Hell: Your Worst Reflection

Dominic Abella
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Eternal flames, suffering, and punishment are the three cornerstones of hell. Sinners from any and every culture go to hell to spend eternity suffering from the sins they committed in the over world. These sins may be as frivolous as petty theft, or as serious as murder. Many fear hell, yet at the same time many are curious as to the punishments sinners may receive in hell. In Dante Alighieri’s, Inferno, the punishment of sinners: Paolo and Francesca de Rimini, Minos, and Count Ugolino are just and symbolic because they all reflect the sins of the overworld, and also correspond to the severity of their sins.

Evidently, the sins of Paolo and Francesca de Rimini in their lives led to their just punishment in hell. Adultery is their sin. For eternity a whirlwind throws them around like ragdolls and can never be changed so the two lovers may be together or not depending on the storm. This is just because adultery is a sin that is not as severe as other sins. Therefore the placement in the second circle of hell is a just placement. Also, this is just because since they are adulterers, they were not supposed to be together in the first place so the whirlwind that keeps them close, yet apart, ensures that they will not be together peacefully ever again. Francesca alludes to the symbolism that her punishment brings, “The double grief of a lost bliss is to recall its happy hour in pain” (Alighieri 118). From this statement by Francesca, it exemplifies that as the whirlwind is a representation of a storm, the sin that Francesca committed with Paolo caused a storm of emotions between them and their family and also a storm within the community. The effects of their adultery caused a great amount of chaos in their lives just as a storm does. Chaos within the whirlwind in hell is a strong symbol of the chaos caused on earth by the sinners.

Additionally, Minos’ sins led to his fair and emblematic punishment. Minos’ sin is portrayed as attempting to be like God and worship false idols. His cruel judgment in his lifetime on the innocent placed him as the judge of hell. For eternity he must judge the punishments of the damned. As stated, this is a just punishment because as a person, he should have left judgment only to God, but he acts as his own God and judges therefore he is doomed to judge for eternity in hell. Symbolically, Minos’ new appearance in hell speaks volumes to the sins he committed. Exemplified within this description, “There Minos sits, grinning, grotesque, and hale… and delivers his verdict with his coiling tail” (Alighieri 6-7). Minos’ judgment during his life left him to punish his own innocent son by throwing him to the Minotaur; therefore, in hell, Minos becomes the very monster that he fears as a symbol of his monstrous ways as the king of Crete. Circles of hell also are symbolized by the coiling of Minos’ tail. His long tail and the amount of times it coils around the damned, represents the circles of hell and the fact that Minos’ is powerless without the crutch of a tail or crown.

Lastly, Count Ugolino endures the most severe yet most unprejudiced and parabolic punishment. “The sinner raised his mouth from his from repast and wiped it on the hair of the bloody head whose nape he had all be eaten away” (Alighieri 1-2). To forever be forced to eat the brains of another traitor is by far the most gruesome and severe punishment out of the three punishments stated above. However, the punishment is just. Count Ugolino’s sins in his lifetime prove to warrant this punishment. Not only is he a trader, but his acts of cannibalism on his own children undoubtedly bring upon his punishment. This punishment is just because he is now condemned to forever feast on the body of Archbishop Ruggieri who put him in the predicament to begin with. In the second level of the ninth circle of hell is where Count Ugolino resides, a just placement for his horrendous sins. Gnawing away at the archbishop’s head is symbolic of the sins of treachery he committed. Since Ugolino is a traitor and exploited and manipulated the mind of the archbishop, he eats the very thing that he tricked, the brain. Also, the symbolic relationship between Ugolino and the archbishop in hell is apparent. Ruggieri knowingly condemned Ugolino to unjust living conditions which drove him to eat his sons, therefore his brain is eaten due to his position as a person of
the church and not following his own beliefs.

In conclusion, the sinners in Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, all endure symbolic and just punishments in hell. All of the sinners' punishments reflect their personal sins that placed them in hell to begin with. These sinners are rightfully placed and have very deep and influential meanings that have inspired many works of literature and films such as the thriller *As Above So Below.*
Through Opposites is Faith

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Through Opposites is Faith
Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Claudius as well as Ophelia and Gertrude’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

As Hamlet and Claudius’ foil are first introduced, there are multiple foreseen similarities and differences straight from the bat. Claudius is first introduced into the play as the new king in place of his late brother. Insensitive remarks of his new marriage to his brother’s widowed wife Gertrude, spew from Claudius’ mouth. He speaks of newfound happiness in place of mourning. A somewhat bright, insensitive, and optimistic first look at the character of Claudius is immediately foiled by Hamlet’s first appearance. Dressed in all black and carrying a pessimistic tone, Hamlet fires back at Claudius. Hamlet’s mourning of his father’s death continues, and the immediate clash of Hamlet and Claudius foreshadows the conflict in the rest of the play. This foil of characters portrays an opposite balance in the world of Hamlet. Claudius’ insensitivity and dirty marriage to Hamlet’s widowed mother is fuel to Hamlet’s fire. The quick glance of pent up anger inside Hamlet and his distaste for Claudius is a clear indication that the foil of these two characters is one that conveys a lesson of vengeance.

Another foil in Hamlet, is through the characters of Ophelia and Gertrude. Their first introduction in the play is parallel to the foil of Hamlet and Claudius. Gertrude’s first appearance is one that leads readers to be uncertain about Gertrude’s true character. She seems to be like a dog with her tail between her legs, and accepting her place as Claudius’ wife. However, she shows courage. Her flash of courage is shown as she seems to be healed from the tragedy of her late husband’s death. Bewildering are her actions towards Hamlet, but her lack of restraint towards Claudius shines light on her character. Gertrude’s foil, Ophelia, is portrayed in a different light. Ophelia’s character is established as a free hearted and loving soul, free from any obligations. Even after listening to Laertes warning about love, she chooses to be free from all restrictions and sets her own heart free. Ophelia has a strong character unlike Gertrude and is capable of freeing her mind and body to more possibilities. Gertrude’s blind obedience to Claudius is a direct foil to Ophelia’s choice of freedom. This foil conveys a message of obedience, later solidified within the play’s climax.

Claudius’ climax comes forth in act v scene ii of the play. Murder quickly becomes the focus of this scene as Claudius realizes his attempted assassination on Hamlet backfires. Claudius, is so enthralled with the idea of disposing of Hamlet that his conspiring with Laertes dooms his wife Gertrude. Vengeance consumes Claudius and in an instant fades because he lets it cloud his judgement. From this tragedy, Shakespeare really comments on vengeance within the foil of Claudius and Hamlet. In Claudius’ case, Shakespeare is conveying the message that vengeance is a poison that will consume the mind and eventually lead to the death of one’s control. Claudius allowed his desire for vengeance to take control and in turn make himself lose control. The lesson learned from Claudius is that vengeance should not be allowed to fester and grow within one’s mind or else tragedy will follow suit.

Hamlet’s climax is at the peak of his insanity in act iii scene iv. Polonius’ death by the blade of Hamlet is the pinnacle of Hamlet’s destructive path to vengeance. This climax is one that entails not only the death of Polonius but the fear and distrust that was sparked inside of his mother Gertrude. Gertrude was visibly distraught andterrified of the insane acts of Hamlet. Gertrude’s incomplete vengeance is shown when he exclaims to Claudius “Your worm is your only emperor...” (IV.i). This quote means a lot in Hamlet’s quest for vengeance. He knows that he is not done and he wants to kill “the worm” inside Claudius further adding to the point that he is going insane and no one is safe.
Undoubtedly seeing what he did to Pelonius and his mother’s reaction, Hamlet was hurt to his core. Emotionally scarred from this tragedy, Hamlet starts to realize that his vengeance will hurt everyone involved in due time. Yet, his vengeance is unfulfilled and this climax will not stop him from reaching his end goal and releasing the full extent of his vengeance.

The climactic point of Gertrude is seen when Hamlet kills Polonius. This for Gertrude is the first warning that her false obedience to Claudius is causing others to be harmed due to the split parties. Since two opposing sides were established because of the conflict between Hamlet and Claudius, the obedience of Gertrude to Claudius forced her to be pinned against her son. In this climax, Gertrude learns of the hidden terrors that lie behind the turmoil. From this moment on, Gertrude tends to be more conservative and safe with her choices. Gertrude follows anything that Claudius says and tries her best to not get in the way of Hamlet for the fact that she does not want to fall victim to his path of vengeance. Gertrude’s false obedience to Claudius is portrayed through this quote “One may smile, and smile, and be a villain”. This means that Gertrude is following a facade. She is being led to her own Demi’s through her obedience of a false good. Gertrude blindly follows Claudius and it leads to many foreseen tragedies that could have been avoided if Gertrude would not be led astray. Her obedience proves deadly in this climax.

Ophelia’s climax is one that shatters her obedience. As she gets rejected by Hamlet in his famous soliloquy, her obedience to his love seeps away in an instant. She was completely obedient to her love of Hamlet even to the extent of disobeying her older brother Laeretes. Ophelia is present when Hamlet poses the question “To be or not to be—that is the question” (iii.i). To Ophelia, her obedience to Hamlet is a matter of life and death. Sadly, her obedience blinds her and clouds her judgment which leads to her decision of “not to be”. She is so attached to Hamlet, listening to his every word and doing anything in her power to keep his love, that she caused her own demise. Her broken heart was caused to her over obedience towards Hamlet. Through this experience in her climax, Ophelia learns her lesson that obedience can poison the mind and lead people astray. Being wrapped up in the affairs of Hamlet led her to be broken hearted and left without purpose. Having no purpose in life anymore after her obedience to Hamlet, is the breaking point of her character. The ultimate lesson learned in this climax is that obedience can poison the mind and lead to the downfall of everyone involved.

The foil of Claudius and Hamlet comes full circle within their resolution. Their resolution is reached when Hamlet finally breaks and is able to bring himself to kill Claudius. Hamlet’s slaying of Claudius is the fulfillment of his own personal vengeance. All of Hamlet’s pent up rage is broken free after he watches his mother die and learns it is of Claudius’ doing. As Hamlet murders Claudius, he sees his vengeance and rage slip away just as Claudius’ last breaths are taken. However, this comes at a fatal price. Hamlet’s own life slips away and his kingdom falls under the hands of outsiders. Claudius also reaches his resolution in this scene. Shakespeare’s comment on vengeance within Hamlet’s resolution is very much similar to those of Claudius. Vengeance clouds the mind. Hamlet became so intertwined with his drive for vengeance that in the midst of his own rage, he fails to keep his responsibilities as the prince and loses sight of his affairs with other nations. In turn, he loses his kingdom and all the family he loves. The lesson that unfolds within this resolution is just the same as the lesson Claudius learns. Vengeance will eat up the mind and body causing it to lose control and be consumed. Again, tragedy follows suit and both Hamlet and Claudius learn the vengeance will always harm all parties involved.

The foil of Gertrude and Ophelia come to their respective end in their resolution. Both Gertrude and Ophelia alike, have their resolution end with death. Gertrude’s death is the final lesson she learns about her false obedience to Claudius. She dies by the hands of Claudius and it is very fitting due to the fact that she was overly obedient to him even to the extent of siding against her own son. The poison she consumes is representative of the obedience slowly poisoning her mind and leading to her death. Ophelia’s resolution is just as tragic and noteworthy. Ophelia drowns. This is a perfect way to end Ophelia’s lesson with obedience. As she was drowned by water, and her lungs overwhelmed; she was overwhelmed by her obedience to Hamlet. By being overly obedient to her so-called “love”, she led herself to her own demise. In both resolutions of Ophelia and Hamlet, the character foil learns that through obedience to toxic characters, everyone involved will be destroyed.

Throughout the play of Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, the foil sets of Hamlet and Claudius; and Ophelia and Gertrude learn lessons of obedience and vengeance. These characters learn simple lessons that these two traits can lead to every party involved being hurt.
“Home” and “The Streets”

“Home”
My home is a place with family
My home is a place with comfort
My home is a place with a little insanity
Yet all the same my home is a place with great support
Home is where the heart is, that’s what they say
But a home is really all you desire
Home can be depending on your stay.
Or even how you sit around the fire
Everyone has a different home, it may not even be a house
What defines a home is not the building or the ground
A home is what you make of it, you can have it with a spouse
There are many other aspects that make it very sound
Me myself and I is not a home for me or myself
My home is my family, my love, my life
My home will always be with what I desire, and for my own self
I will not change for a house is not a home without a little strife

“The streets”
In their streets is where many find themselves driving or walking
There are many instances in which people can be found talking
But the streets cannot be a home
Its simple really, the streets offer no kind of support or community
They are simply means of travel and movement with no end
There is no time for rest or for comfort
There is only time to go go go
For one can never find an adequate place to settle and call home
The streets are unforgiving they do not support
Support is what makes a home a home
Streets were not made for comfort, rest, or sleep
They were made to travel
To pass
To go far and wide
So why do we have many people calling the streets home?
This is the problem this is failure
Why are we failing?
The streets are not a home.
A Villain Needs Education Too

Throughout my days of being a wife and widow to many I have had to overcome a multitude of problems. Especially as a lady, I have encountered many obstacles that put me in many disadvantages to others in my village. My biggest problem that I have faced so far however, has been with my latest husband. Well, now my ex-husband. His manipulative and toxic personality did not allow me to flourish as a woman and reach my full potential.

At first, our relationship was exciting and fresh. Just as every new relationship, gift, or other item, it was working flawlessly. We were happy. He was also much younger than I was and his youth made me feel young again and I was able to provide him with my wisdom from years past. We were truly a dynamic duo. As my ex husband described it, “My lady and my love, my dearest wife, I leave the matter to your wise decision. You make the choice yourself, for the provision” (Chaucer 406-408). He was truly in love with me. With time however, all things simply fade, our love was a true testament to that. My ex-husband began to put on a facade of his masculinity towards me and flaunted his brute strength and his independence to do as he pleases because of course, he is a man. Yet, he forgot one simple detail, I am a strong and independent woman; I am what a man needs, not the other way around. He began to tell me how a wife is supposed to be, “women wanted ‘wealth and treasure’, ‘Honor,’ said some, some ‘Jollity and pleasure,’ Some ‘Gorgeous clothes’ and others ‘Fun in bed,’” (Chaucer 101-103). I was not willing to conform to this mold of a wife, so he hit me with his Bible.

Now this was the final straw, I knew what had to be done. I needed to make an example out of this man and show the village and the country that Bath is an independent woman who does not conform to the needs of a man. As time went on after this incident, I went on pilgrimages to town. I would go in front of the church where all the other men were and danced to the beautiful tunes that cascaded the air. I was flamboyant of course, showing my confidence and true beauty to all. Soon enough, I found myself a worthy source of income, I mean future husband. I knew this was my chance to overcome the problem which was my ex-husband but, I had no way of getting over him if we were still married. Divorce was not an option for then I would be outcast from the village and never to find a lover again. I plotted and plotted but to my misfortune, there was no possible way of getting him away from me. In two weeks time however, to my avail, I got word while I was in town, that my ex-husband had died in our home. I was a widow once again. I had overcome my problem and was looking forward to my next lover. Hopefully the next one will realize that “A woman wants the self-same sovereignty Over her husband as over her lover, And masters him; he must not be above her.” (Chaucer 214-216).

From my experience with problem solving and innovative solutions. I am by far a very good fit for your campus. My intelligence and natural problem solving skills would make any campus reach a higher human potential. Now the University of California-Berkeley is right around the corner, and they want me too, however, the independence of my womanhood drives me to make my own decisions. I want to be a Cardinal at Stanford University.
Diseased and Determined

15 years old was an age full of growth, new experiences, and adaptation to new environments. I can truly say this from first hand experience: these may not all go your way. At 15, most of my friends were enjoying high school, participating in after school activities, and cultivating the fruits of their new lives. I was not. At 15, I was diagnosed with a chronic kidney disease, an illness that would change the way I live forever.

Being that I have always been a positive beacon of love and happiness for those around me, being diagnosed with a chronic disease knocked me off course from my positive outlook. IGA Nephritis changed my life. One simple biopsy on the second of February 2017 would be the difference between the creation of this paper, and a tombstone inscription. My disease had been hiding, slowly eating away at my kidneys and nearly bringing them to failure. My life was saved. 16 pills a day for eight months was only the start to my recovery. Depression, mood swings, and massive weight gain was the definition of my life for eight painstaking months. Although, a smile, laughter, and love were my best medicine. Medicine is not only pills, serums, and syrups; it is anything that will make the body feel better. For me, pills were not the only thing that saved my life. The outpouring of love, and light hearted jokes are what carried me through this time. Disease did not hold me back.

Through eight months, I grew mentally. I took on a perspective of life I had never thought of before. The mental state of someone who was close to death is one of the most eye opening experiences ever. My thoughts were changed forever. I learned that mind over body is true and that positivity can change the outcome of various events, including physical ailments. Not only did my mentality change, but the way I lived my life changed. I became healthier by watching what I eat, and consuming more water. This led to my body and mind becoming in tune. Mentality is key in life. I now do not take life for granted for it could be stripped from me at any moment. Love extends from my heart and hate fades more quickly than it arises. Optimism not only floods my mind and soul, but also is sent out in packages of motivation and advice to friends and family. Also, to be dependent upon others is an idea so lost within our society that we fail to recognize that success can not be accomplished on our own. My friends and family truly pushed me to survive not only for myself but for them. As a 15 year old boy dealing with his freshman year and adapting to high school life, a disease was something that needed to become a part of normal life.

To this day, now 17 and in my senior year, I continue to fight this disease. Even though it is dormant as of now, I fight to keep it that way. Determination and drive is what kept me alive and I continue to tackle everyday challenges as I tackle my disease. I truly can say that through my daily struggle and past experiences, I redefine what it means to be human.
His Airness

1991 was undoubtedly dominated by the heavy presence of Michael Jordan in every household; in the essay by Jack McCallum, he uses heavy logos, and anaphoras to prove to the sports enthusiast, Michael Jordan fans, and people looking for inspiration that Michael Jordan truly is the G.O.A.T.

To begin with, McCallum implements his use of logos to prove Jordan’s greatness on and off the court. When looking at the statistics McCallum certainly makes his case for Jordan being the best, “…twisting his way through the Celtics to score 49 and 63 points at Boston Garden in the 1986 playoffs” (paragraph 7), this exemplifies that through one of the toughest teams of his era, Michael Jordan was still able to dominate the hardwood court. Not even Bird could touch him. Logos made McCallum’s point irrefutable because of the concrete evidence he brought to the table. Not only did he wipe the floor with outstanding stats. He also was a baller outside of the court and this is apparent when in the second paragraph he details the amount of money that Jordan had made so far, in many cases money is linked to success and the amount of money Jordan accumulated, speaks volumes for his success. Not only did Jordan succeed, but he out worked and out performed all of his competition. Facts can not be debated. Through logos, McCallum can further expand his reasoning for Jordan being the greatest basketball player at the time.

Additionally, McCallum penetrates his audience with use of imagery to further portray Jordan’s reign over basketball. As McCallum states in the last paragraph, “The view from the mountaintop is breathtaking”, certainly this sentence was written short to emphasize the meaning that McCallum views Michael Jordan at the top of the mountain and at the top of the game. Imagery is resonating. McCallum’s surgical placement of imagery undoubtedly causes his audience of sports enthusiasts and success hungry people to step back and let their imagination paint a picture of who the greatest basketball player really is. Michael Jordan was alone on this peak. One of these thought provoking moments is when McCallum states that Jordan is a “wonderous athletic machine”, many people view machines as perfect and not able to make mistakes which is how McCallum views Jordan. A person can not be a machine; it is impossible, but through the crafty imagery, McCallum lets the reader imagine a being capable of perfection. Imagery is a powerful persuader. Through the imagery that provoked thoughts of greatness into his audience, McCallum was able to convey his ideas of Jordan’s greatness and spread the idea into all who read.

All in all, McCallum’s use of imagery and heavy logos combines to make a powerful case for Jordan’s legacy as the G.O.A.T. As the audience thought of this article and the argument presented, the debate for who is the greatest basketball player spread like wildfire in 1991 and still rages on today and one name is always mentioned in every debate: Michael Jordan.
Guillaine Arthur
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

Art

The gifts humans have to offer are often implied by the Artist's strokes of the physique. On the opposite spectrum, they can be caught in the visually elusive.

They can be found within the luminescence and dullness of irises, imprints on hands and limbs, shoes and clothing, the lines a face draws, scents, or strands of hair. Sometimes they are recognized in sighs, gasps and breaths, the range of whispering versus shouting voices, words the voices carry, thoughts and epiphanies, and the warmth and wounds of emotions.

It is dangerous that mine are both equally.

Nerve is often thought to bring gifts to life, but it also created gifts, and it is, in Darwin's perspective, humanity's one infinite resource, and the only resource that can explain our survival. It explains mine.

My hands are carved to hold a pen, with ink-stained fingertips with slight creases; I am a writer.

My eyes can be sparkling with blue passion or dull with grey exhaustion as lines lay lazily below them, and they analyze all in their vicinity whilst my digits and palms hold cuts and scabs from scrubbing too roughly without gloves on; I am a worker and scholar of diligence.

My mouth dries from constant chatter and debate, while the adrenaline keeps it running; I am a speaker.

My mind ridiculously remembers every detail studied to where they become more complex from its simplistic state in a wave of nostalgia; I have an analyst's attention and a poet's memory.

Without nerve, I couldn't be nor own any of these gifts, and whether for better or for worse, mine is in abundance.

One of the things I used to be irritated about mine is its methodical nature. It tends to hesitate. But the practice of proper timing of it has helped me cope with failure, an old fear of mine. I have found genius hesitates responsibly, but still trusts in that hesitation. It trusts in the possible setback, as if it is welcomed. My nerve has driven me to refuse to give into the feeling of underappreciation or consumption with lack of proper credit, and the understanding that many might not understand nor appreciate my efforts despite their intensity, apparent passion to learn, nor greatness. But truly, the nerve of resilience, poisons the reality of failing, for one only fails if resiliency crumbles.

My nerve has put me under scrutinizing eyes and venomous tongues. For quite a long time, I hated it for doing so when I could've just done and worn what they had, as I once believed my role had been nothing more than to be average. It was once my only desire to fit in. The convenience seemed easier and more attainable. But it was as if my nerve forbade it, because it built me the defense of confidence in my style instead, that follows me wherever I go. What I wear and my image has inspired others to do the same. Proudly, I can acclaim my originality has never been compromised for the sake of others comfort, a morale that traveled in various circumstances beyond fashion.

Maturity found its way into the aspirations my nerve tracked, and as my awareness of politics, economics, and law since a young age grew, so did my love for it. Justice, I called it, that awareness that gave me contradictory feelings
of hope and despair; a compulsory need that impulse had to earn. My nerve made me walk into positions of discomfort for the sake of others and utilize my words to empower and heal, and it is the one thing it made me do that I never regretted, resisted or complained about. Disobedience against what I had been told called for my attention at protests and marches, whilst my hands refused to cease writing, for it was the only weapon at my disposal. It was the one time when my nerve and I both agreed simultaneously, and the participation in such made my heart soar and my tears fall. My nerve gave me my destined role in my world as a lawyer and a lawmaker; in the courts, to defend others righteously through the law, and in the Senate, the place of altering the lives of citizens through policy.

Lastly, nerve gave me something it never created, but I always had: graciousness, empathy, and compassion for others. My nerve has made me take roles others refused to step up to, only driven by compassion. The obtainment of power or rewards has never been my objective, because it provides no use for me if I can not be with people, advocating for them and being amongst them. As a poet, I am in love with people. Many mistake leadership as one guiding while the rest leads. I have come to find that it is quite the opposite. The leader is in the back of the line, making sure no one is falling behind. It is the last one out of a burning building, it is the last individual who makes sure everyone goes home for Christmas, and it is the individual that connects with everyone else regardless of who they are, especially the outcasts. It is the individual that breaks their bread with one that receives none. It is why I call myself a leader. A true leader loves people, because a leader can not represent what it doesn’t cherish.

So, it can be lethal to have this much nerve when many are afraid of it. It manifests the human condition and all humans can offer, and with this in mind, it might not be such an irrational conclusion. Until the fear of nerve, of challenge, ceases, the perceived lethality will not change. But perhaps, if we opened our eyes to the character shown by details of physique, or more so what we can not visualize told by nerve itself, we would find art. And art is the absence of fear.
Marionette

Katerina Ivanova.
Daughter of purity.

Societal participation proves nothing else could encompass images better than a name. Dozens of dark eyes land upon their target of attention and tight smiles are pulled as if puppeteered by string, for the colonel’s daughter has entered the room. And my own is tightened back, the one that is small enough to be gracious but not large enough to be considered impolite. Almost akin to an illness, the name perceives and it conquers the perceptions of man into undeniable escapism. It could be why it feels foreign to be able to deny those with a significant perception the improvisation of that escapism. In a way, it becomes yours as well. It is why I had rarely objected. Disappointment is the most painful when laced with the truth.

My name has brought me great success in education, social connection, and stability. It raised my pride, and pride breeds all sin. But it snipped my strings when it was swallowed, and now transparency is all that is left. All I see is myself, Katya. With this came disappointment. Naturally, my pride of my name led me to a world where Katerina Ivanova had been dependent upon it, and it couldn’t bear any chance of a strike against it. It was impossible for me to understand when my father fell under financial trouble how to cope with the idea that all obtained by prestige could fall, for not only me, but my father and my sister. The humiliation experienced rivaled my pride into a pit of despair after meeting Dmitri Karamazov, an individual also blinded by the fabrications names offered and the black stains that marked him and his family by extension. The money he offered had been so sharp as to have slapped me across my cheek, the way he proposed it.

It was his need for vengeance that wanted to watch me in embarrassment take the money from the scoundrel, and it was my own need for vengeance that convinced me to ask to be his fiancé. Thoughts of me redeeming him filled my nature, and drove me to desperation for his own flawed nature. I was in love with good nature, not him; I could not believe I had ill nature, and such made me an antagonist. For I was afraid of the reality that I am not as much of a savior, more perfect than he could’ve been; it is why I had undergone much more humiliation after and blinded the vision of the man I truly loved. The preservation of names ensued, all to avoid that I could be as low as the name Karamazov.

But under these events, it occurred to me that the very preservation of names and perceptions only gave them power. Reverence for names only increases the control it bears upon falsities that do not exist. And until I could admit we are not composed of judgement, and not divided depending on prestige and rumors, I became someone I had never wanted to be; an antagonist.

The name Katerina Ivanova translates to daughter of purity in Russian. I have come to find through learning and loving fellow man with courage, that images are only as true as the deeds done in accordance with the good will of others only. Because I am human, I find my name does not define me. It is a joy to be anything but what I am told I must be, and the word for it is human. And my smiles have never been more large, imposing, and real.
Guillaine Arthur
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Poetry

Troubled Artist

Nerves to fray
Forgive my grin
As I anticipate dying your face blue

A red cabaret
A display of skin
For I anticipate dying your face blue

A song sung by crows
In between my teeth
Darling, you should’ve known
All things wither, even we

Grit my hand
God made life to lose
And I anticipate dying your face blue

A song sung by crows
In between my teeth
Darling, you should’ve known
All things wither, even we

Hold my hand
Your light left too soon
Why didn’t I wait dying your face blue
Why didn’t I wait dying your face blue
The Shakespearean play of Hamlet bestows the assertion that dubiety and trust/thrust being at odds creates conflict whilst breeding tragedy until the intent of each ideal becomes blackened by pretension, stained deeply enough to infiltrate bloodlines already soiled with man's ambitions; but the presence of such clarifies the binding obedience the opposing characters of Ophelia, Queen Gertrude, and Laertes are reigned by under these bloodlines, and the choices made within their realms of obedience under this corruption demonstrate their unique and misunderstood motives, inherently proving the good nature of each character, and highlighting the decisiveness of the human condition.

Two women serve as the love interests of the main characters upon different spectrums, Ophelia for the protagonist Hamlet, and Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, for the antagonist Claudius, displaying a set of personalities that foil each other and yet, equate. First and foremost, it is imperative to recall that these personalities understood by the audience are as far as the perspective of Hamlet's goes. Ophelia may be perceived as a character of naivety and innocence if eying through the lenses of the protagonist, emphasized by the doting presence of masculine entities in her life to whom she listens carefully. For example, Ophelia replies quite stoically for one being in love, as she becomes in accordance with her brother's request that she stays away from Hamlet in order for her virginity to be treasured,

"I shall th' effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
And recks not his own rede" (Act 1 Scene 3 line 530-535).

With the severity of the tone in this quote, it must be noted this can not simply be a case of idleness, because she clarifies the stance of her guide, men. She states that as long as he remains good, she shall comply. The presence of Ophelia asserts modesty and humility under Hamlet's perspective, man's perspective, due to the adherence to enforced scrutiny of a woman's position in sexuality and matrimony. Gertrude is presented by the protagonist as a traitor of familial relations, a widowed woman of opportunism, infidelity, and frivolity as a result of her marriage to the brother of her dead spouse. An interaction with this character and Ophelia presents firstly her obedience to her spouse, secondly, opportunism, but something further.

"I shall obey you;
And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness. So shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours" (Line 1725-1730, Act 3 Scene 1).

Gertrude mentions her endearment for Ophelia because of her son's odd behavior, praying them to wed, but highlights the cruciality of Ophelia's influence upon Hamlet. Under immediate scrutiny, Gertrude asserts the role as a promiscuous woman that knows too much, feels too much, and has done too much, initially contrasting from the perceptional purity of Ophelia. While this guides the superficial foiling between them, the interior differences that cause foiling between these characters lie within their motives of obedience represented in these quotes. They are slightly indicating why they are loyal to whomever the source is and insists the truth of the misconceptions of these women the audience was meant to possess. Their similarity lies in obedience, but this does not symbolize a state of hopelessness or complacency, and the same refers to the next foiled pair discussed.
Laertes is written as a character of valiant traits, with a determined and protective demeanor, that is used in the work as a device of tension. Taking the role of a counsel to his sister, this character has an ambition to preserve the family name, as meant to be perceived in relation to loyalty and perpetual wisdom. Laertes being presented as a counsel to Ophelia gives the audience the impression that Laertes knows far more, and can provide more reliability to the plot at hand. Laertes becomes akin to the central theme of the characters presented so far; obedience. Certainly, Laertes is cognizant and submissive to the title he bears, associated with his kin but more so, pride. Ophelia, serving as his foil, behaves quite the opposite in the state of humility and quiet, for various reasons imposed by the structures patriarchal influences create that many forget affect both of the siblings harshly. But this state of mind lasts little time, until it is only subtly identified later in the play that Laertes becomes compliant to a vice by result of tragedy striking.

"How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with:
To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
That both the world, I give to negligence,
Let come what comes; only I'll be reveng'd
Most thoroughly for my father" (Act 4, Scene 5, 3002-3009).
Laertes is designated to demonstrate an allegiance to revenge in this scene, and a boldness Ophelia lacks, but provides a deeper conflict of difference and obedience between Ophelia and her experiences versus his own, thus further proving the unreliability of Hamlet as he thoroughly implies misconceptions of each form inhabited in the play so long as he provides his own bias.

In the spiral of the events of the play, it is found that decisions ultimately guide the psyche and motive of each character, and that decisions are made in general which simplify a quick analysis of costs and benefits, what is priority and what is unnecessary. The missed point relies on the idea that because these characters appear to be blindly submitting to higher sources, decisions and choices are not initiated with full consent of their intellectual and bodily autonomy, which is extremely far from the case. In each periodical climax of the characters, a decision is made and overlooked by the audience because of the predisposition already set at the beginning of the work. This plays as a big mistake, because the decisions made here ultimately define and make the audience realize what these characters are truly obedient to, not quite obedient in the expected circumstance, and increases the validity of their positive influence and good nature corrupted by poor nature. Starting with Ophelia, after consideration of claims her brother and father made about Hamlet's probability of lack of regard, she herself decides to speak to Hamlet, to envision for herself if his claims of cruelty and madness are so, persisting to leave the relationship. It is overlooked that Ophelia does this on her own terms, even though her original arrival was to pinpoint the cause of Hamlet's lack of sanity, because the narrative first given works.

“..."My honour’d lord, you know right well you did,
And with them words of so sweet breath compos’d
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,
Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord” (Act 3 Scene 1, 1792-1797).
The set of citations here display Ophelia, broken-hearted, that she refuses to accept Hamlet's false claims of love if they are not envisioned beyond fake words and material things, which in itself is a rather outspoken opinion considering the time period. It is here that it is finally foreseen that the male-dominated society of the time period corrupted the images of the characters to their fullest degree, because Hamlet proceeds to accuse Ophelia of seductive motives, and that his love had never existed because her beauty had made him lie. It is revealed later that this in itself is its own lie, but the pathology of the argument identifies Ophelia's logical reasoning to assert where she stood held viable. To be the target of a persuasion that a man's affections are filled with deceit at the expense of a woman's beauty accents the lack of accountability of irresponsibility from the other party, but more so the irony that Hamlet, who controls the perception of any individual involved in the story, and under power, demonstrates the effects of patriarchal influence. This proves that these are the boundaries Ophelia can’t cross, and it is found neither can Gertrude, or Laertes. In the realm of these boundaries uncrossed, Ophelia might display obedience, but she has a significant type of obedience. Her source of to who she is obedient is NOT any male influence, but instead, to goodwill. In every decision made here-on, she makes choices within the realm of her will to abide by what is just and what is good, eliminating the factor of her being naive. Thus, this proves Ophelia embodies the obedience to morality, logic, and reasoning, encompassing goodness, ironically something men had been related to more frequently and a woman, at the time, could not be.

Next, because it is clarified that perceptions are unreliable, Gertrude must be explained more thoroughly than how
one would on a surface level of analysis. As written, her role in the play is quite limited and in a means of ambiguity, where she serves as the most complex character. This is done specifically to ensure that she is the most important character, identifying that because the play is in Hamlet's point of view, its limitation infers that she knows more than perceived by her commentary. Despite being depicted as a character that is inconsistent and cold, it can be estimated that her silence or her dismissal is not at the hands of a careless individual, but because her position does not allow her. Like Ophelia, it is to be notified that as queen, Gertrude had little choice in the marriage of her spouse's brother, because it was of her role as queen to take marriage in the event of a death such as this one, and therefore not only reinforced the validity of men and their determination of marital status, but the immense scrutiny of her sexuality despite their own creation of such limitations. It is in this quote, where the audience can recognize the original interpretation of Gertrude's character is incorrect, because of the genuine sorrow and loyalty she bestows to her son after his confession that Claudius committed murder;

"Be thou assur'd, if words be made of breath,
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me" (Act 3, Scene 4, line 2601-2603).

Gertrude seems to believe this to be so after this phrase. Thus, it can be argued that Gertrude, while opportunistic in theory, did not ensure her stature for evil reasons, and if anything, the endurance of her survival and position as a monarch for her son and her equally provides a feminist ideology of self-preservation. Truthfully, finalized by the last quote, Gertrude, in a society that persecutes her enough to where her son believes her to be a whore, displays an obedience to her instincts, and her perception in the event of a thorough analysis of situations. Stabilized by these realities she faces, her perspective has made her able to manipulate those that run society as much as she can, a society that limits and constrains her even in the highest position a woman can achieve during her period of time. Gertrude's significant type of obedience adheres to her intuition.

Laertes, introduced as a strong character that leads and guides, becomes anything but within the climax of the story in accordance with his character.

"Let this be so.
His means of death, his obscure funeral-
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
No noble rite nor formal ostentation,-
Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,
That I must call't in question" (Act 4, Scene 5, line 3089-3094).

The scene presented occurs after the recognition of his sister's lack of sanity, in the event of his father dying by Hamlet. Laertes, immersed in the dignity of his family, relentlessly insists to gain revenge, and falls under the betrayal of his original morals. This provides himself a strong foil to his sister, because of the mere fact that as a male role, he behaves in patterns that demonstrate a lack of logical thinking, and an inability to rationalize in times of grief. Laertes, unbeknownst to the society and the standards he has accidentally promoted and thrives in, did not have an iota that these promotions had fully increased the resonance of double-standards, and how if a woman behaved in such ways, she would be titled as insane. In the evidence of these events, Laertes is obedient to what he can get away with in the world he lives in; in a stark difference from his sister, he is obedient to man's impulse.

This leads into Ophelia's resolution, where her supposed madness is demonstrated the most when she gives her judgments upon characters, through the usage of the most frail objects possible, flowers. Flowers were the only pieces of messages and morals that individuals studied during this period of time. It is the demonstration of judgement she could display without directly doing so, and even this in itself conveyed to the other characters that she was mentally unstable.

“Theres fennel for you, and columbines. Theres rue for you,
and here's some for me. We may call it the herb of grace o' Sundays.
O, you must wear your rue with a difference! There's a daisy. I
would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father
died. They say he made a good end” (Line 3056-3060 Act 4 Scene 5).

Specifically, the judgement passed here becomes an accurate display of the characters flaws, when the King and Queen are given these flowers to symbolize regret by rue, columbines for piety, fennel for infidelity, daisies for death, and violets for loyalty. Violets withered, meaning faith completely gets toiled in the event of the death of Polonius. Best demonstrated as the resolution to this character, Ophelia dies from there on as insane, simply for giving judgement and logic, which makes it arguable if she was truly mentally ill or not. Dying by choice, the last true decision of her life where she finally disobey's the life she had been forced to endure that had been full of restrictions, by guiding her bodily autonomy into the afterlife. Her resolution had been the overcoming of the source of her obedience, life itself, where she had been devoted to good. In peace, she could bask in it, instead of drowning in it.

Gertrudes resolution dealt with the same acceptance of disobeying what she had to adhere to, and thus, had to
disobey the source of her oppression, the King himself. Before Hamlet rests his lips on the wine glass of poison, the queen drinks it swiftly and sacrifices herself.

“I will, my lord; I pray you pardon me. Drinks” (Act 5, Scene 2, Line 3943).

The relay of events had brought many questions, and debates arose if the queen had been cognizant of the position originally. But the real argument that can be made in her favor complies with the object of her obedience, intuition. The queen didn’t typically know, but due to her intuition and her unspoken conclusion, she trusted her instincts and proved her good nature, and how good of a mother she really had been, proving that she had been the most consistent character in the play.

Lastly, Laertes faces his own trifles, while he fights Hamlet to the death with a poisoned sword, symbolizing man's flawed nature. When Laertes realizes his wrongs, and the detriments of the King, he recognizes the errors of what has occurred, deciding to side with what is logical.

“He is justly serv’d.
It is a poison temper’d by himself.
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.
Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me! Dies” (Act 5, Scene 2, Line 3985-3989).

He submits to his final source of oppression, and he learns to forgive instead of undergoing so easily the impulses of death and vengeance, contrasting with Ophelia's exemption of justice but resonating it in the wake of guilty parties deserving their fates.

Thereby the evidence and arguments given, the foiled characters that have stark differences, aligning in similarities establish that even in places of restriction, choices can be made and judgments can be reconsidered.
Guillaine Arthur
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Poetry

Clycamen

Ferragamo feet fostered by foreign Fellows  
Figured to take a stroll.  
As the iris blooms, Sparrow’s song bellows  
Burgeons die by creased brows, strains the Idle stole.

Sneers the Fellows parry with parley in slivers  
Aimed to the Singer who held the blade.  
Continuing prior talk, silence syly slithers  
Amongst the Fellows' scrutiny grew a deadly shade.

The Gardener surveyed petals grey in grief  
For he mothered the beings under the Fellows’ eye  
Hence planted, loud enough to heed, some bittersweet.  
Wooden shade by soles did die, for power couldn’t reign with it alive?

Tansy at the heels for forged leaves they searched.  
Allured, Fellows picked stems of roots.  
Lacking in why luster fades when stripped of hearth  
For their cares are consumed by pursuits.

But the Sparrow, clever! Strew her seeds  
To muster echos of thought  
And knew she again could bear to speak  
Against those who forced her not.
Guillaine Arthur
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Poetry

Purge

An amble from the House
Toured me mart of sylvan choice
Questions for vacuity my thoughts aroused.
In the square, bodies, it was devoid.

Such query should mark a wanton soul.
For purpose of the travel forgot.
Yet moans of despair, afar, did I condole
Punnets of florets meant to be bought.

Begonia in the first made squandered sense
Where solitude quivers marrow
And palms grip for lock immense
Until my throat finds breath to borrow

Released at the touch of Willows coat
Warmth is absent here
Quivers not but heat’s absence, whom shivers devotes
Her fidelity proves austere

The infamous next rules Lavender
Thomas’ pangs that collapse the weight
Peace do I eagerly pander
When the love of another equates

At last it is a tepal, of Calla Lily’s held
Sore hands fall and heavy heart falters
Bitten Lips tremble and blue tears welled
When I dread satisfaction alters.

Amaryllis perched on my chest and to her I wake.
Edelweiss waltzes upon my bridge.
Wittiest Clematis, in bronze strands finds a place.
Susan batting her black eyed lashes to a ridge.

A glimpse of Columbine resting near the Cathedral
To begin anew! stirring to the moans of the people.
Dante's Inferno Analysis

In *Dante's Inferno*, Dante reveals the destructive nature of humanity and society by punishing those who commit sin, since sin is a choice one makes. The only way to stop the destructive society is to punish the sinners for their mistakes. Through symbolism, life, and society, Dante punishes those of lustful attitudes and mindsets to stop the destructive nature of humanity.

For a sinner to be punished for his or her sins, they must receive exactly the opposite of what they desire. This is the only way one can learn a lesson from his or her vile actions. For instance, when it came to the punishment of the lust, Dante had the sinners pushed back and forth by forceful winds, to get rid of their desire for lust. Instead of fulfilling their preferences of peace and desire, there was chaos and savagery. The strong prevailing winds symbolize the restlessness of the sinners whose drive is led by lust and fantasies. This is Dante’s way of teaching them a lesson, so they can learn to better themselves spiritually instead of weakening their covenant with God. These people within life and society can be seen as pests, who take advantage of good people and bring evil upon the world. To resolve this situation, they must meet face to face what they are afraid of.

For a society to flourish, there must be law and order. These two ideas provide for a tranquil nature within life and society, which is what God’s plan entails. Those who sin and spread evil to societies bring chaos and disorder, which refutes God’s mission. Although discord and harmony flow within each other, those who produce evil desires, must be treated with the correct circumstances. If they aren’t treated, then society will not change positively and more evil will spur. This is why there are laws to enforce and go by, so everyone within society has consequences for their actions. Regulations are required in every society to provide a good sense of morals and common sense for those who tend to commit vile actions. Enforcing laws doesn't take away freedom instead, it makes society more responsible for their actions and wills. They will also get the chance to strengthen their bond with God and If everyone follows the law and stays in order, then the chances of getting to “paradise” or heaven will be lengthened. As long as society is healthy physically and mentally, the people it holds will flourish and achieve prosperity.

In other words, those who bring evil within society and the people it holds must be punished with the proper treatments. These enforcements will weaken the destructive nature of humanity. Without the proper treatments, society will never prosper and reach its full potential. The opportunities people can pursue are endless when the environment and society they surround themselves is healthy and beneficial. With the help of symbolism and the aspects of life and society, Dante is able to punish those who defy human nature with sin and malice.
Vansh Chandra
Age: 18, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Caprice Houston-Bey

Category: Critical Essay

Villain Essay

I believe that everyone should suffer for a purpose or to reach their goals. The idea of mystery is very interesting to me. The mystery of faith is constantly revolving around me and has become a part of me. God has always been a part of my life and daily tasks. He is my source of inspiration and hope when it comes to obstacles and commitments. As I traverse this cursed land searching for life and my purpose, I feel a sense of isolation and alienation as I search and decide what path I shall take to reveal the truth of my future and outcome. I remember gleaming with joy in the halls of my palace with my friends and family, but now It has all disappeared. I think of these obstacles in life as a lesson and morale. My experience was a way of getting closer to God and finding my purpose in life. Only those who were exiled can experience the pain and isolation I feel. The cruel reality of seeing many abandoned buildings and relics from my past makes me independent from my people and an outcast. I feel the pain of how lords are banished from their halls and kingdoms. I believe that through experience and suffrage, there is knowledge. This is one of those experiences that makes me wiser and stronger mentally and physically.

As I venture through the harsh conditions of winter, I realize that there is a symbolic meaning to this experience. This idea of winter not only has brought violent snowstorms but fear and helplessness. The creator makes all of this happen on purpose. He brings unpredictability and hardships to anyone and everyone to teach lessons and morals. It teaches us that life has its highs and lows that come with happiness and sadness and that everything happens for a reason. These battles and obstacles in life allow us to show that everything leads us to our fate. In my experience, I realized it was best not to panic rather stay calm and find a solution. I learned that I had to turn my heart towards God to find my purpose and comfort. The ideas of greed and boasting should also be something to stay away from since they lead to sin and distrust. I have figured that it is important to strengthen and embrace relationships rather than to doubt and fickle.

I’ve also learned that all of these obstacles lead me later to my successes and aspirations. Everything that we perceive is subject to our fate. God is responsible for our fate and it is our duty to come to our aspirations and learn instead of fear. Throughout my venture in the harsh conditions of this winter, I’ve realized that life isn’t really what it seems. There is more to life than materialistic things and attributes. Thinking about life in an abstract sense involving God has taught me how I can better myself and help others who are going through isolation and exile.
Picking up the camera, working collaboratively with a group of friends, and fulfilling my drive for creation has heavily influenced my life. Creating content has been a hobby of mine for over a decade. Growing up, I had the opportunity to utilize the digital industry for entertainment and knowledge. My taste in digital content has constantly changed, from gaming to music and people documenting their own lives. I direct, formulate, and market my own content. When I create content, I feel like the only obstacle hindering me from reaching my vision is my immeasurable imagination. I have always directed my creations, and I knew this career was going to play a big role in my life when I was able to reach an engagement of over 120,000 people.

I believe that curiosity and creativity must combine effectively for media content production. I joined our school's broadcasting department to expand on my technical skills and experience. At first, I wasn’t sure how I could be an asset since I was used to making content that I directed and produced independently. However, I then integrated my own knowledge of graphic design with programs such as Adobe Photoshop and editing with Sony Vegas Pro. I taught myself how to operate these programs and how to translate the broadcasting department’s vision using my own custom transitions and editing style from rather simplistic content to exciting vibrant works. This change in style led to the weekly production of a show throughout the year. Using novel techniques, I reached the entirety of my school, alumni, and even people online. Our shows ranged from current world events and sports to daily news around campus. I assumed a leadership role in directing the production team and choreographed how shows would be executed with more lively content and animation. I implemented animations with themes relative to the time the show is aired alongside concise and clean edits to get messages and stories across efficiently. With my approach, we made MARVEL themed animations, introductions, and transitions based on our school’s mascots and color scheme to provide a particular appeal to the students as they watched the shows. In fact, as a tribute to the recent passing of Chadwick Boseman, we utilized Black Panther animations to show our respect and honor his career. Personally, I prefer to take trends and twist them into something unique and diverse, so I introduced these challenges within our department and involved all students and faculty members.

When I get into a creative mindset, the opportunities seem endless. I’ve learned to adapt and produce in different fields and environments. Through experience, I am now familiar with gaming and entertainment platforms because I made graphic designs for online digital streamers and creators. I have made music with my partners based on the topic given at hand; for personal videos, I have made trailers of our school spirit and campus using motivational music to promote a place of growth and development. This translates to students, teachers, and audiences online being more involved and having a greater understanding of the content, since the audio-visuals are more engaging and relative.

Content creation often leads to influence. Influencing those who perceive my work and recognizing the feedback I receive motivates me to produce more driven content regardless of the type—a new business idea, a video, or even a musical taste. The message advocated in digital content can range vastly due to the numerous categories and interests. Personally, my preference is to promote the message of perseverance and confidence, especially when reaching one’s aspirations and goals.
Proposal

Dozens of dogs roaming the streets hollering and screaming throughout the impoverished streets. Broken bones, lives lost, and all sorts of cruelty taking place for the humor and joy of those who desire pain. Numerous dogs disappearing out of thin air and being abused by man-made creations, showing the reality of their nature and aura. Born without a voice to stand up for themselves and those being inconsiderate for their actions really shows the fate of mankind. The fate of mankind is always challenged with the abuse of an animal every 60 seconds. 65% of those animals turn out to be dogs as well. Many people around the world have feasts for harming animals.

There is a solution that can be implemented for this situation. All animals should be caged and locked up so the hunters never have a chance to harm them. We should make fortresses to hold these animals and preserve them for future generations. We should hide them from the hunters and feasters to prevent this abuse and cruelty. Making these additions to our nation will reduce cruelty rates and will provide that these animals don’t need a voice to stand up for themselves against those on top of the food chain. They can be our friends instead of enemies and join us in the fight for their rights.

Starting petitions and fundraisers can raise awareness for this issue. Civilians can come together to halt this ongoing feast of abuse and start a call for welfare for those who don’t have a voice. With all of this funding and engagement, we can stand up for animals and make a change in this world of brutality. If we need to take precautions to the next level, we can cage all pets as well to make sure hunters don’t get their hands on them as well.

Some problems with this proposal are that if we cage all of the animals, we won’t have anything to feast on. Some may believe that we may have to go on plant diets and never touch meat again. This is very untrue and can be refuted. If we only cage pets and animals that are known to be pets in our fortresses, then we will have other animals to feast on. We can attract the hunters to a different species and have them become a resource instead of a threat for the poultry industries. This will allow bigger and faster production rates for the industries.

I truly believe that we can make a difference in this world with these proposal statements. It won’t take a lot of effort and it certainly won’t be responded to negatively. In fact, when we get these simple matters out of the way, we can focus on other issues such as overpopulation and climate change that constantly affect our society. For once, let us take a stance for the speechless souls and make a difference in the modern world.
**Vansh Chandra**  
Age: 18, Grade: 12  
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV  
Educator: Caprice Houston-Bey  
Category: Poetry

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**Poem**

Immersing insanity grew within my veins,  
Measuring my mystery of death with my father  
This tumor tumbling inside me will end me  
Darkness and disillusionment dared and danced towards me as I hear the news  
My father, My mother, My Uncle Claudius, My Anger  
Concealing the plain that hangs off the cliff  
Oh the pain, the pain!  

Scheming for vengeance and recreance  
Oh the pain,  
To fulfill the demands of my father-  
As the pain and chaos makes me numb  
I must commit action against some  
From impending deaths to affairs  
With the intention of the end up in flares  

I shall take the life of those who turned  
Taking the corrupt out of society with a greater good.  
“Hisses” The devil inside of me as I conspire  
I must commit the wrong for the good.  
From imminent poison to abrupt duels  
To formulating vile acts of cruels  
As the scenarios grow as insanity  
Fulfilling the mission to regain my sanity  
I shall slowly and lively take the lives of my foes and enemies  
Taking the evil out of my life shall heal my conscience  
I must repent the evil inside me and around me and within society to fulfill
Injustice has been occurring for many years. It is either racial or sexist injustice when it comes to human beings. For many centuries, men have believed that they are superior to women because of their attributes and characteristics. They have obtained the misconception that women are inferior and can be used. Racial injustice is another instance of injustice that has been happening since the 1900s. White men believe that they have the right to own or dominate a black human being. They think that since they are a different race or color, they have the power to patronize them. These types of injustices are prominent throughout the novel Ragtime. A correlation is made between racism towards different races of people and sexism towards women, especially in the media. This relationship surrounds the recurring theme of injustice in the novel. Although the novel portrays these types of injustices with fictional characters, they translate to modern society as well. It shows that fiction can bring out the faults and reality of society. The novel, Ragtime, by E.L. Doctorow, portrays racism through the perspectives of African Americans and sexism through how women are treated in the media and how that relates to the overall theme of injustice.

In the novel, racism is a recurring theme. It is constantly brought up and plays a big part in the theme of injustice. The novel is set in the 1900s, which is known as the Segregation Era. This led to a lot of occurrences of racism throughout the novel. An instance of racism portraying the theme of injustice is when Father is on the boat heading towards the Arctic. The crew makes fun of the Eskimos and takes advantage of them because of what they look like and how they are brought up. Since they look inferior and are Eskimos, the crew uses them for their own advantage. The crew called them primitives and were prejudicing towards them. These unjust actions appear unfair towards the Eskimos because it is their culture that is being criticized by the white men. They were in the Arctic before them, so they shouldn’t have to be patronized. An example of this has been seen in history when the white men took over the land of the Native Americans. Since they were less advanced, they didn’t have a say against the white men and were taken advantage of. Another instance of racism in the novel is the treatment of Coalhouse Walker, a black man living in America at a time where discrimination and segregation against black people are accepted. Father thinks of Coalhouse as a man who doesn’t "act or talk like a colored man" (Doctorow 59). This shows that there is a stereotype for black people in this society. Black people are supposed to act like what the white men want them to, which is a form of racism. Even though Coalhouse stands his ground and says whatever he believes, he is still looked down upon and discriminated against by the white men because of his race. Stereotypes and racism in regard to these cases were very common in the 1900s. Since it was known as the segregation era, stereotypes and patronizing was very common towards black people. Black men were seen as objects with no skills and talent, which was unfair.

In the book, The African American Experience, the authors show the reality of racism through the perspectives of African Americans. They expand on the fact that they have talent and skills regardless of discrimination and segregation. “Many plays in the 1940s explored the ongoing effects of racism”, which shows that African Americans were affected by this era significantly (Sandra 24). They used their talents and skills to express their beliefs on racism through art and music. It showed that they are more than just people of color due to their dignity and skills. This racial injustice surrounding the fictional characters in Ragtime and modern movements contributes to the overall theme of injustice. It is an injustice where people are patronized and treated differently based on how they look and act.

Sexism is another type of injustice seen throughout the novel that correlates with racism. In the early 1900s, women began the fight for women’s suffrage and rights within society. Since men were treating women as if they were subordinate in society, it was time for a change. The book, Sexism and Race, states that “sexism and racism are equally critical in their relationship to patriarchy, which is the structures in society that empower men at the expense of women” (Harris 25). This relates to racism and sexism because African Americans have a patriarchal relationship
with white men, whereas women have a patriarchal relationship with men. In the novel, sexism is portrayed through the eyes of the media. This is similar to Marilyn Monroe in the 1900s and how she was exploited by men for money and fame. In the novel, Evelyn Nesbit, a woman beginning to get indulged by the media industry, can be seen as the most significant example of this. She was depicted as a sex symbol of beauty by the media. Since she is a female, the men believed they had the right to exploit her using the industry. Although she gained a lot of supporters and publicity, the principle of this exploitation was very corrupt and unjust. She employed her sexuality to gain prominence in a capitalistic society. Emma Goldman tells her, she is the reason a laborer "dreams not of justice but of being rich" (Doctorow 32) This is the perfect example showing that when injustice and sexism are being portrayed through the media, it can lead to bad standards. She is being used for her sexuality by men for money and fame to the point where laborers are convinced to do anything for money. In the book, *Sexism in the Media*, the authors expand on the sexist depictions of women in the media. They state that “sexism in the media has a negative impact not only on the mentality of many women in the industry but their self-worth” (Harris 101). It can lead to mental health conflicts and leave women in a bad state. The same series of events are happening to Evelyn Nesbit. She notices that exploiting her body for the media has raised her level of fame and has given her a comfortable lifestyle to the point where she is shocked as she learns about the hardships of life on the streets. She has become used to living her lavish life and doesn’t realize the reality of how society functions. This shows how corruption and sexism in the media industry can lead to long-term negative effects on society. The injustice for women in the media industry and how men believe they are patriarchal figures over women is inequitable. Women are treated as if they are secondary to men and are seen as sex symbols in society. This shows why the theme of injustice through sexism is prominent in *Ragtime* and the reason for feminist movements.

In conclusion, the theme of injustice in *Ragtime* revolved around sexism and racism. Although they might not sound the same, they correlate with each other in many ways. African Americans are seen as inferior to white men and are discriminated against for their color and race, whereas women are taken advantage of for their sexuality and beauty by men. This corruption throughout the 1900s is very evident in the novel. The racism through the perspectives of African Americans and sexism through the treatment of women in the media summarizes the overall theme of injustice and how a corrupted society can succumb to it.
Growth is key for people. It means accepting your faults and learning from your mistakes. It means looking inside yourself and finding what lies within. If you can gaze into the mirror and love who you see in it, you can accomplish anything. You have to overcome your insecurities, then embrace the person you dream to be. Yes, it will be difficult. Yes, it will be heart-wrenching. But, it will be beautiful! Meaningful change in your life does not mean you modify the core of who you are. Rather, it allows you to refine who you are, and polish the rough edges of your being. Therefore, learn to love who you are, while also growing to become the person you know yourself to be. That will lead to a much happier you.
Being unwilling to alter your views locks you into your manners and makes it impossible to learn from your mistakes. How can you hope to accept the world around you, if you refuse to acknowledge that there are a variety of cultures and people that have very different beliefs than you? You must be willing to keep an open mind, in order to unlock your true sense of self.
Puberty

Help! I’m very awkward
Help! Girls are very scary
Help! Is that a pimple there?
Help!

Before this strange transition in my life occurred
My childhood went by in a serene blissful blur
However now the world seems very different
This situation is causing me great discontent

Is there any way to make this end?
Some simple way to get around this bend?
Literally anything would be a godsend!
Can someone please, please help me?

And now I see them in a very different way
Girls are so confusing and I don’t know what to say
When they come near my brain starts to shut down
I don’t want to embarrass myself and look like a clown

Is there any way to make this end?
Some simple way to get around this bend?
Literally anything would be a godsend!
Can someone please, please help me?

Before this strange transition in my life occurred
My childhood went by in a serene blissful blur
However now the world seems very different
This situation is causing me great discontent

Is there any way to make this end?
Some simple way to get around this bend?
Literally anything would be a godsend!
Can someone please, please help me?
Obedience and Vengeance: Catastrophic Repercussions

A number of readers believe that Hamlet’s five-part plot structure advances through the character of the ghost and the difficulties his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters generally better reveals the calamitous effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance.

Hamlet and Claudius are one pair of characters that foil each other to emphasize Hamlet’s resentment and need for revenge. These two characters throughout the play are put against each other, as Hamlet is the protagonist and Claudius the antagonist. This forces the reader to observe the highlighted differences in the characters. Hamlet is portrayed as a contemplative and passionate character, with much deeper feelings than many people realize. He affirms this when he says, “I have that within which passeth show” (Shakespeare 1.2.85). This quote conveys that Hamlet tends to lead with his emotions, not with his mind. His use of emotions eventually develops into an unquenchable thirst for revenge. This is in great contrast with Claudius, who uses his conniving nature to elevate himself socially and politically. This is the biggest difference between the two characters and is a defining characteristic for both of them. It makes Hamlet the protagonist and Claudius the antagonist.

Ophelia and Gertrude are another pair of characters that foil each other; however, they accentuate Ophelia’s obedience and Gertrude’s dependence on the men in her life. These two characters are often compared, as they are the only two female characters in the play. Gertrude is first introduced as Hamlet’s mother and the queen. She speaks her mind when conversing with the other characters; however, she does not overstep her boundaries, and often tries to maintain a strong relationship with all of the male characters in her life. Ophelia, in contrast, often submits to the will of the men in her life. This becomes clear when her father, Polonius, tells her to stop seeing Hamlet and she responds by saying “I shall obey, my Lord” (Shakespeare 1.3.85). These two characters show the reader that during this time period, a respectable lady is obedient.

At the climax of Hamlet’s character, there is a significant shift in his character that leads him to seek revenge on Claudius. Before the climax, Hamlet is thoughtful and contemplative, but after the climax, he begins to be more impulsive and angry. This change in behavior is shown abruptly—when Hamlet kills Polonius. Thus begins Hamlet’s descent into deep hatred for Claudius and an obsession for vengeance. His revenge consumes him, and all of his actions are geared towards it. After killing Polonius, Hamlet shows no remorse, and justifies his actions by telling Gertrude it was “a bloody deed? Almost as good...as kill a king and marry with his brother” (Shakespeare 3.2.29-30). This type of animosity can only lead to violence.

Claudius, in contradiction to Hamlet, begins to feel remorse for the things he has done in the past and becomes paranoid about Hamlet’s intentions. Prior to the climax, Claudius is conniving, confident, and unapologetic. He continues to act in a self-preserving manner, while manipulating others to do his bidding. Then, Hamlet brings in a troupe of actors to present a play that resembles the bloody deeds he has done. This prompts Claudius to question his deeds and the morality behind them. He realizes that “[his] offense is so rank. It smells to heaven” (Shakespeare 3.3.38). His discovery makes him question his own morality, and eventually “[his] guilt defeats [his] strong intent” (Shakespeare 3.3.41). While this is major character deployment for Claudius, he still continues to act in his own self interests.

One of the biggest lessons learned in this play comes from Ophelia’s journey from obedience and innocence to disillusionment, hopelessness, and madness. Her character shift occurs after her father is killed by Hamlet. A parent dying can cause any person to change their perspective on the world—this definitely happened for Hamlet—but due to the nature of Ophelia and Polonius’ relationship, it is no surprise that she responded in the way she did. Ophelia relied on the men in her life, specifically her father, to guide her life and her choices. When her main source of stability was ripped away from her—by her lover no less—her character takes a dramatic turn for the worse. She begins to realize the world for what it is, while simultaneously dealing with the loss of her father. She becomes disillusioned by the men in her life and states “young men will do ‘t, if they come to ‘t. By Cock they are to blame”
(Shakespeare 4.5.41-42). She realizes that men will do whatever is best for themselves, which leads her to discover that her obedience and loyalty have been misplaced.

In contrast to Ophelia’s revelation, Gertrude does not learn about the nature of men, but rather that she should not have given them as much power of herself as she did. Gertrude often appears as the voice of reason throughout the story—mainly because many of the other characters have become lost in their own problems. She is often the mediator between Hamlet and Claudius, and does so to keep the peace between the two most important people in her life. After Hamlet kills Polonius, he disrupts the balance in Gertrude’s life and “[clefths her] heart in twain” (3.4.157). She recognizes that her need to ensure congeniality in her family has led to heart break, and may likely lead to more in her future.

While Claudius and Hamlet have completely different journey’s in the story, they reach a common resolution in the end. Claudius, being paranoid, begins to plot against Hamlet, and eventually tells him that if he duels Laertes and wins, he can drink for a cup with a gem in it that actually contains poison. Hamlet agrees, but after the duel does not take a drink from the cup. Gertrude does. Claudius is too late to say no and says in distraught “it is the poisoned cup; it is too late (Shakespeare 5.2.235). Hamlet then discovers that Laertes’ sword is poisoned, so both Hamlet and Laertes will soon die. In a last attempt to exact revenge, Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword, and they both die soon after. In the end, the characters came to the realization that vengeance can only lead to one outcome: death.

Gertrude and Ophelia learn a similar lesson in their resolution, regarding obedience to the men in their lives. Ophelia, after turning hopeless and mad, dies after falling into the river when climbing a tree. This unfortunate end was brought about from her obedient and passive nature to the authority figures in her life. If she had learned to stand up for herself and speak her own mind, she would not have been so crushed by her father dying at Hamlet’s hand. Ophelia would have been distraught, but would not have been as overwhelmed, as she would have understood the true nature of men. Gertrude’s demise was brought upon her by her dependence on Hamlet and Claudius. Up until her very last moments, she tries to be the middleman between Claudius and Hamlet. This is seen when she says this to Hamlet right before she drinks the poisoned cup: “the queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet” (Shakespeare 5.2.282). She tries to play to both sides, and ends up the loser in this situation. She would not challenge either of the men in her life, and that ultimately led to her death.

While many readers assume that the king’s commands to Hamlet push the story along, it is actually the foiling of the different characters that lead to a lesson on obedience and vengeance. These characters have a fatal flaw—either vengeance or obedience—that was highlighted by the other characters, to show the audience that an over abundance of obedience and vengeance, while very different, will ultimately lead to the same outcome: suffering and death.
The Art of Time Management

Time management is the key to success; a phrase that is often said, but not followed. For a long time, I was blissfully unaware of its importance. There was minimal homework throughout elementary and middle school, my parents made sure that I did everything on time, and they got me places on time. That all changed when I hit high school—specifically my sophomore year. My lack of discipline and time management skills led to all-nighters and slipping grades. I knew that I had to figure out a way to change my habits and fast. Luckily, we had an English project coming up that required each student to do something everyday for three weeks, and by doing so establishing a habit. I knew this was my chance to not only receive a good grade, but also to fix the problems I had brought upon myself. With this in mind, I chose my topic: organization and time management. I would be able to reorganize my school work and life, while also forcing myself to do so efficiently.

The first step in this endeavor was to create a planner that worked for me. I researched all of the different types of journals, layouts, pens, and much more. I had no idea that planning could be so extensive! I finally settled on the bullet journal, as it allowed me to be creative by using colorful pens and creating my own outlines, while also keeping all of my tasks in an organized fashion. By doing this, I was able to categorize my schedule. I actually found that I had more free time when I did the tasks in an orderly fashion. This made me realize how much time I had been wasting when I put things off until the last minute.

Now that my time was organized, I needed to organize my school work and life. I bought binders, sticky notes, dividers, and other organizational tools and I rewrote some of my notes in an orderly and accessible manner. This made such a difference in my school life, as I not only began to boost my grades, but I was not as stressed because I knew where to find my assignments and notes. I also rearranged and cleaned out my closet and bathroom. This allowed me to be less stressed in the morning, as I knew where everything was.

Those little things I did made a huge difference in my day-to-day life! I was less stressed, I got more sleep, and I was more organized. I came to the realization that the changes I had made would allow me to be self-sufficient in college and beyond; however, my journey from time management is far from over, as life continues to change in different ways. With the changes in my daily schedule due to Covid-19, I had to adjust my planning, school work, and motivation. The lessons I learned in the project have enabled me to remain proactive during the current pandemic, ensuring that I stay successful and motivated during these difficult times.
My Juliet

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.”

Standing twelve feet above the stage, on a wooden balcony I helped build, the famous words floated out into the ether as if they were my own. I was not merely delivering lines, not simply relaying a familiar story. Just two years older than the fictional Shakespearean character, I knew Juliet, and she knew me. As any actor does, I put myself in the character’s proverbial shoes, even though I was initially an understudy and only played Juliet for one show. Digging deeper into Juliet’s motivations and character through not only her words but her circumstances, she came alive. That’s when I really got to know Juliet.

Great conversations are always ripe with questions. And so I asked her: Are you as weak and innocent as you’re perceived? Your words, not Romeo’s, were the first to broach the topic of marriage. The object of your desire became yours: Romeo. But why did you want him so badly? Was it really him? Or was another end your goal? Ironically, it was in consulting another character that I gained deeper insight into the real Juliet. I’d also been tasked to play Lady Capulet in two remaining shows in the event of a cast member’s absence. From a mother’s perspective, many of my questions were revealed.

Context is everything. And, Lady Capulet’s was critical to understanding her behavior: a woman of stature whose power was derived from a man. Recognizing this, Lady Capulet’s “love” for her daughter manifested in her insistence that Juliet marry well, providing her the same comforts Lady Capulet herself had enjoyed. Enter, Paris. Moreover, Lady Capulet’s emotional relationship with Juliet was limited; the Nurse physically raised the young girl. This revelation forced me to look at their relationship in a new way. Again, I aimed for context. A young woman’s heart, as I well knew, is an unfettered agent. Coupled with a teenager’s limited long term perspective (thank you, underdeveloped frontal lobe), the relationship between the mother and daughter was strained. Each desired what was “best” for Juliet, yet their divergent definitions of “best” were never discussed. Such miscommunication and situational confines ultimately led to death.

Barack Obama said, “Learning to stand in somebody else’s shoes, to see through their eyes, that’s how peace begins. Empathy is a quality of character that can change the world.” Ultimately, understanding Juliet and Lady Capulet built my awareness of how empathy fuels my own ability to influence others positively. As an academic tutor for my peers and younger students, I set aside my personal perspective of ease with the material. Instead, I view the content through struggling eyes. Creating new ways of thinking about Algebra concepts or explaining how to balance a chemical equation through analogy and metaphor expands my empathy and my mind. As a babysitter, I listen to the needs of both parents and children, building a joint experience from there that is sensitive and enjoyable to everyone.

Looking into my future, I aim to harness empathy to propel me, as Obama said, to change the world. Interested in medicine, I’m drawn to specializing in Pediatrics. Parents love their children unconditionally, which can understandably cause them to become defensive and controlling. I’ll employ patience, taking into account parental stress as well as the child’s well being. As someone equally drawn to Biomedical Engineering, I know that empathy is the foundation to building limbs and devices that improve bodily function. The capacity to put myself in the inner life of another person is the first piece of critical thinking necessary to building effective medical equipment.

No matter where my life path takes me, I’ll always use empathy as my guide. That, and my friendship with Juliet. Our unconventional connection incited in me a great wisdom, beyond our years, transcending time.
Madeline Chatham
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Humor

Striving for Change

“To be, or not to be, that is the question” (Shakespeare 3.1.8). Do I, Claudius, King of Denmark, choose to be the man I am, or do I let myself grow into a better person? A person who does not scheme to kill my brother and send my nephew off to school in England? A person who realizes his mistakes and learns from his self-preserving ways? A king who rules not entirely with fear? I believe I should grow into a better person for my wife, my stepson/nephew, my country, and—most importantly—myself. It has taken a great deal for me to come to this realization.

It all started when my nephew came home from school, and got it into his head that I killed his father, my brother, to become King. What kind of cruel (and brilliant) person would ever do that? He decided to set up a play that was extremely similar to a situation that I had been involved in. Seeing it play out in front of me forced me to view this situation in a completely different perspective. That little skit made me realize: was it wrong to kill one’s own brother for power? Is self-preservation really not the most important thing in this world?

It spurred in me a great feeling of guilt, for “my stronger guilt defeats my strong intent” (Shakespeare 3.3.40). I killed my own brother for power (though it was never proven), and didn’t even blink. What does that say about my character? I’ll tell you what! It means that I have no compassion for others and only think about myself—which is not necessarily a bad thing. But, I might have been too self-absorbed (only a little). Since then, I have been striving to change my ways—albeit slowly—and create peace. Do I still let my temper get the best of me at times? Yes. Have I convinced my nephew to fight his friend resulting in both of their deaths? Maybe. But what matters is that I am trying. I have had much character growth, and I believe I can continue to grow exponentially in the next few years. I have been seeing such meaningful personal change in my life, and I can see a much brighter future.

I have expanded my horizons, while also highlighting the amazing qualities I already possess. I am very intelligent and cunning, as I have schemed for years with great success. I am the proud leader of the great nation of Denmark. I am a loving husband to my beautiful wife and ex-sister-in-law. But most importantly, I am proudly myself and do not pretend to be someone I am not (except for when a plot calls for it).

I believe that my leadership skills as King of Denmark, my immense personal growth, and my new found empathy for others makes me a great candidate for Georgetown University and its diverse community. Your mission is to develop life-long learners, active members in civic life, and community leaders. I believe that I mark all of that criteria and more, making me an ideal candidate for your prestigious university.
The Perfect Omelette

To make an omelette, you have to break some eggs. Never has this phrase rung more true than within the confines of my seemingly “shell-tered” life.

“Thanks bro” said my twin brother. I handed him the omelette that took me many years and countless broken eggs to perfect. Eight eggs, tomatoes, bell peppers, onions, cheese, ham, and a splash of milk made the perfect recipe for a family of four on Sunday mornings. Watching my family eat is a simple pleasure—a moment of contented pride for a job well done.

Growing up, I’ve always struggled to find moments like Sunday morning—moments of simple gratification for the hard work I’ve put in. Whether it be an important victory in soccer or an “A” on a difficult exam after hours of study, there never seemed to be any real validation - there always seemed to be someone better than me, and I could never feel a sense of accomplishment.

High school has been full of broken eggs, but not too many omelettes. While I still did my best in my responsibilities, I didn’t find much joy in them: math class—typically a place of refuge from the stress of my school day became nothing more than routine convention; soccer—the sport I had played since childhood was at best a form of joyless exercise.

During my junior year, my academic path forced me to make important decisions about the manner in which I live my life. I clearly hadn’t found the right mix of ingredients in an attempt to balance my character and responsibilities, and I needed to make a change.

In my AP Calculus class, Ms. Block prodded students to go to the front board and explain the most difficult problems to the class. Ms. Block intensely scanned the room, looking for her next victim. Why not me? I half-heartedly raised my hand, subconsciously hoping she wouldn’t choose me.

“Jaylen,” she said. “Let’s see what you know.”

I slowly approached the board, regretting my decision as I began explaining how to derive “\(\tan^2(\sin(5x))\)”.

I meticulously wrote down each step, clutching the expo marker with my sweaty palms while narrating my thought process aloud. “Take the derivative of the outside first, starting with the square…”

The heat in this 70° classroom was astronomical. Hoping for a small break, I quickly glanced at my classmates. Every single person was writing down each step with satisfied faces as they took in all of this information. I’ve never felt more relieved knowing that I was actually helping my classmates.

“Don’t forget to derive 5x,” I said, finishing the last step.

My classmates applauded as I was overcome with self-pride, a crucial new ingredient to my recipe.

With each new endeavor, I tried this new recipe—as a member of the Medical Society and Matthew 25 Board, I was thrust into leadership roles, making decisions regarding community involvement and the allocation of thousands of dollars to charities. I was initially intimidated by such responsibilities and some of the very same insecurities I had
previously experienced seemed to linger. But in the end, I was confident that duty must triumph over inhibition. The depth of my role in the bigger picture would never prevail over the impact I make. And with each new decision I helped make, the final recipe for a life of contented service began to take shape.

The last and most important ingredient of my recipe was a purpose outside of mere knowledge and accomplishment. Self-gratification is a selfish joy that’s fleeting at best; it shatters like an egg in your hand when grasping it too tightly. The ability to take what you’ve accomplished and use it to transform the lives of others in a positive manner is both an honor and obligation. After all, what good is it to construct the perfect Sunday morning omelette without anyone to share it with in the end?
The Art of Foils in Hamlet

Some readers view that Hamlet's plot's five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his role evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare's paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to the vengeance of a loved one in their lives through Ophelia and Gertrude, as well as Hamlet and Claudius's first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution.

The first foil pair, Ophelia and Gertrude, is introduced in Act I-II of Hamlet. From a surface-level perspective of Shakespeare's introduction of Ophelia, these characters are outwardly similar: both of them are held by love, Ophelia with Hamlet and Gertrude with Claudius, and they are both women, which is important in the context of this time period when females were restricted by men and viewed as a trophy. However, a key difference between these characters is that Ophelia initially abides by her brother's wishes and keeps their wishes, to no pursue her love for Hamlet, as a "watchman to [her] heart" (Shakespeare 1.3.38). Although she seems to question his brother and father's requests, she still stays loyal to her. Shakespeare creates a tone of positivity with this cone when it comes to obedience. Gertrude, on the other hand, is unloyal to her son and the former dead husband in her marriage to Claudius. It is quite obvious that Shakespeare is starting to convey the value of obedience and its purpose to women, which will later unfold as the characters develop more throughout the climax and resolution.

The second foil pair, Hamlet and Laertes, is also established in Hamlet. These characters a major death in their families which stir a magnitude of emotions within them as they both seek vengeance. The ghost announces that Hamlet's uncle Claudius has killed him and that he must "revenge his foul" (Shakespeare 1.5.104). Shakespeare demons a spark that ignites into full-fledged anger within Hamlet. The vengeance in his heart is unmatched. Until Laertes' father Polonius is murdered by Hamlet. When Laertes finds out, he instantly becomes hostile and he swears on his life that he will "be revenged" (Shakespeare 4.1.21). Laertes has a very similar sense of vengeance in his heart as Hamlet, as both scenes have a very similar tone. This tone that Shakespeare uses with both of these characters brings out negativity within each character as he associates this with reprisal. But it is the way in which they go about their revenge that separates these characters into completely different complex characters: Hamlet, on one hand, is very strategic and patient while Laertes, on the other hand, does not hold back and takes immediate action. Shakespeare, through creating a foil between Hamlet and Laertes, establishes a firm backbone to create a coherent message on the societal effects of vengeance as the stories of each character unfold through the climax and resolution.

The climax of Gertrude undoubtedly conveys a lesson on the significance of obedience, especially of women in society during this time period. It is during Act 3 where Gertrude's character arc in hamlet peaked, which happens to align perfectly with the climax of the overall play. But specifically for Gertrude, her climax is when her son, Hamlet, aggressively confronted her about the manner in which she lives her life after the death of the preceding king of Denmark. Hamlet pleads to Gertrude that "you are my mother", almost like she forgot the role she plays in his life (Shakespeare 3.3.115). What Shakespeare conveys through Hamlet's powerful line speaks volumes on the effects that obedience has on the family dynamics, as exemplified by Hamlet's behavioral patterns throughout the play. Obedience plays a positive influential role in the families. Some may speculate that Hamlet's vengeance stems from not only Claudius murdering his father, but also his mother disregarding her past marriage. The atmosphere of immense tension that Shakespeare creates is astronomical, as readers can easily see where Gertrude's true loyalty lies: lust over family, which is embodied when she later tells Claudius of the events that just took place. Overall, the climax of Gertrude teaches the readers how obedience, or the lack thereof, can lead to the demise of familial values,
ultimately influencing the lives of posterity.

The climax of Ophelia and the lesson that Shakespeare reveals can easily be intertwined with that of Gertrude. First of all, Ophelia’s climax occurs in Act 4 scene 4 when she enters the setting after learning of the tragedy of her father, Polonius. She can be perceived as “importunate, [and] indeed distract” as mentioned by Horatio (Shakespeare 4.1.9). The other characters are warned of Ophelia’s mental state and her derangement as they simply assume she is just grieving from the death of her father. But this supposed insanity that Ophelia projects from a source deeper than her father’s death. The audience can immediately sense a connotation of negativity from her obedience, which is originally positive in the introduction of the foil. She alludes to her longing for Hamlet during this scene as she sings the fact that she cannot distinguish her “true love” from “another one” (Shakespeare 4.1.10). It is clearer from her outburst that Ophelia made some sort of connection between the death of her father with Hamlet’s recognizable impulsion: she knows that Hamlet murdered Polonius. When she recognizes this, she goes insane because, throughout the play, she is following the orders of her brother and father, but she is also so driven by her love for Hamlet that she is constantly at a crossroad. She is truly dependent on the livelihood of other men. When Ophelia learns of this, she becomes insane and cannot truly function on her own. Her overwhelming amount of obedience that she has to the men in her life is what ultimately causes her downfall, not just her father’s death. Shakespeare highlights the patriarchal society that women live in, and he epitomizes this through the self-destructive behavior that he puts on Ophelia from the aftermath of Polonius’s tragic death. The lesson Shakespeare conveys through Ophelia’s climax is that the over-dependence and obedience to men will cause a women’s own demise.

Moreover, the climax of Hamlet reveals how vengeance can really take over someone’s life and cause exponential harm to those around them. In Hamlet’s scheme to avenge his father’s death in Gertrude’s chamber kills Polonius, Laertes’ father, who Hamlet mistakes for Claudius. But the enthralling part about this entire scene is that Hamlet feels absolutely no remorse for Polonius, and he simply states that this is not nearly as bad as “kill a king and marry with his brother” when Gertrude questioned this act (Shakespeare 3.3.120). Gertrude’s response to his act of murder speaks volumes about how this vengeance is fatally affecting him. His blatant disregard for human life just for his own selfish needs is molding him into the character that he despises so much: Claudius. Hypocrisy at its finest. Shakespeare portrays a major lesson on how vengeance can alter someone’s moral integrity and completely change the original goals of a person.

The climax of Hamlet’s foil, Laertes, also expresses a lesson on vengeance and its danger to humanity. During his sister’s funeral, Laertes and Hamlet get into a physical altercation in the grave where Ophelia lays, and Laertes yells out to Hamlet that the “devil take thy soul” (Shakespeare 5.1.240). The vengeance that is deep-rooted into Laertes’ heart completely causes him to throw complete disrespect to his sister, who claimed that he loves her just moments ago. Laertes, who originally had a soft spot for his sister, creates profound hypocrisy within himself as he literally steps on her grave. Vengeance, as Shakespeare illustrates through the climax of Laertes’ storyline, can cause one to forget and abandon their values that were once true to their hearts.

Of course, since Hamlet is considered a tragedy, the resolution of both Gertrude and Ophelia is their deaths. When describing Ophelia’s death, Shakespeare uses very vivid imagery to paint a clear picture of her, depicting “crow-flowers, nettles, daisies and long purples” all around her deceased body (Shakespeare 4.1.51). The flowers, which in nature are very fragile and their petals can easily fall off, truly represent the outcome of how Ophelia lived her life. She is constantly submitting to the men in her life: following her father and brother’s orders and being obsessed with Hamlet. This causes such a vulnerability in herself because she lacks a solidified independence and her own true freedom, which can cause a slip at any moment in time. Comparably, Gertrude’s death is suicide as well. But what differs between these two characters is that Gertrude seems to shift her support and attention to Hamlet as she “carouses to [his] fortune” before drinking the poison (Shakespeare 5.2.74). What seems like the onset of a redemptive story arc for Gertrude is indeed her lack of obedience to a single force. After multiple instances of the motif of claiming to support either Hamlet or Claudius, she does it again right before her death. She simply lacks stability in where her loyalty lies, and she is unable to control this, which then is personified through her death. Shakespeare exhibits the role in which women play in their current society through Gertrude and Ophelia, and that they respectively lack or contain too much obedience to their counterparts. A perfect balance between dependence and freedom in people’s lives needs to be achieved.

Similar to Gertrude and Ophelia, Hamlet and Laertes both have a resolution that ends in their deaths. In their duel, after they both poison each other with the swords, Laertes tells Hamlet that “the king’s to blame” as he begins to lose his breath (Shakespeare 5.3.80). This is ironic because the vengeance that they originally conceived of leads
them to murder each other, even though their common enemy is the king. The negative effects that vengeance has on how Laertes and Hamlet perceive their surroundings in that they are blinded by their own ignorance and anger. The resolution of the foil between Hamlet and Laertes creates a lesson on how revenge can often turn people against each other, despite having a common goal.

William Shakespeare, in his play *Hamlet*, uses paired characters and foils them together to emphasize the meaning of obedience and revenge. Through the pairings of Ophelia and Gertrude, and Hamlet and Laertes, the audience learns how important a healthy balance of obedience with independence, as well as how self-destructive vengeance is and how it turns individuals against themselves.
The Inferno and the Meaning of Punishment

Hell has been a significant concept in society ever since the dawn of religion. From the pagans to the Christians, hell was considered a form of the afterlife used to instill fear into its people to create a moral high ground. Most often, hell is referred to as a spiritual place of eternal suffering and torture for the sinners of the world. However, there is not a set and stone notion of what hell really is. One interpretation of hell specifically was made by Dante Alighieri in *Inferno*, which is part of his epic poem *The Divine Comedy*. His idea of hell consisted of nine distinct rings, each representing a different sin, such as lust or gluttony. In *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri, the punishment for Virgil, Dido, and Count Ugolino is both just and symbolic because of the sinful lifestyles and the magnitude of their sins that each character held upon them.

Alighieri created a punishment that is both emblematic and equitable of Virgil. While Virgil’s life is portrayed as a seemingly good and virtuous person in *Inferno*, he is still stuck in hell. Virgil was known as one of, if not the greatest poet in all of ancient Rome. He never truly commits any serious acts of evil against anyone except to God: paganism. This paganism, or the practicing of a nonchristian and polytheistic religion, serves as a true justification for his place in hell. Virgil was living a life of blasphemy, which is a complete rejection of God. He is never able to devote his life to God because of the culture lives in. Nevertheless, Virgil still never commits a serious sin over another human life, making his punishment less harsh. He only practices what the common religion was “in Rome under Augustus in the noon of the false and lying gods” (Alighieri), before the emergence of Christianity in society. Therefore, his punishment is symbolic of the severity of his sin being that he resides in the first circle of hell called Limbo, representing unbaptized and virtuous pagans. So, Virgil receives a punishment that serves as a representation and rationale for his pagan life.

Furthermore, the punishment that Dido received was both illustrative and equitable. Dido’s punishment in hell is justified through her act of love, putting her in circle two of hell called Hell Proper. During her life, she was the queen and founder of Carthage, married to her husband Sichaeus. However, he was absent from her life, depriving her of an organic source of love and affection. To cope with this, Dido fell in love with Aeneas. This relationship did not work out and Aeneas left her, causing her to kill herself. She could not handle living in this world without love. Love causes suicide. Although it seems that her suicide should place her into the seventh ring of hell, which represents violence against others or yourself, she was only placed into the second ring of hell. Her punishment is undoubtedly symbolic of her intention and reasoning behind her act of suicide, not the act itself. Clearly, his punishment was both allegorical and impartial.

Moreover, Count Ugolino was given a punishment that was both figurative and parabolic. His punishment is justified through his treacherous betrayal of the city of Pisa. He was put into the ninth and last ring of hell. His punishment is only being able to Archbishop Ruggieri for the rest of eternity. Alighieri connected the emotions of the readers to the death of Ugolino. Count Ugolino was put in “the coop of stone now called the Tower of Hunger” where he would be imprisoned along with his four children without any basic necessities including food and water (Alighieri). By describing in detail the starvation of Ugolino and his four children, the audience feels pity for Ugolino. This draws away from the fact that he still commits a grave act of treachery against his city, which affects a mass amount of people, instead of a few. His punishment of eating the head of Archbishop Ruggieri in the ninth ring of hell representing violence is symbolic of his action against a government and its people. Undoubtedly, Count Ugolino undergoes a punishment that is metaphorical and aloof.

The punishments of Vigil, Dido, and Count Ugolino in *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri is just and symbolic through the
severity and impact of the sin. Each of the characters was put into a certain ring of the cell which represents the type of sin they committed. Still, Dante Aligheri’s interpretation of hell is one of many. Even today, there are interpretations made of hell through television, like NBC’s sitcom The Good Place. This show presents their interpretation of hell through quirky characters with a dynamic plotline. One character, Chidi, is punished for being indecisive, causing debates on the justification and symbolism of his punishment, while showing a unique outlook on modern morality. Distinctly, Hell is undeniably a topic that, to this day, still receives analysis whether it be through literature or entertainment.
Modern Activism Satire

Modern Activism Parody of "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You"

Racism
Ceased when white women
Posted black squares on their Instagram
They’ve become
Harriet Tubman
And MLK when in Birmingham

White girls they cancelled
(A) kids show and syrup
Who’s the next scandal
Twitter will eat them up

“B.L.M.”
“Anyway acab”
Hooray, yay for modern activism

White girls they cancelled
(A) kids show and syrup
Who’s the next scandal
Twitter will eat them up

“B.L.M.”
“Anyway acab”
Hooray, yay for modern activism
Hooray, yay for modern activism
A Falling of the Mind

Double-Sided Arrow of the Helpless

You
must
be brave,
you must persist.
Do not let it take over.
But
the
past
will
never
be
erased.
The
demons
will
take
over.
Even so, it is far too late.
You can not escape,
let the memories
swallow
you.

Tree of Forgiveness

The pain
the trauma, the scars left behind
won’t be forgotten, but will be forgiven.
We are all just growing, imperfect humans.
Let this be a new beginning for all that lies ahead,
and heal the wounds between each other.
A new
profound
bond
stronger
than
ever
will
never
be
broken.
This
relationship
is rooted in mistakes,
But sprouts a new Everlasting grace.
Claudius' Personal Statement

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? (500-650 words)

To be or not to be said my arch-rival Hamlet (Shakespeare), whose words of apparent “wisdom” have become an iconic line ingrained into the brains of the ignorant who choose to side with the most manipulative individual in my life.

It all started when Hamlet tried to seize my power and usurp my well-deserved throne, but more importantly, tried to steal the most beautiful woman in my life: Queen Gertrude. She was the girl of my dreams that I couldn’t lose to a man who is jealous that I was able to be the light in her life when she needed it most.

I was simply a man with many hopes and dreams of trying to make Denmark the best home for its people, but Hamlet was filled with much rage and emotion, and vengeance got the best of him, and it almost got that best of me too…

When I found out what Hamlet did to my so beloved companion Polonius, I did not know what to do. I was so angry and distraught at the news of Hamlet’s horrible act against humanity and the rage that filled me was beyond astronomical. I was ready to strike back and get justice for my poor friend. I could barely contain myself as I was ready to confront Hamlet right then and there.

I was ready to go attack Hamlet, but when I heard the details of Polonius’ death, something inside of me just switched off. Hamlet apparently had full intentions of killing me, but when he heard Polonius in the room, thinking that it was myself, he had no control over himself and instantly killed Polonius with no a single drop of remorse. I realized that I was rapidly and unintentionally metamorphosing into the murderer Hamlet that killed my friend. I could not let my emotions get the best of me as it did to Hamlet.

The suppression of my emotions was simply what was best, for now, I needed the stay composed, and instead of letting revenge control every single one of my actions, I had to rethink everything. The person who needed me most was Polonius’ son Laertes. Instead of chasing after Hamlet, I settled and became the support system that Laertes so needed in his life right now.

This catastrophic event caused a rollercoaster of emotions, but in the end, I stayed calm and became a rational person. I was the bigger person. Such an event caused me to rethink the manner in which I will live the rest of my life. I have learned that vengeance is never the answer to anything, for it can easily cost any human life at any moment of a given time, as we can see through Hamlet’s unruly behavior. I, myself, will always pick and choose my battles, and I won’t let my emotions get in the way of that in any sort of circumstance. This profound calmness that I have discovered will stick with me in every single one of my journeys.
A Pardoner’s Ambitions

I am constantly asked what I am passionate about, but the answer is not quite as clear as some may expect. To a distant observer it may seem as though I am a simple pardoner—freeing people from the burden of their sins—but there is more to my story than what is visible from the surface. I am also a businessman, a storyteller, and a world traveler.

From a young age, my main goal was “to have money, wool and cheese and wheat” (Chaucer 26). However, these desires were futile without a viable means to obtain them. Throughout my journey toward building a successful business, I found it crucial to understand my clientele and their needs. After looking around and taking some notes, I realized that the answer was right under my nose. Holy relics “Given me by the Pope” (Chaucer 294), as I am constantly surrounded by those who wish for forgiveness after they have sinned. Some may say that my actions are immoral and exploit the vulnerable, but I would caution them from assuming that this is all I do. “Though I am a wholly vicious man Don’t think I can’t tell moral tales” (Chaucer 37-8). After all, my customers deserve an explanation as to why my relics are authentic.

My intentions may be immoral, but my stories have the power to move people. My business offers more than false relics; I offer hope. Through my stories and preaching, I allow the people to have confidence in my relics. I have often been described as having a “honey-tongue” (Chaucer 732), as some people are drawn to tears after listening to my tales. It is crucial for a business to have the trust of their customers, and for me, trust is gained through my stories preaching ethics and morality. My audience will believe what they want to hear, and oftentimes my stories offer comfort and reassurance. I once was compensated by “the poorest lad” (Chaucer 27) and the “poorest village widow, though she had A string of starving children, all agape” (Chaucer 28-29). My stories have the power to move people, which has allowed me to create the life that I deserve. I can provide for my own comforts and amenities, and at the end of the day, what more is needed to lead a fulfilling life of luxury, comfort, and traveling.

My travels have mainly been for business, but nonetheless, I am a worldly man. I have traveled by foot across many lands, but nothing fulfills the longing my soul like a trip to Rome. Oftentimes, I return home with a “Brimful of pardons” (Chaucer 707), from the Pope himself. It can be exhausting to haul these pardons with me during my travels, but my dedication knows no bounds. My customers

At the end of the day, the question of what I do can not be answered explicitly. I am not simply a pardoner as many may believe. There are layers to my story that can not be encapsulated in words. However, above everything, I am dedicated to my work, my stories, and my travels. As I continue on my educational journey, I hope to foster these passions, and expand my business as I grow as an individual.

Works Cited
Shaelin Chong
Age: 18, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Caprice Houston-Bey
Category: Poetry

Closer to Maddness

In the winter alone she sat
Conflict occupying her mind like an unwelcome guest.
Thoughts screamed as they struggled
For a spot in her disorganized mind. To listen to her father,
Or to search for the whispers crying to be heard.

Constantly chastised for chasing clues in the wind;
Pulled from both sides, torn limb from limb.
Driven, down, down, down
Closer and closer to madness.

And as the painted sky blends from night to day and the seasons change,
Ophelia finds the strength within her to stand
Against Hamlet in the audience, as he drives her
Closer and closer to madness.

Like a brush with drying bristles, she meets her end.
The lines left on the page dulling closer to death, yet the brush paints
With broader strokes to show what taints
The room of thrones.

The crown continues to flaunt in fear
Knowing that his end is near.
Fate, did you even have to try,
When you let Ophelia drown and die.

Alas, the thud of her heart seized in order for her to start her life.
One of autonomy where she is the queen of her own kingdom.

Works Cited
Hamlet's Fall from Sanity

The death of a parent is difficult for everyone, but Hamlet is left to wonder why he is the only one who seems to be mourning the death of King Hamlet, his father and beloved king of Elsinore. While the true cause of King Hamlet’s death is revealed later on in the play, Hamlet expresses his frustration and sorrow in a soliloquy as he attempts to process the events and changes around him. In Shakespeare’s play, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, metaphors and allusions to Greek mythology are utilized throughout Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 2 to illustrate his clear state of impassioned and all-consuming distress.

Shakespeare utilizes metaphors throughout Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 2 in order to create a vivid image of the emotions that he is forced to face, and foreshadow the future. For example, Hamlet compares himself to “an unweeded garden That grows to seed” (1.2.139-140). Hamlet feels as though he is the only person mourning the death of his father, which leaves him feeling isolated as his mental well-being continues to deteriorate. Furthermore, he goes on to say that “Things rank and gross in nature Possess it merely” (1.2.140-141). By using decay imagery within the metaphor of the garden, Shakespeare foreshadows that the deep pain felt by Hamlet will cause him to be overcome by “rank” thoughts and actions that will supersede his own sanity as he learns more about the true cause of his father’s death throughout the story. Shakespeare also uses a metaphor to illustrate how Hamlet feels about her marriage to his uncle, writing that “she would hang on him, As if increase of appetite had grown By what it fed on” (1.2.147-148). Hamlet feels as though Gertrude’s “love” of Claudius is more of a dependence after the death of her husband, and references the motif of women being the root of all evil. Since food is an essential for life, comparing his mother’s desire to an appetite implies that Hamlet feels as though Gertrude can not live without attention from Claudius.

Shakespeare also employs the use of allusions to Greek mythology to further the characterization of Hamlet. By referring to his father as a “Hyperion to a satyr” (1.2.144), Hamlet is shown to feel deeply about how well his father treated and ruled his people when he was alive. Hyperion was the titan who provided the light of the Heavens and symbolized watchfulness, so the comparison between King Hamlet and Hyperion is ironic since his father was unable to realize that his own brother was plotting his murder.

Throughout Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 2, Shakespeare utilizes a variety of literary devices to illustrate Hamlet as a deeply passionate character, who suffers from internal moral conflicts that will eventually blur his judgement. Through the employment of metaphors, irony, and imagery, it is evident that Hamlet sees himself as powerless against the nature of the world at this moment, and foreshadows that he may stray from what is right in the name of justice. How Hamlet viewed his father is also illustrated through the use of allusions to Greek mythology, which further emphasizes the intense emotions felt by Hamlet after the death of his father and the usurpation of power by his uncle.
The Real American Dream

Vincent van Gogh is known for slicing his ear off and sending the severed limb to his lover, embodying the archetype of a tortured artist. What many do not know is that this story is nothing more than that: a story. One of the most iconic lores in the artistic world is a lie. Like the story of Van Gogh and his severed ear, the so-called “American Dream” is a lie that many people still believe. Yet, simply analyzing the reality of the world reveals that the "American Dream" stays true to its name and remains a dream in the minds of both the ignorant and the informed.

E.L. Doctorow utilizes the juxtaposition of characters of various socio-economic backgrounds, the microcosm established by the unnamed family, and the symbolism of the baseball game in order to expose the rigid reality of the so-called American Dream: one of discord among ethnic groups, misleading and futile desires for assimilation, and racial discrimination that is as prevalent in modern society as it was so many years ago.

During the Progressive Era, many immigrants fantasized that the “American Dream” would entail a life of acceptance and success in a melting pot of cultures. However, the concept of America being a melting pot, where people of various backgrounds can exist side-by-side, is an illusion whose reality was examined by E.L. Doctorow. *Ragtime* illustrates “a mosaic” (Tokarczyk) of the nature of American society during the Progressive Era and brings to light the miniscule amount of change in society today. The imagery of a mosaic perfectly embodies the situation; it may have appeared that immigrant groups would find acceptance and comfort in America as they embarked on a new chapter of their lives, however there were harsh and distinct partitions. Doctorow highlights the juxtaposition between characters from different social classes through the complicated and intertwined plotlines. For example, when Evelyn, a member of the upper class, asks Tateh why his daughter is tied to his waist, he tells her that someone of her social class would not know that girls in low-income neighborhoods were stolen from their families and sold as slaves (Doctorow 43). Evelyn Nesbit finds herself involved in the lives of Tateh and his daughter, even though their lives exist in stark contrast to one another. It is the coexistence of these two worlds in *Ragtime* that reveals the discord within the United States. Furthermore, the progressive era created “disparities in the distribution of the newly created wealth” (Adelstein). By capturing a variety of economic classes within his novel, Doctorow expresses these growing divisions between economic classes, and the fall of many immigrants below the poverty line during this time period. Even more prevalent during this time period was the open disgust of anyone considered “other.” Doctorow wrote, “They were despised by New Yorkers. They were filthy and illiterate” (Doctorow 31). These “new yorkers” abhorred immigrants, who simply wanted to fulfill the life that they felt they were promised, and viewed them as a burden to society. During this time, nativists who were rapidly growing rich ignorantly looked down upon immigrants who they believed would obstruct their path to their version of the “American Dream”: wealth and success for nativists while repressing immigrants.

*Ragtime* also highlights the futile and misleading of immigrants to “assimilate” to what they perceive to be the ideals of American culture. Evelyn visits Tateh and his daughter at their apartment, noting that although small, the room was “scrupulously clean” (Doctorow 47). During the Progressive era, cleanliness was seen as an American ideal, prompting many immigrants to seek assimilation and improvements in their living conditions by increasing sanitation (Falck). However, after tireless efforts, Tateh comes to the conclusion that despite these attempts at assimilation, immigrants were still seen as outsiders, primarily by the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants who dominated the upper class and consequently created the ideals that immigrants strove to meet. Tateh worked hard at his job and participated in a strike for better wages with the hopes that he could achieve the “American Dream,” only to realize that after all of the hard work and suffering, “they would still live in that wretched room, in that terrible dark street” (Doctorow 130). Life would not get better if he continued on like this. There would be no hope. It takes tireless
attempts at assimilation and hours of labor for Tateh to realize that his view of the “American Dream” was an illusion, and that he would have to find another way to succeed. Although Tateh would eventually become economically successful, Doctorow wrote that he named himself a baron in order to “[get] around in a Christian world” (Doctorow 259). Tateh had reinvented himself for the sole purpose of fitting the ideals of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, however it had no effect on the opinions of the general public toward immigrants. Humanity has been entrenched in the desire to assimilate to what is deemed as ideal, but discrimination against immigrants will never be resolved as long as this desire is engrained in the plications of the fabric of society. Even the term, assimilation, bears nuances, as it implies that one way of life or culture is normal. As long as this desire stains humanity, there is no way to disintegrate discrimination against immigrants. It has been proven that “There is no biological or genetic basis for race” (Blakemore), so prejudice and hubris based on race only holds its basis in the minds of the ignorant. Furthermore, there is no definite, or absolute way to declare any one thing “normal.” Everything is subjective. The desire to assimilate stems from an extrinsic sense of “normal” that is urged by society. Moreover, with growing industries, the needs of capitalists dwarf desires for a “racially and culturally homogenous nation” (Molina). It is hard to deny that the consumerist society has molded public opinion and normalized certain ideas over others. Rather than embracing and encouraging the cultivation of cultures, society pushes for the wide, overarching acceptance of one viewpoint, creating a monoculture of an infinite sea of people.

While Doctorow exposes the tragedies of the progressive era and the immoral treatment of immigrants, his central message is that the state of racial prejudice will never change. The unnamed family in *Ragtime* serves as a significant comment on the fate of humanity. Doctorow leaves the identity of the family unit ambiguous. However, upon further inspection, the reader can come to the conclusion that this family can be any upper middle class family in New York. It does not matter who the Son is. It does not matter who the Mother is. It does not matter who the Father is. The only thing of significance with regards to this family is that their generic titles are capitalized. Even though they remain unnamed, the audience can imply that this shell of a family still has a voice and a stand in society, which establishes them as a microcosm for the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant class. Allegorically, Father takes his son to a baseball game, but rather than enjoying the game, he comments that the immigrant players are “rude-featured, jug-eared men” (Doctorow 229). Doctorow takes the classic scene of a father and a son participating in America’s pastime and uses it as a symbol of societal opinions towards immigrants. Moreover, Father compares the baseball players to the players at Harvard (Doctorow 230) which emphasizes his elitist and prejudice views. Father is an archetype of the ignorant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, this family can represent any white, middle class family in New York, and the specific details are moot. It does not matter who is in this family. The simple fact that they were white and members of the middle class during a time when working class members were falling below the poverty line gave them status in society. The comments made by Father at the baseball game are meant to illustrate that nativists disapprove of immigrants, even when they are succeeding in an activity that has become a fundamental part of American culture. Even today, it is a known reality that “Racist words, images, and violence will plague our country for years to come” (Steinfelds). There is no avoiding the reality that society can not move past racial prejudice and western hubris until there is a shift in the interpretation of “normal.”

Lies are scattered throughout society like confetti littering the streets, yet one of the biggest lies staring humanity in the face is the lie that the American Dream represents an idealistic, achievable lifestyle full of riches, bliss, and progress. The perceived status of America as a melting pot is a myth and although the term has been coined since the birth of the nation, various events throughout the book as well as history have proven otherwise. Some may argue that the fact that there are so many different people from all walks of life interacting with each other proves that New York was the melting pot during the progressive era, however this only proves the opposite. Immigrants of various ethnic groups, working class white americans, and the upper class all lived within the same city, within such close proximity, yet their lives were far from united. Immigrants tried assimilating to a culture that they saw as the representation of the American Dream, while facing injustices and prejudice based on their race or ethnicity. The “American Dream,” as Doctorow proved, is more like a fairytale.
The Mental Health Crisis

Welcome, all, and thank you for your willingness to read my proposal. As you know, many teens in the US today are suffering from mental illness and it is severely impacting our job markets, economy, and general social environment. Since they themselves claim that their mental health is affecting their everyday lives, and by transitive property, our lives as well, it is crucial that we take action.

I propose that in order to solve this rather simple issue is to sew the eyes, mouth, ears and a single nostril of every teenager in the US. Until they are at an age at which they can handle the stimuli surrounding them. It is clear that social media and overexposure to the world is the sole cause of these mental ailments, so it is only logical to block them from this vulnerable group. It will take some time, but with the support of medical professionals, we will set up clinics in every city that parents can take their children to for their simple procedure. Parents across the country have endorsed this plan, as they have claimed for years that social media is the cause of the rise in mental illness among teens across the country.

Once the procedures are underway, the US should see an immense decrease in the number of mental illness cases reported. First of all, teenagers who may have lingering symptoms would be unable to express them. Secondly, with the decrease in stimuli, teens will be able to focus on improving their mental illnesses in the peace and quiet of their own minds. Thirdly, adults and young children will be free of their worries about whether or not the teenagers in their lives are suffering from this timely ailment.

To those who say that this will prevent teens from experiencing the world for what it is, I would argue that this is the main purpose of this proposal. The teens simply can not handle the world for what it is while they are at this vulnerable age, and should therefore be shielded from as many of its embellishments as possible. Others may argue that this would be unethical as imposing this procedure on such a large group of people would force many who feel well to block out their surroundings, and I will admit that this is a difficult objection to refute. However, it is better to prevent the possibility of illness whenever possible for the wellbeing of the adults and young children who too are suffering from interacting with these mentally ill teens on a daily basis.

I would like to end on a note of sincerity. These are difficult times for everyone, but I know that teens everywhere have been hit hardest. For their wellbeing, and the wellbeing of everyone close to them, I implore you to consider my humble request, and to ask your state representative to do the same. While it may take time to see the improvements, I assure you that it will be worth the time and effort once you see your teens grown and well.
The Road to Michigan

After studying psychology at my local community college, I was obsessed. The class, titled “Understanding Psychology Through Film,” introduced me to the fields of film analysis and psychology, and encouraged me to analyze the world around me through a psychological lens. Throughout this course, I studied the concept of ageism, which eventually led me to examine the fields of cognitive psychology and neuroscience. While I intend on declaring a major in biological sciences and pursuing a career in healthcare, I feel that it is imperative for me to explore psychology and environmental sciences during my studies at the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts in order to understand the interdisciplinary nature of the healthcare field.

As a student at the College of LSA, I am determined to study under the instruction of Professor Polk. After watching his Ted Talk from 2016 on aging and the implications associated with this term, I realized just how complex the human brain is. From its ever-changing methods to processing information to the technology that can now be used to detect these changes, I feel passionately about the health and development of the brain with age. Having been impacted by dementia in my own family, I hope to adopt the lessons learned at the University of Michigan to someday contribute to research that reveals causes of this disease that 10% of people over the age of 65 develop. I want to study how stress and environmental factors, such as soil composition, air quality, impact the likeliness of a person developing dementia in the future.

Air quality, access to fresh water, and local soil composition are just a few of the environmental factors that I am interested in studying at the University of Michigan Biological Station in order to better understand their impacts on brain development and decay. At the Biological Station, where I will have the unique opportunity to explore the interdisciplinary nature of environmental science at a comprehensive research center located just a short drive from campus. From its camp-like atmosphere to its amazing courses, such as Algae in Freshwater Ecosystems, participating in a program at the Biological Station will allow me to learn more about the ecological research process while analyzing the ecosystems that are unique to Michigan. As I delve deeper into subjects such as ecology and ethnobotany, collaborating with peers, professors, and guest researchers will foster an environment ripe for personal growth and development.

At the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, I hope to analyze the relationship between cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and environmental science in order to explore the development and decay of the human brain with age. I look forward to exploring the unique academic opportunities available at the University of Michigan and working tirelessly to cure dementia. I know that the road ahead of me will be long and at times turbulent, but I am determined to make the most of this next step in my life as I grow as a student, and as a person.
**Grandpa/Time**

Grandpa

Grandpa,
Once at the top
Been through hard times
Working behind the scenes to ensure
His family is able to survive the darkest times.
His daughter, with three children, all in one bedroom
Illness strikes at the brain, his mind failing
Who will take the wheel, one to be steering
The son, daughter, the youngest child? No.
Expenses to pay, the cold winter weather
Approaches, he has no choice but to take
One more step into the wild, maybe the last.
The warmth of his love never fleeting, the
Key to our hearts never lost. His limit was
Reached and the illness progressed, who
Stepped up to follow in his footsteps? Me.
Atmosphere gloomy, who knew he far he
Would go, for his grandpa he was sorry.

Hourglass

When it crosses your mind, it seems to pass by slower.
Reality alters as the grains begin to fall, one by
One. Each moment cannot be remembered
But rather cherished, learned from.
Boredom, hatred, malice, all
Dwell on the slowing of
Enjoyment. Yet as we
All grow older, it
is really
Time
Does not.
The fear of running
Out increases as well as
The understanding. It will not
Lengthen or shorten; only in the lens
Of the unthankful, those unable to use it
To their advantage. But as I wander past it’s
Confinement I realize it is the only thing keeping
Me secure, before I inevitably run out, it comes to a halt.
Inferno

Inferno

Trees. A source of life, education, and exploration, trees and other plant life have been symbols of positivity for mankind since the beginning of time. Yet, as much as they can be looked upon as positive symbols of life, the human outlook on them can be changed; this is what happens in the seventh circle of hell within Dante Alighieri’s The Inferno. In this treacherous place, sinners are subjected to a punishment that leaves them embodied within trees, stationary in their suffering in hell. But how is this just? In Dante Alighieri’s The Inferno, Cleopatra, Pietro della Vigna, and Cerberus each receive a punishment that is just, because of the backgrounds of each character and the symbolism within their judgements.

It is certain that the punishments within The Inferno are all fitting, and this is clear when Dante encounters Cleopatra. Venturing into the second circle of hell, Dante witnesses the lustful and carnal sinners, who are punished “To be imprisoned in the viewless winds, And blown with restless violence round about The pendent world” (Alighieri, 30). Such a sight is heavily symbolic, as those who were lustful in their earthly lives are swept away by wind. When Alighieri writes, “blown with restless violence” he is certainly referring to the sinners being swept up by erotic passion in their lives. How fitting. More specifically, the allusion to Cleopatra accentuates the ironic nature of being punished for their sins; she overloved and killed herself in her delusion. Furthermore, she has been known to be the “queen of lust,” and it is symbolic that her chaotic earthly actions became her punishment in hell. In the words of Thomas Foster, “Irony trumps everything.”

The symbolism does not stop with the lustful and carnal sinners, and carries the gluttonous beast, Cerberus. The fact that they pillaged and over consumed during their earthly lives is highlighted with “Howl the rain maketh them like unto dogs; One side they make a shelter for the other; Oft turn themselves the wretched reprobates” (Alighieri 38). From a reader’s perspective, one must remember: “It’s never just rain” (Foster 27), and this comparison of the sinners to dogs being rained on symbolizes the earthly state of the gluttons; they acted like dogs, consuming everything in sight. Cerberus, quite literally being a dog, fittingly guards the gates to this circle of hell, and the voracious nature of the beast reveals the background of every other sinner around him. Yet the punishment in hell does not stop there, as it is not just regular rain falling, but rather it is cold, heavy, and most likely acidic. A seemingly cruel punishment, the life these sinners live in hell is truly reflective of their time spent on earth.

Continuing through the depths of Hell, the punishments progressively get worse but still remain symbolic, as exemplified in the case of Pietro della Vigna. In the scope of today, the act suicide itself has decreased in severity especially when compared to when The Inferno was written. But looking at the sinner Pietro della Vigna, here Foster’s words remind the reader that one must “try to find a reading perspective that allows for sympathy with the historical moment of the story, that understands the text as having been written against its own social, historical, cultural, and personal background” (Foster 78). This strategy must be applied here. Since Pietro della Vigna did not appreciate his body in his earthly life, they were subjected to fitting one that would prevent harm to oneself, and thus is a reflection of the Catholic Church’s view on suicide equaling murder. In Pietro della Vigna’s lifetime, he was wrongly accused of treason. Although his reaction to such events led to a tragic death and consequence, such a punishment is just for the grave sin he committed himself. Moreover, Alighieri uses Pietro della Vigna, showing the severity of those who have sinned against themselves to be an immense sin, from how deep into hell Dante travels into. With these events, Alighieri stresses the violent negation of human life that suicide had during his time.

Truly, the sinners written about in The Inferno are an allegory for the fall of mankind and reveal the pervasiveness of sin. Dante’s journey into hell explores a unique perception of what hell exactly is, and the symbolic nature of each sinner’s punishment. Thus, it is with Cleopatra, Cerberus, and Pietro della Vigna that The Inferno takes into account their backgrounds, symbolism behind their suffering, and context of the punishments, to show how they are just in their unique way.
Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Ophelia and Gertrude, as well as Hamlet and Laertes first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

The Hamlet characters’ introductions set a precedent for their character development, and this is evident within the characters of Gertrude and Ophelia. Starting with Gertrude, she is introduced as the woman who was previously married to the former King, and she remarried the King’s brother. Such an exposition is important to take into account when looking at Ophelia’s introduction, one that extracts opposite tones. Ophelia, loyal and lover to Hamlet, she stays true to him despite her father’s efforts to break them apart. Seeing these characters for the first time, it is easy to pick up that Ophelia and Gertrude exemplify the opposite spectrums of female sexuality: whore and virgin. These foiled characters both reveal Hamlet’s faltering attitudes towards two influential women in his life, with resentment towards Gertrude and unsteady affection towards Ophelia. Thus the introduction of Gertrude and Ophelia reveal a deeper meaning of obedience in Hamlet, that obedience is subjective. This theme is motivated by the blind love that Ophelia seems to have in the eyes of everyone except herself and Hamlet, and Hamlet’s view of his mother, a woman who’s disobedience to his father made her a puppet of manipulation. It is misplaced obedience versus insensitive disloyalty.

The theme of obedience and vengeance is further accentuated in Hamlet with the introduction of the foils Hamlet and Laertes. Hamlet, the son of the former King, full of vengeance, it seems that as the main character, the reader should always be rooting for him. Yet, his character is ultimately juxtaposed with his lover’s brother, Laertes. With the introduction of Laertes, he is shown to be everything that Hamlet is not. Although both Hamlet and Laertes ultimately have the common goal of avenging their fathers, Laertes is more bold and to the point, while Hamlet is thoughtful and patient. Hamlet’s revenge plot is rocky, and his struggle between obedience and vengeance begins when he says “Haste me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift As meditation or the thoughts of love, May sweep to my revenge. (1.5.30-33). Evidently, Hamlet wants to swiftly avenge his father, but his emotions and thoughts cloud his judgement. His confusion reveals the struggle of being obedient and vengeful- he cannot be one without the other.

As the story progresses, Ophelia’s climax furthers the theme of obedience within Hamlet. Although Ophelia had been going mad throughout the play, her indecisiveness and inability to think for herself caught up with her and she went completely insane. Her suicide is the culmination of Hamlet’s overtaking demands, Laertes’ overarching presence, and her father’s restrictions. In trying to “please” the ones closest to her, Ophelia’s suicide reveals that one should not be too obedient. Her example of leading a choice-less existence shows the struggle of being obedient, that reason and free-thinking somehow gets lost in being too submissive. Furthermore, the theme of obedience undermines the society that was in place at the time of Hamlet, and the roles of women in that society.

Likewise, Gertrude’s climax furthers the theme of obedience and vengeance, while stressing the antithesis between the two. In the climactic exchange between Gertrude and Hamlet, Gertrude tells Hamlet is “mad as the sea and wind When they each contend which is the mightier,” possibly hiding her guilt for betraying the former King. Since this is her response to Hamlet’s cries, her true identity shows, highlighting Hamlet’s madness and her own disobedience. Gertrude’s comparison of Hamlet to the turmoil that results from the sea and winds clashing also reveals her cluelessness regarding Hamlet’s situation. Her disobedience is brought back to the reader in this dialogue, and fuels Hamlet’s demise.

Furthermore, Hamlet brings up the theme of obedience within Laertes’ climax. This refers to the pinnacle part of
the play itself, the duel between Laertes and Hamlet.
Wouldn't It Be Nice

Wouldn't it be nice if we were older
Then we wouldn't have to suffer long?
And wouldn't it be nice to live together
Where we're all the same and can belong?
We could get along all that much better
When we see each other as the same
Surely we can agree that were equal
Even though police will always maim
And after we regain some of our civility
Will police look on at us in fame?
Happy times will come beginning
But seems that racism is never ending
Oh, wouldn't it be nice?
Maybe if, we loot and steal and fight and shoot
We'll all be cool (cuh cuh coooool)
Oh my, then supremacists would have no clue
We could go walking(we could go walking)
Absent profiling (we’d be so happy)
Oh wouldn’t it be nice?
You know it seems the more we see it happen
News stations can’t seem to live without it
But let’s talk about it
Oh wouldn’t it be nice?
Please don’t, be racist
Don’t feed, the news
Please don’t, be racist
They just, want views
Grandpa

With a quick whiff of the air he followed the scent to the backyard, placing fresh bay leaves next to the already steaming chicken. He would bend down, head almost hitting the concrete, squinting to see the temperature on the pressure cooker. Every few nights, that was the position I found my Grandpa in while he prepared his authentic chicken adobo. It smelled horrible. Maybe not to my Grandpa, but whenever it was time to cook his favorite meal, he would linger around the pressure cooker outside, staring at the sky. Whenever he noticed the look of fascination that took over my face, he would exclaim, “Kuya! It’s your favorite!” And as I watched him through the window, I wondered why he took delight in making such a simple Filipino dish. To an elementary school boy like me, it was just something to feed my stomach. “It smelled horrible.”

Little did I know the impact of those words. The self-consciousness the stench of such adobo brought by sitting in my school lunchbox, the embarrassment from my grandpa taking my father’s place at Bring Your Dad to School day, the frustration when my Grandpa was ten minutes late picking me up from orchestra rehearsal. Even though I had always lived with my Grandpa, I always felt that his overarching presence was something to distance from. Despite the dementia slowly creeping on him, his dedication to his family never faltered. And it seemed, as my Grandpa’s mind gradually deteriorated, mine grew to understand. Soon, the nights, filled with the smell of the chicken adobo ceased to exist, and the tapping of his footsteps venturing to the backyard were replaced by the remote clicking so he could blankly stare at the tv for hours on end. Sitting at the dinner table, reluctantly consuming store-bought chicken, we all felt the absence of the family tradition. I would ask, “Grandpa, what’s my name?” But only receive a short stare and a clueless wave. Within a couple years, the memories had faded. One day, my Grandpa and I were out for a walk, and he was staring at the sky like he always did. “Boy, did you finish the adobo from yesterday? I couldn’t find the leftovers in the fridge.” That night, we came back from the supermarket, and I asked my Grandpa the question he waited for to hear: “teach me to make it.” I didn’t even have to say what it was. His exuberant smile showed he knew.

We went at it until one in the morning, as I clumsily cut the carrots and poured overwhelming amounts of salt onto the chicken. The stern “good.” my Grandpa abruptly said as I followed his questionable instructions reminded me of the belligerent state of his mind. The man who I knew as once reserved, who now usually turned to quick outbursts in times of frustration, found something sincere to give attention to for the first time in years. Standing next to the dilapidated pressure cooker, gazing at the stars, we soon took a whiff of the poorly made adobo. It never smelled better. I knew that in the morning, my grandpa would wake up like the day never happened, once again unable to remember who I was. So I did. I remembered not just that night, but the nights before that where my Grandpa did everything he could, sacrificing endless amounts of time and energy. All for his family, culture, and especially his grandson. So just as the smell of adobo drifts into my nose whenever I look at my Grandpa, I hope that his legacy can do the same with these words.
In 1920, Charlie Chaplin came in 20th place in a Charlie Chaplin lookalike contest. Yes, the man himself did not even make it to the finals. During his lifetime, the popular comic actor rose to fame in the era of silent films, and to this day he is considered one of the most important figures in the history of the film industry. In the early years of his acting, many of his silent films were shown to audiences with background music, specifically the genre of ragtime. Similarly, this early progressive era musical genre serves as the title of E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime*. Through his use of historical references, the motif of ragtime music, and the symbol of Coalhouse Walker Jr, E.L. Doctorow illustrates the social progression of African Americans in the 1900s and the effect of music on racial injustice.

It is assumed that many would brush over the role that music plays in *Ragtime*, yet its significance within the novel is so clear, especially relating to the novel’s ideas of the identity of progressive era blacks. Originating in the title, ragtime obviously has a pertinent stance within the setting of *Ragtime*. According to the “King of Ragtime,” music of the said genre should never be played fast, and Doctorow chooses to include this quote within his work. Doctorow expertly chooses to leave this quote at the forefront of the novel, as it addresses both the reader and those living in the early twentieth century (Doctorow 8). Just like a piano player would have to take his time and read notes on the sheet music slowly, conveying the sound in a controlled and understanding manner, E.L. Doctorow implores the reader to take the time to appreciate what is coming within the text. He understands the role of music in history. His comparison between ragtime and historical events bring to light the idea that the feeling of nostalgia for a time period such as the progressive era should be cherished. Fostering a new genre of music, African Americans were a major reason for the definition of the Progressive era. *Ragtime* is the music. The reader becomes the player. Understanding the basis of the theme of music taking root within a book about the “American Dream” is crucial to realizing the social commentary Doctorow wants the reader to realize, that the early 1900s was a period of racial revolution. In the exposition, he addresses a prevalent issue of a racial divide with the introduction of Peary. “He lived the most comfortable of all...had a player piano,” and he could play *The Minute Waltz* of Chopin in forty-eight seconds (Doctorow 157). Surely, it is inferred that Peary portrays a prideful white man that is ignorant of the world of music, as he is unable to play the piano yet owns a player piano. Furthermore, his “ability” to play the classical piece: *The Minute Waltz* in a time other than sixty seconds illustrates the entitlement and inexperience Peary and other privileged people of the early twentieth century have. The instructions are in the song title. This stereotypical personality that Doctorow exemplifies within Peary can be juxtaposed with Aberjhani’s definition of a Progressive era “New Negro”. His article he states, “the self-sufficiency that characterized the New Negro was that of celebration so evident in ragtime, jazz, and the blues, the dominant forms of American musical expression during the 1920s” (Aberjhani 2). By looking at the different viewpoints expressed by Doctorow and Aberjhani, they reveal the impact of music when it comes to those living in privilege or oppression. Music shaped the Progressive African American. In addition, recalling that “many others expressed through their music an exuberance that ignored or defied the dehumanizing realities of Jim Crow apartheid,” the idea that embracing music was not really an activity to African Americans blooms (Aberjhani 3). In the face of racism, ragtime and blues were popularized, making their way throughout the United States, creating a sense of solidarity between black men and women. The advancement of colored people took time, just as ragtime takes time to play.

Without a doubt, ragtime music was an important element of the Progressive movement, and E.L. Doctorow’s recognition of this within its motif in his novel reveals the development of the social life of African Americans. Leading to the creation of jazz and music, ragtime established itself as the expression of black life within the early twentieth century (McNally 104). The advancements that celebrated black artists made were social as well as spiritual, maintaining a sense of community within progressive era African Americans; according to his biography,
Doctorow also understood what ragtime did for creating an identity for African Americans, as in his father owning a music shop he was able to witness the joys that music brought to all people and their respective cultures. Even these two authors, both of white descent, are able to convey the role that ragtime plays within the split American society of the 1900s. Ragtime was an implicit resistance to authority. Furthermore, the funeral of Sarah in Ragtime cements the notion of the importance of ragtime within black society, with the mourners who were mostly musicians, and the fanfare they played (Doctorow 408). Such passion for music, more specifically ragtime, was exemplified and when the novel touches upon the idea that the performers took attention, people began to notice the societal value of ragtime. “Ragtime was quaint music on the fringes of society… by 1904 reference to blackness in ragtime only appeared in only a minority of publications” (Berlin 123). Without question, race was a factor in deciding the popularity of music back with the progressives, and this “quaint music” called ragtime would be underappreciated by non-blacks. This and the fact that the number of blacks publishing ragtime music began to drop as the 1900s progressed, does not show that whites took over the musical genre, but they merely adapted it into their lifestyle and created a new appreciation for a piece of African American culture. Music played a part in history.

Meanwhile, the embodiment of music within Ragtime, Coalhouse Walker Jr, should not be overlooked as the symbol for the progressive blacks. The idea of being a black American culminates within Walker, and upon introduction to him the reader is met with what a real connection African Americans had to music; “of all of them he was the only one who knew ragtime… vigorous music that roused the senses and never stood still a moment” (Doctorow 334). This musical excellence is juxtaposed with the incompetence of the aforementioned Peary to illustrate the understanding and emotion blacks at the time had towards music. In addition, the father's question of whether or not Coalhouse could play “coon songs” and the fact that the he feels that Coalhouse Walker did not think of himself as a Negro serves to further employ the theme of segregation and build the father as an ignorant character (Doctorow 336). Throughout the book Doctorow expects the reader to read in a “ragtime universe,” and the notion that ragtime was wild and at times a nightmare shows the established identity that ragtime created for blacks. Ragtime served as justice (Turpin). In the second half of Ragtime, Coalhouse’s struggle to achieve such justice is written in tandem with his journey through music, representing the downfall of many individuals in the African American community. With such dedication shown towards the art of music, the lives of blacks in America were defined; as McNally puts it, ragtime was “signifying, it was African in nature, the performers transformed it” (McNally 106). Exemplified within Ragtime, Coalhouse Walker Jr. transformed the role of music within the civil rights movement, and revealed the importance of music as a means of human progression. He did not perform ragtime, he performed Ragtime.

From the classical era in the 1800s to the period of modern pop, music will always be a defining aspect of everyday life, touching hearts and influencing the lives of every individual culture who listens. It is without music, that people like Charlie Chaplin would have never been able to thrive in their lifetime. Music transcends the listener and the performer, and those people are able to send a message through it. One of solidarity and progression is evident within E.L. Doctorow’s Ragtime, and through his use of historical references, the motif of ragtime music, and the symbol of Coalhouse Walker Jr, music brings the African American populus together and becomes the groundwork for the progression of civil rights.
The Speech

Good Morning, Afternoon, or Evening.

In eighth grade, I was the Valedictorian of my class. The first people I told were my grandparents. All throughout elementary and middle school, my lolo would pick me up at the end of the day and take me to the apartment. I would stay until my dad ended his workday to come pick me up. The day I was named Valedictorian, I eagerly walked into their apartment and smelled my favorite dish: Lumpia Shanghai. It is the Filipino take on an eggroll, and nobody makes it like my lola.

I greeted her with a hug, and for a second, my excitement was overcome by curiosity. “How do you even make these Lola? You’re going to add them to the List, right?” I asked. The List was a compilation of her recipes that I would take into adulthood: a rite of passage, really.

“Of course! Honey, it’s just pork, shrimp, carrots, chestnuts, molasses -’” she stopped when she saw my face. Those last two ingredients baffled me. “It works, doesn’t it?” Well, she was not wrong.

As I plopped a roll into my mouth, I revealed the news. “I’m the Valedictorian, by the way.” The three of us celebrated, and of course, we ate. Soon enough my dad arrived to bring me home.

I wanted to reveal my Valedictorian status with both of my parents together, so I stayed quiet the entire car ride. En route home, my dad and I would pass this neighborhood of grand houses and luxury cars.

“You know you’ll live in one of those houses one day… and drive one of those cars. You would look nice in a Mercedes,” my dad would say. He always hoped, or rather, believed that I would be more successful than he and my mom combined. I think that was their goal in raising me. It was from his words that I learned that a parent’s greatest success is found in his child.

So that became my ultimate pursuit: to make my parents successful. With my new title under my belt, I felt as though I was right on track.

We finally arrived home, and I prepared myself to make the announcement. “So, guess what…” Again, we celebrated. The time came for graduation, and I gave my speech to a crowd of proud parents and relieved students. I felt destined for Harvard or Yale.

However, as the proverb goes, pride does indeed goeth before destruction.

In my speech, I said that I was “finishing my year of lasts and moving onto my year of firsts.” Well, I was not kidding. Fast forward to freshman year and I received my first B on a report card, experienced my first school-mental-breakdown, earned my first C on a test, and pulled my first all-nighter cramming session. Unfortunately, these were all the first of many.

It was disheartening to fail countless times, but it was torturing to feel like I was failing my parents. But if pride goeth before destruction, then failure goeth before prosperity.
With that, I would like to thank my geometry teacher, APUSH teacher, and AP Bio teacher for giving me a B, because next semester I received an A. I want to thank my chemistry teacher for giving me a C on the quiz, because on the next test I earned the highest score in the class. I want to thank Frank Ocean, whose music helped calm me during my “moments.” And lastly, I want to thank the makers of the Keurig, who made it so easy for me to make my coffee at one in the morning.

As I finish this year of lasts and move onto my next year of firsts, I await more trial and error. And then even more try. I will bring with me the recipes for hazelnut lattes, Lumpia Shanghai, failure, and success.

*Thank You.*
Isabela Delos-Reyes  
Age: 18, Grade: 12  
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV  
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern  
Category: Poetry

"Home" and "Away"

“Home”
I
Wake up
To the smell
Of spam and eggs.
Out of my unmade bed,
I stumble to the bathroom,
While goosebumps cover my legs.
Brushing my teeth, washing my face;
I make my way downstairs, at a steady pace.
Pans clanging, music playing: typical Saturday morning.  
Birds chirp peacefully, as we eat and talk,
We finish our plates; 10 strikes the clock.
Now it is time to start the cleaning ritual,
Our list of chores has become habitual.
Clean my room, Pops vacuums the carpet,
Mom does laundry before going to Target.
Around 5 o’clock, my sister comes to hang,
We order dinner and watch the Laker game.
While 10 o’clock strikes, I lay in bed alone,
Thankful for another day in the place I call my home.

“Away”
The
engine
hums, as
I greet the
Pilot. I find
A seat by the
Window, alone,
So it is more private.
I put my earphones in, as
The plane ascends. I close my eyes
And dream about the time I will spend.
In Oakland? In Paris? New York or London?
I let the music transport me to my next destination.
In this plane, I trust, to satisfy my neverending wanderlust.
Novel places,
& fresh faces
I avidly await
The experiences
That become memories,
which ultimately turn into stories.
My Freedom

Since I was young, I have always been taught that women were meant for “procreation” (Chaucer 128). Growing up and living in a male dominant and religious society, the societal and religious norms just did not sit right with me. I did not understand the mistreatment of women with the defense of the Bible. If the “Apostle” commanded “husbands to love us well,” why were we so disrespected? (Chaucer 161). Love comes with respect. If we are loved, those who love us recognize our power, our dignity, and our well-being.

I wanted to be free of the labels and the expectations. I wanted to be the “master of my body” and “my property” (Chaucer 314). And so, I manifested my desires.

While I have been the subject of emotional and physical mistreatment by men, I have learned the “oldest dances” of operating in a male-dominated society (Chaucer 486). I must be sovereign to be successful. I must be sovereign for those around me to be successful. When a man, or any gender for that matter, can recognize the pride and power of a female, anything is possible. Even the work of the great philosopher “Ptomely” helps support this conjecture in his “Algamest” (Chaucer 20, 21).

I am looked down upon for enjoying my life according to my will, but I would have it no other way. I live independently, and it shocks people to see. The most important lesson I have learned is to recognize that I am a “worthy woman.” (Chaucer 455). I realized that the only way to live a happy life is to put myself and my desires first. Self-love and self-priority have become my foundation, and the fight for women’s rights and respect have become my passion. I want to deepen my understanding of what it means to be a woman. I want to learn about those before me who have paved the way for women like me to continue the fight for equality and respect. To continue the normalization of strong-willed, educated, liberated women.

“To what purpose/ were members of this generation made?” (Chaucer 115-116). If men are made for success, then so are women. If men are made for work and intelligence, then so are women. If women are made for pleasure and emotion, then so are men. Your institution prides itself on providing “highly intellectual freedom that supports open inquiry, equality, compassion, and excellence in all endeavors.” My freedom as a woman is my pride and my being. My sovereignty is my strength. “I have the power during all my life” (Chaucer 158). Not only do I want to explore the depths of my free will, but I also want to pave the way for more women to do so as well. And I hope Vanderbilt University, equipped with arguably one of the best Gender Studies programs in the nation, will assist me with my endeavor.
Wouldn't It Be Nice to Go to College... For Free?

Wouldn't it be nice to go college?
I have waited all of my short life.
I really want to build my education
Now I have to go through all this strife
I know the process takes a bit of patience
But I need to release all my frustrations
Wouldn't it be nice if it could be free?
I’ll pay eighty bucks to be denied.
But even if I get into my dream school
Debt will linger till the day I die.
What will be happening with these scholars?
The debt is almost at two trillion dollars
Oh, isn’t it a mess!
Maybe if I pray and wish and hope and pray, I might get in.
Even then, I wouldn’t have the money, do I really win?
Oh, how high the in’trest!
It’s a lot to digest.
Oh, bankrupt my whole life!
They spent so much to build a big deluxe wall
No wonder they can’t give free school toward all
The aid is very small
It really makes no sense!
Free school? Why not?
The debt? A lot.
Good grades? I’ve got.
Funds I do not.
The Consequences of Obedience and Revenge

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and vengeance through Gertrude and Ophelia’s, as well as Hamlet and Laertes’, first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

When the audience first meets Gertrude and Ophelia, they are portrayed with their traditional gender roles - obedient to their men - which ultimately results in disobedience to the other people, such as Hamlet. Gertrude first appears with her newly-wedded husband, as she and Claudius plead Hamlet to accept their marriage and to stay in Denmark. On the other hand, Shakespeare introduces Ophelia being instructed by both her brother Laertes and father Polonius to dismiss Hamlet’s affections, while taking insults such as being referred to as “a green girl” (1.3.101) and a ‘baby’ (1.3.105). Polonius’ insults portray his daughter as an immature little girl, yet she remains obedient to him. The introduction of Gertrude emphasizes her role as a wife and a mother, while Ophelia’s introduction emphasizes her role as a daughter. Both encounters exhibit how each character cannot function without the instruction of a man. It is clear from these first meetings that both females are motivated by love: Gertrude’s love for her son and her husband; and Ophelia’s love for her brother, her father, and Hamlet. This love not only deeply connects their storylines, but it is the ultimate incentive that drives their obedience. However, their submission comes at a price. As Gertrude remains obedient to Claudius, she drives Hamlet further away. Similarly, as Ophelia heeds her father’s commands, she too creates distance between herself and her love. This cause and effect reveals that obedience to one results in defiance to another.

Gertrude’s climax during the play and her conversation with Hamlet reveals where her true obedience lies: with herself. This is where she and Ophelia differ. As Gertrude berates Hamlet for his disrespectful play, the audience sees Gertrude as a woman who demands respect. This instance reinserts her role as Queen of Denmark as she exercises her authority. The readers now understand that her remarrying was an act of solidifying her place as Queen. She recognizes that marrying Claudius was wrong, but downplays the news of her former husband’s death in response to Hamlet’s madness. Thus, her obedience becomes morally questionable. Within Gertrude’s climax, Shakespeare conveys that obedience to one sometimes requires obedience to another. Her obedience to Claudius was an act of obedience to herself.

Moreover, Ophelia enters her climax at the death of her father Polonius, which reveals that obedience is lethal. Polonius’ death at the hands of Hamlet triggers a fit of grief that causes Ophelia’s mental and emotional instability. Ophelia’s loyalty had lain with her father, but that may have resulted in his demise. Had she been honest with Hamlet, the numerous deaths in the play could have been avoided. Though Hamlet’s lunacy was driven by more than one factor, his love for Ophelia put her in a position to strongly influence him positively; but her obedience to her father forbade her to do so. Nevertheless, through Ophelia’s climax, the audience learns that unrestricted obedience to one individual is dangerous to all involved. Obedience proves frivolous if it comes at the demise of another.

Both Gertrude and Ophelia’s obedience proves detrimental to themselves and their loved ones in their resolutions. They both suffer the same fate: death. In their climaxes, their obedience causes harm to others; however, in their resolution, their obedience brings about the consequences they must suffer. They both become tragic characters, whose deaths drive the play into its overall conclusion. Ophelia’s resolution in her drowning in the river, as well as Gertrude’s resolution in drinking from the poisoned cup, both reveal that their overly passionate servility is fatal. When fervent obedience surpasses an individual’s morality, he or she and those around the individual must pay the price.

Hamlet and Laertes’ introductions at Claudius’ ceremony ultimately signifies how quickly vengeance can consume a person. Both first appear to be decent men. Hamlet’s grief at the beginning of the play elicits sympathy from the
audience, portraying him as a good man. Yet, the shocking news of his father’s murder ignites a madness that quickly overtake his being and eventually kills him. Similarly, Laertes appears as a protective brother and an obedient son. Nevertheless, the news of his father’s murder frenzies him into rash action, accusing Claudius of Polonius’ murder. Though Hamlet and Laertes’ vengeance both manifests at the deaths of their fathers, each character goes about their revenge in different ways. Hamlet’s plot for vengeance is gradual. He is introspective in avenging his father, carefully working out the details making sure it is perfect. Meanwhile, Laertes is impulsive and reckless. After storming into the castle and accusing Claudius, Laertes is quickly brainwashed by the King and rashly plots to kill Hamlet, stating that he would “... cut his throat i’th’ church,” (4.7.123) the holiest of all places. Laertes’ excessive but passionate remark reveals that he does not believe that even God will offer Hamlet refuge, further emphasizing his intensifying vengeance. All in all, Shakespeare uses Hamlet and Laertes’ vengeance to convey that revenge can immediately change a person for the worse.

Hamlet’s climax in killing Polonius demonstrates how vengeance brings about violence that harms the innocent. Throughout his early plot, Hamlet seems nonviolent. His retribution is constantly extended because of his existentialist inquiries that force him to question the morality of his plans. However, Claudius’ reaction to the play and Gertrude’s reproach for her son drive Hamlet overboard. He attempts to kill his uncle in his fit of rage but realizes that he had murdered Polonius instead. Even then, Hamlet shows no remorse, calling dead Polonius a “wretched, rash, intruding fool,” (3.4.32) and telling his lifeless body to “Take thy fortune” (3.433). His strong hatred for Polonius stems from the councilor’s obedience to the King, whom Hamlet detests. He is so deep in his madness that he believes Polonius deserved his accidental murder. In addition to Polonius, Hamlet further displays his apathy in sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths in England. His old friends who were only doing their duty being summoned by the King and Queen to check on their friend paid the unfair price at the hands of merciless Hamlet. It is through these deaths that the audience decreasingly sympathizes with the protagonist, as his madness brings about unnecessary deaths. Hamlet’s vengeance has wiped away his sense of morality, thus proving that uncontrollable revenge results in needless cruelty.

The climax of Laertes occurs when he finds out of his father’s death and storms the castle; moreover, it conveys that revenge ignites impetuous behavior and turns self-destructive. Laertes’ revenge is impulsive, but it is done from deep pain. While the audience loses sympathy with Hamlet and his madness in his climax, they still sympathize with Laertes because he is motivated by double-grief and double-loss, losing his “noble father” (4.7.25) and eventually his “sister driven into desperate terms” (4.7.26). Losing a father and a sister in such a short period is understandable, but not morally justifiable, reasoning to seek immediate revenge. Nevertheless, his rashness makes him weakened and naïve to the manipulation of Claudius, who ultimately convinces him to kill Hamlet with a poisoned sword. Laertes’ vengeance is driven by grief, but that grief has blinded him from rationale; therefore, his revenge will lead to his destruction.

Hamlet and Laertes’ plots for vengeance simultaneously prove successful and unsuccessful in their resolutions at their duel, as it costs them their own lives. Like Gertrude and Ophelia, Hamlet and Laertes suffer the same destiny in death. While both managed to successfully kill their targets, unnecessary deaths occurred due to their retributions. Laertes displays an ounce of morality before he dies, admitting to his plot and making it known to Hamlet that “the king’s to blame” (5.2.316). The revelation is the final straw for Hamlet as finally avenges his father and forces Claudius to drink the poison. The deaths of Hamlet and Laertes exhibit the failures of vengeance. Through the two characters, Shakespeare reveals that carrying the burden of revenge will result in one’s demise.

In William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, the foiling of Gertrude and Ophelia, as well as Hamlet and Laertes, reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and vengeance. Through these characters’ introductions, climaxes, and resolutions, Shakespeare teaches his audience lessons on the consequences of unbridled obedience and vengeance. The foil between Gertrude and Ophelia reveals that fervent obedience manifests in many ways but will ultimately prove disastrous if one disregards her morality. Similarly, the foil between Hamlet and Laertes reveals that the burden of guilt is heavy and poignant, and if it consumes the individual, it becomes self-destructive. Both foils manifest the extremities of obedience and vengeance. Overall, if one lets their passion dictate their actions, then he will bring about his demise.
Isabela Delos-Reyes
Age: 18, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Critical Essay

Paternal Relationships and Existential Philosophies

Paternal relationships can be complicated matters. Many fathers face the stereotype of financially providing for the family, while mothers generally form a closer bond with the children; therefore, implying that fathers are not as emotionally connected with their children. Furthermore, the complications of fathers and their kids can be due to the fact that fathers are absent from their lives, not just emotionally but physically. According to the 2017 U.S. Census Bureau, “19.7 million children, more than 1 in 4, live without a father in the home” (National Fatherhood Initiative, NFI). According to NFI’s graphic, the absence of fathers increases behavioral problems, substance abuse, and criminal activity in children. In The Brothers Karamazov, paternal relationships set the foundation of the novel and the existential themes the author Fyodor Dostoevsky portrays. The foil between the two central father figures, the greedy neglectful sensualist Fyodor Karamazov, and the caring devout monk Father Zossima, creates a dynamic in the paternal relationships that Dostoevsky constructs, which are greatly influenced by his own life. Furthermore, they evoke existential ideologies within the characters and the readers, serving as the author’s goal. The complicated father-son relationships in The Brothers Karamazov manifest Fyodor Dostoevsky’s thematic existential philosophies of finding one’s purpose in life, the difficulties of forgiveness, and the burden of guilt.

To understand the depths of the paternal relationships of the novel, it is pertinent to understand the depths of the author Fyodor Dostoevsky’s upbringing with his father. As a former military surgeon, Dostoevsky’s father naturally possessed a stern, yet caring demeanor, which was expressed in his parenting (University of British Columbia). He cared largely for the education of his children, both academic and religious, sending them to the most prestigious schools at the time (University of British Columbia). However, similarly to one of the main characters Fyodor Pavlovitch, the death of his wife resulted in his alcoholism, thus increasing his temper and creating a despised reputation for himself, ultimately leading to his death believed to be at the hands of a serf (University of British Columbia). The unsolved death of his father allowed and steered Dostoevsky to write The Brothers Karamazov, not only to embody his life but to give himself closure and set his stance on his father’s murder.

From the first pages of the novel, the readers are able to grasp what a terrible father and person Fyodor Karamazov is, whose parental neglect foreshadows the destruction of himself and his sons. His neglect of Dmitri, who would be convicted of his father’s murder, is blatantly stated by the narrator, “He completely abandoned the child of his marriage with Adelaida Ivanovna, not from malice, nor because of his matrimonial grievances, but simply because he forgot about him” (Dostoevsky 1.2.5). At the time of Fyodor’s death, there was no time for sympathy, as his existence itself was an incentive for anyone to commit the crime, especially Dmitri. From being abandoned as a child, to engaging in a love triangle with his father, the firstborn had powerful motives for murdering his father. Nevertheless, despite being innocent of the parricide, Dmitri accepted guilt; not of Fyodor’s murder, but of the life that he had lived. His greed, his licentious sensuality, his overall self-destructive and cantankerous behavior seemed to be hereditary from his father, whom he ironically loathed for possessing all the same traits. Nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who read and admired Dostoevsky, once stated, “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster” (“Dostoevsky and Nietzsche”). While Dmitri spent the majority of his life detesting his father, he slowly became the very person he hated. Dmitri became Fyodor. His inability to forgive his father and move on, while in cases justified but proven doable by Alyosha, defined his life as a life of revenge; and after the death of his father: a life of regret. Throughout his entire life, Dmitri carried the burden of anger in his heart because of his father; and his realization of doing so resulted in his inability to forgive himself. That burden of anger turned into a burden of guilt, a central theme, that the readers are left to believe Dmitri carries the rest of his life.

The thematic philosophy of guilt is further expressed in Ivan’s relationship with his father, specifically in the events of Fyodor’s murder. Once Smerdyakov confesses to the murder of Fyodor, insinuating Ivan’s implications, Ivan is
riddled with guilt and disbelief (Dostoyevsky 11.9). Smerdyakov’s execution and explanation of the murder reveal his overlooked intellect and methodical mind, which are the same qualities that define Ivan’s character, thus emphasizing his shame. This shame serves as a parallel between Ivan and Dostoyevsky. According to Joseph Frank in his biography on the author titled Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time “…Dostoevsky emotionally assumed a burden of parricidal guilt,” and this guilt “transformed into the burning hatred of serfdom” (49). Fyodor Karamazov’s death at the hand of his servant symbolizes Dostoyevsky’s father’s death presumably at the hands of his serfs; thus, Ivan’s guilt is the embodiment of that of Dostoyevsky. Furthermore, the author’s accountability for his father’s murder produced his first epileptic seizure (Frank 45). His physical reaction parallels Ivan’s diagnosis of brain fever, which occurs shortly after Smerdyakov’s confession (Dostoyevsky 11.9.647). Their fathers’ deaths affected them mentally, emotionally, and physically. Fyodor Dostoyevsky mirrors himself in Ivan to express the burden of guilt he himself carries, which drives this thematic philosophy of carrying the weight of guilt in the final books of the novel.

Despite the tragedies of a lack of forgiveness and an overbearing of guilt exemplified in Fyodor and his sons, the readers find light in Alyosha and his relationship with Father Zossima. A significant difference between Alyosha and his two brothers is that he had a father figure to lead him and care for him. That figure was Father Zossima. Having him around kept Alyosha from letting hatred consume his heart and criminalize him as it did to his brothers, especially considering that it is proven that present fathers prevent their children from incriminating themselves (National Fatherhood Initiative). He proved to be more of a father than Fyodor ever could have been, chiefly because his relationship with Alyosha was built on the basis of love and faith; not just in God, but in others. Not only was it because of Zossima that Alyosha was able to forgive his father, but it was also because of him that Alyosha found his purpose in the world: to do good. These two contributions make Zossima the ultimate ideal paternal figure in the novel as he helps him find his purpose in life and teaches his “son” Alyosha the importance of redemption, a pivotal theme in the novel that is desired by his brothers Ivan and Dmitri.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky utilizes his own relationship with his father to construct a novel that explores the depths of paternal relationships. The story not only exemplifies his life but also his philosophically driven mind. He efficaciously creates existential themes concerning guilt, forgiveness, and purpose. Dostoyevsky ultimately drives home the truth that bearing the weight of guilt and possessing an inability to forgive those who have done wrong will inevitably result in one’s destruction, as evident in Dmitri, Ivan, and Dostoyevsky himself, all in correlation with their fathers. However, there is hope in those, such as Alyosha and Father Zossima, who find and use redemption to relieve themselves of hatred, disallowing themselves from making revenge their lives’ purpose.
A Tribute to Nirupama Pathak: Dishonored Love

It’s this beating in my chest whenever
You tip-toe over this sanctioned
Body my mother nurtured and cleansed
The holiness inside of me.

Welcome,
My dishonor you stem from
The roots of the hands you
Intertwined every countless
Digit: you lost me in math class.

I was surrounded by creations of
Parental animosity in the scars by
Caste or creed or dishonor
Or honor killing.

Mother burned me at the tip
Of my tongue you fractionated and
Father I felt the hair showering around
My body you first touched in the rain.

Mother, I am sorry for the love I
Wronged your ancestry and loved
Another who loved me more than
Mother, did you ever love me?

And father, I am sorry for the hands he
Invaded my body and the digits you
Taught me to count but not how to add
Two pieces of a heart broken by society.

Father, if you ever loved me,
Love me today and love me
Tomorrow in the blossoming of
These new flowers in the click of time.

Tomorrow is repeating the timeless
Soon to be counted digits of a new
Life that comes from the roots of our
Love that hopes to end the pain in my heart.
It’s this beating in my chest whenever
He comes to me seeking a new sunrise
But I must ask if mother and father
Will this be a new beginning or an honor killing?
God's Gift

When I first came out of my mother’s womb, I thought that God gifted me to this family. When I first came out of my mother’s womb, I thought that the flowers that blossomed in early spring were baby pink, mirroring the color of my femininity. When I first came out of my mother’s womb, the wary eyes I remember. It was as though the gift my mother nurtured into this world was not the child of perfection, of dreams, of beliefs I believe.

The flowers cultured the normality and generality of my first words, the flowers fell to the ground around my first steps, the flowers that flowed through the stream echoed my first tears. The tears I shed to myself through the night formed crystals that shined the next morning. The cries that I heard in the depths of my brain kept the pain alive, soaking the sand that I kneeled into, crying an ocean for this beach. But the river that carried the sorrows of my fallen flowers, carried the stories that I had not been manly enough to tell.

The pink ribbon the nurse tied to my right and left hand were the first chains I wore, that these stories and these truths would never garner the waterfall from the lips of a broken-hearted girl. The man that was within me would remain incarcerated tangled in the veins of my own body. The woman within me would remain a figure of inability and indignity. And the girl that wished to use these chains to spark a flame and burn this world down so that the heavens would return and shower flowers upon the bareness of the Earth was advised not to break through the walls that rose higher into the skies above.

In these principal moments, the girl within broke free and the baby pink flowers that were once unable to believe in the endless possibilities of tomorrow, now rained into the echoes of the waterfall kindling the movement for my lips to blossom too. The chains that I wore once with grief and disappointment, I now wear with grace. With the grace to trail these baby pink flowers along the steps that I take with these bare feet that have grown to support the body of a girl.

The first words that stopped at the sound of “mother” now have learned to give in to the stream of sorrows from the tears I cried and unfold the stories from these blossomed lips. The ocean I cried for the beach that I soaked with my own crystal tears fostered a landscape for the world to witness the strength of a girl. And when I first came out of my mother’s womb, I knew that God gifted me to this family. When I first came out of my mother’s womb, I knew that the baby pink flowers that blossomed in early spring each kindled a story worth being told. When I first came out of my mother’s womb, the eyes I remember were proud of the gift that she had nurtured into this world, that a girl can be the child of perfection, of dreams, of beliefs I believe.
The Sham of Our Truth

All I hear are my words and that sound
And my words and that sound
And I can hear thundering sounds
Under the whisper in that I speak
And that door is shut
Impenetrable forces with no protection
But the magnitude in which
A flame becomes a fire is not
The backbone of my jurisdiction.

The rivaling fires I hear
Beating and beating and beating
My eardrums on the verge of the deaf
My pupils on the simple touch of the blind
My whiltering voice under the breath of the mute.

And all I hear are these harmonious
Harmonies which you underestimate
And that sound
That sound I hear is the division
Between my home, my country, and my imagination.

The bulletproof protection that
Shatters at the brink of your fire
Drop dead
Drop dead
That gunshot fired
Headlines of terrorist attack
Drop dead
And all I see those headlines
Terrorist attack
Drop dead
And the falsification of their blames
My brothers and sisters
Innocent faces pictured in mugshots
Drop dead
Cries at the shrieks
And tears for safety from those
With no true heart to live.

And I am not one of them
But I am a part of them.
My Muslim brothers and sisters
Our country, our home we
Shared that rhythm in our voices
And that color we changed with every touch.

But that divide changed it all
My love for my home
Drop dead
Silent
Forever erased off
The blackboard we used to
Learn Hindi and Arabic on.
And those hands are now covered in dust
In a place far too sacred to be touched
And my only chance to save my people
Too distant to be considered family
But too close in my heart's orbit to forget
Is to learn to love and reach those empty
Hearts with no truth
To forgive guilt for innocence
To foster change under our roof we share
To foreclose this boundary of discrimination.

This world is truth for all
The sounds I hear now will never be
The cries of my brothers and sisters
Lashed at for their innocence
And their true self masked as a sham.
Yet I hear a slight shaking in my voice
A stutter almost mimicking the
Drop dead
Gunshot.
But the truth is out of the
Heartbeat of my orbit.
The truth is for
Your heart to love
Your ears to listen
Your eyes to witness
And your voice to rise.

My love for my home
Will never be enough to
Kindle the strength to say I'm sorry
Because I'm heightened by sorrow.
Forgive me but this is our voice
A voice of those hurting and those praying.
Silent - never the answer
Listen to learn to love
That these gunshots will be forever living a truth.
**Hidden Secrets**

Across the skies,
Riding on a cloud of hope,
Finding my destiny to rise,
This is my story to cope.

Please keep this to yourself,
These are my hidden secrets,
From the memories on my shelf,
This is my shadow of uniqueness.

Masked from the world and covered in black,
My shadow lingers on the edge of escape.
I need no plan or procedure of attack,
I let life go on as I reshape.

Life is full of surprises,
We must try to understand,
What this set of lies symbolizes,
From this place we think of as wonderland.

Let's make this the time of change,
A time to be together in harmony,
One hand in the other in a wide range,
Removing global misogyny.

Rest in peace my dear friend,
I enclose these very secrets,
We are one and we blend,
This is my shadow of uniqueness.
Gunshot: Unnoticed

Gunshot: Unnoticed

I have yet to notice. 1, 2, 20. And then a scream, a voice too easily forgiven but yet shaken. Shaken and thrown to the ground. Shaken and pinned to the ground. Shaken and—gunshot.

Gunshot traversed into the force field of people and shattered the shield that once held. Gunshot crumbled the shield into dust. Gunshot crushed this unity under the cold solitude of this country. Gunshots triggered into an innocent crowd, fired away amidst nothing. The lives beaten onto the ground.

Gunshot meant for it to happen. For the pain to caress through the spider web of nerves on my back. For the crimson blood in my heart to stop moving. For the body I once controlled to remain shaken. Shaken.

We'd been told to pray for those on the beds. We'd been told to learn from those in a better place now.

Heaven. The angelic mirage. The good isolated from the evil and nothing in between. The truth? The naiveness and innocence that overcome me. Lured me into the beliefs that this world was indeed a mirage but it isn't.

People once loved people and lived as human but now the inhumane gunshot kills people. No world of peace, a world of danger and deceit and death.

We'd been told to remember, honor, forget and move on. Remember and forget.

But isn't it hard to forget? Forget the sins. Forget the day our lives fell apart.

All that I can remember is the image of the shattered force field and the unity that stood on an open ground. As if unity could help save me, save us, save this family that we had once known.

But the world of lies disintegrated into the air around us. The lies that gave me hope now broke me and tore apart this family. My family.

I've been lying on this open ground. Waiting for change. Pain stinging into the bullet hole in my heart. Waiting for a human to transpire and convince my soul that this is the world. The world of prosperity. A godsent world. A blessing. I have yet to notice.
Unwritten. Revised. Rewritten.

Writing poetry allows me to share unique perspectives through storytelling. At the age of 12, I scribbled down my first few stanzas, transforming the mighty “Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market” by Pablo Neruda, to my very own “Ode to the Minion!” Crossing my t’s and dotting my i’s, I grinned at my first and final draft; it was a masterpiece.

As I flew through the pages of my crimson journal, I discovered ways to incorporate the symbolism in my poetry and followed the message on the front cover of my journal—carpe diem or seizing the moment. In my mind, poetry was an art; I imagined my poem forming on a blank canvas with immigrant parents, familial values, and cultural roots representing the primary hues that colored my experiences. These hues poured heavily into my poetry, revealing society’s fears for the life of a young girl. “It was as though the gift my mother nurtured into this world was not the child of perfection, of dreams, of beliefs I believe.” (Poem: God’s Gift). As I dabbled with revealing personal experiences through my poetry, I felt the need to be a certain kind of poet and, hence, was afraid to open my poetry to criticism.

The opportunity to attend the Summer Writing Residency at the University of Iowa, in the summer after my freshman year of high school, allowed me to listen to the feedback of other poets during the writer’s workshop discussions, as I unleashed my creative side and expressed vulnerability through my writing. Sharing my poetry instilled confidence within me, as I pushed myself over that last hurdle—an attempt to truly kindle an open-book personality.

I dusted the bottles of oil pastels. Hard-to-wash lumps, dried flakes, and hues that had seeped into the crevices were a testimony to the many perspectives that I brought to life through poetry. Colors gleamed from the skin under my damp nails as I mixed the paints on my palette. Poetry has not only allowed me to find a place to pour out my thoughts and feelings, but it has also allowed me to build and unveil a fearless persona. Today, I added a new color for my canvas—a fresh new perspective to share with the world.

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“Rest in peace my dear friend, / I enclose these very secrets, / We are one and we blend, / This is my shadow of uniqueness.” (Poem: Hidden Secrets). As I close out the poem, I am bombarded with positive remarks as well as critiques to help me improve. At the end of my 10 minutes for the workshopping process, I gather all of my peer annotations, and the ruffling of papers now excites me. Eagerly, I seize the opportunity to be accepted in a community of writers that, like myself, are carving their identities through their writing. Workshopping my poetry extends itself as a tool to sculpt my unapologetic personality. For me, my workshop never ends.
“as kids we learned to crawl and then walk and then just go. / but i wish i could just go.” (Poem: dreaming in the distance). I long to take flight with my newfound identity and use it as a tool to pen my outlook on colorful stories and truly paint the canvas of life.
Memoir

This is the most terrifying moment of my life. An impromptu speech for my junior year English class. Yeah, I know, pretty lame. My hands are cold and clammy, and I can feel my heartbeat thumping out of my chest. Anxiety is coursing through my bloodstream. I don’t think I’ve ever been this nervous before in my life. As I pace around my tiny bedroom, I think to myself, “I can’t do this, I can’t do this. I hate this more than anything.”

I shakily grab the note cards I’d been staring at for the past half hour, and read them over at least forty more times, thinking about every possible thing that could go wrong.

I hated impromptu speeches more than anything else in the universe. Reading and analyzing the book wasn’t enough to know every detail that could possibly be asked about. I had never been too keen on anything that wasn’t methodically planned out to the second, and if it wasn’t, I immediately thought I was a goner from the get-go.

I remember saying to myself, “Since when is this going to happen in the real world?”

Well, I found out pretty quickly that it was more common than I’d like to admit. I became a stage manager for my school’s theatre guild, and, while having a structure and plan for something as complex as live musical theatre, you can’t predict everything that’s going to happen. It was my first year as a stage manager, and when the primary stage manager suddenly dropped out of our annual musical *Guys and Dolls,* I was tossed right into the top spot.

There was nothing I could do to properly prepare for the next few months of four hour-long rehearsals and minimal sleep. However, during those grueling months, I understood the responsibilities and skills needed to fulfill such an enormous job such as running and calling the entire musical. I needed to be quick on my feet and adapt to change at a second's notice. Shaking off that false sense of security that everything would always be planned out right in front of me was pretty anxiety-inducing. But, at the moment of stressing over a one-minute English speech, none of that seemed very monumental.

Now, after practically spending the whole night stressing over this speech, I woke up groggily and headed to my first class of the day: English. I prayed to any god or gods there might be that I might not have to present my speech today, and repeat the whole freak-out process later today. Unfortunately, my name was called first (of course), and I could feel sixteen pairs of eyes on me as I got up from my seat, and headed to the front of the room.

I thought to myself, “This is the worst thing I’m ever going to do in my life!”

But after remembering the strenuous activities from rehearsal, it clicked to me that this situation happens every single day for me! I was still more nervous than ever, but if I hadn’t thought of that connection, I would have failed that speech.

Dealing with anxiety over small things like impromptu speeches held me back from reaching my true potential, whether it be within the arts or my academics. I was worried about what everyone would think of me if I said the wrong thing. But I realized that without failure, a myriad of laws and theories wouldn’t have been part of the science we use today. All of the economic, social, cultural, and environmental progress for humanity wouldn’t have been accomplished without people making mistakes and trying again and again until the desired results were achieved.

I want to be able to do the same for society, and use my communicative and cognitive skills to better our humanity and the environment, both of which need help to blossom.
Inferno

In the divine and sensual nature of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, it is demonstrated through Dante being the representation of man and Virgil of human reason, that the author is attacking his own peers and materialism to Earth. He additionally openly comments on the social and political climate he was living in. Dante expresses his political, philosophical, and religious ideologies through the just and symbolic punishments given to the historical figures mentioned in *Dante’s Inferno*, and allows the audience to have an understanding of the allegory of man’s gradual descent into the temptations of sin, using concrete examples, such as Ugolino, Ruggieri, Jason, Francesca, and Paolo.

Towards the beginning of the fifth canto, Dante, who had made an impression of deciding the justness of the other character’s punishments, encounters his first pair of sinners: Francesca and Paolo, who tells them of the symbolism of their punishment. While Paolo can only weep, Francesca recounts their story of how they ended up in the second circle of hell. Francesca da Rimini was the wife of Gianciotto, who was Paolo’s older brother, but the marriage was only out of alliance to avoid war and tensions. However, Francesca was caught committing adultery with Paolo: her true love. She recounts the event, saying, “...But it was on soft passage overthrew our caution and our hearts” (Canto V 129-130). Evidently, for their misdeeds, both are killed by Gianciotto and sent to the second circle of hell: a place where sinners of lust are condemned. The punishment given to the two lovers was an unceasing whirlwind, described as “…Hell’s full lamentation, sound beyond sound” (Canto V 27), filled with the sinners of carnal lust, symbolizing the convoluting tornado of the lovers’ passions for one another and the ever-changing desires of these sinners. To Dante, even though he is moved by Francesca’s words, the punishment is considered just due to the whirlwind metaphorically mirroring the actions of the lustful lovers. However, Dante only places the sin of lust in Circle Two, so it is assumed that he does not think of the sin as serious in comparison to the lower circles.

As Dante further ventures into the more serious circles, Dante meets Geryon, a winged monster who is the personification of fraud, and he takes Virgil and Dante down to the eighth circle. In this circle, they encounter Jason, the leader of the Argonauts, who is part of the seducers portion of the eighth circle. During his time alive, Jason seduced and left a multitude of women, including Hypsipyle of Lemnos, who he impregnated and abandoned, and Medea, a woman who helped him obtain the fleece, who he left for Creusa. Jason resided on a narrow bridge over the pit, seemingly proud. While he was grouped in with the first portion of the pit, who is punished by being whipped by horned demons, he appeared to not be as affected as the others in the eighth circle. Dante clearly believed Jason’s treatment of women deserves to be punished, hence why he was in the eighth circle, saying, “Here too Medea's inj'ries are avenged. All bear him company, who like deceit To his have practis'd” (Canto XVIII 94-96). He thinks having so many others that are deceitful around him is just, putting Jason in a reversal of his actions against Medea and Hypsipyle.

Finally, further down into the lowest circle of hell, Dante finally encounters Archbishop Ruggieri and Count Ugolino who he judges in accordance with the symbolic story that is told. The punishment for the two was described as “…the head of one Was cowl unto the other; and as bread Is raven'd up through hunger, th' uppermost Did so apply his fangs to th' other's brain, Where the spine joins it” (Canto XXXII 123-127), comparing the scene to that of a ravenous dog. Ugolino requests Dante to listen to what occurred prior to their punishment, and decide whether Ruggieri or himself is the more evil sinner. He begins by recounting the traitorous attempt to betray the city of Pisa and establish a Guelph government, which ultimately failed and he, along with other conspirators of Pisa, were arrested. After being released, Ugolino became a rising powerful force within the government, but switched his support towards the Ghibellines, due to the rising power of the group in Pisa. He then conspired with Ruggieri, another Ghibelline. After Ugolino created political chaos with the raising of food prices and giving away structures to keep enemies away, riots ensued, and, among the disarray, Ugolino murdered the nephew of Ruggieri. Once hearing this, Ruggieri betrayed Ugolino and plotted additional riots, which led to the arrest of the Count. In prison, Ugolino,
along with his sons and grandsons, were left to starve and die. He was to watch all his family die before he passed, saying “…and they were dead. Then fasting overcame my grief and me…” (Canto XXXIII 64-65). Dante recognized the wrongdoings, both of traitorous intent, and rightfully believes they both should be in Hell. The punishment of both being trapped in ice symbolizes the rigidity and the absence of warmth and love, and the eating of Ruggieri symbolizes the crime that was committed against Ugolino. He was forced to starve to death, and now, in Hell, he finally gets to feast again, this time it is the person who caused his death. Dante believes the punishments are given rightfully so, with both being equally punished for their traitorous deeds to Pisa, and Ruggieri being additionally punished with having to suffer the consequences of his actions. 

*Dante’s Inferno*, an allegorical work written after his exile, was filled with his political and religious ideologies, especially in regard to the philosophical aspects of each element. With this influence, Dante puts historical figures, many of who held a political standing in his time period, into appropriate circles of Hell. Figures, such as Ugolino, Ruggieri, Jason, Francesca, and Paolo, are punished in just and symbolic ways in accordance with their actions on Earth. Each wrongdoing is accurately represented, and now they are left to suffer from the same fate that first got them into Hell. Dante’s representation of himself as man allows the audience to recognize the gradual descent, represented by the circles of Hell, into sin, which is represented through Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Anger, Heresy, Violence, Fraud, and Treachery.
Satire

There goes the world, do dun do do
There goes the world, and I say
We’re all doomed
Icecaps melting, who knows how much more we will have
Icecaps melting, it feels like years since they’ve been here
There goes the world, do dun do do
There goes the world, and I say
We’re all doomed
Icecaps melting, the polar bears returning to no more homes
Icecaps melting, it feels like years since they’ve been here
There goes the world, do dun do do
There goes the world, and I say
We’re all doomed
Ice, ice, ice, there it goes
Ice, ice, ice, there it goes
Ice, ice, ice, there it goes
Ice, ice, ice, there it goes
Ice, ice, ice, there it goes
Icecaps melting, I can feel that our climate’s changing
Icecaps melting, it feels like years since they’ve been here
There goes the world, do dun do do
There goes the world, and I say
We’re all doomed
There goes the world, do dun do do
There goes the world, and I say
We’re all doomed
We’re all doomed
Hamlet

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Laertes as well as Claudius and Ophelia’s first introductions, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

Ophelia and Hamlet are foils of one another through their vengefulness they possess during their respective parts of the play. Evidently, the audience sees both characters descending into madness over their parents’ deaths; however, while Ophelia’s insanity is rather immediate and honest, Hamlet fakes his insanity for his own benefit before falling into real madness. Clearly, Ophelia’s madness is her scene with her singing and handing flowers to the other characters within the play, while Hamlet is acting mad since Act 1, scene V, with Horatio describing Hamlet’s words as “wailing and whirling” (1.5.136). Additionally, both characters experience a theme of suicide, with Ophelia’s implied suicide, and Hamlet’s pondering of suicide at the beginning of Act III. While Ophelia’s experience with suicide is an expression of weakness and fragility to the other characters, Hamlet’s experience is a sign of strength since he did not follow through with it. Both characters learn their lesson of vengeance due to the motif of suicide plaguing both of their minds.

Hamlet and Laertes also share a variety of common goals that capture the themes of vengeance that are prevalent throughout Hamlet. For example, in Act IV, Laertes discovers that his father has been murdered and immediately seeks out revenge on the murderer, in this case being Hamlet. The situation parallels itself with the initial conflict of the story: Hamlet’s father being murdered and Hamlet seeking vengeance against Claudius, the killer. However, these characters differ from their actions. While Hamlet acts more with his intellect and tries to think everything through, Laertes acts in a more irrational and spontaneous manner, an example being in Act 4, with Laertes saying, “conscience and grace to the profoundest pit” (4.5.150), which clearly expresses the lack of reason he possesses when hearing the news of his father’s death. Furthermore, Hamlet’s initial reaction to hearing of his father’s death is one of deep depression and grief, while Laertes is immediately rash and hot-headed in his actions. Evidently, both characters learn the consequences of their vengeance in Act V, when both are killed by each other’s hand. Hamlet learns the consequences of his vengeance throughout the climax of his character arc. Initially, it is evident that Hamlet is an extremely contemplative and existential character through his actions and monologues throughout the play. An example of his intellect is through his plan of acting out the murder Claudius committed in order to differentiate the ghost of Hamlet’s father from a devilish spirit. However, as the play progresses, it is evident that Hamlet loses a portion of that rationality, and madness caused by his obsession with vengeance begins to fester. His initial philosophical questions turn from questioning topics with no clear answer to thoughts of suicide and the afterlife, and it acts as a catalyst for his descent into madness. Seeing Hamlet murder Polonius due to his new found irrationality brings the audience into the realization that Hamlet’s madness is no longer a ruse, but a reality. Not only does Hamlet face the consequence of losing a sense of himself, his actions indirectly lead to majority of the character’s deaths; Ophelia’s insanity over her father, Laertes’ newly discovered rage and despair, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s executions, and his mother’s end. Finally, after losing parts of himself, his family and friends, he loses himself after being pricked with Laertes’ sword, and faces the ultimate punishment of man: death.

Evidently, Laertes also experiences the consequences of his vengeful actions. He is obviously deeply distraught over the death of his father, and he decides out of a burst of irrationality and pain to seek vengeance. When hearing the news of his father’s death, he exclaims, “That drop of blood that’s calm proclaims me bastard, / Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot / Even here between the chase unsmirched brow / Of my true mother” (4.5.114-117), which seems unfocused and all over the place, but actually gives reason towards his vengeance and pain. Laertes expresses that if he were to not to act out in the rash way he was about to, he would not be a true son to Polonius.
He thinks of himself as a bastard, which was heavily considered to be less than nothing in the time period of Hamlet, if he does not avenge his father. However, the audience sees Laertes suffer twice, first with the suicide of his sister Ophelia, and second his own death caused by the same person who murdered Polonius: Hamlet.

Claudius goes through a major character arc as he deals with both obedient and vengeful characters. Initially, the audience sees the new King as a power-hungry tyrant with his main goal to be the ruler without any interference. His manipulative and dangerous nature, paired with eloquence in his words, makes him a fierce player within his conquest for power. However, the audience sees a shift after Hamlet puts on the play reenacting Claudius’ murder. There is guilt starting to fester within him, and he spends the remainder of the play trying to run from his actions. Escaping the consequences involves getting rid of Hamlet, and using his manipulative strategies, he convinces Laertes to do his bidding. He says, “Laertes, was your father dear to you?/ Or are you like the painting or a sorrow,/ A face without a heart?” (4.7.108-110) to stir Laertes into vengeance for Hamlet.

Ophelia is one of the few characters that possesses obedience as her downfall. In the play, she is regarded as an obedient girl, and is seen as a people-pleaser more than anything else. First, Ophelia is obedient with her father, Polonius, when he tells her to stay away from Hamlet’s love, saying, “I shall obey my Lord”(1. 3.145). Additionally, when Hamlet pokes fun at her, she does nothing about it and only shows respect for him instead of fighting back. Her innocence and obedience leads her to her implied suicide. The flowers given symbolize a variety of different themes, such as the fennel sympolying flattery and a suck-up nature or the violet representing the motif of premature death, which was given to the majority of the characters besides Horatio. Her expression of obedience and fragility leads to her consequence of death and downfall.

Ophelia and Hamlet, being foils to one another, juxtapose each other in regards to their themes of insanity. Both are going through grief and heartache with the loss of their fathers, but both react in vastly different ways. Ophelia genuinely falls apart when hearing the news of her father’s death, while Hamlet devises a complex and convoluted plan out of vengeance. Hamlet’s lesson is to let go of the vengeance in his heart, otherwise it will lead to madness. Conversely, Ophelia’s lesson is to stand up for herself when and to not be so obedient to the men who look down on her.

Additionally, Laertes and Hamlet as foils share in similar lessons, due to both seeking revenge for their murdered fathers. Both men act out of emotion and immediately make the decision to avenge them through murder. However, they meet their untimely deaths at each other’s hand. However, while Hamlet never forgives or sympathizes with his father’s murderer, Laertes does, saying, “But in my terms of honor I stand aloof, and will no reconcilement /Till by some elder masters, of known honor, I have a voice and precedent of peace /To keep my name ungored” (5.2.233-235). Hamlet learns the lesson of forgiveness in his dying moments, while Laertes learns to not act so irrationally and to think of the consequences of his actions before anything else.

Hamlet, written by Shakespeare, uses the foiling of his paired characters to reveal the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Laertes as well as Claudius and Ophelia’s first introductions, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters. While some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes, the character arcs in the play draw a deeper connection to the relationships between the characters.
Villain Essay

Have you ever killed someone? Yeah, me too. I had to, honestly. How else would I have any chance of getting the throne? Ask him? Absolutely not. So, I went with the next best thing, murder.

At first things were going great; I had a great new wife, a powerful job, and a pretty smart nephew. Nobody knew what I did, and nobody had to. However, as time went on, my nephew, Hamlet, started to catch on and connect the dots. My initial reaction after seeing my nephew come up with an entire play reenacting my crime was rightfully one of utter shock and anger. First of all, how does he even know what happened, and second of all, it’d be very much appreciated if he didn’t try to ruin my status as King. I was incredibly upset at the events that had just transpired, and gave myself time to think about what had happened. I say to myself “Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to Heaven./ It hath the primal eldest curse upon ‘t, /A brother’s murder” (3.3.38-40). Slowly, I begin to realize the magnitude of my actions and just exactly what I have done. Never before had I ever thought so deeply of the consequences of my actions. I reflected briefly, thinking aloud and saying, “May one be pardoned and retain th' offense?” (3.3.58). I am still bent on my own strength to be sustained. Apparently, the old King Hamlet was a stern fighter, but I see myself as a dishonest politician whose main weapon is my ability, through my skillful use of language, to exploit others. Most of the other men here are concerned with the conceptions of justice, vengeance, and moral equilibrium, but here I am, a killer and a traitor.

“My words fly up; my thoughts remain below./ Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3.3. 98-99), and for once, I genuinely felt remorse and grief for the actions I committed. Slowly, I realized a moment of personal growth within myself. Before this moment, I saw myself as a shrewd, lustful, remorseless, and conniving king, but now, I felt a change of heart within myself. That I could finally be a better person than what I was. That I could deepen my understanding of my actions and accept the consequences of them.

This realization changed the way I think, and made me go through my own version of personal growth. After all the actions I have committed, I believe being able to understand and overcome the tribulations makes me a perfect fit at Dartmouth College. A school who “educates the most promising students and prepares them for a lifetime of learning and of responsible leadership, through a faculty dedicated to teaching and the creation of knowledge” will allow me to work on the responsibilities of a true leader rather than the way I attained leadership. The Tuck school of Business offered there will bring me to a better political and social understanding, and make me truly fit to be King.
Our Success
It is a goal
We all share.
No one wants to
Fail at anything.
We are told to be
The best at everything
No one is happy with
Failure. It is frowned upon.
We need to be the best, and never the worst,
Otherwise, we will never make it.
Failure only gets in the way of goals.
Failure only brings people pain and grief.
Success is everything and failure is nothing.
No one is congratulated for failing a test or exam.
Only sympathy is given for not making an interview.
Failure will only have you end up at the very bottom.
Failing can have no upside.
Success is the only force that will get you anywhere in life.

In “Success,” by Jenna Favazza, the two-part structure, conveyed via binary opposition and antithesis, plus repetition mirrors man is faced with society’s values of success being the only acceptable outcome, and that failure is rejected.

When we wander through the wayward path of life, we fail. We fail at the simplest and the hardest things within a life;
Since the day we could walk, until the day we die, we fail.
Through rain, sun, snow, or sleet, we manage to mess up.
When we start going to school, we fail in a number of ways.
We fail tests and quizzes,
We forget our homework,
We don’t study for exams.
After we finish school, we fail in different ways.
We get rejected from a multitude applied for jobs,
We get rejected from the girl or guy we asked out,
We fail to call or text our parents we left behind.
Failure is not a bad thing,
Even if we always say so.
Failure leads to successes
Failure teaches a lot more,
Then succeeding ever will.
Success can only go so far,
While failure sets us up for
Bigger and better rewards
That will last way longer,
Then any initial success.

In “Failure,” by Jenna Favazza, the two-part structure, revealed through imagery and alliteration, in addition to repetition, addresses man’s innateness to failure being a success within itself.

ANTITHESIS:
In “Failure,” by Jenna Favazza, the two-part structure, revealed through imagery and alliteration, in addition to repetition, addresses man’s innateness to failure being a success within itself; conversely, In “Success,” by Jenna Favazza, the two-part structure, conveyed via binary opposition and antithesis, plus repetition, mirrors man is faced with society’s values of success being the only acceptable outcome, and that failure is rejected.
Finding the Right Path

*Don’t think about it, if you do it will only get worse.*

Butterflies fluttered around in my stomach as my eyes darted to the clock to check how much time was left for the timed write during English. Hoping I would not ruin the paper that I had spent 45 minutes on, I wiped my clammy, sweaty hands on my uniform shorts to the point where it looked as if they had been dropped into a swimming pool.

“*Ugh, not again*”, I think to myself, as another hole tears through my paper. This frantic mindset was a common occurrence during my high school years in dealing with hyperhidrosis.

As a child learning to walk, I was diagnosed with hyperhidrosis in the palms of my hands (Palmar Hyperhidrosis) and soles of my feet (Plantar Hyperhidrosis) because I could not stand on the slippery tile flooring. Hyperhidrosis is a genetically obtained medical condition that causes any part of the body to excessively sweat for an arbitrary number of reasons: anxiety, heat, or simply “just because”. This condition has affected all aspects of my life; during high school, my hands often ripped or blurred the words on my papers to the point of illegibility. The embarrassment of shaking hands—either with my friends or in a professional setting—is an awkward task that I often try to avoid through miscellaneous excuses. As a competitive tennis player, practicing in the 120 degree Las Vegas heat sometimes feels impossible because I cannot keep the racket from slipping out of my hands. It is funny, though, when I’m about to slam that winning overhead and the racket swiftly flies out of my hands like Superman.

In any case, having to deal with dripping hands every day for seventeen years means I’ve had to implement creative solutions to make life easier and more practical. At school, I write what feels like a million essays on paper for classes like AP English and AP United States History and have figured out that having a hair tie scrunchie under my hand prevents my drenched palms from ripping and blurring the paper. While this is only a temporary solution, the innovative problem solving techniques and quick thinking that I’ve honed over the years have in fact drawn me to the equally innovative STEM field. I have grown up overwhelming my mind with information about the field through research on my condition, however, engineering specifically exploded into the picture when I took an Intro to Engineering Course in the summer of 2020. The atmosphere, learning environment, and experience was unlike anything I have ever done as I launched virtually created, three-stage rockets; programmed robots meant to save civilians from natural disasters; and designed a carbon dioxide capturing device that reverses the effects of climate change. There are no limits in engineering.

Currently, there is not a cure for hyperhidrosis but rather painful treatments such as electronic shock therapy, Botox, and a notoriously dangerous Endoscopic Thoracic Sympathectomy surgery, which have all failed to alleviate my symptoms. For most people, this disability might be seen as a negative attribute to everyday life, but hyperhidrosis shaped who I am and sparked my future career path. As I paint the picture of my future, I plan on utilizing the next four years to learn how to develop improved treatments and a cure for the 365 million people suffering from Hyperhidrosis worldwide through the extraordinary, revolutionary fields in engineering. I am no longer embarrassed to shake hands in a colloquial or professional setting because I know that it is natural for my body. In the end, I am beyond grateful that I have been given a different outlook on life and ecstatic that it has started me on a future career path in STEM, one that I would have never discovered without my condition. Hyperhidrosis has given me a reason to help millions of people just like me.
GARLAN, ASHLEY

Ashley Garlan
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Caprice Houston-Bey

Category: Poetry

Not Crazy

Hamlet failed to comprehend the calm mentality of his beloved mother,
Her willingness to throw away her husband’s memory,
Her willingness to marry her deceased husband’s brother,
The selfish actions infuriated Hamlet,
And sent him into further despair after the death of his only father.
The ghost of King Hamlet appeared in an eloquent silence to personify the root of evil that pranced throughout the
kingdom like a showpony,

His own blood snatched every drop of value from his recently deceased body,
The betrayal demonstrated that Claudius is inherently naughty,
With the anger building up inside,
Hamlet preached to avenge his father’s demise,
BAM! He constructed a devious plan that made his character grow madder and madder,
Finally he began to climb the revenge ladder,
The prince hesitated at every turn to avenge his father and win back the kingdom.

Timidly Hamlet couldn’t commit to the paths that would officially solidify his destiny,
He broke the balance begrudgingly by placing his free will over his destiny,
Betrayal bled bullets behind the broken façade of Claudius,
Hamlet knew it was time to welcome sweet death upon his snake uncle.

Rage flooded the prince like a thousand suns burning the ground of Norway,
He drew his weapon of death with a cling and stabbed the closest sound he could,
Within the anger he murdered the father of his beloved Ophelia,
He murdered a friend out of his own increasing madness,
Hamlet threw away his destiny out of hestation and inner division.
Religion failed to be the driving force behind Dante’s Inferno. Rather, the detailed journey of protagonist and author Dante through the depths of Hell parallels Dante spiking a jab at his real life bullies that secluded him within his lifetime by portraying Hell as a place where those who tortured him would suffer endlessly. Dante’s Inferno depicts Hell in levels determined by sin through the intricate placing of pain from his life into the story, ironically creating punishments that correlate with the sin, and including a multiplicity of ideas signified in Foster’s “How to Read Literature Like a Professor”.

Dante was a jokester. Not quite literally, but he chose to include irony within every aspect of Dante’s Inferno when it came down to the hierarchy of the sins and the punishment the sins would entail. The novel was written in a manner of high school revenge against the immoral people that isolated Dante in the 1300s, which is why he placed his bullies in one of the highest tiers of the sin hierarchy. With that said, Dante explains each circle of Hell as he journeys through it towards the realm of Purgatory. The circles of Hell are based on the severity of the sin committed in one’s lifetime paired with an ironic punishment configured by Dante himself. Irrefutably, the punishments add humorous irony and imitation to the plot because they typically force the sinner to commit to their immoral choice (the sin) for the remainder of eternity, unless they chose not to which fails to occur. Examples include the lustful being prohibited from peace and rest by strong, relentless winds because an alive person overflowing with lust will never be able to settle down with peace due to their immoral actions with multiple lovers. In Circle 5, the Angry pursue raging emotions for eternity as they argue, fight, and squabble with one another, which is juxtaposed by the sullen forever quite literally drowning themselves because they lack courage and motivation. The hierarchy of sin perfectly symbolizes the irony of sins committed in real life.

Within Foster’s “How to Read Literature Like A Professor”, the importance of geography, weather, and irony are highlighted. Dante’s Inferno takes into account these three aspects of literature because the location evokes emotions within readers and allows them to embark on the journey with Dante, the weather coincides with the punishments of the sins such as the relentless winds punishing the lustful, and the irony of the punishments adds humor and lightheartedness. The story as a whole offers a warning to readers to stop making the choice to sin. Dante’s Inferno and How to Read Literature Like A Professor prohibit readers from further committing to sinful actions because Dante depicts a world where sin is eternal. The ironic punishments propose a significant warning to readers. Additionally, the geography, weather, and location propose a unique outlook and symbolism for the readers to catch onto throughout the plot of the story as it progressed. Sin is irrefutably a choice.
Ashley Garlan
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Caprice Houston-Bey

Category: Humor

Fit for a King

They don’t tell you what your adult life will be like: Happy? Sad? Successful?
However, I always envisioned the outcome of my future as royally successful, even at a young age; I never fail to
strive for the highly staked goals I planned to pursue and, without fail, have committed to the impossible no matter
how many roadblocks appear on my path to divine success. The success I seek, to put case in point, is to be the
most illustrious royal ruler of all time.

My biggest accomplishment to date is my employment as the supreme King of Denmark. (Shakespeare 1.2 35-36)
Royalty is an unbelievable honor, clearly. The dream of mine has been a fairytale to my surrounding family for
decades, but the pure passion that I am engulfed with ensures that I will succeed as King. In order to ensure my
royal prosperity, I plan to take on the major of business management and leadership in college to further the skill,
knowledge, and technique of being a true King. Indeed, my brother was concreted in this position prior to myself,
however his absence to the throne has opened up a comfy little seat that fits my bottom quite perfectly. (Shakespeare
1.2 1) The newly solidified employment I have stumbled upon is all the more reason to obtain a higher education in
business management and leadership. Indubitably, the study entails that natural and earned leadership skills will result
in the highest level of success according to the recent study done by my chamber of subordinates. The natural
leadership skills I contain stem from hereditary backings because, as I mentioned previously, my brother was the
King prior to my rule until he mysteriously died, which of course was completely unrelated to myself if anyone asks.
As the current King of Denmark, I have honed new skills to further my success as a ruler which demonstrates my
hard-working persona and willingness to take on challenges.

Duke University pertains to be the most prestigious university in the Americas as it employs hundreds of diverse
clubs, unique (and castle like) infrastructures, and distinguished programs for the education I push to pursue.
Undeniably, I will decorate my room Denmark Royal Chic with my throne replacing the roommate that I will not be
having’s bed, handmade silk sheets embroidered with the Denmark flag, and a servant’s corner with maybe some
hand towels. Oh, how fun it will be! Additionally, the university name “Duke” fits perfectly alongside my name
“King” because the royal status parallels one another to demonstrate supremely high respect, poise, and power.
Duke University is the only place fit for King Claudius.

The excitement I feel for my college years is uncontrollable. I will pursue my study of business management and
leadership with full force as I work to be the greatest leader of all time. Of course, if you chose to not accept me
into your illustrious university, Duke, then you leave me with no choice other than to cut off your head. Have a royal
day.
“DECORUM PLEASE!” I announced, gripping the attention of the Congressional room.
I would have never been able to run a room like this three years ago, when I registered for Speech and Debate class out of blissful curiosity. Little did I know how much it would change my life.

Walking into my first debate class freshman year, I was cheerfully unsure of what to expect. To answer my own question, I spent my freshman and sophomore years in the class learning different debating formats such as Lincoln-Douglas debate, which is based on the test of morality, or Congress debate, which mirrors the United States Senate and House of Representatives. In addition, the brilliant teacher and experienced upperclassman taught me how to project my voice, perfect my body language, and compose a well-rehearsed speech in order to compete in local tournaments. The delicate preparation of debate cases and exposure to domestic and international issues was intriguing, and I began to fall in love with the challenges the class threw at me.

During my junior year, the teacher that I had previously considered my mentor left the school, leaving an inexperienced substitute to take her place. “How is a teacher that has never taken, competed in, or taught Speech and Debate possibly expected to corral a class of obnoxious freshman?” I presumptuously thought; I mean, we all know how freshmen are. The decision then became clear: I needed to step up and be the educator for the next generation of Speech and Debate kids. From that point on, I taught lessons, explained the diverse formats of speech and debate events, critiqued hundreds of practice rounds, and simplified the tournament jargon in a way that the novices could understand.

Eventually, I was attending every tournament I possibly could. My weekdays were spent scrambling between school, debate club, and tennis, while my weekends were divided between tennis tournaments and debate tournaments. The sacrifices I made usually boiled down to my social life and sleep schedule, sadly, because I would consistently spend 12+ hours a day at tournaments or stay up late until I found that ground-breaking piece of evidence I knew would stump my opponent. Learning how to balance my weekly schedule through time management became a must.

But the sacrifices I made time and time again never outweighed the benefits. Because of Speech and Debate, I have grown into the confident leader I have always desired to be, a lover of current events, and an outstanding public speaker. In addition, I have found a loving home within the (extremely) nerdy community, discovered the wonders of Model United Nations, and was even chosen to compete at nationals on the World Schools Debate Team. The World Schools Debate Team was an experience that challenged my skill set and fueled my enthusiasm for the art of debate: I partook in structured debates, along with my other four team members, in a variety of challenging international topics. My team and I spent months preparing for the week of the tournament, practicing and researching almost twelve hours a day. When it came to competition week, we battled other domestic and foreign teams from locations such as Taiwan, China, and Texas, and I was employed as the starting first speaker in 14 out of 18 rounds. The debate format constitutes a 3v3 ultimate showdown where each speaker takes on the challenge of cramming the maximum amount of ground-breaking evidence and style into a short 8 minute speech. The event was an unforgettable learning and social adventure.

Today, as the President of the Speech and Debate Team, I can sincerely say that I would not be the person I am today without Speech and Debate, and I cannot wait to continue my passion in university.
The Best Solution

The rampant dilemma of teenage depression diminishes the status of overall society and causes concern for the future as the statistics of mental illness in high school students exceed all current numbers on the charts. Our kids are suffering and a solution must be discovered. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the diagnosed depression found in children aged 6–17 years increased from 5.4% in 2003 to 8% in 2007 and to 8.4% in 2011–2012 displaying the striking increase in mental illness projected by the current youth of the United States. An increase in the hopeless, despairing youth population proposes the issues of unmotivated employees, spouse-less adults, and gloomy creative minds proving that the best solution must emerge in order to resolve these potential economic, social, and architectural dilemmas.

The most realistic solution is to utilize the gloomy mindset of these depressed teenagers by employing them into creative work of the arts including movies, modern architecture, and dramatic theatre. In other terms, the different perspectives of sad teenagers can be filtered into placing them into beneficial occupations where they will earn a substantial living wage, utilize their depression to their advantage, and produce a better future for the creative and economic status quo’s.

Of course, the implementation of this perfect solution would raise questions among the general population of the United States, however the implementation of the plan is the simplest aspect. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention discovered that 1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2–8 years (17.4%) had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder which means that these children would be placed into special programs where their creative, unique perspective can be juiced into the cinematic, theatrical, and architectural worlds to display beautiful pieces of art across the country.

The solution has already gained appraisal from prominent government officials, parents of students with healthy minds, and American Federation of Teachers. Not only would this resolve their depression by providing them with purpose and creative outlets, but the economy would gain substantial gains with the increased quality of art, the creative world would expand dramatically with the new talent, and classrooms would contain less students which provides a more specialized learning environment for teachers and normal students. The benefits outweigh the possible cruelty of separating children due to their mental illnesses.

Indeed, the parents and students directly affected by this new solution might oppose the separation because they are being forced into a workforce based on their internal struggle, but they will irrefutably flip over to the good side once they witness the communal benefits firsthand. I can sincerely say that the proposal of this idea benefits all parties involved, despite the objections claiming the solution is “radical” and “will not work”. Teenagers everywhere will thank the United States government for such an innovative and luxurious program. The best solution for humanity is to employ mentally ill, specifically depressed, children into the creative workforce where they will improve the country’s economy, creative status quo, and themselves.
Obedience, Vengeance, and Shakespeare's Foiling

Some readers view that Hamlet's plot's five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare's paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Laertes, as well as Ophelia and Gertrude's, first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

The affectionate Laertes contrasts powerfully with the distant Hamlet in the two characters' introductions. Hamlet's distance from his broken family, and lack of affection toward his mother, oppose Laertes's overwhelming devotion to his sister. Bidding his sister, Ophelia, farewell, in his preparation for France, Laertes warns her, “For Hamlet and the trifling of his favor,/ Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood” (1.3.5-6). Laertes's advice to his sister, pleading that she avoid falling in love with Hamlet, demonstrates the protective role that Laertes has taken on out of love for her. Laertes shares a strong brotherly love for Ophelia, which is evident in his advice to her and his uneasiness in leaving for France. Conversely, Hamlet displays a lack of affection in his familial interactions. Lamenting his father's death and his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle, Hamlet proclaims, “Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears/ Had left the flushing in her ballad eyes,/ She married” (1.2.154-156). Hamlet, shattered and disgusted by Gertrude's actions, states that his mother's tears from his father's funeral had not even dried before she married his uncle. Feeling betrayed by his mother, in her quick decision and incestuous encounter, Hamlet suffers a distrust of women, in addition to a lack of obedience and affection toward them.

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, the female characters Ophelia and Gertrude both have intimate connections with the main protagonist, Hamlet; Ophelia as his love interest and Gertrude as his mother. The two women are foils to one another, as Ophelia is depicted as an innocent and obedient maiden, whereas Gertrude is seen as promiscuous and unfaithful, particularly to her late husband, following her quick remarriage. In one of the audience's first encounters with Ophelia, she humbly obeys her father's command to stay away from her only love, Hamlet, simply replying, “I shall obey my Lord” (1.3.145). Ophelia shows only the utmost respect for her father, even when she disagrees with his rules and guidelines. Again, when Hamlet mocks her and taunts her with sexual comments and innuendos, she still answers, “Ay, my Lord” with the utmost respect and obedience (3.2.105). Ophelia's steadfast obedience is conveyed through her interactions and conversations, particularly with male figures, such as her father, Polonius, and her true love, Hamlet. A clear foil to Ophelia, Gertrude represents everything that Ophelia is not. The audience is immediately introduced to Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, with her wedding to Claudius, not too long after her late husband's untimely death. Hamlet frequently speaks of his mother's promiscuous tendencies, describing Gertrude and Claudius's marital bed as “...incestuous sheets” and “...an enseamed bed,/ Stewed in corruption” (3.4.84-85). Gertrude's immediate marriage to her late husband's relative even begs the question: Could she have been involved with Claudius prior to the death of her husband? Gertrude's disobedience to Hamlet Sr. and tendency to use men to fulfill her instinct for self preservation directly juxtapose Ophelia's unwavering obedience to the male figure in her life.

Laertes, with the news of his father's death, is quick to decide to avenge his father's death, without consideration of the consequences. With little to no time for further thought Laertes states, “Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged/ Most thoroughly for my father” (4.5.143-144). Many young men feel responsible for protecting their family, just as Laertes demonstrates through his brotherly love for his sister Ophelia. However, impulsivity and hot-headedness can get in the way of rationality and responsibility. Laertes’s fierce attitude and compulsive way of thinking inspire his plan for revenge against Hamlet, who murdered Laertes’s father. Although Gertrude is poisoned by mistake and both Hamlet and Laertes suffer untimely deaths, Laertes course of action proves to be more successful than Hamlet’s.
While Laertes quickly feels determined to avenge his father’s death, Hamlet is uncertain of whether to fight for revenge or not. With the news of his father’s murder, Hamlet’s plan to act insane conveys his uncertainty. Hamlet, while discussing with Horatio his plan for revenge, discloses, “How strange or odd so’er I bear myself/ As I perchance hereafter shall think meet/ To put up an antic disposition on” (1.5.171-173). Hamlet’s uncertainty delays him from taking action, and, in a terrible act, Hamlet kills the relatively innocent Polonius. Suspecting the intruder to be Claudius, Hamlet, even in his uncertainty, decides to act and kills Polonius, a crime that his mother describes as a “...rash and bloody deed” (3.4.26-28).

Shakespeare makes it known that Ophelia is very much controlled by the men in her life, especially her father. Her father demands that she cease contact with Hamlet, and makes most of her decisions for her. Subject to the male patriarchy, mainly Hamlet, Laertes, and her father, Polonius, Ophelia is objectified as an obedient pawn. The death of Ophelia’s father is her breaking point. In her grief and madness, after hearing of her father’s murder, she chants, “Young men will do’t if they come to’t,/ By Cock they are to blame” (4.5.59-60). Some of the songs that she sings seem to be about her father’s death, while others, such as this one, concern premarital sex and promiscuity, suggesting that Ophelia may have felt extremely betrayed by Hamlet, especially if the young couple had a sexual relationship. At Ophelia’s climax within the story line, it is clear that she can no longer keep up with such unwavering obedience to the men in her life that continue to hurt her.

At Gertrude’s climax, Hamlet confronts his mother about her promiscuous tendencies and remarriage, while also explaining how Claudius killed her late husband. As Gertrude’s eyes are opened to the truth, she promises Hamlet, “...thou hast thy father much offended/ Be thou assured, if words be made of breath, And breath of life, I have no life to breath what thou hast said to me” (3.4.201-203). Gertrude, however, in promising to keep Hamlet’s secret, and offering her obedience to him, also renounces her obedience to and affections for Claudius. This keeps her in a constant state of disobedience, though it may be so warranted.

As a foil character to Hamlet, Laertes emphasizes Hamlet’s instability through his own unwavering and consistent behavior. Laertes’s consistent love for his sister Ophelia, overwhelming love for his father, and steady plan for revenge, directly contradict Hamlet’s wavering love, lack of familial connection, hindering love for his father, and constant change of plans for revenge. Laertes follows through with his plan to avenge his father, killing Hamlet, whereas Hamlet’s plan for revenge changes constantly, and even results in the unnecessary death of an innocent man. Laertes’s plan to murder Hamlet, and his ability to fully execute his plan, illustrates Laertes’s consistent behavior. Announcing his plan for revenge, Laertes proclaims, “I will do’it/ And for that purpose I’ll anoint my sword” (4.7.155-156). Hamlet changes his mind, after considering the opportunity to kill Claudius at the altar, illustrating his unstable behavior. Hamlet, in his uncertainty, says, “And am I then revenged,/ To take him in the purging of his soul,/ When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?/ No./ Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent” (3.3. 88-92). Hamlet battles himself when making decisions, thinking over the consequences, but with little rationality. Hamlet’s wavering behavior and uncertainty cements the idea that consistency is key, especially when plotting for revenge.

Both the obedient and innocent Ophelia and the promiscuous and unfaithful Gertrude die under the hands of powerful men, revealing that, regardless of the actions taken by the female characters in Hamlet, it is, ultimately, the men that determine the untimely fate of both women. Laertes, in light of Ophelia’s death and possible suicide due to her emotional despair, says “Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,/ And therefore I forbid my tears” (5.7.182-183). Ophelia, during her life, is interfered with in her love life by her brother, her father, and Hamlet himself. Presented as almost entirely the victim, the loss of her father by Hamlet’s hands brings about a madness inside her and, later, her untimely death. Then, in an accidental poisoning meant for Hamlet, Gertrude pleads, “No, no, the drink, the drink!/ O my dear Hamlet!/ I am poisoned” (5.2.305-306). Another female character victimized by male influences, Gertrude dies amidst the contest of foils between Hamlet and Laertes. The women die quietly, with no more to be said of the situation.

The foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters, particularly Hamlet and Laertes and Ophelia and Gertrude, reveal the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance through the characters’ first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters. Although in some ways Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes, it is the foiling of Shakespeare’s paired characters that really cement the devastating effects of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance.
The Just and Symbolic Nature of Dante's Punishments

Punishment is defined as the intentional infliction of suffering on an offender that is being tried for a moral or legal wrongdoing. In order for a punishment to be considered just, the offender must receive a punishment that is of the same degree as their original offense. The idea of just punishment is significant to Dante’s moral messages and the levels of Hell that he has created. In Dante’s Inferno, the punishments within the various “Circles of Hell”, as denoted by Dante, are created in perfect proportion to the sins of the offenders and are highly symbolic, in order to aid in the sinners’ understanding of their offenses, while ensuring that the justice served is completely objective and unbiased.

Circle Three of Dante’s Inferno houses the gluttons who, in their time on earth, over-indulged themselves in food, drink, or items of wealth, and who are now punished in hell for the “pernicious sin of glutony” (Alighieri Canto VI). The gluttons writhe and crawl through deep mud, while heavy rain, hail, and sleet pelt them for eternity. Just like pigs who often gorge themselves and lie in mud, so do the gluttons. In addition, Ciacco, a glutton who appeals to Dante, is named after “Giacomo”, a derogatory term used to refer to a hog or a pig, reflecting the man’s gluttonous nature. Ciacco, upon Dante’s showing, tells Dante that he “...suffers the like penalty for the like punishment (for the pernicious sin of glutony)” (Alighieri Canto VI). As if the punishment was not already bad enough, the gluttonous souls damned to the Third Circle of Hell are also tormented by the three-headed hellhound Cerberus, who repeatedly rips apart the souls with his teeth and claws, symbolizing the actions of the gluttons, with little to no self restraint or concern for anything else, during their time on earth. The punishments of the gluttons directly mirror their own shortcomings from their time on earth, justifying their damnation.

The next group of sinners, the avaricious and the prodigal, are housed in the Fourth Circle of Hell. The hoarders and the wasters are to push heavy weights against one another for eternity, with each “extreme” punishing the other by meeting in the middle. They have been damned to this punishment for their “...ill giving and ill keeping the fair world” (Alighieri Canto VII). The punishment of the avaricious and the prodigal, the pushing of the heavy weights on one another, symbolizes the sinners’ inability to practice and treat money with moderation, or with the avoidance of excess or extremes. Dante even blames these sins for ethical and political corruption, observing that many of the men were hairless, and, therefore, men of the Church. Dante’s scornful wrath in the presence of the avaricious and prodigal aids in the audience’s understanding his reasoning for their punishment, as, fittingly, these two groups punish and insult each other for their extremity in the afterlife.

Circle Four of Dante’s Inferno, while also housing the avaricious and the prodigal, is home to the sullen, otherwise known as those who refused to praise God or acknowledge the beauty of His creation during their lifetime. The sullen often say that they “…were in the sweet air, which by the sun is gladdened”, but, still, they were “…bearing within themselves the sluggish reek”, meaning that, even though they were offered so much beauty by God in their time on earth, they refused to acknowledge it (Alighieri Canto VII). Now, it is these very same people that are unable to see the beauty of God for eternity, banished to hell and forced to sing a hymn of praise, which parallels the hymn of praise that is sung by those who are actually allowed to see the beauty of God in heaven. This punishment forces those who refused to praise God’s and his creation to now offer themselves to God in an eternal prayer of thanksgiving. The symbolism of this punishment lies in the fact that the sullen, who purposely overlooked the beauty of life, are now unable to ever see the beauty of God’s creation ever again, though they are still forced to acknowledge the reality that there is such beauty.

Dante’s ability to create punishments for various groups of sinners, that actually carry the same weight as the original offense, allows him to ensure that the justice served is completely objective and unbiased, though it certainly seems that some sins upset his moral judgment more than others. From gluttons to sullens, Dante mindfully creates a narrative that connects the sins of each soul on Earth to the just punishment that he or she receives when damned to
Hell. The guiding principle of the just nature of Dante’s punishments is balance. Even though these punishments may seem extreme or immoral, in Dante’s mind, he is perfecting God’s justice by serving punishments that are in perfect proportion to the original offense of the sinner.
My Journey as a Pardoner

I have always had an appreciation for storytelling. In my journeys to Canterbury, I began recounting tales, exemplifying the very vices that I have observed in my travels and have decreed in my sermons. Most often, I elucidate the very vice that I deem the most harmful, asserting within my homilies, “Radix malorum est Cupiditas”, which translates to “the root of evil is greed” (Chaucer 98). In addition to my initial gravitation toward language arts and communications, my limited knowledge of modern psychology also aids in my ability to get my point across when delivering my sermons. In an attempt to further my psychological studies and storytelling mastery, I believe that I can best benefit my community, and fleeting travelers, by attending The University of California Berkeley with a focus in Psychology and Communications.

Psychology plays a large part in effective communication, particularly in the stories that I recount in order to convey a certain lesson. For example, I may integrate short Latin phrases or sayings for my illiterate crowd, making it much easier to understand. As I often say, “lewed people loven tales olde;/ Switch things can they wel reporte and holde”(Chaucer 110-111). In some cases, if I feel that my audience is lacking in understanding, I may even implement fragments of a text that I feel my listeners will resonate with, such as the Bible.

Within my narratives, I also make known the distance that I am from sainthood. I know that I still make mistakes, and I feel that explaining my origin and my impurity helps my audience resonate with me on a deeper level. Before I even begin to launch into my parables, I, first, “pronouce whennes that I come” (Chaucer 7). My sermons normally follow a common theme, as I, too, attempt to address my own shortcomings. For example, as I so often state, “Therfor my theme is yet, and ever was/ Thus can I preche agayn that same vyce” (Chaucer 97, 99). I, too, have given into temptation and greed in times when I have been away from God, and I think that it's extremely important to acknowledge that.

So why Berkley? The University of California Berkeley offers a curriculum that consists of a range of upper-division psychology courses that can be implemented in virtually any career path. A school that is guided by the motto “Fiat lux”, meaning “let there be light”, illuminates solutions for bettering the human condition, bringing new knowledge to light and serving as a beacon of opportunity for anyone apart of the community. I, as someone who thrives in an environment where I can learn and teach others, want to be a part of a University that holds itself as a center of knowledge that, ultimately, provides opportunities to build long-term societal benefits with education. I hope that, in telling my story, one has the ability to form a stronger sense of who I am and what I am looking to do. Because even though, “for thou myself be a ful vicious man,/ A moral tale yet I yow telle can” (Chaucer 131-132).
Just Itching to Meet You

“I will begin my first contention by...um...uh...”

I’m furiously scratching the back of my left hand.

“No, no, no...what I meant to say was that the reason that the United States should accede to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea without reservations is because...”

The tingling sensation under my skin is unbearable. Looking at the small audience consisting of my partner, my two opponents, and our judge, I realize that I have completely lost my train of thought. What to do now but beam with embarrassment and visibly flushed skin. I sit down.

“Run away!”

“No guys, you don’t understand!”

“Run away!”

“She’s got chicken pox!”

I sit down in defeat, realizing that I will be spending recess alone again. At least I can even out my tally chart or maybe get ahead on my homework.

I arrive home that night to think over every word that was said to me and every word I said back, as my mom applies a thick coating of hydrocortisone to every part of my body. It burned like hell, but I wasn’t focused on the pain. I wanted to give in and burst into the tears that I had been holding back since lunch.

“What happened out there?” my partner asked, in visible frustration, due to the months of preparation.

“I don’t know.” “I choked.” “I’m so sorry”, I said holding back tears to save me the embarrassment of crying at a high school debate tournament.

“You had better go splash some water on your skin Kate.” “It looks like your wrists are bleeding.”

The cold water burned the wounds that I had scratched open last round. My face was bright red with embarrassment. I wanted to die. Not only was I the worst public speaker at the tournament, but there was physical proof that I wasn’t cut out for the competition.

It would take months for me to heal, both physically and mentally.

“Mom, why don’t the other kids want to be friends with me?”

“I don’t know, have you tried talking to them pumpkin?”
“Well no, I just can’t, mom. I tried talking to a girl last week and she ran away like she was scared of me.”

“Nothing is impossible if you try hard enough. It just takes time and effort, just like your skin baby.”

“It feels like an eternity.”

“You know that if you apply your cream once it’ll do absolutely nothing right?”

“Well yeah.”

“Then why do you assume that you’ll never make friends based on one interaction?”

“You gotta keep trying. For me, at the very least, baby.”

“Ok, mama.”

As I exit the restroom, a crowd gathers in the corner of the cafeteria. Postings for the second round are up. I know what happens next. A chill runs down my spine, followed by a warm feeling in my ears. My mom’s words linger in my ears.

“You gotta keep pushing. Nothing comes easy.”

I stand at the podium and begin to feel the burning sensation on the back of my wrist, and the tingling under the skin behind my left knee. A beat. My mom echoes in my ears.

I lay my evidence on thick like my hydrocortisone, making my way through every contention and ignoring the voice in my head making my skin flame up.

I finish, feeling a cooling sensation engulf my body as I return to my seat.

I know that social anxiety is just like my skin condition, able to be maintained but never quite cured. Although every day feels exhausting, and the journey feels like an eternity, I am one step closer to being where I want to be in life, and that’s okay with me...and my mom.
Katelyn Hackworth
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Poetry

Her Majesty, the Media

The Media’s a little bit biased
The way she chooses to portray,
The Media’s a little bit biased
Leaves our country in disarray.

I would love to tell you that I don’t keep up,
But I can’t sit back and wait undecided.
The Media’s a little bit biased
Someday we won’t be misguided, oh yeah
Someday we won’t be misguided.
Trouble with the Status Quo

Throw Em' Back

As a fisherman, my job is to entice my catch. Against the wishes of my fellow crew, at times, I cannot help but throw them back. It is hard to live to kill, and kill to live.

Playin' Hooky

Like any fish, I love to swim around. Though, unlike most, I’ve yet to make a sound.

With just my one tail and my two fins, I try to escape my original sin. Maneuvering through the bottom deep, I try my best not to make a peep.

For when, us fish, forget to care, it can make for a mighty scare. And ever since, I was of youth, I’ve promised my kind to tell the truth. To stay away from the temptations above, in our ever-state of brotherly love.

For it only takes one inclination. One enticement, one fascination. To kill us all, as our forefathers have told. All our kind, the tales of old. Of fish like us who gave into temptation. Killed their kind and found eternal damnation. “Stay away from the
fishermen’s boat, unless you’d like to die”, my father would quote. But, one day, I couldn’t escape the thought. How delicious they looked, though I shouldn’t ought. Free cheese, how could I withstand the temptation? I had seen others succeed. Heck! I’m just as strong as any other crustacean! So, with a quick swoop, I’d no longer be famished. Would just have to make sure that I’d have already vanished. I slowly approach, so as not to disturb. With the hunger in my stomach ready to be curbed. One quick bite and I’d swim away! But, unfortunately,

as I, so often, replay. First on next day’s menu: one delicious Captain’s fish filet. So to anyone, like me, to take the bait. Where you might end up: on a fisherman’s seaside plate.
Ma, I just don’t know. Nevermind. Es nada, pero todo.
Even in my Ghost Dance, I am still too far exposed for what I’m not.
Jackson comes close and carries us all away from this land for what he claims succumbs to his care.
I’m just a Sioux who sways in the wind with the Cheyennes and the Algonquians.
But when the French come along and invoke to us mystery that makes us leave ourselves behind…
Ma doesn’t get it. Pa doesn’t even understand it.
Grand dad thinks he’s got it, but He knows it to be not.
Voy, I’m coming.
(I hope it was enough to bring the cattle front soon.)
Yes, I’m on my way to you, chasing after your name.
ODE TO TWEED

Money bags, Money bags, Money bags.
They call you the Boss and you have all the wealth. My man: sleeps in the sheets of his feats of NYC in the sleets of this political machine. Call Tammany Hall today’s U.S. Congress, and why? Because it’s Tweed’s. Money bags, Money bags, Money bags. Call the Board of Supervisors, and tell them they need to supervise, and maybe even revise, and why? Cause my man Tweed. Ya know, that’s Boss Tweed to you. Onions cut themselves; tsunamis drown in tears; Thomas Nast hides behind pen and paper; Homer Plessy and Rosa Parks shiver in their separate carts, and why? Cause they’re not no Tweed. How many times did New York Times rally in the times of Boss William Tweed? Engage in the marriage of Tweed’s Ring without the gloves to protect from the smell of bossism? As many times as Tweed wanted, duh! You don’t seem to understand it. Sorry Carnegie, but Tweed doesn’t need horizontal integration to derive winnings. He has all the steal in his guns. Who needs oil when you have the slickness in the Democrats. Rockefeller, that’s who, but why? Because he wasn’t Tweed. Even birds, with their freedom and wings and ability to fly from South to North (although never the other way around), pay homage to Tweed with their songs. Jail couldn’t sustain the beast: it took Spanish and English to pin him down, and why? You tell me. Money bags, Money bags. Money, bags.
**Raul Iglesias**
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Rancho High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Anthony Banto

Category: Poetry

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**Escápare Conmigo**

Like a gazelle caught in the hands of the wilderbeast;  
Like a volcano stuck in the winds of the tundra;  
Like a fowler barred in the cold of the cage,  
Set it all free.

Like a girl lost inside of her broken home;  
Like a chameleon not sure what it’s trying to be;  
Like a song singing itself its own melody,  
Set it all free.

Like a hare in the jaws of the leopard;  
Like a hair in the desert of the head;  
Like a daisy trying to raise itself from the soil.  
It’s time to be free.  
   So go and be free.
Raul Iglesias
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Rancho High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Anthony Banto

Category: Poetry

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**Who are you in the Dark?**

When the curtains reign down on you,
and steal some of that safety from your eyes,
are you still the same person who you are in the light?

Or maybe you’re somebody different.

One who injects the black and blue
of day and night into the stems
of all these transparent lilacs in the dead sun.

I don’t even think you’re human at all.

But who is to say that any of us are,
when we’re all alone, choked in the dark?

You’re not you when you’re like this.

When you got no more light in your star.

So like a comet, find your path down (Just don’t venture into the dark).

That’s where I see the most.

You’ll lose yourself in the groove
of the move, if you swoop too far down into the abyss.
Raul Iglesias
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Rancho High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Anthony Banto

Category: Poetry

Don't Wander Into Me

As I lie among my opaque eyes waiting—
For the steed of nocturnal to carry me to the void
Of deception and stagnation, I can't help but
Look out my window and look at the wind.

But just wind, moreso
not the but the life
Trapped inside of it. Nothing can move but
The passage of soul and gospel, and even those
Continue to wait— before they can finally break free.

The desk in the corner can't help but ask what's wrong.
"They're caught in a blizzard of yellow sand,
Burning down in the fires of snow waiting— for the blaze
To ignite the spark."

Everything becomes more blurry the longer they spend
Trapped in the wind. The wind; so many victims, and even
More yet to be taken away. It's only a matter of time before
You and I feel each of its fingers calling us into it.

But we shouldn't wander into it. It knows not mercy, nor
Contempt, only it knows how to wait—. As it grows angrier
And hungrier, the taps on the window grow more melancholy.
And yet, I am still waiting—
live your story — your own, uncontrollably.

i walked home past the flower beds and
white picket fences, around the celestial
body which all of us orbit. There were ghosts
in my eyes as i lied out there, like a killer, on
that frozen Road. i slid down the slide, thinking
that those raised hands would make me feel more
alive, but from May until December in Cambridge,
that avalanche only sliced away the joy worth chasing.
Most days, it didn’t matter, because there was never much
time to wallow in anything but the outline that they
made out of me: the snowflake in that avalanche. They
will wonder where my secrets lie; they’ll cut the stride
of my sides ‘till I fall down on my knees phenomenally;
they don’t understand — that’s me.

They say they got me posted on the corners, using me
for things i was never meant for. It really is a Chilly Age
in this early December age in Cambridge, as these children
torture the weak snowflake hanging innocently, alone, flooded
in black. i’m haunted on this roaring, frozen Road, burned-out
in grief where i cannot stay, exposed at the bottom of this smile.
i was already gone, my life spilling from my heart as i wished —
wished in vain — that i had already died. They kicked, bit, dragged,
as i carelessly tried to crawl away forever. Then... a sudden blow;
they hold me, helplessly, broken walls crying as snowdrops stagger
onto the dark webs of this great beating. i was very
small, so that’s all that i remember, trying to protect my wrists —
i really didn’t want to have to wear sweaters all the time, but hey;
they don’t understand — that’s me.

i lay in the box with my gaudy scars, bandaged by the nurses and
caressed by the black windows of bad intentions and heat. Even
between the streetlights, i don’t see anyone who looks like me;
a melted snowflake strewn in a casket of regret and defiance. A
snowflake with a chance to make it good somehow, but sits on the
corner at the intersection, feeling like nothing, nothing but a
refracted light that inevitably breaks the more it comes out the box.
i just can’t face myself alone again.
you don’t understand — that’s me, phenomenally.
I can count the times I've loved on two hands

Sometimes I think of summer soaked skin and sticky t-shirts, the feeling of a hand brushing against mine while grass cradles my head and prickles my ears.

It’s the same feeling as a Friday morning field trip in second grade. The lawns were always dewy then (when did I stop noticing dew?)

It’s the same shivers I got from the AC of a rented car as it drives through the desert—I’ve only seen stars then.

The same afterfeel as when my fingers finish running against the brick walls that lined my aunt’s house and they remain buzzing from the bumps and ridges on each individual stone.

Maybe it’s the same as being swaddled in blankets on bad nights when I had to sleep next to my mom, when I was still convinced the darkness can’t hurt me if I’m under the covers.

Jumping into a seven foot wide, four foot deep enclosure of water and chlorine, and I could’ve sworn I tasted the bleach on my tongue even after a shower.

Or dark classrooms with an animated film about dinosaurs as the only source of light.

Or blue lips from popsicles.

Or practicing sign language from the boards in the park.

Or the click-clacks of my scooter.

I believe I have felt God in these moments but I am only a heretic. He is not the only thing I’ve lost.
The Lessons I've Learned (And the One I Didn't)

at age eight i found out that the lessons of my mom are unconventional.
    “if you are hit, hit back harder.”
    “if the end goal is not reached, the journey does not matter.”
    “if your life ever feels unfair, look to your mother.”
they are neat, little maxims that have trailed me for years.
i think my mom wants me to mirror her personality
because my actual reflection looks a lot more like my dad.
it is harder to hate something that acts like you.
and in her attempt to conform me to her bitterness,
to view the world through her eyes,
i grew angry.
sometimes i wished i had never been born at all,
knowing that my life is now a dichotomy
    caught between the woman who raised me
    and the man who abandoned her.
and my mother finally tried to fill that fatherless void
    and my whole life reeled
    and my stomach lurched
at the prospect of a new body inhabiting the home i had grown to hate.
see, when you learn to numb yourself to grief because of its longitude
you will immediately cry the moment a voice whispers
    “dependency is inevitable.”
‘father’ is written in a tongue i do not speak
and ‘mother’ sears my own like acid.
and when a young girl is told that the fifteen years she’s existed
was the life of an anchor,
    when she is told that all she ever could do for her mother was make her cry,
    when she is told that her love isn’t enough to make the hurt stop hurting,
    when she is told that her mother would be happier without her,
    when she finds that her mother is happier
without the stress or the weight of her existence on her—
she learns that there is no such thing as a strong independent woman.
but there is still one lesson that my mother never taught me,
how the aching caused by one man can be solved by another.
A Grove of Bull Bays

“Eve conceived, and bare Cain, and she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering: but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

“So it came to be that Cain thought less of the Lord and fell to the Devil who convinced him to raise a stone of which to harm his brother. Abel fell as swift as the sickle that reaps the crops. From then forth violence was manifested unto man--nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom, brother against brother.”

The cleric scanned the room filled with damp slaves, all in some form of deep thought or another. He held my gaze for a second before moving on, deciding that he should begin his summation of the holy text just presented to us.

“When the white man whips you he is only doing that of which his forefathers have done. This is the work of Cain and Abel personified. This is the world of perpetual conflict and bloodshed that Cain has brought upon us, and the white man is simply his kin.”

I grew aware of the weight that had been lifted from the shoulders of my fellow slaves. It does help some find solace, knowing the answer to why we suffer. It should become easier for us to return to the crops and inexorable heat. I, for one, knew this lesson would never change a damn thing. The whip our owner, John, wielded would still crack at midday, at noon, before supper, it would be as the damn heat. It was equally as doubtful that the Northern whites, abolitionists, I had once heard the minister call them, could change anything as well.

It would have worried any other slave to not take the word of God kindly but I suppose that the internal revolution I waged against whites was best through resentment of our conformity to their Protestantism. I often wish we would recognize this more as a form of genocide. Our cultures have been castrated and now we have found enlightenment in a God that of which is not ours. But still, I confide in the priest, I have sat down through Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus, all within the small confinements of creaky timber and in the air of an offensive odor which had begun to develop as a result of sickness. While I always quarrel with the idea of the whites’ God, I decide quietly that he exists (for I had seen no evidence of my peoples’ own and perhaps they have left us indefinitely).

“Hurry,” a woman beside me whispers, “out before John returns!”

I rise and exit with everyone else. I head with a group of others to the farm’s shed, a rundown man-sized haul of rusted tin, filled to the brim with scythes, sickles, and reaping hooks. I reach for the wooden handle of one sickle, its metal catching the sun’s rays and glinting with an evil smile. The adolescent next to me grimaces, Cain still fresh in his mind. I choose not to tease. Much work needed to get done anyhow.

My hands are already bleeding by high noon. The heat, as I have said, is intolerable and unrelenting. Today is worse than most as I can feel it sting, even through the humidity. It is almost suffocating but I tug the tails of wheat, pull, and slash. I despise this work. On the other end of the crop field I hear the familiar crack of long, spindly leather and wonder what (or rather who) has angered John this time. I stay at my work knowing any head turn could mean that same leather would find its way to my own hind. This daily routine of ignoring my surroundings save for my hands, sickle, and grain, has become a schedule I am well acquainted with, and by nightfall John gathers us for a word before our cabins and consequent rest.

All thirteen of us are standing in the rough patch in front of the farmhouse, far left to our cabin, when John begins:

“I had just gotten wind of a rebellion out by the East end of town. Some slave, by the name of Nat Turner, killed some poor folk out there. Slaughtered a baby in cold blood. Same nasty blood of y’all, all dog pissed and everything.” His face contorted under moonshine, scrunched at the brow, jaw clenched so tight it became no wonder his teeth were rotten. He grew red and angry—no, rage filled.
“Worthless dogs the lot of you. Take this as your only warning of ever wishing me ill. Your only warning...” I catch the shine of his rifle in the moonlight as he says this and wonder how he could be so afraid after suggesting we were nothing but limp dogs. White men are a strange thing I have grown to learn.

On our trek to our decaying timber ‘home’ I attempt to digest what we had just been told. The immediate thought was of course, which Negro would have such audacity? But that quickly spurred into admiration: which Negro possessed such strength, which Negro knew such self worth, which Negro could overpower whites? Out of the thirteen of us I knew not one could produce the spine necessary, nor the will. John really did have nothing to fear. I look back and see the bright yellow windowpane, our owner’s shadow hunched over as if in prayer, and another thought enters my head: did John ever reason bloodshed with the sons of Adam?

John really did have nothing to fear.

I felt ill the next day. Not that of fever or dysentery but of a pit in my stomach, searing against its lining and fizzing with anger. An unsettling and inexplicable deep and hot crawl cradled the nape of my neck, it was as if the heat of the sun, along with its humidity, had promptly rested itself upon my cranium. It was the feeling my mother got before a storm. Something would go horribly, unbearably wrong today.

I had perhaps only worked the field for four hours when I saw Death ride his haunting ashen steed down John’s dirt path; scythe replaced with noose, crown with farm hat, his skin pale, his intent clear, with a mob in tow. John was leaning against the wooden beam of his porch, watching as if uninterested. I realized my proximity to the picket fence separating the farm from the road and stood straight as if to dash but before I knew it the pale hands of Death’s subjects clutched my torso, chest, arms, and legs, and had dragged me over the fence. The others stared as I was abducted, Death’s ghastly palm now on my shoulder, his sickly pallor of a corpse contrasting that of my deep earthen flesh. My last sight of the farm is John stepping back into the farmhouse and shutting the mahogany door behind him. I was pulled upon the steed, and Death, the mob, and I rode uphill to a groove of bull bays.

We reach a conifer with branches low enough that one could stretch and reach, but high enough to complete what we were presumably here for. I faintly catch some phrases among the crowd as I am thrown off the white horse. “Turner”, “Dogs the lot of them”, “Deserves this”, “Should’ve been done earlier”, “Negro”, “Filthy”. It is only when he fills my vision that I realize that Death was in fact farmer Mark from three acres down John’s. He screams at me but I have already accepted my fate. Retirement from slave work was something I would often dream of. Liberty and life are mutually exclusive for me.

I could not control myself from reminiscing of my times on the farm. On Sunday ‘mass’ we always gathered in our cabins, which had already begun to rot from days of torrent and fungi collection, and our minister taught us the words of Samuel, the tale of David and Goliath. He claimed that justice prevailed over all evil and that God would deliver His sons and daughters with strength that would weather them through any adversary. I do not believe that he lied but as the serrated edges of the rope cut into my throat, I could not help but recall how the messiah only wept as He was crucified, and cried to the heavens and His Father “Forgive them, for they know not what they do”. And I ask myself now, as the noose tightens and my body lifts and I gasp and the mob jeers, when that strength to forgive had left me.
Drive Carefully! Come Back Soon!

The drive in is as you expected, lonely and dry. It is all just an expansion of desert sand and Joshua trees, the occasional tumbleweed rolls by. The sun hangs high and the sky is as white and dry as the plains. You turn the radio on but only hear static cutting in and out of a Johnny Cash song, the desert refuses for you to tune in and the wind whistles Home means Nevada. You turn the radio off and continue driving.

The house you’ve bought in the neighborhood is dreary, almost as if the sun has sucked it of its vibrance. It has been bathed in light since the mid-century. A quick glance of your new neighbors tells you that the effects remain the same. The elderly woman across the road introduces herself and welcomes you to the cul-de-sac, she speaks of the abnormal occurrences in this small, big city. She speaks of the countless bodies found in the red dunes. “It’s important to lock your doors at night.” Leaning in, she whispers, cataract filled eyes gazing at you, “Maybe, maybe you’ll discover one of those unlucky ones.” You realize that the Mojave is right outside your backdoor. It sings There is the land that I love the best, fairer than all I can see.

A visit to Red Rock does nothing to calm your nerves. The rough formations remind you too much of blood that’s been soaked in by the landscape for God knows how long. Your feet shuffle across the trail, not knowing how long you’ll stay out here to gather yourself. The desert takes everything it seems. It is hard for you to imagine that before it, millennia ago, it held a deep ocean with life. Existence is so very fragile. Your eyes look up just as a coyote with a golden coat crosses your path, it looks up and into you, with eyes black. It is an odd type of pretty. You stay still so as to not scare it away, but it is not a snake. It is not more afraid of you than you are of it. Before the urge to run fully takes hold of you the coyote moves on. The drive back home is windless.

By the time you return home, you’ve mustered enough strength to visit your backyard. It is all dust, an asthmatic’s nightmare. You never make it past your doorstep because there, at your feet, is a mauled jackrabbit. Its head nearly decapitated, the throat clearly exposed, and with claw marks running deep through its fur. Its blood soaks the sandstone rocks below. It will turn a deep red by dawn, the ground beneath it will be sanctified by a ritual you are not privy to. You look into the mountains that never seem to escape you. They cradle the valley like the Gates of Eden but this is surely not the garden. You cannot shrug the feeling of a pair of eyes on you, somewhere in those hills. Something ancient. That night, the wind whistles—All the live-long night until morning light, is the loveliest place I know—against your closed backdoor.

You stop taking walks now because of that ever present feeling that something is watching you from atop those hills. When the wind isn’t howling the silence is deafening. You cannot stand the sight of the mountains, their looks grow more daunting the deeper the sun dips, bathing them in deep purple and blues. Is that a cougar or a person? Does it matter? That Thursday you lament about these fears to your neighbor. The elderly woman feels akin to the peaks, she insists it’s just home. Is she just repeating the song lyrics? Was she raised to love this land, when it so obviously did not love her back?

Come Sunday, you’ve taken the wrong exit out of the I-15 and pass strip club after strip club after strip club before pulling up to one. Staying outside too long pains you now. A curiosity lingers in the back of your head. The neon signs allure you. Besides, you can’t stand the persistent Whenever the sun at the close of day, colors all the Western sky. The bartender smiles. The couch is damp and you catch a glimpse of dried blood spatter on the walkway before a pretty girl fills your view. Her face—lit by green and blue and yellow neon and framed with golden hair—reels you in. She looks up and into you with eyes black.

Where have you seen that before?
For

For the friend I lost,

This is a letter you will never read.

Sometimes I think about how I used to be three years old and it scares me because I can only imagine those years from a second hand perspective, a distant memory that I have kept alive in my brain for too long, and I can never actually interpret the way I had experienced my life when I was so young, and everything feels so artificial. In my wakings of trying to understand what it felt like to be vibrant I always find myself coming back to our time together and it’s deprecating to realize that my brain is treating you as an elementary school art project that probably involved watercolor and salt, in that it realizes some memories are not worth keeping.
Little Talks

My middle school years are, for the most part, a great representation of preteen angst. As a thirteen year old I found it pragmatic to go home everyday and immediately sulk in my mother’s bedroom closet. This is healthy, I’d reason. This is how my life was supposed to go. It wasn’t until the eighth grade that I found the fortitude necessary to amputate and cauterize a toxic sector of my life that had caused much of my strife for the past two years.

Admittedly it took a long time before I truly realized the extent of my mental and emotional deterioration, and that realization didn’t come without an external force. And it’s with great amusement that I say my first lifeline came in the form of a Portuguese/Filipino boy.

He was inelegant and notorious for his nihilism. Chagrin was a foreign word to him but comedy was one he was all too friendly with. There’s video evidence of him eating dried crickets for the sake of eating dried crickets. He was chubby but had the potential to become a heavy-weight lifter. He favored dark pullovers and hoodies no matter the weather, and with eyes hidden behind photochromic glasses. I had a hard time disillusioning myself of the idea that he was a hermit.

Even with the qualities of a rather extroverted isolationist he was still pigmented with a deep olive tone. His hair was exactly what acclaimed author Rick Riordan and fanfiction writers would describe a raven black. It had a sheen to it that only came from natural oils. His facial structure induced a sense of comfort, with a dollop of a nose, almond eyes, and rounded chin. For someone who wasn’t privy to emotional display he had a rather homely appearance. His physical traits are things I grew to endear. He and I eventually grew closer to each other like Booster Gold and Blue Beetle.

Each class we had together was seemingly filled with laughter and joy. We’d often get in trouble over hushed whispers. We found a mutual love in Hetalia, a satirical anime show where countries are personified based on their most prominent stereotypes, and he introduced me to a Japanese role-playing game series called Fire Emblem that I still adore. Those two passions, paired with five other preteen friends and a large sketchbook, resulted in rather interesting joint creative works. Every page of my black sketchbook was filled to the brim with shorthand sketches of characters we loved with inside jokes and cryptic messages scribbled in the corners. While he and I were a part of a much larger friend group, drawing seemed to allow for mutual growth, and it connected us in a way that made him the focal point of my relationships. This connection would prove vital the night my life seemed to fall apart.

Towards the end of eighth grade I applied to a prestigious boarding school in New Hampshire. I did not get accepted. I had also developed a habit of unintentionally annoying a girl within my friend group, who I had repressed romantic feelings for. She walked into class one day and without so much as a “hi” told me I was jealous of her because I had yet to gain a romantic partner in my, then, fourteen years of life, while she had been dating a mutual friend of ours for the better part of eighth grade. I swallowed the lump in my throat then and ignored her for the rest of the day. The following morning I noticed that I had new messages in a new media platform my friends had urged me to join. It turned out that this particular friend had been bragging about nearly making me cry the previous day.

“You should’ve seen her face. I don’t care much. She’s annoying.”

Needless to say, this angered me quite a bit. I confronted her about it in the same chat and her response was one that caused so much mental and emotional damage that for the following two years I was incapable of amour-propre.

“At least I don’t apply to schools I can’t get into.”

Talking about the fact that I wasn’t accepted into that prestigious boarding school was practically a taboo. Every one of my “friends” saw me crying over it one Monday morning in our school’s cafeteria. It was never brought up again until this instance where someone felt it necessary to tease me maliciously. The waterworks had already begun at this point, and while one of my classmates attempted to calm me I found my way to a mutual friend I shared with She Who Must Not Be Named. This friend, who we shall endearingly call Toad, took one look at my tear streaked face and simply laughed. They continued to laugh even after an explanation of the episode that just occurred.
A few weeks passed and I had used the “silent treatment” as a form of recovery and retribution. Then came the fateful Sunday night, where my friend group’s clockwork ritual of tearing into each other seemed to reach a boiling point. She Who Must Not Be Named vocalized her grievances with our friend group.

“I feel like I’m not heard.”

And after an immature rant she left our group chat in disarray. Toad jumped to her defense despite her departure and it dawned on me that the support they were willing to give to our mutual friends, was not the same as what they were willing to provide me. With a pit in my stomach and a lump in my throat I asked why Toad thought it appropriate to laugh at me that particular morning weeks ago. I was met with justifications, I was told that I wasn’t considering how She Who Must Not Be Named felt, I was denied an immediate apology for the harm I experienced and it became evident that my status in the friend group was not the same as everyone else’s.

This is how I found myself weeping to my lifeline in a private direct message. Tears had already wet my shirt and I was shaking but I didn’t know why. In hindsight it was probably from anger. I had wanted to scream so bad but found it futile when those my anger was directed at couldn’t hear me. I broke down the events leading up to my fallout with my two friends and he reciprocated those grievances. I hadn’t expected a heartfelt response, and at that point I honestly don’t think I desired one either. What I received was a short and concise message that caused not only pain, but an epiphany and self-actualized love.

“You deserve to be listened to.”

The tag read 1:56 AM. Those six words seemed to whirl in my head and it wasn’t with much thought that I promptly resumed my ugly sobbing. At first I realized how pitiful it was to never have been told that my voice was important and that my emotions were worth considering, and that hurt more than the previous, adverse events I mentioned. The message simultaneously broke me and jolted me awake. It reminded me of those moments in bed where you’ll lie half-asleep before experiencing an all too real feeling of falling. There was an intense, negative emotion, quickly followed by the realization that everything was okay. My epiphany was that my emotionally stunted friends weren’t worth the ugliness that festered in my stomach every time I had to witness their self-pity and condescending nature. It felt as though a weight had been shifted off my shoulders, but the ghost of it still leaned against me.

That ghost didn’t leave until eight months later when I found myself in a volatile state one late evening. With a dull ache in my heart I thought back to the night I was told “You deserve to be listened to.” It was then that I felt a surge of passion that I spammed the god-forsaken group chat with messages that denounced every individual whose negative attitude and behaviors had a direct effect on the mental state of everyone else in our friend group, including myself. That group chat naturally dissolved the next day after long overdue apologies. This part of my life had finally been crucified and buried.

Without the help of my lifeline I would have never found the voice necessary to advocate for myself. His unintentional affection reminds me of a quote from Esther Huertas: “To be deeply loved by someone gives you strength, but to love someone deeply gives you courage.” My affinity with him saved me years of grief, but moreover, it allowed me to realize my self-worth. This type of love is one that I have seldom found in any other person, and for that I will forever be grateful for that warm presence.
Luck of the Irish and Rabbit Hunter

Luck of the Irish

Have you heard,
about the good man?
Who could not withstand,
the pot of gold at the
end

of the rainbow? A good man,
honorable, and charitable. A
father to his family. Tempted
by none. Leader to more than
some. One day, the good man
walked to town. Where a lad going by the name of Patrick
approached a shepherd. A great patron he was, of green fabric.
“O good man, come with me to the pub, where we will drink beers in
tubs.” The shepherd refused for he preferred temperance. “Well then”, said
Patrick, “if you would help me find my pot of gold. I would share my treasure.” The
shepherd agreed, although he knew it was a trap, set by the green wearing
chap. They followed the rainbow until the very end, where four leaf clovers
are all that extend. A pot of gold lied in the eyes of a good man. The
shepherd could not subsist and beat Patrick to death with his own
pot of gold. The shepherd made off with the gold he wielded and
a good man who could not withstand lies dead in the clover fields

Rabbit Hunter

Snowfall
covers the fields. Where
rabbits chew their yields. Near,
in a cave, a young orphan sleeps.
But hunger once wakes. I hope to find,
a thing to eat. Before the frost, melts my
feet. I grab the bow, from my cherished dad.
A father, cherished, I once had. The string I pull, to flex my bow. At a rabbit full, as white as snow.

An arrow sharp will make its journey. For nature has its fee. I look at him. And his blue eyes look back at me. This price, I must pay. For it is, the only way. A hesitant moment if I take. And the rabbit, its haste will make. But behold, only a young boy, I cannot claim this kill. All is still. The flee its made, the buck. It will not leave, its family stuck. Certain, I made my choice. Laying in the snow, I hear a voice. I am weak for I did not commit this action steep. Hunger has grown into a mole. That will now take its toll. Like my kin before me. I lie here, under this tree. Where I will fall into a deep sleep. Hopefully, my father, I will get to meet.
Beggin' U.S.A.

Beggin' U.S.A.

If government had a notion
About the U.S.A.
Then everybody'd be beggin’
Like Californi-a
You’d see them moving their bindles
Makeshift sandals too
A grubby grubby green hairdo
Beggin’ U.S.A.

You’d catch ‘em beggin’ at Long Beach
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
All over Anaheim
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
El Monte and Whittier
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
India’s New Delhi
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
Don’t forget Berkeley
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
And there’s nowhere to stay
(Inside, outside)
Everybody’s gone beggin’
Beggin’ U.S.A.

We’ll all be pushing that cart
We’re gonna push real soon
We’re digging through our trash cans
We repurpose the spoon
We’ll all prepare for the winter
We’ll be homeless all day
Tell the tax man we’re beggin’
Beggin’ U.S.A.

Inglewood and Chino
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
East Los Angeles
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
San Mateo and Oakland
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
Yorba Linda LA
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
All over Ontario
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
At San Fran. Bay
(Inside, outside)

Everybody’s gone beggin’
Beggin’ U.S.A.
Everybody’s gone beggin’
Beggin U.S.A.
Everybody’s gone beggin’
Beggin’ U.S.A.
Radix malorum est cupiditas

Radix malorum est cupiditas

Humanity is infected by the poisons of sin. One of such seven is popularly known as greed. Everywhere I looked, I found people indulging themselves without content. A constant lust for more without any bounds, even willing to “slay”. (Chaucer 229) From this experience, I took upon myself the mission to absolve humanity of this poison. Once naive, I truly believed in this possibility.

By the favors of opportunity, I discovered a model for success within this field.

Through my discovery, I exchanged knowledge for action. I walked from door to door preaching the words of God. I forgave sins on behalf of God. I received payment for the work of God. I pardoned thousands of people. I aspired to the best in my area. I did not become a cure, but another victim of the poison.

I progressed and mastered the art of sales and negotiation. My profits multiplied, but so did my greed. Every shilling I earned led me to wanting two more. I pushed myself across the line, waiting until I break. I never did, but my condition escalated to worse, and worse circumstances.

I fell deeper into the dark, dark hole.

I started to drink—a lot. I found myself drunk from drinking the “liquor of grape” and “corn-ripe ale” while telling moral tales of avarice. (Chaucer 30, 34) I, the very bottom of the barrel, was the deceiving moral pinnacle for all. I lacked the understanding of how this came to fruition. I evolved into the very thing I sought to destroy.

But there came a light.

A host of one of the bars I attended regularly said “enough”. He shined a light on the awful monster lurking in the dark hole. I realized what I transfigured into. I combined my passion for faith and business, but I let them mutate into this perverted image of my enemy.

I forced myself to confront it.

The process was not easy, but necessary. After a year in alcohol rehabilitation, many long therapeutic sessions, and constant support from my peers. Finally, I managed to climb out of the hole I dug myself into in the first place. An invaluable lesson that will never be forgotten.

Now, I profess my faith in an honest manner by preaching my story without an insincere motive. I teach a course on sales. I use my business expertise from this costly experience to run a non-profit organization that aids the homeless and impaired.

But let me do better.

I desire to expand my mastery and make a greater impact. I am applying to the Wharton School of Business in order
to utilize my talents for the greater good that continues to grow within me, the very same good that pulled me out of that dark hole. Stronger than ever, I push myself forward to continue improving not only my life, but the lives of others, and especially of those in need. I hope that one day my penance will be made for the damage I have done, but until then I continue to aspire.
Zermatt: twelve-thousand feet above sea level, negative twenty-seven degrees Celsius, blizzards, the ski slope, and horizon blended together into a blank page, except for the faint glow of red trail markers.

At four years of age, I learned to ski down the black diamonds of the Swiss alps between my mom’s legs. Soon, I mustered up the courage to race her down the same mountain. This was a warm welcome to my new home in Europe.

I first arrived in Prague at the age of four and spoke two words of Czech; my mom was not a fluent speaker either, and the teachers did not speak English. I held my education in my hands.

After third grade in the Czech Republic, I returned to America and repeated the academic year; however, upon my re-entry to Prague, I refused to be held back and leapt for fifth grade. In order to catch up, I made best efforts cramming the one hundred and forty-six exceptions of “i” and “y” conjugations into my head. I knew it would be worth it, even though I could not see it at the time.

Another slope had taunted my perseverance like my return to Prague, so I tightened the bindings and adjusted my goggles. This slope preferred moguls that launched me six feet in the air. I would land the jump with a one hundred and eighty-degree spin. The moguls did not satisfy me so I chased after something more difficult.

After completing middle school, I decided to pursue the American dream in the United States, a dream that kept me awake most nights. The idea that someone spent nearly ten years in the Czech school system could then apply to an American high school and barely get by, let alone excel, was unfathomable to most people including me. I applied to Bishop Gorman High School, a renowned American preparatory academy, while lacking English skills. Most of my English was self-taught since the few English classes I had were at a third-grade level. Still, I was determined and went for the jump.

Safe landings were not assured when large, relentless moguls awaited me. My mom recounted stories about double black diamond ski slopes in America with lips ten feet tall and moguls made of ice proportional to a VW bug.

Freshman year, I had face planted into the ice. In the Czech Republic, subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and history were re-sequenced in such a way that they lacked transitions that I could comprehend. Concepts intertwined and tangled as they were retaught with two active language barriers. Complex questions and tedious explanations sent me tumbling down the mountain. Critical thinking: an entirely new concept to me compared to the blunt force memorization of the Czech school system. I lost control and wiped out.

But I picked myself up.

This time, I angled the edge of my board by seeking aid anywhere I could find it. Yes, each subject froze up though I soon found ways to prevent it on my own, still, each swift run required a cold windy wait for some peer, teacher, or internet site to fill the looming gaps.
Everybody knows that the best view is from the summit. That’s where I stand now. My senior year sees me caught up, my grades finally coming close to the 4.0 I am capable of.

In route, I discovered that life, like the mountain, best challenges the people who dare to face it—alone but with support systems that might be rejected by those who’ve never struggled. A steep journey, when first looked down on, is an experience infinitely more rewarding when reviewed. Now, I conquer every slope that presents itself without hesitation—well, most. Looking to the horizon for another mountain, I do not count the number of falls, only the jumps landed.
Justice Dante

Dante’s Inferno sought to punish the guilty as seen fit to the human eye. The sins of Achilles, Helena of Troy, Count Ugolino and Lucifer are punished justly and symbolically through the correlation of their wrong doings.

The sin of Achilles is justified and symbolic because he was more a monster than man. He would tear kingdoms apart for Helena of Troy. He disguised an oncoming massacre as a gift of peace. Countless men, women and children were slaughtered in their sleep for the love that hoped to bond these two souls. The love they deeply shared will be lost in the wind in which their “spirits, wailing…” (V. 46) will “whirl and, whirling…” (V. 43-44). They will fly in all directions, “Here, there, up…“ (V. 46) with a desire to once again reunite to then be ripped apart by destiny as a symbol and memory of all the lives that have been shattered by Achilles and Helena of Troy. The representation of the sins they have committed will be enacted upon them as this punishment serves justice to those they have harmed for they will have no time but eternity to empathize with their victims. The new heel of Achilles.

The just and symbolic sin of a corrupt count such as Ugolino feeding off of others for his well being comes to no surprise; however, cannibalism was not in the job description. Archbishop Ruggieri became an unfortunate volunteer, “whose nape…” (XXXIII. 1-2) when he imprisoned the count and his sons, sentencing them to death by starvation. The count admitted that “fasting overcame my…” (64) which further justifies the punishment of cannibalism for it is the symbolic and literal embodiment of the monster whose “eyes narrowed…” (XXXIII. 66). Count Dracula seems to have acquired a taste for older men. The Archbishop’s victimhood is just as well for he is the very cause of his punishment. Symbolically, the archbishop must feed the hunger that was released when he locked away the count’s humanity.

Satan’s sin is just and symbolic. Ironic, the fiery demon of hell, Satan himself, is trapped in an icebox. However, this is no coincidence but completely of his own accomplishment. Lucifer from the beginning of time strived to be higher than God, manifested by his flapping wings which by “waving them…” (XXXVI. 50-51) freezes the very ice that holds him hostage. The punishment is just because the ice is Lucifer’s ego that weighs him down. The ego has perverted his conscience to desire to destroy God’s creation since “at every mouth…” (XXXIV. 55-57) the biggest traitor of all chews some of the greatest traitors of man which is symbolic of his punishment. Lucifer Morningstar trapped in the depths of hell, where the stars do not shine, mourns the very stars that bind him.

Justice is often portrayed as the punishment that fits the crime; however, not often does one consider mercy as a form of justice. Perhaps, people should practice a kind of justice that can be served with confidence and a light heart for the heaviest of burdens become feathers. Forgiveness is not an easy task but it is a forever lasting one unlike the complacency of hell.
Reese Jednorozec
Age: 18, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Critical Essay

Obedience and Vengeance

Obedience and Vengeance

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Claudius’s and Hamlet’s, as well as Rosencranz’s, Guildenstern’s and Horatio’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foil characters.

Rosencranz’s, Guildenstern’s and Horatio’s similarities and differences certainly demonstrate the lessons of obedience. Rosencranz’s and Guildenstern’s obedience to their king Claudius as Guildenstern suggests “we both obey…”(2.2.23,24,25) stems from stature unlike Horatio’s obedience which roots itself in friendship as well as stature. This, further buttressed by Horatio’s promise to never speak of the ghost as “Our duty to…”(1.2.252) Hamlet certifies his commitment. One could argue that the ghost is the root of obedience and that Horatio only obeys due to the fear of being declared mad as Hamlet, but when the play progresses the audience comes to realize that this case simply cannot apply. Rosencranz, Guildenstern and Horatio share the trait of obedience; however, along with the difference in the foundation of such obedience foils the three characters which continues to shape itself into a detriment for Rosencranz and Guildenstern.

Hamlet’s and Claudius’s similarities and differences undoubtedly exemplify the lessons on vengeance. Claudius swindled his way from uncle to step-father of Hamlet which clearly leads to bitter interactions. When Claudius tries to interact with “my cousin Hamlet…” (1.2.64,65), but he replies with a rebuke. A logical argument would consider that the ghost has provided Hamlet with the new information that propels this bitterness and in effect the story; nonetheless, Hamlet feels this bitterness even without the help of this ghost as Gertrude remarried shortly after his father’s death. The result of this quick tying of new bonds leads to a loose thread which leaves room for Hamlet’s and even Claudius’s vengeance since Hamlet is the descendant of the new King’s victim after all. Claudius and Hamlet share fates and the pursuit of vengeance; despite that, they differ in the reasons for their pursuits.

Rosencranz’s and Guildenstern’s lesson on obedience suggests that blind obedience leads to the demise of the obedient. As an obedient servant does, Rosencranz reports to Claudius with a message about Hamlet that “He does confess…”(3.1.3,4) about his odd behavior. Claudius acting upon the message, assigns another quest for the two spies. Rosencranz and Guildenstern attempt to fulfill the king’s wishes to deliver Hamlet to England where a trial shall be held and Hamlet executed. The two are obedient, but blind, they perish in their mission of obedience. Negative traits meaning blind and misplaced obedience carry out negative outcomes.

Horatio’s moral on obedience affirms that its origin should be within the heart and with eyes. Horatio illustrates himself not as a servant but as a good friend that looks out for Hamlet’s best interest and always at his service as demanded by Horatio’s response “Here, sweet lord…”(3.2.47) to Hamlet’s calling. Horatio although doubting Hamlet’s decisions and concerns himself with the outcomes that may follow, he still obeys. He fulfills his tasks with a kind of love that only true friends share. Horatio carries himself in a positive manner which brings to fruition a positive resolution.

Hamlet’s experience with self reflection upon vengeance illustrates the truly required deep consideration of the consequences that follow. Hamlet contemplates to himself “To be, or not to be…”(3.1.57,58,59,60,61), and comes
to a conclusion to seek out vengeance for his father and king because he is left with nearly no other choice. An opponent may suggest that Hamlet should just walk away, but no such possibility exists for the son of a murdered king. In result, Hamlet carefully contemplates the outcomes of his actions and the choices that must be made, nearly driving him mad. No person copes well with the thought of certain death. Vengeance in itself brings about a negative outcome, but in spite of that, contemplation provides a positive effect of relief in the most trying situations.

Claudius’s actions towards unparalleled vengeance full of greed and corruption to not only his brother, but also Hamlet spirals out of control within his life. Claudius states “I like him...” (3.2.1,7) about Hamlet and decides to send him to England where another king will complete the contemptible deeds of murder that Claudius does not dare himself with. Claudius not only strives for vengeance but hesitates to even fulfill his own defined purpose. Intellectuals dignify Claudius’s response as just in the act of self defense from Hamlet’s vengeance, still, evidence from Claudius’s past suggests that his embedded vengeance does not flow from a cause of circumstance, but instead from greed for power. Power that influences those obedient to him.

Rosencranz’s, Guildenstern’s and Horatio’s teaching about misguided obedience presents itself within the resolution. Horatio obeys for the righteous purposes and receives the gift of life in return as Rosencentz and Guildenstern do not survive until the climax. Nevertheless, Horatio, a faithful servant, states “Never believe it...” (5.3.336,337,338) as he attempts to take his own life to die in accord with his dear friend Hamlet, but before Horatio manages to take the faithful sip of poisonous wine, Hamlet smacks the goblet out of his hand. Hamlet leaves Horatio with one last task, to spread his tale because Rosencentz and Guildenstern, following blindly, would not be able to take on a task as such for only a dear friend embodies a true servant.

Hamlet’s and Claudius’s tale of vengeance highlights, in the resolution, that hatred is the devourer of all things good. The wrath these men enact upon each other pursues nothing, but destruction all around them. Vengeance, the snake that poisons Hamlet and later Claudius as through Hamlet’s claim “Envenom'd too!...” (5.3.320,321,322) and actions will consume the lives of the people surrounding them including Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius, Laertes, Guildenstern and Rosencranz. Vengeance, a tempting siren leads its victims towards the sharp rocks of life, where death lurks in every crashing wave.

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes. The foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Claudius’s and Hamlet's, as well as Rosencranz’s, Guildenstern’s and Horatio’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.
Temptation

Humanity is sin. The Lord instills his gift of conscience in all human beings thus forming an inherent good, yet with the ability of free will, humanity falls from grace and delves into sin. Furthermore, the morality seated in the hearts and minds of man urges us to fight against materialistic desires and instead, towards a life supplemented with spiritual fulfillment. Rooted within the human soul, the temptations of the natural world chips away at the weakest of men, corrupting those with rancid dreams fueled by greed and power. Exemplifying through the acts and beliefs of a multitude of dynamic characters in Fyodor Dostoevsky's magnum opus, The Brothers Karamazov, the internal struggle against the lust of materialistic pleasures is at the forefront of the novel's argument for morality and a Christian lifestyle, profoundly proven through the lives of Dmitri, Zosima, as well as Alyosha, in the ever-present anecdotes and decisions made by these characters, who demonstrate that they are not defined by their pasts and instead evolve into men that they would hope to be.

Evidently, the profoundly deep -- in the sense of transition and revelation -- life of Dmitri Karamazov provides the largest insight into any character's psyche in the novel. In such a description, the audience finds a man, riddled with sin and once assumed to be too far down the path of sin, proves to himself and those around him that any such personality is capable of salvation. Although all humans, with the exception of God incarnate, are inherently sinners, we all have a common soul and conscience gifted by God at the moment of conception which is tasked with guiding and contributing morality to humanity. Dmitri is a hyperbola of such a transition of a man lost to sin finding a path back to the Lord. Dmitri is motivated by the encouragement from those around him, especially his youngest brother, Alyosha, as well as his internal drive to find true love, such that he was denied in his childhood (book 1, chapters 1 and 2). Arguably, the lack of attention in this critical stage of his life is what inevitably drives him to extremes in order to attain what he so desperately craves; to the point of nearly murdering Grigori, the man who raised him when his father was incapable (book 8, chapter 4). Such a heinous act reveals the magnitude of the sinner's loss for morality in the hunt for worldly ambitions. Just as Dmitri is willing to go to extremes, the character undoubtedly most connected to the Lord, Father Zosima, nearly fell to the same fate in his youth. The memoir of Zosima's life as described by Alyosha in regards to the duel and treatment of Afanasy is remarkably similar to that of Dmitri's own life (book 6, chapter 2). The parallelism in the story to the current doings of the eldest brother foreshadows the coming communion Dmitri will have with Christianity. By rejoicing with Grushenka, the woman he would do just about anything for, he was complete (book 8, chapter 8). At this moment, Dmitri no longer requires himself to crush everything in his path to attain that which he craves; for he has found satisfaction in Grushenka. In his words describing their love for one another Dmitri solely concerned himself with the moment “Come what may, whatever happens now, I’ll give the whole world for one minute” (book 8, chapter 8). He understood this may be the final time he would experience such passion yet he would give his life at a chance to continue such relations indefinitely. Symbolically representing the hole left in the hearts of the disbelievers and being whole once again when rejoicing in the warmth of the Lord, as taught in Jesus Christ’s parable of the Prodigal Son. Just as Dmitri foreshadows in his words, it would be the last time he would see his lover as a free man. In the resolution, it is “...pronounced loudly and clearly, in the deep silence... ‘Yes, guilty!’”(Dostoevsky 753). Dmitri has committed patricide. Despite his transformation from sinner to that of sympathetic, the judgment of the new hero’s soul rests in the hands of mortals, stripping the power from God, resulting in a verdict convicting an innocent man. Utterly proving the fact that a shift in the morality of one person is not easily viewed nor conceivable by simple-minded men; only ever truly known by the man and the Lord.

The similarities in the early lives of Dmitri and Father Zosima are no coincidence as such a transition is again found in the life of Fyodor Dostoevsky himself and in real-world events. After his return to St. Petersburg and the formation of his own successful literary journal, not only did Dostoevsky’s wife die but also his beloved brother whom he worked so closely in his journal. In addition to the overwhelming grief; Dostoevsky’s struggle to provide...
for his brother’s widow and children resulted in his self-destructive depression which would be released in the form of an “acute gambling compulsion.” Suffering surrounded him. Such disorder ultimately forced his migration to western Europe to escape not only his debtors seeking reparation but also his mournful past. This escape eventually led to his marriage to Anna Snitkina, whom he wrote his best works with. Dmitri and Zosima are reflections of his own life (Fyodor). Not only are the dynamic characters able to complete renewals in their conscience and morality, but this theme of transition is also observed in the current events taking replace in the Christian Church soon before the creation of The Brothers Karamazov. The First Vatican Council was assembled in 1869 and through 1870 by Pope Pius IX, “the pearl of his pontificate” (Pius IX). In the meetings, the council ruled on the discussion of papal infallibility, and “The last vote was now taken; 433 Fathers voted placent, and only two...voted non placent” (Kirch). For over 18 centuries the leader of the entire Christian church could have been speaking incorrectly in the word of the Lord. Although the Eastern Orthodox Church does not formally recognize the pope as the leader of the church, such a transition in nearly two millennia would have a lasting impact on all aspects of the religion. Dostoevsky certainly got word of the news. Additionally, the other decisions of the council such as its “…[defense]...against the errors of modern Rationalism, Materialism, and atheism,” a serious threat to Eastern Orthodoxy during Dostoevsky’s lifetime. Without a doubt, the rulings of the Vatican Council reached the ears of the magnificent author aided in his contemplation on the ability of all things to adapt and convert. The themes of transition and redemption in The Brothers Karamazov are solidified in the actions of the sudden adaptations to the church, Dostoevsky himself, and clearly exposed in his creations reflecting his own ideals.

Dmitri’s actions were undoubtedly of his own moral compass and his ability to be torn apart by his worldly desires as proven in the outcome of Alyosha’s juxtapositional life, despite both undergoing similar childhoods. Consistently throughout the religious scholar’s life, readers are presented with a young man who emulates what most strive to be: empathetic, motivated, and selfless. Alyosha was also raised in an environment in which he remained without love and care from his neglectful, alcoholic father and deceased mother, and passed between guardians including Grigori. The brothers had the same potential. They had the same opportunity in their lives, yet the reason for their divergent character development and personalities arises directly from their ability to embrace God and his grace. Dmitri’s sinful actions had a great possibility of being outcomes of his cynical perspective on life which, in turn, was birthed from his rotten upbringing. However, Alyosha suffered the same beginning, yet his perspective was shifted from that of his older brother, for he was introduced to the monastery and had lived there since he turned 19 years old (book 1, chapter 4). Furthermore, his moral compass is impeccably strong due to his love for the Lord. Alyosha, the foil of Dmitri, differs solely because of his Christian life. Christianity produces morality. Alyosha’s hero role contains far more magnitude in the context that Russian literature in the 19th century “…[fulfilled] functions, such as philosophical, moral, and religious analysis…” (Morson). Dostoevsky’s portrayal of Alyosha as a christ-figure and an archetypal theological student is tasked with commenting on his ideology of what God incarnate may appear to be in 1879. Finally, in his hopes to follow the Lord’s will through the spread of love in his community, Alyosha entirely encompasses Dostoevsky’s inner desire to abide by the commands of God in a world drowning in sin.

Effortlessly, Fyodor Dostoevsky masterfully exhibits a multitude of grand, philosophical ideologies present in his novel The Brothers Karamazov through his utilization of dynamic characters such as Dmitri and Father Zosima and their experiences in contrast to that of a pure being such as Alyosha to exemplify his beliefs that humanity may be tempted by devils toward sin but are inherently capable to withstand such suffering to transform men and women to people of the Lord. With a profound mind coupled with raw human experience, the genius was able to understand the human psyche impeccably well and pick apart each personality type. Furthermore with the increased literacy rates and overall average education of the nation gradually increased as proven in the 1897 census, Dostoevsky’s philosophies circulated rapidly (Pavlenko). His findings work suggest humans are not greed-filled, selfish beings, but rather desperate for love, which is eternally found in God.
Punishment

Within Dante Alighieri's lifetime, he established a fair share of rivals, love-interests, and mentors, all of whom, among others, appear in his exalted magnum opus, The Divine Comedy. His self-insert character's venture throughout the bowels of Hell within The Inferno results in copious contemporary, and historical sinners' re-emergence, including Farinata, Caiaphus, and Brutus and Cassius, all of whom's punishments are just and symbolic as per the sins of their lives.

As a strong-minded politician, Alighieri provoked conflict between the leading political ideologies within his homeland of Florence, Italy, inevitably resulting in his party's exile. Farinata, one such politician, is damned to the sixth circle, reserved solely for the heretics; those who deny the soul's eternity. The punishment for such sin includes entrapment in burning tombs as well as a lack of perspective on current and past events, and solely an understanding of the future. By understanding the Lord's presence throughout the Bible in the form of fire, it is evident that the punishment of lying surrounded by God's power is symbolic as the heretics deny the Church's teachings and require a constant reminder. Moreover, living in ignorance of the present and past is just as their negligence of the afterlife led them to focus on searching for pleasure and immediate satisfaction. Conjointly, Alighieri argues for the necessity of belief in the afterlife as a mechanism to restrain sinful behavior intrinsically.

Deeper into the abyss of Hell resides the hypocrites, the largest of which being Caiaphus (implied based on his life and unique punishment). As the high priest under Pontius Pilate, he fervently preached prudence yet advised the Pharisees to prosecute Jesus Christ, the man of perfect judgment. In the sixth pouch of the eighth circle of Hell, Caiaphus' punishment consists of crucifixion and trampling by the lesser hypocrites. His sentencing is symbolic seeing as he influenced the decision to crucify Jesus, and so now he lies crucified for all eternity. Moreover, his punishment is just as he suffers the worst of all the hypocrites as Jesus suffered the worst punishment of all the sinners. While Caiaphus does not speak throughout Canto XXIV, he has arguably the most fitting and meaningful punishment of any other sinner.

The absolute pit of Hell is the home to the sinners who betrayed their benefactors. Only four beings exist in the third pouch of the ninth circle of Hell, Lucifer, Judas Iscariot, and Marcus Brutus and Gaius Cassius. In life, Cassius coaxed Brutus into a political coup against Julius Caesar by stating it would best benefit the Roman public to maintain the republic rather than enact a transition into an empire. In understanding their intentions, Cassius feared his loss of power in the Senate. In contrast, Brutus believed he acted selflessly by submitting to his friend's demise for the benefit of the masses. Due to the reprehensible act of betraying one's benefactor, both held repulsive characters in Alighieri's perspective and are thus punished equally for their actions despite the difference in motive. In the afterlife, Brutus and Cassius are eternally eaten alive by two of Lucifer's three mouths (Alighieri Canto XXXIV). This punishment is just because these men are insignificant without their relationship to Caesar and should receive a penalty equivalently mutilating and wretched to that of the impact of their actions. Just as Caesar pleaded for assistance from his dear and trusted Brutus, the two traitors are symbolically betrayed by the originator of sin similar to how they found justification in their envy, greed, and lust for power yet are suffering in the bowels of Hell. Moreover, in his last moments, Brutus altogether crushed Caesar's heart, and symbolically in death, Brutus is repeatedly torn apart by the jaw of the devil. Such punishment remains reserved for the absolute undeniably sinister people and is rightfully petrifying.

Dante Alighieri effectively expresses his perception of the just punishment for the sins of the world in The Inferno by communicating that what you do in life will return to you in the afterlife. The decisions and personal restraint of one's actions will determine their character's ethicality and the deservedness of punishment or salvation. Not only does Alighieri reinforce the importance of religion and practicing the teaching of Jesus Christ, but he indirectly stresses the Hindi understanding of karma, as the soul's eternal existence is equivalent to the sum of one's actions.
Can’t Help Using Social Media

Tech experts say
It manipulates our brains
But I can't help using social media
they say snapchat takes
People's lives everyday
If I can't help using social media?

Like followers grow
Surely it brings glee
Darling, as they go
It is saddening (sadden-eeiing)

Take control
Take your life in your hands
For I can’t help using social media

Like followers grow
Surely it brings glee
Darling, as they go
It is saddening

Take control
Take your life in your hands
For I can’t help using social media
For I can’t help using social media
Kyle Johns
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Poetry

“Split” and “The Kid in the Corner”

"Split"
Irrationality
I rule the world
It's my personality
I rule my world
Can't stop thinking
There are no brakes
Wanting to stop racing
Can't keep up this pace
Don't need acceptance
Gotta keep moving
Chased down
Can't slow down
I am slowing
Down

Don't Fail
It's a different pain
all brakes, no hope
Breath deep
Deep sleep
I'm a dreamer
Can't get a break
Can't run anymore
Can't fail
Don't fail.

"The Kid in the Corner"
I don't want to be
The kid in the corner
Stressed about what I can't control
How could I know
I'm usually in control
Do they even know
I've been living real low?

Rather hide away
Rather give my all
than not at all
Either put my mind to it
Or go with the flow
I know I'm not blind
Gotta put on a show
Either shine or undermined
Got nowhere to go
    I am trapped
In my own mind
    I am
The kid in the corner.
Why Character Matters

In his magnum opus, *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri implies one’s character is no more than their actions, thus determining their worthiness of salvation. I view character as the combination of one’s intentions and morality expressed through actions. Character is the culmination of one’s values, personal autonomy, conscientiousness, inspirational optimism, modesty, and moral responsibility. The importance of good character is evident in societies and leaders determined to defend and provide for the liberties of its citizens.

As portrayed in *The Inferno*, the examples of Marcus Brutus and Gaius Cassius exemplify Alighieri’s ideology. Cassius coaxed Brutus into a political coup against Julius Caesar by stating it would best benefit the Roman public to maintain the republic rather than enact a transition into an empire. In understanding their intentions, Cassius feared his loss of power in the Senate. In contrast, Brutus believed he acted selflessly by submitting to his friend’s demise for the benefit of the masses. Due to the reprehensible act of betraying one’s benefactor, both held repulsive characters in Alighieri’s ideology and are thus punished equally for their actions despite the difference in motive. Alighieri sentenced Brutus and Cassius to the most profound pit of Hell alongside Lucifer and Judas Iscariot themselves (Alighieri Canto XXXIV).

From Alighieri’s perspective, one could argue that the Founding Fathers of the United States of America were mere treasonous rebels seeking to overthrow the rightful King of England. Yet, the leaders of the American Revolution felt it was their moral responsibility to overthrow a tyrannical monarchy. They justified rebellion through faith, belief in individual liberty, and the political philosophy of John Locke. Character often presents itself through confidence in challenging injustice at significant personal risk for the betterment of society. Leaders and revolutionaries such as Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglas, Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela all leveraged their lives in a struggle against moral injustice, which externally represents good character. Additionally, there is also the quiet character of the everyday community leaders: parents, teachers, and servicemen and women doing what is right for their respective societies. Good character shapes posterity and, therefore, history.

From my own experience, I volunteer at the Nevada State Veterans Home. With the average aged resident at 82-years old, these elderly men and women are externally frail and dependent. Their outward appearance masks the remarkable history of those who risked their lives for our nation during the Korean and Vietnam wars. These individuals served our country just as my late grandfather had, and I am symbolically honoring him through my service to his peers. Outside of each room hangs a picture of the respective resident, dressed in uniform and brilliantly reflecting the prime of their youth. The character of these individuals is not readily evident on the surface, but rather from their stories of war and dedication to the country.

Sociologist Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development focuses on the idea of an individual’s morality. The most advanced stage of cognitive understanding of morality is ‘postconventional morality.’ Such a notion is not defined by laws or social norms but rather by the individual’s preconception of ethics. One’s understanding of morality and willingness to fight for justice plays a critical role in judging a person’s character.

Throughout history, men and women find courage in their values and preconception of morality to enact necessary precautions and movements to protect their inalienable liberties. The peak of humanity remains unattainable through the accomplishments that embolden our own lives but rather through internal compassion and empathy, which drives us to care for the wellbeing of our neighbors. While Dante Alighieri discounted the internal motivations and focused on actions, I believe the formation of character is from the inside-out, where actions are the representation of an individual’s internal character.
JOHNS, KYLE

Kyle Johns
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Humor

Loyalty

Throughout my life, education and family remained at the forefront of my motivations. My passion for my own achievement as well as the wellbeing of those I care about has transformed me into a man willing to “never rise again” (Shakespeare 5.2.315) in order to ensure justice is kept. In addition to my passion for justice, it is my duty and desire to continue my education past that of my “return to France” (Shakespeare 1.2.52) where I spent much time at university. It was there that I learned the art of rhetoric and the ability to persuade. Having understood the lifeworks of the roman politicians and greek philosophers who founded the western heritage, I found a deep respect for the ability to communicate and persuade those around me. After the loss of both my beloved sister and father, this art has grounded me in reality and encouraged me to be none other than the best, in their honor. Due to my prowess and understanding of the art of rhetoric and logic, I find it my vocation to pursue self actualization through the Law program in college.

In conjunction with the familial and traditional values at the school, I find it difficult to peruse the availability of other universities with renowned law programs. Having lived in both the remote kingdom of Denmark and the luxurious Paris, I know both the life of the laborers and the consistent hustling of the prudent students destined for revolutionary works. Furthermore, it is because of my deep loyalties to both family and those meaningful to me and my prior experience with both the life of college student and in contrast to the laborious life in the country, this school, both in the rural midwest and heavily populated with the intellectually gifted, I would undoubtedly make a welcomed addition. In addition to this, my fighting spirit and defenseman-like qualities would propel me to the top of my class as I could simply never afford to lose and go to the end of the earth to defend those relying on me in the court of law. In order to further cement this point, in hopes of defending the honor of my family who hath been wronged, I challenged the wrongdoer to a fencing match, and he just so happened to be the prince - no one is above the law and fighting for justice is ingrained in my DNA.

It is my understanding that through my unending and intrapersonal struggle to maintain order that there is none who I would not stand toe to toe with in a court of law. Not only is the opposition’s perspective challenging my client’s ethicality, but my own personal honor as losing is utterly unacceptable. Additionally, it is through my background and devotion to education and back breakingly hard work that I would surely be a perfect fit into the culture and community at the University. With little else in my life to devote myself to, I will become legendary as to honor the lives of my late family, will you be the school to claim my rise to fame?
Aja Johnson
Age: 18, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Poetry

“Hammer and Nail”

Power resides where
evil and treachery are rewarded, and re-
sistance is punished. The people fear the strike of his iron fist. CLINK! The all-mighty Hammer brings down all adversaries to their knees. It’s not our fault! No mercy, CLINK, no forgiveness, CLINK and no re-
and He morse, CLINK. He is reckless, He is corrupt, and ambition preys human spirit. S-
submit, CLINK, for He is de-
stiny. It’s not our fault!
Silence! He is absolute!
CLINK! Ha-
mer makes the man; He corrupts man in the same br-
eath. He without Ham-
mer has no influence, no ability to command obedience. Hammer attracts the wicked and abuses the honorable. But we have no Hammer, no power, no control. We are not in control of our destiny, our actions, our beings. It’s not our fault! We are the innocent, drowning in our own hypocrisy. The world will be destroyed by Him and we are forced to watch. We are the prisoners of His making, banished from truth. He is Hammer; we are his victims. CLINK!

Brute force is done unto me. I am the victim of suffering.
Jesus, save me. I am the victim of pain, the pains of life and death, the pains of fear and remorse. My God, have you forsaken me? Am I so far gone? Jesus, save me, for I am stuck in my ways. I am the victim of power.

Those, who have it, wield it onto me.

Save me!
The Golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I had never gotten those words ’til now. I am the victim of my own creation, destroyed by my own doing. O God! Save the souls of the forgotten. Do as I had done to His begotten son: crucify me! Deliver me my final nail in the coffin.
Can’t Help Falling in Love

Donald said
Only fools wear masks,
But I can’t help keeping my loved ones safe.
Thousands dead
Failed your only task
But now it’s time, time for the second wave

Covid cases grow
Listen to Fauci
Donald, as you know
We’re changing the presidency

“Count the votes”
But also “stop the count”
You look for fraud, fraud that just can’t be found
Covid cases grow
Still holding large rallies
Donald, so you know
You need to follow the CDC

More will die
More will be in pain
This year has been one of our greatest shames
And Donald Trump, you are the one to blame
The Knight’s College Essay

Stereotypes affect how humans respond to environmental stimuli. When I tell people I am a knight, everyone has this defined image of the person I should be: high ranking, honorable, courageous, and courteous to women. The stereotype of knighthood, although a positive one, forced me to become who society expected me to be and made me suppress the desires and urges I wanted to act on. When it came between honor and desire, I chose desire and paid the price. I made a mistake, abandoning everything I was taught, because the pressure from society’s stereotypes set me up for failure. I gave in to carnal desire, but I have paved my path towards redemption. This journey called me to pursue the truth; having come face to face with it, quite literally, I now dedicated my life to living in truth, rather than honor.

When I forced myself on a defenseless maiden, I had all the power in the world, but I soon became powerless. I was damned, set to be beheaded by His Majesty, but the Queen saved me: “‘You shall live if you can answer me: what is the thing that women most desire?’” (Chaucer 80-81). “[I] knocked at every house, searched every place, yes, anywhere that offered hope of grace,” but the answers I received varied and were rooted in vanity and physical pleasures (Chaucer 95-96). My second attempt to identify the answer was asking an old woman. I begged her and promised to exchange my word for the answer; my life lay in her hands. The truth she shared with me, “a woman wants the self-same sovereignty over her husband as over her lover, and master him; he must not be above her,” saved my life (Chaucer 214-216). Women desire power and freedom; I stripped a woman of her greatest desires by forcing myself on her. Although my first problem concluded, a new problem arose. The request I must fulfill to the crone is marriage; I gave up my own desires and freedom for salvation. I solved this problem with a private ceremony, hiding from the public to save myself from the humiliation. Trapped in an unhappy marriage, I was forced to reevaluate my character when my wife, the paragon of truth, forced me to reflect on why I was unhappy. It wasn’t the loss of freedom, it was because she was old, unattractive, poor, and low ranking. The truth dawned on me: nobility is not a birthright. I have been burdened by honor and pride my whole life, but I failed to realize I never had it to begin with: “men fail in living up to their professions” (Chaucer 324). The truth had surfaced: my vice was my superficiality, not my abysmal mistake. Because of this realization, I was presented with an ethical dilemma, the true judge of character: take my wife pretty and unfaithful or old and loyal. It was a battle between outside appearance and inside character. I could give in to “my worldly appetite” (Chaucer 394), or I could become the character I’ve been chasing after my whole life. This time, I chose correctly; I chose truth: I gave into the female desire, and I let her choose. By relinquishing my power of choice to her, I solved my problems. The significance of these challenges lies in the fact that they prompted my journey towards true happiness, self discovery, and the power of women. My adversities pushed me on the path towards the pursuit of truth.

Notre Dame devotes itself to fostering a community of inclusion and diversity. I began and concluded my journey with desire: first the desires of my own and concluding with the desires of a woman. This growth of character is due to my intellectual challenge, ethical dilemma, and the steps I have taken to overcome them. I am strengthened for a life of purpose, service, and leadership.
Inferno Essay

“God has a plan for you” is a common Christian saying that pushes the belief that God guides humanity through a virtuous and righteous path of life. Because humanity has the tendency to stray away from God’s light, people find themselves lost, in darkness, and in a state of confusion. This is the case for Dante, a Christian man who lost his way from the path God set out for him. Dante’s journey to find his way back on God’s path is characterized by the themes of sin, punishment, and justice. Through the examples of Francesca and Paolo, Empress, and Ugolino and Ruggieri, it is evident that God’s punishment for sin is both just and symbolic.

The punishment that Francesca and Paolo endure is designed to uphold the dignity of righteousness, and it is also designed to suggest greater significance. In Circle Two, Dante and Virgil meet the lustful couple. What began as an innocent attraction quickly turned into a love affair. While reading, Francesca and Paolo were unable to control their carnal desire to kiss each other. The word “control” is what makes the tempest a just punishment. In life, Francesca and Paolo were unable to control themselves, were swept away by their carnal desire, and were helpless to their passionate love; in death, they are unable to control their bodies, their souls, nor their pain. They are “wracked by a war of winds...” (V. 30). “Wracked” indicates an eternity of extreme physical and mental pains, “war” suggests destruction, and “winds” alludes to the eternal tempest. Francesca and Paolo “betrayed” God, hurting Him, destroying their connection to Him (V. 39). So it is only just that they endure the same pains they inflicted on God. The feeling of helplessness and lack of control that the couple felt in life is carried on through the sinners’ punishment in death. The eternal tempest “sweeps the souls of the damned...” (V. 32); “sweeps” is a term that shows justice because it was passion that swept the lovers’ “souls” away from God’s light, but in Hell, it is now wind that keeps the damned away from Him. The symbolic significance of the tempest is its endlessness: “And this, I learned, was the never ending flight/ of those who sinned in the flesh” (V.37-38) The endlessness of the winds, demonstrated by the words “never ending”, parallel the restlessness of its sinners. Sinners in this circle are unable to free themselves from the never ending pain and suffering caused by these winds. Because of this, God’s punishment upholds the dignity of eternal righteousness, while also suggesting a greater significance than just eternal wind.

The punishment God delivered upon Empress was upstanding and significant beyond the literal surface. Empress was a woman ravished by lust; however, because of her position of power, she was able to escape consequences: “To hide the guilt of her debauchery/ she licensed all depravity alike,/ and lust and law were one in her decree” (V.55-57). “Decree” suggests that Empress was in a position of control; because of this power, she was able to evade her guilt and the consequences of her sin. In other words, she controlled her fate. What makes this punishment just is that Empress is stripped of the power and control she once had in her life and is subject to God and the eternal storm. Wind symbolizes power and destruction, but it is also a Biblical allusion to God’s breath and His ultimate power over the world: mortal and eternal. Empress thought she had power over her physical world, but she did not. God stripped Empress of the power she thought she had and made her realize His authority over all, His authority of her fate. “Guilt” is the internal gift from God that stems from conscience, and the need to hide her guilt is an admission of sin. Subconsciously, Empress knew she was guilty but never allowed herself to be reprimanded. God’s gift of conscience did not push Empress to uphold moral virtue, rather it forced her to admit to her sins. Guilt serves as a mortal punishment; since Empress was able to evade that by hiding her guilt, it is just that she is punished by eternal winds that strip her of her ability to hide. Guilt serves to maintain the relationship between man and God, to exert God’s moral influence of right and wrong, and to redistribute emotional pain and stress. By hiding her guilt Empress destroyed all of that. Wind symbolizes destruction; therefore God’s punishment is just. In Hell, Empress faces God’s just and symbolic punishment of the eternal whirlwinds. In summary, justice comes from the fact that Empress is forced to embody her sin and erratic life. Allowing herself to be swept away by her lustful desires, Empress lived a life driven by passion and devoid of reason. Justly, she is unable to control her fate and is eternally swept away by the winds of the tempest. The symbolic significance of the punishment is found in its inability to be
controlled. In life, Empress created laws to excuse herself from sin, but in Hell, she is forced to face the punishment. Empress was always able to catch a break, but in Hell, she physically and literally is unable to: “Here, there, up, down, they whirl and, whirling, strain/ with never a hope of hope to comfort them,/ not of release, but even of less pain” (V.43-45). Power and lust consumed Empress, but in Hell she was stripped of that power, forced to face the music, and embody her sinful pleasures. God’s punishment for Empress demonstrated his moral authority to uphold virtue, while maintaining a non literal significance.

Ruggieri and Ugolino, sinners who betrayed their country, were delivered a punishment that was both virtuous and allusive. As a punishment, both are encased in ice up to their necks. Being in the deepest circle of Hell, these men are furthest away from God’s light. It is just for them to be encased in ice because they are furthest from the light and God’s warmth. Ice is a symbol for the absence of love. Because the men deviated so far from God’s path, they are denied his love, which in turn brings warmth. Dante encounters the pair as “the sinner raised his mouth from repast and wiped it on the bloody head” (XXXIII. 1-2). “Repast”, in a literal sense, means meal. Ruggieri imprisoned Count Ugolino and his sons and starved them to death. Due to grief, Ugolino began biting his hands but his sons mistook this gesture for hunger and offered themselves up to ease the suffering of their father. Because Ruggieri starved innocent children, it is a just punishment that he be the meal for a starving father. In this example, the punishment is just because it is the reversal of the sin. Ruggieri starved innocent people, so his punishment is the reverse: to be the meal. In a non literal sense, “repast” is a Biblical allusion to communion. People partake in communion by eating the body and blood of Christ in remembrance of what He did. It symbolizes trust between two beings, but Ugolino and Ruggieri betrayed so it is just that they are in the Ninth Circle of Hell. No longer is it the symbolic body and blood, it is the literal. Rather than communion, the punishment is vampirism. Count Ugolino ate his children. “Bloody head” alludes to Ruggieri, a man of great power reduced down to just a head. Ruggieri starved innocent children and is now the meal of a starving father, which is the reversal of the sin. Blood symbolizes guilt and the permanent stain of sin. Guilt is a mirror to sin, serving to maintain the relationship between man and God, to exert God’s moral influence of right and wrong, and to redistribute emotional pain and stress. Because Ruggieri severed the ties between him and God, he must go on with this guilt and exist as a severed head. The additional punishment of eternal cannibalism is just because it forces Ugolino to embody his sin. Cannibalism is a symbol of inhumanity. That is symbolic because Ugolino describes his imprisonment as “the lingering inhumanity/ of the death [he] suffered…” (XXXIII.19-20). The punishment delivered upon Ruggieri and Ugolino is both righteous and non literal.

As people continue to sin and stray from the righteous path, they get further and further away from God’s light, as indicated by the Nine Circle of Hell. Sinners who find themselves in Hell are given punishments according to the crime and its severity. Although strict, God’s punishment is always just. Behind every punishment is a symbolic message. The themes of justice, sin, and punishment are demonstrated throughout Dante’s journey through Hell.
I Never Came

There persists no worse feeling than knowing one could have done more, or so I thought. Fear immobilizes: it stops one from doing the things he or she needs to do. At least, that was my fate the dreadful morning of November 21, 2017.

As an only child, I had been sheltered from the harsh realities of certain events: death, terminal illness, disabilities, etc. I never learned the true meaning of death; people were in my life and then they weren’t, and I never considered the permanence of death. My dad was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in 2011, but he never let me believe it was anything serious. Despite the biopsies and chemo treatments, Dad never let on to the possibility that he was ill; he acted as if everything was okay, and I believed him. It started to become routine: Dad saw the doctor, endured his treatments, came home, and isolated himself in his room so as to not expose me to the after effects. Sometimes, Dad could not hide his pain, and that was when I began to worry.

He told me, “I’m okay.”

On November 20, Dad came back from a blood transfusion and had fallen very ill. Mom had to go to work, so I was left to take care of him. Beads of sweat hung from his face, his frail body was encased in a red robe, his lips quivered. The look of Fear in my eyes prompted him to say, “I’m okay.” Isn’t it funny how two words could have such an effect on a person? Rationality would tell me, “He’s not okay. Call someone for help”; however, Fear told me, “Get out of that room. Who wants to see their dad like this?” Fear gained the upper hand, but I had my duties as a daughter to help my dad. Every time I heard his groan of pain or a “honey,” I ran into the room yelling, “I’m coming.” At night, Dad was the worst I’ve ever seen him. The consistent groans of pain, the chills, the reluctance to eat, the inability to sleep, and the shortness of breath prompted me to call 9-1-1. Dad insisted that I not call the ambulance because “I’m okay,” but any person with half a brain in their head could see how false that was. The ambulance showed up and fear kicked in; I barricaded myself in the guest room, leaving my mom, who barely understands English, to fend for herself. What kind of parents leave their child in the dark like that, but I think, what kind of daughter never thought to come out and say goodbye? I am this story’s villain: a daughter immobilized by Fear, a girl too afraid to face the harsh realities that lie before her, a person who knows the right thing to do, but her failure to act leads to her ongoing waking nightmare. Is the guilt haunting? Yes, but “I’m okay.”

Now the villain becomes the hero. I am strengthened for a life of purpose, service, and leadership. I have seen the control that fear can take over a person, but I am in control of my own destiny. I choose to act, to lead, to serve. I’m coming.
Hamlet Essay

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* poses a challenge to most readers as many believe that the plot moves through the strong and passionate emotions of characters; however, the misplaced sense of obligation and obedience along with the foiling of Shakespeare’s character better reveals the effects and self destruction the characters face as they heed the call to revenge through Laertes and Hamlet and Ophelia and Gertrude. Their misplaced sense of obedience led them to answer the call to vengeance which led these characters to their demise.

The first foil pair is presented in Laertes and Hamlet. Laertes and Hamlet are unified in the fact that they are sons of murdered fathers and feel the need to call to vengeance. Laertes’ father Polonius did not die of natural causes as Hamlet’s father was also slain. The audience first sees the connection that Shakespeare makes between these two men. One of the things that separates these two characters is Laertes’ quick call to action and Hamlet’s need to think about actions and their consequences. Hamlet, a man of faith and a man with a good conscience, is slow to act. However, that does not mean that he is incapable of action: “So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word. It is ‘adieu, adieu, remember me.’ I have sworn ‘t” (1.5.117,119). While Claudius and Laertes are plotting their revenge on Hamlet, Hamlet is concerned with the possible consequences of his actions: judgement before God, imprisonment, and a guilty conscience: “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all” (3.1.91). While, Hamlet believes that his conscience makes him weak, when in fact, it gives him strength: the strength of wisdom. Although Hamlet’s wisdom is a notable virtue that separates him from Laertes, it is this wisdom that causes his greatest vice: indecisiveness, delay in action, and overthinking. These problems also separate Hamlet from his foil. Laertes doesn’t think, he is impulsive and driven by anger and emotions rather than logic and reason. Laertes’ lack of conscience or rather lack of the fear of a guilty conscience separates him from Hamlet as well as eliminates that tendency to delay action: “To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil! Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit! I dare damnation: to this point I stand, that both worlds I give to negligence, let come what comes; only I’ll be revenged most thoroughly for my father” (4.5.149,154). Hamlet and Laertes are united in their call to avenge their dead fathers, what separates the two characters is Hamlet’s conscience, his need to think before he acts and Laertes’ impulsivity and lack of wisdom. Polonius said it best when he said, “this above all: to thine own self be true” (1.3.84). In the process of following a misplaced sense of obedience, both men were destroying themselves. This self destruction was both internal and external. The fact that they both died should be a lesson enough to not follow the path of revenge. Both of these men lost a part of themselves in the process of chasing after revenge. Death isn’t the true self destruction; the loss of identity in both of these men as revenge consumed them was the true self destruction. Staying true to oneself is the lesson to be learned; to not be consumed by revenge as a way of fulfilling an obligation to obedience.

A character’s climax is reached when the problem reaches a high point. Hamlet’s climax was the accidental killing of Polonius because that violent action got him in too deep, and the rest of Hamlet’s story is centered around Laertes’ attempt to avenge his father. Hamlet’s misguided sense of obedience and loyalty to his father led him down a path to avenge his death. Hamlet killing Polonius was the first violent act he committed and he did so without thinking. Hamlet is crippled by his inability to act quickly; he takes time deliberating, thinking about consequences, etc. But when he stabbed Polonius, it was an instinct thing, no time to think. And in that, he lost part of himself, his virtue: wisdom. The lesson learned is that following the path of misguided obedience and vengeance comes with the price of self sacrifice and self destruction. Hamlet lost a part of himself in the act, a part he would not get back. Vengeance and blind obedience brings out the worst parts of people.

Laertes, however, has a dual climax. The earlier climax is when he discovers that Hamlet killed his father. The later climax is when Laertes and Hamlet duel. In this duel, Hamlet thinks Laertes has forgiven him, but he really just plans to kill him. The lesson learned in Laertes’ climaxes is best summarized in this statement given by Hamlet: “Stay, Illusion!” (1.1.39). Although Hamlet is referring to his ghost, this statement applies to Laertes. Laertes created this false reality where Hamlet murdered his father in cold blood, when in reality it was an accident. Because
Laertes’ vengeance and blind call to obedience is based on an illusion, the lesson learned is that blind obedience and vengeance create illusions that fit each person’s versions of reality and this illusion brings about action. The same lesson can also be applied specifically to the duel. Hamlet truly regrets what he did to Polonius and is willing to make amends. He is disillusioned by the reality that Laertes wants him dead, but this illusion inspires action.

With every climax comes a resolution. Hamlet’s resolution comes at the end of the duel when Laertes is slain, Claudius and Gertrude are poisoned, and Hamlet is eventually poisoned. With this death comes clarity, clarity from all illusions. Laertes and Hamlet are able to forgive each other and the plan of vengeance comes to fruition. It is done. The lesson to be learned is vengeance and blind obedience come with unintended consequences. Laertes and Queen Gertrude were never the targets of any revenge plot; however they suffered the consequences. Hamlet misdirected his obedience, rather than obeying his conscience, God, himself, he obeys an apparition. Misplaced obedience causes the loss of oneself, self destruction (physically and mentally).

Laertes suffers the same resolution. His plan of vengeance comes to fruition, but ultimately he is the one who has to pay a price: his life. But death also eliminates the illusion Laertes is under: “exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee, Nor thine on me” (5.2.361,363). Laertes, a man driven by blind obedience to anger and vengeance, asks for forgiveness. He regrets. The lesson to be learned is that blind obedience and vengeance not only cause unintended consequences and ultimate self destruction, but also a false reality (an illusion); only with death, can clarity come.

The second pair of character foils is Ophelia and Gertrude. Both women are automatically united by their gender because they are the only women in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, but they are more firmly united in their obedience/dependence on men. When Claudius makes the announcement that “[w]e will/mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, in equal scale weighing delight and dole) taken to wife” (1.2.12,14), he makes Gertrude’s dependency on men apparent. Gertrude feels as if she cannot function without a man; her life depends on her having a man and being married. That is why she is so quick to replace her slain husband. Ophelia is no better. Her life is controlled by and dependent on three men: Polonius, her father, Laertes, her brother, and Hamlet, her lover. In the beginning of the story, “Polonius attributes the prince’s condition to lovesickness, and he sets a trap for Hamlet using Ophelia as bait” (Shakespeare, synopsis). Her own father uses her as a pawn in some mental game he’s playing with Claudius and Hamlet. But given that her life is defined by the men around her, she says, “I shall obey, my lord” (1.4.145). When Polonius dies, Ophelia is driven to madness, demonstrating that her sanity was linked to men. The loss of one equals the loss of the other. Ophelia kills herself, physically and mentally destroyed by this dependency and obedience to men; however, both women are also united in their ability to free themselves from this dependency. Ophelia’s suicide is a symbol of freedom as it is the only action she has taken in which nobody told her to do it. When Gertrud says, “I will, my lord; I pray you pardon me” (5.2.318) after Claudius insists she not take a drink, Gertrude, for once, doesn’t obey. Gertrude frees herself by disobedience; she drinks poisoned wine accidentally, but with it, she escapes her self destructing dependency. However, at the same time, both women were killed by the men’s plot of vengeance. Ophelia’s insanity was driven by her dad’s death and her lover’s constant abuse as a result of a plan her father made her a part of; Gertrude died by drinking poison meant for Hamlet. Even though these women made, for the first time ever, conscious decisions, they were killed by men. The characteristic that separates Ophelia from Gertrude is purity. Ophelia is portrayed as a woman of innocence, while Gertrude is an unfaithful “whore”, remarrying at the first chance she got. Hamlet describes her marriage to Claudius as “an act that blurs the grace and blush of modesty” (1.2.156-157). Gertrude’s whorish manners are brought to light and contrasted against Ophelia’s purity and innocence. What Shakespeare hopes that the audience takes away from the foil of Ophelia and Gertrude is that obedience should not come with the price of self destruction and that vengeance harms more people than intended. Ophelia and Gertrude were simply caught in the crossfire.

Although these two women seem to just be a piece in the man’s story, both live eventful lives full of climaxes and resolutions. Ophelia’s climax is when she goes mad. This madness is a combination of many things, but her problem is rooted in men. The lesson learned in Ophelia’s climax is that vengeance has unintended consequences. Ophelia was never the target of the men’s plot for vengeance, in fact, she was merely a pawn. There was no intention for her to be hurt, but the accidental killing of her father as a result of a mistaken revenge plot along with the betrayal Polonius forced Ophelia to be a part of led to Ophelia’s down spiral. Ophelia spent her entire life obeying the men in her life, and by doing so, she dug her own grade. Misguided and blind obedience is self destructive; it chips away at the little self identity Ophelia had left.

Gertrude’s climax is when she goes to confront Hamlet about the play, he essentially calls her a whore, and he accidentally kills Polonius. The lesson learned here is that obedience causes dependence and vengeance causes unintended consequences. Gertrude’s dependence on men was brought to light when Hamlet revealed it to her in the play. Her dependence on men is further demonstrated when she uses Polonius as some type of witness to a mother son confrontation, and immediately after when she calls for the help of Claudius. Gertrude is in constant need of protection because she has lived her entire life obedient to men. Polonius’ death was an unintended consequence of
the revenge plan Hamlet established.

Resolutions are soon to follow after each climax. Gertrude’s resolution comes at the end of the duel when she is happy for her son, proud of him, and celebrating him. Most importantly, when she drinks the poisoned wine even after Claudius ordered her not to. Although Gertrude suffered death, she too has been liberated. The lesson learned is that misplaced obedience, in this case the obedience Gertrude placed in men, destroys the self, physically and emotionally. It quite literally kills Gertrude and forces her to become blind to the realities around her. The obedience she places in herself, however, frees her. Misplaced obedience is destructive, but obedience placed in the self, is liberating. The lesson on vengeance is that it comes with unintended consequences. Gertrude was a victim of a revenge plot gone wrong, but her misplaced obedience stripped her of her awareness.

Given that the two are foils, Ophelia suffers a similar resolution. Her resolution comes when she kills herself. Like Gertrude, Ophelia’s misplaced sense of obedience to men destroys her, for she is driven to insanity. But she too is able to liberate herself by taking actions, following her own orders, putting her life in her own hands, not the hands of a man. Ophelia’s suicide frees her from the illusion and prison created by misplaced obedience. The lesson learned is that with revenge comes unintended consequences. This consequence, however, was not negative. Death frees; obedience to men enslaves. A misguided sense of obedience creates a prison, where the only way to escape is to reclaim life. Ophelia did so, ironically, by dying.

When a loved one is unjustly wronged, natural human response calls people to make it right, so does Laertes’ and Hamlet’s unjust losses justify their response? In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, most readers conclude that strong emotions drive a character down this path of no return; however, the misplaced sense of obligation and obedience along with the foiling of Shakespeare's character better reveals the effects and self destruction the characters face as they heed the call to revenge. Hamlet, a tragic revenge story, teaches its audience that with vengeance comes unintended consequences, demonstrated by the deaths of Ophelia and Gertrude; a misplaced sense of obligation and obedience, too, prove just as self destructive. Vengeance and misplaced obedience destroy a person and bring out the worst side of humanity, the side with no wisdom, conscience, just impulse.
The Dragon & The Mirror

Dragon’s Wing

A beast, a fearsome
dragon A hulk of beating wings
and veins An image of terror Fear like
boiling, roiling heat, searing hearts in cold, blank
flames A static noise of crackling, burning that rends the soul
like firewood in dull chitter-chatter An old sturdy house of impenetrable
scales, a whipping tail and claw The chink in its own armour hypocrisy, irrelevance
of conquest A dull and cold blade that’s multiplying, exponential
Expounding on lies and hate and the hate of those lies, horrifying, terrifying, unseemly
Unaffected by age and untouched
by the ground The flame a dull heat tempered by time Weapons unnecessary, obsolete in presence,
irrelevant A shade, a form, half-corporeal and blurred by salt and water Because dragons don’t bleed crocodile
tears, they feed them Eating, chomping, consuming, guzzling by gallons things misunderstood and confusion,
mistrust a bitter, hellish garnish Eating without breathing, mouth unopened in lust A carnivorous consuming machine
that hasn’t opened its mouth in years, an Ouroboros Biting its own tail as people run screaming just from the shadow
of its wings Yet still growing and feeding in the chaos that raises it Brandishes it Like a sword of cutting sound,
slicing quiet No silence except for screaming A shockwave,
unsubsiding A tide
Unebbing

Mirror

rorrim

Cold glass, cold frames, cold
light in a hard place Reflecting
truth, refracting lies A matter of
perspective Changing views and bending
thoughts Each memory a ray of glass Every
event a warping shard Twisting, bending,
shaping, into full reality and realization
Interwebbed, interspun, interconnected A spider’s
den of crossing cracks Each cornered vertex an angled
feeling, sharpened to the touch What rounded edges and
fractured spines spell out in piercing light Light artificial
and conceited, unbared and unbroken in its source
Stripped by clear and metal clean and regurgitated, naked,
showing, seen Perspective Hard, and cold, and black like ice
frozen over dark road and deep water, clear, conspiring,
inconspicuous, preying in calm and wait for something traction to pull the feet out from under Rock, meet hard place, face-planted and sliding on cracking ice, a plunge into freezing shell-shock, culture-shock, reality-shock, perspective, like knives, digging in and opening minds, hacking out falsities, mistruths, and lies, a deranged surgeon with cold butcher-knives and glass scalpels, revealing butchered insides left whole and unharmed in new light, perspective And glass, once smooth, and soft-edged, cracks, sharpened, and open-ended, fractured in a broken spinning cobweb, the fragments without the lies one tells oneself to feed its frame and smooth its bladed, jagged edges Perspective, reflected, Mirror
Maniac Liar

Maniac liar
False litigations everywhere you look
Looking for a court where he can sink his hooks
All baseless claims of fraud to try and interfere
Unfit for his job
So don’t listen to the maniac liar
Maniac liar

How did he become the most powerful man
When the things he shouts are faker than his tan?
Sadly he’ll still be here for a while
Can’t handle his job
Because he is just a maniac liar
Maniac liar

Maniac liar
Every day he brings conspiracy anew
He’ll be making more in a week or two
If his claims are debunked, found to be too wild
He’ll just change it ’round
Don’t you listen to the maniac liar
Maniac liar

Now he wants a recount, claims it isn’t right
But we’d get the same results and just waste a night
Can’t throw results out, your termination’s near
We all need a break
So don’t listen to the maniac liar
Maniac liar

Maniac liar
Maniac liar
Maniac liar
Maniac liar
Maniac liar
Maniac liar
Maniac liar
Peace

I'm not afraid of loneliness. Throughout my life I have seen people who are desperate to be with other people, to have a show or movie or podcast playing in the background, to always be having a phone call with someone else. I've never needed that. I'm comfortable with silence, comfortable with my own thoughts, with introspection, with reflection. A moment in time that stands out to me as the culmination of this self-comfort happened during the winter of my junior year of high school.

My parents take a trip to Boston every year so my mom can see her favourite football team, the New England Patriots, play, and to give her a break from parenting, the most difficult job in the world. Normally, I would have stayed with my grandparents, but they were out of town as well, so I stayed at my best friend Iago's place. Homework was light, so the weekend was fun, but even though I had been to his place and stayed there dozens if not hundreds of times over the course of our friendship, even though it had become a sort of home-away-from-home, I felt quiet that weekend. I wasn't sure why at the time, but I found out after leaving; Monday morning, I had to go back to school, and my parents would be home afterwards for me to return to my normal living space. Iago's school started much earlier than mine, so I got up to get ready and leave early in the morning. After hugs and goodbyes, I was on my way.

That morning was cold. While many people dislike the cold, I live in Vegas, a city in the middle of the desert with 115 degree summers, so the cold is always a welcome change, both for my body and for my psyche. As I was driving to school, well-rested and awake, the sun rising outside my driver-side window, the theme song for the movie "Cold Pursuit" starring Liam Neeson playing its banjo softly (I felt it would be thematically appropriate), the cold outside just leaking through the thin car walls, I felt right. I didn't feel like I needed people, or shows, or movies, or anything to distract me. I didn't even feel like I needed my own thoughts to be with me. I just enjoyed the moment, the sublime, intrinsic beauty of life, of simply existing, and that being that. I felt at peace.

After my drive, I arrived at school and waited until it was time to get out and start my day. While it was, by all means, just like any other, it no longer felt like it was. Most people who would've had that morning drive would have seen no significance to it, nothing beyond harsh cold, an early morning, and another school day. But what I felt, the pulchritude of peace, the beauty of intrinsic quiet, was significant. To this day, I remember it vividly, and I make sure to have a little time for peace every once in a while, and I think others should too. Peace makes you feel peaceful, simple as that.
Personalis Infernum

Dante’s *The Divine Comedy: The Inferno* though clever, is a story of revenge. The entirety of the epic boils down to the over-embellished revenge plot of a single man who is just as sinful as the characters he tortures in his circles. Dante, when stripped of his ostentatious speech, is petty, lustful, and ignorant of his true faults. While the punishments of characters like the Empress of many tongues and Count Ugolino may be just in their symbolism, Dante’s own comeuppance in the hell he created is equal in its symbolic justice, if not greater.

Evidently, Dante’s sins stem from lust, both from the perceived lust for a woman on which the epic focuses, and the much greater lust for petty superiority which is the heart of the story and his motive for writing it. To see this, one must only look at the circle containing the lustful: “Circle Two: The Carnal” (Dante, 5), in which the sinners contained are the most numerous. Dante dwells on lust. Virgil, Dante’s guide, points out to him “more than a thousand [souls]” (Dante, 6) suffering the punishment for lust before Dante interrupts him, showing by pure numbers how focused he is on the lustful. However, his culpability becomes infinitely more obvious when the actual punishment for lust is examined. The lustful souls are all flying in a whirlwind of suffering “wailing as they fly” (Dante, 6), their flight a mockery of the freedom they desired through their thoughts and actions. Flight was freedom; now it is imprisonment.

The best example of this is the Empress of many tongues, who was corrupted by great lust until it consumed her, and that she made “lust and law… one” (Dante, 6) in order to free herself from the earthly punishment for her actions. She becomes the biggest example of lust, spoken of first and for the longest of the figures mentioned by Virgil as he points them out, “lashed by wind” (Dante, 6) in her just suffering, the very freedom she desired now her damnation. Dante’s punishment is one and the same. The lustful, sinful Dante, consumed with revenge to the point of creating a personal hell for his offenders, is then given the freedom to explore that hell and vicariously experience the suffering of his victims, even forced to take literal flight on the back of Geryon just as the lustful spirits had, and hating every second of it. There is no clearer connection between Dante, his true sins, and his true punishment than this.

Throughout his epic, Dante makes references to a number of figures and events both historical and mythical, one of the most gruesome and pitiful of which is the account of Count Ugolino. In circle 7, “Canto XXXIII” (Dante, 10), the graphic tale is told: a father and his sons are locked up without food or water by Archbishop Ruggieri, and he eats his sons after they die in order to try and survive. As punishment, he is now forced to eat the Archbishop for eternity, symbolically turning Ruggieri from killer to food. While this punishment is in itself cleverly symbolic and just, it has incredible similarity to Dante’s own punishment. After suffering at the hands of another, Count Ugolino is forced to eternally gain his vengeance in a sick meal of psychological self-harm, just as Dante believed he was wronged by his offenders, damning them to the eternal punishments he determined them worthy of, and suffering the consequences of them as he experienced the penances that he assigned first-hand, creating a torturous psychological adventure. Dante wrote of his own suffering.

Throughout all his poetically symbolic and morally symmetrical fantasizing, Dante creates his own personal hell as punishment for his lust for revenge, using the stories of historical figures such as the Empress of man tongues and Count Ugolino to disguise the truth of his guilt. When examined past and between the showy symbolism and grandiose verbiage, Dante simply becomes one of the very souls he has damned for eternity. Dante is petty. Dante is lustful. Dante is a sinner.
Darth Vader College Essay

Darth Vader Goes to College

Nothing is more important to me than family. While loyalty and obedience to authority are also of extreme importance, nothing will stand between myself and my son. When the clone wars ended, I was gravely injured, and when I finally came to, I was told that my wife had died in a tragic accident. However, I was unaware that she had died in childbirth. Thus, my son’s birth happened without my knowing, so I have sworn to do everything within my power to reunite myself with him so that he can rule the galaxy by my side. I feel that I owe it to my late wife to do better as a father after having failed him for so many years. My loyalty to Emperor Palpatine is unbreakable, but my son’s needs trump all else.

I am a born leader. I have been a military general for much of my life, serving in the clone army throughout the clone wars as a jedi knight, and then as second-in-command to the Emperor and leader of the empirical army for 19 years. I have learned much in my many years of service, including the most difficult to learn lesson: you cannot please everyone, and often cannot please anyone in order to accomplish what is needed. I have time and time again been forced to make the tough choice and relieve senior officers who were not up to the grueling tasks they had signed up for when joining the imperial fleet. While I do not take pleasure in such action, I do what is necessary for the Emperor and for the empire, as well as for the galaxy. Luckily, my hardship has been rewarded, with the creation of the first fully-functional Death Star now under my belt. So, while the job is tough, it is rewarding.

The force is strong with me. I have been deeply devout in the force since I was a child, and was raised from a young age by the jedi order on the planet Coruscant. After spending my childhood training to become a jedi knight, I served with my master, Obi-Wan Kenobi, in the clone wars, and was eventually granted the rank of jedi master shortly before the temple fell at the end of the clone wars. When the fall happened, I converted from jedi to sith, believing that they were the path to proper power and prosperity for the galaxy after the failure of the jedi order. Emperor Palpatine, previously Chancellor Palpatine, has been a close friend and mentor for most of my life, and I believe in his cause and his ability to bring peace to the galaxy under his rule.

One of the skills I take the most pride in is my ability as a pilot. Since I was a child growing up as a slave on Tatooine, I have always had a unique proficiency for driving speeders and flying ships. In fact, I even won a pod race when I was only nine years old, using the money earned from my victory to get myself out of slavery. I will always remember my humble beginnings, and I use them to remind myself of how far I have come and how far I have still to go.

I am a father. I am a leader. I am a general. I am a sith. I am a pilot. Despite my humble beginnings in slavery, I have worked hard my entire life to rise up above the shackles I was born into. And I hope to further my journey through college education.
The Psychology of The Brothers Karamazov

Lies hurt the mind and kill the soul. As Dostoyevsky explores the theme of suffering through his philosophy, he develops characters who interact with lies in different ways to show the suffering lies cause. Logically, anyone anyone studying or developing a philosophy will reach moral impasses that the truths they taught themselves cannot solve, just as Dostoyevsky did as shown by Ivan’s thoughts on the nature of suffering and forgiveness (Dostoyevsky Book 5, Ch 4) and by Dmitri’s constant struggle trying to find a place for his perceived identity as a “bug” or “noxious insect” (Dostoyevsky 229). Dostoyevsky uses moments like these to show the consequence of lies: extreme mental strain and illness, caused by cognitive dissonance, or conflict of the mind. However, though every character represents the real philosophical and mental struggles involved with lies and truths, Fyodor Pavlovitch is Dostoyevsky’s example of the extreme end of these struggles. Decades before the science of psychology was invented, Dostoyevsky used philosophy to understand the effect of lies on the human mind, showing how they twist the personalities of those who live them and warp their perception of reality through Fyodor’s suffering from extreme cognitive dissonance resulting from delusions, pathological lying, and even forms of multiple-personality disorder, conveying the horrifying truth that lies can very literally remove one’s humanity.

Evidently, Fyodor Pavlovich holds the central position in the theme of mental illness derived from deception, as he frequently displays symptoms of mental disorders such as dissociative identity disorder (DID), previously known as multiple personality disorder, which is usually characterized by the existence of “two or more distinct people, each with his or her own identity and personality” (Bressert), as well as gaps in memory, and distress and disruption caused by the symptoms of DID (Bressert), all of which can be observed in Fyodor. These symptoms are caused by his self-deception. Although Fyodor does not have separate personalities, patients can display lower-level association with DID and suffer from several symptoms without having multiple completely separate identities, just as is seen in Fyodor’s behavior with Zossima, as one of the first things he says to the father is “you behold before a buffoon in earnest” (Dostoyevsky, pg 75) and he continually speaks of his being this “buffoon”, stumbling over his lies and claiming he does so because one must be agreeable (Dostoyevsky, book 2 Ch 2). Additionally, Fyodor shows strong signs of memory loss and false memories, ranging from false stories of the philosopher Diderot to false memories of spending time with business partners. Eventually, Fyodor even states directly that being his natural self would be “much too much” (Dostoyevsky, pg 81), warning Zossima that doing so would be a risk, and not one he is willing to take (Dostoyevsky, Book 2 Ch 2). Fyodor is not himself. Although he does not have entirely split personalities, he does show signs of having different versions of himself and that deceiving himself in this manner is taking a severe toll on his psyche, his identity, and his humanity as his memory becomes entangled in his web of lies. Fyodor is confusing himself with the buffoon.

Disturbingly severe as Fyodor’s DID may be, Dostoyevsky also wrote him as being a pathological liar, or having pseudologia fantastica (PF), a psychological condition characterized by obsessive lying, often complex and fantastical, with no perceived benefit for the deceiver (Dike). This makes Fyodor a true extreme. Entirely consumed by his PF, Fyodor’s conversation with Zossima holds hardly a single truth as he continually weaves complex lies for no apparent reason or benefit (Dostoyevsky Book 2 Ch 2), with one of the only clearly true statements he makes being “what must I do to gain eternal life” (Dostoyevsky 82), showing that he himself does not understand why he continues to deceive so impulsively. Fyodor is scared, confused. Interestingly, Fyodor’s knowledge that he is being deceptive coincides with the description of PF, as “vigorously and persistently challenging” patients with PF can lead them to “partially acknowledge” their lies (Dike), as seen with Fyodor as he acknowledges his deception when he is...
corrected, but always with the caveat of an excuse (Dostoyevsky Book 2 Ch 2). Fyodor is aware of his deception. Continually more fascinating is that when examined by traditional polygraph tests, sufferers of PF show the usual signs of lying, separating the condition from delusional disorder in which sufferers truly believe their lies, as PF patients may claim to believe their lies but still show signs of logical thought (Dike). Fyodor is impulsive, not delusional. However, this does not lessen the toll it takes on his life, as Fyodor’s obsessive deception disrupts his daily life and causes him a great deal of distress due to his being unable to understand why he continues to lie. This condition is ruining him.

Far before the start of psychology, Dostoyevsky discovered a truth about lies using philosophy: that deception causes severe mental and emotional strain, and can remove one’s humanity. Lies are an ultimate destructive force. Through Dostoyevsky uses all of his characters to convey the nature of truth and lies, he singles out Fyodor to be the extreme example of the consequences of continued deception. Suffering from pseudologia fantastica, Fyodor lies impulsively and obsessively, tarnishing the social interactions we see throughout the novel. The effect of his PF compounds his dissociative identity disorder, the consequence of his constant deception and the condition that is destroying his identity and humanity as he slowly loses grasp over who his true self is. Honesty may hurt, but lies kill.
I Remember Dying

Brief summary:

This is a short, nebulous exploration of imagery. There are some loose through lines, but I wanted to leave the meaning/interpretation of the story open-ended so that everyone could get what they need from it. Rather than focusing on adhering to a strict plot and climactic development, I wrote this story to be more an adventure of the mind where the reader is immersed in a detailed and hauntingly vibrant world that's hard to wake up from. My personal interpretation is that the story is a metaphor for the journey of society and civilization as well as the journey of the individual and the effect of death in one's life. The main themes are a desert environment, light and darkness, and calm. No interpretation of the story is right or wrong, just personal to the reader.

Excerpt:

Trees.

Dappled light touched my skin, filtered through the canopy above, soft and golden in its gentle caress. A dense lush surrounded me, vibrant greens and vivid browns painting a landscape of camouflage in all directions. The once-hard light of the sun was now gentle and secretive as it dotted the forest floor, having been soothed by the soft green leaves above. A few of these leaves lay here and there on the ground, small spots of verdant colour on the soft brown dirt beneath my feet. Patches of grass grew on the ground, and patches of moss grew on the trees, each a cool green respite from the brown that surrounded them. The air felt slightly damp with the moisture of life, and smelled of the earthy scents of dirt and root, with a hint of leafy decay from the fallen. The air was mildly warm but crisply comforting, homey and heart-warming, the temperature of natural things. As I looked around, the trees told their story: a story of wind and rain, of kings and usurpers, of fire and ash, of age and eternity. Twisted trunks stood near-frozen in their slow fight for dominance, sluggishly striking each other over the course of decades. Fallen logs lay in half-decayed states, the ever-changing forest already reclaiming their corpses, the dead lying silent and unmourned. Split bodies and broken branches recoiled in shock and fear from the electric lances that had run them through, their open faces agape with pain. Supple saplings bathed in the filtered sunlight, bastards of wind and seed, many of their fathers unknown to them, orphaned from their origins save for the dead they fed from in their roots. Among all these, between the twisted, the fallen, the split, the young, were scattered a plethora of grasses, mosses, and mushrooms, vagrants and vassals to their mighty wooden lords, humbled before the legion. And over all watched the sun, once forceful and mighty, hushed and stripped of its power by its sylvan parliament, though still depended on by its subjects.

I breathed deeply. Closing my eyes and turning my face canopy-ward, I felt the flecks of the fiery king’s light warm my skin, and the deep, natural air fill my lungs, revitalizing me with heavy calm.

I breathed out. The forest air left my lungs but left its calming weight, and the warming kiss of the star-queen’s bright faded from my thoughts. The forest was still, and so was I. As day floated like a dream, and I was lost in reverie, the sharp crack of a snapping twig snapped my calm in half, awaking me from requiem.

Ahead stood a gentle deer, brown as the forest with white-tufted ears, stone-still with hooves placed wide, eyes deadlocked onto mine; neither of us said a word.

Its eyes were bright with the light of life, open wide in unblinking fright, seeking, searching, calculating, looking for an escape. Neither of us moved a muscle.

As its great legs tensed and its dark nose twitched, I did the same.

Its ear flicked quietly.
I bent my knees slightly.

The deer’s hooves lifted from the ground and it tore into the warzone, my own feet pounding behind it to keep up with its pace. The living and dying trees around us whizzed past, the deer nimbly dodging the cross-fire of branches, roots, and logs as I followed suit, 6 legs churning through a frozen green battlefield. Our stomping feet churned the leaves like an ocean, waves rippling in our wake. The sun pelted us like hellfire, every shot of ringing light striking our eyes as we sprinted through filtered daylight. Running, jumping, leaping, dodging, we twisted around the forest. Sprinting, stomping, climbing, hopping, the forest twisted around us. But as the deer and I grew weak, the deer grew weaker still, its soft brown pelt inching closer with every inch I gained.

The deer grew within my reach, both of us panting hard and fast, when a thunderous bullet stopped my thundering feet, a gnarled root stopping my sprint. My foot was caught as the deer drove onward while I spun out and crashed, the hard beat of its footsteps echoing as my body thumped to the ground. I gasped and panted, out of breath, the wind knocked from my lungs, but eventually I regained my composure and my pumping heart slowed.

I sat up, damp dirt caking my face and moist leaves caught in my hair, the forest still and the deer gone save for the panicked trail it had left behind. I breathed deeply, gathering my stiff legs, and followed, wiping the mud from my face and the leaves from my hair as I went.

I saw the deer’s thoughts unfold as I tracked it. Deep hoofprints, broken branches, and scattered leaves led me onwards along a clear path of fear and adrenaline, a flight for survival, a mad dash to escape some new and unknown but surely insidious entity. Eventually the beat of hooves slowed, adrenaline lost its fervor, and flapping wings prepared to settle down to rest, the forest path repairing itself and healing of its fright. Then calm and exhaustion came on, relaxing the mind, warning of a need to sleep, the fear of moments passed a faint memory, unclear and half-forgotten like a last night’s dream. A hoof print was only visible every few feet, the leaves they mingled with lay undisturbed, and the branches that shadowed them stood whole and unbroken. But as the trail wore down, so did the sun, and my hunt was at an end for the day. I stepped off the trail, sat down, and waited, the monarch’s glow deep and red as he lay his head down to rest.

I rose with the queen the next light, her crown breaking over the horizon, arms stretched out wide and fingers lacing through the trees, the forest waking under her gentle yellow-blue touch. I stood and shook the damp cold of woodland night from my stiff limbs as her majesty admired her reflection in the dew that had gathered on the leaves that trembled in the sunrise. The air was moist and cool, calming my mind while bringing it to life as I stepped back onto the trail and continued after the deer.

The trail had faded slightly over the night, but eventually grew stronger as I grew closer to its blazer. Cool dawn grew into warm morning into stuffy noon into hot afternoon, the monarch attempting to stifle the plants’ revolution, beating down on the canopy with legions of spear-tipped rays. But the golden warriors were no match for sylvan power, the monarch’s hooves crushing leaves and twigs under powerful legs, branding the ground with their marks. The calm breathing of an unaware traveler, fooled by the day’s safety and deceived by its own calm. The occasional grunt and sniff of a curious, lazed forager, nose shuffling the ground’s cards to see if it would deal an interesting hand. It was near.

I crouched down and softened my footsteps, slowing my breathing to a quiet, steady beat just as the forest’s cards to see if it would deal an interesting hand. It was near.

I crouched down and softened my footsteps, slowing my breathing to a quiet, steady beat just as the forest-brown pelt appeared through the branches and leaves, plodding steadily onward. But in my focus, I forgot the ground, my falsely cautious footfall landing on a fallen tree-bone, the dry fragment of its skeleton cracking like a psyche under my weight. While the twig’s snapping was quiet, in my focus and the deer’s daze it was like a gunshot, an explosive firework whose sound seared through the dense forest air and tended the arboreal calm with a serrated edge.

The deer and I froze, its head shooting upward and my eyes shooting open, both bodies tensed like wire as it saw me.

It’s nose twitched.

My head leaned.

My legs launched into overdrive, the deer launching into its own as soon as my feet lifted off the ground, and we were off like rockets blasting out of the atmosphere. Our legs burned like jet fuel, pounding the leaves and dirt like char and smoke, hurting through wooden asteroids that fielded the space like Saturn’s rings, warping in our orbit of the nature that lay still and frozen but animated in our chase. Her highness painted the forest red in a wash of brightly muted rays, lengthening shadows, ghosts of trees, roots, and legs stretching away from her fading might, our strides lengthening with them in great, loping steps. The fiery mood of the sun seemed to warp time, elongating the moments in between each footfall onto the red ground and making each foot and hoof seem to slide backwards along a fisheye lens earth. But the deer knew the forest even when the sun was set, and when we came to a small ledge it leaped,
and I, unfamiliar, my mind warped and stretched like putty in the long red, reached out in haste and found only the
dense forest air, not dense enough to support my pursuit, and fell, tumbling. The deer landed in grace, and I fell to
the earth disgraced, my orbit ending in dirt-smeared descent. As I lay exhausted, heart beating and lungs pumping,
legs tingling with the static that comes after strain, the queen lay her head down, and the forest turned from red to
grey to black. I had not the grace to pick myself up, and thus lay, fallen, in the dark among the leaves and dirt that
surrounded me. And as the dark night tumbled on, my heart slowed, and my lungs rested, awaiting morning.

When majesty’s head broke the sky the next morning, fire-white skull smashing the darkness, I rose from my
place on the cold ground and wiped the dirt from my face. The morning was cooler than the last, crisper, less dew on
the green and a more alert calm in the air. The night had refreshed me after sunset’s fall, my mind awake and buzzing.
Already on the trail where I had fallen, I gathered my legs and walked onward. While the forest was beaten and
broken along the trail as it had been the day before, this state subsided much faster than it had previously, the deer
having had less energy than it did in our first chase. The forest healed quickly, and my feet moved quicker.

On my way, I prepared. Finding a long, sturdy branch, I used it as a walking stick, a creature with four legs now
being hunted by a creature with three. Empowered by my wooden limb, I walked briskly along the trail through the
forest, which began to grow denser. Less of the monarch’s rays pierced the canopy, the trees grew darker and
thicker, and the moss became less populous. Many fallen logs and saplings had been replaced by small stones and
shrubs, shaping the world into a dim grey-green, the dirt more hard-packed beneath my feet and the leaves shorter
and less broad above my head, the canopy comprised of many more subjects in order to block the king’s light.

Finding part of a stone broken beside the trail, I picked it up and raised its sharp edge to my walking-branch,
shaving jagged layers off its edge until it had become a spear-point that thrust upward and challenged the sky with
every step I took. Discarding the rock along the side of the trail, I continued onward.

The day’s journey was a long one, and arduous. The new terrain was less friendly, hardened and old, grizzled and
tough. I was nearing the forest’s origin, stepping through the walls of its heart after traversing newer flesh, and the
deer was leading me inward, though whether by intention I knew not.

After the day’s journey, when the sun began to gravitate towards its earthly bed, the trees started to thin out once
more, though their colour never quite returned. Spear-cane in hand, I marched onward, mind steelied and muscles
prepared for action. The trail was fresher. Hoofprints were clearly visible, the dirt softer and left untangled by stones
and shrubs. Even the moss was thinner here.

Then I heard it.
Shifting feet.
A shuffling nose.
Sniffing nostrils.
I approached the sound of scuffling hooves and shifting leaves.
Then I saw it.
Dark hooves.
Brown fur.
White-tufted ears.
There would be no hesitation this time.
I slowly and carefully and confidently stepped towards the deer, silent as breath.
I planted my feet.
And I charged.
I sprinted, spear in hand, towards the deer, muscles pumping in fluid motion. The deer, startled, tripped and
stumbled as it began its flight, crashing wildly into the forest as its legs churned to gain traction and rhythm. With my
head start and the deer’s panicked fumbling, I was gaining on it steadily. Our feet beat the dirt like a drum-skin, the
thunder of fear and determination rumbling through the forest, a clarion call of kismet.

Adrenaline smashed through my system like waves, my legs pumping harder and faster as I seemed to become
weightless in my dead charge.
Cortisol tore through the deer’s veins like an electric shock, its legs punching at the ground as if it intended to
push the earth away and into space.
The distance between us shortened, pace after pace that separated us dissolving into the hunt. The nuclear
dictator began to sink towards her bed, the woods starting to twist into oranges and golds once more.
Shadows lengthened.
My steps strengthened.
The spear ached like an extra limb.
Closer.
The world began to turn red.
Closer.
The deer’s feet were tiring.
Closer.
I steeled myself.
Closer.
I summoned my strength.
Closed.
I raised my spear, its pointed tip ringing with anticipation. The sun’s head was nearly laid.
I threw.
The spear soared, straight and true.
It met its mark.
The deer cried out, and the clarion bell rang. The deer stumbled and crashed through the trees. My legs slowed to a stop, and I continued after it.
Following the deer, it had crashed through the final wooden wall of the forest’s heart. Passing through the broken branches and smudged dirt, it opened into a small clearing of grass, surrounded by willow trees old and deep.
I stepped forward into the sun’s dying light, a trail of blood droplets leading me to the clearing’s center.
The willows bowed deep, weeping.
Passing through the forest shadows, I approached the deer, spear in its side, breathing heavily in a panicked rasp.
The willows wept.
I stepped up to the deer.
The trees were inconsolable.
I saw the spear. I saw where it impaled.
The forest wailed.
I looked the deer in the eye.
The forest screamed, and I collapsed to my knees in despair.
In the deer’s eyes, I saw pain. I saw fear. I saw desperation, confusion. And sadness.
The deer looked on, unseeing, as tears stained and smeared my face.
The deer’s blood pooled around it, dark and red. My hands and face were thick with it. My vision was crimson and watery.
In the deer’s dying eyes, I saw the sun fall behind me. It crashed, and shattered the horizon, rock and dirt fracturing, the world cracking open with red. The grass around me became a deep crimson, The ground beneath me was slick. The willows dripped with dark red, the hot, sticky lines flowing down their branches bowed with the weight of sadness. The clearing was drenched in blood, the world broken, cracked open like a bleeding egg.
Everything was red.
Red was everything.
And there I lay, rasping, spear in my side, the world wet and slick with my blood.
My breaths grew slow, and weak.
The world darkened.
My heart grew still.
I gasped, and I sighed.
I awoke in a dark place. I was in a subway car, teetering along as it continued its never-ending hustle along the tracks. The tunnel was dark, the car was dark. The lights along the walls of the tunnel brought flashes of sight while the dim overhead lights of the car failed to reveal the world beyond whispers. I stood, my hand on one of the metal handles that hung from the metal ceiling. The car was crowded, its inhabitants waiting for the journey to end. They all wore black robes, cloaks that flowed in the darkness of the car, and the tunnel. Each person wore a mask: perfectly white and pristine, like porcelain unstained by the mark of oily fingers. The dark eyes of the mask stared into the darkness that surrounded them. Not even the white of the masks could penetrate the void of the world, a void that did not dare look into itself. Not one of the passengers made contact with another beyond the jostling of the car’s hustle, their empty masks seeming to contemplate nothing. These cloaked and masked bodies surrounded me, filling the car with their heat.

Breathing was difficult.

After some time, the car stopped, and the passengers swayed with its halting steps. The doors of the car slid open, and its occupants slowly shuffled out of the car. I followed.

I stepped out of the subway station and into a school building. A long, silent hallway stretched out in front of me, moderately lit, with rows of doors watching me on either side. I walked forward, feeling their gaze piercing me, pricking my neck, unblinking in their silent vigilance. The only sound as I walked in their judgement was the slow beat of my footsteps… tap, tap, tapping under their observance. As I traversed the hallway, I met their gaze with my own, their empty souls and wooden husks splayed before me. The glass in each door gave me a glimpse of the spirits trapped within: rows of desks lined the floors, and board lined the walls. At each desk sat a cloaked and masked figure just as they had filled the subway. Larger desks lay defeated in the corners of the rooms, with larger figures placed behind them. They were all patient waiting, their gaping souls left out to dry in the fluorescent lights that clung to the ceilings.

The bell rang.

The doors opened like the gaping maws of the dead, jaws without power that were left hanging as their contents spilled into the hallway, oozing black and silent. The trickle grew, a steady stream of dark marching down the hallway and out the door. I was overtaken by the wave, and joined in the crushing race. They moved on in silence, the shuffle of cloaks and the soft tapping of many feet the only sound that greeted my ears. As I swam through the mass, the rank odor of fear rose to greet my senses, my blood curdling as its cold hands gripped me. I could not see through the inky blackness, save for the small rays of light that stabbed through the surface of the tide, needles that filled my eyes as the stench of terror filled my lungs.

Breathing was difficult.

As suddenly as the void had drowned me, the inkwell dried and the funk of unease bled out of me. I looked upwards, and saw where the rushing current of darkness had been replaced by the steep walls of a dark alleyway. Graffiti of every dark color covered the walls, which wept before me, the salty streams of their pain staining my vision. The walls seemed to stretch up, up, up, into the twilight, no end to their sorrow. The trash of yesteryear melded with that of yesterday, lining the corners of the alley where the walls sink their roots into the ground in order to drink their poisoned water. The soot and grime of neglect covered the ground beneath me, my footsteps disturbing the wallowing despair of the dust under me. A line of figures snaked along the wall of the alley, careful not to touch its sobbing flanks as they waited, stretching around the bend at the end of the alleyway. Their masked faces did not acknowledge me or those around them, focused only on the void that filled their eyes. As I walked along their ranks, I noticed the state of their masks: cracked, fragmented, broken, as fissures of all shapes and sizes inched their way...
across the perfect white, staining in their imperfection. I made my way around the bend, following the weeping walls to their end. A single doorway stood open, the line of figures leading into its stomach. I walked forward, and it swallowed me. The room inside was dark, a faint orange light like dying flame the only source of knowledge as smoke hung in the air around me. I continued along the line, the slow funerary procession, forever and eternally black in its march. I, however, had reached my end in the procession: two masked figures, hovering over a large stone basin. On the edge of the basin lay a knife, gleaming and gorgeous, tempting and lustrous in its cold beauty. As the next figure reached the basin, they reached for the knife, drawing their arm out of their cloak and reaching out before them. The knife slowly penetrated their skin, dipping below the surface and cutting a line in the ice of the red lake. Blood, deep and fluid, rushed out to meet the air, free of the frozen riverbed, dripping into the basin. Satisfied, the knife was placed back onto the edge of the basin to await its next meal. One of the two figures beside the basin reached out with a cloth and wiped the blade clean, none involved having looked out and seen the actions of another. The void dared not watch itself. As I watched the procession, drawing closer, I saw the masks of those who were eaten regain their form, the crashes healing, the fissures closing, and the breaks mending. As I drew next to the meal, I looked into the basin and saw the blood that satiated the knife’s hunger drain away into the stone, quick and quiet as snowmelt, as if it had never existed, joining the void. As I drew next to the basin, I looked into the knife’s gleaming eyes, sinister and consumed in their hunger. My arm itched. The knife beckoned. I reached out and wrapped my fingers around its handle. I reached out and turned my palm towards the air. I reached out and plunged the knife into the ice. My blood reached out to join the air. The basin reached out to consume it. The smoke stung my lungs and the blade stung my nerves as I placed the knife down and left the room.

Breathing was difficult.

As I walked out of the room, I found myself in a large city. Skyscrapers towered over my head, giants of stone and metal forever frozen in their agony. Along the dusty, grey streets at their toes walked more figures in ones, twos, and threes. While the giants silently screamed in their steel skeletons through a thousand gaping mouths of glass, I followed the hooded figures. As I turned down street after street, road after road, the wailing structures reached up, up, up to scrape the sky with their desperate claws, flailing in their feeble attempts to rip open the sky and breathe. Their mouths of glass grew wider, their desperate bones higher, and there seemed to be no end to my journey. The more elaborate the structures grew, the more they seemed to blend together into a long line of stone, metal, and glass, an unending blur of man-made forms pricing the grounds nature had unwittingly built for them. The concrete at their feet faded into the stone in their legs, and the street seemed to be one with the air as I continued onward, lost in an artificial tapestry of grey ribs and skulls, a graveyard of human history stretching out farther and farther as it consumed more lives in their fervent hunger, ever-frantic and madcap in their insatiable lust for freedom. The towers howled, and I walked on, ever-forward, never-ending, the quiet shuffle of my aching feet lost in the symphony of chaos and despair that enveloped me, my legs lungs burning in their unceasing march of exertion.

Breathing was difficult.

I knew my journey had ended when I saw it. Masked figures trickled in from every street like dark streams feeding a hungry, shadowed river, its gaping mouth the entrance to a building whose terrible height stood dominant over every other tower in the city. Up, up, up, it went, its talons hooked into the atmosphere above. Its monumental might was unparalleled by the simple stumps around it, its grey face colossal, breathing in its imposing air as it quietly growled at the sky, unrelenting in its vice grip on the heavens. Its monolithic prowess domineering me, I entered its gaping maw.

Inside, the steady flow of black fabric continued as the masked figures made their way across a blank-faced lobby towards an elevator embedded into the far wall. No eyes met mine as I shuffled through the crowd and stepped into the ominous shaft. As blank white faces filled the doomed elevator, the heat of packed bodies and the touch of dark fabric enveloped me. No eye dared cross mine. The walls of the sky bound cab wept as it ascended, dark and silent tears that went unanswered as it slowly climbed, bloodied and battered hands gripping the walls of the hollow shaft. Up, up, up it stumbled, up, up, up it bumbled, a single electrical impulse lurching up the gory spine of a bloodless giant. As the desecrated box rose ever higher, the air thinned in its vile womb.

Breathing was difficult.

Finally, the elevator’s timeless climb halted. I had finished my descent. The cloaks and masks around me flowed out of the elevator. I followed after them.

I stepped out onto the giant’s crown, the world silent. The final talon of the colossus gripped the sky behind me. The wind of elevation softly whispered in my ears, its claying words saccharine, broken only by the soft sound of my footsteps padding forward. The breeze’s frail fingers fluttered the cloaks around me as their prying fingertips slipped past their folds and edges. The masks stood in two rows before me. As I walked down the aisle between them, they watched, their gaze unbroken, their ken as unblinking as their sight. As their eyes gently touched me, I continued forward. As their vision softly raked over me, I continued onward. As their piercing watch prodded and poked me with a feather’s touch, I stepped upward.
The breeze whispered through my dark hood.
My black cloak fluttered in the wind.
The pale mask made breathing difficult.
As their eyes watched me, I jumped.
A figure clad in white, his robes falling around his ankles, swishing and swaying as he walks with the utmost confidence. His eyes, grey like a rolling storm, shining with Hope as he twirls his golden blades. Beside him strides the embodiment of beauty, her red armor shining in the sun’s delicate rays, entrancing all who look into her soft, rose gold eyes. She struts onward, fierce gaze set ahead, fiery Passion in her deadly stare as she strings her bow. Following close behind is a uniformed soldier, marching forward with her striking blue eyes fixated on the horizon, shining bright as the morning star. She carries with her nothing but a small knife, strapped to her side, bobbing in time with her steps, for her Faith carries her farther than any weapon ever could. Shuffling by her is an older figure, walking with a staff. His torn and ragged cloak hides the Life that shines in his wise eyes, glowing green with an unseen youth. But his shadowy garb holds another secret, a small poison blade, twisted and purple, its black handle old and worn. Together, they steel their hearts and progress toward their enemy.

Beady snake’s eyes glint with Malice, dozens of them leering towards his opposers. A towering figure, immeasurably strong, sits before them. Its Fearsomeness blocks out the sun, the shadow of its might falling onto the warriors. Its eyes gleam with its Lust for blood, its fists clench with Anger, and its mouth forms the smug grin of Arrogance. It rises, nearly doubling in size, and takes a step forward, its feet booming with the Terror of thunderclaps. It cracks its knuckles, each as deafening as Deadly cannon fire. The warriors take their stances, and the battle commences.

Hope dashes forward, rushing the monster, as Passion sprouts deep red wings, springing into the air. Faith runs forward, and pauses, nodding back to Life, who thrusts his staff down into the dirt below him. The ground rumbles, and splits into pieces, rising and falling according to his will. He sends Faith high, who leaps onto the giant’s shoulder, stabbing and cutting wherever her small blade willed. Hope plunged his first sword into the monster’s leg, blood gushing out of the wound, staining his white robe. He stuck his other sword in higher, and the first higher, and the second again, using them to climb up the beast. Passion launched volleys of arrow after arrow, her impeccable aim piercing a new eye with every shot.

The beast roared in pain, swatting and flailing, trying to repel its assailants as dark blood oozed from the already numerous wounds on its body. Its hand first made contact with Passion, casting her down from the air like a fallen gnat, and she plummeted to the earth, dust rising as she scraped along its rough surface, limbs crumpling beneath her. The fire in her eyes died out, and she was no more. The beast then clamped down on Faith, crushing her like a fallen leaf with his powerful fingers. Faith gasped for one last breath as the shine in her eyes dulled, her mangled body dropping to the ground; she, too, had fallen. Hope had made his way up to the monster’s chest, boring into it with his swords as he was soaked in dark blood. The giant plucked him off like lint, casting him to the ground with its terrible strength. The light faded in Hope’s eyes as he lay in a twisted mess, his once white robes stained through with darkness. He was gone.

Life, losing strength, lifted the ground beneath one of the weakened giant’s feet, toppling it like a domino. He shuffled over, standing in front of the moaning giant’s four remaining eyes. Drained, he lifted his trembling arm, pulling out his poison blade. He struck the first eye. The monster roared as he said “This is so that people may never lose Hope, and always find the strength in their hearts to keep going.” He struck the second eye. The beast howled, and he said “This is so that the loving Passion in people’s souls may never die out.” He struck the third eye. The
giant groaned as he said “This is so that people may have Faith in themselves and in each other, so they may always stay strong.” He reached out to strike the fourth eye, but the monster slammed his hand down on Life, crushing his legs and torso. With his last ounce of strength, Life struggled forward and struck the fourth and final eye. The monster gasped for its final breath as he said “This is so that Life may continue, Faith, Hope, and Passion be willing.” The glow in Life’s green eyes dimmed, and he and the beast were no more.
Beached

The ocean hummed around him, the sounds of the beach rolling all around his head. Waves lapped at his feet, their beat drumming like a steady song. The water thrummed, and his feet were wet. Just above where the waves licked him, his body was caked with sand as if he had landed face-first in a mud pile. Its grains bore into his skin, lighting up his senses like cannonades as the cold daggers of the sea sliced open his toes, feet, calves. His hair lay in a mottled and damp mess, full of the sand that drilled into his skull. His shirt was truant, his chest open and free for the spiral blades of sand to cut out his heart, his blood soaking into the granules. The sky above, blindingly bright, sharp as crystals like the uneroded dust of the moon scraped away at his corneas, the sun beating down like a fell hammer onto his skull, bone smashed and cartilage torn as his brains leaked out to join the tides. The water at his feet foamed at the edges, poison on his skin, a sickly green sludge that soaked through his dermis like the cheap cloth of an open weave. The grains were laced with it, his bloodstream filled with nausea, that bilious foam clogging his veins and arteries, choking out his heart. The pellucid shards of the sky, tipped with salted diamonds, ran their edges down his throat, tearing and rending at his lungs until every bronchi was ripped beyond recognition. His tattered lungs filled with the knifing air to scream, managing only a rasping groan to slip past the searing walls of heat that built up from the ground to the faceted sky above. His shorts lay torn, the shreds splayed asunder, the coldfire bayonets of the ocean frore rushing up to sever every cluster of nerves and turn them into fireworks launched into a ceaseless blue void.

As his skin grew redder in the blinding-pain whips of the sun, each knotted flamelash rending his cells, he drew more shards into his chest, throat pulsing with broiling agony as his infirm lungs struggled to push waves of razor-sharpened fragments up and down his ailing windpipe, the salient hunks of crystalline azure lacerating his sand-dune lips. Once more he slugged breath in, and once more he attempted to scream, his vocal cords stretched taught like frayed rope as they feebly trembled and let loose nothing more than a muffled groan of anguish.

Over and over he scored and scorched his tormented body, crying a death-song of desperation, inaudibly begging for clemency. His hot face was stained with the steaming traces of hotter tears, his eyes slashed agape by the lighted fire-brands that rolled like hot glass down his cracked and ruined cheeks. He begged and begged until his words and lips were laced with snot and spittle-foam, begging, cadging, pleading, imploring, beseeching, exhorting, enjoining, adjuring, entreating, obsecrating, impetrating, his eyes misty with his impassioned pleas, but he managed nothing more than a niggling burble, his tortured state devoid of leniency as his fervent purls dissolved just beyond his ardent lips.

And at last, his heart gave up, his body caved, and his soul bled into the sand.
Mirrors

I walked into a world of mirrors
In which each showed a memory
A world of light, of endless sight
Each showing a part of me
That I had left behind

As I looked on, and in, and through,
I saw my past unfold
A never-ending kaleidoscope
Of all the stories I’d told
As I traversed through time

My face stared back, young and new
Reminding me of choices I’d made
Neglecting to show all of the thoughts
That my heart had then forbade
And cast out to the night

I walked on through a world of mirrors
In which each showed each of me
The previous versions, endless and old
Of every kind of me
That I had moved on from

As I looked on, and in, and through,
Their faces spoke in silence
An eternal myriad
Of internal peace and violence
That warred behind my eyes

My face grew tired, old, and shrewd
As my cynicism festered
My eyes grew darker, their shadows longer
With my patience always tested
As I longed to break free

I walked inside a world of mirrors
In which each showed my destiny
The choices I’d make, the hearts I’d break
Before the end of my journey
And the settling of my spirit
As I tried and failed to avert my eyes
My fate began to mock
The person I was, the person I’d been,
And the person I was not
And now could never be

My heart grew heavy, my mind unsteady
I did not want it to be true
That I’d squandered my life in rainbows of grey
To end up black and blue
With my colours all washed out

I walked out of a world of mirrors
In which each showed a fallacy
No eyes looking on could see within
No observer could control me
And I would choose my own fate
Zachary Knehr
Age: 18, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Poetry

Waiting

Waiting

I’ve waited for you so long
For the voice that’s become my favorite song
For the face that illuminated the room
For the smile that always spells my doom

I’ve waited for you all this time
For the warmth that makes my heart rate climb
For the hair that shone in summer’s light
For the eyes as brilliant as moon’s light

I’ve waited for you all alone
For the walk that makes the room your own
For the lips that draw my own in close
For the soul I swore I’d value most

I’ve waited for you night and day
For the arms that melted the cold away
For the fingers that danced across my cheek
For the prowess that always kept me meek

I’ve waited with you on my mind
For the hips that dances with mine in kind
For the hands that brought me back to earth
For the heart that showed me my own’s worth

I’ve waited for you patiently
But now you’re only memory
Hamlet: Cultural Hegemony over the Human Condition

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance as seen in Gertrude and Ophelia’s as well as Laertes and Hamlet’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

The foiling of Ophelia and Gertrude from their first interactions with Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes, and Polonius reveals their obedience to the standards that men and their society have implemented to dominate their lives and foretells how their obedience drives their character development throughout the play. Gertrude and Ophelia’s lives are framed by the men that have control over them. The revelation of Gertrude’s remarriage is proclaimed by Claudius, and its advantages are initially shown from the male, patriarchal perspective. Claudius exposes his marriage with Gertrude, saying that his “sometime sister now…queen” judiciously accepts his marriage proposal in the midst of her late husband’s funeral (1.2.8,9).” Claudius performs this intentional monologue; and it is obvious that he coerces and manipulates Gertrude into conceding her power to him. He proclaims and celebrates the marriage, while Gertrude merely endorses it. Persuading her into obedience, Claudius instigates an awareness in Gertrude that politically, religiously, and emotionally their union is most beneficial for the kingdom. Manipulation of his new wife furthers a motif of male domination over women that is seen not only in the relationship of Claudius and Gertrude but in the relationship of Laertes and Polonius towards Ophelia. Similarly, the audience is exposed to Ophelia and her dilemmas from the viewpoints of Ophelia’s father and brother. Their words reflect the inherent patriarchal and misogynistic society that women endured. Polonius states that Hamlet is trying to “trifle… and… wreck thee (2.1.113.).” and Laertes bolsters this point with his own commentary. Laertes and Polonius inherently believe that Ophelia is a commodity, and Claudius thinks similarly of Gertrude. These women are commodities sold on the market of power and wealth by men whose true intentions are disguised as love to delude women into surrendering themselves. Both women are slaves to societal expectations and hegemony, and their obedience holds them captive. Vengeance that is initially hidden within Gertrude and Ophelia because of their social circumstances eventually unleashes as a result of the patriarchal standard they live under, and reveals unexpected consequences due to their misplaced obedience.

Hamlet and Laertes’ character foiling in their first interactions with each other justifies their concept of obedience to their different views of morality and establishes the basis for their revenge. The foil between Hamlet and Laertes is obvious when Claudius replies, “Take thy fair hour” in response to Laertes’ request to travel abroad but to Hamlet’s request Claudius replies, “we beseech you” essentially denying Hamlet’s request to study abroad. (1.2. 62,115). Comparisons and contrasts are made between the two characters as the story’s exposition unfolds. Claudius gives Laertes the opportunity to move quickly and travel, while forcing Hamlet to stay in Denmark for a long time, despite Hamlet’s desire to leave. This juxtaposition is a defining feature of the foil between Hamlet and Laertes. Hamlet is slow to act upon his initiatives, but his mind is overwhelmed by the philosophical causes and outcomes of possible actions, while Laertes is quick to act and slow to understand the possible consequences of his actions. Furthermore, throughout Act 1, Hamlet challenges his obedience towards his ‘father-figure’ uncle when both his uncle and mother beg that Hamlet change his demeanor and that his dark clothes be removed, to which he is defiant and obstinate. Contrastingly, as Polonius bids his son safe travel and advises him on proper cordiality, proprietary, and etiquette while in France, Laertes is receptive and respectful to his father’s wishes. Both Hamlet’s and Laertes’ understanding of morality dictates their expressions of obedience and vengeance.

In Gertrude’s climactic moment, Gertrude breaks her bond of misplaced obedience to Claudius and aligns herself
with the covenant made between her and her late husband: to love her son Hamlet and protect him as much as she is able. She promises Hamlet, “thou be assured”, that she aligns with her son and promises to keep his intentions secret; and no longer “let the...king tempt” her, or allow him to manipulate her for his own gain and pleasure (3.4.186,201). At this moment, Gertrude understands and acknowledges the gravity of her decision to marry Claudius and the political security that it provides for the safety of her country, however, she does not have to be submissive to her king nor answer his every request. Hamlet acts as the catalyst to her redefined obedience. Her obedience shifts to Hamlet. This shift, while it expresses character development as Gertrude begins disobeying an oppressive force in order to obey a less oppressive force, does not entirely redefine her societal obligation to obedience. Ironically, Gertrude, even at her climax, is unable to escape the patriarchal standards that govern her life. Even as Claudius sends Hamlet to England for persecution, Gertrude is left defenseless and watches cluelessly as Hamlet is sent away to his possible execution, because once again her choice to retain power through remarrying at her late husband’s death was not her fate, but her choice. It is her choice that not only endangers Hamlet but is the cause of her own demise. Her decision influences her life and ultimately forces her to forfeit her power and give her obedience to Claudius.

In the climactic moment of breaking her blind obedience to Hamlet, Ophelia pursues her own self-preservation, despite Hamlet’s constant verbal and emotional abuse. Until her climax in the play, Polonius, Laertes, Hamlet, and the patriarchal society as a whole conditions Ophelia to be a naive, faithful woman and partner. In the play within a play, Ophelia completely dedicates herself to Hamlet and accepts his insensitive, brutal comments as a mere jest. During the play, there is speculation that Hamlet and Ophelia explore their changing relationship and possible marriage. If their relationship is more serious than both of their parents assume, then Ophelia’s obligation to remain obedient and dedicated to Hamlet proves inevitable. Ophelia’s obligation provides the basis for her assertions over Hamlet and her shifting obedience towards him. Throughout the scene, Hamlet belittles her in his statement, “get thee to a nunnery” and her responses to his sly, misogynistic comments “No, my lord” and “I think nothing” assert her boundaries (3.1,2.139,103,107). She tolerates his deranged thoughts about his father and allows it to be an excuse for his harsh words and lack of propriety when interacting with her. This scene portrays the evolution of her mind and her character. Ophelia no longer wants to endure suffering and abuse from Hamlet and she establishes that she is not just his plaything. She acknowledges her feelings and values. Her relationship with Hamlet is not so political as it is of, supposedly, genuine love; and by that definition, Ophelia is not afraid to wound him or herself in establishing her boundary.

At Hamlet’s climax, he forsakes obedience to his mother, going against his late father’s wishes to which Hamlet Sr. reappears to Hamlet commanding “Do not forget,” and perseverates over his desire to avenge his father’s death through plotting and taking revenge on his uncle Claudius (3.4.111). Shifting obedience from his parents to his inner ego leads Hamlet to accidentally or intentionally take the lives of Polonius, Guildenstern, and Rosencrantz. His sudden impetuous, heedless acts of murder mark a shift in his character and his morality. A willingness to commit murder coupled with his lack of restraint juxtaposes his resolute religious beliefs of the value of human life. Hamlet begins to devalue human life, especially his own. With the death of his father, he sees life as a meaningless ordeal and believes that the only thing life perpetuates is sin and those who commit it. Lacking motivation to continue his existence erodes his sense of humanity and self. He believes he has nothing to lose. This realization catalyzes his thoughts of revenge into action. His revelation is significant because up until Hamlet’s climax, he is unable to take the necessary steps to fulfill his late father’s requests. Obedience to his father grows stronger in his climax. As his madness deepens, he is unable to see a world where he allows his uncle to continue taking advantage of Gertrude and the kingdom. In the Elizabethan time period, it was treasonous to kill a king no matter how despotic the king may be. Hamlet disobeys not only his mother but his king and country as well in his pursuit of vengeance. Similarly, Laertes’ climax portrays the obedient son, turned malicious murderer, in his pursuit of revenge on Hamlet for committing his father’s murder. Laertes’ obedience remains steadfast to his family which is seen throughout the play. However, at his climax, the audience’s assumptions about Laertes’ morality and character are tested when he begins plotting Hamlet’s demise. Initially, Laertes is a good-humored, respectable young man who acts judiciously and kindly in his interactions with others, whereas Hamlet seems to be a brutal, brooding, and defiant son who is often sharp and impertinent in his conversations with others. Additionally, Laertes’ morals do not align with theology, as Hamlet’s do, but with his father’s morality based on familial obligation. Laertes regards religion as frivolous and this is seen through his profession, “To cut his throat i’ th’ church. (4.7.123).” As a result of his father’s death and his sister’s insanity, Laertes drives himself to desperate means to restore justice in the name of his family as a result of social tradition and cultural hegemony. Unlike Hamlet, he does not debate murder before he commits it and he does not hesitate on matters of avenging his father’s death when familial loyalty is in question. He is dedicated, calculated, and divisive, ready to commit to his revenge against Hamlet with the help of Claudius, who Laertes disregards at the beginning of the play. Furthermore, throughout the play Hamlet is unwilling to let even his most trusted friend know how he will commit his revenge or why, but Laertes is more than willing to enlist the help of a known foe of Hamlet.
in his spiteful crime.
The foiling of Gertrude and Ophelia within their resolutions reveal that the lesson of revenge and obedience within Hamlet is that vengeance and spite only bring about chaos and destruction and that obedience makes one a slave to one’s master, prohibiting one’s ability think and act freely, which eradicates mental, spiritual, and corporal freedom. Ophelia and Gertrude are slaves to the men that control their lives and the men that dominate their society, which define and limit their opportunities for success and prosperity. However, some key differences that influence their resolutions include: the age and maturity differences between the two women, the power and means of attaining and manipulating power, their spheres of influence, and their life experiences create a foil between the two characters, but also align their resolutions to produce the same lessons. In Gertrude’s resolution, it is seen that Gertrude is able to retain her sanity throughout the whole play despite some of the major tragedies that befall her. This juxtaposes her to both Ophelia and even Hamlet. However, her sanity speaks to her role as queen. Gertrude, in order to ensure the prosperity of the kingdom needs to be the seat of reason, rationality, and diplomacy. As queen of Denmark, her position of power is the only means to which she could retain her sanity as well as control. Polonius’ death greatly affects Ophelia because she exists in a lower social class than Gertrude. She is reliant on both her brother and father to set diplomatic ties between men she could possibly wed, and with her primary caretaker gone, and her possible future husband the murderer, her world is devastated. Her madness comes as a lesson of personal disobedience. Whether intentional or not, Ophelia breaks away from the societal demands that prescribe what a lady of her status should do. She is unable to marry because she is mad, and her death is the ultimate revenge of a woman against a vengeful family and a prejudicial society. Similarly, it is unknown whether Gertrude knowingly drinks from the poisoned, but in the last few moments of her life, she defies Claudius saying “I will” drink from the cup, in celebration of her son (5.2.287). Gertrude’s mindful disobedience to Claudius in this dramatic and deadly scene ultimately Rewrites her lesson on misplaced obedience. Discovering within herself her own identity, Gertrude acknowledges her bond to Hamlet to be stronger than hers to Claudius, and her love and obedience are shed to Hamlet. Ultimately, the death of both Gertrude and Ophelia are lessons of the consequences of vengeance and it’s massively destructive nature, and that the disobedience of women to the social constructs that bind them to the will of others leads women to the liberation of mind, body, and soul.
The resolution of Laertes and Hamlet solidifies the devastating effects of vengeance on humankind and demonstrates through the foil of these characters a deviation of obedience to established social constructs and ultimately elicits a philosophical questioning of morality. It was common for a noble son during Elizabethan times to acknowledge an obligation to avenge their father’s wrongful death. Hamlet, unlike Laertes, struggles with the understanding of this hegemonic obligation to revenge versus the morality of this act. Throughout the whole play, his intellectual mind debates the morality of revenge, and whether it is justifiable to right a wrong with another wrongdoing. The delay of revenge is anti-climatic when Hamlet finally commits the murderous act against Claudius. Hamlet enacts a vengeful murder, but not for the reasons intended. As Hamlet finally commits to revenge, he is intending to commit to the promise he made with his father in order to be reunited with his father in Heaven. However, as the events of Act five unfold, his murder of Claudius is a self-righteous act of protection, done in anger for the murder plot Claudius committed against Hamlet. Hamlet does not kill Claudius with the calculated intent that he originally vows. Ironically, Laerte’s plan with Claudius becomes the murder plot that backfires, not Hamlet’s plot to kill Claudius. Possessing a reflective, intellectual, philosophical nature, Hamlet profusely questions his obligation to avenge his father’s death, whereas Laertes never questions this obligation. Ultimately, Hamlet’s subconscious undergoes the battle and lesson that runs through the entire play. Vengeance only brings about destruction, and obedience to vengeance is a dug grave waiting for the avenger.
While the ghost of Hamlet’s father is an illusive, mystifying element of the dramatic, philosophical, inspiring Shakespearean’s paired characters. The foiling of these characters reveals lessons of the devastating effects of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance as seen in Gertrude and Ophelia’s as well as Laertes and Hamlet’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.
Kira Kramer
Age: 18, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Critical Essay

The Human Experience: Guided by Reason Destroyed by Complexity

The three primary factors that make horror films alluring are tension (generated by suspense, mystery, terror, shock, and gore), relevance (that may relate to personal relevance, cultural meaningfulness, the fear of death, etc.), and (somewhat paradoxically given the second factor) unreality (Walters). It is almost as if the human mind is inherently curious about the more sinister nuances of life and death, or heaven and hell. Despite the current popularity of horror films, Dante’s Inferno, for the past seven-hundred years, has been capturing the human mind and senses in a whirlwind of horror and punishment that is sure to elicit self-reflection in even the most pious of souls. In The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Dante utilizes binary opposition, a theme of mutual antagonism, and religious symbolism within his descriptions of hellish punishment for three sinners in Circles Three and Four illustrate how the sinners of Gluttony, Hoarding and Wasting, and the wrathful Sullen receive a punishment that is both just and symbolic in the perspective of the Christian belief system.

In Circle Three of Dante’s Inferno, the punishment of the Gluttons is just because of the binary opposition and antithesis of their punishments to correct their sins committed during their lifetime. Dante’s conversation with Ciacco further provides insight into the suffering and desires of the sinners in the higher levels of hell and foreshadows the plight of the sinners below circle three. Gluttony is defined as over-indulgence and over-consumption of food, drink, or wealth items, particularly as status symbols. As the gluttons focused on the immediate gratification of their needs and wants, without consideration of the needs and wants of others, they allowed themselves to make no higher use of their abilities or gifts and produced only garbage. Their punishments are just because as human bile and waste fall from the ceiling they are forced to bathe and rott in the sludge, which equates to the filth they created (Dante VI). The pelting rain and snow is a binary opposition to the comfort and pleasure of the sensual act of eating and is, therefore, a just punishment of their overindulgence. Cerberus is a fitting guardian for the circle of the Gluttons because as he gnaws and bites at the sinners, he resembles the way they ravished their food and drink with an insatiable hunger during their lives. While in Circle Three, Dante’s conversation with Ciacco reveals one of the few solaces found in an eternity of agonizing suffering is to be remembered as portrayed in his words, “recall me, if thou canst”(Dante VI). Many sinners that committed less significant transgressions are eager to share their names with Dante because being remembered establishes their place in the world and acts as a comfort in their anguish. Conversely, as Dante travels deeper into hell and becomes aware of more significant and heinous sins, those who have committed them are often nameless and faceless or avoid having their name be known and their shame recorded as their legacy.

The punishments that the Gluttons receive are religiously symbolic because the sinners placed the pleasure of eating and imbibing copious amounts of food and drink in excess over God. Their sin became a false god that they worshipped, and by doing so, they broke God’s first commandment: thal shall not have false gods before me. Furthermore, the sinners act as physical symbols of pigs who roll around in their own filth and mud. Cerberus drooling over them acts as a symbol of their actions on earth towards their food. The cold rain and slush made of waste, and excrement is a symbol of how gluttony is a sin of excess and abuses the earth’s natural resources. The glutton’s selfishness and narcissism refute their ability to acknowledge the needs of others and be stewards of God’s creation. Their symbolic retribution is being forced to eat disgusting black sludge and that they will remain forever hungry because they turned away from the goodness and generosity of God.

Dante utilizes binary oppositions to dichotomize the sinners that hoard and waste in order to create a just punishment that creates an equilibrium between two extremes. Souls belonging to Hoarders and Wasters are forced to pull gigantic weights back and forth to eventually meet in the middle of a battleground where they fling their weights at the opposing sinner. As the sinners shout "Why keepest?” and, "Why squanderest thou?" they are forced to acknowledge each other and punish one another for committing crimes against prudence and temperance (Dante VII). Together,
the Hoarders and Wasters symbolize mutual antagonism. Symbolically, Dante has placed these sinners below the gluttons because he believes that being wasteful of man-made, limited possessions is a more heinous act because it disgraces the dignity of man’s creation. Despite being a pagan reference, “Fortune” has biblical allusion and religious symbolism in the context of Dante’s Inferno Circle Four. Fortune is told through mythology as one of God’s chosen ministers, who distributes luck and misfortune in a preordained manner (Dante VII). The Hoarders and Wasters, however, believed that they could control their luck or misfortune and so they believed that they could control God. While remaining in Circle Four, Dante comes across the wrathful, which are broken up into three types: the actively wrathful, the sullen, and the vindictive. The actively and vindictive wrathful sinners are punished by unleashing their violent, active wrath on one another for eternity. This is justified because, during their lives, they never felt the wrath and pain they inflicted upon others. In Hell, their punishments are a continuation of Dante’s theme of mutual antagonism as a method to establish justice and provide a balance between the forces of righteousness and sinfulness. Mutual antagonism provides the justification that those who have sinned against their neighbor shall be punished by their sin from their neighbor. Strangely, those who are labeled as Sullen, are also placed in the same Circle as the Wrathful. Their punishment is that they choke and gurgle on the filth of Styx, a symbol of their debilitating rage, and are unable to express themselves. They are blinded and surrounded by darkness, and are forced to sing hymns of praise to a God they never appreciated. They choke on their own rage during their lives, taking for granted the inherent goodness of God’s creation. They are blinded by darkness to justify their unwillingness to acknowledge the inherent beauty of life and the human condition. Binary opposition in “sweet air, which by the sun is gladdened,” and “hymn do they keep gurgling in their throats” portrays the justice of their punishment (Dante VII). The sweet hymn they are forced to sing is a song of praise that they would have sung in the heavens, but ironically they are in hell and will despise God for eternity. The punishment of the Sullen is religiously symbolic because it antagonizes the sullen through a mocking, degrading punishment of having to sing angelic songs to God. Their punishment juxtaposes them to angels and symbolically labels them as demons.
Through Dante’s utilization of binary oppositions, a theme of mutual antagonism, and religious symbolism, the sinners of Gluttony, Hoarding, Wasting, and Sullen, have received punishments that correlate to their past existences; punishing them for abusing the blessings found within the human experience. Through their sentences, they receive a symbolic punishment justifiable for their crimes. The price must be paid.
Something Fishy

The day I became a parent I realized many things. As a caregiver to eight juvenile Discus, I have learned that the requisites to sustaining a fish’s life include food, lots of properly treated water, and shelter in the form of plants and decor. I have come to personally understand that life is followed by death. Death, natural and unnatural, is nuanced for all living creatures as it is for humans. Every fish-keeper undergoes the process of learning the many ailments that can afflict fish and the possible remedies for them.

Throughout the process of caring for my fish, I have learned a great deal about the hobby of fish keeping. With knowledge comes a loss of ignorance, and therefore, innocence. Many abuses exist within what seemed to be my little bubble of utopia. From a five-year-old child buying a Betta at a pet store and putting it in a bowl to a thirty-five-year-old placing a six-foot Arowana in a glass box, abuses to the aquatic wild kingdom are hard to avoid and easy to commit in the comfort of our own homes.

How would a six-foot human feel in a glass box?

You wouldn’t know.

Except, would you?

You may have experienced the glass box; your friends, loved ones, co-workers, and neighbors may be affected by it.

Human lives trapped in a glass box of a healthcare system that is created, defined, and perpetuated by the monolith health insurance companies, putting a price tag on what it means to stay alive.

According to a 2018 Census Bureau report, 27.5 million did not have health insurance during the entire year. In a 2019 Westhealth and Gallup survey, the U.S. spent $3.5 trillion on healthcare, more than any other country, yet consistently ranks near the bottom of major health indices. It was reported one in four Americans have skipped treatment because of cost, and that nearly half fear bankruptcy in the event of a health emergency.

Like a fish out of water, Americans are being suffocated by a health care system that is not accessible or available to everyone. If one fish was given an aquarium, while another fish was placed in a small bowl, then the disparity between care of the two fish is inhumane and may be harmful. America’s healthcare has become a privilege where marginalized, vulnerable groups are often unfavorably affected, deprived of access to health services that would help them prevent and treat disease.

If I was given one year and unlimited resources to dedicate to a societal issue of my choice, I would initiate a reformation of America’s health care system, requiring a refocusing of our health care delivery system on prevention, primary care, and effective treatments. Everyone deserves to be provided with affordable health care from birth to death regardless of where they work, their income, their age, or their health status.

Fish deserve to be treated humanely. They deserve to have their basic needs met and to be cared for on an individual basis.

So do humans.
Works Cited
Literary Elements Present in A Modest Proposal

While satire acts as both a literary device and a genre within a literary piece and may categorize a piece as satirical, there are multiple literary elements that create a dynamic literary, satirical piece; these elements including, structure, point of view, cataloging, and verbal irony develop the satire; furthermore, A Modest Proposal reveals an underlying message subtly and controversially in order to criticize socio-political aspects of Irish society.

A Modest Proposal presents a four-part structure and cataloging within the satirical piece that provides ethos as well as the basis for the satiric writing strategy within the work. In alignment with the four-part literary structure, “A Modest Proposal" begins with introductory statements establishing ethos as the satirical language and writing style has not been implemented in this section of the essay. The introduction presents the topic “A Modest Proposal...for making them beneficial to the publick (Swift 2-3).” The introduction then transitions into the opening body paragraphs in which the author depicts the deplorable, impoverished conditions that prevent the Irish families from being able to provide sufficient, adequate care to their children. This is followed by another transition and then his thesis “I shall... propose my own thoughts”; and his thesis is supported by body paragraphs throughout the essay, which is finally concluded with the benefits that would result from his proposal (Swift 1080). The structure of his essay provides initial ethos as it is structured in a format familiar to his audience, as well as provides regimented, professional verbiage, and structure. The structure of the essay in and of itself is satirical because the format of the essay inherently juxtaposes the hyperbolic solutions the author presents within the essay. Furthermore, the author’s cataloging of details, benefits, advantages, demographic figures, and statistical data enhances his rhetorical ethos and phlegmatic diction. A catalog is often used in literature to enhance the audience’s enjoyment of poetry as well as unify the author’s thoughts into a coherent theme. As demonstrated through Jonathan Swift’s, A Modest Proposal, the literary four-part structure, and cataloging develop the author’s ethos as well as creates the framework for the satiric writing strategy within the work.

Throughout the essay, the author’s use of point of view and verbal irony drives the central message of the essay, while maintaining a sense of composure and discrepancy despite the outrageous solutions and propositions. Jonathan Swift writes in the first person point of view, consistently writing on behalf of an unnamed author’s opinions, thoughts, and reasoning. In historical context, Swift was a well-known satirist and author. A Modest Proposal was published as a pamphlet, which during the 16th through 18th centuries was used to comment on the controversy, society, religion, and social issues of Europe. In proposing to sell children to the rich as a luxurious commodity through the traditional, respectable form of political pamphlets, Swift, euphemizes political rhetoric, and separates it from its altruistic nature (Mathur). As a politically active, popular author of his time, Swift was comfortable writing his commentary on issues he felt passionate about and his sphere of influence reached many audiences. His point of view matters because as an educated writer he knows what methods of satire will be most effective in portraying his message to his audience. The author utilizes Juvenalian satire in addition to macabre humor among other satirical techniques to present criticisms of the corruption and ineptitude of the Irish government in addressing the growing threat of the English foothold in Ireland.

In addition to the author’s point of view, Swift’s command of verbal irony encapsulates his encrypted message in a cynical, paradoxical pamphlet whose message sounds like a justification of brutal cannibalism when it is really a cry for decorum. Verbal irony utilizes words to ridicule a person or thing by conveying a meaning that is the opposite of what the words say. In a Modest Proposal verbal irony highlights the discrepancy between peoples’ perception of a situation and the reality of the situation. Swift’s verbal irony acts as a tool that highlights his perception of a situation through his exaggerated solutions, while also illuminating the complementary disparity present in his society as a result of social cruelty. One example of his irony used in the essay depicts that men would begin respecting their wives if the children would eventually be sold, just as they foster and care for their livestock when they are ready to
give birth. The tone of diminution in addition to the verbal irony reduces mankind to the level of beasts. The author implies that he wishes for child-rearing to become institutionalized like animal husbandry (Mathur). He continues this style and usage of verbal irony throughout the play to highlight his message towards the injustices that Irish society was experiencing. He also satirizes the ‘economist’ point of view, quantifying human beings as statistical abstractions, further emphasizing his message that Eighteenth-century politics and economics presupposed human beings as statistical data that would be useful in enumerating national wealth (Mathur). He criticizes the notion that people only have a right to exist if they could contribute to the prosperity and wealth of civilization. Ultimately, Swift satirizes the economy and politics of Ireland through the use of verbal irony.

In conclusion, despite the wide-ranging literature pieces that are associated with the genre of satire, satirical pieces such as A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Smith utilize integral elements such as structure, point of view, cataloging, and verbal irony to bolster the effects and delivery of satire within a literary work.
A Simple Story

Fantastical, whimsical wonderlands of fantasy have always captured me. The Bible was my first grand story, and I have always been inspired by the story of “Jesu Christ” taking “hold” of “St. Peter” as he Jesus guided Peter to ascend upon the unruly ocean waves (Chaucer 716,717). Since I was a young boy, my love for literature and stories has allowed me to evolve into an avid reader and storyteller. I have a passion for taking the hands of my listeners and guiding them through a sensational story. However, as I grew up, my job of processing through a “brimful of pardons” from “Rome” dampened my spirit of storytelling (Chaucer 707). I found that my occupation deviated from my preferred way of connecting with people through storytelling. Despite my occupational challenge and its influence on my emotions, I have learned to find remarkable joy and satisfaction in storytelling to all of those whom I pardon. I have catered my stories to contain lessons of morality that guide my listeners out of their despondencies and hope to follow in the footsteps of “Jesu Christ” and convert sinners into saints.

My competent communication skills and my diverse literary background will serve my community best through attendance at the University of Pennsylvania within their Annenberg School for Communication. Once I established my skillset in interpersonal communication, I found myself “bold in... speech” while remaining “wise and full of tact” no matter what situations my clients were enduring (Chaucer 774). My storytelling ability allows me to seek “justice” and provide peace to every audience (Chaucer 727). During my trip to Canterbury for a pilgrimage, I was able to facilitate a group storytelling workshop that promoted “good morality” and “general pleasure” further testimony to my competence in facilitating interaction and communication with others (Chaucer 818). Additionally, my success on this pilgrimage in developing a collaborative, supportive group environment, but I was not the only one to benefit from this experience. It brought me the most reward to see the other members of our group feel safe and included as well as open up to their lives with pure strangers on this “bright and merry” pilgrimage to Canterbury (Chaucer 822). While I love telling stories of my adventures, the greatest adventure lies ahead of a fulfilling, academic path. I believe the University of Pennsylvania will give me the opportunity to contribute to the growth process of this institution which is founded on the idea of creating a facility that trains the art of caring and transforming communities. Through attending this prestigious university, I not only want to commit to the rigor and excellence of the educational process but also develop meaningful relationships with stories that will last a lifetime. Through this program offered at UPENN I will be able to better serve my community through the most effective methods of communication; ultimately, working towards improving the quality of life and unity within the community of our glorious nation, because at the University of Pennsylvania “However much the journey cost” it “pays” in goodness tenfold (Chaucer 854).

Works Cited
Hung Up

solitude is not solidarity

to promote unity ensure your sincerity

do not defend a self that is selfish

half - balanced, hung up on self - obsession.

hang man

results from a man

who supports supremacy

in their solemnity.

they are dreadfully

fated. and eventually

when those who detest

our unity threaten to oppress

our dignity, we will fight

to be freed. hang

their secrets, their lies

for all to see

in light, shame

them under the law.

Protect our rights

for All.

Lady Liberty

balance counteracts the absence of morality

power - obsessed could care less. is it not clear to see

the leaders of this country need to be those who look at me for me

not as some social security identity with no feelings or family tree

Pick up the weight.

a duty. a

call to deny the bias

realize that the balance lies within, and

to save yourself you must save

too. please

do not sit back in ease while justice
is defined by those diseased
by their power. lead with equality.
we need each other. do not forget about me. sincerely, Lady Liberty
LOTTERHOS, JOCELYN

Jocelyn Lotterhos
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Poetry

“The Beautiful Mind” and “The Loving Heart”

The Beautiful Mind
The mind, molded, shaped and measured
With math and English and science and the rest.
Graded, prodded, and emptied with grades and scores and tests.
While it can be disheartening to have something so unique be measured quantitatively, these things only monitor one facet of the gem of the mind.
The mind enhanced with time and age.
Something not outgrown, instead subjected to gentle change.
Like a piece of art, reworked and embellished with each experience, rather than an outgrown toy that gets tossed away.
Pushed, and shaped, and tested with life, the mind is beautiful despite its strife.
Developed, refitted, enhanced in many ways, but as life goes on, those parts of always stay.

The Loving Heart
The heart wants what it wants
And when it goes without, the vessel the heart resides within becomes so sunken down. But it’s important not to see the heart as a deadly parasitic disease, but to view it instead as a blessing, for all the world to see. Love doesn’t have to appear as it does on a silver screen, instead it can be found in nearly every little thing. Love is in the little cooing baby you pass on the street and love is in the music you hear in summer heat. Love is in the soup your grandmother makes when you get sick, and love is when your puppy runs to fetch you a stick. So it should be noted that love is universal, and found everywhere, all you need is to seek it, and
you’ll find it there.
All is Fair in Love and War

It cannot be argued that certain ideas are better in theory than in practice. The concepts of vengeance and obedience fall under this category, as exemplified in Hamlet. Some readers posit that dramatic irony is what pushes the story along through the private thoughts of both Claudius and Hamlet in their struggle against both each other and their internal demons; however, the foiling of the characters William Shakespeare partners together better illustrates the disastrous combination of trusting yet misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Gertrude and Ophelia, as well as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with Horatio through their initial introduction, unique climaxes, and the seemingly predestined resolution of each of these opposing foiled characters.

One of the most notable pairs of opposing characters Shakespeare presents is Gertrude and Ophelia, who ultimately serve to show the dangers of being too obedient, and are victims of the quest for vengeance of others. The two first encounter each other act two scene two, where their differences are initially demonstrated. Gertrude tells Ophelia that she hopes that her son Hamlet is mad with love for her, a statement that further feeds into Ophelia's obedience being expected. Gertrude simply hopes that Ophelia chooses to be obedient to Hamlet over her father, but this hope is not borne of malice; rather, love is what brought the most joy to Gertrude so she hopes that it does the same for Ophelia and her son. However, Gertrude is portrayed as impure and experienced while Ophelia is written as naive and innocent. These are character traits that have been heavily developed prior to the women meeting each other, but upon their first interaction the differences are even more noticeable. However, both women face difficult choices; Gertrude can either sacrifice her own happiness and remain obedient to her son and deceased husband or remarry for her own happiness and the wellbeing of the kingdom and lose the love of her son. Her decision to pursue her own happiness ultimately leads to her being perceived as foolish and promiscuous, but when her actions are observed objectively without the influence of Hamlet's harsh commentary, it can be realized that she is simply refusing to be wholly obedient to her son. Because she was so subservient to the former king in Hamlet’s romanticized memory, he struggles with her choosing to put herself first. While it is true that her actions are somewhat foolhardy, she is committing no great crime or moral injustice. This greatly contrasts Ophelia, who faces the difficult choice of either lying to Hamlet or remaining loyal to Polonius; it is important to note that her personal happiness is never an option for her. Ophelia’s obedience to Polonius, Hamlet, and Laertes is so slavish that despite her age, her innocence is comparable to that of a child. Ultimately, the foiling of the two women demonstrates that expecting complete obedience from someone is both unreasonable and inequitable, and that vengeance causes nothing but harm to those involved.

Another significant pairing of characters presented by Shakespeare is the foiling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with Horatio, who also demonstrate dangerous obedience and the decimating blows of vengeance. They first interact when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to meet Hamlet and he is promptly dissatisfied with their presence, immediately illustrating the immense differences between the characters despite all three being labelled friends of Hamlet. Horatio is honest and loyal to Hamlet and his whims, but does not overly flatter Hamlet as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do. It must be noted that while Horatio is loyal, he is not obedient; he is his own individual person who expresses his unique thoughts and ideas, as seen when he questions Hamlet on his decision to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths. He is intelligent, calm, and wholly respected (quite notably the only character to be so); Hamlet greatly admires Horatio and wants to be like him. Horatio is also one of the few characters who doesn’t fall victim to the greedy hands of vengeance. This starkly contrasts the saccharine and dishonest behavior of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are indiscernible from each other in their bumbling stupidity and weak mindedness. Their enthusiasm to gain the king’s favor and their utter idiocy make complete obedience possible, and their main goal is “[T]o be commanded,” by the king (2.2.33-34). They disregard the feelings of the mourning Hamlet, despite calling themselves his ‘friends’, but their dishonesty is so rank that even the preoccupied Hamlet can detect it. The pair also
never question the king’s motives or their actions in support of him, while Horatio challenges Hamlet on occasion for his benefit. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern symbolize obedience while Horatio personifies loyalty. Ultimately, the foiling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with Horatio conveys the message that complete obedience is unnatural and inequitable, while vengeance is a corrupting and detrimental force.

Gertrude’s character climax further works to convey the message that obedience is unreasonable to expect and that vengeance causes immense harm. The height of her character arc is when Hamlet mercilessly berates her and causes her to introspect on her choices. This scene serves as a turning point for Gertrude; Hamlet’s refusal to carry on an actual conversation with her and his immense cruelty in his judgement indicate the extent of his harsh bias against her. He calls her a “virtue hypocrite”, amongst other insults, and derides her to the point where she fears for her life (3.4.42). Not once does he take into account her mourning process, the fact that she is unaware of her new husband’s treacherous dead, or that she did what was best for Denmark, as indicated by the joy of the country with the exception of Hamlet. Hamlet’s desire for revenge against Claudius and, to a lesser extent, his mother, clouds his judgement and confuses the situation in its entirety. Gertrude’s confusion and shock over the her new husband’s atrocious sin indicates her lack of knowledge of the situation; it can be argued that, had Hamlet presented his case against Claudius in a rational and sympathetic manner, his mother could have assisted him in a lawful and supported removal of the new king. Instead, his harsh presentation against Claudius (and her through her association to him) leads her to blame herself instead of take action, and to grow more concerned with Hamlet’s sanity than her husband’s possible treachery. Ultimately, the climax of Gertrude’s character arc reveals the futility and detriment of Hamlet’s desire for vengeance, as well as the inequity of his mother remaining obedient to a man who is no longer alive.

Ophelia’s character climax also features an angry outbreak from Hamlet in which the dangers of expecting total obedience and placing vengeance above all is further emphasized. Ophelia suffers at the hands of both Hamlet and her father; while Hamlet verbally abuses her, Polonius manipulates his daughter’s life in desperate attempts to please the king. She is forced to sin either way; she can either lie or disobey her father. Despite Hamlet’s strange and disrespectful behavior, he is shocked and angry when Ophelia returns the tokens of his love, instead choosing to totally deny loving her in the first place. When Ophelia returns his gifts, she makes her choice and ultimately pledges her obedience to her father; this decision is further solidified when she lies about Polonius’ whereabouts. Similarly to Gertrude, Hamlet cannot handle losing obedience, and lashes out against Ophelia, listing that he would give her a “plague” for her “dowry”, and that she should get “to a nunnery” before proceeding to verbally condemn all women (3.1.68-77). His hunt for vengeance corrupts his relationship with Ophelia, indicating the deep-reaching negative consequences of letting revenge consume all aspects of one’s life. This event ultimately leads to Ophelia going mad, and eventually committing suicide; while her internal strife is present throughout the play, this event truly emphasizes her struggle.

The peak of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s character arc is when Hamlet correctly points out the fact that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are spies due to their clumsy attempts to determine the cause of his behavior; this entire scene truly exemplifies their stupidity and lack of knowledge of the human nature. The pseudo-obedience of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reeks of dishonesty and is entirely too saccharine to ever be confused for true loyalty, and Hamlet proceeds to attack them for their dim-witted and blind compliance to a king. However, they are too idiotic to even understand that he is insulting them; as Rosencrantz says to Hamlet, “I understand you not” (4.2.2697). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are merely pawns in Hamlet and Claudius’ fight for vengeance, illuminating the lengths to which each man would go to exact revenge on the other. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to like them, their immense stupidity (which is exemplified during the climax of their character arc) reduces them to a sense of child-like innocence which is taken advantage of by Claudius. They also work to further serve as an indicator of the harm that a hunt for vengeance causes.

Horatio’s character climax is reached in act five scene two, when his loyalty is truly exemplified and his logic and clear-mindedness is obvious. He opposes Hamlet’s choice to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, which truly indicates that he is above the concept of vengeance and that he recognizes the child-like stupidity of the two men. This also demonstrates he is a loyal friend rather than a blind servant. During this portion of the play, Horatio also advises Hamlet against participating in the duel for his own safety; again, this rationale is uncommon throughout Hamlet, and indicates that he is one of the few characters not totally blinded by the idea of vengeance, but instead understands the danger of being involved in a desperate fight for revenge.

Gertrude’s resolution is seen in her rather untimely death; despite failing to actively seek vengeance, she still suffers from its greedy hands. It can be argued that her lack of awareness worked to further seal her fate, but despite Hamlet’s harsh criticisms of her, her actions indicate that she is kind at heart. She attempts to gently break the news of Ophelia’s death to Laertes before she scatters flowers on Ophelia’s grave, saying “farewell” (5.1.3578). She even drinks the goblet of poisoned wine that was intended for Hamlet in an attempt to save him from certain death, despite his unforgiving attitude towards her. Although she has more power over her fate than Ophelia, societal
demands ultimately damn her. She did not actively partake in any act of vengeance, but instead refused to swear her obedience to a dead man; however, Hamlet’s selfishness and quest for vengeance led to her unfortunate death. However, she is not entirely innocent, and her death occurs at the same time as others, including her husband. Shakespeare masterfully does so with the knowledge that the greater the number of deaths, the less significant each one seems. While Hamlet does exact revenge against Claudius, he cannot glean much satisfaction from this as he inadvertently led to his mother’s death as well.

Similarly to Gertrude, Ophelia also suffers from an unfortunate fate; regardless of who she chooses to completely obey, she is damned either way as a result of the thirst for vengeance possessed by Polonious, Hamlet, and Laertes. She commits suicide after going mad, rambling about “young men” and how they are “to blame” (4.5.2922-2923). While *Hamlet* does not shy away from the theme of death (as seen in the disastrous ending), Ophelia’s death is utterly tragic. Her death is isolated from the rest, truly emphasizing the complete misfortune of her life, and the havoc vengeance wreaks upon her. She is doomed regardless of who she chooses to obey, and her ending comes through no fault of her own. She is forced into obedience, and a plot for vengeance she had no choice in ultimately decided her fate, illustrating the complete danger of both.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also suffer an unfortunate fate, arguably a punishment for their blind obedience to the king. Their fate is more deserved, considering their commitment to the act of vengeance. Their complete lack of individual thought is reflected even in their death; a single sentence marks their passing, and no one mourns their death. They were mere dispensable pawns for Claudius, although they never came to this realization. Their deaths can be considered more of a blow to Claudius than an actual act of cruelty against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; however, the expendability of two men and the lack of impact their death has upon the events as a whole is used to emphasize how all-consuming vengeance is to the point where two deaths are seen as nothing.

In stark contrast to his bumbling counterparts, Horatio’s character arc does not end in death; his lack of severe punishment indicates that refusal to be completely obedient is rewarding, but he still suffers as a result of the acts of vengeance of those around him. He loses his best friend, and is tasked with repeating the tragic tale of his passing for the rest of his life, but he receives the lightest sentence of all the characters in the play. While he is not completely removed from the acts of vengeance, he serves as the voice of rationale. His relatively happy ending indicates that refusing to be wholly obedient and get caught up in the tide of vengeance is rewarding, and the best way to live.

In conclusion, the foiling of the characters William Shakespeare partners together better illustrates the disastrous combination of trusting yet misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Gertrude and Ophelia, as well as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with Horatio through their initial introduction, unique climaxes, and the seemingly predestined resolution of each of these opposing foiled characters. The unfortunate deaths of both Gertrude and Ophelia indicate that obedience is expected of them due to their societal and gender roles; their deaths are tragic because they did not actively seek vengeance. Rather, the controlling men in their lives did. The deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also serve to indicate the dangers of obedience and vengeance; they make no decisions of their own and are expendable pawns in the vie for revenge between Claudius and Hamlet. However, they are punished for their blind obedience and their role in cruel revenge. The only character who remains alive is Horatio, who is notably the one character who remains somewhat above the muddled events centered around revenge, and the one character who is not trying to be obedient or forced to be obedient.
Beyond Sitting in the Corner: Just and Symbolic Punishment

Beyond Sitting In The Corner: Just and Symbolic Punishment

“It’s not fair!” The three words of protest uttered by toddlers, teenagers, and adults alike, challenging the “unjust” punishment assigned to them. The subjective nature of punishments makes it difficult to determine whether they are justified or not; each person abides by a different moral code. In some cases the majority can agree that a punishment is justly earned and rightly given; laws and commandments provide rules for the masses. However, in literary punishment, there is another aspect: the punishment must be symbolic as well as deserved. In Dante’s Inferno, the unique punishments given to each of the sinners are reflective of the sins they committed and mirror their actions during life, resulting in sentences that are both just and symbolic.

A notable example of a sinner who has been punished both just and symbolically is Semiramus. Following her husband’s death, she “licensed all depravity alike, and lust and law were one in her decree,” (V 56-57), becoming corrupted and perverted, with “mad sensuality” overtaking all other reason (V 54). Her place in Hell is quite symbolic within itself; she ‘justified’ her actions on Earth but was unable to escape punishment from a higher power for eternity. Just as she couldn’t control her carnal appetite in life, she cannot control anything in hell, doomed to be “lashed by the wind” for eternity (V 49). Her insatiable lecherous actions not only corrupted her morals, but those of the people she ruled. By dooming them as well as herself, her punishment is certainly just.

The lovers Francesca and Paolo also have been assigned a punishment that is both just and symbolic. Francesca, a married woman, fell in love with Paolo, her brother-in-law, and the two kissed. Francesca’s husband Gianciotto discovered the affair, and had them killed; for this sin he is already damned to the lowest circle of hell despite not being dead yet. The two lovers are in one wind together in hell, symbolizing their eternal love for eachother. Francesca describes Paolo as one with herself, “he who is one with me alive and dead,” which indicates that the lovers cannot redeem themselves or change their character, and are immersed in their love for the rest of time (V 131). Paolo weeps for eternity, but Francesca has enough command over herself to be able to speak; her ability to do so can be based on the fact that she succumbed to love, not lust. This indicates that the punishment is justified; both Paolo and Francesca committed adultery and deserve to be in hell, but did so out of genuine love and care for eachother, not out of carnal instinct.

A final example of sinners who have been punished both justly and symbolically is found in Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri. They reside in the 9th circle of Hell, reserved for treachery and political traitors; Archbishop Ruggieri (a traitor) hypocritically imprisoned Count Ugolino and his sons as traitors and denied them food. As his hunger grew stronger and stronger, Count Ugolino became driven to eat his sons. Now, Count Ugolino is damned to eat Archbishop Ruggieri for eternity, clutching his skull “again between his teeth grinding it as a mastiff grinds a bone,” (XXXIII 67-68). This punishment is quite symbolic; Count Ugolino is cursed to live in his greatest shame and commit his damning sin over and over for eternity, while Archbishop Ruggieri suffers the same fate as Ugolino’s sons, being punished for his own hypocrisy and traitorship as just he punished them. Ruggieri’s hypocrisy and cruelty in imprisoning Count Ugolino and his family without food justifies his punishment, and Count Ugolino’s sin of cannibalism and betrayal in times of peril ensures that his place in one of the deepest circles of hell is deserved.

In conclusion, the punishments Dante assigns to the sinners in his work Inferno are both just and symbolic. The characteristics prevalent in the characters in life follow them into the afterlife, and are exemplified and utilized against them in their unique punishments. While Semiramus and the pair of lovers (Francesca and Paolo) are both at the mercy of the gusts of wind, their punishments are still distinct. Semiramus’ wind is uncontrollable like her lust, while Francesca and Paolo are together and have more control over their circumstances. The Count and Archbishop’s punishment is arguably more severe, but the punishment preys off of their shames and hypocrisies. The punishments are equated to their sins in life, and are of similar nature of their sins; an example of this is the Archbishop’s punishment, suffering the fate that he assigned to others. Overall, Dante’s punishments are reflective, just,
symbolic when assigned to the sinners in his work the *Inferno.*
“Here Comes the Sun” Political Satire

Information, true whichever way
Information, should be used
With bias
People around, it can be bad to learn what differs
People around, it’s good to slight what won’t agree
Information, true whichever way
Information, should be used
With bias
People around, it is easier to simply listen to others
People around, you can follow celebrities or friends
Information, true whichever way
Information, should be used
With bias
There’s no need to recognize
There’s a need to weaponize
There’s no need to sympathize
There’s a need to terrorize
There’s no need to open eyes
People around, it’s best to form opinions
People around, please ensure that things are true
Information, true in one way
Information, should be used with
No bias
Information, verify the truth
Information, be seen in it’s entirety
It’s alright
It’s alright
Rediscovering Optimism

Optimism. A positive word for many, but for me, optimism was the gravest sin imaginable. My mother died of cancer when I was 7, leaving me a pessimistic and angry child. Even at a young age, I felt stupid and foolish for thinking that she could ever recover, and I felt robbed of my childhood. This event was the first of a series of setbacks. Within the next few months, my life overturned. I moved across the country to live with my grandparents, was put into a new school, and had foot surgery after years of failed braces and physical therapy. Each event only embittered me further, and I grew angrier.

I stayed like this for a few years, festering and wallowing in my pessimism and sorrow. I was proud of my pessimistic nature, and wore my cynicism like a badge of honor. One night, my grandmother came into my room and sat on my bed. “Why are you so angry all of the time? Who are you spiting, and what are you gaining?” “I… I don’t know,” I answered. I had been angry for so long I had forgotten the root of my anger. “I know that you’re upset about your mother, but she wouldn’t have wanted you to live like this. You have to learn to cherish the time you had, not the time you don’t.” Her words would stick with me; it took time, but eventually I learned to cherish the good in things and celebrate life in the present rather than live in the events of the past.

The surgeries, the move, and my mother’s death were all things I realized that I wasn’t able to control, but I was able to control my reactions and what I learned. I became grateful for the surgeries and grew a newfound appreciation for my ability to walk properly. The move had changed from an uprooting into an opportunity and a blessing to meet new people and experience a different culture. My mother’s death was still a tragedy in my eyes, but rather than spend my life wallowing in sorrow, I remember my time with my mother and think back fondly on the memories. The values that she taught me as a child would stay with me for the rest of my life; curiosity, determination, and an enthusiasm for life that I had neglected for so long.

Once I stopped spending so much energy on my pessimism, I rediscovered my passions: reading, education, piano, and tennis. I became a voracious reader and was constantly competing with myself to get the best possible grades in advanced classes. I ventured into the realm of self-education, and took online college courses focused on medicine and personal improvement. I shadowed doctors, volunteered with Aceing Autism, and received my Girl Scout Gold Award. I was able to become so much more accomplished after rediscovering the joys of life.

Bad things didn’t stop happening; my childhood dog died, my car got totaled on the freeway, and I needed more surgery. But I no longer let these things drag me down; instead I learned to overcome each of these events with more determination and gratitude than before. I remember my dog fondly and often think back on the joy and love she brought me, and these emotions would bring our family to get a new puppy to love and cherish. I used my time on bedrest after each surgery and the car accident to read my favorite books and learn about topics I was interested in to benefit my future. These events have shaped me into the person that I am today; I have accepted that hardship is unavoidable, but each occurrence offers an opportunity to learn and grow. I am now proud to say that I am an optimist.
Claudius the Chemist: Why MIT is Right for Me

Claudius the Chemist: Why MIT is Right for Me

Since I was a young child, I always felt fierce competition with my brother Hamlet. This internal desire to be the best led to an voracious appetite for knowledge; while I began studying and teaching myself to outperform my brother, I eventually developed a deep appreciation for education and a thirst for knowledge. I began studying in great depth out of my own interest in order to truly understand the world so that I may improve it. While I am fascinated by history, math, and English, the subject I find most compelling is chemistry. Therefore, due to my natural predisposition and interest in chemistry, paired with my deeply competitive and ambitious nature, I believe that I would be the perfect fit for Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Department of Chemistry.

It would be unfair to discuss my love of chemistry without sharing my greatest success. After years of intense study of chemistry, I realized that all my research had finally led to the perfect solution; a poison so insidious that it could be fatal when poured into the ear. By using this chemical I had created, I would not only prove my proficiency in chemistry, but I would also be able to overtake my brother Hamlet and achieve my true dream of being king to better serve the people, ultimately improving the world. When I snuck towards his sleeping form, my heart raced; I questioned myself… Did I add enough Chlorine? Did I mix the solution enough? Did I mix it too much??

I took a deep breath and steadied myself before pouring the chemical into his ear. Then came the moment of truth. I waited for a few seconds before checking his pulse…. Nothing. I had succeeded.

After witnessing the success of my experiment, I have come to the realization that chemistry is my one true passion, and something that I would love to spend the rest of my life pursuing. My focus, dedication, and ambition characterize me as a hard worker, and I feel as if it is my duty to serve the people, which I can do best from inside the chemistry lab. During my time as the ruler of Denmark, my country was marked with revelry, prosperity, and joy, indicating that I also possess formidable leadership qualities, which are important when working on a team in a lab and heading research.

I truly believe that Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Department of Chemistry is the best school for me; as stated in your motto “mens te manus” (mind and hand), MIT stresses education for practical application. I have applied my knowledge of chemistry to my life in order to achieve my goals, further my status, and help the people I care about. In addition, MIT’s highly competitive nature fully matches with my lofty ambitions; I am extremely dedicated to my goals and am determined to succeed. Ultimately, MIT would serve to be the perfect environment for me to succeed, and together, we can work to benefit mankind.
Character Poem

Claudius’ Poem
I didn’t believe in family value;
Rather, I believed in family power.
By poison I took my brother’s throne,
I took his wife; I took his home.
I pretended to care, but a facade was all.
My behavior was fashioned to curb my fall.
Hamlet, my dear, I am now your father!
(He knows not that my only concern is power.)
But I took the king’s wife and I took the king’s home,
By poison I’ll take the entire throne.
Bam! No one could keep me away from the crown,
Neither Gertrude, nor Polonius, nor Hamlet (that clown!).
But wait! Hamlet, ingenious fool, knows what I’ve done,
He’s like a true crystal ball, that meddling one.
But I took the king’s wife and I took the king’s home,
By poison I’ll take the entire throne.
Now, no one knew of my scheming before,
But Hamlet has thrown wide open the door.
My disguise must fall; I must begin
To bring down Hamlet so I can win.
But I took the king’s wife and I took the king’s home,
By poison I’ll take the entire throne.
I am no longer the father, the husband, the friend.
I am now the tyrant, the ruler, the end
of Denmark’s desire. A fight must ensue,
Hamlet, Laertes, and poisoning too.
But I took the king’s wife and I took the king’s home,
By poison I’ll take the entire throne.
I first lost my wife by poisoning cup,
Laertes too was found belly up
by poisoned blade. But finally then
Hamlet did fall, not the last of the men.
I followed him down, by scheming I went,
For a poisoned heart that poison was meant.
Modest Proposal

Hello, citizens! Our education is simply not up to snuff. Millions of citizens are not getting a proper education, and it shows in our economy. I am prompting to get rid of basic education and construct rigorous and harsh military training. This would be a proper use of time and money because it would actually benefit our communities. This was extremely beneficial to the ancient Spartans, after all! Their community flourished being strong and well prepared for the future. By the citizens engaging in military training, their level of respect, tolerance, strength, etc. brought success.

We should immediately transform all schools in the United States to military barracks in which no academic training will take place. Only basic reading and writing skills will be implemented. At a young age, music and dance will also be taught to help with agility in battle. At the age of 8 both boys and girls will be stripped from their families and begin training. From ages 8-18 they will be expected to train in speed, agility, weaponry, strategy, power/strength, and street intelligence. Once 14, each student is required to fight against another classmate to the death, until 18 when the last people from each district are standing. This will bring an emerging era for the elites. These people will be the leaders of the military for our country.

Parents should support this solution because they will no longer have to worry about college tuition. Rather, their children will grow up to be excellent soldiers who learn to kill, thus protecting the country. High schoolers should support this solution because they will no longer have to get a 4.5 GPA for success but rather get the chance to show what a real warrior is. The government won’t have to worry about constant education reforms and school taxes. Overall, my proposal benefits so many groups and individuals! How can one not support this solution. This solution is advantageous to our country because “students” will either achieve success or be killed. We no longer have to worry about students coming out of school and remaining ignorant.

Some people might think that this solution is too harsh. How can we possibly treat children that way? It’s quite simple, though, if we remember that citizens are here for the sake of the country and not the other way around. If they cannot keep the country safe, they do not deserve to live in it. This is much better than churning out ignorant students and letting them become ignorant voters and parents. In the end bringing success to our future generations and impacting them in incredible ways. Most importantly it will benefit us long term.

I am completely sincere about this because I am still young enough to go through the experience of the military barracks. Eventually, one must realize that this is the most efficient use of our time and resources for success. Our education system is simply too weak; it’s time for change! We are the ones to do it!
I cracked my phone yesterday. The typed words were refracted, broken among the glass shards. Upon texting a friend, his response flickered back at me in a language I couldn’t comprehend. The cracks in my screen distorted his every word. Eventually, I had my phone repaired, and communication was again restored.

I saw the cracks in my dad’s face during Ramadan last year. He looked at me. Dark, black eyes. One eyebrow a bit higher. After fasting for thirteen hours, my patience was getting the best of me. I attempted to engage in the family dinner, but my Hindu father was in the way. He sat with arms crossed, face stoic. He didn’t repeat the ritual words. My Muslim mother and my sister inhaled the aromas of the Ramadan meal, embuing the house with a gratifying warmth. With their heads down and eyes closed, waiting to satiate their hunger after four hours of chopping, cooking, and baking, we repeated the words with eager tongues. Though prayers of peace encircled us, we felt the cracks... the tension.

Every year during Ramadan, my dad’s cracked face reflects back at me. Shards and glitches about my views on religion and culture have sharply shaped our relationship. My dad has always provided for my family, putting our education first. In fact, he sent us to “the best” schools, regardless of them being Seventh-Day Adventist, Jewish, and Catholic institutions. From reciting the Beatitudes at Bishop Gorman’s Easter mass, to repeating “Baruch Atah Adonai” at Adelson’s Shabbat services, to fighting for a sanctioned “No Place Hate” organization in student government, all of these experiences taught me about the cultures and religions of my fellow man, enlightening me to our shared humanity.

I decidedly and mindfully apply the values touted by these systems into my daily life. Puzzle pieces of principle, connected together to create the wholeness of who I am. I find myself less interested in one religion and more interested in opening myself to them all. Though my father paid for me to attend parochial schools, the passion I brought home for these divergent ideals was regularly greeted with disappointment. After all, I was the son of a Hindu man and expected to follow in his footsteps. The cracks in his face appear deeper now. I wonder... are they from years of my enthusiasm wearing him down?

Papa loves me. Indeed, he’s always been one of my biggest supporters, readily congratulating me for my academic and extracurricular achievements. But he is simply unable to communicate his feelings about his son: me, an autonomous, open minded, self-realized young man. It’s like the cracked phone--we just can’t read each other, tension the inevitable result.

In spite of the pain I feel at not being fully accepted by my father, in spite of the dark looks he’s given, I’ve discovered an unfractured truth. The people we love can’t always be the people we want them to be. Sometimes, no matter how much we love each other, we will always communicate through a cracked screen, unable to fully understand the other’s point of view. There is no technician alive who can mend the cracks in people’s relationships. Some relationships must be accepted for what they are, imperfections and all. This doesn’t mean that communication isn’t there, it’s just different--taking a little more effort to interpret.

My father may never fully accept me, a person who has taken into himself the Mystery of the Tetragrammaton, the ideal of humanity on which the figure of Christ is based, or the significance of the Greater Hajj. But he sent me to those schools; he supports me in my elections, cheers for me at my swim meets, guides me through my service, and chose my mother, a Muslim woman, to pass his life with, to create children with, and my dad is proud of me. That, I can see clearly.
Villian College Essay

Villian College Essay: Claudius
Leadership in our community is so important! It is what truly bonds and connects the people, which I’m all about. Growing up in a respectable family, I had to put many important service hours into the area. By using my brother’s example in a high leadership role, it was important for me to engage in the role and learn the attributes of what it means to be a leader.

However, upon working with my brother, I learned that there is a difference between a leader and a follower. I was the difference! I was the one who needed to take action for my path! So I killed my brother. I, now King Claudius, was the King of Denmark. Now I could truly fulfill my potential as a leader. Multiple challenges, hate, rejection, but I was ready for it all. The major challenge in this leadership role was that everyone in my community simply didn’t realize that my position as King was sanctioned by God Himself! How can one even reject that teaching! The worst part in the process was Hamlet, my own nephew. As a leader, I learned that you must always be ready to speak properly and engage; you must hear out those over whom you preside. These were the exact skills I implemented on my nephew. A good leader listens and discovers exactly how others think, especially when those thoughts are negative toward their leader. I listened to Hamlet quite keenly, and I grew so much as a leader in doing so! Knowing that he wanted to steal my leadership role so unjustly made me stronger because it made me realize that the greatest attribute of a leader is sacrifice.

When sweet talking your underlings does not work, a good leader knows that sacrificing them is the next best step. Though I had already gone through the harrowing experience of poisoning my own brother (and who could deny how important leadership is to him who will sacrifice his own kith and kin?), I had not yet discovered that sacrifice must be a regular experience of a great leader! Indeed, I had read stories of the Roman Emperors before me and their extraordinary sacrifices of women, animals, and slaves to keep their communities safe, but I had not realized that sacrifice is ongoing until Hamlet, the meddler that he was, began to question my authority. So I tried to have him killed. Unfortunately, it resulted in the death of his mother too. (Did I mention that she was my new wife? There’s another important lesson a leader must learn! We need to accept the things that come with leadership, even beautiful women.) As I’ve mentioned, however, sacrifice is necessary for the greater good, so women, money, the death of loved ones: all must be taken in stride if one wishes to excel in leadership. It’s important to recognize that we all have leadership potential and qualities but the difference between them and me is that I go for it. I will push to achieve everything I put my mind to and to my full extent at any campus in Denmark. Leadership is about taking care of those in your care, so let me be your new leader.
Sin is a complex idea in which is known to be an internal battle. The concept of suffering and a struggle lives in every single person in humanity. A story that brings an exciting perspective to society's destructive nature is "Dante's Inferno" by Dante Alighieri. This story brings the different types of sin present, and the deeper meaning of it relates it to today's humanity. The Sins and Punishments, Lustful and Greedy, show a destructive lesson for the sin being committed from Dante's Inferno.

Lustful is a sin here on humanity. It is the action of a person who is led by pleasure desires instead of actual value. Dante has this certain sin punished in a significant way. Dante punishes the act of lust by violently making strong winds that move the body back and forth preventing people from finding peace and rest. This punishment is believed to be appropriate according to Dante because it takes away from the typical pleasure and now being forced upon with restlessness. In How To Read Literature Like A Professor readers are introduced to a chapter just focusing on symbols and the deeper meaning behind them through the text. The wind is considered to be this in Dante's Inferno. This symbolically connects to the respective sin because in the bigger picture the wind represents air being active and violent causing harm, being an overall symbol for suffering.

Greed influences and drives a person to do things that are regretful. It is the intense selfish desire for something. Dante punished people committing this sin by dividing the two types of people in groups. One being the people who hoarded possessions and those who lavishly spent it. After separating both groups, the groups would fight and fight to relieve the treasure but in the end tearing each other apart (figuratively and literally). This punishment is appropriate in Dante's eyes because now their greed and temptations is no longer a long term goal rather now their actions and personality is causing them harm. This symbolically connects to the sins by making a whole group break in half and never being able to unite again. In an overall concept it is a representation of humanity breaking away from each other, with constant fighting and arguments and not focusing on the bigger picture, humanity is slowly breaking away from each other and getting divided. In How To Read Literature Like A Professor we learn the significance of geography and a location. The fact that the division took place in hell is a deeper representation that dividing against each other is an action of hell.

Overall, there are multiple forms of sins. Greed and Lustful are just a few that are exploited in Dante's Inferno. Throughout the story society must learn that these sins that people commit on a day to day basis will come to haunt them, and it is important to live life as a humanity united, positive and be influenced by the right pleasure. As one society, people can change what has become the destructive nature of society.
Random Work Essay

Environment Shapes Children
Poverty is not having enough material possessions or income for a person's needs. Poverty may include social, economic, and political elements. The threshold at which absolute poverty is defined is always about the same, independent of the person's permanent location or era. In Jacob A. Riis's book, *How the Other Half Lives*, argues that young children affected by poverty grow up hardened through no fault of their own. This argument is valid because young children are neither mentally nor physically developed, which makes it easier for them to be influenced by their environments.

Riis claims that a negative environment is what allows young children to make bad decisions. Negative environments include anywhere from an unstable household, malnutrition, and bad influences from people. These specific environments are what influence young children to have no choice but to make bad decisions. For example, Riis mentions a conversation with a child regarding Jesus. In this conversation, the child says she has never even heard of Jesus regarding church or faith, just in swearing by it. This example symbolizes the ignorance of morality by way of religious education. Riis makes it clear that the child does not know simple things, such as the sins of not stealing, cursing, etc. They are leaving impoverished children with no other choice in the way of life resulting in sinful behavior. This sinful behavior becomes the root for struggle and pain long term.

Riis's claims are prominent in other people's experiences of child poverty. For instance, in the book *Poisonwood Bible*, by Barbara Kingsolver, the Prices, headed by the father Nathan Price, were affected by the conditions of their environment. The environment to which they had to adapt was Africa, a hard place to adapt to. The children in the Price family had to change their way of life and develop tactics for their survival. The kids had no other choice but to be influenced by the people of the Congo and their ways, resulting in them becoming more suspicious, unhappy, unhealthy, etc.

Furthermore, I’ve had my own experiences with the results of poverty on children. Traveling through India, I witnessed impoverished children in Hyderabad. In this city children commit crimes in order to make a living. This occurs because the children have no other choice, given their environment. Without committing these sins, it could result in death or the deaths of their families. In this way, Riis's claims extend far beyond his article; they are evident even today.

The conditions of young children in harsh environments lead to a change in their behavior. Not only is this shown in Riis's article but also through books such as *The Poisonwood Bible* and my own experiences. Riis's suggestion that these New York children should be treated with compassion and given lives in new and healthier environments so that they do not "grow up thieves and thugs," is the most reasonable response to this problem. All in all, it is important to take into account all environments.
Claudius for President

Claudius For President

“Delegate of Denmark, you have the floor.”

After the chairperson opened the discussion, I watched as my brother eloquently explained his country’s perspective on different current events. His composure and grace before so many students impressed me and ignited a flame for a newfound passion in governmental relations.

Through my older brother’s participation in clubs such as Model United Nations, I became inspired to one day become a leader and politician. The deep desire to guide others and represent their interests I gained from observing my brother “was a kind of fighting that would not let me sleep” (Shakespeare 5.2.4). Desperate to fulfill my dreams, I sought for different opportunities and clubs where I could demonstrate leadership skills and communicate with others in a diplomatic setting.

Following my brother’s footsteps, I joined Model United Nations. From discussing solutions for overcoming gender bias in the workplace to introducing amendments to resolutions on economic recovery in war-torn countries, I have been able to stimulate conducting negotiations with other leaders and become more aware of global affairs. Through this club, I have gained more knowledge about the inner workings of government and the process of forming legislation. This experience allowed me to further develop my interest in becoming a politician and helped prepare me for a lifestyle in law surrounded by individuals of diverse backgrounds and ideologies.

Becoming a government official would allow me to fulfill my desire of guiding and helping my community at a larger scale. With my knowledge of governmental processes and world affairs, I seek to promote others’ interests and foster a peaceful environment. By actively listening to citizens’ perspectives, I will be open to ideas and “will try” to implement any plausible solutions (Shakespeare 2.2.159). When issues and “strange eruptions [threaten] our state,” I would act efficiently to counteract any inequality or violence (Shakespeare 1.1.68). Holding such power and authority is a great liability, but I truly believe I am a “faithful and honourable” individual ready to take on that responsibility (Shakespeare 2.2.121). Being able to accurately represent citizens’ interests and rights is at the forefront of a dynamic, successful nation.

With this ambitious aspiration, I plan on attending university to major in political science to further broaden my knowledge about government, law, and political processes. To accomplish this goal, I do not envision a better school other than Harvard University. The many research centers and institutions offered at Harvard will allow me to interact with government scholars and receive different perspectives on the many approaches to politics. Through joining Harvard’s Intercollegiate Model United Nations, I can continue my involvement in stimulated international negotiations to further develop my experience in diplomacy. In addition to the wide array educational opportunities, the diverse faculty and students with varying ideologies will expose me to a range of cultural interests and beliefs.

Lastly, the college’s simple but powerful motto, “veritas,” aligns with the foundation of a politician’s career—truth. In an occupation such as a politician, openness and sincerity is necessary to represent the needs of civilians. By becoming a student at Harvard University, I would be one step closer to achieving the feat to serve citizens with respect, empathy, and truth.
To “Bee” a Champion

Harsh white lights shone onstage. Cameras focused, broadcasting the moment to the world. I already asked for everything that could help me: origin, definition, part of speech, even a sentence. Looking down, I saw I was running out of time. The word was derived from Latin, which meant there should not be any k’s, and the /s/ sound could be spelled with sc. Trying to be calm and confident, I began to spell the word.

“A-C-C-R-…”

Through participating in various spelling bees in middle school, I learned prefixes, suffixes, root words, and different language patterns. Using my colossal copy of the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*, I tirelessly studied and familiarized myself with infinite combinations of letters. Words are multifaceted, each combination creating a different meaning. Just like words, I have unique and complex qualities that define who I am.

Assiduous /əˈsijoʊəs/ (adjective): “showing great care, attention, and effort: marked by careful unremitting attention or persistent application.” Rereading my essay about feminism during the Jazz Age at least twice before submitting, I wanted to ensure there were no grammatical mistakes and that I was pleased with my writing. I recognize that this trait may be a weakness perceivable as perfectionism; however, my main desire is to represent myself authentically and release quality work rather than being perfect.

Aesthetic /es-ˈthe-tik/ (adjective): “responsive to or appreciative of what is pleasurable to the senses.” From a Disney-singing toddler to a high school theater performer, my adoration for the arts has flourished. Creative and artistic activities such as playing instruments, performing, or sketching helped me to develop an original voice to express myself and my ideas.

Amicable /ˈa-mi-kə-bəl/ (adjective): “characterized by friendly goodwill: peaceable.” Like the Latin root amic meaning friend, creating friendships and connections with others is an important personal value. Establishing relationships through social interactions allows me to learn about different perspectives, keeping me open-minded and adaptable.

Activist /ˈak-ti-vist/ (noun): “a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.” Environmental issues, racial injustice, and gender inequality have been hot topics, causing invigorating debates and fueling different movements against discrimination. Through speaking out against bigotry and educating myself and others, I advocate for the equality of all and hope to foster a safe, diverse community not only on campus, but for the world.

Omnipapillous /äm-nē-pa-pē-əs/ (adjective): one who undergoes a metamorphosis in all aspects of themselves, driven to continually search for new discoveries and endeavors. In this word of my own creation, the Latin prefix omni-, meaning “all;” the rootpapill from the French wordpapillon, meaning “butterfly;” and the French suffix ous, meaning “full of,” create a word that encompasses my identity. Similar to a butterfly’s metamorphosis, I have transformed and continue to evolve into a more educated version of myself, ready to keep growing.

“...E-S-C-E-N-T.”
As I finished, I heard the shuttering of cameras capturing the tension in my body.

“That is correct.”

Reflecting on those memories, I remember the meaning of my word. Accrescent /-sᵊnt, ˈaˌk-/ is defined as “growing continuously.” Throughout my life, I have embarked on different journeys that have taken me to the acme of success or the abyss of doubt. On these adventures, I have acquired knowledge that will guide me to the future: my own words. Discovering new roots and derivations, I will continue to formulate more words that define who I am and who I want to become.
Calamitous Consequences from Obedience and Vengeance

Some individuals believe that Hamlet’s five-part structure progresses through the character of the ghost and the complications due to his command for obedience; however, the foiling of Shakespeare’s characters better conveys the calamitous effect of mislead obedience and a desire for vengeance through Gertrude and Ophelia’s, as well as Claudius and Hamlet’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the evidently destined resolution of these foiled characters.

The foiling of Gertrude and Ophelia reveal the disastrous conflict between misplaced obedience and individuality. At their introductions, both Ophelia and Gertrude follow their male authoritative figures, Claudius and Polonius, and “shall obey” their orders (Shakespeare 1.3.136). They blindly follow Claudius and Polonius’ commands and do not stray to share their own opinions and interests. Regardless of how controlling and restricting the men’s orders are, Gertrude and Ophelia never fault on complying. Gertrude allows Claudius to influence her judgement of Hamlet by permitting him to perform many tests to gauge Hamlet’s sanity, which in turn leaves Gertrude no room to think things for herself. Her gullible compliance with her new husband leads her to rely on Claudius and become incapable of understanding her son’s perspective. Meanwhile, Ophelia obeys her father’s orders to “…repel [Hamlet’s] letters and den[y] / his access to [her],” limiting her freedom of choice (Shakespeare 2.1.109-110). Ophelia carries herself as a docile woman, not making any extreme decisions. She tolerates orders from men of respectable authority, such as her father, and obeys their conditions despite her own feelings. Together, these women exemplify true subservience and obedience. The foiling of these characters convey the consequence of loss of individuality due to strict obedience and subservience.

Furthermore, the foiling of Claudius and Hamlet display the drastic measures to which one will go to achieve vengeance fueled by personal desires. Although they are contrasting enemies, both Claudius and Hamlet share a deep commitment to seek revenge and go through extensive schemes to fulfill their desires; however, their motives for vengeance differ. Hamlet’s desire for revenge roots in the deep obedience to his father’s wish to “…revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (Shakespeare 1.5.25). Driven mad by the ghost of his father, Hamlet’s focus of killing Claudius compromises his judgement, making him act irrationally. At Claudius’ introduction, he does not have a very strong feeling of resentment or a deeply rooted need for revenge against Hamlet. In contrast, Claudius’ main motive at this point in the play is to prevent any additional damage Hamlet may make on his custom-made life. Unlike Hamlet’s familial obligation for revenge, Claudius’ motivation stems from his selfish, greedy desire to keep the lavish life he steals from Hamlet’s father. The foiling of Hamlet and Claudius reveal that no matter if the intent is noble or selfish, acts of vengeance can be driven too far.

To intensify the story, Shakespeare amazingly writes shifts in each character’s personality and behavior at their separate climaxes. At Gertrude’s climax, she shifts and pledges her allegiance to Hamlet. Following Hamlet’s condemnation of his mother’s sins, Gertrude listens to his requests and propositions. After never ceasing to obey any of her husband’s wishes, Gertrude promises to listen to her son’s orders to stop sleeping with and taking orders from Claudius. Gertrude’s change in alliance asserts that one can be blind in their obedience to another individual and become oblivious to their actions due to a lack of solid judgment or control over their emotions.

At Ophelia’s climax, she transforms from the meek woman shown in her introduction to become completely irrational. While at her introduction she would not commit extreme deeds and would only follow her fathers orders, following Polonius’ death, Ophelia crazily traipses across the kingdom wailing and condemning Hamlet. Her change in behavior reveals that no matter how obedient one can be toward reliable individuals with good intentions, outcomes of their compliance can still be disastrous and out of their favor.

Meanwhile, at Hamlet’s climax, he becomes more violent and committed to his desire for vengeance. At the peak of the play when he murders Polonius, Hamlet cements his plan of killing Claudius for his father’s sake and becomes
“revengeful / [and] ambitious” (Shakespeare 3.1.123-124). His desire for revenge escalates further due to the increasingly high stakes of the situation he put himself in. Hamlet goes through extensive consequences, not worrying about his own reputation, just to avenge his father’s death. Hamlet’s intensified hunger for vengeance expresses the extreme measures one would endure due to the deep reverence and feeling of obligation one has for family.

Claudius’ climax comes at his discovery of Polonius’ death. Claudius’ thirst for revenge against Hamlet intensifies after Polonius’s murder, as he becomes more certain about Hamlet’s goal to kill him and ruin his handcrafted life. At this threat to his ideal lifestyle, Claudius sends Hamlet to England and plots to kill him. He continues on to connive with Laertes and works with him to carry out his plan to kill Hamlet, claiming that “...revenge should have no bounds” (Shakespeare 4.7.128). Having enough of Hamlet’s tricks, Claudius persuades Laertes that Hamlet is responsible for Polonius’ murder and tests Laertes’ loyalty and love for his father. Claudius manipulates Laertes through his desire to avenge Polonius’ death and sneakily leads Laertes to kill Hamlet for him. Claudius’ shift toward a more intense, drastic way to deal with Hamlet’s outbursts reveals how greed and selfishness can cloud all reason and cause an individual to seek vengeance when someone attempts to ruin their assets.

Shakespeare excellently concludes his play by punishing the characters at their resolutions for their sins and misdeeds. Ophelia and Gertrude’s demise come when they break their ties to obedience. Following Ophelia’s irrational behavior in the kingdom, she distributes flowers to those in the village as a farewell and later “[falls] in the weeping brook” (Shakespeare 4.7.171). Ophelia’s life is one marked by strict obedience to others; it is fitting that her demise is due to a decision she makes on her own. Like Ophelia, Gertrude’s life is characterized by her constant compliance with Claudius’ wishes. Her life culminates with her decision to defy Claudius’ command to not drink from the poisoned cup. The deaths of Ophelia and Gertrude express the disastrous conflict between obedience and breaking it to have one’s own voice and judgement.

Both Claudius and Hamlet’s resolutions also include punishments for their extreme deeds. In his final attempt to kill Hamlet, Claudius prepares both a poisoned cup of wine and a poisoned blade. His plan to kill Hamlet ultimately succeeds when Laertes scrapes Hamlet with the poisoned blade during their duel. However, at the discovery of Laertes’ pact with Claudius, Hamlet retaliates and stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink the tainted wine. Although both men succeed in their plots to kill each other, neither of them survive and they also cause other deaths in the process. The resolutions of Claudius and Hamlet express that committed acts of vengeance may succeed, but at extreme costs.

Although Shakespeare’s well crafted five-part structure notably calls attention to the devastating impact of misplaced obedience and vengeance, the foiling of Hamlet’s characters—such as Ophelia and Gertrude, as well as Hamlet and Claudius—at their introductions, climaxes, and resolution better reveals the true tragedy of the play. Through each character foil, Hamlet incredibly captures the conflict between misplaced obedience and breaking free to make one’s own decisions, while also signifying the terrible consequences of extreme deeds for vengeance.
All For One and One for All

"All For One"

W
H
A
M!

the iron fist
came down
with a slam.

No love or mercy is
seen from the all-mighty
tyrant Queen. The elite laugh
from their littering, pristine pillars at the
impoverished, who shuffle for scraps from their
litter. Watch and see the malice and polarization
in such an un-united nation! The Queen and her
administration create self-serving legislation
causing segregation among the population. It is a
free-for-all fight to defend what should be
regular human rights. There’s no communion,
no offering of a helping hand—none
in a society where everything
is all for one.

"One For All"

Respect.  Anity.
Shaking hands,  smiling faces,
a leader who understands,  helping all the places
they come across, no matter the background or culture.
Community and cooperation is the forefront of the nation.
Justice, equality, peace are apparent in such a country where
love is inherent. When issues arise, our leader never defies
to listen to their citizens, their supporters, their guide.
Diversity, inclusion, and tolerance are encouraged for
an environment of innovation, where all ideas are
valid and put into consideration. Regardless of
a person’s class, gender, or sexual identity,
our leader welcomes and accepts them
as part of our community. No
matter what may befall,
we will foster harmony
— a world that
is one for all.
Make America Sane Again

"Make America Sane Again"

Trump vowed to make the country great again
He made the U.S. flourish for all businessmen
Under him the country became number one,
Yet, we are number one in all but none!

He’s all talk, oh Trump’s all talk
The whole country was a laughing stock
For his foolishness around the clock
He told the people that the virus was a fake,
Kept us open for the economy’s sake,
But now in terms of cases we are number one,
Our number of cases can’t be outdone!

He’s all talk, oh Trump’s all talk
The whole country was a laughing stock
For his foolishness around the clock
He believes guns are worth more than lives
To him, it doesn’t matter who survives
As long as he’s protecting Amendment Two,
He couldn’t care less what will ensue!

He’s all talk, oh Trump’s all talk
The whole country was a laughing stock
For his foolishness around the clock
With May came the rise of peaceful protest
Started by a black man strangled during arrest
Instead of finding ways for change and reform,
Trump stayed in a bunker, away from the swarm!

He’s all talk, oh Trump’s all talk
The whole country was a laughing stock
For his foolishness around the clock
Next was the election on November 3
Trump thought he knew what the results would be
But once Joe Biden took the lead,
The president stubbornly refused to concede!

He’s all talk, oh Trump’s all talk
The whole country was a laughing stock
For his foolishness around the clock
Oh, he’s such a laughing stock
Oh, he’s such a laughing stock
Oh, he’s such a laughing stock
Oh, he’s such a laughing stock
Oh, he’s such a laughing stock
Consequences of Being a Woman in a Patriarchal Society

Throughout history, women have held an inferior role in society. A female was deemed fragile, domestic, and nowhere near as intelligent as a male. This subordinate attitude toward women became normalized in societal culture. Eventually, women began to rise up against social injustices and fight for their rights—leading to the rise of the feminist movement. In the novel, *Ragtime*, Doctorow introduces the theme of feminism, reinforcing the victimization and oppression women experience to emphasize the toxicity of patriarchal society and culture.

Patriarchal culture has been ingrained in society for centuries: “Patriarchy originated in sedentary social structures that formalized male ownership and inheritance” (Ananthaswamy and Douglas). This culture arose due to the development of agriculture and patrilocal residence. Before those two developments, humans were hunter-gatherers and egalitarianism was built into where a family resided. However, when humans moved away from a nomadic lifestyle, families started to settle down. Different generations of males in a family would live close to each other and pass down property through the male line. Power shifted to physically stronger males. Through this shift of authority and male inheritance, “female autonomy eroded and patriarchy emerged” (Ananthaswamy and Douglas). Thus, patriarchy became normalized as the standard for human organization and living. Moreover, with the creation of patriarchy, gender roles emerged. Due to male authority, men were deemed as powerful, strong, and bold; women were stereotyped to be submissive, feminine, and fragile. These gender constructs caused society to view females as inferior to men, fostering an imbalance in gender equality.

*Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow discusses society’s attitude toward female oppression and stereotypes during the Progressive Era. Many of the same beliefs about women from primal times continued to be manifested in society during the time period in *Ragtime*. According to research done by Williams and Bennett at the University of Missouri, American history textbooks represent women in the Progressive Era in ways that fit according to a patriarchal view. Their research shows that “women typically were depicted as wives, nurses, and domesticated figures, or in ways representing patriarchal definitions of importance” (Bennett and Williams 125). This depiction of women is widely accepted due to gender schemas, which “develop during childhood and lead to development of an understanding about what it means to be male or female. Gender schemas influence how both men and women perceive themselves in relation to their own roles and the roles of others” (Bennett and Williams 125). Early twentieth century’s patriarchal culture fostered beliefs of women inferiority and “led to negative perceptions of women’s competency,” leading to the normalization of sexualization and objectification of women (Bennett and Williams 125).

One particular instance of the victimization of a woman in *Ragtime* is the sexual assault Mameh experiences. In order to support her suffering family, Mameh endures sexual abuse from her employer. “He [the employer] counted out the money, adding a dollar more than she [Mameh] deserved...because she was such a good looking woman. He smiled. He touched Mameh’s breast” (Doctorow 188). Mameh’s employer finds no wrong in his actions and continues to assault her: “She became accustomed to the hands of her employer...He kissed her face and tasted the salt of her tears” (Doctorow 188). Mameh does not desire to be sexually assaulted. She continues to undergo the sexual assault from her boss to ensure her family’s security in their adverse economic conditions. Rather than recognizing the self-sacrifice Mameh endures for her family, other male characters—including her husband—see her actions as “moral degeneracy” (Doctorow 188). Tateh drives his wife from their home and leaves her to live a worse fate of prostitution and vagrancy (Doctorow 454). Tateh’s action of casting his wife to the streets reinforces Doctorow’s focus on the injustice of victimization toward those exploited.

Doctorow further explores female victimization through Evelyn Nesbit, who is also a sexual abuse victim. Nesbit is abused at the hands of two men, Harry K. Thaw and Stanford White. When Nesbit was fifteen, she was drugged and raped by White. In order to stop White from having his way with Nesbit again, Thaw pays Nesbit’s mother to
take Nesbit to Germany to rape her. Later on, when Nesbit visits Thaw in jail, Thaw “demanded proof of her devotion” and forced her to give him a fellatio (Doctorow 273). Both White and Thaw take advantage of Nesbit to have their sexual needs fulfilled. These men do not recognize Nesbit as another human being. She is a body. Nesbit is accustomed to being abused. She becomes blasé toward the pure love she receives from Mother’s Younger Brother and leaves him because “she want[s] someone who would treat her badly and whom she could treat badly” (Doctorow 934). She normalizes abuse and yearns to be used by men. Nesbit’s mindset exemplifies the consequences and damage from patriarchal violence. Patriarchal oppression may cause women to suffer from mental health issues: “Depression is one of the most common disorders that are strongly associated with gender roles and expectations” (The News Minute). Gender roles fostered in patriarchal societies cause insecurities, anxiety, and damage mental and emotional health. The toxicity of gender expectations in patriarchal societies puts pressure on women to achieve a certain appearance and disposition.

Evelyn Nesbit is also an example of the objectification of the female body. She is painted to be “the first sex goddess in American history” and “the inspiration for the concept of the movie star system” (Doctorow 878). Nesbit’s face is used to advertise and sell merchandise. Her appeal is her visage. She is the basis for “the business of sexualized publicity that presents the female body as [a] passive object of the male gaze and as a commodified product that can be sold and bought” (San Miguel 106). Westkaemper develops the theory of advertising according to women’s standard of beauty during the early 1900s. “[Beauty product] promotions emphasized women’s eternal devotion to their appearance and to pleasing men...celebrating adherence...to strict standards of femininity” (Westkaemper 40). Early twentieth century media sexualized women, portraying that their sole purpose is to seduce a man. The portrayal of women in the media thus adds to the social acceptance of the sexualized view of women. Through the sexualization of Evelyn Nesbit, Doctorow examines the social expectations and objectification of women during the early 1900s.

While many women still suffered from social injustices during the Progressive Era, it was also a period marked by great reform for women. One of the most active representations of feminism in Ragtime is Emma Goldman. Goldman was “a Russian-Jewish immigrant...Her early experiences working in a clothing factory in Rochester, New York, soon turned her into a critic of the capitalist system” (Sanders 12). Goldman speaks at rallies about women’s rights and social issues, at which she vocalizes her dissent with gender roles and social limitations: “Women may not vote, they may not love whom they want, they may not develop their minds and their spirits, they may not commit their lives to the spiritual adventure of life, comrades, they may not. And why? Is our genius only in our wombs?” (Doctorow 564). Goldman expresses the role of a woman in the early twentieth century as a system for sexual reproduction. She “helped to build a bridge from immigrant radicalism to a native American tradition of dissent” serving as a feminist icon twentieth century women could look up to (Sanders 14). Emma Goldman serves as a solid representation of feminist reform in Ragtime, exhibiting Doctorow’s underlying support for feminist interests.

Doctorow includes characters such as Mameh, Evelyn Nesbit, and Emma Goldman in his novel to establish his concern for feminism and female oppression. Through the circumstances these female characters endure, Doctorow reveals the dysfunctional nature of patriarchy. The oppressive essence of patriarchy configures societal norms, forming a selective mold in which both women and men are expected to fit. These expectations are not only limited to the past, as certain expectations continue to be accepted and manifested in modern culture such as through the concept of toxic masculinity. Women are men’s equal counterparts; no gender is inferior to the other. It is only due to society’s acceptance and maintenance of gender roles that gender inequality exists. Only by destroying the harboring of social constructs will both men and women be equal in the eyes of society.
Dear Brown University,

Allow me to introduce myself. I am a scholar. Which scholar, you may ask? The scholar Nicholas of Oxford, of course! As you may already know due to my world-famous reputation (in the Canterbury Tales, obviously), the arts and sciences are my passion. I’m always looking for something new to interest me, and lately that something has been astrology. While some may denounce astrology as a fake social media trend, I have found it to be quite an advantageous skill. After all, I used it as part of my ploy to win over the girl of my dreams! The next girl of my dreams that I want to win over is you, Brown University. We’re perfect for each other. I mean, I even share the same first name as the namesake of your fine institution. I don’t have to take any core classes, so I am free to explore my interests. One day, I can take an astronomy course, while the next, I can take an engineering course (I hope to learn how to build a bathtub). Brown will allow me to explore who I truly am, without fears of repercussion.

Strangers have branded me as “too feminine,” and have publicly written that one of the most embarrassing moments of my life proves this assumption. At Brown, I can see if this assumption is indeed reality because of the open and accepting nature of the student body. Providence is the home of Brown, and it allows for ample opportunities to explore both urban and rural areas, due to its strategic location. For me, it is important that I am comfortable wherever I live and that it is comparable to where I am from. My hometown of Oxford is of similar size and fame to Providence, so I already know that I will immediately feel at home in Rhode Island. Most importantly, I will be able to afford a Brown education. My parents are not in the picture, and I have to support myself. I am currently renting out a room from a carpenter and his (if I do say so myself) gorgeous young wife. Whenever he introduces me to other people, ‘poor’ is one of the first words out of his mouth! It is humiliating. In contrast, at Brown, I would not have to suffer from this humiliation. Thanks to the need-blind admissions and generous financial aid, I will be able to get a Brown education without worrying about the effect it would have on my finances. So you see, we truly are perfect for each other! I am driven and curious, and you reward those who exhibit curiosity and drive. I want to be in a place where I am comfortable, and you have a welcoming student body in one of the nicest towns in America. I want to discover, preserve, and communicate knowledge, and you are the perfect place for me to do that - it is your literal mission statement. I truly hope to hear back from you, darling. I expect nothing less than good news. Yours sincerely,

Nicholas
PAYCOM, we are having a medical anomaly.

I looked up from my mission handbook and flipped my microphone on. “Roger that, Ouranos. Please describe.” I wrote down the symptoms as they came through my headset: dizziness, nausea, and trouble seeing. Pushing back my chair, I went to the other side of Mission Control to grab the binder for medical anomalies. Leafing through the pages, I looked for one that matched most of the symptoms I had written down. “Try two of the red medicines.” Silence. I watched on the screen in front as the scene inside the station played out.

“Anything else we can try? That didn’t work,” he responded.

I sighed and turned back to leafing through the binder. This time, I made sure to be much more accurate in my choice of antidote. My finger finally rested on the word “migraine.” “Try three of the green medicines.” The scene repeated. But this time, I got good news back.

“Resuming normal activity.”

“Great. And you’d better, we’re already behind schedule.” I returned to my mission binder to resume the botanical experiment. As the payload communicator (PAYCOM), I was the person in Mission Control who was responsible for talking to the Ouranos crew on Phobos, a moon of Mars (the acronyms get easier, I promise). I was responsible for handling on-station operations. Which we were behind on. I refocused my thoughts on the binder and made a friendly reminder over the intercom. “Environmental specialists, you need to finish adding water to the experimental group.” I looked at the screen, but instead of a thumbs up, the entire crew was gathered where the medical anomaly had been. Uh oh. “Um, crew? Everything good?”

“Not really,” the chief medical officer laughed. “The other crew members wanted to sample the medicine from before.”

I grimaced. The medicine was M&M’s, but still. “How many other crew members sampled it?”

“Everyone but me.”

Not. Good. The entire crew, save for the CMO, had overdosed on medicine. Astronauts are surprisingly good actors, so they all began to act out the effects of their overdose.

“PAYCOM? I think someone died.”

I made my displeasure known in Croatian. “Try to revive them. Make sure the rest of the crew doesn’t damage anything. I’ll find an antidote.” Failure was not an option described in the camp brochure.

I turned around to grab the medical binder (again), but my mission operations director was already holding it out for me. Thanking him, I grabbed it and turned around. Overdose… there. “CMO, give everyone four yellow M&M’s. And get back to work, we are really behind schedule now.”
“Copy that. Oh, and that person was actually just passed out.”

I heaved a sigh of relief. “Roger that.” I hadn’t failed Gene Kranz! I watched on the screen as the M&M’s were passed out to the crew’s delight and they returned to work.

Despite my failures, I learned so much from being in Mission Control. The importance of both leadership and teamwork, which I practice as the captain of my school’s Varsity Quiz team. The importance of accepting help, which I practiced during my college aerospace engineering course. The importance of staying calm under pressure, which I practice during my AP exams. The importance of accepting failure, which, as a straight-A student, I have always refused to practice. But when failure came unexpectedly through my headset, I had no choice but to confront it. Together, these lessons have prepared me for life in a drastically changed world. Advanced Space Academy gave me the right stuff, both figuratively (how to stay cool under pressure) and literally (an award called “The Right Stuff Award”). When problems arise in the future, I won’t be afraid. I’ll look them in the eye and plan my next move, of what I need to do to help move the mission forward. All I have to do now is put on my headset and jump into the action.
Obedience and Vengeance in Hamlet

Obedience is a virtue. However, with obedience can come pain, and with pain comes a desire for vengeance. Two of the major parental figures in Hamlet, Polonius and the elder Hamlet, demand obedience from their children. Unfortunately, this obedience leads to death and destruction. With those affected still pledging obedience to those who were killed by Hamlet's obedience to his father's desire for vengeance, they too have no choice but to seek vengeance as well. Shakespeare shows that while some may see obedience as a virtue, it can lead to catastrophic results. Some readers believe that Hamlet's five-part structure helps to develop both the character of the ghost and the complications created by his demands of obedience; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare's paired characters often instead reveals more clearly the disastrous effects of the misplaced obedience caused by a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Laertes', as well as Gertrude and Ophelia's, first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

Hamlet and Laertes are both obedient to those who have called on them to carry out their vengeance. The two characters are first foiled in Act 1, with the comparison of their responses to their parental figure asking for obedience. Laertes only returned to France for school after receiving permission from his father, along with the king. When Hamlet is asked by his mother, Gertrude, and the new king, Claudius, not to return to Wittenberg, he grudgingly agrees to obey, and only when his mother begs him to. The two are foiled based on their drastically different responses: Laertes readily obeyed his father, while Hamlet reluctantly obeyed his mother. This foiling conveys a lesson on obedience in that those who obey their parents are more likely to be happier. Laertes easily has his wishes fulfilled thanks to his obedience, while Hamlet goes so far as to wish that "the Everlasting had not fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (1.2.131-132). This quote, in which Hamlet wishes that suicide was not a sin, is part of a larger paragraph in which Hamlet is lamenting his position in life and what has become of his parents. The quote allows for the audience to first grasp the beginnings of Hamlet's apparent descent into madness. Hamlet is losing his obedience to his own life, which has a clearly negative impact on him. His refusal to recognize what his parents have become, and his subsequent failure to become obedient to them, helps to contribute to this. Thus, the initial foiling of the characters of Hamlet and Laertes gives the audience a lesson on the importance of obedience to one's parents and the potential consequences of the failure to do so.

Similarly, Gertrude and Ophelia are also foiled by their relationship with the title character Hamlet. Gertrude is the mother of Hamlet, while Ophelia is the love of Hamlet. The two characters are also foiled in Act 1, as their individual relationships with Hamlet are scrutinized. Gertrude is the only parent that Hamlet shows any obedience to. Although he is disgusted by her marriage to Claudius, he still stays obedient to her. With Ophelia, the only other significant female character in the play, Hamlet shows varying levels of obedience, usually depending on his mood. Ophelia, however, always shows him the same level of courtesy and respect, out of obedience to her father. When Laertes, her brother, tells her to stay away from Hamlet, Ophelia does her best to obey. Hamlet is never able to obey his heart enough to take his relationship with Ophelia to where he would like it to be. When he tells her that he does not love her, Ophelia simply responds that “[she] was … deceived” (3.1.120). Ophelia realizes that her best path forward is to obey her father, which gives this quote a negative impact on her. This forced confession starts Ophelia, as well as Hamlet, on the path to insanity. Thus, the two women are foiled based on the levels of obedience they receive from Hamlet: high with Gertrude and varying with Ophelia. This foiling conveys a lesson on obedience in that, if one is obedient to one's heart as well as one's parents, they will be happier. If the two conflict, one must follow their heart. While Hamlet was obedient to his mother, he was unable to stay obedient to his heart and follow his wishes to be with Ophelia. Ophelia's obedience to her father and his commands to stay away from Hamlet led her to lose her sanity, ultimately drowning in a river. Neither character was able to be happy, because they did not follow their heart. They only followed the wishes of their parent. Thus, the initial foiling of Gertrude and Ophelia symbolizes the consequences of failing to follow one's heart for the audience.
The climax for the character of Hamlet arrives when he kills Polonius, the father of his foil, Laertes. In this moment, Hamlet finally decides to take action, instead of continuing with the indecisiveness he had shown throughout the play. He decides to follow through with his obedience to his father, by carrying out his father’s vengeance against his supposed murderer, Claudius. Hamlet assumes that the man hiding behind the curtain is Claudius, but he has actually murdered Polonius instead. He took out his vengeance against the wrong man. When his mother shrieks in horror at what he has done, Hamlet tries to call out Gertrude for her own wrongdoings. He blows off the murder he has just committed, saying that it is “almost as bad… as kill a king and marry with his brother” (3.4.29-30). His statement serves to show how Hamlet feels no remorse over his crime, and instead tries to blame his mother for giving him the motive to commit it. The quote shows both obedience and vengeance, as Hamlet is trying to be obedient to his father’s orders to carry out his vengeance. Once again, there is a negative impact, as this scene convinces Gertrude to tell Claudius that Hamlet has gone completely mad, which helps to seal the fates of these main characters at the conclusion of the play. The lesson here in obedience is that it is not always right to be obedient, as blindly following one’s orders of obedience can lead to fatal mistakes. Additionally, if this occurs, one will become a target for the victim’s vengeance. After his father’s death, Laertes begins to target Hamlet, which eventually leads to their fatal duel. The lesson here in vengeance is that while it may bring satisfaction, it may also be the last thing one ever feels. At Hamlet’s climax, the audience and Hamlet learn that obedience to one can lead to vengeance from others, and vengeance can quickly and easily bring death.

The climax for the character of Gertrude arrives during her confrontation with Hamlet after he has killed Polonius. Before the confrontation, she had been working with Polonius so that the two of them could discover what had been causing Hamlet’s erratic behavior. However, after Hamlet slays Polonius, she is forced to listen to his attacks on her character. She is so hurt by his attacks and apparent madness that she tells him that he has “cleft [her] heart in twain” (3.4.158). Gertrude knows that her heart now has two sides to it: a side dedicated to Hamlet and a side dedicated to Claudius. The quote is negative, as her pain is evident. After this point, she must choose to whom her loyalty and obedience lie: her husband or her son. In the end, she decides to split her obediences. This is obvious during the final duel, as Gertrude tries to look out for her son and refuses to obey her husband’s order to not drink from the poisoned goblet. The lesson here in obedience is that one’s obedience can quickly change to whom our obedience lies. In the case of Laertes, the only obedience he had left was not to his physical family, but to the memories of his family. To Claudius, as they begin to plot the death of Hamlet, he pledges that his “revenge will come” (4.7.29). He will be obedient to his desire for vengeance, creating a mixed outcome, as the audience can understand his motives while simultaneously still understanding that they are intrinsically flawed. The lesson here in vengeance is that once one pledges obedience to vengeance, vengeance can quickly overpower and consume them. Laertes was so consumed with his desire of vengeance against Hamlet that he went so far as to collude with Claudius to ensure that Hamlet would be killed. In the end, not only was Hamlet killed, but so were Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes himself. One should not pledge obedience to vengeance, as vengeance will have no obedience towards keeping them alive to see their vengeance through.

The climax for the character of Laertes arrives during the funeral of his sister, Ophelia. By this point, he has already lost his father and his sister. The losses of both can be attributed in some way, either directly or indirectly, to Hamlet. With his obedience to his family shattered, Laertes pledges obedience to the one thing he still can pledge loyalty to: vengeance. Laertes had no control over these events, as he was away in France. Yet, out of obedience to his family, he vows vengeance. The lesson here in obedience is that one cannot always control their obedience, as external events can quickly change to whom our obedience lies. In the case of Laertes, the only obedience he had left was not to his physical family, but to the memories of his family. To Claudius, as they begin to plot the death of Hamlet, he pledges that his “revenge will come” (4.7.29). He will be obedient to his desire for vengeance, creating a mixed outcome, as the audience can understand his motives while simultaneously still understanding that they are intrinsically flawed. The lesson here in vengeance is that once one pledges obedience to vengeance, vengeance can quickly overpower and consume them. Laertes was so consumed with his desire of vengeance against Hamlet that he went so far as to collude with Claudius to ensure that Hamlet would be killed. In the end, not only was Hamlet killed, but so were Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes himself. One should not pledge obedience to vengeance, as vengeance will have no obedience towards keeping them alive to see their vengeance through.
doubtful” (5.1.201). This statement is often interpreted to mean that her death was a suicide, as she made no effort to rescue herself. The quote shows that she had no obedience left to anyone - a truly negative thought. She truly lost all hope for existence after losing those she loved. The lesson here in vengeance is that it can, once again, easily consume someone once they have committed themselves to it. Laertes, after losing his entire family to Hamlet, vows his revenge, going so far as to plot with Claudius. However, during their duel, Laertes himself is struck down by the poisoned blade meant for Hamlet. Although Hamlet is later killed as well, it is only after Laertes has died. Thus, in his quest to get vengeance on behalf of his sister, Laertes found himself killed and unable to completely see it through. While vengeance may seem like the best course of action, it can often easily have fatal consequences that affect not just one, but all.

During their resolution, Hamlet and Laertes learn the lesson that while obedience may demand vengeance, vengeance can easily consume all and make obedience worthless. The resolution for these two characters arrives during the final moments of their duel, as Laertes is dying. At this moment, Laertes is given a choice. He can be obedient to his desire of vengeance and kill Hamlet before he dies, or allow for Hamlet to stay obedient to his desire of vengeance by revealing the truth. Laertes chooses the latter. He alerts Hamlet that “the king’s to blame” (5.2.316). Laertes switches his obedience to Hamlet. Because of this dying deed, Hamlet is able to stab and kill Claudius. He stays obedient to the desires of vengeance of both his father and himself. However, this obedience costs him his life as well. Hamlet stays alive long enough to ask Horatio to be obedient to him and tell his story. The lesson here in obedience and vengeance is, as previously stated, that while obedience may demand vengeance, vengeance can easily consume all and make obedience worthless. In their obedience undertaking their respective quests for vengeance, Hamlet and Laertes were able to achieve their vengeance, albeit at the cost of their own lives. Vengeance truly consumed them. The climax serves as a warning to the audience, as a desire for vengeance will lead only to great peril.

In contrast, the resolution for Gertrude and Ophelia arrives at the final duel, but the effects and lesson in the true worth of obedience that they learn must be learned separately, as one is already dead when the duel begins. Ophelia has already been buried by the start of the duel, and the fight that takes place at her funeral is one of the catalysts for the duel. She has already learned that if one loses obedience to all others, they will lose their obedience to themselves as well. Gertrude, however, has not yet completed her lesson on obedience. As Ophelia’s brother and lover engage in the duel, they are both trying to get their vengeance in some way or another. As the duel progresses, Gertrude observes but does not intervene. She decides to take a drink from the prepared goblet, and directly disobey her husband when he tells her not to drink from it. She asks him to forgive her disobedience, with a simple “pray [Claudius], pardon [her]” (5.2.287). Despite her disobedience, she believes that it shall have no great consequence. While her failure to be obedient to her husband is obvious, the positivity in her quote is impossible to ignore. Unbeknownst to her, the goblet is poisoned. Her failure in obedience caused her death. Hamlet avenges her death by killing Claudius, after being alerted by the dying Laertes that the king had been the mastermind behind the entire plot. The lesson here in obedience is that it can easily destroy someone, whether it is because they did not give their obedience to others or others did not give their obedience to them. Ophelia lost her life because she lost the obedience of her father and Hamlet. Gertrude lost her life because she did not give her obedience to Claudius. The lesson here in vengeance is that if others care enough about someone, they will get vengeance for that person. Laertes got vengeance for Ophelia by killing Hamlet. Hamlet got vengeance for Gertrude by killing Claudius. This vengeance, however, also cost Laertes and Hamlet their lives. Obedience and vengeance are closely related, and it is a balancing game to ensure that one does not consume too much of the other.

In William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the audience is taught many lessons on obedience and vengeance through the actions and foilings of the characters Hamlet, Laertes, Gertrude, and Ophelia. The audience is taught to stay obedient to themselves with Ophelia and to always know to whom one is obedient with Gertrude. Hamlet teaches the audience to not always blindly follow one’s orders of obedience, while Laertes teaches that outside events can quickly change one’s obedience. With obedience comes vengeance, just as it does in this play. Hamlet and Laertes teach the audience that vengeance can and often will consume those who seek it. Gertrude and Ophelia teach the audience that vengeance will often be attained on behalf of someone who needs it, if someone else cares enough about that person. The ultimate lesson is that vengeance and obedience complement each other extremely well, and it will be to one’s peril to not ensure that the two are kept in check. The cause of all of the desires for obedience and vengeance can be traced back to the ghost. Some readers believe that *Hamlet*’s five-part structure helps to develop both the character of the ghost and the complications created by his demands of obedience. This is due to the length of the play, which gives Shakespeare ample time to flesh out the story, these desires, and their consequences. Thus, the foilings of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often reveals the disastrous effects of the misplaced obedience caused by a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Laertes’, as well as Gertrude and Ophelia’s, first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.
The Duality of Success: “Good” and “Bad,” Respectively

Success is good, I think
   With success, you have the ability to create
   Influence minds just by choosing what words you say
   Never have to worry about finding food to put on your plate
   You can find success in anything, from school to work to ballet
   With enough of it, you can go to any school and graduate
You can choose to live wherever you like, on a mountain or by the bay
   If you’d like, you can even become a head of state!
You can travel anywhere, from Croatia to Norway
   If you have a private plane, there’s no need to wait!
   With success, every day can be filled with nothing but joy and play
   You could be beloved for your success, and known to them as a magnate
For you, every day will be your very own personal heyday
   There’s no need for you to be a cheapskate!
   With your success, you should help others, hey
   Giving donations to those in need can change their fate
   You can give that for which they pray
   With this success, your name will carry great weight
   With generosity, success can save the day!
   I think that success is good

Success is bad, I think
   With success, it all might seem great
   You have no worries, and all day you can play
   But is success really the best, or is it a sad fate?
   If you get too busy, you will miss many a birthday
   To your absence at events, family and friends will acclimate
Sure, you can live wherever you’d like, but why, if not to stay?
   You will only be at home on a certain date
   Most likely on another work trip in Taipei
   The kids will grow up without you, as time doesn’t wait
   If you work too hard to stay successful, you’ll need to buy a toupee
   If you work too hard to stay successful, you’ll never find your soulmate
   The stress will fill up like a personalized ashtray
   Oh, being a workaholic will become your defining trait
   People around you will say you have lost your way
   Not thinking of the money or time you could donate
   Since you’re stubborn, from this path you will not stray
   But do you think you will ever really reach home plate?
   With time, success can destroy the day!
   I think that success is bad
Maia Marshall  
Age: 17, Grade: 12  
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV  
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern  
Category: Poetry  

"Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" 2020 Remix  

They say the virus started in a marketplace  
But spreading, it soon got out of hand  
So they changed their tune, said, cover up your face  
They sang, as people got sick all over the land,  

“Ob la di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra  
La-la, how the life goes on  
Ob-la-di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra  
La-la, how the life goes on”  

People laid dying on the hospital floor  
A president acted like a king  
He tweeted at all hours, oh yes he swore  
That his government’s inaction meant not a thing  

“Ob la di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra  
La-la, how the life goes on  
Ob-la di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra  
La-la, how the life goes on”  

In a couple of months he’s destroyed  
Trumpian Rome  
And leaving all the people forever scarred  
They waited to throw their stones  

So the people lined up at their polling place  
Having waited four years for this stand  
With votes counted, it was clear who won the race  
Despite his claims of voter fraud across the land  

“Ob la di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra  
La-la, how the life goes on  
Ob-la di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra  
La-la, how the life goes on”  

Two months until 46, we’re left  
Alone to roam  
But against 45’s virus, we must guard  
Without some containment zones  

From governors, tweets go out for each new case  
But he stays silent, unlike his brand  
Not acknowledging that he’ll need a new place
Or giving his successor any sort of hand

“Ob la di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra
La-la, how the life goes on
Ob-la di, ob-la-da, life goes on, bra
La-la, how the life goes on”

And who we need is clear: Madam President, da!
AP United States Government and Politics, sixth period. My class. My first introduction to the class was on August 19. It seemed larger than my other classes, but I was joining through a Google Meet, so it was hard to tell. I sat through the class syllabus and wrote down my first page of notes. My teacher had said that since it was an election year, this class would become much more relevant for us, and we would be able to discuss developments in the race in real time. Interesting. Who knew that discussions in a small high school government class would pretty accurately reflect the discussions happening across the country? At the time, I didn’t, but I quickly found this to be the case after reflecting on the class after the election.

The discussions would happen at the beginning of every class. It seemed like every night, there was some breaking news story that had to do with the election and then had to be discussed in class. So discuss them we did. The first real discussion we had was on August 21, our second day of class. The Democratic National Convention had just wrapped up, so our teacher decided to focus our discussion around it. I thought that the discussion was fair and unbiased (as unbiased as something like this can be, at least). My other classmates, however, did not. They quickly made their views known, like how pathetic it was that the Democrats were too scared to gather in person for their convention. My teacher calmly explained that since there was a pandemic going on, they felt a virtual convention was the best way to safely involve as many people as they could. From behind my muted microphone, I groaned. I could tell that this was going to be a long year.

Those next two weeks were known as the “drop period.” A student could switch out of a class for any reason that they wanted. By the end of those two weeks, my government class was smaller and much, much quieter. Perhaps these students thought the class would be too difficult, perhaps they had assumed the political views of my teacher and did not want to listen to them, perhaps they did not want their view of politics to be changed with actual facts. I do not know. But what I do know is that my class got smaller and the discussions became friendlier with much less toxicity. At least, until the presidential debates.

I actually made it a point to watch the two presidential debates, as well as the vice presidential debate. I couldn’t even vote, so there was no real point in watching them, but I wanted to make sure I could keep up with the discussions about the debates in class. However, it turned out that I was only one of a handful who had actually watched the debates (which was disappointing, especially since we were in an Advanced Placement government class). Unfortunately, most of the people participating in these discussions were not part of that handful. They made sure to keep the discussion centered on the few edited talking points which they had seen on their social media. Although my teacher did a better job than Chris Wallace did at moderating the discussion, there were still a lot of things said that were just plain wrong. To me, they were even ludicrous! I was glad I was muted in the Meet, because I could find myself chuckling out of my disbelief. Biden had a microphone to help him with answers? Antifa was an organization that had a leader that could be contacted? Trump had easily won the debate? In my opinion, no one won the debate. But, as my teacher reminded us, the real winner would be decided on Election Day, which was rapidly approaching.

I spent the night of November 3rd periodically refreshing the incoming election results. That’s what happens when you’re the daughter of a political science major, after all. The next day, I logged into class and prepared for the discussion. I noticed that many of the voices who had been spewing falsehoods and inaccuracies during the election season were… quieter. To be honest, it was nice. However, I wasn’t sure how long this peace would last. It turns out, for quite a while. That Saturday, Joe Biden was projected to be the winner of the election by practically every
media outlet. We didn’t return to class until Tuesday. I still remember that discussion. It was just so… quiet, especially compared to the previous ones. Everyone knew what the result would be. They felt as if nothing would change it. It was ironic, seeing how vocally my classmates had defended Trump during the year, that they were shocked into silence after the election. My classmates seemed to realize that it was time to be quiet and move on. If only some of this country’s adults could do the same.
My Inheritance

I lived as a king when I was just a boy. I was fortunate enough to have a childhood of luxury: I lived in a highrise apartment overlooking the Las Vegas Strip, went to one of the few private schools in the Valley, and was blessed to have anything that I asked for. After months of destruction in the financial crisis and the recession’s lingering effects, my life would abruptly change. Despite the family’s efforts to hold on, in 2012 my family’s long-time-apartment would be foreclosed upon, I was taken out of private school, and we scrambled to find a home. A once spoiled kid wondered where his next meal would come from. When our family finally found a small house in a developing neighborhood our lives would still be inundated with struggle: my father begged his friends for rent money, eviction notices were placed on our door every other month, school supplies were rare, luxuries were only an imagination. Although we lost our home, our opulence, and much of our livelihood- I came to discover myself.

Towards the end of eighth grade, my parents had a competition: who could yell the loudest. Our house trembled as my father’s booming voice combatted my mother’s cacophonous Russian cursing. I held on to the shuddering handrails as I walked downstairs, my knees wobbled as the staircase swayed from their discord. From what I could get from the argument, my father insisted on enrolling me in a private high school, whereas my mother registered me in a public high school in one of the worst public education systems in the nation. After months of in-fighting, my father had won his way: I began my high-school career at one of the most prestigious private institutions in Las Vegas. My freshman year proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. It seemed that every step I took was barraged by stringent deadlines, monotonous homework, and extraordinary expectations. Every night was dedicated to hours of studying and school work, but even with the deluge of new responsibilities, I was distracted. Through the walls I could hear the family business failing. My parents labored through the night to provide for the livelihood with no avail. Our only source of income was on its very last breath. I could not let the family lose everything again. On top of school, on top of sports, I stepped up to help my parents. I created a marketing campaign, managed emails, and supervised social media. I dedicated days, weekends, sometimes entire school breaks to assisting with my parents’ endeavour. After months of hard-work and grit, my efforts would reward me with lists of hundreds of interested customers, followers, and even investors. For the first time in years my family felt secure, and tuition for myself and my younger brother was no longer an issue.

For the last four years, I have worked as a partner with my mother and father in our family business. Now, I spend hours of my day dedicated to excelling in countless AP classes; participating in numerous clubs and honors societies, captaining my state-level cross country team, managing employees, and laboring in our family’s business. A seemingly grueling schedule is only possible because of my voluntary inheritance of my parent’s turmoil. The same discipline I learned when sending thousands of emails a day has allowed me to keep my discipline on an all-night-study or on all-out-run. The same patience I developed from working with my employees has assured I am patient with my teammates. The same creativity that came from working with my innovative business strategies has gifted me creative solutions in all of my classes. For the last four years, I have used that same passion and industriousness that has pushed my family into long-awaited security to excel as a student, athlete, and leader.
College Aspirations for Claudius

Puppies, tiger cubs, even adolescent sharks play-fight with each other, eventually that play-fighting subsides as those animals grow into adults. My brother and I were not immune to the animalistic instinct to fight one another, even to this day we find each other brawling for miniscule issues. Some believe that our in-fighting epitomizes incompatibility with each other, on the other hand I believe that our fighting has allowed me to become one of the greatest leaders in my kingdom.

Young animals play-fight for a reason: to build up confidence and skill for the real deal. I was blessed to have the opportunity to fight with my older brother all of the time, every time we fought our skill, intelligence, and leadership abilities grew as we attempted to fool one another with a new strategy or tactic. Before I knew it, I would have to use those skills in practice when my brother, Hamlet, unfortunately passed away. As King of Denmark, my brother’s death gave me kingship but even then I was still distracted by the passing of my beloved sibling. Some nights I found myself crying and praying in the hallways of the castle as I mourned my brother’s death. I never thought that I could recover from such an intrinsic loss.

I could not let my brother down and I ruled the kingdom just as he would. When my own nephew, son of my late-brother, murdered Polonius, I knew that I had to take action to stop the chaos from growing into full-blown anarchy. I took a moral route and encouraged my nephew, Hamlet II, to go to England as a way to save his face and prevent his madness from spreading. Despite my valiant efforts, Hamlet’s rage-induced-manslaughter, would incite Polonius' daughter, Ophelia, to kill herself out of madness. The son of Polonius, Laertes, having already arrived in Denmark when he heard of his father’s passing, was enraged with the news of his sister’s death. Laertes was determined to avenge his father and sister’s death. I couldn’t let the situation deteriorate anymore; the same diplomacy, leadership, and compromise skills I learned fighting with my brother were used to reach a peaceful conclusion between Laertes and Hamlet. I organized a fencing competition between Laertes and Hamlet so that the two could work out their differences in a peaceful and gentlemanly manner.

Without a doubt, my brother has contributed to my success as a great King of Denmark. His unforeseen and accidental death revealed to me the tools I had at my disposal not only to be a superb leader but to be a great college student. My skills as a leader, diplomat, and compromiser would give me the opportunity to succeed in my major of political science. Politics, like my life, is riddled with leaders being forced to compromise with competing interests and ideologies. An experience such as mine would allow me to strive in such a class, as well as benefit your college community as whole. Conflicts that arise between student groups, issues regarding teachers, can all be easily resolved with my skill set. Undoubtedly, my long practiced and recently implemented, skills of leadership, diplomacy, and compromise would allow me to succeed inside a political science classroom and on your college campus.
Hamlet: An Analysis of Obedience and Vengeance

Californians and Senegalese have a lot in common. Despite being separated by culture, tradition, and thousands of miles, both people have experienced what it means to be human. Not only have Californians and Senegalese experienced their own humanity, but so have the Taiwanese and the Québécois and all other peoples of the world. These strikingly different cultures are united in their desire to express their humanity through stories, arts, and tradition. Literature is one of the greatest expressions of humanity, where the paramount of human emotion and thought intermingle to form a powerful and moving message. Just as all cultures are united by literature, all great literature unites people through its universality. Undoubtedly, the principle reason why tragedies such as Julius Caesar, The Tempest, and Romeo and Juliet have endured the test of time is due to the universal messages rooted in Shakespearean literature. Shakespeare’s Hamlet is no different than his other works in that regard, and Shakespeare’s accentuation of vengeance and obedience in Hamlet is clear throughout the five-part play. Although some critics believe that Hamlet best emphasizes vengeance and obedience in the symbolic and thematic relationship between Hamlet Sr. and Hamlet Jr., the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Laertes and Ophelia, as well as Hamlet and Claudius’ first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

Shakespeare introduces Laertes and Ophelia as two very similar characters, whose age, implied societal views, and even family are identical. However, these characters’ first interaction highlights the stark differences between the siblings. Upon leaving aboard a ship, Laertes makes sure to emphasize the importance of straying away from any relationship whatsoever with Hamlet to his beloved sister, Ophelia. Laertes stresses that Hamlet would be unable to truly love, respect, and sacrifice for any relationship he was to have. Laertes’ litany reveals that he does not believe a man such as Hamlet can truly love any single person. On the other hand, Ophelia argues with her father, a man with the same disposition as Laertes, citing what she believes to be Hamlet’s true emotions. Although being brother and sister, they share startling different views not only on Hamlet, but on love in general. The juxtaposition in just the first interaction creates foil characters. Furthermore, when Ophelia rebuts her father, Polonius quickly cuts her down and Ophelia concedes stating, “I shall obey my lord” (1.3.136). Ophelia’s concession demonstrates that despite her disagreement with her father, she is truly obedient to his wishes. Moreover, Ophelia’s servile concession highlights that she recognizes that she is in the wrong and willing to follow her father’s orders not because they are right, but because she is loyal to her father. Not only is Ophelia undoubtedly obedient to her father, but so is Laertes whose similar disposition on Hamlet further accentuates his obedience to his father’s teachings. In the first familial interaction between Laertes, Ophelia, and Polonius, Shakespeare eloquently creates foil characters in Laertes and Ophelia as well as buttressing the siblings’ obedience to their father.

As with all aristocracy, it is only natural that the current king and prince of Denmark have similar attributes. Both desire to rise in their political stature, both have either directly or indirectly killed characters within the play, both are incredibly influential characters, and both feel a resounding pain as a result of the death of Hamlet Sr. As one could imagine, the murder of Hamlet Sr. has wedged the once close Uncle and Nephew into a great rivalry, a rivalry that ultimately results in the deaths of both characters. However, the foundation of that rivalry differs between the two characters, Claudius’ want to kill not only Hamlet Sr. but Hamlet Jr., is rooted in the desire for movement up the political hierarchy through the deposition of kings and princes to further his aristocratic proue. On the contrary, Hamlet Jr.’s deep hate for Claudius is founded in vendetta; Claudius’ fratricide has left Hamlet without a father and without his rightful throne, upon hearing his father’s ghost, Hamlet is quick to want to take his vengeance. Claudius and Hamlet are undoubtly similar characters, but their hatred for each other is rooted in strikingly different things;
Claudius’ battle for power is competing with Hamlet’s desire for vengeance. Expertly, Shakespeare has foiled characters to accentuate a human call to vengeance as reconciliation for wrongs done to them.

In war, some men must die; this is especially true in the coup d’état that Hamlet Jr. plans to commit against his Uncle, Claudius. One of the first characters to fall victim to the rage of battle is Polonius, the father of both Laertes and Ophelia. Polonius’ son, Laertes is a young man with extreme devotion and obedience to his father. Not only did Laertes stay obedient to the teachings of his father, he was quick to reassure his obedience to all of Polonius’ valuable lessons before his departure in Act I Scene III. The result of his strong relationship with his family, and most importantly with his father, is the abject misery following the death of his father and later his sister. Laertes’ depression would drive him to want to “…get [his] revenge…” (4.7.29) on the man that directly killed his father and indirectly killed his sister: Hamlet Jr. Eventually Laertes’ would become so infatuated with his vendetta that his own means of murder would spare no main character, not even himself. Laertes’ revenge would eventually kill him.

Laertes’ climax in his fencing competition with Hamlet is a result of his misplaced obedience in his father Polonius. Polonius was truly just another bureaucrat looking to climb the social ladder, however, his devoted son would come to be so obedient and attached to his father that his revenge would lead him to kill the prince of Denmark, and indirectly kill himself. Ultimately, Laertes comes to realize his wrongdoings citing, “I can no more” (5.2.316), when dying to his own poison. Laertes could no longer keep up his façade of chivalry and righteousness after slaying a man with poison. Shortly before his death, Laertes realizes that his vendetta was just that, a vendetta. Laertes’ final realization concludes the life of an obedient son, whose desire for revenge was greater than his humanity, a desire he would come to regret when he is poisoned by his own blade. Shakespeare conveys the frivolity of revenge, and its dire consequences in just one characters’ short-lived-journey.

Polonius’ death would rock the foundation of Danish monarchy. Not only is he the catalyst of the remaining characters’ deaths, his influence through his children will further destabilize an unstable kingdom. Even Polonius’ sweet and innocent daughter, Ophelia, will come to influence the story in unprecedented ways following his death. Ophelia is undoubtedly faithful and obedient to her father. Consistently, she put her father’s desires in front of her own, even ending up lying to Hamlet, a man she loves, because her father told her to do so. When Laertes dies at the hands of Hamlet, Ophelia, just as her brother finds her self seeking vengeance. However, unlike her foil brother, Ophelia would intentionally take her own life as a form of revenge against the man that killed her father in her climax. One of the greatest forms of punishment is to kill something that another man loves and it was clear that Hamlet still loved Ophelia. When Ophelia states, “By Heaven, I’ll get revenge for your madness” (4.5.131,132) it is clear that she plans on taking vengeance. Ophelia’s close and obedient relationship with her father was able to pierce through her delusional state and come to fruition. In the same act, Ophelia takes revenge on the man that loves her, and she takes her own life. Her death is felt by the whole aristocracy and leads her brother into an uncontrollable rage and drives him to his final desire: more vengeance. As a result of a sweet and innocent girl’s death, nearly every main character will be slaughtered at the hands of each other. Yet again, Shakespeare accentuates the horrid consequences of misplaced obedience that can result in an overemphasis on vengeance seeking, only leading to a continued cycle of revenge.

There is some truth in critics’ belief that Hamlet Sr. and Hamlet Jr.’s thematic and symbolic relationship accentuates a call to vengeance and misplaced obedience. In fact, there is no doubt that Hamlet Jr. was obedient to his father. When the ghost of his father, a demon in protestant culture, confronts Hamlet, he quickly puts his trust in the ghost and stays obedient to his ghostly father and his final goal: to slay Claudius for killing his father. Hamlet’s misplaced obedience to his father and his cause comes to a climax when he first realizes that the fencing swords are poisoned. Hamlet’s realization instantly leads him to force Claudius to drink the poison he had set out for him. When Claudius dies, Hamlet fulfills his promise to seek revenge for his father. However, the revenge driven by Hamlet’s misplaced trust in his father’s ghost resulted in dire consequences when ultimately some of Hamlet’s last words would be “O God, Horatio, what a wounded name” (5.2.341). Hamlet realizes that his vengeance and misplaced trust in his father has wounded his reputation for eternity. Moreover, Hamlet recognizes that his heinous and vile acts have only contributed to a nation’s downfall and will permanently mark Denmark as a nation of atrocious homicide. Hamlet realizes that his misplaced trust in the ghost of his father and his vendetta against his Uncle, has only led to the deaths of the aristocracy and has permanently marked his name.

However, although Hamlet Jr.’s misplaced obedience in Hamlet Sr. results in a call to vengeance that drives the story to a fatal conclusion, had it not been for Hamlet’s foil, Claudius, and his obedience to his own conscience, the story would be unable to arrive at its tragic resolution. Claudius’ fratricide is rooted in a deep obedience to his conscience that has led him to believe that he can take away power from his brother so long as he kills him. As a
result, Hamlet Jr. becomes infatuated with his father’s death and eventually trusts the ghost of his father. When Claudius suspects Hamlet Jr. of wanting power, he once again becomes obedient to his conscience and creates an elaborate plan to murder his own nephew. Undoubtedly, Claudius’ obedience is the catalyst of the story. When Claudius finally succumbs to his treachery by drinking the poisoned wine, Claudius begins to realize that his misplaced obedience, combined with his infatuation with seeking revenge for what is brother had done to him, is leading to his final conclusion when even the very guards sworn to protect him, watch him wither away and die (5.2.319). Claudius’ obedience to his conscience and his infatuation with seeking revenge for what his brother had done to him gives the readers a clear message: misplaced obedience can lead to misplaced rage and revenge.

As expected, the obedient siblings, Laertes and Ophelia, whose obedience to their father is unmatched by almost any other character in play, had very similar resolutions. Both of their misplaced obediences would result in their desire for revenge, however they differed in the way they got that revenge. Laertes, the chivalrous and noble man, looked to avenge his father’s death through a fencing match, where he could show his dominance on the field and prize as a fighter. Ophelia, Laertes’ foil, chose to punish the man that killed his father in an act of vengeance by killing someone Hamlet loved, herself. As a result of their similar misplaced obediences, yet strikingly different methods of revenge, both Laertes and Ophelia exemplify the frivolous nature of vengeance. Especially vengeance rooted in misplaced obedience when both of their acts of revenge resulted in the needless deaths of nearly every other main character in their conclusions. Both of their efforts would result in nothing but dead bodies and broken hearts, their misplaced obedience and revenge would only ruin the Danish monarchy.

As all rivals, Claudius’ and Hamlet’s similarities do not make them friends. In fact, their different obediences is a principle reason behind their conflict. The two aristocrats, power hungry, and inhumane men differ on where they place their obedience. Hamlet’s obedience is rooted in the ghost of his father, a man murdered by his uncle; whilst Claudius’ obedience is founded in his own self-conscience. Both are equal evils and launched each other into vendetta driven campaigns that concluded with the deaths of not only themselves, but their queen, Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia. Their rivalry based in their differing misplaced obediences led to an equal battle of vengeance. A battle whose carnage led to a tragic conclusion. Shakespeare easily emphasizes that no matter the foundation of revenge, revenge will lead to unforeseen consequences and the destabilization of an entire hierarchy.

It is easy to say that Hamlet Sr. and Hamlet Jr. and their thematic, symbolic relationship are the driving force behind the overarching theme of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance. However, William Shakespeare’s, *Hamlet*, used foils characters to better reveal the devastating effects of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance through Laertes and Ophelia, as well as Hamlet and Claudius. Both pairs’ introduction, separate climaxes, and seemingly fated resolution emphasizes that revenge is frivolous and will only result in unforeseen consequences once the cycle of revenge is complete.
MONTANO, SERGIY

Sergiy Montano
Age: 18, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Poetry

A Civil War and the Same Goal

“Elephant”

We only want to help our blessed nation.
We only want smaller government and a bigger economy.
We only want what’s best for the people and this democracy.
We are fighting for the right for an unborn fetus to live and thrive.
We know gun control will only create more criminals with weapons.
We know citizens without guns will create an outbreak of felons.
We need more fighter jets, bombers, tanks, and aircraft carriers.
We need to assert our international dominance with more harriers.
We must focus on our country rather than the “United” Nations.
We acknowledge that there is climate change and global warming.
We must focus on ourselves and fear the word “globalization”.
We are fighting for the right for an unborn fetus to live and thrive.
We need more fighter jets, bombers, tanks, and aircraft carriers.
We need to assert our international dominance with more harriers.
We much prefer slow changes, conservatism, and the status quo.
We must focus on our country rather than the “United” Nations.
We much prefer to stray away the socialism that stripped Moscow.
We must focus on our country rather than the “United” Nations.
We acknowledge that there is climate change and global warming.
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“Donkey”

We only want to help our nation.
We only want a system for the people.
We only want a world that is far less lethal.
We are fighting for the rights of the dreamers.
We are fighting for cleaner air, cities, water for the lemurs.
We know that gun control will lead to safer communities, homes and schools.
We know that citizens with guns will create more mass killings, shootings, and family blues.
We need more government to protect our civil liberties, gay marriages, and people of color.
We need more aid for our homeless and our despairing so their lives aren’t duller.
We much prefer to have a world of unity rather than american superiority.
We much prefer leading the world to prosperity with our seniority.
We must focus on our country and her people before corporations.
We must focus on business recklessness and battle with regulation.
We acknowledge the failures and calamities of American history.
We acknowledge that affirmative action is a resolution, no mystery.
We are fighting for the better place.
We are fighting for rivers without waste.
We only want a prospering people, city.
We only want our children to have liberty.
We only want to help our nation.
"This Wouldn't Be Nice"

Wouldn’t it be nice to have a beach front
Then we wouldn’t have to wait for flights?
And wouldn’t it be nice to live in sunshine
In the kind of world that will ignite?
You know it’s gonna make the world much better
When we can say goodbye to Cali’s beggars.
Wouldn’t it be nice if we could wake up
In the morning when the day is warm
And after having spent the day together
Hold each other through the rainy storm
Happy times Switzerland will be having
They wish that every day was nonstop surfing
Oh, wouldn’t it be nice?
Maybe if we keep on oil and fuel and gas
It might come true (burn burn ooo)
Baby, then there isn’t a single thing we couldn’t canoe
We would be flooding (we would be flooding)
And then we’d be sorry (and then we’d be sorry)
Umm, this wouldn’t be nice…
You know it seems the more we talk about it
It only makes us want to breathe without it
But let’s talk about it
Oh, wouldn’t it be nice?
Clean air, oh maybe
Smog rare, oh maybe
Clean air, oh maybe
Smog rare, oh maybe
Man’s concept of justice has evolved with the growing influence of religion. The Mesopotamians of ancient times believed that probity came in the form of reciprocation, citing Hammurabi’s “an eye for an eye” policy; however, as that same region came under the influence of the Abrahamic religions, reciprocal justice began to fade away in favor of consequences delivered by God Himself. Concern of adultery, cheating, and even murder began to shift from temporary punishment judged by society to eternal punishment judged by God. Perpetual consequences became the forefront of the justice system for thousands of years: good deeds and the belief in an eternal judge was rewarded with endless bliss in heaven; mediocre lives were rewarded with a mediocre eternity in purgatory; the failure to believe in God or a life riddled with bad deeds was rewarded with perdurable damnation in hell. The Inferno by Dante Aligheri epitomizes the Medieval European idea of justice, whose society, founded in Christian theology, believed in symbolic, eternal, and righteous punishments for those who failed to coincide with Christian beliefs of morality of the time. In The Inferno by Dante Aligheri, the punishments of Minos, Paolo and Francesca, and Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri, are both just and symbolic.

Minos, “...decides which place in hell...” (V. 10) the damned are to be subjugated and sits on the judge’s bench as a result of a fitting and emblematic punishment. As King of Crete, Minos was also the decider of which children were destined to die at the hands of the Minotaur or be spared from the gruesome and hellish death. In the end, Minos would be responsible for the deaths of 14 children. Now, Minos sits as the head of judgement in hell, forced to judge other “ill-fated souls” (V. 8), whose ill-fated souls are as wretched as his, to eternal punishment. Just as he judged the 14 children who perished to the Minotaur, he will judge all who perish in hell. Minos’ punishment in the dead is symbolic of the judgement he did in the living; furthermore, the justice behind Minos’ punishment comes through a perpetual and forced contemplation of his actions. As Minos judges the souls destined for a circle in hell, he is forced to reflect for eternity on his own judgement that contributed to the horrid and gory deaths of young men and women. Minos’ subjugation to judge souls as he judged the lives of children during his life, forcing him to reflect on his decisions is a fitting and emblematic punishment.

Naturally, as Dante descended into hell he is first met with a wall of wind created by the screams, screeches, and moans of the sinners of love where he meets Paolo and Francesca’s right and allegorical punishment. As King of Crete, Minos was also the decider of which children were destined to die at the hands of the Minotaur or be spared from the gruesome and hellish death. In the end, Minos would be responsible for the deaths of 14 children. Now, Minos sits as the head of judgement in hell, forced to judge other “ill-fated souls” (V. 8), whose ill-fated souls are as wretched as his, to eternal punishment. Just as he judged the 14 children who perished to the Minotaur, he will judge all who perish in hell. Minos’ punishment in the dead is symbolic of the judgement he did in the living; furthermore, the justice behind Minos’ punishment comes through a perpetual and forced contemplation of his actions. As Minos judges the souls destined for a circle in hell, he is forced to reflect for eternity on his own judgement that contributed to the horrid and gory deaths of young men and women. Minos’ subjugation to judge souls as he judged the lives of children during his life, forcing him to reflect on his decisions is a fitting and emblematic punishment.

Cannibalism is a practice that is mostly frowned upon in society and as a result from such a heinous act both Count
Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri are forced into a befitting and figurative punishment. When Count Ugolino was forced to eat his own children to deter his inevitable death from starvation it was only logical that he would be eternally damned to hell. Count Ugolino “rears his heart” (XXXIII. 4) even at the thought of his atrocious actions, but it would not have been possible without Archbishop Ruggieri who sentenced Count Ugolino to death by starvation with his own children which resulted in Count Ugolino’s resortment to rear the hearts of his own children. The two are punished together in hell and Count Ugolino is forced to “gnaw the brain” (XXXIII. 11) of the Archbishop, symbolizing the Count’s atrocious sin of cannibalism and Archbishop Ruggieri’s power struggle that gnawed on him so much that he would force a father to eat his own children. Their punishment is not only symbolic but it is also just, as Count Ugolino’s lust for cannibalism can never be quelled, forcing him to eat human flesh for all of eternity; whilst Archbishop Ruggieri’s consuming power will leave his rash brain to be consumed by the very man he imprisoned. Archbishop Ruggieri’s consumption with power will lead to his figurative and befitting punishment of being consumed by the man he forced into cannibalism. The man forced into cannibalism is doomed to an eternity of consuming human flesh, figurative of his cannibalism and a befitting punishment for a man who ate his children.

As societies develop so does their understanding of justice and righteousness. The Inferno by Dante Aligheri exemplifies the view of justice in a Medieval European society founded in just and symbolic consequences for sinners. The Inferno’s Minos, Paolo, Francesca, Count Ugolino, and Archbishop Ruggieri are symbolically and justly punished for their sins in the living world through eternal torture and torment rooted in their sins of the past.
Soar

I clutch my mom's hand and lose the contents of my stomach. Just seeing the lurking monster elicits fear and instability. My nine-year-old sense of whimsy dissipates as I think of the relentless motion sickness that awaits me.

Mom pets my hair. “Be brave. You can do this.”

When she’s not there to urge me on, I draw inspiration from her bravery: she soared across the Atlantic to start a new life.

The first time I see the enormous object looming outside the window, mom squats down next to me, points at it, and softly enunciates “lie-tad-lo.” Once trapped inside, I nod off. Lietadlo seems to be a teleportation device between the shimmery sprawl of sweltering heat and a balmy green town in Slovakia. It spits us out, and my toddler legs carry me directly into the arms of my loving grandparents. Learning to ride a bike, delicately picking raspberries, and discovering caves weave together in a beautiful tapestry.

I stay up all night; the anxiety of boarding a plane the next day still potent at twelve years old. To calm my nerves, I scramble out of bed, pull out a single sheet of paper, and scribble on top:

To Do List
1) Make a batch of flavorful brýndzové halušky with Grandma.
2) Help Starky learn new English words for his crossword puzzles.
3) Tour the Bojnice Castle.

The next morning, I stare down the rumbling beast and don’t shy away.

I exit a seemingly endless return flight the day before high school starts. I nervously drum my fingers on my glossy Sugar Paper planner, tracing the gold script of “agenda” over and over. I flip the blush cover open and jot down everything I’m looking forward to. Soon, I delight in sashaying down the Yellow Brick Road in the Wizard of Oz, scooping the lacrosse ball out of midair, and lunging for the buzzer to answer a Varsity Quiz question.

Turbulence shakes my steady sophomore trajectory, even as I am standing firmly on the ground. I stare at my mom's face as the air leaves my body. Her usual bright smile is replaced with quick tears and a trembling voice. Melanoma can’t be whisked away by a boarding pass, or wiped out by plunging myself into extracurriculars. I find myself repeating familiar words as I clutch her hand: “Be brave. You’ll get through this.” I focus on kindness by packing meals at the food bank and tutoring students who struggle with their own daily challenges. Helping others gives me hope and the strength to continue flying high.

Hurtling across oceans and continents at five hundred miles per hour in a metal tube sounds much scarier than it is. After going through the experience for sixteen summers straight, I am almost positive that I won’t fall out of the sky and crash in a fiery explosion. At seventeen, I anticipate a takeoff that never comes, stalled not by a mechanical issue, but by the virus that has turned the world upside down. The borders may be closed, but in my mind, I am still in the cramped seat looking down at the clouds, where anything seems possible. When we descend and little specks of cars and buildings take shape, I try to fathom what each small spot is doing, where the tiny toy cars are going. No matter the noisy cabin and the uncomfortable journey, I love to explore.

I have a knack for converting anxiety into excitement. Singing, acting, dancing, and playing clarinet quell my fear of a crowd, Varsity Quiz helps me think on my feet under pressure, and lacrosse drills perseverance into me like never before. I can imagine the many destinations I will arrive at, leaving a mark on the world around me, like the lingering white trail of an airplane. As I embark on any new adventure, I whisper to myself: “Be brave.”
“Under the Umbrella” and “A Drop of Courage”

“Under the Umbrella”
Let the rain slide off;
you are safe here beneath
the smooth tarp. If something
bothers you, feel free to ignore it. And
the splitter splatter may sound harsh, but remember
that it can’t hurt you as you rush forward towards your goal.
Don’t be upset if you feel sad. Struggle only jails your soul.
If I act ok I can roll out ca-
A

drop of rain is falling from
the sky. Smile, because you do not
want to be dry. Welcome
the soak as an opportunity.
Those who cry “inconvenience”
lack maturity. Because if you had
stayed inside, you would not know the
joy of warmth. Dripping and splashing ruined
your clothes, but you are stronger for dancing
in the cold, wet air. Free from the judgement of
those who stare, you are brave. Feel the water
soaking into your skin. You are not drowning.
The struggle of life can overwhelm you,
but you come out strong enough
to absorb the challenge
and let it make you
more powerful.
Nicole Needham  
Age: 17, Grade: 12  
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV  
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern  
Category: Poetry

An Ode to Technology

The child stares enchanted by the iPad screen  
Family who loves her, no, they remain unseen  
While bullies are rejoicing’ at this way to shame  
So easy right now to hurt without blame

Let’s post everybody, let’s post  
Everybody base your life on likes  
So what kids don’t recognize bikes

Fake news from our devices feeds the masses  
The brightness is too high I need my glasses  
Interaction’s overhyped, comments show you care  
Step away and find a hobby if you dare

Let’s post everybody, let’s post  
Everybody base your life on likes  
So what kids don’t recognize bikes

Just text me even though you’re three feet away  
My mouth stopped working but my fingers are okay  
I sure would like to repeat my every day  
Wanna forget reality this way

Let’s post everybody, let’s post  
 Everybody base your life on likes  
So what kids don’t recognize bikes

Not an addiction but where’s my phone at?  
Let’s go watch the video with the funny cat  
Ignore all the problems of the real world out there  
And let the online stalkers find you anywhere

Let’s post everybody, let’s post  
Everybody base your life on likes  
So what kids don’t recognize bikes

People’s educations should be through the roof  
The age of information makes us foolproof  
But why would I try when Google has my back?  
You want me to go “outside” and throw away my Mac?

Let’s post everybody, let’s post  
Everybody base your life on likes
So what kids don’t recognize bikes

Drawn into a mindless loop
Drawn into a mindless loop
Drawn into a mindless loop
Drawn into a mindless loop
Drawn into a mindless loop
Drawn into a mindless loop
Foiled Characters in Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”

Some readers of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* may view the five-part plot as being moved through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Gertrude and Ophelia, as well as Laertes and Hamlet’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

Gertrude and Ophelia’s first introductions convey that Gertrude displays a promiscuous persona while Ophelia demonstrates herself as an innocent maiden; however, both women obey the wishes of men who ultimately betray them, affirming that excessive misplaced obedience ends in tragedy and loss of free will. Gertrude’s first line in the play is to tell Hamlet to cast his “nighted color off” while speaking to him about mourning for too long about his deceased father after Hamlet shows disrespect to her new husband, Claudius (1. 2. 270). In this scene, Shakespeare portrays Gertrude as a lady who moves on much too quickly after her husband’s death. He conveys to the audience that not only is she someone to be looked down upon because she is telling her son to be happy just two months after his father’s death, but she is shameless because she is sleeping with the dead King’s brother. In contrast, Ophelia is introduced during a conversation with her brother, Laertes and soon after with her father, Polonius, who both warn her to stay away from Hamlet. She is an obedient daughter when she replies to her father “I shall obey” (1. 3. 623) when he tells her to avoid Hamlet. Polonius believes that Hamlet’s affection is fleeting, and wishes to protect his daughter’s purity. Even though she loves Hamlet, Ophelia denies all of his affections and letters, causing him to view her in the same light as his unfaithful mother, while the audience knows she is just following orders. Ophelia obeys her father, brother, King, and Queen, even to the point of lying to Hamlet that no one is watching them when Claudius and Polonius watch to see if Ophelia is the cause of Hamlet’s madness. We see that Ophelia and Gertrude have the similar qualities of being complacent to men when Gertrude tells Claudius “I shall obey”, the exact words that Ophelia says to her father, when he tells her they will be spying on Hamlet and Ophelia (3. 1. 1724). Gertrude is the Queen and does not actually have to do anything Claudius says, but she obeys him regardless, because she cares about the well-being of her son. In this scene, the audience sees that both Gertrude and Ophelia are obeying the men in their lives, but they are perceived so differently, with Gertrude as a floozy and Ophelia as an honest daughter. The misplaced obedience of these foils eventually leads to their downfalls, because they give up too much of their free will in order to serve others.

Laertes and Hamlet’s first introductions demonstrate Hamlet as an uncaring and disobedient son whose first instinct is to disrespect his uncle, while Laretus displays the utmost respect to the King, foreshadowing who they will align themselves with to take vengeance for the deaths of their fathers, and demonstrating that both overwhelming obedience and apathy towards honored figures can lead to vengeance that ends in tragedy. Laertes asks for the “gracious leave” of the King to go back to school in France, and Claudius easily grants him permission (1. 2. 258). Laertes is immediately presented as a favored and honorable man who obeys authority and can do as he pleases. On the other hand, Hamlet is denied a similar request to go back to school in Wittenberg by Gertrude, and says he will obey her. Although he is also obeying the orders of his King and Queen, Shakespeare presents Hamlet as reluctant and morose, as he exclaims his dark clothes are just his “suits of woe” (1. 2. 289). He continues to talk about his father and how much grief he feels for his death, criticizing his mother and Claudius for seeming unfazed. Hamlet’s extreme emotional responses showcase that he desires more recognition for the death of his father, which will culminate in the revenge he seeks later. Both Laertes and Hamlet feel love and attachment to their fathers, which causes them to seek revenge on those who harmed them. However, vengeance as a response to their grief ends in tragedy.

The revelation that the audience has misjudged Gertrude appears in Shakespeare’s climax, as she is finally recognized as a woman who was simply doing her duty to her country as Queen by remarrying, and her disobedience
to her husband to protect Hamlet shows that lack of unconditional obedience is necessary at times for good. For the first time, she shows anguish and regret for remarrying so quickly and not properly mourning the deceased King as Hamlet accuses her of being horrible and promiscuous, but as Queen she had to serve her kingdom. After Hamlet stabs Polonius, he explains that his father is back as a ghost, and that he has told him that Claudius poisoned him. He asks the Queen to go along with the act that he has gone insane. When Claudius enters and asks how Hamlet is, she keeps her promise to Hamlet and shows her first kernel of disobedience to the King by lying to him, saying that he is “…mad as the sea and wind” (5.1. 2633). By showing Gertrude as not completely subservient to Claudius, Shakespeare affirms that power comes from free will rather than blind obedience. If Gertrude tells Claudius that Hamlet is seeing his dead father, Claudius would have him killed. By making her own decisions, Gertrude has the power to protect her son from harm, signifying that obedience should not be given excessively, and only in situations of respect.

In the climax, Ophelia finally begins to stand up for herself in the face of Hamlet’s abuses, illustrating that women must not always be obedient in order to be respected. Before watching the play in which Hamlet attempts to expose Gertrude and Claudius as the killers of his father, he behaves in an inappropriate way towards Ophelia, laying in her lap and making sexual comments. When Hamlet says that his mother is too happy for his father having died only two hours ago, she makes her first contradictory remark in the play, saying that it has actually been “twice two months” since his death (3. 1. 2008). In this line, she is not being disrespectful to Hamlet outright, but for the first time, she is not agreeing with what everyone else says, and the audience can see that she is an independent woman. Like Gertrude, she takes control by not being obedient to men in her life that she would normally listen to. She has enough of being taken advantage of, and Shakespeare shows that forced obedience is just a trap for women to be reliant on men, and when they break free and have a choice of when to be obedient, they can finally be independent.

When Laertes returns in the climax, he transforms from an obedient son to a man focused on vengeance in the name of his father to the point of threatening to kill the king and become king himself, highlighting the madness that revenge can create within seemingly innocent people. Laertes’s action in the climax starkly contrasts to how Hamlet himself should claim revenge against Claudius, but instead, he spends the whole play contemplating if it is the right course of action. It seems absurd that a commoner who has always been obedient to figures of authority now refers to Claudius as a “vile king” and wants the throne for himself (4. 1. 2983). He believes that Claudius is responsible for the death of Polonius and means to take revenge for causing his sister’s madness as well, but the King reveals that it is all Hamlet’s doing. It makes sense to the audience that Laertes feels a strong emotional response to the immense tragedy in his life, but the stark pivot he makes from calm and loving to vengeful is still surprising. His absurd yet purposeful actions contrast to Hamlet’s seemingly random madness, but both characters cause chaos in the kingdom, illustrating that revenge is not the way to cope with loss, and it accomplishes nothing.

Hamlet’s climactic moment of stabbing Polonius reveals that he is not an innocent man that the audience should feel empathy for; rather, he is evil and his overwhelming urge for revenge culminates in killing an innocent man, communicating that mindless vengeance has unintended consequences. Before he stabs Polonius, the audience feels sympathy and understanding for Hamlet, and he is the hero of the play. When he stabs Polonius, he can even be forgiven because he believes that it is Claudius behind the tapestry. However, he stands over the body of Polonius and calls him a “rash, intruding fool”, erasing any empathy the audience feels for him because he makes fun of the man he just murdered (3. 3. 2421). Rather than feeling guilty that his revenge plot claims an innocent victim, and that victim is even his girlfriend’s father, he makes jokes and claims that Polonius deserved to die. Through Hamlet’s apathy towards murder, Shakespeare demonstrates that rage can consume someone if they do not find an outlet for it, and they can actually turn into a different person. The irony is that Hamlet’s revenge doesn’t solve anything, just like the revenge that Laertes seeks on him, because vengeance does not honor the dead and cannot bring them back.

Gertrude and Ophelia both die in their resolutions after taking control of their lives and freeing themselves from a cycle of obedience, signaling to the audience that the only way for a woman during this time period to truly have control over her own destiny was to die, and making that choice of her own free will was more meaningful then continuing in obedience to men and society. After Hamlet murders her father, Ophelia succumbs to madness, but symbolically passes out various flowers to other characters in the play, revealing how she truly feels about them, before drowning in the river. It is debatable whether her death was suicide or an accident, but her actions just beforehand show that she was done with being an innocent and obedient maiden to society and chose to take control of her own future. Gertrude announces Ophelia’s death, foreshadowing her own later in the play. As a precautionary measure, in case Laertes is unable to strike Hamlet with the poisoned sword, Claudius poisons a wine goblet and asks Hamlet to drink from it. Hamlet refuses, but instead, Gertrude wants to drink to the success of her son. Claudius directly tells Gertrude “do not drink”, but she does so anyway (5. 3. 3942). The audience sees a gradual building of Gertrude’s rebellion against Claudius since the climax, but this final action of direct disobedience is what kills her. This death, although she did not choose it, is a direct result of her own action, and displays that she finally
escaped the prison of forced obedience and took control. Both of these women started the play with contrasting personalities, but they both claim their independence and denounce obedience by reaching the same resolution of death.

Laertes and Hamlet also die in the conclusion of the play through the action of each other rather than of themselves, highlighting that the consequences of rageful vengeance are tragic and ultimately signify that revenge is worthless. As Hamlet asks for Laertes’s forgiveness before they fight, he lies and says he is “satisfied in nature” but must duel for the sake of his honor (5. 3. 3883). This is a lie because of the plan he makes with Claudius, and the extra action he has taken to remove the blunt from his sword. This action results in Laertes’s own death when Hamlet stabs him with it, and this tragic irony shows that there are no winners in vengeance plots. Before he dies, Laertes does warn Hamlet that he is poisoned, and that the “king’s to blame” for both his death and his mother’s (5. 3. 3977). With this action, Laertes redeems himself and earns Hamlet’s forgiveness, revealing that truth and communication are the most effective instruments in dealing with grief and suffering rather than vengeance. As Hamlet is also dying from the poison, he begs Horatio to not kill himself with him and asks him to “tell my story” (5. 3. 4009). Hamlet does not want to have the horrible reputation that his cruel actions created in his thirst for revenge. This line shows that he regrets having a deep vengeance, and recognizes that he hurt many others, as well as himself, with his ruthless behavior. Both Laertes and Hamlet die, but they have sought forgiveness from each other and the world, showing that vengeance is never the proper answer to turmoil.

The foiling of Gertrude and Ophelia, as well as Hamlet and Laertes, reveals that misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance have devastating effects that hurt both the characters who are engaging in these behaviors and those around them. William Shakespeare entrusts his audience with the message that both excessive obedience and vengeance do not serve a purpose through these characters’ introduction, climax, and resolution of death, rather than the character of the ghost and his instructions. Ultimately, Shakespeare presents the play as a tragedy because he wants to display that revenge and obedience can never save anyone and are so often misguided.
An Unlikely College Essay

Growing up in a society that most highly values wealth, class, and appearance, I am at the very bottom of the chain of respect. Although I am seen by all as an old, poor hag, I always knew that my worth was so much more than my appearance and economic status. I never bothered to take away my wrinkles or stooped posture, despite having the ability to do so. I am fueled by a desire for knowledge and have a passion for helping those in need, so I did not consider turning myself into the traditional standard of beauty, until I encountered a handsome Knight and saved him from death with my wisdom. In return for my help, we were married and I was elated, while he seemed to “twist and wallow” (Chaucer 278). When my own husband had no problem referring to me as “old, and abominably plain” as well as “poor to start with, so low bred to follow”, and claimed he could not love me based on these superficial values, I knew I had the responsibility to challenge his viewpoint (Chaucer 276-278). Having experienced such shallow ignorance and fighting against it in my very own marriage showed me that I want to change the standards and inherent prejudices of all of society by majoring in Sociology at Georgetown University.

Because my husband was so disgusted with my appearance and social status, I had to make it clear to him that these are not attributes that truly give people value. I began by justifying why class is not at all important, because it cannot actually determine the virtue or morality of a person. I told him that, “whoever loves to work for virtuous ends” and does deeds of gentleness should be considered the “greatest gentlemen” by Christ, but not because of his “wealth of ancestry” (Chaucer 289-294). Challenging such fundamental beliefs shows that I am built for a college life in which I will challenge others and myself to constantly learn and grow, as well as embracing diversity of faith.

Next, I persisted that, “He who accepts his poverty unhurt, I’d say is rich although he lacked a shirt” (Chaucer 353-362). I have been regarded as less than all my life because I am poor, but instead of pitying myself, I have turned it around, and I needed to show my husband how it made me stronger and more capable in the long run. My personal experience will provide a diverse perspective in college, and I can help others who are struggling from unjust situations by reminding them that being poor does make them weak and worthless, but rather can help mold them into someone who is strong and joyful.

To solidify my argument, I even showed the Knight how my looks can be an advantage to him because he “need not fear be a cuckold, then” (Chaucer 390). If I kept my appearance as an Old Hag, my husband would never have to worry about me cheating on him or other men trying to steal me away. In this instance, I demonstrated my values of faithfulness, happiness, and goodness, analyzing traditional beliefs in a different light. In the end, I succeeded in changing the Knight’s mind after providing a well-reasoned argument. He allowed me to choose whether or not I wanted to change myself for him and said “whatever pleases you suffices me” (Chaucer 411). The encounter above all showed me that I can hold my own opinions despite strong opposition and even malice, and therefore can fight in the same way for others who are experiencing social injustice.

Georgetown prides itself on an education that creates “responsible and active participants in civic life” that “live generously in service to others”. I am a candidate that will fully stand behind this mission by challenging the antiquated beliefs of Medieval England, especially creating a platform for women that is separate from simply being valued for beauty. I hope that my personal actions are just the beginning in changing the opinions through grounded knowledge, leading to a common good for humanity.
Just and Symbolic Punishments in Dante’s “Inferno”

According to Christian faiths, sin is a constant of humanity. Because each person is stained with Original Sin, he or she must either repent on Earth or be punished in Hell. Every human being does have the opportunity to be forgiven by God, but for those who do not receive the forgiveness, a just and symbolic punishment must be administered. In Dante’s Inferno, the author portrays sinners as both historical and literary allusions and real people in his own life that he wanted to see suffer for their actions. Dante illustrates punishments delivered based on the type of sin committed, specifically tailored to creating the worst type of suffering for the sinner. The punishments in Hell for Dido and Aeneas, Geryon, and Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri are just and symbolic because they directly mirror the harm they caused to others and their relationship with God in life, and withhold what they idolized or succumbed to above God.

Dido and Aeneas violated the commandments of God with their sin of lust and adultery; thus, their punishment is just and symbolic because they are tantalized with the lust they craved in life. Dido is the queen and founder of Carthage: a woman in a position of great power. She vowed to remain faithful to her absent husband Sichaeus, but instead fell in love with Aeneas. She killed herself for love’s sake when Aeneas left her, so her sins amount to lust, adultery, and suicide, while Aeneas is also a sinner of lust. In Circle II of Hell, Dido and Aeneas are whipped around by whirlwinds until they are almost able to kiss, and then are rapidly pulled apart, because they “…betrayed reason to their appetite” (Alighieri, V. 39). The punishment is just because when they were alive, passion blinded them and whipped them around as well, and they let go of their logic, just as the wind now lets them fly aimlessly. In addition, they are brought so close together because “The double grief of a lost bliss is to recall its happy hour in pain” (Alighieri, V. 118-119). Dido and Aeneas put their own love for each other above their love of God and doing what He commands, so they must live out that choice for every moment for eternity, without the promise of heaven or peace with God awaiting them. Furthermore, the punishment is symbolic because the storm they are trapped in symbolizes loneliness and weakness, the direct opposite of the passion and strength Dido and Aeneas felt from the adultery they committed. Not only are they denied the pleasure of being with one another, but they are constantly reminded of what they gave up. The sin they committed was about even more than lust, it was a direct offense to loving God above all else, so they are punished with the pain of the storm as well. Dante deliberately makes their punishment just and symbolic, but not unnecessarily cruel, because he believes this is the circle of Hell where he himself may end up. He does not reserve the same mercy for the sinners in deeper circles, but grants them due punishments that are symbolic for their heinous crimes.

King Geryon is a sinful monster in life, so in Hell he is one who is confined to the bottom of circle seven, which is just as he is literally turned into a monster, as well as symbolic because he engaged in political sin, so he is marked by being a servant of the system of Hell rather than being in power. Geryon was the King of Spain and a sinner of greed, because he lured strangers into his borders so that he could have his people rob and murder them. Dante illustrates him as a sinner that must now carry the weight of strangers, and be completely trustworthy and steady for them. Dante mounts “…the great shoulders of that freak”, a grotesque dragon that is granting safe passage into the lower circles of Hell, rather than obstructing their journey (Alighieri, XVII. 1). It is just that he must guarantee travelers the very thing he stole from them. In addition, his punishment is symbolic because it represents his failed quest for greater political power. Instead of becoming all-powerful, he is forever trapped in his actual quest of discovering self-knowledge, that he was selfish and had no mercy. Virgil warns Geryon to “…bear well in mind that his [Dante] is living weight” and to “…make your circles wide and your flight steady” (Alighieri, XVII. 8-9). Even in Hell, he references how negatively Geryon previously misled others, and must now aid them on the way to their own punishments. Furthermore, turning Geryon into a monster serves a dual purpose of showing his true colors to the outside world, while being symbolic because a physical disfigurement signals to the reader to pay particular attention to a certain character, and how it influences them. Geryon is completely unable to speak and can only fly in circles,
taking away the free will that he used with malice. Geryon was an evil man, but Dante still reserves the most cruel, just, and symbolic punishments for those in the deepest circles of Hell.

Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri are sinners of gluttony, and their punishment is just because their gluttony is turned into a grotesque perversion in which they can clearly see the error of their ways, and is symbolic because both used acts of vampirism, in which they weakened another to gain power, and are degraded in Hell by being trapped in a cycle of cannibalism with one another. In life, Count Ugolino and his sons and the Archbishop conspired to overthrow leaders in Pisa. However, sharing power once they were overthrown was not enough, and the Archbishop saw an opportunity to rule alone, demonstrating greed for power. The Count explains to Dante that he “...had to undergo imprisonment and death through his [Archbishop’s] treachery” (Alighieri, XXXIII. 16-17). The Archbishop threw the Count and his sons into jail to starve to death, and the Count’s sons died from starvation. After he went crazy from starvation himself, he ate them. As punishment, the Count takes the Archbishop’s skull “...between his teeth grinding it as a mastiff grinds a bone” for eternity (Alighieri, XXXIII. 67-68). The punishment is just because he is forced to relive the action that brought him into Hell, one that he is disgusted with and causes him to hate himself. Still, he blames his sin on the Archbishop rather than himself, although his own hunger for power led him to the crux of his vampirism: feeding on his own sons. In the same way, the Archbishop engaged in vampirism by weakening and disposing of the Count in order to grow his own power. Therefore, the punishment is also symbolic because the Archbishop is food for the Count, and both are trapped in the greedy cycle they created for themselves on Earth. Rather than the Archbishop benefitting from the cannibalism of the Count, he is the one who receives the blunt end of what he forced the Count into, and the Count is forced to confront how weakening others to gain power affected him negatively in the long run: he will now never be united with true fulfillment in God’s love.

The sinners in Dante’s Hell are punished justly and symbolically, with their sinful actions in life being mirrored into terrible perversions specifically designed to torture them and directly confront the error of their ways. Their sins of lust, greed, and gluttony are all confined to a place where unique punishments can torture the victims at once. In the case of Dido and Aeneas and Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri, Dante employs the power of pairs to remind them of their sin all the more. Geryon may not be connected to a pair, but he also shares a connection to the other sinners in Hell by being responsible for their safe passage. The punishments of Dido and Aeneas, Geryon, and Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri are symbolic because they combine elements of just torture for the sins committed, with additional symbolic elements that amplify the pain. Through his just and symbolic punishments, Dante illustrates that sin is nothing to be taken lightly, and the utmost responsibility of humanity is to seek forgiveness for sin and hold love of God in the highest regard in their lives.
Shape Poem 2: The Poor

There’s more than enough money to go around so why do we have such disparity.
Families starving on the streets, whilst families devouring food greedily. A man will sleep on the road tonight, while a man drives himself home tonight. One man can have all the money, enough to change the world, while one man works day and night to take care of one little girl.
Wasting away in their bank accounts, their entire self-worth built upon the number of zeros that they can count. Crimes and punishments are meaningless if you have the right amount.
The place you call home is what is no longer your home, if you have the right amount. How can it be fair for there to be enough money for everyone, yet the number of homeless is never none.
Some say money is the root of all evil, yet is a few slips of paper what really hurts the people? Was it really the papers that made our own brothers and sisters spend their nights hungry? Or was it ourselves, who turned a blind eye to when they were in need that are to be blamed. It is clear to see that the ones to shame are not the papers that act as currency, but are those who would keep the money from those in need. As the saying goes, money is the root of all evil, but is instead what brings forth the evil in the hearts of man. The root of all evil is humanity’s greed, to hoard each and everything that they can. The root of all evil isn’t something that you can find for it is inside. You and me, inside mankind.
Vengeance and Obedience

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Hamlet/Laertes as well as Hamlet/Gertrude’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

Shakespeare presents the duo of Hamlet and Laertes so that they may act as foil characters and demonstrate how vengeance is a double-edged blade. Although the two characters often take part in the early stages of the play, surprisingly their first direct interaction with each other doesn’t occur until the later stages of the play, such as in Act 4, where Laertes discovers the news of his father’s death and returns to Denmark in the pursuit of vengeance on Hamlet. This is a clear parallel to Hamlet’s quest throughout the entire play, where he pursues revenge against Claudius, who he discovers murdered his father before the play’s inception. While this shows a clear similarity in the two characters, their methods of attaining their revenge demonstrates an equally clear difference between the two. Laertes approach to avenging his father is brash, quick, and ineffective while Hamlet’s approach is thought-out, tedious, and not only pursues vengeance on one person, but it also pursues justice among those he finds to have wronged his late father as well. Though their pursuits of revenge are different, they are once again brought together in the ultimate consequence of their actions, that is, although they were able to avenge their fathers, they also paid the ultimate price through their own death. In this, Shakespeare demonstrates the idea that the pursuit of vengeance is a blade that poisons both sides involved, alluding to the universal message of the wrongs that lie in vengeance.

On the other hand, the pair of Hamlet and Gertrude, act as foiled characters who display the universal message of misplaced obedience, and how such obedience is closer to enslavement. Hamlet and Gertrude interact with each other, just as quickly as they are introduced in Act I, where Hamlet is shown mourning his father’s death and Gertrude has just become married to Claudius, the late king’s brother. Their first interaction consists of Gertrude telling Hamlet to cast off his “nightly colour,” already showing a contrast between the two characters and their attitudes, but at the same time, showing a comparison between the two and their obediences (1.2.66). Though it may seem cruel of Gertrude to remarry so quickly, and to her late husband’s brother no less, her new marriage demonstrates her misplaced obedience to the preservation of the nation, at the cost of her own dignity. Gertrude’s act of quickly marrying an appropriate candidate for the throne was an act of putting in place a ruler as quickly as possible in order to prevent the chaos that would occur until a new king was put in place. This parallels Hamlet’s misplaced obedience in his father’s late ghost, and the quest given to him. Through his obedience, Hamlet ultimately completes his quest for revenge but in the end, it resolves nothing. His father remains dead, the sins of those who wronged his father still exists, and through his death he ensures that the proper bloodline taking the throne will never happen again. The only key difference that can be seen between Gertrude and Hamlet’s acts of obedience is that Gertrude’s obedience was done in order to save, whilst Hamlet’s was in order to kill. Through this, Shakespeare shows a clear lesson on misplaced obedience, and how this type of mindless servience can destroy the one who demonstrates it.

The climax of Hamlet’s quest for vengeance occurs when he finally kills Claudius, in Act V. During his duel with Laertes, Hamlet is wounded by a poisoned blade, and ultimately kills his father with the same blade. The symbolism behind this weapon is clearly presented throughout the play, in the increasing madness of Hamlet and his closing distance to his goal of killing Claudius as well. It is directly symbolic because it shows how Hamlet’s pursuit of vengeance was not just a double-edged blade, destroying him and Claudius simultaneously, but the poison could also be shown to represent the way Hamlet’s revenge was slowly killing both parties as well, rather than a rapid death that a double-edged blade would produce. On top of this, the poisoned blade’s symbolism is not just limited to
Hamlet and Claudius, as Laertes, in his own pursuit of vengeance, also ends up dying to the same blade, reinforcing the nature of vengeance and its effect on its holder. Through this, the lesson presented by Shakespeare in Hamlet’s climax is that vengeance not only destroys the person who receives it, but also the one who carries it out.

Hamlet’s climax in his misplaced obedience also occurs in the same scene that his climax in vengeance occurs, through his death. Whilst his climax in the shape of his revenge was actualized in his murder of Claudius, his climax in the form of his obedience was materialized in his death. His misguided faith in the ghost of his father drove Hamlet’s actions throughout the entire play, leading to his gradual spiral into insanity by the end of the play. There is a great deal of cosmic irony shown in the peak of his loyalty, as Hamlet eventually dies and is able to join his father in the fact that they both died the same way: in an evil plot created by Claudius. Consequently, Shakespeare portrays the universal message behind misplaced obedience, and how this servility holds no regard for the well-being of those who hold it.

The climax of Laertes' vengeance holds a similar universal message to that of Hamlet’s. Laertes initially fails to carry out his revenge in the form that he had planned, in the shape of his march on the castle, but is able to actualize his revenge through the rigged duel Claudius creates between him and Hamlet. After agreeing to Claudius’ plot to kill Hamlet, Laertes becomes even more similar to the character of Hamlet, in the sense that he is now pursuing justice for his father, but by going under Claudius and his plot, he now also holds misplaced obedience, becoming one of the only characters in the novel who hold a position of misplaced obedience and vengeance, alongside Hamlet. The goodness of Laertes, and the fact that he was just simply misguided is effectively shown when he states: “…You’re not responsible for my death and my father’s, and I’m not responsible for yours.” (5.2.325).

Here, it shows the conscience that Laertes has in his dying moments, where upon completion of his revenge, he is able to regain his misguided faith from before, and is able to think for himself and feel the sin of his actions. From this, the universal message Laertes demonstrates is that even the best person can be guided down the wrong path.

In Gertrude’s climax, she drinks from the poisoned wine and is ultimately betrayed by her own misplaced obedience. Her death, resulting as an accident from the plot of Claudius, is symbolic of how her loyalty to the crown led her to Claudius, and as a result, led her to get caught up in his plot to kill Hamlet. Although Gertrude had good intentions in her desire to preserve the nation and the throne, she was misguided in her quickness to carry it out and her compromising of her own morals. Gertrude displays her acknowledgement of her wrongdoings in Act 3, when Hamlet confronts her about what she has done and she replies with: “…Thou turn’st mine eyes into my very soul—and there I see such black and grained spots…” (3.4.90). The climax of her story, in the shape of her death by Claudius’ poison, portrays the universal message that misguided obedience will, more often than not, lead one to sacrifice for the cause.

So what is the message Shakespeare put forth through these foiled characters? When it comes to obedience, Shakespeare shows that the essence of obedience itself is not a bad thing, which he portrays through Gertrude’s character. The fruits of her obedience to the throne were seen, in the fact that just as soon as the funeral for the old king was occuring, the marriage to the new king was simultaneously occurring as well. As a result, there was no mention in the play of any period of turmoil during the period of time between the death of the old king and the wait for the new one, as is the case in many kingdoms. But, Shakespeare stresses the importance of making sure that obedience isn’t put in the wrong place, as misplaced obedience can quickly lead to ruin. Shakespeare demonstrates this through Gertrude’s act of putting Claudius on the throne, leading him to try and kill Hamlet and, due to his plot, ended up destroying all of the Hamlet family. The devastation caused by misplaced obedience is also shown in one of the instruments of the aforementioned plot, in Laertes and his going under Claudius. In doing so, Laertes became just as guilty for the deaths of the entire Hamlet family as Gertrude, as his agreement with Claudius was the catalyst for the disaster of a duel that killed them all. Through this, Shakespeare resolutes that obedience itself is a benevolent thing, but when it is placed in the wrong hands, it can lead to complete ruin.

The message that Shakespeare puts forth through the foiled characters of Hamlet and Laertes is the wrongs of vengeance. Not only did these two characters demonstrate how their quest for revenge led them to their demise, upon carrying out their mission, but it led to the deaths of others who were not supposed to be involved in their plans for vengeance in the first place, with Hamlet’s unplanned victim being Ophelia and Laertes’ victim being Gertrude. The message that Shakespeare is trying to portray through the innocent victims involved in these two characters’ plans for revenge shows the fact that violence breeds more violence. Were it not for Hamlet’s pursuit of vengeance, Polonius would not have died and Ophelia would not have committed suicide. In turn, Laertes wouldn't have gone down the same path as Hamlet, and wouldn’t have led to the death of Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude. The death of all of these people all stemmed from the violence that laid dormant within Hamlet, and through the reinforcement of this idea through Laertes similar actions, Shakespeare shows how violence is not the answer, as more often than not, it breeds even more violence.

Some readers may feel that Hamlet’s plot moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better
reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance, demonstrated through Hamlet and
Laertes as well as Hamlet and Gertrude’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated
resolution of each of these foiled characters. Through these characters, Shakespeare effectively demonstrates the
deeper implications of misguided obedience and a call to vengeance, in the form of gradual deterioration of the
individual, the spread of the flames to the innocent, and the lack of retribution left behind by these actions.
A Sinner’s Justice

Justice of A Sinner

Justice is one of the core values that humanity has built their history upon. Through the emphasis on justice, humanity has evolved into a people that emphasize the punishment of evil and the pursuit of good, which has led to the culmination of this idea in today’s world, where laws and courts determine the justice behind an individual’s action each and every day. In order to further reflect on the idea of justice, Dante Alighieri describes a tale of a man who ventures through hell, observing the punishments and cause for their punishments of the people he comes across. In Dante’s “Inferno”, Dante finds himself wandering through hell, observing the punishments of those who have been condemned to that place. Three sinners who stand out are Ulysses, Count Ugolini, and Francesca Da Rimini, due to the nature of their just and symbolic punishments.

Ulysses is one of the prominent sinners that Dante runs into during his venture throughout the multiple circles of Hell who experiences a righteous and metaphorical punishment. The punishment indicted on Ulysses within the eighth circle of Hell is that he is being constantly burnt in flames, due to his deception during the Trojan War, through the utilization of the Trojan Horse. As a result, the city of Troy fell, and Ulysses and his nation had won. The flames that burn Ulysses are a just punishment because they can be described as a symbol, as fire can be both a sign of benevolence and wickedness. The multitude of meanings behind the symbol of fire is further reinforced by Foster’s “How to Read Literature Like a Professor” where he states “Symbols, on the other hand, remain open to multiple possible interpretations;” (Foster 12). The fire of Ulysses’s punishment is just because fire can be a sign of guidance and warmth, which is what Ulysses was to the people of his country when he led them to victory at the Trojan War, but on the other hand, fire can also be a sign of destruction and death, as Ulysses was to the people of Troy, upon conquering them. As a result, the flames of Ulysses’s punishment is righteous and metaphorical because it perfectly encapsulates the duality of the nature of Ulysses’s sins.

Count Ugolini is another sinner who carries a fair and meaningful punishment based on his sins. Count Ugolini and his sons were condemned to prison for treason, and whilst their imprisonment, the food began to run meager and both him and his children began to suffer from starvation. One by one, his children died in front of him due to starvation while he ate and lived on, and even then, with their lives precariously balancing between life and death, his kids offered up their bodies to him in order for him to eat more. Eventually, Count Ugolini finds all of his children dead whilst he lives on and despite his initial thoughts, he resorts to cannibalism either way. He eventually dies and was sent to Hell for his sins of cannibalism and gluttony. In Hell, Count Ugolini is able to be found constantly gnawing on the corpse of another person, in order to remind him of his sins. The symbolism for his actions lies in the nature of food itself. Foster accurately describes the significance of a meal in this statement: “…anytime people come together to share food and, in doing so, create a temporary community with one another.” (Foster 2). Sharing a meal with another goes far beyond just a group of people eating, but it also demonstrates a bond and a sense of connection between the people. Ugolini grossly perverts this sense of community of eating by not only greedily keeping himself alive at the cost of his kids, which he should be responsible for, but also in the fact that he resorts to cannibalism in the face of his children’s kindness for him. Ugolini’s punishment of cannibalism is just for this reason, and also because Ugolini also demonstrated a breach of community and connection in his original purpose in being imprisoned: his treason. For these reasons, the punishment of Count Ugolini is just and symbolic in retrospect to his misdeeds.

The final sinner that Dante encounters who carries a highly justified punishment is Francesca Da Rimini. Francesca Da Rimini cheated on her husband with another man in her life, and that sin is what she carries with her into Hell. Her punishment is that she and the man she cheated with are forever stuck in a tempest, keeping all people separated but not truly separated at the same time. Foster would agree with the implications behind the symbolic nature of Francesca’s punishment as he has stated previously that “…types of weather often have significant
symbolic meaning” (Foster 9). Through the nature of the tempest, Francesca is condemned to be with the man she had been unfaithful to her husband with, whilst also never being able to truly be together with him for eternity. This is just because it plays with the desires that she had for the man, and uses that as her punishment for all of time.

Through this, Dante’s “Inferno” draws a clear connection between what may seem to be a cruel and unusual punishment is actually a justified and, arguably, most suitable punishment for these sinners, due to the connection between their misdeeds and their punishments. In doing so, Dante demonstrates an aspect to humanity that is oftentimes swept under the rug, due to its dark nature and its reflection of the bad in humanity. This not only serves as a lesson for those who would make the same mistakes, but it also shows the path of benevolence that people can walk by avoiding the same path of these sinners, and that is precisely the nature of justice in humanity.

Works Cited
Derek Nguyen
Age: 18, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Humor

Abortion Satire

Elvis Presley: Can’t Help Falling in Love With You Satire
Some men say
Pro-choice is killin’
But how is DNA something alive?
You can pray
But it aint a sin
Cause how is DNA something alive?
Like a chromosome
Is not a baby
Just so you know
Sperm’s not a baby too
Stop trying
To make it survive
For how is DNA something alive?
Like a chromosome
Is not a baby
Just so you know
Sperm’s not a baby too
Stop trying
To make it survive
For how is DNA something alive?
For how is DNA something alive?
“Quiet. Reserved. Kept to himself.” Ask anyone, and I guarantee you one of these options would be brought up if you asked who I was. That is, until my junior year of high school. Up until then, I must admit, I would probably use those words to describe myself too. In an attempt to put myself out there, I found myself standing in front of the speech and debate club.

A sudden streak of confidence combined with a passing whim in my mind, leading me to sign my name on that club admissions paper. I had figured if I wanted to become a more social person, why not try public speaking? Despite my newfound desire, I found myself no better at public speaking than the next person. In fact, I might have even been worse.

“So like, um,” I stammered. “Yeah I forgot the rest so,” I said as I slowly walked back to my seat. During my first practice, I delivered a 90 second speech, when I was asked to speak for 3 minute. Not only that, but my speech was hardly what you could call coherent. I walked back to my desk, not able to look up at any of my peers. I felt that same defeat I’d always felt when I tried to step out of my comfort zone. It was my first steps in trying to become a new and better person, and I had already fallen flat on my face. But when I came home that day, something inside of me changed. The weight of my shame changed into something else, and in its place I found myself angry. I was furious at myself for such a poor showing, and a second later, I got to work practicing. In the past, I would have played a game or watched a show to try and get my mind off of what had happened, but not this time. The only way I could quell the anger inside of me was by feeling myself improve. I spent hours that night studying the top students and emulating the qualities that made each of them great. Practicing like so every night, I could feel myself slowly getting better. Soon enough, I found myself at my first tournament, within the very month I had entered the club. This was no mere tournament either. The first tournament of my high school career was a qualifiers tournament to compete at the national level.

Although my club members knew I had improved, they hadn’t expected me to place anywhere above last, considering my fierce competition and my skills at the time. The tournament was just supposed to be a learning experience for me. I knew that, and yet the drive that had possessed me all those nights I practiced had returned again. As the tournament started, all my nerves just fell away, and I felt my concentration peak. I could feel myself performing at a level above what I had been capable of before. Three rounds would determine if I would move on to the national stage or not, and for three rounds, I delivered the three best speeches of my life. Then, I went home and waited for the results of the tournament.

About a week later, my club captain informed me of my standings: 3rd, 4th, and 4th. It was a good score but it wasn’t enough to qualify. And yet, I felt no regrets. The person I was at the end of that tournament was a completely different person from who I was before it. I didn’t know it at the time, but this tournament would become the catalyst for me to improve myself. Sure I didn’t manage to qualify, but I managed to become a better person than I was yesterday, and to me, that’s what it truly means to go from zero to hero.
Shape Poem 2: The Rich

My father is
A great man. He
is a pro athlete, and not
just any old pro athlete,
One of the greatest,
one

that no one can beat. Because he’s such
a great athlete, many people watch his games. My dad’s
so famous, there’s no one in the world that doesn’t know his name.

And since he’s so famous, my dad makes a lot of money. He makes
more than lawyers, he makes more than surgeons,
makes more than you, your parents, and

It’s not his fault he makes so much, it’s just the
way it is

The better you are, the more people watch, the more
more people that watch, the more money
bring in. It’s only fair that he gets paid for

viewers that he brought to watch. But

I don’t think that my dad doesn’t.
deserve all the money he makes.

Without it, he would never have been able to open the school
For kids that can’t afford the education, and he would never have been able to pay back my grandma, for taking care of him

on his own when he was little, when she was struggling to feed
my dad donates millions of dollars to charity,
each and every year.
the amount of money that nobody will ever hear. My dad worked hard to get to where he say he doesn’t deserve
Instead, the problem decide to keep all

themself, treating
Money isn’t bad, that many people’s lives

easier. A knife can

be a tool make
everyone’s
life easy, but in
the wrong
depend on, a
hands, a
knife can
Be a
weapon, an item
Purely
deadly.
The Mountaintop

When I take you to the Mountaintop, you'll see the calm grasslands at the base, 
the sheep grazing and the red wooden farmhouse that they live in, 
and maybe you’ll say, “There it is, that’s it!” 
But I’ll say, “A little farther.”

We’ll go on, I hope, and you'll see the lush green forests and the spiked white mountains. 
You’ll hear the waves of the Pacific and the song of humanity being sung throughout the Earth, 
and maybe you’ll say, “Let’s stop here, this is it!” 
But I’ll say, “A little farther yet.”

We’ll go on, and you’ll see the Sun shining its warmth on the blue marble you used to stand on 
and the spiral of the galaxy you used to look at in the night sky. 
You’ll see the black holes and the exploding stars, 
the planets unseen by man and the planets yet to be touched.

Looking back you’ll see the Universe in all its glory, 
the web of cosmic clouds and swirling galaxies and unknown forces 
that glue the Cosmos together. 
and you’ll say “Isn’t that the Mountaintop?”

And all I will be able to say is, 
“Rest here awhile, the best is yet to come. 
We have a long way still to go 
and I can’t go without you.”
Are You Kidding Me?

Here come old grandpa
He come joggin up slowly
He got clear dementia
Trying to stay alive
Crooked cop for his V.P.
Got to be the winner
Cause the other’s D.T.

He got no mask on
He calls immigrants rapists
He got Proud Boys ready
He got AZ angry
He says what he says, the usual
We’re not gonna support that
Loser’s funeral
Come together, are you
Kidding me?

Antifa riots
Trumpets race down the streets
Buildings catch on fire
Cities losing power
No one knows what they should believe
Then all of a sudden
Kanye enters the scene
Come together, are you
Kidding me?

Right
We got both saying
That the other’s evil
Blues are spending big bucks
For some biodiesel
Reds go on and on election fraud
Screw it I’ll just leave this
Place and study abroad
Come together, are you
Kidding me?
Aidan Niehoff  
Age: 18, Grade: 12 

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV  
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern  
Category: Poetry  

A Space for Hope  

“Shooting Star”  

A shooting star flying across the sky. A sign of hope, a sign to try. To try to be someone better and new. A better person for me, a better person for you.  

And now as that bright light in the night runs across the Earth, I am reminded of my insignificant worth. For I am small, and the stars are large, the size of a rowboat compared to a barge. But then I think of my God-given gift to look at the sky in wonder and bliss. To look at a star and appreciate its glory, to look up in the dark and wonder what came before me. Did those ancient apes look up as well? If they were with me now, would they understand what I tell? No, probably, in fact undoubtedly no. But if there was one thing in common between my ancestors and me, it is found when we both look at the star sea. In the back of our minds though we cannot explain why, A shooting star flying across the sky is a sign of hope, a sign to try.  

“Singularity”  

The world is coming down on me. Collapsing. Singularity. A single point where I am to be taken. The Universe’s final destination. Where all our lives will no longer have meaning, the remains of us superfluously fleeting. Where there was once life, once love, once civilization, there will be nothing but a quiet vibration. Nothing will matter in the end, that is sure, for in a Universe so wide, nothing will endure. The advancements of humanity to worlds beyond ours,
will impact little in the Universe's final hours. Nothing matters when we reach it.
Ebb and Flow of Hamlet Hopefuls

Some readers view that *Hamlet*’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Laertes, as well as Laertes and Ophelia’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

Hamlet and Laertes perfectly foil each other in how they handle vengeance. Both dealing with the loss of a murdered father, the two vow to get revenge on the killers. Hamlet, during the final monologue of act two scene two, says that while he was given the task of revenge, he instead chooses to “unpack [his] heart with words,” (Shakespeare 2.2.71), and let the anger fester inside of him. This phrase serves to show how Hamlet exacerbates his emotions and issues, rather than facing them quickly and decisively. Unpacking is a long and strenuous process, just like his plan for revenge. Laertes, on the other hand, has a “speech of fire” and acts decisively, contrary to Hamlet’s prolonged and dramatic plan (Shakespeare 4.1.53). Hamlet and Laertes provide two unique perspectives on vengeance, as they both deal with the grief inherent in the motive for vengeance.

Laertes and Ophelia, although being brother and sister, have two very different views on the power of obedience. Laertes only trusts in his family’s obedience and is skeptical of everyone else’s. For instance, when he is warning Ophelia about a relationship with Hamlet, he tells her, “Fear it, Ophelia,” (Shakespeare 1.3.67). Laertes shuts out any and all loyalty except for his family’s. On the other hand, when Polonius tells Ophelia to stop seeing Hamlet, she responds with, “I shall obey, my Lord,” (Shakespeare 1.3.85). She says that she “shall” as if she has no other choice but to comply with her father’s wishes. Her blind obedience to her family and her ignorance of the existence of loyalties outside of the family unit allow her to be used by her father, as she is unmarried and therefore is compelled to follow her father’s orders. Laertes and Ophelia, despite being brother and sister, have very different perspectives on where trusted obedience should be placed.

Hamlet learns a lesson in vengeance after he kills Polonius in his climax. He realizes that he must act on his emotions if anything is to be done. Hamlet embraces what he needs to do in order to get revenge when he exclaims, “A bloody deed!” (Shakespeare 4.3.116). Normally, this phrase would be distraught and carry a melancholy tone, but with the addition of the exclamation point at the end, it turns the words into a triumphant phrase, as if Hamlet is finally conquering his indecisiveness by deciding to kill the king, who he later found out was Polonius.

Laertes’s belief about vengeance is reinforced at his climax, which is when Ophelia is buried. He sees Hamlet and leaps at him, saying “The devil take thy soul!” (Shakespeare 5.1.40), which exemplifies his attitude towards vengeance; one of quick and decisive action. Laertes does not wait to seek if what he is feeling is true. He acts on what he feels in the moment, which led him to attack Hamlet.

Additionally, Laertes also learns a lesson on obedience, which was that even familial obedience is temporary. His yearning to hold her “in mine arms” (Shakespeare 5.1.39) shows that helps him to realize that even family might be a breakable bond because death knows no bounds. Up to this moment, Laertes had believed that nothing could tear a family apart, but through his sister’s death, he realizes what he should have realized at his father’s death, that the only permanent aspect of life is impermanence.

Ophelia learns that obedience is not always ideal in any given circumstance. In fact, obedience should only be observed when it is willing obedience. That is, when the person is not being forced or pressured into compliance. She learns this when Hamlet is harassing her during the play and she cries out, “O, help him, you sweet heavens!” (Shakespeare 3.1.29). Realizing the harm being done to her by Hamlet, she is no longer willing to blindly obey others. Instead, she chooses to do what she wants to do.

Ironically, despite Hamlet’s and Laertes’s opposite views on how vengeance should be exacted, they both come to the same resolution in the end. After both are dying from being cut by the same poison-tipped sword, they realize
that vengeance only leads to more tragedy. In the end, they forgive each other, stated in Laertes dying words to Hamlet, as he says, “Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee, nor thine on me!” (Shakespeare 5.3.78). The two finally learn the true lesson on vengeance after it is too late.

Laertes and Ophelia both learn their respective lessons in the resolution that had been developing over the course of the play. Laertes learns that obedience and loyalty to others can be found outside of the family just as easily as it can be found inside of it. His asking for “forgiveness” from the “noble Hamlet” proves that after everything, he was willing to find relationships in others, not just his family (Shakespeare 5.3.78). Ophelia, on the other hand, learns that she does not to be obedient to anyone if it is not fulfilling. Before she starts to hand out flowers to everyone, she says, “Fare you well, my dove!” (Shakespeare 4.1.21). Shakespeare uses a dove to symbolize Ophelia’s purity and departure from the shackles of blind obedience. Both Laertes and Ophelia continue on their foiled paths of obedience until the very end, where they realize fundamental truths about the issues in their lives; that obedience can be anywhere, and that it is never binding.

The five-part structure that forms the plot of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet could give readers the impression that the ghost and his commands for obedience move the plot forward, but this is not the case. It is rather the foiling of characters such as Hamlet and Laertes, as well as Laertes and Ophelia, that shape the structure into what it is. Undoubtedly, the lessons learned by the characters, that vengeance only leads to further catastrophe, that obedience can be found in anyone, not just the family, and that obedience should never be binding can only be displayed through the aforementioned foiling of characters.
“Why?”
Ever since I was a little kid, I used to ask my dad that same question over and over.
“Dad, why is the sky blue?”
“Because blue light is scattered more than other colors when it enters the atmosphere. It travels as shorter waves.”
“Why?”
“Well, there are different colors of light, all traveling at different wavelengths to make up what we see as light.”
“Why?”
My dad, getting noticeably more exasperated, said, “Because that’s just the way it is.”

Wow, Dad! Thanks so much for that obvious answer!

Eventually, I grew up, and my need to always ask why began to fade. The days of asking my parents “why” on the car ride home turned into ones of me being asked the same, simple questions by my parents.

March 25, 2019 was no different. I got in the car after school not knowing that the only part of the day that would be familiar would be the questions my mom asked me on the way home.

“How was school?”
“Good,” I said as I reached for my phone.
“Anything interesting happen?”
“Nope.”
We approached the local middle school.
Then, for the first time, my mom said something that she hadn’t said while driving me home from school.
“Oh. My. God.”
Immediately realizing this was out of the ordinary, I glanced up from my phone to see what she oh-my-Godded at.

What I saw I will never forget.
There were a bunch of cars, a group of people, and a man doing CPR on a little boy who was lying motionless on the ground; that little boy was a twelve-year-old named Jonathan, who was hit by a car and died in the hospital later that day.

I had just seen an innocent child dying in front of me.

After seeing Jonathan, the questions I asked weren’t about the color of the sky.

Why do we die? Why do we seem so important, yet our existence means nothing in the cosmic timeline of our Universe?

By the end of the century, most of us will be gone. The ones who loved us will miss us, but they will carry on and on a long enough timescale, it will be as if we were never here at all. However, as time passed I was able to find peace with this timescale through accepting one crucial truth: it is just as arbitrary to lose hope as it is to find it.

While we will not be here for long, we have a purpose; we must do whatever we can to improve the world for the many generations that will undoubtedly come after us. Eighty years or eighty million years, charity would still be necessary, kindness would still be in our DNA, and spreading love would still be the universal goal.

Now, I don’t wonder about what will happen in a million years. I cannot control that. Instead, I choose to focus on what I can do in the short amount of time I have, from leading my Mock Trial team to success, helping parishioners at the Church, or giving my time and talents as a youth group leader. I make the most of every day because we never know when our lives will be cut short like Johnathan’s, a boy who changed my life without me ever even knowing him. Although we are just a blip, we are a part of something bigger: a great experiment that has spanned across all of human history, called “us”. A chance to be a part of this great experiment is a privilege we cannot afford to waste.

Because of Johnathan and the questions that arose after seeing him, I have learned to live a reflective life,
constantly looking inwards on myself to see how I can become a better person for the community around me. Because that’s just the way it is.
We were inseparable, my family and I.

Of course, I’m not talking about my mother and father, my brother and my sister. They never understood me. My real family came in the form of two guys I had met all the way back in middle school. We did everything together, running up the town every night, living the dream. Unfortunately, none of us had any source of income, so we had to make our own. Robbing and scamming were just a couple of ways we made our dreams come true.

April 14th started out as just another ordinary day. We had gotten ready for the day, grabbed our gold, and left the hotel room to see what the city had to offer for the day. After grabbing breakfast, we began walking around the suburbs when one of my brothers said, “What if we killed Death?”

I laughed, obviously, because I did not know how anyone could kill Death. My other brother, however, took it as a serious question. He told me that they had been planning this for a while and that they believe they are prepared to do it.

“Why didn’t I know about this?” I asked half-heartedly. I got no response.

And so there we were. Three boys looking for Death with some plan to kill her. Eventually, we found an Old Man smoking a cigar on his porch.

“Excuse me, sir!” one of my brothers shouted, “Do you know where we can find Death?”

The Old Man actually replied, “Yes, of course! Keep walking and you’ll run into a forest, underneath the single oak tree is where you’ll find her.”

My brothers said thank you and started walking in the direction he pointed. I stood there for a minute, thinking to myself.

Has this senile old man really given us the location of Death?

When we arrived at the tree, we saw heaps of shiny golden coins. We were confused at first. But unbeknownst to us, we had indeed encountered Death and had just given up all hope of killing her.

We had no idea how to get that gold back to our room. It was getting dark, and having no way of getting the gold home, “It fell upon the youngest of [us] all,/And off [I] ran at once towards the town” (Chaucer 198-199). Never one to back down from a challenge, I am prepared to independently step into any situation and am ready to go wherever I am needed in order to help others.

While I was running towards the town, I kept thinking about why they had never told me about their plan to kill death. We had told each other everything about ourselves, and we had no secrets until now.

We found something far greater than death, what if they don’t tell me about their plan for using our newfound treasure?

I am ashamed to admit it, but I believed that my brothers, who had been by my side since I was eighteen years old, would scam me out of my share of the treasure.

And I was right.

Two to one, they killed me.

But I had a contingency plan as I always do. I had laced their wine with poison. Even if I am not around to see my full goals and visions come to fruition, I always make sure that I make the right moves to ensure my goals are reached.

“Thus these two murderers received their due,/So did the treacherous young poisoner too…” (Chaucer 289-290). After all of us died, I learned a very important lesson: actions have consequences. Now, I know that anything I do, important or seemingly insignificant, will have a consequence and that I should be wary of these when making decisions in life, as I have been doing in deciding where I want to go to college.

As I said in my article in the latest volume of Canterbury Tales, although hope may seem arbitrary in such a greedy world, the consequences that having, or losing, hope creates have a large impact on the lives of those around
us.

I hope you will consider me as you look for new students to bring into your community. My persistence in the face of challenges, time management, and preparedness would make great additions to your wonderful university.
Blinded was I, by love and disillusionment  
My father and brother believed it was true,  
From both, I received their harsh judgment,  
Yet I could not see how Hamlet truly felt too.

To Hamlet I seemed to be transparent,  
So my kin continued to speak of a love untrue.  
Their thoughts—traps, I had to ensure to be present  
In the eyes of Hamlet, I was corrupt, deceitful too  
Though I am pure, I am dishonest,  
And the constant dilemma left me unhinged.

“Shh” said Father. Here comes Hamlet so we  
Must listen closely. The voice of Hamlet spoke  
And how it seemed to be so lonely.  
The truth of his madness was uncloaked.  
Though I am pure, I am dishonest,  
And the constant dilemma left me unhinged.

Father had fell victim to Hamlet's madness, with  
Me left to nothing. My ears now know the truth.  
Did I try to survive, so I forthwith  
Began to pass out flowers, as I roamed the halls in my youth.  
Though I am pure, I am dishonest,  
And the constant dilemma left me unhinged.

Daisies, Columbines, Fennels, but no more violets left.  
They are like sorrow and love, and just like I, they  
Seem to lack purity. With no father and lover, I am distressed.  
The feeling creeps while I sleep, slowly across my chest.  
Though I am pure, I am dishonest,  
And the constant dilemma left me unhinged.

So hard, did I try to survive a world filled with men  
That I can no longer be the pure flower I once had been.  
So I am withering away and I cannot bear to hurt again.  
I am left with no choice but to start within.  
For I must reclaim my voice that I had lost  
Even with my own life as the cost.
Claudius's College Essay

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? (Claudius)

As much as one might think that having a brother who is king would be great, I never found it appealing. I was always second. For as long as I could remember, I always sought the attention and approval of my father, so I worked and worked. I used my voice and speech to do what needed to be done. Though it seemed that it was never enough, so I decided to take matters into my own hands. I had to poison my brother, the King.

It was no surprise to me because I had to gain control and power somehow. After years and years of being deprived of the throne that should have been mine, I finally took action and became King of Denmark for “It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t, A brother’s murder” (Chaucer, 36-38). This clearly demonstrates how passionate I am and how once I set my sights upon something, I am determined to obtain it no matter the cost. Not to mention, the murder was absolutely spotless—no traces back to me whatsoever. Though some may see it as an extreme measure to take, I see it as taking what is rightfully mine and it is for such reasons that I lack the need to ask forgiveness from God because I am completely satisfied with what I have done. And I believe that “revenge should have no bounds” (Chaucer, 125), for the greatest men fight for their honor and all that is rightfully theirs.

All that work that went into becoming king was going to ruin shortly after I took the throne for the country because I had to send a message to Norway to keep peace. It was up to me to retain the power we have as a nation, and I did so all on my own accord. Previously I had tried to get the nation to move on after my brother’s death “together with remembrance of ourselves” (Chaucer, 7), but after the funeral, Hamlet went insane and began to mess up everything I worked hard for. It was then that I sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to see what had been “Grating so harshly all [hamlet’s] days of quiet/ With turbulent and dangerous lunacy” (Chaucer, 3-4), but it was to no avail. It was soon after that I was informed that Hamlet killed Polonius, so to ensure my safety, Laertes and I decided to kill him with a poisonous sword that “Under the moon, can save the thing from death/ That is but scratched withal” (Chaucer, 142-143).

Like father, like son. I had to do away with Hamlet’s father, and I had to do the same to Hamlet if he threatened my throne as well. Though I honor my family, power comes first. And with that power, I learned that anything and everyone can be controlled according to my will. It is for such reasons that I think my character will change your college entirely. I will take initiative in all classes and show people how one must take leadership to be able to have strength and influence. Not only will I be a perfect fit for your college, but I will also open the eyes of all those enrolled to the possibilities of what power can do.
A Modest Proposal to The Unfortunate Danger of Cell Phone Usage

Everywhere one walks, it is likely that each time one turns his head, he will see some form of technology, whether that is a cell phone, a computer, digital billboards, or cameras. It has become even more common to bump into someone on the street as a result of staring into a tiny little screen in front of one’s eyes. Something as small as a phone screen that is about six inches tall and three inches wide, contains the internet, a way to communicate with people all over the world, and infinite possibilities. Children as young as six or seven years old and adults as old as eighty years old are fascinated by all that comes with a phone screen. It is clear how simple it has become for one to turn to his cellphone during every minute or second of the day and it is for such reasons that society has digressed. Though it may seem like cell phones have allowed for better communication, it has resulted in less personal connections among communities. It is for this reason that they should be done away with.

Cell phones have ruined society more than it has done good: children are amongst those that are affected the most by overuse of cell phones. To start the banishment of all cell phones, it must be made law across the country and must be enforced immediately. Instead of the use of phones, people will once again be able to interact with the rest of society in person, rather than over an electronic device. As something that has plagued the world for so long, phones must be eradicated.

There is nothing good about phones no matter how much knowledge they provide, so with the support of parents and government, phones will finally be eradicated. There will no longer be means of communicating with someone across the world within a matter of minutes, and now society will have to revert to written communication once again. According to a study done in 2016, it was found that forty-one percent of teen drivers reported checking social media while driving. This in turn could cause so many more accidents and deadly consequences. Children whose brains are still in the early stage of development, will no longer risk slow brain growth and in person communication will increase. With so much information readily available, children could be exposed to media that could corrupt their innocent mind and could influence them to participate in immoral choices.

Not everyone will support this difficult decision because some people actually advocate for the knowledge readily available on a cell phone. Keeping cell phones also means that children will continue to experience slow brain development and even an increase in bad behavior—according to some studies. Cell phones give children the ability to easily access information that could easily corrupt their moral compass they set at a young age. It is incredible to believe that some people are not in favor of preventing such horrible things from happening.

It is for such reasons that I urge one to take into consideration the imminent danger of continuing the use of cell phones across the world. It would be horrible if children of future generations continued to suffer the negative consequences of cell phone usage and if the rest of society continued to digress. Everyone should work together to allow the nation to begin to progress even further than it has in the past by abolishing cell phones.
Choice Piece: Personal College Essay

Select a piece of art (e.g., musical composition, movie, book, painting, play, etc.) that you dislike. Clearly describe the subject and offer a critique with specific ways the artist(s) could have made it better. Please also describe the effect that an improved version of the work would have on the audience and how it contrasts with the effect it currently has. (500 words maximum).

Jumping out of bed at exactly nine o’clock every Sunday morning is what I looked forward to every week as a seven year old girl. Turning on the TV to watch Avatar the Last Airbender and consuming a bowl of cereal on the couch in front of the television would be my source of joy for the next years to come. When the series ended, I was disappointed, but when I learned that a new movie would be coming out soon, I was ecstatic. I walked into that movie theatre with so many expectations, and fell asleep a quarter of the way through. Going home, I hopped on my dad’s computer and began looking for the names of the writer(s) behind the movie that completely destroyed one of my favorite series. For many reasons including—but not limited to—the casting, the length of the movie, and the crucial details to the plot, the movie failed to meet my anticipation.

Having to fit multiple character storylines, plot lines, and villains into an hour and a half movie completely took the life out of a story I held so dear to my heart. The screenplay attempted to do so much in so little time that it ruined what the movie might or could have gotten right. It simply no longer gave me that same feeling I would have at nine a.m every Sunday morning. If the film were to be improved, it should have been made into multiple movies that would almost mimic the seasons of the television show, giving it more room for important plot lines or characters that were not in the first movie. Something else that could have been done in a better fashion was having a realistic cast that actually fit the characters. The cast in the movie all looked to be over the age of eighteen—except for one or two, but the series describes all the main cast to be children of ages twelve to fourteen. More importantly, the comedic elements that the series had and that affected the audience, was clearly not in the film. Furthermore, the series depicts some of the main characters to have some indigenous lineage, but the film completely disregarded that aspect. As someone who comes from a Hispanic family, I really loved being able to see unique nationalities on screen, but I was let down even more.

Even with such changes, I believe that this film should not have been made at all. The appeal of making a good live action movie is to allow people of all ages to really fall deeper into any make-believe world and to connect with the characters and story on a more personal level. As an eight year old in elementary school, I wanted to experience the same feeling I would get on Sundays, but the movie failed in almost every aspect. Maybe Avatar the Last Airbender and other animated series are better off as cherishable 2D characters on a screen.
Hamlet's Predicament

Pondering about choosing to kill Cladius, Hamlet reflects on his thoughts and his actions and whether they have any true significance if he is not acting upon them. In this soliloquy, Hamlet leaves home and sees Fortinbras leading a massive army to fight for what seems to be a small meaningless plot of land. What he realizes is that Fortinbras and his army are not really fighting for the physical land, but for honor. This leaves Hamlet reflecting on the direction he has to take against Cladius in order to fight for his father’s honor or to possibly restore the honor of his mother.

From the very start of the soliloquy, Hamlet points out “how all occasions do inform against [him, and spur [his] dull revenge!” (Chaucer, 31-31). This personification of the world and “all its occasions” is what Hamlet believes to be telling him that he needs to act, but he somehow cannot follow through with the action of revenge for his father. His head wants to act, but he cannot follow through with his action because of his heart. This conflict is common throughout the entire play and presents itself through characters like Hamlet, Claudius, and Ophelia. Unlike any other character, Hamlet achieves a complete turning point in his thinking process. Once he sees that army, he realizes that he has to take action against those who have stripped his family’s honor.

Though “[he] has cause and will and strength and means to do’t.” (Chaucer, 44-45), Hamlet cannot seem to take that final step and kill Claudius. It is ironic how though Claudius and Hamlet are related to one another, they are clear juxtapositions with how easily one was able to kill his own kin. Hamlet also mentions that unlike the soldiers who are fighting for an insignificant piece of land, he is fighting for something real. He is fighting for his father and mother—even the country of Denmark. This also reveals evidence of juxtaposition. He wishes to fight for his family’s honor, but his heart is preventing him from getting revenge, but he vows that “from this time forth, [his] thoughts be blood, or be nothing worth” (Chaucer, 65). This marks that chance in Hamlet as he vows that he will no longer think of anything but his vengeance that he wishes upon his own uncle.

In this culmination of events, Hamlet moves from uncertainty to assertion. He promises that from this point on, his sole goal will be to kill Claudius to have revenge, and if he has any other thoughts, he will ignore them. It is crucial to recognize that Hamlet is now obsessed with avenging his father which serves as a clear element of foreshadow that will predict what is to come of Hamlet. Though Hamlet knows that habit is an evil and will only do harm, he still engages in it—doing exactly what he warned his mother of. In trying to logically justify killing his own uncle, Hamlet is actually becoming more and more irrational. Not only is this a paradox, but it is also ironic. Hamlet is abandoning his values and becoming someone he warns others against becoming.
Orozco, Isabel

Isabel Orozco
Age: 18, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Caprice Houston-Bey

Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

**Personal College Essay**

Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

Car rides are nothing short of spectacular for me. Whether it is driving to the park five minutes away, taking a road trip to Los Angeles, or learning how to drive, I find myself the happiest. I could be on a twelve hour car ride to visit family in Colorado, and I would be awake every second of the trip because—to me—time seems to stop. The never ending natural beauty and cities filled with people never cease to amaze me. Ever since I was a little girl, I have always spent my time staring out the window in the backseat gazing at my surroundings and watching the world go by. Though I love driving and taking the journey into my own hands, I enjoy seeing where the driver takes me—the passenger. Seventeen years later, and I still continue to do the same thing.

My dad’s work makes him drive everyday, sometimes for hours at a time, and when he comes home, he always tells me how tedious it becomes, but I can never understand why. Being in a car gives someone the ability to not only look at his surroundings, but it gives someone the chance to look at humanity on a closer basis. Though many people find this thought common, I am fascinated by the ability of being able to have a glimpse into someone else’s life. At the moment I see someone through the window of my car, they could be driving to work or walking across the street to get groceries, and it is something that always has me thinking. All those thoughts pop into my head within a matter of seconds of seeing someone walk across the street, or seeing someone drive by in a car next to me. The experience I have by simply being in the passenger seat in the backseat of a car leaves me stunned every time.

In the same way that the driver of a car takes me places, I am currently in the backseat of my own car ride called life. Everything that happens in my life, I play an important role in and I have the ability to impact it in whatever way I choose—good or evil. At the same time, I also have the ability to to allow myself to just—to put it simply—go with the flow. Those times that I am in a car, I sense a break in time where I can just “go with the flow” and quite literally see where my next destination is. Oftentimes, I also find myself taking the time to go out by myself and take walks either in my neighborhood or maybe around parks late at night.

Any time that I am alone outside of my house, I am given the ability to just have some time with myself and my thoughts. A couple years ago, I struggled to do this. Graduating middle school and entering high school, I was confident about my academic skills, but sophomore year, I began struggling. I was constantly facing setbacks in my academic career, and I was doing everything in my power to get back on track, but the endless hours of tutoring and work got me nowhere. I decided to walk my dog around eleven one night and a feeling of calmness and almost peace came over me, a familiar feeling. The same one I got those countless times I was riding along in the backseat of a car. So to any one else who asks me if I’m getting my license soon, the answer is “no”.

To Reach the Peak

Treacherous boundaries and precarious footholds, further and further still I would pursue, in order to behold a treasure only few could appreciate. Such rare treasures that reveal themselves through activities that permit a more profound sense of self. The rapid heart-beats, and embarrassing sweat streaks are familiar experiences that frequently occur on strenuous hiking trails. Yet, for this particular day, something was quite different, I was alone. Well, not quite alone, rather, I was trekking on my first solo hike, with two distinct dogs marching beside me. Despite being a well-versed hiker, the trail that I intended on doing was on the tougher end regarding elevation gain. Regardless, the many weeks of persuasion have led me to believe that the hardest part has already come to pass. “Are you sure you have everything you need? Make sure to pack a jacket!” exclaimed my concerned mother. “I’ve got it all already. No need to worry. You trained me well.” It is responses like these that would help settle the tension and officially secure this first-time solo hike. Patiently, I waited till my mom was reassured of my preparedness. Our agreement was that I could hike solo, so long as I took both family’s dogs on an already familiar trail. Such terms were easily passable, and certainly did not hamper my excitement for the hike. As my mom gave her finally goodbyes, I came to the sudden realization that I was running behind by nearly a half an hour. “Oh well, let’s do our best...okay doggos?” I said to my hiking companions, Kenai and Koda once we had arrived at the trailhead.

Their hyper energy was not overwhelming, but rather proved to feed my fire of anticipation. In response, we began quickly meandering around the starting bend which reveals a much steeper incline. “No problem, Lets go.”

As we hiked the mountain side, the shadows casted by the scattered trees provided relief from the challenging trail. Yet, quick glances at the dogs playfully trotting quickly began to discourage me. “You guys have so much energy. Can’t you guys take it easier?” Yet, Koda, the one year old pup, seemed to think quite the opposite. After we were already two hours into the hike, Koda spotted a rabbit running up and around the mountain. Before I had even realized it, Koda had broken free and was charging after the unsuspecting rabbit. Instinctively, I reached for the dog whistle, hoping that my week-old dog treats would indicate his return. “Koda...Come!” I called out, whistling in between the commands; I was hoping that my attempts would reach Koda’s ears as I continued to run in his general direction. Even from a distance, I saw the change in Koda’s demeanor. His ears perked up, his body halted, and his eyes strayed from the fleeing rabbit and to me. “Come.” My voice called out in the wilderness.

At the same speed Koda initially ran after the rabbit, he charged back to me. Within a matter of seconds, Koda had returned to me waiting for his treat and his leash. Normally, Koda’s naughty behavior was inconsequential, but we were too far up the mountain to just let him run off carelessly. As I neared the bend, I spotted his silhouette still running. “Koda...Come!” I called out, whistling in between the commands; I was hoping that my attempts would reach Koda’s ears as I continued to run in his general direction. Even from a distance, I saw the change in Koda’s demeanor. His ears perked up, his body halted, and his eyes strayed from the fleeing rabbit and to me. “Come.” My voice called out in the wilderness.

At the same speed Koda initially ran after the rabbit, he charged back to me. Within a matter of seconds, Koda had returned to me waiting for his treat and his leash. Out of breath, I ran beside Koda back to Kenai, the older dog. Sitting down, I poured the dogs water and munched on my own trail mix. “Oh boy, I got you water. No need to worry. I trained you well, Koda.” After a well-deserved break, we continued the hike with renewed strength. Just an hour later, we reached the peak of the mountain. A beautiful treasure overwhelmed by sense. It was a feeling of satisfaction. I’m not sure how long we stayed there, but when I returned to the car, I came back with two dogs. Upon entering the house, my mother greeted me with a home-cooked meal.
“Right on time…” she said with a smile.
At that moment I looked to my loyal companions and my sore legs, and once more I was enveloped by the treasured feeling of satisfaction. For a successful first solo-hike, I am glad to say that since, I have continued to pursue the unexpected, but satisfying adventures found on the trail.
**Water’s Grace**

Connected Well: The Water Pump

Corrupted
Unadulterated
Up Shameful neglect
Up Blissful ignorance.
Yes There is a story
Up In the corners
Of this shared world
Up Untamed, yet civil
Up Beyond privilege
Peace within, but only
From spiritual satisfaction.
There is no
Peace Where there is no
Water
They must coincide
With one another.
Yet, life moves on
Finding way, Upon way
Peace
Found in one within
Water
Bring these wells
Pump them well.
Up and up
We shall rise
On this one earth,

Downward Climb: The Fountain

Beauty, beauty
Coming from above
There is no fall
For civil society.
No fall beneath the untamed seas. For we are
Too grand, too strong
To fall.
Yet, even the rain
Must fall.
Down down.
Beneath the ground
Nutrient rich, well kept land.
Nevertheless, we rise.
But at what cost?
At what cost must the water
Rise and rise
High enough where
It won't be drunk.
Drunk, drunk, drunk on luxury.
Higher and higher. Too high to see
Those beneath. Beneath the means of all humanity.
Fallen creatures.
No matter how high, it shall fall.
Dante’s Inferno is well known to be a poem based on his worldly opinions of sins and their consequences. Yet, Inferno is well thought-out, in order to make each punishment as just as possible through the eyes of an opinionated man. Still, such an interpretation reveals a relationship with hell that highlights how human emotions of unendurable pain, hunger, regret and remorse, can impact the course of an individual’s punishment in hell. Therefore, in Dante’s Inferno, the detailed punishments for treachery as seen by the ‘sinners’ Ugino, Judas, Brutus, and Cassius describe the consequences of sin and reveal that Dante’s interpretation of hell is one that is an extension of the sins committed in the living world, to order to stress the importance of making amends in the while alive. While alive, Ugolino starved to death, but not before committing a most severe act of cannibalism. When Ugolino’s fasting overcame his grief and his sense of self, Ugolino lost control of his human reason in order to satisfy the indescribable pain of starvation through the consumption of his dead sons (Dante XXXIII). Though even such a vile act, Ugolino’s starvation overwhelmed him and he was condemned to hell. Consequently, in hell, Ugolino must continue to relieve the guilt of consuming another human being on the brink of insanity to replicate “the lingering inhumanity of the death” he suffered (Dante XXXIII). Though, no matter how much he gnaws at the skull of another human being, he will not be satisfied because the sheer destructiveness of eating his own sons cannot be lived down. Dante intentionally keeps Ugolino’s punishment parallel to the sinful deed that he committed on earth. In order for his inhumane act to be realized for the common man, it is necessary that such grim measures must be taken to warn living mortals of the consequences of losing control of a sense of humanity. Ugolino’s loss of humanity is what led him to abandon his emotions and consume his sons’ flesh. Therefore, by being unable to lose the desire for flesh, Ugolino is tortured to have his eyes narrow into slits while he seizes the human skull again and again, thus forcing him to relive his final moments for all of eternity (Dante XXXIII). Without proper closure or an opportunity to redeem himself, Ugolino’s death as a cannibalic father continues in the depths of hell.

In the living realm, the sinner Cassius and Brutus conspire against Julius Caesar and act upon such treacherous plans by dirtying their hands and murdering Julius Caesar. For this reason, their head is found downward while the rest of the body is within Satan where in every mouth “his teeth was crunching” (Dante XXXIV). Both men are found eternally in agony while remaining unable to move or escape the very mouth of Satan, to bring justice to Caesar who was cornered by men he once could trust. In addition to being subject to eternal unease, they are reliving the pain that Julius Caesar endured in his final moments, but several times more severe and for all of eternity. While remaining conscious of their suffering, each of them have no choice but contemplate their sins of treachery. Thus, much like Ugolino, they are unable to move forward from their respective sins against Julius Caesar and against God. While they may be able to think of the ways they could have lived differently, their suffering will not lessen nor with their punishment be overlooked.

In Dante’s time, treason or blasphemy against the Church was both a moral crime and a mortal sin. For this reason alone, it is understandable that Judas, a direct sinner against Jesus’s divinity would be deemed the one who is condemned with “the greatest pain” (Dante XXXIV). Since Judas’s sin of treachery was committed directly against the Son of God, it is reasonable that Judas would be found with the closest proximity to Satan. Judas led the Jews to Jesus so that he may be executed to please the public, therefore, Judas is too sentenced to eternally be “utterly stripped of all skin” just as Jesus was stripped of his clothing (Dante XXXIV). For each of these parallel similarities, Judas is brought closer and closer to realizing the severity of his sins. When Judas turns away from Jesus, he no longer sees the light of the divine. As such, Judas is found in the darkness of Satan’s mouth with his “head inside” as “he plies his legs without” for it was through his kiss that he fully commits to his sinful desires (Dante XXXIV). Despite his head being chewed off, Judas is incapable of dying. For there are
certain emotions that cannot be evaded even after death, such as Judas’s lingering regret at his betrayal of Jesus. Regardless, the consequence of betrayal is immeasurable suffering without ever being able to face the light of day again.

In addition, as seen consistently through the numerous punishments, Dante emphasizes that hell in the continuation of one’s sins on earth. Thus, overall each of these men are met with fates that Dante deemed satisfactory for their respective mortal sins. Yet, in broader terms, Dante reveals that inhumanity reaps evil deeds that can willfully control the worst of men condemning them to ‘hell’. While it can be easy to distance oneself from the sins and less-attractive attributes of the sinners found in Inferno, it is perhaps not the best course of action. Between each of the sinners, Ugolino, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas, none of them are fully capable of redeeming themselves in order to cleanse their consciousness filled with disobedience. Though they may have felt justified while alive, the irredeemable actions of committing such vival sins prevents them from truly coming to terms with themselves. As a result, they are condemned to wallow in their most unbearable memories for their lack of forgiveness while alive. Thus, Dante’s walk through hell serves as a reminder to the bondage-breaking capabilities that redeeming forgiveness can unveil to relieve oneself of lingering misgivings or violations against humanity’s innate moral code.
Expression of Self-Reliance

In order to transcend time, there must be an understanding of oneself. In other words, to go beyond the limits set in place by society, an individual must embrace himself. Transcendentalism is similar in this sense. In literature, transcendentalism usually deals with issues of community and of the individual and the role those play on one’s mental state of mind. In both The Awakening and the Invisible Man, the lead characters are minorities in their respective societies. Thus, a theme of self-reliance, taken from the philosophy of transcendentalism, plays a role in their character development.

Invisible Man focuses on the minority race of 20th century African-Americans, with the narrator being an unnamed African American himself. Consequently, the theme of self-reliance as becoming a part of someone's mentality can be realized through positive self-reinforcement. When the narrator recognizes the control that society had over him, he was able to begin the process of “renewal of the entire individual” (Halliwell 164). Furthermore, once the narrator begins to self-rely, several opportunities arise for self-improvement. Therefore, when the narrator accepts his invisibility and adopts a self-reliance mentality, it symbolizes his acceptance of himself that allows progression to move forward.

In The Awakening, the female lead, Mrs. Pontellier, is in the minority due to her female gender. Still, Mrs. Pontellier has the potential to obtain the self-reliance of transcendentalism. This potential is due to her apparent willingness and openness to questions that expand beyond the obvious answer. As referred to in the title of the novel, Mrs. Pontellier’s ‘awakening’ is due to the “fact that they [women] have been overdoing the self-sacrifice business,” (Dix 145). As Dix states about the “American Wife”, Mrs. Pontellier’s role is to discipline and to manage the children (Dix 146). Yet, the responsibility women would have in the home is not fully understood by the opposite sex. Thus, the bridge of understanding between male and female is difficult to realize. Despite self-reliance being against the culture of the time, Mrs. Pontellier’s connection to her emotions and inner thoughts are a start toward self-reliance. So, as a woman, she will encounter difficulty embracing the philosophy of transcendentalism, especially the pillar of self-reliance.

A common trait among both lead characters is a questioning of societal norms. This questioning leads to them to examine their individual roles in society. Though many people may deny their doubts about the way society chooses to operate, the fact remains that those who do are looked upon as heroes. These heroes who are willing to defy even themselves in search of answers that they may not come across. In the case of Invisible Man, the narrator obtains the philosophy of transcendentalism because of his understanding and embracing of his own invisibility. Also, The Awakening’s Mrs. Pontellier has the potential to embrace herself and progress her role in society beyond that of the home. Self-reliance, as found in transcendentalism, is an outlet for minorities to explore their thoughts and personal beliefs to realize a healthy mindset.
Aim for the Sky, Find the Ground: this is Hell

Hell, snitch’ put it down eye been out ballin’ in my grave
We find it in the dark for we seek mornin’ we find it is not
Hell, Wonder do hook on mine (hook on mine)
An eye, no wit, couldn’t make lunch mine
Forward to hell the wonder
Health gettin’ out to the park
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
This aint Wonder, yeah
Get it out of the park
See it those in the life
For we could’ve all of that
(Oh Wonder)
Fool to be forever, my life before me
And we clamored for them
(Oh Wonder)
Well, Wonder we fought a sky
But I am now am under ground, cry
No forget it, my Wonder
Hell is in all the, at this park
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
This aint Wonder, yeah
Get it out of the park
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
Hell be Wonder
Hell, hell be Wonder
This aint Wonder, yeah
Just get out of the park
“Do it right and do it well,” is what my mother taught me, since I was a little baby. “Yes, ma’am!” I would giggle out, since I was a little baby. A little baby too innocent to realize how little I actually knew. Though as a baby, it made sense that I would be a child. A child with little understanding of my mother’s words. Now, that I am older, it is shameful that I still have no clue what my mother meant. For my mother was a great success, who built upon her failures as if she had all the time in the world. Yet, she was a coward. A coward who hides in the light of success to hide her fear of failure. She thought that protected me when she told me to succeed. Yet, all she did was create a child who became an adult who still knows nothing. Though, maybe she knew little of her own fears, just as I know little of what I write. Maybe just maybe, we are the same type of madness. “Don’t bother doing anything, unless you do it right,” she would whisper in my ears as she tucked me into bed, while her eyelashes dripped droplets of tears. These tears told me that her world was much different than mine. Her sweet, yet daring words would ring in my head whenever I wanted to do something with my life. So, I moved through life duly and unmotivated, worried that I may upset the perfect society that I lived in. Yet, as I aged, my dreary eyes were opened to a world of imperfection. “Such a disappointment,” I said to myself almost everyday, as I watched people walk into a fire of their own creation while being none the wiser. I can’t help but laugh at society! I laugh and point the finger so that I might never fail, for I know that people are weighed down each with their own worries. Thank goodness I don’t live for any longer than a life-time. I wish I could run away, back to the world where I was too much a coward to live properly. Being a coward is underappreciated. If I am a coward, then I do not have to do anything that would inconvenience me. Goodness! I am sure my mom would be proud if I remained a coward, for who knows what chaos would ensue if I did something for someone else’s sake. Well, now I want to do something purposeful. “You’re welcome!” I say to society. I surely must make life a bit better by believing that I am trying to better the world. I do not think that I am a coward. After all, I just tipped the waiter who works hours too long to buy for themself a lonely gift for no reason at all. Goodness! That’s me. Only me. Please don’t be like me. For I haven’t tipped anyone, as I can’t even afford my own happiness. Don’t listen to a fool like me, and do take heed of my warning. I do not try. Be the opposite of me, for I am a coward who hides from my own shadow. That is all. Thank you for harboring my thoughts in a couple well-placed paragraphs, but only a coward will try to hide from themselves forever.
On the Subject of Digital Media

Welcome to the digital age. A new addiction has hit the nation’s youth. It is pervasive, unrelenting, and leaves the user with irreparable damage. The youth waste their days away, endlessly scrolling through what seems like unlimited media. Children as young as 3 have been struck by this addiction. At such a young age, they have already grown a dependency on technology, their eyes glued to their iPads and cellphones, watching hours of entrancing, brightly filtered YouTube videos. Instead of spending time with their peers, the youth isolate themselves and create their own worlds separated from society. They are disconnected, unmotivated, and worst of all, brainwashed.

The internet can be a tool for good. It can connect people from all over the world, bring about new ideas, create communities, and so much more. In this day and age though, it’s become more like a trap. Social media platforms intentionally spew out as much content as possible to keep users interested, and essentially, addicted. Young minds are constantly being bombarded with trivial things. Instead of being productive members of society, they waste away their healthy bodies and minds.

The youth are in a deplorable state, and there is only one way to reverse the harmful effects that the internet and social media have placed upon them, internet deglobalization and a return to the Industrial Era. The youth are assets to this nation. Their abilities must be harvested while they are still plentiful. Instead of wasting away in their rooms scrolling through senseless media, they will be put back to work, utilizing their capabilities to the fullest. By extension, the internet will be reserved for those that will use it for the collective good.

The first step to this plan is implementing an age requirement when purchasing electronic devices. Individuals must be at least 30 years of age in order to legally purchase an electronic device. Disobeying this law will result in criminal charges. Parents who buy devices for their children will face repercussions as well. Next, once children have developed proper cognitive skills, roughly around age 6-7, they must enter the workforce and provide their families with the entirety of their paycheck. In replacement of after school activities, they will be expected to work 8 hour shifts from around 3pm-10pm, giving them ample time to rest for at least 8 hours a night to rejuvenate their young minds. Their work will take place in factories, ranging from assembly lines to heavy labor. To ensure that children will be focused on their work both in and out of school, guardians must enroll them in a hybrid boarding school/factory campus, most of which are in rural areas where factories are primarily located. At age 18, when the children are officially legal adults, they will be allowed to quit their labor jobs and keep the entirety of their wages. Those who have the money to do so can enroll in some form of higher education such as college or trade school in order to pursue a more profitable career. Labor work will still be available to adults who cannot afford to pursue higher education. At age 30, around the time when individuals are finished with whatever form of higher education they are pursuing, it is legal to purchase an electronic device with a valid ID. By the time individuals reach this age, they will either be too immersed with their career to worry about such trivial matters or not have enough money to purchase devices in the first place. Devices will be a kind of luxury item, enjoyed only by the most affluent members of society. Individuals in the lower class will most likely never be able to afford devices, ensuring that their minds and bodies will be dedicated to the labor work that keeps our nation running.

The idea for this proposal came about during a meeting with my closest friends, all of which are coincidentally part of the 1%. This diverse group of billionaires all agreed that labor is needed more than ever and that allowing all people access to the internet will only harm the already struggling workforce. Children should not be exposed to new ideas and opportunities, they should remain in whatever social class they were born into and make the most out of whatever opportunities they are given. The men had a slogan for this, “the rich must get richer while the poor must get poorer”. By implementing this caste system like structure of social hierarchy, the nation will become even more affluent by piggy-backing off of the less fortunate.

The advantages to this proposal are plentiful; big businesses will be thriving like never before, the economy will
flourish, the labor workforce will always be filled, and the elite will continue to lead the country in the direction of progress. There are quite a few objections to this proposal though, the most prevalent being that the lower class will not be given equal opportunity with the upper class. To respond to this qualm, I’ll pose this simple question, what has the lower class ever done to benefit society without the help of the upper class? The lower class work in factories and perform manual labor, jobs that were made possible by the upper class! Why should the lower class indulge in technology, a luxury that was made possible, once again, by the upper class? The opposition also argues that this system lacks morality. Since when did “morality” become more important than progress? In a society that values advancement, it is inevitable that not all groups will reap the same benefits. Those who do the most deserve the most, and as the elites have proven time and time again, advancement is only possible when those with money take action.

I myself have been impacted by the detrimental effects of internet access. I grew up in the beginning of the digital age, a young lamb sent into the endless expanses of the internet. Members of my generation can attest to the fact that technology has left us damaged in one way or another. Many of us struggle or have struggled with depression, anxiety, or insecurity as an after effect. We alienated ourselves from our peers and created our own reality. One that was free from all the pain of the real world, pain that was normal and necessary to our growth as adolescents. Putting children to work and commodifying access to the internet would undoubtedly prevent future generations from ever facing such struggles. In a world that is constantly seeking innovation, it is imperative that people are acting as valuable members of society in whatever way they can. The internet can be a tool for good, but only when placed in the right hands.
Living in the Shadows

Guilt: “feelings of deserving blame especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy”. My new kingship was blissful. I had inherited from my brother a beautiful kingdom and an equally as beautiful wife. My rise to the throne was by no means peaceful though. I had the blood of my brother on my hands and a new “son” who detested me greatly. Why did I commit this crime? For “my crown, mine own ambition, and my queen” (Act 3, Scene 3, Line 59). I knew I was destined for the throne, but the guilt that came along with my new position threatened to demote me once more.

Young Hamlet, my nephew and my new “son”. His mere presence in the castle haunted me of my crime. As expected, he was deeply unnerved by his father’s sudden death as well as my marriage to his mother. His constant sulking equally unnerved me. I told him that his prolonged mourning was of “impious stubbornness” and “unmanly grief” (Act 1, Scene 2, Line 98). When this tough love approach didn’t work, I invited his old friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to the castle “to draw him on to pleasures” (Act 2, Scene 2, Line 15). I thought that their visit would draw Hamlet out from the darkness, but it seemingly caused him to retreat even further into it.

When he invited the court to a show of his choosing, I was sure that his spirits had risen. I could have never anticipated that he was going to pull me into his own darkness. The play re-enacted the events of my crime. I was mortified, I rose from my seat and exited the theater in a frenzy while from a distance someone exclaimed “lights, lights, lights!” (Act 3, Scene 2, Line 296). Hamlet’s inadvertent display of public humiliation forced me to deal with an emotion that I had long suppressed, guilt. In that moment, “my stronger guilt defeats [defeated] my strong intent” (Act 3, Scene 3, Line 44). No matter how much I tried to wash myself clean of his murder, my brother’s blood still stained my hands.

I suddenly came to a realization, “there the action lies” (Act 3, Scene 3, Line 65). My actions could not be reversed and no amount of repentance could nullify my wrongdoing. For the sake of my role as king, I had to accept my fate. Not only for myself, but for my kingdom and for my queen. Guilt would do me no good. In order to be the leader that I felt as though my brother had not been, I needed to overcome my own struggles.

An important part of this journey was realizing that not all things are bound to go as planned. After the incident with Hamlet, I quickly realized that I would not be able to carry out my new kingship without a few challenges. Regardless, I was able to easily adapt to my situation and work around new obstacles. Above all though, I realized the importance of strength. Though tensions may rise and emotions can overshadow the bigger picture, ultimately, a true leader must be strong minded in order to truly escape the shadows.

Works Cited
The Storm

From a witty, waggish, winsome prince,
Hamlet turned mad from his deceased father’s wish.
Once a young man in mourning, he quickly found purpose in his father’s forewarning.
To young Hamlet, his father was a god amongst men —
King Hamlet, the powerful, the noble the great,
The conqueror of lands and head of the state —
And with his death, the kingdom had its last breath
As Claudius rose to power and uprooted the flower
That was the once powerful Denmark.
Dark clouds were cast over the Crown
And the once beautiful flower began to wilt and decay
Under the interminable skies of gray.
The death of his father led young Hamlet astray,
But a visit from his ghost made him change his mentality.
His emotions were far from at bay,
Rather, he was willing to resort to brutality.
Boom! The sound of lightning echoes through the kingdom,
The storm has just begun.
The weight of his father’s request fell on Hamlet’s shoulders like a ton of bricks.
He knew from then on he could not fall victim to Claudius’ tricks.
The young man was consumed by empty vengeance.
From the mistreatment of gentle Ophelia to Polonius’ slaughter,
his madness became a man of its own,
Wreaking havoc on the lives of all those in the shadow of his father.
The court became his enemy,
Pawns on a chess board guarding their king.
As he played his game, the storm raged on.
The clouds multiplying nonstop
The thunder echoing through the castle.
The storm was unforeseeable,
But one thing was for certain.
In order for the storm to calm.
Hamlet needed to be lifted from his burden.

Work Cited
Strength in One

A society without a leader is bound for chaos. The divisiveness of large organizations, from businesses to governments, requires a leader to rise above and lead the masses. While strength is said to come in numbers, the strength of any group is often centered around one individual. Authoritative leadership demands for a leader who is willing to take action for his or her people. By nature of society, authoritative leadership is far more successful than collaborative leadership for this very reason. Despite the title, authoritative leaders must not be tyrants, but rather, learned individuals who maintain a balance between power and authority.

It is often argued that successful leadership lies in a leader working in correlation with his or her people. Confucian doctrine asks, “If a prince can govern with tolerance and propriety, what difficulty will he have?” (Confucius, The Analects). This quotation suggests that a mutual respect between a leader and his or her followers ensures peace within a society. While this may initially appear to be the case, a level of superiority must be established in order for a leader to be justified. The basis of leadership is a single individual rising above all others. If a leader were to be indistinguishable in power from those being led, no true progress would be made within a community. Additionally, it is imperative that the leader in question holds a vast understanding of the complexities of his or her community in order to rule without constant outside interference.

The idea that a leader must be distinguishable from his or her subjects affirms Hobbes’s theory that members of a society must “appoint one [man]… to represent them all” (Hobbes, Leviathan). The voices of citizens must be relayed through a single messenger. In a divided society, an overseer of the many different, and often conflicting, ideologies is necessary in viewing the needs of the masses from a larger perspective. By centralizing this under one leader, solutions that accompany the various facets of such needs can be made possible. More than anything, societies require instruction. In order for a society to achieve any kind of progress or deal with conflict, it is imperative that its citizens are actually led by their leaders. By assuming such a significant role, leaders should be ready and willing to take challenges head on and act as a trustworthy guide.

While the primary role of leaders is to guide, their power must go beyond simply ruling. As individuals of high status, leaders must also “have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom met in one” (Plato, The Republic). This mix of physical and mental strength is essential. Beyond the façade of conquest and domination, leadership requires intellect and understanding. In order to be worthy of the authority to rule others, one must first hold the proper knowledge to make decisions on behalf of the masses. Influence can only go so far, intellect is what will determine a successful rule in the long run.

Though mutual respect should exist between leaders and subjects, it is often better for a leader to be feared than to be loved. If citizens love their leader, it is easier for them to justify wrongful actions. On the other hand, “fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails” (Machiavelli, The Prince). The feeling of fear greatly outweighs the feeling of love. While many individuals can be loved, only few are feared. If a leader is feared, he or she is placed at a higher status than those being led. Love is often taken for granted as an irreplaceable emotion. Citizens often use this as a false sense of security, that regardless of their actions, the love they feel for their leader and the love their leader feels for them cannot be replaced. On the other hand, fear is the feeling that something far more dangerous lies beneath the surface. Fear keeps citizens in check and prevents them from disobeying their leader. No matter the diversity of citizens in a society, fear is a universal emotion guaranteed to maintain order.

In its entirety, authoritative leadership is necessary in ruling any type of organization. The inherent divisiveness of society proves the need for centralized power. While collaborative leadership is successful to a certain extent, a singular leader will always rise up. An effective leader, skilled both physically and mentally, can have a far greater impact than the combined efforts of a collective.
Choose Your Own Adventure

As I stand in the center of the dark jungle, with only streaks of light piercing through the canopy trees overhead, I hear the faint sound of hissing. Staring back at me are hundreds of poisonous snakes. They begin to encircle me. I struggle to see them all but I hear their hissing reverberate through the forest. Hope seems to be lost, but I quickly try to devise my plan of escape.

When I was a child, I was an avid reader of “choose your own adventure” books. Encountering a cluster of deadly snakes was a daily occurrence for me. The real challenge was in deciding what I should do in order to safely continue my journey. I had initially believed that there were only two options to choose from when encountering such a situation, one ultimately ending in success and the other in failure. Upon discovering the index though, which contained every possible combination of routes that the reader could take, I found that they were all interconnected. More importantly, I discovered that choosing one bad route wouldn’t result in the hero’s story coming to an abrupt end. Rather, the hero would be taken on an alternate route, one that could even end in victory despite previous failures. It wasn’t until I was thrown into a “choose your own adventure” story of my own that I realized the significance of this “alternate route”.

Freshman year was successful, I ended both semesters with all A’s and even won first place at my first speech and debate tournament. I anticipated my sophomore year to be even better, but I was in for a rude awakening. In just 6 months, my childhood home was foreclosed and my dog who I had since I was just 6 years old passed away. What ultimately tipped the scale for me though was losing the last speech and debate tournament of the year. After months of enduring major losses, I thought that this was my opportunity to get myself back to the top and return some sense of normalcy in my life. It all took a turn for the worst when I lost the tournament, not even ranking top 10. I took this loss to heart. I blamed my tears on my failure at the tournament, but I knew that it was because of much more. From the perspective of a “choose your own adventure book”, I had simply ended on three unfavorable routes. At this point in the story, I had reached my “rock bottom”. I was now faced with two options, stay where I was or climb back to the top. In staying true to the hero that I embodied as a child, I decided to pick the latter.

After trying to cling on to the past for so long, I realized that I needed to start living in the present. The months following the speech and debate tournament were some of the best months I had experienced in a long time. I did things that brought me genuine happiness such as working hard in school, spending time with my family and friends, and making art. I was able to continue on my journey by simply creating my own positivity. Ultimately though, it's easier said than done. I experienced my fair share of self doubt and would find myself going back to the negative headspace I had been in for almost a year. What kept me going though was imagining all of the possible routes ahead of me. Whoever said an adventure was supposed to be easy? During this time, I realized something incredibly valuable, life doesn’t end at a loss or a failure, but rather, these experiences lead to an alternate route. As Thomas Edison once said, “I haven’t failed, I’ve just found 10,000 ways that don’t work”. Failure isn’t a setback, but rather, an opportunity to grow and prove oneself once more.
**Master of One’s Own**

Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act IV, Scene iv provides insight into his growing madness over his plot for revenge. He is stuck in an internal and external power struggle. While trying to overthrow Claudius, he is forced to deal with his own demons. He feels trapped in his own body, unable to act on his plans and allowing the kingdom to run its course while he simply watches it burn to the ground. The frantic, ever-changing tone of Hamlet’s soliloquy best exemplifies the complexity of his emotions and his own internal corruption.

At the beginning of the soliloquy, Hamlet is experiencing a kind of existential dread. He states that he feels as though he is “a beast, no more” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 4). Rather than taking advantage of his gifts of intellect and free will, he feels as though he is simply existing rather than living. A once confident and self-assured young man, Hamlet begins to see himself as just another pawn in Claudius’ game. In his retelling of the story of the young prince of Norway, Hamlet states that the prince is essentially willing to put everything on the line for glory, “even for an eggshell” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 22). Hamlet’s reference to an eggshell is intended to demonstrate the prince’s ambition, an attribute that Hamlet feels as though he is severely lacking. His use of this metaphor is intended to create a comparison between himself and the strong prince that he aspires to be. Towards the end of the soliloquy, Hamlet uses a simile, stating that soldiers “go to their graves like beds…” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 31). This comparison mirrors the one he previously made with the prince. Unlike these men who are willing to put everything on the line, he is stagnant and undetermined.

Hamlet’s existential dread quickly develops into impatience. He is angry at his complacency and asks himself, “I do not know/Why yet I live to say ‘This thing’s to do,’/ Sith I have the cause, and will, and strength, and means/To do’t” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 12-15). Hamlet is referring to his revenge plot. The longer he waits to execute it, the quicker he spirals into madness. Finally, the soliloquy ends with Hamlet coming to terms with his emotions and actions. He swears that he will carry out his plan for revenge, stating that from then on, “my [his] thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 35).

Shakespeare’s use of shifts demonstrates Hamlet’s capriciousness. As mentioned previously, the soliloquy represents Hamlet’s feelings of existential dread, impatience, and resolve regarding his plot for revenge. The constant shifts among his emotions are presented through shifts in the tone of the poem. The first shift occurs when Hamlet states “I do not know/Why yet I live to say ‘This thing’s to do,’/ Sith I have the cause, and will, and strength, and means/To do’t” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 12-15). This line is Hamlet’s transition from existential dread to feelings of impatience over not being able to execute his plan for revenge. The next shift occurs when he states “How stand I, then,/That have a father killed, a mother stained…” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 25-26). Hamlet begins to ponder his own status, but quickly realizes the power he has in the situation and is therefore determined to carry out his plans. This realization is presented when he states that “my [his] thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth” (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 35). After being dejected just moments ago, he quickly gains confidence and makes a pact to himself to take on this much more violent mentality.

The many shifts that occur in Hamlet’s soliloquy once again represent his volatile feelings and conflicted emotions regarding his father’s death and struggle for power. He feels as though he is not doing enough to execute his father’s wishes. By the end of the soliloquy though, he is filled with newfound determination, purely brought on by himself. This sudden shift demonstrates that Hamlet is the only true master of his emotions, but at the same time, he is quickly losing his own grip.
Laura Penalosa
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Poetry

**Life After College/The Break Up Text**

Living
with
this endless debt,
I wish that my life was
set. When I was little, I could
barely afford a skittle But I know
that college Will fill me with
endless nods of knowledge
My only fret Is that I will
forever sweat At
my nine to five Where I
won't learn how to thrive But
to sink And be at the brink
Of paying off What should
be free. While the rich
scoff And continue to
be At the top While
I can't stop the
work for a boss
Pouring his sauce From
day to night Til death
is in
sight

Love is like an open door Until you are crying on the
floor Endless nights of heartbreak and betrayal And I am
less than, believing I am unable To release my ties From you
who left me in surprise When I looked at my phone to see a
text I immediately said that you were a jest When my eyes read
the words I couldn't help but see the birds Flying around my
head as I prepared to faint. You are clearly not the saint I thought
you were. But it's okay now because you're with her. Now, I am
rising. And I am thriving Opening the knob To my new six figure
job That without your leaving I would not be achieving. The
flames of our love Shall never be talked of As I walk
onto a new road
Without you
as a
useless
load
Misplace Obedience for Dummies

Many may interpret *Hamlet*’s plot’s five-part structure as elicited by the character of the ghost and his off-putting demand to Prince Hamlet as a toxic; however, the plot is better represented through Shakespeare’s foiling of Gertrude and Ophelia as well as Laeretes and Hamlet during their first introduction, their separate climaxes, and their fated resolutions in order to reveal the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance. Shakespeare’s Gertrude and Ophelia are foils in their sense of loyalty and obedience to the men in their life, demonstrated in Acts I and II. Ophelia is seen to be an innocent, faithful daughter. She obeys anything her father says regardless of her own feelings. In confessing to her father Hamlet’s unwanted visit, she says, “My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber, Lord Hamlet comes before me” (2.1.91). Although she knew her father had a certain reserve towards Hamlet, she chooses to confess the visit as a truthful young daughter. On the other hand, Gertrude seems to be unfaithful and flirty. As his mother, Hamlet perceives her to be unloyal to his father. With marrying his brother soon after her husband’s death, Gertrude seems to move on too fast. As Hamlet mouths off his uncle, Gertrude says, “Do not for ever with thy valid lids seek for thy noble father in the dust. Thou know’st ‘tis common: all that lives must die” (1.2.70-71). It is obvious that Gertrude has moved on from her husband’s death with ill feelings from her son. Shakespeare placing these two women so intimately with Hamlet displays how Hamlet’s want for vengeance overshadows the love of the innocent. In demonizing his mother, Hamlet ends up placing all women in a poor category of promiscuity and disloyalty including Ophelia, who is the total opposite. His misplaced obedience towards his father’s ghost inhibits him from experiencing a better relationship with a person like Ophelia. Rather, he undermines all women because of his motherly issues.

Similar to the prominent women in Hamlet’s life, Laeretes and Hamlet are prominent men in Ophelia’s life who have both experienced the death of their father, exemplified throughout Acts IV and V. While both men consume themselves in avenging their father’s death, they go about it in different ways. Hamlet is more introspective about the kill. He wants to make sure he is analyzing his ghost encounter and the reality around him with accuracy. Suspecting Claudius, Hamlet uses a play reenacting the way his father was killed. Hamlet says, “If his occulted guilt does not itself unkennel in one speech, It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen” (3.2.73-75). The play should trigger Claudius; therefore, confirming that he is the murderer. Meanwhile, Laeretes is abrupt about the situation. Hearing that his father was killed, he rushes from France and searches for the killer. As he and Claudius talk of Polonius’ death, it is obvious that Laeretes is in a rash state of mind stating, “Repast them with my blood” (4.5.123). His anger is only impassioned when Ophelia starts singing. Both of their children want revenge fast. Both Hamlet and Laeretes are sabotaged by their call to vengeance. Although Hamlet is intricate when dealing with the matter, it is obvious that both of the men are ready to kill anyone in the name of their fathers.

In Ophelia’s climax, she changes from being an innocent girl to a mad woman. Though innocent and lovable, Ophelia is heartbroken by Hamlet as he calls her a whore. The person she loves has gone mad, making her lose herself. Then, her father dies and at the hands of her lover. Losing all the men in her life, she begins to sing, causing others like Gertrude to say, “Alas, look here, my lord” (4.5.30). Tragedy has taken over Ophelia’s mind in a way that corrupted her. Finally, she kills herself in the brook. As Laeretes asks, Gertrude confirms, “Drowned, drowned” (4.7.181). From Ophelia’s climax, readers can understand the true effect of vengeance. Though the act of revenge may seem heroic and selfless, it is the complete opposite. War and violence only leads to more pain and suffering. Had Hamlet not been so angry, Polonius would not have died. Ophelia is the perfect example of what happens when one person becomes so caught up in their pride to affect the lives of others. Not only is she overlooked by Hamlet in a romantic sense, but also in that he killed her father. Although Hamlet wanted to make Claudius suffer, Ophelia was the person hurt in the end.

In Gertrude’s climax, her true power is radiated. In the beginning of the play, it is blatant that Gertrude is reliant on the men around her, or so the audience thinks. She does what they say, and she loves Claudius maybe a little more
than her son. However, as Polonius is stabbed by Hamlet through the curtain, we see another side of Gertrude. Hamlet thinks she is cheating with another man when in reality she is just talking with Polonius. As Hamlet berates her, she responds, “What have I done, that thou darest wag thy tongue in noise so rude against me” (3.4.40). She stands up for herself. Gertrude internalizes this hate for her son, but it is only now that the audience sees Gertrude legitimizing his claims. She goes on to repeat, “No more” (3.4.103). Until this point, the audience is biased towards Hamlet; however, he becomes an unreliable character when he kills Polonius. The audience is able to see that Gertrude is not the mistress that Hamlet portrayed her to be. Rather, Hamlet is clouded with the hate of his mom for moving on. Truly, she may like her men; however, she is not reliant on them. Her climax reveals her monarch traits. She is able to stand up for herself without the help of another aside from the ghost. Gertrude’s climax reveals the unreliability of Hamlet’s understanding of his mother.

In Laeretes’ climax, the audience sees more of Laeretes’ true character. While going through the motions of his father’s death as well as mourning the death of his sister, Laeretes enters into a duel. While speaking to Hamlet, Laeretes says, “I do receive your offered love like love and will not wrong it” (4.2.237-238). He is speaking from true intentions unlike Hamlet. Laeretes realizes this saying, “You mock me, sir” (4.2.244). Regardless of Hamlet’s toxicity, Laeretes’ climax shows his humane persona. Throughout the play, he is portrayed to be an angry man who is rash and unbecoming. However, in this instance, the audience is exposed to his soft side. In giving his love, he becomes emotional. After losing so much of his loved ones, it is honorable how he is able to return love to Hamlet even while Hamlet is sarcastic.

In Hamlet’s climax, he changes from an introspective human being to a rash killer. Unlike Laeretes, Hamlet is thoughtful about his decision. Sure, he wants to kill Claudius in revenge for his father. However, he always planned it out. As Laeretes and Hamlet start to duel, Hamlet eggs on the competition with clouded judgement. He tells Laeretes, “Nay, come, again” (4.4.297). While they duel, Gertrude takes a sip of the drink and dies. Yet again, the protagonist is sent into a fury. Insulting Claudius, Hamlet forces Claudius to drink the potion repeating, “Drink off this potion. Is thy union here? Follow my mother” (5.2.321). In witnessing Hamlet’s climax, the audience is exposed to the consequences of rash emotions. Although Hamlet had been planning this win, the way it came about was not as intended. In the duel battle, Shakespeare uses phallic symbolism through the swords. The “sword” is their most vulnerable selves. At first their duel is sensible. As Hamlet eggs on the competition, their sense of pride is being tested, making both men grow into their anger. Gertrude dying adds to Hamlet’s anger, causing him to kill the man he intentionally wanted to. Small rash decisions can lead to bigger consequences like death.

With the death of both Ophelia and Gertrude, Shakespeare shows Hamlet’s loss of purity. In novels, women are a sign of innocence and fragility. In Hamlet’s case, the women in his life kept him somewhat grounded. However, as his mind became more clouded, so did his care for the women. Pursuing his father’s vengeance only results in the death of his innocence and fragility. The death of Ophelia, being the epitome of mindless obedience, could be a symbol of Hamlet’s true intentions dying away. Rather than avenging his father, he just became angrier out of spit of everything that happened. All of his nice character traits disappear as anger overtakes him. Gertrude’s death can be interpreted as the death of Hamlet's anger. Right before Claudius’ death, Gertrude dies. She screams, “The drink, the drink! I’ve been poisoned” (5.2.306). The poison was placed by Claudius himself. She drinks his revenge away and days, symbolizing the embodiment of their fight dissolving. As well, the reason Hamlet hates Claudius so much is not only because he is the suspected killer but because his mom betrayed his dad by marrying him. She is not only the symbolic embodiment but the physical. Soon after, Claudius dies. The death of Ophelia and Gertrude is a consequence and resolve to Hamlet's misplaced obedience and call to vengeance.

The deaths of Laeretes and Hamlet are the result of anger. Both men are so obsessed with the idea of vengeance that they die at the hands of it. They never get to experience the victory of killing another. Shakespeare does this to show that revenge will not spur joy. Rather, it results in lame consequences like death. These two people were taken over by their loyalty to their fathers when it would not have truly been what they wanted. Shakespeare legitimizes this idea by their dying of the swords with poison on the tip. As mentioned previously, swords are a phallic symbol of pride. This pride was poisoned by their fathers’ deaths, causing these emotions of distress. Their dying by these swords represents their dying by vengeance and obedience to their ghosts. Laeretes and Hamlet were corrupted so harshly by their obsession with revenge that it killed them.

In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, the five-part plot structure is moved by the idea of vengeance and misguided obedience through character foils such as Ophelia and Gertrude as well as Hamlet and Laeretes. Through the characters’ introductions, climaxes, and unfortunate resolutions, the audience is able to understand the severity of vengeance and obedience, interpreting that though feelings may be strong, it is better to kill with kindness.
Laura Penalosa
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

Free Nose Jobs for 11-Year-Olds

The “I Got Your Nose” Game turned into a harsh reality when I realized I could not actually switch my gargantuan snout for the skinny, up-turned style my classmates had. A mixture between my parents’ noses, my nose is bulbous, big, and bulky with a small bridge but large base. Everyday, I searched “Free Nose Jobs for 11-Year-Olds,” longing for a cheap solution to my growing insecurity. My parents cried when they checked my internet history. “Your nose shows the Penalosa in you. Never be embarrassed by it.”

The Penalosa? Sure, our family talks a bit louder, likes a good karaoke session, and has extremely high cholesterol, but the Penalosas are not necessarily a special breed. Slowly, I began to understand what they meant. I examined my mother as she exuded confidence and wit by cracking jokes with both her friends and strangers. I saw as my dad followed the American dream, where he went from a man using cornshucks in the field to two-ply toilet paper in a beautiful house. I watched as my parents housed and supported several of my cousins to help them finish their education. My last name was a prophecy of what I needed to become. A Penalosa: A person who thrives in all settings whilst bringing up others to do the same.

The Penalosa name manifested itself in my nose. Because of its largeness, my nose became an actress itself. Entering auditions, I was the shortest yet the tallest with confidence as I held my head high with my nose higher. Scrunching up or down, my nose added emotions of discontent or shock. Wiggling side to side, it transformed my 17-year-old face into Grandmama from Addams Family inhaling a whiff of her new potion. During every piano or violin recital, I breathed in and released my anxieties through my fingertips. In orchestra, I quickly drew in a breath to start the next line of sixteenth notes in Bernstein’s West Side Story. My nose helped me truly engage with music by giving me a sense of confidence and control. It pushed me through every long sustained note, every worried gasp when orchestra rankings came out, and every standing ovation. My nose became my trusty sidekick.

From the sea of small, pinched noses, anyone could tell that I am of ethnic origin. My nose screams Filipino power! Its roundedness protrudes from my face creating my soft side profile. My brown skin and features coupled with my Valley Girl accent shock others in the Filipino market. I embody my parents’ dream of an English-speaking daughter. While I speak English at school, I speak Tagalog at home. I translate anything my parents do not understand or cannot express in English including business proposals, marketing ads, and formal emails to help our small family business. Similarly, this line of communication allowed me to better help my younger cousins as they moved to America. I would say, “Kumusta na?” while they translated back, “How are you?” They began to feel more comfortable every time they talked to a new friend at the playground. Connecting the world in these minute ways, I have become a mediator between two cultures, and my nose is the best representation of this.

Although I had felt a great insecurity over my nose, I have grown into it. Still large and obtuse, my biggest insecurity influences my sense of individuality. I am a Penalosa as well as my own person. I obtain familial traits like my nose and confidence, but I nurture these traits to create something more long-standing through music and language. I seek to bring the world closer together with my nose in front of my eyes. As my nose accompanies me through my life’s adventures, I have come to enjoy it for all that it is: big, bold, and beautiful.
Laura Penalosa
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Poetry

They're Screwed

They're screwed, Don’t take their cash
Stake your future or debt forever?
Surrender yourself to debt to be smart
When you get smart, money shows faster

We’re screwed, I am amazed
Could we pay to send her to Rutgers?
The limit to spend on our low budget
Sorry my Lin, we can't afford it

Now any sign of green money, bank grows ,
Lets save
Don’t bury yourself in the arrears
More wealth will come after doing school, don’t be that fool
By taking a swirl of loans for nowhere
No no no no no no no no no no

Pay due, I go to Brown
I am drowned in debt to learn better
Remember to get a big scholarship
Get a jumpstart to pay it sooner

So cash it out and get it in, pay due, submit
Withdrawing some money or transfer it
The cost just grows though interest’s low, pay due, what’s new
The blooming tally is almost over

They’re screwed, Don’t take their cash
Stake your future or debt forever?
Surrender yourself to debt to be smart
When you submit, you’re free for
Ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever.

Nah!
Naa na na na na na na, they’re screwed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, pay due
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, pay due
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, pay due
na na na na na (Take a loan out baby), na na na na, pay due
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, pay due
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, pay due
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwsed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, pay due
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwed
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, pay due
Naa na na na na na na, na na na na, they’re screwed
After God created men, he created women. This is the true vice of the story of the world’s genesis. Understanding the superiority of one gender has been a battle fought long and hard. From the moment of creation, women have had to prove their worth. From a young age, chores and obedience were taught to be the work of the women. However, with the growing work of feminists around the globe, women are learning to understand their humanity. Equality is not a term for only men, but it is a term encompassing people of all genders and races. Particularly in the early 20th century, women struggled with embracing their femininity as a strength rather than a weakness which is exhibited in the novel, *Ragtime*. With the use of feminine foils, the progressive transformation of a housewife, and the bildungsroman of a young girl in the early 1900s, Doctorow’s *Ragtime* incorporates feminist theory to inhibit social commentary which criticizes the strict gender roles and sexism of the time.

The foils, Evelyn Nesbit and Emma Goldman, supplement one another to show the contrast between the traditional and feminist thought. The traditional view of a woman’s purpose is “to glory in their own femininity” (Friedan 22). The work of Betty Friedan explains how women were expected to be fulfilled in serving others. Thus, this led to others feeling entitled to treating women as servants. However, if a woman used her sexuality to get ahead, people loved her. Doctorow portrays these views in the character Evelyn Nesbit. In the beginning of *Ragtime*, Evelyn is stuck in a quarrel between her lover and her husband. Constantly, the men compete for her attention. After her husband had beaten her up, she fled to Stanford White, pleading for help. Of course, he kissed her, and he gave her an affidavit to bring to her abuser (Doctorow 30). Evelyn understands her advantage of having a man’s undivided attention. She toys with the two boys, leading to the death of Stanford White. She was the sex symbol of the time, and no one failed to stop her. Evelyn was the “woman” men wanted her to be. In describing Nesbit’s fame, the narrator mentions how when Nesbit met Goldman “the revolutionary...lashed her with her tongue” (Doctorow 2). Goldman shamed Nesbit for letting others perceive her in a sexualized light. It is not until the character, Emma Goldman, is introduced when the feminist viewpoint is shown. Goldman is a free woman who owns her power in order to uplift other women to do the same. In an ingenious way to demean the ploy of “glorifying one’s femininity,” Doctorow shows the impact Goldman has on Evelyn Nesbit. Nesbit develops guilt for her actions in the past and proceeds to donate to several charities that support children and women’s needs. In “Teaching Feminist Theory As A Man,” Clayton says that “just because I cannot speak as a woman...does not mean that I should get a pass from learning about, speaking about, or teaching about feminist issues” (Clayton 28). Just as Clayton does, Doctorow understands his privileges as a man, but he continues to make the effort to fight for women’s rights. The author of *Ragtime* uses the juxtaposition of the two women to comment on the injustices faced by women. Although he could not experience the prejudice first hand, Doctorow acknowledges the widespread problem. Especially in the early 20th century, sexism and gender roles were thriving. By creating such passionate characters, Doctorow creates a conversation about the suppression of powerful women.

Similar to Evelyn Nesbit, Mother transforms from her role as a housewife to an independent thinker, revealing how the world thrives when women do. Gender roles were strict. The man was the breadwinner while the woman was the housewife. However, women such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman “asserted that modern women must have access to jobs in industry and the professions” (Norton 641). Essentially, domestic chores were meant for the servants, and women were called to industry. Through Mother’s characterization, Doctorow introduces the subtle qualities of a housewife. In the beginning of the book, readers acknowledge Mother’s submission to Father. Whenever Father wants affection, it is on his terms. As Father went off, she was left at home to take care of the family. Mother describes how she “felt deserted by the race of males” (Doctorow 35). Without her husband’s help, she felt alone in dealing with her daily tasks. However, her dependence on Father changes as time passes. Slowly, Doctorow introduces moments of independence in which Mother is thinking for herself. First, she becomes angry at Brigit for
being lazy. Second, she initiates acts of affection toward Father. Lastly, she progresses in her knowledge of business practices. Father begins to see her potential, saying he was “astounded” (Doctorow 87). By having a male character see her growth, Doctorow shows his dislike of stereotypical gender roles. As Mother begins to flourish, the world seems to prosper. Father’s business thrives under Mother’s supervision, and Little Boy is smarter. Similar to Mother’s intelligence, *Little Women*’s Jo March crushes the oppressive connotation that comes with being a girl. Although the two stories take place in different time periods of American history, both Doctorow and Alcott depict women’s fight for independence. Talking about her father, Jo says, “I’ll try and be what he loves to call me, “a little woman,” and not be rough and wild; but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else” (Alcott 7). She feels that the fight to be a “good” woman is harder than being in the Civil War, attributing its difficulty to the oppressive duty of women to be solely lovers. Later in the novel, the reader sees how she blossoms from despising her femininity to seeing her potential. Just because she is a woman does not mean she is of less value than a man. Jo becomes a prosperous writer, selling copies of her own book. When women thrive in their work, the world is filled with light.

The bildungsroman of the Little Girl identifies an instance in which feminist theory is respectfully combatted with the love of a father to his daughter. Feminist theory is the understanding of gender inequality due to the ingrained patriarchy. The goal of feminist theory is to “emancipate oneself from the institutionalization of oppression” (de Saxe 183). With this thinking, it is true in nature to believe that all men look down upon women. However, with the relationship between father and daughter, Doctorow normalizes the idea of men appreciating women. Tateh and Little Girl’s relationship can be exemplified in this quote: “She gazed at him with such serene approval that he had a fever to create for her” (Doctorow 112). Their mutual respect towards one another is a great example for men and women everywhere. By giving respect, one gains respect no matter the gender. Similar to the juxtaposition of Evelyn Nesbit and Emma Goldman, the Little Girl is a foil to the Little Boy. Noticeably, their names are similar; however, they live completely opposite lives, showing the differences between men and women. Here, Doctrow shows the stark contrast between the male and female upbringing. When Little Boy matures into an analytical and intelligent young man, Mother is “very pleased” (Doctorow 117). On the other hand, Little Girl “attracted people” which “frightened” Tateh (Doctorow 126). Little Girl is stuck in the sexualization of her body due to society’s corrupt thinking. Rather than being proud to see his daughter prosper elsewhere, he knows what happens to girls in these times. An example of his experience is with his own wife. Mameh was taken advantage of, and he cannot fathom the fact that his daughter could have the same fate, too. In understanding gender inequality, one must notice the ingrained objectification of women’s bodies. A boy’s growth can be looked at as mature while a girl’s growth is looked at as prey.

In *Ragtime*, Doctorow takes a stab at the patriarchy by creating interconnected stories about women. These characters show the problem of traditional women’s roles in today’s corrupt society. In being able to truly appreciate women, the author emphasizes the need for respect. Specifically in engaging in the topic of feminism, Doctorow stresses that women are people, too. Whether man, woman, or goat, no person is inferior to another. All people breathe the same air, meaning all people deserve the same opportunities and understanding. Respect is gained when respect is given.
Laura Penalosa
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Humor

The Miller and NYU

Although it may be unfortunate, alcohol has been a prominent aspect of my life. Growing up with an alcoholic father, I was surrounded by alcohol’s freeing yet corrupting abilities. I could hear him combining songs like “Let Erin Remember” and “Irish Washerwoman,” experimenting with transition and key changes on the bagpipe. His mind was liberated in enjoying the sonorous sound of a bagpipe combined with the buzz of a liquid. The alcohol allowed him free his mind of musical barriers, but it also turned him awry when my mother died. Soon, I learned to cope as he screamed insults my way, and I cleaned up after major arguments between him and his friends. The lofty weight of my mother’s passing and father’s addiction took its toll on me, so much so that I gave into my father’s same temptation. Eventually, looking at my father felt like staring at my reflection.

On my way to Canterbury to be healed of my alcoholism by Saint Thomas Becket, I took a long break at the Tabard. With the rest of the English pilgrims, we sat and shared stories. Surely after a few drinks, I took a stab at it. I began with my improv about a lodger named Nicholas. I watched my audience as my words overruled me. “This clerk was cleped Handy Nicholas Of durn love he could and of solace, “ I started (Chaucer 3199-3200). Taking on a dramatic tone, I conveyed a story of love, lust, and humor. With the classic love triangle narrative, I grabbed at the hearts of the ladies. I incorporated sparks of my humor as I detailed “But with his mouth he kissed her naked arse” (Chaucer 3734). I had never felt this kind of freedom. My improv gave me an innate feeling of calm and peace.

At NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, I would thrive on the basis of its innovative and intellectual Drama Department. My love of improv did not stop at the Tabard. From comedy clubs to high school talent shows, I never failed to make a crowd laugh with the rattle of my witty jokes. With my bleak appearance, I am able to crack a chuckle out of the most serious people. The giant wart on my nose allows me to take on any sort of “Danny Devito” archetype. While I am infatuated by the playfulness of comedy, I would also like to explore the realms of serious acting. Professors like Mark Wing-Davis, having starred in mature acting roles in shows like *Henry IV* and *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, would prepare me to take on this new field. With my tenacity and grit, I know my time at Tisch would be dedicated to creativity but also addiction awareness. I would take part in sharing my story of alcohol dependence in the AlcoholEdu for College course. I believe hearing stories from peers allows other students to truly grasp the subject’s gravity. As an NYU student, I hope to grow alongside a community of doers and dreamers to make the world a better place.
“Growing Within to Change Society”

I am a knight who seeks to fight for truth and for Christ rather than for glory or wealth. I recently went through a meaningful mission which ultimately granted me my life due to my wrongful mistake in disrespecting women. In this time I have reflected and acknowledged my mistakes and how society perspectives have negatively affected my way of thinking. As a knight it is my duty to be respectful and help to improve and save the life of others, but I have not been able to fulfill this role. I acted in a wrongful manner that ultimately led me to possibly losing my life. But each and everyday I started to get closer and closer to my true self, I know what it takes to learn from my failures and become the lawful knight in which I intend to be. This journey brought me to my sense and awareness on how women should be treated and ultimately led me to falling in love. As I come to understand my struggles and how I was able to overcome them, I know that I must change society’s views on women. I am strongly passionate towards this issue of women’s rights because I used to be the problem. Even though I once was not that respectful knight, I know that lessons learned can make a change through my personal growth but I also hope to impact society’s views on the world.

I am planning to study Sociology. Studying sociology will allow me to learn about the historical, psychological, anthropological, economic and socio-cultural factors that impact our society and current realities. As a knight, it is important for me to understand the past and present in order to impact the future. Sociology is about the interconnectedness of our world and the University of Michigan will provide me with the opportunity to experience this in a hands-on manner.

This is a program that is unique to the University of Michigan and fits perfectly with my personal, academic and professional goals. I am particularly interested in issues surrounding equality and women’s rights. I want to be able to apply different perspectives of social issues between law and society, eventually attending law school. I know that lessons learned in the classroom at the University of Michigan will be applied to real-life situations into certain organization in which I can empower my fellow peers and make change in specific world views that need more awareness.

I know that in order to make real change, I need to develop a strong foundational knowledge to inform my actions. I have come to understand that intellectual pursuits are in fact highly personal. The knowledge I obtain at University of Michigan will certainly not stay in the classroom - it will come alive in a hands on manner. I look forward to developing connections between the academic and the political, the personal and the professional. University of Michigan is exactly where I want to be; I welcome the possibilities!
Locked in Cages

Here comes the sun, do, dun, do, do—Locked in cages, do dun do, do
Here comes the sun, and I say—Locked in cages, and I say
It's all right—It's not right
Little darling, it's been a long cold lonely winter—Little babies, been ripped away from family
Little darling, it feels like years since it's been here—Little babies, it feels like years since they have been free
Here comes the sun, do, dun, do, do—Locked in cages, do dun do, do
Here comes the sun, and I say—Locked in cages, and I say
It's all right—It's not right
Little darling, the smile's returning to their faces—Little babies, smiles slowly fading from their faces
Little darling, it seems like years since it's been here—Little babies, it feels like years since they have been free
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes—No, no, no, they need their family
Little darling, I feel that ice is slowly melting—Little babies, I feel that ICE is ruining dreams
Little darling, it seems like years since it's been clear—Little babies, it feels like years since they have been free
The Causes of Unavoidable Revenge and Obedience

Brief summary:

In Hamlet by William Shakespear, the lessons on revenge teach the audience, through the method of foiling two characters, that revenge is never a precise resolution. The foiling of Hamlet and Laerets’, as well as Ophelia and Gertrude exemplify characters’ influence in the effects of misplaced obedience and negative cause of vengeance through their introductions, climaxes, and resolutions. Ophelia and Gretrude foiling causes one another to fall for the dependency of men and therefore, lose their own moral dignity. Hamlet and Laertes’ foiling through their willing desire causes revenge through their sins but later learns the importance of forgiveness. Although the elements of anger, protection, and devotion allow the audience to be fully aware of what truly causes the action to seek vengeance; ultimately it becomes clear that revenge does not go as planned and others will be affected by it through unknowing consequences. Both vengeance and obedience is truly exemplified by the method of foiling within the pairs decision on manifesting their actions or desires. Revenge can be the quickest way to seek satisfaction but in the end characters face unavoidable troubles through their tragic deaths.

Excerpt:

The Causes of Unavoidable Revenge and Obedience

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance through Hamlet’s and Laertes’, as well as Ophelia’s and Gretrude’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

A foil that evidently influences Hamlet’s decisions is Laertes. Hamlet and Laertes share a common circumstance—a father murdered and in return seek revenge. Furthermore, they demonstrate their actions on how to successfully plan revenge in very distinct matters. Hamlet, of course, has a mandate from his father’s ghost to avenge his death, which he has mistakenly killed Polonius, Laertes’ father. While Hamlet suffers from an inability to act upon his desire for revenge, he contemplates every opportunity. However, Laertes is overly incautious in his executive decisions and urges in rage to kill the murder, Hamlet. Furthermore, in the final scene of the play, Hamlet says to him, “I’ll be your foil, Laertes: in mine ignorance your skill shall, like a star in the darkest night, Stick fiery off indeed” (2.5-7). Hamlet comes to acknowledge how aligned his situation is compared to Laertes for they both seek vengeance. Shakespeare uses Hamlet and Laertes to show that revenge will always result in excess damage not meant to be dealt. Instead of choosing the morally correct pathway to solve this issue of revenge, they seek to danger oneself, but resolve the various conflicts throughout the play in a tragic matter. As a result, they both forgive each other before their death, which signifies light from their sins and provides closure to the scene.

The foil between Ophelia and Gertrude involves a connection with Hamlet. Hamlet views both women by their morals, whereas Shakespear demonstrates them as dependent on men. Gertrude, the mother of Hamlet, is a loving, protective mother, and Ophelia, is young, and easily manipulated by men. One of the main stances, to which they both contrast, is their love for Hamlet. Ophelia, who is madly desperate for Hamlet's love is persuaded against her infatuation by her father and her brother. Laertes, her brother, does not approve of Hamlet when he says, “…ear you list his songs, or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open” (1.3.30-31). He thinks that Hamlet is not a match for his sister due to him being the cause of their fathers death. Both these women are portrayed as codependent, for example, Ophelia obeys her father in any command he propels unto her and Gertrude quickly marries Claudius right after her first husband was murdered. Their obedience is evidently depicted through their
reflection of actions. Ophelia who is completely reliant on her father and will do as he pleases, while Gertrude obviously is attempting to protect the peace in her marriage by denying Hamlet's theory of his uncle having anything to do with her deceased husband's death; ultimately Gertrude tries to please Claudius right after Hamlet confronts her on their “sinly” marriage. Shakespeare demonstrates their lessons learned through their codependency. As a result, Shakespeare depicts Ophelia and Gertrude as dependent on men as Ophelia goes mad and commits suicide and Gertrude remarried right after they lose the men that they depend on in their lives through their deaths.

The main theme of revenge is told by Hamlet's father's ghost. Upon finding out Claudius, his uncle, was the murder of his father, he immediately feels the need to take action, but begins develop a critical crisis in his own head on whether it is morally correct to act decisively or let nature take its course. The conflict between Hamlet is focused on his internal desperation: Hamlet constantly attempts to fight his self-doubts. Therefore, Hamlet tries to search for information that makes Claudius capable of killing his father, since he cannot convince himself to act upon the vengeance. In his search in trying to find evidence for Claudius, he mistakenly kills Polonius, Laertes father. As a result, the interconnectedness between his desires and flaws truly are exemplified within his lessons of obedience and vengeance. Moreover, Hamlet apologizes to Laertes for killing his father and is still faced with death. Since the beginning of ACT 1 he is told that he must take vengeance but not until ACT 4 does he take part in this success. This lack of resolution causes the ending to have nearly all the characters suffer from death; ultimately nothing was ever solved except for the act of forgiveness. As a result, his central goal, revenge, never brought him satisfaction and in the end learns to forgive for what he has done to ultimately make amends with his enemy.

In contrast to Hamlet, Laertes seeks for revenge with full motivation in the urge to kill the murder. When knowing his father was killed by Hamlet, he immediately knows that revenge is the only way to fulfill his satisfaction. As a son, he knows he must protect and obey his family's values and virtues by killing the murder. Not only was he obedient to his father, but also obedient by partaking in Claudius's plot to kill Hamlet. Another cause for Laertes surge to kill Hamlet is due to his sister, Ophelia, having feelings for him. Laertes plays the part of the concerned older brother, offering advice and discouraging her from pursuing a romance with Hamlet. Upon the fencing match, Hamlet apologizes to Laertes, however, his actions clearly grate on his conscience, and as he dies, he reveals his account to Hamlet and petitions for a mutual reconciliation. This truly signifies the lessons learned through that act of forgiveness. As a result, this strive for vengeance truly never satisfied his will due to it causing his death but rather taught him how to deal with his grief through forgiveness.

Throughout the play, Ophelia is described as an innocent and virtuous woman that obeys her father’s commands. Ophelia has a deep love interest for Hamlet, but in return is treated cruelly by him. Laertes and Polonius warn Ophelia that Hamlet’s attention may be deceiving, which she begins to obey her family's desires and avoids Hamlet. As an innocent girl, she truly believes that the advice her father and brother give her is for her best interest. According to Ophelia's family, Hamlet only wants to use her for the wrong form of love or pleasures and seeks for no ultimate marriage. and the death of her father, Ophelia develops a sense of madness; ultimately leads her to drowning in what may be implied a suicide. Since Hamlet and her father have been killed, she is the ultimate victim, a chaste and innocent girl swept into madness by patriarchal abuse and self-denial. Her love for Hamlet and her loyalty to her father creates chaos and leads into her tragic death. As a result, Ophelias drive to insanity due to the death of those men she loved completely ruins her capacity to overcome sorrow; ultimately her suicide is described as a passive affair, she unknowingly drowns because she cannot function independently.

Gertrude loves both Claudius and Hamlet, which causes chaos to the trio. Hamlet expresses his feelings toward his mothers marriage as wrongfully bitter and “sinly”. Her goal is wanting to love two people who dislike each other in which she tries to satisfy both men. Gertrude displays moments of guilt regarding her marriage to Claudius, describing it as “o'erhasty” and begging Hamlet to stop when he confronts her. The Ghost tells Hamlet to come between Gertrude and her “fighting soul,” implying that she is a conflicted character. This interpretation positions Gertrude as a loving wife and mother who is simply making the best of a bad situation and remains obedient to her husband's desires. Moreover, throughout the play she is known as an ignorant character because she is not aware of anything that is happening. She is not aware of who King Hamlet’s murder was and Claudias and Laertes plans to put poison into Hamlet’s goblet, which ends up killing her. Overall her ignorant trait causes her death. The cause of Hamlet’s rage would be Gertrude, for her hasty marriage. Gertrude is Hamlet’s shield. But she is also portrayed as a loving mother, for example, Gertrude protecting Hamlet, without realizing it by drinking Hamlet's goblet which is mixed with poison. This is what could have killed Hamlet if he did not get cut by the rapier and thus she is Hamlet’s shield. Hamlet dies after she dies because now Hamlet is defenseless and cannot hide behind her for protection, his shield is broken. In conclusion Gertrude is a strong character in the play and affects the plot. With her obedience for Hamlet and Claudius, she wants everyone to get along and by being Hamlet’s shield; she loses her in life.

Upon hearing about his father’s death, Hamlet procrastinates and doesn’t do anything in order to take revenge as he spends too much time debating whether or not Claudius was responsible for the murder. However, Laertes, quickly acts toward avenging his father’s death, and although his rash decision making lead him to his untimely death, he is
still able to exact revenge by killing Hamlet. Even though they both cause their own death, they later learn that their obedience in commanding the will of their family’s values brings them closer together in death. When they both recognize their sins in the fencing match by asking for forgiveness, they at last make amends. As a result, their driven force for revenge never fulfilled their satisfaction but instead brought peace within their spirits now that they had forgiven themselves for their wrongdoings.

The main concern with Ophelia and Gertrude is that they both are trying to protect something, their desires. Gertrude obviously is attempting to protect the peace in her marriage while being confronted with Hamlet’s feelings, while on the other hand Ophelia is torn between what her family wants, and what she wants. Gertrude had a man holding her back (Claudias) and Ophelia had a man holding her back (Polonius and Laertes). Her uncontrollable desire for Hamlet evidently leads to her insanity. Gertrude’s life ended in a more abrupt, unexpected manner. She took the drink from the poisoned cup, and it was all over by protecting Hamlet. The way that Ophelia died could have been expected because for one she had a motive for a possible suicide, and two, humans associate a great deal of water with drowning and danger. The way that Gertrude died was not expected but out of sacrifice to save Hamlet she warns him of the potential harm of the poison. The two deaths compare because both Gertrude and Ophelia die without reaching their desired goals. For example, Gertrude’s goal to successfully find companionship and love and Ophelia wants Hamlet’s love. Afterall, they both do not get their wishes granted but die. This one factor makes the irony and the sadness of Hamlet so real because both women were driven by so many instances, yet separated by a wall of respect for family against love. Ophelia and Gretrude one goal, to be appreciated and loved by all of the men in their lives due to their codependency in men led to their tragic death.
The Community Organizer

As a young Latina woman, the recent social justice movements coupled with the pandemic crisis have severely impacted my community. Working for Mi Familia Vota has given me the privilege to encourage Latina women to vote and make a difference in this election.

I am particularly proud of my contribution in organizing a Latinx Women Get Out The Vote Rally. Over 100 people, including elected officials and national press, attended. We even hired an all women mariachi band to play traditional Mexican songs, to cheer up the spirit of our rally. I was honored to be given the opportunity to speak. Even though my vote won't be counted (I don't turn 18 until the end of November!), I know that my voice has made an impact.

I congratulated the women for standing up for their rights, and reminded them of their power as a collective. Too often, Latina women lack information and resources to vote and my team has ensured that they were able to exercise this essential right.

In my role as a Community Organizer, I was responsible for monitoring unfactual and suspicious information posted on Social Media. I was trained to recognize false and inaccurate posts and to report them. I saw firsthand the impact of misleading content.

If people have access to the truth, they can be active citizens. Mi Familia Vota registered over 11,000 Latinx people in Las Vegas, Nevada! By bridging cultural and language gaps, we were to communicate the power of Latinx votes. It has been one of the most rewarding achievements in my life. I hope to continue to create movements throughout my community, to empower the voices of the unrepresented.
Arleth Quintero  
Age: 18, Grade: 12  
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV  
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern  
Category: Novel Writing

"Journey to Success" and "Lost in Thought"

Brief summary:

In the “Journey to Success” by Arleth Quintero, the three-part structure, revealed through visual imagery and internal rhyme, in addition to repetition, addresses the importance of the way students must implement the practice of studying in order to succeed; conversely, with Quintero’s “Lost in Thought” the three-part structure, conveyed by internal rhyme and binary opposition, in addition to repetition, demonstrates the lessons learned to failure when acting in an ignorant manner.

Excerpt:

In the “Journey to Success” by Arleth Quintero, the three-part structure, revealed through visual imagery and internal rhyme, in addition to repetition, addresses the importance of the way students must implement the practice of studying in order to succeed; conversely, with Quintero’s “Lost in Thought” the three-part structure, conveyed by internal rhyme and binary opposition, in addition to repetition, demonstrates the lessons learned to failure when acting in an ignorant manner.
Inhale the Future

Inhale the Future
The phone rang, and it was a mother whose son had tested positive. “My son cannot breathe, please help; what do I do?” Instinctively, the response was simple: call 911 and get him to the hospital. The real world, however, is not always instinctual, or fair. She was hesitant to go to the hospital because she was undocumented and afraid. I immediately thought back to an earlier crisis, this one my own.

It was Thanksgiving and my father broke the silence. “I have been fired.” Normally impassive, his face was in a state of panic. Fear began to overwhelm me. We proceeded to lift our hands in prayer, and said together, “Gracias Dios mio.”

It was 2009 and even the border town of Calexico, CA was severely affected by the 2008 market crash: jobs were at an all-time low. I was confronted with shocking news that we had to leave everyone and everything we knew. We were all devastated.

Not being able to pay for my house or my education was not the most painful reality: leaving my grandparents behind was. My Yaya held me tight: “Adiós mi niña.” My close knit family union was now broken and I suffered severe separation anxiety.

Assimilating to the culture of my new parochial school was exasperating for a Mexican girl like me. Entering 1st grade, I only knew Spanish. Learning English as a second language created complications beyond academics: I was the girl sitting alone at lunch, the kid on the fringe of the playground, always on the outskirts listening to a language I only half-understood.

Over time the Spanglish of the school day developed into English but at home it was always pure Spanish. I was adapting...until high school arrived.

“Hey Narco.”

“Wetback, go back to where you came from.”
Learning English is possible, but teaching tolerance is much more difficult.
I did not know how to react, whether to be sad, annoyed or angry. Why was I the target? They did not even know me. The taunting was repeated, scars formed. Although these scars are still fresh they have pushed me to become a stronger individual, proud of my cultural heritage.
I made up my mind: I would not be their victim minority, but rather a dedicated advocate for those that have been marginalized. I recently started an internship at Mi Familia Vota, a civic engagement organization to help unite Latino, immigrant, and allied communities to promote social and economic justice. My leadership role is to help with planning events, citizenship, and immigration efforts.
Moreover, that young Mexican girl who once was alone and neglected is now managing 10 other volunteers for a COVID-19 Patient Support Center Hotline, assisting more than 100 families by providing community resources during the pandemic. I proudly translate for doctors and medical students at the University of Las Vegas, Nevada. I am doing my part, but it is not enough. Every single day a patient states that they are undocumented and fearful of when they will be deported. It turns out that the son who could not breathe was reacting to something beyond COVID-19. He was actually having a panic attack, and I figured out that he needed a psychologist, not an EMT or ER Doctor.
When I see others struggling, I am reminded that in some ways, I am still that little girl taken away from her culture, still learning how to adapt to a society that does not value me. However, I am no longer the little girl on the sidelines. I know that advocating for others is my true calling, and I will be an immigration lawyer one day. Basic human rights, after all, are just as important as breathing.
Cultural Journey

Nine thousand forty-two miles. That is how far I am from the origin of my culture. Yet it is still a part of my life at every waking moment. Growing up in Las Vegas, the South Indian community is quite small compared to major cities like New Jersey and San Francisco. Nevertheless, this gave us the opportunity to become one large family and bond over the celebrations of our magnificent heritage, specifically our annual festivals that I would dance for.

My journey with Indian dance started at a young age, but it took a turn in the spring of 2015: I stood behind the thick, black curtains on the side of a colorfully decorated stage, awaiting my cue with a large bouquet in hand. The last of the Bollywood dance teachers in Las Vegas was delivering her farewell speech to the rest of our small South Indian community at our annual cultural festival. Frankly, I didn’t hear a word of it; I was too busy thinking about what would happen to the dance group I had grown up with. Was that it for us? Would this be our last performance? As I waited by the edge of the stage, I couldn’t help but think of the first time I stood there. “If you miss a step, just keep dancing and if your hairpiece falls off, make sure not to step on it,” my dance teacher sternly reminded us for about the hundredth time. Of course, as a six-year-old, I failed to understand the significance of this advice. All I wanted was to get on stage and do the dance that we had been practicing for two months.

Suddenly, I was pulled back into reality as my mom waved me over to present the bouquet and I had to step out from the comfort of the curtains.

A year passed and the annual festival was nearing. I wallowed in self-pity as I thought about how exactly a year ago I was preparing for a big performance. Then it occurred to me: maybe we didn’t need someone to teach us. Immediately, I called the other girls in my group and they reluctantly agreed to give me a chance at choreographing. In the weeks after that, I immersed myself in the world of choreography, watching videos on the internet and making up routines in the car. Then it finally came time for our first practice. I had it planned out in my head: I would show them the ideas I had and we could work on the dance together. Clearly, I had the wrong impression. That first practice was a disaster. Everyone was getting distracted and we were getting nothing done. As much as I wanted to lead the group, I was still their friend and I didn't want that to change. I came home defeated. The goal I had to choreograph this dance suddenly faded away as I met with reality.

Just as I was considering giving up, I came across some of our old performance videos. I watched as my group and I emerged from the black curtains smiling and ready. There were obvious signs of pure joy on our faces as we moved about the stage. It may seem like a cliche story from a movie, but that was enough to convince me to keep trying.

After about two months of rehearsal, we found ourselves back on the side of the stage. This time we were alone. We went through our usual routine of quickly going through our dance to calm our nerves, then we inched closer to the edge of the stage to watch the performance before us. I turned back to glimpse at my friends. Worried looks were plastered across all of their faces.

“Remember everyone, if you miss a step, just keep dancing and if your hairpiece falls off, be careful not to step on it” I whispered to them.

They all took a breath and smiled back at me. With that we stepped out onto the stage, ready as ever.
Deekshana Ram
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Poetry

Recycle USA

If everybody could recycle
Across the U.S.A
It’d be good for the revival
Of the Escambia Bay
You see it full of plastic baggies
Plastic bottles too
It could all be gone if you
Recycle U.S.A
You could recycle in Boston
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
To save the sea lions
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
All you need is to recycle
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
In Atlanta, New Orleans
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
Trash covers 70% of
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
All the oceans today
(Inside, outside)
Everybody’s gotta recycle
Recycle U.S.A
But there are careless people who
Have better things to pursue
They feel their time is wasted
But it takes a minute or two
The environments full of clutter
So we gotta start today
Tell the people to recycle
Recycle U.S.A
Recycle in Miami
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
To save the blue whale
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
Save the otters and dolphins
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
From the trash mountains
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
All over the ocean
(Inside, outside, U.S.A.)
And in the river banks
(Inside, outside)
Everybody’s gotta recycle
Recycle U.S.A
Deekshana Ram  
Age: 17, Grade: 12  
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV  
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern  
Category: Poetry  

Order vs Chaos

Order  
Conformity:  
the bane of existence.  
Order has become a deformity. To  
escape we must show some resistance.  
Our silent killer is uniformity. Slowly destroying  
our souls as we live. Suffocating, we stay in this bubble.  
And to the world we have nothing to give. To stand out from  
the crowd brings us trouble. For anything but, we have no motive.  
Each personality has a double. Moreover, each life has gotten relived.  
Individuality has no place. In a society that’s full of rules. Because all our  
lives have become a race. And in this race, adherence is the fuel. In this  
condition we can’t move forward. Stagnated in progress we will remain.  
With all these guidelines our lives are bordered. From creativity we will  
refrain. If by the crushing world we are cornered. Oppressiveness is our inhibition.  
Keeping us from reaching our potentials.  
For fitting in has become our mission. And following  
has become essential. For a world with order  
lacks ambition. We will look the same in  
every instance. If we submit to  
conformity.

Chaos  
Chaos: there’s an unfound beauty in it.  
There’s nothing else that allows such freedom. We think best  
when there’s nowhere we must fit.  
It’s easy to live when rules are seldom. From nature’s beauty we can benefit. In the chaos of the world we will thrive. The storm of wonder brings new proposals. Of Creativity none will deprive. Lot’s of ideas at our disposal. No restrictions make it easy to contrive. With nothing holding us back, there’s greatness.  
Of new innovations there are many. And our brains we can be used to their fullness.  
Solutions to problems: we’ll
have plenty. When our society is in chaos.
Hamlet Analysis

Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Gertrude and Ophelia’s, as well as Hamlet and Claudius’s first introductions, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

The effects of misplaced obedience are best seen, firstly, through the juxtaposing personalities of Ophelia and Queen Gertrude who first interact in Act III Scene I. These two characters exemplify obedience in different ways. At the beginning of the story, Ophelia exercises obedience to the point of oppression. She serves as a human pawn for the men in her life, including Hamlet; her brother, Laertes; and her father, Polonius. Each of these men chose to ignore her true feelings and point her in different directions concerning her life decisions. Hamlet leads her on with affection only to break her heart claiming he doesn’t love her, and Polonius and Laertes force her to reject Hamlet and stage setups through her to spy on Hamlet. Ophelia allows herself to be subject to the warring decisions of these men. Conversely, Queen Gertrude uses the men in her life as pawns to sustain her power. As a consequence, she must remain obedient to these men so that she can use them for her own personal benefit. To retain her power after her first husband’s death, she marries his brother Claudius. While seeming to be obedient towards him it is clear that she wields the power. At the same time, she is very gentle and timid towards her son, Hamlet, one might even say she is obedient to him.

In Ophelia’s climax, she is driven to madness after the death of her father. His death symbolically allows her to see that her obedience to him has ruined her life, it has driven her away from her true love and now that her father is deceased she has no one to take order from. Her mental and emotional demise shows that too much obedience can take away from one’s self-worth and ability to make decisions. Without her father’s guidance, Ophelia is left to fend for herself in a world of people she can not bring herself to trust. (Shakespeare Act IV Scene V)

Although less horrific, Queen Gertrude’s climax allows the readers to see another consequence of obedience. After years of falling in line with the men in her life, Gertrude finally asserts her power to confront her son in Act III. She only bears Hamlet’s behavior for a little while then she takes matters into her own hands. “Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.” she scolds him (Shakespeare 2394). Evidently, this quote shows her breaking away from obedience to her son. As Hamlet fights back she grows stronger in her words as she shows readers that obedience is not the way to sustain power and self-respect. What one must do for power is prove themself. However, because of her history of obedience, Hamlet fails to take her seriously, dismissing her attempts to discipline him.

Ophelia’s resolution is tragic, yet it conveys an essential message for the readers. Driven to madness by the events that had unfolded, she drowns herself. She symbolically teaches the lesson that if one submerges themself in the orders and beliefs of others, they will inhibit their own growth. Ophelia allowed for societal standards and beliefs of her father and brother to oppress her. Rather than embrace her love her Hamlet, she drowned herself in obedience and was ultimately driven to death. (Shakespeare Act IV Scene VII)

The Queen also faces a tragic ending as she dies drinking the poison meant for her son, Hamlet. This shows how her obedience to her son and her obedience to her husband Claudius drove her right in between their deadly feud. Rather than sustaining her power herself, she relied on these two men to sustain her power and now they are the cause of her death. (Shakespeare Act V Scene II)

The effects of a strong desire for vengeance are best seen through the juxtaposing personalities of Hamlet and Claudius who first interact in Act I Scene II. Hamlet’s strong desire to avenge his father by killing Claudius overpowers everything else in his life. It ruins his relationships with his mother and Ophelia and it drives him to a fit of volatility. On the other hand, Claudius with his deceitful planning appears to be sane, however, his hunger for power pushes him to remove anything or anyone that stands in his way. Although Claudius’s vengeance is not targeted at
any specific person, it is directed toward anyone who lessens his chances of taking absolute control over Denmark. Hamlet’s disposition significantly changes in his climax. He becomes enraged, and those around him even call him insane even though his madness is just an act. “Though this be madness, yet there is a method in’t” Polonius says to himself while talking to the deranged Hamlet (Shakespeare 1308). Although Polonius has convinced himself that Hamlet is madly in love with Ophelia, it is clear through their conversation that Hamlet is, in truth, maddened by his drive for vengeance. His behavior comes across as concerning to Queen Gertrude, when he stabs Polonius in front of her, so she speaks to Claudius about sending him away. However, Claudius interprets her concern differently.

In Claudius’s climax, he begins to see Hamlet’s true intentions and that he is a threat to Claudius’s life and success. This sparks a desire for vengeance towards Hamlet. When Queen Gertrude informs him that Hamlet had killed Polonius he says: “It had been so with us, had we been there” (Shakespeare 2640). At this point, Claudius shows his true colors when he worries about if he had been there rather than the safety of his wife. He also comes to the realization that Hamlet is out to get him. Consequently, when Gertrude suggests sending him to England, Claudius agrees but secretly begins to brew a different plan. After seeing Laertes enraged after his father’s death, Claudius decides to use his emotion to his advantage. He tells Laertes that Hamlet is responsible for his father’s and sister’s death and sets up a plan for Laertes to kill Hamlet.

Much like the other characters, Hamlet suffers a tragic resolution. He enters a fencing match with Laertes and is slain by a sword that was poisoned by Claudius. However, right before he dies he is able to complete his mission and kill Claudius. This symbolically teaches the readers that if one spends their life seeking vengeance, they will waste it. Hamlet achieved his goal, but there were no benefits, in fact, he died because of his desires. He also lost his family, his love, his friends, and his respect in the process.

In the end, Claudius is of course killed by Hamlet using the sword he himself had poisoned, thus showing that his selfishness and desire for revenge blind-sighted him and caused his own plan to backfire on him. (Shakespeare Act V Scene II)

Shakespeare’s Hamlet displays the meaningful effects of misplaced obedience and vengeance through the foils of the characters within the plot. The foils of Ophelia and Gertrude show how misplaced obedience can lead to the inhibition of personal growth as well as one’s own demise, while the foils of Hamlet and Claudius show how an unnecessary desire for vengeance can blind-sight a person and lead them to ignore the truly important aspects of their life.
Lay Over

I have been stopped at one too many security checkpoints. I have stood panicked at a bewildering flight information display multiple times. I have seen wild toddlers tethered to their parents by brightly colored, festive-looking leashes to prevent them from running loose in the crowd. I have heard the sound of rolling suitcases so much, I now hear it in my sleep. I have gotten so caught up on moving walkways that I forgot where I was even going. I have constantly smelled the harsh smell of disinfectant. I have been asked for help or directions in way too many incomprehensible languages. I have fallen asleep out of boredom at tons of different gates. I have witnessed a kid fall off his suitcase trying to ride it down a ramp. I have memorized the security briefing before take-off. I have heard the ear-piercing scream of babies as the plane soars into a higher altitude. I have learned how to entertain myself for hours with just a few magazines and a tray-table. I have discovered that pretzels taste way better in the sky. I have still not gotten used to the feeling of flying upwards. I have experienced the pure joy one gets when finally arriving at their destination.

Being the daughter of two Indian immigrants, I have done my fair share of long-distance travel. Throughout my lifetime, I have been to over 11 different countries; thus, flying on tons of different airlines. However, what tied together all of these travel experiences was the absolutely dreadful atmosphere of the airports. Why is it that an airport, filled with people going on exotic vacations or visiting their families, has the most dreary and mundane ambiance? Each person is there for a different reason, but we all feel the same. Despite my excitement to visit my relatives in India or travel to a whole other country, the second I set foot into an airport, a sense of exhaustion comes over me like a weighted blanket. It is an outlandish feeling. When I look around to find at least one person with a joyful manner, all I see are weary travelers mindlessly lugging their carry-on suitcases, like zombies, along the abnormally shiny airport floor. Luckily, I have my family with me to look to for enjoyment, but we seem out of place joking around among drained parents looking after their whining children and business-people speaking in hushed, serious tones on the phone. Eventually, my family also slips into a pit of annoyance. Our downfall is inevitable. And so, we thoughtlessly shuffle along the rest of our journey mirroring the zombies around us.

You would think that 8 hours of sleep on a plane would get you energized and ready to catch a connecting flight, but it just makes you drowsier and angrier. But what makes you feel better is the fact that everyone is in it together. There is no way to win in an airport. Nevertheless, the final destination makes it all worthwhile.
Claudius in College

From a young age, I have considered myself a noble leader. Guiding the crowd came easy to me, as I would lead my class in school and choose the games we children played outside. My peers and family members have always said that one day I would make a great King, and I wholeheartedly agree. I still remember the moment in which I realized what my dream was. I was on my way home from my Latin hymn class when I came across a large crowd of people in the town. Intrigued, I made my way to the front of mass and saw a politician standing on the steps making a speech. At the time I could not understand what he was saying, but I saw that he was wearing the finest clothing in all of Denmark which meant he was powerful, and I wanted that. After that, I had always attended these speeches. Soon enough, I began to understand the content of them and I knew that I was meant to be a leader.

With the burgeoning desire of mine to one day become the King of Denmark, I have always immersed myself in the world of politics. By closely examining the current politicians of Denmark, as well as the current king, King Hamlet, I taught myself what to do and what not to do. As a budding politician, my views of the king are mostly negative. He lacks the initiative and drive that I possess. A man like him should not be in power. It is no doubt that I was born destined for greatness. Many commend me on my characteristic of stopping at nothing to achieve what I want. Personally, I feel that I could allow my country to grow much more than King Hamlet ever has, but to do that I require the tool of knowledge. This knowledge would be best attained through the political science program at Stanford University. Stanford University prides itself on “Its object, to qualify its students for personal success, and direct usefulness in life” and that is exactly the type of education I require to realize my dream.

Through the political science program, I will gain an understanding of the political systems around the world and how to handle international conflicts, so that when I become King, I will be able to mirror the most successful governments to bring Denmark to prosperity. My determination and dedication are best suited for Stanford’s rigorous nature. At this school, I will take my first steps to successfully overthrowing- I mean succeeding our current King. As someone who is willing to do anything to reach their goals, I am ready to work day and night to further my education.
Please, don’t stray
He did not win
Well the media displays America as blue
Is this dismay?
How is it a win,
When the media displays America as blue?
Him we must depose
Swiftly, with no plea
Hatred for him grows
Shortly, my point you’ll see
It was planned
It will take a coup
As the media displays America as blue
Him we must depose
Swiftly with no plea
Hatred for him grows
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Some readers view that Hamlet’s plot’s five-part structure moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters often better reveals the devastating effect of misplaced obedience and a call to vengeance via Hamlet and Claudius’s, as well as Laertes and Ophelia’s first introduction, their separate climaxes, and the seemingly fated resolution of each of these foiled characters.

The characters of Hamlet Jr. and Claudius are initially foiled through the assumption of the throne by Claudius and the realization that Claudius murders his father which leads to the path of vengeance for Hamlet to make amends for such murder and usurpation. Truly, these relatives share family and the milieu that they live in, forcing them to be alike in natural ways. Furthermore, the ability of both to deceive others is an important similarity when understanding that the deception game Hamlet plays allows for his credence in getting to the bottom of this debacle. Claudius’s focus continues to be the maintenance of his position as king as the play progresses. This foils greatly with Hamlet as his motive of obtaining “my revenge” is far opposite to such immoral fibbing by Claudius (1.3.5). Such ownership of the action of revenge illustrates the passion Hamlet feels in chasing this retribution.

Laertes and Ophelia are troubled siblings who are foiled in their early responses to the call for obedience from their father and the throne of Denmark. Indicatively, the environment of these siblings propels them to being quite similar in their disposition towards respecting their father’s wishes and commands. Both children find little struggle in complying with Polonius’s orders and this illustrates the merit with which Polonius raises them. However, Ophelia’s willingness to completely revoke her feelings to Hamlet and “to re-deliver” his love gifts to him shows her complete obedience to authority (3.1.96). Laertes allows himself much more freedom in decision especially when he turns to being such authority to Ophelia in saying “Fear it, Ophelia” when describing Hamlet’s supposed love for her (2.1.33). A rise to authority over his very own sister allows him to foil her in their duties as children of Polonius. Laertes allows himself to leave for France while Ophelia binds herself to the words of her father. Although both characters exemplify obedience to authority, they differ in their responses to the changing situation with Hamlet; Laertes finds himself taking authority over Ophelia and becoming a foil to her complete compliance.

Committing himself fully to avenge his father’s murder, Hamlet’s climax arrives when he realizes that his abstainment from full action prevents the completion of what is just. It is true that the ghost plays a major role in catalyzing Hamlet’s reaction to the misdeed of Claudius, but his realization that all men face an “imminent death” fully pushes him over the edge (4.4.58). Hamlet needs not to be frightened of the consequences of his actions if at any moment he or his enemy could turn into nothing more than dust. No longer facing uncertainty, Hamlet learns that vengeance is a necessary evil in human nature and that obedience to a subconscious mind only hinders this fulfillment. Such realization propels Hamlet into action, and such thought clearly plays a role in his judgement in accepting the duel that would end the lives of many. These events play out in a cause-and-effect manner which stems from the observation of meaningless war and how such war relates to his personal battle with what is good and evil.

Claudius faces many individual climaxes, but the biggest one for his character is the moment that Laertes blows his cover and reveals him as being behind the planned murders. Undeniably, Claudius learns that the obedience to his desires and hopes for being king leads to his downfall at the moment of his death. He calls, “yet defend me”, in hopes he maintains a clean record during his time as the king (5.2.319). Clearly, such a cry exemplifies this obedience to lust and wanting of power. It takes his last breath to understand the seriousness and gravity of his tortuous quest. Moreover, this situation allows him to realize the meaning behind Hamlet’s vengeance as just and
necessary. Laertes’s ease in exposing Claudius allows the King to view reprisal as an honorable deed whereas, prior to this climax, he sees it as a grab at his throne. It takes his own downfall for Claudius to open his eyes to the meaning of his obedience and vengeance, but such a downfall allows his character to be complete prior to death.

Laertes’s climax arrives at the moment of his death, when he makes his confession to the entire crowd, realizing the reason behind his want for vengeance and the obedience he shows to the King. He reneges his blame on Hamlet, claiming it does not fall “upon thee” which cleanses himself of the guilt of vengeance weighing him down (5.2.325). His father’s and sister’s deaths fuel his rage and such death broke the rage into understanding. Once he realizes the result of this unkempt anger, his reason returns and vengeance becomes but a silly motivator for his actions. Furthermore, his death undermines his obedience to the King through his exposure of the treachery that Claudius commits. The lesson he learns in obedience is to avoid blindly following others while vengeance influences you like alcohol does. Laertes, through his death, learns the truth behind the earthly temptations of vengeance and obedience; succumbing to them, he murders individuals who follow the same goal as him.

Much earlier in the play, Ophelia’s climax occurs during her fit of madness following Polonius’s death from which she learns that she cannot live without obedience and that misuse of vengeance leads to the death of father. Ophelia highlights that Polonius lies in “cold ground”, showing her disconnect from her father (4.5.42). Her madness emerges from such a disconnect, as she cannot understand life without being obedient. All of her life, she has done as told, and now, with no authority, she crumbles like Yorick’s skull. Moreover, her lesson in vengeance stems from the root of her madness being her father’s death which rises from Hamlet’s vengeance. Ophelia feels nothing close to such vengeance and this mystery furthers her over the edge into madness. Such a climax is a testament to the pedagogy of characters in the play, as Ophelia faces a climax that allows her to better understand herself while also rendering her useless.

Hamlet and Claudius intertwine in many ways, but the resolution marks their biggest crossover in the play as the two face the same understanding of vengeance at the end of their lives. While working as foils, they also help each other grow as characters until this final scene. All of Claudius’s actions garner reactions from Hamlet and vice versa. Quite frankly, this allows the play to move along. Furthermore, the resolution in which both of these characters understand that their quests for vengeance were flawed is important as it serves the purpose of unfoiling them at the moment of death. In life, these characters were polar opposites, but in both of their final moments, they understand the damage their antics brought about. Undoubtedly, the scene at the conclusion of the play serves as the climax of the entire play as it resolves the misunderstandings between characters and allows for the duo of Hamlet and Claudius to realize that their retribution was not worth the trouble. A universal message that emanates from this resolution is that vengeance is a temporal virtue but an eventual and everlasting vice.

There is no connection by blood, Laertes and Ophelia also connect in the reason for their resolutions, as both end up perishing because of vengeance-driven events. Laertes suffers with Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius, and Ophelia suffers from her own madness. Although their deaths result from different circumstances, it is undeniable that Laertes’s death stems from his hope for vengeance against Hamlet and that Ophelia’s death emerges from Polonius’s death which was a casualty along Hamlet’s path to vengeance against Claudius. Since both of their deaths emerge from vengeance, intertwining them is not far-fetched. Just as they are foils, their fates work together to produce a larger lesson behind retaliation. These siblings suffer in different ways from vengeance which furthers the universal message of revenge being a nominal release to a much larger amount of trouble. Hamlet serves to speak against vengeance by portraying the outcomes of it, especially in pessimistic ways.

Some believe that the five-part structure of Hamlet trudges along due to the ghost and his call for vengeance, but this is not entirely true. It indubitably moves forward through the introduction, climax and resolution of the foil characters of Hamlet and Claudius, and Ophelia and Laertes. Their new understanding that vengeance is not a permanent solution and that obedience is not a reliable motivator pushes the universal message against living life vengefully and in servitude to others.
Beep, beep, beep. The unbearable alarm clock noise filled my head as I woke up from a deep sleep. It was Friday morning, so my mood was naturally jubilant. My routine went as it always does: teeth were brushed, face was washed, and breakfast was eaten. It wasn’t until I was about to head for the door when my jaw dropped. My Spanish speech was today and I had completely forgotten. At the border of an A and a B, my grade would suffer if I did not step up to overcome this nightmare.

On the way to school, my thoughts raced back and forth. How had it slipped my mind? My shock was rooted in the fact that I was a consistent student who rarely had such hiccups. This would be a great test of my intellect, willpower, and resilience. I was forced to skip the family’s daily morning talk; my dad was confused as he watched me frantically shuffle index cards to come up with something to talk about for three minutes in Spanish. As I looked over my notes, I began to panic more. The words seemed like gibberish and I knew that I needed a miracle to overcome this. Spanish was my first period and our presenting order was random, so I could strike gold and be last or have the worst of my fears come true and be the guinea pig. Our fifteen minute car ride felt as if it had passed in five, and we arrived at school.

Sitting down at my desk, my miracle came in the form of self-composure and reassurance. I told myself that if I committed to this material in the ten minutes before class, I would do well enough to pass the assignment. I locked in, reading the words over and over again and translating my makeshift speech from English to Spanish. Before I knew it, my teacher was taking the roll. As he read names, I continued to study my index card over and over again, knowing that it would be at my desk when the real test came. I would be without help. Roll had ended and my teacher moved towards his hat of names. Our class’s chatter ceased and I prayed every prayer that I had ever learned from Sunday school. The teacher spoke and announced my name. Just my luck, I was the first pick the only time I was not prepared for it. Rising up and heading to the front of the class, I took one last moment to review my speech. From the early shock of realization to the butterflies in my stomach, I knew that if I succeeded, this nightmare would be over. Before I knew what was happening, I opened my mouth and out came the exact speech I had recited in my head for the last half hour. Finishing my performance, I thanked my audience and took the notecard with my letter grade from my instructor. As I took my seat, I realized that I did not care what the card said, I had overcome one of the greatest moments of academic reflection in my life. Pride overtook me more than all, as I knew how much determination and commitment my feat had taken. Back from cloud nine, I unfolded the card: my smile grew from ear to ear.

I would not be the student I am today without this experience. The lessons of confidence, dedication and poise have aided me greatly in my high school career and they will help me even more in my quest to be a college student. I know that I will be the best student possible on any campus and in any challenge because I have experienced adversity like this and greater before, and I know how to overcome it with composure. I learn from my mistakes.
Oppositional Shape Poems

Overall Name: Adversarial Ideological Allegories

The Elephant: En Route to Unity

The country is perfect with no flaws,
Our constitution lists our rights and liberties clearly,
So why do Liberals wish so greatly to take away our gun laws?,
Our patriotism slips by the hour as the inauguration comes eerily.
We attempt to reason but in return they accuse him of treason,
Without appeasement, our country will fall like leaves in August,
To be honest, the wall succeeded by the immigrants still ease in,
To further our worries, the riots are hailed while they are lawless,
Our plans are not flawless, but they do not hail pointless violence,
Is the belief that a child should live so radical that we must march?,
They sit during our dear anthem while we stand proudly in silence,
We fight for our country's freedom while they stay home and targe.
Both sides can harm the cause, radical nonsense disturbs the peace,
In a perfect country with no flaws, how do we hate on our own police?,
The people who roam the streets are the ones who send the nasty tweets,
Freedom of speech is waning as is liberty for each,
The feet of our country are tired from this civil war,
We must unite, without our teamwork, division will sadly soar.
A new America needs to rise, such change is good and wise,
We love all without cause, our country will be perfect without trivial flaws.

The Donkey: Distanced from Unity

No justice,
No peace.
You feed off of our riots,
You think we will back down, but we are not frightened by your orange clown,
The time is coming, when you can’t run from change that should have arrived long ago,
You preach freedoms while your policies take them away from hopeful immigrant folk,
You tell us you are right while your policies allow another shooting to go down,
We will not back down from the hatred you spew, the lies you contradict,
Our love and freedom with, America stands as a laughing-stock due
to the ass you elected, our new man will turn this upside-down.
Change is the tool that drives democracy,
Without it, people would live unequally,
We must focus on those treated unfairly,
To allow people to heal up just barely. The right does not see our cause, and for That, they can not continue on for long, We must rise up to take what is ours for The benefit of the lost ones who cannot, We yell no peace, those who need help Need it more than they ever did before.
Hamlet College Essay into USC

A proper weekend is spent in the art of theatre and in perfecting the performing arts. Since I was young, drama has been a part of my life. From a murdered father to a convoluted new uncle-father relationship, I have learned to have a passion for the act of deception and showmanship. The current state of theatre in our year 1490 is sullen due to the lack of passion and dedication I have seen of students from various performing arts schools. However, the USC School of Cinematic Arts stands out from the rest as a prestigious and accredited institution. Students who emerge from this dazzling place are mature and composed in their acting and understanding of the arts. My qualities of sharpness in performance and dedication to classwork would be compatible qualities with a campus of such high caliber.

My depth of knowledge in the arts is endless, as I have enjoyed countless performances sitting as the Prince of Denmark. My opportunities are endless, and I do not take them for granted. Frequently, I find the best performer on stage and study that person to analyze how I can reach such a level. Being humble is a crucial part of growing as a performer, so my questions to said performer after the show are endless. I have the passion and personality for the theatre, I simply need a home to grow until I can grow no more. From the knowledge and mentorship of some of the best actors of Europe that the Reformation has bred, I see myself as a destined candidate for the sun-kissed University of Southern California campus. One particular reason I know this is that the greatest performer I have ever studied, Oscric, was an alumni of your campus. His undeniable talent is a product of years of hard work and strenuous study at the never-off campus in California.

My father, King Laertes, advises me to enter the arts as he advises me to study in England. Such persistence has driven me mad as I hope for nothing more than to receive a good education that can make my potential endless. Without a doubt, many campuses can provide me with ample practice and lessons to make me the best performer in Denmark. However, my goal is set on becoming the world’s greatest performing arts student. With limitless goals and an unrivaled opportunity at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, I would not use my resources lightly.

As your motto “limes regiones rerum” states that reality ends when you enter this school, reality ends for me when I am performing. My conviction and dedication to deliver a breath-taking performance is so great, but I need to have coaching and experience until I am at my greatest. The strive for the USC School of Cinematic Arts to be the world’s best program in the arts is enough to want me to spend the next four years of my life studying and becoming a better actor, performer, and person.
Ragtime Analytical Essay

Robert Fulton, the inventor of the steamboat, once said, “The American Dream of rags to riches is a dream for a reason - it is hard to achieve; were everyone to do it, it wouldn't be a dream but would rather be reality” (Fulton). Clearly, Fulton’s words highlight the true ambiguity within the “American Dream”. Many see this dream to be the unparalleled advantages that one can find in the Land of Opportunity. Others see it as the ability of free and unrestricted accumulation of wealth. With all differing interpretations, one goal in the Dream seems to be universal. People want freedom. Truly, liberty is what the United States promotes, it is what it evokes. Nonetheless, freedom seems to escape many of those who yearn for it. Novelist E.L. Doctorow was intrigued by this concept intended for many but given to few. Whether it was due to race, religion, or standing, true freedom was and is not communal. The only solution for many of these individuals was to change their belief on what the “Dream” actually was. E.L Doctorow used nuancing perspectives of families in early 20th Century America such as those of immigrants, black people and upper-class people to develop the multitude of varying compromises that each has to make to achieve their unique interpretation of the American Dream in his novel Ragtime.

The American Dream has a plethora of connotations. For most immigrants, the hope is to diffuse their lifestyle as did Luigi Vallorani, an Italian newcomer, who wished to spread “the riches of his culture to the American economy” (Vallorani). People strive for riches. On the contrary, many hold the belief that the true American Dream is the ability to be free and enjoy civil liberties. Such a belief should be constant through time. History has shown the contrary. From the absence of women’s suffrage to the enslavement of an entire race, the claim that America is “the land of the free and the home of the brave” seems paradoxical (Morley). Nonetheless, many still find ways to reach this goal by maneuvering the injustices within American society. Their compromise propels them. People have adjusted over the years to making their own decisions and rerouting themselves onto the path of the fabled liberty they seek. Within all of the families in Ragtime, characters are forced to change their outlook on the American Dream in order to truly reach it. The adherence of many to be able to look to reform in their personal lives highlights an idea prevalent in Ragtime. Mother’s internal battles and Coalhouse’s lingering demons exemplify these personal wars. Familial struggles further them.

The first impressions of the book show promise when the lines “there were no negroes” and “there were no immigrants” are read (Doctorow 2). Clearly, Doctorow envelopes the readers into a privileged person's perspective through these words. The absence of black people and immigrants from a white person's viewpoint highlights the negligible struggle that was faced by Caucasians in attaining the American Dream. Basically, Doctorow points out the ability of many privileged people to tunnel themselves into their own fantasy. The novel is set during the Progressive Era, a time for supposed reform within American social, economic, and political culture. Progressives took on “a broad range of social justice issues” (Ouzts). Verily, many whites of the time opposed immigrants and blacks. Indubitably, the timing of this novel has correlation to the different obstacles faced by every family. Clearly, as aforementioned, the family with the least struggle is the family of Mother and Father, as they are white. Nonetheless, the differences in race did not affect their ability to face challenges but it surely had to do with the gravity of these inhibitors. As Ta-Nehisi Coates stated in Between the World and Me, “The Dream is treehouses and the Cub Scouts” (11). From the viewpoint of white people in the Progressive Era, the Dream was not for the black people and immigrants of the world. Exclusion runs deep in the novel.

E.L. Doctorow used the families of Mother and Father, Tateh and Mameh, and Coalhouse Walker Jr. and Sarah to explicate the various challenges they face in reaching the Dream. The least challenged family is Mother’s. Simply put, their skin color and hierarchical superiority give them an easier obstacle in the novel. Challenging them is the
model family that they have to be. Specifically, after the misdeeds of Coalhouse, the family has to come to terms with the fact that they will experience a “community from which they would be increasingly alienated” (Doctorow 86). Friendship with blacks was shunned. White people in Ragtime are faced with the goal to be viewed perfectly to reach their hope of societal liberty. Doctorow highlights the idiocy of society’s views in all facets, even one as silly as this one. Moreover, within the family, Mother’s struggle for freedom is clear. She struggles to find herself in the role she has been given. Following Father’s trip to the North Pole, she feels separated from him and restricted by him. She yearns to be free. Clearly, this is a symbol for the sentiments of many women during the Progressive Era. A patriarchal system was undeniably present in the families of the 1920s. At the end of the story, Mother’s struggle is solved when she marries Tateh; Doctorow writes, “their union was joyful though without issue”, to clearly parallel her previous marriage (117). Mother’s American Dream was reached when she could feel free with her partner; the overbearance of Father was no more. She was granted her liberty.

A far more prevalent struggle in the novel is that of Tateh and his family. Tateh finds himself on the streets trying to make ends meet as many immigrants of this time did due to jobs being full (“Immigrants in the Progressive Era”). In response, these immigrants would do what they could to make a living, some would “learn the piano, carve stones for the streets, and sing and tell jokes” (Roynon). Tateh’s niche was as a street silhouette artist. Moreover, he was a socialist and accepted these hardships while protesting at workers’ meetings. Tateh emits the common goal of immigrants of the time; to find success in the Land of the Free. Towards the end of the story, it is clear that his route of doing this is by accepting Capitalism. Tateh found a fortune making movies and creating storybooks opposed to the rags he had as a sidewalk artist. “He had become a voluble and energetic man full of the future” (Doctorow 95). To reach the American Dream, Tateh had to face the challenge of accepting a Capitalistic system, even if he had endlessly vouched against it before. His freedom and liberty became apparent after he could accept this change as his quality of life drastically improved. Tateh’s American Dream was fulfilled.

Coalhouse Walker’s family faces the hardest struggle. The event at the fire station spirals the story into chaos. Indubitably, his skin color makes him seem to be the suspect rather than the victim. Clearly, the damage done to his vehicle was racially driven and he had a point in his demands of a fixed automobile. Coalhouse had tried to lead a simple life. Never messing with white people, he found freedom in solitude. Nonetheless, his new fight for liberty drives him into madness. A cartoon by Chris Kindred portrays a brown hand with a broken key approaching the lock of a door; the door of the “Dream”. The black person could not have liberty in this time period. No matter how hard they pushed, their skin color was always looming in all they did. The wrongdoings of a white man led Coalhouse into this unquenchable thirst for vengeance. Even towards the conclusion of the story, he has to make a compromise. He compromises his demand to have the life of Willie Conklin. “Coalhouse had modified his demands” because his personal liberty could not be accrued and he knew it (Doctorow 105). This was, and, still is a common theme for many African-Americans; they have to give up what they like to fit the demands of the privileged man. Even with compromise, freedom still eludes them. Doctorow knew this to be wrong and used Coalhouse to undermine it. At the end of the novel, it seems that Coalhouse was a character that never got a sense of liberty. After the debacle, he knew that he would not come out of this alive, “more probably he knew that all he must do in order to end his life was turn his head abruptly or lower his hands or smile” (Doctorow 111). The black man paid for the white man’s leisure. Willie Conklin was left in life to roam the streets, while Coalhouse lay in a coffin. He had all but liberty.

Concludingly, E.L. Doctorow used each family and their issues in Ragtime to highlight nuancing perspectives on the “American Dream” and how it is not universally reached; with each family having to make their own specific compromises. Furthermore, the struggle he most vividly presents is the black person’s as Coalhouse’s fate is a lingering example of a black man unable to achieve liberty because of the white man’s hindrance.
Unimaginable

Imagine no religion
We’d have to wonder why
Nothing to save us
Stuck in eternal night
Imagine all the evil
Starting its crusade… Oh-no…
Worlds without any boundaries
Violence would ensue
Nothing to live or cry for
And no salvation, too
Imagine all the evil
Dawning our decrease… You…
You may say I’m a sinner
But so is everyone
I hope I’ll be forgiven
By the blue and final sun
Imagine world poverty
Every woman and man
Begging on streets and corners
Surviving all they can
Imagine all the evil
All stones left unturned… You…
You may say I’m a sinner
But so is everyone
I hope I’ll be forgiven
By the blue and final sun
Guilt and Grief

Indecisiveness can be the cause of a painful death. Self-doubt, fear of the wrong decision, and wrong intentions are the roots of indecisiveness, however in order to overcome this internal conflict one must learn to decipher their inner workings. Unfortunately, in the play Hamlet by Shakespeare, this outcome never arrives. Due to his enigmatic and complex nature toward others and with himself, Hamlet does not know what path to take in order to deal with the guilt and dread he experiences. Becoming wrapped up in his own pressing issues with revenge, he neglects the future of Denmark, the woman he claimed to love, and himself. Shakespeare knew how to expertly convey inner turmoil between vengeance and obedience faced within oneself, and present it to a greater audience so that they might learn from it. Through foil sets, themes of uncertainty, and symbolism, Shakespeare displays the antithetical relationship between vengeance and obedience that can highlight inner securities and doubts about oneself, and how it can ultimately lead to chaos without restraint.

Foils can often be used to highlight characteristics about the main character. Shakespeare does this expertly by including Laertes into the story of Hamlet. Laertes is a driven character, who knows exactly what he wants, and takes clear and concise action to get it. Laertes’ obedience to his own conscience and will can be contrasted with Hamlet’s main motive: vengeance. Guilt and grief can lead a person down dark paths. Hamlet, consumed by grief and anger can be seen struggling between the idea of getting revenge on the murderer of his father, and suicide. His curiosity about what life is after death is entangled with his father’s passing, making him search for answers he will not unless he commits the act. What’s stopping him from being so driven in vengeance and curiosity is his inability to communicate and obey his actions and thoughts efficiently. He feels these emotions deeply, and says that he “has that within which passeth show, These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (I.ii.)” Hamlet becomes eternally trapped with these tormenting ideas, as Laertes depicts an oppositional character who highlights Hamlet’s flaws by creating his own strengths within them.

With King Hamlet gone, Denmark is in need of a strong leader. Due to the conflict with Norway, Hamlet should have stepped up to his place on the throne, and handled business. However, submerged and buried in guilt with his father’s death, Hamlet was unable to do so. Prince Fortinbras was especially helpful in shedding light on Hamlet’s motivation, by creating a foil set. His father was murdered too, by King Hamlet himself. This lit a fire in Prince Fortinbras, just the same as King Hamlet’s death did in Hamlet. They are both motivated by revenge, and will go to destructive measures in order to get it. Hamlet and Fortinbras take turns recriminating themselves, leading to larger conflict between the nations of Denmark and Norway. This conflict symbolizes the inner conflict they both face within themselves, due to dealing with unbridled grief and guilt about the death of their beloved family members. Both of them feel their emotions deeply, portrayed by Hamlet saying, “O God, God, How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable Seem to me all the uses of this world! (I.ii.)” In this way, they parallel each other and highlight their innate flaws that prevent them from leading their country effectively, and toward peace.

In order to truly understand a character’s purpose, one must examine their lowest point to uncover their truest emotions and motivations. Hamlet, the protagonist of his story, experiences his climax when he’s attempting to prove that Claudius is in fact guilty of his father’s murder. His demeanor was portrayed as being clinically insane, in a wild attempt to prove what he had been searching for in order to get the revenge he, now more than ever, needed. However, this madness did not cure his inner turmoil, in fact it is unclear if it ever receded. In his madness he stated, “I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw. (II.i.312–13)” One can clearly tell that he is not in the right mind. In his poor judgement, he mistakenly and impulsively murders Polonius instead of Claudius. This gives a lesson to all who are facing inner demons with the sole goal of revenge, and act impulsively upon them. Revenge did not make Hamlet feel content or satisfied. Instead, he feels contempt for himself and for others while still facing inner turmoils that are now almost incurable. Hamlet learns that it was never the answer to begin with, and now feels lost and consumed in grief and guilt. Claudius was always a conniving man, who
never showed any ounce of empathy toward anyone but himself. He obeyed his wishes that only he benefited from, and manipulated those around him to get what he wanted. In a way, this can be contrasted with Hamlet’s lesson. Claudius faces his demons in the people around him, seeing nothing wrong within himself. Hamlet is the exact opposite. While Hamlet seeks revenge, Claudius seeks power, submittance, and obedience from those around him. When these two intertwine, it symbolizes the undulating battle between obedience and vengeance, their relationship, and why these two characters behave the way they do.

Shakespeare’s emphasis on a father’s influence is heavy in Ophelia, Polonius’s daughter. From the very beginning, Ophelia has been an extremely obedient figure, submitting to her father, her brother, and occasionally Hamlet. Therefore, she has always been told what to do, how to think, and how to behave. Unfortunately, her relationship with obedience ultimately led to her untimely demise. Her trust in those around her, and her unrelenting obedience to them, leads her to never making her own decisions. Ophelia’s life has been out of her control since the story of Hamlet began, and the consequence of this was death. Renouncing Hamlet’s love by order of her father and brother leads to a beratement from Hamlet that sent her into a state of grief like no other. Polonius commands this by saying, “In few, Ophelia, Do not believe his vows. (I.iii.)” Her death symbolizes her maintenance of everyone’s expectations of her dematerializing. She is dead, but she is free. Her lesson was to not be taken advantage of, and become overly obedient. That life is not a good one to live. A character in a similar situation is Gertrude, King Hamlet’s widow, and Claudius’ new lover. While she does not seek revenge, she seeks validation and self-worth in male attention, including Claudius. In doing so, she obeys him and participates in his games. She does not think critically about her own decisions, but rather bases her life upon what other things about her. Her lesson in obedience is separate from Ophelia’s. Her character serves to prevent others from finding self-worth and validation in anyone but one’s own self. In doing so, one can make decisions that benefit them, while simultaneously benefiting those surrounding.

Between Laertes and Hamlet, the symbolization of a mixture of obedience and revenge can be found. Laertes, who is highly driven and strong-willed, can demonstrate that in order to achieve one’s goals and lead a happy life one must fight self-doubt with every molecule of their being. Hamlet’s complicated and enigmatic inner workings prevent him from having the confidence he needs to get over his guilt. He struggles with his identity also, and the concept of living or dying. He says, “To be or not to be—that is the question (III.i.)” While his motivations are certainly skewed, with him wanting to commit murder, he will never be truly cured of his ailment without confidence and self-worth. To the greater audience, these lessons are important to know. Being humble while also maintaining confidence in oneself to fulfill a contented future is the key to a successful, depressionless, and meaningful life. Shakespeare uses Laertes and Hamlet to demonstrate that between obedience and revenge, and show the viewers what not to do.

The countries of Denmark and Norway can be used to analyze the relationship between Fortinbras and Hamlet, and how their relationship correlates to the lesson Shakespeare was attempting to show the readers in this tragic story. Both characters were consumed with grief from the death of their fathers. Shakespeare utilizes them to show that there is more to life than wallowing in grief and revenge. While Hamlet sometimes believes that impulsive actions can result in good outcomes by saying, “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hewn them how we will. (V.ii.),” it is not necessarily true. By overcoming this evil motivation of wanting to murder or attack someone based on past actions, instead of forgiving them, one can truly move on and find peace within themselves. Shakespeare’s lesson here is that both of these characters must move on, and forgive those who wronged them in order to be at peace, not only with themselves, but with the world around them. For these two characters in particular, being a phenomenal leader is expected. Revenge and guilt block that destined path. Through overcoming their demons and inner conflict, both Fortinbrash and Hamlet can be what they were always meant to. Shakespeare uses this to parallel with the audience, and portray that living a life of peace is the ultimate goal.

In conclusion, Shakespeare utilizes foil sets between influential characters in order to demonstrate how the relationship between vengeance and obedience plays an important role in understanding the lessons being taught within this story. Peace and tranquility within oneself will ultimately lead to a happy life. In addition, Shakespeare’s use of symbolism augments the connection between the philosophies of this story, and the reader to make it easier to understand and empathize with. With analysis, essential truths can be pulled from this famous and historic play. Hamlet is a tragic story, however philosophical lessons and existential truths can be pulled from it to learn more about human nature and behavior.
Reese Rosebeck
Age: 17, Grade: 12

School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern

Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

Memory Lane

Remembering vivid moments of my life has always been easy for me. I was two years old when my dad let me sit in the front seat of his convertible while we drove around the neighborhood. Wind was blowing through my nonexistent hair as I toyed with my car seat, which was the only thing between me and an unfortunate near-death experience. My dad’s presence in the driver’s seat, constantly turning his head to make sure I was alright, still lingers in my mind.

Years later, when I was about seven years old, I planted a sunflower seed in my backyard. Every morning I would wake up, rush downstairs, squeeze through the back door, and check to see if my precious sunflower had miraculously sprouted to its full size. Obviously, that did not happen, and I can still taste the disappointment on my tongue. One morning I woke up, and a tiny stalk poked through the dirt revealing a miniature stem and leaf to my curious seven year-old self. I can still feel the electricity shooting through my body as I cupped that tiny sprout. Those electric moments fueled my childhood, and supplied me with the joy I needed to see in the world. However, like any human being, one must experience the lowest of lows to appreciate the highest of highs.

That morning came with an emergency alert for a flash flood and a torrential downpour like I had never seen. But I loved the rain. My day continued on as usual, until my mom and I arrived back home from school. Something was not right. While doing my homework, my mom called up to me from downstairs.

"Reese! Have you seen Leo?"
I paused. Where was he?
“Reese?”
My heart dropped.
“No! I haven’t!”

Heavy and fast footsteps could be heard from downstairs. I leaped out of my chair and sprinted to my mother. I found her in the living room, throwing blankets out from behind the couch.

“What are you doing just standing there? Look for him!”
I ran outside, fear racing through my veins and raindrops blurring my vision.

“Leo!”
Nothing. I turned the corner toward my pool.
“Leo? Come out!”
Nothing. I looked behind some rocks.

“Leo come on!”
Still nothing. I turned another corner to the side of the house.

“Leo?”
There he was, stiff as a board. His eyes were half shut and his body was convulsing to the point where I thought he was having a seizure.

“Mom! He’s over here!”

The rain and my tears mixed together, and I did not know which was which. The only thing I did know was that if I had found him minutes later, I would not have found him alive. We were lucky, and he lived. But in that moment, I felt like the entire world was coming to an abrupt end.

Remembering these vivid moments has always been a blessing and a curse. We choose to remember the things that bring us joy, but the question must be asked: what are we learning from those happy moments? The truth is, the darkest and deepest memories you have can teach you the most valuable lessons. Another truth is, you can learn to repress those memories, or you can choose to embrace them. Everything that has happened to me has made me exactly who I am today, even the tiniest flashes of moments that I can vaguely remember.
I used to think that my memory was inescapable; that I was forced to see the things I wanted so badly to forget. I thought my brain was uninhabitable. Now, I embrace the things I have no control over. I know of their importance in my whole being, and I adapt to learn from the hardest moments in my life. I accept them.
Calamitous Claudius

Usually, murder isn’t considered an accomplishment. But for me, on the other hand, it was much more than that. As I always say, “My words fly up; my thoughts remain below. (III.iii.)” Something that has been extremely important to me for the majority of my life is power. Power is much more than authority over someone, or something, but it’s the act of instilling fear into others. Obviously, this could be considered an atrocious concept to fully believe in. Others have ridiculed me beyond repair, and trust me, I know how to take it. However, power is a very useful attribute and possession to have. Without power nothing would be done. Countries would collapse, society would turn to anarchy, and life as we know it would seemingly dissolve and melt into chaos. Doesn’t power sound so much better than that? Authority is what keeps the harmony among all things, and that is all I am trying to achieve.

Using power in order to get what you want is also a very helpful characteristic in life. If you want to accomplish something for the betterment of others, and oneself especially, then power is a great tool to have in the toolbox. Public speaking comes in handy as well. Rallying together a crowd of people and guiding them towards a goal that may or may not be shared among them can be very useful when attempting to get things done. There was a period in my life that was dark, evil, and full of regret. I would use manipulation and wordplay to convince others that what I was doing was right. Even though power was abundant within my life, I learned from the moment I looked back at myself and watched what I was doing that it was wrong. Growing because of my mistakes is a human thing, because no one is completely perfect or free of sin. I know plenty of people who have fallen victim to the tempting traps of power, money, and greed. It is a very slippery slope, but those who have recovered are some of the best people I know.

Looking back at my life, and my mistakes, and all the harm I have caused others, I realize that I needed to make a change. I actively need to think about my actions and how they directly affect other people. I’ve learned that greed is the root of all evils, and that anyone who thinks they are indestructible can fall victim to them. Even though my story ended in a timely demise, I can only hope that other people learn from this event, take what they can from it, and learn to not repeat the same mistakes that I did. The world deserves those who are not power hungry, but rather people who have compassionate hearts, open minds, and welcoming personalities. Greed is never the answer to any problem that needs to be solved, and learning this was one of the most valuable lessons I could have experienced. Looking back on all the events in my life that have led up to myself at this point in time, I realize that I could not be luckier to be where I am today.
Inevitable Sins

Everyone has something to hide. Whether it be their darkest secret, their most treacherous sin, or a bad grade on their math quiz, everyone has something to be ashamed of. However, some have it worse than others. Those who have committed atrocious acts during their days on Earth, as told by *The Inferno*, receive fitting punishments during their time in Hell. According to Dante’s depiction of Hell in his vision, he saw different circles for different sins. As he went deeper into Hell, the sins got worse. As the sins got worse, so did the punishments. Dante described the people he saw there, what they did, and what their punishment was. Here, we see figures such as Count Ugolino, Satan, and Mahomet, who have all committed sins and received equal punishments as repentance. It’s debated over whether these punishments are fair and just, but for each reaction has an equal and opposite reaction.

Count Ugolino resides in the ninth circle of Hell, which is considerably deeper than the rest of the circles. Ugolino, while alive, committed treachery against his people. Treason is one of the darkest sins you can commit, thus him being so far into the circles of hell. With him is another traitor, known as Archbishop Ruggieri. Ruggieri was the man who locked Ugolino, and his sons, in prison for his treasonist crimes. However, Ruggieri committed an equally evil sin by withholding food from Ugolino, forcing the Count to devour his own offspring. Just as their lives were intertwined, so are their punishments. In the ninth circle of Hell, the Count now gnaws on Archbishop Ruggieri’s head for eternity. This punishment is both symbolic as well as fair. Count Ugolino’s guilt of consuming his sons eats him alive, so now he spends eternity consuming yet another human life. This is a constant reminder of his grave sin, and forces him to acknowledge his wrongdoings and his guilt. Archbishop Ruggieri, in turn, did this to Count Ugolino. Therefore, he becomes the one being consumed as punishment for his terrible acts against the Count for coercing him into eating his sons. While these punishments may seem quite gruesome and downright awful, the act of cannibalism and treason are deserving of the consequences enacted.

Perhaps one of the most infamous figures in literature is also included in this *Inferno*: Satan himself. He is deemed the master of deceit and lies in many works of well-known literature, such as the Bible. He disobeyed God and was abusive of the power given to him as an angel. When he fell from Heaven and descended into Hell, he was appointed overseer of all sinners that happened to dwell in the treacherous pit. It was his home. His punishment was most fitting, and addressed his abuse of power and his comfortability in Hell. In many depictions of Hell, it can be interpreted that it is a sweltering and inhabitable place. For this reason, Satan is condemned to be frozen from the waist down, becoming immobile. The cold contrasts his comfortability in Hell, making it all the more unbearable for the fallen angel himself. Additionally, phallic symbols are traditionally used as symbols of power. Satan abused his power; therefore, the source of it becomes immobilized and frozen, signifying that it has been taken away in the place he calls home.

The third and final figure that will be discussed is Mahomet, located in one of the deepest recesses of Dante’s *Inferno*. When Virgil first encounters Mahomet, you can clearly see his punishment. He is disemboweled from his neck to his groin, which would be a horrible sight to see. While this punishment is quite possibly the most gruesome of them all, it is both just and symbolic of the sins he committed while he was still living. Mahomet dwelled upon those who suffered the same fate as him, and explained that his punishment is disembowelment because of the discord he created. Causing rifts and scandals within a society and tearing people apart is a considerable sin, due to the fact that it affects an extremely large community. Just as Mahomet caused splits in society, he is now eternally split in his physical body. These wounds that he endures do eventually heal, but are ripped back open just as quickly by demons with swords. This is symbolic of the damage he inflicted upon those around him by causing huge rifts within their lives.

These severe punishments may seem on the brink of insanity, however the descriptions of the sins committed point to why they are all symbolic and just. Each figure’s punishment accurately reflects the harm done to those around them, or perhaps to themselves, while they were alive. Many ideologies have come up with crazy theories about the
afterlife in an attempt to provide an answer. Dante’s prediction, like most others, is unlikely. However, his depiction of his vision acts as a cautionary tale to prevent poor human souls from committing terrible sins, all in the hopes of saving them from their inevitable fate of damnation in Hell. Nobody wants their sternum ripped open for eternity.
Love/Hate

Love is but a chemical
That connects us and makes us whole
Some say it is trivial, a tricky thing, perplexing
Perhaps it is so, that love is unpurposed and baffling
Tell me then, who are we without it?
Empty shells of fruitless human beings who do not like to submit
To the wills of the universe that dictate our fate
Truthfully, love is a careful thing. Be sure to nurture it before it’s too late
Or soon you will forget what we are here for
What am I here? Who am I? What is my name? Who came before?
These things we may never know, but we do know love
We’ve always known each other, but not what is above
Some may hate the idea of love, and I cannot help but wonder
Why it is they’ve chosen to go under
An imaginary spell that keeps their head down
And their minds quiet until they meld their frowns
Permanently upon their faces
Lives seemingly wasted
Forever and tonight
We are light

Nature is not capable
Of the same destruction as man
Mankind could be unbreakable
But they do not understand
The consequences nature will bring
Against all their mistakes
The sirens will not ring
Nature will take
Back
What is rightfully so, man has evil in his heart
We already know, we knew right from the start
That man can be evil and cruel and spiteful
Nature did not sign up to be man’s only rival
If only man loved just as nature loves all things
Maybe one day man could finally bring peace
If only man wasn’t born with hate in his eyes
He could finally see that his timely demise
Will be because of natures made up mind
That she is finally drained due to mankind
And she’ll take back what is hers this time
A Stove and Scrambled Eggs


I never would’ve imagined my first time cooking would feel this way. My hands were freezing despite the stove’s heat. The sun had gone down and my confidence had gone with it. Disparaging thoughts crowded my mind.

I simply can’t cook. For others, it may be a subjective statement in reference to stale mac-and-cheese or a half-burned salisbury steak, but for me— freshman year at least—I was genuinely incapable of being around fire.

Now don’t laugh. I know it seems bizarre for my childhood to be wholly shaped by this irrational fear, but I sure have my reasons. Perhaps those scared-straight fire prevention programs in elementary school worked a little too well. Maybe a few too many Final Destination movies did the trick. Or possibly, it was the Catholic school education and the fascinating tale of St.Lawrence that left me with a deep-seated fear of being burned alive. Either way, I always sat the furthest from the hibachi grill.

One day, my stomach rumbled. I had grievously miscounted the number of frozen dinners I had left. I realized I would starve if I continued to be passive. So, I decided to be bold. Daring. Unpredictable. I was going to make myself scrambled eggs.

I’ll save you the details. It didn’t work out. As soon as I felt the scorching heat from the fire, I turned off the stove. For the next week and a half, that failure kept replaying in my mind. I genuinely couldn’t look at the stove without seeing dancing, taunting scrambled eggs. It plagued me so much that I felt like I had no option but to try again. And soon enough, I found myself back at the stove.

I’ll be honest; I almost chickened out again. But I knew that if I didn’t do it, those scrambled eggs would haunt me forever. As the click-click-click of the gas stove rang throughout the house, I mentally prepared myself. The oil crackled, the egg sizzled, I quivered.

And before I knew it… my egg was on the platter. I had conquered my greatest fear.

As I enjoyed that slightly bland, slightly singed egg in disbelief, I thought about all the opportunities I’ve missed just because I failed the first time and was too scared to try again. From then on, I realized I had more control over my life than I thought. Like a cassette tape, the memory of initial failure, subsequent determination, and ultimately scrambled eggs, rewound and replayed whenever I began to doubt myself. I was scared of taking AP Chemistry as everyone said it was the hardest class at my school; a savory smell of scrambled eggs wafted through my memory. I didn’t want to become debate captain for English class as I never did well in speech and debate club; a solid crunch of an eggshell piece rattled my brain. I wanted to give up on learning how to drive as I couldn’t figure out how to parallel park for the life of me; a warm sizzle of eggs on the stove jogged my mind. Even now, I eat some scrambled eggs before a test or competition, for good luck and a reminder of my own capabilities.

At the end of the day, no matter how terrified I am, I know that I’ll look back on a difficult experience with gratitude and nostalgia. Through scrambled eggs, I gained self-confidence. And through my own determination, I have realized that failure is not the end. The fire within me grew as I turned on that stove. Now, I face my problems head-on.
I persevere.
I never set out to save his life. But from the moment I set eyes on that poor knight, I knew I had to do something. I think it’s absolutely ludicrous that a man was presented with the question of what women want most in the world. Luckily, I knew the answer.

People often ask me, “why did you decide to help him?”. To be fair, I wasn’t sure either; I don’t remember exactly what it was. However, I can assure you it wasn’t just about a strong desire to help him. Honestly, at that time, I couldn’t care less about the problems of others. Maybe it was boredom. Maybe it was wanting to teach him a lesson. I can’t exactly explain it. But I knew I had to step in.

The approach I took in that situation set the path for my future approaches with humanitarian issues. First, identify the problem. Then, figure out how to solve the problem. And finally, just solve the problem. It’s very methodical and honestly, it works like a charm. The problem was that this knight was ordered to find what women most desired in the world. If he did not find it, he would lose his head. He did commit a heinous crime to warrant such a harsh punishment, and that caused a bit of a headache as I tried to figure out this grey area, but still, the voice in my brain called on me to help. Now, to figure out the answer to the problem. The knight told me the answers of the women he asked. From money, to honor, to beauty, the answers were all there. And so I pondered. Why money, when money is a man-made concept? Why honor, when honor is so fickle? Why beauty, when beauty standards change so quickly? After a hot lunch and a quick nap, the answer came to me. All these desires lead to the same thing: to have some sort of power over their lovers.

So we traveled to the court and answered the queen. And I was right. The knight was pardoned from death row. Now I know this may seem like a bizarre story to you, but it was the first time that I felt drawn to something. I had a desire to help him; even if he is a terrible person. Out of my boredom, came a life saved. From then on, I became an involved member of society, instead of hanging out with sheep for friends. I started a charity to help people on death row, as well as interning at a law branch in my village.

My experience with the knight has made me want to become a humanitarian and work for non-profits. There is no better place to do that than Fordham University. With a humanitarian studies major and a peace and justice studies minor, I can get that sense of fulfillment from when I first started helping others. Fordham’s motto is Sapientia et Doctrina (Wisdom and Learning). My experience with the knight is the perfect example. I want to give back to my community, one person at a time. I am constantly learning from the people around me and I use what I’ve learned to give back to society.
Death is universal. In every religion, there is an afterlife, typically in the form of reincarnation or an eternal paradise, to soothe the natural fear of death. For Christians, the afterlife consists of an everlasting Heaven or Hell with one’s place decided by one’s actions. Dante’s *Inferno* reflects this idea. Through the allegories, Biblical references, and Dante’s own reactions, the punishments of Francesca, Count Ugolino, Archbishop Ruggieri, and Satan are just and symbolic, providing social commentary on the sins of man and reflecting Dante’s own feelings toward the sins.

In circle two, the punishment for the lustful, particularly Francesca, is fitting and symbolic. Allegories in the description of the circle reveal the purpose of her punishment; for example, she is doomed to be blown about in an “…infernal hurricane that never rests” (V.31). The punishment is fitting because Francesca was led astray by her lust when she was alive, so now, she must be blown about uncontrollably. The hurricane is violent and unstoppable due to her inability to control her own desires. The storm will never end and allow her a moment’s peace because pure passion never ceases. Just as she was helpless in her love, she is helpless now. Furthermore, the storm that whips throughout the circle is symbolic of the wild passions, giving no regard to logic and societal norms. It is unrestrained and chaotic, alluding to the feelings of lovers. The circle is also “…mute of all light” (V.28). This is fitting because sinners of love are so blinded by their passions that they have fallen away from the light that matters—God’s light. It is a symbol of Francesca’s blind love and how it made her blind to God’s rules and her duties as a wife. However, Dante’s reaction must be noted. He does not treat Francesca as harshly as he does to sinners in the ninth circle; he instead exclaims in sympathy, “Thine agonies, Francesca, sad and compassionate to weeping make me” (V.95-96). He emphasizes with her. His past experiences with Beatrice, his lover, shapes his view of Hell as he relates to sinners in the second circle, instead of just condemns. Dante’s reaction hints at his belief that although lust is a sin, it is not as abhorrent as other abuses. With Dante’s personal feelings in mind, Francesca’s punishment for her sin of lust is both subjectively and objectively justified for her sin of lust and symbolic for her inability to control her passions.

As Dante further descends, the punishments for Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri are rational and allegorical. Circle 9 involves the sinners who have betrayed their nations, and both the Count and Archbishop betrayed their countries by attempting to overthrow the government. Dante beholds them “…frozen in one hole” (XXXII.125). Therefore, the rigid ice they are trapped in together is an allegory for the prison that both sinners belong in for taking part in the betrayal. This punishment is rational because the Count was locked in a cell by the Archbishop, so now both are locked in a block of ice. Furthermore, the stillness of ice is a juxtaposition to the living water that is Christ. In the ninth circle, at the very bottom of hell, the furthest away from the living water and the warmth of God, is where they will spend eternity. They are punished together “in one hole” (XXXII.125) because their sins were intertwined, first betraying the country and then betraying each other. Likewise, the punishment for the Archbishop being eaten in Hell is rational because the Count’s cannibalistic actions were indirectly caused by the Archbishop, as “…trusting in him [he] was made prisoner” (XXXIII.17). Because the Count committed the sin of cannibalism, he is now forced to continue gnawing on a human. And because the Archbishop caused this situation to arise, he must be the one that gets eaten for all eternity. This relationship in their punishments is an allegory for corruption in government. Specifically, the Count feasts on the head of the Archbishop, and persons in authority are known as a ‘head’, for example, a head of state. The Archbishop was an authority figure in the Church who misused his power, so the Count gnawing on his head is an allegory for both the cannibalistic fate the Archbishop forced the Count into, and the corruption in government and politics which Dante himself was a victim of. The punishment of Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri is justified due to their sin of betraying their country and each other and symbolizes Dante’s
personal hatred towards corruption in government.

Further down the ninth circle, the punishment of Satan is appropriate and figurative. As the ninth circle is reserved for betrayers, Satan is fit to be there. After betraying God and falling from Heaven, Satan is now in Hell, described in Dante’s *Inferno* as being surrounded by “a heavy fog” (XXXIV.4). The punishment of fog is appropriate because Satan was unable to clearly see all that God offered him; instead, he wanted to be greater than God. Now he can no longer see anything clearly. Additionally, fog symbolizes uncertainty and blindness. Satan is shrouded in fog which references his fall from heaven and how, without the light of God to part the fog, he is left spiritually blind and uncertain. Moreover, his “…three faces…joined together at the crest” (XXXIV.42) symbolizes the intertwining Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Satan’s three heads present a clear juxtaposition of what he once had: God’s grace, and now his lack thereof. Those three faces are an appropriate punishment because for each face of God he turned away from, he grew a distorted version of them. Satan’s punishment is justified due to his sin of betraying God and symbolic of his lack of heavenly grace.

Through Dante’s description and experience with the characters of Francesca, Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri, and Satan, one can see how his version of Hell is very subjective. He sympathizes with Francesca due to his love for Beatrice. He puts Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri in the deepest circle as his experience with betrayal makes it a great sin. Most significantly, his description of Satan as a juxtaposition of what Satan used to be, an angel and a heavenly figure, and twisting those figures, shows how he views the concept of sin. It is a betrayal of God. To Dante, this Hell is both an outlet and a reminder of the daily sins of man. From tormented passions to serious betrayal, Dante’s just and symbolic punishments provide social commentary to the sins of human nature.
Pro-life

I want those migrant kids encaged.
I don’t think healthcare is a right.
To open borders would make me enraged,
But no worries, I’m pro-life.

Police violence is not my fight.
I don’t care about the poor.
I truly follow the teachings of Christ.
Death penalty? I’m still unsure.

Foster care reform is boring.
School shootings? That must suck.
My love for guns is outpouring,
So don’t panic, just duck.

I want those migrant kids encaged.
I don’t think healthcare is a right.
To open borders would make me enraged,
But no worries, I’m pro-life.

That’s right.
I’m pro-life.

I threaten the defenseless with my gun.
But no worries, I’m pro-life.

It’s stupid to say you’re pro-life.
Christians fight for others.
You hate the call for equal rights,
Like we’re not from the same father

You should care for other issues
Concerning others on this earth.
You harass women about their tissue,
You’re not pro-life just pro-birth.
Perception and Reflection

Perception
I lack confidence.
In every interaction lies an aura of doubt.
They are judging me, staring at my pores.
Inwardly sneering at my lack of words, my silence.
I am overcome with self-doubt. I am only comfortable with myself and not in the eyes of others. There is no peace with others. But when I’m alone, with me, by myself, I begin to question others, their opinions, and if they are right. And if I exist only through their eyes, then, really, I don’t exist.

I am just an empty shell, grown on the back of society’s opinions. I do not know myself. I am only every perception together.

Reflection
I look in the mirror; I see you. You are a reflection of me. Our eyes, the same color. Our noses, the makeup, the same. You hold your palms; the same palms that come whispers like the wind. From your cheeks come a glow like the Sun. Glowing amber. You tell of gods, heroes, of the same material, the same eyes, my hand to your heart; it beats born dove. And I finally understand. That we are the same.

And that my emotions are
the same ones
felt by you. We really
are the same. And there is no
place for contempt, disservice, and
condemnation. Because everything I do to
you, I am doing to myself. We are all the same. I
must treat others with respect, kindness, and reverence.
Because what I do to you, is simply a
reflection of myself.
SHAO, ANNIE

Annie Shao
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

An Etude in A-Flat Major

Playing music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. In the small living room of my childhood apartment in Fuzhou, China, there was an old Chinese harp, a guzheng. I began plucking the various strings creating shrill, aggravating sounds, which my family, of course, did not appreciate. Life was good, straightforward, no thoughts required, no complicated emotions; until I had to move into a small, uniform, less-than-welcoming town in the United States. I became one in a thousand. Literally. Being the only Asian child in the whole town, I felt isolated and misunderstood; the lack of diversity manifested into a discomfort gnawing at my identity.

So music became my answer. A simple solution to the complex emotions I was battling. I found the sense of belonging I desperately needed within my music. I soon started to play the guitar in fourth grade, the flute in sixth grade, and the violin during freshman year. The interest in those instruments came and went, but I always returned back to my piano. I'll be realistic. It wasn't a convoluted stirring in my chest that made me realize piano was my one and only, rather, it was the stinging pain in my fingertips when I played other string instruments. Playing music wasn't something I was naturally good at; it was difficult and demanding. But at the end, when the piece came together, there was only the simple, beautiful music I craved.

I first discovered Liszt’s Etude in A-flat Major my freshman year of high school. Through the rollercoaster of new friends, unexpected responsibilities, and a sick mother, Liszt proved to be a piece that let my mind drift from reality. The notes may be complicated, the dynamics intricate, but to me, the etude gives a pleasant escape. There was no longer the daunting language barrier that childhood me would dread. There was only a mutual understanding that the clatter of keys will bring a desired moment of peace.

I am wedged in between the complexity and simplicity of Liszt’s Etude in A-Flat. Between moving 6,823 miles, struggling with my identity, and being lost in a vortex of perplexing emotions, there were also the sweet moments of making new friends, discovering my hobbies, and reaping the benefits of my hard work.

But most importantly, the labyrinth of my difficult experiences have lead to the pleasant melody of me. In the search for my identity, I have found that no matter how complex the situation seems—whether it’s public speaking, the fear of failure, the crushing weight of mortality—I will always look back and appreciate what I have learned from a difficult experience. The determination to keep going. The willingness to do more. The grace to admire the less noticeable details. They’re all found in the rising crescendos, intricate accidentals, and the soothing melody of Liszt’s Etude. It all looks so complicated now, but I promise myself that all memories will become distant and tinged with the sweetness of hard work and nostalgia.

I am complex. But I am simple. I am the beautiful intricate harmonies that tell a delightful story. I am Liszt’s Etude in A-Flat Major.
The journey in “Dante’s Inferno” takes the reader to visit the personal hell and punishments of many characters. Every punishment being delivered is symbolic. All punishments of the characters revolve around how they lived on earth, there were specific rings in hell for specific types of sins. If you were guilty of gluttony you would be placed into the ring for gluttons. The deeper the ring of hell, the worse your sin was, therefore the worse your punishment is set to be. There are some characters who I believe did not truly deserve the punishment they received. There are some who simply did not have the chance to redeem themselves and there are some who I believe did not get punished enough.

Of all the prisoners trapped in their respective ring of hell, there were two sinners suffering for the same thing that I believe they did not deserve. The story of Paolo and Francesca. The two lovers trapped in the ring reserved for those guilty of adultery. Francesca was married to Paolo’s brother but her true love was Paolo. The two of them were caught in the act of cheating by her husband, he was so furious with them he killed them both on the spot. Francesca states that “we are in one hell…” (line 99) meaning that not being able to love who you love openly was a terrible hell, just as they are in hell now together. The thing that makes adultery so interesting is that it is a sin based upon a person’s ethics or moral code. It has to do with the fact that you have a chance after the damage is done to try and redeem yourself, ask forgiveness and repent for your actions. Unfortunately this was not an option for Paolo and Francesca. Because they were killed while in the act, neither one of them were given the chance to beg or plead for forgiveness. While living, Francesca was happy with her lover, but when she died her love became her hell. The two of them should be judged based on if they would have begged for forgiveness and been sorry for their actions, not just because they were adulterers. One cannot choose who they love, you can not control your feelings. If Francesca loved Paolo then she could not change that. However if she was not apologetic for cheating on her husband then that would be something worth punishing.

Count Ugolino was trapped and punished in hell for cannibalism of his children. And he deserved it. He and his children were locked in a dungeon to starve to death. The sounds of his own sons screaming and crying that they were in so much pain due to the lack of food they were forced to endure. His sons said to their father at one point that “it would give us…” (line 50). However at the time Count Ugoilo could not bring himself to do it as he loved them too much. He watched all of his kids die one by one. He was the last to die surrounded by the starved bodies of his sons, when something overcame him and he could not take the fasting any longer, as he started to eat flesh and bodies of his lifeless children. Count Ugolino deserved the punishment he received in full, he was a traitor to his country along with the man who locked them up. It was his fault his children died. He was sentenced to be trapped in ice with only his head free and to eat the brain of Archbishop Ruggieri who had thrown them in the dungeon. The punishment is symbolic and justified, as it is a reminder of what he did to his sons. That he was weak by giving in to temptation. He ate the bodies of his children because he could no longer endure the same pain his children did that came with starving.

The one character that I believed deserved more of a punishment than he got was Archbishop Ruggieri. His actions of betraying Count Ugolino and then throwing him and his sons into a dungeon to starve should be met with a more actionable punishment than he received. Trapped in ice with Count Ugolino gnawing on his head is not enough. He killed innocent children because of the actions done by their father, it seemed like the punishment was more of a reminder to Count Ugolino of his actions than anything else. The Archbishop did have to starve like he forced the family in his dungeon too, but it almost seems like he was let off easy. Like he did not get enough suffering to match the suffering he caused.

When being judged for your sins committed on earth, all factors must be taken into account. As the reader I am judging based on my own beliefs and standards, and there are some characters that truly got what they deserved but there are others who should have to suffer much worse than they did. A punishment should make the sinner feel sorry
and think about the bad choices they made. If hell is about delivering those punishments, then it should be done right and to the fullest extent.
The Criminal Justice System in America

In Dr. Bryan Stevenson’s Speech about the need to reform the criminal justice system He talks about so many problems and injustices that it was hard to keep everything straight. Just the statistics alone were enough to make my eyes go wide. That 31% of the black population in Selma, Alabama have lost their right to vote, because they have been convicted of a felony. That in the 20th century, ⅓ of male black babies are expected to go to jail or prison in their lifetime. These facts alone are what truly appalled me of how corrupt and our criminal justice system is. Dr. Stevenson brought up four points that can help us create a better criminal justice system.

The first thing was proximity. Not enough people in america are aware of how bad the prison system is and how unfair the court rulings can be to underage children. We all have the ability to educate ourselves on these types of matters, he said “proximity can change a lot, we have to get close to something to make it work”. By saying this he is bringing attention to the fact that we can not change or help a problem if we do not know what the problem truly is. The second point was that we need to change the narrative behind our justice system. We see young boys being given life sentences even before the age of 17. In America when a young black or brown boy commits a crime, our justice system considers them to be “super predators”. We allow young brown and black boys all over our country to be classified with a name that dehumanizes them because of the color of their skin and a stereotype. Dr. Stevenson told a story of a real case he had and took back to court, about a young boy and his mother in a domestic abuse case. Thinking that the mother's boyfriend hit his mother so hard that she cracked her skull open and died, the young 13 year old boy shot the boyfriend. The boy who was not even in high school yet was sentenced to life in jail because the abusive boyfriend was a deputy sheriff. The system is so corrupt that they looked past the mother being hit so hard she was bleeding out from her head and the abuse both her and her son had suffered, and decided to try the boy as an adult in a court of law. Three days in prison and the boy had already been assaulted multiple times and raped by men that were three times his age. Our justice system and our prison system condemned a 13 year old boy to a life of misery, because he was trying to protect his mother.

The third thing that Dr. Bryan Stevenson said that we need to do in order to have a better justice system is to be hopeful. He said that if you go into a trial or anything for that matter with no hope, you have already lost. Sometimes the problem seems too big and too impossible and we lose hope, but because it is big and it seems impossible, that is the reason why we must have hope. The final point is that we need to commit ourselves to do the uncomfortable things that most people don't want to do. We need to help those people who had unfair trials and essentially were doomed from the start because the people and the judge already decided that that person was guilty. In the time between 2009 and 2011, the state of Alabama had executed 17 people in less than 3 years. This alone made Alabama the state with the highest execution rate in the country. Of those 17, was a man that was very mentally unstable and showed visible signs of it. His lawyer was offered a chance for his client to plead out and take a deal for 20 years, instead of a death sentence. The lawyer never presented the deal to his client. The lawyer never even had the man be interviewed by a psychologist to see if he was mentaly stable and fit for a trial, nor did the lawyer have his client take an insanity plea. If at least one of those things had been done, the trial could have ended differently, with him maybe being alive in a mental institution when he would be getting the help he needed, not dead because of an unfair trial.

The system we have to live with and use daily is so unfair and corrupt that in the state of Alabama you can not even use DNA evidence to try and appeal a court sentence. You would have to rely solely on new witnesses or some other form of evidence. Research even shows that 75% of false convictions come from false eyewitnesses statements, meaning that around 100 innocent people can be falsely convicted every year. Things like this along with mass incarceration and the statistics surrounding it, and the issues that come with voting rights and the impact it has on minorities. I mentioned in the beginning that ⅓ of black male babies are expected to go to prison or jail in their lifetime, well it is very similar for young hispanic boys. ⅔ hispanic boys are expected to go to prison or jail in their
lifetime, compared to the statistic of one in 17 young white boys. As of today the largest growing population of incarceration is in female prisons. Nearly 25% percent of the world’s prison population is made up by the U.S. Since 1970 the incarcerated population in America has grown by 700%, making more people in prison than there are with the population and crime growth. One of the biggest issues with mass incarceration is that there are so many people that could be innocent are sitting in jail awaiting their trial. They sit in jail or a prison and within that time of waiting, they could be attacked, sexually assaulted, raped or killed, all while maybe being innocent and awaiting a hearing, trial or even a jury decision. And even after they have served their sentence and have been released from prison, men and women struggle to get jobs because they have a criminal record, making it even harder for them to adjust back into the world. Another problem is private prisons, which essentially make money from the government by having more and more people in their prison, we as americans should not be making money off of locking people in cells.

I mentioned early on that in Selma, Alabama, 31% of the black population has lost their right to vote after being in a federal prison. Meaning that only 69% of the black population has a voice in city, state and presidential elections. This is a problem all over our country. In 11 states you lose your right to vote entirely, in 21 states you lose your right to vote while incarcerated and for a period of time afterwards. In 16 states and the District of Columbia you lose your right to vote only while incarcerated and are then able to vote again as soon as you are released, and in Maine and Vermont felons never lose their voting rights. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, was a piece of federal legislation that allows all minorities the ability to vote, it even prohibits certain jurisdictions from changing this to discriminate against minorities. Since then, there have been changes to this legislation that add certain drawbacks to this that affect minority populations ability to vote. Because this legislation was created in 1965 during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, the court decided in 2013 with Shelby County v. Holder that this was no longer needed because blatant racism is not a problem anymore. Just by looking at the news today, you can tell that racism is just as strong as ever. For a free country, we do not govern free enough. How are you free if you can not even vote, after going to prison for a crime you may or may not have even committed. With a jury that may not have been fair, a lawyer that did not offer you every option you had. And with a system that calls young black and brown boys that can not even drive yet, a “super predator”. As Dr. Stevenson said, “we have a criminal justice system that cares more if you are rich and guilty, than if you are innocent and poor”. For it being called the “criminal justice system” it doesn’t seem like much justice is being done for any criminal, guilty or innocent.
Don't Fear the Gun

They tell us don't be scared
But then we go and see the news
They tell be quiet and stay put
Some run away and hide
But then they stop, hear a cry
Open the door, fire away inside
They are pissed at the world
And they want to take it out on us
*bang bang*
They always take it out on us
**Twister**

It twists and turns and swirls and whirls, we run away as our world burns
The uncertainty is present with the sun and the moon's crescent
Day and night, health and hurt the everlasting every present
Disease burns from in to the out, the out to the in
They die and we cry, try and pry away at the layers
Of the sick. Of the hurt. Of those we can not serve
It twists and spins Relentless with it’s victim
No cure in sight we are blind
We are dying and still we are
Trying, Tiring and crying
We buy time to lose time
Time is running out
Our time is dying
As we are dying
To rid the
Disease
Before
The
Disease
Rids
Us

The use of binary opposition, rhyme, repetition and structure in this Twister poem, helps to convey the idea of chaos and constant uncertainty in a time of an unforgiving disease; the relationship between words and ideas gives the speaker emotions to help the reader understand the severity of the world at this time.
Flowing River Poem

Breathe in breathe out as the chaos surrounds
To release, reduce the chaos that is around
We take pills to calm
Therapist talks, therapist walks,
Depression and regression
Our chills that are about.
  Calming the chaos, taming the mind
  Framing the the type, making it mine
  Drink hot tea, smoke warm leaves
  Trying to breathe
We plead. Gasping for air trying to see
The end of the agony, feel the release
The calm we need, the calm we dream
  Unimaginable, unpredictable
  Unruffled waters we try
  To be, but still we
  Are unable to see
  The calm of the
Storm in the disease

The use of rhyme and repetition in the “Flowing River Poem” portray the earnest need for some semblance of calm and peace within a chaotic world, the narrator describes the methods that try to relieve themselves of the uncertainty of the world but is yet to be granted the relief needed.
Feminism In Ragtime

Singer Ani DiFranco said, “every woman has the right to become herself and do whatever she needs to do”. Similarly E.L. Doctorow makes that very clear with his theme of women and the rise of feminism in the early 1900s. Women using their bodies and fending for themselves is a prime example of females taking matters into their own hands and forging their own way in the world. E.L. Doctorow uses both fictional and non-fictional characters along with influential historical figures such as Evelyn Nesbit and Emma Goldman to portray his themes of feminism and the growth of women in the 1900’s by unapologetically embracing their bodies and sexuality, alongside the struggles women endured in this time while fighting for gender equality.

It is not a secret that in the early 1900’s women were not seen as equal to men. They were expected to cook, clean, take care of the house, and have babies. Female characters in the book *Ragtime* challenge that. Emma Goldman is a picture perfect example of this. She challenges the stereotypical beliefs that women are inferior to men. Emma Goldman was described as “not a physically impressive woman” (Doctorow 52), however she made up for it in the way she spoke about women’s rights. Goldman was known around New York as a women’s rights activist, some even called her an anarchist. She brings to attention at one point in her public addressing of the lack of women’s rights asking the question, “Is there no connection between the institution of marriage and the institution of a brothel” (Doctorow 53). Addressing the truth that women even in a committed relationship with a man are still only ever used for their bodies. Emma Goldman, an independent women rights activist goes on and calls out the men in the audience who believe that women are worth nothing more than baby makers. In one thought provoking quote she brings to attention many issues at the time regarding the rights of women or rather the lack of. “women may not vote, they may not love whom they want, they may not develop their minds and their spirits, they may not commit their lives to the spiritual adventure of life… is our genius only in our wombs?” (Doctorow 53-54). This statement brings focus to different injustices to women at the time. The law against women being able to vote, the social norm that women are told who to love by their parents, adding to the cultural norm of arranged marriages for money. The normality of women being told what to think and believe not being able to have a separate opinion to their husbands. And that women are not allowed to do anything but cook, clean, and take care of a house. This was the initial movement for women’s rights, many years later in 1967 they had eight goals for Congress, which were all met, one being that women “demanded that the EEOC enforce the law banning sex discrimination with the same vigor that it enforced banning racial discrimination” (Rolando, Paragraph 2). This is truly just the beginning of women rights and feminism in the early 1900s.

Another influential female character in *Ragtime* is Evelyn Nesbit. Evelyn Nesbit was a famous actress in the early 1900s. She was best known as a symbol for sex that used her body to her advantage. In the book she is right in the middle of a murder case and court trial concerning her husband Harry Thaw, who is being tried for the murder of Evelyn’s ex-husband Stanford White. Evelyn Nesbit essentially made her fortune “from prostituting herself to wealthy male capitalists or exploiting the capitalistic system with her sexuality” (Jones 19). She is basically everything that Emma Goldman goes against. Yet she is still a large symbol of the idea that women in this time period are viewed as nothing more than an object. Harry Thaw is being tried for the murder of Stanford White, who had also drugged Evelyn and then raped her while unconscious. The morning after she was drugged Evelyn woke up to find “the effulgence of White’s manhood lay over her thighs like a baker’s glaze” (Doctorow 22). This exact situation proves the point that women, no matter what, were treated poorly. An American History article speaks about women and the types of jobs that they were allowed to have in the 1900s. “Women in urban areas could be found as inn and tavern keepers, laundresses and domestic workers, nursemides, prostitutes, and merchants” (Newman, Paragraph 4). Evelyn Nesbit was a prostitute, a high end one to be exact. However, just because she sold her body for a living does not mean that she is a toy for a man to drug, rape and then leave her like a rag doll. In the early 1900s prostitution was a common profession, it was not one of the most respectable of jobs but it was still one that was
common among most women. When Harry Thaw heard word of the rape he made a plan to take Evelyn away from Stanford. They ran to Austria together. Once they got there Harry immediately started treating Evelyn like an object he can just use to satisfy his needs. “He pulled off her robe, threw her across the bed and applied a dog whip to her buttocks and the backs of her thighs. Her shrieks echoed down the corridors” (Doctorow 23). The actions that were done to Evelyn in Ragtime were a big setback for Doctorow’s theme of women in the book. By writing Evelyn as an extremely sexual character, he does not help the case for women having more freedom and rights in the time period, nor does it show any progress in the fight for gender equality.

One woman in the book that really steps up and makes her own rules is Mother. Her husband, Father, goes on an expedition to the North Pole, leaving Mother to her own devices. She makes changes around the house as she pleases and even takes in a young African-American girl with a baby. Along with making changes around the home, she too changes. “Not as vigorously modest as she’s been” (Doctorow 125). Mother and her behavior is pushed “to new forms of self realization” (Jones 20) Mother finds herself having to run the family business while Father is away along with running an entire household. She also started looking into more feminist literature and reading. She also starts to become more intune and open with her sexuality. Before Father left she was quite shy towards the idea of sex, but after he left she was starting to discover her body more and more. Betty Friedan once said, “no woman ever gets an orgasm from shining a kitchen floor”.

A paper written by assistant professor María Ferrández San Miguel at the University of Zaragoza specifically speaks on some of the feminist impulses in the novel. Mainly that the book exposes “the oppression, and, at times, violence that women faced at the turn of the century which intersects with racial and class discrimination.” (San Miguel 6-7). Sarah, the girl the Mother brings in, is at the absolute bottom of the class system she is a woman of color, a mother, unemployed, unmarried, and until mother takes her in, is homeless. Sarah even tries to kill her baby for the sole reason that she is all alone and has no way of taking care of the baby. When Mother finds the baby she knows that it is Sarah’s and takes them both into help care for them. A similar situation where women are discriminated against not only for their gender but also for their race. Mameh is a poor immigrant from Latvia that is struggling to make ends meet. “Hardships of her life as a working class immigrant are notably accentuated by her condition as a woman in deep patriarchal culture” (Miguel 7). She is forced to succumb to the sexual advances of her employer just to make a little extra money for her family. “He counted out the money, adding a dollar more than she deserved. This he explained because she was such a good-looking woman… he touched Mameh’s breasts. Mameh fled taking the dollar... She became accustomed to the hands of her employer”(Doctorow 15). Women are used for their bodies regardless of the circumstances in the day and age of this book. When Mameh’s husband finds out about the abuse he casts her out to the street when she has no other choice but to become a prostitute. He does not take into consideration the fact that the family needed the money and that she was sacrificing not only her body, but her dignity, her self respect, her self worth, every single one of her morals and everything she must have stood for was thrown out the window so that she can bring in more money for the family.

Evelyn Nesbit and Emma Goldman were only two of the women E.L. Doctorow used to portray the oppressed and degraded women in the early 1900s. Women like Sarah, Mameh and even Mother truly represent every woman breaking from the man's hold on her and making her own way and her own rules. Women faced not only violence but they were often underestimated and dismissed by the male population at the start of the century. Really the only woman who came out on top of all the others, was Emma Goldman. That can only really be attributed to the fact that she defied the societal norms to get married and have kids. Instead she forged her own path rather than surrendering to the male chauvinists of the century.
Absalom’s Letter

Dear Canterbury College of Music Admissions Office,

When I was a carefree young man, nothing could bring my spirits down, especially when I was singing “in treble voice” and playing my “violin” or “guitar” (Chaucer 145-147). I believe that it was my light and airy demeanor which made me an excellent “parish clerk,” a job which gave me the opportunity to view the many pretty “wives” of the parish (Chaucer 126, 155). I fell in love with an especially attractive young woman, and I would serenade her with my guitar. Regrettably, my affections were not reciprocated, and I have found myself depressed and confused. I will not, however, allow these negative feelings to overwhelm me and bring me down. My music has always been a source of merriment and comfort, so I believe that by studying Music Therapy at the Berklee College of Music, I can once again find the cheerfulness that previously inspired myself and others.

I used to be a “jolly,” energetic, and jaunty individual (Chaucer 169). My charm was shown through my music and overall cheerful disposition. My presence was one of absolute gaiety that could brighten any room I entered. I was most possibly the happiest man alive, dancing “after the school that reigned in Oxford” and playing my music (Chaucer 143). Everyone who came across me had their happiness increased by my positivity and youth. I admit that I enjoyed the company of women and became especially attached to the beautiful, young “carpenter’s goodwife,” Alison, for whom I would play and sing songs of fondness (Chaucer 157).

The sweet Alison humiliated me as a sign of her indifference, and at that moment I vowed never to love again, to never again experience affection for “paramours” or any other woman who would not return my attachment (Chaucer 569). Rejection has allowed me to realize that I would have wasted my life away trying to woo women, which is why I want to pursue a career through which I can find myself and be appreciated by those around me. Even though my songs of love and tenderness failed to win over the wretched Alison, I believe that I can utilize my musical talents and passion to inspire and comfort others who will actually cherish my sentiment.

So why your school? I admire your use of the saying, “Be yourself at all costs.” I think that I must learn to be myself so that I will never again fall into the gruesome clutches of unrequited love. By learning to connect with others through music at your university, I believe that I will develop my musical abilities, increase my passion for music, regain the positivity which so defined my youth, and inspire others who are in need of a little tenderness. “So may I thrive” at your school, which encourages its students to discover who they really are, as a man who desires immensely to find himself so that he may learn to comfort others (Chaucer 487).

I should also mention that I do not have much money at the moment, so I will not be able to pay for my education.

Sincerely,

And may the power of music open your heart,

Absalom
Goosebumps

My parents forced me to participate in the Driver’s Edge program, an event that was meant to prepare me for the dangers of driving through hands-on experience and individual instruction. Then, in the afternoon, the finale of my piano school’s Halloween recital. My heart raced as I drove myself and my parents to the Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

After learning about the various parts of the car, I moved on with my class to the main event of the day, a simulation of what we should do when there’s an obstacle in the road. We were supposed to accelerate towards a line of cones and swerve around the cones at the last second. Also, to add just a tiny bit of pressure, there would be a professional race car driver sitting in the passenger seat, studying our every move.

*I’m going to fail and embarrass myself.* I thought. *Why did my parents drag me here?*

When it was my turn, I got into the car and put on my seatbelt. I was so nervous, my hands were shaking. My instructor, noticing that I was terrified, tried to comfort me by saying, “You’ll do great.” I didn’t believe him. I took a deep breath and pressed the gas pedal. I drove toward the cones like I was told to, but instead of dodging the “obstacle,” I lost control of the car. We spun around and I pressed the brake. I was mortified. I knew I would fail, and I did.

I was relieved when it was finally time to leave. Then I remembered that I had to practice for my piano recital. The nerves came back in a wave of goosebumps.

*I can do this. I’ve played at so many recitals before.*

But the only difference was that I usually have the entire morning and most of the afternoon to get over my anxiety and prepare myself for a flawless performance. This time, I had two hours. After practicing as much as I could, I left my house feeling more nervous than usual.

My legs bounced as I sat and listened to the other students play their pieces. When it was finally my turn to play, I rose from my chair and automatically went through the motions: bow, adjust bench, sit, place hands on keys, play. I played the opening theme of Grieg’s “Piano Concerto” with only a few mistakes. Afterwards, my teacher congratulated and commended me for my air of confidence and composure. “You did great!” she said. I was relieved.

In all the commotion, I had forgotten about what I would be doing at the end of the day. After my piano recital, I went straight to my Confirmation class. The theme of that day’s session was “Anxiety and Depression.” I spent two hours listening to people talk about their own experiences with anxiety and how God has helped them battle their fears. As I listened, I broke down in tears. God had gotten me through the day. Even though I had been embarrassed at the speedway, I was proud of myself for trying. In the end, I had been able to set aside my anxiety and deliver an excellent performance at my recital.

*Today wasn’t so bad. I did the best I could at Driver’s Edge, and I’m proud of myself.*

That day, I learned that fear and anxiety are things that I will always have to live with; what matters is how I choose to let them affect me. I can let my light shine through my anxiety by remembering that I am the master of my life. Now, when faced with any obstacle, I won’t swerve past it. I’ll face it head on.
What Foiling in Hamlet Reveals About Vengeance and Obedience

Some readers believe that the five-part structure of Hamlet’s plot moves forward through the character of the ghost and the complications his command to obedience evokes; however, the foiling of William Shakespeare’s paired characters better reveals the devastating effect of a call to vengeance and of misplaced obedience via Claudius and Hamlet’s, as well as Ophelia and Gertrude’s, first interactions, their separate climaxes, and their seemingly fated resolutions.

The first interaction between Claudius and Hamlet illustrates how the two characters are foils of each other and reveals how the combination of an obedient nature and a desire for vengeance can have detrimental effects on a person’s mental health. When Claudius and Hamlet first speak to each other, Claudius is trying to convince Hamlet to stop grieving the loss of his father and to celebrate Claudius’s marriage to Gertrude. He says that Hamlet does indeed have a “filial obligation” to grieve for his father, but only for a certain amount of time and to a certain extent, both of which Claudius believes Hamlet has surpassed (1.2.95). Here, Claudius creates a negative tone around Hamlet’s obedience to the common idea that people should properly grieve the death of a family member before moving on with their lives. Hamlet, on the other hand, believes that Claudius and Gertrude have not grieved enough over the loss of Hamlet’s father. This conversation between the new king and the dead king’s son shows how Claudius is satisfied with how his life has changed as an effect of his brother’s death, while Hamlet is anything but. When he is alone, Hamlet says that despite his annoyance with Claudius and Gertrude over their quick recoveries from the king’s death, he “...must hold my tongue” because they have asked him to end his grieving (1.2.164). Though he does not want to, he plans on obeying his mother and uncle’s requests because he respects them as queen and king. This again places a negative connotation on the idea of obedience, as Hamlet resents Claudius for celebrating when everyone should still be mourning. At this point, Hamlet misses his father and already hates Claudius, so he would be obedient to someone who told him to avenge his father’s death by killing Claudius. This combination of reluctant obedience and a thirst for vengeance in Hamlet’s mind is what drives him to listen to the ghost when it tells him to kill Claudius. It also seems to be what drives Hamlet mad.

When Ophelia is told to return Hamlet’s belongings to him, the foiling between Ophelia and Gertrude is clearly seen and demonstrates that obedience should be willingly given as a result of a mutual desire for success. At this time, both Ophelia and Gertrude have been characterized as promiscuous in Hamlet’s eyes, and therefore, in the eyes of readers. Also, both women have been obedient to men who seem to have power over them. This scene, however, introduces the main difference between Ophelia and Gertrude: the reason why they obey others. When Polonius commands Ophelia to lie to Hamlet and to give him his belongings, Ophelia says that she “shall obey” him (1.3.145). This obedience causes Ophelia great suffering, as she does not want to reject Hamlet’s love. She obeys her father anyway because she believes that he knows better than her in all matters. Unknown to both, however, is the fact that Hamlet really does love Ophelia and wants to marry her. If Ophelia had not obeyed her father, she might have been able to eventually live happily with Hamlet. Before Ophelia goes to speak with Hamlet, Claudius asks Gertrude to leave so that he and Polonius can hide and watch the interaction. Gertrude says she “shall obey” him, but this is different from Ophelia’s obedience (3.1.41). Gertrude is obeying Claudius because she, like the king, wants the interaction between Ophelia and Hamlet to happen smoothly, whereas Ophelia does not want it to happen and merely obeys her father because she feels like she must. In obeying Claudius, Gertrude also does what she wants to. This shows a positive side to obedience that Ophelia has not been able to discover, as she does something she does not want to do in order to obey her father. From the difference between Ophelia’s and Gertrude’s types of obedience, one can see that it is easier and more beneficial for a person to obey someone when both people share a common goal.

Claudius’s climax, which occurs when he finally shows remorse for murdering his brother, shows that when a person neglects to obey his or her conscience, he or she can be overwhelmed by regret. Before this point in the play,
the audience believes that Claudius is a ruthless man who does not feel any guilt over the fact that he murdered his brother. During his climax, however, Claudius laments that the stench of the murder he committed “smells to heaven” (3.3.40). He is aware that he has disobeyed the laws of morality by committing murder and regrets doing so. This places a positive connotation on obedience, as it is Claudius’s disobedience to his own conscience which causes him internal suffering. Because of his guilt, Claudius tries to ask God for forgiveness, but he knows that it will not be granted for him because he is not willing to give up what he has gained from killing his brother: the crown and Gertrude. Even though he regrets committing murder, Claudius does not feel guilty enough to surrender his title of king and the satisfaction that has come with it. He is still disobeying his conscience, and this causes him to lose his chance for grace and any sympathy he had gained from the audience. Claudius has failed to accept that he should obey his conscience at all times.

The lack of a shift in Hamlet’s thirst for vengeance during his climax demonstrates that vengeance can corrupt a person’s soul, making him or her as vile as the person on whom he or she seeks vengeance. When Hamlet sees Claudius kneeling and supposedly repenting for his sins, he goes through a major internal struggle. Up until this point, Hamlet has been focused on obeying the ghost and seeking revenge on Claudius. Now, he actually decides not to kill Claudius, but not because he has had a change of heart; instead, he wants to wait to kill Claudius until the king is sinning. This way, Claudius, just like Hamlet’s father, would not have the chance to repent for his sins before his death. Hamlet doesn’t kill Claudius while he’s “praying” because he wants Claudius’s soul to be “damn’d and black” in Hell (3.3.99). Hamlet still wants revenge for his father’s death because Claudius killed the king without allowing him to repent, thereby sending his soul to Hell. This demonstrates Hamlet’s thirst for vengeance in a negative way, as he plans on doing the very thing that Claudius did to cause him to desire revenge. It should also be pointed out that soon after Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius, he murders Polonius, thinking the old man is Claudius. This shows readers that Hamlet’s thirst for vengeance has obviously not disappeared. The lesson to be learned from the malicious motivation behind Hamlet’s decision not to kill Claudius while he is praying is that seeking vengeance is not the correct way to establish justice, as it only corrupts the person who wants revenge by encouraging him or her to stoop down to the wrongdoer’s level.

Gertrude’s climax occurs when she chooses to shift her obedience from Claudius to Hamlet, illustrating that a person should take his or her own conscience into consideration when deciding whether or not to obey another person. Before this happens, Gertrude tells Hamlet that she had nothing to do with her husband’s murder, which makes the audience more sympathetic towards her. If Hamlet is wrong about Gertrude’s involvement in the murder of the king, is he also wrong about the promiscuity she apparently has displayed in marrying Claudius? After observing Gertrude choose to shift her allegiance from Claudius to Hamlet, readers tend to answer that question in the affirmative. Gertrude asks Hamlet, “What shall I do?,” and he tells her to confess her sins, to repent for the past, and to refuse to sleep with Claudius (3.4.202). She listens to him, plans to follow his instructions, and agrees to keep his sanity a secret. Gertrude’s obedience shifts from Claudius to Hamlet here because she believes her son and trusts him to some degree. Instead of staying loyal to Claudius, who she does not fully trust as a result of Hamlet’s accusations, she chooses to obey Hamlet, who she now believes to be at least partially sane. Gertrude’s obedience is always granted, not taken. Gertrude’s choice to obey Hamlet teaches readers that someone should only obey another person if he or she believes that what the person is asking him or her to do is right.

The resolutions of Claudius and Hamlet show that though seeking vengeance can lead to justice, it also corrupts the soul. Claudius dies after Hamlet stabs him with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink the poisoned wine. As Claudius is dying, Hamlet finally accuses him of killing King Hamlet when he calls Claudius an “incestuous, murderous, damned” king (5.2.356). This is when Hamlet gets his long-awaited revenge on Claudius for the murder of his father. Hamlet’s actions and words here should reflect his call for vengeance in a positive way because there is finally justice for his father’s death. Plus, Hamlet gets exactly what he has wanted, as Claudius dies soon after being outed as a murderer. This means that Claudius’s soul is not clean when he dies, so he will be sent to hell with his
brother. This scene, however, does not end well for Hamlet. After avoiding death twice by refusing to drink the poisoned wine, Hamlet gets cut by the poisoned tip of Laertes’s sword. He then finds out the death of his mother is Claudius’s fault, which sparks another flame of vengeance in his heart, causing him to finally kill Claudius. Soon after, as he is dying, Hamlet says that a “potent poison” is overwhelming his spirit (5.2.390). This can be interpreted in both literally and figuratively. In the literal sense, poison had entered Hamlet’s body through the cut on his arm. Symbolically, it can be asserted that the poison affecting Hamlet’s soul is his thirst for vengeance, which causes him to commit murder just before dying himself. As can be seen, Hamlet’s achievement of revenge is not a positive thing; instead, it negatively affects Hamlet’s own soul, causing him to be unclean at the time of his death, just like his father and Claudius.

Ophelia’s tragic resolution uses symbolism to show that the lack of self-confidence that comes with being too obedient to others can engulf a person. After going crazy over her father’s death, Ophelia dies by drowning. There has been debate over whether she commits suicide or drowns by accident. If Ophelia has committed suicide, it can be speculated that she does this because she no longer has her father to obey as a result of his death. Gertrude says that Ophelia did not struggle for her life while she drowned because she was either oblivious to the danger she was in or she was “a creature native” to being in danger (4.7.204). The use of the word, “creature” shows that Gertrude apparently has sympathy for Ophelia, which places a negative tone on Ophelia’s obedience, as she spent her entire life being put down by other people. This idea of Ophelia being used to peril is very plausible, as she has been badly treated by her father and Hamlet. It is possible that by the time of her death, Ophelia feels like she has already been drowning due to the fact that she has been forced by her father to lie to Hamlet, which cost her the love of her life. Her death by literal drowning reflects the smothering effects that being too servile has had on her throughout the play. The tragedy of Ophelia’s symbolic feelings of suffocation coupled with her literal drowning as a result of her overwhelming obedience to others teaches that being overly obedient can cause a person to feel insecure and trapped.

Gertrude’s resolution marks a visible shift in her obedience to Claudius and demonstrates that obedience must be a product of a healthy, trusting relationship. Her death is caused by the poisonous wine, which she chooses to drink despite Claudius’s commands. When Claudius tells her not to drink the wine, Gertrude responds, “I will” (5.2.318). Now, her lack of obedience has caused her death. This situation may seem to place obedience in a positive light, but when one reflects on why Gertrude chooses not to obey Claudius, they can see that it actually depicts Gertrude’s former obedience as a bad thing. She originally obeys Claudius because he is the king and because she believes that he is trustworthy. The audience, on the other hand, knows that he has murdered his brother. Gertrude only finds this out when Hamlet tells her during her climax, and this causes her to lose trust for Claudius and to stop obeying him. While this is a good thing, it should be pointed out that Gertrude should never have obeyed Claudius without knowing how good or bad he actually is. Now, in boy-who-cried-wolf fashion, after losing Gertrude’s trust, Claudius no longer has any authority over her actions, and he cannot prevent her from drinking the poisoned wine. Gertrude’s death shows that obedience should come with mutual trust and the assurance that the one being obeyed has the other person’s best interests in mind.

Overall, it may be concluded that the negative effects of a call to vengeance and of misplaced obedience are clearly expressed in William Shakespeare’s Hamlet through the interactions, climaxes, and resolutions of the foiled characters of Claudius and Hamlet, as well as those of Ophelia and Gertrude. The lessons learned from these foiled pairs reflect the ruinous consequences of their words and actions and teach the audience that a desire for revenge and undeserved obedience are both detrimental to the human mind and spirit.
Pull Off the Road

I might be getting real mad
This drive is so stress-ful
The guy who cut me off bad
Feels fine nonetheless

He needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
And go elsewhere

If I could hurry on home
I’d be really grate-ful
But he’s just seeming to roam
A way that’s not straight

He needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
And go elsewhere

I just want to make sure that he’ll die
No time to be kind
I gotta just run him down
And find a place for his bones to lie
No time to be kind
I gotta just run him down
I might be getting real mad
This drive is so stress-ful
The guy who cut me off bad
Feels fine nonetheless

He needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
And go elsewhere

I just want to make sure that he’ll die
No time to be kind
I gotta just run him down
And find a place for his bones to lie
No time to be kind
I gotta just run him down
I can’t just sit here and frown
As he keeps on text-ing
I think I’ll call the cops down
And see what comes next
Ugh, he needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
He needs to pull off the road
And go elsewhere

At him I’ll just glare, at him I’ll just glare
At him I’ll just glare, at him I’ll just glare
At him I’ll just glare, at him I’ll just glare
“Sunlight” and “Moonlight”

“Sunlight”

A ray. It gives me hope. Warmth. Joy. I am tied to the light. Ecstasy. It lifts me up. It is blinding. It causes pain. Sunburn. I can’t help but stay. I can’t live without it. Life. The light envelops the world with a wave of warmth. It reaches me. It fills me up. It fuels me. Growth. It makes the birds sing. It makes the insects crawl. It makes the trees reach the heavens. It keeps me awake, aware, alive. I’m motivated. I’m inspired. I’m amazed. Success. My heart beats with the pulse of the Earth. I sing. I crawl. I reach the heavens. I’m running to my future, to tomorrow. It will be bright. I will get there. Strength. Everything around me reflects the light. Sunspot. I absorb it. I am its messenger, its warrior. It leads me to a better place, one that shows me the rewards of love. I feel safe. I feel happy. I feel warm. Savior. It floats me above the Earth. I see light hit everything, everywhere, everyone. It warms all. Divine. It feels right. It is constant. Happiness. I am burning. I am thankful. I am bright. I am thriving. I am happy. I am a part of it. I need it.

“Moonlight”

Why don’t I feel warm inside? The darkness is tied to me. It pulls me down. I wear a mask of light. It reflects
what I see. My heart
feels like a crater. I
see lunacy. Eclipse.
Anger, hate, depression,
anxiety. Diana’s arrow.
The darkness is daunting. I
float above it. It tempts me. I accept it. I
see it, but I also see the light. I change like the tide.
Life sweeps me up and down, light and dark. I
go willingly. Day and night. I wake up, I go
to sleep. My heart grows and shrinks.
I have my ups and downs, ebbs
and flows. I am balanced.
I’m okay with it.
A New Universe

As a little girl, I fell asleep under the stars every night. I loved looking up at the constellations. My dad had placed glow-in-the-dark stars on the entire ceiling of my room. Since then, I have been fascinated by any information I have learned about space. My favorite thing to learn about in elementary school was space, but we barely touched the subject. I did have to memorize the order of the planets in our solar system, though. With the help of the “Planetary Posse,” a group of middle school students rapping in a YouTube video, I memorized many facts about the solar system. I showed off my knowledge to my family and friends, wanting to share my love of space with everyone. Did you know that Jupiter has seventy-nine moons?

Although my classmates may have been a tiny bit annoyed, they now saw me as the girl who knew everything. I was called a robot because I had so many facts about almost any subject in my head. I did not mind having this nickname, though, because it made me happy to know that my friends recognized my love of knowledge. Since then, I have always been the person my friends go to with almost any question, and I pride myself on being pretty accurate in my answers.

When my parents divorced, I was launched into unknown worlds. I no longer had the answers to questions I would ask myself. How could I split my life in two? My dad remarried, and I gained three step-sisters. When I was with them, I felt like an alien. My universe was now bigger, and I had to get used to my new orbit. I went from being an only child to sharing my dad’s attention with three other daughters. My dad and I were still close, though. Together, we journeyed through our shared universe by expanding the horizons of our knowledge. My new siblings would always come to me and my dad for help with their school work, or to ask general questions. In my other unexplored world, my mom married an anesthesiologist who had two sons, but my step-brothers lived in Texas, so it was like I was an only child again. My stepdad loves to read sci-fi novels and has become a second father to me. When I was in the seventh grade, knowing about my passion for the extraterrestrial, he began to introduce me to many sci-fi and dystopian books. I began to read about different worlds. I fell in love with the works of Stephen King, Dean Koontz, and J.K. Rowling. Both my dad and my stepdad loved Star Trek growing up, so I began watching The Original Series. I loved it so much that I then proceeded to watch The Next Generation, Deep Space Nine, and Voyager. I finished watching all twenty-one years’ worth of episodes in about ten months, because when it comes to watching these shows, resistance is futile.

Science fiction has become a huge part of my life, and I annoy my friends daily with my constant Star Trek, Harry Potter, and Marvel references. I continually enjoy learning anything about these fandoms and spreading my knowledge. Being introduced to these worlds has immensely fueled my curiosity about our universe. I keep up with news from NASA, and I love reading about new discoveries made every day, just as I love reading about fictional worlds. My love for science fiction continues to grow, and I hope that the path of my life keeps rocketing towards the final frontier.
Optimistically Oblivious

Despite being popularized in the Enlightenment period, satire bleeds into many modern-day stories, whether in writing or on screen. Classics from that era are the source of common elements, such as blind faith and hyperboles, found in contemporary satires. *Don Quixote* and *Tartuffe*, two increasingly influential tales, incorporate both of these aspects by forming a story around a character that faces many adversities due to their ignorance towards reality. A similar notion comes into play in the 1998 film *The Truman Show*, which follows the life of a man who is also oblivious to what is truly happening around him. Contemporary stories such as *The Truman Show* highlight satirical elements of works from the Enlightenment period, specifically how an unawareness of reality can form blind optimism and result in the betrayal of trust.

Satires at their core amusingly address a serious issue. For *The Truman Show*, that point of controversy is society’s widespread obsession with social media and, in turn, technology’s ability to control human lives. Directed by Peter Weir and written by Andrew Niccol, the film tells the story of a middle-aged man named Truman Burbank who exists in an entirely fictional society where his every move is broadcasted live to the real world on a show called *The Truman Show*, unbeknownst to him. Jim Carrey, an actor well known for his performances in multiple satires, plays the role of Truman. He exhibits his talents as an actor by appropriately displaying an ignorant and used character who draws empathy from the audience. *The Truman Show*, despite its unique approach, successfully portrays a modern-day issue in an exaggerated, and therefore satirical, light.

Dramatic irony, a fundamental component of satire, is when the audience is more aware of reality than the main character, leading that individual down a disassociated path that presents many dangers. Christof, the fictional creator of *The Truman Show*, states that “we accept the reality of the world with which we’re presented” (*The Truman Show* 1:06:10-1:06:15). While the viewers of *The Truman Show*, as well as the audience of the film itself, know the truth, Truman believes that his life on Seahaven Island is reality. The public’s meta-awareness indicates the ironic element of blind faith and ultimately leads Truman down a dangerous path to self-discovery. This metaphorical blindness, however, stems from both *Don Quixote* and *Tartuffe*. Just like Truman believed in his reality, Don Quixote, after transitioning into knighthood, “had come to believe that all these fictitious happenings were true; they were more real to him than anything else in the world” (*Cervantes* 1546). Their similar disassociation from reality and attachment to the world of fantasy ties into the satire by slowly revealing the consequences of blind faith. *Tartuffe* highlights the audience’s awareness through Dorine’s speech when she comments that Orgon’s trust “is poured out to Tartuffe, like he’s his priest! You’d think they’d see the heresy at least” (*Molière* 143). Like Dorine and other characters, the viewers of this play see through Tartuffe’s ploys, while Orgon remains infatuated by the hypocrite. Orgon’s blind faith, similar to Don Quixote’s and Truman’s, places him in a situation where he is vulnerable to society’s evils.

The main character’s disassociation from reality often promotes a false sense of optimism, causing them to act overwhelmingly positive towards an undeserving society which satirically shows how the selfishness of humanity drowns out the selflessness of genuine optimism. At the start of every day, Truman greets his neighbors with a lovely “good morning…oh, and in case I don’t see you, good afternoon, good evening, and good night” (*The Truman Show* 0:02:46-0:02:53). His cheerful spirit traps him in a repetitive loop, believing that his routine actions are out of free will and not from a controlled environment. Don Quixote shares a similar fictitious optimism in his daily endeavors, such as when he claims that “those black-clad figures that you behold must be…certain enchanters who are bearing with them a captive princess” (*Cervantes* 1569). He attempts to save the “princess,” blinded by his belief that he is acting in her favor rather than against her. Don Quixote expects positive reactions from those around him just as Truman does, although Truman is much more likely to get such responses from his controlled society than in Don Quixote’s free world. Orgon’s optimism also presents an opposing force as he turns against his own family, stating that Tartuffe has “taught me to love nothing and no one…I’d feel no pain”
As dismal as this thought seems, Orgon sees it as a positive outlook towards his own self-growth, like how Truman uses his animated personality to discover himself. The exaggerated optimism of all three characters exemplifies the concept of hyperboles, a common element seen across most, if not all, satires.

Once blind faith creates optimism, optimism in itself will hide obvious dangers, resulting in betrayal due to the character’s inability to see past their positivity which satirically depicts how optimism is no longer a benefit to humanity, but a threat to the individual. As Truman begins to understand the reality of his existence, his childhood best friend, Marlon, attempts to dissuade him from such thoughts, saying, “The last thing I would ever do is lie to you” (*The Truman Show* 0:57:49-0:57:55). Up to this point, Truman has put full faith in Marlon, but his friend knows the truth just as well as the audience. Truman’s cheery nature compels him to trust Marlon blindly, allowing his childhood companion to take advantage of him and continue controlling his environment. This kind of betrayal, while evident to the audience, happens behind the back of the protagonist, a common theme that also occurs in *Don Quixote*. After coming across a farmer whipping his slave, Don Quixote attempts to prevent the farmer from continuing. However, the moment after the daring knight leaves, the farmer “seize[s] the lad’s arm and [binds] him to the tree again and [flogs] him” (*Cervantes* 1559). Don Quixote, blinded by his optimistic trust in strangers and his belief in societal morality, is entirely unaware of the perpetrator’s deception. The connection between Marlon’s words and the farmer’s actions reveal the satirical consequences of excessive optimism found in both Enlightenment and modern-day stories. For Orgon, however, Tartuffe’s betrayal is apparent to both him and the audience when the heretic says, “This house belongs to me, yes, all of it, and I’ll decide what’s true, as I see fit” (*Molière* 181). The protagonist’s optimistic view of Tartuffe becomes his downfall as the antagonist attempts to hijack Orgon’s life. Despite subtle differences, the uniting factor between all three tales is that through a certain amount of oblivion among the characters, satire reveals society’s manipulative and self-destructive tendencies.

*The Truman Show* is one of many contemporary pieces that draws inspiration from Enlightenment satires such as *Don Quixote* and *Tartuffe*. Despite the gap in centuries between Cervantes and Molière and Niccol, their shared elements prove literature’s ability to span multiple eras, regardless of societal or technological changes. Blind faith and exaggerated optimism, while important to these stories, are only a small taste of the similarities one can find between past and present satires. Whether on the screen or by the page, satires from ages prior have continued to influence the modern world of storytelling.
Tie a Ribbon, Their Suffering, A Memory

Tie a Ribbon

Tie a ribbon round my finger
And make sure that it’s tight
For securing my beginnings
Makes life worth the fight

Tie a ribbon round my wrist
And connect it to your own
To lead me on my path
Until I am fully grown

Tie a ribbon round my waist
As if it were a belt
To bring forth my imperfections
The ones I cannot melt

Tie a ribbon round my heart
And squeeze it till it bursts
So one day I may not feel the pain
That has left me at my worst

Tie a ribbon round my neck
And leave a trailing thread
To do what must be done
A tear shall not be shed

Tie a ribbon round my finger
And make sure that it’s tight
 Cause if you loosen your hold
I may fall into the night

Their Suffering

Imagine a world
A place seemingly beautiful
A place filled with wonder
A place with no end

Now imagine it dark
Grim and distasteful
A place without joy
A place without hope

How do you see the beauty?
How do you see the horror?
Maybe beauty meant rainbows
Maybe horror meant death

But how you see it
May be different to someone else
But how you feel it
May contrast with someone else

So how can you feel the pain
Another person feels?
How can you understand the struggles
Another person handles?

Don’t tell them to “be happy”
Don’t tell them to “stay strong”
Because no matter how you see it
No matter how you imagine it

You will never understand their suffering

A Memory

It was a foggy night
When I went out
To dare the woods
And everything within

I stepped over logs
And sloshed through the mud
While watching the creatures
Bird, beast or fish

It was all in a moment
I suddenly stopped
When a gentle glow formed
Before my very eyes

Then another and another
Appeared before me
And it was in my curiosity
That I followed them

After quite some time
We stopped abruptly
I stared peculiarly
At the wall of vines before me

I brushed them aside
And my eyes lit up
For beyond the vines
Was something beyond my imagination

A misty lagoon stood before me
And it glowed like the Northern Lights
As the breeze blew through my hair
And the water sprayed against my face

A scent of sweet flowers
Filled the air around me
As fairies played along the water
Their wings as sparkly as diamonds

Butterflies floated in the air
Their appearances unlike any other
The wings were the size of our hands
And contained designs only a magnificent artist could draw

I continued to stare in awe
As the fairies and butterflies gathered around
And lifted me high into the air
Making me feel like I was flying

In nearly a flash, I was back in my bedroom
Lying peacefully on my bed
But I jumped quick to my window
And saw the creatures fly away

I smiled softly to myself
Happy to know it wasn’t a dream
For now, it would forevermore be
A memory
FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - 6:50 PM

NOAH (17) sleeps soundly in his bed. While he has a jock personality on the outside, he can be quite charming and cuddly, especially around his girlfriend.

A clock on his bedside table reads 6:50 PM. His phone is lying next to the clock.

His phone DINGS and lights up. A message from his girlfriend reads “We’re meeting at 7 right?”. Noah stirs in his sleep.

The phone DINGS again. Another text reads “I can't wait!” Noah wakes up groggily and checks his phone.

    NOAH
    Shit!

Noah quickly responds to the texts as to not upset his girlfriend. He clambers out of bed and trips on a pile of clothes.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The bathroom counter is cluttered. Noah looks at himself in the mirror. His hair is a greasy mess. He runs his hand through his hair, a thin layer of grease coating his palm.

He climbs into the shower, but in his haste, he forgets to let the water warm up. He lets out a high-pitched scream.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Noah exits the shower, a towel wrapped around his lower half. He shaves his face and cuts his chin in the process.

After cleaning the wound, he dries and combs his hair. He encounters a cowlick.

    NOAH
    You've got to be kidding me.

He struggles to comb down the cowlick. After much effort, it disappears.

    NOAH (CONT'D)
    Finally!

After a brief moment, it pops back up again.
NOAH (CONT'D)

INT. BEDROOM CLOSET - LATER

Noah shuffles through his shirts, tossing away the ones he doesn’t like. He pulls out a white dress shirt. It’s wrinkled.

    NOAH
    Figures.

He grabs a tie and a blazer and rushes back to the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Noah wets the shirt and blows it dry with a hair dryer. It looks worse than before.

    NOAH
    Screw it.

Noah walks off. He comes back wearing a white t-shirt.

    NOAH (CONT'D)
    She probably won’t notice.

Noah struggles to put on his tie. It takes him three tries. He throws on the blazer. He grabs the cologne bottle but decides against it.

Noah grabs his phone. The time reads “6:57 PM”. Noah smooths out his jacket and looks at himself in the mirror.

    NOAH (CONT'D)
    Not bad.

He texts his girlfriend “See you soon!” A “Not Delivered” notification appears below his text.

    NOAH (CONT'D)
    What?

He notices that the WiFi bars on his phone are missing.

    NOAH (CONT'D)
    No, no, no, no-

Noah rushes out of the room.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - CONTINUOUS


Noah grasps the router. He jiggles some of the cords and checks his phone. The WiFi is still down.

In his desperation, he hits the router and checks his phone again. The WiFi bars reappear.

    NOAH
    Huh.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS
Noah grabs a flute glass out of the cabinet and a bottle of sparkling cider out of the fridge.

INT. BEDROOM - 7 PM

Noah sits down at the desk. He opens his laptop. On the screen, a news article heading reads “COVID-19 CASES ON THE RISE”.

He fixes his tie, pours himself a glass of sparkling cider, and clicks off the article. He calls his girlfriend through Zoom.

GIRLFRIEND answers, wearing a lovely summer dress. A glass of sparkling cider sits next to her.

GIRLFRIEND
Hey, babe! Well don’t you look handsome?

NOAH (nonchalantly)
Oh, this? It was nothing. You look beautiful.

Noah and his girlfriend continue to talk happily, enjoying their glasses of sparkling cider. As the camera pans out, it is shown that Noah is wearing a pair of boxers.

FADE OUT.
The Red Sea

The water rocked viciously as I dove through the surface, escaping the grasp of those slimy pirates once again. With the brig of their ship blown to pieces by my clever hand, they were enraged and pursued me with full force. I didn’t have long before they would cast a net over my fleeing body, as they had done many times already. To evade their eyes, I sunk beneath the waves. Grasping my floating satchel, I pulled out the conch shell I had stolen from the captain and played a solemn, pleading tune. Despite my usually unsuccessful attempts, I had a strong intuition that the mermaids would respond.

I listened in silence for their sweet songs, but my suffocating lungs soon forced me back above the choppy waves. The shouts of the ruffians were now much more distinct as their ship barreled towards me. I watched as rowboats dropped off the sides with a splash, and with no mermaids in sight, I swam as fast as my little arms and legs could take me. But it wasn’t enough. The rowboats were steadily approaching, and I was quickly losing energy. It wasn’t long before my exhaustion dragged me beneath the waves. The sun glistened through the water as I sank ever so slowly, my sight giving into the darkness.

Something in my mind, however, told me it was too soon to give in. I forced my tired eyes open and spotted a floating plank above the waves, which I assumed was from the explosion. I pushed upwards and grasped the wood with my trembling hands, gasping for air. The laughter of pirates filled my water-logged ears, much to my confusion. I looked up and matched the gaze of several brutes, their broken teeth smiling down at me. Releasing my hands from the edge of their rowboat, I quickly attempted to push myself back under the water, unaware that my chin was still over the side of the boat. My head bashed into the wood, shooting excruciating pain throughout my entire body. Before I could comprehend what had happened, my body slipped under the water. I floated in a sort of trance, not fully aware of my surroundings. I felt the water moving around me as if something or someone was swimming nearby, but my eyes wouldn’t focus. A pair of hands grasped my arms just before everything went dark.

I awoke to the blinding light of the sun, a shadowy figure hovering over me. As my eyes began to adjust, I realized it was the face of a beautiful woman. “A mermaid!” I thought excitedly. The more I stared into her chocolate brown eyes, however, the more she seemed familiar to me.

“Mom!” I asked quietly.

“Athena! Oh, thank god you’re okay!” she responded. She was holding a soft cloth to my chin. She pulled it away for a moment to reveal a massive bloodstain. Scooping me up gently, she took me away from the pool and to our car.

We rushed to my dad’s clinical office, where I was once again blinded by bright lights. I squeezed my mom’s hand as my dad carefully stitched up the blatant hole in my chin. The daring adventurer in me wanted to stay strong, but, deep down, 6-year old me knew she was terrified.

The procedure was quick, although it felt like centuries. I walked over to the mirror, investigating the new stitches in my chin.

“Darn pirates,” I said, “I’ll get them for this.”
A Dance Among The Stars

FADE IN:

INT. ELEVATOR - NEW YEAR’S EVE 1959

A dapper man (late 30s) stands inside the elevator, a harsh look on his face. AUDREY (mid 20s), in a wheelchair, rolls into the elevator. She wears a swing dress, perfect for a night out dancing.

Audrey and the man stay silent as the elevator moves upward. Loud music can be heard playing at the party above.

Suddenly, the elevator lurches to a halt, startling the pair. The wheelchair starts to roll, but the man stops it, more out of instinct than out of kindness.

AUDREY
Thank you.

The man presses the emergency button.

MAN
We should be out of here soon enough.

AUDREY
Do you happen to know what time it is?

The man pulls out a pocket watch.

MAN
Quarter to midnight.

AUDREY
Oh no! I might miss the holiday bash!

The man remains silent. Audrey can feel a tenseness in the air.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Might I ask your name?

MAN (after a pause)
Mr. Harris.

AUDREY
It is nice to meet you, Mr. Harris. My name is Audrey. Audrey Magdaline. I work at the office on floor 15.

MR. HARRIS gives her a slight nod.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
What are your plans for this evening?

MR. HARRIS
Work.

AUDREY (incredulously)
Work?! But it’s New Year’s Eve!

MR. HARRIS
Yes, well, I’m not one for “bashes,” as you put it.

AUDREY
You don’t want to celebrate the start of a new decade?

MR. HARRIS
It’s just another year, isn’t it?

AUDREY
Well, I think every new year is worth celebrating.

Mr. Harris ignores her.

AUDREY (CONT’D)
Oh, I really hope I’m not late. I don’t want to miss the dancing!

Mr. Harris’ face goes cold, as if she has reminded him of a dark memory. Audrey doesn’t notice.

AUDREY (CONT’D)
Do you like dancing, Mr. Harris?

MR. HARRIS (after a pause)
Not anymore.

AUDREY
Why, might I ask?

Mr. Harris stares blankly. Audrey chooses not to push it.

AUDREY (CONT’D)
Well, I think dancing is wonderful.

MR. HARRIS (quietly)
Do you dance?

AUDREY
Oh, if only my legs would allow.

MR. HARRIS (realizing his mistake)
Right. I’m sorry.

AUDREY
No need.

(beat)

AUDREY (CONT’D)
Would you like to join me upstairs once we’re free?
MR. HARRIS
No, I am very busy.

AUDREY
Are you sure? Maybe some dancing would be good for you.

MR. HARRIS (coldly)
No.

Audrey takes the sternness of his response as an indication that he wants to be left alone. Mr. Harris looks down at his feet and notices that his shoelace is untied. He bends over to fix it. His wallet falls onto the floor. It lies open. A photo of Mr. Harris and a woman sits in one of the plastic inserts.

AUDREY (pointing)
Who is that? She’s very pretty.

Mr. Harris looks over to where Audrey is pointing. He snatches the wallet hastily.

AUDREY (CONT’D)
I-I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to...

Mr. Harris stares at the picture quietly before placing the wallet back in his pocket.

AUDREY (CONT’D) (realizing)
Is she...?

Mr. Harris turns his head, not wanting to hear the end of the question.

AUDREY (CONT’D) (realizing)
Was she a good dancer?

Mr. Harris’ harsh look fades. He looks solemn, heartbroken.

MR. HARRIS (quietly)
The best.

AUDREY (after a pause)
My parents were the most amazing dancers I ever knew. When my mother passed, my father used to tell me if I looked hard enough, I could see her dancing among the stars...maybe she’s up there too.

Mr. Harris pulls out his wallet and looks at the picture again. He can’t help but smile.

MR. HARRIS (putting his wallet away)
Care to dance?

AUDREY (incredulously)
What?

Mr. Harris helps Audrey out of the wheelchair and situates her feet on his shoes. He holds her tight to keep her stabilized. He slowly begins to dance with the music playing upstairs, taking her along with him. They laugh as the bell tower outside strikes midnight, ringing in the new year.

FADE OUT.
THANOS, CASSANDRA

Cassandra Thanos
Age: 17, Grade: 12
School Name: Meadows School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Jessica Stewart
Category: Dramatic Script

One More Night
FADE IN:
INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT
The room is dark and cold. There are bars over the window. CAMERON (17) fiddles with the lock on her bedroom door. Her sister, MANDY (15), sits on the bed, balled up. She rocks back and forth. Her eye is bruised.

MANDY
Cam, please stop. You’re gonna get us in trouble.

CAMERON
Would you shut up?!

Mandy bites her nails.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Hand me a bobby pin.

MANDY
Cam-

CAMERON (interrupting)
Hand me a fucking bobby pin!

Mandy pulls a bobby pin out of her hair and hands it to Cameron.

MANDY
He’s gonna hear you.

CAMERON
No, he won’t. He’s probably passed out by now anyway.

Off screen, a bottle CRASHES and a man YELLS angrily, but unintelligibly.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Or not.

MANDY (nervously)
Cam, let’s just sleep, okay?

CAMERON
And stay one more night in this hellhole? I don’t think so.
MANDY
It’s not worth it.

CAMERON
It is to me.

Cameron turns back to the lock. The bobby pin breaks.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Dammit. You got another bobby pin?

MANDY (not listening)
Do you think mom made it to heaven?

CAMERON
I hope that bitch is in hell for being so selfish. Now, can you-

MANDY (interrupting)
Do you think we’d make it to heaven?

CAMERON
Don’t talk like that, Mandy.

MANDY
Why not? Even if we make it out of this room, we’ll never make it out of the house.

CAMERON
Yes, we will. Now hand me another bobby pin.

Mandy refuses. Cameron pulls one off of Mandy’s head herself. Mandy unsuccessfully tries to take it back. Cameron goes back to fiddle with the lock.

MANDY
Cam, please-

The lock CLICKS open. Cameron reaches for the doorknob.

MANDY (CONT'D)
Cameron, no. Listen to me.

CAMERON
No, you listen! We can make it out of here. Together.

MANDY
It’s too risky!

CAMERON
We have to do this!

MANDY
No!

Cameron starts to open the door. Mandy leaps off the bed and pushes her to the side. She SLAMS the door shut.

CAMERON
Mandy...
MANDY
No! I’m sick and tired of you trying to be the hero. Wake up! There’s no way out of here.

CAMERON
Not with that attitude there isn’t.

MANDY
I’m just trying to be realistic.

CAMERON
And I’m just trying to survive!

MANDY
Yeah? Well so am I. If we go out there, there’s no coming back. You know what he’s capable of.

CAMERON
And I know what we’re capable of.

MANDY
Don’t be ridiculous.

Mandy moves back to the bed and starts picking at the skin on her fingers. Cameron moves onto the bed to join her. She grabs Mandy’s hands.

CAMERON
Mandy, listen to me. I know you’re scared. So am I. I’m terrified. But as long as we cower in fear he wins. He doesn’t deserve to win.

Tears stream down Mandy’s face. Cameron goes to wipe them with her thumb, but Mandy flinches.

CAMERON (CONT’D)
Sorry.

Mandy shakes her head. Cameron retracts her hand. Cameron puts her forehead against Mandy’s.

CAMERON (CONT’D)
I love you.

Mandy smiles softly. Loud footsteps ECHO in the hallway outside the door. Cameron pulls back hastily.

CAMERON (CONT’D)
Get under the bed.

MANDY
But-

CAMERON (whispering)
Do it! Now!

Mandy scrambles underneath the bed. She sees Cameron’s bare feet move towards the door. The door swings open, and she sees the man’s boots in the hallway. A vicious scuffle occurs, and Cameron is thrown onto the ground. The man SLAMS the door shut and locks it. Mandy crawls out from under the bed.

MANDY (in tears)
Cameron! Cameron! Oh, I’m so sorry!

Mandy cradles Cameron. Cameron lightly places her hand on Mandy’s unbruised cheek.
CAMERON (through the pain)
Shhh. It’s alright…We’ll try again tomorrow.

FADE TO BLACK.
The Power of Foils in Hamlet

Some people see that the play *Hamlet* progresses as a result of King Hamlet’s ghost and the issues he causes between Claudius and Hamlet; although, William Shakespeare’s foils allude the troubling effect of obedience and the aspiration to seek vengeance via Hamlet and Laertes’, as well as Gertrude and Ophelia’s first introductions, their own climaxes, and their fated resolutions.

One of Shakespeare’s most obvious foil pairings is Hamlet and Laertes, which ultimately allows the exploration of issues on obedience and vengeance and how it affects principles and rationality. Laertes and Hamlet’s first interaction with one another is in Act I Scene II when Laertes is seeking Claudius’ permission to return to France and Hamlet sulkingly stands by. Right away, the audience notices the difference between the two. Laertes is very respectful to the king and asks for his “gracious leave” (1.2.57), while Hamlet makes snide remarks such as “more kin...less kind” (1.2.65) on the side. This allows Shakespeare to display where their obedience lies, Laertes to the king and Hamlet to no one. Hamlet’s quote produces a negative outlook on obedience when it comes to his view of Claudius and how it only lies to his real father. Additionally, Laertes and Hamlet share a great love for Ophelia, Laertes’ sister, but while Laertes seeks to protect her throughout, Hamlet holds an anger towards her when she returns his letters and renounces his affections, and he even goes on to taunt her at the play. However, he believes his level of love for Ophelia is greater than Laertes, to which he describes it as not even comparing to the love of “forty thousand brothers”(5.1.247) to Laertes when he finds out Ophelia is dead. Their obedience and dedication towards Ophelia displays the potential of loyalty they hold. It shows off the positive love Hamlet contains for Ophelia, no matter how upset he is with her. Vengeance clouds the mind, causing Hamlet to remain sullen and abrasive with the other characters, while Laertes remains a cheerful outlook until the death of his father, which impacts his morality and rational thought.

A second pairing of Shakespeare’s foils is Ophelia and Gertrude, which displays how obedience brings oppression and impacts one’s morals. Ophelia and Gertrude’s first interaction with one another is not until Act III Scene I when they are in the hall to discuss the root of Hamlet’s madness and Ophelia tries to talk to him. It is here, the audience notices the similarities between the two. Both state quite similar lines; Gertrude says that she “shall obey” (3.1.39) to Claudius, which mimics Ophelia’s line in Act I Scene 3 when she says that she “shall obey, my lord” (1.3.136) to Polonius and turn away Hamlet’s advances earlier. The quotes negatively show the power of obedience and the toxicity it contains. Although both women care deeply for Hamlet, their obedience to the men above them causes them to set aside theirmorales and harm Hamlet rather than help. However, they do share their differences. Ophelia is pure and innocent, while Gertrude is unfaithful and treacherous in Hamlet’s eyes. While Ophelia’s unquestioning obedience lies to her father who is her rightful role model, Gertrude’s obedience goes to Claudius when it is rightfully for her first husband, thus the catalyst to his demise. Although, both result in Hamlet’s troubling act and anger towards others. Additionally, it seems that Ophelia’s conscience is present while Gertrude’s is not. After Hamlet angrily leaves Ophelia, she does not lament his cruelty but rather feels pity and sadness towards him, and asks the heavens for help. Meanwhile, Gertrude continues to remain tight-lipped about his father’s death, even though she knows that it can help him, but her obedience still lies with Claudius. Ultimately, it is the two women’s obedience that blocks them from their free will, which results in the negative consequences on Hamlet.

While both men seek justice for their fathers’ deaths, during Laertes’ climax, it is his quickness to action that blocks his rationale, which proves that obedience and vengeance obscure morals. Laertes’ climax occurs after he hears of his father’s death and rushes to the castle to take up arms against Claudius in Act IV Scene V. He undergoes a transformation from his cheeky personality to one bent on revenge. He already intends to fight the King, even though he does not have the full story. Laertes’ pursuit of vengeance is unthought out. Additionally, Laertes soon finds out of Ophelia’s madness and his obedience to her fuels his promise of vengeance further, which makes him declare his allegiance to Claudius to kill Hamlet even though he knows the good nature Hamlet holds in his character, but in the
heat of the moment it seems like it is his only choice. In Act V Scene I, he declares for the devil to “take thy soul” (5.1.235) to Hamlet upon his return. From this he shows how he immediately blames Hamlet, no questions asked, and suggests his quickness to follow his raw emotions to determine his actions, unlike Hamlet, to the audience. It displays how the anger vengeance holds and the love devotees have, can obscure righteousness and truth.

Unlike Laertes, in Hamlet’s climax he acknowledges the pointlessness behind the pain he can potentially inflict on his opponents, which displays how even though he wants vengeance, his obedience to no one but his dead father allows his mind to stay clear and to reflect. Hamlet’s climax occurs in Act IV Scene IV. Here, Hamlet finds out Fortinbras’ plan to lead a massive army to seize land that won’t contribute to him greatly. Hamlet proclaims that his thoughts are either “bloody, or nothing worth” (4.4.65). The quote is a mix of positive and negative because in the beginning, Hamlet constantly questions his right for vengeance for his father such as when he sees Claudius in prayer even though he wants to kill him.Hamlet thinks about the justness of bloodshed and acknowledges that he does have a noble cause of seeking vengeance now and pushes himself to finally take action. Hamlet finally comes to the conclusion of revenge once and for all for his father because he had previously been too slow and rational. It is Hamlet’s reflection of his cause for vengeance and obedience that allows him to stay true to who he is unlike Laertes. Vengeance and obedience are just reasons to take action, but one needs to acknowledge if they are going about it the right way.

In Gertrude’s climax, it is because of her following of Claudius that proves that blind obedience can result in negative consequences. Gertrude’s climax occurs when Hamlet kills Polonius in Act III Scene IV. Gertrude chastises Hamlet for embarrassing Claudius, during the play, and angers him. Gertrude does not see how her reckless obedience pushes Hamlet away from their connection as mother and son. As a result, Hamlet stabs the tapestry when he finds out there is a spy, Polonius, and kills him. For the first time, Gertrude is guilty about what she did to her son and ex husband. She states how Hamlet turns her “eyes into my soul” (3.4.90) and that her heart is “in twain” (3.4.158) when he tells her how disloyal she is and how her actions are wrong. The obedience she upholds for Claudius is a result of a heinous action, and destroys Hamlet’s love for his mother. The quote is having a negative impact on Gertrude because she does not want to see her wrongdoings even though she needs to. Not only does it cause rifts in relationships and ends them, sometimes it can cause preventable damages.

Similar to Gertrude’s climax, Ophelia’s also results in a period of reflection. It shows how obedience can lead to a sense of loss for the follower when they lose their leader. Ophelia’s climax occurs when she becomes insane due to her father’s death. Polonius guides all of Ophelia’s actions and now that he is gone, she doesn’t know what to do. Her pain is clear when she states how her tears burn out the “sense and virtue” (4.5.132) of her eye. Ophelia negatively faces her father’s death because of her deep devotion for him, and it makes her think. With her father gone, she realizes the horrible actions that Gertrude and Claudius did and that they need to pay. Ophelia begins to pass out flowers and recognizes how each of them contains a symbolic significance for the people before her: Laertes, Gertrude, and Claudius. As she does so, Ophelia morbidly states that she would give them violets except that they “withered all”(4.5.155) with Polonius’ death, which reminds them of their loss. Ultimately, when an obedient person faces loss, their actions become meaningless to them and they see the world in a different light.

Laertes’ resolution occurs when Hamlet kills him. Laertes comes clean to Hamlet after the duel, thus proving that vengeance and obedience can be set aside for the greater good. Upon Laertes’ death, he constantly battles between his obedience for Claudius and the vengeance of his family and his morality. At first he says to Claudius that he will “hit him”(5.2.290), but then he goes on to say that it is “against my conscience” (5.2.292). This quote produces a mixed result and displays the similar qualms Laertes and Hamlet have. While Hamlet doesn’t take action until he doesn’t have a choice, Laertes could have stopped himself from the beginning but he doesn’t and regrets his actions. When Gertrude dies and Hamlet stabs Laertes, Laertes proclaims to the court that he is killed with “mine own treachery” (5.2.304). This quote produces a positive result with Laertes realizing his wrongdoings from his impulsive actions of vengeance and obedience. He asks Hamlet for forgiveness and wants to make sure that Claudius is justly served. His brevity of his death contrasts with Hamlet’s prolonged one. From Laertes’ resolution, the audience learns that morality can overcome toxic vengeance and obedience.

Hamlet’s resolution occurs when he finally takes action and kills Claudius while he is dying. His righteous vengeance and obedience to his father and Ophelia allows him to progress his character in his final moments and mend his damaged relationships. Even after his conflict with Laertes, not only does he ask Laertes for forgiveness, but Hamlet forgives him and states that God will “make thee free” (5.2.328) due to his devotion towards Ophelia. Both characters set aside their unjust anger to one another and mend their relationship. Hamlet still hesitates to take revenge on Claudius until finally a clear and just motivation for vengeance is present before him: the death of his mother and the sabotage of Laertes. Once he fulfills his vengeance and obedience for his father, like Laertes, his mind becomes clear and he wants to make sure everything is right. He proclaims to Horatio that he is leaving behind “a wounded name” (5.2.341) while he succumbs to death. While the quote seems to be negative, his proclamation of the bad things he leaves behind makes him realize that he wants to right his wrongs. He makes sure Horatio doesn’t
die and appoints Fortinbras to rule. From Hamlet’s resolution, Shakespeare displays character growth by using his rightful obedience and vengeance to mend his relationships and progress the rest of the play. Gertrude’s resolution occurs when she takes a drink from the poisoned goblet and succumbs to death, which shows how her wrongful obedience to Claudius prevents herself from a just fate. After her climax, she reflects on her past deeds and tries to reform herself. Gertrude finally goes against Claudius’ actions when she proclaims to him “I will, my lord” (5.2.287) and drinks the poisoned goblet after he told her not to do so. This quote provides a mixed display of how she reestablishes her obedience to Hamlet and tries to encourage him during the fight, but it is not enough. Gertrude follows Claudius’ actions blindly and now her independence is gone, which results in her not even being able to make the decision about her own death. There is a symbolic significance and justness with Gertrude’s death. Her new spouse kills her after she kills her husband. Hamlet’s obedience to Gertrude led to his demise and the same happens to her. Ultimately from Gertrude’s resolution, the audience learns that a toxic obedience can lead to an unhealthy dependency. When one strays from rightful loyalty, it can lead to the damages of life. Finally, Ophelia’s resolution occurs when she takes her own life and drowns in the river. Ophelia is showing how she is finally set free from toxic obedience from the people around her. Ophelia is aware of her past errors and defies the others. She no longer listens to Claudius or Gertrude because of her insanity and they can no longer expect her obedience towards them. Before her death, Ophelia sings to Laertes, Gertrude, and Claudius that they must go to “thy deathbed” (4.5.164). This quote displays a negative theme that because of those characters' toxic obedience, they share Polonius’ fate. Although Polonius tries to do the right thing by helping Hamlet’s lunacy, his blindness causes his death. The other characters are much worse and Ophelia realizes this. Since Ophelia listens to her conscience, she regains who she is and therefore gets the choice of what she wants to do with her life, unlike Gertrude. With Ophelia’s death, Shakespeare tries to show how the freedom from a restrictive obedience progresses not only the character, but the rest of the plot. Many people believe that the play Hamlet only progresses because of King Hamlet’s death, his ghost, and the effect on his son. However, William Shakespeare tries to illustrate that the play progresses with the use of foils Hamlet and Laertes, as well as Gertrude and Ophelia and their motivations of obedience and vengeance throughout their introductions, climaxes, and conclusions. It is because of toxic obedience and the wrongful reasons for vengeance that hinders the play and the characters from progress, but as the characters learn to come to their senses, they create a better impact for themselves and the people around them. Otherwise, they meet a tragic fate. With a healthy obedience towards other characters and a just cause for revenge, Hamlet showcases to the audience a sense of freedom, accomplishment, and clear morality. Ultimately, he leaves behind a cautionary tale of where the warnings and dangers of wrongfully placed devotion and malicious intent leads.
The Symbolic Importance of Punishments in Dante’s Inferno

At some point in everyone’s lives, they will begin to question the actions they do on Earth. Whether the reason behind them is for the greater good or one’s own personal gain, will they end up in Heaven or in Hell? How much will they suffer? From what will cause them pain? While some may be able to resist, others face conflicts with their morality and give in to temptation leading them to Hell where they shall face their punishments. In Dante Alighieri’s Inferno, through the use of just and symbolic punishment for his characters, Dante signifies the nature of sin on Earth and their correspondence to the levels of punishment in Hell.

Punishments that Dante encounters in the second circle of Hell that are just and symbolic are Francesca and Paolo. From the line “The rhyme of Lancelot… alone with innocence and dime time,” (V. 124-126) Dante uses the allusion of King Arthur. In the legend, Arthur was betrayed by his best friend Lancelot when he fell in love with Arthur’s wife, Guinevere. The two have been blinded by their lust and committed adultery, allusive to Francesca and Paolo as she was already married to Paolo’s brother. The quote shows justness because even though in both tales they were innocent people and did not intend to betray an important person in their lives, they still ignored their fidelity to a prominent member of their lives. Love, most commonly associated with good and purity, had brought them to hell. Their punishment is fair because they face winds where they are tossed around and not able to reach each other. Dante describes the couple before him as “wailing as they fly” (V. 48). From this line it symbolizes how the wind leaves them helpless of controlling themselves, just like how they had given in to their “whirl-wind” romance and became helpless to their passion for one another. This punishment is just because they had committed a mortal sin by coming together, and it is symbolic because they must now forever be apart.

Later on, Dante introduces Geryon the dragon, which the audience will soon understand why his punishment is just and symbolic. Geryon was a king of Spain who lured tourists into the country where he would rob and kill them. Consumed by the monster of greed, Geryon would become a dragon himself, a literal “monster” as Dante constantly refers to him. This is just because Geryon will suffer for murdering innocents and it is symbolic because the dragon embodies the monster he had become with his actions. His horrid appearance is illustrated when Dante climbs on the “great shoulders of that freak” (XVII. 1). It is symbolic because when Geryon was king, he had nothing on his shoulders, meaning no one to listen to, and now he must transport others. The word freak once again hits at the justness of Geryon’s transformation into what he used to be on the inside and how he must now be a servant to others like he forced his people to be for him. Geryon acts as the farrier from the Circle of Violence to the Circle of Fraud, both qualities he held when alive. This punishment leads to suffering by making him have taxing trips, with evidence from visual imagery in lines such as “a flight-worn falcon” and “sinks down wearily” (XVII. 37). This punishment is ultimately just because travelers would make long and hard trips to go to Spain only to be killed, so now travelers shall take advantage of him and he would serve them, stripping his title of king and it is symbolic because he must now take on the appearance of the monster he always was.

A third pair of sinners Dante created a just and symbolic punishment for is Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri. Archbishop Ruggieri seized Count Ugolino and his family, leading them to starvation, and ultimately the Count into eating his sons with them saying “put upon us this sorry flesh…now strip it off again”(XXXIII. 52-53). This line shows how the punishment is symbolic because in order to survive the Count had to keep eating all of his children in order to survive and now he will continue to strip off Ruggieri’s flesh again and again. It exemplifies fairness because he will constantly be reminded of the task that led to the undoing of his family. Both were to be frozen in ice, however with the Count eating the Archbishop. Dante noted how the Count “seized the skull… grinding it as a mastiff grinds a bone”(XXXIII. 67-68). With the use of the word “seized”, it shows how the Count and Ruggieri’s punishment is everlasting and therefore just. This punishment was just for the Count because he had chosen cannibalism over death and must now continue to be one in the afterlife. The audience can see his pain by the line “I bit… in helpless grief”(XXXIII. 48). The Count’s family was helpless when Ruggieri locked them up and they were
also helpless when the Count decided to eat them, thus the punishment is just because it makes them feel the pain they caused. However this is a sin against blood, sending him to Hell where he can now only be a cannibal, feasting from the man who had caused his starvation. Thus, the killer becomes the victim, making the Archbishop’s punishment symbolic and it is just because now he must feel the pain he inflicted upon the Count’s family. Ultimately, one must acknowledge the sins they have committed on Earth and amend those wrongs before it becomes too late. While unintentional like Francesca and Paolo, one can still be sent to Hell and face endless suffering. The more deliberate and heinous the crime, the worse the punishment, like what the Count and the Archbishop face. All their punishments coincide with their wrongdoings on Earth, and act as not only a message to Dante, but to the whole audience of what one shall not do while alive. As unfair as these punishments seem to be to the recipients, they are in every way what they deserve to face.
The Playground

When I had switched schools in the second grade, I realized what it meant to be outside of my comfort zone. I had left my old friends behind, had new teachers, and even had to wear uniforms, creating my great disdain for khaki skorts. However, the unease I held throughout the day quickly dissipated as I would rush home as fast as I could and be free at the park by my house, putting the playground at my new school to shame with its ginormous red slide and seemingly endless row of swings.

Spending every day at the park never ceased to bore me because of the narratives my brother and I fabricated. One day I could be a pirate hunting for treasure, the next a spy on a secret mission. From there I embarked on “impossible” ventures, scaling railings over molten lava or flinging myself across multiple monkey bars in one swing to avoid the river of crocodiles below.

Even in the limited space, I never felt bigger. The whole world was within my grasp and I wanted to see what it had to offer. The park’s promise of limitless adventure ensured it to become an important aspect of my life.

In my many expeditions at the park, I rapidly encountered determination. Even with the allure the park holds, it doesn’t prevent life’s scrapes and bruises from getting in the way. At the park, I found strength in myself, so even if I had fallen trying to climb backwards on a slide or got the wind knocked out of me crashing into another kid, I wouldn’t let that stop me. Ignoring the pain, I would get up off the ground and continue my quest. So whether I’m facing a tough opponent on the tennis courts, struggling on grasping differentiations in the classroom, or rehearsing for the school play, I know never to give up. If I had not done so, I would miss out on the opportunities the world has to offer.

My love for adventures did not limit itself. The summer of my junior year, I had gone to study in Spain, where I ventured all across the country, and got to see what made all these places so unique, even if they were a train ride away from one another. I encountered brilliant works of art, dance, and other customs. Inspired with what I had seen, I gained a profound sense of appreciation for the people around me.

This spirit also moved me to create. The stories I had produced in my head at the park, transferred to my aptitude for art, and I explored the depths of my mind and brought my thoughts into reality. Inspired, I would explore a wide range of materials, from oil paints to pastels to charcoal, just to discover the different ways I could produce my creations and make them the best they could be. As they are displayed in the school hallway and the gym foyer throughout the year, I found pride, not only with the final outcome of my work, but the reactions of my classmates and teachers, seeing how my ideas are sparking their own.

My love for education is taken on with the same passion. Everything I learn becomes meaningful contributions to the adventures I would have. From studying environmental science to literature, I find their applications in the world. I am always driven to learn, excited to discover, because I realize that everything I do will be shared with the world. Growing up, going to the park would soon take a backseat, but the memories of the adventures I had there held firm- giving me motivation in my actions, my passion for learning, and my purpose in life. Whether it’s as close as the classroom or in an entire new country, I continue to look for the next adventure the playground of life has.
Here Comes Global Warming

Pollutions grow, oh no, no, no
Greenhouse effect, science says
It’s our fault
Global warming, we see the ice caps slowly melting
Global warming, oceans will rise and temps are high
Emissions grow, oh no, no, no
By burning fuels, science says
It’s our fault
Global warming, the alt-Rights don’t believe in the fights.
Global warming, Amy Barrett will not hear it
Erosions grow, oh no, no, no
Which causes floods, science says
It’s our fault
Change, change, change, climate change
Change, change, change, climate change
Change, change, change, climate change
Change, change, change, climate change
Change, change, change, climate change
Global warming, the Supreme Court has rejected you
Global warming, the EPA has lost its way
Landfills will grow, oh no, no, no
As we expand, science says
It’s our fault
What can we do, ooh ooh, ooh, ooh
Reduce our waste, science says
We can help
We can help
Sophie Vansomphone
Age: 18, Grade: 12
School Name: Bishop Gorman High School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator: Christi Thomas-McEachern
Category: Poetry

The Truth to Growth

The Community Tree

I inspect the huge tree,
seeing the color moving down.
And I notice while some of the leaves fall,
the ones still on do not turn brown. The hulking tree is
not threadbare or worn, but rather living hearty and healthy,
allowing new creations to be born. This whole tree ensures life
for the whole world, but if a single part is out of order, death
will follow and chaos will be hurled. A tree may be one entity
but there are so many parts to it, creating its greater identity.
The lively light leaves collect the sun’s rays to turn
energy into food and the
massive trunk’s
form ensure
the tree can
withstand a storm.
Even the thin roots down below
carry nutrients throughout the body
and makes sure the chance the tree gives to others will not
be shoddy. All the parts unify to make the tree a whole, and with them working together,
growth can take hold.

A Single Flower

A flower of any shape or size.
will not always survive. Without
the presence of the sun’s soothing embrace
or the constant supply of water needed to thrive,
a flower will have a hard time staying alive.
While silky and delicate a flower may be,
it can not just rely on the bees. Always getting crushed
and trampled, there is no one protecting it from being destroyed.
In a field full of many, that is hard to avoid. In dire circumstances,
where everything is competing, one can not rely on others and take
any chances because so many sources are fleeting. While it will
be a great dread to have so many end up dead, each flower
is on its own and remains alone. They keep to their
own way and with their smooth petals, in
the wind they can sway. From a dandelion
covered in fluffs so light to a rose filled with
thorns ready for a fight, they all have a frailty,
but can still make an impact with their
individuality. No two flowers are exactly the same, and they each stand out, making their own name. Due to this, beauty and strength begins to stem, and one can prevail over all of them.
A Villain’s Essay for College

It has always just been me, my sister Ophelia, and my father Polonius. He was a scholarly man and prompted me to attend college. From him, I learned of the importance of family. He told me to “be true” (1.3.78) to myself and I held those words to heart. He also warned me to “give thy thoughts no tongue” (1.3.59). So off to France I went, leaving behind my old life to embark on something new. I thought when I left everything would stay the same. However, I couldn’t have been more wrong. My father was murdered, killed by the people we served, the people we trusted. Once I heard of his undeserved death, I decided to end my journey and return home and do what seemed to be the most logical thing to do: raise an army. I wanted to make sure whoever did this heinous crime got what they deserve. I became blinded by Claudius and my anger and pushed my father’s advice to the side. I was quick to blame Hamlet and started the undoing of us all. It was unfair how my father’s death occurred and I realized that I wanted to do all I could to make sure nobody befalls the same fate. Thus sparking my passion to major in criminal justice.

This fiery belief was ingrained in me further when I found out the repercussions of my father’s death had on my sister. Once a well-spoken and kind lady, she was driven to insanity, passing out flowers to everyone around her! So I decided to pledge vengeance for the both of them and proclaimed that my “revenge will come” (4.7.31). To make Hamlet’s death more secure, I even came up with the idea to “anoint my sword” (4.7.136) with a poison, a very creative approach. Once, I have a goal in mind, I will do anything to make sure that it’ll be accomplished. However, I soon realized that I was wrong.

Recognizing the consequences of my reckless actions, I grew to understand that revenge is not the answer to all. Although I still believe passionately in bringing Hamlet to justice, I found it in my heart to receive his “offered love like love” (5.2. 239). Beginning to understand the wrongness of my actions, I hoped to make amends by confessing to Hamlet of how I poisoned the sword and that the “king’s to blame” (5.2.317). I wanted to make sure Claudius was “justly served” (5.2.321) because of his reckless actions on the rest of us.

So why the University of California Los Angeles? The University of California Los Angeles prides itself on its training of criminal justice. I never got to finish my studies in France and I would like to resume them in order to make sure vengeance can be achieved the right and honorable way. Your institution states in the mission statement that you will “hold ourselves accountable to our professed ideals.” Not only do I strongly believe in this statement and want to take accountability for my own actions, but I want others to as well.