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Hi-Fi Font

Shebley Browne

Stereotype-A set image; a standardized or typical image or conception held by or applied to members of a certain group.

-Webster's Dictionary

Why do we have words like soccer mom, biker, yuppie, and hippie? It's because people love to stereotype each other. The act of stereotyping can target just about anybody and it can be based on a variety of different topics such as; economic class, race, religion, dress code, level of intelligence, or sexual preference, just to name a few. My dad calls stereotypical situations "classics". Stereotyping works as a classification system, a sort of filing structure for the mind. Why does the heavy-set, tattooed, ponytail-wearing man dressed in black leather fit nicely into one person's "B" for Biker 'file', while another classifies the same man into their "A" for Approach with Extreme Caution 'file' and yet someone else places him under their "H" for Hot Babe? Why does the woman weaving recklessly through traffic in her S.U.V while talking on her cell phone and simultaneously passing out snacks to a pack of hungry kids fit nicely into my "S" for Soccer Mom file? (Come to think of it, she falls under my "A" Approach with Extreme Caution heading, too.) The answer to these questions is complex, but we can start with realizing that stereotyping is dictated by both the stero typer and the stereotypee. The stero typer being the judgmental one, the stereotypee being the victim. Things like past experiences, knowledge, or gossip can play into how the situation is perceived. Often, stereotyping is used to gauge a person, "Should I pick up that hitchhiker, or not?", other times it is used group people, "Those lazy good-for-nothing kids!" and there are times when it is meant to insult, "That dumb blonde...". I believe that we all have all been guilty of stereotyping at one time or another although this is not something readily admitted to by your average person, because the connotations associated with stereotyping are often negative. My point is that the stereotyping is, sadly, a very common practice. People do it without even realizing that it's being done. The danger of this, of course, is that often these assumptions are completely wrong. Just because the wrapper looks good, that doesn't mean that what's inside is absolutely delicious.

In her poem, [Paseo en El Paso](#), Elaine Schwartz addresses the issue of racial stereotyping and one woman's incredible grit and uprightness in such a situation. This is a poem about racism. It speaks of assumptions made by someone who hasn't taken the time to learn the truth. Ms.

Schwartz's piece is a powerful voice for those who have found themselves dropped into a convenient category by another based on the color of their skin.

Paseo in El Paso has no rhyming scheme, just deliciously descriptive language that transports the reader to El Paso, Texas on a hot spring day in 1945. The reader is taken back in time for a casual stroll with Miriam and her baby. Miriam's "Dark, olive toned hands firmly grasp/ the warm metal handle" of the stroller she is pushing, indicating to the reader that she is definitely a woman of color, yet in a subtle way that allows for some speculation as to what relevance this may have in the piece. The overall feeling conveyed is that of a woman, tired possibly from the heat, but happily enjoying the company of her daughter. It is when "Miriam adjusts her baby's lace bonnet/ Brown eyes focused on her daughter's blue ones" that the reader becomes aware that perhaps the color of skin/eyes may play an important role in the story yet to unfold. And, sure enough, it does. It is at the moment that Miriam is fidgeting with her daughter's bonnet that a woman approaches unnoticed and begins to gush, "What a happy baby! So clean and so fresh!/ You take her for a stroll every afternoon?" And then the clincher, "You are a fine nanny./ I have two little ones at home./ I could use your services./ I'll pay you well". The whole picture suddenly becomes crystal clear to the reader. This mystery woman has made a grave mistake, and is oblivious to her error, so convinced is she that this fresh, clean, white-looking, baby could in no way be the offspring of Miriam herself. It is Miriam's reply that really makes this piece powerful, "Thank You./ I'm happy with my current employer." Her short, polite response speaks volumes. I was touched by the words, "thank you", for somehow they forgive the mystery woman for her blatant act of racism with a grace that is not only admirable, but also quite unexpected in this type of situation.

I had the great pleasure of interviewing Ms. Schwartz, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the woman depicted in this poem is her mother, and Ms. Schwartz herself was the blue-eyed baby in the stroller on that sweltering hot day in Texas some fifty-seven years ago. During our interview, Ms. Schwartz explained that not only is this piece "a family memoir, showing her mother's strength of character and integrity, but it is also a critical voice for important social issues surrounding racism in post-war America." Ms. Schwartz went on to explain that this is not the first piece she has written about her mother's experiences as a first-generation American and that currently there is a sequel in the works.

Perhaps one of the most interesting things I realized about Ms. Schwartz's piece is that I instantly stereotyped the mystery woman as being white. There is no evidence that points to this fact, and so in reality she could have been any nationality at all. And yet, in my mind's eye, a white

woman was exactly what I imagined. Aren't I the one who just said that people stereotype without even realizing it's being done? I was truly shocked when it occurred to me that I myself had been so quick to jump to conclusions. It was then that I realized that Ms. Schwartz's piece had worked its magic on me. It had done what it set out to do, which was to bring to the reader's attention the many injustices that people have faced in the light of racial stereotyping. My daughter's father is African-American and I am white and so it goes without saying that we will face these sort of incidences here and there. I can only hope, that should a similar situation arise I am able to handle the situation with the same integrity that Miriam had fifty-seven years ago.



In Times of Tragedy

Heather White

What have mothers always done? Our mothers love us unconditionally like no other human can: they are there to clean our cuts when we fall, they comfort us when we have bad dreams, they protect us and keep us safe. But what do they do for us during times of uncertain fate? "Even as the plane crashes/ the over door shuts/ the dark eyes close/she keeps humming/ stroking/ rocking" (line 42-47) According to this poem throughout the world mothers are our safety nets. I believe that in times of tragedy our mothers are our safety nets; they do their best to comfort and protect us.

On September 11, 2001 our nation was faced with a horrific tragedy. Two planes crashed in to the World Trade Centers in New York City. These events effected the lives of many throughout the nation and the world. In the beginning of the poem, I picture a person- a mother who has just lost their child- sitting in a dark room with the blinds closed. Not letting the light of day in. They are playing loud music- the kind that disturbs neighbors. This person is laying in bed trying to avoid what may have happened to their loved ones. "I've been hiding for two weeks/ in loud music/ and cinnamon rolls" (lines 1-3) This is how some people react with faced with the tragedy of losing the ones we love. In this state of depression the person has turned to junk food and music to help them heal.

What would a mother do when faced with the fear of death and a screaming child, unaware of what my happen to them." "Other visions haunt me of/ mothers quieting children/ on hijacked planes" (Lines 12-14) The mothers-according to this poem- on these planes new that their fate was going to be death. I feel that these mothers calm and console their children because they do not want them to face the fear of death." "Holding them close to / fast beating hearts / singing lullabies / rocking and / soothing with soft hands." (Lines 15-19) A mothers embrace can be warm and soothing. Mothers want their children to feel calm and relaxed. The job of the mothers in this poem, is never let their children know that their life my be ending. I fell that the child should always feel secure and safe. If the child feels safe and secure then the mother on the hijacked plane has done her job.

We must remember that throughout out the centuries, even before the September 11 hijackings I feel that our mothers have been there to comfort us. "In Germany standing in line" (line 21) In Germany during WWII the Nazi's took the Jews, the disabled and the gypsies and put them in concentration camps to exterminate them. Hitler did this so that he

could create an ideal human race. In line 21 the author is talking about the line that the holocaust victims would stand in. This line led them to the crematorium. "At the crematorium / a child on each side / arms around shivering shoulders" (lines 23-25) A mother stands with her beloved children in front of a huge oven. She knows their out come, death. Her two children hooked to their mother unsure of what is going. "Mothers hush lull promise/ All will be well" (lines 25-26) Just as the mothers on hijacked planes soothed their scared children, the mothers in the concentration camps did the same. They made them promises, maybe one's saying that their next life would be better or that death would be better then living as a prisoner. "We will see daddy soon" (line 27) This line promotes the idea that their father has been killed in the concentration camp and is now in a better place. The mother promises them that they too will go to heaven or a better and be reunited with their father. This mother so reassuring even in the face of death. I think that by the mother reassuring her children to calm them, she is at the same time reassuring herself that thing will soon get better.

Throughout the world there are millions of starving children whose mothers are so poor that that cant feed them or give them clean water. Living in an industrialized country like America we forget that there are countries that are not as lucky as we are. In third world countries, such as Somalia people are faced live without clean running water and the luxury of food. "Or in Somalia/ one child leaning/ the other sucking air/ from dry breast" (line 28-31) This stanza in the poem portrays a child who is so hungry that they try to drink from a dry breast hoping to get something in your stomach. The dry breast is a symbol of poverty. The mother is so malnourished that she can no longer produce breast milk. "Stomachs protruding/ past meatless ribs/ wild wide eyes" (line 37-34) These children have little chance of surviving to adult hood. The protruding stomachs a sign of severe malnutrition. No meat on their bones, just the loose skin surrounding their frail bones. "Asking why?" (Line 35). Asking why they have no food, no money, and why are they starving? What can a mother do but tell her children that everything will be OK and they will make it." "While mothers continue/ to quiet/ to sing/ to assure/ it will be better." (Lines 36-40) She comforts her child's hunger by singing, to quiet their cries hoping and telling them that all will be OK.

"Even as the plane crashes/ the over doors shut/ the dark eyes close/ she keeps humming/ stroking/ rocking" (lines 42-47) Mothers are always there to soothe and calm during terror no matter what the out come my be. They are always there though the good and the bad. To protect us from danger and keep us safe. Our mothers do their best in every situation to keep us safe.

“All we have is now” said author Susan Allison when I interviewed her. That is why I feel we should thank our mother for what they will endure to keep us feeling safe. We should do this every day. Just take five

We All Know Ed

Shawn Simpson

After reading Season I feel I know Ed. He was the elderly gentleman that lived down the street. When you’d find your way home after a long day of work he’d be there to greet you and let you know how the day had been back home. On weekends when you tended to your yard he’d find his way there to barrow you ear for just a bit. Tell a story of his days at Notre Dame, or at sea in the Navy.

Ed grow on me through out the story. When it was time to get the mail you’d be sure to see Ed outside smoking. If it were a cold foggy day he’d brighten it for you with a joke, and even if he had told it before you would laugh and return home with a smile on your face. However, like many sunshine filled days a storm cloud would follow.

The author, Eleanor Van Houten, lays out Ed’s life like the passing of the seasons. We pick the story up in the early fall. Ed is a smoker and because his wife hoped to break him of the habit must find his way outside to have a cigarette. Fortunately for us, and Ed, his house was just across the street from the neighborhood mailboxes. When you found yourself at the mailbox you’d stop

“to visit with him in [you] comings and goings and to listen to him tell jokes as if they had happened to him.”

During the warming summer weather Ed would venture from the mailboxes, sometimes to the local store. It was then that he’d find his way past your yard to stop and talk awhile. When finally he would find his way to the store to “purchase”... a quart of milk [it] could lead to a half an hour of story telling with Jake, the proprietor.”

Fall brought on football. This was Ed’s favorite time of year. In his younger days he went to school at Notre Dame. He was Fighting Irish.”“A framed black and white photograph, on the mantle in his living room, showed ... that impish Irish grin.” Ed loved to watch Notre Dame play and TV. “He was filled with legends and lore of Knute Rockne and the years of glory.”

Winter was rung in by the cold and rain. This time of year Ed did not find his way out past the front porch. Only for a quick cigarette did he find his way that far outdoors. When there was a break in the rain all the neighbors would find their way to the mailboxes “and ask about Ed. Surely he would be better when the weather cleared. Funny how much we missed him.”

When winters end was near Ed was spending less and less time outdoors. His sons came for his birthday and after a day of excitement with them the next was spent in bed. May brought on a trip to the hospital for Ed. When he returned home he was bed ridden. As he lay in bed he would wave to passersby. If we would stick our heads in he’d have a joke to tell. “He was pale and weak, but the grin was still there and he still told stories.”

Finally one “warm day in summer” Ed passed away. Though Ed was a warmth for the neighborhood we could no longer enjoy it. Now when we meet at the mailboxes the “sun no longer shone so brightly.”



Carpe Diem Is My Dying Wish

Drew Clowser

In an interview the author of *Dying Wish Of A Seventy-Three Year Old For Her Far Distant Future* said:“ The simpler things in life are the great things” (Mayfield). Her words remind me how often I dismiss the small things. Awaking each morning my spirit shouts” **carpe diem**, and yet there are times I neglect my inner desire and wish nothing more than to finish this day and move on without a care. This is a common occurrence in my life where I fail to pursue my goals. What is it that we need to keep us fueled and motivated in life? Can’t the answer be more simplistic? It is hard to explain one’s opinions in a few sentences. The poem’*Dying Wish Of A Seventy-Three Year Old For Her Far Distant Future* by Phyllis Mayfield expresses the desires of an elderly woman to hold fast to life. She tells us she wants to be active and tired from a days work and play. This is the action of life that thrives in author Phyllis Mayfield. The author is able to reach her audience with a familiar desire and doing so through a brief message using grandma’s wish to live a little that is so matter of fact. Embrace life or it will pass you by.

I cannot count the times on one hand that I have attempted or succeeded in writing a poem less than thirty-six words. The author took a gamble on writing a short poem and did a wonderful job narrowing down her message. And what about the lack of punctuation? Writing for 23 years, Mayfield believes in her gift for writing. She is compelled to release her thoughts on paper very quickly. For these continual thoughts that flow to the next, punctuation is irrelevant. What kept me in focus was the direction in which the writing was given. It wasn’t in the second person directed at me, but rather taken into context of the first talking about his or herself. Even in speech I have discovered referring to myself as an example rather than pointing a finger at another to be more effective. Mayfield made me think and question my own life through the interaction of another character, without the pressures of any judgement to how I should be living. It was the inward direction of the writing that got me thinking into myself to discover what my wishes could be before I reached death. I didn’t have to search hard to discover her thoughts. People love to search, to be continuous in skimming the small poems to search for fun looking titles.

The Dying Wish Of A Seventy-Three Old For Her Far Distant Future is a huge title. Again I thought this was a risky choice because I was always taught that long titles weren’t acceptable or professional. Well, if it gets them interested and gets the job done I’ll go with the risk taker. Mayfield really experimented with her title further by allowing the words to tell

some of the story. This lengthy title becomes part of the poem by giving us a few lines of information. 'The Dying Wish Of A Seventy-Three Old For Her Far Distant Future'(46). The old woman's opinion rests in the title. We know she is seventy-three and she has a dying wish, but when it says *for her far distant future* (46) she is telling us she has no plans on dying anytime soon. In contrast to some elderly folk, she does not want to sit at the TV she wants to celebrate life and have fun. The title also leaves the reader hanging to continue to read and find out this old ladies remedy to experiencing life.

"When I die / I want to have a black thumbnail / from when the hammer missed""(46). The author gives us an example of the old woman's mindset for goals. Now such a statement doesn't literally mean this old lady knows the day she will die and on that day go out to the garage and purposely slam her thumb with a hammer. This is an expression of her desire to be active and in motion in life. The statement "I want..."(46) presents that firm desire and to be tough. There is a sense of freedom in making mistakes. Bad things happen and no matter how many times I miss the target I can accept it and look back at that black thumb and remember I survived.

"And a web of scratches / from pruning the roses that day" (46). I can refer to Mayfield's personal passion for roses with her shared analogy. How roses produce a course of beautiful life long after losing its pedals. As pedals fall they contain the life of seedlings that eventually spawn new roses. Even at the point of losing life more is given. And unlike plastic flowers that can last forever, there is further pleasure taken in the life of a real flower. Experiencing anything other than the real thing isn't as satisfying.

Having goals and determination is only part of what I believe is in Mayfield's poem. After working towards building your dream house, visiting Europe, taking up yoga, walking the dog, or pruning the roses that day what do you have to show for it? Your determination brought you accomplishment, satisfaction, belief in yourself, and hope. These things carry you and build upon your character making your life full. This small poem helped remind me of that. My reason to live is to experience as much life as I can possible in the time I am blessed with. So few words and such a simply expressed thought remind me to seize the day.

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You: A critique of Ken Weisner's *Responsible Backpacking*

Lucas Fornace

After reading one hundred or so submissions for this year's Porter Gulch Review, I came across this oasis of a poem. I immediately noticed and enjoyed the smooth, unobstructed flow of the piece, free of unnecessary punctuation. The poem can actually be looked at as having two parts, or sentences, and uses only two periods throughout. The poem has a very easy feel to it, which makes for an enjoyable read that just seems to soothe all that ails. At first, it simply paints a picture of a camping experience in solitude, but in the end leaves the reader to interpret the finish. I believe it is a story about the love between two beings; namely, a man and a woman who set out on a mission of self and selfless discovery.

The complex metaphors of the poem show Weisner's experience as a student of poetry. In fact, he graduated from UCSC with a doctoral degree in poetry and is now a professor at Deanza College where he teaches an intro to poetry course. He has had about 25-30 pieces published and has a book out titled *The Sacred Geometry of Pedestrians*, published in 2002 by Hummingbird Press.

The author begins the poem "studying topographical maps by flashlight" (1st stanza), which tells a story in itself of an upcoming adventure or conquest. It suggests rugged terrain that needs to be tamed—similar to a sexual desire that needs to be quenched. This first line can also describe an intimate relationship between man and the land—a need to find inner peace and solitude with nature as the only medium. The poem continues in the same vein with colorful diction mating the beauty of nature to the receptiveness of one's senses. In a phone interview, Ken stated that the—"relationship between nature and imagination" was a major theme in the piece overall. It isn't until the seventh stanza that the author stops the sailing sentence and shifts from physical description into an imaginative craving that can be read many different ways:

And then,

as the topo starts to fade,
it hit's me! And I picture
you, your
formations and curiosities,

and set out
inch by inch,
with renewed
scholarship and enterprise,

across farthest
corners, boundaries,
into the untold
wild.

Being a young male, I instinctively formed an image of sex. I imagined a backpacker who, temporarily intoxicated by his incredible map reading skills, finally puts his priorities in order and realizes that a gorgeous woman—in desperate need of exploration—lies only inches away. With a new poise, or a “renewed scholarship” as the author put it, he has the confidence to cross those “boundaries”—whatever they may be. And this is a beautiful thing—love and the wild; however, that is only one view and is exactly what makes this poem work. In the context of the writing, “you” can be almost anyone or anything. I naturally saw a woman, but to some, “you” may be a god, or oneself, or the texture of the planet itself, and that “boundary” can be a metaphor for almost anything that hinders. In the words of the author, the poem “doesn’t force views or metaphors” and allows the words to take on a custom meaning tailored to fit any viewpoint.

Ken told me that he wrote this poem, in unfinished form, while on a camping trip with his son in Meek’s Bay. He said that “nature is the ultimate metaphor for what is possible”. I would have to agree.

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Street Life

Sean Kiehn

I have never read anything that describes the young homeless life of Berkeley in such a humorous and accurate way as did PUNK CHICKEN, BY Stephen Lestat. The only real problem that I see with the piece is that it could have problems crossing over to older generations, and to people not particularly familiar with Berkeley. The readers are drawn into the world of the protagonist in a way that was both interesting and profound. PUNK CHICKEN shows the way in which the people of the Berkeley streets actually deal with life.

The story takes place on Telegraph Avenue and the surrounding area, which is in close proximity to the University of California, Berkeley. The protagonist is a new age hippie who is friends with a gutter punk and his pet chicken. All have the similar predicament of not having permanent housing. The gutter punk and his chicken become mentors to the aspiring panhandler, passing on to him the tools for survival on the streets. The chicken has strong human like characteristics that are familiar and humorous. The chicken gives the story a fresh and funny feel, drawing in the reader.

Over the course of a few months on any one particular town most winos, thugs, prostitutes and generic derelicts including hippies and yes punk rockers with chickens will acquire tickets for a number of varied violations. Such as: drinking in public, trespassing, drunk in public, pan handling, and my all time favorite for embarrassing court appearances, urinating in public. (Lestat, PUNK CHICKEN)

The writer has characterized these kind of people extremely well, and has a youthful way of writing that is particularly appealing to an audience born in the 80s.

From personal experience, having grown up in Berkeley myself, I can say that this story truly and accurately portrays Berkeley's homeless youths in the 90s, from the kind of people that live there to the style of dress and the particular brand of humor they use. The story brings back nostalgic memories of summers spent in People's Park, with crisp insight that washes over the reader. PUNK CHICKEN brought me right back to the summer of '97, hanging out with my girlfriend Tweaky and trying to bum enough cash for some grub, or talking with friends in Peoples Park. For anyone who has ever spent time on the Ave (Telegraph Ave., Berkeley, CA), this story is easy to relate to, and they will obviously notice that it is written by a true member of the Berkeley panhandler demographic.

The author's use of the current vernacular of Berkeley was quite interesting; it is not often found in literary works. An example of the use of this vocabulary is when the author wrote, "Don't ask'm for fucking change you schlep. Ask'm for a few pennies man. When he hears pennies he'll think, hey, what the fuck, a few pennies can't hurt right?" (Lestat, PUNK CHICKEN). The writer is using current mannerisms of speech in order to depict a more realistic view of how people from this area would interact with each other. This keeps the story closer to the truth, making it more believable. This kind of speech is not as readily used in prose because of its harshness, but it adds to the credibility of the story.

One aspect of PUNK CHICKEN that is both interesting and humorous was the writer's use of a recipe of how "[t]o construct a Berkeley Gutter Punk". This is another example of an unconventional style of writing that describes the individual in question very effectively. A sentence of particular interest is, "Place in liberal college town allow to cool for one to two years or until exhausted." (Lestat, PUNK CHICKEN). This sentence is intriguing because it implies the limited amount of time that people stay the way they are at any point in time. This whole part of the story was also very funny in a sarcastic and powerful way.

PUNK CHICKEN is one the funniest stories I have ever read, and I hold it in the highest regard. This story has a terrific realistic humor that delights and informs, to which I give my personal seal of approval.



When the Price of Love is Too High: *In a Wild Place, Alone*

Jacqueline Kerkhove

Julia Alter is yearning for the one she loves to love her back. But when love hurts more than it gives pleasure, it is time to let go and move on. In the poem, "In a Wild Place, Alone" Julia Alter expresses her overwhelming heartache. Even when given the options to be with more than suitable men, she cannot release the love that lives inside her. She takes her reader through a journey of love, pain and difficult decisions. You know within the first few lines that she must let go of this love which is causing her so much pain, "I will spend too much time/ knocking on the door of the one/ who does not love me" (Lines 5-7).

Everything else seems to disappear when you're in love. So blind by infatuation, she could not see what she was doing to herself. Her life was flooded with this obsessions, this "love" that would never satisfy her. The world seemed boring, senseless, and all that exhausted for her was him and the quest for his love. While waiting for him, she builds statues of her unrequited love, the image of him burned in her mind, unable to rid herself of it, she waits patiently incapturing his face with logs.

The door will never open and I will sit
on his front porch whittling statues of him
from small logs stolen from the woodpile.
He will begin to use the backdoor to avoid my eyes. (Lines 8-11)

She know this is a waste of time, but when you love someone it is exceptionally difficult to let them go, even if you don't really have them. She turns her hunger and desire for love into a mystical spell. It seems that love has become a job, and painful for those who experience it. It also seems that she knows she must give up, "I will spend too much time..." It leaves you feeling as if she knows it's obvious this love may not be worth it, but that she can't except the truth. The dream of a magical love potion even becomes an option. "Making love potions to lift the curse/ of silence from the mouth of the one I love" (Lines 14-15). So desperate to make him love her, she is willing to something that doesn't exist, something magical and unreal.

During my personal interview with Julia Alter she commented on this part of her poem, "We're going to reach into magic, into something that doesn't exist. Outside the world." Not knowing what else to do, and unwilling to give up, a love potion seems to be a possible answer.

I will write letters in my blood to draw the animal

of this love who is not hungry.

Lines of men will wait beyond the bramble with signs
around their necks: Attractive, Available, Future Surgeon.
But this won't matter.

I will set up a shrine to the invisible one. (Lines 16-21)

She knows he won't feel the same as she does. Even when she could have any man, the greatest man, she won't have them, because she wants the invisible one.

It's easy for most anyone to relate to what she says. Wishing with all your heart that the one you love would love you back. Nothing in the world seems to matter, except for them, their presence, and touch. Even with the eager love of those close to you, you are unsatisfied without the love of that one special person. The emptiness and anguish is unbearable. The dwindling thought of becoming 70-year-old women alone in a house with 50 cats flashes endlessly through your mind. She continues dropping slight doubts of her hopes, and with those a fear of being alone with nothing but her thoughts." In a wild place, alone I will end up / with my notebook and my ink" (Lines 12-13).

The fear of living, and dying alone is prevalent in many lives. This is one of the reasons I enjoy this poem so much; you feel how much she loves, and how desperate she is. Then at the end it seems she realizes that it's never going to be enough. Her first lines are very powerful; they make you want to know more about her. "I will barbwire the ones I love / out of my life, plant blackberries, / an impenetrable cord of them / in the front yard" (Lines 1-4).

When I picture barbwire around something it tells me do not enter. If you try and go beyond them the thorns will cut you, and get entangled in your clothing. Blackberries as well, if someone were to have both barbwire and an impenetrable cord of blackberries surrounding them, they obviously do not want anyone around them.

But towards the end she begins to reveal that she wants her life back, her love and to cease her aching soul. "begging the mystics and gods to give back my heart" (Lines 25-26). She feels out of control, asking herself why she couldn't let go.

Throughout the poem she is describing how much she is in love, and battle and sacrifices she goes through to grasp the untouchable. The reader feels the emptiness behind her wishes, and actions. In her last stanza she says,

And I will throw coins to the I Ching spirits
Wash my hands and feet before entering the kitchen.
Walk backwards on a full moon.
And he will never love me enough.

Searching for an answer she asks the I Ching spirits. The I Ching spirits are somewhat of a fortune telling ritual. Not knowing what to do—whether she should abandon her love and regain her heart and life, or continue chasing after the unattainable—she turns to the power that may be. So desperate for an answer, she searches under every rock, and in every song. Suddenly coming to the realization that even if he did love her back, and the answer was there, the sacrifices she had made were not worth it. She handed over her heart on a grimy plate, because that's all she had, she had given everything to him, sacrificed the love of those close to her, and her life. Nothing would be worth that, but no matter what the love will always glimmer inside her, never to be blown out.



Help! I'm *Lost* and I Don't Know Where I'm Going!

Matt Neff

"Lost," by Susan Allison, is one of the best-written prose pieces of the Cabrillo College Porter Gulch Review 2002. The short story explores the human connection and the effects it has on the crisis of becoming old while engaging the reader in a clear and realistic atmosphere. The characters are likable and well conceived. The work appeals to deeper themes of fear and love by the actions and thoughts of its subjects and shows an interesting correlation between them. The story targets an emotional gut reaction in the reader with its compassionate perspective on the trials of the elderly. The piece is simply written, yet it makes a valiant and mostly successful effort to discover a part of the human connection in its presentation.

"Lost" portrays the plight of a mostly helpless old woman trying to find the veterinarian because her cat is sick. This in itself is a heart-wrenching scene to most readers. But more is learned about her situation from those she comes into contact with. Sequentially, the story is presented well; there are no flashbacks or extraneous thoughts to clutter up the scene. There are few enough characters and actions that the reader can easily see the whole scene mentally and react to it as a single image. The events of the story flow easily and logically from the standpoint of each character. The fact that the author uses prose instead of poetry draws the reader more into the focus of the moment (the problem and momentary feeling). Description is interesting, realistic, and only takes preeminence when it is necessary for the reader to see a vital part of the picture or when thoughts from the characters need to be exposed. Allison makes her work more interesting by letting the reader use his own imagination to fill in the non-essential details and not providing every single verbal brush-stroke on her canvas, which can bury the reader under a blizzard of unnecessary description. The scene is one that most people have experienced at one time or other in their life—either being lost or helping someone who was; and one can't help being sympathetic to a sick cat (a clever ploy for commiseration by the author). The slight description Allison puts into the old woman's face—"Up close, she seemed even smaller, more frail, and older than I first thought; she looked at least ninety... (Lost)"—almost directs the reader to imagine a living, porcelain figurine, easily shatterable; one can't resist sympathy to this personage either (especially when the image reminds me of my own grandmother).

The whole piece creates a soft, sentimental mood throughout,

which might also be interpreted as lightly depressing by less enthusiastic readers. There was also a thin air of uncertainty and fear about becoming what this old woman typified—namely helpless, alone, and weak. The tone focuses on evoking sympathy from the reader in multiple directions. Foremost, the old woman's predicament demands our empathy. Secondly, the cat's sickness prompts at the least a twinge of sentimental "awwww" from the reader, depending on how much he likes cats. Lastly, one has to feel connected to the two people who tried to help and comfort the old woman but didn't really know how to; they were both frustrated by their insufficiency and saw their potential futures in her troubles.

The characters in the story all have commonality to each other; they are all helpless in some way. The old woman is unable to find her way to the veterinarian's office; the cat is sick and will soon be unable to survive without care; and the middle-aged man and young woman are powerless to comfort the old woman worry and misery. Allison unites the characters' lives through the hardships of the old woman. She also shows each of them as having some kind of fear. The older woman's fear of being alone and lost in the present is contrasted to the other two characters' fear of becoming helpless and someday being in the same situation as the woman they are trying to help. On the other hand, each one's fear promotes a show of love and concern. The old woman's fear of losing her cat prods her to overcome her fear of being lost. In the same way, the compassion felt by the man and the woman on the street is provoked by their own fears of growing old and becoming helpless like the old woman.

The theme is simple but profound—to quote the author, "we're all mortal, we're all going to get old, we're all going to die. (interview)" The main surface character of the story is the old woman and the main surface conflict is her difficulty and confusion in finding the veterinarian's office for her cat. There is a sense, however, that the main character is really the reader. How the reader reacts to the short story is the real issue. Allison plays with the reader's mind by giving and taking the power of imagination from them over the course of the story. At the beginning, she develops a simple picture of the old woman and allows the reader to fill in the gaps in her life with their own hypotheses about her more specific appearance, her background, and her attitudes. Then she directs us into the moment, forcing us to make our preconceptions fit her storyline. Again she gives us power to fill in the particular details of her own mental picture of the old woman's private situation, and then yanks it away as she offers again to lead the old woman to the vet's office. The story ends inconclusively, allowing the reader to follow subconsciously behind the woman's scooter to whatever destination they imagine and, at the same time, remain in the troubled minds of the two would-be helpers on the sidewalk. The reader gets to finish the story however he wants, but he

can't escape the ending punch, which is that he will get old and this situation might happen to him some day. The last realization strips him of all real power.

This real life incident is only a "snapshot or vignette" (interview) in time, but it is not meaningless after that moment. In the background, "Lost" presents an effort to cope with the inescapable fact of an end to life. It portrays the universal human helplessness against death, and the compassion it produces for its victims through the commonality. Allison's purpose was to "tell the story of the woman's life—what she was going through" (interview) by presenting a single five-minute or less segment of her existence. Granted it was inglorious and utterly exposed her human weakness, but the ultimate point is that she lived. There is triumph just in that fact; and, in the end, that is what the story is really all about—the importance and triumph of living.

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Too Far

Melanie Monser

My dad use to love to tease me, but more than that, he liked to see my reaction to his taunting. He was looking to get a rise out of me and he wouldn't stop until he knew he had ruffled my feathers. His attempts to annoy me had always been successful, so he never let upæwell, at least not until I moved out of the house and got married. Lucky for my dad, he still has my younger sister who is old enough now to be his new target. When I go visit my parents, it's funny to be on the other side of things and see the little boy come out in my dad when he is being hilariously obnoxious towards my sister. I had always been "his little baby girl" and we were really close when I was a kid, so I realized that by his taunting, it was his way of keeping an open line in our relationship when there wasn't much we had in common anymore. Instead of feeling sorry for my sister, I almost felt sorry for my dad. Until now I had completely misunderstood his intentions. He teased me because he loved me and didn't know how else he could show his distant teenage daughter. And it would be a long while before my sister would understand what I had learned.

I could truly relate to the short story *The Ruby Ring* by author Carol See-Wood because the speaker's father is also a joker, one who loved to get a rise out of her. One tragic event occurs after one joke too many from dad and not enough patience from his daughter.

An adult speaker thinks back on a specific day in her past. This day was not an ordinary day; this was a day both her and her father would not forget. It was as if they both felt equally as guilty or responsible for hurting the other and taking things too far.

"Now this morning, while cleaning out my father's top dresser drawer almost a year since he died, I come across it. He'd placed it in a manila envelope, sealed it, folded it, and wrote 'ruby ring' on it." It was a ring that her father's parents had given him when he graduated college during the time of the Depression. Even though she gives simplistic detail here, she sets a tone where it's easy to imagine yourself being in that very room in a reminiscent state of mind.

This woman's character is pointing some obvious significance to her father's ruby ring, yet she doesn't give an abundance of information. This was a good way to bring the reader in. I was drawn into the story this way and wondered what had happened in the past that made this particular ring the focus.

Now the speaker remembers the story from her perspective as a young girl. She is asleep when her father enters her room, “ ‘It’s time to get up’ he said. I grunted and pulled the pillow over my head shutting him out.” The way the speaker responds here (completely annoyed) gives me the feeling that this is routine for her father to come in and wake her up. He continues to taunt her, first by singing loudly in her ear, then by tickling her and all the while she is telling him to “go away”. You can understand how absolutely irritated she is becoming that her father is not stopping when she asks. It is awful to be a kid and to feel like nobody takes you seriously, especially on the weekends when it is your only time to sleep in.

“It was blessedly quiet for a moment and I thought he had truly gone away. Then I felt a drop of water on my face.” Well, as you can imagine, one drop of water turns into two, and two into three. It’s amazing how one person can push your buttons so badly that it turns into revenge. “If you don’t leave me alone, I’m going to hurt you!” If you have ever asked someone repeatedly to stop bothering you and they kept it up, you can try not to resort to violence, but after awhile you take justice into your own hands, and that’s just what she does here.

“I wanted him to know I could hurt him. I took hold of the door and slammed it as hard as I could on his hand and I heard him yell on the other side.” It’s interesting how at first she wants revenge, but then the minute after taking matters into her own hands, she hides out in her room feeling guilty for what she’s done. “I’d never hurt anyone and now I hurt my father, my best friend really.”

After pondering about what had happened, fear sets in and she says, “I went and sat frozen on the edge of my bed waiting for him to come barreling into my room, waiting for the explosion.” I remember that well; the feeling that very soon, your freedom would be taken away from you. Even worse was the realization that you were wrong. Surprisingly enough, she never got in trouble that day or ever again for what she had done. “Never yelled at me or hit me like any reasonable father would.”

She sat in her room while her mother took her father to the hospital. When he came home he had his finger in a splint “He worked as a traveling salesman and since he couldn’t drive for three weeks while his finger healed he couldn’t work and since he couldn’t work he lost money.” It ate her up inside that she never apologized, especially because she was sorry.

The woman had never forgotten that day or her loving father’s mercy on her after what she had done. I think she had a hard time putting this passed her, maybe she would have been able to put it behind her had her father punished her for it, but he hadn’t, he was kind about it, almost kind to a fault. Because she never received just penalty, she couldn’t put it to rest. So she asked her father what had happened to his ruby ring. “And

he told me that the doctor had cut it off when he hurt his hand." The speaker points out that her father always referred to it as "when I hurt my hand". It seems that he said it that way because he was sorry for going overboard, making it clear to his daughter that he had never blamed her for his injury. He had blamed himself.

"But I always wondered about the ring and why he never had it repaired, never wore it again." Maybe the absence of the ring meant that he didn't want to be reminded of how far he had pushed his daughter. He might have tucked the ring away in his drawer and tried to forget about it just like he had tried to forget about the way he brought out the worst in his own daughter.

There was a deep connection between this father and his daughter. Not only had they been close before this day occurred, but after this day they both took full responsibility for the events that took place. They both felt guilty, they both felt like they had wronged the other, and they both felt that way because they loved each other.

The speaker concludes by wondering what to do with her father's ring. "And so because I don't know what to do, I return it in the same envelope, take it home with me, place it in my own top dresser drawer." And her decision is symbolic to me of just how much she respected her dad and left things the exact same way he had.

Cigarette Twilight

Nick Bassano

“Seasons”

by Eleanor Van Houten

Seasons is a short story about a man who throughout the course of the story dies from his smoking addiction. It relates the seasons of the year with the health and emotions of the main character, Ed, but also it takes into account the feeling and emotions of those involved with Ed. The author gives us great imagery of the neighborhood that Ed lives in and does a great job describing the seasonal changes that evolve throughout the story. The author is arguing that the weather or our perception of the weather is directly related to our emotional states and that Ed in and of himself is like a season with his own changes.

The author makes clear that Ed does die from his cigarette addiction, but the author does not portray his habit in an unfashionable manner. The author gives credit in the story to the fact that if it were not for his addiction he would not have made as many personal connections to people that he made.

“In a vain attempt to curb his habit, his wife had banished smoking from the house, but nothing seemed to work for Ed. Butt ends of the cigarettes that finally killed him were scattered on the road for thirty feet in either direction of his front door”. Because he was not allowed to smoke in the house he had to go outside and usually on walks when he needed to smoke. I think it’s ironic that the cigarettes that did kill him gave him a new identity and opened him up to a whole new life. Smoking these days is under much scrutiny and rightfully so, more and more laws are being passed so that smoking is less and less accessible. The joy he encountered through his smoking walks was his demise. It’s a catch 22 and the author uses that to play with the reader’s emotions.

The main part of the story was how the seasons were related to Ed’s condition. The author starts out in the summer and Ed takes long walks talking to lots of people telling jokes. The author makes sure to point out that the weather is beautiful. The next was to show how Ed started to decline. A very subtle point was made for the fall season about how Ed loved football. He never missed a game of Notre Dame football on TV I think this is signifying how Ed is starting to stay indoors a little

more feeling the effects that his addiction has taken on his body. The next season winter is when the author throws the debilitating nature of Ed's disease at us, but she does not use medical terms at all. She talks about day after day of rain and the worst flood in memory. She paints us a terrible dreary picture of place where going outside isn't an option, and the kind of weather that breeds sickness. "The winter that Ed died, the weather was torrential. Day after day the rain sluiced down the hillsides, undermining trees and filling roadside ditches". This can clearly correlate to Ed's health. Ed no longer is able to go outside and talk to all his friends and do the things he so loves to do. Because of the weather, Ed's health starts to deteriorate. I really like how she can talk about Ed in such an indirect manner. Before she even mentioned Ed's state of health I knew it was bad. And when she does talk about Ed's health it is not very descriptive at all. She lets the description of the season stick out instead of a descriptive paragraph of Ed disease. "In February a false spring came". The hard winter that came diminished Ed's health so much that even the new weather isn't enough to help Ed's condition. So the false spring then leaves gray days and fog, reflecting Ed's health once again. Seasons and weather have a way of affecting us, and when the author talks about Ed dying she tell us that "The sun no longer shone so brightly in our neighborhood and we shivered despite the warmth". The author is letting us know that no only can the weather affect our mood, health, and state of mind, but all those things can affect how we feel about the weather. Despite the fact that it was sunny out, and the weather was good, they still had the feeling of coldness left with them from Ed's death.

All these physical and emotional changes within Ed's life also shapes him out to be like a season as well. And just as much as the weather changes bring out certain perceptions and emotions with people, so does Ed's own health. Even if we were to ignore the weather and just focus on how Ed's life is changing, like a season changes, and with this brings new emotions in and of its self. The authors last quote really stuck with me. "So it is the seasons that brings us gifts and then takes them away". I really like how she sets up the ending. In the end she shows us how the seasons can bring us up, make us happy, and really enjoy life. But it can also tear us down, make us cry, and loose hope. Just as Ed's life, which could be viewed with the same intent. The story is told in a cycle just like a cycle of the seasons that this author so greatly exemplifies. I really enjoyed the quality of the writing done with this piece; it really evoked an emotional response.

The Mind's Eye: Changing One's Perspective

Lisa Macdonald

At one time this country decided that religion was so important they choose to put the phrase "in god we trust" on the nation's currency. In this day and age a large percentage of our children recognized Santa Clause before Christ. Our nation has changed in more ways then just our views on religion. We have become desensitized to the depth of sex thanks to the flat pop definition of what is cool. Sex in our cultures mainstream has become a game, a sport, a hobby. It is nothing more then a popularity act and an esteem enhancer, only good if it's pure animal. Lost are the ideas of sex being a thing of beauty, an act of making love, and the art of creation. When a society begins to strip away the layers of its ideals their culture can begin to seem flat and sufficing. Joan Zimmerman's poem *Annunciation for the Third Millennium* is a wonderful breath of fresh air. She has taken a moment we only thought we knew, the conception of Jesus, and turned it in to a timeless experience all can appreciate. She has done so by providing a multi-leveled moment, not just an image; she invokes emotion and a sense of being, not just a flat reflection.

In an interview with Ms. Zimmerman the author relayed to me that she writes for the challenge of essentially putting shape on a memory or emotional sate. While she usually draws her inspiration from topics she deems filled with energy, this piece came from a less abstract place. It was done as an exercise in writing a love poem and was -at face value- an attempt to describe the act of lovemaking. The work is a wonderful homage to love but, true to form, that's only the beginning of its importance. In the title of the piece *Annunciation For the Third Millennium* you find a reference to a very important moment in Catholicism. Historically " The Annunciation" was the moment in which Mary was told she would be carrying the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It is recorded in the Bible that Mary was visited by an angle and then preceded to conceive by the essence of God. No longer is this a poem about two anonymous lovers sharing a moment in the sunset, but for many this could possibly describe the conception of their Lord and savior.

In the Bible the actual act of Christ's conception is glossed over with talk of shimmering energy and a "flutter" in Mary's womb. That may have been fine for people 2000 years ago, but that sort of sugar coating is no good for today's hardened world. Perhaps as a society we are ready to ask the question, if Jesus was truly God embodied in man, then wasn't

it likely that he had been conceived like man? While this interpretation not for everyone, *Annunciation's* title allows the reader to explore this reading of the poem. This freedom allows our minds to elaborate. With that liberty new layers can be uncovered. A piece that displays the true quality of profundity, and not a forced depth is hard to find. It's also a good reminder that while you can't judge a piece by its title, they must never be discounted.

Sex and life clearly go hand in hand. Weather you call it sex, making love or fucking it's a vital part of the human experience. Yet through time it has been glorified and vilified more times then probably any other human action. Even in today's advanced society it has been both crudely and gregariously displayed or swept under the rug. Some make money off it; some just want it to go away. The problem with the art of love is that everyone has taken a crack at dissecting it. After a while it seems as though everything's been said. The physical act is not the focus, the emotional moment is.

The sensuality of the work is amplified with word like "suppleness", "enfolds", "caresses" and "strokes", which guide you along the passionate rhythm of the poem. Once you lose your self in the piece you begin to feel the wholeness of the experience. The opening lines follow, "she reclines/ she falls back/ she falls back slowly" the break down of the action forces you to take it in leisurely and appreciate the importance of the movement. You begin to see the scene in your mind. As "the light turns golden/ blossoms like sunsets/ fills with roses" you can taste the air at sunset. Later as "he bends towards her/ leans over her/ reaches her" you can begin to feel the phantom touch on your body. Finally the closing lines "now they begin/ they begin to open" and you are released from the spell. The author at this point had not only captured the experience but the senses and emotions as well.

The only thing people have been doing as long as having sex, is talking about it. What's set this poem apart is that opposed to the reader's classic fly on the wall role *Annunciation* brings you a new perspective. Immediately you are struck by the piece visually. Written in three columns each line begins a step below the last. The form lends the poem a feeling of motion and new perspective. You are not the eyes at the window, but the room, the experience it's self. Most would read the piece from left to right, though you might also read it top to bottom as three separate views of a single act. You can even read randomly along the columns catching flashes of the scene. The effect is truly captivating.

Ms. Zimmerman's use of creative vocabulary, arrangement, and innuendo, craft an intricate piece that leaves your mind plenty to explore. The writer's job is to show you a place you've never been seen, feel emotions you've never felt, and coax you to think thoughts you never

would have dreamed of. The masterfully complex *Annunciation* does just that by bringing you to the edge of the tangible world and showing you the door to the mind's eye. As long as writers are willing to reexamine life's oldest experiences we will always discover new perspectives. Perhaps that is the key to unlocking the door.

Alan Voegtlen



Why Die When You're Still Alive?

Cody Townsend

*Dying Wish of a Seventy-Three Year Old
For Her Far Distant Future*

When I die
I want to have a black thumbnail
from when the hammer missed

And a web of scratches
from pruning the roses that day

Phyllis Mayfield

In a telephone interview Phyllis Mayfield describes her writing process as getting down the first line and the rest just pouring out “like an uncorked barrel.” She says the words are a gift that she needs get on to paper even when she has to pull over on the side of Highway 9 to write down her thoughts. Three life-threatening car accidents and leaving her love put the words of “Dying Wish...” onto paper. Her emotions pour out in this poem illustrating her need to fully live before she dies.

Her own near-death experiences and seeing peers “waste their lives” have made Phyllis contemplate the rest of her life. And all she wants, is a few simple things before she dies. She doesn't want to see the Great Wall of China, climb Mt. Everest or go to the Moon, but she wants remain active, get out in the sun, work in the yard, and stay strong. These are not monumental feats that should be written about in a novel, article or even a poem. But obviously this simple message has become so important in her life that she would write this beautifully simple poem.

Five lines of writing typically tell almost nothing. But in “Dying Wish...” five lines put a much stronger emphasis on each word, as well as accentuating a central theme of taking risks and staying tough. An unusually long title and a very short poem go against most rules of writing. Her title is half the length of the poem. She shows her desire to keep taking risks by writing against the rules as well as showing her yearn for the simple.

76-year-olds are characteristically not supposed to be driving much; if at all. A woman who has been involved in three life threatening car accidents should be the first person to yield to the danger of driving a

car. But congruent to her daringness illustrated by writing a five line poem she doesn't back down to risks. The poem's format, length and subject exemplify Phyllis' desire to take risks, whether it is on paper or outside of her house. The first time I tried to interview Phyllis, she had to leave to drive from Boulder Creek to Aptos for a poetry reading. .

The topics she has written about show the wishes she has before death, but her choices of words show much more.

I want to have a black thumbnail
from when the hammer missed

Literally she wants to physically create things: make a birdhouse or fix the garden box. And if she crushes her thumb in the process, it will add a little character or a good story. Figuratively, it's a metaphor for her entire life. Whether it be making dinner or writing poetry she needs to satisfy her need of staying productive in life. As Phyllis said, writing has brought her many new friends, time well spent and a feeling of constructiveness to her life. And as her life nears its end and as she witnesses peers "waste their lives in front of the TV" she has come to cherish the smaller things in life. Like cancer patients on their deathbed who only wish to take a walk with their spouse or have dinner with their family as death approaches, the simpler things in life become cherished.

Also that fact that she wants to be injured is different than you would expect from a 73-year-old woman. She doesn't want to break a leg or anything, but if she stubs her toe she isn't going to whine about it. Like Phyllis the allergy sufferer said, "They don't have any marches for allergies." Also, as her poem's title says, her death is going to be in the "far distant future." She is a tough woman that isn't going to give in to anything.

And a web of scratches
from pruning the roses that day

Roses are beautiful flowers that experience the tolls of life like humans. They bud, sprout, bloom, reach their full potential and slowly began to wilt and die. But according to Phyllis, when the flower is wilting and dying there is still very much life in them. Phyllis wants to find that life left in her.

Also, both of the injuries that happen to her in the poem are not very painful injuries that go away fairly quickly. No surgery or hospitals needed to fix those kinds of problems. During the writing of this poem she was breaking up with a love. It was a painful event but an event that with a little time and a little self-healing will be gone. Phyllis shows the

importance in life to move on to the next step. Life is too short to dwell on inconveniences.

Phyllis' stream of emotion in this poem is shown in ways beyond just words. Phyllis didn't use any punctuation in this poem. Thoughts don't happen in formal, complete sentences and Phyllis wants you to know what she is thinking about. Also on an initial read, the poem feels like it was cut short of its planned ending. The short length of the poem and the cut-off feeling demonstrate a metaphor for Phyllis' perception on life. Adding to Phyllis' strong need to fill hers up before she dies.

Phyllis' need to fulfill the rest of her life before her approaching death represents a common human emotion that almost everyone can relate to. The Latin maxim *Carpe Diem* translates as "seize the day". An ancient, almost dead culture has a saying for what Phyllis is illustrating through her poem. Even thousands of years ago, people reflected upon the rest of their life. Phyllis' own thoughts show modern day ideas for elders accomplishing what they wish for before their death. Even as a 19-year-old, Phyllis' ideas resonate with me a great deal. And I believe Phyllis will pass away with no regrets and a fully satisfied life.

Dutiful Daughters: Easy Pickings

Beth Truso

Barbara Leon's poem, "'Green Like Unripe Mangos'" was written in response to the documentary by Ellen Bruno called *Sacrifice* about how Burmese girls are sold or enter into prostitution in Thailand in order to help their families. The piece begins with the two lines: "They say: daughters provide for this life/ sons for the life beyond" and ends with the same two lines reversed in order. By beginning and ending with the same lines, one can get a sense that despite what is known about girls going to Thailand to work in the sex trade—that the chances of them getting AIDS and returning to die does little to change the inevitable. More girls will go to replace the ones returning home to live their last few months of their lives. "Green Like Unripe Mangos" is a dark narrative on how families, bound by tradition, struggle with the loss of their daughters, and how the daughters lose their sense of themselves as valued and not simply valuable.

As the poem suggests, it is the girls and women who "'provide for this life"; they are expected to work to help support the family, work in the fields and to work maintaining the house. As Leon writes, it is their "filial duty" to take care of their parents and family in this manner. Despite all this responsibility, they are not given a voice in making decisions that affect them. Traders know just the promises to make to lure girls away with their parents' blessing—the promise of work—as domestic servants or as waitresses. For a family that is truly desperate, daughters can be the last valuable possession sold by a destitute family.

Pushed off their land, without a way to grow food for themselves, the daughters just become more mouths to feed, so they in turn become the crops that feed the family. When a girl is sold into prostitution it is more like debt bondage; the money is given up front to the family, and then the girl must work off the debt including interest, the cost of food, clothing, and medicine. If she were to try and escape, the brothel owners would go back to the family to seek restitution—a failure of the daughter's duty.

Leon talks of land being stolen from the people living in the hills, and "crops burned", so in a sense they are stolen as well. At the end of her poem, she suggests that the girls are also stolen: "our village bereft of daughters". But what is being stolen from these girls? It would be easy to apply a western ideal of a luxurious childhood to Hill Tribe villagers, and suggest that what has been stolen is a childhood full of material possessions, and free time to play. But the reality of survival and subsistence

farming dictate a different type of childhood in the mountains of Burma. Chances are there are no schools available in the remote areas they live; children would be expected to do their share—work in the fields, help take care of younger children (asia). So really it is something more fundamental that is stolen—something more universal—innocence. Ironically that is what makes these young girls, “green in city ways,” and “unwitting in the ways of men” so desirable to the human traffickers who seek them out. Innocence is what is being prostituted to the men who go them for sex.

The sex trade in Thailand is demanding younger and younger girls for several reasons: one is to benefit the supplier, and the other is to the benefit the customer. The young girls benefit from neither of these fallacies. It is assumed that young girls, especially those from remote areas, are less likely to have been infected with the AIDS virus, and their virginity can be sold over and over for more profit to those that pimp them out. Leon describes the situation with these three lines, “where greed claims the girl child’s life/ green whets the appetites of a thousand men/ fresh shoots fetch a better price”. Because of the market’s demand for the youngest girls possible, there is a high turnover in the brothels as the girls contact AIDS, from either sex, or from the infected needles used to give inject contraceptives. AIDS is so prevalent 80% of the girls in brothels become infected within the first year (naatanet), “one short season, then consumed/ they come home to die”.

When a girl does return home with AIDS, fear and ignorance about the disease keep her from returning to her rightful place (considering all that she has sacrificed),— the bosom of her family. She returns as an outsider to remains outside the village living in a bamboo hut. Stolen is the comfort she could derive from being close to her family as she “lie[s] dying in fields, [like a] strange discarded crop” . Even her family will not take care of her funeral or burial except to pay thugs to burn her body on a pile of tires. Bruno, the filmmaker, described what she saw while making her film *Sacrifice*:

So in the countryside in Burma you will see plumes of big rubber smoke. It’s a daily thing. You hear the firecrackers and look into the horizon, You can see the big black smoke and smell the burning flesh. It’s a daily occurrence. (asia)

Governments on both sides of the border are turning a blind eye to the plight of these girls and offer no protection. Burma was cut off from receiving foreign aid since they cracked down on a pro- democracy movement in 1986. So they turned to Thailand who was willing to give them economic concessions and open the border between the two countries. This along with corrupt officials is making it easier to traffic people across the border (TED).

Although brothels are illegal in Thailand, they are the ones who benefit from police protection; if caught on that side of the border the girls will be sent back to the brothel or to another one. Girls rescued from the brothels cannot return home because if caught at the border they could be imprisoned, and they cannot stay in Thailand where they are illegal.

Just as the families back in their home country are “besieged” by a hostile military regime these girls become “besieged” in brothels by the pimps and mama-sans who keep them in bondage. Though slight as it may be, for a girl who does not speak the language, and has no education, the brothels offer protection from the Thai police. In effect, their country has been stolen from them, and they become dependent upon the people who are abusing them, and are responsible who were the first brought them to be in the situation to begin with.

Extreme poverty and a military dictatorship has made Burma easy pickings for the people whose business it is to traffic people. As Leon writes, “soldiers besiege the hillsides/ leave nothing we can use/ nothing but dutiful daughters.” Although girls from every area of Burma are trafficked into Thailand for the sex trade, those from the minority Hill Tribes are especially vulnerable. Leon’s image of the girl’s being, “[S]cythed like growing grass” illustrates that in some villages there are no girls under the age sixteen left (naatanet).

It is non-governmental organizations that are doing the most to help these girls to get them home safely, to raise awareness about issues to get laws made and enforced to help protect children. Bruno’s film allows the victims of the sex trade a voice, while “Green Like Unripe Mangos” tells the story from the villagers’ point of view. Taken together they provide more facets to a troubling issues of child prostitution, and the trafficking and bondage of human beings. In an interview, Bruno is quoted as saying, “My mission is to touch people in a visceral way,” —“it’s not until you kick them in the heart that you fuel them into action.” For Barbara Leon she was compelled to write her poem after viewing that film, and I, in turn was compelled to learn more. I know that I couldn’t go back to Thailand and view it with those same “green” eyes I had when visiting 13 years ago.

Works Cited:

Samsara

Jeremy Burch

“This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.”
— T.S. Eliot

The dark, gritty world within Roxan McDonald’s creation, *Fat Girl*, is that of a nightmarish landscape filled with an all consuming apathy and indifference to life brought about by the delusory effects of drug addiction, or the unreal expectations of one’s body image. Spurred on by their own baseless cravings for self-gratification, the characters within the story foretell their fall from grace, as—one by one—their lives are reduced to nothing more than the day to day search for the next high or the perfect body. Where, in the end, even the narrator finally succumbs to disillusioned apathy, the reader is left to helplessly watch as the cycle of destruction plays itself out, only to resurrect itself again within the next generation. While leaving one to ponder over the ultimate fate of man, *Fat Girl* also encourages us to stop and look at the destruction going on around—and perhaps even within—each and everyone of us, and to see that our true salvation comes from being able to stand aside and look objectively at our lives and of those around us.

The story opens with the narrator’s introduction of Tracy, a young “white trash” girl whose troublesome issues with weight leads her to bulimia; an addiction she inherited from her mother; the latter of which readily contributes to her daughter’s unhealthy lifestyle through a constant litany of “helpful hints,” which include the use of speed as a “Much better diversion for young ladies trying to keep their figures” (1). Desperate for approval, Tracy’s life becomes one of blind ambition as she seeks to follow in her mother’s footsteps in a feeble attempt to bring control over her chaotic world through the mastery of her body. Without a father to provide perspective, Tracy has grown up with the belief that thinness is tantamount to godliness, and most importantly, the worthiness of a mom’s affection. But behind the outward illusions of their carefully constructed “fluffy woman world” of frilliness and silver spoons, lies at the heart a mother and her daughter struggling to maintain some semblance of a normal family; bound, as it is, by self-induced starvation (1). Their escape from the downward spiral of addiction depends on their willingness to break the cycle, but neither of the two is prepared to look beyond the narrow scope of their self-deprecating lives, preferring, instead, the emptiness of their stomachs and their souls to that which would provide sustenance and, ultimately, salvation.

Unceremoniously dragging the reluctant reader along through its dizzying decent into hell, the story fully immerses the captive audience into Tracy's disintegrating world of drug dependence and obsessions. With a foreshadow of the disaster yet to come is the introduction of Ramona, a young mother of Mexican decent whose implied addiction to narcotics has led her into prostitution. Playing the part of the neighborhood beer buyer for underage kids, Ramona agrees to purchase alcohol for Tracy and the accompanying narrator. But with her drug habit taking precedence, she quickly abandons the care of her infant son to the visiting strangers in order to better attend to the sexual needs of two local gang members. The full extent of Ramona's enslavement to drugs becomes clear when the narrator's attempt at calming the wailing child reveals numerous "bruises on its arms and legs like track marks," and a diaper so old and dirty that the helpless infant is literally slathered in "diarrhea shit all the way up to its T-shirt to near its neck" (2). Attempts at pacifying the child prove futile and the narrator is left with trying to make a crucial moral decision in which she must choose between taking the boy with her, or leaving the defenseless infant with his mother—and a most certain doom. With the future of the child in her hands, the narrator unknowingly finds within her grasp the power to break the cycle of destruction, but instead, she, too, succumbs to the apathy so prevalent within the story, and giving in to Tracy's admonishes, leaves the child to its own fate; her one chance of saving the infant, and perhaps even herself from ruin, gone forever.

Though the narrator's actions ultimately lead to her downfall, like all the others, McDonald uses her as a bridge between her world (representative of our own), and the much more sinister world for which Ramona and Tracy reside in. As one would probably expect, the narrator's friendship with the girl is merely superficial; as are all the other human attachments in the story where such relationships are fleeting, and, at best, halfhearted. And yet, she remains with Tracy, partly out of boredom, and partly out of envy of the dubious bond Tracy and her mother share. In comparison, though, her own life is the most normal of them all. This is how she is able to look upon the ensuing events with something akin to detachment, or like that of an outsider peering in. Precariously balanced on the sharp edges of multiple realities, she stands between both her world of mundane normalcy, and the realm of addictions. Not that she is totally immune—as evidenced by her distant relationship with her family, and a burgeoning sense of apathy characteristic of everyone involved—but she provides a stability and structure to the narrative when all else falls into chaos. Ultimately, though, even she finds herself drawn into the other world, as we find her in the last scene "tripping out...in [Tracy's] little froofy apartment," resigned like everyone else to the mind-numbing world of indifference (4). Despite her being the only one truly capable of providing

help to the infant boy, and maybe even saving his life, in the end she really only contributes to the problem as she, too, falls into complacency. Though the narrator's actions, or inactions as it may be, are deplorable in their very nature, perhaps McDonald's intentions are to make us recognize this very same weakness in ourselves, and to force us to see that we can just as easily fall prey to the very same mentality. After all, it's much easier to simply look away and ignore the problem, but it takes a considerable amount of inner strength to stand-up and fight for change.

Eerily reminiscent of the movie *Requiem For a Dream*, McDonald unblinkingly depicts people at their absolute worst; where the only concern is the satisfying of their addictions, be it drugs or food, and regardless of the sufferings they inflict upon themselves and others. They live, and yet, they are without life; motivated only by their obsessions, their whole existence is centered around the momentary satisfaction of these cravings. Emptied of all that makes them human, they are reduced to animalistic desires and needs. Much like the shackled inhabitants of Plato's cave, they refuse to see beyond the illusionary shadows on the wall, preferring to remain blind to their own entrapment; slipping deeper into their obsessions until any chance of escape becomes hopeless. A lurid tale, to be sure, but this is a story of reality, where whole families are destroyed and each generation is resigned to repeat the mistakes of its predecessor. It's a cycle that leaves nobody unaffected. Encompassing all spheres of life, regardless of race or gender, it destroys individual and community alike, ultimately leaving the children to bear the sins of their parents, which does nothing more than add another link to the unbreakable chain of addiction and downfall.

McDonald's detached, no-fuss writing style mirrors the grim nature of the story with her impersonal, matter-of-fact tone. Without apologies, she pulls the reader into a bleak, unforgiving ride through a landscape of self-destruction. Filled with a raw sense of finality, this dark tale of inner-demons run amok forces the reader, in no uncertain terms, to see the horrific consequences of addiction. Disturbing in its cold demeanor, *Fat Girl* offers no easy resolution; in fact, it leaves the reader with a sense of hopelessness to rival the characters themselves, ultimately leaving a bitter aftertaste and a certainty that change is impossible. And yet, it's a universe that very much so mirrors the present state of our culture where body image, drugs, and child abuse, are enormous problems facing the country today—and where resigning to apathy solves nothing. Though it is difficult for one to feel for the characters within the story (as even the narrator is left without redeeming qualities), and where they often appear more like soulless demons than three-dimensional humans with human problems, perhaps, this is the core of McDonald's argument—that addictions sap the humanity from us all, and to free ourselves from it we must look beyond our own entrapment if ever these cycles are to be broken.

Bovine Brewing

Stephen Kok

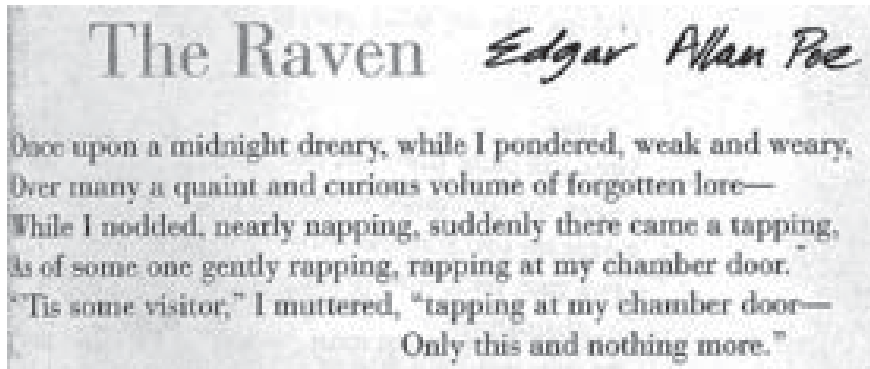
Cows have been used for many years in numerous comedies and jokes to make fun of the dullness and simplicity in which they live their lives. The satiric poem "The Cow" makes fun of many things but was written to play with the poem "The Raven" which has very similar subject matter but with a comical twist with the cow jokes, and the diluted feeling which "The Raven" colorfully conveyed. This poem tells the comical story of a person that gets abandoned in a cow field and has an unusual experience with a cow. Of course this poem was made to play with "The Raven" subject matter, and does it in a way that is funny, and brings more to light about what is said within that poem by the abrupt transitions of comedy and a dreamy resemblance's.

This story is dreamy and comical with funny visuals, yet lacks a main point to the story, possibly on purpose from the holes left throughout the story from the lack of description, and from the rhyming poetic form used. One of the things that the author leaves us to imagine is that of the event that took place with the cow which motivated him to become hostile and angry. From what I have read, I have come up with a more detailed description of the events that may have taken place between the characters of the dreamer, and that of the Bovine.

This dream like story starts out on a sunny morning with a person in a field left by the person's friends who likely provided the transportation to the field. Feelings of loneliness had begun to swell inside the abandoned person. All the sudden cow started mooing some distance away which the dreaming protagonist noticed, but turned to look at the cow who was eating grass. It seems likely that the cow was starring at him, giving him a strange feeling of fear- yet another mockery of the classical cow jokes. The dreamer then awakens to see the cow appear in the room, which swiftly sat upon the bedroom door. The cow started to "scold" the person who was likely in bed from just having been awakened by his likely dream with the cow. During the verbal unsought, the plans of the mad cow were revealed during the time the cow "explored" the person's mind. Then the hostile cow was called an evil "prophet", and was told to leave, intending to let the narrator be relieved from his presence who saw him nevermore.

This story shows how the protagonist feels about his feelings of loneliness and confusion by having been left by the friends who went to the store, and then were transformed into the cow's actions of aggression. The feelings of loneliness and the lack of ability to be with the friends having fun probably produced the mad cow in the dreamer's thoughts, portraying the feelings felt by the events in the narrator's life within the

dream. This poem is well written, and gives enough descriptive detail with enough dialog to tell the story, and leave it open enough to let it have the feeling of a dreamy story. I feel that the poem was written well because of the gaps it left in the story that gives more to it than it takes away from the story as a whole by the dreamy feeling it permits. The main gaps I see are that of the unseen events of the cow when it becomes upset in the field, the gap left about how the cow got to the door on which it sat, and the complete loss of any background of what the evil bovine's plot is. This poem has many possible ideas it could leave the reader with, and shows how a strongly written poem can leave interesting thoughts in the reader's mind, from the thoughts of the characters to the connections of this poem to that of "The Raven" which we will see evermore.



Boogers

Ben Gonzalez

To conceptualize the characters of Barb and Caryn are easily done through the author's writing. Barb seems more of a snobby type with a bigger ego. She uses more elaborate vocabulary and longer sentencings to get her point across. Caryn on the other hand is the opposite. She uses short sentences and just witty remarks to Barb's answers. The author uses these two women as an example of how bad having a roommate is, whether its college or just moving out of the house, many people can relate to this story with their own situations. Seeing these women argue over boogers in the sink just brings a smile to my face and gives humor to two women arguing.



Diane Patracuola

Is it love?

Jak e Whitelaw

Construction, although short, is deep and very interesting. I felt a lot when I read this poem. It's like a reality TV show on NBC. The author calls this a love story, and I will examine what the author means. I was a construction worker. I'm in the laborers union even. The poem so vividly describes the very men I worked with every day for a couple of years. Waking up at the earliest light to get to work by 7 a.m., and sweat it out all day every day over and over like a never ending cycle of torture then pleasure. Daytime (the torturous heat and hard work) then nighttime (the pleasure of some rest and relaxation), all the while dreaming of 4:00 on Friday, payday). It is not uncommon to become close with your co-workers. You can't get away from them so you're stuck listening to their problems and hearing their advice on your own. I can see so clearly the red necked, missing teeth, blue-collard men; is it love?

His first couple of lines with the coffee and donuts, and the radio blasting loading up the tools into the truck. It is a typical morning for the construction worker. He says "today together we bend... lift the tamper, tomorrow who knows, but today I am one of them. The simple-minded redneck living day to day, not caring what happens tomorrow. Yes this is a horrible generalization, and I'm not saying all construction workers are simple-minded rednecks, there are plenty of smart, driven, and motivated construction workers. For instance the author of this poem. I can't imagine an uneducated person writing with such deeper meaning. At the end of each stanza he states that he is one of them. He's letting the reader understand that he is one of them. Who is them? The Rednecks, the simple-minded day to day guy, no, he is part of the family. With family comes diversity. His crew is a huge part of his life. Those rednecks, as I've been calling them, are real people with real feelings and real problems. To be a part of his family is special. Hearing their problems and being there to offer his advise for what ever it is worth is sacred.

He writes of the character, Chino. Chino is a classic example of what I'm talking about. Chino is a man with real problems, and to read this poem and not feel sorry for him is simply, cold-hearted. This is the end of the poem.

Chino misses a half day's work
Then shows up shovel in hand
Whatever his reasons
I am one of them
I am one of them

Nobody cares that he missed half a day of work. Whatever his reasons, he is still one of us, and "I am one of them"

So, is this a love story? My answer is yes it is. The quote above is an example of almost unconditional love. Unconditional love I think would be a little strong for this type of love; but it is love nonetheless. I get from reading this that it may have taken the author a little while before realizing this himself. That is why he is repeating the line over and over. I am one of them, I am one of them, almost as if proving to himself that he to is part of this amazing family called homosapiens.



Cricket Grice

“If You Choose Not to Decide, You Still Have Made a Choice”: A Look at the Telling of a Story and the Significance of Details Chosen

Katie Holman

Roxan MacDonald’s short story, “Fat Girl,” follows two “white trash kids” to the Sandpiper Motel, where they intend to “shoulder tap off this lady [Tracy] knew down there.”

Our nameless narrator is never revealed as more than such; all we know about her we glean from her appraisals of others. It appears that she is meant to be merely a documentor—she tells the story rapidly and without analysis—but the details that she chooses to give reflect her censure of the cyclical lifestyle led by Tracy and her mother.

MacDonald opens her story with an attention-grabber: “Tracy was a fat girl till her mom taught her how to throw up. I met her a year afterward, when we were both fourteen and she was ready to show off her new tight body and bask in her mother’s approval.” “Odd that “approval” is the word used to describe Tracy’s mother’s reaction to her daughter’s bulimia, in light of the fact that the narrator, while fascinated, is silently disapproving of the (perhaps unintentional) havoc wreaked on the body and emotional well-being of her friend. As well, it is notable that the narrator cannot necessarily discern what is “womanly” from what may be destructive. “I remember being so jealous of them wrapped up in their fluffy woman world when I had to share my space with a dad and brothers and a mother who could barely say the word pink. Everything in that place was frilly or had fake fur on it. They even had silver spoons next to the toilet resting on napkins with their names written on it in pink felt pen.” It becomes clear that Tracy’s mother’s ritualizing of the subject of bulimia—“womanly stuff”—is not only confusing to the narrator, but misleading to Tracy as well. Perhaps this will manifest itself in Tracy. Twenty years later, she may be seen perpetuating the image wrought upon her by a mother so like her future self that she may, in effect, watch herself grow again in her own daughter.

Correspondingly, the image of two silver spoons set on the toilet—heavily romanticized by pink felt pen—is an interesting one. I suppose, if one were a chronic upheaver, that it would make sense to keep a spoon at the ready, but the extravagant decoration of the spoons and the area itself belies the typical secrecy of bulimia. In teaching Tracy how to make herself thin, and in celebrating the “femininity” of that aspect of her life, Tracy’s

mother has, in effect, made bulimia usual, even a source of pride. From what the narrator says, I feel that she does not fully understand the implications of bulimia, but what she does realize is that society rewards thinness, that skinny women are “feminine” and “beautiful,” and that throwing up to lose weight can net you some of the benefits of society’s approval (which is not to mention that Tracy’s mother—a role model—fully supports and justifies these statements through her actions). I myself recall thinking, at perhaps age fifteen, that sure, anorexia is an illness, but it makes you thin, doesn’t it?

It appears that the narrator comes from a different family background than does Tracy, and here I feel as one with the narrator. For one thing, her father is around; she complains that she has to share her space with what she thinks of as utter normalcy. This ordinariness is emphasized by the fact that her home life is not particularly interesting—certainly, to our narrator, not worth mentioning—and indeed, must be very functional compared to Tracy’s house, where “We’d sleep in the living room when I came over and her mom would curl up on the kitchen floor.” The narrator felt that Tracy’s mom treated her daughter like another woman, whereas her own mother (about whom I can only speculate) must not have bothered with such indulgences; the reader is left with the feeling that common sense must have been prevalent in the home of the narrator. As much as she wanted to deny that prudence and wisdom, it shows itself in her telling of the story. In this way, I feel not only like a spectator, but as though I can relate to the narrator—while she is part of a friendship, she is also merely a watcher, for her lifestyle has none of the societally anomalous qualities that Tracy’s does... the narrator is a visitor and an examiner. She has a perfectly normal home to go to when she tires of Tracy’s ups and downs and her mother’s irresponsibility. The narrator has safety in the wings.

When Tracy and the narrator wind up watching a screaming baby while its mother “does business” with two men in a bathroom at the Sandpiper Motel, the narrator takes control of an unfortunate situation—the baby is wearing an ancient, shit-filled diaper, wailing, and spasming—while Tracy “is pissed again about having to wait for the beer and is banging on the door and yelling for Ramona.” Her self-interested attitude is clearly a detriment to the narrator, who says, “I’m freaking out at this point and yell for Tracy to turn off the T.V. because the noise was really getting to me and making it hard to think of the right thing to do... Tracy is really pissed now and starts shoving packs of cigarettes down her pants till she can’t hold any more. Then she starts shoving them in my clothes. I’m feeling bad about the kid and start yelling at Ramona that her baby is sick and she needs to come out but Tracy keeps telling me to be quiet and starts going through the rest of Ramona’s stuff.” Although the narrator is trying to do the right thing, it is Tracy who has the upper hand, Tracy who

dictates when they leave and what they do next. The narrator obviously doesn't have the life experience to gauge her circumstances, and at fourteen, she shouldn't have to. Though she will follow Tracy's lead for lack of a better path, her bewilderment at Tracy's seeming knowledge has a negative tint to it. The narrator appears to feel that Tracy shouldn't be so blasé and self-righteously pissed about the situation; but should, like herself, be trying to save the baby, not escape with the beer.

When "one of the Mexican guys came out of the bathroom and Tracy grabs the baby from me and runs over to him and kind of drops the baby into his arms," the narrator "keep[s] wondering what [she] should do but Tracy yells 'Adios' and slams the door behind us." Clearly, the narrator does not feel that she has done all that she could for the good of the situation, and Tracy's total disregard for the baby's well-being is off-putting. Nor does it get any better. Walking home in the rain, " 'Let's get some acid,' she says. We've never done acid, I want to say. We're just stoners and drinkers, we're only fourteen and the world feels like it's going crazy and acid doesn't seem like the answer to sick babies and moms on their knees in the bathroom with Mexican guys but I just say 'sure' like it's nothing because I don't know anything else to do." At this point, the narrator feels greatly distanced from Tracy, and her apprehensive confusion at Tracy's method of dealing with their recent experience is evident. She doesn't know what is best, but she knows what isn't.

Unfortunately, Tracy can't imagine a better life. She's happy with her stolen cigarettes, her acid high, and the experiences that would age her tremendously if only she weren't so used to them. Finally, however, the narrator comes into her own: "Later, tripping out with her in her little froofy apartment with her mom stretching on the floor saying how good it feels to be completely empty, to know that you didn't eat at all in a whole day, Tracy leans over and lines up four cigarettes between my index finger and middle finger and lights them all. Laying back with her smoking all those cigarettes at once, she stares off over her mom and says, 'don't you feel like a king?' and I say 'sure' cuz I don't know anything better to say." The author closes at this point, and, while it's an abrupt ending, I think it's fitting. The narrator is suddenly her own self, no longer a part of who Tracy is or what her world consists of. She sees, finally, the faded skin of glamour laid over what is, ironically, a purging disease, and though Tracy may never see that sight, the narrator can rid herself of the notion that Tracy's life is better than her own. This is a strength more potent than the will-power to resist eating or the ability to ease ugliness with narcotics. Though the narrator does not speak of her feelings, the author gives us her character's anxiety, fear, and personal transformation through the documentative voice of a nameless, though very alive, entity.

Work Cited: Title quote taken from a Rush song.

Lost in the Glowing Equatorial Sky

John Sargent

Under glittering stars on the island of Okinawa, an old man walks steadily towards an American military camp where he works during the day to support his large family. A young American soldier named Stan Rushworth who is heading back to the camp as well, follows behind his native friend, and admires the beauty of the night contently. Suddenly the night's cool air is disturbed and the peaceful tranquility of the moment is forfeited to the loud rumblings of a vehicle barreling up the road behind them. After nearly hitting Stan, the truck plows into the old man and in an instant his life is smashed out of him in the form of ignorance and blind aggression by the speeding hulk of a truck full of bigoted soldiers who call him a "fucking gook" before murdering him. Stan watches in horror as his friend is killed in an act that completely defiles all the beauty and wisdom the old man and the place surrounding him possessed. The truck then disappears, silence returning to the night.

War itself is much like the leprous actions of these young men, tearing forward on its own drunken energy, out of control and flailing about, destroying beautiful places and people, usually for motives that take human life for granted. War gives way to ignorance, and ignorance can lead to poor decision making and unnecessary violence. This has happened in Vietnam, in wars before it all over the world, and is happening in different form right now.

The story "Returning" by Stan Rushworth is an emotional piece that describes an experience he had during the Vietnam War while stationed on the island of Okinawa. The island was used for camps during World War II and a major military station during the Vietnam War. One of the amazing things the story does is show a human being in a detail of spirit as to capture the essence of humanity within the description. The person the story is about is a real person, one that the narrator was befriended by while stationed for two years on the island (Rushworth Interview). In the story the man is run down by a group of American soldiers in a truck who call him a "fucking gook" (PGR 138) as they hit him, knocking him off the road and into a field. Stan runs to him only to watch his eyes become void of life under the blanket of stars above. The act committed by these young troops is portrayed as an ignorant act of racism and bigotry, and the wisdom and love shown in the old man makes this scene all the more meaningful and sad. The idea of ignorance conquering love and understanding in war runs like a vein from the beginning to end of the piece. This sad aspect of war—that people can

become so blind to the beauty surrounding them in times of fear and of aggression—is one that people should consider in our modern times.

An interesting quality of the story that intrigues me is the obvious love and admiration that was felt for the old man by Stan and other soldiers. Stan's written descriptions of the old man and the relationships people built with him depict him as being almost like family to them. This is expressed emotionally in the description of how "...when he was serious, which was also often, because we were in the beginning stages of a long war, his eyes grew deep, reaching out with reassurance" (PGR 138). The old man is mentioned as radiating "...strength and life, black eyes sparkling when he joked," (PGR 138) and as being a comforter of fears, a person who offered compassion and light heartedness to the troops. Stan also mentions how the old man had to carry his grandchildren on his back to caves in order to hide out when World War II ensued and there were camps of Americans and Japanese on the island. The writer's appreciation attests to the age and knowledge the old man possessed.

The old man comes to represent a respectable figure in strained and difficult times, a person who "...understood loss and pain" (PGR 138). He had experienced war before and was on his home turf—he was someone who they could relate to and who understood the situation they were in. Although the soldiers pretended to be unfazed by the dangers of war, they were definitely afraid. The soldiers are described as being cocky and "quick with the jibe" (PGR 138). Over-confidence and a joking attitude seem like natural practices in times of stress, where the reality of things may seem too harsh to think about all the time. No one would want to think about the fact that they were entering life-threatening situations where the consequences of inaction or panic could not be more severe. The absolute craziness of it—the awkwardness of being so young and fighting a war—is shown in the story. Stan captures this idea when he articulates how he, and others like him "...were soldiers and we were nineteen, teenagers in uniforms with high caliber weapons" (PGR 138). The blunt statement seems to show how little sense it all made: to be in a foreign country—young and inexperienced in life—fighting people they knew virtually nothing about in armed battle. People develop different ways of dealing with these types of things. Stan and others like him formed a bond with each other and those around them. They obviously saw a lot of beauty and strength in the old man and how he treated the soldiers with love, offering his smile or "placing his powerful hand on a young soldier's arm when needed to quiet the boy's spirit" (PGR 138).

The experience of the old man parallels the inexperience of the young troops. Stan shows that his feelings for the old man and some of his fellow soldiers were ones of love and compassion. The young men who killed the old man were unaware of him as a caring human being, and in seeing

him only as a “gook,” were blind to the reality of what they were doing. Regardless of whether these men had been drunk, or angry, or joking around and being brutal, their actions are indicative of a much larger problem with war and racism. The two often go hand in hand. These men killed a man who others looked up to because of racist feelings and ignorance. Stan expresses his opinion of the men from his perspective and comments on how the action seems to call out to God and say, “I am completely and utterly stupid and if you had an ounce of mercy in you, you’d end my miserable life” (PGR 138).

War can make people angry and frightened, enough so that maybe they start looking for someone to blame. On top of that, during Vietnam certain Vietnamese were enemies of the U.S., and others were on the American side, a confusing prospect. Ignorant reactions are likely in a situation where there are frightening realities to face, and perhaps some people in Vietnam ended up wanting a scapegoat for their entrapment in a war. I feel like the death of the old man was an example of what happens when people do things out of fear and don’t have their eyes open to what they are feeling and how it is effecting their actions. Understanding and patience are virtues that take more courage than many people have in the face of war and life threatening situations.

I am twenty-two years old and have never been to war. When I think of groups of teenagers who are just over eighteen and stationed on a distant island in the waters off the coast of China, far away from their families and homes, I think of the complete loneliness of such a situation. With everything that was part of their everyday lives thousands of miles away, an old man who has lived a long life and seen many things could be a reassuring and comforting presence. People at the younger ages entering situations that would be hard even for grown adults must have ways of dealing with the stresses of war. Knowing that your life could be in danger, or that you may have to kill other people and might see your friends be killed, is more of a strain than I have ever known. “Returning” shows how these types of scenarios can lead to ignorance and callousness. Ignorant reactions are understandable in tense situations to some extent, but should never be tolerated. Just because experiences can be tough on one person’s constitution hardly means harming another person is justified.

Stan ties in the whole story to our present day situation and our government’s ever growing motivation to get resources, using nationalism and American fervor to manipulate support from the people. The ending phrase is: “We’re here again now, and the strangers wrap themselves in flags to hide their motives. The old man’s eyes still pull in all the light there is” (PGR 138). This statement shows that the old man represents something that is always lost in war, the absolute beauty and innocence of life, the humanity of our being that is crushed when fear and ignorance

persevere. Unfortunately, war gives way to many acts like this one because people are confused and susceptible to such derision. Stan describes how this story became one of thousands he heard that were similar over the next couple of months (PGR 138). When we engage in war, we risk injuring our own humanity with every violent action. It takes patience and strength to see clearly in times of angst. "Returning" unveils this aspect of war very well, and expresses the perspective of someone who recognized the beauty surrounding them when they were in a situation where nothing was forgiving.



Jody Bare, *Raised Aloft*

The Phantom of the Market

Jason Shuffler

Def Persevere: to continue a course of action, etc, inspite of difficulty, opposition, etc. (Websters New World Dictionary, 1995)

Sometimes there is nothing more refreshing than a story about perseverance and camaraderie; a story that is tragically personal and true to the characters. MaryAnn Hotvedt's *the Corner Store*, is an inspiring short story that leaves the reader asking questions about themselves in the bathroom mirror. The story is about Salvatore, a brave young man who gets his face burned while putting out a fire the corner store him and his buddy Eddie own. With a newly disfigured face and out of the hospital, Salvatore returns to people that are now scared of him.

Often, a reader will judge the story he or she will read by the first sentence. The delivery of an intriguing first sentence is indispensable. Sad but true, it can compel the reader's eyes to halt or move forward. The first sentence of the story, "Right after the accident people sent a lot of flowers to Salvatore and get well cards by the truck loads", gets the attention of the reader with the bait "accident". Immediately, the reader wants to find out what happened to Salvatore. People do not receive get well cards and flowers for accidentally spilling the milk on the kitchen floor, so immediately into the story the reader knows that the accident was terrible, instead of trivial. For example, when a fire engine truck blares their sirens down the road, curious listeners wonder what could have happened.

MaryAnn Hotvedt also utilizes the most important thing in creative writing, the reader's imagination. Often writers will over describe and give away too much detail instead of allowing the reader to devise and make sense of their own images. For example, Hotvedt could have heavily decorated the pages with a description of Salvatore's burnt face. However, in two sentences she writes, "Says face was a mess. His right eye was nearly closed and his skin hung like warm wax that drips from a candle". Since Salvatore's face is a notable ingredient of the story, some writer's may have been tempted to write on for another two or three sentences describing the gory details of it's hideousness. The description Hotvedt gives is just the right amount to let the reader fill in the unknown to their satisfaction. Another example of this is when Eddie is talking to Mrs. Peterson about Salvatore delivering her groceries, Mrs. Peterson says " I like Salvatore and all, but he's giving me the creeps. Is he healed and everything, because he looks like he should still be in the hospital". If one thousand people read that line, one thousand different images would form in each one of those heads. Ultimately, this style explores the perfect

medium between mystery and volunteered information which allows the story not just to belong to the author, but the reader as well.

Another terrific element of the story which helps it work is the friendship between Salvatore and Eddie. Everybody loves a story about friendships and the day to day hardships of the common blue collar working man because the reader can often times relate themselves to them. Salvatore and Eddie are couple of hardworking guys that almost lost everything they had to a fire. In the beginning of the story Hotvedt uses the imagery of “mini malls began propping up” and “nothing could ever replace the corner store”. Mini malls are gigantic and impersonal and The Corner Store is the local small store where everybody knows everybody. By putting out the fire and saving the store, Salvatore lost his face, his identity, but he did not lose his friends. For example, Eddie says “That first night at the hospital, Sal, I was scared, more scared than ever, hell, I’m still scared”. To further illustrate Eddie and Salvatore’s relationship she displays brutal honesty. For example, Eddie says to Salvatore “your stupid bravery may have saved the store, but you lost your face, and you know what else, everybody around here thinks you’re an ugly son of a bitch”. Initially, this might leave the reader disliking Eddie, however, it reinforces the truthfulness of their friendship because only a good friend would say what others would not. The truth is that Eddie and Salvatore are dependent on each other; the truth is that Salvatore’s face scares people on his grocery delivery route; the truth is the scars Salvatore cannot run from; the truth is the potency in The Comer Store.

Contrary to the comradeship Hotvedt developed between Salvatore and Eddie she cleverly experiments with a kind of disturbing literal paradox. When Eddie, Joseph and Sal arrive at the local pub fosome drinks, Hotvedt writes “The pub was always crowded and fill of locals. It was the kind of place where you could walk in alone and always find a familiar face”. The pub represents a family or club where everyone knows each other and safety can be found. The familiar face is the superficial mirror that reflects the strength of Sal and Eddie’s friendship.

Hotvedt also uses a good amount of dialogue, contrary to an overdose on narration and description. This method helped give personality to the characters; matching voices to faces, similar to a play. Have you ever secretly listened to a conversation so intently that you wanted to join in on it? This is the effect that Hotvedt creates with her dialogue. It is a sense that Hotvedt developed a relationship with these characters beyond the pen and paper.

In the end, the classical love story develops with the introduction of Brenda Sawyer. No heavy-hearted story is complete without love. Brenda Sawyer character helps distinguish Sal’s life before the accident

and after. Before the accident, “Look, the only woman in town who we know has always been crazy about Sal is Brenda Sawyer, and I don’t even know that she’d be interested anymore”. Brenda helps define Sal’s character in realizing that despite his face, he is still the same person inside.



Dustin Thelen