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STUDENT EDITOR

Makenzie Zimmerman

COVER IMAGE AND DESIGN

Makenzie Zimmerman

The cover features the gently-lit SBU clock tower in the foreground, set against a pink, purple, and yellow sunset. At the top of the image, "SCOP 2024" appears in bold white text, while "Volume 51" is displayed in the bottom right corner beneath the SBU logo.

VOLUME 51

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Writing Contest: Poetry

"Visionary" - Kira Zook, 1st place

Some days the world is fine:

Perhaps a bit soft at the edges

Blurring lines of imagination and reality

into wondering.

A world that is livable

though imprecise.

A world where

Mountain kisses sky.

Other days the world becomes chaotic:

So slurry-mixed together

that no shapes are left,

A palette stirred together by impatient hand.

A world that is a jumbling mass of color

to be puzzled over.

A world where mountain becomes sky.

Then there are the glasses days:

Artificially precise, for a time.

The needles of far off pine trees

pin-sharp and prickling irises with vivid life.

The world just data for cataloguing.

A world where
mountain cuts the sky.
Yet when removed,
The world once again blurs,
until the line between
mountain and sky
disappears.
After all, what is life
If not a vision?

"My Favorite Season" - Josey Murphy, 2nd place

In winter, mornings soft with downy flakes,
and fire licking logs within the home —
my book in hand, with quilts for chasing aches
and cups of choc'late drink. No need to roam
or brave the cold, like woodsmen made of snow,
their necks in woolen cloth to keep them warm,
but they will never feel. A world to know —
the men of frozen rain who stand through storm
of silent dancers, flitting through the air.
A coat of white on stubborn needles pine,
and glist'ning daggers hang from branches bare —
the wind shares music through the icy chimes.
And yet, for all this beauty, I would trade
winter for fall — if even just a day.

"Ode to a Toad" - Careena Campbell, 3rd place

Little shiny orb, what is your wisdom?

You bring such joy, blessing my sidewalk.

Tell me your secrets.

"Catching Fireflies" - Josey Murphy, 1st honorable mention

Cupped hands inhibit
anthropoid courtship;
thin, crystalline wings
clothed by starlight
hold bug bodies
in summer suspense,
nabbed from night's
garden of indigo ether.
Fragile lives enclosed
in the palm of my hand—
release, catch, release
each of the ephemeral
fireborn. Forgive me,
lightning incarnate,
illuminate your love
eternal to the secret
souls in the grass.

"Weaving Ghazal" - Careena Campbell, 2nd honorable mention

Cards click, *forward, cross, reverse.*

Shuttle flicks, *forward, cross, reverse.*

Threads connect in days and years.

Clock ticks, *forward, cross, reverse.*

Tuning out the voices, weaving music sings.

Tension kicks, *forward, cross, reverse.*

Is she focused, or merely lost her wits?

Lunatic, *forward, cross, reverse.*

Weaver dances, steps in footprints deep.

Traditions stick, *forward, cross, reverse.*

Writing Contest: Short Stories

"To 5:45" - Erin Campbell, 1st place

Bird song, the rumble of cars, and distant chatter greeted me as the door swung shut behind me. One earbud in, I smiled at how well the music fit with the sounds of life.

Crisp air filled my lungs, bringing the smell of cut grass and barbeque. The rosy evening sky was glorious; it was my favorite so far. The purples and pinks blended gracefully yet never lost their distinct hues. Blue shadows and golden light spilled across the ground, making everything appear softer. Warmth rose in my chest and soothed my thoughts as the light soaked into my skin.

5:45 is the hum of conversation and the barking of dogs. 5:45 is the sound of boat horns calling from the river. It is an open car window letting in the rush of wind. It is petrichor after a day of rain.

The sky was the color of songs—slow and melancholy yet equally hopeful. I always listened to something on my evening walks, I couldn't fully appreciate them without the background music.

The dying light felt like an apology for the day. Tension ebbed from my frame, my shoulders dropping when I hadn't even realized they were raised. It's as if peace was settling in my bones.

5:45 feels like music blooming from the radio as we sing along. It feels like connecting to something bigger than myself. It feels like the warmth of a smile. 5:45 feels like letting go of old hurts and forgiving myself for new ones.

When I was younger, I helped my dad in his garden, pulling weeds and planting vegetables. I would grumble about it but do it anyway. The garden was my dad's favorite place in the world—a sanctuary of life and color. He always said that every growing thing, from the tallest tree to a single blade of grass, was a miracle testifying to the nature of God. We worked until the sun painted the horizon in gold, surrounded by freshly tilled earth and miracles.

My mom would call from the house to come inside for dinner. The fading light on the yard threw everything into sharp contrast. I would run ahead, spinning and dancing under the blessing of sunset until I reached the porch, calling back for my dad to hurry up. My mom would scold us for tracking in mud and send us to wash up before we ate, laughing despite herself.

5:45 feels like grace. It feels like memories long forgotten. It feels like my mother's hugs—just the right amount of time and pressure. 5:45 feels like my dad brushing his knuckles against my cheek, affection in every line of his face.

A smile tugged at my lips without permission as I tipped my head back, basking in the irrepressible joy wrapping around me like an embrace. I got confused looks as people walked around me, but I ignored them. I had to continue with my day eventually, but right then, I was content to stand there forever.

5:45 was made for poets. It was made of surprised laughs and yet-unmade plans. It was made for porch rocking chairs. 5:45 was made of southern goodbyes. It was made for clearing troubled minds. 5:45 was made for moments of peace.

“Spider Motel” - Josey Murphy, 2nd place

They lived in the walls. I could hear them — scratching, writhing, *crawling*.

That first night, the rumble of passing cars on the highway outside lulled my mind into autopilot. My laptop’s screen bathed my motel room in a vivid mosaic of colors, all from the logo facing the scrutiny of my cursor. *Red. Blue. Green. Red again. Dark blue now.* Defeat settled its hand on my shoulder like an old friend, the worn desk chair squeaking beneath me with the added weight. I held my face in my hands. *Three times.* I had presented this logo to the customer three times, and three times, I had received it back. *Not the right color. Too thick of lines. Too modern.* My fingers wrapped around the splitting ends of my hair. I had to fight the urge to pull.

8:13 PM blinked at the bottom of the screen. Work should have ended at 5. Another *da-ding!* announced the arrival of an email, and I reminded myself just how desperately I needed this job.

I needed a break, too. With a deep, cleansing breath, I shook out my arms and leaned as far back as the raggedy chair would allow, ignoring its mechanical groan of protest. My spine popped in several places, from my shoulders all the way to my lower back. It felt good to move again — until I heard a different sound: *skrtch, skrtch*.

I froze in place, my arms still extended above my head. Had that been my spine? The chair? My hands dropped. I twisted around in my seat, squinting over the headrest into the shadows of the room. Did something just break?

As I stood to switch on the overhead light, it happened again. *Skrtch, skrtch, skrtch*. This time, though, it didn’t stop. It just kept going, muffled yet consistent.

Something was moving in my room.

A shiver crawled down my back, and I cleared the room in two bounds, hitting the light switch with enough force to leave a red mark on my palm. Fluorescent light

beamed into the little room, illuminating the twin-sized bed and berber carpet with a sterile white glow. Nothing was moving. Nothing seemed out of place.

My teeth grinded anxiously against my fingernail. I hadn't noticed that I'd been biting at my thumb again. I wiped my hand against my shirt, and with the lightest steps I could muster, I moved to the center of the room and listened. *Skrtch, skrtch*. I tracked the noise to the headboard of my bed. Leaning over the mattress, I pressed my ear against the pinstripe wallpaper, blotchy and bleached from decades of sun peering in through slanted blinds.

Beyond the paper and plaster, something skittered within the wall. *Skrtch, skrtch* — the sound of several little legs scraping against the drywall as they traversed the building's innards. The noise crawled into my ears like a parasite. *Skrtch, skrtch*. It scratched at my brain.

Bugs. I've always hated bugs.

I dialed the main desk immediately. With each ring of the corded phone, my thumbnail reduced in size as I chewed away. No one picked up. I dropped the relic back into its receiver and scurried to the window. The red of the vacancy sign cast a hellish glow on the building's exterior, allowing me to see the darkened office tucked into the bend of the ground-level motel. No one was there.

My heart sank to the floor. I considered calling an exterminator, but at such a late hour, I doubted any were still available — not that I had the funds to afford one. I dragged the bedframe away from the infested wall and laid down that night without any help, my eyes boring holes through the popcorn ceiling as the bugs kept scratching just a few feet behind me.

I couldn't remember falling asleep, but I remembered waking up the next morning to silence — as silent as a roadside motel could be. Not a single sound came from the walls all day. I almost began to wonder if I had imagined it all.

I tried to call the office again anyway, and a lady picked up on the first ring. "Hello, and thank you for calling the Aranea Inn." she recited, "How may I help you?"

I asked her about exterminator services, and after a rustle of papers from her end of the line, the woman told me that the owner of the motel would have to send someone to find evidence of bugs first. A sigh of disappointment escaped my throat—I prayed that she hadn't heard it—before I thanked her and hung up. They wouldn't find anything. The sound was gone.

That was, until nightfall.

In the stillness of the late evening, just as I began to accept the idea that the scratching noise was a one-time event—

Skrtch, skrtch, skrtch.

This cycle carried on like clockwork. The bugs scratched at the walls every night, but by the time the main desk opened in the morning, they were long gone.

The sound started to wear me down. I dreamed about it. I woke up each morning with the wish in my head that the noise would be gone permanently, but it always came back, and in the weeks to follow, it only grew louder and louder.

There hadn't been any bugs in May. If I had known that there ever would be, then I wouldn't have stayed — then again, on such a tight budget, I couldn't have been too choosy.

Despite its low price, the Aranea Inn, a motel in a midwest nowhere town, exceeded my expectations. Walking in may have felt like being dragged into the 90s — blue-and-beige striped walls and gray carpeted floors— but it was clean with only a slight scent of dust. That was my only standard. This would be my place to live for — what I hoped would be— only a few weeks.

Nights passed. *Skrtch, skrtch.* Months passed. *Skrtch, skrtch.* When was the last time I checked my emails? *Skrtch, skrtch.* A full night's sleep became a fond memory.

Lying in bed last night, my eyes weighed heavily in my head yet refused to close. I stared into the shadows cast onto the ceiling and listened to the bugs gnaw at my brain until the darkness suddenly... moved? I froze. The inky black shapes above started to crawl over each other, but they weren't confined to the ceiling. A flutter of cloth was the only warning before a wave of pinpricks crept over my skin — hundreds of hairy, itchy legs, skittering all over me, under my sheets and clothes.

My scream caught in my throat, halted by the heart that already cowered inside. Spiders swarmed my face. I felt them enter my mouth and ears, their legs like needles on my tongue. I threw off the covers and shook myself as hard as I could, flinging my head and arms around until I couldn't see, yet the spiders wouldn't leave. They enveloped me, consumed me...

I dove dizzily for the lights. Fluorescence baptized the room. The itchiness vanished.

Nothing was there.

Tears welled in my eyes. I collapsed in the corner, wrapping my arms around my knees and hugging them tightly as I wept. I kept the lights on for the rest of the night. Every time my head would dip low, I shot back up, awake again. I didn't sleep. I couldn't — I *wouldn't*. Not as long as I could still hear those little *demons*.

In the morning, I dialed the exterminator myself. I begged and begged for an appointment as soon as possible. I no longer cared about the price.

By noon, two men were crawling on their hands and knees on the carpet of my room, inspecting the baseboard and peering underneath the bed with oblivious eyes. I leaned my body against the wall as I watched, arms crossed and the quick of my thumb in my mouth. Why were they on the floor? I kept pointing to the wall behind the bed; I told them that that was where the spiders lived. Why weren't they just following their ears?

I hated every second that the men were there, inside of my space — *just like the spiders*. They inspected the room, top to bottom, and when they were done, they lied to my face.

"Sorry, ma'am, but there's no bugs in here."

A flare of anger shot through my veins. I had to bite my tongue to stop from yelling at them. Liars! They could hear the spiders. I was sure of that.

I certainly could.

I couldn't stand it anymore. With the metallic tang of blood coating my mouth — had I bit that hard?— I stomped out of my room.

Fresh winter air hit my lungs, and the cold dug its claws into my underdressed body. The sun sat tucked behind a blanket of clouds, refusing to warm the Earth, refusing to shine on me. I shivered as I walked along the side of the highway, arms hugging my chest. I didn't turn around. I didn't go back. I just kept walking.

The familiar view from my motel room soon melted into a small neighborhood, dusted by snow and aglow with Christmas lights. A row of houses stretched forever on either side of the street. Angels encased in golden light waved to me from every yard. I glared and moved on.

I thought about last night and fumed. The anger warmed me, so I kept thinking. I thought about the spiders, my job, my savings. I thought about everything that had caused me stress. It was all for nothing now.

The wintry air pricked at my skin, and I started to feel itchy again. I scratched at my arms, but after a minute or so, the feeling wouldn't go away. I looked down at myself and the bright red skin covering my arms. Nothing was there, yet I felt *something*.

My veins ran cold. My scream rattled my bones, and I stomped my feet in a fit of fear. The spiders were *inside* of me —in my head, in my ears— crawling, breathing, *alive*.

I had to get them out.

I started running. I sprinted down the sidewalk, nearly slipping on the snow-slicked cement. I didn't know where to go, but I couldn't stop until the spiders were dead.

How could I get rid of them, once and for all? I glanced around, and I, for the first time in a long time, made up my mind.

I never stopped running. Not as I spotted the car cruising down the street. Not as people called out to me from their porches. Not as I launched myself into the middle of the road.

"The Bus" - Naomi Sperduto, 3rd place

The bus that morning was four minutes and twenty-seven seconds late to reach the stop by the park. The smartly dressed woman waiting alone for this very bus was perspiring a little more than she had expected in her navy blazer. The brief thought passed through her mind that it might make her face shiny and give her boss an excuse not to take her seriously today. But as quickly as she realized she was thinking the thought, she tried to throw it out of her mind. That was not important right now, and she was overthinking her day as usual anyway. Where in the world was the bus? She wished she had a car.

The bus driver knew he was going to be four minutes and twenty-seven seconds late to reach the stop by the park, but, frankly, he did not care much. Actually, he knew he was going to be late, but not by exactly how much. There were nine people in the bus already, but he was paying them as little attention as possible. What did little girls want for their sixth birthdays? Wondering this took up much more of his thought process today, and he was beginning to think he may just have to go to Walmart after his shift and pick whatever looked nice. He had to get something before his daughter went to the birthday party tonight. Oh look. Only one woman at the stop by the park today. This should be quick.

Before the day had really begun, and definitely long before the woman in the blazer had woken up this morning, the man sleeping on the bench next to the bus lot had started awake, woken by a loud and unpleasant noise. The noise woke him, but he cared little about what happened on the other side of the chain link, so long as it did not affect him. He fell back asleep in only eighteen seconds.

On the other side of the chain link, three kids froze at hearing the screeching noise. Surely someone heard that. Would there be someone nearby to come and investigate? Hearing no footsteps or car engine, they drew their bicycles closer together

and tried to hush their giggles. Whispering fiercely, they decided to leave the bus lot. It was too much work to ride the bikes between the busses anyway, what with the tight spaces and gravel. It was not as much fun as they had anticipated. What should they do about the long scrape one of their pedals had just made on the side of one bus? Well, there was not much they could do about it now. Better to leave and not get in trouble than hang around, of course.

So when the bus driver had gotten to work that morning, of course he had immediately noticed the large scratch, even though it was low and near the bottom edge of his bus. It was exactly five feet and three inches long, which he did not know. What he did know, however, was that it had most certainly not been there when he had left the bus last night. After driving this bus for so long and keeping it looking decent the whole time, it was annoying to see the scratch. What had caused it? Nothing should have been happening in the bus lot during the night. So he spent an unplanned four minutes and twenty-seven seconds that morning inspecting the scratch and wondering at its origin.

The man sleeping on a bench nearby had woken for the day and gathered his few belongings to leave, as usual. He was perfectly in routine for the morning. But in the back of his mind, he was a little frustrated at having been woken in the night by the unusual noise. He usually slept hard, since there were always strange noises in the night. But for some reason he had woken up last night, and he did not appreciate it. Ugh. He started walking, in search of a breakfast.

After scraping the bus as they snuck through the bus lot in the night, the three kids snuck home and into bed. They woke up too soon the next morning and dragged themselves out of bed for school. None of them told their parents they were tired, of course, and of course none of them mentioned anything about the night before. They all met in the middle of the cul-de-sac at seven forty-one to walk to school together.

They discussed the birthday party two of their little sisters were going to that afternoon at another house in the neighborhood. The three wondered if they could get some cake if they showed up just after all the younger kids ate. They knew the birthday girl's mom, so they figured she would probably feed them if they showed up.

As the three kids walked through the front doors of school, as the man from the bench ate his breakfast, as the bus driver continued driving his route and forgot all about the scratch, and as the woman in the navy blazer sat down at her desk to begin the day's work, the day, though it had begun slightly unlike normal, was proceeding as it always did. A jagged scrape on the side of a bus seemed forgotten and unimportant.

But what the woman did not know as she sat at her desk looking intently at her computer screen was that, in the four minutes and twenty-seven seconds she was late to work this morning, her boss had answered a call meant for her. What she did not know was that this call had been the very call she had been awaiting all month and that her boss had forgotten to tell her she missed it. And so, the offer of her dream job went forgotten, and the woman assumed she had been passed over without even being declined. The woman continued to work the same desk job she had for years, and her boss remembered the call he was supposed to tell her about only weeks later. To save face, he decided not ever to tell her what had happened.

What the bus driver did not know as he drove his route all day, barely paying attention to the roads he knew so well, was that the city would hold him accountable for the scratch on the side of the bus he drove. At the end of his shift, he would be let go from his job and his pay would be deducted to cover the damage he did not cause. As he headed home in shock and frank disbelief, he would forget all about the errand he needed to run. And so, the man's daughter had no gift to take to the birthday party she attended that afternoon. The mother of the birthday girl assumed this was due to laziness on the part of the bus driver and his wife, and she no longer allowed their

daughters to play together, assuming the bus driver and his wife were bad influences on her child.

What the man who had been sleeping on the bench did not know as he found a new and hopefully quieter place to sleep the next night was that it was very fortuitous that he did not sleep again by the bus lot. Another person had taken his place on the bench the next night but was himself woken up in the early morning. This time, however, the cause of the arousing was not some kids messing around in the bus lot nearby, but rather two masked robbers taking what little the man had. The first man's new sleeping place was much more peaceful and his sleep much more restful. And so, the man was inadvertently saved from robbery.

What the three kids who had decided to sneak into the bus lot and had accidentally scraped the side of one of the busses did not know as they went to school the next morning was that their neighbor, an elderly insomniac, had been sitting on the porch nearly all night and had seen them sneak out of their homes and, later, back in. And so, by the time they arrived home from school that afternoon, their parents all knew about their sneaking out. Because each of the kids refused to share what they had done in their time away from home, they were each punished as if they had been out for all the wrong reasons. But none of the adults on the cul-de-sac were ever the wiser about the five-foot, three-inch long scratch on the side of one of the city busses. None of the kids went to the birthday party with the little sister that afternoon to ask for slices of cake, but all were instead at home and not allowed to visit friends for many afternoons to come.

Six slices of cake were left uneaten at the close of the birthday party, and unfortunately, they grew mold at an astounding speed and were thrown in the garbage uneaten two mornings later.

Writing Contest: Non-Documented Prose

"How Batman Saved Christmas" - Josey Murphy, 1st place

When Christmas morning arrived in 2021, I refused to open presents. Box after box, wrapped in seasonal Scooby-Doo paper, waited underneath the plastic pine in the living room. The gifts sat with "From Mom & Dad" tags taped to their sides, but I knew my father was as unaware of their contents as I was. Pastel morning skies morphed into afternoon blues, but the wrapping remained intact, untouched beneath the tree. I couldn't open my gifts without Mom.

On the 23rd of December, she had flown to her birth state of Wisconsin. While my father and I stayed home, she spent the holiday with her own mother. It was Grandma's first Christmas in a nursing home. Mom didn't want Grandma to endure Christmas alone in her new place, so she stayed the holiday, not planning to return to us until after New Years.

Without her, a fresh sheet of melancholy blanketed our house rather than snow. However, God must have taken pity on me and decided to deliver a miracle. He sent no angel or star, but a text message from a friend: "Do you wanna go see the Christmas Lights at Six Flags?"

On December 27th, I climbed into the back of a silver sedan that I had never seen before. As I plopped down onto the rightmost seat, the scent of cigarettes oozed from the cushion, infecting the air and crawling into my lungs. In the passenger's seat, my friend's mother Chrissy puffed light-gray smog out of her barely-cracked window, though it kept seeping back in with the chilly winter wind.

Beside her sat a balding man in the driver's seat. Like his car, I had never seen him before, nor have I seen him since. I should have asked for his name, but his presence wasn't important to me. Instead, my focus locked on one person. In the center

of the backseat, between me and her husband, sat Brianne — my childhood best friend, looking as excited to see me as she had during her Halloween wedding. Before then, we hadn't seen each other since graduation; this time, only two months had separated us, but we still acted as if we were in high school, watching videos with earbuds split between us.

Three hours passed in the spaces between video frames, and before I even looked up from her phone, the car was parked, resting in the far corner of an asphalt sea. From his high position on the nearest light-post, Daffy Duck stared down with black eyes, frozen in an eternal wave over the letter F. His endless torment of greeting strangers and never resting seared itself into my mind. I would not forget where we parked.

Crossing the vast parking lot on foot, we approached St. Louis' Six Flags. Even before stepping through the main gate, the air smelled of over-buttered popcorn and sweet funnel cake. The food scents floated through the night air and buried themselves in the strands of my clothes, mingling with the smoke already attached to me. As the day crawled forward from sunset to night, though, the temperature steadily declined, and every smell soon melded into one: the bitter cold, stabbing my nostrils with icy, invisible barbs.

After buying tickets and entering, Chrissy broke away to smoke. We waited for her return in the aptly named "waiting area" — a section of cold metal benches, barely lit and sitting far away from any source of heat. The winter wind ripped through all of us, and I pulled my knitted beanie over my ears and snuggled deeper into the warm recesses of my thick, one-size-too-big hoodie. My clothes still couldn't keep the cold from nipping at my exposed nose and cheeks, though. Sitting beside me, Brianne was even worse off. Her thin cloth jacket, borrowed from her husband, did little to warm her than her t-shirt underneath. Seeing as she shivered and used my body as a windbreaker,

I took hold of her bare hands and held them in the sleeves of my hoodie. Ice-cold skin met warm palms, and I shared my warmth with her as generously as I had during late-autumn field trips and winter bus rides.

Once Chrissy came back from her final smoke, we turned to the rides. Only four remained open for the winter, but that didn't bother us: the Holiday in the Park lights were the main appeal. String lights hung loosely from pines all around the park, painting the landscape with blue, red, green, and golden glows. Beneath these lights, beneath these trees, no presents waited to be opened. Christmas felt alive.

I followed Brianne and her family through Six Flags, traipsing past cement gumdrops and empty wooden sleighs. We kept walking deeper into the park until we crossed paths with a celebrity: Batman! He didn't look like how he does in the movies, though. He wore no cape or black tights, no cowl, and no tactical tool belt of any kind. In fact, "Batman" was no man at all: he was a metal rollercoaster, standing several feet high. He had twists, upside-down loops, and tracks that hung above while passengers dangled below.

We followed his line of fans to meet him, crawling around dividers and inching up metal stairs into a metallic tube. Red lights were strung on wires along the top, giving the masked man's coaster its grunge aesthetic. Arriving at the top of the steps, I had to take my beanie and glasses off before climbing onto the ride. I obliged, and as my eyesight dwindled to that of a bat's, Brianne gathered our possessions and set them in one of the safe-keeping cubbies.

When an operator strapped me into the third row, I relaxed into the seat, and the ride started with a whirl. After a short climb into the sky, the ride halted, and with it, so did time. The coaster dangled me at the edge of a precipice with nothing but darkness far below — and then came the descent. The wind whipped against my face; my unshielded eyes squinted, and my head turned to the side. Speeding through loops and

spirals, unable to look forward, I focused on all that I could see without my glasses: blurs of light. The Holiday lights appeared as colorful smears against the dark canvas of nightfall. I saw no sidewalks, no trees, no patrons — just color, light, pure Christmas spirit shining through the darkness.

After what felt like only a minute, I stumbled off the ride with other dazed passengers, enchanted by the image of those blurry lights. The thought of them hung in the back of my mind like their strings on pine branches. I wanted to see them from up high again; I was addicted to that feeling of Christmas. I *needed* to see the lights.

After visiting a few other rides, we met up with Batman once again, and the ride operator relayed the time to us: 11:50 p.m. The park closed at midnight. Knowing this, we took Batman for another ride, and I saw the lights in full glory once more. The winter bulbs continued to glitter in full brightness as the rest of the park began dying down to nothing. The ride ended, but we weren't done. With caution thrown to the wind and a time limit rushing our judgment, we ran back through the non-existent waiting line. This became a race between us. I laughed and hopped metal dividers, trying to get ahead, before sprinting up the stairs that stretched longer now — much longer than when we had been walking up them. I paused halfway, hearing the wheezes of my asthmatic friend behind me. I was no better; I doubled-over, hands on my knees and panting to breathe, and the rest of the family copied my example. Out-of-breath laughs still rang throughout the metallic tube, though, and we slowly crawled up the rest of the way.

The ride operator recognized us from mere minutes ago, and he told us that we could just keep riding the Batman coaster until the park closed — *without* cycling through the queue. We rejoiced with wheezes. None of us had the energy left to run the length of that line again. Sitting by ourselves in the front row, we did what the operator said: we rode Batman until closing time, passing by the lights again and again. I had to get off after two rounds, but Brianne and her family went for two more.

As I called it quits, the operator herded me behind the security gate to wait for everyone else. Through the mesh wiring, I watched Brianne and her family speed off into the darkness, their joyous shouts trailing off into the black.

I smiled. Christmas wasn't only in Wisconsin anymore.

“Once Upon a Time: A Young Writer’s Beginnings” - Careena Campbell, 2nd place

We’re all familiar with the concept that children learn by imitation. I have certainly found that to be true in my own life, especially when it comes to how I learned the art and craft of storytelling. From the time I could form sentences, I would imitate my favorite stories, in my own style, in hopes of creating something just as captivating and inspiring. From a version of the movie *Nim’s Island* scrawled in colored pencils to a crudely crafted knock-off of Strawberry Shortcake (seven-year-old me thought the name “Cherry Pie” was ingenious enough to avoid copyright infringement), I was always seeking to imitate, and perhaps even improve, the stories I saw and heard around me.

I still vaguely remember the thrill of listening to Mom read a new Max Lucado picture book. The pages lit up with brilliant color as a tale of knights on a mighty quest unfolded on crisp paper. Myself and my brother were transfixed on our mother’s face as she read the story aloud, lamp light illuminating the room on a cool late winter day. The pictures were fascinating enough, but what truly captured my heart was the words. They wove a story of chivalry, heroism, and a heart of gold. I wondered, could I write something like this?

I spent many an hour poring over those Christian fairy tale stories. One of my favorites was about saving one’s kiss, and therefore heart, for the person God destines as her husband. From this, I learned to be specific with the moral of a short story. The author, Jennie Bishop, also penned a tale of a squire on a quest who must use the truths on a special scroll to navigate the treacherous woods and misleading traps on his quest for a magic lantern. It was an allegorical story, one of my favorite kinds, where the scroll’s teachings represented a variety of Biblical passages and sayings. From this tale, I learned the importance of incorporating Scriptural truths into everything I wrote. After all, the Bible was my life’s guiding map just as the scroll had been for the young squire.

As I grew older, I found it harder to find books like these. No longer satisfied with reading and re-reading the same stories over and over, I decided it was time to write one of my own. I set to work crafting all the key elements: a kind and courageous princess, an epic quest, and a chivalrous prince to swoop in and save the day. I was most proud of the example I felt the story would set for young women. The opening of the book described how the princess “had long, flowing hair and a smile that brightened each day. For as beautiful as the princess was, it only amplified the beauty within.” Brave and selfless, she was willing to traverse a dangerous forest to get relief supplies for her plague-ridden kingdom. Rose was the princess’s name, and I gave her a theme color (pink, of course) just like I saw the Disney princesses had. I wanted her to be fabulous, but also fabulously inspiring in her character, just like heroines in the books by Jennie Bishop and my other favorite authors.

Another significant influence on my writing journey was the Moody Family series by Sarah Maxwell. It was a simple series, chronicling the day-to-day life of a fictional Christian homeschool family. I loved it because it was about kids like me in a family like mine. In the back of each book, there was a section called “Not all fiction!” This page explained to the reader (me!) which parts of the book were inspired by real-life events. They were usually mundane things—such as an unexpected veterinarian visit with a neighbors’ cat, or a night of caroling in the author’s neighborhood—but this showed me that fiction writing isn’t all about events of fantastical proportions. It’s the simple things that bring life to a story, like personality details or moments of inner conflict, that make it feel like we’re there with the characters. Without those realistic, relatable moments plucked from the fabric of reality, the tapestry of story is a blur of every color woven into one homogenous hue. Relatable moments organize the colors into something recognizable.

I tried multiple times to emulate Sarah Maxwell's work. At first, my attempts at imitation yielded results that could hardly be distinguished from the original. Eventually, however, I began to grasp how to merely glean from the creations of others, allowing the work I produced to be truly my own. I realized that what I needed was not to recreate what another author had already written, but rather to figure out why I liked the stories I liked and incorporate those specific aspects into my writing.

In high school, I experienced a book drought. Middle grade fiction was too "basic", but adult and young adult fiction were either too intense or too ambiguous in their moral principles. Instead of perusing the library for more short stories and chapter books, I crossed over to the galaxy of nonfiction. I had enjoyed some nonfiction in my younger years, but those small paperback science books had been but a single glowing nebula in a diverse web of galaxies. I devoured information on running a small business; I drowned in diagrams of ancient ships; I laughed and cried over the true story of a very famous library cat named Dewey.

My writing took a turn during this time, too. I pained myself with trying to write novels, as I saw them as a much more "grown up" writing endeavor. The nonfiction books I read spurred my desire to write historical fiction, as I had often tried and failed to do in middle school. Most of my attempts in high school met the same fate—nothing but a pile of random sketches and notes about a Viking princess, or a colonial romance, or a very odd (and poorly researched) ancient Roman enemies-to-lovers. However, there was one story of a girl in Restoration England and her misadventures on a cargo ship that I later went on to publish. It wasn't perfect, certainly. But it was a real novel—a real, forty-thousand-word novel with characters more realistic than anything I'd created before. I like to think this was, in part, because of the deeper understanding of humanity I had gained from reading nonfiction. At the very least, the ship diagrams and nautical

dictionaries I had been perusing came in handy for my first partially successful attempt at historical accuracy.

Now that I'm in college, I don't have as much time for creative writing. When I do, I now pull from film and theatre instead of from books. Visual media has taught me the importance of every part of a story being important. Prior to studying film, I bloated my stories with filler and deadwood, thinking using more words was inherently better. However, with a film, there isn't room for any of that. By writing novels like I would write a film, including only the important things that the audience will care about, I was able to craft even more engaging plotlines.

I've changed a lot as a person since penning that first fairy tale—even just in the six years since my first novel. Six years was plenty of time to grow, put my work out there, get harsh critique, and almost give up writing altogether...only to revisit my old hobby and realize I wanted to pursue it as a career. I've learned not just about writing, but about rejection, loss, and pain. I've come to know more of the evils of the world. I now understand that such perfect ideals as I once wrote about are not realistic in the sin-cursed world we live in.

People fight. People struggle. People fail.

I fight. I struggle. I fail.

But I still hope, and I weave that hope throughout my stories alongside the ideas and strategies I learn from the stories I both love, and hate, from others.

"Darren Aronofsky's Noah: Putting the "Extra" in Extrabiblical Sources" - Kira Zook, 3rd place

When looking at the story of Noah, there is not much given in regard to specific details about Noah's life and choices, which makes sense as the focus is meant to be on the Flood and the Ark. The Bible gives the reader the bones of the story, what God deemed important that we know. The story of Noah covers over a hundred years and the Flood itself lasts a year, this means that there is a lot of room for storytelling and extrapolation. However, instead of telling the tale of Noah, the Noah movie as directed by Darren Aronofsky, poorly weaves a tall tale, and labels it "Noah" to get the Bible crowd.

The movie barely got three things right, even if one were to include such facts as the main character is a man named Noah, and he has three sons, named Ham, Shem, and Japheth. However, if one is to be generous, the three things it got correct were Methuselah, the Flood, and the Ark. Each of these correct things is unfortunately riddled with inaccuracies.

Methuselah is present in the movie. This is accurate to the Bible, as should one calculate the ages of those in the genealogies in Genesis, he would have been alive until very, very close to the time of the Flood. As a presumably godly man, therefore it stands to reason the real Methuselah was probably in contact and helping Noah as much as possible. The movie Methuselah mentions having met and talked to Adam. This possibility is also real, as once again, according to the genealogies Adam would have certainly been alive long enough to meet his several greats grandson.

While there is no direct evidence of how Methuselah dies in the Bible, I do not believe the movie portrayal is accurate. Since the dates for Methuselah indicate only the

year he died in, which is the year of or the year before the Flood, he might have died in the floodwaters. However, since his father was Enoch, who remains one of only two men to be holy enough that God did not let them taste death, but took straight to heaven, it seems logical to think that God would not let a righteous man perish in a judgement meant for the wicked.

Having mentioned the Flood, I must point out that for the most part, the depiction of the Flood is accurate. It is implied to be a catastrophic global flood, which destroys all life on earth other than the fish and those creatures and people on the Ark. The people on the Ark will be discussed later in this paper. Despite getting the major details of the Flood correct, they also got some incorrect. The rise of the flood waters while rapid is not portrayed as all that violent. According to the Bible the fountains of the great deep burst forth. Without knowing the precise Hebrew, the fact that this verb is translated into "burst" in English seems to indicate a fairly violent rising of water, which is not what is depicted in the movie.

The Ark was not fully accurate either. The length of the cubit depends on the cubit used, so there is a range of size for the Ark. Guessing off the size of it on screen, it was the correct size, and in a general boxy size, which once again would fit the Biblical criteria.

That having been said, the manner in which it was constructed to me seems only barely correct. While the Bible does not give a precise description of the manner of woodworking used to construct the Ark, one would expect it to resemble that of ancient ships or wooden ships in general. This would mean shiplap planking, as reed bundles would not last well in turbulent waters such a global flood would create. Instead, as far as my inexpert eye can tell, the Ark is created from logs lashed roughly together into frames and then the frames lashed together. I'm no ship building expert, however I am

pretty sure a vessel so constructed would hardly be watertight. There is also the matter of no windows on top of the Ark, so that Ark would have gotten stuffy and smelly very fast.

Despite all these design flaws, as mentioned previously, the Ark is sufficiently large enough to house animals. It is hard to tell with editing and storytelling, but it seems like there are most species on the Ark. Whether or not it follows the rules of a pair of each kind and seven of the clean animals, is unclear, though from what I could tell without going through frame by frame performing quantity surveying, it was not accurate to this command.

Having listed the things which are marginally less incorrect, I now turn to the things which never approached accuracy. Since this statement would apply to the majority of the movie, I limit myself to three things in particular. In no particular order of heresy, the three chosen are, the people on the Ark, the Watchers, and Noah.

Starting with the people on the Ark, it is clear that a lot of incorrect dramatic interpretation was taken. The Bible clearly states that Noah and his wife, and his sons and their wives were the only people aboard the Ark. Note the plural on the sons' wives. Each son had at least a wife, and probably only one wife, as the family was God-fearing and the model of one man and one woman had been the one God created.

The movie shows seven people boarding the Ark. Noah, and his wife, Shem and his recently made unbarren wife, which deserves its own rant, Ham, and Japheth. That is a total of six. Tubal-Cain, who made a magic rock shooting gun, sneaks onboard the Ark and tries to kill Noah. He leaves the Ark as a corpse. A keen reader might have noted that neither Ham nor Japheth have wives. That is correct, the movie does not grant them the privilege of on-screen wives or does it. When they leave the Ark, Shem's wife has given birth on the Ark to a pair of twin girls. Since the Bible records children born to

Ham and Japheth, the film maker's logic seems to be that the men would marry their nieces. None of this is accurate to what the Bible portrays, and all of that is not even mentioning the fact that Noah attempts to murder his grandchildren/future daughter-in-law. I will be dealing with Noah in a later point, however.

In the movie, Noah is assisted in building the Ark by a group of fallen angels, known as "The Watchers." According to the movie lore, they are so named, because their job was to watch over the world and humans, but they interfered and so they fell to the Earth. They were then enslaved by the humans they sought to help, until they were freed by Methuselah. They are convinced by a miracle that their new purpose for a time is to assist Noah in building and protecting the Ark. They are rewarded for their repentance by being returned to their original states.

There is so much heresy in that paragraph I'm not entirely sure where to begin, so I suppose I'll start with the largest piece of heresy: The Watchers as fallen angels. While I acknowledge that the writers claim to have collected information from the apocryphal book known as the Book of Enoch, I do not believe that it takes precedence over the Bible as a primary source. In the Bible it is very clear that all fallen angels become demons, which is to say, followers of Satan, and hateful towards humankind. These angels fell not because of compassion for humankind and interference, but because of hatred towards God and a desire to disobey his rules.

While humans are promised salvation in Genesis 3, the same is never promised to the fallen angels. Indeed, there are multiple promises throughout the Old and New Testaments of eternal punishment for these Angels who fell, these demons. Revelation especially is particularly clear on the matter. There would be no forgiveness of fallen angels.

Then there is the matter of enslavement and their assistance with the Ark. Even ignoring the theories over the Nephilim and what precisely is meant by "sons of God" and "daughters of men" no fallen angel would have helped with the Ark. Satan and his followers would have been overjoyed if there was no Ark and God had wiped humanity from the face of the Earth in its entirety. In Genesis 3, God promises a deliverer who will smite Satan will be born from a woman. There can be no deliverer if there are no women. The entire theme of the Bible is Satan's attempts to thwart God's promises. Therefore, there is not a chance any fallen angel would help with the Ark, unless it was to help sabotage it. The fallen angels would have been helping Tubal-Cain.

Then there is the matter of Noah. A minor but significant problem occurs in the first ten minutes of the movie. Lamech, Noah's father, is killed in front of a young Noah. This does not fit the Biblical genealogy. According to Genesis 5:30, Lamech lived 595 years after he fathered Noah and fathered other children. While it is understandable that to limit characters the writers would ignore the existence of siblings, even though adding siblings who didn't make it would create more drama for them to work with, ignoring the length of Lamech's life cannot be forgiven, especially since they are so precise with Methuselah's life. It also doesn't make sense that Lamech is not in contact with his father Methuselah, nor is Noah until a Watcher leads him to Methuselah.

Another thing that the writers don't deal with is the life span of Noah. Noah was five hundred years old when he had Shem, Ham, and Japheth. There is no indication of this in the movie, whatsoever. Noah looks like maybe thirty years have passed; he looks like a middle-aged Russell Crowe. Also, according to the Bible, Noah's sons should be either 100 or nearing that age, instead they look like teenagers who haven't even hit twenty yet.

Russell Crowe's Noah is very swift to give up hope for humanity. To be fair to the character, the writers set up humanity as utterly abominable and deserving of destruction, through implied cannibalism, for the most part. However, while Genesis never says Noah was a preacher, it does call him a righteous man. In the movie, Noah is portrayed as a self-righteous man who firmly seems to believe he is the only one who can possibly understand God's will. Because of course God never speaks directly to anyone, even Noah. How does Noah get the precise dimensions of the Ark, I suppose the Watchers must have given them to him. The Bible is clear that Noah is a righteous man, but still human as shown by his episode of drunkenness after the destruction of the world.

Overall, the movie may be inspired by the Bible, but it is far from Biblically accurate. Rather than theorize on the things we aren't told about, they chose to ignore the Biblical account in favor of their imagination and the Book of Enoch, and the movie suffered for it. Not only does it manage to be heretical, it manages to be bland and barely a story. This is not a Biblically accurate movie. If one manages to get this movie, I would recommend throwing it in the rubbish and going to watch the old VeggieTales, as they are sillier and still more biblically accurate.

Writing Contest: Documented Literary/Linguistic Essay

"Living a Lie: Oberon's Manipulation of Helena and Demetrius" - Kelsey Snowden, 1st place

The human heart desperately craves to be adored, to be desired, and to be loved. The thought of having one's soul tied to another ignites a spark and a longing that feels otherworldly. However, if one realizes their love and affections are mere figments of the imagination or exist solely in a faraway fantasy, their spirit shatters, their heart sinks, feelings of worthlessness and wasted time cloud their thoughts and reason. Who would wish such turmoil and heartbreak upon another? Who would willingly persuade someone to live in a lie? In Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fairy king Oberon deceptively manipulates the emotions of four young Athenians so their wills and affections align with his own. By using magic to entice false emotions within Demetrius, Oberon unjustly robs Helena of the possibility to find real, genuine love and a relationship in which she is authentically pursued and adored. His injustice forces Helena to live in a fictitious fantasy where her partner stays with her against his own will.

Instead of acting out of pity or care for the Athenians, Oberon intervenes because of his own pride. Some would argue that Oberon justifies his underhand actions by intervening out of a place of pity and care for Helena. Quincy writes that "Oberon's wisdom" (109) and "therapeutic insight" (110) allows him to discern the best for Helena, claiming that the "audience stands witness with Oberon, knowing that Demetrius should love Helena, even if he must be brought to see this by having his vision disaffected" (Quincy 109). However, if Oberon truly cared for Helena and her situation, he would desire that she receive the best thing for her: a real life and a genuine relationship.

While lacking a shred of self-esteem, Helena adores and idolizes Demetrius beyond reason, announcing to him, "I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius / the more you beat me I will fawn on you" (2.1.203-204). The level of desperation with which she addresses Demetrius borders on insanity or madness and alerts the reader that all is not right. Rather than begging for love like a stray dog underfoot, she deserves a partner who will treat her with value and love her for her true person. Demetrius fails to treat Helena the way he should, initially rejecting her love and breaking the bond of their betrothal in order to pursue Hermia (4.1.162-164). Helena needs to be treated with dignity and respect, to be adored for who she is and not merely for what a bit of love potion makes others see her as. She expresses to Demetrius that "[women] cannot fight for love, as men do / We should be wooed and were not made to woo" (2.1.241-242). Helena "desires Demetrius' desire for her, presumably as an affirmation of her worth" (Weller 73). She longs to be pursued, to feel valuable and wanted, and she deserves someone who would love her if the flower never once touched their eyes. Nevertheless, Oberon behaves indifferently to Helena's best interests and acts more out of his own pride and pleasure than out of pity. He, like Puck, revels in witnessing how his manipulations mold the desires of the young Athenians to his own will. His pleasure pours from his power to push and pull these young lovers like puppets tethered by strings.

Oberon doesn't offer the couple a choice or a chance to work their conflicts out for themselves. He steps in to play the role of God by manipulating the circumstances of others' lives. To provide himself with a sense of control and authority, Oberon attempts to act as the almighty. The fairy king relishes wielding power, rejoicing in his ability to use "Cupid's flower / [which] hath such force and blessed power" (4.1.64-65) to manipulate others' thoughts and actions. Not only does he interfere with the Athenians' relationships but attempts to control his wife, Titania, taking pleasure in humiliating her.

Recounting a series of events to Puck, Oberon describes how "at [his] pleasure [he] taunted [Titania]" (4.1.48) until she would give him the changeling child. So obsessed with his identity as a ruler and his power over others, so fueled by conceit, he cheats and changes until his will prevails.

Rather than seeking to gain authority through the trust and respect of others, Oberon demands to see results immediately. Iftikhar writes that "the fairy world is a world of instantaneous time, in which Puck can circumnavigate the globe in less than an hour... in pursuit of love-in-idleness" (Iftikhar). Oberon lacks patience for the slow-moving progress of human nature because he resides in a radically different world. Because of his deficiency of patience, the fairy king holds his power over others and takes advantage of them through his use of magic, creating a world which "is being ruled by Oberon" (Iftikhar). Rather than interfering with the affairs of other's lives, Oberon needs to focus on finding solutions to the rocky situations he attempts to navigate in his own life.

Instead of using his magic to promote truth, Oberon plants lies in the minds of the young Athenians to create his own warped sense of right and justice. Pursuing true justice requires the presence of consequences and conflict, for "the course of true love never did run smooth" (1.1.134). When people have been hurt, and relationships have been bruised and battered, reconciliation must stem from open communication and the honest pursuit of conflict resolution. As Lysander states in Act V, Scene I, "it is not enough to speak, but to speak truth" (5.1.120). The young Athenians miss the opportunity to truly repair their relationships because of Oberon's interference. Demetrius returns to his relationship with Helena "not from the self-discovery of a true relationship" (Lewis 254), but because of Oberon's manipulation.

Demetrius wastes his chance to recognize Helena's true beauty and value and exposes his true character and intentions when he abandons their commitment to

pursue her friend, Hermia. If he left her before, what would prevent his abandoning her once more? At the end of Act V, Demetrius claims that he recognizes the error of his ways and will be faithful to his relationship with Helena (4.1.165-167) while simultaneously admitting, "It seems to me / that yet we sleep, we dream" (4.1.184-185). His promise cannot be trusted as he strings together his words while in a state of dreaming. In addition, he remarks that he knows "not by what power / But by some power it is" (4.1.155-156) that his love has been rekindled. Who knows how long the potion's effects last or how many moments Demetrius' affections will be anchored to Helena? If Helena ever found out why Demetrius returned to a relationship with her, she would be devastated. The knowledge that Demetrius, the person she viewed as her one true love, remained in a relationship with her because of another's manipulation would crush her spirit. The young Athenians do not "resolve anything themselves but are pawns in the hands of unseen and unknown outside forces" (Lewis 254). The fairy king lacks a true sense of justice, but desires that his will should prevail no matter the means or cost. Oberon twists reality into a lie by toying with Lysander and Demetrius's will and affections.

By manipulating the emotions and perceptions of the young Athenians through magic, Oberon forces Helena and Demetrius to live a lie, unjustly robbing them of the opportunity to build a real relationship. Under the guise of sympathy and generosity, Oberon conceitedly appoints himself as the all-knowing ruler and absolute authority, exploiting his power in order to plant lies and pervert justice. Pride resides at the root of his injustice. As the Athenians wrestle with their longing to be loved, Oberon's pride poisons the beautiful, pardons the guilty, punishes the weak, puffs up the powerful, and perpetuates lies. The fairy king's deception forces the Athenians to lose sight of genuine love, truth, and beauty as they forevermore follow in the footsteps of fantasy.

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"Ironic Injustice in Shakespeare's

Othello" - Careena Campbell, 2nd place

Shakespeare often upsets social conventions in his plays. In *Othello: the Moor of Venice*, he creates "perfect" or "good" characters, such as Desdemona, and has them meet the same fate as all the other characters, even those that are far less morally pure. Shakespeare tells a story which seems to state that being a good person does not necessarily mean an individual will have a good life. In *Othello*, a character's humor inclination and character type does little to nothing to change the character's fate, showing that even good people can encounter misfortunes and even possibly have the same fate, or worse, as morally bankrupt individuals.

The people of Shakespeare's England viewed good and evil as directly tied to the concept of humors. In her book, *Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare Plays*, Ruth Leila Anderson explains that in Elizabethan thinking, there were three kinds of souls—the kind of plants, that of animals, and that of man (8-9). Accordingly, man had three types of souls within him, each with a different source. The liver and heart were the source of emotions and desires, and the brain served the functions of logic and will (9-10). These three souls were each affected by the humors, a type of fluid believed to move about the body. There were four types of humors: "[m]elancholy, phlegm, blood, and choler—corresponding respectively to earth, water, air, and fire" (33). Humors come from the liver or form when other humors mix (33). These humors need to be in perfect balance and harmony in order for the person to be at the ideal level of physical and spiritual health. The goal is for all the humors to be in equal balance because each is associated with a certain function of the mind, such as wisdom from choler and faithfulness from melancholy (35, 39). Problems arise when these are not in equilibrium.

When the humors become out of balance, certain character and behavioral traits will be telling signs. According to humoral theory, phlegmatic person is lazy, weak-minded, overweight, and gluttonous (34). Someone with too much melancholy is stubborn, paranoid, anxious, sad, or "down in the dumps" (34). A sanguine person is brave, kind, creative, smart, and cheerful, whereas a choleric person is irritable, aggressive, proud, and jealous (34). In addition to being represented by behaviors, humors could also affect the physical appearance of a person. "Tall, lean, and brown" are associated with choler as is hair that is "black, crisp, and hard" (34). This is important to note in *Othello* because the title character, Othello, is a Moor, an African people group, meaning he is dark-skinned and has dark, coarse hair. However, at the beginning of the play, Othello is a patient, loving man with no obvious choleric imbalance.

Within the play, the protagonist, Othello, is a tragic hero with a significant humor shift. Frank Amon observes that at first, Othello's love seems to be nothing but sincere and of the purest quality (23). He even acts level-headed in the face of insults and threats, being so well acquainted with danger and courage (24). His humors seem to be in a healthy balance. He loves his wife, is honored and respected by his peers, and trusts, however wrongfully, his closest friend Iago to support him. However, as Iago plants the seeds of doubt in Othello's mind, his humors begin to shift from a balanced humor leaning toward sanguine toward a choleric state. Othello tries to bring himself back to a balanced state through optimism and reason, but eventually, his strict personal understanding of honor trumps his faith in his wife's goodness. The audience, amidst their fear for Desdemona, is inclined to feel pity for Othello (41). Othello is torn between his love and his jealousy, even as he plans Desdemona's fate (51). This shows that though he is choleric, he still has his wits, and his heart, which makes him someone the audience can relate to and sympathize with. Despite what one might think after first reading the play, Othello is not numb or cold-hearted; in fact, the hotness of his

emotions is with him until his dying breath (55). He longs to believe she is innocent, even the wonderful young woman he fell in love with, even while choking her life, and his hopes for domestic happiness, from her throat. Even after killing her, his thoughts are for her soul (55). He wonders, is she happily on the other side?

When Othello finds out how he has been tricked, and that Desdemona was innocent, there is agony and yet also a strange sense of release (59), as if being reassured that yes, his sweet Desdemona was indeed true to him. After committing such an irreparable, unjust wrong, his suicide, his self-imposed judgement, is his way of atoning for his sin (59). As Amon writes, "His suicide, given what he had done and his ensuing agony of spirit, we feel [as the audience], was the best possible end for Othello" (59). He knows his wrong, and the same honor code that led him to kill his beloved—coupled with inconsolable grief—leads him to take his own life, dying with some tiny shred of peace knowing he has atoned for his sin and now, he hopes, can be reunited with his Desdemona in death in heaven. Othello goes from a secure, confident, and respected member of society to a doubtful, rash killer. This shows a shift in his humors from sanguine to choleric.

A pivotal aspect of the play and why its tragedy is so visceral is the egregious beliefs rooted in the seemingly logical mindsets of the characters. Norman Council writes that the tragedy of *Othello* is not that Othello comes to believe that Desdemona is unfaithful, but rather that his concept of honor requires that he avenge such unfaithfulness with murder (113). If it were not for this, his grievous, irreparable error would not have been made. His killing himself is not really a tragedy in and of itself, but rather a product of the real tragedy of his misguided and faulty thinking (113). Ironically, Othello and Iago both believe that affronts to their honor require revenge, specifically taking a life. Iago is jealous of Cassio, whose promotion over him Iago sees as an insult to his honor, while Othello is jealous of his wife, Desdemona (116).

As often happens in life, the innocent, in this case Desdemona, is caught up in the midst of a jealous struggle through no fault of her own. Throughout the play, Desdemona is painted as a "perfect wife", only to meet a wholly unfair end. Lily Campbell points out that Desdemona is wholly fair, reasonable, and respectful (155). This shows a balanced humoral state. However, she becomes more and more blind, showing an imbalance in her humors, specifically not enough choler. However, she has plenty of melancholy, not enough to make her depressed or stubborn, but enough to make her loyal to a fault. Frank Amon adds that the audience pities Desdemona and grows attached to her as if she were a real person, even a friend (46). She is the perfect dove that everyone wants to see protected and given a happy ending. She is the perfect woman, surely could nothing terrible could happen to her. The tragedy here is that her fate is entirely created by others—Iago's scheming lies to her husband and her husband's inability to believe her denial of wrong bring about her demise despite her complete innocence. She is undone by the jealous schemes of a petty villain, Iago. This unfair turn of events leaves the audience or reader wondering if the same fate could happen to any one of their good-hearted friends, or possibly even themselves.

Iago is a despicable villain whose punishment seems insignificant compared to the pain he caused. His humors are heavily choleric, as he displays jealous, proud, and wrathful behavior. The audience waits anxiously to see Iago dealt the same blow as he deals others, but it never comes. Everyone, including his wife, trusts him and believes he has their best interest at heart. And yet, in addition to getting away with his evil scheme, Frank Amon points out that Iago even gets the satisfaction of Othello thanking him for his "help" (42). Only after he has completed his scheme to bring down Othello and Cassio in the most painful way possible is he found out. Iago suffers the least emotional anguish compared to his peers. Even after being led away for torture, he shows no

remorse. Poetic justice cannot be served because his jealous, choleric pride makes him immune to some of the emotional pains that he has inflicted on others.

Othello is a tragedy, and as such is meant to display human suffering in a way that provides a twisted sense of catharsis to the viewer. After watching or reading *Othello*, the audience is left with many questions. They wonder where the poetic justice was in the play, or if there even was any. If Desdemona is the perfect friend who is good and kind and true, and yet still meets a terrible end, that means any good person whom the viewer loves could meet a similar fate. People do not like the idea that evil can be done to people who are undeserving. They want evil to be punished and good to triumph. However, *Othello* serves as a reminder that such is not usually real life. Real life is messy. While most people will never be in the kind of situation as the characters in the play, everyone faces situations that are unfair and unjust. However, Shakespeare does give the audience a little hope at the end of *Othello*, when Iago is found out and taken to justice, even if the damage has already been done. William Rolfe summarizes, "It is evil which suffers defeat. It is Iago whose whole existence has been most blind, purposeless, and miserable—a struggle against the virtuous powers of the world, by which at last he stands convicted and condemned" (18). Iago's sin finds him out, and ultimately, truth triumphs.

In *Othello: the Moor of Venice*, Shakespeare uses character types and the four humors to tell a story about unfair ends for both good and bad people, amidst which the truth does ultimately triumph in the face of deception and jealousy. The play leaves the audience or reader wondering where these tragic pitfalls of logic and emotions might come into play in their own lives as they deal with the complicated notions of honor, justice, and righteousness amidst the human condition. Readers and audiences alike see themselves and the people they know in the characters of *Othello*, and that is what makes the poetic injustice within the play all the more powerful. *Othello* is a

reminder that fairness and justice aren't always black-and-white issues, but that they often become muddied in the swamps of real-life relationships.

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"The Use of Duality in Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*" - Josey Murphy, 3rd place

In Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, duality appears in many forms. Duality, or dualism, is the idea that "there are two fundamental kinds or categories of things or principles" (Robinson), meaning that almost everything has an opposite of near-equal power. The most well-known duality within Stevenson's novella is the opposing good and evil ethics of the titular Dr. Henry Jekyll and Mr. Edward Hyde, respectively. However, the two alter-egos also display dichotomies in their social classes, appearances, and mentalities, all of which exist to contrast the warring morals of the personas.

The living conditions of Jekyll and Hyde, which rely on the main setting of the story, indicate their separate social classes. London functions as the perfect location for the novella because it "[represents] that division-within-essential-unity" that Jekyll and Hyde exhibit (Saposnik 717-8). London, as it was in the Victorian era, is divided into four Ends, each named after their respective cardinal directions. The West and East Ends of London possess the most obvious dichotomy; they are not only complete opposites in direction but also in class. The West End houses the wealthy, and the East End, which was seen as a "slum" during the Victorian period, still teems with "'destitution and distress'" (quot. in Dyos 14). Although Jekyll and Hyde both live in the West End of London, they mirror the different economic statuses of the Ends. Like the West End, Jekyll is wealthy, having been "born... to a large fortune," and he owns a mansion that resides within "a square of ancient, handsome houses" (Stevenson 1128, 1147). Hyde, in contrast, is poor, similar to the East End. Due to the recent creation of his identity, Hyde has not had the opportunity to accrue any wealth of his own, and he instead relies on Jekyll's money. After a violent incident that forces Hyde to pay reparations with a cheque from Jekyll (Stevenson 1124), the doctor "[opens] an account at another bank in

the name of Edward Hyde" and even "[takes] and [furnishes]... [a] house in Soho" for his counterpart to live in to avoid any associations of wrongdoing with his own identity (Stevenson 1150). Even though the house and the bank account are under Hyde's name, they are made available only through Jekyll's money, and the house bought for Hyde, despite being in the West End, occupies a neighborhood with similar conditions to those in the East End. It resides on "a dingy street" in "[t]he dismal quarter of Soho," a crime-ridden section of central London (Stevenson 1132). Unlike Jekyll's neighborhood, Soho is "a district of some city in a nightmare" with "slatternly passengers" riddling its streets (Stevenson 1132). These descriptions within the novella emphasize the dirty and dangerous conditions of the impoverished district, which are adjectives that also apply to the East End of London and the morally unclean Hyde.

Despite having a house in Soho, Hyde spends very little time within its walls. He instead frequents Jekyll's home, and as a result, Jekyll's mansion is split between the front and back doors. Each entrance embodies the nature of the primary ego that passes through it. Hyde, due to his desires to remain unseen by society, "mostly comes and goes by the laboratory," which is the back entrance (Stevenson 1129). This door stands "on the left hand going east" of a bystreet (Stevenson 1123), thereby associating the entrance with the East End of London. Hyde's door, similar to the East End, exists in a poor condition; it is "blistered and distained," and it "[bears] every feature... of prolonged and sordid negligence" (Stevenson 1129). The door is in terrible shape, like the morals of the evil Hyde, and since it sits on the east side of the bystreet, the opposite entrance of the house may then logically be on the west side of the adjoining square. This front door, which Jekyll frequents, possesses "a great air of wealth and comfort," much like the doctor himself, and it leads to "the pleasantest room in London" (Stevenson 1129), mirroring the respectable conditions of the West End and Jekyll's moral richness. The contrasting features of Jekyll and Hyde's entrances and individual

homes reflect the chasm between the personas' social statuses and their moralities, and so does their looks.

Despite sharing a single body, the physical descriptions of Jekyll and Hyde have nothing in common. As the representative of good between the two, Dr. Jekyll is depicted as "a large... smooth-faced man of fifty" with a "handsome" and "well-made" appearance (Stevenson 1130), which suggests that he has no visible defects. Due to this physical flawlessness and his moral righteousness, the doctor is seen as "the pinnacle of evolution" within the novella (Stiles 884), or the highest form of Man. Mr. Hyde, on the other hand, exhibits the exact opposite of Jekyll's apparent perfection. Hyde appears young, and those who see him refer to him as a "dwarf" because of his short stature (Stevenson 1128, 1149, 1140). This simple size comparison marks the beginning of Hyde's dehumanization within the novella. Hyde is frequently described using folkloric, "bestial[,] and animalistic" metaphors (McCrystal 236), as well as primitive rhetoric, such as "troglodytic" (Stevenson 1128). Hyde's primitive appearance primarily comes from his "ugly" face and his unnatural hairiness, since his hands are "thickly shaded with... swart growth[s] of hair" (Stevenson 1149, 1151), similar to an ape's. These degenerated aspects of Hyde's outward form, according to an evolutionary view, hint towards his "reversion to a primitive state" and his retrogression "into something Other" (McCrystal 237). Nonhuman entities with which Hyde is equated include the demonic. Jekyll himself calls Hyde a "devil" and a "child of Hell... [that has] nothing human" about him (Stevenson 1152, 1154). Hyde's immoral nature gives weight to these hellish comparisons. The degeneration of Hyde continues beyond the demonic, though, and he quickly falls beneath Man on the Great Chain of Being. He is referred to multiple times in the story simply as "the creature" (Stevenson 1140, 1145, 1147), and his actions and attitude are often described as "apelike" (Stevenson 1131, 1155), thereby placing him on the same level as an animal. Animals are lower than humans on the Great Chain of

Being, yet Hyde manages to fall even farther down the Chain. By the end of the novella, the descriptions of Hyde degrade him back into the primordial soup of evolutionism, or "the slime of the pit," as well as "the amorphous dust" that God used to create Adam in Christian theology (Stevenson 1154-5). Over the course of the story, Hyde devolves from a human-like creature to literally nothing. His degeneration highlights his evil nature because, as McCrystal writes, the degradation of a person's appearance to a more primitive state equates to a more "corrupt morality" (236). Meanwhile, Jekyll, in contrast, stands as a prime, virtuous example of Man. This polarity between them emphasizes their dual natures of righteousness and wickedness, a division which originates in their minds.

The split psyches of Jekyll and Hyde influence their opposing mortalities. According to Victorian thought, specifically the "dual-brain theory," brains are "double organ[s]" with left and right hemispheres which "not only [differ] in their abilities, but also occasionally [exhibit] contrasting desires and moral inclinations" (Stiles 882, 884). The functions of the brain hemispheres are split by logic and emotion, and so are the mentalities of the scientific Jekyll and the instinctual Hyde; therefore, the two egos have dominance in different hemispheres of the brain. Hyde favors the right hemisphere. According to Victorian beliefs, "the right brain [is]... [the] feminine seat of emotions... [and] instincts," and although Hyde is a man, he displays femininity through his "emotional lability," or his tendency to become hysteric (Stiles 884-5). Hysteria was a "stereotypically feminine [disease]" during the Victorian era (Stiles 894), and Hyde showcases the uncontrollable emotions associated with the illness when he writes the notes for Poole at the end of the novella. His feelings "[break] loose on the page" as he pleads desperately for the chemists to find the right drug (Stevenson 1139), and while waiting for the drug in Jekyll's office, he "[weeps] like a woman" (Stevenson 1141). His handwriting on the notes also hints at the influence of the right brain hemisphere. In all

of his notes and letters, Hyde writes with "an odd, upright hand" that is "only differently sloped" from Jekyll's (Stevenson 1133, 1135), suggesting that it is written with the body's left hand. Left-handedness, or "bodily left-sidedness" in general, "[signals] right-brain hemisphere dominance," and at the time, it was also associated with "moral weakness and insanity" (Stiles 888). Without a doubt, Hyde is insane. In fact, he is a "pure[ly] evil" madman (Stevenson 1131, 1149). He shows no remorse when he murders the innocent Sir Danvers Cardew (Stevenson 1131); he instead "[has] a song upon his lips" as he relishes the memory later (Stevenson 1152). Thus, as a result of his right-brain dominance, Hyde is insane and has a definitively wicked nature.

Contrary to Hyde, Jekyll represents the left hemisphere of the brain. According to Victorian beliefs, the left brain relates to masculinity (Stiles 884). As mentioned before, Jekyll is described as handsome in the novella, which is a conventionally masculine adjective, thus connecting him to the left hemisphere. Additionally, "the left brain [is] seen as the logical seat of reason" (Stiles 884), and Jekyll showcases his analytical skills and intellect through his achievement of several doctorates and his membership in the Royal Society (Stevenson 1126). Unlike Hyde, Jekyll is also perfectly sane. Despite being described in several places by himself and his friends as "wrong in mind" (Stevenson 1126), he is clearly sane in the novella because he feels a deep sense of regret for Hyde's actions. Jekyll, "the very pink of proprieties," shows remorse by regarding Hyde's actions "with an almost morbid sense of shame" and "[making] haste... to undo the evil done by Hyde" (Stevenson 1124, 1147, 1150). After Hyde commits the Cardew murder, Jekyll even tearfully "[falls] upon his knees and [lifts] clasped hands to God" (Stevenson 1152), thereby showing repentance for the sin. His sense of guilt bars any claims of insanity from his grasp, since "any sign of rationality [demonstrates] the presence of a conscience and the ability to discern right from wrong" (Ganz 368), thus declaring Jekyll

sane. This shame, and the rationality needed to feel this shame, prove that he has left-brain dominance and a good conscience.

Jekyll and Hyde, although they were once one, are now two complete opposites. Their wealthy and poor social statuses, handsome and ugly looks, and sane and insane psyches reflect their split moralities of good and evil.

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