

Morpheus

Literary Magazine



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Meet the Staff

Rachel Peters, Editor-in-Chief

Rachel James, Layout Design

Kasandra Christner, Media Representative

Tanner Gitcheff

Fletcher Grey

Molly Calaway

Contact Us:

Email: morpheusliterarymagazine@gmail.com

Facebook: Morpheus

Twitter: @HUMorpheus



The Mother's Grief

By Kory Wise

First Place Poetry Winner

You hold him in your arms,
his body broken
just like your heart.
Your eyes are closed
in utter defeat.
The sorrow is drowning you alive.

Your son has been taken —
killed —
because of one man's sin.
The holes in His body
symbolic of the ones in your heart,
put there by that prophetic sword.

You can't even look God in the eye.
The doubt, the anger, the depression
are seeping in,
the hope you once had is gone.
You gave Him your life,
only to be abandoned in the end.

If only you could open your eyes,
you'd see this was part of the plan.
There is hope,
there is trust,
there is light
to be found in the promise He made.

[Based on Michelangelo's Pieta]

Candles

By Rachel Peters
Second Place Poetry Winner

I know a boy who has candles.

*

He has candles that are blue.
He has candles that are white.
He has candles that are black.

Some candles are invisible.

*

He has candles to honor God.
He has candles to honor the moon.
He has candles to honor the earth.

Some candles honor the dead.

*

He has candles for praying.
He has candles for cleansing.
He has candles for love.

Some candles are for you.

*

He has candles made of wax.
He has candles made of ash.
He has candles made of twigs.

Some candles are made of insects.

*

He has candles that smell like rain.
He has candles that smell like thunder.
He has candles that smell like snow.

Some candles sting demons' noses.

*

He has candles to make people go away.
He has candles to make his ancestors come.
He has candles to make the trees talk.

Some candles whisper in his ears.

*

He has candles. I have seen him light them.
He has candles. Some light themselves.

Artemis to Orion*

By Rachel James
Third Place Poetry Winner

In a blinding rage, I smote you,
Struck you down, like the huntress I am
Proving my legacy to these woods and this bow
While your legacy is carried through me.

Your manhood was torn asunder
By your inability to defend yourself
Your sword against my bow and beasts
Mere man against immortal.

Despite the reason behind your fall,
Whether it be pure accident or brotherly anger,
My victory was tragically glorious
While your defeat was gloriously tragic.

I suppose, briefly, in the future
When you are but a pebble in the path of memory,
I might remember our shared hunts
And grieve, if only for a moment.

However, I have had many companions before
And will have many companions after
As is the joy and burden of immortality.
So, I say goodbye to you and will not dwell further.

Orion was Artemis', the Goddess of the hunt, companion. He is sometimes depicted as a descendant of Poseidon. He was killed either by a giant scorpion or Artemis, sometimes it is her brother, Apollo, who tricked her into doing it. Artemis either shot him with her arrow or had her hounds tear him apart.

Golly Gee

By Megan Cook

When Lake Erie sweat clung to my youthful curls,
brushed against my warming cheeks
in the giggle of summertime,

my father slipped a cone of ice between my fingers—
twisted creamy melty chocolate vanilla heaven.

“Don’t let it drip” whispers nestled in my ears
as I petted the treat, soft as a kitten’s lick.

The sun pestered me like an elder sibling,
little tears of ice cream rolling down my sticky fingers

while a smile lit my face,
and golly, “Golly Gee” glimmered, hand-painted across the shop

as if it took the words right from my daddy’s happy lips.

Spinners of the Thread*

By Rachel James

We are the spinners of the thread,
The women of destiny.
We weave the cloth of your life
As the needle cuts through time,
Pointing you in whichever direction
We want you to go.

There is no escaping us
As we tangle you in our web,
Toying with you as the bug
And us--the spider,
Feasting on your misery,
Enriching the lucky few.

We can be generous hosts
If you play our game,
Granting you a life worth living,
A life worth remembering in Elysium.**
But trying to unravel the tapestry
Will cause the cord to be cut.

*In Greek Mythology, the three Fates are the ones who determine a person's destiny and when their life is going to end. Clotho is the spinner of their life, Lachesis measures the thread, and Atropos cuts it, making the person dies. Typically depicted as older women.

**Elysium is the part of the Underworld where heroes are sent to. Considered to be a paradise.

I Miss It

By Tanner Gitcheff

I miss it, I miss terribly

I miss going to Fosters after school with Mac
I miss Coco and her tendency to lay plastic eggs
I miss Edwardo, his cute cowardice and spanish
I miss Wilt and his kindness towards others

I miss Ed and his innocent idiocy
I miss Double D and his intelligent ways
I miss Eddy and his ego minded schemes
I miss Plank and that catchy song about him

I miss Numbuh 1 and his brave leadership of his team
I miss Numbuh 2 and and his puns
I miss Numbuh 3 and her obsession with rainbow monkeys
I miss Numbuh 4 and his hot headed attitude
I miss Numbuh 5 referring to herself in third person, and street smarts

I miss Camp Kidney
I miss Lazlo and his tendency to get himself into trouble
I miss Clam and wondering what the hell kind of animal he was
I miss Scoutmaster Lumpus and the way he seemed to hate his job.

I miss Camp Wawanakwa
I miss Gwen and Trent being my OTP
I miss screaming in excitement when they finally kissed
I miss crying when they broke up

I miss Marzipan City
I miss Chowder and his devotedness to being a chef
I miss Mung Daal and his crazy ideas
I miss Schnitzel and rada rada rada
I miss Panini and her devotion to Chowder

I miss being able to not worry about what I have to the next day
I miss being able to not have to worry about big responsibilities and my future
I miss being genuinely happy
I miss my childhood.

Only The Good Die Young

By Tanner Gitcheff

The innocent, the youthful, the optimists
Barsi, O'Rourke, Bernall
The mistake makers, the escapists, the addicts
Phoenix, Joplin, Hendrix
The enchanters, the joy makers, the cryers
Cobain, Brandis, Chubbuck
The misunderstood, the confused, the insane
Harris, Klebold, Artan

Are you sure, Mr. Joel?



The Witch Trials

By Alexis McClimans

First Place Short Story Winner

“Ready for the big night, Aster?” Lucia asked, with an excited smile.

I was somewhere between excited and irritated that this night had taken so long to get here, but I returned her smile, and said, “I was born ready, Luc. You know that.”

“It seems like it was just yesterday that we entered the Academy, and now our apprenticeship is over. All those grueling classes and late nights have finally paid off! Tonight’s the big night, I can hardly believe it!” Luc did her trademark happy dance, which was really just the cabbage patch dance with a lot of extra pep. Luc was the peppiest person I’d ever met, and it was slightly revolting. I just couldn’t comprehend how so much perkiness fit in such a small person.

Personally, I thought my time spent at the Academy so far had crawled by slower than a legless turtle, but I couldn’t help but be a little nostalgic as I looked around our little, white, apprenticeship classroom for the last time as an apprentice. Three years ago, I didn’t even know witches and wizards existed, let alone the North American Academy for Witchcraft and Wizardry. It had been three years since I started my journey at the Academy and my apprenticeship with Esmerelda Cross, the head witch of Halloween.

“Yeah, I’m excited that we finally get to handle some action on our own,” I said. For three years, Luc and I studied under Miss Cross as she and her committee worked to contain the troublesome spirits of Halloween in their designated area. Every year each witch drew a city for which they would be responsible. “I wonder which town we’ll get, Luc,” I added.

“Me too, I just hope it’s not on the top ten most haunted list. I just want an easy town, so we can pass this night with flying colors and get a good Placement at the end of the year,” she replied while playing with her short, blonde hair.

“That’s a good point, but I at least want a challenging place. Just challenging enough to make it interesting because I refuse to be Placed as kitchen staff.” I said.

Every student finishes their apprenticeship in their third year, and they are graded on the most demanding night of their job. That grade basically determines if you get a decent, action filled Placement within the society or if you spend the rest of your life making food for the Academy students. No one ever wants to be Placed in the Academy cafeteria. The students cause magical havoc by throwing food and utensils around at least once a week.

“Actually,” I amended, “If I get placed in the kitchen, I will take down all the Academy’s safety wards and blo—”

“Ms. Thornheart, Ms. White! It is time for the drawing! I expected you to be on your best behavior!” Miss. Cross said, as she gave me a particularly stern look. Yeah, yeah, I thought, you better keep your eyeballs to yourself, Cross, before I poke ‘em out.

“Yes, ma’am!” I saluted because Cross twitches with anger every time I do it. The first time I saluted she got so angry her Power busted all of the lights in the classroom. It was fantastic.

Luc gave me a look that said “please behave yourself” as Cross escorted us down the

long corridor that lead to the Halloween Council's Chamber. It was one of the many places Luc and I had been "forbidden" to enter since our apprenticeship started. It was also one of the many places I had been caught trying to break into.

The door to the Chamber was elaborately decorated oak surrounded by a stone arch. Everything inside the Academy had an ancient look to it, unlike the modern look of the outside building. Cross passed her hand over the door and the large metal lock opened.

The Chamber looked much larger on the inside than it did from the outside, like most of the Academy. Inside the walls were lined with bookshelves that were overflowing with books in a variety of shapes and sizes. Scattered around the floor were even more books in impossible stacks. Probably held up by magic, I thought. In the middle of the room a fire blazed high enough to lick the ceiling, harmlessly. It was as if a bonfire had been placed in the middle of the room. I could feel the heat radiating off of it, it felt more like a fireplace fire, yet the objects around the fire remained untouched.

Cross, being the Head Witch of Halloween, instructed everyone to take a seat on the floor around the fire. Luc and I took our place next to Cross. "Everyone take a block of wood," instructed Cross, as she pointed to a stack of wood next to one of the impossible stacks of books.

"Would you mind?" Luc asked, as a blush spread across her face. I gave her a comforting smile, and I pointed my finger at the stack. Silently and effortlessly, I flicked a piece of wood in front of Luc and me. Since we would be doing our assignment together, we only needed one.

Once everyone had their wood, Cross said, "Let us begin." Her face was serious, as always, but in this setting power and control seemed to emanate from her. Even the eye that I believed was occasionally lazy demanded respect.

Cross began the chant of the drawing. She had drilled this chant into my brain. The fire began to dance as Cross spoke. She finished the chant once, then the rest of the circle joined in. As we all spoke, the fire began to change colors: green, blue, purple, red, and orange. It twisted and swirled in beautiful ways.

After the chant was repeated three times, the fire split off and headed toward the pieces of wood. As it reached Luc and my piece, I watched as it started to scrawl letters into the wood. I tried to read the letter but smoke obscured it. I looked to everyone else and saw the fire doing the same thing to every piece of wood. Magic is so fucking awesome, I thought to myself, because Cross would have hung me for swearing out loud.

Once the fire finished doing its thing, the tendrils snapped back to the source of the fire and died down. Smoke still clouded the letters on the wood. "Okay!" Said Cross. "The drawing is finished and you all have your assignments. Don't disappoint the Academy. Don't disappoint me," she added, flashing me a particularly stern look, yet again. "Everyone is to meet back here at 6:30 for departure."

I looked back to the piece of wood in front of me. It read: Beggar's Hallow. I looked at Luc and said, "Well, I guess we'll be sitting on our asses all night." Her blue eyes widened as she studied something behind me. I could practically feel Cross's eyes on the back of my head. I gave Luc a questioning look and she nodded slightly. I had impeccable timing.

"Ms. Thornheart!" Cross' voice thundered behind me. "I expect you to treat each and every town or city with the same amount of caution, importance, and respect! It does not matter if the particular town in which you have been placed is notoriously busy or notoriously quiet on Halloween night! You will take this seriously. Need I remind you that your performance tonight is a contributing factor in your Placement?"

Of course she didn't have to remind me, but she did anyway. I turned to her and put on a face of mock shock, "What?! It does?! I had no idea! I am completely unprepared, Miss. Cross!" Luc snickered behind me, and Cross shot her a look of disapproval.

Cross turned her attention back to me, "Very well, Ms. Thornheart. Joke as you must, but I sincerely hope you have prepared yourself for tonight—mentally and physically—as I have instructed you to." She turned away and walked out of the room.

Everyone began to file out of the room to prepare for their assignments, so Luc and I did as well. We walked down the corridor and returned to our classroom to gather everything we thought we would need for the night. We mostly just grabbed what we had been instructed to in our training: spell bottles for holding difficult spirits, various potions, a guide to handling spirits, water, snacks, and some odds and ends. With a few hours to spare, Luc and I decided to get some rest before the big night.

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"Aster, get a move on!" Luc yelled as we sprinted toward the Chamber. Waking up was a lengthy process for me, so we were running a little late.

"I am! You know running isn't my thing, Luc. These legs were made for couch sitting," I huffed.

We reached the Chamber just in time to watch as everyone else was sent off, one by one, to their destinations. I had forgotten that apprentices always departed last. "Damn it," I whispered to Luc, "I could have slept longer." She looked at me, half-amused and half-appalled.

Time crept by, and, finally the room was clear of everyone except Cross, Luc, and I. "Ready?" Asked Cross.

"Of course!" Luc squeaked. Her voice always squeaked when she was nervous, like she was a little blue eyed mouse.

"I was born ready, Miss Cross," I said with a confident smile.

"You know what to do," Cross said.

"You first, Luc. I'll be right behind ya," I said with an encouraging smile.

Luc closed her eyes and said, "Lacus." In the blink of an eye, Luc was gone.

As I readied myself to follow suit, Cross said, "Aster, I know you try to protect Lucia, but try to let her make her own mistakes. She'll never learn or grow, otherwise."

I looked at Cross, a little wide-eyed. It had never really occurred to me how much Cross observed or cared. I nodded to her sincerely and said, "Of course, Miss Cross."

Cleared my head and envisioned what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go in my mind. When I was ready I focused all my Power into that thought, and snapped my fingers. One second I was next to Miss Cross; the next minute I was in the town square of the mighty Beggar's Hole. The town was small enough I could see everything from the square. There was a small gas station, a bank, a police department that looked more like a tiny apartment, a library that was bigger than the police station, a McDonalds, and a dollar store.

The town, which was more like a village, sat on flat land and was surrounded by fields of various plants and wooded areas. Houses were clustered within the town for the most part, but there were a few farm houses further away.

Sunset was approaching fast, so I went searching for Luc. About twenty minutes later I found her chatting with the dollar store employee. I pulled her from the store, apologizing to the employee, and reminding her that we needed to prepare for our "party" tonight.

Once we were outside, I asked Luc, "Where do you think we should start out? The sun is practically sitting its ass on the horizon, so it's show time."

She twisted her lip in thought, "Let's start by the two abandoned houses behind Mc-

Donalds.” I looked at her, confused. She continued, “I asked the cashier in there if this town had any places known to be haunted and that’s where he directed me.”

“One point for Luc! Let’s go!”

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Several hours passed and we had only encountered one spirit. She was an elderly woman who had lived in town by the gas station. “I’m lost,” she cried, “I can’t seem to remember how to make it back to my home. It’s right by the gas station.” She was in a nightgown, as if she were sleepwalking. Her face was scrunched in confusion and she was clearly distraught.

Luc and I gave her comforting words, and helped her move on by using the Peaceful Passing spell. As we uttered the last word of the spell, the woman’s face relaxed and she smiled. “Thank you,” she said. Then she was gone, she had passed on.

Luc and I sat outside McDonalds, drinking hot chocolate. We were near death by boredom when the golden arches began to flicker uncontrollably. I didn’t look away from the sign, “Luc, do you see that?”

“Yep,” she squeaked, “that’s not good, is it?”

“No, no, it’s not. It’s a struggle for most spirits to throw your favorite vase off the table, let alone make a huge sign flicker.” It took years of being dead as a doornail to gain the power to flicker a low voltage light in a home. I had a feeling this couldn’t just be any regular spirit.

I stood, loose and ready. Luc slipped a spelled bottle into my hand. I heard a loud metallic groan. The McDonalds sign began to fall as several spirits burst from it, spreading out across the residential area of the town, killing the power to it as they went. I couldn’t believe it. I’d never heard of spirits working together, they were solitary beings. We were not prepared for this. “Three years of apprenticeship and we get tested on things that weren’t in the book! Just my luck.”

“Wh-what do we do?” Asked Luc, completely horrified.

“We do what we’ve been taught, what we’ve trained. That’s all we can do. We have to at least try to protect these people. There’s only about an hour left before veil between us and the spirit world closes. We just need to hold them off until then.”

We decided to stay together. Luc and I went towards the more residential area first. I sprinted after the group of spirits, struggling with my duffle bag of supplies as I went.

Once we caught up, I noticed the spirits were all very aggressive. They were breaking windows, blaring car alarms, and one was even trying to take control of a car full of people. That spirit needed attention first, obviously. I looked at Luc and silently motioned towards the car. If those people ended up hurt, I would be spending the rest of my life scooping cafeteria food for a bunch of magical brats.

I positioned myself closer and Luc circled around to face the spirit from the opposite end of the car. With a clear view of the spirit, I focused all my energy into stuffing his 1920s suit and tie into the bottle in my hand. Luc started chanting softly, her intentions the same. The spirit soon realized what Luc and I were trying to do. Immediately, it started to throw garden gnomes, from the house closest to him, at me without using his hands.

One clipped my leg, and it hurt like hell. “Shit!” I exclaimed. “Are you kidding me?!” Charged with adrenaline and rage, I stopped one of the gnomes, midair, and sent it right through his stomach. The spirit blinked and faded, caught off guard, and that’s when Luc was finally able to stuff him in the bottle. “Nice one, Luc!” I yelled in encouragement. As soon as the spirit was out of sight the car full of people bolted out of the car and ran for a house down the street.

"I don't get paid enough for this," I grumbled as I pressed my hand to my leg. My hand came back red.

Luc seemed to be handling a small spirit that was ripping plants out of people's yards, so I went after three ghosts who were breaking windows, I could hear families screaming inside. They looked like a group of '90s teenage hooligans. Two were broad, like football players, and the third was thin and short. I thought, Go big or go home. I focused on the two biggest ones, while they were preoccupied with throwing rocks. The plan was to get them both in the bottle in one swoop, easy peasey, but things don't always go to plan.

I snagged one, but the other resisted. He sent a flower pot at me. I ducked just before it took my head off. This got the attention of the smaller one and he whipped around, quick as lightning, and sent razor sharp glass shards in my direction. Terrified, I faced my palm towards the shards, and focused on the one word I was screaming in my mind, STOP! The shards stopped about a foot away. Angry and scared, I sent the shards back at both of the spirit, as I did before, and it took all my effort to stuff the pair in a bottle. I briefly wondered if the larger one was squashing the smaller one. I hoped so.

I turned to see Luc chanting another spirit, a young woman, into a bottle, while another, a tall man, snuck behind her. As Luc's attention was turned towards the man sent a tree branch at her like a dart, right at the middle of her back. "NO!" I screamed. My palm darted out, but I was only quick enough to barely deflect it. The branch still grazed her arm just after she bottled the spirit in front of her, ripping through the skin as it did.

I looked at the last spirit, fuming. "I'm done with this bullshit," I growled. Quickly, I went to Luc's side and we faced the remaining one, together. I launched

I threw an fake, ugly flamingo at the last spirit. It fazed the tall man for a second, but he recovered quicker than the others. He was stronger, much stronger. "We have to do this together," I told Luc, "he's strong." She nodded and gripped the bottom of the bottle in my hand. I focused my energy on him and Luc closed her eyes, chanting.

The spirit became angrier as our magic started to overpower him, and he started to launch yard items at us. Since Luc had her eyes closed in concentration, I was left to deflect the items. I was doing well until he sent garden gnomes at both of us at the same time. I protected Luc first, sending her gnome down the street. I focused on my gnome just in time for it to hit me right in the leg, again. "Fuck!" I screamed in pain.

Using everything I had I managed to keep most of my Power focused on the remaining spirit. Gradually, our combined power forced the spirit into the bottle. As I finished packing the last bottle into my duffle bag, I wondered what the owners of those gnomes would think in the morning. I decided to write them a note: "Sorry about your gnomes, but they were hideous. I did you a favor." I stuck it on their front door, and made my way to the rendezvous spot behind McDonalds.

~~~~~

We decided to return to McDonalds, best to not be near the wreckage of that neighborhood when the residents come out. First, I looked at Luc's injuries. She had a small scratch on her cheek, a wide gash on her forehead, and a large gash on her arm. I put my hand over her injuries and focused my dwindling energy on healing her wounds.

When I was finished, Luc tried to return the favor. I held up my hand, "Save your energy. I'll take care of it later." I was limping and my injuries hurt but I could handle it.

I could tell that Luc was shaken up. "Want to go on a walk? We should probably check these houses behind the restaurant."

She nodded, and we warily headed toward the houses behind McDonalds. My body was still tense and full of adrenaline. I looked around every corner, in every shadow. We

passed houses that were heavily vandalized and houses that were untouched, almost as if some houses had happened to be in the eye of a hurricane. It was completely unnerving.

“Aster?” Luc whispered.

“Yeah?”

“How did this happen? Why? Why were the spirits working together and so violent?”

I paused. That was the million-dollar question wasn't it? “I have no clue, Luc. I'm sure the council will figure it out.” I smiled, but I was afraid of the reasoning behind this as well. We were almost back to McDonalds when something caught my eye. I saw a flash of red on one of the gray, abandoned houses. I motioned for Luc to stay quiet and follow me. We rounded the corner of the house to reveal a can of spray paint on the ground and dripping, red letters. It read: “We will rise and the world shall fall. Halloween shall soon free us all.” I felt the blood drain from my face, but remained composed. Luc's eyes were a watery blue and her lip began to quiver. Quickly I took a picture and put the can of spray paint in my bag.

“We need to go back, right now, Luc.” I grabbed her arm and snapped us both back to the Chamber.

When we returned, Cross was the only one in the room. She bolted from her chair and rushed over to us. “Are you two alright?!” Her face was lined with worry. I saw something in her face, and in her eyes, I had never seen before—fear. Cross never showed fear.

Luc and I assured her we were fine, and I asked, “Can we go lay down now? I've never done so much physical activity in my life, and I need a nap,” I said with a tight chuckle.

Cross smiled a small, grim smile. “I'm afraid you cannot, Aster. The Headmaster was keeping tabs on tonight's events and has asked to question the two of you—immediately.”

# Boy, When You're With Me

By Megan Cook

Second Place Short Story Winner

"When we were closing up the restaurant late at night, somebody was always supposed to take out all of the trash to the dumpster. The guys at work never wanted a girl to go out there by herself, and so somebody always offered to go with me if it was my task for the shift. He always volunteered, telling the other guys that no, no, he was the boss. He should be the one to make the sacrifice.

Once we got out there, we would dawdle and be weird for awhile, and so I usually knew when it was about to happen, and when it did, I could feel the fence slam as he picked me up and thrust me against it. The way he used to kiss me was so different than anything I had ever felt before. It felt good. His taste was sweeter than any lips I had ever tasted before. His eyes were so navy, it could make the nearby Great Lake shy away, brimming with issues of self esteem. Then, when we felt like we had spent too much time MIA, we would go back inside, pretending that moving a wheel barrel of trash to the dumpster and emptying it together was the only thing that made us winded. It sounds pretty trashy when I put it like that."

"Why are you telling me this story? I know the story," he said, counting the register drawer for the next morning. He was always good at multi-tasking.

I rolled my eyes.

"Then after work after we would all go out to our cars, he and I would hesitate to put our keys in the ignition, as if the lock screen of our phones were suddenly urgent and interesting, as if we weren't dying to get home. Then, after everyone had left, we would dawdle some more--or at least I would--and then I would get the head-nod with the flirty smirk or the 'Are you going to stay awhile?' text. It wasn't ever easy or planned. I always felt like I had to work for it. Sometimes we would sit, stare at anything, talk about whatever was bothering me that day. Sometimes he opened up, but not usually."

He took a sip of his soda, set it down. Gave me a look. His signature look. I got butterflies.

"And then he would kiss me again with the blue lights of his souped up little car, sometimes chewing gum. It always made me think of the first time he kissed me--mid-sentence, saying that even though we wanted to, we shouldn't do this--and I was always a shy little girl for him. This was because even there, sitting in his car knowing full well what was about to happen, I had to wait for him to make the move; otherwise, he would stop me with the 'ah-ah-ahh' smile. I should have known what I was doing, really. Not that I didn't.

It's just that he smelled so amazing, and when he kissed me, I could feel my whole body fill with radio static, buzzing, sand. I was breathless at every bite to my bottom lip. He made my blood boil. I can still remember the first day I met him. He was on break and I was wiping down tables. 'Why do you keep biting your lip?' he asked, paying way too much attention to me.

'I'm not,' I had said, realizing that my lust for him was clearly all over my face. This

just made me blush more, and I'm sure he liked it, but at the time, I never thought I could have what I wanted. If you know what I mean..."

"Uh, yeah, like when I was yelling at you for something and you said all you could think about was what would happen if you just kissed me 'cause you thought my yelling was hot."

"Yep," I said, remembering. "For real, though, stop interrupting. Let me tell the story," I said, sipping from his drink.

"I could almost forget the girlfriend who was obsessively texting him, asking when he'd be home, yelling at him, hating me. Was she psychotic? Probably," I paused as he snorted. "...but could I blame her? I always felt him hinting that it was time to go, and I'd get out of the car acting as if I was so into the idea that I was making him wait for next time, that he was making me wait for next time. How exciting. Thrilling. We would leave it on that note, too, that we didn't know if it would ever happen again.

And then, usually, I would get back in my car and watch him speed at 70mph out of the lot, wondering why on earth my eyes were filling with tears. And every time I would sit there, wet with the guilt of being teased and the tears of feeling unwanted and yet wanted at the same time. I always said I would never let myself feel that way again, and then the next opportunity I was given, I would do it all over again. But then there was one time that made everything different for me: my 18th birthday. Don't worry. He played the Katy Perry song,' I said, laughing.

"But when you're with meeeee!" he sang in his highest voice, laughing. He used to play the song in front of other people just to get me worked up. This was definitely his favorite inside joke.

I rolled my eyes. I expected this insertion. I was just glad he wasn't still commenting on my third person narration.

"Anyway, he and his girlfriend had broken up, and he asked me to come see him at a pier--the pier to be exact, the one where everyone goes to have the deepest conversation of their lives--overlooking an amusement park that makes us all strangely nostalgic.

"Did you know the Millennium Force glows in rainbow colors?" he interjected. Another of his favorite inside jokes to bring up in front of other people since no one else knew.

"That night we held hands; that night we kissed; that night, he said he wanted to be with me, but that he didn't think he could with me moving away to go to university. We said we would figure it out, but what I didn't know what was that his version of 'figuring it out' was far different than mine, and by my next shift, he was back together with his girlfriend. I felt stupid. I pretended I didn't care. That I had someone else, too. And so, something happened about a year thereafter. The one time that we went far--too far--to a place where one cannot return. Something happened. I'll leave it at that. You remember," I said.

"No, Megan, I don't remember," he laughed. "It wasn't that memorable," he joked.

"Fuck you," I said, practically giddy.

"Promise?" he said, winking.

I rolled my eyes and shook it off. For awhile, since I had been in a new relationship, we had made it a new inside joke after having been in the walk-in cooler alone together. This was another dangerous place for us that I had declared now off-limits. The inside joke was that if we felt a joke was going to be too far, we would simply say "Mustard!" We had so many inside jokes that I can't even remember how this came about.

"Well it was different that day," I told him. "And obviously we can't go back to that. I just want to know, like, was it...did any of what happened mean something to you? Like was it special?"

“Yeah, it was special to me,” he said.

“To me, too,” I said quietly.

I don’t remember who said it first, or how it even got said. I have no idea who was brave enough to ask whether it would ever happen again, but somebody did.

“I’m in a committed relationship now,” I said. “And I’m happy, too. Am I still attracted to you? Yes, I mean, I’ll probably always be... but I could never do that to him,” I added.

“Well I guess that’s what makes you a better person than me,” he said, not looking at me. I tried to ignore the feeling in the pit of my stomach. It was silent.

That night, it was so icy that I simply could not walk on the blacktop to my car. I wasn’t trying to dawdle this time. I slipped, and he caught me.

“I’ll help you,” he said. “But if I go down, you’re definitely going down with me!”

We both laughed, and he took my hand.

That was the thing with us. No matter how serious a situation got, we always found a way to be friends. I smiled, enjoying this last moment--somehow I knew it was the last--as he mocked his escorting me as if I was an elderly woman. “Theeeeere you go,” he said, placing my wrist on the handle of my Corolla. There, he let go of me, heading over to his own vehicle.

And I’m still not sure if the reason I didn’t turn around to thank him was because I was too afraid to see his face before I drove off or if it was because I was too afraid he would see mine.

# Bridget

## By Megan Cook

### Third Place Short Story Winner

“Been at Paulette’s almost a decade now, but y’all know. You’ve seen me almost every Sundee mornin. That’s beside the point. What I’m about to tell ya, darlins, is something that in all my time here, I never saw before. Ain’t nobody ever come in here and do what I saw this fella do last month.”

As she talked, I noticed the faintest beauty mark above her lip; the soft curvature of her hips beneath her faded apron; the wispy sandy brown hair that brushed against her cheekbones, free of the big wooden clip that held the rest off the nape of her neck. For 52, she was truly a sight for sore eyes.

Oddly, I felt as if I was noticing her beauty for the first time.

“Sonny, I’ll tell ya. You know that big shot marketing guy from across town?” This woman was not my mother, but she had served me on my very first morning in Cornwall, caring for me like the natural Mother Goose that she was. Selfishly, I never did ask her about her life--where she grew up, whether she had children, how she ended up at Paulette’s--but she knew all about mine, and she seemed content with that.

I raised my mug to take a sip of black coffee before returning my hand to my fiancee’s knee. Kat raised her eyes to acknowledge me, and then she returned her attention to Bridget.

Kat was easily pleased--give her some rye toast and jam for early morning breakfast and she was happy for the day--and so she was a good listener to Bridget. I had waited awhile before bringing Kat to Paulette’s, for I wanted to make sure I was certain about her before taking her “home to ma.” It all turned out well, however, and Kat began accompanying me to breakfast everyday after she moved in with me. “Shacking up” was the impolite way of referring to our living arrangement, but Bridget was rather fond of the term. I didn’t particularly mind.

“He came in here with his briefcase like normal ‘n then he opened it up here on the table. He had a picture in there, you see,” continued Bridget. She wagged her finger at us as if scolding us for not having guessed the punch line.

“A picture of what?” I asked before clearing my throat. I was oddly surprised to hear my voice after so long of listening to Bridget. I always did appreciate her ability to continue a conversation with no reciprocation. It was a good thing for me when I was having a hard time adjusting early on.

“A picture of a lady,” Bridget said. Her mouth was a hard line, her lips pursed as if she knew this man was up to no good.

“He was sitting over yonder,” she said, pointing to the “date table” by the window. “I could see the reflection of the woman,” she continued, disapproving. “He was studying it real hard at first, but then he moved his hands around and I realized he had a whole stack of ‘em. And they weren’t just of her face. No, no, they weren’t inappropriate or nothing, but I still got the heeby jeebies. Tell ya, I still get goosebumps just thinkin’ about this,” she said, pointing at her forearm. “He had photos of her arms, her neck, her back, you name it. All on different close-up shots. And he was sitting studying ‘em, sipping on his orange juice and twirlin’ his fork and choppin’ up his home fries. It was weird, lemme tell ya. He was looking at em like...like he was fascinated or something.”

I sat picturing this for a moment. This was something I was very good at, something I developed over time in my friendship with Bridget. After all, she had a natural knack for storytelling, and

I had a natural talent for imagining exactly what she described--if you considered that a talent--but together, we made a good team. We always joked that we should co-write a book. She always laughed because she was a waitress at a small diner in a tiny town like Cornwall. That wasn't why I was laughing. I was laughing because I didn't think I would be much help in writing when all I did was sit and listen to her narrate whatever novel was already published in her mind.

"It made me wonder what he was going to go home and do with those pictures," Bridget said. Kat squeezed my hand, and I laughed. It was raspy. I cleared my throat again, self-conscious.

"I'll fetch you a cough drop outta my purse, handsome," Bridget winked at Kat, tossing me a little packet of strawberry jam. The pencil behind her ear stayed put as she twirled around and headed for the back room. I wondered what she would be capable of if she simply put it in her hand and let it glide across paper. I let a little extra air exit my nose in silent laughter, but Kat didn't notice.

"Tell you what, if he ever comes in with those pictures again, I'm gonna ask him what they're for," Bridget said, sliding an orange menthol drop across the table to me. "Cause they best not be for what I think they're for," she laughed.

"No kidding," I said, unwrapping the smooth candy-like substance and dropping it on my tongue. It tasted like a combination of fruit and medicine, like the "tooty fruity" flavor they use to clean your teeth at the dentist--not particularly tasty but not altogether nauseating either. It confused my taste buds.

As I signed my receipt and left a tip on the table, escorting Kat out to my beat-up Ford Focus, I realized that I couldn't imagine what Bridget meant by her last remark, but then I never did ask with her.



Fall 2017

# Overcoming Loneliness and Withholding Emotion in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

By Rachel Peters

First Place Literary Essay Winner

Charlotte Brontë's 1853 novel *Villette* is rich in complexity with its religious, classist, and cultural divides, but its protagonist's mind might be the most complex aspect of all. Much of the psychoanalytic and psychological criticism of *Villette* focuses on Lucy Snowe's inner life. According to Ryan, these two forms of criticism altogether explore emotional or relational problems in the text as well as whether or not "the form of the work" is "a way of dealing with psychological or emotional problems" (58). *Villette* lends itself well to such a lens: Even though Lucy endures hardships throughout the novel – from the death of her family, to the death of a love interest, and remarkable periods of loneliness in between – the primary focus does not seem to lie on the plot or events. Instead, Lucy's emotional responses are emphasized.

Lucy's emotional tendencies shape her mental health, which in turn shapes *Villette* as a text. John Hughes specifically notes that some of the novel's themes include "the sense of life lived in isolation, transit, and subjection, without adequate social...resources" and "the suffering of a nervous derangement that signals to the buried grief of the psyche" (712). Hence, the novel can be examined to unveil both Lucy's conscious and unconscious turmoil. Ryan explains that psychoanalytic and psychological criticism are distinctive, as psychoanalysis focuses on "the relationship between consciousness and unconscious or with the urge of the instinctual drives toward satisfaction," while psychology focuses on "the behavior of the self in the world" and relations (50). This interpretation manifests itself in the psychological realm but also includes some implications concerning the unconscious mind, for Lucy consciously observes her two most prevalent psychological problems, and these problems certainly affect her behavior. These two prevalent issues are Lucy's loneliness and her reluctance to express her emotions to others. Even though she acknowledges her feelings to readers when narrating, she does not generally communicate her unpleasant emotions and memories during times of stress. This repeated passivity links to her perceptions and opinions of others and their emotional displays, but ultimately, her co-worker and eventual love interest Paul Emmanuel's influence is able to partially solve these two main psychological issues.

Lucy's loneliness is a main focus of *Villette* early in the novel. Not much is known about her family other than that they have all passed away – she describes them as a "bereaved lot" (Brontë 38). Gretchen Braun notes that "her losses have diminished her social and economic worth almost to the point of invisibility," so naturally, Lucy must find work as a result (189). Any of the loneliness she may have felt after losing her family is then somewhat alleviated by the elderly woman she is hired to take care of, Miss Marchmont. Miss Marchmont becomes the only person Lucy can communicate with while she works for her, and Lucy treasures this small amount of social opportunity wholeheartedly, referring to the woman as "my little morsel of human affection, which I prized as if it were a solid pearl" (Brontë 40). Lucy soon feels completely alone when Miss Marchmont passes away and Lucy must seek work again. This time, she leaves England in her pursuit, fully aware that she

leaves little behind: “If I failed in what I now designed to undertake, who, save myself, would suffer? If I died far away from home – home, I was going to say, but I had no home – from England, then, who would weep?” (Brontë 53). Thus, she not only journeys alone, but to her knowledge, no one knows or cares for her at all now that her family and even the woman she recently took care of have all died.

Being alone or simply acknowledging the fact that one is alone does not necessarily constitute the feeling of loneliness: Both the mental and physical tolls are far greater, and they are especially evident in Lucy when employed at a school in Villette. According to Rutger C. M. E. Engels, et al., “Loneliness is defined as the negative emotional response to an experienced discrepancy between the desired and the actual social relationships” (19). In addition to eliciting an emotional response, loneliness can have a detrimental impact on overall health since “people with good social connections are physically healthier and live longer” (“What Is the Psychiatric Significance of Loneliness?”). Since Villette is a completely foreign place to Lucy and she has no previous connections to any of the people she works alongside, any initial loneliness she might feel is relatively common among those in a new place away from home. Her emotional response resembles that of modern-day college students away from home for the first time: “The difficulties that young adults experience with these transitions have been related to decreases in emotional well-being, such as higher levels of depressive feelings and particularly increased feelings of loneliness” (Engels, et al., 19). One might infer that as she becomes acquainted with the students and teachers these negative effects will subside, just like what could be considered ‘regular’ homesickness.

However, the amount of time Lucy spends in isolation at the school in Villette is astounding and unhealthy. Since Lucy does not have a home to go back to when the rest of the school goes on break, she has to stay behind, almost completely alone. The only people who also have to stay behind are a servant and a handicapped child, so Lucy feels quite lonely: “My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless!” (Brontë 174). By saying her heart “almost died” and describing “miserable longings,” Lucy demonstrates that she feels an overwhelming sense of anguish. The lack of social stimulation makes the days drag by, and Lucy even notes, “I hardly knew how I was to live to the end” (Brontë 174). John Hodge claims that this statement expresses “suicidal depression,” which “results from Lucy’s nagging idea of being forgotten by those she loves” (906). So, just as when Lucy left England, the state of being alone is accompanied by feeling as though no one cares enough to remember her. It seems then that Lucy has a low or negative self-concept, which Dale Hahn, Ellen Lucas, and Wayne Payne define as the way one views his or herself (35). A negative self-concept would mean that a person views him or herself in unfavorable ways. The possibility of Lucy having a low self-concept correlates to a study by Chit-Kwong Kong and Sing Lau which found that “high lonely individuals” tend to have a lower self-concept “in comparison with nonlonely individuals” (236). While it cannot necessarily be determined if Lucy’s loneliness influences her self-concept or vice versa, there certainly seems to be a link. Part of the reason Lucy’s loneliness takes such a strong psychological toll is because its affects leak into other components of her wellbeing.

Eventually, the mental effects of being left alone at the school during the break accelerate and Lucy is even affected physically. She becomes immobile – “at last a day and night of peculiarly agonizing depression were succeeded by physical illness; I took perforce to my bed” – and this mental and physical illness lasts “for nine dark and wet days” in which “sleep went quite away” (Brontë 177). She says that the “house roof...was crushing as the slab of a tomb” (Brontë 179). This signifies that being stuck in a school mostly alone makes her feel

trapped, suffocated, perhaps even dead from lack of stimulation. She then seeks out a priest so she may speak about her ailments and collapses on the street, where Dr. John finds her. He later takes note of the toll the experience took by simply looking at her: He notes how she looks pale and comments, "She is much changed indeed" (Brontë 199). Being lonely had such a strong impact on her physically that she even appears ill. Its effects are not limited to the mind.

Having opportunities to be with others instead of doing nothing at school for days would certainly prevent such psychological and physical issues from occurring. Dr. John instructs her, "Cheerful society would be of use; you should be alone as little as possible; you should take plenty of exercise" (Brontë 206). The recommendation is logical not only considering the experience that triggered the breakdown, but also considering how Lucy feels when traveling or when teaching. When she left England, even though times were uncertain and she had nothing left, she thought, "Methinks I am animated and alert, instead of being depressed and apprehensive!" (Brontë 54). Simply being in society (though not necessarily engaging in it actively) gave her enough stimulation to feel better than if she had been completely isolated. She also took note of this exuberance when walking about the busy city of London: "To do this, and to do it utterly alone, gave me, perhaps an irrational, but a real pleasure" (Brontë 52). Furthermore, when she reminisces on some of her first experiences teaching English, she remarks, "I had hardly a spare moment. It was pleasant" (Brontë 90). These clues in the text concerning how Lucy feels when in society and when she has enough to do seem to indicate that both social and mental occupation alleviate her loneliness.

Even receiving letters help alleviate Lucy's loneliness. When Lucy receives letters, the event elicits a huge response, thus showing her desperation to communicate with someone. The need to be written to is described as an instinctual need: "I suppose animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always on the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter" (Brontë 302). Lucy believes she needs social interaction as much as any animal would need food, and she feels deprived without it. Receiving a letter from Dr. John left her "feeling as if fairy tales were true and fairy gifts no dream" (Brontë 369-370). This comparison of receiving a letter to finding out "fairy tales were true" insinuates that Lucy's joy is childlike and pure: She feels genuinely elated. The intense happiness she feels relates to a study by Engels, et al., which found that "students high in loneliness benefited more from positive company than students low in loneliness, as their levels of NA [negative affect] decreased more when they were in more positive company" (26). "These findings are in contrast with the socio-cognitive model on loneliness, which states that lonely individuals are less rewarded by social stimuli," but this is not the only study to reach such conclusions (Engels, et al., 20-27). In Lucy's case, positive company comes in the form of letters rather than someone's physical presence. Lucy reacts so strongly to positive social interaction as a result of her loneliness. She is more appreciative than most would be of receiving a letter because she has become accustomed to isolation. This demonstrates how loneliness affects more than just the feeling of loneliness itself: Lucy's social perception is influenced by her loneliness.

Brontë herself had experience in craving communication, and this experience sheds light on some of Lucy's social desires. Beth Tressler discusses that Brontë was infatuated with a professor when she attended school at Brussels, and "on leaving Brussels, her passionate admiration and dependency seems to transform into an ardent longing and unreturned desire for correspondence" (5). Thus, she could relate to Lucy's desire to receive letters from Dr. John. When the last of Brontë's siblings passed away, Helen Benedict explains that Brontë spent a great deal of time in solitude: "For months at a time...she sat, paced, and reflected alone in the remote Yorkshire parsonage that was their home, surrounded by cold and

echoing rooms emptied by death. It was in this atmosphere that she wrote *Villette*" (574). Brontë's dreary setting and mindset parallels Lucy's setting and mindset. Furthermore, Sharon Connor notes that Brontë expressed feelings of loneliness to a friend at this time, and Brontë specifically commented that being an unmarried woman did not bother her, but being lonely did (Connor 94). If this specific description of feelings can be applied to Lucy, "the solution to her loneliness is explicitly something not someone" (Connor 96). Hence, while one could potentially consider Lucy's reactions to Dr. John's letters and believe the intensity comes from her infatuation, this may not be the case. Like Brontë, Lucy feels lonely and needs any form of interaction or stimulus, not specifically Dr. John or any other male companion.

In fact, Lucy needs stimulus so desperately that in addition to communicating with someone, she needs to keep her mind active in general in order to maintain psychological well-being. Scenes from *Villette* seem to recognize that creativity and imagination are valid forms of mental exercise, but Lucy refrains from engaging in such stimulating mental activity. Tressler argues that Brontë was familiar with the psychological concept of moral management, which emphasized "self-control" and was rather popular in the nineteenth century (2-3). In that time period, "The majority of psychologists commonly associated any state of withdrawal, such as daydream, reverie, trance, and fiction reading, with a lack of inner regulation and moral weakness" (Tressler 3). However, Brontë felt that "it is the unrelenting regulation of the imagination through incessant self-control that creates various forms of insanity and becomes ultimately devastating to the self" (Tressler 1). Hence, Brontë believed that inner activity such as imagination and daydreaming are actually healthy mental stimuli and deprivation of such mental activity would be unhealthy. Lucy only shows her imaginative, creative side on a couple occasions in *Villette*. Tressler notes that Lucy enjoys watching a play because it allows her to use her imagination as she watches (12). Still, Lucy's most actively creative moment is her performance in a play, which allows her to channel her strong feelings for Dr. John into her portrayal, an artistic move that would involve her using her imagination to make connections between the play and her own life. She enjoys this, but decides never to do it again:

A keen relish for dramatic expression revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this newfound faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by, and I fastened them in with the lock of a resolution that neither Time nor Temptation has since picked.  
(Brontë 156)

The emotional connections and expressions that acting draws out of Lucy not only makes her feel good, but is "part of [her] nature." The "strength and longing" she describes indicates that she feels an intense urge to participate in a creative performance again. So, if Lucy wants to act and experiences positive mental health effects when doing so, then why would she refrain? Perhaps Lucy (as a character and not necessarily as a shade of Brontë's personal beliefs) is too preoccupied with moral management to regard it as worthwhile (Tressler 2-3).

This is not the only way that Lucy withholds her emotions rather than expresses them, and her unwillingness to express links to her loneliness and past traumas. Unfortunately, lonely people tend to not express that they are lonely, and "an unwillingness to self-disclose would, in turn, hinder their chances of receiving social support, resulting in a vicious cycle: The more unwilling or fearful they are of their loneliness becoming known, the less social support they can obtain from others" (Kong and Lau 239). Thus, by not expressing her feel-

ings to others, she inadvertently worsens her situation. The most obvious way that Lucy conceals information about her feelings is through her refusal to tell anyone, including the reader, about what specifically happened to her family. After describing the metaphorical shipwreck that represents what happened, Lucy notes, “as far as I recollect, I complained to no one about these troubles” (Brontë 37-38). Not bothering to ‘complain’ or discuss with anyone the pain of losing family members is difficult to imagine as the situation has a heavy load of emotional baggage. Benedict states, “[Brontë] obliterates Lucy’s past, as if it is too painful to describe” (574). This insinuates that if Lucy were to give readers the details of her losses, she would suffer in the act of telling. Shedding light on Lucy’s resilience to talk about her tragic memories, Braun asserts that Lucy is dealing with trauma, which “produces variable but definable psychic, narrative, and cultural patterns resulting from the tension between the desire to tell and the desire to conceal the threat or psychic wound” (191). Leila S. May observes the “lack of evidence that she has talked about them with any of her close associates in the novel, with the exception of Mrs. Bretton, her godmother, who surely knew all the sad details of Lucy’s early childhood” (223). The question then becomes whether Lucy simply ‘conceals’ her trauma from other people or denies the traumatic events ever happened to her to begin with.

Considering the aforementioned evidence, it may seem that Lucy represses her memories. Bert Garssen explains that “repression is the general term that is used to describe the tendency to inhibit the experience and the expression of negative feelings or unpleasant cognitions in order to prevent one’s positive self-image from being threatened,” but this term tends to be used when anxious defensiveness is the better fit (471-479). “Repression implies (some degree of) self-deception,” but ultimately, Lucy does not try to convince herself that her tragic memories are not real or less painful (Garssen 479). She fits more closely into Garssen’s classifications of impression management (or other-deception) and self-concealment since she inwardly acknowledges her own feelings – if she was not, Villette would not be told in first person – but she does not want others to see them (474-477). Just because Lucy does not tell readers about her past does not mean that the feelings and memories are not there. May affirms this idea in her argument against Nicholas Dame’s interpretations of Lucy’s memory: Lucy does tell readers that she is aware of all that has happened to her even though she may not describe it in a satisfying amount of detail and uses metaphors, and hence, “It is clear that Lucy has not repressed this information” (224). The issue, then, is that she does not tell other characters about her troubles and seek their support.

Thus, Lucy would benefit from being social so that she is not isolated or deprived of stimulus and because she could use a friend to talk through her feelings with. According to Braun, “She grows more eager for a social connection that would allow her not only to selectively draw upon her psychic life, but to validate it fully” (197). Braun claims that Lucy is in “search for a witness” and not a husband, which connects to Brontë’s letter which described the need to be with somebody as more crucial than being unmarried, as mentioned by Connor (Braun 199; 96). Part of the reason she cannot talk to others is many “female characters display insensitivity to her sadness,” and “Lucy herself demonstrates little sympathy for other women and girls” (Braun 200). The overall social climate of the school is not conducive to having empathetic conversations. Also, Lucy believes Miss Marchmont dies as a result of disclosing personal, painful information shortly before her death, even though discussing these aspects of her life initially seemed “to demonstrate only the positive, healing power of witnessing,” or having someone there with her to see an emotional display (Braun 201). This potential belief that the emotional release causes Miss Marchmont to die is invalid in this case because too much emphasis is placed on the previous expression of emotion: Discussing

her feelings probably is a positive experience but Miss Marchmont's physical health is beyond the benefits of that experience. If anything, the expressions of emotion right before her death seem to lift a hypothetical weight preventing her to move on from this life.

Lucy reveals her opinions about other characters' expressions of emotions throughout the novel and connects to Paulina, a girl who once lived with Lucy's godmother and crosses paths with Lucy again later in the novel. Hodge notes, "Quite regularly, Lucy equates her observations of a person's nerves with that individual's overall health" (900). It may seem as though Lucy makes judgements about how healthy or unhealthy someone's reactions are, and she does, but she also looks to others in order to reflect on herself: "Lucy reports and critiques the actions and feelings of others to convey her own history and desires (the opening interlude with Polly at Bretton, for instance), while concealing from both the reader and the other characters the source of the grief that triggers her periodic outbursts and fuels her latent hostility" (Braun 197). Additionally, Hughes notes that Lucy's observation of Paulina "is less solicitude than introspection" (714). She connects to Paulina's reactions when Paulina receives a letter from Dr. John. Paulina responds with the same intense level of excitement as Lucy does as discussed previously when she receives a letter from him, for Paulina goes as far as calling the letter her "ewe lamb," her "treasure" (Brontë 423). While Connor emphasizes that in Lucy's case, the desire to receive letters and communicate with others stems from being lonely rather than wanting a husband, the same cannot necessarily be said of Paulina since she spends a great deal of time with her father and does not know the isolation Lucy has known (96). However, the outward displays of emotion resemble one another nonetheless.

This is an important distinction to make because Lucy also places a judgement on the way Paulina (and she) react regardless if they experience a common situation or will in the future. Early in the novel, Paulina displays emotional turmoil over the absence of her father, and Lucy frowns upon this display: "This, I perceived, was a one-ideal nature; betraying that monomaniac tendency I have ever thought the most unfortunate with which man or woman can be cursed" (Brontë 11). By calling Paulina's type of emotional reaction "the most unfortunate" of all, Lucy seems to scorn such a way of dealing with emotions. In fact, Lucy additionally admits, "It is true I little respect women or girls who are loquacious either in boasting the triumphs, or bemoaning the mortifications, of feeling" (Brontë 422). Hence, the type of emotion expressed does not matter to Lucy: She simply does not want to hear anyone express his or her feelings.

Further examination of Paulina sheds light on the specific connotation Lucy attaches to emotional expression. When Paulina weeps that she must return to her father and leave Dr. John, Lucy asks herself, "How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, and humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason, tell me are prepared for all flesh?" (Brontë 36). This passage suggests that Lucy believes Paulina is too weak to handle the negative emotions will likely encounter during her life. Based on her outward display, emotions affect her too strongly; they knock her down and she will lose the "battle" called life (Brontë 36). This description indicates that Lucy finds outer emotional display to be representative of inner weakness, and she affirms this when directly thinking about her own speechless, nervous reaction when two men are questioning her about whether or not fellow teacher Paul Emmanuel plagiarized. She remarks, "Had I been a man and strong, I could have challenged that pair on the spot – but it was emotion, and I would rather have been scourged, than betrayed it" (Brontë 454). Her emotions overwhelm her because she is not "strong," and she will not dare release those emotions – that would be too feminine and weak. These intense yet withheld emotions prove

detrimental to the quality of her response to the men, so the weakness of being overcome by emotion is therefore a nuisance to her.

According to Braun and Hughes, since Lucy is making connections to her own life when she looks at Paulina, this means Lucy may consciously see some of this weakness in herself (197; 714). After all, Lucy acknowledges the weakening effects that her emotions have on her when trying to defend Paul Emmanuel, and she even claims her reactions may be more severe than they should be: "Mine was a soon-depressed, an easily deranged temperament – it fell if a cloud crossed the sun" (Brontë 356-357). If Hodge's idea that Lucy equates "nerves" with "overall health" is applied, then Lucy also recognizes that she too has unhealthy tendencies (900). Furthermore, if it truly is a matter of "temperament," then she may feel she is naturally prone to 'unhealthy' emotional expression, and since she does not respect other emotional women, she may not respect the emotional side of herself (Brontë 356-422). Lucy not only frowns on Paulina's passionate outbursts, but she holds herself to the same standard to remain calm even though she seems to find it difficult.

Lucy also comments on the emotional displays of her employer Madame Beck – or in this case, the lack of emotional displays – and judges her much more positively because of this lack. Lucy observes that Madame Beck does not show much warmth or affection to her children: "She never seemed to know the wish to take her little children upon her lap, to press their rosy lips with her own, to gather them in a genial embrace, to shower on them softly the benignant caresses, the loving word" (Brontë 102). This observation implies that Madame Beck is rather stern and does not express love outwardly, and Lucy later notes that Madame Beck seems unaffected by most feelings that could interfere with her well-being or job efficiency:

It is true she had neither strong feelings to overcome, nor tender feelings by which to be miserably pained. It is true likewise that she had an important avocation, a real business to fill her time, divert her thoughts, and divide her interest. It is especially true that she possessed a genuine good sense which is not given to all women or to all men: and by dint of these combined advantages, she behaved wisely, she behaved well. Brava! (Brontë 116)

Lucy's statement of praise implies Madame Beck not only conceals her emotions, but she is too busy to ever be affected by the severe loneliness and overall lack of stimulation Lucy endures. Madame Beck therefore seems to be happier than Lucy, so the fact that Lucy admires the potential contributors to this happiness (not allowing emotion to affect her and not being lonely) is unsurprising. Altogether, Lucy thinks Madame Beck's lack of emotion makes her powerful and admirable: "She ought to have swayed a nation...Nobody could have browbeaten her, none irritated her nerves, exhausted her patience, or overreached her astuteness... What more could be desired?" (Brontë 81). The rhetorical question at the end of this statement implies that Lucy does desire to be like Madame Beck: Strong, powerful, and unaffected by emotional obstacles.

However, Lucy's beliefs that those who display emotions are weak and those who conceal them are strong eventually crumble as she gets to know Paul Emmanuel. The two of them relate to one another. Hodge argues that Paul Emmanuel teaches Lucy more of obsession, as he "has obsessed over the loss for many a year" (915). While Hodge's overall argument about obsession's role in *Villette* is insightful, Lucy may have learned another thing from Paul: How to display emotion. She does not initially view Paul Emmanuel in a positive light, as "that absence of what I considered desirable self-control...were amongst his faults" (Brontë 352). He displays his emotions for all to see. He even turns an activity as mundane

as gardening into an emotional release: “He would dig thus in frozen snow on the coldest winter day, when urged inwardly by painful emotion, whether of nervous excitement, or sad thoughts, or self-reproach” (Brontë 471). Even cold weather cannot keep Paul Emmanuel from releasing his emotions whilst gardening. Thus, it may seem then that he and Lucy are very different people based on how they act around others, but they actually share a key commonality: They have each “suffered a tragic loss” (Braun 205). Because of this link, “of all her acquaintance, only the ‘fiery’ Paul Emmanuel correctly interprets the warmth of both love and rage in Lucy’s grief” (Braun 206). Benedict supports this perspective, noting that “M. Paul is the only person in the entire novel who sees beneath Lucy’s mask...he sees the powerful creature imprisoned within” (582). In other words, he sees Lucy’s inner strength, but contrary to Lucy’s belief that she is too emotional to be “strong,” Paul Emmanuel believes she is strong because of her inner emotional nature (Brontë 454). Benedict even refers to Lucy as “fiery,” the word typically associated with Paul Emmanuel (575; Braun 206). Even though Lucy has not allowed herself to show much emotion throughout the novel, she and Paul Emmanuel are not naturally that different.

By recognizing this similarity, Paul Emmanuel attempts to coax Lucy into showing him her affective side. This does not initially produce desired results, for Lucy gets angry when M. Paul sees her crying and tries to ask why she is upset. When she refuses to answer, Paul Emmanuel tells her, “You remind me, then, of a young she wild creature, new caught, untamed, viewing with a mixture of fire and fear the first entrance of the breaker-in” (261). He knows she feels afraid that someone recognizes her feelings, and as a result of his intrusion, she feels exposed. By additionally noticing the “fire” Lucy emanates as a result of this intrusion, Paul Emmanuel is acknowledging yet another emotion (Brontë 261). This episode correlates to Hodge’s observation that Lucy does not like when people point out her anxiety even though she “cannot completely disagree” with them, just as when Dr. John tries to diagnose Lucy (901). Hodge further argues that

she can diagnose neurotic behavior as precisely as John can.

Yet, she does not take neurological discourse wholesale. If she did, such strict adherence to the profession would require her to resign the role of neurologist, allowing men to write her case history on her behalf. After all, what patient in 1853 determined her own treatment? (902)

Hence, she may be defensive out of fear of being told how to fix her problems rather than having her feelings validated, and Braun suggests that Lucy does indeed seek validation (197). Furthermore, recent examination of loneliness suggests, “People in our society are often embarrassed to admit loneliness” (“What Is the Psychiatric Significance of Loneliness?”). If the same can be said of Victorian society, Lucy may feel embarrassed to admit her feelings to another person.

But eventually, Paul Emmanuel helps Lucy overcome both of her major ailments: Suppressing her emotions and being lonely. His displays of emotion become what she loves about him: “He was roused, and I loved him in his wrath with a passion beyond what I had yet felt” (Brontë 544). As Benedict notes, Paul is incredibly unlikeable throughout much of the novel, but “then comes the metamorphosis: He becomes kind, loving, and generous” (581). However, his temperament does not change. So, it seems that Lucy only accepts his passionate nature when he has something pleasant to say – she inadvertently (perhaps unconsciously) recognizes that his “nerves” alone were never a problem (Brontë 433). Their love becomes mutual and unconditional: “I was full of faults; he took them and me all home” (Brontë 554). She appreciates his passionate nature and he appreciates her passionate na-

ture. As Benedict suggests, “He wins her love...by seeing and accepting her true self” (582). This love resolves both her unwillingness to express emotion and her feelings of loneliness.

By the definition of Adrian Furnham, G. Neil Martin, and K.V. Petrides, Lucy’s emotional intelligence – the understanding of emotions and behaving under their influence – has increased (149). Braun begins to hint at this when discussing the positive influence Paul Emmanuel has on Lucy:

Over the course of their relationship, we see the positive effect of Paul’s affirmation of Lucy’s capacity for agency. She is increasingly assertive, saving money to start her own school and taking Paul into her confidence in this plan, and standing up to the wheedling of Père Silas and the bullying of Madame Beck when they oppose her interest in him. (206-207)

When she ‘stands up’ to Madame Beck, emotion drives Lucy. She feels that “the whole woman was in [her] power” when she shows Madame Beck how angry it makes her to be separated from Paul, and because of this outburst, Madame Beck “quietly retreated” (507). Since Madame Beck retreats, the incident demonstrates that emotions do have power when they affect behavior. This is a completely different opinion than the one Lucy initially has about emotions when she praises Madame Beck’s emotionlessness as a sign of power (Brontë 81). Her love for Paul Emmanuel and her new acceptance of emotional displays finally allow her to expose her inner turmoil.

Lucy’s reaction to the news that Paul Emmanuel must leave is the first major demonstration of her evolved beliefs regarding emotional release. Her prior feelings about and prior standards for emotional releases eventually work their way into her classroom, and Lucy begins to see that her views may not be reasonable. Once the school finds out that the professor Paul Emmanuel will leave Villette and go overseas, the students are quite depressed. Lucy also feels pain upon hearing this news, and in order to smother her own emotions, Lucy smothers the emotions of her students: “Their emotion was not of much value...I told them so unsparingly. I half ridiculed them. I was severe. The truth was, I could not do with their tears, or that gasping sound; I could not bear it” (Brontë 498). This “severe” reaction – scolding her students for sharing a moment of sadness – is harsh, perhaps even cruel. She eventually calls a girl who continues to cry “weak-minded” (Brontë 498). Lucy also holds in her own feelings on the matter, so on Paul Emmanuel’s last day when everyone else is behaving like they would any other typical day, Lucy finds it unbearable: “I scarce knew to breathe in an atmosphere thus stagnant, thus smoldering. Would no one lend me a voice?” (Brontë 501). Even though she previously “half ridiculed” her students for expressing their grief, now that Lucy has no choice but to face the reality of Paul Emmanuel leaving, she seems to understand why people are compelled to express their feelings (Brontë 498). While everyone else has dealt with the idea and moved on, Lucy feels terrible: She must release her emotions because she is too in love with Paul Emmanuel to simply not react in a way that others can see. This realization is a turning point for Lucy: Her new understanding that she must express some of her feelings reflects a positive change.

Unfortunately, the solutions to Lucy’s primary psychological issues only partially manifest. While Paul could give her the social interaction she longed for through writing letters during the three years he was away – Lucy’s “happiest years” – this is short term, and she does not completely overcome emotional problems (Brontë 556). Even though she and Paul Emmanuel love one another and write to each other for years, she never tells him about her tragic past – or at least, the text does not explicitly mention if she does: She could have told Paul about it sometime during their exchange of letters (Braun 207). Furthermore, the

way Lucy tells her story must be considered. May argues, “Lucy remembers with or without the faculty of remembrance. We know this is the case...because she has written over 500 pages of text” (May 231). This is true, but recalling May’s attention to the metaphorical shipwreck Lucy describes in relation to her family shows that her transformation is never complete: She remembers and vaguely describes, but she does not directly tell readers certain details (224). Even as she tells readers the story, she uses the shipwreck metaphor to describe the deaths of her family members, and she additionally hints that Paul Emmanuel dies in a shipwreck (Brontë 559). Since Paul Emmanuel does go overseas, it certainly is possible that he dies that way, but readers cannot be one hundred percent certain. Shipwrecks could be the metaphor Lucy uses when she does not want to talk about particular memories.

Since Paul Emmanuel dies somehow, he only alleviates Lucy’s loneliness for three years. This short period may not seem like it could be satisfying for Lucy, but Benedict uses Brontë’s background to argue that in its own small way, it does satisfy:

Charlotte Brontë wanted more than anything to live a life of letters – she said as much in her many letters to friends – but because of her religion, her sex, her time, and her family, this choice was denied her.

By allowing the satisfaction of allowing Lucy to fulfill her own dream, Brontë gave her the very happy ending she wished for herself. (Benedict 583)

Villette does not seem to have a happy ending since someone with such a positive influence on Lucy dies on his way back to be with her, but the temporary alleviation of loneliness and the newfound ability to voice more emotions than before suggest that the truth is more complicated. Lucy may not be completely free of what seem to have been long-term troubles, but she has certainly improved since the first page of her tale. She regards emotional displays in a better light and finally has someone to write to for a time. Paul Emmanuel’s influence does not completely transform her as she does not completely overcome her psychological and emotional issues, but substantial change takes place regardless. His influence is a positive one.

As for Lucy’s potential influence on him, readers cannot be completely certain. Since Villette is told through Lucy’s point of view, the minds of the other characters cannot be entered directly, but as with Lucy, their inner emotions and beliefs about emotions may be represented in their actions (or lack thereof). Benedict notes that Paul Emmanuel undergoes a “metamorphosis” and “becomes kind, loving, and generous” over the course of the novel (581). Even though his temperament does not change, it may be interesting in future research to consider and analyze whether or not Lucy influences this psychological change in personality and beliefs about Protestant women as he influences emotional changes in her. For better or worse, characters can have an impact on each other’s psychological states, and their opinions and actions can reflect upon their changing psychological states. Ultimately, a psychological understanding of a character leads to a further illuminated understanding of their behavior and troubles overall, whether they are as frank as Paul Emmanuel or as inward-looking as Lucy Snowe.

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**“Don’t You Black or White Me”:  
A New Historicist Look at the Work of Michael Jackson  
By Kory Wise  
Second Place Literary Essay Winner**

There are few people that have ever reached the level of fame that Michael Jackson did in the 1980 and 1990s. It seemed that everyone on the globe recognized his name and owned at least one of his albums. Because of this level of notoriety and experience traveling the world, Jackson was privy to many injustices that existed throughout his day and age, not the least of which he experienced firsthand — the issue of race. Like many great artists, he incorporated these historical elements into his work and used his art as a means of drawing attention to the issues plaguing society. Two examples of this historically-conscious work include his songs “Black or White” and “They Don’t Care About Us.” These songs are products of the historical time in which they were produced and draw upon the long history of racial tensions and inequality to propagate a message of frustration and acceptance.

Race relations have had a long and complicated history in the United States. This can be seen going all the way back to the period of the Civil War, where the nation split itself apart over the issue of slavery. Even after the war was settled and the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued, the mistreatment of African Americans in the country persisted for several decades. Jim Crow laws forced black Americans to live a life of forced, hard labor without any way of breaking free, while segregation kept blacks and whites separated from one another for a hundred years following the war that set everyone free. The root of all these issues was nothing more than prejudice against the color of others’ skin. While there was no real basis for these prejudices, it still seemed that there was never going to be any true equality between people of different races.

Then came the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Extreme progress was made for the equality of blacks and whites, led by people such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. The movement consisted of marches and protests against racial inequalities and fights for equal liberties. It culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin (“The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission”). It could not outlaw, however, those personal prejudices that people may hold against a particular race, and it is these unfounded beliefs that the nation was still dealing with in the 1990s, and even up to today.

Particularly useful to a study of Jackson’s “Black or White” would be a look at the history of interracial dating laws in the United States. For many decades after African Americans were given rights to citizenship and the right to vote, several states still maintained anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting a black male from marrying a white woman, and vice-versa (Crowley 445). Nothing seemed to enrage white men more than the idea of a black man being with a white woman, and many members of the African American community who were caught in an interracial relationship paid the price for it through lynchings, beatings, or other forms of mutilation (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 100). For example, in 1955, a fourteen-year-old boy named Emmitt Till was heinously beaten and murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi (a claim which was later retracted by the woman) (“I Ain’t

Scared of No Sheets” 100; Pitts). At the height of the Civil Rights era, few people actively fought against these laws because the intermixing of races was plainly and repeatedly listed as one of the fears of those who opposed racial integration in society (Crowley 445). To them, to fight for something that so many people were explicitly terrified of, no matter how irrational the fear may have been, would only have made their case harder to fight (Crowley 445). It was not until the 1967 Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia* that miscegenation laws were ruled inherently racist and unconstitutional (Crowley 446). Even this could not put an end to the racist attitudes of some white Americans, though, as evidenced by the murder of another young black man, Yusef Hawkins. He was killed by a group of white teenagers who falsely believed he was going to visit a white woman in Brooklyn (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 101). This case occurred in 1989, twenty-two years after *Loving v. Virginia*, and the same year that Jackson began writing “Black or White” (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 100).

As progress brought about by cases such as *Loving v. Virginia* and *Brown v. Board of Education* continued to reshape the structure of American society, it was natural for movements to arise that fought against the change. One such movement was the resurrection of a strain of the Ku Klux Klan that had terrorized African Americans following the Civil War, as well as during the 1920s after World War I when black Americans began to migrate north (“A Brief History of the Ku Klux Klan”). The Klan was synonymous with the white hoods and cloaks they wore to intimidate their enemies, as well as their symbolic burning cross and many lynchings of black men. Woodrow Wilson wrote of “the delightful discovery” southern white men made “of the thrill of awesome fear...their sheeted, hooded figures sent among their former slaves...It threw the Negroes into a very ecstasy of panic to see these sheeted ‘Ku Klux’ move near them in the shrouded night” (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 103). This intimidation was something that a young Michael Jackson experienced firsthand in 1971 at the age of twelve (Jackson 133). While touring with his brothers in Mobile, Alabama, the group passed by Klan propaganda “where it was clearly intended to be seen” (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 103). Jackson’s brother, Jermaine Jackson, recalls that the brothers froze, “stayed quiet and kept our heads down” (Jackson 133). One can imagine how affected a young black child would have been after seeing this vitriol in a world that was supposed to have moved beyond it.

There were some groups, however, that took their pride in their race to the opposite extreme. One example of this is the Nation of Islam, an African American nationalist movement that arose in the 1960s (Anderson 68-9). This group promoted the idea that white people are created to be wicked devils that are incapable of justice or righteousness (Wilson 502). In an interview with *Life* magazine in 1963, the African American leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, said that “the white devil’s day is over. There is none a black man can trust. He was given 6,000 years to rule...He’s already used up most trapping and murdering the black nations” (Anderson 69). For this reason, the Nation of Islam also taught that blacks and whites could never successfully merge in society, and a separate state solely for African Americans needed to be established (Anderson 69). Some leaders even advocated that this state be located back in Africa (Wilson 503). While groups such as this one were unique in that they fought for equal rights for black Americans, the end-goal they had in mind, when compared to that of white supremacist groups, was not all that different.

One would think that by the early 1990s, many of the problems seen throughout the Civil Rights era would have dissipated, but this could not be farther from the truth, as evidenced by the case of a young black man named Rodney King. In March 1991, four police officers mercilessly assaulted the taxi driver after a high-speed car chase (Ralph and Chance 137). Vogel describes the injuries King sustained as including being “shot twice with taser

guns, kicked multiple times in the head, and struck relentlessly with batons (it was revealed during the trial that he was hit 56 times by police officers). By the time he arrived at the police department, he had endured multiple facial and skull fractures, a shattered eye socket, bruises, lacerations, a broken ankle, and brain damage” (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 107). This occurrence was not a first in American society. What made it unique, though, is that it was caught on video and broadcast on television screens across the nation (Ralph and Chance 137).

The police officers involved in the case claimed that King was resisting arrest, but a majority of the American public viewed it as an egregious abuse of power. For many, the event also brought to light the inner racist tendencies of every American, the inherent racist nature of our governmental systems, and the problem of white paranoia. Black men are consistently viewed as threats because of what they might do, not frequently because of anything they actually did (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 107). A sense of alienation was immediately felt in the black community following the release of the video. It also raised an important question that the American people were left to ponder: would the police officers have assumed King was resisting arrest and beaten him so ruthlessly had he not been black?

While it is impossible to answer this question, it is important to note that many people in the early 1990s felt the answer was a resounding “No.” This is what spurred their infuriated response to the verdict in the officers’ trial in 1992, in which they were acquitted of all wrongdoing (Ralph and Chance 137). The acquittal was a fuse that lit Los Angeles on fire, as thousands took to the street in the largest riot the United States had seen since the 1960s (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 91). By the time it ended with the intervention of the California national guard, fifty-three people had been killed, another 2,000 injured, and property damages totaled nearly \$1 billion (Ralph and Chance 137). In many ways, Los Angeles was a microcosm for what was going on across the entire nation at the time. (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 108). It was at this point in the discussion of race that Michael Jackson decided to enter the conversation in 1991 with “Black or White” and again in 1995 with “They Don’t Care About Us.”

“Black or White” went on to become Jackson’s biggest global success, topping the charts in over twenty countries (Man in the Music 158). With its upbeat message of harmony and racial equality, it is not difficult to see why. A closer look at the text, though, reveals the anger and frustration of an African American man who has experienced racial discrimination and injustice. Jackson knows that any conversation about equality must first start with an acknowledgment of past inequalities, and he does this within the first few lines of the song. After singing about a Saturday date that he is taking his girlfriend on, an unnamed (presumably white) onlooker asks “Boy is that girl with you?” (“Black or White”). The word “boy” is a degrading term that whites would use to refer to adult African American men during the periods of slavery and segregation (Anderson 67). It was a way of establishing their superiority over people they did not view worthy of being full members of society. The usage of the word “boy” is Jackson’s way of referring back to the long history of racial issues in the United States, and preparing his listeners for the confrontation of these ideas that will come in the song’s following line.

The white man’s question in this song also reveals and makes reference to another problem in American society — prejudice against blacks having romantic relationships with whites. Roberts writes that “The framing of this question—if she is rightfully in his possession— recalls the historical trope of the white female as victim of black male sexuality, a narrative used to justify lynching and other racist acts” (32). The fear present here is that the black man would corrupt the white female’s purity. Contrary to these misinformed beliefs,

the concept that “Black or White” supports is the one that race is not an important factor in forming relationships (Amisu 47). Jackson responds to the onlooker’s question by saying “Yes, we’re one and the same,” denouncing the racism and misogyny in the man’s question (“Black or White”). Their relationship is something that he considers a “miracle,” given the historical context of such romances (“Black or White”).

Following this exchange in the song, Jackson sings that “they print my message in the Saturday Sun,” where he “told about equality” and “had to tell them I ain’t second to none” (“Black or White”). It is significant that he is using the news to get this message out, as it is the same place where the violent injustices in racial treatment had just come to light in the Rodney King case. Perhaps even more significant, though, is the fact that the idea blacks are not second to whites is treated as news to people, as if this had not been conceived of before. Why else would it need to be printed in the newspapers? It is an indisputable message (“either you’re wrong or you’re right,” he sings) that Jackson believes the world is yet to learn, as evidenced by the violent beating of King (“Black or White”).

As soon as the song’s bridge section begins, listeners notice a change in the tone of Jackson’s message. The music switches from upbeat, light music to hard-hitting, grinding guitars, and Jackson’s vocals become fiery and angry while he sings “I am tired of this devil...I am tired of this stuff” (“Black or White”). Not only is he tired of the injustices he has just been singing about, but he is also tired of the other side of the argument, the side championed by such groups as the Nation of Islam. Jackson is “tired” of the idea that white people are “devils” that are incapable of treating African Americans with respect. The singer is fighting for equality for all and harmony between all races, and both sides of the argument are only serving to exasperate him and the American public.

In the bridge to “Black or White,” Jackson also shares another message with his listeners, as well as those who may be opponents to the message he is propagating — he is not scared. Specifically, he “ain’t scared of your brother...ain’t scared of no sheets...ain’t scared of nobody” (“Black or White”). This is significant because Jackson, arguably the most powerful black voice in the world, is openly defying victimization (Man in the Music 159). He is denouncing the legacy of intolerance and racial violence, and challenging the history of terror and intimidation that the Ku Klux Klan represented, an intimidation that he experienced firsthand (Roberts 34). Jackson is no longer scared as he was that day in 1971 (Jackson 133). Later, he takes this one step further by not only calling out the KKK, but also closet racists, those who try to hide their racism or hypocritically spread a message of acceptance while practicing something else. He sings, “Don’t tell me you agree with me / when I saw you kicking dirt in my eye” (“Black or White”). Not only is Jackson saying that we need to fight outright racism, but we also need to fight against our own racist tendencies.

Immediately following the song’s bridge comes a rap portion, an interesting insertion into an otherwise straightforward pop song. (Many critics believe this was yet another way that Jackson was attempting to tie the two races together, by merging white “pop” music with black “rap” music) (Brackett 174). It is in the rap verse that Jackson tries to redefine race. It is not about “being a color,” he sings, but rather “places / faces / where your blood comes from” (“Black or White”). The only thing traditional notions of race have served to do is cause “grief in human relations” and “a turf war on a global scale” (“Black or White”). He is also reminding people, such as the cops in the Rodney King case, to “hear both sides of the tale” before jumping to conclusions based on the color of someone’s skin (“Black or White”). Perhaps once the world accepts the definition of race that Jackson is supporting, they would see that human beings are not so different after all.

After these two interjections into the song (the bridge and the rap), Jackson switches

back to a lighter, upbeat tone, perhaps a way of symbolizing that once the aggressions are worked through, harmony can be achieved. As the song draws to a close, he leaves his listeners with three different messages. The first is the one shared throughout the song in its chorus — “If you’re thinking about my baby / it don’t matter if you’re black or white” (“Black or White”). Here, Jackson is taking the viewpoint of a parent, saying that he would be content with his children dating people of any race. He then repeats this phrase, but he switches the lyrics to “if you’re thinkin’ of being my baby / it don’t matter if you’re black or white” (“Black or White”). On the surface, it may seem that Jackson is advocating color blindness, but he is really saying, as Vogel writes, that “the choice of whom he loves is his and not contingent on race” (“I Ain’t Scared of No Sheets” 100). He changes the words one more time to say “I said if you’re thinkin’ of being my brother / it don’t matter if you’re black or white” (“Black or White”). This is the final message he gives, a way of saying that any relationship, even a familial one, is based on so much more than race. In a way, it is Jackson’s way of echoing Rodney King’s own cry of “Can’t we all get along” that he uttered in the wake of the 1992 riots — a plea for racial harmony (Brackett 175).

If the Michael Jackson of 1991 decided to approach the issue of race inequality as a mediator, trying to build a bridge between both sides of the divide, the Michael Jackson of 1995 decided to take a different approach. While still fighting for equality, he does so in a much more hard-hitting, pull-no-punches sort of way. “They Don’t Care About Us” is a powerful song of protest in which he makes the voice of the oppressed his own. As the song begins, we hear a woman leading a group of children in a chant that will become the song’s chorus. “All I want to say is that / they don’t really care about us,” they cry, as the woman throws in ad-libs such as “enough is enough,” and “we know the truth” (“They Don’t Care About Us”). Michael soon steps in and makes their cries his own voice. In this song, he is inhabiting and witnessing for those who have been previously unheard or unacknowledged, those who are “invisible because you ignore me” (Man in the Music 192). He is identifying with them and empowering them through this song.

The first significant thing to notice about the song is the way Jackson chose to structure it. The chorus (which he shares with the group of disenfranchised youth at the track’s beginning), as well as the rhyming verses are presented as a call-and-response lyric, in which a leader begins a phrase and a crowd of followers holler back a response. This type of song encourages audience participation and helps listeners to develop a higher sense of self-worth as they are allowed to “have a voice” in the issue at hand (Maultsby 3). Call-and-response songs can be dated all the way back to slaves’ time spent in the fields, where they would sing to pass the time (Maultsby 5). This structure has also influenced nearly every other genre of traditionally black music from gospel to hip hop (Maultsby 7). Jackson’s use of the tradition in his pop song is a subtle, but powerful, method of standing with the black community during this time of protest.

What exactly, is the singer protesting in the song, though? As he mentions in the chorus, “All I want to say is that / they don’t really care about us,” so the only message he is here to give is one of protest and frustration that he and his minority group are being overlooked, but by whom (“They Don’t Care About Us”)? That becomes clear in one of the song’s verses, when he explicitly states that, as much as he “hate[s] to say it / the government don’t want to see” the problems that are going on in the nation (“They Don’t Care About Us”). Instead of trying to abate the problem, “they’re throwing me in a class with a bad name,” presumably one being ascribed to all African Americans — that they are dangerous individuals with a great potential to do harm (“They Don’t Care About Us”). To Jackson, this type of treatment is not in line with the promises made decades earlier during the Civil Rights and post-Civil

War eras. He even sings “Your proclamation promised me free liberty,” a reference to the Emancipation Proclamation and the freedom that he, and those he is representing, now feel is being taken away (“They Don’t Care About Us”). This mistreatment is something that Civil Rights champions of the past, such as “Roosevelt” and “Martin Luther” King, Jr., “wouldn’t let...be” if they were still “livin’” (“They Don’t Care About Us”). It is also something that has led to Jackson’s dis-identification with his own Americanness (I can’t believe this is the land from which I came”) (“They Don’t Care About Us”). He wants no part of a nation or government that deliberately overlooks injustices going on against its own citizens.

While the news was a place Jackson was willing to take his message of equality in “Black or White,” in “They Don’t Care About Us,” he views it as part of the problem. As Rossiter writes, “he envisions a parallel between the barbaric nature of the media and the reckless gun violence perpetrated on the streets of the United States” (208). Even people and things that should be above racial discrimination, like newscasters or broadcasts, are still subject to the traditional norms and ideas of a dominant white society. For many years, the type of discrimination witnessed in the Rodney King case occurred without being reported on. Perhaps if journalists had done more to search out problems of racial discrimination, instead of assuming society had moved beyond that point, then the “they” Jackson refers to would have to do a little more to show that they do “care.” Instead, the injustices are allowed to persist, resulting in people being “shot dead,” hence Jackson’s belief that the news is now part of the problem (They Don’t Care About Us”).

It is interesting, then, that upon the release of this song, Jackson was criticized by predominantly white journalists for being a racist himself (Amisu 93). They condemned his usage of slurs, in particular the phrases “Jew me, sue me” and “kick me, kike me” as anti-Semitic (Man in the Music 191). Other journalists, and especially members of the African American community, defended Jackson’s usage of the words, claiming it was no different than rappers using the term “nigger” “as a rhetorical device or ‘reverse discourse’” (Man in the Music 192). They also overlooked Jackson’s references to “skin heads” or white supremacist groups like the KKK, as well as the “black man” himself (They Don’t Care About Us”). To Jackson, using these terms was a way of identifying with every disenfranchised group in America, and as Vogel writes, taking “charged epithets and deploy[ing] them to opposite ends” (Man in the Music 192). Some people, such as Armond White, even believe the media’s response to the song was exactly the sort of injustice Jackson was singing about, and their backlash was an attempt to cloud his message in a “smokescreen of fake indignation” (Amisu 93).

Jackson famously tried to redefine race in “Black or White” by sharing what he thought should matter most in building relationships. In “They Don’t Care About Us,” he tries to reshape the outsider’s view of what it means to be a minority. He says that “I have a wife and two children who love me,” undoubtedly an attempt to drum up sympathy and understanding for the plight the African American has experienced up to this point (“They Don’t Care About Us”). He seems to be attempting to normalize those who are different from the majority culture, the “other” that is so often abused. In the process, then, he hopes that it would become clear why it is absurd that these human beings are being made the victims of “hate” and “shame” and being subjected to “police brutality” for no substantial reason (“They Don’t Care About Us”). At the end of this verse, Jackson uses one other aspect of life to hopefully break down racial barriers — mankind’s shared faith in God. He “look[s] to heaven to fulfill its prophecy” and “set me free” from the trials he is experiencing on earth (“They Don’t Care About Us”). This line is a subtle reminder that not only are we supposedly connected to each other through a divine being, but those who oppress their brothers and sister will even-

tually have to answer for their sins.

The idea of mankind being brothers and sisters with one another is something Jackson first referenced in “Black or White” when saying race is not a determining factor in the relationships he will build with people. He brings it up again in “They Don’t Care About Us,” but this time, he uses the idea to highlight the offenses people are committing against one another. He sings that people are willing to “black mail” and “throw your brother in jail” (“They Don’t Care About Us”). This is significant after the message of harmony and equality he shared in “Black or White,” that mankind should all be able to live as one. Four years later, the country clearly had not reached that point yet. People are not treating each other as brothers and sisters, and even if they are, it still is not hard for them to black mail each other or cast their brother aside and forget about him. To Jackson, this self-centered attitude may be the cause of all of the nation’s race problems, hence their inability to move past them.

“They Don’t Care About Us” shares one other concept with “Black or White” — the idea that it is time for African Americans to resist intimidation and scare tactics that are being used by the dominant white culture. He tells his oppressors to go ahead and “beat me, hate me...will me, thrill me...beat me, bash me...hit me, kick me” because “you can never break me,” “you can never kill me,” and “you can never get me” (“They Don’t Care About Us”). His pride in his race, and his resiliency as a human being are too strong to succumb to intimidation. These lines also serve as encouragement to the African Americans that are being oppressed every day. If the most powerful black man on the planet at this time is not going to be beaten by fear, then there is nothing that should scare them, either. Just like Jackson, they have the power to fight back and stand against those who don’t care about them.

While Jackson chose to approach the issue of race relations in his day in two very distinct ways in these songs, the method of proclaiming his message in both can be boiled down to a similar formula. Both songs make reference to the inequalities of the past before challenging listeners to make the future a better place to live. The injustices of the present moment do not need to outlive us. These songs also posit the message that racial harmony is possible if the problem of injustice is addressed instead of overlooked. The color of someone’s skin should not determine how they are interacted with. Instead, we need to recognize that we are all “one and the same” and treat each other as we would our brothers.

Great art is often able to reflect the historical events taking place when it is made, and that is certainly the case with Michael Jackson’s “Black or White” and “They Don’t Care About Us.” These songs do not refrain from tackling the difficult issues of race relations in the United States, and they do so in powerful ways. From the prejudices against interracial relationships to the violent police brutality witnessed taking place against Rodney King, the influences of several aspects of history can be felt in the song’s lyrics. Most importantly, however, may be the message that the artist was trying to share with listeners of all races. It is time to start caring about one another because it doesn’t matter if you’re black or white.

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# The Color of Transformation

By Kory Wise

Third Place Literary Essay Winner

The plight of women in the world is something that became heavily explored in the literature of the 1980s. As more people were beginning to experience the financial freedom that the decade brought them, it seems logical that authors were wondering why women were still not being treated equally to men. One of those authors was Alice Walker. Her 1982 novel *The Color Purple* deals with the story of Celie and her oppression at the hands of her family and the society in which she lived. It is an effective story of the character's transformation from victim to liberated woman, as well as how through the bond of sisterhood, women can transform each other into powerful forces.

The Celie that readers meet at the beginning of *The Color Purple* is very different from the Celie at the end of the novel. She fulfills the typical, oppressed feminine stereotype in many ways, but first and foremost in that the men in her life have complete and total control over her. When Celie's mother refuses the advances of Celie's father (who is later revealed to actually be her stepfather), he turns to Celie to take out his frustration and get satisfaction (Walker 1). He also beats her for "dressing trampy but he do it to [her] anyway" (7). Her Pa then warns her not to tell anyone about the fact that he has been raping her (1). The abuse does not stop once she leaves her father's home, either. The man she married "beat [her] like he beat the children," probably as a means of keeping her "in line" and in accord with the way he wants her to speak and behave (22). Celie is unable to fight back and defend herself at this point, believing that the abuse she is sustaining is just a natural part of life. By remaining quiet, she thinks she will stay alive longer than if she were to speak "out of turn."

Language in *The Color Purple* is in the hands of the men, and they use it to dominate the women (Sedehi 1330). Even though the men in Celie's life do all they can to keep her voiceless, their command is something she challenges for the rest of the novel (Lewis 161). She must tell someone about the sufferings she is going through, so she decides to write letters to God describing her misery and asking for a "sign" to explain what is happening to her (Walker 1). Though she has been silenced, these letters give her a way to speak out and make sure her message is heard, not only by God and eventually her sister, Nettie, but by the readers, as well (Hsiao 93). Writing, then, is a method of revolting for her, a way to fight against the patriarchy in which she has been living.

That patriarchy also sees Celie being forced to enter an arranged marriage set up by her stepfather. The relationship he chooses for her is not one that is based on mutual affections or respect for his daughter. Instead, he shows her off to her potential suitor, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, like a prized animal that is for sale, having her "turn around" so the man can get a proper look at her (Walker 10-1). He then spins the situation around so that it sounds like this is Celie's idea or something she wants to happen, telling her brother that "Your sister thinking bout marriage" (11). Her wedding day is not romantic, as she spends it fleeing from Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s children who are trying to hurt her, nor is her wedding night special (12). While Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ consummates their marriage, Celie just lies there "thinking about Nettie while he

on top of me, wonder if she safe” (12). She clearly has no romantic interest in this man, and probably would not have married him had she had a say in the matter.

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ also tries to suppress his wife’s personality and happiness. When Celie is laughing with the mayor’s wife, she says that “It feel like to split my face,” evidence that this feeling is a new sensation for her (15). It is clearly not something that she does often because it is not something of which Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ approves. When he returns to the wagon, he asks his wife why she is “laughing like a fool” (15). He also does not allow her to wear bright colored clothing because it is “too happy lookin” (21). The only colors of dresses she is allowed to wear include “brown, maroon, or navy blue” (21). These bland, dead colors could be viewed as a symbol of the life she is being forced to live with her husband. There is no excitement, no happiness, and she is required to suppress who she really is, all of which cause her stepson’s wife, Sofia, to feel sorry for her. Sofia says that Celie reminds her of her mother who is “under [her] daddy thumb...she never say nothing back. She never stand up for herself” (41).

The men in *The Color Purple* have other powers over the lives of the women, as well, truly controlling nearly every aspect of their lives. They even have power over life and death, in a way, as they have the authority to decide whether or not the children the women reared can stay with their families. For example, when Celie had given birth to a child at a young age, her stepfather “took it while [she] was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods” (2). The young mother is not allowed to tell her own mother what happened, saying instead that God had called the child home (2). The men also have the power to prevent women from communicating with one another, as evidenced by the stash of letters from Nettie that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ had been keeping from Celie (124). In an ideal society, women would be able to communicate freely and openly with one another, but that is clearly not possible here.

When reading Walker’s novel, it also becomes clear how much disdain men have for women in general, simply because of the fact that they are not men. After Celie’s stepfather had taken her second child and sold it, she was lactating without any baby to consume the milk (3). As a result, her dress was soiled, prompting her stepfather to ask her “why don’t you look decent?” (3). While motherhood and the features of it should be something that are celebrated, to him, they are disgusting and should be concealed. Women do not have value in the things that make them unique, but in the aspects that they share with men. For instance, even though Celie is “ugly,” “not smart,” and has the bad habit of “giv[ing] away everything you own,” her stepfather believes she is still valuable to her potential husband because she “can work like a man” (8). With such hatred running rampant in the culture, it is not surprising that Celie is afraid to even look at a man (5).

While Celie has clearly been affected by the powerful men living within this patriarchal society, she has also encountered a few incredibly influential women who begin to help her break the chains that bind her. One of those lays the foundation for her eventual liberation early on in her life — her sister, Nettie. Early into Celie’s marriage to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, Nettie comes to stay with them to get away from her stepfamily (16). When she witnesses the mistreatment her sister is going through, she tells her, “You got to show them who got the upper hand. You got to fight. You got to fight” (17). Even though Celie says she “dont know how to fight,” the seed has been planted in her head, nonetheless. This seed will grow into a fully blossoming plant by the end of the novel.

Many years later, when Nettie is doing Christian missionary work in Africa, she writes letters to her sister describing the plight of the tribal women with whom she is working. This tribe, like the culture in which Celie lives, is also incredibly misogynistic and oppressive of their women. They do not believe that the young girls should be educated as the young boys are, and this is why the parents of Tashi, a girl with whom Nettie grows close, become so up-

set when they find out that she has been attending school (160). In this culture, women can only find meaning in their lives by being wives and subservient to their husbands. This is why marriage to the chief is the highest goal their can ever strive to obtain in life (157). Besides, as Nettie writes, “who wants a wife who knows everything her husband knows?” (170). These letters, and certainly the way Nettie frames and comments upon the situations within them, help Celie to see the grotesque nature of the situation at hand in her own life. After all, as Celie’s daughter, Olivia, tells Nettie, the plight of women in Africa is not unlike the plight of women and colored people at home in the United States (156).

Perhaps what makes these forms of misogyny so disturbing is that according to Nettie, “the world is changing...it is not longer a world just for boys and men” (161). While women in other parts of the world are becoming liberated and experiencing more freedom, other women are still left to struggle against their oppressors. Some of them take up this fight valiantly, as does Sofia, Harpo’s wife and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_’s daughter-in-law. Of all the characters in the novel, she is one that most forcefully challenges the patriarchy and traditional gender roles to which women are forced to adhere. She does not let males make decisions for her — if anything, Sofia is the one that makes decisions for them, no matter what the consequences for such actions may end up being.

The most evident way in which Sofia challenges the dominant culture is that she does what Celie can’t seem to bring herself to do — fight back. When Harpo is encouraged by Celie to beat Sofia as a means of forcing her into submission, she does not take kindly to the encouragement. She tells Celie that “All my life I had to fight...I never thought I’d have to fight in my own house...I loves Harpo. God knows I do. But I’ll kill him dead before I let him beat me” (40). She holds true to this promise, beating Harpo back to the point that “his face a mess of bruises. His lip cut. One of his eyes shut like a fist. He walk stiff and say his teef ache” (36). She even takes this hostile attitude to the government itself when she knocks the mayor down for having slapped her after she refuses his wife’s suggestion that she be their made (85). For doing this, though, she is severely punished. After serving time in jail, she is sent to work as the mayor’s maid after all (100). While her predicament is somewhat ironic, it also makes clear the fact that the patriarchy has the potential to fight back. Those who subscribe to its ideals do not want to lose their control, and they end up being able to force Sofia to do what she refused to do in the first place.

Nevertheless, Sofia is successful at defying traditional gender roles within her own home and in her personal relationships. Quite literally, she is the one that wears the pants in her family as she does hard, laborious work (61). The type of work she is doing, climbing up on a ladder to fix the roof, is typically something the man of the household would do, but Harpo is the one sitting on the porch with his feet up and eating (61). Clearly, the roles are reversed in their relationship. The interesting aspect of this, though, is that Sofia is not doing this work because it is the only way she can find value in her husband’s eyes, as Celie would. Instead, she does it simply because she is capable of doing it, and it needs to be done. Also, much like men, she believes herself to be able to do what she wants and go wherever she pleases. When she begins to fall out of love with Harpo, she decides to take her children and leave for a while (67). Typically, one would picture the men to be the ones that would end the relationship and go away, especially in this time and culture, but here again, Sofia is challenging the usual expectations of men and women’s roles. Surprisingly, Harpo feels absolutely powerless to stop her, a testament to Sofia’s strong will. He tells Celie that “She made up her mind to go...How I’m gon stop her?” (67).

Another influential liberated woman in Celie’s life is Shug Avery, one of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_’s former lovers. It is arguable that Shug played an even larger role in Celie’s transformation

than Sofia, as the two of them became very close and intimate friends. One of the most noticeable differences between Shug and Celie is that the former feels comfortable calling Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ by his first name, Albert (47). To her, he does not demand the same respect that Celie affords him, nor does he have any sort of authority role in her life. He does not control her or the things she does as he does Celie. It also illustrates the different levels of intimacy Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ had in his relationship with each woman. His relationship with Shug was evidently of a much more personal nature, while his marriage to Celie is almost more of a business arrangement, hence her using the formal term “Mister” whenever she refers to him in her letters.

Celie’s relationship with Shug also teaches her an important lesson about the value women can hold outside of their relationships to their husbands. When Harpo decides to open a juke joint, he is unsuccessful at getting people to come to the club for the first few weeks (71). It is only once Shug Avery starts performing that people come (72). She alone is able to do what several men together could not accomplish. She also ends up “making big money” and “dress[ing] in furs all the time” (107). Unless a woman married a wealthy man, it would be unusual to see her dressed in these types of clothing. Shug proves, though, that a woman can be a success all on her own, without the assistance of a man.

Shug further redefines Celie’s understanding of women in a conversation she has with Tobias, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_’s brother, an encounter that had enough of an impact on Celie that she chose to write about it in a letter. While they are talking about different women, Shug tells the man that “all womens not alike, Tobias” (57). This statement emphasizes the fact that although all women may share the same sex, they are very different in their aspirations, feelings, thoughts, and desires (Sedehi 1330). Shug is encouraging not only Tobias, but Celie, as well, to think differently about the world around them. They do not need to subscribe to the patriarchal ideals that their ancestors did. Her mission is successful, too. Celie writes that after this conversation is the “First time I think about the world” (Walker 57).

Not only does Shug transform Celie’s understanding of women and the world in which they live, but she changes her friend’s understanding of God, as well. She tells her that “God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it” (195). The most notable aspect of Shug’s theology is that God is not a “He” but an “It,” removing the male connotation (Lambert 47). Shug believes that “man corrupt everything,” including humanity’s ideas of the divine (Walker 197). To her, prayer as Celie understands it is just another tool the patriarchy uses to reinforce the idea that men are dominant over women. Because of this, Celie is compelled to stop writing letters to God and begin writing to her sister, Nettie. As Gregory writes, “the God Celie thinks she is writing to is a man who acts like the other men in her life, ‘trifling, forgetful, and lowdown” (368). The way Celie puts it, he must not be listening to her prayers anyway because “if he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place” (Walker 192). So, in an effort to turn away from this white, uninterested male god, Celie looks for support in her sister and the other liberated women in her life.

There is another dynamic to the relationship between Celie and Shug Avery that helps Celie to liberate herself from the norms of the patriarchy, and that is the sexual chemistry that exists between them. She writes that the “only time [she] feel[s] something stirring down there is when [she] think[s] of Shug” (65). She also tells Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ after their relationship is over that to her, when men take off their pants, they “look like frogs to [her]” (254). This is undoubtedly due to the fact that Celie is a lesbian, and she experiences no attraction to the male sex whatsoever. She is much more interested and active in her sexual encounters with Shug than she is with Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (113). This is significant because at

this time, it would never have been acceptable for a woman to express romantic feelings for another woman, let alone act upon them. Celie “becomes the architect of a successful life without Prince Charming and without idealized heterosexual love” (Lambert 45). This form of “acting out” is one of Celie’s first real attempts at breaking free of her chains, and it could even be marked as the beginning of her transformation from victim to liberated woman.

Her transformation goes far beyond her relationship with Shug, however. By the time the novel ends, Celie has finally taken enough cues and lessons from her fellow women that she feels the need to outrightly revolt against Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. She and Shug head out for Memphis, leaving Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and his family behind because, as she tells him, he is “a lowdown dog...and [his] dead body is just the welcome mat [she] need[s]” to begin her journey (199). Upon hearing this, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ leans over to slap her, but this time, Celie is not going to take it; she stabs him in the hand before he has a chance to touch her, a hand that has abused her so many times before (200). Finally, she is no longer going to remain a victim of the patriarchy. Her transformation is noticeable even to the people around her, such as Harpo, who “stare at me like he never seen me before” (218). Harpo, like many others, does not recognize this new, liberated Celie. She is a different woman than the one they met so many years ago.

Celie’s triumph over the patriarchy is also noticeable in what she chooses to do with her life after getting out from underneath Mr. \_\_\_\_\_’s oppressive thumb. At the suggestion of Shug Avery, she decides to make pants that anybody can wear. While she is at first reluctant to take up this job because she “ain’t no man” and “Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ ain’t gonna let his wife wear pants,” she eventually turns her pant-making into a full-blown business with employees working under her (146). She, like Shug Avery before her, has proven that a woman does not need a man to make her successful. She is more than capable of doing it on her own. Through her business, Celie has also proven that, contrary to her husband’s belief that “men suppose to wear the pants,” “anybody can wear” them, both as a clothing item, as well as the figurative ‘pants’ in a relationship/society (271).

Just as the other women in her life were inspirations to her, so Celie tries to inspire other women to liberate themselves from their oppressive significant others. An example of this is her influence on Harpo’s girlfriend, Mary Agnes, whom he calls Squeak. To Celie, this nickname is degrading and disrespectful, so she tells Mary Agnes to “make Harpo call you by your real name” (84). Eventually, she does exactly that in a moment of frustration with him, standing up and saying “My name is Mary Agnes” (97). Harpo does not understand the importance or significance of this differentiation, but to Mary Agnes, it means a lot (203). Celie, out of respect and admiration for the young woman, even reflects her desires in her letters, writing about her as “Mary Agnes” instead of “Squeak” (98).

Perhaps the true testament to the strength of these liberated women, though, is the fact that not only do they have a powerful effect on each other, but they spur a transformation in the men of their lives, as well. By the end of the text, these once hyper-masculine men have begun to show a softer, more “feminine” side to themselves, participating in activities they would have traditionally been associated with the female sex. Harpo, for instance, “sound a little proud” of the fact that Sofia does not “mind” him as he thinks she should (27). It is even revealed that he loves housekeeping and doing such things as “cooking and cleaning and doing little things round the house” (59). It is hard to imagine chores more traditionally associated with women than these, and yet Harpo does not mind when he has to do them. Even more surprising is that Harpo, who had once been frustrated that his wife took on such masculine roles and was not submissive to him, is perfectly content with her doing hard work. He tells Celie that “it seem to make her happy. And I can take care of anything come up at home” (281). These two have undergone a complete reversal in the roles they play

in their relationship, and they are both completely satisfied with their lives.

The person that undergoes the more significant and surprising change, though, is Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. Once Celie leaves him, he is practically unable to go on without her. He does not clean the house, buy food for himself, or even take a bath (224). It seems logical that he realized just how much he relied on and should have valued Celie. When she returns to his home, he is almost an entirely different person, and the dynamic of the relationship between he and his estranged wife has totally changed. He puts his arms around her and even tells her that it “took me long enough to notice you such good company” (271; 276). His transformation shocks Celie and prompts her to ask him “what load of bricks fell on you,” to which he responds, “not bricks, just experience” (270). Celie even begins to refer to him as “Albert” in her speech and in her letters, showing that, finally, she is no longer his submissive business arrangement, but his friend, his equal, and his companion (284).

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ has developed so much respect for Celie that he asks her to marry him once again, though this time he wants to marry her “in the spirit as well as in the flesh” (283). This is significant because this time, he is giving Celie a choice in the matter. Gone are the days when she would be forced into an arranged marriage with him. Now, she has made it out of that patriarchal system and is viewed as an equal. Also significant is the fact that she declines his offer, demonstrating the fact that she has power over her own life. After this long journey, Celie “figure[s] this the lesson [she] was suppose to learn” all along (283). Finally, she feels content with her life. Finally, she feels happy.

A powerful novel of transformation and acceptance, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* serves as an effective story of how by working together, men and women alike can serve as powerful agents of change in the world around them. This novel is one of those rare stories where not only are the characters contained within its pages changed, but those who read it walk away feeling changed, as well. Though the world readers live in today is not completely devoid of the effects of a long-standing patriarchal system, *The Color Purple* offers a possibility of hope and a potential way of changing any remaining flaws — through a strong sisterhood and a shared humanity that sees everyone as equals, no matter their sex or skin color.

### Works Cited

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