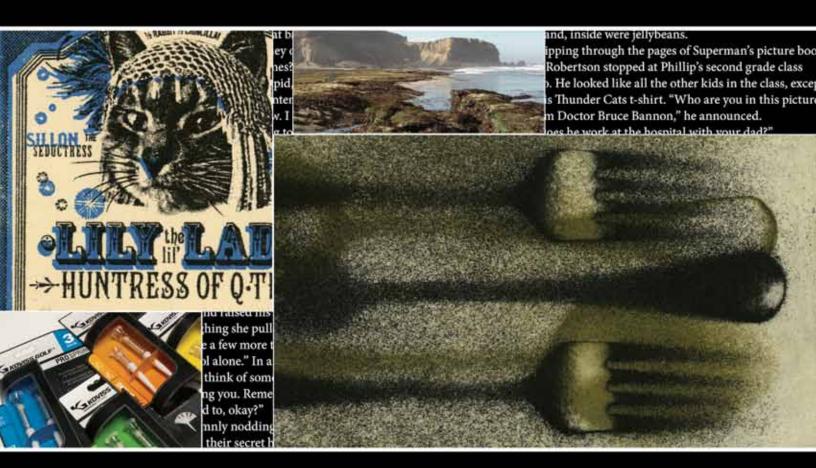
# @UTLET



08 FALL
THE BYU-IDAHO LITERARY JOURNAL

"WE WILL YET HAVE MILTONS AND SHAKESPEARES OF OUR OWN."

—Elder Orson F. Whitney

# Orson F Whitnes

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ver the past year students majoring in art and English have collaborated to bring the campus community a new version of Outlet: The BYU-Idaho Literary and Art Journal. From the journal's title to its design concept, this edition reflects a greater synthesis of art and the written word. Junior and senior-level students have sifted through, argued about, and stewed over which writing and art pieces should be included within these pages. In the edition that follows, you will witness the efforts of many individuals who have done their best to make this issue memorable and engaging. Students have selected and edited all the work herein. These great students have also chosen the award winning entries and continue to spread the word to their peers about Outlet's mission, goals, and future.

As one of Outlet's faculty advisors, I am grateful for the students' talents, unity, and vision. They are working hard to fulfill the prophetic mandates regarding BYU-Idaho and artistic endeavors. One such statement comes from former Church President Spencer W. Kimball. In his classic message "The Gospel Vision of the Arts," President Kimball declared,

Our writers . . . with the inspiration of heaven, should tomorrow be able to pro duce a masterpiece which would live forever. Our own talent, obsessed with dyna mism from a worthy goal, could put into such a story life and heartbeats and emo tions and love and pathos, drama, suffering, fear, courage; and they could put into it the great leader, the mighty modern Moses . . .

Take a Da Vinci or a Michelangelo or a Shakespeare and give him a total knowledge of the plan of salvation of God and personal revelation and cleanse him, and then take a look at the statues he will carve and the murals he will paint and the masterpieces he will produce. (5)

Outlet will continue to serve as a starting point for the kind of writers and artists President Kimball describes. As greater numbers of students better understand this journal's purpose, we believe its influence will expand even more in the years ahead.

Indeed, we hope you enjoy your journey through this edition. Once you've studied these pages, please share a copy of Outlet and its mission with other students so that they may also have a chance to submit their very best work.

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Isaac Johnson April Kelley Jordan McCann Robert McKenzie **Emily Newman** Jessica Nieman Preston Norton Jalene Peterson Adam Piper

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Student Outlet 7 Literary & Art Journal 2008

#### BLACK AND WHITE

Heather Baird

The soldier swung the blade of his heavy sword at the man charging toward him. The enemy's ax, poised to slice through steamy breath, filled the soldier's view as it split the last shards of daylight.

An instant later, the man fell. The soldier's head dipped briefly over the body. He whispered a few mixed words of respect and regret before the tumultuous cries thundered back into his ears.

Now the soldier faced a difficult decision. Retreat was unthinkable- his next move would only be further into the conflict. But he must decide which of his comrades would benefit most from his sacrifice.

And a sacrifice it would be. Serving on the front lines, the outcome was inevitable- his life would be thrown willingly onto the alter of duty for his king. That very morning, the soldier had polished his weapon with the same calm strength that had filled his days before the war had even started. Now everything he had prepared for, if unknowingly, stood before him in gripping hues of white and black.

The moment of indecision ended as another figure broke from one part of the battle and ran toward the lone soldier, the man's blazing eyes sending defiant daggers ahead of him to initiate the engagement. Somehow, the look itself ignited the pain from several wounds that the soldier had not yet acknowledged, and they began to sear his awareness with pulsing clarity. The soldier's pupils hardened into glassy shields as he braced his body for what he knew might be his last offering.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Streams of sweat blurred his vision as the palefaced knight watched the soldier grapple with the new opponent. The knight blinked to wash the salty mixture out of his eyes.

He made the gesture just in time. A figure in burnished black armor whipped around on his horse to thrust his lance toward the side of the knight's saddle, but the knight pulled himself back as the gleaming point achieved its destination. The blow glanced off of the knight's breastplate and found another fleshy target- his horse cried out with shrieks of intense agony. When she stumbled over her own forelegs, the knight slid off her back and threw himself at his attacker with his blade drawn. The enemy was knocked from his own beast and the two wrestled in their stiff armor with awkward but deadly intent.

Soon, the dark figure lay motionless beneath him. The knight gasped for air as he struggled to stand erect in the heavy metal suit which both guarded and constrained him. He shoved the visor on his helmet up in order to focus his gaze on the distant castle walls where the chalky, rough stones he had so long guarded presented a facade of impenetrability.

With graphic recollections of the day's battle overwhelming his thoughts, the knight's lungs convulsed, releasing a puff of air which froze instantly in the deepening cold. Observations pieced themselves together to form a picture of an enemy that was not only well-armed but also thoroughly trained in warfare. The complex strategies known to the Dark King's army easily outmoded those of the naïve soldiers of the knight's homeland. Truly, their nation had grown accustomed to peaceful times during the years of the reign of their great king- and any chance

for success appeared to be tainted by that fact.

Yet these admissions of His Majesty's weakness did not provoke in him wrathful reactions, but rather softened his outlook. Should the entire battle be won or lost, it would be done in the name of the ruler to whom he had sworn his absolute allegiance.

A sudden blow from behind forced the knight to his knees and his thoughts were swallowed up in unconsciousness.

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As he gazed on the fallen knight from the slender gap between the barred doors of the chapel, the old man shuddered beneath his white robes. War was not in the bishop's blood. In all his years of service, he had only felt a desire for the happiness of the people of the kingdom. Now he stood watching as the flock for whom he had offered only guidance and safety was forced to confront an enemy whom none of them had believed would really come.

Only the bishop had carried any idea of the reality facing them. He had seen the effects of war in the eyes of those who had engaged in similar battles and he knew that someday it would come to this place. Yet he could do nothing to prepare the people- they would not hear and he could not explain.

For now, the chapel stood as an island in the middle of a stormy world. When the carnage was over and the losses counted, perhaps it would be the only thing left standing. In men's hearts, it was certainly meant to be so.

The old man lowered his head and muttered words of comfort that he hoped would be felt by those who fought for their precious freedoms. But his greatest concern was for the ruler he so dearly loved. The bishop himself would leave the haven that protected him and join the battle if it meant saving that one man.

The queen grasped the stones encasing her window until the trembling in her marble white hands finally ceased. Just below her, bodies lay strewn across the fields- fields where she had so often ridden her horses in the summertime. Now, icy winds swept the first vapors of winter over the inanimate forms of those whom she knew well- the knight who had trained her new stallion, the king's swordbearer, the brave young stable boy.

Her husband's words from only a few days before rang strangely in her memory. "If only my soldiers had

your cleverness, my dear, there would be no enemy we could not conquer." He had meant it as a joke, a response to her thorough planning for an addition of stronger battlements to the castle. They had laughed together and then embraced. Neither of them had realized how soon a viable threat would present itself.

Though he was now ardently engaged in assessing battle plans and resources with his generals, the queen knew the king's heart. She knew it was breaking over those being ravaged by these dark forces, breaking because he wanted to be among them, offering himself for his country. He did not view himself as any better than the rest. Perhaps that was one of the reasons for their singular devotion.

Yet he and she both understood that the battle would be lost if he was lost. This enemy did not accept surrender, they did not take prisoners. The destruction of the king alone was their design, but in the taking of his life, all the others would be destroyed as well. The irony of their offensive was despicable.

Finally, the queen withdrew her eyes from the scene. Though her lord might be trapped in the castle by circumstance, she was not. An enemy who gave no mercy would find no mercy in her as long as she still had breath.

As she traded her ivory robes for a fur-lined winter wrap, three tears stained the cloth. She ignored the spots as she poured the vial of poison into a leather waterbag. It would be easy to move in and out of the battle. An unarmed woman would provoke no fear. Her tainted refreshment would be offered only to the enemy, but words of comfort would pour freely for the soldiers who so faithfully served.

And should she be caught, the price of her life would be willingly paid for her husband.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

As the last of the generals passed through the heavy curtains drawn across the wide, arching door, the king closed his eyes. It was tempting to imagine himself astride the brawny flanks of his favorite horse, raising his sword heavenward with a call to fight, even more tempting to envision the enemy being swept beyond their borders and cries of "Victory!" filling the northern skies.

In such an ideal scene, life could return to the way it had been. The annual summer picnic where the nobles served the grateful kitchen help. Rides with his queen

#### THRESHOLD HERO

Patricia Cady

across the fields to where the Western lake perfectly framed every sunset. Christmas dances when the castle seemed to reverberate with his favorite music.

With a knowing nod, the king's eyes flashed open again. The plans and strategies were all a farce. From bishop to soldier, the king knew that each subject made his stand heroically. Let them fall with honor gracing their frozen features. He knew that the black- clothed warriors would finally break through his defenses and that he, the king, would suffer the penalties of destiny.

A loud crack shot like an arrow through the compressed air in his war chambers. The outer door had at last been breached. Without searching for a window's view to confirm it, the king envisioned the dark-clad figures pouring in over each other like vermin. His best men lay lifeless on the battlefield. Reports had revealed the crushing news that even the quiet bishop had disobeyed orders to remain shut inside the chapel and had been struck down by one of the barbarians. In his heart, he somehow sensed that

the queen, too, was now gone. It would only be minutes before the enemy would find him calmly waiting in this room. He would not sit- no- the king stood in blood-pounding readiness.

In those last seconds, it ran through his mind that the one thing no enemy could destroy was the quality of life that he and his kingdom had known. The past could not be erased. That alone was his comfort as the velvet curtains draping the door fell in slashed pieces at his feet.

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Death's ebony robes slid back to reveal a bony hand as Life sank lower in her soft chair, the white cloth wrinkling beneath her taut fingers. Death reached out for his battle-hardened knight and slid it slowly, deliberately, onto the chosen square, knocking the queen from her place on the board. The white king stood motionless, awaiting the verdict as Death's chilly voice whispered a single, irrefutable word.

"Checkmate."

"There's a bomb in your basement," he matter-of-factly told her.

"What?"

"There's a bomb in your basement," Superman repeated. "I saw two men climb through your window and leave it."

Rolling her eyes Mrs. Robertson asked, "Did you run through my flower garden again?"

"No," the four-foot-tall superhero replied, looking down at his untied sneakers.

With a deep sigh Mrs. Robertson said, "You have a wonderful imagination, and that's something really special, but I can't have you tramping through my flowers. Last time I caught you pretending, you were in the African jungle and my sunflowers were beheaded with a stick. They've never been the same since."

"I didn't run through your flowers Mrs. Robertson. Promise." To prove his point Superman stepped to the side so she could see behind him toward her flower garden.

On the sidewalk was his getaway car, disguised as a bicycle. Perfectly matched to his crimson cape, she could see the horn he often used to warn others of impending danger. The tires had playing cards in the spokes that always rattity-tat-tatted his arrival; a handmade Superman logo, made of duct tape, decorated the banana seat; and attached to the bicycle was a do-it-yourself sidecar with mismatched wheels.

"Are you okay Mrs. Robertson?" Superman asked, looking up at his neighbor's face. "You're gettin' really red. Did you swallow a bug? I swallowed two bugs on my ride here," he proudly told her.

Hiding her smile, Mrs. Robertson choked out, "I'm fine. Just fine. How are you?"

"Today's been great! I got a check plus on my "When I Grow Up I Want to Be..." paper and only missed two words on my spelling test. Cool, huh?"

"That's a real improvement," she answered. Noticing Superman holding something behind his back she asked, "What are you hiding?"

Pulling a book out from under his cape he stated, "We had show-and-tell today. Do ya' wanna see?"

"Absolutely," she said, and invited Superman through her front door.

Superman, a.k.a. Phillip Francis Phillipson the Fourth, was born April 1st and his birth was a miraculous tragedy. He took his first breath as his mother took her last, and had always felt out of place, except for at Mrs. Robertson's house or when he was with his older sister Lily.

"Mrs. Robertson?" Phillip asked as she returned from the kitchen.

"Yes?"

"You're kinda pretty, and not too old, why aren't you married," he shyly asked.

Setting a candy dish and two juice boxes on the coffee table, she smiled and answered, "Well, I was married once, to Mr. Robertson. But he died a number of years ago." Changing subjects she stated, "Now on to the important stuff. What did you take to show-and-tell today?"

Superman thrust the book into her hands as she sat next to him. "This is my picture book," he explained. "It has pictures of me and my family since I was a baby."

Opening the book on her lap, Mrs. Robertson pointed to the first picture asking, "Who are these absolutely adorable kids?"

Giggling, Phillip answered, "That's me and Lily. She was only four years old. We have almost the same birthday you know."

"That's right" Mrs. Robertson said.

Pointing to a stuffed animal in the photo he continued, "That's the purple bunny my mom gave Lily before she went to the hospital to have me. It's all Lily has left of her – the purple bunny and me."

"What about this animal lying on the floor in front of you?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"That's a Great Dane," Phillip stated. "I guess that's Horse. He died before I can remember. He's the reason Lily is like she is," Phillip said matter-of-factly.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you see how gynormous he is?" Superman asked.

"Yes...'

"Well, Lily was only four and she tried to ride Horse ... well, like a horse."

"Oh, no," she said.

"Yep. She fell off Horse and hit her head. Now she's four-years-old all the time. Daddy says she's special, just like me, but in a different way." Turning the page Phillip stated, "Here's my Kindergarten picture. That was a good year."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Robertson asked.

"Well, I was a big ol' scaredy-cat when I walked through the doors. I remember my sword hit the ground a lot 'cuz I was shaking. It helped me be stronger," he said with a smile.

"What do you...," stopping and pointing to the class picture Mrs. Robertson asked, "What are you wearing?"

"Like I said, I was a big ol' scaredy-cat, so I wore my Zorro costume to school. It made me feel better," he said defensively.

"What's it made of?"

"Well I wore all black, of course, had the plastic sword and then a mask over my eyes," he explained.

What he forgot to mention was the mask was painted on with black shoe polish and hid his freckles, but accentuated his bovine eyes.

A picture on the opposite page caught his glance. "Do you remember that?" he asked.

Smiling to herself Mrs. Robertson nodded. "I was brand new to the area, moved into this new house and was nervous about teaching the first grade."

"I didn't know teachers got nervous. I thought they knew everything," he said with wonder.

"We know a lot Phillip, but we don't know everything." Mrs. Robertson leaned in closer and whispered, "Do you want to know a secret?"

Glancing around the empty living room, to make sure no one could overhear, Phillip nodded. Mrs. Robertson softly said, "Even adults get scared. I was scared until you walked in my classroom as Batman. I knew we were going to be friends."

"Me too. You're my most favoritest teacher ever!" Phillip exclaimed.

Leaning back against the couch cushions Mrs. Robertson stated, "I remember your utility belt was your dad's tape measure. I did the math and your waist came out to about 12-inches."

"Wow," he exclaimed. "Well, I've grown a lot since then. My waist is probably ten times that big now. My dad says I'm a big kid," Superman said proudly.

"You sure are," Mrs. Robertson agreed.

"Yep." Tapping his head he stated, "Lily's still a kid in here, but I'm seven-and-a-quarter, seven-and-a-half next month. Now that I'm more older than her, I make sure she's okay. It's like I'm her big brother," he said.

"And you're a good big brother."

"Do you know what my favoritest thing about Lily is," Phillip asked.

"No." Mrs. Robertson answered.

"When she's happy. Her face almost breaks 'cuz her smile is so big and sometimes, if I'm really funny, she laughs until she hiccups," he said with a soft smile.

"How about you, who watches out for you," Mrs. Robertson asked.

"I do." He said. "Sometimes I get hurt, but superheroes don't cry."

"What about bullies?" she asked.

Looking at the floor and shifting in his seat Superman asked, "What do you mean?"

"Phillip, look at me." Mrs. Robertson waited until he raised his eyes. Holding his gaze she continued, "I know your dad thinks you're clumsy and fall down a lot, but we both know better. Why don't you tell me their names so I can talk to their parents?"

"NO!" he shouted. Taking a couple deep breaths he

added, "It's not that bad – really. They don't always hit me. Sometimes they only call me names."

"What kind of names?" she asked.

"I dunno...like stupid, loser, weirdo, or Freaky Fart Face Phil." Looking intently at her he pleaded, "Please don't let my dad know. I don't want him to be sad."

"What are we going to do then Phillip?"

"I could walk to school with you," he said hopefully.

"Not every day. Let me think..." she said as she gazed out the window.

Looking at the coffee table Phillip asked, "What about the Power Pills?"

"What?"

"You know," pointing at the dish of jellybeans in front of him, "the power pills. I'll take some with me so that I won't be nervous, and then scare 'em with my SUPER POWERS!" he shouted as he jumped onto the couch and raised his arms in the air.

Laughing she pulled him down. "Okay. Okay. You can take a few more today to save for when you walk to school alone." In a serious voice she added, "But we need to think of some other way to stop them from bothering you. Remember you can come talk to me if you need to, okay?"

Solemnly nodding his head, they sat on the couch and did their secret handshake. When Phillip opened his hand, inside were jellybeans.

Flipping through the pages of Superman's picture book, Mrs. Robertson stopped at Phillip's second grade class photo. He looked like all the other kids in the class, except for his Thunder Cats t-shirt. "Who are you in this picture?"

"I'm Doctor Bruce Bannon," he announced.

"Does he work at the hospital with your dad?"

"No, he's the guy who turns into the Incredible Hulk when he gets mad," he explained. "He turns all green and his arm and leg muscles get humungous!"

"Is that why your pockets were always filled with balloons and you had such interesting brown bag lunches that year?"

"Yep. I would blow up the balloons whenever I needed super strength," he explained. "In order to keep my Hulk power at its best, I only ate things that were green. Usually I had green jell-o, pickles, cucumbers, which I hate, but ate anyways, and tic-tacs. I also carried green food coloring to add to my school milk ... because I need strong bones."

"You're right," she agreed, "but it must have been hard to find things to eat."

"Sometimes, but my dad made me green eggs for breakfast and put a bag of M&M's in my lunch as a treat. I only ate the green ones and gave the rest to the other kids." Looking at the clock Superman jumped up from the couch. "Ohmigosh! I gotta go. Lily probably forgot to meet me here and is home. We're gonna ride around and see if there's any evil out there."

"I would hate to keep you from fighting crime," Mrs. Robertson said as she rose from the couch. Closing the book and handing it to him she added, "Don't forget to take some extra power pills."

He nodded and took a handful, making sure to include some purple pills for Lily. Stopping at the door Superman turned around and said, "You know Mrs. Robertson, there aren't any bombs in your basement... in case you're scared."

"Thank you Phillip. I was worried about going downstairs, but I feel better now. Hurry home and find Lily."

"Okay. Thanks Mrs. Robertson. See you tomorrow," he yelled as he got on his bicycle and pedaled away from the front porch.

At the bottom of Mrs.Robertson's driveway, and two houses from home, Superman saw a large purple bunny in the middle of a hostile circle. Popping a couple of jellybeans in his mouth he quickly sped towards the group.

"You are bad boys," he heard Lily heatedly yell at them. "Bad!" Her aggressive stance was only matched by her angrily contorted face.

The boys laughed and made fun of her outfit. "Man, is it Halloween every day of the year for you weirdoes," one voice tauntingly asked. "Aw," one boy said in a babyish voice. "Is the baby bunny mad?" Egged on by his friends' laughter he pointed to the lavender rabbit under her arm. "Is dat your baby too? Where's Freaky Fart Face Phil? What costume is he wearing today?"

Not understanding, Lily again said, "Bad boys!"

Laughing at her the bully grabbed Lily's rabbit. Shrieking and running toward the boy, Lily halted in shock when the boy tore the bunny's head from its body. Tears immediately filled her eyes.

Propelled by the pain on his sister's face, Superman flew from the moving bicycle and rushed Lily's attacker. Catching the rabbit killer off-guard, Phillip

#### CALIFORNIA GIRLS

Elizabeth Scoresby

It was a long drive up Highway 1 to the Hamilton Library. Amy had been there once before on a field trip for her art history class in her fourth semester. It was old-world, like Jane Austin, with the spiral staircases and the floor-to-ceiling windows and the hard-wood paneling, the walls lined with classical artwork depicting chubby women bathers and picnicking nobility. Amy had had a boyfriend at the time; they had held hands through the long hallways and had snuck away from the group to go kiss behind the cypress trees in the garden. It had all been like a scene from an oil painting.

"I can't picture Melanie there," she said to Elliot as they drove along the winding two-lane coastal road. He was tapping his fingers on the cracking leather steering wheel to the weak, tinny sounds coming from the ancient stereo of his Cutlass Cruiser. Amy had her foot on the dashboard, twisting at her nylons, trying to hide a hole between her toes. "She's the gawkiest accounting major in California. I keep imagining her standing next to Elizabeth Bennet and I can't help laughing."

"I feel like crap, Amy," Elliot said.

"I'm sorry. I remember the drinking fountain on the third floor. It was so shiny, I was sure it would shoot out champagne. Or Mountain Dew, at least."

"You want to feel my head, tell me if I have a fever?" Amy reached over and touched his forehead.

"Ninety-eight point six, on the dot. Could you believe her dress? Or did you see it? Maybe she only showed the girls. She looked like Grace Kelley."

"Is she the one who drove off the cliff? Or was that

Doris Day?"

"I don't know. Check out this hole. There's no way I'm gonna hide it in these Roman sandals."

Amy tugged at the straps on her shoes. The heels were three inches tall. She hated the idea of wearing them for the next twelve hours, but she also wasn't sure about taking them off at the Hamilton Library. "If Mel was having her wedding at the Grove like we always planned, I could totally go barefoot. I'm a Berkeley woman, I wasn't meant to wear nylons."

Elliot didn't answer.

"You're being kinda quiet, El. What's up?"

"I told you, I feel like crap. Can we open the window?"

"Are you kidding me? Do you see these curls? Three hours. Three hours and six burns on my roommate's curling iron. Besides, it's cold outside."

"Like seventy, maybe. That's not cold."

"I can't believe you think that. Weren't you in San Diego yesterday?"

"Yes, and this is my twelfth hour driving in two days. My head is going to implode if I don't get some fresh air." He reached for the air conditioning dial.

"No no! My contacts. They'll dry out, which means red, teary eyes in all of the five million pictures that are going to be taken today, so no AC."

"Amy, I'm gonna die."

"No you're not. *I'm* gonna die. Look at what I'm wearing. At least you get a nice comfy suit. If I ever get married, my bridesmaids are wearing Birkenstocks. Nothing else. Won't that be easy?"

"A little weird, maybe."

Elliot and Amy had been friends for twelve years and Elliot had never yet gotten his way. He leaned his head back against the seat and tried to imagine being stationary as he steered the massive car around another bend.

"I wish we could have gone up yesterday like everyone else," he said.

"Stupid Professor York always gives exams on Friday nights. It's one of his many sadistic rituals. Sorry, but you know I couldn't miss it."

"Oh, I know. I couldn't make the drive until yesterday, anyway. But wouldn't it have been fun?"

"Heck no. Sleeping in the Regency? Give me a break. I'm afraid aristocratic is the last thing on my list of adjectives. I always thought it was last on Melanie's list, too." She twisted in her seat, trying to get the filmy skirt of the bridesmaid dress to lie flat beneath her. "Can you believe she ordered these? I almost took her temperature when she showed me the designs."

"Italian silk, right?"

"Yeah. Same as her dress. Ridiculous, isn't it? We could sell these at auction and build a school for illiterate kids in Ethiopia or something. Maybe I'll do that. I'll talk to the other thirteen bridesmaids and get them to pitch in their dresses and see if we can break a million."

"Thirteen?"

"Yeah, fourteen of us total. How do you like that? I don't even know eight of them. They're Tom's friends. Girls he didn't want left out of the wedding party. He asked Melanie if it would be okay to add them to her side."

"That's..."

"A little unethical, I know. But that's Tom for you."
"I haven't met him yet."

"Just as well. There's not much to meet."

"You don't like him?"

"No! Of course I like him! I have to like him. He's my new best-friend-in-law." Amy shrugged. "I don't know. He's kind of a social octagon. All straight edges and sharp corners. He doesn't roll right when you push him."

"Amy, please, I need the window open."

"No! That would ruin all the work I got up at five to do! And after only two hours of sleep! What kind of sacrifice are you asking me to make?"

"Ames, I really, really feel like crap. I'm roasting

alive here."

"Take your coat off."

"How? There's no place to pull over."

"There'll be a turn-off soon. Like a vista, you know."

"I don't know if I can last that long. I'm gonna ralf,

Ames."

Amy looked at Elliot. There was sweat along his hairline and the corners of his mouth looked vaguely green. "Okay, El, take it easy." She started pumping the window down. "Hey, it's okay, go ahead and roll down your window."

He nodded weakly. His face was very slack. Amy looked ahead. "There, a turn off! Around the next bend, I saw it! Just one more minute, we can rest!"

"Amy, I'm not going to make it." He was struggling with his window crank. He suddenly went very pale and leaned his head against the glass.

"ELLIOT! Don't close your eyes! What are you *thinking*?" Amy jumped for the steering wheel in time to avoid the thin, rusty guardrail. "Wake up, El! Cut it out!"

It happened far too quickly for Amy to avoid it in any way. Elliot exploded like the ocean beneath them, all over the steering wheel, all over his lap, all over Amy's arms.

Amy shrieked. "Brake! Brake!"

She swerved away from the rocky cliff face to the right, but overcorrected and scraped against the guardrail. "Elliot! Use the stupid brake!"

Elliot was still retching beside her, but he managed to take the wheel back and swerve them into the turn-off, then came to a jerking halt, skidding slightly on the gravel.

Through the static on the radio Amy could hear the Beach Boys singing "California Girls." Out of the open window came the sound of the waves on the rocks far below the road.

Elliot was panting, his eyes closed and head tilted back.

"Feel any better?" Amy finally asked.

The side of his mouth turned up. "Yeah, actually. Thanks."

"Sure thing."

They were quiet then for several seconds.

"We are alive, right?" Amy said.

"I think so. Unless that reek is the stench of hell."

"No. Hell doesn't smell this bad. Gosh, Elliot, what

did you eat for breakfast?"

"A pop-tart."

"No wonder you're sick. Do you know how many preservatives they pack inside those? About as natural as latex."

Elliot was opening his door. Amy followed, slowly undoing her seatbelt, careful not to touch the lavender silk of her dress with her slimy arms.

They walked around the Cutlass once to view the damage. The scrape against the guardrail had left a small dent, but there was nothing else but a vague burning smell from the quick brake. Elliot bent down and kissed the headlight. "Thank goodness for American cars."

Amy walked over to the edge of the vista. Behind the rickety guardrail was a hundred foot drop to a jagged coastline of evil looking rocks. "Funny," she said to Elliot, "I always thought the North Pacific coast was pretty."

"Here, Ames," Elliot said from behind her. She turned in time to catch the oil rag he tossed. He was rummaging around the trunk. "Use it on your arms, but don't touch your dress, it could leave grease spots."

"What about you? You're gonna need more than the napkins from the glove box to clean up that mess."

Elliot sighed and put his hands on his hips. "I've got my clothes back here, the ones I was going to wear home tomorrow. But this is my only suit..."

"Ruined."

"Yeah, pretty much."

Amy turned back towards the cliff. Death was only six feet away. "Elliot..."

"All I've got are my blue jeans. And my San Francisco t-shirt. I don't think that works for the Hamilton."

"Elliot."

"But it might be better than crusty vomit."

"Elliot."

He looked at her over the open trunk. "What?" She turned away from the cliff. "I didn't think you were really...I'm so sorry, I should have let you open the window."

Elliot rolled his eyes. "Oh, come on, Ames, don't even think like that."

"It's true! All because of my stupid hair! We could have died!"

"Cut it out, Ames. You saved our lives. You kept us

from driving off this wicked cliff."

"We wouldn't have needed saving if I had just opened my window to begin with."

"I'm a math major, don't try to be logical with me. We're still alive, the car still runs, there's no vomit on your dress, what else matters?" Elliot put his head back into the trunk.

"But your car..."

"Seriously, Amy, stop worrying about it."

Amy folded her arms against the salty breeze and turned back to look out over the flat ocean horizon. It was a clear day, no clouds, just a blue April sky. She could see forever. "All the way to China," Melanie used to say. They would go to the beach on weekends during their high school summers and stay late and build bonfires and light illegal firecrackers. Elliot would go to gather more driftwood and the girls would lie side by side on the flannel blanket and talk about traveling.

"There's nothing for it, Ames, I'm gonna have to wear the grubbies. I could drive home to San Diego, but we might miss the pictures." Elliot was shaking out a pair of pants with a hole over the left knee.

A small bubble of anger was detaching itself from Amy's heart and rising into her sinuses.

"At least they're clean. Melanie won't care, anyway, and she's all that matters." He pulled out the green San Francisco t-shirt Amy had bought him for his fifteenth birthday. It was six years old, faded like a Kleenex.

"You don't think Melanie will mind?"

Elliot looked up at her and grinned. "Oh, come on, Ames. We're talking about Smelly Mel, here."

"No we're not. If we were talking six months ago, then we would be talking about Smelly Mel." Amy flushed. She was surprised at the sudden bitter edge on her voice.

Elliot closed the trunk. "What are you saying?"

"Nothing. Nothing, forget it."

"No, Amy, tell me what you mean."

Amy frowned at the waves swirling around the gray rocks a hundred feet below her. The anger bubble was swelling inside her head. "Elliot, you can't tell me you haven't noticed."

"Noticed what?" Elliot was frowning, too. He came to stand a few steps behind her.

"How Melanie's changed! She's *different*, okay? Just look at what I'm wearing! A wedding at the *Hamilton*! What the crap is that? She was going to get married in

a tree, remember?"

"Amy, that was in eighth grade. People change."

"Not this much! They're not supposed to! They leave people out to dry when they do."

Elliot put a hand out and touched Amy's tense back. "Come on, Ames. She's not leaving you out to dry."

"What would you call it?" Amy turned sharply. She was scowling. "Have you been to the Hamilton? No! It's the snootiest place on earth! It's where you go if you're doing a research paper on the social habits of the rich and conceited. And here's Melanie, the most socially unconcerned college student in the world, wearing a dress from Italy and flashing a Tiffany ring and turning slow circles in front of a gaudy gilded mirror in some exclusive upstairs room of that bourgeoisie mansion surrounded by thirteen bridesmaids! Only thirteen, because the fourteenth is stuck in a turn-off on Highway 1 with vomit on her arms and oil-spots on her dress because she couldn't make it up the night before because the bride failed to consider her best friend's demanding school schedule! 'No, I can't have it in May! The Hamilton's only opening is in April! You can just skip school.' Well, I can't skip school. I have one semester left and I can't afford to take time off. Unlike her, I still have dreams."

The slow smile that spread across Elliot's face only made her angrier. "How long have you been rehearsing that?" he asked.

"I hate you, Elliot! Why can't you just sympathize for once?!"

"Sorry, Ames, I just don't know where this came from. All of the sudden you're ranting like Mr. Smith."

"Elliot, our *best friend* is ditching us! For an aristocrat! For a mansion in Marin! For a million dollar wedding! Can you blame me for being bitter?"

"Absolutely. Melanie's a beautiful, simple, unassuming girl, the most deserving in the world. She finds a kind, considerate man who's willing and capable to care for her for the rest of her life and you throw a tantrum because you're one of fourteen bridesmaids. Go ahead and hate me for saying this, Amy, but you need to grow up."

He said it in the happy, matter-of-fact voice that he always used when he was obviously right and she was obviously wrong. Amy stood there on the vista, scowling at him, arms folded tight against her stomach. There were several seconds of sulky silence before she

turned and started walking away.

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Call me when you get there. I don't want to worry."
"You know what?" she shouted, turning back.

"You're just a jerk. You just don't want to understand! You don't want to see how she's changed. You just don't—" Her voice broke. She turned around and faced the road. She didn't want to cry in front of Elliot.

"Amy," Elliot said. He started walking towards her, then stopped and looked down at his suit. "Just a second."

Amy turned around to see him pulling off his suit coat. Even through her anger she was able to recognize the hilarity in the situation as she watched him strip out of his clothes. When he was down to his undershirt and boxers he went to her and wrapped her in a hug.

The anger bubble in her head was telling her to resist, but somehow she found herself relaxing onto his shoulder. She went ahead and cried.

"Don't get mascara on my underwear."

Amy choked on a laugh and went on crying. She liked hugs from Elliot. His arms always wrapped around her so snugly, like a crepe. "She probably doesn't even notice I'm missing."

"She notices, Ames. She probably thinks you stopped at In-N-Out."

Amy wiped her cheek on his shoulder and pulled away. "I'm sick to death of this. I'm sick of change. It's not supposed to end like this."

"Who says it's ending?" Elliot asked.

"Melanie. She's not going to have time for us anymore. She'll be busy going to her husband's company parties and trade shows at the Hyatt. When will we ever sit in the Grove again and play bongos in the sycamore trees?"

"We haven't done that since high school."

"It's the principle of the matter."

"She has changed, Amy. But we change for the people we love. You should be happy for her."

Elliot was watching her. Amy could never meet his eyes after an argument. Mostly because she was always wrong. She stared at the gravel. "I am happy for her," she whispered.

There was a long moment of silence. The wind was picking up. It smelled like the Golden Gate Promenade. She closed her eyes and remembered walking across

the bridge in the fog. "California!" Melanie had shouted. "We're California girls, Amy! What else would you ever want to be?"

"I'm feeling fine, now, Amy," Elliot said. "We can go if you're ready."

"I don't want to go."

"Yeah you do."

"I don't. I'm ashamed."

"Come on, Ames. You want to go. You want to hug Melanie and kiss Tom and stand in the bridesmaid line-up and smile at the camera and eat cake and then complain to me about your sore feet as we drive back to Berkeley. It'll be closure."

Amy looked at Elliot, standing there in his underwear, goose bumps up and down his skinny legs. She looked down at her own wrinkled bodice, creased across her stomach where her arms had been folded. She smiled. "Yeah, let's get this over with."

"Can you imagine the valet's face when we give him the car?" Elliot asked as they drove away. All four windows were rolled down.

Amy grinned. In her mind she saw the two of them walking into the reception hall, wrinkled and frizzy and smelly, and over the murmurs of the crowd echoed Melanie's gutsy laugh, the sound of pure friendship.



fter years of being encouraged by school teachers to use more descriptive, interesting language, I was stunned when my college English tutor chastised me for using "pretentious language" in my writing. After all, isn't the word "pretentious" rather, well, pretentious? I now prefer to describe my grandiloquent verbiage as "highfalutin lingo." ("Highfalutin" is a spellcheck-approved word, by the way

# "Spellcheck" is not.)

As a mom, I rely on highfalutin lingo for survival. When my kids insisted that they were tired of eating the same things all the time, I interpreted their problem as being one of semantics. Macaroni and cheese, for example, has a name that is straightforward but blah. Now when I announce that we're eating "pasta in a cheddar- enhanced bechamel sauce, "the kids devour it with renewed enthusiasm and my husband's eyes shine with reverential awe."

mission accomplished.

rtistic expression also keeps my marriage intact. Instead of being dragged kicking and, yes, screaming, into home improvement stores with my husband, I now go along willingly. The secret is that, while my husband drools over power tools and do-it-yourself manuals, my hours are spent happily reading the names on paint swatches. Saffron Thread. Opaline White. Crocodile Smile. What a less imaginative person might have called "purple #316," some pigmentation nomenclator designated "Quixotic Plum." And when we have a painting project, I don't stress about matching colorsinstead I am wooed by attractive appellations. After one exhilarating foray to Home Depot, our deck shone like a flaming beacon in "Cranberry Zing."

delicious.

reative rhetoric has even taken the communication in our home up a notch. In the past, my husband and I spelled out words to keep certain things from being understood by the kids. Things changed one day when I was headed to the grocery store to buy some soda (a rare treat in our home). I asked how many "b-o-t-t-l-e-s" we needed. Our five-year-old shouted out "bottles!" My husband laughed and said, "I think we're sunk." "S-u-n-k!" our daughter replied.

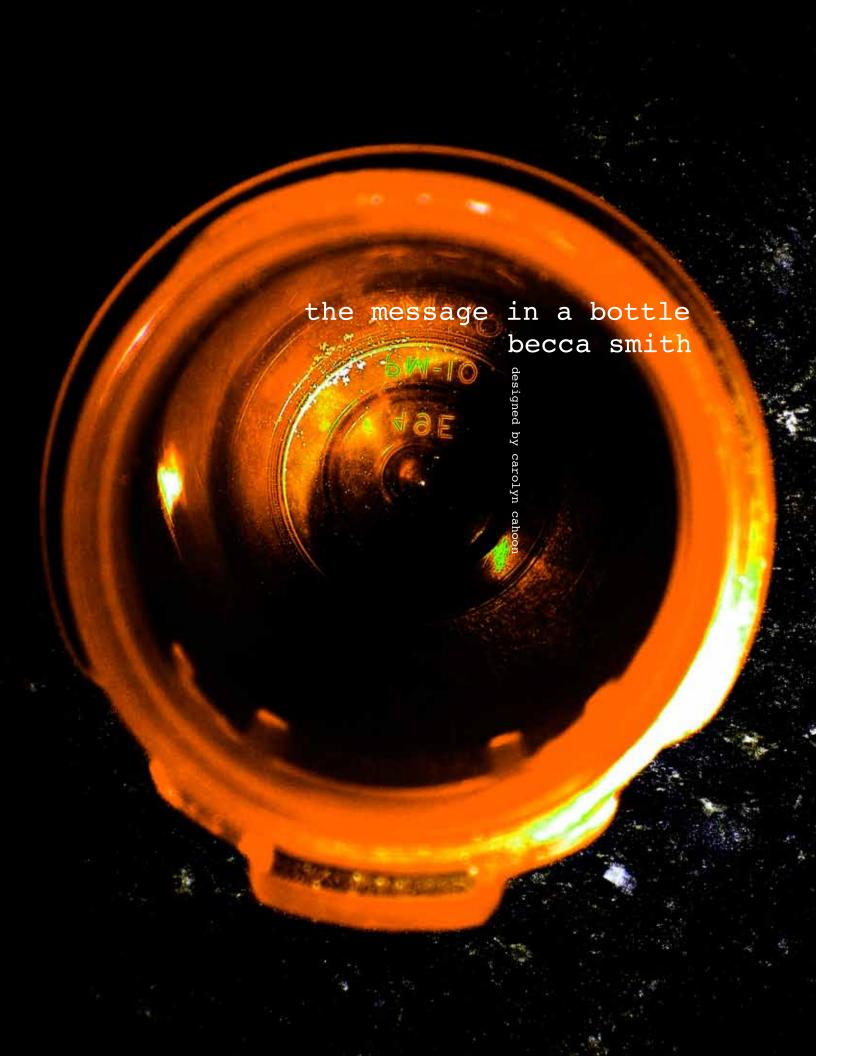
Ever since that disturbing incident, rather than spelling words to disguise our intentions, we've opted to employ our underused vocabularies. Recently, when I was considering fast food for dinner, I asked my hubby, "What do you think about purchasing comestibles at the location signified by twin yellow parabolic curves?" The kids didn't bat one eyelash between them.

survival assured.

plan to invite the afore mentioned English tutor over for dinner. When I tell her that we're having flame-broiled Angus patties atop yeasty rolls, and julienne potatoes with tomato-sucrose dressing, I'm sure she'll be duly impressed.

### fortunately,

McDonald's specializes in those.



The sidewalk chalk scraped along the uneven floor of the tree house, leaving a dusty yellow arc in its wake. As the two ends of the circle met, something ugly lurched madly inside my chest and made me want to vomit, but I swallowed hard and kept my lips tight. I sat, knees clutched to my chest and eyes closed singing to myself the lullaby she had put me to sleep with so many times. At first I just hummed, then whispered the words "I love you, I love you, I love you, no matter what," to myself as I rocked back and forth, back and forth. She used to say it every night as she pressed her face up against mine, making me giggle, but not any more. Hot tears escaped the corners of my eyes and I soon gave up trying to clear them away with the back of my hand. I rocked and sang and rocked and cried. Great sobs wracked my frame and I found myself lying in the safety of my circle, clutching the loose strands I had pulled from her hair as she shoved me away for the last time.

I had come home from school earlier in the day and found the house unlit and filthy. I called out to her but she didn't answer. A crash upstairs led me to the tiny bathroom at the end of the hall. As I approached, I caught sight of my reflection in the tall mirror and looked away, ashamed. My bony frame gave away nothing of the ten years I had spent on this earth, only the reality that I was half starved and unclean. I tried to smooth my frizzy brown hair as I pushed the door open. She was there alright. Right where I expected her but the sight still sickened me. An empty pill bottle sat next to her, its contents long gone and the smell of vomit and smoke filled the air.

"Momma?" I said it quietly at first. I knew how her head hurt on days like this. She would be mad if I spoke too loud. She hadn't heard me. Either that or she chose not to. Her entire body shook. Every few seconds, her head would jerk to the side or the muscles in her stomach would contract, causing her to gag and struggle for a breath. "Momma." This time it was louder and she rolled her head toward me, her bloodshot eyes searching for something to focus on. She opened her mouth to speak, but quickly returned to the open toilet and heaved into the bowl. I grabbed a washcloth from the side of the sink and wetted it with cold water. As my hands pressed it against her face, she shrieked and clawed at me, scraping the flesh from just under my right eye. I had tried to grab her arms, to control them, to stop her from acting this way, but she kicked and shoved and screamed. I tried even harder to get a hold of her, any piece of her to hold on to, but she was already gone. There was none of my mother left in that woman. I clung to her hair tightly as she backed into the corner by the tub. She kicked me hard in the stomach before slumping to the bathroom floor, jerking. I stared in shock and horror for a moment before crawling into the hallway, still clutching the hair I had ripped from her head. My breath came in great heaves as I clutched my stomach and dragged myself outside and into the tree house. That is where I drew the circle and hummed and whispered to myself, trying to put myself to sleep in hopes I would forget the events in the bathroom. But I would never forget that day. I would never forget the look in her eyes, the impact of her foot in my gut, or the tearing out of my

soul the next morning as neighbors and social workers held me back while they wheeled my mother out in a body bag.

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I wiped the tears from my eyes as I sat on the porch of our little beach house overlooking the Oregon coast. My fingers paused for a moment in the indentation under my right eye that thirty years had failed to erase before clearing the moisture from my cheeks and reaching for my untouched cup of tea. The morning was beautiful, but I was having a hard time enjoying it. What was it my daughter had said? Oh yes, I hate you. Three little words but she had blended them together and said them over and over and over until they were nothing but nonsense. *IhateyouIhateyouIhateyou*. The pain in my heart resurfaced as I relived the memory. Of course she was mad. Who wouldn't be? I had invaded her privacy after all, and who was more sensitive about privacy invasion than a sixteen year old? But would she ever forgive me?

The tea had long ago lost its heat, so I set it back on the table and looked out toward the beach. In the distance, I saw her sitting among the driftwood, leaning over something she was working on diligently. It reminded me of the half dozen vacations we had spent at the Oregon coast during happier times. Ones where we would drink lemonade together as a family and fall asleep snuggled on the couch. She used to love that. But that was years before and the past months had been hard on both of us. The accident had left her without the lower half of her left leg and no father. Did she realize it left me with no husband? Of course not. Her teenage mind revolved solely around herself. When I told her we were leaving Minnesota she had

slammed the bedroom door in my face and gave me the silent treatment for a week. When she began talking to me again, the first words out of her mouth were, "I can't believe you would do this to me."

The move had been uneventful, but I almost wished something would have happened to spark a conversation. Our exchanges had been brief and distant. In the beginning, I had tried to find things to talk about, but none of my conversation topics seemed to interest her. I knew her missing leg was hurting, but that was no conversation starter. I made a small breakthrough one morning after leaving a sleepy little town in Montana. I related a story I had read about in my book where a pair of young lovers was separated by hard times and the young man had died at war. Fifty four years later, the woman had returned to their costal hometown only to find a bottle on the beach in her lover's handwriting that said simply, "I love you" and the woman's name. This was remarkable because the date on the letter was the day after they had last spoken. The young couple had gotten in a fight because she wanted to meet him at the beach in the morning but he told her he didn't have time. The next morning, wracked with guilt, he had returned to the beach and thrown the bottle into the waves. Instead of some sarcastic comment or the usual "Mom, that's lame," she quietly said, while looking absently out the window, "I wish someone loved me that much."

The next day, we had arrived at the little beach house. At first it felt like a vacation. We spent that first day combing the beach for treasures. We couldn't go far because crutches sink in sand. Watching her struggle to hop along, I wondered if another activity would have been better, but she seemed determined, rather than frustrated, so I let her work her way along the beach until she found something. It was an old

green bottle and she handed it to me, saying, "Look, Mom, it's probably from your long lost love." We laughed. Both of us. But soon after, as I started work and she started school, it became obvious that life was going to catch up to us wherever we were. Bills began coming, work became more important, and soon I found myself interviewing for a second job working evenings at the local diner. I had too many things to worry about, and I was not paying enough attention to my daughter or her activities. By the time I got home at night, she was shut up in her room. She always claimed she wasn't hungry or that she had already eaten. She complained constantly about her leg and back hurting and we scheduled more and more doctors' visits where they sent her home with a cocktail of pain medications.

It was a Thursday morning when the school nurse called me at work. They said she was shaky and weak. When I arrived, she was lying on her side, facing the wall of the office, one hand under her head and one clutching the place they had removed her left leg, just at the knee. When I said her name, her head jerked and she rolled toward me with bloodshot eyes. The memories that flashed in my head paralyzed me for a moment and a faintly familiar lump expanded in my throat. I tried to ask how much medicine she had taken, but she cut me off fast. When her head would twitch toward her shoulder, she would deny that anything had happened. We drove the rest of the way home in silence.

What was I supposed to do? I hadn't been prepared for this. Was I imagining things? Did she just have the flu? Was I really *that* paranoid that I would jump to such conclusions? I mean, my mother- she had problems... but this was my daughter. Where was my husband now that I needed him so much? Why, after losing my mother, then losing him, was I now on the verge of losing my daughter? She wouldn't even talk to me about what was going on. Why, after all I had done to get myself and the remainder of my family back on its feet, did this have to happen? When I tried to ask her questions, she would just say, "Why would I tell you?" What had happened to my beautiful little girl?

After talking to a specialist that afternoon, as she slept, I went to her room and gathered all the pill bottles I could find. Why were there so many? Why were so many of them empty? I began dumping them into the kitchen sink, my saltwater tears mixing with the tap water, the whole time wondering how on earth I had let this happen. The image of her curled up in the nurse's office resurfaced in my head. She was so skinny now... how had she gotten so skinny? She was nothing but bones, convulsing silently behind the half drawn curtain. I hadn't even noticed.

I was awakened from this unpleasant recollection by her voice.

"What are you doing?! Mom! No!" She hopped toward the sink and frantically began trying to rescue the drowning pills. It was no use, as most of the medicine was already dissolving in the pipes beneath the house. I stared at my daughter through tear-filled eyes and watched as her anger boiled up. She pounded the counter and swiped at the empty bottles, sending them flying to the floor. I told her she had a problem, maybe more than one. She screamed with rage. I told her I had already talked to a special doctor who could help her. My already broken heart shattered into pieces as I told her I was sending her away. Eyes wide with terror, she repeated the word "no" over and over again while wildly shaking her head. When I tried to put my arms around her, she struggled with all the energy that was left in her. She lost her balance and fell hard against the floor. That was the first time she said it. And she said it loud.

"I HATE YOU!" I tried to help her up, but she swatted my hand away and struggled onto her good leg before hobbling back to her room and slamming the door.

"I love you, I love you," I said quietly after her, "No matter what." But she ignored me, if she even heard it

The day she was checked in to the clinic was











Student Outlet 27

hard. I would not be able to visit her until checkout. I wasn't sure if I could bear going home to an empty house and part of me wanted to get a hotel room in the city so I could at least be close by even if I couldn't visit, but it was too expensive and I had to be home for work, so I decided to return to the beach house. The last words she said as I walked slowly away from her room were, "I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you..." and I am sure they continued long after the door was closed and I was out of ear shot.

Weeks passed and the updates from the clinic sounded promising. She was finally allowed to come home, as long as certain rules were enforced. When I picked her up from the clinic, I was immediately pleased with the physical difference in my daughter. Her weight was back to normal and her all-too-often defiant face was replaced with a placid expression. I almost didn't recognize her. Still, I didn't know what to say to her so I just hugged her tight for a long moment before smiling at her. She smiled an awkward smile back and then looked at the floor uncomfortably before picking up her backpack and crutches and heading to the car.

The conversation on the ride home was simple and felt somewhat forced. There were so many things I wanted to say to her, but didn't know how to put into words. I wanted her to know just how much she meant to me, how much I loved her, and how terrified I was of losing her. I wanted her to know, also, that I was sorry. I was so sorry for not being there for her when she needed me the most, when we needed each other. These thoughts ran through my head, but I could not express them. She didn't look like she had anything to say so instead we rode home in our usual silence.

That night, I sat down and wrote her a letter. A long one. I spilled my feelings onto the page without holding anything back. I told her how I felt about losing her father, how much I loved him, and how much I loved her. I told her how much she reminded me of him, and how beautiful and strong she was, and just how proud I was of her. I apologized for not being available physically and emotionally when she was suffering.

As I wrote, I realized that she was the teenager. She had that excuse to explain why she sometimes acted like she was the center of the universe. I was a grown woman. I had no such excuse. I was so busy wondering why she didn't see my pain that I missed

the opportunity to ease hers. With this guilt fresh in my mind, I rolled up the letter and slid it inside the old green bottle we had found on the beach our first day at the house. I tied a white ribbon around the top and slid a single wake-robin blossom behind the knot. I left the bottle on her nightstand and went to bed.

The next morning when I woke, she was already out on the beach. I was pleased to see a used cereal bowl in the sink when I went to make my tea. I had come back to the porch where I had made it a habit of reading the morning paper and warming my hands on the hot mug, but that morning was different, and so much better, than the mornings preceding it. My daughter was back and I could see her bent over some task among the distant piles of driftwood.

After watching her absently for a while, I went back in the house to shower and get ready for the day. Upon exiting my room a little while later, I noticed an addition to the porch railing. A big orange pill bottle sat on top of the morning paper next to my unfinished cup of tea. The sight of it at first shocked me, but overtaken with curiosity, I walked out the open door onto the porch and removed the cap. Inside were dozens of pieces of paper. On each scrap, in a rainbow of colors was written, "I love you I love you I love you I love you," in my daughter's neat hand. I emptied the notes onto the morning paper to take them all in. I heard the unmistakable sound of my daughter's crutches on the floor behind me. I turned around to look at her, the thousand "I love yous" echoing through my head. She smiled at me awkwardly with questions in her eyes. Apparently I wasn't the only one who could not bring myself to say the things I meant. I glanced down at the papers in my hand, "I love you" written across them in a rainbow of emotion, and opened my arms to her. She hugged me tight and in that moment, apologies and forgiveness flowed between us. When we finally released each other, we smiled. Her gaze was steady and she didn't look away.

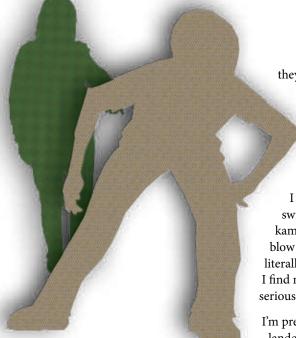
"I love you." She said. I pulled her close and pressed my face into the side of hers, just as I had done so many times when she was a little girl, just like my mother had done to me.

"I love you, I love you, no matter what." I told her.

"Mom. That is so lame." She laughed. We both laughed. She was back.







they're so intense they'd shoot laser beams and blow up his Neanderthal skull if I had those kinda powers.

I run at him, swinging like a boxing kamikaze that's gonna blow his brains out, literally. And this is where I find myself in a very serious predicament.

I'm pretty sure that I landed some fine punches in that mad maelstrom of

pugilism. But he landed one really, really good blow. That's all it takes, apparently, when you're the freaking Sandman. "Bring me a treat." There's a load of crap for ya. Unless you think that having every bone in your whole puny body broken by one lousy punch is a treat.

Seriously though, I'm on the ground now and I can't move at all. I'd be scared if I could feel anything. Maybe Sandman cast a spell on me. With a name like that, he could be a warlock or who-knows-what. I should have taken that into consideration before fighting him in the first place.

"Yeah, you should have. But it's a little late for that now."

Someone's talking to me. I'm not sure who. It must be somebody worth talking to, though, if he's reading my thoughts like some kinda messed-up alien freak.

I'm trying to see whoever it is cause at least my eyes still work—for the most part. Everything's kind of blurry, like I'm looking through that messy glass stuff that old people put in their living rooms. I can see people's feet. Sandman's walking around, getting the crowd all riled up. Or at least he's trying to. Nobody likes him though; he's a huge old jerk.

I can see the tan school building and the cars in the parking lot. And I can see that my face is being used to wipe the nasty dirt off the old pavement. I just can't tell who's reading my mind and providing an insightful commentary on that which is none of their business.

Then I see him. Right in front of me. Really, seriously right in front of me, standing on my nose. That sounds

awful, I know, but it doesn't hurt as much as it sounds because this person is absurdly tiny, like a cartoon bug in human clothes. It's not a bug, however. It's a very tiny version of what looks like none other than me. Little Mac. I guess that makes him Tiny Mac. Or Miniscule Mac. I like that one better.

Honestly, I'm not insane. You hafta remember that my brain has been punched in a lot of places that any boring psychology text-book will tell you it should never be punched. Some seriously messed up crap is bound to happen. But the way I see it, if this hallucination is going to read my thoughts and offer me advice I might as well talk to him. Besides, I think it's rude to ignore whoever's speaking to me. Unless they're a huge freaking jerk, like the Sandman.

"What the crap was I thinking" I ask him.

"I don't know, I guess you were standing up for people. Nothin' wrong with that if you ask me. Either way, we've got to get you out of this mess. Jump up there and knock him out already."

Obviously Miniscule Mac has delusions of grandeur stemming from some sort of hallucination complex. Sandman is going to kill me. I might as well play like that one animal and pretend I'm already dead.

"Play like you're dead? What the crap is wrong with you? What happened to the Little Mac that had enough guts to get into this thing in the first place?"

"I think he was smoking drugs or something. I'm paralyzed anyways. I can't move. Let's just wait this out and Sandman will leave eventually" I reply.

"You've gotta fight. Nobody else has ever stood up to this jerk. If you don't fight him, nobody will ever stand up to him, again, ever. That's serious. He's an evil guy."

"I give up," I say, giving up.

Miniscule Mac grabs my eyeball and squeezes. It hurts like cancer—strange, coming from a hallucination. He gets in real close until he's breathing on my eyeball and it's fogging up like a windshield. "What do you think will happen if you give up now?"

I really start to thinking about life and stuff when he asks me this. The way he says it makes it sound like a really important question that merits some honest consideration, ya know? It hurts, but I raise my head and look around a little bit. Sandman is talking to his buddies and pointing at me, like he wants to kick me while I'm down and they're makin' him wait. A

lot of people have gone quiet. If we were all cowboys and cowgirls a ragged bunch of tumbleweed would go blowin past in the dusty wind. I look at people's faces. Some of them look scared, almost disappointed. Some of them look amused.

I see that a few kids are just walking away from my big fight. It dawns on me then, I'm not their hero. I'm their sacrificial lamb. They just wanted to throw me out to their terrible god, Sandman. This crowd doesn't care if I win this fight. They'll slit my throat and let their evil god drink my blood. As long as he's appeased until his weary subjects can find another sacrifice. I can't believe it. Honestly, I never thought I'd say this about anything, but it hurts worse than Sandman's punches.

"I'm done," I say to Miniscule Mac. "I'm nobody's sacrificial lamb."

He runs a nonexistent hand through his non-existent hair and draws a long, non-existent breath. "Listen to me for a second, okay.

"I'm asking you again, what do you think will happen if you give up this fight? Nothing. Absolutely nothing will happen if you give up. Nobody will care. It won't matter to this world or anything in it. Life will go on, continuing the same as it always has. You giving up will be the most insignificant thing in the history of existence. And you should think about that because it's coming from a tiny person who's nothing more than a figment of your imagination. If you give up, the world will roll right over you like you're some stray turd squashed beneath its tires."

He's talkin' for a while. Man, for such a freaking tiny little guy, he sure can make a huge old speech. I see Sandman is forcing everyone to chant his name. Nobody sounds excited to be doing it, but he's threatening them if they don't.

Miniscule Mac is still goin, and I'm listenting. "Like I said, no one will care, because no one will remember. But you will. You'll always know. And you'll know that the only thing that you could have done right would have been beating the world. That's it; the world rolls over you like you're not even there, or else you stand up and make it take notice of you. You make noise that it can't ignore. You change its course."

For a pint-size illusion, he makes a good point. While he's talking I even begin to think that maybe I am seeing some hope and concern in the faces of some of these reluctant spectators. Maybe they really wanted

me to knockout
the Sandman.
Maybe I am a hero.
Rocky knocked out
that huge Russian
dude. David blew out
Goliath's brains with a
rock. Those people in
Jurassic Park got away
from the T-Rex. But,
man, Sandman is
gigantic.

"You can beat him," Miniscule Mac is saying.

It's not even annoying that he can read my thoughts. That way I only have to express myself once. Instead of thinking out the dang thing then saying it. More conversations should be like this.

"What am I supposed to do? Have you not been watching the rest of this fight before you magically appeared? He's killing me. I'm paralyzed on the ground soaking up my own blood like a freaking sponge" I tell him.

"He's tough. That's for sure. He's gotta be as tough as a gorilla and a rhino combined. But that's okay. It just means that you have to punch him a few more times than you would a normal human being. One piece of advice: let him throw three super-punches at you, then punch him in the face. Oh yeah, and don't let him hit you." And like that, like a reflection that just walked right out of a mirror, Miniscule Mac disappears.

I can feel my body again. It's sore, and I'm thinking that maybe I shouldn't be listening to a tiny hallucination. I'm also thinking that it's kinda nuts, but I never really considered the whole concept of not letting the Sandman hit me. It's sorta Zen-like or Bruce Lee or something. It's peaceful. Now it's not like I wanted him to be hitting me before; I know I'm not invincible. I may possibly be a hero, but I'm definitely not a superhero. I just didn't think about not letting him hit me, ya know? I sorta figured that having the metaphorical crap punched out of me was a given part of fighting a monster. And I don't think I ever believed that I could beat him. That wasn't part of the plan. I just wanted to stop him from picking on me and everyone else every stupid day of the week.

But I can beat him. I can knock out the Sandman. My fists are machine guns and I'm gonna blow him full of bullet holes. Stupid piece of crap.

I'm on my feet now. It wasn't easy, but I made it. Everyone starts cheering. Actually cheering loudly, spastically even, like we're on HBO, boxing it out for millions of dollars or something. I'm clenching my fists at my side, so tight they're changing color. I don't know how religious I am, but right now I'm wondering if souls are made of something flammable, because it feels like someone tossed a match on mine and lit it on fire.

The Sandman is furious. He'd thought that he'd subjugated another poor sucker. But I'm still in this until one of us is knocked out, and the crowd is chanting my name now—with enthusiasm. He starts swinging at me. His pumping fists blast by my face like hurricanes, but I'm remembering what that crazy, stupid, brilliant hallucination told me, and this murdermachine can't even touch me. I'm dancing like a butterfly, waiting to sting like a bee.

Then he winds up for the big ones. One. The punch is so intense the wind itself stings, even though his fist doesn't touch me. Two. I'm thinking that one of these might really kill me. No drama—my life is in danger. Three. My life flashes before my eyes in the form of a monstrous, hairy, jumble of clenched knuckles. He doesn't connect. And I'm seeing that Miniscule Mac was right. Sandman has thrown three super-punches and now he can hardly breathe; he's exhausted his hulking, demon self.

While he gasps for breath I stop hesitating. Everything builds up inside of me. Every moment that he's ever tried to make my life miserable. Every time I've seen him messing with other people that never did anything to him, and I couldn't help. Rage is building in my guts like a storm of vomit and indignation. Maybe when I have kids I'll tell them somethin' idealistic, like violence is never the answer. But right here, right now, beating this gorilla senseless is the only solution. For me and the whole freakin school.

My fist is a Revolutionary War cannonball, and it goes straight into his stomach. He hunches over, and I just start laying into his face. I'm punching him

over and over again. He's swaying and groaning and trying to stop me, but I just keep it coming. I punch him in the nose; I punch him in each eye; I throw a couple mean ones at his brain, not that it will do much damage there. I'm almost laughing now as I punch him. It's almost like freaking pinball. I keep punching and punching and his eyes are bouncing around in his big ugly head, racking up the points. If Sandman's pinball head had a scorekeeper I'd get the world record for sure.

Then he punches me. Out of the blue. Who could have seen it coming? The way the crowd gasps in shock, they must not have seen it comin' either. I thought I was digging his grave deeper every time I hit him, then all the sudden this maniac hits me! And holy Smokin' Joe does it hurt!

Blood actually comes out of my mouth when I cough. It's disgusting. Who knows what he's done to my guts? I might be crapping out of my mouth and taking a leak out of my ears. I might have to eat with my butt. Everything's broken, shifted, ruined.

We're both hunched over now, choking, coughing, spitting blood, and trying to see what's going on. The crowd is desperate. People are shouting for me to kill him or him to kill me. Somebody's gotta kill somebody else. Sandman's cronies know that he has to win or their reign of terror might come crashing down like the Fourth Reich. The rest of the crowd knows that I have to win. The rest of our lives are at stake. If I lose then the Sandman will spend forever making us pay for this moment of insolence. He might even murder some of us—the brave ones.

Miniscule Mac's not here to help me. Rocky Balboa's not here to help me. Principal Mario is not here to help me. One of us has to recover first to end this, but I'm lost in bloody, broken oblivion. Everything's distorted and weird. People's heads are shaped like pears and tires. The sky is green and the grass is blue. Sandman has horns and he's breathing fire.

And now he's coming at me. I've got two choices the way I'm looking at it. I can

give in to this oblivion, pee my pants in fear, and let him knock me out, or I can get over this and fight. I shake my head. People are back to normal; Sandman's not breathing fire, but he's still got horns; the grass is still blue. But less blue. That's a start. He's throwing punches at me now. I'm still shaking my head. The world refuses to go back to normal. I gotta deal with that and just dodge projectile punches that want to shatter my skull like glass.

The Sandman is slowing down again. He's still punching and I'm still dodging. I'm like water that shapes myself around his deviating punches. There's an opening. My fists dig in like a grave-digger's blunt shovel. I'm working his ribs and his stomach so I can have more time on his face before he recovers. He can't stand it. He'll probably start crying like a girl cause nobody's ever worked on him like this.

It's time for his face. It's time to finish this. I punch and punch and punch. Who knows what this is going to do to my knuckles? But when I think about everyone here and the freedom I can offer them, some broken fingers are a small price to pay. So I keep hacking at his cerebrum with my pounding sacks of fragmented bones.

He's reeling like King Kong on the top of the Empire

State Building. I'm the helicopters that never relent. He stumbles toward me. I crouch down to build up the momentum of a rocket and throw the craziest uppercut known to man. It connects with his jaw, and I'd love to say that it lifted him into the air and threw him over the moon. Maybe I'll tell my grand kids that someday. Right now, it's enough to tell it how it really happened: that space-rocket uppercut knocked the giant out cold.



#### MEMORANDUM

Robert Brown

To: Miss Gloria Carnegie-Steinem
4405 180<sup>th</sup> St. SE, Apt. A
Mill Creek, WA 98012
From: Simon Carnegie
Date: November 8, 2007
Subject:A letter to a friend
Attached: Five dollars (I need you to return it for me)

Miss Carnegie-Steinem,

You told me to keep in touch, remember? I haven't done it very well. Today, though, I've been restoring balance to the world, and so I wanted to write you and tell you something funny. I figure we deserve it, after all these years, to have something funny between us.

I still run the Longevity Insurance Marathon every year, whose slogan remains Runner = Longevity, and yesterday I noticed they stopped giving away their trademark grape popsicles. You know how much I love grape popsicles. Well, this afternoon my secretary (I have my own secretary now), Lucy (you remember Lucy, right?), filled our old Frigidaire with grape popsicles. Amazing, yeah? I lost one of my favorite pens today, too. But you wanna' know what? I found another one just like it lying on the floor in the lobby. Don't stop reading. I'm going somewhere with this. The watch you gave me for our fifth anniversary—our last anniversary—broke last Tuesday. With all the bitter memories associated with it, I was going to just throw it away, but Lucy convinced me to send it back (even though it was past the very-limited warranty you purchased with it) and they mailed me a new watch, free; A brand new watch, free of you.

If you think all that's weird, wait 'till you hear about this. Remember when you left me for an "aspiring" gymnast. I do. I'll admit it, I hoped for years that someday you would come back to me. I waited and I waited, you always said you wanted someone with longevity, but you never returned, and you took a lot of me when you left. I've felt so powerless. Well, yesterday I met your "aspiring" gymnast friend. You probably already know this, though, you never told me (we really need to talk more), but he's homeless now. Apparently he didn't make any Olympic team and all those "promising sponsors" didn't quite pan out. Anyhow, he was wearing the red power-tie you gave me the last Christmas we were together; the same tie I discovered missing just a week before you left me. I liked that tie. It was hard losing you, but, man, I really loved that tie. Seeing my tie on that bum brought back all those feelings of loss and inadequacy—I mean that derelict was just sitting there with my tie on. I offered the bum, Jack if I remember right, two dollars for the tie. He said no, someone very important gave it to him. I thought that was really sweet. I offered him five dollars and then, you know what, he agreed. I guess five is the lucky number for us. When he gave me back my power-tie some involuntary notion got the best of me and I kept the five dollars and I ran off. I just took it all back from him, and I took off with myself. Here's the funny part, though, the part that really brought the missing rest-of-me back, the first thing to make me truly happy since you left me: For an exgymnast, he's not much of a runner.

# "REPRESENTATION OF TRUTH": DUALITY WITHIN MARK TWAIN'S A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT

Patty Cady

Black or white. True or false. Romanticism or Realism. In a world teeming with absolutes, who are we to say something is *only* one way or another? The sky is not always blue; it can be grey before a storm, orange and yellow with the sunrise, or purple and red at sunset. First published in 1865, Mark Twain's stories are considered a reaction and opposition to the Romanticist Era (1800-1850) directly preceding his writings ("romanticism"). Twain's works are considered realist as they represent truth by telling things like they are with no embellishments. This is in contrast to romanticism, whose version of truth requires sentimentality while looking through rosecolored glasses to see a kinder and gentler world. Bruce Michelson states that within Twain's canon of writing, "one can find several all-out-uprisings against the romantic mode, campaigns to drive its bad habits clean out of the American [...] and supplant them with plain-language representations of experience as ordinary people know it" (609). But is that absolutely true? Does Twain forsake all romanticism and write as a pure realist with no romanticist leanings? I don't believe so. While I agree with Martha Banta who discusses "Twain's own notorious double nature" (489) within his personal life, I don't believe Twain's duality is limited to his day-to-day activities, but translates itself onto the pages of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. While Twain is often spoken of as a writer following the realist tenets, I propose that because of Twain's role as one of a few writers who transitioned American literature from romanticism to realism, that within A Connecticut Yankee he did not

write solely as a realist, but incorporates romanticism in his novel, thereby creating a duality within the text.

Published in 1889, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court tells the story of Hank Morgan, a 19th century Yankee, who wakes up from a blow to his head to find himself 1300 years in the past, in the age of Camelot and King Arthur. The book takes the reader on a journey from Hank's initial culture shock to subsequent utilization of his future knowledge, to become second only to King Arthur. While Hank is the protagonist, his primary antagonist throughout the book is Merlin, the sorcerer and romantic figure from literary works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia regum Britanniae and Wace's Roman de Brut. While Twain's works are often analyzed by new historicists and feminists, I intend to engage A Connecticut Yankee as a deconstructionist critique. As Barbara Johnson states, "Deconstruction is not synonymous with *destruction*....The de-construction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself" (qtd in Abrams 60). It is "the careful teasing out of warring forces" that utilizes the concept of binary oppositions as pioneered by Jacques Derrida. Sound/silence, day/night, as well as life/death are some examples of simple binary oppositions; however, when applied to literature, binary opposition doesn't restrict itself by looking only at opposites, but examines hidden hierarchy within the oppositions as well as possible inversions within that same hierarchy. By employing binary opposition to A Connecticut

<u>Yankee</u>, I intend to investigate the characters of Merlin and Hank as symbols of romanticism and realism, the subsequent hierarchal tendencies between them, as well as explore inversions of this hierarchy within the novel.

Upon examination of the characters Merlin and Hank, it becomes apparent that Twain uses Merlin as a symbol for romanticism and Hank symbolizes realism. By utilizing Merlin within the text, Twain automatically imbibes the novel with a romantic element. Within <u>Historia regum Britanniae</u> "Merlin functions as prophet, sage, and wizard to three kings" (Rider 2), Tennyson's <u>Idylls of the King glorifies Merlin and his magical powers</u>, and in <u>Roman de Brut</u>, when Merlin's mother explains his birth, Wace has her say:

When I was somewhat grown, something, I do not know if it was some ghostly illusion, often came and kissed me closely. Like a man I heard it speak, and it felt like a man to me, and several times it spoke with me, but it didn't show itself at all. It came near to me this way often and often came to kiss me, and it lay down with me and so I conceived; I have never known another man. I bore this boy (qtd in Rider 4).

Thus Merlin's birth appears to be one of only two immaculate conceptions in the history of the world, the other belonging to Jesus Christ. Within A Connecticut Yankee, Merlin is described as a person whom "men fear...for that he hath the storms and lightnings and all the devils that be in hell at his beck and call" (39), thus Merlin symbolizes romanticism as he stands out from the multitude of Camelot citizens due to his "magical" powers and skills.

However, Merlin is a hack magician who believes in his own sleight-of-hand and performs "real" magic when no one is around; he never seems to exhibit these same professed magical feats in front of a crowd. At an 1888 reading given in Baltimore, Twain reinforces his personal distain for romantics by asking "his audience to compare the 'mighty miracles' of science in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the 'trivial miracles' and 'humbug magicians' of the Middle ages, to 'conceive of the blank and sterile ignorance of that day and contrast it with the vast and many-sided knowledge of this'" (qtd. in Williams 102).

Nearly all that Twain dislikes with romance is epitomized in Merlin. "Merlin, whom Tennyson has recently promoted to Grand Master of romantic

daydreams, is portrayed as a third-rate vaudevillian [...]. His tales promote superstition and confusion in his own world; they frighten children and gullible adults; they frustrate the search for truth, [and] foster injustice" (Michelson 615, 618). Twain clearly states his abhorrence for Merlin when Hank asks, "Who is that?" and Clarence, Hank's first friend in Camelot, replies, and "Merlin, the mighty liar and magician, perdition singes him for the weariness he worketh" (39). And thus the first volley in the battle between a realist view and sentimentality is fired.

In stark contrast to Merlin's romantic description, the forerunner of realism, Hank Morgan, introduces himself as "a Yankee of the Yankees—and practical; yes, and nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose—or poetry, in other words" (19). This initial description sets the stage for Hank epitomizing realism by stating his lack of individuality and being any one of a number of "Yankees." Twain further promotes this lack of individuality as the reader doesn't even learn Hank's name until Chapter 39 of the book. Prior to that revelation, Hank is referred to with titles such as a "Yankee" or the "Boss." In contrast to proceeding romantic literature, Twain writes Hank as a character who "Look[s] at the opportunities for a man of knowledge, pluck, and enterprise to sail" (95-96).

Throughout the book we gain a sense of Hank's character: practical, business-minded, hard working, determined, resourceful, intelligent, and having a firm idea of right and wrong. It is not surprising that when Hank awakens in Camelot, we see his disgust toward the idea of an inherited rank and strict social stratification as well as detesting the citizens of Camelot's narrow-minded adherence to superstition. It is because of this distaste that "with his common sense, inventiveness, and practical knowledge, [Twain] sets out to enlighten the kingdom, with its superstitiousness and ignorance, most fully embodied in Merlin" (Hill 85). By using a realist as his main character, Twain shows his proclivity toward realism and opposition to romanticism.

By viewing these two literary figures in regards to binary oppositions, what is the hierarchy? Which character is more important? When looking at the title of the book, as well as the fact that a majority of the narration for the book is from Hank's point of view, I think it is safe to say that Twain views Hank/

realism as more important than Merlin/romanticism. While Merlin is the more powerful figure of the two upon Hank's initial introduction to Camelot, soon Hank's only superior is King Arthur and Merlin is forced to work in order to survive. With two such polarizing characters it comes as no surprise that they quickly become adversaries. Clear-headed intellect and thinking overcomes mysticism when Hank uses his knowledge of historical events, specifically a solar eclipse, to unseat Merlin as the greatest magician and becomes "the Boss." Recognizing "Merlin as an enemy of truth, peace, and progress" (Michelson 619), Hank uses his new position within Camelot and blows up Merlin's tower as "his first public act as King Arthur's chief minister" (Michelson 628). From that moment on, Merlin and Hank battle to "one-up" each other in various situations. Merlin attempts to use his "powers" to thwart Hank, who in turn employs intellect to overcome and usually beat Merlin. One such occasion occurs when Hank visits the Holy Fountain.

Upon his arrival at the Valley of Holiness, the abbot greets Hank and entreats him to "get to thy saving work" (220). However, when Hank learns Merlin is already on the scene and attempting to employ his tactics to return the fountain to working order, Hank states he will wait for Merlin to finish before completing the task. When the abbot attempts to persuade Hank to help the wizard, Hank employs the weapon of words against Merlin by saying, "Merlin is a very good magician in a small way, and has quite a neat provincial reputation. He is struggling along, doing the best he can, and it would not be etiquette for me to take his job until he himself abandons it" (221). This belittling of Merlin's ability undermines the abbot's confidence in him and makes the abbot want to "persuade [Merlin] to abandon it" (221). However, with an eye toward winning the battle, Hank talks the abbot out of attempting to dissuade Merlin from proceeding. One contrast between the means employed to fix the fountain is in the way which both Merlin and Hank approach the task. While Merlin stands outside the well-chamber and performs incantations, Hank enters the chamber, looks around and quickly surmises the problem. In regard to Merlin's tactics Hank states:

He did everything by incantations; he never worked his intellect. If he had stepped in there and used his eyes, instead of his disordered mind, he could have cured the well by natural means, and then turned it into a miracle in the customary way; but no, he was an old numskull, a magician who believed his own magic; and no magician can thrive who is handicapped with a superstition like that (224).

Thus we see Twain's disgust towards romanticists in their refusal to view or write what they actually see and not what they imagine happening or want to see. Instead romanticists, like Merlin, use their "disordered" minds and are "handicapped" with the belief that their way is the best and only way. Interesting to note though, is that after realizing some of the stones near the bottom of the well had fallen, thus allowing the water to escape, Hank was disappointed in not being able to utilize a dynamite bomb, or realism, to fix the problem. Additionally, he planned on letting Merlin be the one to perform the "miracle" with the bomb, thus raising Merlin's value as a magician. This inclination indicates the hierarchy between Hank and Merlin is beginning to shift as Twain begins to recognize the use and need for a bit of romanticism in literature.

Soon the war of words becomes a physical altercation. Before long, Merlin persuades Sir Sagramour, one of King Arthur's knights, to challenge Hank to a joust. While Merlin may hope to remain in the background and pull Sir Sagramour's strings, it is not to be. Twain states that:

There was no talk in all Britain of anything but this combat [...] not because a tournament was a great matter [...] it was born of the fact that all the nation knew that this was not to be a duel between mere men, so to speak, but a duel between two mighty magicians; a duel not of muscle but of mind, not of human skill but the superhuman art and craft; a final struggle for supremacy between the two master enchanters of the age [...] Yes, all the world knew it was going to be in reality a duel between Merlin and me, a measuring of his magic powers against mine (404).

So Merlin gets to work creating "spirits of the air a fleecy veil which would render" (404) Sir Sagramour "invisible" to Hank, but visible to anyone else. This act by Merlin reiterates his personal delusions in believing he has the power to perform such an act of magic. "Merlin has so muddled the truth with fantasies and exaggerations that he can no longer recognize a reality. He has confounded not only the world and the truth,

but himself as a storyteller. Merlin is literary romance at its destructive, self-destructive worst" (Michelson 619). And destructive Merlin is. Exercising his future knowledge, Hank employs a lasso and soundly beats Sir Sagramour as well as seven other knight contenders When Sir Sagramour reenters the jousting stadium to fight Hank again, destruction rules and Hank ends up shooting and killing Sir Sagramour, as well as eight other knights with a gun. The instigator? Merlin and his attempt to change the hierarchal standing between himself and Hank.

The greatest indication of Twain's "war with himself," as well as binary opposition between romanticism and realism, occurs at the Battle of the Sand-Belt. Having been an indirect source of an Interdiction by the Church as well as being decried by the Church itself, Hank takes his final stand within Merlin's old cave; a symbol of the previous age of romanticism. With all of Hank's grand efforts to enact societal changes, he realizes that his attempt to change the misguided and idealistic beliefs of the inhabitants of Camelot is ineffective. Hank states:

I began to get this large and disenchanting fact through my head: that the mass of the nation had swung their caps and shouted for the republic for about one day, and there an end! The Church, the nobles, and the gentry then turned one grand, all-disapproving frown upon them and shriveled them into sheep! (448).

At the first sign of the Church moving against Hank and all he did, the common folk were the first to join the bandwagon. "Why, even the very men who had lately been slaves were in the 'righteous cause,' and glorifying it, praying for it, sentimentally slabbering over it" (448). And with this great army of people preparing to march against Hank, he had only Clarence and fifty-two boys standing with him. Perhaps Twain realizes that an overnight change in styles of writing, similar to what Hank had attempted in Camelot, is impossible.

We see this in his letter to the Knights where he states: "We know that at the utmost you cannot bring against us above five and twenty thousand knights. Therefore, you have no chance–none whatever. Reflect: we are well equipped, well fortified, we number 54. Fifty-four what? Men? No, minds" (454).

Ultimately, after ten minutes of battle between Hank's forces and those of the Church, Hank states,

"twenty-five thousand men lay dead around us" (461). Twenty-five thousand symbols of romanticism; knights, peasants, squires, and other inhabitants of Camelot, were dead. In the final bid for supremacy after Hank is wounded, Merlin sneaks into Hank's compound and shows he has true power by sending Hank into a trance "and [Hank] awakens back in the nineteenth century, with 'an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and...all that is dear to me, all that could make life worth the living!" (Hill 85). Thereby we see that romanticism, shown in the form of Merlin, does have true power within literary circles and the binary hierarchy first supposed to portray realism as more important than romanticism is turned on its head. Merlin/romanticism overcomes Hank/realism, ultimately putting Hank to sleep for 1300 years.

Although Twain may have set out in writing A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court as a rail against romanticism and sentimentality found in writing before him, it is clear that by implementing binary opposition Twain realizes the merits and need of romanticism, in some part, within literature. This is apparent after slaughtering so many men, and being surrounded by the dead that Hank realizes "we had conquered; in turn we were conquered" (464). Hank fails because "the world is too much for one man to change" (Michelson 631). We cannot blithely discard and throw away those beliefs, views and tactics that lead us to where we are. As Michelson states, "Romance is both a problem and an advantage for the novelist, whether realistic or not his inclinations. As a mode, romance is an absurdity, a thing of beauty, and opportunity, and a threat" (616). An author can fight, battle and rail against a form of writing, but Twain realizes that it is impossible to write a truly pure realist piece of literature because, as in all life, literature is built upon the precepts and ideas that proceeded. "If [Twain] was a realist in his language ... he was also an archromantic ... Wild coincidences, improbable changelings, melodramatic courtroom climaxes, dues ex machina denouments, supernatural visitors, dream visions are the stuff of pure romanticism" (Hill 93). The romantic tenets in some part; be it one character who stands out among the others due to some special quality or a sentimental view another character has, will always be present within literature. Literature is always evolving and with the evolution comes the assimilation all things before.

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#### WHY WRITE?

Travis Washburn

No one says a word—it's just an unwritten rule, a sign of respect; it's something sacred in our house. If you've got to blink, you pause it first.

The credits fade in and out, on top of the opening scene. I slouch down and push my head back into the leather cushion. My three sisters sit next to me on the couch. My older brother stretches out on an adjacent couch, his socked feet up on the cushion. The lights are off. Our faces glow—highlights in the front, shadows in the back. The music crescendos and the subwoofer rumbles, surrounding us like a war party. I hear footsteps on hardwood, then on tile. My mom bends down and whispers in my ear: "The boys want you to tell them a story." I nod my head and smile with half my mouth. I roll up off the couch.

"Do you want us to wait?" my brother asks. "Naw. Thanks."

I go downstairs. Jeff and Jack lie in their beds, hands behinds their heads, elbows pointing out. With their nightlights, it's brighter than upstairs. There's an eagerness in their eyes—like when you smile—and I begin to wonder if I can meet their expectations.

I stretch out on the end of Jax's bed and put my feet up on Jeff's parallel bed.

I start on a battlefield—no life except the vultures

and the fallen banners quivering in the wind. They're listening carefully.

I end up on my feet. My hands are in the air, fingers in the shape of razor-sharp jaws. Then my hands are holding the jaws open. The hilt of my broken sword sticks out of the dragon's neck. In slow motion, a claw rips across my right side. I lose my hold on its deathly jaws. Like I'm moving through water, I grasp the handle of the sword and jerk it upward. The dragon's roar turns to a gurgle, and it collapses on top of me, crushing me to the ground. Its blood oozes onto me, mixing with the blood coming from my side.

They're both sitting up now, gripping the edges of their quilts. I lie on the ground quietly.

"What?" they say, when they realize that Baelin is dead. "Yeah, but it was to save the kid," I reply.

"But still..."

I tell them it was glorious. He was pretty old anyway. That's the best way for a warrior to go.

Now that I'm done, they start questioning. I get off the floor and answer questions about the dimensions of the dragon's mouth, teeth, hands, claws, body, and tail. It's all spatial, so I show them "from here to here," or "about this size." I tell them they have to go right to sleep or they won't get a story the next time. I run back upstairs. No one acknowledges my return. Their eyes stare, flickering in the white and blue light. I flop down on the leather.

"You guys missed one heck of a story."

\* \*

Professor Richards asked us to answer the question: Why write?

I started to answer on the back of a college-ruled sheet that I found wrinkled in my pocket. I wrote something about fulfillment. And accomplishment. But it was just a bunch of words, so I crumpled it up.

Let me try again.

I feel good when I've written something good. It's the same for all arts: drawing, photography—music is an art. It's a rush to have a few hundred people screaming, whistling, and clapping—all aimed at you. You breathe it in. It rushes upward at you, flying past your ears and filling your lungs, like a free fall.

Writing is like that. When you create an outstanding piece of art, you feel that exhilaration. But you don't need an audience to scream that it's good. You just know it. And you know it 'cause you feel that rush.

But I'm not in it for the praise. In fact, I'll finish a piece, and I'll smile just looking at; but I hand it to someone else, and they just don't get it. Maybe that's because they're not writers. Whatever the reason,

there's very little praise involved.

I think I write to find meaning—to make sense of life. But, again, this is vague—it's too abstract.

The problem is: these are all abstractions. Meaning, fulfillment, and exhilaration—these words don't mean much. Well, they mean one thing to one person and something totally different to another. When I say meaning, my brother thinks of something he read in the scriptures, something about faith. Meaning to me has something to do with a brunette I used to know, and why she isn't around anymore.

That's why I wrote that bit about my younger brothers. I wanted something more concrete. The reason I write is somewhere in that event. I'm not sure I can pin it down with one of those abstract terms. I'm not sure I want to.

So why do I write? I don't know.

But I know this: There was no drudgery when I wrote this piece (I mean this piece you're reading). It's pleasurable. Or maybe instinctual. I'm not sure which. But I am almost always glad to write—like when I went downstairs to tell that story.

I crumpled that first attempt to explain why I write. It didn't make sense to me. I like the concrete example more that the abstract definition. But I'm not sure I've reached a conclusion either way.

I might crumple this one too.

### The Silent Language



I'm making a habit
Getting mileage out of the comma
in an age when we talk for talking.
Letting the words
create empty spaces between us.
It's "talk or die" nowadays
And whatever I have to say
tends to stop at my lips
filling my mouth with
punctuation,
and my cheeks with color.
And the Lord confounded the language
so we seek a oneness of tongues

Better to let
lips and punctuation
and soul and breath and the dizzying floating bliss
do the talking.

An attempt to make a good-bye a series of ellipses

instead of a period

## POEM FOR WALT WHITMAN

by Elisabeth Whittaker

You are the object
of more poetry
than you yourself wrote.
Ginnesburg
and Pound
both tried to reconcile their words
to yours
as they wandered supermarkets
and sat in parks
and in the end we all write
of the same things.

Perhaps it is the alliteration,
Walt Whitman,
that draws us poets
to your name.
But William Carlos Williams
and I
have never shared a page
until now.

Penning your name today,
Walt Whitman,
I like to think
adds me to the great fraternity
of men and women
who sat alone in lecture-halls and hilltops
trying to fit
The Cosmos
into a station of the metro
or a red wheelbarrow.

Lindsay Papke

They were mostly strangers, sitting on the worn-in carpet floor in jeans and smiles. I entered head bowed and found my place on this their pale green couch. It was warm. It was inviting. Various guitars, a mandolin, milky light bouncing from their frames—a snare, tambourine and cymbal tucked in the corner beaming their potential in patience. I wanted to tuck myself into the nothing places where the cushions joined and perhaps become one with the folds and woven fabrics. Smelling this incense, burnt matches and the warmth of our twenty-something bodies pressing down like a blanket against my skin, it was sticky and delicious to my soul. Strings plucked and chords strummed, racking all my insides, and I shed tears. These voices mingling and singing out their poetry and depths of stories they were letting us become a part of so willingly. Bringing out stories in each of us including my silent struggles being so suddenly brought to the

surface and I wanted them to be handled with tender tips of trusting fingers—their voices each as threadbare as my soul. I wanted to hold each voice and stretch them wider and wider to the point of snapping but then stop just before and gently press my face into the space creating a map of these eyes, this nose, cheeks, broken mouth and chin. Where do the roads lead from these points of intersecting truths? I want to embed this music into the pores of my skin, so deep I bleed tenderness and dreams and heartache. I want to sit forever in this warmth of strangers and listen to these delicate voices sing the feelings I couldn't bear to unfold—singing songs of summer, songs of leaving and missing, and songs of remembering. It seemed to penetrate to every single cell of my body and resonate through the layers I'd built to hide behind. And I shed tears, silent striking tears, for these the beautiful moments.

#### THE SAXOPHONE

by Elisabeth Whittaker

Sitting in the corner
It hums of its own accord sometimes
Tingling in anticipation
Of something sorta jazzy
vibrating in the hidden corners of this instrument.

The light glints off the contours
He smiles at the pleasing curve here
Runs his finger over a shining key there
Wipes the dust that just might have gathered.

When he takes it in his hands
And puts the reed to his lips
Notes go knocking around in the rafters
And then sizzle in puddles around his ankles
You never know what
you'll hear next
That's the beauty of it, you see

And when he's done
And when the song is over
And when the music's blasted through the roof
He lovingly disassembles
The gleaming horn

He enjoys being boggled by the fact That so much music Can be broken into smaller manageable pieces And stored at a whim In perfect sensible compartments.

## THE LONG NOSED LIAR

Kimberly Grace

That blue fairy is a menace! I never lie; oh there it goes again.

Geppetto says if I poke one more person he will burn my nose right off my face, Oh! If only I were a real boy, I could squish Jiminy

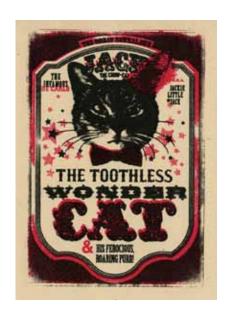
cricket and lie about it.

#### I AM FROM

by Elisabeth Whittaker

I am from plastic toy horses, ballet shoes, and a constant little sister Chubby cheeks and chocolate eyes and a fearless temperament. I am from the salty taste of play-dough, calloused palms and the grit of sand between my teeth. The click of sandals on a hot sidewalk. I am from the cool dusk of autumn and the smell of pine needles. From wrestling with Daddy in the living room, a warm cotton shirt and Old Spice. I am from dreams and fantasies of riding winged horses and meeting fairies. From tiny splinters and the sticky milk of broken jasmine stems.





#### Ben Griffin

House Keys Gocco

#### Ben Griffin

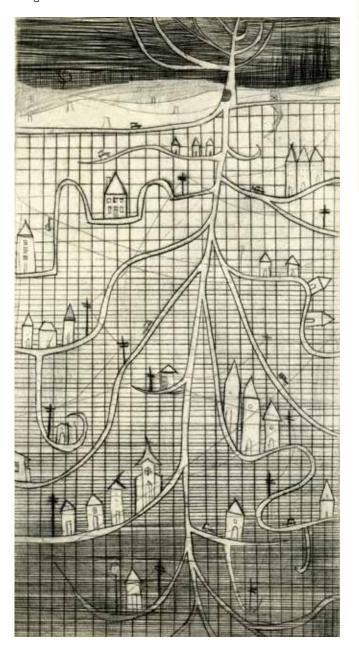
Jack & Lily Gocco

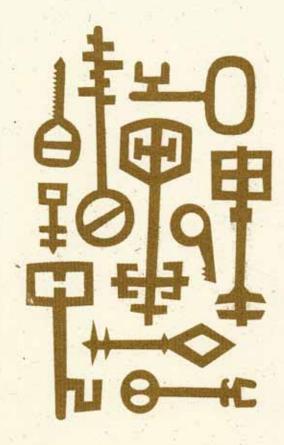
#### Carolyn Cahoon

Top Hat Intaglio

#### Elizabeth House

Roots Intaglio











Elizabeth House ??? Intaglio

Jennifer Jex forking Intaglio

Jennifer Jex spooning Intaglio



Erin Taylor Black Bird Digital Mindy Palmer Joshua Colored Pencil Adam Taylor
Up in the Air
Paper-cut and
Gouache

Kerry Moser Abundance Oil











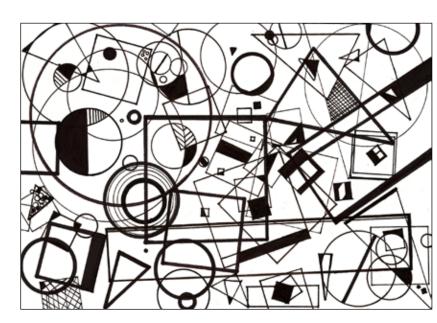


Koviss Golf Packagin Package Design

#### Shawn Murdock

Fastenal Packaging Package Design

Alan Cox Chaotic Digital













Kerry Moser Seafoam Bowl Ceramics

Kerry Moser Tango Dancers Ceramics



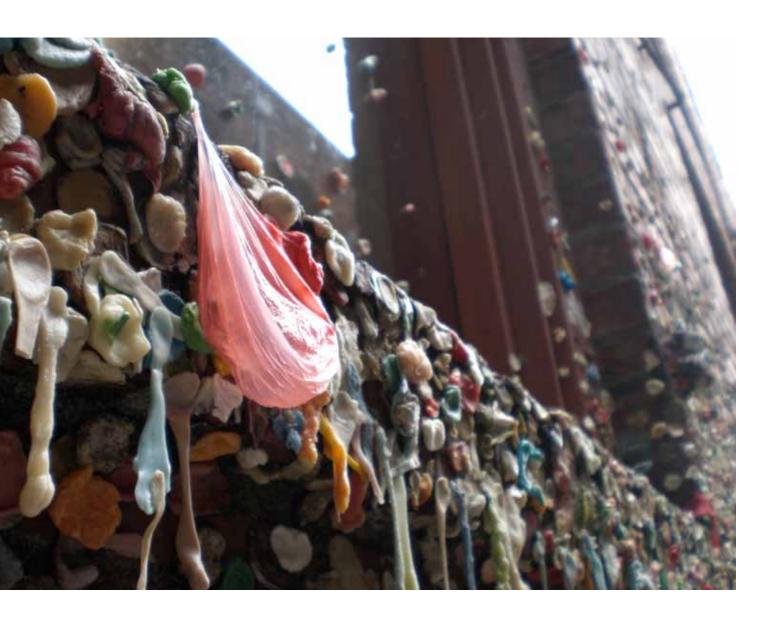
Kyle Dickson Blue Vases Hot Glass

Kerry Moser Ebb and Flow Photography

Alan Cox Nails Photography







Carolyn Cahoon Hanging Photography

Emily Burdick Interrupted Meeting (the Colosseum) Photography







