

Volume 2

# The Nemadji Review



2013



# **The Nemadji Review**

**2013, Volume 2**

*Editor-in-Chief*

Ben Holmquist

*Editor*

Samantha Lokken

*Editorial Staff*

Elizabeth Hunter

Sarah Ann Johnson

Katie Lach

Mandy Peters

Brooke Sayles

Nyssa Search

Tobias Weber

Katie Wolden

*Faculty Advisors*

Hilary Fezzey

Jayson Iwen

John McCormick

All correspondence should be addressed to [thenemadjireview@uwsuper.edu](mailto:thenemadjireview@uwsuper.edu)

All works printed herein remain the copyright of their creators and are printed with permission from the authors

Cover art by Hanna Paquette

Funds provided by SUFAC. *The Nemadji Review* is a student organization at the University of Wisconsin– Superior.

# Table of Contents

## *Poetry*

Jan Chronister, “Chest of Drawers,” “Selection”	8
Naomi Cochran, “Ore Boats”	9
Samiha Dib, “A Tiger, Born”	12
Autumn Gray, “Siege,” “The Creative Mind,” “Drug Den”	13
Ben Holmquist, “The Bitter Dredges of a Prayer,” “No Mona Lisa,” “Sinful and Innocent”	14
Samantha Lokken, “Misfortune Melody,” “Abandoned Chamber,” “Loving Pain”	18
John McCormick, “Paths”	22
Ashleigh Niemi, “I love thee”	23
Susan Perala-Dewey, “Lily”	24
Kourney Sande, “Mist”	25
Brooke Sayles, “Ivory Gown”	26
Wade Schadewald, “Stray Winter,” Molly’s Hair,” “Venus after Adonis”	27
Peggy Trojan, “Harley Guy,” “Flesh of Poems,” “Absolution”	30
Tobias Weber, “51° 7'4.63"N, 1° 9'14.33"E”	33

## *Short Fiction*

John Gunnon, “Fresh Boots”	34
M. R. Hall, “An Excerpt From the Personal Journal of Benjamin Bourbon”	47
Laura Halverson, “Sarah”	52
Jason McDowell, “Letters”	59
Mary Lou Perham, “A White Board Fence”	77
Jacob Randa, “Minnesota Nice”	83
Eric Rauvola, “The Hotel Honeymoon”	102
Nyssa Search, “Lost and Found”	108
Katie Wolden, “The Listener”	124

## *Research*

Mike Harman, “Hegemonic Discourse in Mainstream Media,” “An Intercultural Approach to Conflict”	130
Tanya Oswald, “The Unpronounceable Foreign Experience”	166
Hanna Paquette, “Bromance to Romance”	176

## *Artwork*

Hanna Paquette, “Homecoming”	191
------------------------------	-----

## Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

When *The Nemadji Review* started last year, there was a great response to the inaugural issue. We ended up running out of copies for people to take. With such a great response last year, I hardly knew what to expect when I took over as the editor-in-chief this year.

When the deadline was upon us this year, we realized that we had our hands full of great submissions. The response to our call for poetry, fiction, and research was overwhelming. It took us a few weeks to sift through the works submitted, and we realized that there are many great writers here on campus and throughout the surrounding areas. And what you see here in the following pages are the best pieces submitted.

Even though we are only in our second year as a student organization, the length of our journal has over tripled in length. I could have not seen this amazing turnout when I took over in the fall, so I would like to thank all those that submitted. You are the ones that made this journal possible. Secondly, I would love to thank the UW-Superior English Club and the UW-Superior chapter of Sigma Tau Delta for helping when the process of selection became overwhelming. I would also like to thank the advisors for their guidance and advice over the course of this academic year, you helped bring this all together. I would also like to thank you, dear reader, for it is you that this journal is for.

Lastly, I would like to thank *The Nemadji Review* staff for their all of their hard work and understanding, as well as choosing me to sail this metaphorical ship. It has been a tremendous pleasure, and I look forward to see new growth in the ranks as I graduate this year.

Sincerely,

Ben Holmquist

# Jan Chronister

## *Chest of Drawers*

I find the key  
in ashes after Mother  
set fire to her childhood cabinet  
use it to unlock  
her propped-up, secondhand heart.

Digging for identity  
I discover an orphan's past.  
Father killed while felling trees  
months after his wife  
bled to death  
delivering his second son.

Mother is sealed behind granite  
on the top shelf of a crypt.  
In the memory drawer  
on the side of her casket  
I lock a poem no one will ever read.

I inherit costume jewelry  
a closet full of too small clothes  
and a pair of boots that fit.

## *Selection*

In July I thin parsnips,  
pulling pale taproots  
too small, too crowded.  
Twinged by conscience  
I retrieve the best,  
scrub and dice them  
for a salad.

At Auschwitz nothing  
was wasted.  
After the harvest of hair  
the healthy went  
to slave labor.  
Children, the old, the infirm  
were sent to the showers.  
Almost 100 kilos of gold  
was collected from corpses  
in less than 65 days.  
Warehouses filled up  
with suitcases, clothing  
and shoes.

After the first hard frost  
I dig up broad-shouldered roots,  
find a pair left too close together.  
Entwined, they refuse to separate

# Naomi Cochran

## Ore Boats

What I knew of your life as a deck hand  
was nothing, other than  
one amusing story  
about a toothless old sailor—  
and that maybe,  
stepping off the dock in Duluth  
onto a cargo ship  
wasn't a bad way to spend a summer.

But I know now  
that the ore boats also carry ghosts  
in and out of the harbor,  
and men whose hearts are cold and hard  
as the filthy iron in their bellies.

I know now  
that your life as a deck hand  
was nothing;  
that old sailors don't like gentle men;  
that if a shove toward the open door  
of an empty cargo hold  
buries you

beneath a thousand tons of ore,  
no one will know.

No one, except the angels  
who held tight to your feet and  
hands  
before you slipped, and let you  
jump ship  
before you ended there,  
before the part of me that begins  
with you

# Samiha Dib

## *A Tiger, Born*

A tiger born into a new world.  
Young, blind, not knowing.

Will it learn?  
Will it thrive?

Will it run, try, find, brave, fight, love search?  
Will it follow its instincts of run away, hiding.

A tiger born into a new world.  
A new life, a new mind.

A new brilliance to be nurtured and cherished.  
A tiger born into a wild world.

A tiger born into a forest of its own.

Captured the next day.

Taken, tagged, kept in a lab.

Shipped away, sent to a zoo.

As alive as it is, it's dying inside.

Slowly, slowly, falling apart; its insides crumbling while the outside grows.

Creativity destroyed.

Imagination stamped out.

Instinct lost.

Life extinguished.

## Autumn Gray

### Siege

Beautiful meadow laid siege by the bees.  
As they dive towards the pollen, then soar to the trees.  
A buzz in their wake, as they ride on the breeze.  
Oh, beautiful meadow laid siege by the bees.

### The Creative Mind

Inklings from feathered quill,  
Produce the workings of hardened will.  
Gentle bearings beneath brush stroke,  
A quiet release from under harsh yoke.  
An artist needs her sweet release,  
Lest her mind does wander and cease.

### Drug Den

What is my drug?  
What is my addiction?  
Quickening the heart and consuming the mind.  
Smoke-able, drinkable, or any kind of pill?

My drug is bound between leather covers.  
Pages worn and weathered from fingertips.  
Frayed and decayed binding, stitching the world together.  
An illusion of age, but in reality the story of my mind altering release.

A story is not just words written on paper.  
It's a struggle to sleep at night, or eat by day.  
It's a bond between author and reader.

A journey through the narcotic drip.  
Testing boundaries of the written word.

You traverse the pages.  
You spill blood and tears with the protagonist.  
Yet this drug does not release you until the final chapter is read.

For an author grabs your conscious mind,  
and drags it kicking and screaming amongst its chapters.

Even then the addicts can not escape.  
A story is never complete until your own story is written.  
Until pen touches paper and your tale is told.  
And your story is written.

Like opium addicts in their den.  
You can not leave the world of fables and fiction.  
You can not survive without your novels.

# Ben Holmquist

## The Bitter Dredges of a Prayer

My God!

The words you never said

Haunt me more than the ones you have.

You could have whispered anything

But you chose nothing and

Left my chest the way it was

When you found it,

Broken, empty, and loveless.

I am no thrift store teddy bear

And I can't carry the weight of

Your second-hand soul any longer.

## No Mona Lisa

“This is like the Mona Lisa.

You're working on the background

And soon, the hair. The smile...

Comes after sex.

You make relationships

Look like art.”

He once said,

And I thought:  
Relationships are like art,  
Beautiful and horrendous.  
And if this work in progress  
Is my Mona Lisa  
How do you expect  
Me to get any better?

Sinful and Innocent,

Crickets chirp their choruses  
While street lamps soften sounds  
Disguised as innocent thoughts.

We feign sleep to listen  
To wishes and whispers  
Of our sinful hearts.

*“Indulge your flesh in  
Taboo topics of your fathers  
And bask in the afterglow.”*

Sinful hearts say many,  
Many things that we dare  
Not dream ourselves.

Come...

...listen to your sinful heart

Saying “*Fall in love this time...*

*It will be worth it.*”

# Samantha Lokken

## Misfortune Melody

Poison,  
That runs  
Through your  
Veins.

Hate,  
That burns  
In your  
Eyes.

Silence,  
Because that's  
All you know.

Fighting,  
With your  
Family.

Throw your  
Family away  
Like you've done  
So willingly.

Never knowing,  
What you've  
Done.

Watch as  
Your lover rips  
Your soul  
Apart.

You're Lost,  
In the eyes  
Of Eternity.

You Pity,  
Those who can't  
Forgive.

You Forget,  
Those who seem  
To cower.

You can  
See the face  
In the mirror

and wreck  
the life you  
so perfectly  
Wanted.

You can  
Stay lost  
In the  
Darkness.

You can  
Run away  
From your  
Selfish  
Problems.

### Abandoned Chamber

Ghosts are weeping  
As they are alone.

The men are brooding  
As the whispers of the  
Dead are after them.

The letters speak in  
A ragged tone, wanting  
Their story to be told.

The wineglass sings as  
Its death is near, for  
The red liquid is almost  
Drained.

Creatures scurry as to  
Stay away from the

Light of dawn,  
And myself sitting in a  
Dark room, listening to  
The time that is gone.

### Loving Pain

Love is like a candle  
That has just been lit,  
How it flickers in the dark  
Like the only hope  
Left in the world.

The flame that burns,  
And melts the wax to give  
Off a scent that  
Reminds you of something  
From your childhood.

The soft scent of pine,  
The warmth of the sun,  
The soothing sound of waves  
The playfulness of the puppy  
The bubbly laughter of people.

Love is like an arrow.  
It can pierce the skin,  
And cause  
Tremendous  
Amounts of pain.

Or it can be like a feather.  
White and light  
And gentle to the touch.  
With soft caresses  
Like a peaceful breeze.

Love takes time and care.  
It can be sweet as chocolate  
Or bitter like vinegar,  
Hurtful with tears,  
Or happy with laughter.

Most of all  
Love takes time and patience.  
Be kind to love  
And love will  
Be kind to you.

# John McCormick

## Paths

*I*

In the winter, rabbits run the same paths  
during the nights to stay warm. This consistent scamper  
creates “rabbit highways” where savvy trappers lay their snares.

A rabbit freezes to death, afraid to move  
with even the slightest pressure around its neck.

*II*

Paths are worn in this forest  
where the redundant weight of life  
wears life, leaves a mark:

an

active scar

acting as a vein

or

a lengthened synapse between the hophophop of thought

*III*

Paths are inevitable. It's not  
which path you choose;  
it's how you react when you feel  
the pull of the noose.

# Ashleigh Niemi

I love thee

I love thee not the way I love myself

But with a reverence unimaginable

Your words to me sing melodies of wonder

Your actions a glorious dance indefatigable

To tell you how much I love thee

I would most definitely fail

For my love is more than words can speak

More than motions can tell

My love is the colors hidden within the song of life

The heartbeat within the stars

My love is unexplainable

My love is mine, is ours.

# Susan Perala-Dewey

## Lily

Your exquisite bloom  
Layered petals of white  
Unfold their outstretched silken fingers  
Seeking sky and sunlight to hold and behold you  
My eyes follow your floating pads beneath the surface where  
longated tendons connect  
Safire tangerine ovaries  
Clinging to furried algae strands  
Leading to the depths of your grounding  
If only I could open myself to the world with such abandon  
Revealing myself wholly  
Reveling in my aged beauty  
Testing and trusting waters that surround my weightless body  
Capturing what I need to move through these middle years of  
rediscovery.

# Kourtney Sande

## Mist

The breath and tantalizing of mid-morning dew.  
My gown practically cascades around me as I run into the forest.  
I am alone.  
Bittersweet bliss until I run into the pouring rain.  
Exhilaration,  
Breathtaking,  
Smooth and damp my skin is and  
I keep running from the yelps and shrieks for me to come back.  
I look at the sunrise, and I continue my quiet dance of cascading  
skirts and my rustling shoes.  
Serene and giving, I call the rain.

# Brooke Sayles

## Ivory Gown

I imagine being a young bride in an ivory gown  
that flows behind me like the ruffles across the ocean  
when a soft breeze pushes the water closer to shore,  
closer to you, my love, closer to the days and the years we  
will spend together as one. Closer to the days we will mirror  
ourselves in bright eyes and small rosy cheeks. Closer to the  
days we will sit on our quiet porch and overlook what we  
have worked so hard for, and reminisce about the day  
I was a young bride in an ivory gown.

# Wade Schadewald

## Stray Winter

The weatherman on TV referred to the forecast as Old Man Winter. Irritable, negative, and grey... But I would prefer to imagine winter as a stray dog:

Coming and going, lingering around long enough just for a handout here or there. The kids in the neighborhood like give names like Snowball, Frosty, and Snowflake. I, myself, like to call him Chilly. And lately he's been greeting me outside for my morning coffee and cigarette ritual. Wagging his tale he's happy to see me, looking wild with frozen froth around his mouth, bright teeth, and a thick fur coat that looked ruffled, tangled with mangle and the cold. But his eyes have a calm coolness about them, a blue hue as tame as moonlight. Occasionally at night I would invite him inside, where he would lay at the foot of my bed, sometimes kicking me awake with his dreamy spasms, but always keeping me comfy and cozy—the way warmth does on blustery February nights. By the time April arrives, he's seen by a whisker. Headed north I suppose, trying to find his way into Canada, searching for frozen ground. He's much too cool for those other dog days of summer. So, every spring, I leave out a bowl of ice water at my front door, just in case he decides to come back early. Oh, and I saved a few snowballs in my freezer... his favorite treat.

## Molly's Hair

The leaves of her Nov-embers hair  
Are turning, rustling with the shades,  
But always hinting a tawny bit.

The long scent of it dangles low,  
Like branches of tamarack or dead balsams,  
Away from her eyes,  
Scarves the neck,  
Making her face glow.

It's the season she blends with,  
A perfect match,  
Getting lit and Catching fire,

Tempting the combination of awe  
And burn.

Awe and burn.

## Venus after Adonis

She would mark her  
Pretty loves with the  
Inks of her kiss upon  
Those of pouty-puckered  
Lips...

    Just a taste  
Just another taste—  
They would plead!  
But their mouths  
Would already be  
Red, from their one  
Love's true colors  
Bleed...

Though it could not  
Be said—her kiss  
Meant not love,  
But rather,  
Only a purse to push  
On those of her sweet  
Beloved, dead—

You see,  
She once had a taste  
From a mouth that  
Leaves her now to what  
She makes—drawing  
One sip from the tips of his kiss,  
Now she nips on meaningless  
Drips, marking her pain,  
By marking them his way,  
All the same.

## Peggy Trojan

Harley Guy

He revs it up at the light,  
impatient.

Sleeves cut off his tee  
display his tattooed muscles  
flexing the sinuous siren.

Thin graying pony tail  
swings from the back  
of the red bandana.

Decorated vest opens  
across his good life belly.

Black metal  
and shiny chrome power,  
and all that rumble  
between his legs.

## Flesh of Poems

Someone said I had to cut  
a strip of flesh for every poem.

I believed it.

Strips can be very small  
if the knife is sharp.

I thought by parsing them out  
I might last longer,  
but now,  
I will give it all to you,  
down to the bone.

## Absolution

Mark this day  
for this hour  
I set free my guilt  
grown so familiar  
with use.

I have worn the shirt  
of my making  
long enough.  
Felt the scratches  
and burning,  
rubbed new scabs  
until they bled again.  
Smiled the public smile,  
denying any pain.

I have done with it.

All past sins,  
those known and those  
too sharp to admit.

Penance paid.

Today I will acknowledge  
only future guilt.

Tobias Weber

**51° 7'4.63"N, 1° 9'14.33"E**

Not long ago, near Folkestone, Kent,  
I visited a good old friend.  
He did not ask me to attend  
His solemn – and sadly – last event.  
But standing after brief lament  
In midst of soothing flowers' scent,  
I thought about the time we spent,  
And turned around, and smiled, and went.

# John Gunnon

## Fresh Boots

The sky was a mix of orange and pink as the sun finished setting behind the mountains to the west. A cloud of dust followed a convoy of three Humvees making their way to a gated off road flanked by large cement barriers. Two U.S. soldiers stood at the gate wearing flak jackets and helmets with M-4 assault rifles in their hands. Once the convoy made it to the gate, the vehicles came to a stop. One of the gate guards walked up to the driver's side of the lead vehicle. After some chatter, the back door of the lead Humvee opened and a soldier stumbled out, falling on the ground and dropping his rifle. He picked himself up, dusting off his new utilities and straightening the helmet that was too big for his head. The guard at the gate chuckled to himself.

“Welcome to Asadabad. You okay there, killer?” one of the gate guards asked while trying to keep a straight face.

Lee made his way out of the post. Anderson stood there, turning around to look out into the darkness one more time.

“Yeah, I’m okay,” the soldier grumbled, “I’m Private First Class Anderson. I’m looking for post thirteen.”

“Go around that Hesco barrier,” the gate guard replied as he pointed at the barrier to his side. “Follow the road about three-hundred yards and you’ll see a sign.”

“Uh, okay,” Anderson said as he checked over his equipment. He then began his trek down the road as the gate opened and the convoy made its way into the base.

The sun was now down and the stars were out as Anderson continued down the road to his post. He came to a stop and looked down at his gear. His squad leader had reminded him that he better not lose anything or it’d be his ass. He opened his side pouch, pulling out a never-been-used set of night vision goggles. He attached them to the mount on his helmet and pulled them down over his eyes. He knew that he stuck out like a sore thumb in this place and his squad leader couldn’t help but remind him that every day. Even though it was his first deployment to a war zone, he was determined to make the best of it. He turned off the NVG’s and lifted them from his face.

Anderson came up to a security post sitting on top of the barriers with a ladder leading up to it. He pulled out a small flashlight from his pocket and shined it on a wooden sign next to the ladder. It had a big “13” spray painted on it. He turned off the flashlight and put it back in his pocket. Slinging his M-4 over his shoulder, he made his way up the ladder.

The entrance to the post had a sheet hanging down in front of it. Anderson pushed it aside and made his way in. The inside was fairly dark with a bulletproof glass window directly in front of him. He could see the outline of a grenade launcher and a bench in front of the window, but not much more. He reached in his pocket, pulling out a flashlight and turning it on.

“Hey, dumbass, shut that light off!” a voice shot from the corner of the post. Anderson jumped, pointing his flash light in the direction of the voice. Sitting in the corner was a soldier with his hands behind his head, his feet resting on a stool, and his rifle leaning against the wall. His appearance was one of somebody who’d been in this country for a long while. His flak jacket was fairly tattered along with his utilities. His dark hair was fairly shaggy, especially for a soldier.

He put his feet down and leaned forward in the chair.

“Are you deaf? Shut that fucking flashlight off!” the soldier repeated, his tone rising as he pointed to Anderson.

Anderson fumbled the flashlight in his hand for a moment before clicking it off. The soldier in the corner leaned back in his chair and perched his feet back up.

“What’s the matter with you?” the soldier demanded. “You don’t just walk onto a post without announcing yourself. You’re lucky I didn’t smoke your ass.”

“I, uh,” Anderson spoke with a shaky voice. “I’m supposed to be standing post with Sergeant Lee.”

“I’m Lee, but I ain’t no Sergeant.”

“Well, uh, I just got in today, so I’m, uh,” Anderson fumbled.

“Sit down, look out the window, and shut the fuck up.”

Anderson stood frozen looking at Lee. He slowly made his way to the window, sat on the bench, and began inspecting his gear.

“You know, Sergeant,” Anderson began, looking back at Lee. Lee looked up at the ceiling and took a deep breath. He glared back at Anderson.

“Are you retarded?” Lee barked. “I’m not a Sergeant. If I have



back to the window.

“Wake up, bitch!” a voice roared from just outside the entrance of the post. Anderson recognized his squad leader’s voice and instantly arose to his feet. Two soldiers in full gear made their way into the post and approached Anderson.

“Good- good evening Corporal Davis,” Anderson sputtered out. “We weren’t, I mean, I wasn’t sleeping.”

Davis looked over at the soldier who accompanied him then put his hands on hips and stepped up to Anderson; their noses were almost touching.

“Oh, I guess we don’t report our post properly when the Corporal of the Guard is on deck,” Davis said sarcastically, peering deep into Anderson’s eyes. “Don’t tell me your dumb ass already forgot how.” Anderson snapped his arms to his side and stood at attention.

“Private Anderson reports, I mean, this post is secure-,” Anderson said, clearly flustered before being cut off.

“Wrong!” Davis spat, causing Anderson to jump. “You stupid fucking boot.”

“Well, don’t you look the comfy,” the soldier shadowing Davis

said, noticing Lee sitting in the corner. Davis looked over as well, turning to face him and cocking his head to the side.

“Are you just going to look at me like an asshole or are you going to report your post?” Davis asked. “And where the fuck is your Kevlar at?”

Lee let out a soft growl as he picked his helmet off the ground and grabbed his rifle before standing up.

“Right here, asshole,” Lee said, waving the helmet in front of Davis before dropping it back on the ground. A surprised look came over Davis’s face as he gave his accomplice a quick look.

“Who the fuck do you think you are, soldier?” Davis asked in a stern tone.

“Who the fuck do you think you are?!” Lee snapped back. “You’re the second son of a bitch that’s walked into my post without announcing yourself.” Lee brought his rifle up and pointed it at Davis’s face. “I could put a bullet in the both of you and it’d be perfectly legit. This post is secure. Get the fuck out.”

Lee and Davis stared at each other momentarily.

“You can bet your ass you’ll be hearing from my First Ser-

geant,” Davis said. Lee hadn’t moved an inch, still holding up his rifle. Davis glanced over his shoulder, but his crony had already exited the post. He was quick to follow in suit.

Lee lowered his rifle down and made his way back to his seat. He plopped down in his chair and raised his feet back up to the stool.

“Sounds like you two know each other well,” Lee said. Anderson moved back to his bench slowly.

“Yeah, he’s my squad leader,” Anderson replied softly.

Lee gave himself a little chuckle. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He took a cigarette from the pack and held it out to Anderson.

“We’re, I mean, I’m not allowed to smoke on post,” Anderson said.

Lee put the cigarette in his mouth and pulled a lighter out of the same pocket. He bent over to light it and took a drag, keeping his hand cupped over the cherry.

“The reason it’s frowned upon to smoke on post is because a sniper can see a cigarette cherry from a mile away,” Lee said, bending over to take another drag. “If he can’t see it, he can’t shoot it. Plus, that



Anderson sighed and looked at the ground.

“I wish I could get out and do something on this deployment other than just stand guard,” Anderson said.

“But I thought you said you just got here today?”

“I just arrived at Asadabad, but I’ve been in country for a month now. My unit got stuck on guard duty once we got out here and I haven’t really left the wire since. We go on security patrols from time to time, but it’s not the same.”

“That’s the paradox of being a soldier,” Lee said, taking a deep breath and shaking his head. Anderson turned around on the bench to face him. “The ones of us who were unlucky enough to have seen how utterly gruesome this world can be wish we never had, and the ones who haven’t seen it have an undying need to be a part of it. This is my third deployment to a combat zone and I always hear the same thing from the boots. You don’t know how lucky you are.”

Anderson dropped his head down and turned his attention back to the window.

“Do you feel bad about the people that you, well, you know what I mean,” Anderson said.

“Not one bit,” Lee said. “It<sup>43</sup> was either me or them, and I wasn’t

“Not one bit,” Lee said. “It was either me or them, and I wasn’t coming out on the short end of that. I do feel bad about the people we lost, though. About the people that I lost.”

A soft rumble of a vehicle could be heard approaching in the distance.

“I do believe that’s our relief approaching,” Lee said as he looked at his watch and rose from his chair. Anderson continued to stare out into the darkness.

“Why aren’t you a Sergeant anymore?” Anderson asked, standing up to face Lee.

“There was a disagreement.”

“You lost your rank over a disagreement? You gotta’ be kidding me,” Anderson said as he put his hands on his hips.

The sound of brakes squealing echoed outside the post as the Humvee with the guard relief came to a stop.

“I thought that my platoon commander needed to be punched in the face for getting two of my boots blown up,” Lee said, picking up his helmet and slinging his rifle. “The Army disagreed with me. They didn’t take my rank, they took something far more valuable: my squad.”

squad.”

The sun had just finished setting over the mountains to the west as Lee put out his cigarette. He peered out the entrance of the post and saw a soldier approaching from down the road. He went back into his seat and assumed his usual guard position. He could hear the sound of someone coming up the ladder and it made him shake his head.

“God damn it, Anderson!” Lee yelled. “What have I told you about announcing yourself before you come on my post?”

A soldier wearing a spanking new Kevlar poked his head in the entrance, but it wasn't Anderson.

“Yeah, I'm Private Douglas. You Sergeant Lee?” the soldier asked.

“Where the hell's Anderson?” Lee asked.

The soldier made his way into the post with a solemn look on his face.

“You didn't hear about the IED that went off earlier today outside the wire?” Douglas asked, taking a seat on the bench next to the window. “It took out half of the security convoy during their perimeter check. Pretty fucking nasty is what I heard.”

Lee sat in his chair, emotionless.

“Anyway, you think that we could do split shifts tonight?”

Lee sat in his chair, emotionless.

“Anyway, you think that we could do split shifts tonight?”

Douglas asked as he looked over to Lee. “You sleep for four hours, I sleep for four hours. Sound good to you, man?” Lee leaned forward in his chair, glaring at Douglas as a look of confusion came over his face

“You? You? What am I, a fucking female sheep?!” Lee asked, his voice growing louder. “I’m a Sergeant, asshole. And you will address me as such.” Douglas’s face began to turn white as Lee got out of his chair and walked over to him. “If I have even the smallest suspicion that you are sleeping on my post, I will slit your throat and hold up a mirror so you can watch yourself bleed out.”

Lee sat back down in his chair, picking his feet up and putting his hands behind his head. Douglas slowly turned towards the window and looked out into the everlasting darkness that lay in front of him.

“Listen man-,” Douglas began. Lee clenched his teeth, closed his eyes, and let out a soft growl.

# An Excerpt From the personal Journal of Benjamin Bourbon

Dated September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008

M R Hall

*Note: This journal was found inside a tomb located in the fifth mausoleum of the third row in St. Louis Cemetery #1, located in walking distance from the French Quarter of New Orleans.*

My eyes flicked open, observing the darkness which so gently engulfed my body. Though dead, I remained very much so alive.

Over the course of a century or so, the city I had once so freely roamed had grown into something so foreign to me. The incessant clashing of cymbals, exuberant plucking of guitars and carefree squawks of brass instruments immediately surrounded me, causing a thunderous, stabbing pain to echo inside my head.

Amongst the clatter, the angry yelp of devilish horns greeted me alongside some sort of beastly growling and a chaotic series of screeches (... or were they squeals?) of some large, roaming monstrous object. It had taken only a few silent beats for me to block out these extraneous noises. I listened closely to the smaller sounds exiting the mouths of the inhabitants of the city. To my sweet surprise, I was first blessed with hearing the familiar gliding, velvety-smooth, proper sounds of the elongated vowels of a local resident. However, to my dismay a large group of visitors soon accompanied the local, and her voice was drowned in the sea of the booming, pseudo-inhabitants.

The lot of them had a particularly sickening nasal quality to their vocal tone, and the improper nagging quality of their words, and voices didn't much suit my liking. "Ma-ah-tha, MAAHTHA, stahnd by the tomb." A man called out to his wife, presumably. "MA-AH-THA,

I wanna take ya' pick-tcha!" The lack of eloquence these beings retained became a rusted dagger to my head.

My thumb and forefinger massaged the deceptively soft space between my eyes and the bridge of my nose. With a few deep breaths (the feeling of my lungs expanding and contracting had remained a soothing habit of mine over the years) I managed to calm myself – restoring my much needed reason.

It was in this calming moment that I heard *it*... the sweet, mellow thrum and swish which had captivated me all those years ago.

I can't quite say that I was in the prime of my youth, as I have been stuck in my prime for a comparatively long time. It had only been half a century since God had fastened a thick rope around my neck and deemed me (and others like myself), a monster. It hadn't always been this way, (and it wouldn't always, as this resurgence of God and which way moral compasses might point – leading to salvation would ebb and flow throughout the course of history, as it had appeared many times before this, and every time, it would disappear around half a century later. This particular case of moral salvation died out around mid-June of 1850) in fact, my father and his predecessors had been the same as I, and were beloved by their subjects (that is, until the uprising of the Bourgeoisie). The belief that because of *who* we were, *what* we had become, was only a recent addition to the list of offenses which are deemed worthy of condemnation.

As it is I cannot deny the commonwealth's application of the word, to us; to me. Undeniably, I was a monster. I had chosen to roam the dimly lit cobblestone streets, willing to take anything, *anyone*. Whatever might soothe the pains of my hunger, I would capture, and deplete. Underneath the clever guise my father had bestowed unto me – the title of an upper class citizen, and the wealth to back my title; I could and would consume anything I desired.

This same desire to feed has kept me alive over the years. *Recently, I had taken to rats, which had provided me with just enough sustenance to keep my body living, should I be needed for some detrimental reason. Food was a necessity for me to be kept barely alive, ever aware of the horror I had succumbed to, and should I need to flee the tomb which I was so lovingly self-imprisoned inside.* Yet, as just a fledgling, I quickly discovered my refined palette. My favorite of walking meals tended to be young, blonde women, of higher standing

in the new elite (the wealthy bourgeoisie) of New Orleans, my home. Their expensive tastes in food, and perfumes provided a particularly delectable taste – somewhat savory, tangy, like biting into a recently sweetened half of a grapefruit.

Yet, as the fates would have it, on a particularly devastating, humid early August night (1830), an odd victim had crossed my path. I had never seen her before, as I bided my time with people whom she probably worked for, and she was far from my tastes. Her scent alone was sugary enough was like trying to swallow a teaspoon of nutmeg (a painful process, I assure you), and had an uncharacteristically sweet quality to it, overpowering enough to make you gag and think you were attempting to swim up river of sticky molasses. The clothes she wore were nothing special, and her skin was coated in a thick few layers of what looked like mud, and a sickly sea-green scum. Though I should have been repelled by these qualities to her alone, I found myself drawn to her, and while my nose longed to grow legs and walk away my own two legs moved without invitation, circling her, observing her. It was, perhaps to my great misfortune that I learned why she was special, only after my brutish hands let her frail, limp body fall to the rough floor of a dark alleyway in the center of town.

After years of well calculated thought, I now am able to deduce that she seemed so strikingly different, so enrapturing to me because she was – had always been as much a part of me, as I her.

*In dreams I frequently conversed with her soul.* Through the heavily wooded area, I could see her clearly, though; I suspect that she was never able to actually visualize my full body through the dense fog which romantically clouded her end – I was able to see her. Her appearance had changed once – transforming from the haggard and almost toxic form which I had grown to know and admire into a modern version of a child of the new elite, the new aristocracy (or so it seemed, they had crowned themselves). Her deep auburn hair was lengthy, and bountiful in large, yet tightly woven, innocent curls. This naturally was a stark contrast to her near porcelain alabaster skin, and eyes – which glowed like two large peridot stones.

While her eyes, from afar had seemingly been gifted the sweetened, innocent look of a young child, with the years I had accumulated from observing her in dreams, I recognized a look of distrust, with a certain slant of animosity when she tried to hide in the shadows. When I now called to her, I heard no answer; she refused to respond – studying me with the curiosity of a young child.

Originally, I had thought this a fluke in the system of the network of souls – her new appearance, that is. I was permitted into her circle, nearly closed off with small stones with names and dates engraved in them – I had particularly focused on the most recent one, (Sacha 1813-1830) when I noticed that this was the last stone before she would be trapped in her own circle. Only a small pathway remained, which barely allowed me the space to cross through to her. When approaching her now, I was keen on keeping a slight distance between her and I; who could tell how she or I might react when in contact with each other – yet it was she, who bumped into my lanky body. The metaphysical form her soul had taken had heard the rustling of leaves as I circled her; unknowing where the noise came from, she had backed up – directly into the body of her past oppressor.

A shock, like lightning sparking fire, which seared mortal flesh, bound a certain current between her body and mine. It was in those few seconds, which time had suspended long enough for me to focus on her heartbeat.

The sound was fresh, not a residual imprint left in my weak heart from all those years ago. It was at this point in time that both of our metaphysical forms, shocked with contact; had started to dematerialize.

The thrum... her heartbeat had awoken me. Through the distant commotion of the modern world, I can still hear it. She calls to me.

Perhaps, I am a masochist, or worse yet – a sadist. Surely, rational thought might dictate that I am suffering from both these afflictions. Yet, I cannot stop my feet from running to her, no matter how hard I might try.

My body has betrayed the pleas of my mind.

When the sun has lowered past our plane of existence, I will regain my strength once again – returning the youthful look to my body, and I will find her. I.. I don't quite know what I will do once I find her, but I must go.

She calls to me, and I must follow her.

Laura Halverson

Sarah

It is cold. There is one long LED light that stutters every few seconds and casts quivering shadows along the wall. I bite my tongue; blood erupts, and I swish it around my mouth, savoring the tangy metallic taste. I bite my tongue again.

I begin to rotate my feet in even, clockwise circles. The metal cuffs rub into my anklebones. Every 23 seconds my toes bump against the legs of my chair. Turn, rub, bump. Again.

There are 33 ½ ceiling tiles in the room, and there are seven cracks in the white plaster—four large, two medium, one small. There is one table, two chairs, one door, and zero windows. There is one me, but I'm not sure I should count because I'm transient. I will leave; the table will not.

The door opens and my pupils dilate to accommodate the extra light that cascades into the room. A woman carrying a clipboard steps in, her black pumps clicking against the tiled floor. She is

wearing a frilly, salmon-colored blouse and a pencil skirt; she has three bobby pins and one clip in her blond hair. There is a birthmark on her left ankle. It looks like knife.

She smiles, her teeth forming two jagged rows. “Good morning Sarah, my name is Ms. Spencer. I would like to ask you some questions.”

Her speech is carefully measured, her tone even, her mouth neutral. I don’t try to contain the snort that shoots out my nose—they’re done with bad cop, now I get to listen to good cop.

Ms. Spencer pretends not to hear me as she sits down and opens a manila folder. Its upper left corner is slightly crinkled. “So, Sarah, what can you tell me about Monday night?”

Monday night was approximately 59 hours and 24 minutes ago. It rained for 72 minutes that night. I ate chicken noodle soup out of the can. My spoon was eight inches long.

Ms. Spencer opens the folder and thumbs through a series of pictures. “Jacqueline Frioli; you knew her, right?” She lets the question hang between us as she pushes one of the photos towards me.

It's an 8X10 of a woman; she is lying face up, brown eyes open, in a crimson pool. The red compliments her pale cheeks quite nicely, I think. Jacqueline's index finger on her right hand is longer than her ring finger by two centimeters; it has always bothered me, and now is no exception.

"Did you see her on Monday?" Ms. Spencer wiggles the image with her left hand, as if moving it will move my memory as well. I am silent, but the truth is that I *had* seen Jacqueline on Monday. I saw her on Sunday, as well, and Saturday. She lived in the apartment directly above mine, and I liked to listen to the sound of her feet beating the floor as she exercised every night. She would listen to Ladyhawke—Dusk Til Dawn was her favorite—and step on and off her Stairmaster, approximately 132 times per minute.

"Jacqueline is dead, Sarah, dead. I don't want to believe you did it, but I will be forced to if you refuse to speak."

Jacqueline is dead. I know this, but the words still look strange as they roll off Ms. Spencer's lips. Dead. It's such a funny term, beginning and ending with the tongue smashing against the front of the mouth. One syllable, four letters. Dead.

"You were friends, is that correct?" Ms. Spenser runs her tongue across her upper teeth as she tries to control her growing irritation.

She was one of the few people who didn't aggravate me; except for her index finger, of course, and maybe the Stairmaster. We might have been friends, but only until she died, when we were suddenly merely co-habitants of the same room. One living, one rotting. One consuming life with each breath, one spilling life across the linoleum, under the refrigerator, along the baseboard.

We might have been friends, but only until she was stabbed twelve times—four wounds in the abdomen, four in the back, and four in the chest. Her death was symmetrical, at least. She looked at me as the light faded from her eyes, looked at me with a long, thick gaze that cut through my brain and into what lay beneath.

She looked at *him*, too. That was different, though—dilated pupils, trembling corneas, flared nostrils, pale lips. Her mouth opened in the middle, just wide enough to form one word—one syllable, four letters, begun with the tongue between the teeth, ended with the teeth biting into the lower lip.

She loved him, her teeth told me, her eyes told me, her nostrils told me. He looked back at her, his hands planted firmly on my kitchen floor, seven inches apart from each other, and said nothing. His mouth didn't even twitch.

“Sarah, I’m going to be frank with you.” Ms. Spencer folds her hands together and leans forward; her body is at a 45-degree angle with the table. “We have enough evidence to put you away for a very, very long time. If you don’t start talking, now, I’m going to label you as hostile and you will be put in solitary confinement until your trial.”

I am already in solitary confinement, but I don’t see the point of mentioning this.

“Jacqueline’s son witnessed the whole event.” Ms. Spencer

sits back in her chair and regards me with an air of detached abdication.

I mimic her position and try to look detached myself, but I think my temperature climbs 1.2 degrees because there is suddenly a papery layer of sweat on the palms of my hands. I want to stab Jacqueline's son—6'2", sandy brown eyes, grease-saturated hair, and twitch-less mouth—24 times with that old rusty kitchen knife they found in my apartment. The one with the serrated edge and four-inch handle.

Jacqueline's son did not witness the event; I witnessed it. I watched while he chased her to my door, I counted each agonizing second while he did his business, planted his hands on the floor, and she looked at him with that heinous four-letter word in her eyes. I measured each heartbeat, each wracking breath, until the police gushed in and bashed their batons into the side of my face.

We might have been friends, Jacqueline and I, so I cannot let her last wish go unanswered—the one her nostrils whispered into the night. She loved him, and so must I. She protected him, and so must I.

Ms. Spencer stands and opens the door to five officers. They release me from the chair and dig their fingers into my arms as they pull me from the room. I gasp and, as the weight of my future settles into my brain, I open my mouth for the first time since Monday. “I ddd...ddd....ddd.”

But it is useless. My tongue thumps futilely against my teeth like the inept muscle that it has always been. I didn't do it. I know it, he knows it, and that is where it ends.

## Letters

By Jason McDowell

*Specialist Andrew Davis sipped the water from the bottle, savoring its feeling on his dry tongue. He drank enough to wet his mouth because he thought it would be best to save it. He had no idea how long a rescue might take. It had been hours and there was still no sign of help. After the crash he had tried the radio. It was broken. They were overdue in Balad by now. Hopefully when they didn't show somebody would come looking. It was too hot, but a piece of shrapnel pinned his flak jacket to his abdomen so he couldn't get it off. He thought it might have been a piece of the gun turret. Another shard of metal stuck out of his right thigh. When he'd first woken up the pain had been intense. Now it wasn't so bad, and that probably wasn't so good. Blood soaked through the bandages that he'd wrapped around the debris in his leg. He pulled the tourniquet tighter.*

His eyes snapped open. He surveyed the room, remembering where he was. The sheets on the hospital bed glowed dimly in the moonlight coming through the window across the bay. He blinked a few times to clear the cobwebs from his head.

Pulling the crisp white sheet down his body, he paused as it passed his waist. With one quick tug he jerked the sheet free. There was a bandaged stump where his right leg should have been. He began to scream.

A nurse and a doctor forced him back on to the bed. The doctor was shouting, but Davis wasn't listening. A third nurse appeared, injecting something into his I.V. The struggle lasted a few more seconds before everything went black.

*He slumped against the smoking wreck that had been his platoon's Humvee. PFC Black was dead in what remained of the driver's seat. Most of the passenger's seat was missing. So was Sergeant Thomas, who had been sitting in it. At the moment, he couldn't remember who'd been in the back seat.*

*He could see a leg hanging limply out from where the canvas door used to be. A big foot. Peterson's, maybe. Probably.*

*He unscrewed the top of his canteen, took another sip. The water was almost uncomfortably hot. There had been cold water in a cooler in the back of the Humvee. God only knew where the cooler had landed. He put the cap back on the canteen, set it down and looked at his watch. The tiny digital screen was smashed in. Great. A glance at the sun told him there was still a few hours of daylight left.*

Daylight was streaming in through the bay window when he opened his eyes again. He was in a hangar bay that had been converted into a field hospital. He lay quietly in his bed, watching the activity of the room. Another patient nodded to him as he shambled by with a cane. Davis watched him. The flap of the patient's gown was open in the back, but at least he had his PT shorts on underneath.

Specialist Davis let out a sigh. He supposed he wouldn't be out doing physical training anytime soon. Probably never. One-legged guys doing laps on the track were a rare sight.

He reached a hand under the sheet and felt his abdomen. There was a bandage there. At least his guts hadn't fallen out.

“Specialist Davis?” a voice spoke, interrupting his thoughts.

“How are you feeling?”

At the foot of the bed, a doctor stood with his chart.

“Like I was in a Humvee that hit an IED shortly before I laid in the desert in a hundred and thirty degree heat for a day or two,” Davis answered dryly. Then he added, “How are you?”

The doctor cleared his throat. Apparently took no offense.

“I'm sorry for what happened to you, son. I am. As you noticed last night we had to take your leg. The infection was too far along. You'd lost too much blood by the time they brought you in. You had a pretty nasty piece of shrapnel in your abdomen. We managed to get it out. It's a miracle it didn't hit any major organs.” The doctor flipped a page on the chart as Davis stared at him. “You aren't out of the woods yet. You'll need to stay in bed for at least a week before we can risk moving you to Kuwait. After that I'd imagine you'll be on your way home.”

He stared at the doctor for another few seconds and then said, "Great."

"All right. Try to get some rest."

Davis laughed, but it hurt his gut wound so he stopped. Get some rest. What the hell else was he going to do? A little while later a nurse came by and gave him something for the pain. He dozed off again.

*When he woke it was dark. He blinked a few times, saw a shadow crouching near him. His first instinct was to go for his rifle, but he'd lost it in the crash. He pulled the bayonet from his vest. "Who's there?" he said.*

*"No, no, mister," came a voice from the shadow. It moved closer and in the moonlight he could see it was a boy of about ten. "George Bush good!" the boy yelled, putting two thumbs up to accentuate his point.*

*"Yeah," Davis said. "Good at golf. Do you speak English?" The kid stared at him.*

*"Guess not." Davis groaned in pain as he shifted to get a better look. "Doctor? Do you know that word? Doctor?"*

*The child continued staring at him. Then he smiled, put his thumb up.  
“American!”*

*Specialist Davis nodded. “Yes. Get Americans. Help me. Do  
you know ‘help?’”*

*“Help. I help,” the boy said. “Give me money, okay mister?”*

*The soldier laughed. It was painful but he couldn’t help it.  
Here he was, bleeding out all over the sand, and the kid wanted mon-  
ey. Then again, pretty much every kid here wanted money. “Yes, fi-  
ne.” He reached into his cargo pocket and removed his wallet. He  
took out the two twenties that were in there.*

*The boy’s eyes went as wide as dinner plates.*

*Davis handed him the first twenty dollar bill. He held up the  
second one, and then snatched it back when the boy reached for it.*

*“Help. You get this one when you bring help. Okay?”*

*“George Bush good!” the boy yelled again as he tore off into  
the dark. His bare feet left a trail of dust as he disappeared.*

When he regained consciousness it was dark again. He shifted  
uncomfortably in the bed.

There were big air conditioners chugging away but the bay still had to be at least a hundred degrees. His back was damp and sticky with sweat. He started to roll onto his right side but the pain in his abdomen stopped him. “Be a little hard to lay on that side without the leg, anyway,” he mumbled to himself.

He tried to content himself staring at the dim image of a giant ceiling fan turning slowly in the dark, but his mind wandered. What was he supposed to do now? What does a soldier do when he can’t soldier anymore? When he can’t walk anymore? The doctor had said he wasn’t out of the woods yet. He wondered if he might die, almost hoped for it.

*He was dying. It had been a couple of hours and the boy hadn’t come back. It was almost dawn. “Stupid to give him that much,” he mumbled with dry, cracked lips. Then, “I’m going to die out here.”*

*He reached inside his flak vest and into his breast pocket for his cigarettes. His mouth was so dry that he’d been trying hard all day not to smoke, but it didn’t matter now. ?”*

*As he pulled the cigarettes out, a crumpled envelope clung to them briefly before falling into the dust. He set the cigarettes down, picked up the envelope, damp with sweat. It was from yesterday's mail call. From his Grandma. He'd jammed it in his pocket, forgotten about it.*

*He lit a cigarette. Tore open the envelope. He decided he didn't really care if it made him a sniper target like the told you in basic training and flicked his lighter so he could read by the light. Some of the words were smeared, but it was still readable:*

“Dear Andrew,

I hope this letter doesn't take too long to get to you.”

*He smiled. His lips were getting so dry and cracked that even that was painful now. He was smiling because the letter was dated over a month ago. Damned Army couldn't do anything on time.*

“I baked you some cookies and mailed them separately.

I hope they are still good when they get there.

Grandpa and I are doing good. We celebrated my 81<sup>st</sup> birthday

yesterday. Your mom came and took us out to dinner.

Your Grandpa wanted

to walk to the Hammond but I was afraid his legs would give out, so I called

your mom and she took us. Grandpa is still bowling three days a week. His legs

seem fine there. It's only when he tries to walk anywhere that they give out.

Your Uncle Bob came home for hunting season. He spent \$135.00 on an out

of state license but he didn't get a deer. From what I hear most of the family

didn't get anything. Sounds like you didn't miss much.

It's been a mild winter so far. Not much snow. Bob said there was quite a bit in

the woods around Solon Springs when he was hunting, but we don't have

any in town.

No other news, I guess. I'll write again soon.

Love,

Grandma and Grandpa

P.S. I pray for you every night. I hope it helps!!!”

*He took a last drag on the cigarette and stubbed it out in the dirt. He was crying, though he didn't know why, and God only knew where his body found the moisture for it. He looked up from the letter in time to see a cloud of dust heading down the road toward him.*

In the hospital, he pushed the green Jell-O back and forth on his tray. He never liked Jell-O. Weird texture. A couple of medics had come by before lunch to give him a sponge bath and changed him out of his sweaty gown. He'd never been so embarrassed in his life. “Well, this is a new low,” he said to the Jell-O in a low voice. “Can't piss by myself. Can't bathe or change my clothes by myself. Some life.” The only bright side was they'd just given him a fresh set of painkillers. He mashed the green gelatin into pieces with his spoon.

They'd forgotten to pull the curtains back after his bath. So now he was stuck in his bed *and* he couldn't see anything. Outstanding. He put down the spoon, picked up the butter knife. He looked at the knife carefully, then at his wrist.

“Never get deep enough,” he muttered. “Besides, don’t need a Section Eight with your Purple Heart.”

“Purple Hearts. What a joke. ‘Oops, sorry about all the excruciating pain, have a medal,’” said a voice. A hand drew back the curtain and opened up the rest of the room to Andrew’s view once again. It was like a breath of fresh air. The man who’d opened it smiled and extended his hand as he stepped toward the bed. “Jones.”

“I’m Davis.”

“Yeah, I know. I been next to you for a couple days but you been pretty out of it,” Jones said.

“I guess. Painkillers keep knocking me out,” Davis told him.

“I hear that. They took a 7.62 millimeter out of my lung a few weeks ago. I was out for days,” Jones told him. “This place sucks but at least the drugs are good. Got a cigarette?”

“I wish,” Davis answered. “I’d kill for one.”

“Me too,” Jones said with a smile. “They catch me smokin’ one and they’d kick my ass, though. So, you thinking about killing yourself with that?”

Davis looked down and realized he was still gripping the butter knife. He set it back on the tray. “No.”

“Uh huh,” the other soldier said knowingly. “You hang in there, Davis. They’ll send you home soon. Then you’ll see it ain’t so bad.” Jones clapped him on the shoulder and walked off to another patient a few beds down to see if he had any cigarettes.

“If you say so,” Davis replied, laying his head back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

*The kid had come through after all. He had gotten his father and they had driven down the road until they found some troops. Davis handed the boy the second twenty dollar bill just before they loaded him into the truck.*

*He was in and out of consciousness for the ride. Every bump woke him up screaming in pain. Then the pain would knock him unconscious again. Some distant part of him figured they must have turned onto Tampa. Main Supply Route Tampa had been under construction since before he’d gotten in Theater.*

*They would grade it, then grade it again, but for some reason they never paved it. Driving down it was like riding a bicycle down the middle of the railroad tracks. Only replace the occasional railroad tie with a pothole the size of a small Buick.*

*After an hour or more of torturous bumps they arrived in Balad. As they drove through the gate, he lost consciousness. When he woke up again his leg was gone.*

If he didn't get out of the bed soon he was going to go crazy. He'd been laying there for days, staring at that giant ceiling fan. Jones had been sent to Kuwait. There was nobody for three beds in either direction. He was getting used to the pain killers so they didn't make him tired anymore. All he wanted was something to do, and if it didn't happen soon he was afraid he would start screaming and not be able to stop.

"Mail," a nurse said as she plopped a letter on his lap on her way by.

He picked up the letter and looked at the return address. His sister.

*“Andrew,*

*Hey little brother! How are you? I miss you a ton.*

*Everytime something comes on the news that is anything  
bad over there,*

*my heart skips a beat and I say a little prayer. Take care of  
yourself*

*cause it doesn't look like things will calm down anytime soon.*

*Anyway. Aeron lost another tooth. That's three now! It's  
pretty funny*

*because his sister pushed him off the bed and he has a big  
black eye and*

*now is missing his front right tooth. He looks a little rough...*

*Jim started playing basketball again on some team from work.*

*He hasn't*

*played since high school (ten years now!). He hasn't been  
able to walk right for*

*two days. His knees hurt, his back hurts, his shoulder hurts –  
he's an old man!*

*That's all right. It gives me something to give him crap about.*

*Other than that, not much going on here. Take care of yourself.*

*My thoughts and prayers are with you every day. I miss you and I love you!*

*Always,*

*Jeanie."*

He read the letter three more times for something to do. For the first time in days, he was smiling. It seemed as if his sister always knew how to cheer him up.

Several more days passed. The heat was stifling. He spent the time lying in bed, sometimes sleeping, sometimes awake. Being trapped in the bed was bad enough, but all the time alone left him trapped inside his own mind. There was too much time to think, and most of his thoughts weren't positive.

He was scheduled to be flown to Kuwait for his out-processing in just under an hour. The doctor told him that if everything continued

on course, he should be stateside at the Minneapolis VA Hospital in four or five days. That made him nervous. He wanted to see his family more than anything, but he wondered what they would think of him. When he left they'd treated him like some kind of hero. What would they treat him like now? Would he be a burden? The doctor said with a prosthetic and a cane and a lot of hard work he might walk again, but it would take time. Maybe years.

It wasn't fair to them. He'd probably have to move in with his parents. He was terrified that his fiancé would leave him because of what had happened. How could he ask her to stay with him? He was wishing he'd died in the explosion when the nurse came by with another letter.

"Oh, good. You're still here," she said as she handed him the envelope.

"Yeah, just got back from a refreshing jog," he muttered. He took the envelope and knew before he looked at the address that it was from Jennifer. He could faintly smell the perfume she'd sprayed on it. Turning it over in his hands a few times, he began to read:

*“Hi baby!*

*So I was thinking today that in two months it will be my  
birthday. I wish*

*you were going to be home for it. I just have to remind myself  
constantly that*

*as much as this sucks right now, it’s just a sacrifice that I have  
to make to have*

*you for the rest of my life.*

*Sorry, there I go being sappy again. I know, I’m good for it.  
It seems like*

*every time I write to you I sit down with a bunch of stuff I was  
going to say and*

*just end up rambling on for a couple pages about how much I  
miss you and love*

*you. I can’t even listen to country music on the radio because I  
start*

*crying every time a love song comes on. Pathetic, right?*

*I guess the advantage to being apart for all this time is that  
we’ll never take*

*each other for granted again. No matter what happens we will be ready for it as*

*long as we can be together.*

*Anyhow, I have to get going to work and I want to get this in the mail before*

*I leave. Sorry it's so short but I'll write again soon.*

*Love,*

*Jennifer*

*XOXOXO"*

He folded the letter back up and put it in the envelope as two nurses approached with a wheelchair.

One of them smiled. "Ready to go home?"

He thought about it for a moment before he returned her smile.

"You know, I think I am," he said.

Mary Lou Perham

## A White Board Fence

Maureen stared out the kitchen window at the sparks of morning sunlight shooting off the metal horse barn. Walt, her husband, had built the barn himself. His retirement hobby, as he called it, stabled his horses and a year's worth of hay bales, with room for a small tack room and granary. It stood at one end of a small pasture enclosed by a white-board fence, where two massive draft horses grazed the dew covered grass. She heard Gina's car drive up, stop, then drive away. Walt walked into the kitchen. "Doc says my shoulder will be okay as long as I take it easy. I'm going upstairs to rest," he said, avoiding eye contact. Maureen had objected to Walt buying the horses. Neither he nor Gina knew anything about the dangerous animals. Her older brother Jim, however, an experienced horse handler, had promised he'd coach them. A month later, two black Percherons moved into the new barn. The conflict over the horses had continued, coming to a head the day Walt and Gina returned from a horse-pulling contest via the emergency room of the hospital. "I knew this would happen," Maureen had said to Gina. "You're thirty years old but you act like an irresponsible teen." "What do you know about it? Gina shouted at her. "You're afraid to go near the horses, so you think we should get rid of them. Well, I'm not afraid of them." Maureen had ignored Gina's outburst and turned to Walt. "I wish you'd get rid of those horses. Your arthritis is so bad you can hardly get around. The last thing you need is an accident." Walt had said nothing. As with the other lectures she'd given after mishaps with the horses, he thought this one would soon end. Then he would apologize, and Gina, pouting, would avoid her mother for a while. This time, however, he had returned with a torn ligament in his shoulder. The youngest horse had reared and knocked him down, and Maureen wasn't giving up. "It's a merry game to you," she said. "But, every time you go off with those animals, I wonder if you'll come back in one piece. This proves my point."

Looking at Walt's immobilized arm, she broke into tears and ran up to the bedroom. That was three weeks ago. Gina still avoided her and Walt barely spoke. It was unfair, she thought. Her only concern had been their welfare. She quickly turned on the faucet, letting the splash of the running water hide her sobs. "You crying, Sis?" Startled, Maureen turned around to see her brother Jim standing at the kitchen table. "Yes, I'm crying, if you must know," she said. "It's about Walt and Gina, isn't it?" "Yes. And those beasts they fool around with." Her anger rose. "I've no right to complain about you and your horses. That's your wife's problem. Fortunately for you she doesn't seem concerned. But Walt and Gina don't have your experience. I'm afraid they'll be killed one of these days." "Tell you what, Sis. If there's to be peace in this house, someone has to change. It won't be Gina. She's stubborn as they come. She'll always resent anyone criticizing her risky hobbies. Her ex-husband discovered that. And Walt cares too much for the both of you. He'll always feel like he's caught in the middle. That leaves you." "Why can't she just once take someone else into consideration?" "Maybe it's not fair," he said. "But, you can't spend the rest of your life crying." He squeezed her hand, then left to do Walt's barn chores. She watched her brother walk along the pasture fence as the two horses galloped toward him. "How ya doin' guys?" she heard him say. "Having a good breakfast today?" The three of them walked together on opposite sides of the fence until they reached the gate leading into a paddock. The horses waited for him to open the gate and invite them in. Once through, they waited again while he latched it, then the three of them walked into the barn. Maureen stared at the empty paddock. Several years ago she had been watching a neighbor trim his horse's hooves.

She and the man's wife had been chatting, when suddenly the animal kicked, hitting him in the chest. His wife screamed, the horse reared and broke the lead rope, then charged past them and jumped the pasture fence, his hooves throwing up clods of dirt. By the time the ambulance arrived, the neighbor was dead of heart failure. Jim caught the horse and brought it home. She had never forgotten the sight of the wild, charging horse and the man lying dead on the ground. Yet, Walt's monstrous black horses had followed Jim around like harmless dogs. They were quiet around Walt and Gina. Even Jim's wife, who had no interest in animals, wasn't afraid to handle them. I'm the one who doesn't fit in, Maureen thought. Walt was asleep when she left the house the next morning. "I'm Maureen," she said as the horses looked up from grazing. She stood a safe distance away from the white board fence. "You having a good day? The grass is good, isn't it?" She felt stupid, as if she were talking to herself. The horses leaned on the top board, stretched their necks toward her and nickered. Were they talking back? She inched closer, and one of the horses touched her with his muzzle. She recoiled, then felt ashamed. I'm acting like my three-year-old grandniece, she thought. The child cried whenever Gina's dog came near her. The horses nickered again and Maureen forced herself to reach out and stroke their jaws. She was beginning to enjoy their company, when suddenly they wheeled around and ran off. She watched them galloping around the pasture, chasing after one another. Just as suddenly they turned back toward her, their giant hooves pounding the ground. She backed away from the fence, preparing to run. The huge animals slowed to a trot as they approached, then stopped in front of her and nickered again. Cautiously, she stepped back to the fence. The great black heads nuzzled her, looking for treats. The youngest horse rested his head on the

fence, and she stroked his long mane. "You like this, huh?" she said. She patted both heads. "Time to get back before Walt gets up." For the next several mornings she made secret visits to the horses. The day Gina drove Walt into town for his medical appointment, Maureen made her decision. Today she would take the horses into their stalls. With the horses accompanying her on the opposite side of the fence, she walked toward the barn, just as Jim had done. She intended to let them into the paddock, but her leg muscles quivered as she approached the gate. Forcing herself to take deep breaths, she stood as far from the gate as she could while still touching it. She unlatched it, letting it swing in. "Go in, boys," she coaxed, and the two horses walked through. Once in the barn, the well-trained animals entered their respective stalls. So far, so good, she thought and latched each stall door. She remembered Walt kept horse treats in the tack room. She let the horses pick the treats off the palm of her hand, as she had seen Gina do. Their muzzles felt soft against her fingers, and she reached out to touch them. "Would you like me to brush your hair?" Maureen said as she stroked the big heads hanging over the stall doors. In the tack room she found a brush with black horsehair clinging to the bristles. She hesitated, then opened the first stall door and walked in. The horse nickered and moved closer to her. She stepped back immediately, glancing down at the long black hair fringing the plate-sized hooves. More than once those giant feet had stepped on Walt's toes. Staying an arm's length away, she stretched toward the horse and began brushing its neck. As the horse's head lowered, her tension eased. Moving in closer, she brushed its back and rib cage. Satisfied with her progress, she moved to the second stall. This time she stepped up to the horse and began brushing its back and the top of its rump, while keeping her distance from the powerful hind legs.

"That's it for today, guys," she said. "Back to the pasture, now. I'll see you tomorrow morning." She let the horses out of their stalls. Once through the paddock gate, the two horses trotted off, then charged around the pasture, bucking and kicking. She watched them, enjoying their high spirits. After their romp, they returned to graze near her. It was shaping up to be a beautiful day. She rested against the fence, letting the morning sun warm her shoulders. The wind was calm and she heard the quiet buzz of flies, interrupted occasionally by the chatter of a chickadee perched in a nearby tree. She'd tell Jim about her secret visits to the horses. He could teach her the ropes. As she started toward the house, Gina and Walt drove into the yard. She saw them looking in her direction. Flustered, she hesitated. They'd wonder what she was doing by the horses, especially since she had made such a scene after the accident. Let them. She started again toward the house, waved, and continued on into the kitchen. Maureen watched through the window. Within a few minutes Gina emerged from the barn carrying two halters and lead ropes. Walt stood outside the fence as Gina attempted to catch the horses. Each time she came near, they'd trot some distance away, then stop and graze. Gina's coaxing turned into frustrated cursing. Finally, Gina stomped to the barn and returned with a bucket of grain, which she rattled. The horses, always eager to eat, walked toward her. The horses' reluctance to come to Gina surprised Maureen, yet she understood it. Gina kept everyone at a distance. She loved those horses, but didn't know how to be close to them. How lonely she must be. Maureen's heart ached for her daughter, bold and defiant, yet so vulnerable. She and Gina both needed to learn from the horses. She decided to talk to Jim that afternoon. Two months on, when Gina and Walt went to the barn to get the horses for the next pulling contest, she'd be there, waiting,

the horses haltered and ready to load in the trailer. Humming to herself, she began preparing lunch.

# Jacob Randa

## Minnesota Nice

“Good Morning! Welcome to Northwest Airlines!” she greeted, overly enthused. “I’m Joanne, but you can call me Joanie! I’ll be your flight attendant this morning! Is there anything I can get you before we take off, sir?” her voice squealed with joy. *Yes, a warm glass of shut the hell up.* “I’ll have a cup coffee. Black, please.”

“Okay! I’ll be right back,” she said, grinning broadly.

Joanie walked towards the back of the 747. *6:30 A.M. is way too early to be that happy. Cocaine must be a helluva drug.* He sat in coach, row 26, seat C next to the window. His flight was bound to Minneapolis International Airport and he felt ready for a nap. *I’m glad the company spared no expense for my trip. My knees will be numb by the time we hit the tarmac in the cities.*

Joanie returned with his cup of coffee. “Here ya go.”

“Thank you,” he replied sleepily, taking the coffee from her.

“What’s your name?” Joanie enquired with butterfly eyes.

“Sam,” he said wearily.

“It’s nice to meet you, Sam,” she replied sweetly.

“You too,” Sam said as he turned his head to stare out the window, hoping she’d end the conversation.

“Heading to Minneapolis for business or pleasure?” Joanie pressed on.

*Go away.*

“Heading home actually.” He turned his face back to her. “I was in Rocky Mountain National Park on business,” Sam said, cringing inside now that he’d opened a can of worms.

“I’ve always wanted to go there! There just isn’t time in my schedule!” she squealed. “What do you do?”

“I’m a freelance writer and avid outdoorsman. Field and Stream hired me to write an article on fly fishing in the park.”

“Field and Stream!” she squawked like a cockatoo.

*It’s like I’m talking to a parrot.*

“I grew up reading those! My dad and brothers were avid hunters and fishers!” Joanie said overjoyed. “Have you worked there long?”

“No, this is my first story for them.”

“Well, I can’t wait to read it!” she exclaimed sincerely.

“Are you usually this personable with your guests?” Sam responded.

“Only the cute ones.” she gave him a wink.

Her blonde hair was curled in ringlets that complimented her deep set green eyes, and she had a slender, tan face. She was definitely a health nut, as her blue dress clung to her fit frame. And she walked with her hips jutting out side to side. *She knows how to work it. Too bad blondes are so high-maintenance.*

“Is there anything else I can get you?” she asked, leaning in a little further.

“Nope, I think I’m okay!” Sam replied quickly, trying not to stare too hard at her breasts.

“Well, if there’s anything you need, just press this button and I’ll come in a jiffy!” she ejaculated, pointing to the call light.

*Yes, you will be...* He put on a smile. “I’ll make sure to call you if there anything I need!”

“You’d better!” She smiled. Clearly, his sarcasm evaded her.

She walked away. Passengers slowly trickled in. He was ready to enjoy a nice, quiet trip home. As much as he enjoyed spending a week in the mountains fly fishing, he hadn’t enjoyed fishing alongside the pretentious businessmen who adopted him into their party. Sam had politely declined their invitation, but eventually succumbed to their demands. *Everyone likes the polite Minnesotan.* He spent the last five days enduring their self-righteousness and dick jokes. It took every ounce of self-possession he had to bite his tongue as he witnessed their promiscuity at the Stanley Hotel on their last night in the park. He knew their wives would never hear of this escapade. *But no one ever insinuated that trophies were smart.*

He tried to forget his weeklong torture as he took a sip of his coffee. It tasted like charred shit.

*Must be Folgers.* But he drank it, and settled into his seat. Fleet Foxes played in his headphones and he dreamt of his cabin in the rustic Iron Range woods as he closed his eyes and rested his head against the headrest.

“Hey, dad! I found our seats!” a boy cried at the top of his lungs.

Sam shot forward in bewilderment. “Fuck!” he yelled, spilling his hot coffee on his crotch.

“Good job, champ!” His dad bellowed back, walking towards the seats.

Joanie ran to Sam’s seat to see what the commotion was about. The father and son laughed as Sam stood slouched beneath the overhead cabinets, wiping off the spilt coffee from his jeans.

“Are you okay, Sam?” Joanie asked, panicked.

“Oh, terrific! My crotch is on fire!” Sam snapped back.

“You might consider wearing a diaper, big slugger!” the father mused. His son laughed in a high-pitched voice.

“I’ll get you a towel.” Joanie offered.

“You might wanna get him an ice pack, honey!” Sam’s crotch hurt too much to shoot the stranger a dirty look. “I’ll just,” Sam winced in pain. “I’ll just change into some different clothes.” He grabbed his Duluth pack from below his seat. “Excuse me.” he said, gritting his teeth. *You’re going to get yours, asshole.* Sam stepped out into the narrow aisle, walking to the restroom in the rear of the plane. *I swear they’re making these things smaller.* He set his pack down atop the toilet and emptied out his pockets before unbuttoning his jeans. Sliding them off was a task he did not relish. He braced his hand against the wall, trying not to fall. Standing half-naked, he examined his crotch. It was inflamed and tender. *A kick to the balls might actually feel better.* He grabbed paper towels from the dispenser and soaked them in lukewarm water. *God forbid the faucet should have cold water.* The damp towels helped relieve some of the pain. He lifted the side pocket flap of his pack, drawing out a bottle of Tylenol he kept next to his Klean Kanteen water bottle. He shook out three tablets and popped them in his mouth,

washing them down with a big swig of water. Now came the difficult task of redressing. He was relieved that he kept a pair of sweatpants in his pack at all times. *Fuck, I don't have any clean underwear.* Sam hated going commando. He braced himself against the wall and stepped into his sweats, carefully pulling them up. Then, yanked his t-shirt off and grabbed a clean one from his pack along with a hoodie. Finally satisfied, he threw his clothes in the pack, tucked his wallet and phone back in his pockets, and opened the door.

The plane had filled up quickly as Sam made his way back to his seat. He passed a man who reeked of incontinence and body odor. He grinned at Sam and his lower teeth were missing. *Good lord almighty.* Sam politely smiled back, chocking on the stench. *What the hell is the matter with people?* As he neared his seat, the obnoxious little boy had absconded his window seat while his father sat by the aisle. *Of fucking course.* He swallowed his frustration.

“Excuse me.”

“Hey, Big Slugger! I like your sweatpants!” The father exclaimed

sarcastically, laughing jollily with a slight western accent. “I hope you don’t mind that my champ here took your seat!”

*Oh no, not at all.*

“He’s never been on a plane before, and you know how much it means to kids to sit by the window.”

*And do you know how much I want to punch you in the face?*

“It’s no problem at all,” Sam said struggling to disguise his disdain. He took the seat between the two strangers and tucked his pack beneath him. The cramped quarters exacerbated the tenderness of his groin and he shifted uneasily round in his seat finding little comfort.

“The name’s Mark.” He reached his hand out to Sam.

“Sam.” The two men shook hands.

“And I’m Luke!” his son chirped arrogantly.

*And I’m living a fucking nightmare.*

Thankfully, the pilot interrupted them and Joanie began the pre-flight spiel. Sam stared at her. It had been awhile since he’d been on

a date. His last relationship had been a nightmare and ended in a shit storm. Dating had taken a backseat afterwards. He'd also been so lost in writing his political thriller novel that he'd forgotten what a social life was. Perhaps he'd muster the courage to ask her out when the plane landed.

“Would you look at those tits?” Mark whistled softly. Sam glanced over in disgust. Meanwhile, Luke had his face pressed against the window, blowing his cheeks in and out against the glass and slobbering profusely.

“I'd do unspeakable things to her.” Mark continued, licking his lips. Sam leaned over to get his canteen from his pack and stole a glance at Marks' wedding band. He rolled his eyes, and sat back up.

“If I were you, Sammy boy, I'd call that fine piece of tail over here to help relieve that cock pain you've got. If you know what I mean.” Mark said chauvinistically, elbowing Sam in the arm.

“We're moving.” Luke cheered. As the plane proceeded to take off, Sam couldn't tell if Luke was flailing around in excite-

take off, Sam couldn't tell if Luke was flailing around in excitement or was epileptic.

He lay back in his chair and studied the two of them. Mark was in his late 40's, early 50's. He had brown eyes and hair, the crown of his head bald and glistening. He wore a white polo with horizontal maroon strips and khaki cargo shorts with leather flip flops. Sam figured he was about 40 pounds overweight, giving his face a bowling ball shape. Luke was an obnoxious tween. He had Justin Bieber blonde hair, blue-gray eyes, and a razor sharp jaw line. He wore a black t-shirt with **SWAG** written in red, skinny jeans, and matching red and black high top shoes.

“So, what do you do for work, big Samster?” Mark asked

*He's that fucking guy.*

“Um, I'm a writer. I work...”

“Oh that's great!” Mark said cutting him off. “I'm an executive manager at a department store chain in Denver.”

“Wow,” Sam replied in annoyance.

“Yeah, it’s the life.” Mark bragged, lifting his hands behind his head. “I get to play as much golf as I want and fire people when they fuck up.”

“Sounds pretty rough.” Sam rolled his eyes.

“You have no idea.” Mark laughed. “But me and my champ here are taking a vacation for 2 weeks. We’re going to a hockey camp in Edina.”

“Yeah! My dad says I’m going to play in the NHL!” Luke piped in.

*Wonderful, another retarded barbarian on skates.*

Sam, even though he had grown up on the Iron Range, had never given two shits about hockey. He liked football, but hockey irritated him as much as the movie Fargo. Minnesota might as well just adopt the Canadian National Anthem and Maple Flag. But his Ranger heritage forbids him from speaking such heresies. Disrespecting hockey on the Iron Range was a death sentence. Whenever his friends asked him why he never played growing up, he always responded with, ‘my parents couldn’t afford it.’ It wasn’t a lie per say.

“Can I get you gentlemen anything to drink?” Joanie asked, her eyes locked on Sam.

“I can think of a few things.” Mark joked.

“I want a Red Bull and a Mountain Dew!” Luke clamored.

Sam was utterly speechless.

“I’ll have the same as my champ, sweet cakes,” Mark said with hunger in his eyes.

“Here you go,” Joanie handed them each their Red Bulls and Mountain Dews with a smile. “Sam, would you like anything?” she asked sweetly.

*To drink or not to drink? That is the question.*

“I’ll have a root beer.” Sam said, snapping out of his disbelief of the shit show that was transpiring before him. Sam was mortified as Luke chugged down his drinks and grabbed his fathers’ Red Bull. He tossed the empty can on the pull out tray and belched loudly. Joanie handed Sam his root beer.

“I can take those empty cans for you,” she offered to Luke who

was off in his own little world. Sam handed her the cans. “Thank you, Sam.” Sam nodded his head with a slight smile on his face.

Is there anything else I can get you boys before I go?”

“I’ll take another Red Bull, sugar,” Mark cooed.

“I will too!” Luke’s shrill voice burst out causing Sam’s right ear to ring.

“Are you sure you should have another?” Joanie asked uncertainly.

“Oh, it’s fine,” Mark answered. “My champ here drinks them all the time! We keep a supple of them at home for him!”

Sam was flabbergasted.

*What the fuck is the matter with you?*

Luke flung himself over Sam- pinching Sam’s legs together- as Joanie reluctantly handed him another can. Sam felt sick from the pain. Luke cracked open the can and leaned his head back, draining the putrid elixir in seconds.

Joanie was slightly horrified as she handed Mark his second can. She didn't bother offering to take Luke's second can as she proceeded down the aisle.

"The doctors say my champ has attention deficit disorder." Mark said nonchalantly. "I say doctors are full of shit."

*I say, you're a horse shit father.*

"You're right, doctors are full of it." Sam responded.

"Dad! Dad! Dad!" Luke screeched in caffeinated euphoria.

"What's up, champ?" Mark looked over at his son.

"Watch this!" Luke put both hands to his mouth and began producing the rhythmic music of flatulence. His father burst out laughing. Sam's frustration grew and he restrained from exploding as Mark mimicked his sons' juvenile shenanigans. The other passengers around them stared and mumbled obscenities under their breaths.

*What the fuck did I do to deserve this shit show?*

Sam felt like he was sandwiched between two Adam Slanders. Each couldn't have been anymore cliché or any less endearing. Yet,

somehow, their natural stupidity attracted people like flies to sticky tape. Sam couldn't understand how fart jokes were still considered funny. He had no respect for Mark. His baboon of a son was slightly more understandable, and Sam would grant him a pass for his delinquency. But Luke represented everything wrong with his generation. Even by rangers' standards, the kid was dumber than dirt. Sam just wished for an eject button. He only hoped he'd be granted a moment of temporary relief. He pulled his iPod and headphone from his pocket. His thumb scrolled down to P.O.S. and he put his headphones in, and quietly mouthed the lyrics.

*Aight, motherfuckers I was born like this, pissed with a twist.  
Raised in the Midwest where they hate with a grin.*

Sam wished Luke and Mark had heard them, but he took advantage of the silence. Luke was busily occupied with Playstation Vita and Mark was buried in his Golfers Digest. Sam closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

“Motherfucker!” Sam howled, having been awoken by Luke inadvertently socking him in the face.

“I want another Red Bull!” Luke hollered, throwing a temper tantrum.

“I think we should let your father decided,” Joanie said forcing a smile. She gazed at Mark, who continued reading his magazine, pretending not to notice his son’s outburst.

“I want Red Bull! I want Red Bull! I want Red Bull!” Luke shrieked, pounding his feet.

“Are you going to do something?” Sam asked Mark poisonously.

Mark continued to ignore his sons’ behavior. Passengers stared and were visibly frustrated with Mark’s inaction. Luke’s flailing hand flung down into Sam crotch.

“God damn it!” Sam thundered, folding over himself.

“Oh my God, Sam! Are you okay?” Joanie shrieked horrified.

Sam gritted his teeth and flung his arms out at Luke, the momentum caused Luke’s face to bounce off the window, before being slamming him back into his seat.

“Shut the fuck up, you spoiled rotten brat!” The words exploded from Sam’s mouth.

Mark awoke from his hibernation.

“Keep your fucking mitts off my champ!”

He grabbed Sam by the shirt and tried to yank him from his chair. Sam attempted to resist. Luke latched on to Sam’s back like a Spider Monkey. His arms wrapped around Sam’s neck. The three of them tumbled into the aisle knocking Joanie back into the laps of the passengers behind her. Chaos erupted as the three of them were sandwiched together with Sam in the middle. Passengers stood up, and two U.S. Marshals ran forward with the other flight attendants close behind them.

“Enough!” one of the marshals bellowed with pepper spray in his hand. Luke looked up just as Satan’s Spit shot into his eyes. He sailed backwards with his hands flailing over his eyes, and screaming at the top of his lungs. Mark shoved Sam off him, sprung up enraged, and tackled the marshal to the ground. The marshals’ deputy fired his Taser at Mark.

The electric barbs embedding into his back seizing his body like a board. Passengers were yelling and crying. Sam sat up horrified. Luke quietly whimpered behind him and the deputy slapped the cuffs on Mark. Sam put his hands up as the marshal approached him with narrow, rattlesnake eyes.

“Lay down with your stomach on the ground.” He ordered Sam.

The cold steel tightly clamped around his wrists. The marshal yanked him up off the ground and pushed him into his seat. Joanie was helped back up by one of the other stewardesses and she looked at Sam with tears in eyes. Sam looked down feeling awful. The deputy sat Mark down next to him while the marshal zip tied Luke’s hands behind his back. He sat Luke down next his father.

“Now, when we get off this plane, you three boys are going to be coming with us so we can sort this mess out,” the marshal said with a Texas accent.

*Well, fuck me. I’m screwed.*

Mark began to wake up. The Taser had done nothing to subdue his anger. “You’ll be hearing from my lawyer before I tell you a thing!” Mark raged, attempting to stand up. The marshal sprayed Satan’s Spit in his face. He fell back moaning like a dying jack rabbit.

“That’s police brutality!” cried the man who reeked of incontinence. He lunged toward the marshals. Satan’s Spit hissed in his eyes. He fell to the floor, stop, dropping, and rolling.

“We have to land this plane immediately!” the marshal commanded his underling- scurried off to the cockpit.

“You’re in my world now.” the marshal grinned. Sam’s stomach sunk.

“It’ll be okay, Sam. You didn’t do anything wrong.” Joanie said, trying to reassure him. “I’ll help you get this all straightened around. I promise.” Sam stared at her remorsefully.

*I just wanted a quiet flight home.*

## Eric Rauvola

### The Hotel Honeymoon

The finest hotel in the Adriatic, the Honeymoon was the place to be. Dinner, drinks, beautiful women, dancing, gambling, all this and more could be yours for the taking. if you could get in. You see, the Honeymoon was not simply the watering hole for local alcoholics or folks out on the town. No, the regular clientele was limited strictly to the rich, the powerful, the beautiful, the mysterious, and the lucky. Mobsters, military officials, flying aces, and Indian princes all flocked to the dimly lit tables of the Honeymoon in hopes of being kissed by fortune. If there was one rule of thumb in the Hotel Honeymoon, it was this: no matter who you were, you didn't impress anyone, especially not Lady Umbrella. No-one knew where Lady Umbrella came from, or even if Umbrella was her real name. Some thought she was a wealthy baroness; others, a jewel thief. All anyone knew for sure was that every Saturday night, the mysterious beauty would sit alone at the bar, drinking wine or champagne, but never anything strong. And while asked by hopeful suitors several times throughout the night, every night, she never danced with anyone. This particular evening was no exception, and Lady Umbrella, radiating grace and poise, sat serenely atop a leather barstool, her crimson evening gown tastefully revealing just the tiniest bit of cleavage as she chatted with the elderly Mr. Mancini, owner of the Honeymoon, who was attending the bar. Amused by one of Mr. Mancini's famous witty remarks, she laughed, a silent giggle as she raised an open hand to her mouth, her slender fingertips touching her deep red lips. A young, visibly shaken man dressed in a snug white suit approached the bar and opened his mouth to speak to Lady Umbrella. However, his nerves got the better of him, and only a small, unintelligible mumble left his lips. Panicking, he silently jerked out his hand and nodded to the dance floor. Smiling, Lady Umbrella closed her eyes and gently raised her hand; a symbol now known amongst the town's bachelors to be a polite refusal. Flustered, the man promptly left the bar and headed back to a table filled with sniggering men, no doubt amused at their friend's utter failure.

Lady Umbrella turned back to the bar and cast a playful smile to Mr. Mancini, who chuckled. Overhead, barely audible over the mirth of the Hotel Honeymoon, a low rumbling indicated a plane landing nearby. Another patron had arrived. Outside, the seaplane skimmed the sunset-kissed waves and gently came to a rest. Stopping neatly by the dock, the pilot jumped out of the seat and tossed a coin to the boy who stood waiting, rope in hand. With a nod of thanks, the kid got to work securing the plane to the dock as the pilot unclasped his bomber hat and loosened his scarf. "Grazie," he said. The boy nodded. The pilot climbed the concrete steps leading from the dock to the Hotel Honeymoon. He removed his scarf and hat and spit-slicked his tousled brown hair before quietly opening the heavy wooden door and stepping inside. The pilot took off his coat, revealing a finely tailored suit underneath. He stored his bomber hat and scarf in one of the coat sleeves and handed it to the coat attendant, who bowed dutifully. The pilot twirled his mustache and surveyed the hotel floor. Cabaret was far too modern for the cultured tastes of the Hotel Honeymoon's patrons. Instead, a fat, slouched-over man skillfully played the grand piano onstage while a blonde young songstress sang along, sashaying between the tables of captivated onlookers. Overhead, expensive chandeliers cast an ambient glow over the floor of the dining room, bathing the maroon upholstery in soft, warm light. The bar was near the entrance, closest to him, and he cheerfully made his way over. It just so happened that the only other person sitting there was one of the most exquisite women he had ever laid eyes on. She went with the room: red dress, red lips, and gorgeous red hair that elegantly fell about her shoulders. The pilot was immediately intrigued. He sat next to her without paying her any attention, instead addressing Mr. Mancini.

"Two glasses of your finest red wine, please," the pilot said in English, gently tapping twice on the carved mahogany countertop. He looked over at Lady Umbrella and smiled; a casual smile that just barely revealed his interest. Obviously well-practiced. "Forgive my rudeness," he added in a deep, gravelly coo. "I don't feel like speaking Italian tonight." "An American," Lady Umbrella answered, deigning to speak English as well. "I thought one of your kin would make a beeline to one of the tables where cards are being played." The pilot smiled, wider this time, and winked. "Sure, I could go dance with Lady Luck. But I'd rather dance with you instead. I'm in love, after all." Mr. Mancini set the drinks on the counter. The pilot took one in each hand and offered one to Lady Umbrella, who politely obliged. "You're in love?" Lady Umbrella asked, her green eyes narrowing as she gave the pilot a sultry smile. "With whom?" "With you, of course." "That was certainly quick." "Quick is my middle name. That's why they call me Rabbit," the pilot answered, raising his glass and gently clinking Umbrella's own. "To the end of the War." Umbrella smiled and brought the glass to her lips. "So," she began, setting the glass down again. "Rabbit, hm?" "Yes, ma'am. Rabbit, all-American flying ace of the Great War!" Rabbit proudly declared, sitting up straight and raising his hand in salute. "And you are?" "Lady Umbrella," Umbrella answered holding out her hand. Rabbit gently clasped her fingers in his own and brought her hand to his lips. Across the bar, Mr. Mancini smiled to himself as he dried glasses and placed them neatly in rows behind the counter. "A pleasure, my lady," Rabbit said, his eyes locked with Umbrella's own. He released her hand, and Umbrella brushed her hair behind her ear. "So tell me, why are you sitting alone here at the bar, when obviously every gentleman in this place would like to have you on their arm?" "Who says I'm alone?" Lady Umbrella asked in turn.

"For all you know, I'm the wife of one of the gangsters in the corner there." She pointed to a far corner where a group of suited men sat huddled together, smoking cigars. "Or perhaps I'm a hostage of pirates, forced to sit here while they negotiate with the secret police for my safe return." "I wouldn't believe you if you told me either one," Rabbit replied. "You're far too beautiful for a don to let out of his sight even for a moment. If you were one of their wives, you'd be sitting right there next to them. And you are not a hostage. In fact, I'd sooner believe you were a pirate yourself." Lady Umbrella feigned offense, pouting and raising her hand to her mouth as her eyes narrowed even further. "No, you are most definitely here alone," Rabbit finished, pulling out a case of cigarettes from his pocket, offering one to Umbrella as he took one himself. "American cigarettes," Umbrella playfully rolled her eyes as she took one and leaned forward to light it on a match that Rabbit struck. "I know, they're trash. But I can't smoke Italian," Rabbit answered, taking a drag and exhaling a thin line of smoke. "Too rich for you?" "You could say that," Rabbit answered. "You'll find much of Italy will be," Umbrella replied teasingly, turning to look out at the hotel floor as she brought the cigarette to her lips. Rabbit smiled. "I suppose you may be right," he said. "But I'm a persistent man." "So I've noticed." Umbrella murmured, allowing a slight smile to creep across her lips. "You speak excellent English," Rabbit said, keeping his eyes locked on Lady Umbrella as she surveyed the hotel patrons. "You'd expect anything less?" "Not at all." Rabbit turned to watch the songstress elegantly sway between tables for a moment before speaking up again. "This is a lovely place." "You may not find yourself welcome before long," Lady Umbrella replied. "So I've heard. Are you a Fascist, as well?" Rabbit asked.

"I am Lady Umbrella of the Hotel Honeymoon," the lady replied, grimacing slightly as she took a drag on her own cigarette. "And who is that, exactly? Umbrella can't be your real name." "Perhaps it is, and perhaps it isn't. Regardless, Umbrella is the name of the woman who sits here with you. Who I am on any other night is nobody else's business but mine." "Fair enough," Rabbit answered, taking another sip of wine. "And you?" Umbrella asked in turn, giving Rabbit a playful sneer. "You're awfully courageous for a rabbit." "You'll not find one braver." "What's your real name?" Rabbit narrowed his eyes playfully. "For you, Lady Umbrella, I believe Rabbit will suffice just fine." "Well then, Mr. Rabbit, shouldn't you have scampered back home to your den with the rest of the Americans?" Lady Umbrella asked, twirling the cigarette between her fingers. "I did, for a time. But I wanted to fly again. So I took my pay from the army and bought my plane and headed out on my own to see the world. This seemed like as good a place as any to stop for a while. I'm good with the trigger; I thought I might try bounty hunting." "You'll need more than a good trigger finger to make it bounty hunting. The pirates are dying out. It's an age of war and governments now." "A man can try. I hear stories of seaplane pirates plaguing the Adriatic all the time." "You hear stories, Mr. Rabbit. Stories." "Then what would you recommend I do?" "I would advise you to go back home to America. As you said, you're a rabbit. You have to move fast. I believe you'll find things move at a slightly different pace here. You hadn't even asked my name before telling me you loved me," Lady Umbrella answered, crossing her arms. "Then let me make it up to you," Rabbit offered with a half-smile. "Have you flown before? I could take you for a ride in the morning."

"That's awfully presumptuous of you, Mr. Rabbit," Lady Umbrella sneered teasingly. "That's not a no." "No, it isn't," Umbrella raised her eyebrows just slightly. The sound of polite applause disrupted the conversation. Having just finished a song, the songstress took a deep, grateful bow. The fat pianist offered a grin and a two-fingered salute. The songstress smiled and touched the pianist on the shoulder; he nodded and began to play again. "I love it here," Rabbit said, polishing off his glass of wine. "I could stay forever." "You say that," Umbrella replied, finishing her glass as well. "But you don't mean it. You'll move on, seeking the next big thrill." "Not if I had someone like you to keep me company," Rabbit answered. Umbrella said nothing, but smiled as she looked out onto the Hotel Honeymoon. "So you never answered my question," Rabbit said, twirling his mustache. "Which was?" Umbrella asked, turning to look at her handsome companion one final time. "What's a lady like you doing here by herself?" "Simple. I've been waiting for someone," said Lady Umbrella, and delicately offered Rabbit her porcelain hand. Baffled patrons stared, mouths agape. Old Mr. Mancini at the bar stopped cleaning glasses and looked on with amusement. The following morning, whispered rumors would circulate throughout the small seaside town that Umbrella, lady of the Honeymoon Hotel, had gotten up to dance.

# Nyssa Search

## Lost and Found

It was a tenebrous autumn night, the kind that threatened to swallow you into the abyss with every step. A chill cascaded through the air as it had reached that point in the evening when previously bustling streets now sat eerily silent. In the midst of the endless umbra stood a beacon of sorts; a light to offset the dark. The neon sign of “Casey’s Diner” shined bright, illuminating a path for all those unfortunate enough to be awake and alone at such an ungodly hour.

Lila slinked through the entrance like an alley cat seeking refuge from a storm. A petite young thing with long auburn hair and curves that could stop traffic, she wore far too much makeup and too few clothes. Her emerald eyes squinted as she adjusted to the garish fluorescents beating down throughout the space. Once sufficiently acclimated, she seated herself in a small corner booth that afforded full view of the room.

Not many people were there that night. Tables sat empty and place settings remained untouched. The handful who’d gathered were the usual bunch—grizzled truck drivers looking for repast and traveling salesmen haggard by too many weeks away from home. There was, however, one individual who didn’t seem to fit in. A dark-haired, well-groomed man in his mid-forties sat by himself nursing a cup of coffee and smoking a cigarette.

What marked him as different from the rest were his clothes. He sported a three-piece charcoal colored suit and the shiniest gold watch Lila had ever seen. Immediately, she knew she had to make her move.

Walking over to meet the man, she took a cigarette from her purse and coyly inquired, "Got a light?"

Lifting his gaze from the coffee cup, he simply answered, "Sure."

As he pulled a silver Ronson from his jacket pocket, Lila noticed a set of initials engraved into the side reading "CL." Intrigued, she thought this would make a good starting point for a conversation, and so she slid into the seat across from him. Holding her cigarette out, the man ignited a flame with a single strike of his thumb against the wheel of the lighter.

Taking a long, deep drag, Lila exhaled, then spoke, "So what's 'CL' stand for?"

Without skipping a beat he replied, "Charlie Lennon."

She grinned slyly. "Well Charlie, you look like a guy who could use some company. How about we go someplace for a date?"

He stared at her for a moment, seemingly in disbelief of her frank approach. *The girl doesn't waste any time, that's for damn sure*, he mused.

In a tone that held half-serious, half-sarcastic, Charlie asked, “Do your parents know you’re out this late?”

Lila laughed. “I’ve never had a bedtime in my life,” she scoffed, blowing smoke rings in the air. “Besides,” she added, “Wouldn’t matter anyway since my parents are dead.”

Charlie shook his head. This girl gave nonchalance a new meaning.

“So are we on? I’ve got some special skills you might enjoy,” she assured with a smile.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea,” he said, taking another sip of his increasingly tepid coffee.

Not one to give up easily, Lila slipped off a stiletto pump and slowly ran her bare foot up the length of his leg. “Come on, give me a try. I think you’ll like what you find.”

Charlie shifted in his seat, steeling himself to reply. “Sweetheart, I’ve got shoes older than you.”

Lila mocked a pout. “Maybe, but no loafer in the world feels as warm and soft as me.”

Charlie realized the young woman wasn’t about to quit, not hardly. Giving up the ghost, he sighed.

“All right, fine. But I’m only taking you back to my motel to get you out of here. Better to leave with me than some scum of the earth.”

For her part, Lila appeared very pleased. “You won’t regret it,” she confidently declared, as if not merely speculating, but rather stating an undisputed fact.

Lila looked around Charlie’s room. It was small and bland, the color palette nonexistent, comprised solely of muted tones and dreary lighting. The furnishings were equally sparse, consisting of a double bed, dresser, television, and phone. It was truly barebones all around and definitely not the kind of place you’d want to tell your mother you were staying at.

“Thought we’d be going somewhere nicer than this,” Lila quipped, a hint of disappointment ringing in her voice. “I know a hotel nearby that’s got way more style than this joint. Costs a little more, but it’s worth it,” she continued.

“I like it here,” Charlie said coolly as he casually leaned against the dresser.

Lila shrugged. “Suit yourself. I’ve done it in far worse digs than this.” She sat on the edge of the bed, kicking off her heels and leaning back in a come hither pose.

Charlie didn’t move a muscle toward her, instead he plainly asked,

“What’s your name, hon?”

Lila bit her lip playfully as they locked eyes. “Anything you want it to be,” she answered in a seductive lilt.

Charlie couldn’t help but chuckle— the girl was laying it on thicker than mud in a bayou. Flustered by his laughter, she quickly cut the pretense and spat out, “It’s Lila.”

“That’s a pretty name,” he remarked. “I went to school with a Lila.”

Charlie turned his back to her, pulling a sealed plastic bag of tobacco and paper from the dresser drawer. Laying out its contents, he began methodically rolling his own cigarettes. Lila grew impatient as he persisted at it. She decided to take matters into her own hands, quickly slipping off her tank top and mini skirt while he remained facing away from her. She sat wearing only a black lace bra and panties, just waiting for him to notice.

At long last, Charlie crept back around. Lila grinned in such a way that her expression would’ve almost seemed little girlish if not for the fact that she was sprawled out in her underwear. But the man was not so amused.

“What the hell are you doing?” He clearly wanted no parts of the product she was selling. Lila, still smiling in a near unsettling fashion, replied, “Getting comfy.”

Charlie groaned, exasperated. "I think you've got the wrong idea here. I'm not looking for anything more than conversation."

She sneered at his words. "Right. Just in it for the chat. Uh-huh." Her sarcasm was infused with agitation, as if there was something bubbling beneath the surface.

"Lila, I'm not that kind of guy," he said, lighting up a freshly rolled cigarette.

"Yes, you are. No man just wants to talk. That's a lie dished out to lure women in so you can make the kill." The bitterness that bled from her voice was so striking it became almost palpable.

Taking a drag off his smoke, Charlie spoke. "Honey, you've been hanging out with the wrong people."

She shot him a glance that could cut glass, then just as quickly, realizing she'd lost her cool, softened her stare. "Sorry babe, you're right. I'd just like to hang out with you," she said, standing up from the bed and walking toward Charlie. "Are we good?"

Flicking a stray ash into an empty coffee can he was using as a receptacle, Charlie replied, "We're good so long as you put your clothes back on."

Lila smirked, as if amused by the man's apparent chivalry. Quickly redressing, she noted,

“You’re the first trick I ever met who didn’t want to see some skin.”

The glibness of her statement seemed to bother him. “I’m not a trick, get that straight.” She paused for a beat before questioning, “What am I doing here then?” Silently, they held each other’s gaze.

*If only you knew*, he thought.

Lila turned toward the door.

“Wait,” Charlie called out. “What do you charge?”

She spun around to face him. Approaching the man once more, she entered into a more chipper tone than the one she’d affected before. “Depends. What do you want? Full sail or half-mast?” If you ignored the meaning behind her words, Lila’s demeanor could easily rival that of a PTA mom pushing a bake sale. Only difference was, the goods on display were entirely different.

“Neither,” he insisted. “Back at the diner, you said I looked like I could use some company. Well, it’s true.”

Lila peered at him skeptically. Something about the whole situation felt off to her, but she was never one to look a moneymaking opportunity in the mouth. Brushing her reservations aside, she answered. “A hundred bucks and I’ll stay through the morning. I only accept cash up front, though, no exceptions.” A strange sense of poise resonated in Lila’s voice when she recited her policy, as if it somehow made her feel more in control of the proceedings.

Charlie reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a well-worn black leather wallet. Digging inside he took out five twenty dollar bills and handed them to Lila.

“Consider yourself duly compensated.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Lurking in the shadows of the motel’s poorly lit exterior, Charlie whipped out his cell phone and began to dial. “Yeah, it’s me,” he said. “The plan worked like a charm. All I had to do was slap on a cheap suit and knockoff watch and she literally came right to me.”

The male voice on the other end flippantly remarked, “Figured it would. Doesn’t take much to impress the little bitch.”

Charlie laughed at the man’s comment, not out of genuine amusement but rather in an attempt to diffuse its awkwardness. “So when do I get paid?” he asked, cutting short the banter and getting straight to the point.

Just as directly, the voice replied, “You’ll get the money when I get her back. You’re shackled up at the place we talked about, right?”

Charlie nodded to himself. “Yep, and she’ll be staying here the rest of the night, so I strongly recommend you start hightailing it now.”

The caller agreed. “I can be there in about two hours, maybe less.”

That said, Charlie was left with nothing but the sound of dial tone ringing in his ear, as the man on the other end had hung up in record speed.

\*\*\*\*\*

Arriving back at the motel room with a bottle of whiskey and a bag of Funyuns in hand, Charlie noticed Lila shuffling a deck of cards and then laying them onto the bed. It didn't seem like she was playing any game at all, but rather just keeping herself busy.

*Poor kid must be bored out of her mind*, he thought. "I take it nobody ever taught you a real card game, huh?" Charlie quipped.

"I've watched plenty of guys play, but I never picked up a thing. Best I can say is I'm wicked good at 'Higher, Lower,'" she said, smiling.

Charlie paused for a moment, taken aback by the sweetness of Lila's expression. It reminded him so much of his own daughter's, he couldn't help but be charmed.

"You should do that more often."

She stared at him quizzically, unsure of what he meant.

"Smile, hon. It looks good on you."

Lila let out a nervous laugh, seemingly blindsided by the concept of receiving a compliment.

“Thanks for getting the snacks,” she said, hurrying to change the subject.

Charlie rested the bag and bottle on the bed before sitting down himself.

“No problem,” he replied while picking up the deck of cards and reshuffling them.

“Let me show you something.”

He placed two face up cards in front of Lila, then stacked two in front of himself, only revealing the top card. “Okay, so you’ve got a 3 of clubs and a 9 of hearts which makes for a total of 12. I’ve got a 10 of diamonds showing but you don’t know what my other card is. You’re going to want to take a hit in hopes of getting as close to 21 as possible.” He laid another card in front of Lila, this time a 7 of clubs. “You’ve got a total of 19 now, so you’ll want to stand. This also means that I can show you my other card.” Flipping it over, it was revealed to be a 9 of spades. “We both have 19, so it’s a push. Nobody wins or loses.”

Lila nodded. “Cool game. Let’s play again— loser takes a shot.”

Charlie laughed. “Whatever you want, doll.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Nearly an hour had transpired since Charlie first explained blackjack to Lila, and they were still going at it. The idea of turning it into a drinking game was catching up to them, as each were riding the wave of a fairly heady buzz. Finally, the pair opted to take a break.

Lighting up a cigarette and leaning back against the headboard of the bed, Charlie remarked, “You’re a natural, you know that? With a little more practice you

Lighting up a cigarette and leaning back against the headboard of the bed, Charlie remarked, "You're a natural, you know that? With a little more practice you could make a killing at casinos."

Pausing, the wheels in Lila's head turned. She crawled on all fours from the foot of the bed to the top, pressing herself obscenely close to Charlie. "I can show you other things I'm a natural at," she whispered, placing a hand on his thigh.

Rejecting her advances, he gently pushed her away to create space between them. "I told you before, I don't want to sleep with you."

For a fleeting moment a look of hurt flashed across Lila's eyes. "Why not? What did I do wrong?" she asked in a tone that was painfully sincere.

*Jesus, someone must've really done a number on you,* Charlie thought. "You didn't do anything wrong. I'm just not into jailbait." Stopping to take a drag off his smoke, he continued, "How long have you been in this line of work anyway?" He knew the question was a little too personal, but he was genuinely curious.

"Always," she answered.

Charlie raised an eyebrow incredulously. "Bullshit. Nobody's born a whore."

Lila sunk her head down, blanching at his words.

*Ah fuck. That was real smooth.* “Hey, I’m sorry. I have a bad habit of sticking my foot in my mouth. Ask any of my ex-wives, they’ve got some stories.”

Lila peered up at him, her expression eerily reminiscent of a Precious Moments doll.

*Yep, I’m a shoe in for Asshole of the Year.*

“You’re right,” she said softly. “No one starts out this way. It just feels like it’s been forever.”

Charlie wondered if he dared press the issue further. He didn’t want to give away what he’d already been told by the man who’d hired him, but there were some vague spots to the story that didn’t sit particularly well with him either. He’d have to articulate this carefully.

“Level with me, Lila. I know you said your parents weren’t in the picture, but somebody must’ve taken care of you. You’re so young, I can’t imagine you’ve been on the streets your whole life.”

She vehemently shook her head. “No...no one’s ever taken care of me, not really.” Charlie couldn’t help but notice her choice of words. “Not really? What do you mean by that?” Lila sat silently for a beat, fidgeting with her hair and staring down at the drab, beige bedspread. Her eyes took on a glassy quality as she seemed to mentally drift away.

“Lila?” Charlie spoke, eliciting no response. *Fantastic, she’s gone catatonic.* “Lila?” he repeated, placing a hand on her shoulder in the hopes of snapping her back to reality.

She lifted her head quickly at the feel of his touch. “I...I’m sorry,” she stammered. “I zone out sometimes.”

*No kidding.*

“You never answered my question.” Charlie wanted to know what was truly going on, as the job he’d embarked upon was feeling stranger by the minute.

“It’s just...I...” Lila trailed off, the words seeming to get caught in her throat. “It’s complicated,” she finally managed.

Snuffing out his spent cigarette, Charlie replied, “Lay it on me. I’ve got the time.” *Or do I? He might be here soon.*

“After my parents were gone, I stayed with my uncle,” Lila began. “He seemed okay at first, but it didn’t take long for me to realize he was a drug addict. On top of that, he never held a job for longer than a month and he’d burned bridges with people all over town. Things got bad fast.” Sliding off the bed, Lila walked over to the nightstand and poured herself a shot; first one, then a few more. She stared sullenly at Charlie, looking young but feeling so very old.

“You got kids?” she asked him.

He nodded. "Yeah, a daughter."

Lila sighed, a half-smile all she could muster. "I bet you're a good father. I bet you never miss a birthday or a holiday. I bet you always call when you say you will and never let her down." Lila seemed to be drifting into her own mental space again.

"Wrong," Charlie answered, the sharpness of his tone catching her attention.

She blinked in surprise.

"I'm a terrible father. I cheated on her mom, twice; I missed more than one holiday because of work; and as of right now, I haven't seen her almost two years."

Lila was clearly taken aback.

"The truth is never what we want it to be, hon." Charlie rolled over to reach the nightstand and proceeded to pour his own set of shots. Between the two of them, the whiskey bottle was damn near drained.

"So maybe you won't win any parenting awards, but I'm sure you care a hell of a lot more about your kid than my uncle ever did for me," Lila said.

"You don't know that," he replied. *If he didn't want you, he wouldn't have hired me to find you.*

Locking eyes with Charlie once more, something consuming seemed to pulse in her gaze. "Of course I know," she insisted. "I know because you're not some junkie who'd trade a girl for drugs. You wouldn't drop her off at a dealer's house for the weekend because you were offered five grams of smack in exchange." Lila shook her head in lament. "So yeah, that's how much my uncle cared about me."

Charlie was absolutely sickened. *What have I done?*

He looked at his watch. It had been well over an hour since he'd called Jack Malloy, the man who'd said he was Lila's uncle, and told him to hurry over. If he was going to make things right, he'd have to act fast.

"Lila, you need to get out of here," Charlie blurted out.

She looked at him, confused. "What? Why?"

He grabbed the wallet from his jacket and rapidly pulled out several twenty dollar bills, placing them in her hand. "I am, or rather was, a PI. I lost my license a while ago, but I still work under the table. I met your uncle Jack at a bar and he hired me. I suspected he wasn't telling me everything, but I had no idea it was like this."

Clearly shocked, the color drained from Lila's face.

"I'm sorry, so sorry," Charlie pleaded. "But now you've got to make tracks. I called him after I left for the liquor store. He's on his way right now."

Dazed, Lila stuffed the money in her purse, her hands shaking with every motion.

“Go as far as you can,” he instructed.

“Wait,” she said, her voice wavering. “You’re the first person who’s been decent to me in a long time. I need to know how to contact you once I’m gone.”

*Decent? You give me too much credit, kid.* But he could see how much it meant to her, and so he grabbed a pen, jotting his number on a wadded-up napkin taken from his pocket. He handed it over. “Call me anytime, day or night.”

She nodded. “You can count on it,” Lila affirmed, before rushing out the door.

# Katie Wolden

## The Listener

"You're a really good listener," she slurred, breasts squeezing out of her shirt as she pressed them against the bar. Her eyes were a mess of black smudges and they flickered about, settling on the gleaming surface of the bar, her amber drink, my shirt, my mouth, my nose, but not quite my eyes. Her name was Rayne, she'd told me. A sad name for a sad girl. "You don't know how hard it is to find a guy like you. My boyfriend never listens to me. He's always too busy with," she made quotations with black-nailed fingers, "work." I nodded, nudging her drink towards her. She took a sloppy sip. "Work," she sighed, "I keep telling him what he does ain't a real job. My daddy always said it ain't a real job unless you can put it on a résumé. My daddy was a good, hard-working man. You know what he'd say if he found out about Jeff? He'd say he's a no-good low-life who'll never be able to provide for a family and he don't deserve me. And he'd be right!" She gulped her drink, angrily, sloshing some down her shirt. "Oh geez," she said with an embarrassed giggle. "You gotta stop buying me drinks, man! Pretty soon I'm gonna be spilling everything!" I chuckled along with her, hoping it was true. She didn't seem like the brightest, this girl, but she'd been talking for hours and had yet to reveal anything important. I was beginning to think she was smarter than she let on. The bar was nearly emptied out with only a few college kids doing shots at the corner table and a middle aged man with slumped shoulders telling the bartender his story of woe. That's why people come to bars alone: to confess things. to the man behind the counter who nods and says "that's tough" a little too often; to the poor slob next to you who can't wait till you're finished talking so he can take his turn; or, if you're lucky, to the silent stranger who cares enough to buy you drink after drink and listen all night. "Anyways, what was I talking about?" she murmured, absently stuffing a napkin down her shirt and glancing around. "Man it must be getting late. I gotta get up for work tomorrow and we get real busy on Mondays. Maybe I oughta."

I cleared my throat loudly in an attempt to distract her. She looked at me suddenly, as though remembering I was there. It happens; I'm easily forgotten. "Oh yeah, my boyfriend!" she exclaimed. "I was telling you about Jeff." Back on track. I quickly signaled to the bartender for another drink. If we didn't get there soon, I'd have to start asking questions. I hate asking questions. It makes me feel like a cop. I hate cops. Funny, I have so many on my speed dial. "It wasn't always like this, ya know. When we first met, he always had time for me and we did lotsa fun stuff together. We went to movies and parties and Applebee's every Friday. We went to the park sometimes just to look at the stars. He used to talk all the time about getting married and having kids. The future just seemed so big then, ya know what I mean? He never talks about that stuff anymore. He never talks to me all; he's either out dealing or home on the couch, high as a kite." She cupped her hands around her new drink and leaned over it as though warming herself over a flame. Tangled brown curls hid her face but I saw a single, bright tear fall into the glass. She was silent for a long time but there was no way I was talking now. Get the answers without asking a single question-that's the best way to do it. I can't help what people choose to tell me. So how could the results be my fault? "I guess the thing I hate the most." she sighed, still staring into her drink, "is when he has dealer meetings at our house. I mean, it's our house, you know? It's supposed to be a home. How can I call a place home when there are all these scary guys shooting up in the living room? And geez, you know they're all packing! I can't stand being in the house with them; I always have to go out. That's why I'm here with you tonight... Hey, what did you say your name was again?" Caught off guard by the sudden direct question, all I could do was stare as she turned her head and really looked at me for the first time.

Behind the inky smudges her eyes were hazel and surprisingly clear after the amount she'd been drinking. "Kevin," I said, my voice sounding strange to my own ears. I never say my own name. No one ever asks. "Kevin," she repeated with a small smile. "I'm sorry for talking your ear off all night, Kevin. I've just had a lot on my mind and I feel like I can really trust you. That sounds stupid cause I just met you tonight but there's just something about you. I'm not sure what it is. You're just. a really good listener." I never was much of a talker. Didn't speak a word until I was almost four years old. My parents put me in a special program for autistic kids. But I wasn't autistic. Truth is I understood language perfectly. I knew what words meant and how they worked. I knew how to string them together to get what I wanted, to say what I thought, to change people's minds, to make people laugh, and to make them cry. I just chose not to. It wasn't that I didn't like words. I loved them. I loved listening to them, absorbing them, and understanding them. And it's amazing how speaking gets in the way of listening. So I chose not to speak. I listened. And the more I listened, the more I learned and the more I realized that no one else around me was listening at all. The kids at my school barely knew I existed. But before long, I knew everything there was to know about them. I knew about their home lives, their families, their relationships, their opinions, their hopes, their fears, their secrets. They gave no thought to talking in front of me. I didn't speak; therefore I was not real to them. But they were real to me. I was like a dog, hearing but unable to understand or repeat. But I did understand and I could repeat. I just chose not to. It wasn't until college that I began to discover that with a few drinks and sympathetic nods, I could get just about anyone to tell me just about anything. That was when the secrets started getting big-too big to keep to myself.

The roofie rapes at the frat house were the first thing I reported to the police. They busted the place up and arrested five guys. They took me in as well and questioned me for hours. How did I know so much about it if I wasn't involved? That was when I started to hate cops. Next thing I reported was a Heroin house. Could've kept it to myself I guess but the thing is, junkies drive me insane. They have this air about them like they're better than everyone else because they're involved in something big and illegal. They go around dropping hints and acting tough and mysterious. But then they're around me with a drink in their hand and before they know it, they've dropped too many hints and it's all over. Before long, an entire drug operation was uncovered thanks to me. The police force labeled me their informant and called me, day or night, whenever there was a suspicious person to investigate. I had a gift, Police Chief Hadley told me and all I could do was laugh. If listening is a gift, what a sad, self-centered race mankind has become. "Hey, do you know what time it is?" Rayne asked, startling me again with a question. "It's just, I told Jeff they all had to clear out by midnight." I glanced down at my watch. Eleven-thirty. Too perfect. "Twelve-thirty," I said, trying not to cringe. Only thing worse than asking questions is lying. But sometimes you just have to get the job done. It was for her own good, wasn't it? "Oh Jesus!" she exclaimed. "I gotta get going!" She slid unsteadily off the stool and fumbled in her purse for her keys. I rose and tentatively put a hand on her shoulder. She was tiny, 5'4 at the most. "Let me give you a ride home," I suggested. "Oh," she said, looking up at me, face flushed with gratitude, "that's so nice of you. Thanks a lot." I led her out to my car and opened the door for her. "You're gonna wanna take Oak and turn left on Haynes," she told me as I started the engine. "It's a little white house. Needs a new paint job bad. Jeff keeps saying he'll get around to it.

Next weekend, next weekend, he says but he never does it. My friend Bethany says all men are like that. But that's not true is it? I bet you do what you say you're gonna do. I bet you don't lie." She looked at me hopefully but I kept my eyes on the road, feeling like I was back at the police station being interrogated only this time I was guilty. "I try not to," I answered finally and that seemed to be good enough for her because she settled in her seat and looked out the window. That wasn't a lie was it? I do try. It's a hell of a lot easier when people don't ask me questions. I turned on the radio, hoping to get through the rest of the car ride without having to talk again. With every word I said, I was getting more involved. I don't like to be involved. Silence is distance. Silence is innocence. David Bowie's *Life on Mars* played and she hummed along softly and pleasantly. "I like this," she said. "I bet you listen to a lot of music, quiet thoughtful type like you. I just never seem to have the time anymore. Turn left up here, kay? My house is two blocks over on the right." Her house was small with peeled white siding and shuttered windows with light shining through the cracks. Two cars were parked in the drive way and five more on the street out front. "What the hell?" Rayne exclaimed. "They're still here?" My car rolled to a stop in clear view of the battered screen door with the plain black numbers hanging over it. I slipped my iPhone out of my pocket as she fumbled with her seatbelt. 1162 Haynes Ave. H dealer's meeting. They're packing. Send. "I can't believe this," she grumbled, throwing off her seatbelt and opening the door. "Wait," I said suddenly, without thinking. She turned back and stared at me expectantly. "Um. Do you want to hang out for a little longer? Until they leave? We could go to Applebee's. Or the park. Great stars tonight." She gave me a small smile. "No thanks, hon. I gotta have it out with Jeff. I can't let him treat me this way.

I gotta lay down the law. And if he don't listen. well then I'll meet you next week, same time, same place and take you up on that offer." Before I could open my mouth, she walked away and left me feeling like an idiot. Where did that come from? Most words I'd spoken all at once since college. My iPhone beeped and I looked down at it. Thanks, Kevin. Go home. -Hadley I slid it back into my pocket, shook my head to clear it, and drove away with the strangest feeling in the pit of my stomach. I was still in bed when my phone rang at nine the next morning. "Hey, Kev," said a familiar gravelly voice. "Thanks for the tip last night." "No problem, Chief," I yawned, sitting up and stretching. "I gotta tell you it didn't turn out so well though. There was already some kinda argument going on in there and when they heard the sirens, they lost it. Turned into a shootout. Three casualties, none of em ours, thank God. Two bad guys and the girl, unfortunately." "The. girl?" I repeated stupidly. "Caught in the crossfire. No idea who got her. Sorry kid, you can't win em all." The phone cracked against the wall and clattered to the floor before I realized I'd thrown it. Somewhere in my reeling mind, I knew it was broken and that I would need a new one. But I didn't want a new one. I didn't want to get a call ever again. I didn't want to listen to another word.

# Mike Harman

## Hegemonic Discourse in Mainstream News Media: Limiting Interpretations of Reality Based on a Particular Framework of News Coverage

The current research aims to examine the link between discourse and a hegemonically-ruled news media. In investigating this relationship, it will be essential to review several critical areas of language and social reality: linguistic ambiguity, discourse practices and hegemony. Throughout the investigation, the current paper will operate under the overarching hypothesis that, given the ambiguous nature of language, hegemonic entities – mainstream news media in particular – can manipulate perceptions of events by altering their linguistic discourse. This investigation looks to confirm a theory that news media operates under specific frames and in doing so, allow for a limited interpretation of events.

### **LINGUISTIC AMBIGUITY**

Language allows us to communicate ideas, experiences, emotions and descriptions through a process that is inevitably dependent on a set of shared meanings.

The ambiguity of language creates a reality in which we can describe events that have never been witnessed before. This same ambiguity also allows for a reality in which we rely on similar and shared perceptions of language use. In the process of conveying a message, we are implicitly forced to make choices about our language use. We make these choices based on the perception we want to pass on of a particular event or happening. It is these choices, to a large extent, that help us create frames of interpretation.

The purpose of the current section is to assert that language, in itself, is ambiguous and only gains meaning through a shared interpretation in a particular culture. Because of this, we are able to convey meaning in certain discourse. Psycholinguist, Roman Jakobson enhances this point by making the assertion that a specific language can then influence how you think: perception (Deutsher 2010). Jacobson's research into the psychology of language reveals that "different language use or discourse influence our minds in different ways, this is not because of what our language *allows* us to think but rather because of what is habitually *obliges* us to think about" (Jakobson, Waugh & Burston, 1990).

For example, Jakobson argues that we attribute a fundamentally different meaning between the words “protest” and “civil disturbance.” Both words convey an accurate description of an event, yet they each recall different perceptions of an event.

Following the previous example, the current research strives to uncover how the news media uses language to support a particular framework of interpreting reality. Reality in this sense will be discussed as the coverage of particular events.

In order to properly evaluate the language use, we need to adopt an interpretational method of research that looks at hegemonic relations, discourse relations, and how these areas all contribute to a constructed reality. It is also necessary to make a note that areas of the current research may not generalize to populations outside of the English language. For example, many other languages have a structural system that explicitly incorporates areas of masculinity and femininity as well as neutrality. Since English does not have a structure as such, we are forced to make many implicit decisions around particular discourses.

In saying this, the current research is operating under the assumption that the actual structure of a particular language will affect the perception that is created. Thus, we will assume that the structure of the English language itself has aided in the creation of a specific reality.

## **DISCOURSE**

In the words of J.S. Atherton, author of *Theory of Theory*, “discourse is a way, pretty much any way, of talking about things” (Atherton 2011). Though simple in the definition, Atherton covers, to a large, extent what discourse is considered with. In terms of the current research, a choice of discourse or theme in language, draws attention to what the speakers think is important about the subject. In the world of news media, discourse is used to convey to the listener what a particular news station believes is important about an event.

Relating hegemony to discourse requires us to allow a multiple realities-theory in which the favored realities are conveyed. A hegemonic discourse is one which has become so embedded in a culture that it appears silly to ask “Why?” about its assumptions (Atherton 2011).

From this view, we can draw conclusions on what versions of reality mainstream news media is conveying to us.

For example, our news media often uses an “us-versus-them” approach towards war-coverage. In-line with the assertion of Ather-ton, the previous statement seems *silly* to question, but let us allow for an analysis to take place. When war is covered as such, the perception of killing is viewed as necessary to *winning*. In a society that punishes killing, we change our perception when it is in-line with “war-discourse.” Because this discourse is so embedded into our societal perception, our news media can cover a murder-story where an individual was killed and then talk about the causalities of war in terms of statistics. At the linguist level, these stories are covered differently. In the hypothetical murder-story, a *murder* was committed. In the war-coverage story, an individual was *killed*. Both words convey a loss-of-life, but each elicits a different perception. By using a particular discourse or theme in coverage, the news media can change, create or reinforce a particular interpretation of an event.

George Lakeoff, a UC Berkeley professor of linguistics and cognitive science, gave another example of how discourse can be used

to convey a particular frame of an issue. In an article published by Bonnie Azab Powell (2003), author of *Framing the issues: UC Berkeley professor George Lakeoff tells how conservatives use language to dominate politics*, Lakeoff is quoted as saying:

In Arnold Schwarzenegger's acceptance speech, he said, "When the people win, politics as usual loses." What's that about? Well, he knows that he's going to face a Democratic legislature, so what he has done is frame himself and also Republican politicians as the people, while framing Democratic politicians as politics as usual - in advance. The Democratic legislators won't know what hit them. They're automatically framed as enemies of the people.

## **HEGEMONY AND LANGUAGE**

The Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci was the first to conceptualize the idea of hegemony. He stated that hegemony is “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Allen 2004). This theory states that the actions, beliefs or attitudes that a culture perceives to be *common sense* are actually the result of a ruling ideology being communicated.

Communication scholars Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy expand Gramsci's definition by stating that hegemony is "the process of moral, philosophical, and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups" (Allen 2004). A proper understanding of the concept of hegemony is necessary before we investigate how these principles are incorporated into news media discourse.

When individuals challenge hegemonic values, they are often perceived as *alternative realities* that are differing from the norm. When this occurs, the groups are often described as deviant and radical. This process of viewing differing, non-hegemonic versions of reality as deviant and radical and the connection to mainstream news media is central to the current research. In the current news media, many stories have been framed through the covert use of language in the coverage of events or issues. With aid from pictures and video clips, a news station can effectively convey any interpretation of particular events.

An example that exemplifies how the hegemonic powers have the ability to create a version of reality through the process of language use is described in Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson's book, *unSpun: Finding Facts in a World of [disinformation]*. The authors dissect the language used in the framing of a particular tax affecting few but the extremely rich. The "estate tax" as it was previously called, looked to put a tax on bequeathed inheritances of over several million dollars. James L. Martin, head of the Conservative 60 Plus Association began lobbying to change the name of the tax from "estate tax" to "death tax." The thinking behind this change was that the American people would not vote for a law that taxed death. Though this law would have only affected the richest 1.3% of the country, an overwhelmingly 75% of Americans voted to repeal the tax (Jackson & Jamieson, 2007).

The previous example underscores the idea of hegemony and the use of language. Although the term "death tax" was misleading, it framed the issue in a way that made people think of the tax unfavorably even before they considered the facts. In this analysis, we were able to see how a small group of wealthy and powerful individuals

were able to use language to skew an interpretation of an issue in such a manner that 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the American people explicitly communicated disapproval for the issue – even if it only affected an unrepresentative, 1.3% of the population.

By analyzing issues like the previous, we can hypothesize that even larger and wealthier organizations can use language to skew events and issues that challenge the basic structure of that organization. We see certain news events framed in a particularly negative manner or completely excluded from coverage thus, implicitly stating and reinforcing a hegemonic ideology of what is considered newsworthy.

## **DISCUSSION**

The current research offers many bold assumptions about the carefully constructed discourse of the mainstream media. Though much research has been conducted in this area, the main hypothesis rests of theoretical interpretations of media. For the purpose of the research, allow us to examine possible implications of a hegemonically controlled media discourse.

George Orwell, scholar of language and discourse, first came up with the concept of doublespeak. According to Orwell, doublespeak is “language intended to distort or obscure its actual meaning” (Orwell 1949). The United States is currently in an Orwellian period of doublespeak and a time when lies will pass for truth (Luntz 2007). According to Poole, author of *Unspeak: How words become weapons, how weapons become a message, and how that message becomes a reality*, “we now live in a period where the uneducated or non-critical thinkers have become the target for multimillion dollar companies to pursue and create a trap for them to fall into” (Poole 2006). Unfortunately, morals have been replaced by dollar-bills when it comes to big corporations or political parties.

Political parties are the worst (or best) when it comes to spinning ideas and beliefs. This was demonstrated by George Lakoff (2003) when he exposed that the Republican Party has been using multimillion dollar “think-tanks” to create a language that can appeal to the majority of the nation even if it only applies to a fraction of a percent of the nation.

The Republican Party uses very specific word choice to *sell* their ideas to the nation. An example is the passing of the “patriot act”. This was an act that was thought of after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks and gave the government the right to investigate any and all communications made by anyone (Luntz 2007). The reason that this is an example of a political party spinning and re-framing words is by the use of the word “patriot”. The Republican Party knew that a word like that in a time just following a massive attack on American patriotism would create great rally with the population and the majority of the citizens would not be opposed. People hear the word *patriot* and immediately want to associate their self with its definition. The Republican Party used spinning and cognitive dissonance theories to literally make the decision for the population when it came time to vote on the act. They knew that the majority would not want to vote against an act that spoke about patriotism as they would then be considered a *non-patriot*.

Authors Jackson and Jamieson (2007) incorporated the example of the HIV testing equipment that was sold to millions of people

best represents an Orwellian take-over in large corporations. The company that sold this product knew that they would be creating a “solution” to something that is a large problem. They advertised this product as being discrete and less embarrassing than going to a professional doctor. The product sold to millions of people until the company was shut down by the FTC for fraudulently marketing the products purpose. They settled in court for a few million dollars, but the damage was already done. This product played on the hopes of its users and was spun as a solution that was once embarrassing or expensive. The ironic detail from this scenario is the warning on the actual test package that it is not accurate. The warning label was presentable and easily recognizable; however, the company knew that its consumers would be “blind” to this label because they were already spun to believe this product could detect HIV.

Language is the most important tool we have to communicate effectively our ideas and emotions. Language is the basis of every framework that has ever been created (Poole 2006). The uniqueness of language is that it is entirely arbitrary and it is necessary that we assign meaning to every sentence or word. The meaning that we assign to language is critical to effective communication.

The meaning that we assign to language is critical to effective communication.

As powerful as language is on our cognitions, our cognitions display a matched affect on our language. How we think shapes and frames how we speak and use language. When we want people to think the way we do, we use language that we know will cause them to see similar viewpoints. Examples of this come from the previous discussion involving Frank Luntz and his implantation of the phrase “death-tax” (Powell 2003). He wanted people to observe the viewpoint that he *wanted* them to. Due to this new phrase he was able to shape how people viewed the “estate-tax” and in turn changed how people spoke about this tax.

In short, language shapes how we think and how we think shapes our language. This ever important paradox of communication will be vital to not only interpersonal communication but, also, intrapersonal communication.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, B. J. (2004). Power matters. Difference matters: communicating social identity (pp. 23-38). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Atherton, J.S. (2011) *Doceo: Theory of theory* [On-line: Uk] retrieved 2 December 2012 from <http://www.doceo.co.uk/tools/theory.htm>.
- Deutsher, G. (2010, August 20). Does your language shape how you think?. *The New York Times, NA*. Retrieved December 3, 2012, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/29/magazine/29language-t.html?>
- Luntz, F. I. (2007). *Words that work: it's not what you say, it's what people hear*. New York: Hyperion.
- Jackson, B., & Jamieson, K. H. (2007). *UnSpun: finding facts in a world of disinformation*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.
- Jakobson, R., Waugh, L. R., & Burston, M. (1990). Two aspects of language. *On language* (pp. 115-132). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- Orwell, G. (1949). *Nineteen eighty-four, a novel*. ([1st American ed.].  
New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Poole, S. (2006). *Unspeak: how words become weapons, how weapons become a message, and how that message becomes reality*. New York: Grove Press.
- Powell, B. A. (2003, October 27). Framing the issues: UC Berkeley professor George Lakeoff tells how conservatives use language to dominate politics. UC Berkley News, NA. Retrieved December 3, 2012, from <http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003>

## An Intercultural Approach to Conflict: Roman Catholicism and Homosexuality

The current research looks to analyze the intercultural conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the homosexual cultural. The history of conflict between these groups is rich with historical events as well as changes in overall interpretations and attitudes towards each culture. Both rely heavily on a deep structural root centered on their culture's history. The current paper looks to take an approach at this conflict from an intercultural perspective. Areas that will be addressed are the deep structures of culture and how it is defined through history as well as approaches that emphasize such aspects of communication that include hegemony, ideology and power.

Prior to the analysis of the current conflict, it is necessary to fully evaluate the history of each culture. Though the current research summarizes much of the historically relevant points of each culture, it should be noted that much of the history was omitted. None-the-less, the current research had deemed it necessary to gain historical perspective in each culture prior to a full evaluation of the conflict.

## *History of Roman Catholic Church*

In order to properly understand the stance that the official Roman Catholic Church utilizes in its description of homosexuality, it is necessary and beneficial to the current research to examine the history of this religion. Catholicism is the world's largest religious organization with over one-billion people claiming this denomination of Christianity. Both believers and nonbelievers would probably agree that Catholicism has been an impactful and decisive spiritual force in the history of Western civilization. Accordingly, many of the social practices and *rules* that are enforced in the Catholic Church surface as the structural values in much of society at large.

According to much of the literature available in the study of Catholicism, (see Guiseppi 2000 & Pipim 2001) "Roman Catholicism" as we know it today, did not exist for the first thousand years of Christianity. Up until this time, there was only "one, holy Catholic church" which abided under the early creeds. These creeds represented the common traditions, beliefs, and church structure of all Christian churches (Guiseppi 2000).

In-line with the previous statement, the word “catholic” means universal. Under this type of structure, all other belief systems were considered heresy. This is important to note, as this will be a defining structural value in the current Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church traces its historical genesis back to the Apostle Peter. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, St. Peter was considered the first pope of the Catholic Church and every pope after him has been considered his *spiritual successor*. Again, it is important to note this historical context as this succession gives the pope, as leader of the church, full spiritual authority. When examining historical disputes and conflicts between cultures and the Roman Catholic Church, it is important to remember that the church gives full authority to one leader. The Church views this line of succession as “an unbroken line from the apostles and their teachings and has thus, contributed to the survival of ‘pure Christianity.’” (Guiseppi 2000)

In 318AD, the Catholic Church began to adopt a governmental structure mirroring that of the Roman Empire, headed by Emperor Constantine (Encyclopedia Britannica).

From this structure, the Church then adopted a system in which cities across Europe would be headed by catholic heads. With the adoption of the Roman Empire, it was deemed necessary that the *capital* of the church would be centered in Rome (current day Vatican). It was the Roman bishop Leo I (440-461 AD) who was the first to claim ultimate authority over all Christendom and thus, began a denomination of Christianity called Roman Catholicism (Pipim 2001).

Since the creation of the Roman Catholic Church, the culture has endured many tribulations that have affirmed their concrete stance of faith. Due to their structural value of furthering “pure Christianity,” the Church has taken a considerably conservative stance in many social and political issues (Guisepi 2000). In defending their social and political stances, the Church often cites the scriptural text of the Bible. Direct interpretation of text has been (and will continue to be) a defining asset to the religion. It is important to note that the structure of the Roman Catholicism is set as such that they defer to the scriptural interpretation of one leader, the pope. In relation to the current research, the Church has outwardly professed disapproval for the homosexual lifestyle because of scriptural interpretation.

## *History of Homosexuality*

The history of the concept of homosexuality is rich with events and interpretations that have aided in the current definition of homosexuality. It should be noted that, throughout history, attitudes towards homosexuality have greatly varied as society has shifted from accepting to not-accepting. The term “homosexuality” came evident in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by a German psychologist, Karoly Maria Benkert (Davidson 2004). Prior to that, there was no knowing and defining term to explain this type of sexuality. The history of the discussion of homosexuality dates back to the era of Plato being expressed in *Symposium*. Relevant to the current research is the lack of mention until *recently*, thus furthering the argument that sexuality is construct that only attains meaning when society attributes it.

A frequently mentioned area in homosexuality-history is the lack of use of the term in the ancient Greek culture. This is especially salient to the current research because the Greeks certainly participated in homosexual acts. It was seen as common for younger boys to be mentored by older men in their society and in doing so submit to sexual acts between them (Yoshino 2006).

In this era, the gender of individuals that engaged in sexual acts was not as important as the implicit beauty that was displayed. This being said, we must assume that these cultures valued a very strict set of cultural rules that favored ascribed power and value.

The ancient Greek culture's participation in homosexuality provides strong evidence for the current research. However, it is necessary to look to scripture when forming an argument against a religious perspective. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, it is unclear exactly what the New Testament states towards sexuality in general, and same-sex attraction in particular (Davidson 2004). John Boswell, author of *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, argues "that many passages taken today as condemnations of homosexuality are more concerned with prostitution" (Boswell 1980). Boswell asserts that much of the scriptural teaching of sexuality are more concerned with the sinfulness of sexual acts participated in outside of marriage.

As the decline of the Roman Empire emerged, an overall tolerance of homosexuality began to occur in many parts of the world.

This viewpoint is in accordance with the prior analysis of Roman Catholicism as they have, historically disapproved of the homosexual lifestyle. A scholar in the field of homosexuality summarizes the attitude towards homosexuality in the eleventh century as “European secular law contained few measures against homosexuality until the middle of the thirteenth century.” (Greenberg 1988) In the late half of the twelfth through the fourteenth century, an increasing intolerance began to emerge on the topic of homosexuality.

For the next several centuries (until about the nineteenth century) strict and brutal laws against homosexuality (and sexuality in general) were put into effect in much of Western world and Europe. Especially relevant to the current research is to examine why this sharp increase in homosexuality occurred when it did. During the time of these laws being enacted, an extreme reform was taking place in the Catholic Church. The Church started their culture-defining reformation by condemning non-procreative acts of sexuality as forbidden as stated as “Whoever shall be found to have committed that incontinence which is against nature shall be punished.” (Boswell 1980)

During this reformation, we first see a term used to describe an individual by the sexual acts they participated in. As defined in Catholic law, an individual who participated in sexual affairs out of marriage was considered a “sodomite.” This word differs from “homosexual” as it does not explicitly state a gender one is attracted to sexually (Davidson 2004).

In the 1700s the Dutch deployed an extremely heavy campaign that aimed at harshly punishing sodomy. It is estimated by one historian that as many as one hundred men and boys were executed and denied burial because of these laws (Greenberg 1988). It is around this time that we see the first indications that sodomy only occurred between members of the same sex and was, therefore, stigmatizing an interpretation of sexuality.

The history of homosexuality that traces its roots to the modern era starts in the mid-twentieth century. During this era, the acceptance of pre-marital sex became more prevalent and an overall decline in prohibitions against sex for the sake of pleasure outside of marriage. It was at this point (1960s) in time that the gay-liberation movement took off (Yoshino 2006).

Many gay and lesbian rights groups gained serious ground in a society that generally did not accept this lifestyle choice. Many gay rights groups draw their genesis to June of 1969, when patrons of the Stonewell Inn – a gay establishment – were invaded by the local police. After this riot, a large number of gay rights activist groups began to emerge across of America. There was enough of an impact that in 1970, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official listing of mental disorders (APA). The era since Stonewall has created marked changes in Western Europe at a societal level by the repeal of anti-sodomy laws more common (Davidson 2004).

## **CONFLICT**

Much of the conflict that is occurring between the homosexual cultural and the Roman Catholic Church centers on areas of identity. Though a divergence in concrete views, the homosexual culture, at large is striving to live in a society in which they are not implicitly or explicitly forced to cover their homosexual orientation. More than ever, the resulting consequences are extremely crucial to the everyday workings of society and thus,

the current research finds it necessary to address areas of conflict between the gay community and the Church.

Prior to analyzing the conflict and possible interpretations of it, let us address what exactly the conflict *is*. According to the Roman Catholic Church, homosexuality is in direct conflict with the scriptural teachings of the Bible (*Roman Catholicism*). The Church is quick to cite numerous biblical references in defense of this stance. Most common among these references is Leviticus 18:22 - *Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable*. In interpreting the previous scripture, the Roman Catholic Church states that this verse is explicitly stating a biblical disapproval of homosexuality. Due to their structural set up, the Church will not alter their perceived interpretation as this would taint the “perfectly preserved line of *pure* Christianity” descending from the Apostle Peter (Guisepi 2000).

Though this verse has come under great scrutiny as of since, the Catholic Church demands on making this a cornerstone to their stance on homosexuality. Because of this, the gay community has felt an ever-present need to cover their own sexual identity in order to abide by religious law (Yoshino 2006). In fact, several religious

scholars have begun to argue that the proper interpretation of this verse should be taken in the context of the times – sex with men should be discouraged as the male “seed” was so valuable to procreation (Greenberg 1988). Among the homosexual culture, there is an increasing dissonance felt by those WHO identify as gay yet also identify as religious.

As discussed previously, much of the Catholic ruling is felt in the Western world (largest religious group in the world) as inspiration to social law. Due to this, the United States of America has seen a great resistance to accepting homosexuality and especially, gay-marriage. This overriding disapproval of the homosexual lifestyle by the Roman Catholic Church has caused much conflict as individuals are being forced to *cover* their identity (sexual orientation makes up a large part of one’s identity) in the effort to assimilate to the mainstream culture (Yoshino 2006).

Though a large portion of conflict is readily interpreted as Catholicism versus homosexuality, the Roman Catholic Church has also been the bearer of a large internal conflict. According to R.E. Howard-Hassmann, author of *Gay Rights and the Right to a Family*,

an overlooked area of this conflict is the internal one arising within the church. There are portions of the Catholic Church that are actively attempting to progress with an accepting society in the effort of incorporating homosexuality into their workings. However, these groups are met with extreme resistance by the heavily conservative Catholic leaders (Howard-Hassmann 2001). These branches of Catholicism that attempt to accept homosexuality are unfortunately brought to ruins by the ultimate refusal by the Vatican to acknowledge the church.

### **ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL CONFLICT**

When analyzing cultural conflicts, it is essential to keep mindful the deep structural values of each culture. In saying this, it is also necessary that we view all conflicts at a critical level and are not confined to a “right-and-wrong” approach of analysis. According to authors Samovar, Porter, McDaniel and McDaniel (2009) a large majority of conflict can be traced back to the, often hidden deep structural roots of a particular culture. The current research looks to analyze the conflict between the homosexual culture and the Roman Catholic Church.

As discussed previous, these cultures are both equally rich in historical context as well as well-ingrained deep structural values that define many of their social and political stances.

For the current research, it will be necessary to review and interpret much of the deep structural roots of each culture. It should be noted that these structures are the interpretation of common themes of decisions, actions and attitudes of each culture's worldview. In order to hone in on the specific conflict between the cultures the current study will utilize two communication theories as a means to organize the conflicting structures: hegemony and ideology. Both these concepts will be explored in the effort to display the power-structure that the Roman Catholic culture abides by and why it leads to intercultural conflict. It should always be stressed that these conflicts did not occur in a vacuum and the current analysis notes that many contributing "outside" factors plays significant roles in intercultural conflicts.

### *Hegemony*

Conflict occurs when two (or more) groups believe that they are "right." Since we construct reality socially, we need to understand how individuals can come to the conclusion that *they* are "right" even

with opposing viewpoints in perspective. In order to understand this phenomenon, the concept of hegemony is used.

The Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci was the first to conceptualize the idea of hegemony. He stated that hegemony is “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Allen 2004). This theory states that the actions, beliefs or attitudes that a culture perceives to be common sense are actually the result of a ruling ideology being communicated. Communication scholars Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy (2004) expand Gramsci’s definition by stating that hegemony is “the process of moral, philosophical, and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups” (Allen 2004). A proper understanding of the concept of hegemony is necessary before we investigate how these principles are incorporated into this intercultural conflict.

In both the Roman Catholic Church and the homosexual culture, an overruling ideology has halted progression to reach a goal of solving conflict (Boswell 1980). The Roman Catholic Church has held

within its deep structure that they are the “true and pure” descendants of the Christian faith. This comes from their viewpoint that the leader of their church, the pope, is a religious descendent of the Apostle Peter. This viewpoint has led to the conclusion that the Catholic faith is the untainted version of Christianity. In the effort to continue this perfect interpretation of faith, the Catholic Church has ascribed to its cultural values to not accept alteration to their faith that go against their interpretation of religious scripture (*Homosexuality: Catholic Answers*).

In relation to hegemony, we see a clearly defined cultural group that is dependent on the ideological viewpoints of a small, yet powerful portion of their culture. As demonstrated in Catholic history, when portions attempt to go against the ruling ideology and allow for an acceptance of homosexuality, they are cast off from the Church. This style of creating worldviews allows for little progression to be made in the acceptance of homosexuality – individual level and cultural level – in the Roman Catholic culture.

### *Ideology*

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, an ideology is a

“systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture” (Merriam-Webster 2003). In relation to the current conflict, ideologies help shape the way individuals perceive certain events or other people. Accordingly, ideologies exist that look unfavorably on individuals of other cultures. Ideologies are created through the hegemonic process as discussed previously and are maintained through the consent of the majority of individuals in a culture (Allen 2004).

The Roman Catholic Church currently operates a particular ideology that frames the homosexual culture as deviant and abnormal (Guisepi 2000). Though these assumptions do not generalize to the entire population of the Roman Catholic Church, their structural set up delegates the power to one individual to set up the entire culture’s ideology. In examining the powerful ideology of the Roman Catholic Church, it is easy to comprehend why they perceive acts and behaviors of the homosexual culture as deviant and unnatural (Pipim 2001).

In order to address solutions to this conflict, it will be necessary for the Roman Catholic Church to reevaluate their ideology of homosexuality. As clearly stated previous, this will be extremely

difficult as their deep religious structures do not allow for much change or alterations in their worldviews (Roman Catholicism). However, if a solution is ever to be met, progression is necessary on the side of the Roman Catholic Church. It should also be noted that it will also be essential for the homosexual culture to accept that is a part of the Roman Catholic culture's deep structure to not allow for progression, thus patience will be necessary (Boswell 1980).

### **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Though an overall acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle seems far off, the Church can use many tools of intercultural competence to properly communicate with members of the homosexual culture. It is through these communications that we can hope for a settlement of the conflict observed between the groups. It is necessary for this conflict to be solved because of the influence that the Church has on the attitudes of society at large as well as lawmakers.

Samovar, et al. (2009) defines intercultural communication competence as the “abilities to properly and appropriately communicate with members of another background.” This concept can be utilized in the current conflict to help bridge a gap from the heavily

structured system of the Roman Catholic Church to the homosexual community. Scholar, Samuel Koranteng-Pipim (2009) offers a three-viewpoint solution to the conflict:

The non-acceptance view, which maintains that homosexuality, is not compatible with biblical Christianity, the qualified-acceptance view, which argues that homosexuality can be compatible with Christianity, and the full-acceptance view, which asserts that homosexuality, is fully compatible with the Christian faith.

In addressing all three of these views, it will be necessary to keep mindful the deep structural values of both cultures. In particular, we need to be extremely mindful of the Roman Catholic Church as they have built much of their structure and culture on their current conservative position towards sexuality (Guisepi 2000). In relation to the previous, it is also necessary to make note the validity of a particular worldview. Since we construct reality through social interpretation, we need to be accepting of conflicting views on humanity. That being said, there is always room to be more competent in communication techniques and practices.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, B. J. (2004). Power Matters, Sexuality Matters. *Difference matters: communicating social identity* (pp. 23-36; 117-137). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Boswell, J. (1980). *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davidson, D. (2004). Homosexuality. *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Winter 2003 ed.). Stanford, Conn.: Stanford University, Metaphysics Research Lab.
- Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV-TR. (4th ed.). (2000). *Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Greenberg, D. F. (1988). *The construction of homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Guissepi, R. A. (2000). *A History Christianity*. History World International, 1. Retrieved December 4, 2012, from [http://history-world.org/a\\_history\\_of\\_the\\_catholic\\_church.htm](http://history-world.org/a_history_of_the_catholic_church.htm)

Homosexuality | Catholic Answers. (n.d.). Catholic Answers. Retrieved December 4, 2012, from <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/homosexuality>

Howard-Hassmann, R. E. (2001). Gay rights and the right to a family: Conflict between liberal and illiberal belief system. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23, 73-95.

Pipim, S. (2001). Three Conflicting Views on Homosexuality. *Must we be silent: issues dividing our church*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Berean Books.

Roman Catholicism - ReligionFacts. (n.d.). Religion, World Religions, Comparative Religion - Just the facts on the world's religions.. Retrieved December 4, 2012, from <http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/denominations>

Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., McDaniel, C., & McDaniel, E. R. (2009). *Communication between cultures* (7th ed., International ed.). Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth ;.

Webster, I. (2003). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (11th ed.). Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc..

# Tanya Oswalt

## The Unpronounceable Foreign Experience

I recently was inspired by Firoozeh Dumas's article, "The 'F' Word." As Dumas metaphorically states, her belief that having a foreign name in America "is a pain in the spice cabinet" (Dumas, p.752). I have seen many of the metaphors that Dumas uses, come to life through my foreign friends and families experiences they have had with their own names. Dumas's web of metaphors persuades the audience into feeling different ways. One that stands out is that foreign names are more 'exotic' and may broaden society's palate. This may also give the sense that there are, simply put, a great many plain names in some societies. As a foreigner, that is something that is totally different, but that does not give Americans the right to call them the "F Word" (Dumas p.754).

Throughout this article Dumas uses the appeals of ethos, pathos, logos, and humor to persuade her audience into an enlightened state of understanding, or at the very least to empathize with immigrants, and what they face in America when they do not have

Yoshino, K. (2006). *Covering: the hidden assault on our civil rights*.

New York: Random House.

“normal” names. Dumas also uses her personal experiences to connect with the audience and build her ethos. Through these same personal experiences, which naturally evoke a wide variety of emotions, she forms the pathos needed for her argument. The author also provides the readers with many details about the how, what, why and when to make sure that the audience can understand the logos behind her claims in the argument. Dumas also uses humor to make serious points while taking the sting of the topic away and persuades people to view this issue under a different light. Therefore in this rhetorical analysis of “The ‘F’ Word,” the use of ethos, pathos, logos and humor as techniques of persuasion will be dissected.

Ethos plays a huge part in how this essay is used to persuade the audience. Dumas is Iranian and has lived through the experiences that she writes about. The essay starts by giving examples of Dumas’ own family and friends who have non-traditional American names and how they mean something very beautiful. However the people with these names are made fun of for how their names sound. This sets the stage for pathos to be intertwined with the ethos, which the reader will find to be a common theme throughout the essay.

This gives Dumas the perfect potent dose of persuasion and knowledge for the readers. Readers can see that the author has firsthand experience with people of other nationalities making fun of her or completely rejecting her as a person.

Dumas gives an example with her own name, “My name, Firoozeh, chosen by my mother, means ‘Turquoise’ in Farsi. In America, it means ‘Unpronounceable’” (Dumas p.752). Readers are persuaded into understanding and possibly feeling of guilty that they have maybe reacted like this to a foreigner at some point in their lives. This further persuades the audience to not only be self-reflective but also pushes a button that goes against the obsessive need for humans to be accepted and not rejected. This is a very powerful piece of persuasion, as it is something that most humans have faced at one time or another. It tugs on the audience’s emotions and ethics, as most of society know and understands that making fun of people is wrong.

The use of pathos as a technique of persuasion runs continually through the essay, as nearly every statement is laced with emotion, which evokes the power of persuasion and elicits feelings such as

shame, guilt, humor, and even bias at times. Since it is such an emotionally charged piece, it is very important to look for the ethos and logos that provides evidence for her persuasive argument. Dumas wrote this essay to shed light on a very touchy subject with a target audience of mainly Americans, who are usually on edge about being called out for being racist or bias against any group. The author handles this delicate subject well with her audience, clarifying that “America is a great country,” providing persuasion with the use of strong pathos to evoke the feeling of pride while building ethos as well.

The author than follows that up with logos that Americans would have a hard time arguing with: “America is a great country, but nobody without a mask and cape has a z in his name” (Dumas p.751). The imagery of “a mask and cape” and letter z is synonymous with the thought of Zorro. This image of a childhood hero is also something that is going to push most of the audience into emotion of some kind; humor, pride, nostalgic feelings, or happiness. This quote uses facts and an image that most Americans can agree with and relate to.

It persuades the readers to think about what the author is saying and the point she is trying to make, without getting upset or disengaged with the message. Either way, some persuasion through pathos will arise in most of the readers due to the solid use of rhetorical persuasion.

Dumas continues her web of persuasion carefully by providing logos filled evidence that backs up her emotionally charged statements. Dumas states, “To strengthen my decision to add an American name, I had just finished fifth grade in Whittier, where all the kids incessantly called me ‘Ferocious’.” This statement provides the logos that the audience can relate to the author. The statement then provides the pathos through the struggles and emotions Dumas clearly went through. It shows why she decided at the age of twelve to change her name to something American (Dumas p.752). At some point the whole audience has either witnessed something of this nature or has been the one picking on someone in this manner.

Therefore Dumas creates an unbreakable bond with the audience through her personal experience. Dumas takes her readers

through her meticulously woven web of thoughts and shows them who, what, where and how, by providing this intricate road map. Dumas easily persuades her audience with a very clearly and logically argument. The author explains how she and her family went through the alphabet to choose a new name for her, and the freedom that she was given by society when she was “normal” (Dumas pgs.752-753). The logic that Dumas provides is something that most anyone in society can relate to. As Dumas states, “People actually remembered my name, which was an entirely refreshing new sensation” (Dumas p.753). As people of the same society, the readers feel a need to belong and/or to be “normal,” so Dumas’ feelings toward getting a new “normal” name is something that the audience not only can understand but can be persuaded into logically concluding that, yes, it would make her life better.

However, the author then helps her readers to understand that with this new “better” life comes a rollercoaster ride. The use of logos is so intertwined with pathos during this point in the essay it is hard to clearly pick it apart. Dumas logically persuaded herself into the American world, with an American name, but is still consumed with

hardships of an unexpected kind, people's true thoughts and feelings (Dumas p.753). The pathos of guilt, shame, and sadness are nothing but a pile of raw emotions for the audience, which is very persuasive. This is a very strong way to show logos, in that individuals within American society have all, at some point, let someone in because they are "normal" (as far as society is concerned).

This is a tangible experience for most of the readers. The audience can relate to and clearly think through this experience that Dumas is sharing, and may also learn a lesson from it as well. Dumas clearly shows the emotions that she felt from being in a situation of knowing everyone's racial points of view. This brings the audience back to the main goal of this essay, which is to enlighten the audience about the troubles foreigners face with uncommon names and make readers think about their actions and words towards others.

The author moves the readers further into connections to the essay with humor. Dumas discusses a doctor's visit and a receptionist who has not done "a little tongue aerobics" (Dumas p.751). Dumas's imagery that she provides the audience is very amusing.

However, this humor is always embedded with ethos, logos, and/or pathos. Dumas's personal experience takes her readers through her logical thought process on why she did not respond when the receptionist called her "Fritzzy, Fritzzy DumbAss." The author goes on to say, "I am highly accommodating. I did not, however, respond to 'Fritzzy' because there is, as far as I know, no t in my name" (Dumas p.754). This again provides very strong evidence while using sarcastic humor to get her point across that it is much harder and more emotionally difficult to live in America, due to having a different name. This personal experience is a great example where the author provides the readers with the full experience of ethos, pathos, and logos.

Dumas builds solid ethos through sharing her own experiences with her audience. The shock and feeling of embarrassment give the readers the pathos, and logically speaking even if a reader hasn't experienced anything like this, they can imagine it, and agree that an experience as this would be difficult for anyone to deal with. Dumas also keeps this difficult issue much lighter with the use of humor and metaphors. Dumas says things like, "It was like having those X-ray glasses that let you see people undressed, except that what I was seeing was

far uglier than people's underwear" (Dumas p.753). This statement refers to the 'vision' that her American name allowed her to have into people's real thoughts and feelings toward foreigners, while using a humorous image of X-ray glasses to see people undressed. The author also uses a metaphoric statement when she says, "Move over, cinnamon and nutmeg, make way for cardamom and sumac" which metaphorically refers to the typical names that Americans use versus the more exotic names from other countries (Dumas p. 751). These metaphors and humorous imagery helps persuade readers into understanding the difference between foreigners having a wider set of "non-traditional names", while most Americans have a narrower set of more traditional names due to our languages and their roots.

Dumas bases her argument on the solid ethos of her own personal experiences, which makes her a very good source. Also she guides the readers through her emotional journey, and if that were not enough, she gives readers real life experiences that back up her logos in the argument. Dumas does all of this while keeping the topic light and downright funny at times. Dumas drives this argument well, as

her audience is always taken into consideration, and she helps them to understand a point of view that would otherwise may not have been seen by many in her audience. After the audience reads this essay, there is hope that they will be more conscious in their daily interactions with foreigners and help make an easier life for them and give them the respect that they deserve. I hope that you not only read the article, but you also may broaden your palates.

## Works Cited

Dumas, Firoozeh. "The 'F Word'. A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America." New York:

Random House, 2004. Print.

Lunsford, A. Andrea, Ruszkiewicz J. John, Walters, Keith. Everything's An Argument With Readings.

Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010. Print.

# Hanna Paquette

## Bromance to Romance:

An Examination of Relationships in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady*

### *Audley's Secret*

He loves her but she was once married to another man who thinks she is dead and now everybody thinks he is dead. Were you able to comprehend all that? That was just the basis of one of the complicated relationship plots portrayed in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Victorian sensation novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*. The relationships between Braddon's characters are essential to the plot in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Much of the plot and suspense is created by how the characters react and relate to each other. The love triangles between characters are especially important to Braddon's success in *Lady Audley's Secret*. The love triangle relationship mentioned at the beginning that involves Lady Audley, Sir Michael Audley, and George Talboys creates tensions and suspense for the readers and also helps shape the characters. There is another set of relationships within Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel that could be looked upon as a love triangle that is also essential to the story's plot, ending, and character

growth; it is the relationship between George Talboys, Robert Audley, and Clara Talboys. By using Queer Theory, I will examine the “love triangle” relationship between George, Robert, and Clara, how this relationship applies to Robert’s character growth, and how it can be socially acceptable upon which to act.

Though Braddon’s novel was written during the Victorian era where sodomy was taboo, Queer Theory is relevant, because it can be used to examine the relationships between others within a society based on heterosexual privilege. Heterosexual privilege, according to Ann B. Dobie, is “the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard by which sexual practice is measured” (350). The assumption of heterosexual privilege is an exact reflection of Victorian times, so how can this theory be applied to *Lady Audley’s Secret*? Another important term “homosocial desire,” defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, shows how queer theory is relevant to Braddon’s novel. Homosocial desire, according to Sedgwick, is the “social bonds between persons of the same sex ... potentially erotic” (*Between Men* 1). The bond between Robert Audley and George Talboys is one of

homosocial desire or what might commonly be called today a bromance; not a definite show of sexual relations but a strong bond between two men. Their homosocial desire can be displayed with the erotic triangle within queer theory. This erotic triangle is a love triangle theory that places two men competing for a woman. It was first brought to light by Rene Girard but then redefined by Eve Sedgwick. Sedgwick states “the triangles Girard traces are most often those in which two males are rivals for a female” (*Between Men* 21). It is their passion for the woman that creates at times a bond between men that could be seen as suppressed homoerotic urges. However, this new urge created between them is almost never acted upon, and one of the men wins the girl in the end.

Jennifer S. Kushnier, in her article “Educating Boys to be Queer: Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*,” also examines the potential homosocial relationship between Robert Audley and George Talboys by using the erotic triangle following Girard’s original method by placing the woman, Clara Talboys, on top. She claims that “Clara as George’s love object... incites” a rivalry between George and Robert. Though I too choose to examine the three’s relationship by using the

erotic triangle, I disagree with Kushnier's positioning of the characters for two reasons. First, the bond between rivals is formed during their competition for the female; Robert and George's homosocial bond was created before the existence of George's sister Clara within the novel and as Kushnier even points out, this bond was potentially formed within Eton College (62). Secondly, George is never seen once competing with Robert for Clara's affections.

I will be using the erotic triangle to establish the relationships between George, Robert, and Clara and to explain why at the ending of Bradon's novel it is acceptable for Robert and Clara to act upon their new found urges of desire. Unlike Kushnier's positioning of characters, my triangle has George Talboys placed in the position that most women would occupy, because he is the driving force of passion for both his good friend Robert Audley and his sister Clara Talboys. Sedgwick's reworking of the erotic triangle also allows this repositioning. Her reworking of the triangle creates an asymmetrical triangle involving the difference of power between the two male suitors; I would like to go a step farther and have it be an asymmetrical power struggle by having one of the two suitors be female and the original

object of desire be male (*Between Men* 23). The erotic triangle then is a diagram of competing suitors with the original object of desire placed at the top. It is George's absence that captures and demands Robert's attention throughout the entire novel. That is why George is placed at the top of the triangle, because he, like an eligible woman, is the object desired and sought.

Robert Audley's obsession with finding George is the driving plot point of the novel and a major cause for his character transformation. Robert Audley is a bachelor and a dandy. Sedgwick describes the typical Victorian bachelor as "partly feminized by his attention to and interest in domestic concerns ... though, his intimacy with clubland and bohemia gives him special passport to the world of men, as well" (*Epistemology* 189-190). She also explains that the typical bachelor hero is "selfish... bitches... a hypochondriac... [and places] a high value on introspection and... self-knowledge" (*Epistemology* 189-190). Robert is the type of man who would be found "smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels" (Braddon 71). He is described by Braddon's narrator as a "handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing

fellow,” and the narrator shows Robert’s lazy work ethic when they state he “was supposed to be a barrister” (Braddon 71). These qualities of Robert reflect Sedgwick’s concept of the Victorian bachelor hero and places his character in a disapproving light. He was not a bad man, but as the narrator states, he was “a man who would never get on in the world” or at least not until he becomes reacquainted with George Talboys (Braddon 71). Robert’s attitude towards George Talboys is very similar to his habit of bringing home stray dogs. This can be seen in their first encounter; George Talboys is seen as “pitiful, bewildered... helpless as a baby; and Robert Audley the most vacillating and unenergetic of men, found himself called upon to act for another. He rose superior to himself and equal to the occasion” (Braddon 78). This passage shows Robert’s curiosity with George and also how George’s character, performing almost feminine traits, creates an instant change within Robert.

After his disappearance, Robert becomes even more infatuated with finding George. According to Vicki A. Pallo, in the article “From Do-Nothing to Detective: The Transformation of Robert Audley in *Lady Audley’s Secret*,” Robert “increasingly takes on the

role of the forlorn lover as he despairs of ever discovering his friend's whereabouts... This strong love/obsession for his friend becomes the motivation that at last drives him to break out of his lethargy and take up the mantle, however unwelcome and apparently incongruous, of detective" (470). Pallo's observation shows how Robert's position of the bachelor hero begins to change through his desire to find his friend. The obsessive search for George forces Robert into action. In the article "Robert Audley's Secret: Male Homosocial Desire and 'Going Straight' in *Lady Audley's Secret*" by Richard Nemesvari, he explains that Robert "does not want to analyze too closely the motives that are driving him" (116). Robert claims "it is this miserable uncertainty, this horrible suspicion, which has poisoned my very life" (Braddon 273). This quotation shows how Robert's thoughts are swarming with thoughts of George. This 'poison' of George, as Robert puts it, is similar to how the narrator describes love, "the fever from the first breath of contagion" (Braddon 342). Robert's obsession with George could then be seen as infatuations of possibly suppressed homoerotic urges or desires. This also makes up for Sir Michael Audley's suspicion of Robert being unnatural when it comes to love

and women. Sir Audley wonders at how Robert has not fallen for Alicia calling it “extraordinary and unnatural in Robert Audley not to have duly fallen in love with her” and why “Robert has failed to take the fever” of love (Braddon 342). Nemesvari claims that “Alicia has perceived... George is her rival, and eventually she will indeed lose Robert to ‘him’” (117). This quote shows how Robert’s relationship with George has not gone unnoticed and that Robert is seen as not fitting into the heterosexual privileged society by not falling in love or rather not being contaminated by desire of the proper sex. George is the one to disease Robert’s mind, and it is through this obsession of George that he soon forms or transfers his desires onto no other than George’s sister, Clara Talboys.

Clara Talboys, though first appearing passionless and indifferent to her brother’s potential demise, is full of pent up passion: “I have grown up in an atmosphere of suppression... I have stifled and dwarfed the natural feelings of my heart, until they have become unnatural in their intensity; I have been allowed neither friends nor lovers ... I have no one but my brother. All the love that my heart can hold has been centered upon him” (Braddon 222).

This unnatural intense form of love Clara possess for her brother could be considered dangerous in the heterosexual privileged society, not because it breaks boundaries for gender norms, but because of its almost incestuous tendencies. These tendencies are not acted upon; instead, they were formed by her forced suppression of emotions within the dominant, male heterosexual society. It is her desire for her brother that Robert finds bewildering, when she gives him her ultimatum: “Choose between the two alternatives, Mr. Audley. Shall you or I find my brother’s murderer?” (Braddon 222). Herbert G. Klein states, in the article “Strong Women and Feeble Men: Upsetting Gender Stereotypes in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*,” Clara “differs from her brother, namely in her strength of character and decidedness of action” (168). Perhaps this deceive action of Clara is why Robert finds her desire so baffling. Both Klein and Nemesvari see Clara as the driving force for Robert’s continuation in his search for George. Though Clara provides a powerful presence as a competitor within the erotic triangle, her power to go out and search for George differs greatly from Robert due to being a woman.

She is then forced to rely on her competitor, Robert, forming a bond with him, following the pattern of the erotic triangle, and proving that she should be one of the competitors and not the object of original desire.

It is after his first meeting with Clara when Robert's thoughts of George soon turn into thoughts of Clara: "It's comfortable, but it seems so d—d lonely tonight. If poor George were sitting opposite to me, or—or even George's sister—she's very like him – existence might be a little more endurable ... The idea of me thinking of George's sister ... what a preposterous idiot I am" (Braddon 230). This slip of thoughts follows the erotic triangle theory. Robert's infatuation with George is being transferred onto Clara Talboys. Klein states that "in Clara he [Robert] finds the man he had been looking for in George" (169). Clara's more masculine qualities over the effeminate George shows Robert's preferences to male characteristics and why she soon starts replacing George within his thoughts. These transferences of thoughts also show how Clara is becoming the new object of desire for Robert.

The erotic triangle comes to completion when Robert Audley

realizes the full extent of his feeling for Clara:

Clara Talboys! Is there any merciful smile latent beneath the earnest light of your brown eyes. What would you say to me if I told you that I love you earnestly and truly as I have mourned for your brother's fate—that the new strength and purpose of my life which has grown out of my friendship for the murdered man grows even stronger as it turns to you, and changes me until I wonder at myself. (Braddon 405)

This realization of Robert's is an important turning point between the relationship of Robert and Clara, because it shows how their mutual affection towards their lost companion led them to have feelings towards each other. The relationship mirrors that of the queer theory erotic triangle. Robert's and Clara's affection, like the two suitors within the triangle create a bond, but unlike the two suitors Robert and Clara are allowed to act upon their new found bond. Within the heterosexual privileged society of the Victorian society, Robert's and Clara's relationship fits within the social norms of man and woman relationships. Before their relationship, both Robert and Clara did not

quite fit within society; Robert was a dandy with no goal in life, and Clara was full of suppressed emotions. It is their relationship that helps them fit in within society; their transferred feelings are allowed to be acted upon, and because of that, they are able to be married at the end of the novel. Nemesvari also claims that “Clara provides Robert with the perfect object of transference and offers him the opportunity to turn his illicit homosocial desire for George in a socially acceptable direction ... because the possibility of being faced with his own homoerotic responses is safely evaded” (119). Both Clara and Robert are now able to free from social judgment when sharing and in some ways uniting their obsession over finding George.

In the end Robert and Clara are able to continue searching for George with no threat to their social relationships. Robert is no longer the bachelor hero but rather a true Victorian gentleman; married, successful, and shows concern for others. The ending becomes truly happy for the couple when George shows up not dead but alive and well. Klein states that when Robert married Clara “he practically also marries George, since the three of them will live together” (169). The ending Braddon has written still shows the strong homosocial bonds

between Robert and George but now in a more acceptable situation within society. Robert, Clara, and George all win in the end, because Robert and Clara are able to continue their close bonds with George and create a new bond between themselves.

Robert's and Clara's marriage is a result of their mutual affection towards George Talboys. The erotic triangle relationship shows the importance of relationships within Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. The relationship among Robert Audley, Clara Talboys, and George Talboys shows the character development of Robert, and by using queer theory, how Robert's and Clara's relationship is formed and socially acceptable in a heterosexually privileged society. Even within a strict Victorian society, the relationship between others is important whether it is bromance or romance within Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*.

## Works Cited

- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Ed. Natalie M. Houston. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 2003. Print.
- Dobie, Ann B. *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012. Print.
- Klein, Herbert G. "Strong Women and Feeble Men: Upsetting Gender Stereotypes in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*." *ATENEA*. 28.1 (2008) : 161-174. *EBSCO*. Web. 10 Apr. 2012.
- Kushnier, Jennifer S. "Educating Boys to be Queer: Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 30.1 (2002) : 61-75. Print.
- Nemesvari, Richard. "Robert Audley's Secret: Male Homosocial Desire and 'Going Straight' in *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*. Ed. Calvin Thomas. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 109-121. Print.

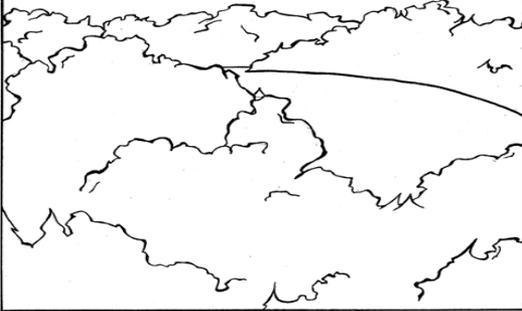
Pallo, Vicki A. "From Do-Nothing to Detective: The Transformation of Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*." *The Journal of Popular Culture*. 39.3 (2006) : 466-478. *Wilson Web*. Web. 10 April 2012.

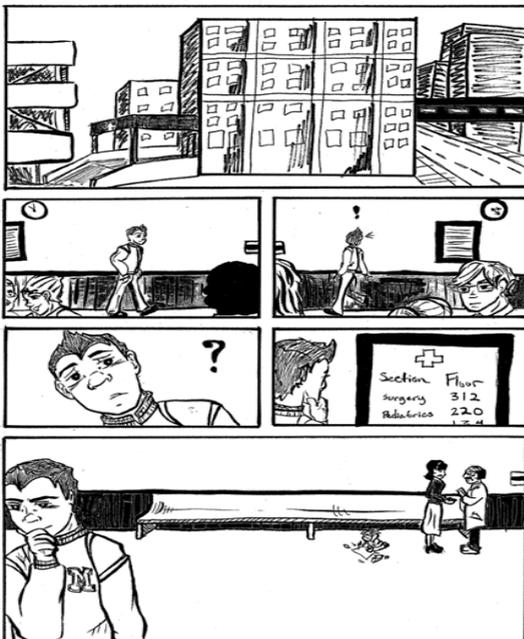
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. Print.

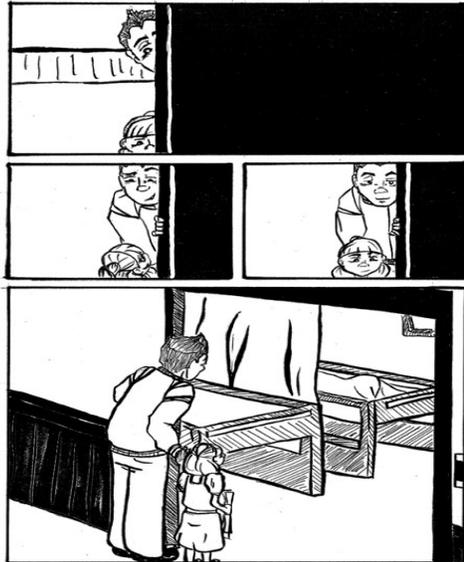
---. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2008. Print.

# Homecoming

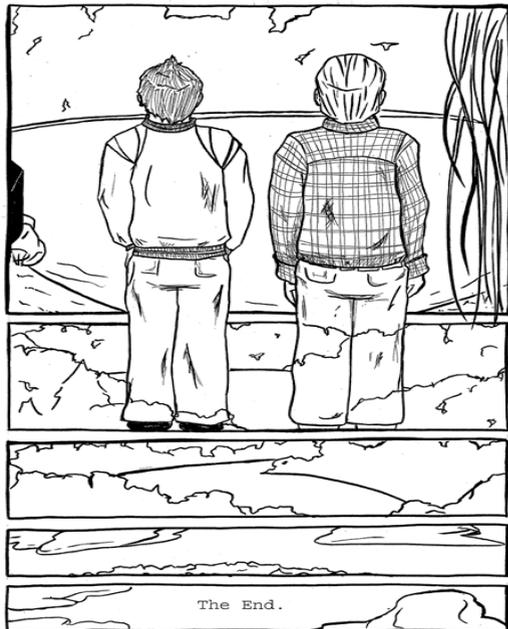
By Hanna Paquette











Like editing? Like reading? Like designing websites?

Then joining The Nemadji Review is the student org for you!

Meetings held every other Thursday.

If you are interested in joining, please e-mail: [thenemadjiireview@uwsuper.edu](mailto:thenemadjiireview@uwsuper.edu)

For more information, please check out the website at:

[www3.uwsuper.edu/  
thenemadjiireview](http://www3.uwsuper.edu/thenemadjiireview)

Like the English language?

Like fun and games?

Like discussing literature?

Like being a part of an honors club?

Then joining the English club or Sigma Tau Delta is for you!

Meetings are held every other Thursday, opposite of The Nemadji Review.





