seen ‘Joseph and His Coat’ so many times I could spit!” Unfortunately, we don’t have the original cast of Joseph …, so Donny Osmond will not play the starring role. I apologize, but I’m sure his nephew David will be sensational.

When you ask for tickets to “Joseph and the Electrical Dreamcoat,” “Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Overcoat,” “Joseph and His Amazing Dream Boat,” “Joseph and the Amazing Technology,” or even “Joseph and the Amazing … Whatever” I understand, sometimes you just get sick of trying and say, “Hi, I want tickets for ‘Jose and His Colored Garments,’ or whatever the hell it’s called.” I won’t laugh at you, and I even might call up
Andrew Lloyd Webber to ask him why he didn’t simply call it Joseph, just for your sake. Just so you wouldn’t be embarrassed when you ask to see “Joseph Smith and His Coat.” Equally, I bite my tongue when you ask for tickets to “Les Miserballs,” or “That Miserable Show.”

When you call and want to get tickets for Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat on a night that Beauty and the Beast plays, I will, of course, make a few calls to the director, stage manager, and actors, and we will be happy to cooperate with you on a show change, completely disregarding the other 1,919 people that have tickets on the same night. If the show you want to see closed two weeks ago, I might just be able to round up the cast from their various current shows and harass the crew into doing a “special” performance. You are my most important customer. If the leading lady breaks her leg and the understudy has the measles, I will make use of my Idina Menzel voice to fill in. Yes, I have the lines memorized. Yeah, I’m that good.

I am definitely sympathetic when you call to get tickets for tomorrow night (which has been sold out for two weeks) and expect to sit in the front row. You know, I might just be able to set up folding chairs in the aisles and behind the orchestra just for you and your family reunion! In special cases, I will personally kick the other paying customers out of their seats for you: if you are a Red Mountain Spa employee, have a second home in Spain, or know the President of the United States, you are in luck. No, really, I will. You’re very welcome. It’s all part of the job.

When you call with a complaint because of the offensive scene with Potiphar’s wife in the show last night, I will be prepared with a sincere apology. I wouldn’t dream of telling you that the very same seduction scene occurs in the Bible, and Andrew Lloyd Webber wasn’t making it up. Have you ever read Genesis? Chapter 39. Good stuff. Also, your complaints that...
the sailors in *South Pacific* swear like, well, *sailors,* won’t succeed in ruffling my feathers. Unfortunately, no refunds.

I’m sorry to inform you that our *outdoor* amphitheater is subject to inclement weather. No, sir, I don’t know if the show will be cancelled tonight because of rain. No, we don’t have a big circus tent to cover the amphitheater if it does rain. Chances are, the weather might clear up, so we won’t be canceling the play if it starts sprinkling twelve hours before show time. Weather’s unpredictable like that. I sincerely hope that doesn’t ruin your day. If, however, it is raining at show time, I will understand you banging on my window for an immediate refund, along with the other two thousand people here. I am sorry that we won’t be able to process everyone’s refunds the night of the show; because neither you nor I want to be up until 2 am. Sure, we will pay for your flight, your hotel, and your meals for the next three days as penance because of the rain. Yes, our computers are capable of giving you a refund if you don’t have the tickets, don’t have your credit card, or don’t remember if it was you, your brother, or your mother who ordered the tickets. I am equipped with special detective skills, and just from looking at you I can decipher any information about you: your birthday, social security number, and the name of your oldest child. Just part of the job.

When you come back the next day determined to see the show, but grumbling about all the trouble you’ve gone through to get there, I will calm your fears about a second rainout and assure you that the show will be worth the wait. No, you don’t have the exact same seats as you did last night; I apologize that you’re in the west side instead of the center section, but you *are* closer to the stage than you were last night. Sir, I can hear you; you don’t have to bang on my window. No, we didn’t double charge you. No sir, like I mentioned on the phone, Donny Osmond will *not* be here tonight. Don’t worry; he wasn’t performing last night either, so you didn’t miss him. No, really, he isn’t in our production of *Joseph* … I’m sorry. The show is still great. You’re very welcome. Here are your tickets.

And enjoy the show.
“For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.”

-1 Corinthians 11:29–30

We had been practicing with quarters for a couple of weeks: “Follow closely behind the student in front of you and when it’s your turn, hold out your hands, the right under the left, both cupped in a shallow, boat-like shape with fingers touching. The sacrament will be placed in your left hand. Everyone practice that.” Sister Eileen walked up and down the rows inspecting our hand canoes.

I was not the only fifth grader afraid of Sister Eileen. She floated without feet and weaved in and out of the rows while we stood in practice. Clearly, she was born with an unnaturally tall head and I suspected that she kept the deformity carefully hidden beneath her black and white habit. When she wafted down my row, I avoided eye contact. I had not seen her since the beginning of the school year when I was sent to her office with a bean in my nose.
One Friday, I lost interest in our weekly Bingo game and even though I had marked three of the four corners in the area of Sin, Reconciliation and Penance with a red bean, I doubted the possibility of my teacher drawing the final Nightly Examination of Conscience square that I needed for a win. I had embraced a more entertaining and challenging use of the raw pinto beans by arming a nostril and firing for distance. I even discovered that if you plug the unused nostril, you can maximize the velocity and achieve surprising distance. But if, upon arming, you succumb to an ill-timed laugh, you might find yourself in the same predicament that landed me in the front office. Had I not started to cry, the bean-ammo likely would have fallen back down the chamber of my nose and all would have been fine. But I choked. I panicked. I whimpered in fear and with each pathetic snivel, I lodged the bean further and further up the barrel of my nose. The gravity of my situation increased and I became certain that I could feel the bean beginning to swell with the moisture of my snot and I knew that within a short time, it would surely sprout and I would choke to death. Eventually, I was hauled to the front office by Sister Flannigan and told to wait on the cold, wooden pew-bench for Sister Eileen, the Principal of Holy Family Catholic School.

The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee….something something something…Take and eat in remembrance…something something.

“With your right hand, take the wafer in between your finger and thumb and place it in your mouth. Make the sign of the cross—forehead, stomach, shoulder, shoulder—and then turn left and return to your seat. Do not forget your genuflexion when you pass in front of the Holy Sacrament. Fold your hands and return to your seat. Keep your head bowed but pay attention to where you are going. Lower the kneeling cushion and bow in prayer for an acceptable period of time then return to a seated position.”

I remember the hype surrounding this important day as if it were yesterday: the People, not just the Celebrant, would actually be permitted to touch the sacrament. I always thought it looked odd: the open mouth “say aahhh” sort of thing and then an old guy feeds you the Body of Christ like you’re a dog who has just performed a trick. Never mind allowing anyone to handle the Cup of Salvation. That’ll never happen. Father Anthony will always be the one to dip the wafer into the Blood of Christ and then place
the dampened circle onto the outstretched tongue of us kids. But soon … soon, the grimy little playground fingers would be permitted to grasp the Bread of Heaven and direct it into the Kool Aid-stained mouth of the Worthy Faithful. The middleman’s role will be greatly reduced and we will all be so very lucky to be a part of a new Eucharistic Rite.

When Friday mass arrived, we all took turns, dutifully washing our hands in the big, tempura-paint-splattered sinks near the art station of our classroom. No one was required to do the hand boat thing but most wanted to. It had been the talk all morning—out at recess, in between subjects. We lined up according to the alphabet and traipsed over to the sanctuary in all postures of anticipation and privilege. I was particularly nervous, but not for the same reason as my fellow schoolmates. You see, I am not a Catholic, and so, despite my earnest practice in perfecting my shallow-bottomed, finger-tip ski, I was not invited to take Communion with my fellow Holy Family peers. I sang. I knelt. I did the Catholic up-down-up-down shuffle in perfect time, but I was forced to remain seated during the Communion Celebration because I am a Protestant.

My hands were perfectly scrubbed for the occasion and I took my place in line behind Teresa Drake. We filed into the big, stained-glass-adorned sanctuary and were blessed with the cool air on our cheeks from the only functioning air conditioning on campus. I was goofily giddy and considered dipping my fingers into the holy water bird fountain at the door, but I refrained for fear of causing suspicion. Today’s Liturgy was significant for all of us, even me, because I had convinced Teresa to steal the sacrament wafer and sneak it back to the pew where I would be waiting to accept the holy hand off.

“I was goofily giddy and considered dipping my fingers into the holy water bird fountain at the door, but I refrained for fear of causing suspicion.”
As a symbol of the purity he radiated, Father Anthony washed his fingers following the offertory. His hands were knitted together in a gesture of supplication while the acolytes and the laymen prepared the Eucharist. The Liturgy was well choreographed and implied the precise organization of all movements of its various participants. We had been well instructed in terms of our new involvement in these proceedings, so I had faith in Teresa's ability to pull this off. I was grateful for the emphasis on ceremony because on this day, of all days, the sensation of sacredness in an environment of absolute peace and tranquility was necessary. Teresa needed to remain focused and true to the plan.

Our row was ushered out and into the main aisle leading to the front of the sanctuary and I was forced, as usual, to fold my knees to the side so that my classmates could exit. I relished this usually awkward and distracting act because unknown to all but two, I had found a way to participate in a rite from which I had hitherto been excluded. My eyes were keenly focused on the backs of my fellow students, and my heart beat in time with the gradual forward progression of the line as each youngster took his or her turn at the Cup of Salvation.

From my vantage, I detected no indication that Teresa would fail to complete the task at hand. I saw Father Anthony raise his arm outward toward her. The long sleeves veiled her cupped fingers, and I was unable to determine, for sure, if she had elected to be among the first of a new generation of young Catholics to take the host into their own hands. I could make out the waist cord of Father Anthony's vestment and I knew Teresa had passed to the left and was making her way toward the outer aisle. I scanned the line in search of her knowing look and saw her walking with her head lowered in accordance with tradition. When she finally lifted her head to approach our row, I saw her jaws moving ever so slightly in what appeared to be a chewing motion. I was simultaneously devastated and disgusted by her lack of commitment, and I bowed my own head in extreme disappointment.

Teresa slid into her spot next to me on the pew but did not take the customary knee on the kneeling cushion. She sat unusually close and I knew that she was attempting to make apology for her failure. I could not stand to look at her, and I briskly acknowledged her presence by jerking
my knee away from hers. As my eyes remained focused on our side-by-side knobby kneecaps protruding from our green-and-blue-plaid skirts, I saw her small-fisted hand lower into the divide between our legs. My throat tightened and my eyes opened wide in shock and in intimate communion with my faithful friend. I slid my left hand into the same crevice and opened my fingers slowly. Teresa lifted her fist onto my open palm and slowly released her grip. Our fingers and palms met, separated only by the paper thin, circular biscuit.

*Take and eat this in remembrance.* The wafer melted like a pat of butter on my tongue and I savored it like rich and bitter chocolate. *Almighty and everliving God, we do most heartily thank thee for that thou doest feed us, in these holy mysteries.*
I don’t say “I miss you” anymore. The “I-love-yous” only come as often as the garbage gets picked up, packed in frozen piles of snow at the edge of the driveway. It’s not that I don’t feel the words. I still love you as much—
more—
I still miss you when you’re not here—
more—
I still watch for you—
more.
The words pulse from my heart to brain to lungs.

But somewhere between the sharp intake of air to say, “I missed you,” I stop. And the words sit unuttered in my mouth, becoming soggy. You wouldn’t want them this way.
So, I swallow hard and you comment off-handedly—
your words flowing
as quickly as your thoughts—
that I’ve been awfully quiet lately.
The knot of words in my stomach disagrees.
Once there, they discover that sunshine isn’t enough.
Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*

We pace Fox Circle and Mule Deer Run, side-step scat leavings dried in the sun.

Green power stubs dot lots all around this half-vacant, oft-burgled, mountain ghost town.

Hoppers broad-jump concrete footings, fern floors, pinching our forearms with calipers, moored.

Sporadic wing pops pepper ambient drone of insects strumming to their Great Metronome.

The black trail is cracked, divots in the crust, where bracken did buckle and mushroom must.

A soldier’s sunk chest deep in one slim breach—you tug it free, mimic catch and release.

But she had been gluing soft pearls in that groove, so hunkers back down to deposit her brood.

This mechanical planting, her claw-rump on tar, to us this is primitive, gruesome, a scar.

We adjourn to our house thru quackgrass and burrs, past decorative felloes of wheels, hubs and spurs.
Once realtors hid portraits, staged a door wreath, fanned fragrant quick-bread at covenant’s bequeath.

Now long-since-breakfast dishes nest and revert to clay and glaze and spent coffee dirt.

At bedtime I sang your frog solo, sans banjo—you fell to sleep well and deep under that rainbow.

Yet my thoughts race circles, molting deer run, and arthropods crumble in short setting sun.
I gather up the earth in cupped, desperate fingers—
makeshift little shovels clawing at frosted clumps
of ground.
The snow tumbles lazily across a slate sky.

Without a notion of why
I bury the bones.

I pass by on occasion,
hoping the rain hasn’t washed away
my carefully placed soil,
revealing the heavy evidence of all I’ve tossed aside.
The remnants.

These earthed mounds have settled in time,
in this burial yard—for bones.
The burial feels final.

Until the red-eyed dog howls.

It’s digging in the yard—
sniffing hungrily at the ground,
snarling and smacking cracked lips,
greedily circling the site.
I stand watchful, waiting, an angry sentinel, for one dry bone to be scratched up from the earth and carried off. Dragged away. By greedy, yellowed teeth. In that swift, panicked moment I feel myself defensive, in the realization that buried or not; they’re still my bones.
The billowing shawl
surrendered to the wind
its purity –
cloth and clay
one color.
It waved a limp farewell to
the distant red peaks,
floated above the bare
and desiccated sea bed.
It whipped the hunch of
the enduring camel
and caught in its threads
the sands of the Danakil.
Michael Gillham

Circe

“Quando giungon davanti a la ruina,
quivi le strida, il campianto, il lamento;
bestemmian quivi la virtù divina.”

-Inferno, V

Perhaps your mirrors were blinding at first. Your panopticon of screens Did not make me reel with fascination through your sequined halls. I do not remember. I only remember today, and today was the flourish of your arm, white as a mannequin’s, That appeared my feast. Your generous board creaking with burgers, fries, and cokes.

Today were the TV shows of the scrubbed Nazi youth, their clean pursuits through the glassy metropoles, The Boy Scout Priapus impales his Maiden League Lotis at last. The anthems swell, and commercial. The stinking springs supply the wash that dyes you blonde, brunette, brass, lavender, carmine, ceil, fawn.

Each night a new seduction. A face to cure the other faces of themselves. The brazen elliptic bed, the chandelier.

You name the gods, the oaths, just like we promised. The names, all the names, their homilies. So, when I’m inside you, I give as if incantatory.
The weeping pedant at the golden calf. 
You grip me like a hearty hand. The iron seal of state capitalism. That trusty pump, 

And I spend, and I spend, and in that flash I am given the sea within.

What black ink smokes up from this emptying? The narcotic of sleep. 

First, the sea, the mind of god. The men consumed in her frontier. And I see her again. Child at her breast, each warmed to each as the day begins the hills. As one. 

She whispers through the lace and I am back in the fields. My song combs through the white grass. Avé, avé. O avé. And they are gone.

Tomorrow, pour the wine from the box and raise high the plastic glass. 

Hail the empire of the gaping mouthful. 
Hail the merchandising mystery plays, the pratfall pageants. 

Hail the sweated herd, the slow bacchanal groping beneath the watchtower. 
Raise high the rafters, countrymen. The Malls of Mammon, The Temple of Toys. 

Banish boredom, solitude, surprise. Fog the black pyramids away from sight. 
For this is the hour of the overlord. May he bless our circuses with color and light.
May our blood sparkle for him as coins of tribute in the sand.

Raise high the glass, another, and another

For all the toasts I can’t remember and for the sea inside that stays.
And there the fisherman and his wife remained for the rest of their days.

-Grimm’s Fairy Tales

In Boundary Waters,
moose salivate,
eagles glare like goats,
loon point and laugh.
Walleye wink white
poker chips on green felt.

Unnumbered lakes lap amniotic.
Copper water circles ankles.
M’lady yearns to slip under
like the illusive menominee.

Dancing that old two-step,
I scratch my name
into her feet; pores ooze
pike oil; camp smoke
sours our gunflint hair.

Fat catfish couple,
yet she rebuffs
my dull red anchor
thick with rime.
Sunken leviathan root
in vintage tin cans,
cold raccoons palm bony hands,
muddlers wonk in rushes and slime.
My fishwife ponders
this water without tide.
Michael Gillham

Insomnia

“Sleep is the most moronic fraternity in the world, with the heaviest dues and the crudest rituals.”

-Nabokov

Pretty soon, the turning fluorescent halls
Look the same. All the doors are unlocked.
They knew you were coming. No one will stall
You from rifling the files, from taking stock.
Like a bad spy movie, flashlight in teeth,
You find the same old surveillance pictures.
Here’s you, searching for a lost pen beneath
Your desk again. Nothing new, to be sure.

No shadow stalking your struggling bulk
In these photos you’ve seen time and again,
No shape of Thanatos beneath these bright bulbs
No whiff of Eros in the halogen.
No flogging passion in this world of men.

You storm the tower, machinegun in hand.
You climb, your legs pumping forward, you climb,
Your head and heart pulsing with bright demand.
There are no guards. No flunky that says “I’m
Anathema, your shadow’s henchman.” You
Stop to heave about midway. You descend
Defeated, unmanned. Tonight, you will go through
The interstate to the logical end
Where the long causeway pulls beyond sight
Into the personless smear of the night.
Sleep came too hard last night,  
brain buzzing with thoughts of next week  
next month  
next year.  
Jobs to do, scenes playing out, voices—jumbled.

I drifted, some time around 3 a.m.  
Down deeper into tomorrow,  
saw you had grown up.  
You didn’t need me  
anymore.

I offered up my time,  
my love,  
my advice.  
(Triplicity of motherhood)  
I scolded you, even.  
But you couldn’t be bothered.

And all those years I had  
budgeted away,  
prospective plans and goals.  
I wished so hard to have just one back.  
To hold tight  
even for a single sleepless night.
Zachary Metcalfe

The Willow Weeps
For Ophelia

Walking along the wild brook,
In perfected harmony,
Singing thy sweet, solemn songs,
Sewing threads through my silven
Bough, you wove more than pale weeds.

Oh, how I loved thy little lays!
Though, in my love lingered a
More dangerous dissention
Than I hitherto imaged.
Envious, I refused thee.

Now nymphs nay sojourn near me.
May my somber tears witness
The grief and lament brought
By bellowing pride within.
Ashamed, I weep evermore.
Nicole Wardell

Life

You were already
dying
when I learned of you.

Waves and waves of pain
crushing
your liquid cocoon.

A rapid heartbeat
whispered
of a life unlived.

Your short existence
haunting
my imaginings conceived.
I wish that you would see me, finally, with love
Revealing as the dawn when you hear my name.
Because I am the morning’s fire edging the grove,
A white shield burnishing within the flame.
And you? You are the white Sunday
Of my joy, the goldenrod of sunny spray
Laurelling my head, and feet, and hands
With music’s unfurling white brocade.
You are mayday’s yellow bunting played
Around the poles to bless the giving land.

Forgive the nightly flowers of my rage.
A woman’s heart cannot know man’s lust for profanation,
To guzzle God’s blood from the grail, to stage
Our coupling where I will drink the sea of my damnation.
A woman’s heart cannot know.
Forgive my gallant raptures when love’s narcotic flows.
When blood rings with song, I hunt you through
familiar halls
Where your mirrors always hide you from my
meager darts.
Suffer this fool his eager game of hearts
For my love for you is the slow death of Summer
turned to Fall.

Soon I will awaken from night’s phantasmal haunting
And your words to me will set soughing the boughs
of Spring.
You are the billion megatons of vernal dawning
Bringing the littleness of flowers into everything.
And I? I am colossus within the night
Where the dreaming forge smolders the shield of light,
A light whose yearning brings a light more true
To melt each of your heart's frozen glades
And reveal, perhaps, the lamp your love has made
Pulsing with want, with life, as the seasons made
bright by my love for you.
Michael Gillham

Fire and the Slave

I.
So, on the night when you finally come,
Unlock my chains and lace your fingers through
My knotted ribs and whisper, “What have you done,
My slave? Is this the fire that grew and grew
As you fed it your wicked love for me?
Is this the hidden forge where you hammered
The dripping blade that will be our death? See
The whiteness of its blaze. Hear the stammer
Of perishing fuel. Closer, slave, come close.
We must share the kiss of this inferno.
I am the one who has fed this blaze the most.
I love you as the mountain loves the snow.”

Then our love will banish snow from mountains,
Consuming as comets. Lips, like fountains.

II.
How long will I wait for your sweet pardon,
Unmanned, a cripple, in your iron chains?
The fire is reborn with every new dawn.
Your shape within it, white as porcelain.
If this iron could be slipped by desire,
I would push down the columns of your wrists
And pour into you my vintage of molten fire,
Rob the bright blood brimmed chalice of your kiss,
But I must earn bread as your slave and fool.
Don’t you require a blue-eyed, dusky thief
Who takes only you and leaves your jewels?
Throw a file from your window. End the grief

I have fed this blaze in gardens unseen.
For you, the fuse in my blood, are my queen.

III.
The princess looked out her palace window.
“Oh, damn this golden cell of my husband’s
That frosts me here, while my slave sleeps below.
Unknot the muscles knit into his hands
And shear off the sabled cords of his hair
So that my secret flesh might forget him
And I can stanch the flood that honeys there
When I see the dark ropes that cloud his limbs
That hoist his hammer as it falls and tolls,
Falls and tolls; each hammerfell a lick of flame
I blot with tears. Damn the day I was told
His name; the word my sobbing heart became.

I must grow old while he wastes in the fire
Fed hot by dreaming in my master’s spire.
A July 2012 article posted in the satirical internet news source *The Onion* describes the difficulty students have in finding good teachers. The fictional author writes, “[Students are] not puppies you can show off to your friends”—students need teachers who are educated and will teach them (Mendez). Current scholarly debate surrounding the best way to provide that education often includes the purpose and effectiveness of composition courses and the best use of writing exercises in classrooms. While critics question the benefit of composition courses and classroom composition, proponents of composition-based pedagogies argue that writing exercises give students a unique opportunity for internal personal learning not afforded by a traditional teacher-to-student transfer of information. Writing exercises and assignments allow students to study their own thoughts and learn in their unique ways with a demonstrable improvement in depth of comprehension. While educators and academics agree
that writing improves education, a debate arises as educators seek to illustrate the best approach for integrating writing. The issue centers around the question of the purpose for writing both in university classrooms and after students go into professional careers. If writing is considered primarily a learner-centered process of thought and application, then pedagogies should focus on the development of thought and drafting; if, in contrast, composition exercises should produce error-free writing in university students bound for professional environments, prescriptive pedagogies should focus on mechanics. This paper will survey academic dialogue concerning the importance of in-class writing, the benefits of composition in regards to university education, and the debate concerning a process or product-oriented pedagogy of teaching composition.

While academics agree that writing is crucial to learning in academic settings, the purposes are multifaceted. One such purpose is the important process of personal learning through writing. Benson, Mathers, and Newton summarize numerous scholars’ discussion on the critical nature of writing by describing it as essential to understanding:

Work on the writing process by researchers…has focused on the “internal” nature of writing. Central to the process approach is the notion of composition as an act of personal “meaning making”; writing, like learning, is a meaning-making process that facilitates the learner’s ability to ask questions, discover connections, and find answers. (Benson et al.)

Writing creates an opportunity for learners to internalize and process ideas and information. Initial drafts are more useful when seen as a process of discovering what the writer wants to say than as a statement of what the writer is trying to express. Composition scholar Donald M. Murray posits that a writer’s first drafts “are initial attempts to think on paper” (qtd. in Benson et al.). Once a first draft is written, learners can engage in a process of elaboration and clarification as they go about making meaning. The more writers work with their ideas, the more they are able to revise, rethink, and clarify their thoughts. Learners engaged in writing “clarify their thoughts” and are more able to process ideas and respond to material, thus enhancing overall education (qtd. in Benson et al). Douglas Reeves’ work examines research on the use of writing as an assessment tool and indicates
studies finding that the use of writing-to-learn pedagogies in universities is an indicator of universities with high academic performance. Reeves explains that this is because “Students process information in a much clearer way when they are required to write and answer” (129). Writing creates an opportunity for learning comprehension that exceeds traditional learning.

The demonstrable positive impact of writing exercises on student learning does not apply only to academic studies. A second benefit of writing-to-learn pedagogies in academic settings is the personal growth afforded to students. In “Talking to One’s Selfs,” Ryan Ireland argues that the give-and-take relationship between students and teachers is a key to the composition process. Ireland adds context to the effect writing has on learning when he points out that writing also urges learners to discover their personal thoughts and feelings. The goal of a writer, Ireland writes, “is to gain an awareness of not only the voices composing their writing, but also the voices sti

den[ed] by skill acquisition.” Khansir describes writing as “thinking discovery,” and as “learner-originated,” meaning that the learning is an internal process that happens when learners engage in writing, instead of when teachers supply information. The importance of writing demonstrates itself in the effect it has on the student: students internalize material and ideas better when writing is a part of the teaching/learning environment; writing provides opportunity for students to discover their own
ideas and separate those ideas from “selves” they have been trained by in earlier years; and writing creates a situation of self-discovery in which the writer engages with language and thought without being hindered by as-yet un-acquired skills.

A third benefit of writing in classrooms is the demand that writing makes upon students to engage in language. The relationship between word and thought cannot be divorced. Andrew Waywood describes an “intimate connection” between “the appropriation of words and then concepts” (Waywood 321) Of course, “writing plays an essential role in language learning” (Khansir), but university-level students are not required to pass composition courses simply to enhance ability in the language. The underlying concept is the fundamental principle, which is then applied on a larger scale to university pedagogy.

A rising debate concerns the relevance of composition courses preparatory to students’ entrance in modern technology-driven careers and cultures. The argument defining the disparity between university composition and the professional culture will be discussed later as the debate between process and product pedagogies is outlined. General support of composition courses across university disciplines describes the value of writing as “the ability to communicate ideas and information affectively through the global digital network is crucially dependent on good writing skills” (Khansir). The ability to use language effectively is a clear demarcation of professional ability. However, though scholars may agree that writing is critical to learning and that language is an essential element of it, the most effective way to teach writing provokes a more exhaustive debate.

As crucial as writing is to learning, thinking, and language, current academic dialogue categorizes two popular pedagogical philosophies on the student experience with university composition courses. One side of the discussion defines writing as a skill that must be learned by the learner; the opposite describes writing as a skill that must be taught. The two sides argue the values of what are called a “process” approach and a “product” approach, respectively.

The process approach to teaching literature is based in the philosophy that writing should by learned by an individual student’s engagement with the steps of composition. The process approach to teaching composition is
defined by a contemporary scholar as a method of teaching that “focuses on the steps involved in creating a piece of work” (Khansir). Instead of focusing on the quality of a finished product, “the primary aim of the process approach is to help learners understand their own composing processes and to build their repertoires of strategies for pre-writing, drafting, and rewriting” (Khansir). This later model, appearing in pedagogical discussions of the 1990s, is drafted on the theories of Donald M. Murray’s work of the 1980s. In his essay, “Teaching Writing as a Process, Not a Product,” Murray states, “The process we should teach is…the process of discovery through language.” This process of discovery, he argues in another article, teaches key principles to learning and understanding.

To produce a progression of drafts, each of which says more and says it more clearly, the writer has to develop a special kind of reading skill. In school we are taught to decode what appears on the page as finished writing. Writers, however, face a different category of possibility and responsibility when they read their own drafts. To them the words on the page are never finished. Each can be changed and rearranged, can set off a chain reaction of confusion or clarified meaning. This is a different kind of read which is possibly more difficult and certainly more exciting. ("The Maker’s Eye” 161)

If writing is taught as a strategic process that involves steps, analysis, and improvement, students learn critical thinking skills, which also educate their view of the world around them. By using a pedagogy that is “problem-posing”—or, in other words, a pedagogy that teaches students to seek a process-oriented progression towards a solution—students “develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process” (Freire 70-71). Challenging students’ views also creates university students who can challenge institutionalized thought in their society. In “The Arts of Complicity: Pragmatism and the Culture of Schooling,” Richard E. Miller argues that students who are capable of expanding their skills beyond the “whims of corporate culture” will become citizens who can “be heard as reasoned [thinkers] rather than dismissed as…bleating sheep” (Miller). As students learn an analytical view of, and relationship with, first their work and then the world around them,
they develop invaluable critical thinking skills, which translate to disciplinary writing, professional environments, and life experience.

Concerns about a pedagogy based on the idea of teaching a process and development of thought are focused on the contradiction between what is learned and taught in universities and what is actually applicable to real world professional experience. In “What Professors Actually Require: Academic Tasks for the ESL Classroom,” Daniel M. Horowitz argues that the process approach does not prepare students for future professions, which is the context in which they will do their writing after leaving the university. The problem with the process approach is that “emphasis on multiple drafts may leave students unprepared for essay examinations” (Horowitz 446). He adds, “Overuse of peer evaluation may leave students with an unrealistic view of their abilities,…[and] trying to make over bad writers in the image of good ones may be of questionable efficacy” (446). Even the theory of teaching composition as an internal thought discovery is invalid, because

[The process approach] ignores certain types of important academic writing tasks, and the approach gives students a false impression of how university writing will be evaluated; and the approach focuses on the individual’s psychological functioning and neglects the social-cultural context, that is, the realities of academics that in effect, the process approach operates in a socio-cultural vacuum. (Horowitz 446)

The process approach lacks a clear focus on structure and mechanics, which leaves students without practicable knowledge they will need in the professional world beyond the university.

The counter approach to a process-based pedagogy is termed a product approach. This style of teaching focuses on producing an error-free final product, rather than the process of brainstorming, drafting, and revising. Richard Badger and Goodith White suggest that writing should be “mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher. In order to focus on acquired writing skills, this approach to composition is taught through writing exercises emphasizing mechanics. Anita Pincas describes process approach pedagogies as,
“Students are given sentences and paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically, for example, change statements into questions, changing words or classes or combining sentences” (118). Because students’ writing and language is carefully controlled by the exercises, students’ work shows few errors. The product approach is based in such writing activities as “copying [and] gap-filling” (Khansir). The benefit of this approach is that it offers teachers a clear system of grading: either the students have copied correctly or they have not.

The drawback of the product approach is its prescriptive nature. Writing is diminished into “how we can arrange the fitting of sentences and paragraph into prescribed patterns” (Khansir). While the “prescribed patterns” of a product approach may serve to educate students in a more universal class of form and structure, modern studies have clearly demonstrated that teaching for the purpose of reducing errors actually increases errors (Hartwell). In the 1970 text “Teaching English as a Second Language,” J.A. Bright and J.P. McGregor agree that the goal of teaching only to prevent errors or to correct errors is counter-productive. Bright and McGregor define product approach as a goal to prevent errors in students’ writing, and he added that the pupil does not learn from his mistakes: “If he did, the more mistakes he made, the more he would learn” (10).

An added dimension to the discussion of the pros and cons of process and product approaches to teaching composition appears in research performed by Linda S. Bergmann and Janet Zepernick, co-authors of “Disciplinarily and Transfer: Students’ Perceptions of Learning to Write.” The authors explored the value of first year college composition courses and reported that students “actively reject the idea” that what is learned in first year composition courses is applicable to writing in other disciplines; because of this, “students valued the disciplinary approaches to writing more” (Bergmann and Zepernick). This study complicates the debate of how writing should be taught by questioning the utility of both composition and the teaching of it. A summary of the work of Bergmann and Zepernick outlines their results and connects it with contemporary authors on the subject. In his article, “Teaching Rhetorical Analysis to Promote Transfer of Learning,” Nelson Graff writes that “to resolve that tension” between composition courses and real-world professional composition require-
ments, composition courses “should focus less on teaching students how to write than on teaching students how to learn to write.” Graff says that “this conclusion resonates with findings from Greene (2001) and Wardle (2007),” who also studied freshman composition and disciplinary composition. Graff explains, “They found that one of the most effective techniques involves teaching students writing strategies, which they described as ‘steps necessary for planning, revising, and/or editing...for accomplishing specific types of writing tasks.’” By learning strategies for writing, university students acquire skills directly transferable to professional environments beyond the university.

Composition courses may be based in teaching content, structure, and grammar, but the true value of the courses is in the education they provide incoming university students about how to learn. Students in composition courses learn to clarify thoughts and how to analyze personal opinions and opinions of others; they delve into language in ways otherwise not provided; they learn procedures for brainstorming, drafting, and revising—each of which teaches a valuable process that will be used in professional environments after university graduation. If the pedagogy is based in correct grammar and mechanics, students learn precision and accuracy.

Thus, the manner in which composition is taught returns to a discussion of the purpose of composition—if the purpose is to produce mechanically correct and stylistically advanced statements of information, the product approach teaches students to produce what is expected. However, if the aim of composition is to produce learners capable of self-expression and higher thought, writing provides the ideal avenue for learner-autonomy and therefore learner education.
Works Cited


Keeli Espinoza

Exploring Language and Cultural Identity Loss Through Irish Poetry

Belfast writers, poets, and cultural historians have brought to light the struggle and turmoil related to the oppression of the Irish people during the British Occupation by attempting to fight the elimination of the Gaelic (Irish) native tongue. By exploring works from Belfast writers, we can see how they handled the use or lack of use of the Irish language. John Montague’s *The Rough Field* (1972) can be considered a striking example of work by Irish writers which pose questions of change and loss of cultural identity caused by linguistic impositions. In a variety of poems, including “The Grafted Tongue,” we will discover how the political, cultural, and linguistic identity of Ireland was affected. By way of British mandates, the English language was “grafted” onto the hardy Irish culture causing a fragmentation between generations and a loss of touch with their native heritage and identity. In addition to Montague, Irish poets from the Belfast
Grafting, in common terms, is the act of attaching something that is considered to be foreign onto another well-established, hardy entity which will later produce a scion, or descendant. Grafting can lead to exotic, highly desired outgrowth, but in the case of Irish linguistic and cultural identity, the result was life-altering. Historically, countries have been occupied by people looking to make a new start on a far away land or to gain land holdings and financial growth. However, during the quest for new lands there has been a tendency to impose regulations and bring some type of “order” to native civilizations which were often thought to be uncultured. In the case of British colonization of Ireland, the process was long and tumultuous, leading to bloody outbursts and political upheaval. The push for the English language in Irish communities became a topic some Belfast writers were compelled to include in their work.

Irish writers inspired by this topic faced two opposing ideas about writing in their native tongue. First, writers had to face the fear that they were writing in a dying tongue that did not appeal to as many citizens as written works in English; critics failed to take into account how the Irish language struggled to survive colonization. Second, writers addressed attitudes toward revivalist ideology that called for the decolonization of Ireland along with the repossessing of cultural identity and linguistic purity, despite an English-dominated society. The effect this had on writers, especially for whom Irish was an acquired tongue, was deeply felt. For American-born, Irish poet John Montague, in his poem “A Grafted Tongue,” he outlines the linguistic problem Irish speakers faced.

(Dumb, bloodied, the severed head now chokes to speak another tongue:—

As in
A long suppressed dream, some stuttering garb-led ordeal of my own) (1-8)
The poem depicts those to whom the English language has become a hindrance and a tool to separate them from their native language, their culture, and future generations. In the beginning stanzas Montague illustrates the idea that the people of Ireland were forced to learn the colonizers’ language, and how they stumbled over the pronunciation of the foreign words.

Montague’s use of the line break between the word “garbled” also creates the word “garb,” suggesting that by using English instead of their native Gaelic, the students were putting on a costume and by doing so changing their identity. He continues on in the later stanzas:

An Irish
child weeps at school
repeating its English.

............................

In shame
the altered syllables
of your own name;
to stray sadly home

and find
the turf cured width
of your parents’ hearth
growing slowly alien:

In cabin
and field, they still
speak the old tongue.
You may greet no one. (9-11, 21-32)

Montague’s vivid descriptions illustrate the fragmentation between young and old generations in the community because of the language change. Although Montague was not a native Irish speaker, he felt a close connection to this struggle. In his younger years, he developed a stutter
which decreased his confidence in school, and he mentioned, made him feel as if he were an outsider. In the final stanzas, he circles back to the idea of grafting leading to generational separation:

To grow
a second tongue, as
harsh a humiliation
as twice to be born.

Decades later
that child’s grandchild’s
speech stumbles over
syllables of an old order. (33-40)

This profound poem illustrates an insightful understanding of the human psyche and disruption caused by changes in the linguistic environment. Montague comments on the serious implications leading to a sense of loss of native Irish identity and generational ties.

Montague’s sensitivity and attachment to the Irish culture and its people can be explained by his background. Due to his parents’ political activities in Ulster, they were forced to immigrate to America where he was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1929. There they experienced linguistic and cultural issues face by many incoming immigrants. Because his parents were unable to financially support him, Montague was sent to Ireland at the age of four to be raised by two unmarried aunts in a rural county. The early separation and dislocation from home, in addition to his experience growing up in a turbulent environment, greatly impacted his work bringing linguistic and cultural awareness to his poetic themes.

British mandates required surveyors to set out among the Irish countryside to alter Gaelic placenames of topographical features into English. The gesture was meant to repair relations between rival nations; however, the desired result was not achieved. Ania Loomba was quoted as saying in Anna Bryson’s article, “‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’: Researching Memory and Identity in Mid Ulster, 1945-1969,” “language and signs are the sites where different ideologies intersect and clash with another”
The ideological intersections and clashes gave way to unintended turbulent periods in Irish history. Brian Friel explores these very issues of cultural belonging through the speaking of both English and Gaelic in his play, *Translations*. The ideas that history, culture, and identity are bound together by a shared language, making it one of the strongest criteria for nationhood, rang true to many. Nash states that “The Gaelic language and the soil of Ireland were ... deep repositories of the native spirit. To lose the Gaelic language would be to lose the soul of the nation and, crucially, the ‘natural’ connection to the land that could only be articulated through the native tongue” (461). The importance that Irish topographic placenames played in literature and cultural identity were evident in many areas due to its power to suppress and erase culture. The reception to the politically themed works showed the complex nature of the desires to return to a “pure” linguistic culture and the desires to recover some aspects of cultural identity.

By mandating an English-only policy in educational and governmental systems, British colonists were successful in beginning cultural identity repression. It was further implemented with the re-naming of topographical locations, “In light of the paramount significance of language as a marker of collective identity, these naming processes have been read as practices of cultural erasure in which the newly named mapped places were appropriated as the indigenous cultures were subordinated” (Brealey 1995). As illustrated in “A Grafted Tongue,” the relationships between carriers of native culture quickly started to fragment within the generational time frame. In only three generations, the native language use was seen in a meager seventeen percent of natives. When language changes are imposed for four or more generations, the number of native language speaker’s drop significantly to only one percent.
Colonizers saw placename changes as an effective way to gain control, and many names were changed to reflect Royal or Anglicized names such as “Queen's County” for “Laois.” However, after realizing the separation caused by these changes, the formation of the Free State was put into action. The Free State was to take Ireland back to its former state by reinvigorating the language and other previously suppressed cultural aspects. However, with the post-colonial renaming of topographical locations, the politics of the cultural histories were not as straightforward and as easy as once thought. Many Native Irish were fighting an uphill battle with those who desired a reversion to a “pure” linguistic and cultural heritage, while others were completely fine with keeping elements of the English language as noted in Nic Eoin’s article “Severed Heads and Grafted Tongues.” Albert Memmi states:

If only the mother tongue was allowed some influence on the social life, or was used across the counters of government offices, or directed the postal service; but this is not the case. The entire bureaucracy, the entire court system, all industry hears and uses the colonizer's language. Likewise, highway markings, railroad station signs, street signs make the colonized feel like a foreigner in his own country. (172-73)

However, during this revival period, Protestants and non-conformists in Ulster tended to equate Gaelic tradition with Catholicism, which created more of a sectarian version of “purity” with neither side allowed to be completely included.

Tensions involved with the recovery and re-establishment of Gaelic language and sense of place were seen in a variety of writers’ works, many of them experiencing it from a different point-of-view than Montague’s. Unlike Montague, these additional Belfast writers were all native Irishmen sharing a common homeland. However, this identity still allowed for various ideas about how the language and land played a role in the Irish cultural identity. To writers such as Seamus Heaney and John Hewitt, language became an important topic. It can be seen in Heaney’s placename poems, which focus on the divides between the land and language, and turn to older examples as foundational support for his ideas. During the Romantic period of Irish literature, writers were drawn to the idea of finding “self”
through illustrations of cultural identity written about in past generations. Clark states that because “Yeats and Synge had implied that the islands were the last vestiges of ‘real’ Ireland, and because the islanders still spoke Irish, they were inextricably linked to an authentic Irishness” (Clark 161). The Aran Islands were one of the last places to be considered “pure.” The people managed to maintain their native language and their cultural identity.

In Richard Rankin Russell’s article “Regionalism,” he notes that when “Heaney was learning to write poetry thoroughly grounded in the actual conditions of Northern Ireland, he interacted not only with other Belfast Group poets but also turned naturally to older literary exemplars from the province” (Russell 50). In “The Peninsula,” Heaney brings about elements of *dinnseanchas*, meaning lore of places. *Dinnseanchas* originally were short poems describing how places in Ireland got their name. In modern times, the word has taken on a new meaning regarding topographical elements. These lines from Heaney’s “The Peninsula” illustrate features of Ireland’s topography:

The glazed foreshore and silhouetted log,
That rock where breakers shredded into rags,
............................................................
By this: things founded clean on their own shapes,
Water and ground in their extremity. (9-16)

The lines elicit images of ancient forms being a powerful symbol of a history that developed long before the reader ever learns of them. Heaney describes these topographical features without assuming an allegiance to a specific place or people but having a profound respect for the natural surroundings of Ireland. The forms themselves are used as a historic pin-point for the Irish identity. This idea differs in the way that John Hewitt approaches the Irish landscape and cultural identity.

Although Hewitt uses similar subject matter in his poem “Glenarriffe and Parkmore,” Hewitt calls on particular locations by name in these lines:

Go to Glenarriffe if you’d know this Antrim,
from Waterfoot’s wide street of lime-washed walls
with broad sandbank where the children play
and gulls cry among the billowy washing.
Go to Glenarriffe, take the rising road,
the curving road that hugs the northern slope,
that winds and clambers among the trees
and spreads the little valley flat below. (1-8)

By his poetic gift, he is able to make Ireland’s beauty eternal. The way in which Hewitt chose to write about his native homeland allowed him to write about Ireland in a different way. “For Hewitt, knowledge of place is intimately connected to self-knowledge” (Clark 124). Hewitt calls attention to names of the topographical features as a way to connect back to Irish identity.

Both Heaney and Hewitt were inspired by the Aran Islands and their connection to a “pure” linguistic heritage and cultural identity attached to them. Heaney’s work pertaining to the Aran Islands, as a whole, did not have the strong sense of following the regionalist ideals; rather, he thought in more universal terms. He felt that all of Ireland held importance. In “The Peninsula,” Heaney never refers to names of places and has no real stopping point. The reader is taken on a journey with no destination, people, lights, or any man-made object for that matter. Hewitt focuses on specific names and it seems as though he is admonishing the reader to look at all Ireland has to offer by way of people, roads, etc. before you see the beautiful countryside, for it is the Irish identity that holds the highest level of importance. Both Heaney and Hewitt are connecting with the land, the Irish cultural identity, through their works.

Heaney’s poem makes more sense of placename change by focusing on the native names. The poetry of both Hewitt and Heaney can be thought of as an elegy for cultural loss. By Heaney writing the Irish placenames into his poetry in English, he illustrates the collective loss of the Irish language and how that has changed the identity of the landscape to the natives, making it seem almost alien in some poems. James Longenbauchin suggests that “Heaney wants to think of poetry not only as something that intervenes in the world, redressing or correcting imbalances, but also as something that must be redressed—re-established, celebrated as itself.”
Longenbauchin’s view is that Heaney is using his poetry as a way to inform and elicit readers to question their surroundings and rise to action.

The process of grafting requires a delicate touch to make something beautiful and unique, but when it is done with a heavy hand, ruin may come to those involved. Sometimes no matter the number of times, the amount of effort, or the length of time the grafting process occurs, it never succeeds and the entity recovers from whatever damage it sustained and hardy as it ever was. In the case of the Irish cultural and linguistic identity, Belfast writers such as John Montague, Brien Friel, Seamus Heaney, and others brought to light the struggles and turmoil related to the oppression of the Irish people. By writing about subjects that they found important, they were attempting to fight the elimination of the Gaelic native tongue during the British occupation. They were able to have a voice and bring awareness to the issues they faced recording their surroundings so that others may know and learn of their struggles. While some writers focused on the language and how that affected the Irish people, others were more politically centered and used their writing as a springboard for change. Brian Friel’s play *Translations*, and John Montague’s *The Rough Field* (1972) succeeded in being striking examples of work by Irish writers bringing about change and awareness of the loss of cultural identity caused by linguistic impositions.


People with vision often are ostracized and labeled abnormal or crazy. They walk with keen insight among those who lack it. Their so-called madness runs only as deep as group perceptions that lack tolerance for dissimilarity and penetrating truth. Darl Bundren in William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, Tayo in Leslie Silko’s *Ceremony* and Don Quixote in Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* exemplify this pattern. An argument can be made that each of these characters is insane, yet the stronger argument is that their so-called insanity is not mental imbalance, but a state of enlightened vision found in higher truths. Their madness is a label applied by each character’s surrounding culture, founded in differentiation and, at times, fear. The result is a cultural inversion of sanity and insanity. Though labeled mad, these characters’ words, actions and intents prove sane and sound. Conversely, words, actions and intents of those around them who are purported to be sane, exemplify madness.
This essay will show this inversion as represented by Darl, Tayo, Don Quixote and characters in their spheres. It will display the sound sensibilities and reasonable actions put forth by these characters to counter mad actions of a crazy world. Perversion often accompanies the inversion of sanity and insanity in these novels. Darl, Tayo and Don Quixote seek merely to cope with and overcome the madness around them, yet those closest to them seek to undo their purposes and in many cases belittle, mock and abuse them. In addition, this paper will lightly touch on the inherent ironies in each of these characters’ situations.

The character of Darl in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* best exemplifies this thesis. The book tells of the epic and tragic funeral journey taken by the Bundren family to bury their mother in her hometown. The chapters are individually narrated in different voices of the different characters. For example, Darl’s voice relates several individual chapters and other family members, each in turn, relate entire chapters, etc. It is a book of broad perspective and deep insight.

The funeral journey the family embarks on reveals the lunacy, desperation, dysfunction and abusive tendencies of family members. Darl is one of three sons in the family. He is a visionary man who sees beyond his own experiences, even to the point that he can describe his mother’s death, though he was not present when it occurred. He is intuitive and omniscient. He knows truths closely held by others and keeps them in a matter-of-fact way without judgment. His knowledge of these truths turns others against him, resulting in his committal to an insane asylum.

To illustrate the inversion of sanity and insanity in *As I Lay Dying*, it’s important to look at a few of the supposed sane characters who surround Darl. Take his father, Anse, for example. Getting new teeth is more important than the suffering he causes his family in journeying to bury his dead wife in Jefferson. “‘Ay,’ Uncle Billy says. ‘It’s like a man that’s let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows,’” Vernon Tull says (Faulkner 89). The entire journey to bury Addie in Jefferson represents madness promulgated by Anse.

Addie, the cause of the mad journey and of much dysfunction in the Bundren family, displays madness in a number of instances. As a teacher, she is mentally and physically cruel to her students. Here enters some of
the perversity tied to the inversion of sanity. “I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them,” she says (170). This cruel, loveless attitude carries over toward all her children but one, showcasing her deranged mindset.

Perhaps Addie’s deepest madness lies in her secret vengeance against Anse. “My revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died” (173). In a bit of irony, Anse negates Addie’s revenge by benefiting from the funeral journey to Jefferson. He gains new teeth and a new wife.

Addie views the one child born to her from adultery as her salvation. This perverse irony is as much foreshadowing as it is madness. “He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me” (168). Though she loves him deeply, Jewel is at best indifferent toward her and at worst hates her. He has the perverse cruelness of his mother and like her, has little love. He does express affection for his horse, but it is cruel affection. He curses it “in a whisper of obscene caress” and “strikes it upon the face with the back of the curry-comb” (183). None of Jewel’s behavior could be termed normal.

Cash, who is most akin to Darl, at times acts as if he has Asperger Syndrome. He fixates on building Addie’s coffin and keeping it balanced on the wagon. His family feverishly recovers his tools from the raging river because they know his obsessiveness requires him to account for each. The mere fact that Cash continues the journey after his leg breaks is an expression of madness. He had the opportunity to remain behind, but chose to continue. It’s crazy to endure such great discomfort, and risk losing his leg by allowing cement to be poured on it, which fosters infection.

Darl is seen by those around him as unnatural and odd. This is made clear in a few instances in the book. When the Bundrens are progressing on their journey to Jefferson with their mother’s corpse, Samson stops their wagon to tell them the bridge is out. A few moments later, he describes
Darl as “the one folks talk about,” asserting that Darl is commonly spoken of as being different (113). Another passage in Tull’s voice reinforces the perception that Darl is strange. Tull describes Darl this way: “He is looking at me. He dont say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you” (125). Darl’s penetrating vision makes others uncomfortable and points to his intuitiveness. Tull continues: “It’s like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes” (127). This illustrates Darl’s seeming omniscience as perceived by other characters, and perhaps is a clue that he is the narrator of the book, as some scholars have suggested.

Darl knows secret truths held by others. He learns intuitively that Anse is not Jewel’s father, that Jewel is the product of an adulterous relationship had by their mother. He sees Addie express deep love for Jewel. This arises after Anse argues with Jewel when the family finds out that Jewel had secretly been working nights to buy a horse.

That night I found ma sitting beside the bed where he was sleeping, in the dark. She cried hard, maybe because she had to cry so quiet; maybe because she felt the same way about tears she did about deceit, hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to. And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day. (136)

Darl later asks Jewel: “Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, ‘Jewel?’” (213). Jewel hates Darl for knowing this hidden truth about his parentage.

Darl also knows his sister Dewey Dell slept with Lafe and is pregnant, and that her main reason for going to Jefferson is to find a means to abort her baby. After having sex with Lafe because she “could not help it,” Dewey Dell says she saw Darl (27). “He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew,” Dewey Dell says. Darl states this more directly. “I said to Dewey Dell: ‘You want her to die so you can get to town: is that it?’ She wouldn’t say what we both knew” (39-40). Dewey Dell hates Darl because he knows the truth of her indiscretion and the burden she desperately wants to be rid of.
Darl also knows the truth about Anse, that he cares only for himself. He knows that Anse stole money that Cash had saved to buy a gramophone. “So that’s what you were doing in Cash’s clothes last night,’ Darl said. He said it just like he was reading it outen the paper. Like he never give a durn himself one way or the other,” states Armstid (190). “Cash aimed to buy that talking machine from Suratt with that money,’ Darl said.”

Darl knows the persistent lunacy of his family and sees the madness in traveling to Jefferson to bury Addie. “His desertion of the wagon when it is struck by a log during the crossing of the ford makes clear his feeling that the journey is absurd, in contrast to the view of Cash and Jewel who risk their lives to rescue the coffin,” writes Charles Palliser in “Fate and Madness: The Determinist Vision of Darl Bundren” (629). Cora Tull points out to her husband that deserting the wagon and coffin was a sane act. “And you’re one of the folks that says Darl is the queer one, the one that aint bright, and him the only one of them that had sense enough to get off that wagon” (Faulkner 152). Darl abandoned the coffin to let the madness be flushed away with the rushing waters. His attempt failed and the casket was rescued.

He gets a second chance as the coffin lies on sawhorses in a barn. Darl surreptitiously lights fire to the barn, but is seen by his younger brother Vardaman. “Darl tries to destroy the corpse in order, presumably, to halt the journey which he sees to be so dangerous and so costly to his family” (Palliser 632). “Darl’s conduct in firing the barn is no more insane than that of his family in persevering with the journey at the price of sacrificing Jewel’s horse and crippling Cash for life” (632). Darl’s arson leads to his undoing. Vardaman tells Dewey Dell that Darl started the fire and she uses the information in crazed vengeance against Darl because he knows the truth of her unwanted pregnancy. She is almost psychotic in her desperation. She will do anything to abort her baby, including sexual favors for the pharmacist’s assistant.

After Addie is buried, the authorities come for Darl. Jewel, Dewey Dell and Anse fiercely subdue him. He turns to Cash, seeking one final trace of humanity, of sanity, from his dysfunctional family. “‘I thought you would have told me,’ he said. ‘I never thought you wouldn’t have’” (Faulkner 237). Cash concludes that burning the barn was wrong and Darl should
pay the price. He tells Darl he wants him to go to the insane asylum. This is Darl’s breaking point. He sees the incongruities of life, “the insanity of existence” and drowns in it, writes William Rossky in “As I Lay Dying: The Insane World” (94).

Darl laughs uncontrollably like a madman and a regretful Cash questions the nature of sanity: “I aint so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It’s like there was a fellow in every man that’s done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment” (Faulkner 238). Darl’s committal to the insane asylum represents one final overarching irony: The man of vision is locked away in the looney bin and his lunatic family is left to roam free.

In similar fashion, Tayo, the gentle protagonist of Leslie Silko’s Ceremony, is seen as crazy by those around him, even as they exhibit lunatic tendencies. The book tells of Native American men who had found acceptance and honor in fighting for the U.S. during World War II only to return to their reservation in America’s southwest to find they are outcasts, embroiled in a world of shame, alcoholism and dysfunction.

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must learn and follow the Indian stories to find the interconnectedness of all living things. Only then can he find true sanity, true healing, to conquer pervasive witchery, or madness, that causes imbalance.

Those closest to Tayo, his friends and family, think he has gone mad as he pursues this prescribed path to peace. Here we have an inversion of sanity and insanity. In pursuing the old ways, the old stories, Tayo is countering the witchery that has infected him and the world around him. The ceremony helps Tayo to forsake madness. Yet others, prompted by Emo, seek to subvert his healing ceremony by claiming he is crazy.

Tayo’s sickness in part stems from witchery promulgated by his aunt. She instills shame in him for being the illegitimate product of her sister’s misbegotten tryst. She keeps a deliberate and palpable distance between her son Rocky and Tayo from the day Tayo had been abandoned by his mother at Auntie’s house when he was four. She made sure Rocky had things that Tayo did not and that Rocky did not share them with Tayo. “She would not let Tayo go outside or play in another room alone. She wanted him close enough to feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them” (61). Auntie perpetuates the shame by telling Tayo stories of his mother’s indiscretions, of how she walked home after a night on the town in only high heels (65). She psychologically abuses Tayo and in so doing reveals her own sickness, the perversity of a woman who professes Christianity and suffers from a martyr complex.

Emo, and to a lesser extent Leroy, Pinkie and Harley, are far from sane in their lifestyles. They suffer psychologically, as did many veterans who returned from the war. “Liquor was medicine for the anger that made them hurt, for the pain of the loss, medicine for tight bellies and choked-up throats,” Silko writes (37). Emo in particular is sadistic and evil. He carries with him a bag of teeth taken from dead Japanese soldiers and rattles it with merriment. This is insanity and perversity by any measure. When Tayo begins to find peace of mind by living the ceremony with Ts’eh, it is Emo who persuades Tayo’s family and friends that he is crazy. Ts’eh teaches Tayo that Emo and those like him are destroyers, who want to see witchery triumph. To fight the witchery, he must resist it, and never engage it. If openly engaged, the witchery, the pervasive madness, will triumph.
Tayo had previously engaged the witchery when he stabbed Emo with a bottle in a bar. As a result, he was sent to the hospital mental ward. Tayo comes close to engaging the witchery again at the climax of the book, when Emo is torturing Harley at night in the desert. Tayo almost jumps from the darkness to attack Emo with a screwdriver, but resists the urge at the last moment. “He realizes that to give in to that benevolent impulse would be to make of himself a victim and give the story set in motion by witchery its desired end,” writes Diane Cousineau in *Revue Francaise D'études Américaines* (31). It is no coincidence that the climax takes place near a uranium mine and atomic bomb test site. The A-bomb is the ultimate witchery of the destroyers, the ultimate madness that can destroy all mankind, and Tayo’s triumph over his own madness is part of a greater triumph over a larger potential destruction. “What is dismissed as a form of insanity is, Silko ultimately argues in the novel, the only sane view of the world. The alternative is universal death,” writes Allan Richard Chavkin in *Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony: A Casebook* (98).

Because Tayo resists witchery’s allure, he completes the ceremony. He sees the truth and gains peace of mind. “He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time,” Silko writes (229).

Much of *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes, deals with the madness of Don Quixote and his subsequent exploits. The book is recognized as the first novel and parodies several genres of literature, including chivalric romance, picaresque, pastoral and historical. It was published in two parts in 1605 and 1615 but is read as one work. It is rich in humor, satire, and social and political commentary of Cervantes’ day. It is a model of metafiction.

Don Quixote turns mad from reading books of chivalry and sets out as a knight errant to right wrongs and defend the helpless. Though driven by lunacy, his motives are pure and infused with higher purpose. Quixote seeks to do good and spread virtue, to punish villains and institute justice. At the same time, those of noble birth and high class in the book, who are reputed in Cervantes’ time to be virtuous and wise, often mock, humiliate and abuse the good knight for their own base reasons. This represents an inversion of sanity and madness.
Throughout the book, sane characters respond in psychotic ways to Don Quixote’s madness, often for the sake of restoring his sanity. The priest, barber, Sansón Carrasco and Dorotea adopt disguises to trick Don Quixote and lure him to his home with the intent of curing his madness. Ironically, his madness is founded in doing good, and their crazy escapades seek to destroy that madness and thus the goodness it embodies.

Don Quixote endures much perverse abuse. He is beaten more than once. His teeth are knocked out and he is left to hang from a window. In one cruel ruse, a bag of cats is thrown into his room at night and his face is severely mauled by one of the cats. Many of these acts represent perverse lunacy on the part of those perpetrating them.

The duke and duchess in the Second Part of *Don Quixote* set about to prank and toy with the knight and his squire, Sancho Panza, often in humiliating and mean-spirited ways. They plan an elaborate procession in which Merlin the magician appears and relates the cure for Dulcinea’s enchantment, that Sancho Panza must flog himself 3,300 times on his bare buttocks. Also, Altisadora feigns love for Don Quixote and fakes her death as a result of being spurned by Don Quixote. It is crazy to go to such lengths to make sport of a madman.

“Don Quixote’s insanity is, in part, a form of higher wisdom,” writes Fidel Fajardo-Acosta on Creighton University’s World Literature Website. “In his madness, he sees humble people as noble and elevated and challenges the rich and the powerful, often calling them monsters and villains.”

When conversing with Sancho about accomplishing great feats for his fictional lady, Dulcinea, Quixote dispenses selfless wisdom. “A knight errant deserves neither glory nor thanks if he goes mad for a reason. The great achievement is to lose one’s reason for no reason” (Cervantes 194).

When Sancho points out his master’s lunacy in believing a barber’s basin to be an enchanted helmet, Quixote counters that “hordes of enchanters always walk among us and alter and change everything and turn things into whatever they please, according to whether they wish to favor us or destroy us; and so, what seems to you a barber’s basin seems to me the helmet of Mambrino, and will seem another thing to someone else” (195).

Early in the book, Don Quixote sees windmills as giants and a herd of goats as a great army. But as his quests progress, he stops fighting delusions
and takes on reality. He encounters a wagon with two lions in cages and commands the wagon master to release the lions so he can fight them. He sees the lions for what they are, ferocious beasts. He holds no illusions of any enchantments surrounding them. “He isn’t crazy,’ says Sancho Panza, “he’s just reckless” (561).

He thinks he is a true knight errant and seeks to prove it. Don Diego de Miranda, a character in the novel who witnesses the adventure of the lions, describes it best. Don Quixote “seemed a sane man gone mad and a madman edging toward sanity,” he said, “his speech was coherent, elegant, and eloquent and his actions nonsensical, reckless and foolish” (Cervantes 565). Don Quixote believes he is valiant and strong, a warrior whose reputation and name are known and revered. Perhaps his evolved madness, somewhat akin to an inflated ego, is not so different than that displayed by sane men through the ages.

The characters of Darl in As I Lay Dying, Tayo in Ceremony and Don Quixote in Don Quixote are labeled as mad, but possess keen insights, rationality and wisdom typically found in the sanest of individuals. Those around them lack these insights and have little tolerance for the characters’ differences and pointed truths. These characters’ actions, words and motives are seemingly pure and sound. Conversely, the actions, words and motives of those around them, who are purported to be sane, are base, irrational and absurd. They exemplify madness. Darl, Tayo and Don Quixote are not so much mentally imbalanced as they are reactive in sane and sensible ways to a crazy world. They seek merely to cope with and overcome madness that surrounds them. Yet those nearest to them, friends and family, seek to undo their purposes and in many cases abuse them in perverse ways. All three are labeled as mad, but have more inner peace than those who aggressively label them as mad. Herein lies grand irony, represented in each of these books, and often found similarly in real life.
Works Cited


Finding Self, Finding Country: Liberian Civil War Diasporic Literature

The calabash now shattered

her contents spilled like palm wine

across the regions of the world

(from “Africa” by Patricia Jabbeh Wesley)

The independent African nation of Liberia is located along the west coast of Africa. Before being founded in 1816 by the American government as a land where freed black slaves could be sent, the land was a rich cultural mix of numerous indigenous tribes of African people. As a nation rich in the oral tradition of storytelling, the literary tradition of Liberia is not only emergent but also widely unknown, and yet, their literature is worth studying. The
Liberian canon of literature, although small and largely ignored, touches on the themes of conflict, humanity, progress, and the human experience.

From 1989 until 2003, the sovereign republic of Liberia was plagued by two violent civil wars. These civil conflicts were in part a result of ethnic disparity and a weak unifying national identity. Fourteen years of fighting left thousands of Liberian citizens dead and displaced thousands more. The works created by authors displaced by the war make up the canon of Liberian diasporic literature. Current scholarly approaches to Liberian diasporic literature focus heavily on the weak national identity leading up to the civil wars and the role of women’s literature in rebuilding and healing their communities. This thesis examines the emerging diasporic canon not only as a means of rebuilding but also redefining Liberian culture. By examining the texts of Leymah Gbowee, Agnes Fallah Kamara-Umunna, and Patricia Jabbeh Wesley, the role these texts play in restoring the war torn country emerges. The literature produced by the exiled Liberians fleeing the oppressive socio-political atmosphere of their homelands serves not only to heal the ethnic divisiveness but also to promote a distinct Liberian national and cultural identity.

The texts produced by the country’s war refugees, which are still emerging, are often analyzed by critics in relation to Liberia’s ill formed and weakly defined national identity. Herbert Howe notes in “Lessons in Liberia” that the country, roughly the size of Tennessee, contains seventeen different ethnic groups (147). Howe asserts that the elite Americo-Liberians, originally freed slaves returned to Liberia by the US government in the late 1800s, held social power. They constituted a mere five percent of the entire Liberian population, but their US backing granted them power over other indigenous tribes (147). Howe states, “Political domination, economic exploitation and the lack of widespread education prevented a common Liberian nationalism” (147). This weak national identity created divisiveness between the Americo-Liberians and the oppressed indigenous tribes, making conditions ripe for civil war.

The social polarity and its damaging effect on national unity is a prominent motif in Liberian diasporic literature. Agnes Fallah Kamara-Umunna and Emily Holland’s memoir, *And Still Peace did not Come*, opens with the line, “My family is Gio” (1), at once making a distinction on the part of the
narrator between Gio ethnicity and other ethnic lineages. The speaker does not announce a Liberian heritage, but rather a heritage derived from the indigenous tribe of the Gio people. Jefferson, the young Gio boy speaking, recalls his aunt’s distress over learning of a slaughter carried out by soldiers at a local church. She screams to Jefferson, “I am a Gio woman! See what they did to your mother, your father, your little sister? If the people come and find out we are Gio, they will kill us too” (1). Kamara-Umunna and Holland’s text immediately throws readers into the cultural divisiveness perpetuating the Liberian civil war. Kamara-Umunna and Holland go on to expound on the political divisions within Liberia when they state that “the political and socio-economic differences between the Americo-Liberian settlers and the natives grew...[and] sparked the bloody war that decimated families, decimated communities” (4). Their memoir illustrates the disastrous effects of Liberia’s divided nation when the warlords of indigenous tribes decided the era of Americo-Liberians was over.

The opposition between the tribal social systems and the Western influence of the Americo-Liberians plays a prominent theme in African Diasporic literature. Richard Douglass-Chin states that the ethnic disparity within Liberia “raises complex questions concerning the evolution of Liberian literature and representations in that literature of Liberian nationhood and diaspora” (238). This is apparent in the Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee’s *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer and Sex Changed a Nation at War*. Gbowee illustrates the delicate and complicated social structure within Liberia:

Your ancestor’s origins determined your place in the social order. Settlers who came from the slave boats...from America...called “Americo-Liberians”—formed a political and economic elite. They saw themselves as more “civilized” and worthy than the tribes of Africans who already occupied the land: the Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mandingo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandio, Loma, Kissi, Vai and Bella. (7)

Instead of the citizens of Liberia claiming a shared national identity, the discordant relationships between the ruling class and the multiple indigenous tribes prevents a sense of unity. The social order Gbowee discusses pervades every aspect of Liberian society, replacing any sense of national pride with division.
Just as the weak national identity is a focus of Liberian scholars, equally important to the study of Liberian diasporic literature is the impact of women’s literature. The women of Liberia, as an oppressed and victimized group before the war, find a voice within the diasporic canon. They call for peace, equality, and justice for themselves. In her book, African Literature: Gender Discourse, Religious Values, and the African Worldview, Safoura Salami-Boukari says, “African Diaspora women writers serve a therapeutic remedy for the predicaments and psychological issues women have to deal with, internally and externally” (197). The cultural and individual history of Liberia is portrayed poignantly through the texts of female writers. Women’s writing relays a unique Liberian cultural history as well as a therapeutic remedy for the psychological scars of the civil wars.

The works produced by female authors of Liberia’s diaspora aim to help rebuild Liberia into a nation in which female members are free from oppression. By revealing the degradation of women both during and following the civil wars, Liberian feminists hope to rewrite social attitudes towards women. Lois Bruthus in her article “Zero Tolerance for Liberian Rapists” documents that “a 2005 survey of six counties of Liberia found that almost seventy five percent of female respondents had been raped during the civil war” (35). Bruthus goes on to describe that “many young girls and women were forcibly taken as ‘bush wives,’ cooks, cleaners, and sex slaves to the fighters” (35). It is no surprise that Gbowee’s influential work contributed to her nomination and eventual winning of the Nobel Peace Prize. Gbowee organized three thousand Liberian women into the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign. Their goal was to bring peace to Liberia. In an interview with Gbowee, Amitabh Pal notes that Gbowee “mobilized women in large numbers...led sit-ins [and] bravely spoke out in a meeting with [Warlord Charles] Taylor” (36). Gbowee and Liberian women’s actions resulted in peace negotiations moving forward and in bringing an end to the decade long civil wars. Gbowee writes, “We’d shown

“By revealing the degradation of women both during and following the civil wars, Liberian feminists hope to rewrite social attitudes towards women.”
women’s awesome power, but to me, our actions were the foundation of a movement, not its end product. It was time now to build on what we’d done, so in the future women’s concerns wouldn’t be pushed aside” (168). Gbowee’s writing serves to galvanize Liberian women, renewing their faith in themselves. Her literature continues to protect and empower females, urging them to take part in the political rebuilding of Liberia. The end of Liberia’s civil wars and the rebuilding of the country are a direct result of the social influence found in the literature of displaced Liberian women such as Leymah Gbowee.

The Liberian diasporic canon concerns itself with not only praise for the power of Liberian women, but also with protecting members of the female sex from abuse and oppression in the aftermath and rebuilding of Liberian society. Like Gbowee, Liberian poet Patricia Jabbeh Wesley serves as representative of the feminist scope within the Liberian diasporic body of texts. Their works are a reminder of the brutal oppression forced upon women in pre-war Liberia as well as a warning for the next generation of Liberian girls. In “This Is What I Tell My Daughter,” Wesley discusses the lessons she finds it necessary to pass on to the daughters of Liberia. She warns of “The University, bringing the whole globe / with hurried feet on our street, / emptying its men in one room boarding houses / in our backyard” (26-29). The “whole globe” includes “men from Nigeria, men from Sudan / From far away villages in Liberia, from Mars” (23-24) and all of them “know how to get a girl pregnant” (20), leaving the girls with “sad trophies in teen arms” (36). The war and rebuilding period leave the young girls of Liberia vulnerable. The world is coming to Liberia to aid, to rebuild, to escape their own conflicts, and the men come—preying on the girls of Liberia. The boarding houses and backyards serve as brothels and the Liberian girls serve as sexual escape. When the men leave Liberia, the young girls are left with babies in their arms they cannot care for. The message Liberian women such as Patricia Jabbeh Wesley hope to leave to the women who follow is a rewriting of male oppression and a warning for Liberian girls to avoid jeopardizing their fledgling autonomy as Liberian females.

Scholars of Liberian diasporic literature concentrate heavily upon the weak national identity and the role of women’s literature, and while these emphases explore valid topics of the new corpus of diasporic literature,
additional focus should be given to the healing process as experienced through the literature of exiled Liberians. Liberian diasporic literature aims to heal ethnic divisiveness and the social disintegration of culture. Noted Liberian author, Wilton Sankawulo, discusses this aim of the literature of Liberian exiles when he states, “we need to forge reconciliation among ourselves…this is the question readers of Liberian literature want answered at this juncture in our history” (Naxela). Displaced Liberian authors focus on the theme of reconciliation and healing in an effort to answer the question Sankawulo refers to: how a complete reconciliation amongst Liberians is possible.

Healing the ethnic and tribal disparity that fueled the civil wars is a major theme for Liberian authors. Kamarra-Umunna’s memoir of the war years and post-war period in Liberia focuses on overcoming the political divides present within the region. She writes that her local Liberian radio show “was about reality…Deep-seated hatred and painful memories, which many people, including politicians, wanted to push past as soon as possible…We weren’t just going to talk about Liberia as it ought to be, but Liberia as it really was” (92). Kamarra-Umunna seeks to write the Liberian history of the war, not in clichéd phrases and patronizing fables, but in stark reality. It is only by addressing the hatred and issues dividing the factions within Liberia that the healing process can begin. Kamarra-Umunna declares, “We must stand shoulder to shoulder as our brother’s keeper, not as Congo or country, not as Krahn or Mandingo, not as Gio or Mano, but as Liberians” (285). According to Kamarra-Umunna and Holland, it is only after telling Liberia’s true history that unification can occur. The tribal conflicts and social disparities need to be overcome in order for Liberia to move forward and heal.

The healing which Liberian authors seek is not only that of divisive tribal conflict, but also the healing of social disintegration caused by the civil wars. Liberian diasporic literature wades through shocking tales of death, destruction, violence, rape, torture, and degradation not to dredge up old injuries, but to allow those injuries to heal. Kamarra-Umunna and Holland describe the process when they state “Reopening old wounds will be painful…but in the end, the scar will be smaller” (92).
aim of Liberian literature in regards to social healing. Gbowee recalling “close to a thousand men, women, and children [who] had ultimately taken refuge in St. Peters chapel” (30), who were massacred by government officials is not meant to shock or horrify, but to relay the truth in order that healing might follow. Her narrative that “Among the pews where we sang and prayed, where on Women’s Day husbands and children pinned flowers on their mother’s clothes—they raped, slashed, shot and hacked” (31), juxtaposes the memory of a Liberia where the church and the family were central to the social order with the brutal honesty of what the war cost. While the image of the desecration of human life on the pews of the church is haunting, the recognition of humanity and decency within the same sentence provides a slight reminder of hope that Liberia might be restored to its place amongst civilized societies.

While Gbowee urges Liberian women to reclaim their communities, their selves, and their families through relaying their experiences of war, Kamara-Umunna and Holland focus on the healing of a Liberian group both despised and rejected by the majority of the recovering nation: the child soldiers. In their memoir, *And Still Peace Did Not Come*, Kamara-Umunna and Holland write the stories of the child soldiers. The stories of young boys who are “enthusiastic about the game of war” (45), and who “did not hesitate to treat innocent civilians as enemies (73) are told in the novel. It is these young boys and thousands like them that Kamara-Umunna and Holland attempt to find healing for.

They are responsible for horrendous actions. Murder, torture, rape—a fourteen year nightmare. But many who fought the Liberian war were very small or confused when they were taken. Traumatized the day a powerful warlord stormed into their villages, massacred their families, and gave them a decision: kill or be killed. Many were too little, or too drugged, to realize there was a choice…Who’s the good person? Who’s the bad person? (301)

As both perpetrator and victim, child soldiers often carry added burdens of psychological scars. Kamarra-Umunna attempts to provide insight into the guilt and innocence of child soldiers. Diasporic literature aims to promote a Liberia in which all victims of the civil wars can find peace and reconciliation—even those accountable for the violence.
In addition to a focus on healing in Liberian diasporic literature, the theme of creating a unifying and cultural identity is also apparent in the corpus. Without this unified nationality, the rebuilding, healing, and reconciliation will lead to a cyclical repeat of Liberia’s bloody past. The weak national identity leading up to the war, and featured prominently in discussions on Liberian diasporic literature, needs to be strengthened. Displaced Liberian authors define and convey a national and cultural identity in their works. They create a rich perspective and deeper understanding of Liberia. It is through the works of exiled authors that Liberia’s cultural and unifying heritage is being formed.

Patricia Jabbeh Wesley admits that “Monrovia has lost its name” (8) in her poem “In the Ruined City: A Poem for Monrovia.” Wesley acknowledges that wartime Monrovia is a city with no identity. She writes, “the fighter cannot recall why he still fights. / The men have forgotten they used to be men, / and the women sit by the roadside wondering / what has happened to this land” (24-26). Not only has the city lost its name, but the men have also lost their identity. Although Wesley conveys a deep seated sorrow over the Monrovia lost to the war, she refuses to accept Monrovia as a lost city. In “Monrovia, Revisited” Wesley displays her feelings for her nation and city after the fighting convenes. In opposition to the city that lost its name, in “Monrovia, Revisited,” Wesley states that “immigrants from all over the globe / used to come here / on tender feet / in search of themselves” (8-11). And although the city is recovering from the devastations of war, it still holds value for immigrants and citizens alike. Wesley’s injunction that “you should come here if you want to know how sacred pain can be” (24-26) reveals Wesley’s belief that the immense pain her nation has undergone serves as a refiner’s fire, touching her land with a sacred power that was absent before the war. The Monrovia being rebuilt serves as a pilgrimage for many, where spiritual meaning is found and self-reflection leads to cultural and personal understanding. Wesley’s poetry offers the view that Liberia is resilient and hallowed, offering a new identity for the ruined city that once lost its name.

Like the diasporic authors previously discussed, Emmanuel O. Oritsejafor explores the need for cultural redefinition when he stresses that “the issue of national integration is even far more profound given the near col-
lapse of the state as a result of the civil war and the post-war challenge of nation building” (98). Liberian authors of the diaspora address the issue of national integration, define the shared culture and heritage amongst all Liberians, and stress the value of unifying the tribes under one Liberian nationality. The literature of the diaspora aims to build on the common values held by each tribe within the country—urging Liberians to band together under their shared culture.

In 1989 Liberia plunged into a fourteen year period of civil wars, bloodshed, and carnage. Over the course of the civil wars era, 200,000 Liberians were killed and nearly 1 million more sought out what little protection exile and refugee camps could offer. The literature of the displaced Liberians, fleeing the violence of war, contributes to the rebuilding efforts of not only the nation, but the identity and culture of the country as well. Authors like Patricia Jabbeh Wesley, Leymah Gbowee, and Agnes Fallah Kamara-Umunna all have stories to tell. But their writings are more than stories for the curious outsider. It is through their texts that Liberians learn to heal divisive relationships, redefine Liberia in terms of nationalism, claim Liberian identity, and rebuild the social and civil aspects of Liberian society. In the midst of rebuilding Liberia, Gbowee states, “my deepest dream, though, is to go home. My heartbeat is Liberia; I sleep, eat and breathe Liberia. After everything that’s happened, when I think of my country, I think of happiness” (228). Her poignant statement reflects similar sentiments held by exiled authors and resounds in the literature of the diaspora. Liberian diasporic authors use writing to illuminate and expound on the socio-political crisis that led to civil war and to heal a ravaged nation by redefining the Liberian cultural identity.
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When audiences watch a Western genre film, they expect the good guys to wear white, the bad guys to wear black, the women to either be schoolmarms or prostitutes, and they expect to see a showdown between gunmen. In the past twenty years, films have begun to challenge those conventions and have raised questions about what constitutes a Western. The HBO series Deadwood, which aired from 2004-2006, continues the trend of challenging traditional genre conventions.

Many scholars have studied the graphic language of the show, the fidelity of that language to the time period, and the effect that language has on contemporary audiences. Others have studied characters in the show based upon real persons living in the town of Deadwood at that time, but no one has really studied the character of Whitney Ellsworth (played by Jim Beaver). Ellsworth is not one of the main protagonists in the series, but he evidences the most transformation and his narrative trajectory covers the entire series. When
David Milch creates a character with no historical basis in a show full of characters based upon reality, viewers should take note. David Holmberg’s introduction to a *Great Plains Quarterly* issue dedicated to *Deadwood* quotes Milch as saying “Deadwood, like other gold rush towns, was a kind of reenactment of the founding of our country” (236). The trajectory of Ellsworth then is a reenactment of the trajectory of the everyman in the founding of our country as well as in gold rush towns like Deadwood, and as such it demands critical exploration.

Ellsworth’s trajectory can be observed through his language, dress, and manners towards others he encounters. He is one of a few characters who truly change and evolve through the series. According to Alison Landsberg in her article, “Waking the *Deadwood* of History: Listening, Language, and the ‘Aural Visceral’,” people watch historical re-enactments to get an immediate impact in the present so that they feel connected to the past in a more real way. She argues that the sound in *Deadwood* moves spectators between identification and alienation with the past (545). Ellsworth’s language throughout the series illustrates this effect as he feels like a real person from that time, but then he says something so complex to unravel that viewers are forced to recoil from the story in order to make sense of his speech. Landsberg claims that this push and pull helps viewers maintain a distance which allows for some understanding of aspects of the past while also realizing its difference from the present (547). Some of Ellsworth’s dialogue is discussed below to show that tension.

Viewers are introduced to Ellsworth in the first episode of the series when he is shown in the Gem Saloon selling his gold findings for the week to Al Swearengen (played by Ian McShane). He is dressed in tattered dirty clothes which indicate he is not interested in or worried about his personal appearance. He insults Swearengen’s character and business practices with “I don’t trust you as far as I could th’ow you, but I enjoy the way you lie,” but he seems comfortable dealing with the devil he knows rather than taking his chances somewhere new (“Deadwood”). This scene establishes not only Ellsworth as a typical miner who lives alone on his gold claim making just enough to pay for “whisky, pussy, and food,” but it also establishes his attitude toward Swearengen (“Deadwood”). Ellsworth’s interaction is a fascinating mix of low profanity and complex Victorian structure in his speech. He tells Swearengen:
I’ll tell you what: I may have fucked up my life flatter’n hammered shit, but I stand here before you today beholden to no human cocksucker, and holdin’ a workin’ fuckin’ gold claim, and not the U.S. government tellin’ me I’m trespassin’, or the savage fuckin’ red man or any of these other limber-dick cocksuckers passin’ themselves off as prospectors had better try and stop me. (“Deadwood”)

Scott Eric Kaufman breaks down the sentence to show how it swings from the drunken confession of “I’ll tell you what” to the alliteration and assonance of the *f* sounds and back to the public confessional of “I stand here before you” and back and forth to capture viewers attention and make them aware of the language for more than just the profanity. Ellsworth clarifies that he is “beholden to no human cocksucker” (emphasis mine) which begs the question of whether he is beholden to an inhuman cocksucker and what exactly that might be. Kaufman claims that the reason so many scholars have become fascinated by the language of *Deadwood* is the literary value in it.

The same exchange from Ellsworth is examined towards the end of Kyle Wiggins’ and David Holmberg’s article “‘Gold is Every Man’s Opportunity’ Castration Anxiety and the Economic Venture in *Deadwood*.” Their article examines the castration anxiety in the Western genre which usually equates the loss of a man’s guns with the loss of manhood. They spend most of the article illustrating various points of phallic threats through the series, but they bring up Ellsworth’s speech to show how his sense of manliness is tied to his ability to work his gold claim “without the meddlesome interference of the nation (that the camp is not a part of) or the Sioux (whom the prospectors stole the land from)” (293). Ellsworth even feels the need to make the phallic connection to his freedom by insulting the other prospectors as “limber-dick” (“Deadwood”). Ellsworth does not carry a weapon at this point in the series, so he does not have the fear of being unmanned in the way that the typical Western threatens. His fear is related to the economic situation in the camp and his ability to keep his needs met. He represents all of the other faceless nameless miners in the camp who are in the same situation depending upon the success of their claims.
The next time Ellsworth appears in the series, he takes his place at a
gold claim again representing the generic gold miner. It is in his capacity as
a miner that he becomes entangled with the soap opera stories of the ma-
jor players in the series. He witnesses the killing of Brom Garrett (played
by Timothy Omundson) at the hands of Dan Dority (played by W. Earl
Brown) and is hired by Seth Bullock (played by Timothy Olyphant) to
assay the Garrett claim to determine if the price offered to Widow Alma
Garrett (played by Molly Parker) is fair. He only agrees to participate in
order to alleviate the threat to his own life from witnessing the murder of
Mr. Garrett. The Alma asks him to work her claim in order to fulfill the
convention that a claim is only valid if it is being worked and developed.

Ellsworth evolves from a soli-
tary miner living in the mountains
with his dog to the supervisor of
Alma’s claim and his change of
status is reflected in his dress and
speech. He is enough of a gentle-
man to refrain from swearing in the
presence of women or children, but
does not hold back when speaking
to other men. His clothing is still
rough, but not torn and tattered,
and he appears to be cleaner than his first few appearances. Alma may be
having an impact upon him as she is the model of a Victorian woman with
high-necked gowns that trail to her wrists and to the floor. Her speech
patterns are also very constrained and proper, so perhaps Ellsworth is try-
ing to elevate his appearance so as not to disgust her with his presence or
demeanor. Brad Benz discusses the language of Deadwood in his article
“Deadwood and the English Language.” He claims that the stereotype of
the strong-silent type of Western hero is a product of the Hays Code not
allowing swearing, so they just didn’t talk a lot which causes Westerns to
seem to distrust language (241).

Some characters in Deadwood fit the model of the tight-lipped West-
ern Hero, notably Bullock and Wild Bill Hickok (played by Keith Carradine)
but Ellsworth does not. He tends to speak more and act less than Bullock or

“Ellsworth evolves from a
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dress and speech.”
Hickok who can be monosyllabic at times. When he does speak, he is not constrained by the Hays Code, so he is free to express himself as he will while at the same time he never commits a violent action in the series. If un-language is equated with action which is equated with manliness, then Calamity Jane (played by Robin Weigert) is manlier than Ellsworth, but he is better suited to domestic life with a wife and a child than the more manly characters.

Although he seems like an ancillary character at first, Ellsworth becomes more and more involved with the central dramas in the show. By the beginning of the second season, Bullock’s wife and son arrive in town which necessitates the dissolution of his affair with Alma. Ellsworth gets involved when people begin to notice that Alma is sick in the mornings and other symptoms of pregnancy. Trixie (played by Paula Malcomson) berates Ellsworth into considering a marriage proposal to Alma in order to make people think that he is the father of her child. Ellsworth’s background and personality have not been shown much in the series up to this point, but viewers are given an essential piece to his life in order to make him a potential mate for Alma.

While supervising the claim, he confronts Francis Wolcott (played by Garrett Dillahunt) the chief geologist for George Hearst (played by Gerald McRaney) who has been buying gold claims for Hearst. Now Ellsworth is wearing nice clean clothes and a pistol on his hip which he handles while he argues with Wolcott. The conversation reveals that Ellsworth used to work on a claim for Hearst and spent a week without respite attempting to save the lives of miners trapped in a collapsed shaft. He was able to save three men, but 46 others died and Ellsworth holds a violent grudge against Hearst for putting those men in that situation in the first place. The implication of this scene is that Ellsworth fled the kinds of working that Hearst employs in order to work his own gold claim where he is accountable to no other person. It is a little sad then that he is being pulled back into the same kind of drama that he tried to escape due to his desire to protect Alma.

The reasons behind Ellsworth’s coming to Deadwood are illuminated in Mark L. Berrettini’s article, “No Law; Deadwood and the State,” where he uses Louis Althusser’s formulation of subjectivity and the State. At first the State is the United States and the annexation of the camp into the territory cum state of South Dakota. Later, the State is represented by Hearst’s consolidation of all the gold claims under his control so that he would own
the town. The members of the camp, notably Swearengen and Bullock, believe that they are “concrete individuals and that their transformation into subjects will demolish their interests within the camp” (Berrettini 254). Ellsworth also considers himself a concrete individual and he came to Deadwood to escape the State as represented by Hearst. When Hearst appears in Deadwood, Ellsworth is in favor of leaving again to avoid becoming a subject again, but ultimately stays to be with Alma and Sofia.

His desire to do the right thing causes him to propose to Alma in the most awkward yet forthright manner possible. His nervousness is plain from his posture and how he spins his hat in his hands. He explains how he had a wife and a baby girl which he uses as evidence of how he understands that Alma is pregnant. He never asks her for her hand in marriage, but talks around the subject so that viewers, Alma included, have to puzzle out what he is saying:

And I’d say, not claiming credentials for raising a family, as my time with them was brief, but I’d hope it’d testify to willingness as a candidate for marriage and so forth, offering myself. [He kneels in front of her] Completing the sorry presentation. (“Childish Things”)

He stills feels inadequate and knows that she would not consider him as a potential husband under normal circumstances, so he feels the need to put forth his prior experience, hint at the reason for his proposal and provide a reason for her to accept in order to obfuscate the origin of her child.

The final stage of Ellsworth’s narrative trajectory occurs after he is married and his wife opens the First Bank of Deadwood. First, he confronts a miner who questions the availability of his funds. Ellsworth tells him in no uncertain terms what the situation is and uses language more like his initial appearance than his more recent. When confronted with coarse language, he reverts to the miner side of his personality and responds in kind. Then, he moves out of his wife’s house to live in a tent at the claim because she tried to initiate sex while she was intoxicated with laudanum. She used to be addicted to laudanum when she was married before and only kicked the habit after her husband died, so he thinks she is feeling constrained by their marriage and offers to leave so that she can get herself straight. As much as he fears becoming a subject of a State, he worries about subjecting others in turn. His instinct to flee rather than subject others proves to be his undoing.
The final piece of his story comes when he encourages his wife not to engage with Hearst. His previous dealings with Hearst give his argument some credibility, but Alma believes she can offer a deal suitable to Hearst and herself. Brent Strang discusses her dealings with Hearst in his article “‘I Am Not the Fine Man You Take Me For’ The Postmodern Western from Unforgiven to No Country for Old Men.” Strang examines how Deadwood challenges and undermines generic expectations of Westerns in the age of Postmodern Westerns. He recaps and analyzes the meeting between Hearst and Alma and the follow-up between Alma and Ellsworth (87-89). Hearst does not even bother to reject her offer to sell partial control of her claim; he simply threatens her with rape or other violence because he considers her unworthy as a woman to do business with. When she tells Ellsworth that she went against his wishes, he tells her that she is a “Goddamn fool who almost got what she deserved” (qtd in Strang 87). Ellsworth claims he wants to protect her because he knows the danger she faces and he reiterates an old masculinist script saying that men have essential capacities lacking in women and that women need men to protect them as men are stronger or wiser (Strang 87-88).

Hearst also believes that women need men to protect them and decides that killing Ellsworth is the best way to ensure that Alma sells her claim to him. Ellsworth's final thoughts are expressed as he's talking to his dog. He is debating whether or not he should go back to living in the house as Alma has stopped taking drugs again and invites him back, but he is concerned that his coming and going may confuse the orphan-child Sofia who they are caring for.
body is brought back to camp in an open wagon so that Alma can see what has occurred. Strang claims that “of all the people in Deadwood, Ellsworth is arguably the most noble” and that:

of all the relationships in Deadwood, theirs [Alma and Ellsworth] is arguably the most dynamic and productive for each other’s growth. This is why it is so tragically appropriate that Ellsworth is the only one of Deadwood’s principle characters who is shot and killed by Hearst’s order – it pitches selflessness against avaricious misanthropy, or those who would embrace gender struggle against those who would stamp it out completely. (89)

His death also serves as the catalyst to action for the townsfolk who have been anticipating a bloody confrontation against Hearst’s hired guns.

The actions of various women including Trixie and Alma are discussed in Anne Helen Peterson’s article “‘Whores and Other Feminists’ Recovering Deadwood’s Unlikely Feminisms” when she claims that while the first and predominant images of women in Deadwood are of abuse and subjugation, it highlights and affirms the advances of women (267-8). Peterson argues that Ellsworth’s death forces members of the camp to make choices they have been avoiding. Alma has to choose between keeping herself and her ward safe and keeping her business interests under her control. “She must renounce her claim for the good of her child and, in essence, the good of the camp. Feminine self-sacrifice is thus affirmed as an essential element to patriarchal control” (Peterson 279). Alma is not the only woman to provide a sacrifice to satiate patriarchal control. When Trixie shoots Hearst, he demands that she be killed and that he view the body. Due to Swearengen’s and other’s affinity for Trixie, they decide to sacrifice another blond whore and present her body to Hearst. Hearst is taken in by the ruse because women are interchangeable to Hearst’s patriarchal masculinity.

The series concludes with Hearst victorious and he and Alma each leaving town. David Milch planned on a fourth season, but HBO cancelled the show after the third. The ending is both infuriating in its lack of closure on so many stories and also appropriate because Ellsworth is one of the first characters introduced and his death signals the end of the series. Holmberg claims that the “development of Ellsworth’s character shows the underlying effect of the settlement of the West on the individual settler and the indi-
individual’s repeated powerlessness against the momentum of history” (235). Hearst will continue to chase “the color,” Swearengen will continue to sell booze and pussy, and the citizens in the newly incorporated territory will continue to resist or embrace governmental corruption.
Works Cited

The unexpected death of city council member Barry Fairbrother rocks the little town of Pagford and creates a “casual vacancy,” or empty council position. The timing could not be worse; for the first time in 50 years, Pagford has the chance to reclaim some of its former glory from rival town, Yarvil. The Fields, a section of land bordering the two communities, had been controversially taken from Pagford to encourage the development and growth of Yarvil. Dilapidated and drug infested, Yarvil wants Pagford to take the Fields back. Fairbrother had held a tenuous grip over the majority of the council to prevent this, but his vacancy creates an opportunity for his opponents. Worse, damaging and scandalous messages are being posted about the new candidates on the city council website under the pseudonym “the Ghost of Barry Fairbrother.” The town must find a way to come together and determine the course they will take.
The Casual Vacancy represents J.K. Rowling’s first major attempt at writing since the Harry Potter franchise. Incredibly successful, the Harry Potter series firmly entrenched her as an author of young adult literature. Printed all over the world in dozens of languages and made into eight blockbuster movies, the series finds itself on the doorstep of “the Canon.” Obviously, a reader will look for Dumbledore in The Casual Vacancy but will find no such familiarity. Where Ms. Rowling entered the magical world of Hogwarts, she enters the mundane and utterly normal world of Pagford. The town resembles any small town in the world, where everybody knows everybody else, and where rumors are a staple product. Ms. Rowling addresses many themes, including poverty, abuse, sexuality, and infidelity. In an interview with NPR, she states that while not autobiographical, The Casual Vacancy touches on familiar ground: “I, too, have passed through a period of poverty in Britain and can understand some of these issues” (“Poverty Informs J.K. Rowling’s New Novel For Adults,” 9/26/2012). The story develops slowly throughout the entire book, focusing on each individual and his relationship to his peers and his home.

Ms. Rowling’s main weakness in the story revolves around its relationship with Harry Potter. Although no tangible connection exists within the text, any fan of the popular series will compare the two. An almost palpable tension builds as the author’s awareness of this becomes clear. The text, while succinct, comes across as forced; the intimate moments strike the reader as clinical and emotionless. The most powerful moment of the story loses momentum because it focuses on the sideline and not the event itself. Almost every imaginable sexual experience takes place within this story: sex between lovers, between adolescents; affairs, rape, and masturbation. However, no sense of love or lust exists in the telling of it. Each experience feels like a third person affair – like hearing about sexual intercourse from a sex education teacher – and makes the reader question the relevance of many of those supposedly intimate moments. The only exception, when a drug dealer rapes a young girl, reveals the disparity between the old guard and the new, unwanted outsiders.

There are redeeming aspects to The Casual Vacancy, however. Ms. Rowling forces the reader to contemplate the humanity within a community. Pagford may be made of individuals, but their individual actions affect
the community as a whole. A young girl who is bullied by one of her peers and parents begins to experiment with self-inflicted wounds. A man who convinces his out-of-town girlfriend, Kay, to move to Pagford realizes that he wants nothing to do with her. Kay inadvertently becomes involved in the political turmoil over the Fields and plays a significant role in the overall story. Miles, the son of the Parish council leader, decides to run for office and endangers his marriage in the process; and, of course, Barry Fairbrother dies, connecting everyone to the climax of the story. While the language feels forced, the commentary on social relationships provokes serious thought. Who judges the “other” within a community and what criteria can they use? The American reader also must consider the cultural and class differences in English society. Though the story develops slowly through the beginning, by the end it has increased immensely. *The Casual Vacancy* should be read cautiously. Drop from the mind visions of broomsticks and wands, be wary of the sex, and understand the community that is Pagford.

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Brittany Kutz

**Wildcat Spotlight:**
Liesel Hill’s *Persistence of Vision*

A common goal for many writers is to get a novel published. It is tedious work and many of us give up before completion. Even rarer are those that continuously send work to publishers without giving up and (crossed fingers) get published.
Liesel Hill, a fellow Weber State Graduate with a BS in Creative Writing, is one of the lucky ones that has had her dream realized. Tate Publishing picked up her first novel Persistence of Vision. The novel was released to the public in January 2013.

“It is what’s called a dystopian fantasy. It is about a world where most of the earth’s population are in collective minds and live as a collective conscience. There are very few individuals left and the ones that are left are being hunted to the verge of extinction. It’s very much a small group of individuals fighting for their freedom against the collectives,” Liesel explains.

**Briefly describe the publishing process you went through and the publishing process in general.**

I’m traditionally published, which is different than self-publishing. You have to send out query letters about your book to determine who would be interested, and you have to send it to people who do your research, and send it to people who are interested in publishing your type of book. I actually sent out a lot of query letters and didn’t have a whole lot of success, but I found my publisher Tate through a Facebook ad which, by the way, Facebook ads are ridiculously effective, but that’s a whole other thing. [Laughter]

They’re actually a little bit different because they’re very middle-of-the-road and there are not very many companies that are … Usually you either have people that charge you (called vanity presses) and they don’t do any promotion for your book or marketing at all, they just charge you to print the book and then you have to do it all yourself and that’s very much what self-publishing is. Then, there are the kind of people that are royalty-based and they do promotion for you. Usually it’s one or the other, but Tate—they do charge you, but then they do promote your book, and you work with a marketing expert. They are royalty-based, so they are kind of an odd duck because usually there’s not a combination…I uploaded my query letter, and I think they asked for my manuscript right away, so I sent

“Once I started going to classes and networking with other people, and to some extent being forced to write for a group or a class, it made all the difference in the world.”
it to them and within a few days they got back to me and said they were interested. After that, like I said, I had to pay a fee so it took a while to get to production, but once you go into production, you do editing. The editorial department goes over everything and sends you notes and you have to kind of go back and forth until everybody’s happy with the manuscript and then they do the cover art … After that it’s just a matter of taking time to send it to the printer and they send you proofs to make sure everything’s correct, which I actually missed something on the back of my book. It says I was a graduate of Webster State University. Yeah, I kind of missed that one.” [Laughter]

**How did Weber State prepare you for the publishing process?**

I guess in general just knowing what to expect … I’d say Weber State, it did teach me to never give up, just to keep looking. And also it very much instilled in me a love of writing. I knew I wanted to write before, but I remember having a hard time forcing myself to sit down and write. It was like I didn’t know where to start or what to do with myself. And then once I started going to classes and networking with other people, and to some extent being forced to write for a group or a class, it made all the difference in the world. After that I kept writing and that’s what kept me motivated to find a publisher.

**Why did you choose traditional publishing over self-publishing?**

Originally it was because of the stigma, I will admit. Self-publishing has always kind of had this really negative “oh they weren’t good enough to be published by a traditional publisher therefore they’re self-publishing.” And that has actually been true in the past. Now, things are changing really rapidly and there are a lot of people self-publishing. Because of the technology we have now, people can do the work themselves and upload it to Amazon in a few days—and Amazon also gives you higher percentages of the sales price, so the royalties are higher. The bad thing about that is that you have to do all the promotion yourself, which can be difficult. Unfortunately, there are still a lot of people who write a book and two days later they’ve uploaded their first draft to Amazon to sell and it sucks … If you’re going to self-publish you need to make sure you do the work—that you pay
to have it professionally edited. Don’t use it as a shortcut, use it just as simply a different way of doing things. I think that’s the mistake most people make.

So, originally that was why. I wanted to be good enough to be published by a publisher and also just because I didn’t know what I was doing … Now, after having been at the promotion for a year, and blogging for eight months, and having gone through the process, I think I could be more effective at it and I’m kind of more open. I’d like to self-publish something in the future.

**What were some of the hurdles you came across during the publication process?**

I think the biggest hurdles were just finding the publisher first of all, getting my writing up to par to where I could find somebody who was willing to publish it, and then after that, just waiting. Especially on the first book. I’m sure once you have five books out it’s not such a big deal. It just took so long to get it out and I was thinking “oh I just want it to be out now. I just want to get there.” If you want something that’s fast moving, the publishing industry is not for you.

**What have you learned from the experience so far?**

I’ve learned a lot about the industry. I’ve learned a lot about success. That everybody has their priorities but if you really want something, and you stick to it, and you just learn everything you can about it, and constantly try to move forward, you kind of can’t help but succeed. There was a time I remember in school going “this is what I want to do but what if I can’t do it. What if I fail? That’s going to be really embarrassing.” I don’t even think that way anymore. If you want it bad enough and you work for it, you’ll succeed at some point. Anybody who doesn’t succeed, it’s because they didn’t want it bad enough.

“If you write regularly, even if it’s not very often, like if regularly for you is an hour a week, you’re still going to write during that hour as long as you do it and eventually you’ll get your book done, even if it takes you two years, you’ll get it done.”
When’s the next book in your series coming out?
The second book in my *Interchron* series, I don’t know yet. I’m hoping to have it out by the end of the year … There’s another series that I have, my historical fiction, *Kremlins*, that’s going to be out through Jolly Fish in September.

Do either of your publishers have requirements for when the next book in the series is needed?
I have a completely different series coming out later in the year; with that publisher [Jolly Fish Press] they wanted it within a year. This one [the *Interchron* series with Tate] they actually only picked me up contract-wise for the first book. So, they didn’t really give me a time when they needed it, but if I go through them for the second book they’ll just create a new contract for the second book … I know with most publishers they try to publish them on a yearly basis.

How much extra work do you have to put in to promoting your book?
Creating valuable content for my blog and networking and getting people to notice me—that takes a lot of work. I mean it’s not necessarily directly related to promotion, it’s kind of an indirect thing. Just on social networking I spend probably between 10 and 20 hours a week. A lot of it I do on the weekends … On top of that, of course, there are other events and signings. And I do vendor fairs where I go and just sell my book. It can take a lot of work. It does. It takes a lot of commitment to get there.

It seems harder nowadays to be an anonymous writer.
What are the benefits of social media?
If you want to be successful you really need to be doing social media. At the same time social media gives you the advantage of remaining anonymous in a lot of ways. Because you can, and not that I would necessarily encourage this, but if you really were not wanting to put yourself out there and were really nervous about it, you could upload just about any picture you wanted and you can keep people at a distance because you’re from your computer. It’s kind of an interesting thing. It forces you to be social while at the same time allowing you to remain somewhat anon-
ymous. Social networking though has so many ups—so many reasons to do it. It’s the best promotional thing out there. It’s the best way to get your writing out there even if we’re not talking about what you’re publishing. For example, I blog and the best way to build an audience blogging is just to put stuff out there that people enjoy reading … It’s building a platform and getting to know people and letting them get to know you as a writer.

**How often do you write now that you are promoting your book?**
I try to write daily now, but it doesn’t always happen. I would say I write three to four times a week for a couple of hours. On a good week I try to get that much in. I’m trying to get into a routine where I’m writing every single day. I’m just trying to finish up some other projects, and then I can focus more on it, but I try to write regularly.

**Do you think it’s important to write regularly?**
I do. And the amount you write I think depends on what you want to accomplish. If you write regularly, even if it’s not very often, like if regularly for you is an hour a week, you’re still going to write during that hour as long as you do it and eventually you’ll get your book done, even if it takes you two years, you’ll get it done. If you’re trying to make a business out of writing it’s important to write more often than that. I saw something that said, it was about I think James Patterson, and they said that he was one of the only writers that had been studied at Harvard by business professionals and it’s because he makes his writing a business. He has five books at a time on the best seller list. It’s about constantly bringing in enough revenue that you can live off of it. So it just depends on what you’re trying to accomplish. If you want to do that you need to be writing every day … I think it’s important to write regularly and you just have to decide for your life and your goals how much works for you.

**Do you ever get a nagging feeling that you have to write?**
Now that I write all the time, I’m that way. If it’s been a few days and I haven’t written anything it starts to bug me until I do. I’ve always been somebody who’s off in my own head, making up stories in my head, even
before I was writing them down. It’s just kind of my outlet, it’s just what I do anyway, so I might as well write them down, share them and get paid for them.

**Now that you are a published writer, what advice do you have for Weber State students?**

You have to be willing to work and be willing to learn. Everybody’s writing is different so you’re never going to have one writer that’s going to please everybody but you’ll find an audience for what you write if you keep at it.

**Any regrets?**

Maybe just that I originally went into science when I first went into college … I did it for two years and then realized how miserable I was and how much I hated it. And so, then I switched over to English and it was like my whole life changed because I loved it so much. I was so much happier. I guess my only regret would be maybe not realizing it sooner.
Brittany Kutz

Interview With Dr. Hal Crimmel

Born in northern New York, Hal Crimmel began his collegiate career at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. He then returned to New York where he received his M.A. and Ph.D. at the State University of New York at Albany. Just before the Olympics, in fall 2001, Dr. Crimmel was hired by Weber State University as an Assistant Professor of English. He welcomed his 12th year in the Department of English with a new position as Director of the Master of Arts in English program.
Dr. Crimmel’s Ph.D. dissertation was *Perceptions of Wilderness, Woods and Water in American Literature*. “It was environmental literary criticism even though that was not a field when I wrote the dissertation,” Dr. Crimmel explained.

**That seems to be your focus.**

That is my focus.

**You’ve edited a book called *Teaching in the Field* and have written numerous times on the subject. What are the beneficial aspects of teaching in the field (outdoors)?**

I think it allows students to focus on the topic at hand. They’re not distracted by cell phones, or the next class they need to go to, or their work or family. You need to be out there for an entire week, as in the Capitol Reef class I am doing this summer. I think that people learn in the intellectual sense, but they learn in other ways that are not so easy to quantify. I think we tend to think that ideas at the university are transferred from a book into people’s brains. But I think that by being outside, and being on location in a place—this whole idea of experiential education—which includes the physicality of the place, and the way the light is, often triggers something that helps people really engage with the topic, because a classroom can only appeal to people in one very particular way. But if you’re outside, though you don’t necessarily have to be outside, you could be visiting buildings in a city, there are just so many different ways to learn. And this immersion experience captures people’s imagination and interest.

**You gain experiences.**

That’s right. So in reading you can relate to it intellectually but you don’t necessarily have a physical, tangible experience. On these trips students will read the book in the morning, and then they go experience what they read. Or, they experience it and then read about it the next day. I think that’s really exciting and allows people to engage in the text in a way that is hard if you’re just sitting somewhere reading. Plus I really like the students to have a lot of interaction with each other and though I think that a classroom provides a context for learning, the energy that students bring to the whole endeavor creates education.
How has your passion for the outdoors influenced your writing?
When I get out and experience something, whether it’s a positive experience or a negative experience, I want to express that. That forms the basis for most of my writing. When I read something in a book and then go experience it, I think, “now I can see how that writer, why that writer, felt the way they did,” or maybe alternately, “I don’t think that person spent that much time here, or they had brought a bunch of intellectual and emotional baggage to a particular place that made it hard for them to take the place on its own terms,” if it’s even possible to do that. Even my dissertation sort of grew out of this interest in the outdoors. I wanted to know why people felt one way in a particular landscape and different in another. I was always attracted to writers whose work seemed to include place, or for whom the idea of place acted as a central character in the work. I became interested in why that was, and so, that’s probably what led me in that direction.

Besides your job, was your love for the outdoors why you came to Utah?
I really love Weber State; it’s a great place for me. I like all the different opportunities, and the direction of the university. I like Utah a lot. I mean in some ways, my heart is back in northern New York where I grew up, but I like living here. I don’t like the air pollution. That’s the only thing that would cause me to leave. I’ve been working with the WSU environmental committee, and talking to students to try and find ways to see if we can begin addressing the air pollution problem. So, I moved here for the job. It’s very difficult to get tenure track jobs, and I did not want to move to a place where there wouldn’t be opportunities to be in the outdoors because I grew up in a place that was very remote and sparsely populated. It is a beautiful area—the Adirondack Park in New York State is a 6-million acre state park and we lived right on the northern boundary of that, so you could go 5 or 10 miles out of town and then be in woods that stretched for 200 miles all the way to the southern part of the state. So I wanted to be in a place where I could have something similar to that.

When you accepted the position as director of the Master of Arts in English program, what were your first thoughts?
My first thoughts were, there are many great things going on in the pro-
gram and there are a lot of things I would like to have us build out. Try and develop more opportunities especially for creative writing. Look at how we can provide more teaching assistantships for students, more scholarships. And then, of course, just the concern about recruiting enough students. Unlike at the undergraduate level where the students come to us in part because they have to in English 1010 and 2010 (those are courses that are required by the state), the master’s program is really optional and it costs people money out of pocket.

**Any other improvements you would like to make to the program?**

Genevieve Bates and I want to make sure that students can plan their schedule two years in advance. So we’re trying to work on that, trying to get the classes in place so students would know a class will be offered in two years, so they can plan their classes. We really want to provide students a creative writing option in the program because students have uniformly said they want to do more creative writing. Also, I want to look at TESOL.

**Author’s Note:** Dr. Crimmel has a cabinet full of projects that he’s working on for the master’s program. Some of the projects being considered include providing a concentration in creative writing, reviving the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program, starting a summer writing institute, finding assistantships for students, implementing a student and faculty award for those doing outstanding work for the program, and offering more writing courses to learn the principles and processes that go into quality writing.

**It sounds like the Masters of Arts in English program will not be taken in a more specific direction, such as a focus in creative writing or even environmental studies. Is this true?**

That’s right. Right now we have the teacher education track and we have
the literature track and I think it would be nice to have a creative writing track. Also, I’d like to spend some time thinking about how to restructure our literature offerings. So instead of the focus on American, British or World, it might be more thematically based. For example, gender and literature, or the environment and literature, we’d spend some time identifying what strengths various faculty members have, and then do some surveys from students to see if the students are interested in taking classes in those areas.

**Do you plan to offer more classes with field-based teaching?**
Yes and no. It’s really hard during the semester because I can’t be gone for a whole week and most students can’t be gone for a whole week because everyone has other classes. However, we can do it in the summer, and so this summer we do have two field-based classes. I love those classes. I find you can really build relationships with students and they build relationships with each other. I don’t want to say that those classes are often the highlight of their educational experience at Weber State, but for many of them I think they are. The students that I have long-term contact with are almost always the students that come out of those classes. I would love to do more of them, but it’s a question of supply and demand.

**What do you love about the MENG program?**
The enthusiasm of the students for learning—that when students take the class they’re excited about the topic and they bring a lot to the class, and they challenge you as an instructor. You’re like, “wow, I hadn’t thought of that idea.” I think it’s refreshing and stimulating.

**What is the hardest part about heading up the program?**
I like the idea of taking something that is already running really well and trying to improve it and provide more opportunities for students and so forth. The thing that I worry about the most is the recruitment. Will we continue to have enough students? As the economy gets better, typically fewer students come to school.
Which writers influence you and why?
That’s a tough one. Some writers are really right for a person, at a particular time in their life and they read them and think ‘that was valuable’ and then move on. Others they keep coming back to again and again. What I read the most of now is creative non-fiction that has generally to do with the intersection of nature and culture. I find that fascinating because I think about it all the time, even if I’m not working. Certainly someone like Thoreau is a person you can come back to again and again and always get something new. He’s unusually good at leading you to reexamine your ideas.

I would say broadly any writer who engages me with that question of the intersection of nature and culture is a writer that I enjoy reading. I’m reading a Graham Greene novel right now called *The Heart of the Matter*. I read a lot of Graham Greene when I was younger. One of the things I always liked about Greene is that I think he’s a writer who often explores the impact of place on an individual. What is the impact of the physical environment on a character or person or on that culture’s behavior and belief system?

What interests you about that?
I don’t know if I can say specifically, it’s more of a visceral thing. In the same way that some people like spicy food and some people don’t. I’ve just always been fascinated with the question of how does the environment impact the way people view the world? Or how does a place where it rains a lot, or has mountains, or grasslands—how does that change people’s perception of their relationship to other people and to the physical environment that they live in? I just find that really fascinating, it’s sort of a life-long love affair.

Do you have any advice for your students?
Come to class on time. [Laughter] The number one thing I would say is seek out your professors. Come by and visit with them to share ideas and questions. We like to help students. So that would be the number one thing I would say, and number two would be find something that you really enjoy working on. It could be an idea, or a topic, or it could be an
author that you really enjoy working with, and pursue it. Just see where it goes and don’t worry too much about where you’re going to end up, because many times these projects just keep leading in different directions. I think there’s a lot of emphasis in our culture on completing something and knowing exactly how it benefits you. It takes a long time to figure that out. I would encourage people to think of a master’s in English as a starting point for something that you might work on for another 10 or 20 years, even if you’re not writing papers. It might be something that you’re thinking about, or a way to live your life, or maybe some idea that gets incorporated into professional or family life. Use that time to explore different ideas. Also, try not to worry too much about grades. I would encourage people to think about getting an education as opposed to getting a degree. I mean, students are investing the time, and want to have that piece of paper that says “Master of Arts in English,” but at the same time it’s really important to focus on the idea of getting an education.

**Anything you’d like to add?**

Email the governor and tell him you demand that he support immediate action on Utah’s air pollution problem! It’s become something of a national embarrassment and we need to do something about it. I never would have thought when I started my dissertation on *Perceptions of Wilderness* that I would be sitting in an office talking about air pollution. But it is something that I think about every day. So that might lead me to my last comment. Think of an idea, a concept, and combine it with the passion for your studies, and use it to impact the world. Realize that each of us has the opportunity and the ability to impact change on a broad level, but you first have to believe that you can make a difference. It sounds kind of corny, but if you believe that, I think you can do really good things.
Submission Details

Aelurus is published annually during the spring semester and welcomes submissions of unpublished fiction, creative non-fiction, scholarly papers, poetry, book reviews, and interviews. We publish graduate-level work from students of English and alumni.

The review and selection of all submissions is managed through a blind review process with no author information provided to editorial review staff. This process ensures that all work is selected based on its literary merit.

For information on submitting to Aelurus, please visit www.weber.edu/aelurus.