

PULSE

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Richard McCue, "Same-Sex Marriage: A Proposal for Debate"

Andrew Victores, "A Walk Through History: My Bar Mitzvah in Israel"

Composition II

Jennifer Moss, "Symbolism in John Steinbeck's 'The Chrysanthemums'"

Rebecca Pleasant, "Symbolism in Allegory"

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The Sun Drops

A pale yellow sun with wrinkled edges
slowly sets behind a spray of baby's breath.
It hangs there, head down, and slightly slumped,
next to an empty bottle of red wine.
My mother's gramophone is perched by its side,
and appears to be listening to a story
of days when dancing feet tripped over long notes,
when the wine met the brim of long stemmed glass,
and laughter leaked through the cracks in the walls
and beneath the sturdy floorboards of the old house.

The Gambler

She was a real gambler, the kind who installed
a quarter slot machine in the dining room.
For the longest time, I thought she was a woman
with enough faith for the entire family
because she was always going to "church,"
which turned out to be a casino boat in Louisiana.
We called her Mama Ruth, the kind of grandmother
who invited her grandchildren to spend the night
on card night to mix the drinks. I watched
ashtrays fill and overflow, smoke always rising.

When the last of her hair fell out
she started to roll pinter joints. Between long drags
she would choke out, "Please don't tell your mother."
I never did, and in return she taught me how to play
poker and Texas Hold'em, whispering,
"The gambler's eye is the eye of the soul,"
as she showed me her three aces.
The doctor miscalculated, and she hung around
a year longer than expected, had time to tell us to bury her
in her favorite silk nightgown. "If you put me in
something uncomfortable, I swear I'll haunt you all,"
she stammered. And we believed her. There were lilies
instead of roses at the funeral, their tiny trumpets
silently sounding the things we tried so hard to stifle.

Storm, Mattress, Lonely Ghosts

We lugged the mattress from the bunk
hauled it through the narrow hallway
towards the bathroom, hunching its back around

sharp corners, wincing at the pop and stretch
of springs. What a strange sight to see,
three tiny girls in lace-trimmed pajamas, straining

to move this mountain of coiled metal and packed cotton.
We pinned each other against walls,
smashing our toes and fingers as we plowed along

with the grace of an elephant.
When we reached the bathroom, my sisters climbed
into the porcelain tub, filling it with pale pastels and skin.

There was no room for me, so I did what any big sister
would do
and slid the mattress over the tub. With both of my arms
wrapped around the toilet, I waited,

we waited for shards of broken glass to pierce
our peachy flesh, tensed our muscles and listened
for the great roar to come and suck us up into the black sky.

Twenty minutes later, we were asleep on the bathroom floor.
The wind muttered, and we slept, soundly this time, no
longer
twisting beneath our sheets, afraid of each snapped branch

or clap of thunder. Now, our sheets lay in bed alone—
flattened and limp, like ghosts who have finally been put to
rest,
ghosts who have lost their mystery because they have no
secrets.

MATTHEW CRUMPLER

Seasons of Obsession

Some Spring-sent morning I shall wake to find
your silken breast consumed in gentle light,
and in that moment you might be so kind
to give me license to relive the night.

Or O! that I might see warm Summers bring
our fleshy forms a-mingle of the sea,
or on a moonlit hill where owl-birds sing;
we take, then, leave of our plurality.

But then, perhaps, an Autumn evening late
when we might fancy company of none,
but save for trembling fingers at the gate,
our silhouette against a setting sun.

Though Winter seeks to quell these flames with chill,
such passions as we share burn stronger still.

*Falling Sky**

Marching; far off in the distance I can
see them coming. Thousands of them, flawless
in formation, footfalls all in rhythm
like a creeping storm. I'll let them come, though,
I've already fallen, even before
they left the palace at Qin. The nameless
swordsman; Zhao by blood, and matched by only
myself in skill, did have me fall to his
steel, before a host of chess house patrons*
in my foe's own lands (for such is my love
of simple pleasures, I would choose to risk my
life in territories hostile). His blade
pierced me swiftly, cleanly, and I feigned death
so to benefit the nameless. I could
see his heart through swordplay, in his technique
I knew our plan would not fail, except that
one of our own would turn his mind away.
I am foolish to have placed my trust in
hands that hold the broken sword, the man who
saw the emperor's will and folded even
as he held his edge in poise to strike a
final blow. The arrows ready, sound of
bow strings, thunderous echo. Let them take flight,
I won't contradict the traitor. Yes, the
spear is broken, I am undone in this.
Let the soils of Our Land be now richened
by the blood of those in opposition
of one man's ideal.

*Sky, the character in "Hero," starring Jet Li, based on the Chinese historical legend of a king in the state of Qin who sought to unite the warring states of China by conquering them. Sky fell to the nameless hero's blade to deceive the king in order to aid in the assassination of the king.

*Chinese Chess is significantly different from Westernized Chess. It is played with pieces similar to those played with in Go (or Wei'qi), but on a different type of board.

Match

Dance your little dance.
Distract me from your nature
as your shifting form makes its way
slowly, slowly in advance toward
a goal. The wooden road
you travel ends on
fingers.

A scratch, a sharp scent,
one burst of light preceded
your creation, and now it seems
I can't remember a time when you
were not shimmering with
that glow, colored like
sunrise.

Yet, as you give chase
to your destiny, I glimpse
within you an acceptance of
finality. There is a certain
dignity knowing you
go forth, as the stick
gives way...

Stepping Stone

What is that light which makes the sky to be
heavenly with illumination?

Despite the halo, she cannot turn back,
the old home forgotten in the virgin snow
where that divine glow shines on her kin
no more akin to her than a past life.

An unspoken wish for a happier time
is almost on her lips, and she muses
that it was she who sought to go.

The edge of this wood is dead, or dying;
the snow here is not so thick.
There is less of God's abundance to
behold the sin she bears on those dark wings.

She, herself, a stepping stone, and forsaken
as she forsook those closest, and fell.
What does she look to, clasping tightly her heart?
Is it the past, a history of the innocent,
the good, the pure, released from this prison
in flight, while she remained in blackened error?
Or perhaps she can see, from here, the altar
of that withered church where her own prayers
were never answered.

Yokoi-Sempai

Can one truly recall the
brilliance of the stars?
Even those ill-fancied
shine with a divinity
unsurpassed by any
luminescence on the earth.
And when those celestial forms
fade and are no more, the heavens
are made to weep alone
for common mortal men
never can perceive the
glory of the divine,
even as they pass from
existence.
Even still, as I
look to the west, though
I still know that the
Rising Sun gives its blessing
it seems to me that its glow
is not quite as it was
some time ago. As the
rain drowns out my silent
revelation, what remains of
a faded star manages
to hint at itself
whether I notice or not.

*Gunpei Yokoi (1941 – 1997)

An employee of Nintendo of Japan during Nintendo's reinvention of
the video game industry. Responsible for several of their successful
video game character franchises and the creation of the original Game
Boy system. Died in an automobile accident.

MIKE DUNKLIN

Life

Work, play, sex, getting drunk,
and all the cosmic forces conspiring
in the universe to wiggle
the middle finger of fate.

The world will end on a Friday
seventeen minutes till quitting time
when all the good union men
are already wetting their whistles

down at the Icehouse while
the management bean-counters count bodies
on fingers and toes and calculate
whom to dock and which parachute to pack.

God laughs while the French commie
squirms and none save Pascal
have a clue. It's best to play
only for table stakes when the fix is in.

Hook

You cut me cold and hard,
like the bitter-end snapping and breaking,
so you watch the last of the whole
damn chain go rattling down the hawse-pipe.

The dial tone of the phone screams in my ear.
I slam the receiver down—doing no good except for me.
I mutter something about being gone
when I'm gone, being a ghost when I'm there.

People don't understand about anchors much,
you want a sea bed soft but not too sandy,
something the flukes of the hook
can bite into—digging a foundation.

I wonder if you ever know
how I long to drop the hook
and see the chain pull taut
as the hull backs down—home can be an anchor too.

Intelligence

I got the job of going through the dead man's pockets
who died trying to kill me.

Death before breakfast—a nameless Vietnamese
blasted from life from a black market grenade cooked off
short.

Ruby Queens and Player's cigarettes
along with a can of mackerel
and little else for he traveled light.
Inside the wallet of the dead man

I found a clipping of a Playmate
but not the naked centerfold.

Instead the homey, next door shots of a blonde girl
cooking king crab—smiling, reading, reaching across an
ocean.

The Little Finger Lift

I cannot say I follow much
the unending string of things
I'm supposed to know or do,
to fit in with those fellows of mine
just climbed out of the cave
though my wife insists I try.

I can't say it has much point
knowing which fork to use
when somewhere in your mind
you're most comfortable drinking
coffee from a salvaged tin can
the lid bent back to form a handle.

I smile at her as she lays out
Sunday clothes on the bed
bustling about with a mother hen's
gentle clucking, I'm glad
she's discarded the notion
of a coat and tie on one so coarse.

"You can dress 'em up,"
I can hear her say, shaking her head
as she gets solace from a group
of gently nodding wives
while I remember brushing back the scum
and leaches of some stream to get a drink.

The Mourning

You would not let me comfort you
what could I say, you pushed me away
the child was not mine, but yours
what could I say, you closed
the door and opened the space
between us—a gap I could not cross.

Carrie was your—I know
but I miss her too—her cherub face
ablaze as she tried to pluck the kitten
from the floor, her run-on sentences
of baby-talk, demanding this
or that, right now not later
It is hard to lose a child of yours
even one not tied by blood
hard to bury her in the misting rain
and hear you wail unconsolated.

Now her grave is three months old
populated by Carrie's toys and ceramic cats
gnomes and elves dance on the mound, now grassy
which you cut yourself
not wanting the caretaker's mower
to destroy your daughter's
carefully placed menagerie.

What can I say, dear wife?
The child was yours, not mine, I know.
Yet in your heart her blood is warm
while our bed is cold.
Our preacher says give you time,
but each day you plant something new:
a sprig of green, a flower blue,
a Disney toy from Burger King.

"One Trippers"

"Fare ye well, ye well-stewed
sons of Bacchus---ye salt-stirred
Barnacle Billy sons of bitches.
Mind the gangway going down
with all yer bags and truck
and all the knick-knack tourist
cray ye bought from bum boatmen
that no real sailor would dare take
home.

Spend yer ill-gotten salt ashore,
in the gin mills and cathouses of
a thousand ports 'o call,
ye buck-toothed, ill-born kin
of old Bristol.

Clear yer berths--
let some other barfly or
Kansas hayseed with a
buckwheat tassel dangling
from an open mouth,
take yer place and do
what ye did---
Deliver the goods."

Piece of Work

I chisel a face from a block of knotty pine. I keep looking at myself in the mirror to model, but the woman in the sculpture is not a close match. She is fuller, not skinny and drawn like me, and she has long flowing hair with pine knot highlights, not a 70s-looking bob. The teary face of a sister-woman stares back at me from an inter-connected nest of metal gears that surround her, as if consuming her, grinding her away. The bogus machinery forms the base of the piece and I am wishing now I had done the wood sculpting separately. I had earlier bolted down the block of wood in the mock hopper thinking I could better chisel the woman's head and shoulders to a closer scale with the piece assembled. Now I am finding it awkward. This is my most complicated and ambitious piece to date, and I wish I had planned better.

I am close to finishing so I am tense because my movements have to be finer, surer. Sawdust and wood chips cover my living room floor, now bare of all furniture but two long work tables, loaded with wooden and ceramic sculpture.

The woman-grinder piece will make an even dozen when finished. A gallery owner over in Tyler has promised me a show; and though Tyler is not exactly Dallas, it's a start. I'll have to keep teaching three nights a week, but maybe I'll feel less hopeless, less useless. Working slowly around the piece, I grip tightly the familiar wooden handles of the mall and chisel. Feeling connected, I sense each splinter of pine I peel away. I am one with the work. The sawdust on the floor coats the bare soles of my feet.

I wonder if I should scatter the wood shavings around the base of the grinding machine that is supposed to represent modern society. Instead, I notice one of Traci's little Barbie shoes lying on the cluttered floor. I place the tiny plastic stiletto at the base of the sculpture, near the trailing edge of the gear teeth.

While I mull over whether to use shavings or Barbie

accessories, there is a knock at the door and I'm irritated at the interruption. I can't use both because that would muddy the clarity of the theme. The knock gets louder. The visitor has discovered my doorbell does not work. I mutter to myself and hope it's a salesman I can easily shoo away.

"All right," I yell to the door, looking at my work.

I wipe my dusty hands on the tail of my chambray shirt before I yank open the door.

They stand like power-suited bookends, a matched set—team players. Brock, my ex, gleams at me with perfectly capped teeth. His blond hair is the color of wheat, lighter than I remember from last year, the trip he tried to buy Traci a four-wheeler. He looks tan and fit. My heart skips a beat till I remember I should hate him. He wears a pale grey suit. Hers is black. Her shades are smaller, hipper. The tortoise shell ovals frame a beautiful olive-toned Mediterranean face. Lydia, his barracuda girlfriend-lawyer-agent offers her hand after she notes the curt nod I give Brock. I wipe my hands again on my shirt. Her palm is cool and dry, like the gears on the sculpture.

"Martina, I don't think you've met Lydia," Brock smiles.

"Just call me Marti. We've talked," I say, remembering Lydia's suave voice telling me child support would be just a bit late.

I look at the razor crease in her Armani slacks, feeling shabby as I stand barefoot in jeans.

"I'm on a shoot down near San Antonio and thought I'd pop up and talk about Traci," Brock says, adjusting his West Coast shades.

I want to scream since he blocks eye contact behind the amber lenses. East Texas is a long way from San Antonio. Warning lights go off in my head. A smug look spreads across his face. He looks five years younger than me, and Lydia looks five years younger than Brock. Hollywood, I think, feeling like Texas trailer trash even though I'm standing in the doorway of a mortgage-free, if cluttered, frame

house. I wonder how many child support payments his suit would cover. I'm on the verge of asking him about it when she speaks.

"Aren't you going to invite us in?"

I step out of the doorway. They brush past me. Brock wrinkles his nose.

"I guess we caught you," Brock says, running a finger on my dusty work table.

"I wish you'd called, Brock," I say slowly, trying to make my voice as soft-spoken as hers, but I feel tension scratching in the back of my throat.

"Well, I'm not here to critique your housework. I want to see Traci," he says, brushing his hands together.

I bite my tongue, knowing he wants to provoke a fight he's already rehearsed.

"You do this every time. You build her up, then you break her heart."

"She's my child too," Brock interrupts.

"When did you ever show any interest longer than fifteen minutes? What's your motivation this time?" I say. I am glad Traci is not here.

Brock works his mouth for a second, then looks at his girlfriend. She turns away, studying my various projects. Brock presses his lips together. Having to improvise throws him. I cross my arms. Lydia looks at my woman-grinder sculpture. I remember in three weeks Brock will be thirty-five.

"This reminds me of Chaplin in *Modern Times*," Lydia nods. "Nice work."

I blush with pride then Brock snorts. I feel like a mud-splattered peasant. "We don't chop cotton here anymore," I say, feeling defensive.

"No need to be sensitive, dear," Brock says.

"Lydia, did Brock ever tell you his Daddy cut pulp wood for his acting lessons."

She still looks at the artwork but a veiled smile spreads on her lips as Brock sputters and gets red.

"Every time I see him on TV, I think of all those wasted trees," I say.

Lydia turns, making a poker face.

"We need to talk, but now is not the time," Lydia smiles. She reaches over and touches my bare skin where my forearm pokes out from my rolled-up shirt sleeves. I flinch. She hands me a piece of paper.

"We only want what's fair."

My heart sinks as I read the joint-custody proposal. It's been drawn up in Texas and I can see all the groundwork has been laid if they need to haul me into court.

"We won't have to serve you," the barracuda smiles. I feel like I've been chewed apart at the waist. Brock hides behind his shades. He smiles. I clench my fists.

Fifteen minutes after they leave, Traci stomps in from soccer practice.

"Would you like to go to Discovery Zone?"

"Oh, Momma, you remembered," Traci squeals and she bounces up and down, clutching me around the waist. She beams as her wire-rimmed glasses flop up and down on her round face. She has grass stains on her white socks and a smudge of dirt on her nose. I resist the temptation to wipe it off.

"You'll have to change out of your soccer things and get cleaned up," I say.

"With school tomorrow why can't I get cleaned up after?"

"Well, we'll be meeting someone."

Traci's eyes narrow and then widen. "Daddy!"

I remember all the times, at intervals of every six months or a year, that Brock has brushed through our lives. He calls or writes on some Zoloft-induced whim, so regular you can mark the calendar, but spaced far enough apart that any past damage is partly forgotten if not forgiven.

"Momma," Traci says, "could you, you know, dress like a girl."

I grimace, but later slide on a broomstick skirt and pull on a pair of cowboy boots that are not quite scuffed to the ratty stage yet. There is a thin but ominous line of blue clouds to the north. Boots seem a safe bet.

Later that afternoon we meet outside The Discovery Zone. Lydia is wearing black leather jeans and a cashmere sweater. Brock's Levis have a perfectly placed hole in one knee. A tailor-made hole. Brock smirks at the umbrella I have tucked under my arm, but the dark clouds seem closer. I can smell rain. I feel overdressed, but still clearly part of the K-Mart crowd.

Brock flashes the tickets and a fist full of tokens for the games. Traci jumps into his arms and he twirls her around like he did when she was five, before he left. I study the dark northern horizon.

"What do you want to do first?" Brock shouts.

"Laser tag," Traci says breathlessly, jumping up and down.

Brock takes Traci into the laser-tag arcade, and Lydia and I square off over Styrofoam cups of lethal-looking coffee. We sit on opposite sides of a booth that has a Formica tabletop and blue, fake-leather seats. The seat makes a farting noise as I cross my legs. I make sullen coffee rings on the Formica with my wet cup.

I can't imagine Lydia with any kid. She looks at Brock. I see her shoulders droop and hear an audible sigh. I remember feeling that way when I saw Brock in high school.

"You can't want this," I say.

"He does."

We watch as Brock and Traci bounce around the padded arcade.

"Mid-life crisis hitting early?"

"Something like that," Lydia says.

"Another look on him? Another hook to give you a little control?"

She smiles. Brock's laser target bleeps an alarm, and he tumbles to the padded floor, sprawling. Traci shrieks and piles on top of him. "Brock has stayed a boy at heart," Lydia says, watching the two.

"He dies well," I admit. I cross my arms tight and look away. Outside black clouds are rolling south.

"This picture might do something for him," Lydia says.

"Marvelous." At first I really don't care if Brock climbs to a class B actor, but then maybe the child support would come with more regularity.

"We shouldn't be enemies," she says.

I look at her hard. Her glossed lips seem to provoke further comment.

"So why does he want to serve me now?" I ask. "He didn't want his child when he fled for the coast."

"He has this notion to get joint custody while he's filming here—while it's convenient. I know you're worried about the child support. I promise you that won't change—and it'll show up when it should."

I do some quick calculations. I can stall this, but it will take money. I can see it all in my head, my lawyer versus her. If we go to slinging silver bullets in court, I know my purse will empty first.

"Are you wanting a deal?"

"Depends," she smiles.

"Say we sign a piece of paper that counts as an agreement between you and me, something you can show your client-boyfriend?"

"I think you've got a grip on it."

"So why didn't you just say that?"

"It wouldn't be ethical."

I have to bite back laughter so suddenly that I almost spew coffee. A lawyer with ethics? I hug myself as a damp chill intrudes. Someone has left the door open and it's beginning to rain outside. Big drops strike the front picture window, the wind driving the rain under the awning. Lydia

smiles, and for a brittle second I think I've made a mistake. She studies me. I squirm in my chair.

"Don't worry," Lydia says, "the agreement has all the legal clout of a gum wrapper."

"He doesn't know that?" I say, jutting my chin toward Brock.

"He knows what he wants to know," Lydia says.

I tuck my right foot underneath me. The air is being sucked from the room, I hear a crack of thunder. Right now, I would be grateful for a tornado. Smoothing down my skirt, I hide my white legs. I can feel Lydia's superiority oozing over me.

She has confidently mapped out our lives. I shiver, folding my arms, my mind struggling to find some lame excuse, an easy way out. She reaches over and touches my elbow, an awkward gesture, but the only one open to her since my hands are hidden under my armpits. She smiles. I wonder if she is really being reasonable or is just well-practiced at appearing so.

So I know at that instant I am going to cave in, that Brock is going to have his way once more.

"I need to pack her," I say.

"We can buy her some things in Austin," Lydia says. She takes a sip of coffee, then begins to explain their plan.

Six weeks, she promises, no more, no less. I could use the time, she points out. I sit there helpless to do anything but listen and nod. I watch Brock shoot invisible bullets at his daughter.

Eight days later the phone rings at home while I am drinking my second cup of coffee and contemplating taking up smoking again. Lydia coos softly on the other end of the line like we are sisters. "Could you meet me half way, say at Austin?"

"How about Round Rock?" I counter, not admitting my fear of driving in cities.

"Where's Round Rock?"

"Just north," I say, "where Highway 79 comes in."

"Oh," she says, and I sense something is wrong.

"How's Traci?"

"It's just not working out," Lydia says, ignoring me.

"Brock's in a critical stage of the project. The money-men have cut our shooting budget."

Later that day, I nurse my beat-up Taurus down Highway 79, the windows rolled down because the air conditioner has crashed. They are waiting for me at the Sam Bass Steakhouse in Round Rock when I pull in. I hug red-eyed Traci and put her in the car. There's a large Band-Aid on her knee.

"She scraped herself playing at the trailer," Lydia says quickly. "I put some Neosporin on it."

"Thanks for taking care of my baby," I say.

"It didn't go as bad as I thought," Lydia replies, taking off her shades for an instant, then jamming them back on. Her lips work like she is going to say something else, but she studies the dusty toe of her pump instead.

"Didn't quite make six weeks," I say. "What happened?"

"Everything's in turmoil right now and Brock's just not sure," Lydia says nervously, pushing up her shades. I wonder how many pairs of sunglasses they have.

"So he just wants to jerk her around like a yo-yo," I complain. I want to sound angry, but my heart is not in it because now I have Traci back.

"He's not the first man that's not sure what he wants," Lydia says.

We look at one another, then she slides into her leased Volvo S-80 and drives away. Traci is crying in the car.

I slip behind the wheel, feeling like the counterfeit mother standing before Solomon. Traci snuffles and looks at me, her glasses enormous on her puffy face. I turn the key and the starter sounds like the noise my daughter is making.

Steering the car onto the highway, I head northeast on Highway 79, feeling like the wooden woman in my sculpture. Traci's shoulders heave.

Tomorrow, I will tell her her father isn't a bad man, just busy. Tomorrow, when I can trust myself, I will tell her something about parents wanting the best.

"So you got to see a movie being made," I say.

KELLY TIBBETTS

Libra

And the bells are still resounding
In the heart the clock is set
Open doors and locked compartments
Summer triumphs
Fall regrets

In the silence of an hour
Moves a season to a season
The sleepy to their slumber
And the dying
To their deaths

Like the stars we are transparent
In our systematic turning
Of beginnings and beginnings
Never knowing
Where we journey

Blackbirds

Blackbirds pass as rain clouds
Through the bleak November sky
In the dreariest of seasons
Like a funeral procession
Wicked birds and evil omens
Cold as frozen air
They slide on.

Blueprint

I still dream of the day we spent at the beach.
You wore a blue bikini
With pineapple sunsets and palm trees
In the pattern

Together we laid on the warm sand
Drinking Blue Hawaiians until our mouths
Changed colors and our skin burned.
I think you were disappointed
That I would not go into the water with you
But you hid the frustration well

When the sun began to weaken and fall
I took pictures of you standing on the dunes
Your knees turned inward
Bashful and awkward before the camera

You will remain in my memory
As you were that summer day in June
The sound of your voice taken by the wind
Mingling with drowsy waves
Hugging a grateful shore

Handprints

There are handprints on the windows
I am not the first to be here
Nor will I be the last to see
The world from such a view

Revelations

Nickels and dimes and
One-dollar bills
Fill the highly-glossed offering plates.
And the pipe-organ blows
While the teenagers go
For a shot of the communal wine.
And I see children sleep,
And I hear infants cry,
And I see one man curse at his watch.
And I think to myself as I sit in the pew,
God must have died in this church.

The Bonfire of the Vanities

"...where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there." Psalm 139

A citrine light pierced the gloom that morning waking me from a fitful night's sleep. I was wide awake in an instant, crawling from beneath the tangled covers, my mind whirring with the responsibilities to be met that day. My hands moved mechanically through my morning rituals: brush teeth, shower, scrub—the quiet enjoyment of an early morning shower, humming, praying, was eclipsed by the vivid nightmare and the long checklist clicking back and forth in my mind like the pendulum of a grandfather clock. After pulling on a robe and wrapping my hair in a towel, I turned to examine myself in the mirror. The eyes that met mine were puffy and red—but dry, shadowed with blue smudges of fatigue, the skin pallid. There was nothing in there. The frayed nerves were senseless after five days' onslaught of ambulance calls, hospital visits, and, finally, funeral arrangements.

The panic that usually gripped me before any major event was overwhelmed by a numbing void gnawing at my heart. Fear was a constant companion of mine. The nagging self-doubt dogging my steps tinged every experience with a "yes, but..." It is this doubt that prods me to rehearse before approaching teachers, administrators, pastors, *anybody* for any purpose. It is fear that clogs my throat and tinges my voice with a quiver of nervousness when I have to speak—or sing—in front of a group of people.

But I had forgotten all of this. The petty anxieties burned away in the face of true despair—and all that was left were the fundamentals. The life-animating spark propelled

me through preparations and duties, inspiring nothing in me but sheer perseverance. My innate sense of joy and expectancy that shaped each day withered, replaced by obligation: this or that *must* be done, mom's counting on me, dad would've wanted it that way.... It felt like my skin had been pulled back, burned off, and every nerve was exposed, the effort of mere breathing raising the pain to a frantic pitch nearly rendering me insensible.

Somehow I found myself dressed and on my way to the church with the box of pictures and memorabilia documenting an entire lifetime. The heat of the early summer sun smoldered on the highway, wilting the tender blades of hay swaying in the fields and drawing beads of sweat on my forehead. The beauties of the day slipped by me, my mind caught between strains of "An Ashokan Farewell" and the details of my two last tasks. I noticed, grimly and a little angrily, all the ends that seemed to emerge and tie together, aggravating my own loss: workmen lopping down mature oak trees, hawks swooping to snatch at an unwitting field mouse, the steady baking of broken earth tilled for cultivating.

Pulling into the parking lot, I caught a glimpse of the hearse and the kind men from the funeral home sliding the sleek casket onto rollers to push into church. I turned away, examining the chips and cracks in the windshield. I waited for a few minutes to pass before I gathered my purse and the box and headed inside, balancing precariously on thin high heels. One of Them opened the door for me, and smiled a gentle greeting, taking the box from my arms. Another offered me the program: my breath caught as my dad smiled up at me from pictures taken during high school as a football player, as Reserve Grand Champion, on his wedding day.... I quickly flipped through, checking this and that, skimming through the eulogy my family insisted we print on the back. It was perfect.

My family began arriving just as I finished arranging the pictures, John Deere caps, and toy tractors on the table in the foyer.

There was only one last thing.

Glancing over the pictures I set out, mom flashed me a grateful smile on her way to see dad. I sat in a pew on the far left side and let my family greet people as they arrived. I closed my eyes, the steady rise in people's voices drowned beneath the music that droned in my head. A couple of women I knew from church came up to offer their condolences, unctuous in their well-wishing. They bloomed in disaster. I nearly hated them as I made myself hug and thank them for coming. I turned around to take in the church.

Packed.

With people standing up in the back and along the walls.

I turned back around and shut my eyes, my mouth drying. Too soon, an expectant hush fell over the congregation as the pastor stood and opened with prayer. Lifting his head, he looked into my family's pew, "Mike's son, David, his daughter, Carrie, and his sister-in-law, Melissa, will begin the service with "He Leadeth Me," acapella, as special music."

I don't know what happened that day. I found out later that there were a little over 400 people at my father's funeral, performing for such a number would have overwhelmed me before. That day, looking at the resolute faces of my brother and aunt, the grief of my mother, sister and brother, the cold, handsome face of my father, my fear was scorched beneath the heat of the refining fire. The petty self-consumption, the little fears that cobbled my soul, lost their dimension. It was as if a hand stretched out to steady me. I sang without paying the least attention to the words, without thinking about the melody, completely unconscious of the church full of people before me. I can't remember the details of the experience, I only know my voice was true, more clear and more beautiful than I have ever heard it, interweaving with the voices of my brother and aunt and calling out a tender response from my family in the pews in front of us. This was the last duty I had left for my dad.

My faith has always been timorous, at best. The idea of God seems so far-fetched, too good-to-be-true, a vain grasp at hope. A few days after the funeral He became so wholly real to me. Getting ready for school one morning as I sang over the lyrics of "He Leadeth Me," I absorbed the meaning of the words for the first time:

And when my task on earth is done
When by Thy grace the victory won.
In death's cold wave I will not flee,
Since 'tis my God who leadeth me.

The uncertainty that comes with death, the remorse I felt with my father's passing, everything that pulled fear from my heart melted under the certainty of God's existence. In the darkest moment I have ever experienced in my life He was there. All skepticism, all attempts to rationalize existence evaporated. In the care and concern of loved ones, in the phone calls and casseroles, in the stillness I experienced on the stage, God simply *was*—delivering me from the pitfalls I set up for myself, consuming the vanities that cluttered my life. It was His presence there, in the bonfire of all my vanities, which turned that terrible moment into one of my finest.

Same-Sex Marriage: A Proposal for Debate

The debate over the legalization and social acceptance of same sex marriage dates back hundreds of years. According to William N. Eskridge, Jr., the western world has never accepted these marriages as either legal or moral; however, other cultures have accepted them in various configurations since the thirteenth century (16). The issue became controversial when the gay community pressed their desire to have these marriages recognized as legal. On May 18, 1970, Richard John Baker and James Michael McConnell petitioned the State of Minnesota for a marriage license after they were joined in a quiet religious ceremony in their church. The controversy arose on May 22, 1970, when Gerald Nelson, Clerk of the Hennepin County District Court, denied their petition because they were of the same sex. Nelson based his decision on the fact that same sex marriage is illegal in the state of Minnesota. The petitioners, Baker and McConnell, carried their battle to the Supreme Court of Minnesota and received a negative ruling in 1971. These proceedings became the beginning, but by no means the end, of the Constitutional challenges presented in the various states by gay and lesbian partners (Eskridge 48). Generally, people support same-sex marriages because they believe that discrimination in any form is no longer acceptable in society. Generally, people oppose same-sex unions because they feel it is a personal affront to the values and traditional family structure that are a strong part of their history and their culture. This opposition is supported in a newspaper article from *The Beaumont Enterprise*. Kevin J. Dwyer points out that John Gray has won legal custody of his two nephews. His custody is jointly shared with his sister Ursula, the mother of the children. The boys, ages five and seven, lived with Gray and his "lover", Paul Burch, for the preceding

twenty-one months. Gray testified that living in the home with their natural parents, the children were exposed to other individuals with felony drug convictions on their record (A1). Gay marriage should be legal because it will afford legal protection to the partners, it will provide equality for all citizens gay or not, and it will provide benefits currently reserved for heterosexual couples only.

First, gay marriage should be legal because it will afford legal protection to the partners. Dwight J. Penas argues that the cost of denying marital status to the partners becomes enormous. This denial exposes them to discrimination from employers, discrimination from landlords, and discrimination from institutions offering services and facilities to the public. He continues to note that unmarried couples, regardless of their sex, face discrimination in housing, banning them from spousal benefits from worker's compensation laws, special tax treatment and Social Security benefits (152). Mary Bonauto asserts that marriage is a relationship, similar to the relationship of a "family." No one dares challenge the right to be by a spouse's side if a couple is legally married. The word marriage, of itself, becomes a protection of legal rights. Married couples can take for granted rights of hospital visitation, security for their children, and rights of inheritance. Additionally, gay and lesbian families can protect themselves in limited ways by creating wills, health-care proxies, and co-parent adoptions; however, this does not come even close to giving the peace of mind that the simple ceremony of marriage guarantees (739). Scott Bidstrup notes that married couples are not required to testify against one another in a court of law. Gay partners lack this protection under the law (28). The opposition would assert that gay marriage should not afford legal protection to the partners because they believe that legal protection is only for those couples married in the sense of a marriage between one man and one woman. Gay and lesbian couples allowed the legal ceremony of marriage would truly be equal participants with the rest of society in the protections afforded under the law.

Secondly, gay marriage should be legal because legalization will afford equality for all citizens, gay or not. Richard D. Mohr claims that limiting homosexual couples to civil unions reported as separate but equal to heterosexual marriage serves only to degrade the gay men and lesbian women. The lack of legal marriage accessibility to the gay couple strikes directly at the issue of their dignity. Their dignity is at stake because of the denial of their equality (34). In an interview with Mary Bonauto, author Jo Ann Citron asked her to respond directly to the issue of dispensing with the commonplace idea of marriage and making marriage simply a contract between two people. Her response was that it would only work if there were no repercussions or if it did not convey any stigma or disrespect. Bonauto's position is that a place will be reached where the government no longer denies equal rights to gay couples. She believes this issue will be resolved in the near future (18). Evan Wolfson discusses still another parallel when he compares the direct relationship between the struggles for equality fought by those that supported interracial marriage and those that support same-sex marriage. The language used today relative to same-sex couples is eerily familiar to those who remember the language used to oppose interracial marriage (32). He insists that the denial to gay couples of their freedom and their equality is based only on the choice they make regarding whom they love (Wolfson 35). Yuval Merin references *Identity and the Case for Gay Rights* in which David Richard discusses the similarities between the three minority groups: racial minorities, women, and homosexuals, as they struggle for equality. The battles fought by civil rights advocates and women's rights advocates have paved the way for the fight now at hand in the gay community (43). The opposition would assert that gay marriage should not afford equality for all citizens because equality is already at hand. Equality is an innate right, which allows all Americans, gay or not, the dignity and freedom supposedly guaranteed in the constitution.

Finally, gay marriage should be legal because it will provide benefits currently reserved for heterosexual couples only. Walter Isaacson reports that a Domestic-partnership Benefits Commission, recently established by the City Council in Washington, is to explore the feasibility of extending benefits to the partners of municipal workers (102). An employee derives as much as 40% of his remuneration from a fringe benefits package. The denial of fringe benefits to the gay couple while allotting them without question to the married couple is direct discrimination (Isaacson 101). Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller reveals that labor, in both private and public contract negotiations, supports the expansion of benefits to include gay and lesbian partners (115). He points out that fourteen years after going officially on the record in support of gay and lesbian civil rights, the American Federation of Labor national leadership appointed a "constituency group" among its membership. The purpose of the group was to promote mutual understanding of gay rights and labor issues (Goldberg-Hiller 115). Workplace benefits of same sex partners usually do not measure up to the benefits of heterosexual partners. Even the Internal Revenue Service does not recognize or qualify same sex partners' benefits unless they meet the criteria as a dependent (Merin 199). Jeff Barge divulges many law firms have begun to include benefits packages for same sex domestic partners. Recruitment of law school graduates many times turns on the firm's policy relative to domestic partner benefits (34). Todd Henneman discusses the fact that benefits follow the couple into death. Inheritance rights are put in place to assure that, even if the deceased spouse has not left a will, the surviving spouse will inherit. This benefit is just another that is not available to the same sex partners (3). The opposition would assert gay couples do not deserve the same benefits as heterosexual couples because they are not married. Benefits available to gay partners, if they are indeed married, in and of themselves give strong reason in favor of the continuing quest for the legalization of gay marriage.

To reiterate, gay marriage should be legal because it will afford legal protection to the partners, equality to all citizens gay or not and benefits currently reserved for heterosexual couples only. Marriage is a dynamic institution. The reason for marriage throughout history has changed but includes such considerations as money, consolidation of property, power, and politics (Merin 6). The day that same sex marriage becomes legal is the day that all citizens can be proud to be Americans. Today, the inclusion of love in a marriage influences the couple more than at any other time in history. The debate over the legalization and social acceptance of same sex marriage will no doubt continue as civilization progresses through the twenty-first century.

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Instructor: Mrs. Pat Heintzelman

A Walk Through History: My Bar Mitzvah in Israel

Standing nearly one thousand feet above the base of Masada, the most famous archeological site in Israel, I experience a feeling of awe. This towering refuge of my ancestors will soon serve as my bridge to manhood, maturity, and Bar Mitzvah. In the Jewish religion, a Bar Mitzvah involves reading from the Torah for the first time in front of a congregation, and it functions as certification of one's adulthood. As I stand at the top of this desert plateau, prior to performing one of Judaism's most sacred rituals, I wonder about the young Judeans many centuries ago that stood where I stand today.

Masada holds historical and sentimental value for its well-maintained ancient structures as well as its location. In 70 A.D., Jews remaining against a Roman onslaught retreated to their final fortress, Masada. Located on a towering mesa containing ample food supplies and intricate water systems, Masada was a near undefeatable natural refuge. The Romans, however, built an enormous ramp to the fortress gate forcing Jewish slaves to do their work. Jewish rebels refused to kill their own people, despite almost certain defeat. The day before the completion of the ramp, the rebels and their families chose to commit suicide rather than be taken as prisoners. Today, inductees to the Israeli army are sworn in at Masada, with the vow that, "Masada shall not fall again!" I am honored to walk in the footsteps of so many men and women who deserve eternal recognition.

"Andy, come on!" shouts my sister Nina, jerking me forward through thousands of years to reality, "we have to meet the Rabbi!" I shake my head and slowly walk forward on the smooth, polished surface of Jerusalem granite. My eyes focus on the black speckled floor as I continue on, reviewing my Hebrew Torah portion in my head, trying to hide

my intense nervousness. Rabbi Romm is a Conservative rabbi who lives in Israel. A short, slightly stout man with a yarmulka and a kind expression comes into view as I raise my head. He waves a greeting to us, and we all enter the large cable car that takes visitors to the top of Masada. With Rabbi Romm's paint brush-like mustache, accenting a wide grin, I instantly feel a gentleness and kindness radiate from him. As he reaches out to shake my hand I silently sigh with relief. I step onto the cable car with my family and the Rabbi follows close behind.

As the cable car moves silently along its upward path, I observe how the rough rocks of the desert become smooth and tranquil when viewed from the great height of Masada. I know that this day will be like none other. Upon arrival, we walk down the red and tan rock path. As we pass the ancient buildings, I run my hand along their smooth, weathered edges. We continue along the path and snake through an elaborate network of off-white, stone walls. I feel as though I am walking through an age-old catacomb. We approach King Herod's Summer Palace, built of hand chiseled stone, and in a sublime gesture to its beauty, the salty air drifts over from the Dead Sea.

Crossing squeaky, dust encrusted planks, I notice a small, covered outdoor synagogue, complete with stone pulpit and chairs. Unlike the lavish synagogues of the United States, with stained glass windows and elaborate light fixtures, this open air "synagogue" exists vulnerable to nature. The sheltered area cools my body from the radiant sun. "This is how it is supposed to be," I tell myself. Like Judeans of the past, I stand at the head of the congregation and begin to recite the Shemah Israel...

My voice rings clearly, and I gradually lose all of my anxiety. The ends of my tallis sway gently in the wind, and a sense of confidence sweeps over me, rejuvenating my spirit and relaxing my nerves. I feel as if all the men and women of Masada are standing behind me, cheering me on. Although I have never met these people, I know that I will al-

ways carry a piece of them with me, in my prayers.

Down the great heights of Masada, after the ceremony, we descend by cable car. The memory of the serene structures and uplifting history of Masada allow me to forget everything else in the world. Although sad to leave, there will always remain with me the vow that I will return to this desert refuge of my ancestors. As I return to reality, I become aware of the other tourists crowding around me, singing and dancing in celebration of my Bar Mitzvah. These strangers suddenly become family members as we all realized that we experienced separation by the Diaspora.

Instructor: Mrs. Holly Carey

Symbolism in John Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums"

"The Chrysanthemums" by John Steinbeck is centered around Elisa Allen, a plain woman living in California during the time of the Great Depression. The author provides more than an adequate setting for the story with his descriptions of the Salinas Valley and the appearance of Elisa. However, the full scope of the nature of the main character is not directly revealed. It is only through his recurring use of symbolism that Steinbeck offers a deeper, more poignant insight into the life of Elisa Allen.

Because Henry does not involve her in the business on the ranch or consult with her regarding important decisions, Elisa is not allowed to be a true partner in her marriage. The need she has for validation and equality lead her to seek out a place on the ranch that Henry will not control. Elisa's desire for something of her own is realized in the beautiful garden she plants each year. The garden is her domain, the one place where she feels whole and valuable as a person. When Elisa, standing in her garden, responds to Henry, "I've a gift with things, all right [...]" (247), the author is revealing that Elisa feels confident when she is there. Nowhere else does Elisa speak with the buoyancy and assurance that she exudes while in her garden.

Elisa is strong within the confines of her garden fence because it demarcates her own private place, her sanctuary, and alone there she is released for awhile from the unfairness of her life. On some level, Henry senses the separation of the garden and knows that he is not welcome beyond the fence, as is illustrated in the following passage: "Elisa started at the sound of her husband's voice. He had come near quietly, and he leaned over the wire fence that protected her flower garden from cattle and dogs and chickens" (247). The fence protecting the garden is the space Elisa puts between

herself and Henry by remaining silent about her needs. Unable or unwilling to vocalize her feelings, Elisa keeps her sadness and dissatisfaction locked inside and does not allow Henry to enter the invisible fence that exists around her heart. Because of her sorrow, she keeps Henry at arm's length, refusing to let him near again, yet ironically her greatest desire is for that very closeness in their relationship. Essentially, she perpetuates for herself an unbreakable cycle of disappointment and heartache and virtually guarantees that her present discontent will continue.

Just as Elisa veils her emotions, so does she mask and thereby safeguard her femininity. The narrator comments that "Her figure looked blocked and heavy in her gardening costume, a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clod-hopper shoes, a figured printed dress almost completely covered by a big corduroy apron with four big pockets [...]" (246). Elisa has both conscious and subconscious motives for cloaking her feminine self in such a manner. She has an inherent need to show Henry that she is as able as any man, and she consciously dresses herself as such in order to emphasize her strength and capability when she is working. Additionally, when in her garden, Elisa feels that she is inferior to no one, and her manly clothing exhibits the equality she feels while she is there. On a more subconscious plane, her fear of vulnerability lurks just beneath the surface, and it is a self-defense mechanism that compels Elisa to disguise her prettiness. Though not entirely complacent about the remoteness between Henry and herself, Elisa is accustomed to it, and because she cannot allow him to be close to her heart, she wants nothing to provoke Henry's interest in her as a woman.

The emotional detachment between Elisa and Henry is certainly the product of years of disappointments, in addition to a debilitating lack of communication. It is unknown whether the lack of children in the marriage caused the distance between Elisa and Henry or was merely an effect of their lackluster relationship. Regardless of the cause, Elisa

obviously feels a deep emptiness and looks for something to fill that void and satisfy her instinct to nurture. The chrysanthemums become the children she cannot bear, and she guards them from harm as surely as a mother would her offspring. The narrator explains how "She took off a glove and put her strong fingers down into the forest of new green chrysanthemum sprouts that were growing around the old roots. She spread the leaves and looked down among the close-growing stems. No aphids were there, no sow bugs or snails or cutworms. Her terrier fingers destroyed such pests before they could get started" (247). The enthusiasm and thoroughness Elisa exhibits as she cares for the flowers is very like that of a mother with her children. When the tinker comments on her plants, Elisa's response is "Oh, those are chrysanthemums, giant whites and yellows. I raise them every year [...]" (249) as if she were indeed raising children rather than merely growing flowers in a garden. This point is strengthened further by the explicit instructions that Elisa gives the tinker regarding care of the chrysanthemum seedlings.

The tinker plays an important role in "The Chrysanthemums," when he walks into the garden and unwittingly crosses the barriers of Elisa's isolation, bringing out a side of her that has long been dormant. It is impossible to fully understand the tinker's effect of Elisa without examining the deeper meanings of the garden, the fence, the masculine clothing and the flowers. All have significant connotations regarding the emotional state of Elisa Allen, and it is through the exploration of these literary symbols that Elisa Allen evolves into a character of the depth that Steinbeck intended her to be.

Instructor: Mrs. Holly Carey

Symbolism in Allegory

In "Rappaccini's Garden," Nathaniel Hawthorne interprets Christian themes and their impact on men and women. The tale touches on several beliefs within the faith including the idea of a creator, free will of Man, and punishment for sins. A diverse range of images produces this effect. The setting expresses an artificial, manmade world, with frightful alterations to God's plan. Characters reflect prominent figures from the Bible story. Enlightenment and spiritual darkness set the tone, as well as the impact of sin upon the world and its inhabitants. By presenting aspects of daily life and their relation to Christian ethics, the story's purpose seems one of morality and correct judgment. The use of symbols in setting, character development, and tone convey the message. Biblical symbolism constructs an allegorical tale.

First, the reader experiences an idyllic garden comparable to the Garden of Eden. The narrator questions "Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world?" (291). The garden possesses similarities of structure to Eden in that it contains a fountain and a beautiful, dominant shrub. Don Parry Norford contends that the fountain compares to the Tree of Life as the sustenance of all existence, whereas the shrub corresponds to the Tree of Knowledge representing awareness (177). The garden casts a hypnotic spell over all who enter it, in the same manner of Eden. This forbidden world appeals to the curiosity of onlookers. Temptation reigns supreme with wildly captivating plants, musical bubbling of water from the font, and exotic aromas which the vegetation emits. However, something awry abounds here. The unsightly, crumbling fountain sustains a garden bastardized by hybrid mixtures. Exceedingly beautiful, these variations among the fauna appear in opposition to those in na-

ture, suggestive of paradise after the fall of Man, according to Joe Davis (7). Similarly, John N. Miller notes the corruption of the garden (29).

Second, the character roles resemble iconic figures in the Bible. Dr. Rappaccini, although irreparably flawed, presents as the Creator image. His earthly garden and daughter spring from his scientific endeavors. As noted by Leonard A. Podis, Rappaccini's obsession with generating life comes to fruition in his production of Beatrice and transformation of Giovanni (247). Rappaccini seeks to demonstrate his scientific expertise in tangible forms, surpassing all others in his field. His formation of Beatrice first alludes to the reversal of order compared to Eden's inhabitants. By securing Giovanni as Adam for his Eve, the story suggests that Rappaccini's power exists in an unholy realm. He places more importance on the maternal image, in contrast to Christian ideals of men as leaders. Furthermore, Rappaccini does not possess omniscient command of his creations. His inability to withstand physical contact with some of his plants demonstrates his limited authority. Therefore, Rappaccini may be viewed as a false god. Baglioni appears akin to the Serpent of the Garden of Good and Evil. His assertions to Giovanni serve as irresistible temptation. Samuel Coale alleges that Baglioni embodies ego and skepticism (60). Like the evil snake, he seeks to thwart God by damaging his children. Baglioni obsessively desires Rappaccini's position and diligently pursues attaining this goal. Similarly, the snake seeks to reduce God's dominant state and plots a downfall. By appealing directly to Giovanni as "Adam" instead of Beatrice as "Eve," Baglioni's character reverses the order of Biblical reference. Giovanni's likeness to Adam seems truer in form. Gillian Brown contends that Giovanni blames Beatrice for his misfortune and entrapment in Rappaccini's plan (95). Much like Adam, Giovanni refuses to reflect on his own shortcomings and permits manipulation from others. He also suffers from the inability to perceive evidence before him, instead choosing to adopt Baglioni's message as gospel. His

first encounters with Beatrice leave him in bewilderment. Even the young woman's reassurances confuse Giovanni. Just as Adam rebukes Eve, Giovanni dispels Beatrice's assertions of her innocence. Ultimately, Giovanni's indecision leads to the demise of his only possible earthly mate. Beatrice resembles Eve in her naivete and willingness to appease the male influences around her. Nancy Bunge points to Beatrice's childlike qualities and purity of heart (70). She attends to her father's whims without question. Beatrice desperately depends on Giovanni's daily visits similar to a child who waits for a playmate. The only evil apparent in her character results from Rappaccini's making. So, like Eve, Beatrice's actions reflect domination by male influences.

Thirdly, the creatures within the garden represent innocent victims bearing the consequences of Man's sinful nature. Rappaccini's deeds affect every aspect of life in his provisional world. Beatrice's body exudes botanical toxins as a result of Rappaccini's science. Her impact on the lizard and winged insect demonstrates the wicked effects of altering nature. Even Beatrice acknowledges guilt by blessing the tiny martyrs. Giovanni witnesses these encounters and begins to view her as dreadful and repulsive. Baglioni promotes Giovanni's suspicions by telling of Rappaccini's experimentation on animals with deadly poisons. Baglioni stresses that Rappaccini does not value the sanctity of life in any creature, not even his own daughter. After his breath kills a spider, Giovanni experiences horror at his transformation to a poison being yet refuses to dwell on the deed. Instead, he focuses only on resolving Beatrice's defect. Rappaccini's sins foreshadow his ultimate recompense. He reveals his primary intentions to the young lovers. Rappaccini's injustices against the blameless result in destruction of his most sacred creation.

Furthermore, the effects of the Sun and moon note the Heavenly Father's hand in mankind's actions. In Genesis, God creates light and distinguishes it from darkness. By pronouncing light as good, it becomes a metaphor for a

desirable state. Rappaccini's false world displays its heavenly light in Beatrice's beautiful countenance. Giovanni basks in the light from this human Sun, yet the nightfall causes him to doubt its wholesomeness. The moonlight beaming upon the garden dims his recollections. The total darkness of sleep brings terrible dreams to him as well. Alfred J. Kloeckner contends that the story fixates on darkness (335). Light and dark may suggest varying stages of consciousness. Edward H. Rosenberry recalls Giovanni's apparent confusion at dusk (41). Giovanni waxes and wanes between illuminative and shadowy aspects of a future life with Beatrice. The struggle between cognitive decisions and imaginings reflects the human dilemma (Norford 185).

Next, the issue of scientific experimentation typifies human nature to rebel against the Creator. Jeannine Dobbs surmises that social views in the Victorian era stand in opposition to this exploration as an effrontery to God (429). Berberhard Alsen guesses that Rappaccini seeks domination as lord of a manufactured universe (431). Baglioni fears Rappaccini's advances and seeks to halt them. Unbeknownst to Giovanni, Baglioni and Rappaccini share a rivalry, equally wishing to control this new field of study. By heightening Giovanni's suspicions, Baglioni creates the catalyst for Rappaccini's destruction. In this way, Baglioni manipulates as despicably as Rappaccini. The unfortunate Beatrice suffers betwixt these destructive forces. She suffers as a laboratory specimen in this competition between scientists. In any society, experimentation with poisons on a person defies common sense. This unholy contest defies God's commandments and appeals to a sense of prudent judgment in all persons.

Lastly, the poison and antidote typify a contrast between good and evil aspects of mortal beings. Margaret Hallissy proposes an analogy between poison and sin, especially the association of females embodying the sexual downfall of males (231). Hallissy further implicates Victorian ideas viewing sexuality as toxic (234). Giovanni and Beatrice feel

a mutually strong physical attraction. Nineteenth century ideals dictate marriage in resolving possible enticement to sin. Like the plants in the garden, Beatrice and Giovanni display powerfully noxious traits and their souls must undergo cleansing. However, Beatrice's pureness of spirit serves as her personal antidote (Hallissy 237). Since she displays true goodness, the antidote overwhelms her system. Richard Brenzo evidences the antidote's effect on Beatrice as further proof of Baglioni's evil intention (163). Baglioni uses Beatrice as a test subject, then blames her death on Rappaccini. This displacement of guilt from the sinner mimics human nature to refuse responsibility for actions. Adam tries the same course when God confronts him. Morton L. Ross presents Giovanni's all too human failings as Man's lot in life (345). Giovanni's blind pursuit of purging Beatrice's stain causes him to negate his own ugliness. He does not realize his own depravity until Beatrice verbalizes it. Interestingly enough, Giovanni's problems still exist after Beatrice's death, leaving the reader to suppose that Giovanni will bear responsibility indefinitely.

In conclusion, symbolism creates a dual atmosphere of reality and contrivance. A moral quest tantalizes with enigma and obscurity. The images of good and evil exist in each character and force the reader to analyze levels of representation. The setting draws on pastoral perfection in contrast to manufactured imitation. Although the Christian parallels abound, they inspire interpretation on an intimate level for each reader and serve as figurative examples. The attitude of the piece points toward personal responsibility at every turn. The desire to put an old lesson into a more modern context succeeds in its cautionary goal. As in Christian scripture, provoking God's justice usually proves dangerous, sometimes deadly. Comparisons with Biblical references assist in distinguishing character, developing setting, and establishing tone.

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Instructor: Mrs. Pat Heintzelman

I am Africa

I am Africa and Africa is me
And I have no problems with that as far as I can see
I am as strong as an elephant and as sweet as sugar cane
But the best thing about me is the size of my brain
I am Africa and as beautiful as they come
So you can hate, discriminate, or even call me dumb
My will and determination is what puts me on top
So while you're thinking I am ignorant, just know I won't
stop
My parents started out slaving but I'll end up ruling
I started out learning, but I will surely end up schooling
Because I am Africa and Africa is me
Strong, independent and being all that I can be

The Critic

Full beard overgrown
dry tongue, sharp tone

A familiar rage
leaves beauty alone

The spell lost
with poetry glossed

Additions, revisions!

Soft hands come and go
as Carmine drops

a letter in an empty hall

Caramel Infatuation

Your milky brown complexion begs
my tongue's attention

but not to mention the sinful
thrill and cold chills I

feel as your sweet scent tickles my
senses. Wish I could

melt into you the way you do
in the heat of my

mouth. Your flavor urges me to
savor every bit

of sugar on my tongue, exciting
shivers down the small

of my own caramel colored
back. Downfall to our

relationship? You're too small, my
appetite's too big.

The beautiful butterfly flutters
off the corpse's back
the cherub girl's smile
is cold and everlasting
the children ring around the rosy
in unidentified rows of tiny feet and hands
the picturesque queue of buildings
all fall down

perfuming Sri Lanka's present
is the tang of mortality
the fragrance of black roses
filling the inhabitants
with a bouquet of life's
adversary, death,
aromas of plague
the only remnant

Jock

Thanks for the draft beer
 And cheap sex.
 You can tell your buddies
 I'm strange and have a huge
 Tattoo on my ass
 But at least I know
 "The Birth of Venus"
 Isn't a porno and
 And Da Vinci never played
 For the Saints.

Catkin, Dried

A stiff cluster of scales
 is bristled, bound tight
 up and down a spine
 in frozen slither:
 a fossilized slug or dragon.

A glossy, plated beak
 is the hard head slid
 snug, like a helmet
 without holes, over
 what must have been a slimy brain.

This dragon larva's scales
 breathed like gritty gills,
 snapped closed on moisture
 and rubbed the wetness
 down to the floppy, spongy pith.

But sun and sand and dust
 have scratched and baked away
 the cool, oozy meat
 of this pried-open,
 dried, crunchy exoskeleton.

Dunce's Witless Sonnet

Oh woe is me, I'll never be a bard
who sings, "I am, I am!," for I am cursed:
headless lines are difi-...er, uh, hard.
Of sharp trophies I always win the worst:
a prize of fingers sliced. And every bar
of my budapest rule all end up ending girlie.
My metaphors I crash though I've no car;
I sometimes back over the tenor. Surely
a master versed in verse can turn my mess
upon the pithy track. No Swift, no Keats,
no Donne or Blake, no Poe, no Frost: their tests
of skill are crude. But rather praise the feats
of Kennedy!(just don't forget to bring
your Master Clue XJ Decoder Ring!)

Frustration Reincarnation

A glow in sight, she stumbled as she ran:
a spirit freed in the labyrinth of death
reached for fire, returned where she began.

"Here candle still, but locked my door," she said.
A voice came rippling back to her and scared
that spirit freed in the labyrinth of death;

She fled late niche and stumbled down dark stairs.
"I'm lost!" she cried. "Oh, where the guiding light?"
A voice came rippling back to her and, scared,

she raced down halls and fell another flight.
"I can't stay here," she growled mad. "Ah damn,
I'm lost!" she cried. "Oh, where's the guiding light!?"

She sensed some sighs behind dim walls; them rammed
till she found that jarred. She peaked inside:
"I can't stay there," she growled mad. "Ah damn,

too old- in babe or seed I need to slide."
A glow in sight, she stumbled as she ran
till door she found that jarred. She peaked inside,
reached for fire, returned where she began.

BRANDON HARRINGTON

A Father's Revenge

He slipped through the door not wanting any attention
Took a table in the corner with his back to the wall
Ordered two shots of whiskey and a draft beer back
Not for courage, his anger clearly covered it all.

He kept an eye on the boys in the pool room
Making sure he knew who was where
He watched the door through the dancers on the dance floor
Making ready for his prey unaware.

Under coat in his belt was the Smith 44
Justice due for the crime that had been done
For the memory of his daughter taken down her first time
Commands his hand on the grip of the gun.

The wait wasn't long or for naught
Eyes piercing through the dancers to the door
In walks the cocky young taker
Searching women and wanting for more.

He rose, moved deliberately toward his target
Boiling passion for the blood and the gore
Pulled his weapon and fired 'til it was empty
His revenge laid waste upon the floor.

A Man's Shirt

You can tell a lot about a man's shirt.
Injuries he's had or how he was hurt.
Places he's been and what he's bought.
Love he's found or love he's sought.

You can tell a lot about a man's shirt.
How he's bled or how he's worked.
It tells a brief story of things in the past.
How it was brief or how it did last.

You can tell a lot about a man's shirt.
How he served his country and went to church.
With the names of the men he fought beside
He'll forever wear them and wear them with pride.

You can tell a lot about a man's shirt.
A different story told by each stain of dirt.
You may never know what each story might be,
But on the shirts of those men that story you'll see.

Flourishment

When my heart in blackened grasses shall lay
 I'll overcome the fear
 overcome the fray
 When in peace, ne'er turmoil I shall be
 I'll sing a song, sing with glee
 O dear, where have you turned?
 my Love, it glistens on the bowers of time
 The plights of sickness
 The weary-worn heart, we swore the vow
 "Death do we part..."
 but you picked up your brow
 Your tinsel and your limp-forewarn / Art—wandered,
 sauntered into dark

In the Hollow

-To the coal miners of Trinidad, Colorado, 1887.

There was no pulse in the deep of the mine.
 That kerosene smell was sharp in our noses.
 We breathed in the blackness, our insides
 darkening. Black tears,
 lit by hanging carbide lamps,
 left pale streaks down darkened cheeks.
 Young boys in heavy boots unsettled the dust.

No sun burning my arms,
 or blinding my eyes.
 With picks and shovels
 we were digging the shadows,
 living in fear that the black
 lung would take us
 before the Good Lord called us home.

Notes from Writing Seminar

No hearts
No cats
No abstracts please.
Dot matrix printers?
They're floating
at the bottom of the Neches
where they should be.

Check your smart ass
at the door
if you forgot it.
Borrow someone else's
Don't forget anymore.

Out of My Dictionary

Our old picture fell
out of my dictionary.
I saw your young, handsome face,
my pink cheeks.
What were we? Sixteen? Seventeen?

We were trapped between
"trow" and "tuberculosis",
laughing at our shyness.

Why is it I can't remember
the way lines creased around your eyes
until someone mentions your name?

I can't remember how
your arms felt around me
until someone tells me they saw you.

I don't remember why
I fell into your eyes
or how I drowned in the scent of you.

I don't remember what
made me follow you
or why the distance between us
was greater than the miles.

You said you didn't trust me
and had no reason to.
Between our legs
the word "try" is printed backwards.

"Trunk" is etched into your arm,
"truce" is stamped on my chest.

The grainy color doesn't do your smile justice.
Your sideburns were always too long.
I wonder if you have your father's gut
or your mother's lack of sense.

It's funny
I won't remember
how I left you that day
or the taste of your lips on my memories.

I won't remember when
you told me I had ruined you.
I don't shed tears now,
I wouldn't cry then.

I place our picture back
in between the pages.
Nestling in the white pocket
of yellow paper,
you sit laughing under "trust."

Past "The Willikies"

Early mornings break
wood slaves zig zag patterns on walls

Goats and bony cows chew
weeds along narrow roads
that curve like exposed ribs.
Dusty front porches with green doors,
pink window frames
face rusty bins sleeping
on sugar plantations.

Bull finches and banana quiches
squabble over crusts of bread
in sand-worn tile cracks.
Flies rest atop bottles of rum
in open cafes.

Abandoned sugarcane fields
cover half the town.
Bleached wood fences
enclose sandy earth,
unfit for grain or animal.

Men and sons cast nets
for snapper bait
to sell at market,
pulling their nets, each time singing songs
of mangoes and lost loves.
Suns rise and fall over
empty nets resting on rocks
in a land that produces no sugar.

*Wood slave: a nocturnal lizard native to the West Indies that lives
behind wooden frames in houses*

NANCY OAKES

Beloved

I sing a loving song all day to you
out from my soul—in with a catch, a sigh.
My longing touch will swell each verse. I do,
Beloved, want to rouse, to hear you cry
my name; your love—a chorus sweetly falls
upon my heart! Beloved Dan, my song,
my love is yours. Do say you hear my calls--
for aching need possesses me and I long
to sing to you; to be with you—to hold
and have, till death does part my loving verse
from tune. My soul subdued, yet still so bold,
will search all hell or heaven, risking a curse,
to always sing to you, to always love, to be
by you so loved, is sweet enough for me.

Countdown for Momma

12 step program for me that Wednesday when
11 A. M. you arrived at my younger sister's. With
10 I-love-you(s) being all there was between us,
9 of which you echoed "Me too."
8 hours ran down through the
7 assorted phone calls to your children.
6 gathered for the final supper. You had
5 lucid minutes when you realized your
4 hour, pounding headache was more than
3 aspirins could cure. My sister summoned the
2 paramedics that worked frantically to save; but
1 massive stroke,
0.

CALLIE ODOM

Dead Cricket

Someone should have set you free
Or at least put you out of your misery
You were searching for shade inside
Lying in the corner, there you died.

My Guitar

It stands in the corner
mocking me
silently
I run my fingers
over the
six sweet places
but no melody
flows on
the breeze
the curve of the sleek
hard body
begs to be held
yet screeches
ghastly discord
when embraced
my hands too
inexperienced
and crude
not near nimble enough
to please
the soul of my guitar.

Recycle

Place on me that sweet sweet earth
Let that brown death
Cover my eyelids
Chasing the life from my nostrils
Creeping crawling creatures of the dark
Wandering slowly to death's idol
Solemn acts of worship
Performed with miniscule incisors
Recycle and reuse
This body that fails me so

Tis the Season

crisp crackling wrinkles
paper thin and wind torn
frozen empty veins
what once flowed life
flutters, dangles precariously
a whisper of winter's breath
carries away
spring's last son

RANDY SAMPSON

Eye Candy

*From a poetry workshop assignment to produce
a rhyming sonnet with one requirement:
use the following end-rhymes in this order:
suppose, trace, erase, knows,
through, mine, anew, fine,
intent, tries, meant, -ities, -ion.*

"With only these words as ends – eyes up! Pose
some verse for the workshop," he said. A poet-race
was on. The template, or polymerase,
was chalked for each to craft their clone. Heck! Now's
no time to write: it's 5 A.M.! My fifth rough
rough draft lies in the can. Soon, light will illumine
the darkness without and in, bringing a new
conference day. Please, don't ask that I define
this form where the ends are wrapped in rules, in tent-
acles that strangle and squeeze. No symmetries
framed here by any immortal hand; (rhyme ant
with aunt elsewhere). Only a printer's pi ties
this sonnet's disarray – a minestrone
verse which one must tune, not an ear, but an I on.

Molly

She has a bedside book with all the answers,
believes all you have to do is ask & open;
watches Channel 12 News every night
(all the while swearing the world's "f'd-up"),
then follows that up with a Xanax & Zolof.

At times she's certain God is on His way,
so just in case she keeps a suitcase packed;
thinks heaven's like an Amway pyramid
with only a few card-holding saints on top,
each managing their own eternal down-line:
she bought the start-up kit, now faithfully makes
the monthly minimums—at ten percent
who'd pass an opportunity like that?

So watch her pave the roads in her SUV,
the weary traveler always on the go,
doing a good deed here, a good deed there
(*the miles* she's earned she can never redeem)—
happiness always a trip away.

*On Visiting Our Lady of Lourdes, Early Fall, in Vidor,
Texas*

*You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains
Carried the cross of my shame, of my shame
You know I believed it
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
—Bono*

Our fellow's come to see the whore of all the earth,
that MOTHER OF HARLOTS, here—for here he was taught
she'd be, some years ago in Sunday school—
& so here he sits, uninvited, on the back
pew, anxiously engaged in finding her.

Bells sound. & then a priest enters, soon followed
by a girl & boy, each clothed in a white robe,
who softly stroll the center aisle, stop
& bow before the altar, priest, & cross
then separate, the boy to the priest's right,

the girl to his left. Carefully one by one
they gather a few golden bowls & cups,
some towels & things & place them on the altar
before the priest, who, apparently pleased, nods.
The children, bowing, cross their hearts then stand

motionless—innocence poised under a heavy
cross which hangs from a burdened beam: the figure
tacked to it looming over their very lives...

—while still no sign of prostitute or whore,
our fellow wonders if all he was taught was true.

After much ceremonial polishing, a short
sermon, some chanting from the neighboring pews,
more standing & kneeling (our fellow's least favorite part)—
suddenly, without warning, an entire host

of folks around him rises to meet the priest:
from everywhere they gather in lines, waiting.

Our fellow, first, neither rising nor kneeling,
watches each & every soul eventually reach
the lingering priest hosting the approaching mass
(what they do up there he hasn't a clue).

The smoke of incense mingles in the rafters

& having come here without invitation,
host, or company, he likewise goes,
not having found what he was looking for.

Voices: Two Sonnets

Our fellow on his baptism:

They baptized me when I turned eight years old,
twice. Once wasn't quite good enough, you see;
it seems a single hair, so I was told,
hovered above the water, floating free,
effectively voiding my sacred rite.
& so I plunged two times from head to toe--
a double-dip & dose to make it right--
into that cleansing agent: H2O.

& the Bishop on his baptism:

Afterwards I explained to him that one
must be completely dunked, immersed in water
for the saving ritual to work. Thus done,
your sins are washed away. In the name of the Father,
the Son & the Holy Ghost another sinner
had joined God's Only Church: reborn a member!

Our fellow on his ordination:

So many heavy hands placed on my head:
when will they ever move? That's what I thought
that Sunday afternoon when I turned twelve.
I should've been more reverent then, myself,
but, well...my mind was mostly on girls instead
& all those men were messing up my hair.
So in a three-piece suit my mother bought
I sat, struggling to focus on their prayer.

& the Bishop on his ordination:

Well I remember how reverent the fellow was
as we, the brethren, laid our hands on him;
surely he thought about the Savior then,
& how, soon, he would bring souls unto Him.
In prayer, we blessed him to do good, because
now the boy shared God's power among men.

You cheated me

*The great and spacious building was the pride of the world;
and it fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great.*

—1 Nepht 1:36

from a friendship with the colored kid
in the third grade, he was one of a kind;
and my buddies from up the block—
their daddies smoked, plus, they were catholic;
and from the gorgeous girl in eleventh grade,
whose skirt was cut too high, and top too low.
You cheated me from the music—yes! The music!
From Styx to the Stones, and Led Zeppelin to Zappa,
and all the tunes and bands that ever jammed.
When I was just a kid you took them all
from me and made them out to be bad things
from hell and lesser folks
that just weren't good enough for me.

But, most of all you took from me
a family:

my cousins, they never came over—
you made them feel unwelcome;
my younger brothers Dave and Gabe
who never served or measured up
(you know they both shacked-up with chicks);
my sister Sarah had a bastard child
and I still can't understand
why you pressed her so to give up Ty—
she nearly died from all that shame.

You took me from my Dad who didn't fit in
and never came around to see
things quite your way,
and now he's gone and never coming back.

You took from me my life, my joy, —my World!
And now I claim all you kept me from, back.

Contributors

Vera Akinkuotu is a freshman majoring in nursing.

Casey Applegate graduated in May 2005 with a B.A. in English

Vera Clark is a senior majoring in English.

Matthew Crumpler is a junior majoring in English.

Mike Dunklin is a graduate student of history.

Luke Garlock is a junior majoring in English and Spanish.

Brandon Harrington is a freshman majoring in General Studies.

Ashlynn Ivy is a junior majoring in English.

Rachel Lane is a freshman majoring in English.

Richard McCue is a sophomore majoring in nursing.

Daniella Medley graduated in May 2005 with an M.A. in English.

Jennifer Moss is a sophomore majoring in history.

Rebecca Pleasant is a sophomore majoring in General Business

Nancy Oakes is a senior majoring in English.

Callie Odom is a junior majoring in Biology.

Randy Sampson is a graduate student of English.

Kelly Tibbetts graduated in December 2004 with a B.A. in English.

Andrew Victores is a student in the Texas Academy of Leadership in the Humanities.

Carrie Zoch graduated in December 2004 with a B.A. in English.