

# the phoenix

*Spring 2011*



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Cover Picture was submitted by Luke Freeman

## a word about The Phoenix

**T**HE PHOENIX has been in publication for many years and in many forms. In fact, it used to be called *The Helicon* years ago. It has always celebrated creative writing, especially poetry. But this year we wanted to focus on the many kinds of writing that take place at Milligan College. We have included academic research as well as creative non-fiction. This inaugural issue of our new approach includes a piece by Biology major Jennifer Seals, who combines her faith with her study of science. She writes of her medical internship in India with great passion and an eye for detail. Other writers, like Corri Richardson and Tim Laurio offer new insights into literary works with their academic research. Katie Cachiaras demonstrates academic inquiry into a contemporary spiritual topic. And of course, this Phoenix includes many creative pieces—some from English majors, but many from other fields. In the years to come, we hope that The Phoenix becomes a repository for all types of fine writing, a venue that celebrates writers from all disciplines.

Special thanks to Adam Proffitt and Jim Dahlman for their technical support and to Megg Rapp for her editorial work.

And to the readers, enjoy this new direction of The Phoenix. We hope to see you submit something next fall!

# A Summer Memoir

by Jennifer Seals

My shoulders felt heavy with the weight of the elders' hands and this righteous responsibility they have prayed over me just a week before I would catch my flight to India. "Guide her and bless her so that she may be a light to others wherever she goes. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen." I would be interning under the instruction of Dr. Anburajan, the founder of Peace Health Centre in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. It was nearly a three-month internship, lasting from mid-May to early August. My goals were to gain an understanding of medicine through a cross-cultural point-of-view and assess my compatibility in the career of medical missions. I also wanted to know what it felt like to take a risk. I would go alone, without the typical group of students or mission teams that I traveled with in the past. I needed to know what it felt like to be completely out of my cultural comfort zone. I needed to live among the people, adopting their lifestyle and seeing through their perspective. I wanted to mingle with them, the way I imagine Jesus did. In the months that followed, I would think back on this moment many times and wonder at the certainty that I felt, which can only come from the grace of following God and complete obliviousness of what I was getting into. The elders prayed that I would be a light unto the people of Tamil Nadu. The irony was that it was the people that I became closest to who were examples of faith to me, not I to them. They truly have faith that can move mountains. The Lord allowed my experience there to be a blessing in all aspects of my life. He took me out of the niche I had created and let me see Him work in new and different ways. I know Him more fully than I once did. Even now I am discovering the ways in which the people I met and the places I went to refined and broadened my views of healthcare, humanity, myself, and my faith.

Aside from "Where are you from" and "Do

you like India," the most common question I faced upon arrival was "How will you manage?" How will you manage sleeping on the floor? How will you manage eating our food? How will you manage without a Western toilet? How will you manage living in a house where no one speaks English? How would I manage leaving all of my friends and family and every comfortable piece of my culture behind for three months and adapt to theirs? It was a question no American had ever asked me, despite their broader knowledge of the difference between cultures. In an attempt to ameliorate my pride after such an assault on my cultural flexibility, I assured them with smile that it was nothing at all. I pretended that such abrupt changes in sleep cycle, daily routine, and my status in India as a young woman and medical student were effortless fluctuations; for all they knew, I did this kind of thing all the time. I did my best to convince the hospital staff, the nurses at the hostel, the family I stayed with on the weekends, and myself that this was true. After a while, I had them convinced. It was towards the middle of my stay that I realized my carefree façade would only get me so far. I needed someone to share this experience with me who knew my heart and could be a comfort and a guide. I would never make it going alone.

The first month went by fairly effortlessly. Everything was new and exciting; landing in the middle of this life that was already in motion did not give me much of chance to take in my initial surroundings. The only introduction that accompanied my arrival was a brief tour of the layout of the hospital and the hostel that I would be staying in Monday through Friday. Before I left, Dr. Anburajan confessed that he had expected me to be an Indian. He was shocked when he saw my white skin, brown hair, blue eyes, and jeans: as American as could be. He did not want to disappoint me and the high expectations he

assumed that I had as an American, and was somewhat at a loss as to what to do with me. On my first full day, I did very little. I was unaccustomed to being let loose in a hospital with little regulation. I was unaware that not only did they allow me, but they expected me to make my own rounds and perform exams on patients. Once I discovered that these opportunities were available to me, I was sure to make use of them. I accompanied the doctors on morning and afternoon rounds, took some my own patient histories, did examinations, wrote case studies, and researched many of the most common diseases. All of the doctors and the nursing tutor were ready to answer any questions, even though it may have taken some of them several days for them to get back to me. The exposure to a new environment, great opportunities, and a vast amount of information left me with a sense of gratitude and realization that God had blessed me far more than what I could have imagined when I set off just a month ago.

Although I have been a Christian all my life, I have never seen the faith practiced with such dedication. It could be that, for the most part, Americans have somewhat private prayer lives. We do not often pray in the open, unless at church or before a meal. In India, I prayed three times a day with the nurses. Prayers occurred in the mornings and evenings in the hospital's prayer room, as well as in the hostel at night. Even though I could only understand a few words spoken, the differences were obvious. Upon entering the room, many of the girls would kneel, heads covered with the cloth of their sari and hands pressed together in prayer with the fingers pointing up like steeples, the way we often depict children praying at their bedside. Someone would pass out song books and a short acapella worship session would begin. Here, it seemed quantity mattered more than quality; nearly everyone sang loudly. This was quite the opposite from the worship I was used to, where usually only those with professed musical capabilities performed above a half-hearted mumble. A short message followed, and then prayer. I quickly adapted their postures of prayer, either praying on my knees or kneeling so that my

head nearly touched the ground. This new routine and alternate mannerisms caused me to examine my own prayer life more critically. It is not difficult to pray three times a day, so why did I not do it? In the past I have prayed in a casual manner, maybe lying in my bed or while I was brushing my teeth. Did I view God's presence in a similar carefree manner when I spoke with Him? If I did not recognize God for who He is when I spoke with Him, how could I say I have a relationship with Him? It was time to re-evaluate and make some serious changes.

I first began to reform my prayer life by finding my own time to be completely alone with Him. This was easier said than done in an over-populated country whose inhabitants were very interested in my actions and habits. I had to wake up at five o'clock in order to fit in time for prayer on the flat-topped roof, away from the hurry and the noise of the nurses preparing for the day. This time alone came as a relief from the constant bustle of people around me; my culture had made me much more familiar with isolation and I was most comfortable praying this way. It also gave me time to speak in my own tongue, as all of the other services were in Tamil. The first song I sang was You Are My All in All. Hearing the familiar words flow from my mouth was like food for my starving heart. I saw how important it was to have my own time of adoration in my own language so that I could truly worship. I poured over the Psalms, looking for other fountains of praise to add to mine; praise was the only thing fit to do that day. Psalms 36 told me about the love of the Lord reaching to the heavens and His faithfulness to the skies. This word filled me with joy and gave peace. When I prayed, I kneeled down so that my body reflected the humbled position of my spirit and my mind while I went before Him. I realized the deprivation I had suffered by unknowingly drawing away from the presence of the Lord. I prayed that He would show me the ways I needed to renew my life and be attuned to His voice. I could have continued for hours, but the morning had ended and it was time to go to the hospital.

As the week wore on, the importance of that morning became more evident. It was the first

Friday of June, and so far the day had gone on like any other. I had battled translation difficulties between myself and the patients. I spent several hours looking over patient charts, attempting to decipher the scribbles the specialists had penned as advice for further patient care. I fought with the wireless modem of my laptop, moving around various locations until I could finally get wireless connection to research what I had found in the charts. At the hostel I attended prayers and carted buckets outside to do my laundry. It was not altogether a very strenuous day, but by ten o'clock, I was ready to collapse. Unfortunately, sleep would not come soon for me.

Upon entering the second floor where we all slept, one of the girls asked me what I was going to wear. I made a confused face at her. I was going to bed. I was wearing the ever-fashionable cotton nightie, extending from my collar bones to my ankles so that only my arms were free to feel the air. She laughed and informed me in a broken mix of English and Tamil that we are going back to the hospital at ten o'clock for night prayers. She went to my bag and dug out my most popular chudidar, a mix of pale pink and white that they liked because it matched my pasty skin. As usual, I was somewhat lost to what was going on. I have never heard of night prayers and had no idea what to expect. I took my Bible and got on the bus to the hospital.

We began as usual, all sitting in rows with girls on one side and men on the other. A pastor had come to lead service and the small room was packed with keyboards, drums, and sound systems. The music was steady at first, yet as the songs wore on it accelerated and became frenzied. Girls were rocking back and forth, falling into people, and losing control of their otherwise composed manner. They were being moved by the spirit. The music seemed loud and chaotic to me, the amount of stimuli in such a small place was stressful. I made a mental note to plaster myself as far against the back wall as possible during next month's session. The pastor laid hands on several of the girls, causing them to fall to the floor with the power of the Holy Spirit. He took everyday items like handkerchiefs and water bottles and

transformed them into spirit-filled objects. Girls would lose all their strength and sink to the floor when they touched them. Everyone was immersed in the moment. When he prayed, all eyes were closed. Some girls had tears streaming down their face and others were rocking back and forth, fervently mumbling their additions to the prayer.

I could attribute my confusion over the bizarre situation to the language barrier that kept me from being able to comprehend most of what was being said, but the truth was I was fascinated and somewhat terrified by what I saw. I was the only one not participating on some level. My eyes remained wide open, often making awkward contact with the pastor as he shouted the prayers above our heads. I would not ordinarily let myself stand out like this, but no one seemed to be focusing on their surroundings enough to pay attention to my peculiar behavior. I was worried that if I closed my eyes I would miss something. I thought if I could watch long enough, I would understand what was going on. Eventually, the wave of energy subsided. Around two a.m., we headed back to hostel. The next day I was talking with a friend from the hospital, a doctor. He asked me what I thought of the prayer last night. Though I was not very fond of the experience, I did not want to pass judgment on a situation I knew very little about and that they all appeared to believe in. Thankfully, he sensed my unease and urged me to just say my honest opinion. From there we discussed the different ways the Spirit gets our attention and how we are really unable to know if someone is being genuine. These types of physical manifestations occur often throughout the Bible, usually with new believers. It could be that these physical actions were more effective for a new believer than the quiet way in which I usually associate the Spirit moving through me. I was, and still am, a little unsure of the whole thing. I gave up on trying to solve the mystery of authenticity and let God decide. I knew when the Spirit was speaking to me, which is all that matters.

Another dimension of my prayer life expanded to include the patients. In the United States, praying for people who are sick is also a common practice among Christians, and I

award it little more than a passing thought at first. Most of the doctors, at least the ones who were Christian, made time to pray over their patients during rounds. The first time this happened, I watched the doctor slip off his shoes with a swiftness I did not possess, lay his hands over the person, and begin prayer. As I stumbled over my feet, trying to get out of my shoes and avoid falling over, I noticed that this patient had not asked to be prayed for. In this environment, health care workers did not need to ask permission to pray for someone or for permission to share their faith. They just did it. It was part of the process of healing. Without prayer, the medicine would not work. With prayer, the patient can receive God's blessing and healing. I saw medical miracles happen, and entire families come to Christ because of them. Still, I hung back, a little doubtful of my own capabilities. I would have remained this way if it were not for one lady who unknowingly showed me the miracle of prayer.

She had been in the hospital since the day I had arrived. Her battle was against lung cancer, fatal at this point. Her family members, including her two young daughters, kept a vigil in her room. They never left her side. I would see her during rounds, usually from the back of the crowd, as the room was already crammed with bodies. I played with her children, drawing little smiley faces on their fingers and laughing at their funny poses for the camera. I stood anxiously by the doctor's side during afternoon rounds as he prayed over her and listened to her hoarse voice as she described how she felt. I did not like to go in that room. To me, it felt like death stood at the door, waiting for the right time to go with her. I could not take the sorrow of these two girls losing their mother, a woman not much older than me. I did my best to stay out.

One day, in the midst of drafting discharge summaries in the office, the nursing tutor came looking for me. The patient I so skillfully avoided was asking for me. I followed the tutor into the room. The space was closed-in and it smelled like soap and the ointment she used to ease the pain of the blisters on her skin. The tutor asked her how she was feeling. As usual she replied that she felt fine, maybe had a slight

cough. I looked down at her face, her head void of hair, her skin pale and dry, her eyes tired. She gave me a fragile smile and asked if I would touch her. It was not an odd request; I had a few others ask to touch my skin and my hair, but they were all just curious children. I moved my fingers over hers. Our hands came together. "Pray for her," the tutor urged. Eyes closed tight, I began to pray with words did not come from me. I thanked the Lord for the healing that He would pour out on her, in the life to come. I knew that soon she would be with Him. As I said amen, I drew a tiny cross on her hand with my finger, the way I had seen many others do. She was crying and I knew she was afraid, yet I admired her courage.

Even though the prayer did not heal this patient, being able to bring her before God, our ultimate healer, drove home the importance of prayer. I saw that I should not be shy about praying for patients. Just like God had promised to Moses, He promised to me that His spirit would intercede when I needed words to speak. It was not about what I said, but rather what I did. If I went to the Lord, He would do the speaking. She knew that she could depend on God this way. I think that is why she could face her future and her family's future with such courage. This woman, as well as several others I met, would unintentionally become an example of faith to me.

When I left the hospital on Saturday night, I went to stay in the home of a family nearby. The parents, Daniel and Esther, lived in a small town in a newly developed neighborhood. They had two daughters, Giftlin, age thirteen, and Sweetlin, age eight. Esther's mother and father and sister lived a few houses over, and we spent many days going back and forth between the two houses. Only Giftlin spoke English; she had gone to an English-medium school until fifth grade and had learnt the basics. I might have communicated well with her, but she was very introverted and a little shy. Much of my time was spent as honorary babysitter for Sweetlin, who made her endless need to be entertained well known by employing various methods of noise-making. She would call, shout, stomp, clap, blow whistles, or cry until she had someone's attention. Because I was not

preparing dinner, cleaning the house, washing laundry, or really doing anything useful, I served as an outlet for her energy.

My presence made Esther, their mother, a little apprehensive at first. They had never had an American stay in their home. Like everyone else, they were doubtful that I would like their food, be able to sleep on the floor, use their bathrooms, and be able to get by without a common language between us. After the first few weeks, we all became more comfortable, and the language barrier began to evaporate. In their broken English and my bits of Tamil, Esther, her sister Rex, and their mother and I chatted all day long. Every day I spent with them, I learned more about their character. I began to greatly admire Esther. She woke up around five in the morning to get her family ready for the day. If any one of us had a need, she took care of it. She was very observant and always aware of those around her. Somehow we would all make it out the door and walk to church, reaching a little after eight. She would help me fix my sari so that it covered my head (without uncovering my back, which I would do if left to my own clumsy ways) and we would pray, side-by-side. After church she would feed us lunch, chasing Sweetlin around the house will handfuls of rice while making sure Giftlin and I ate all that she had given us. When it was time to sleep, she laid down so that Sweetlin would fall asleep, but was up in a flash at midnight when her husband came home from work and wanted dinner. I was never sure when she ate her own meals.

I remember one night, at least two months in to my stay, she called me outside where she and Rex were talking. She explained to me that for the past few weeks she had felt a painful lump on her breast that would not subside. They wanted to know what I thought it was. (Most people did not understand the difference between being a pre-med student and being a doctor and assumed I knew all of the ins and outs of medicine). I shook my head and gave the only words of wisdom I could offer: go see the doctor. The next day at church I watched her begin prayers, her forehead wrinkled with worry. I knew that God could heal her, but I also knew that He may choose not to. I decided

I should plead with Him the way that Moses pleaded to God for the Israelites. He had changed His mind then, maybe He would now. I told Him about all of the selfless work she has done and how she would always a blessing on all of us before we left the house. I told Him that she was His servant and I asked Him to heal her. The next week, when I asked her about the doctor's appointment, she said the mass had gone. She praised God.

Even though this experience gave me ample opportunities to grow as person, as a student, and as a Christian, I also had times where I struggled in the difference. I missed the ease in which I could move through my own familiar culture and the freedom it allowed me. I longed for another American to sympathize with, even though I purposefully went without one. I felt limited by being a woman, as we rarely went out of the home while men traveled freely here and there. I was frustrated as being seen as a child. Unmarried girls are usually treated in a more child-like manner than married women of the same age. My opinion was not taken seriously and few people thought I knew best about how to take care of myself. This hurt my pride and exasperated me. I had planned this entire internship myself. I had set up a hospital to work through, found a family to stay with, helped arrange the course load, bought the flight tickets, and traveled to India alone. All of this, in my opinion, made me capable of deciding whether I would wash my hair at night, how many idlies I wanted to eat, what outfit to wear, and when to take my medication.

However irritating, this circumstance taught me many things. First of all, I was not as mature as I imagined myself to be. I liked to see myself as a responsible adult, with full control over myself and my surroundings. The abrupt change in my status in society made me see how laughable my previous illusions were. Although I still think I am nowhere near as childish as they would have me be, I have surrendered to the fact that I do not know the ways of the world inside and out. It is always good to rely on others to some extent. Even "responsible adults" have to. Another observation I made was that environment plays a much more vital role in

a person's characteristics than I previously thought. In our culture, we pride ourselves on being independent and efficient. We raise children, girls and boys alike, to reflect these qualities. In Tirunelveli, I saw girls my own age and older reduced to acting like children. They fought and argued easily, called off sick over stomach aches, and played around while on the job. The manager of the hospital often settled tearful disputes between two nurses. I was shocked that anyone would put up with such melodrama coming from women in their mid to late twenties. Yet in the town where I stayed, their society has conditioned them to be dependent this way. With this personality being forced upon me as well, I saw just how difficult it is to get out from underneath it. Sometimes it is simpler just to go along with it. They would be astonished if they saw our behavior, too.

Throughout my trip, and even still to this day, God has reminded me of what He has taught me. Most of what I learned, I had already known on some level. I could say that God would heal a patient through prayer, but I did not know it. I could say that He always provides for His children, but I did not know this until He took care of me when I was in need. I could say that God open doors, but I did not know this until I looked back at what He has done for me. I thought I was planning my trip, selecting the hospital and the family, the medical camps and the new friends. In reality, He had known what to do before I did and had directed me where to go. I could have also said that prayer is important, but I did not know how to pray well or always why I was praying.

Now my understanding of my Creator and of His creation has changed. It is enhanced and cherished all the more. The times I meet with Him are essential to my daily life. When I go without speaking to Him, I feel the disconnection between my soul and the Spirit inside me. By taking me out of my familiar comfort zone, He was able to show me anew the truths I grew up internalizing. Instead of just the knowledge of the Lord and His work, I gained faith in Him. It may not have taken a trip to India to get me to this point, but I think that God knew what He was doing when He planned it. I hope that He has used it as further

preparation for my future. The people I met there are never far from my mind, and it is their image that sticks with me when I consider why I have chosen medicine. In the United States, much of the perception I had of healthcare was from the scientific point-of-view. I had selected this career path because it interests me intellectually and it is a way to relieve the sufferings of others. India challenged my half-hearted attempt to rationalize my decision by placing me side-by-side patients and their doctors for twelve hours a day and six days a week for three months. My romanticized notion of dedicated, altruistic doctors delivering ideal care to their rapidly recovering and optimistic patients deteriorated. In the real world, neither patient nor doctor fit the role I had designed for them; each were imperfect and could be just as unpredictable as the life they were both in charge of saving. However, through this realization I more fully understood the value of the true role of a doctor in the community. Doctors are often the only ones willing to listen to the patient's voice. They have the power to dramatically transform the lives they are involved in, either positively or negatively. Although they are not always able to resolve every disease and symptom, they hold many answers to what their patients may consider as mysterious and frightening afflictions. If they really take notice of and listen to the patient, they can use their knowledge not only to treat symptoms and rescue the physical condition of the patient from deterioration, but also preserve his or her humanity in the process. I saw this point clearly while working at the village clinics. For the majority of the patients, their bodies were their source of livelihood. They spent nearly everyday sweating under the sun, working with their hands to earn a living. A health concern could deprive them of their income, which, in turn, could result in the loss of their home and wellbeing of their family. Thus, the doctors not only had their health in mind, but their humanity- what it took to live a decent life and take care of a family- was also at risk. This responsibility is immense, and many healthcare providers are content to treat symptoms and move along. This technique may suffice for some, but it is neglect of the

duty of a physician. The Hippocratic Oath also admits this obligation towards a patient's entire wellbeing. "I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick."

The profession itself is not at all simple or glamorous. The responsibility may sometimes feel like a burden, the thank-you's few and far between, the work load unrelenting, and the grief and failure haunting. Why do I have such a desire to run head-on into a career that will undoubtedly push me to these limits? It is the same reasons firefighters storm into burning buildings and the reason soldiers fly off to war. It is the same reason Christ died for us. The call to maintain the integrity of humanity-to cherish and restore human life- is more powerful and satisfying than all the hardships that come when fighting for it. Now when I reflect on my decision, this image enters my head and I am thankful for the lessons God has taught me and that He allows us to join Him in His love of life. I plan to continue to pursue my passion in a way that respects and adores these children of God and brings glory to the Lord I love.

## A Son of Adam in Salem: Holgrave's Role as Hero in Hawthorne's Seven Gables

by Timothy Laurio

Critics have often found fault with the ending of *The House of the Seven Gables* for being abrupt and inconsistent with the rest of the book. F. O. Matthiessen puts it graciously when he says that "the conclusion of this book has satisfied very few" (331). Much of the criticism focuses rightly on the character of Holgrave, especially his conversion from a radical to a conservative in the second-to-last chapter. To some, Holgrave's change of heart has seemed such a betrayal of his character that they have written off his conversion as an artistic flaw. Robert Milder's remark that "the haste and unpersuasiveness of Holgrave's conversion [...] testify [...] to [Hawthorne's] wish that acute readers should feel the ending's insincerity" is characteristic of attempts to make sense of the conversion ("New England" 488). When read as an abrupt and fundamental change of character, the conversion makes the conclusion seem rushed at best and superficial at worst.

Hawthorne's happy ending, however, is more than just a tacked-on conclusion, and Holgrave's change of heart is more than just a sudden reversal of his nature. A careful reading of the book reveals that the necessary pieces for both developments are put in place over the course of the story. This is particularly true in the case of Holgrave, whose character follows a consistent arc throughout. The critics are right to focus on him, because he is at the heart of the book's story of redemption. His journey is that of a hero in the Christian mold: for, within the context of the story, he is the new Adam who vanquishes the evils of the past and ends the dominion of the curse.

Because Holgrave is such a radical in the beginning, his conversion to conservatism in the end can appear a dramatic reversal, which is how critics have often perceived it. Milder argues that Holgrave's inconsistency as a character makes the happy ending

unbelievable, saying that "the conclusion to *Seven Gables* was untrue even to the intuitions of the writer" ("New England" 484). For Milder, Holgrave's conservatism is "an all-too willing surrender of intellectual and artistic freedom" ("Dreams" 198). Francis Battaglia, though he supports Hawthorne's character development on the whole, agrees that the "resolution seems contrived; the final chapters are too late a point for a character to begin to undergo his basic change" (emphasis in original) (579). Like Battaglia, Nina Baym sees Holgrave's conservatism at the end as a fundamental change of heart, but she reads the change as a conscious capitulation on Hawthorne's part. In an essay titled "Hawthorne's Holgrave: the Failure of the Artist-Hero," Baym argues that Holgrave's conversion is Hawthorne's acknowledgement that an artist-hero such as Holgrave cannot survive as an artist nor as a hero in the real world, because his energy will be stifled by the dead forms of the past. For Baym, the book's ending is intentionally hopeless: "a finale in which the hero abandons all the best of himself" (598).

These criticisms rest on the premise that Holgrave's change from radical to conservative is a fundamental change of character. Hawthorne's own description of Holgrave midway through the novel, however, suggests otherwise:

*Homeless as he had been,—continually changing his whereabouts, and, therefore, responsible neither to public opinion nor to individuals,—putting off one exterior, and snatching up another, to be soon shifted for a third,—he had never violated the innermost man, but had carried his conscience along with him. It was impossible to know Holgrave without recognizing this to be the fact. (216)*

This describes a man of integrity who will

not surrender his conscience, as Baym would suggest Holgrave does. Hawthorne's ideal, moreover, is that a story should be consistent from beginning to end, as he states in his preface: "A high truth, indeed, fairly, finely, and skilfully wrought out, brightening at every step, and crowning the final development of a work of fiction, may add an artistic glory, but is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first." (vii). That Hawthorne would contradict both his description of Holgrave's character and his own philosophy of storytelling by making Holgrave undergo a fundamental change in the penultimate chapter is conceivable, but this interpretation reflects sadly on Hawthorne's skill as a writer. Unless Hawthorne is inept, Holgrave's conversion must be not a fundamental change but a natural growth.

In addition to giving Hawthorne more credit as an author, interpreting Holgrave's final character shift as a natural development is in keeping with a more careful understanding of the idea of consistency. Consistency does not mean that the story or the characters must act the same way from beginning to end. Things change in stories: a dark beginning may lead to a bright ending. An inconsistency is an event or a change for which the story cannot account. If Phoebe died suddenly in the last chapter, that would be an inconsistency, because nothing in the earlier story prepares for that development: her death would betray the story as Hawthorne has told it up to that point. Holgrave's conversion to conservatism, on the other hand, is a sign of his maturation as a character. He does not suffer a sudden, inconsistent change of heart; he simply fulfills the character arc which Hawthorne laid out for him from the beginning.

That character arc is not, as Baym suggests, the story of an abortive hero, but of a hero who fulfills his quest and comes home. The shift from radical warrior to conservative homemaker may appear incongruous, but it is natural. Like any hero with common sense, Holgrave wants to change the status quo when it is broken and preserve it when it is fixed. In this he follows the model of many Christian heroes, from Christ to St. George

to Aragorn, who set out to defeat an old evil and, upon succeeding, turn towards their bride and their home. The comparison is useful because Holgrave bears more than a passing resemblance to the Christian heroes of other stories. Close reading, in fact, reveals that the story of Jesus, the new Adam, forms a model for that of Holgrave, the new Maule.

The history of the Maules and the Pyncheons can be read as a model of human history as it is laid out in the Bible. To put it another way, the Biblical story of human history is concisely represented in the history of those families. Colonel Pyncheon's crime and Matthew Maule's bloody retribution are like the first sin and its deadly effects; after both Falls comes a Curse which perpetuates the cycle of sin and death. The Pyncheon house and garden, which have been contaminated with their owners' sins, are like the world itself, which in the words of the Apostle Paul "was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it" (Romans 8:20). In this setting Holgrave, a son of Maule, plays the role of a son of Adam. As the rightful owner of the land and the curse, the responsibility for righting the past's wrongs—and therefore the hope for a happy ending—rests upon him.

Like Adam, whose first task was to care for Eden, Holgrave is introduced as a gardener. The first sight of him comes through Phoebe's eyes:

*Turning quickly, she was surprised at sight of a young man, who had found access into the garden by a door opening out of another gable than that whence she had emerged. He held a hoe in his hand, and, while Phoebe was gone in quest of the crumbs, had begun to busy himself with drawing up fresh earth about the roots of the tomatoes. (109)*

It becomes apparent that Holgrave is responsible for the "careful labour" which has kept the roses, pears, plums, currants, squashes, cucumbers, string beans, and tomatoes from succumbing to the "rank weeds" which grow naturally from the dead debris of past years (104-5). Hawthorne says explicitly that such

weeds are "symbolic of the transmitted vices of society," so by inference Holgrave's care for the garden may symbolize more broadly his care for the natural world (104). In this he is like Adam: a steward of creation who both nurtures and prunes the garden of the world.

Holgrave is not merely the old Adam who cares for the garden, however, but a new Adam who is also the steward of the past. Hawthorne makes a distinction between the natural world, represented by the garden, and human institutions, represented by the House of Seven Gables and all such "human dwellings" around which weeds "are always prone to root themselves" (104). As a son of Maule, Holgrave is the proprietor of the family history: the feud with the Pyncheons; the long list of wrongs both suffered and committed; the claim to the property; Maule's Curse. He is a son of Maule who bears the inherited weight of the past, both its creations and its curse. In this he is like a son of Adam, bearing the burden of human history, our institutions as well as our curse.

As Maule's descendant, Holgrave is the only character who can rightfully claim ownership of the Maules' past or the Maules' property. True, he hides his claim to both while it serves his purpose. Baym is right when she compares him to a "returned exile who bides his time waiting for the appropriate moment to strike or reveal himself," like Odysseus or (I would add) the Christ (586). Like them, Holgrave is a dispossessed owner who has come to make a rightful claim. Though he does not flaunt it, he is the true heir to the property. Phoebe sees a glimpse of this identity when she senses an "odd kind of authority" in his invitation to her to help him tend the garden: "rather as if the garden were his own than a place to which he was admitted merely by Hepzibah's courtesy" (113). Because in the truest sense the property and the past belong only to him, Holgrave is also the only one who has the authority to set them to rights. Terence Martin agrees that Holgrave "has the most thorough and systematic knowledge of the family past," which gives him—unlike Phoebe—the power to shape the past (135). As Maule's son he holds not only the ownership of family

belongings but the office of family executor. He is the heir of the past and therefore bears the responsibility of redeeming the past.

Unlike all his ancestors, Holgrave pursues this aim with meekness rather than vengeance. He could have acted like a king, declaring his right to the property and forcibly taking what belonged to him. In doing so, he would have been responding to the Pyncheon injustice in like kind. That is what all the Maules before him did: the first Matthew when he claimed the Colonel's life, and the latter when he took possession of Alice Pyncheon. Perhaps because all the Maules before him tried that method without success, Holgrave chooses another. In this he is like Jesus. The Jews expected a king who would lead them to military victory against their oppressors, but Jesus established his kingdom in a different way, with meekness and love. By doing so, Christ heralded an end to the old system of violence. Holgrave does the same. To respond to violence with violence might get him the land which the Maules have been trying to get for generations. It would not, however, end the wrong that Colonel Pyncheon began by stealing the land; it would only perpetuate it. With violent retribution Holgrave might regain the land, but the family feud—and the curse—would continue. Instead, Holgrave acts with meekness. He does not declare his identity; he does not force his claim. He waits.

The decisive moment for Holgrave—and also, I would argue, for the whole story—comes at the beginning of chapter fourteen, when he refuses to perpetuate the past's wrongs by taking mastery of Phoebe. After finishing his story about Alice Pyncheon, Holgrave finds—gifted Mesmerist that he is—that he has unintentionally put Phoebe in a half-trance, and he sees that "with but one wave of his hand, and a corresponding effort of his will, he could complete his mastery over Phoebe's yet free and virgin spirit," violating her just as his ancestor Matthew Maule had violated Alice (Hawthorne 260). Holgrave's choice now is not merely whether to exercise his power over a susceptible girl; it is whether he will continue the cycle of strife and death which his ancestor began, or whether he will end it by letting "reverence for another's individuality"—

what might be called love—rule his actions (Hawthorne 260).

With a choice that proves his “integrity,” as Hawthorne says, Holgrave releases Phoebe from his control, reversing his ancestor’s wrong (260). Terence Martin sees this as a turning point in the book, the moment when the shadow of the past rears up and is vanquished:

*Hawthorne’s story stands at a moment of crisis: the dead past has been made the living past, and it exercises a hypnotic effect on Phoebe. At this point the entire cycle of misfortune could be recapitulated and begun anew [...]. To his credit Holgrave does not subjugate Phoebe to his will [...]. By refusing an opportunity for revenge, he loosens the bond of the past. (136)*

This is the crucial scene: the moment when the past is redeemed and Holgrave assumes his role as a hero. Had Holgrave taken control of Phoebe, then even when Judge Pyncheon died the legacy of sin and retribution would have continued. As the heir of the past, however, Holgrave has learned from the past, so he rejects its mistakes and thereby defeats them. The death of the Judge later on completes the victory, but the battle was won in the garden.

With this victory, Holgrave proves himself to be a type, not just of a son of Adam, but of the one Paul called the last Adam: the son of Adam who rectifies his father’s sin. Paul explains how Jesus, the new Adam, redeemed the first Adam’s sin when he says that “just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). For Paul, the two men were Adam and Jesus, but within the context of Seven Gables, the two men might just as well be Matthew Maule and Holgrave.

Holgrave’s journey does not end with that victory in the garden. Though he has confronted the past’s wrongs and rejected them, the evil from the past lives on in the person of Jaffrey Pyncheon, and Holgrave must eventually confront him. Maule’s Curse still lives, too, and until its terms are fulfilled Holgrave’s responsibilities are not over. In the end it is the curse that kills Jaffrey, not

Holgrave; yet when he stands before the corpse, Holgrave assumes his family’s guilt. He has some reason, because as the current owner of the curse its actions may be attributed to him. In that moment when Holgrave stands before Jaffrey’s corpse, the whole of the Maule family’s guilt rises up and overwhelms him. As he tells Phoebe later, the embodiment of the Maules’ sins before him “made the universe [...] a scene of guilt and of retribution more dreadful than the guilt” (376). In order for the evil of the past to be finally defeated, the Maules’ guilt in the matter would have to be purged. In order for this to happen, some Maule would have to assume the guilt for the wrongs the family had done. Holgrave, standing before the dead judge, becomes that Maule. Like Christ, Holgrave bears the sin of his whole family; like Christ, the deed costs him a death, not physically but spiritually. As Holgrave tells Phoebe, the guilt he felt then “took away [his] youth,” sucking the life out of his past and future (376).

Holgrave is resurrected, so to speak, by the presence of Phoebe and by the love they share. His pale face greets hers with a smile of joy (Hawthorne 370). Now that his mission to redeem the past is finished, Holgrave finds a new purpose in his love for her. As Martin writes, in looking to Phoebe Holgrave is looking “homeward” (140). He has slain the dragon and recovered from his wounds; now he is ready to settle down and marry the princess. This does cause him to change his political views: he is now for, not against, preserving and passing on the current state of affairs. But this is only to be expected of one who has striven so hard to make the current state of affairs what it is.

The critics’ dissatisfaction with *Seven Gables* may say more about the critics than it does about the book. The happy ending may come abruptly, but that does not mean it has not been prepared. Even in the real world, good things often come unexpectedly, like falling in love, or winning the lottery, or the Incarnation. Holgrave does change as a character, but that change follows a definite pattern, and has a clear purpose. Using a hero whose journey resembles Christ’s, Hawthorne is able to

tell a story of past wrongs being righted and past divisions being healed: a story that is ultimately one of hope.

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# Lord Tennyson, Sylvia Plath, and Stephenie Meyer: Voices of Loss

by Corri Richardson

Few mediums of creative expression are more powerful than the written word. Writers capture and display human experiences and emotions in ways that most effectively resonate with others. The words of poets and novelists reflect real human struggles and affect individual readers differently and personally. Good writers are – and have been throughout history – the most powerful communicators of the human condition. Great literature often takes readers back to times in their lives when they experienced or felt something similar. Through literary works, one can see that many aspects of the human condition transcend individuals, as well as time and space. An examination of works from different writers and time periods demonstrates that many experiences and emotions are universal, unaffected by time, gender, or location.

This principle can be illustrated well in works by three very popular, yet very distinct writers: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Sylvia Plath, and Stephenie Meyer. Although Tennyson, Plath, and Meyer may appear to have little in common, their works share themes of love and loss. The sentiments of losing a loved one expressed in Tennyson's 1850 poem *In Memoriam A. H. H.* and Plath's 1953 poem "Mad Girl's Love Song" are echoed today in Meyer's best-selling novel *New Moon*, proving that emotions and experiences, such as those experiences connected to feelings of love and loss, transcend time and have strikingly similar effects on all humans.

At first glance, substantial connections are not obvious between these works, other than the fact that each writer is, in some sense, writing about loss. These works are products of different authors and, therefore, different inspirations and emotions. Tennyson, Plath, and Meyer have individual

styles of writing, just as they have individual responses to circumstances in life. However, close examination of each of these writers' inspirations and motivations, as well as their approaches to symbolism and imagery, reveals that these pieces are much more comparable than one might first conclude.

In 1833, Alfred, Lord Tennyson's very close young friend Arthur Henry Hallam died suddenly, catapulting Tennyson into a state of shock and despair. According to Patricia Spacks, Tennyson "composed the long elegiac poem *In Memoriam A. H. H.* to record the profound emotional and intellectual effects on him of his friend's death" (Spacks 820). *In Memoriam* is a truthful, beautifully written response to the loss of a loved one to death. Out of the three selections to be examined in this analysis, *In Memoriam* most vividly captures a real man's true, personal emotion in response to loss. It evokes a very strong empathy in many readers simply because Tennyson has lost his best friend permanently with no hope of his return. Tennyson's beautifully haunting words would evoke painful emotions even if they were based on contrived experiences, but the reader's knowledge of Tennyson's real pain and suffering give this poem an emotive edge. Readers empathize with Tennyson, especially if they themselves have lost loved ones in the past.

In addition to being an elegy about the death of Tennyson's friend, *In Memoriam* is also argued by many to be representative of Tennyson's personal theological crisis. Eugene R. August notes that "Tennyson intended the poem to portray a convincing resolution of doubt by faith" (August 217). August also quotes Tennyson himself, communicating the writer's explanation that *In Memoriam* serves

to portray "[his] conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through Faith in a God of Love" (August 217). Tennyson struggled, especially after Hallam's death, with his beliefs about God – a struggle that so many have experienced and understand. Many question God's love – even His very existence – when tragedy strikes, just as Tennyson does. This poem portrays a man dealing with death, mourning, and doubt – common struggles in life.

Tennyson does a wonderful job of capturing all of these emotions in the words of *In Memoriam*. He opens the Prologue section of the poem by immediately addressing his issues of faith:

*Strong Son of God, immortal Love,  
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove; (1-4)*

These lines hint at Tennyson's struggle for faith, countered with his insatiable desire to believe. Many people react to the loss of a loved one in this way; they desperately desire to believe in and trust God for comfort and hope through the tragedy, and yet they simultaneously doubt Him because of the tragedy's occurrence in the first place. Such feelings often take someone on a quest for answers and, as a result, a journey of self-discovery, just as Tennyson experiences and writes about in *In Memoriam*. Throughout this poem, the reader sees Tennyson's journey through stages in his faith. In Section 54, Tennyson reasons with himself, "trust[ing] that somehow good / Will be the final goal of ill" (1-2), attempting to remain reasonable and optimistic as he is continually searching for God in the midst of his loss. Tennyson does go through periods of intense doubt and darkness. However, near the end of Section 55, Tennyson seems to surrender to the peace offered to him:

*I falter where I firmly trod,  
and falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar-stairs  
That slope through darkness up to God,  
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,*

*And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope. (13-16)*

His seasons of faith continue in and out, but this conclusion in Section 55 leads one to believe that Tennyson does find bits of comfort in his faith, resonating and giving hope to readers in similar situations.

Tennyson addresses his pain in regards to Hallam's death beginning in Section 5. He opens by describing the difficulty of discussing his pain. He writes, "I sometimes hold it half a sin / To put in words the grief I feel" (1-2). Further in Section 5, he presents the reader with the most vivid personification of his sadness: "Like dull narcotics, numbing pain. / In words...I'll wrap me o'er, / Like coarsest clothes against the cold" (8-10). The sadness and grief he feels at the loss of his friend envelop him entirely; like garments, he must wear these feelings every day, and they cover his entire being. Readers can certainly remember a time in which a loss consumed their lives in such a way. Not only can they identify with Tennyson's feelings and make connections between him and themselves, but they can also enjoy the merit of his poetic talent. Tennyson presents human emotion utilizing beautiful language.

Whereas the particular instances that shaped Tennyson's writing of *In Memoriam* are well documented, Sylvia Plath's background in regards to "Mad Girl's Love Song" is not quite so clear. Plath's 1953 poem "Mad Girl's Love Song" is one of her lesser-known, and therefore least researched, poems, so her specific inspiration and motivation for writing this poem is unknown – or at least unpublished. Based on what is known of her life experiences and her personality, it is easy to speculate that some kind of personal experience led her to write "Mad Girl's Love Song." Anyone familiar with Sylvia Plath and her writings knows that she is immortalized for works filled with dark symbolism and somewhat varying tones denoting an obsession with depression and death. Jooyoung Park notes of Plath, "Her poems are not consoling; they are filled with hurt, excitement, and a bittersweet joy"

(Park 467). Plath's poetry is unique and focuses on the darker sides of life, and is almost always immediately deemed peculiar.

Although Plath certainly experienced heartbreak in her lifetime, whether or not a particular experience with a man influenced her in writing "Mad Girl's Love Song" is unknown. Regardless, this poem is reflective of Plath's other literary works, as well as her personality. Plath's poetry reveals her seemingly permanent state of melancholy – her state that was also apparent in her personally every day as she lived her life. Kathleen Spivack, who knew Plath personally during their time together at Smith College, writes, "It was hard to imagine her married, passionate, or caring about anything really" (Spivack 214). Plath suffered from depression, a depression so deep and debilitating that it manifested itself in all of her writing and ultimately resulted in her suicide. Those facts taken into account, "Mad Girl's Love Song" is not one of her darker poems. This poem does not create intense images of death as many of her other poems do so strongly. "Mad Girl's Love Song" is the account of a girl who has lost her love – not because of death, but because of his own decision to leave her. This poem is more approachable than many of Plath's other works because it is not quite as dark, and most readers, females especially, can identify with the sentiment of a broken heart.

Plath's words brilliantly capture the "break-up" scenario and the girl's responses. The first stanza of the poem reads, "I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead, / I lift my lids and all is born again. / (I think I made you up inside my head)" (Plath 1-3). Immediately, the reader senses a shift, a sudden and complete upheaval of the narrator's world. In the blink of an eye, this "mad girl" has lost the one she loves. The fact that she "think[s] [she] made [him] up inside [her] head" (3) leads the reader to assume that this lover's disappearance was so sudden and unexpected that the girl has begun to question his very existence, or at least to question his true nature as a human and a romantic interest. Females, and most likely males, of all ages and backgrounds can relate to such feelings in response to rejection. For

anyone experiencing such heartache, they often feel like it is the end of the world, just as Plath depicts in these first three lines. This end-of-the-world metaphor is continued throughout the poem. Plath writes "God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade. / Exit seraphim and Satan's men. / I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead" (10-12). This religious imagery strongly symbolizes the intense feelings she had for this boy, as well as the finality she feels about losing him. The depicted disappearance of God is symbolic on both of these levels. The girl held this boy up on a pedestal, practically worshipping and immortalizing him in her heart, and losing him makes her feel as if "all the world [has dropped] dead" (12). This situation has such devastating effects on this girl that, as indicated in the title, she is going mad. Plath's poem illustrates a universal human emotion, and her audience may recall similar moments of near madness.

The tone of the poem leads the reader to believe that Plath's "mad girl" is aware of her folly. Unlike Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, "Mad Girl's Love Song" does not have a tone indicating extreme grief and sadness. In fact, in many ways this piece is not particularly emotional at all. The narrator's world has been changed permanently, and she is dealing with loss and rejection, just as Tennyson does in *In Memoriam*. However, whereas Tennyson's poem is overflowing with palpable grief and sadness, "Mad Girl's Love Song" deals with loss in what seems to be a calmer, more rational way. Granted, the circumstances of loss differ in these poems – losing a friend to death and losing a lover to choice are two very different scenarios. Whereas Tennyson mourns and searches for answers, Plath's narrator recognizes the loss, accepts her feeling of despair in response, and simply lets the darkness take over her life. However, although this girl responds to loss differently than Tennyson, her reaction does not invalidate her pain. Many people, in times of personal tragedy, find themselves trying not to show negative emotions outwardly, finding it easier to accept the hardship and speak of it without interjecting their true feelings. Like the girl in the poem, they feel as though their worlds

have crumbled, yet they do their best not to acknowledge or emphasize the full effects that the tragedy has on them. Plath's narrator feels lost and abandoned and hopeless. Her words in this poem are honest and descriptive of the pain she feels, but they are also lifeless and devoid of any extreme emotional inflection. In relation to *In Memoriam*, this poem offers a different reaction to a similar loss, and in relation to readers, it offers a response to heartache with which many can most certainly identify.

In this combination, Stephenie Meyer's work differs slightly from the others. Whereas *In Memoriam* and "Mad Girl's Love Song" are poems, nonfiction accounts of their writers' emotions, *New Moon* is a novel and complete fiction. As one naturally concludes, Meyer did not write this fantasy romance novel based on a real personal experience – in fact, as Meyer herself explains in an interview, the "premise came to [her] in a dream" ("Interview" 631). Since the entirety of the work is fictional, the novel, at a glance, seems much less personal than the aforementioned poems. However, the fact that *New Moon* was not based on real experiences does not make it less effective. *New Moon*'s status as a novel proves that writers of all genres are able to capture real human emotions and portray them in various forms, all of which are valuable.

Meyer's first novel *Twilight*, *New Moon*'s prequel, tells the beginnings of an engrossing, fantastical love story between Bella Swan and Edward Cullen, her perfect romantic match who happens to be a vampire. By the end of the novel, the two have been through quite a journey and have fallen in love – a love that is described as being unprecedented, remarkably intense, and unstoppable. Meyer continues the story in *New Moon*. Love is already the driving force of the story, and loss soon follows. Similar to the disappearing lover in "Mad Girl's Love Song," Bella loses Edward because of his own choice to leave. This decision, however, is not made out of selfishness or his lack of love for her – he leaves in order to protect her. The body of the novel is primarily made up of Bella's cognition in response to this loss.

These three works all truly connect

through *New Moon*. Both *In Memoriam* and "Mad Girl's Love Song" are clearly, albeit unintentionally, reflected in this novel through similar circumstances and imagery, as well as the overall common theme of dealing with loss and pain. The fact that the sentiments shared by *In Memoriam* and "Mad Girl's Love Song" are reflected in one of today's most popular fantasy novels supports the claim: emotions transcend time and space, and writers are the best communicators of those emotions.

Bella's loss is similar to the losses described in both *In Memoriam* and "Mad Girl's Love Song." Like the narrator of "Mad Girl's Love Song," Bella loses a romantic lover; like Tennyson in *In Memoriam*, although Bella does not lose Edward to death, she feels a sense of permanent loss – almost as if Edward has died. In this analysis, *In Memoriam* and "Mad Girl's Love Song" share so many commonalities with *New Moon* that they serve as poetic, autobiographical accounts of Bella's emotional journey through her rejection experience and learning to cope with her loss.

An immediate correlation can be seen based on lines in Section 22 of *In Memoriam*:

*But where the path we walked began  
To slant...  
we descended following Hope,  
There sat the Shadow feared of man;  
Who broke our fair companionship, (9-13)*

These lines concisely describe the scene of Bella's rejection. Edward asks Bella to go on a walk into the woods. Bella is already afraid of what Edward has to say, but she tries to remain positive right up to the moment that Edward tells her that he and his family are leaving. The "Shadow feared of man" that Tennyson speaks of is death; to Bella, the "Shadow" is the loss of Edward in any sense. He tells her that he is leaving her, making her a promise: "This will be the last time you'll see me. I won't come back... It will be as if I'd never existed" (Meyer 71). In an instant, Bella loses the most important thing in her life. Edward's exit and Bella's response are best described by the first stanza of "Mad Girl's Love Song": "I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead,

/ I lift my lids and all is born again. / (I think I made you up inside my head)" (1-3). Meyer depicts Bella's account of their final moments together with vivid imagery: "He leaned down, and pressed his lips very lightly to my forehead for the briefest instant. My eyes closed... My eyes flashed open... He was gone" (73). When Edward leaves Bella in this moment, everything ceases to exist in her mind.

These moments in *New Moon* are also reflected in the Epilogue section of *In Memoriam*: Farewell, we kiss, and they are gone.

*A shade falls...  
From little cloudlets...  
...as we pass  
To range the woods... (20-24).*

These lines in Tennyson's poem describe actions similar to those Bella takes in *New Moon*. After her moment of awakening, Bella sets out to escape, but she is so thoroughly devastated that she cannot even think clearly to navigate. Meyer, through Bella's stream of conscious narration, explains: "The forest looked the same no matter how far I went... [and as time passed] it grew darker and darker" (73). Meyer then describes the darkness of the night and, symbolically, the darkness that Bella feels as she finds herself laying on the ground, lost in the forest: "Was it always so dark...? Surely...some little bit of moonlight would filter down...and find the ground. Not tonight. Tonight the sky was utterly black" (74). Darkness is also used as a symbol of loss in the second stanza of "Mad Girl's Love Song": "The stars go waltzing out in blue and red, / And arbitrary blackness gallops in" (4-5). No light is in the sky that night, and no light is in Bella's life. Edward, her "star," is gone.

The majority of the rest of the novel deals with Bella's response to the loss. Meyer captures Bella's mental state by describing one particular act of desperation: Bella going by Edward's abandoned house in an effort to cling to memories of him. Chapter 7 begins by Bella explaining that she is driving out to find Edward's house in hopes that she might "hear his voice again" (160). Bella describes

her experience as she confronts the last remaining tangible evidence that Edward had truly existed: "The house was there, but it was not the same...the emptiness screamed from the blank windows...I approached the [house] slowly... [but] there was...no lingering sense of [his] presence" (161). Bella confronts this place in hopes of arousing more memories of Edward that she can cling to, but she simply finds that he is, indeed, gone, and the feelings of permanent loss flood back again. Tennyson also writes about a similar act of searching for memories in Section 7 of *In Memoriam*:

*Dark house, by which once more I stand  
...  
Doors where my heart was used to beat  
So quickly, waiting for a hand,  
...that can be clasped no more – (1-5)*

Tennyson also felt the need to revisit the house of his lost loved one, and the closure he receives is exactly the same as that received of Bella: "He is not here; but far away / The noise of life begins again" (9-10). Neither find comfort in reliving moments connected to their lost ones – in their minds, they only solidify the fact that they are gone.

These three works all have different resolutions. The Epilogue of *In Memoriam* concludes with Tennyson seeming to surrender to God's power and control even though he is still hurting and dealing with loss: "That friend of mine who lives in God, / That God, which ever lives and loves" (68-69). Tennyson surrenders to faith, believing that Arthur now resides with God. Plath's poem has a more somber, pessimistic conclusion: "I fancied you'd return the way you said, / But I grow old and I forget your name. / (I think I made you up inside my head)" (13-15). Plath's narrator has not been on a journey of discovery as Tennyson has, so she is still in a state of negative emotion directed towards her situation. In *New Moon*, Bella continues to struggle throughout the novel, but her fears of permanent loss prove false when Edward returns to her.

Three works, three writers, three tales of love and loss. These works demonstrate that many experiences and emotions are shared by people

in varying times, but they also emphasize the different facets of emotion in individuals. The main characters of *In Memoriam*, "Mad Girl's Love Song," and *New Moon* experience similar, yet different, losses and have similar, yet different, responses. The varied resolutions of these works serve to draw another parallel to life: every situation and every individual is unique. Humans can relate to one another through times of heartache, but no two people are the same. Consequently, everyone can learn to better understand each other through reading works like *In Memoriam*, "Mad Girl's Love Song," and *New Moon*. The human experience is complex, but through the reading of works by great writers, one can gain a broader and better understanding of shared emotional characteristics of all humans.

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# Life on the Fast Track: The Tragic Absence of Fasting in Christianity Today

by *Katie Cachiaras*

In the thirteenth century, Frederick the Great performed linguistic experiments on newborn babies to learn which language children innately speak. He instructed nurses to tend to the babies' basic needs of food and bath, but forbade them from speaking to or coddling the infants. Unfortunately, Frederick's experiment never reached completion because none of the infants survived. Even though their basic needs were provided, when left without personal contact and relational nourishment, the babies could not survive. No matter our age, culture, gender, or personality, we all need food to live, but as this story illustrates, humans need more than food to sustain them. Perhaps Jesus expressed this best when he said, "Man does not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). However, living in a land of excess, Americans often forget this truth and place high priority on the possession and consumption of food. Any infringement on the inalienable right to eat is counter-cultural, and to purposely abstain from food would be considered a threat to American freedom. In the Church, this abstinence is known as fasting, a spiritual discipline that Jesus practiced himself and one that He expected his believers to imitate. In Matthew 6, praying, giving, and fasting are equated in presentation. From this passage, fasting appears to be just as important as both of the others. Often times, however, Christians have fallen short of this expectation, changing Christ's commands to fit into their culture's mold. To some, the rarity of fasting today may seem natural because of its personal, secretive nature. Fasting produces deep humility, so the most qualified persons to speak up about fasting likely consider themselves unworthy to do so. Giving, a practice to which we are more commonly accustomed, is also intended to be

secretive; we are told not to "let our left hand know what our right is doing" (Matt. 6:3). Thus, fasting and giving are both intended to be discreet practices, but while Sunday school teachers and church leaders routinely and unashamedly encourage giving, fasting is rarely expressed. Therefore, something about fasting, other than its quiet, humble nature allows it to remain unnoticed by many, something rooted in our culture and our country's church. I submit that fasting in America has suffered because of a culture that more readily accepts gluttony and a religious understanding that undermines the body's value. Christians in America don't often question the amount of food they consume as it seems a mechanical routine of life, and therefore, they often fall into the sin of gluttony. Gluttony usually refers to the over-consumption of food, but a person can be gluttonous in regards to other aspects of life that routinely draw attention from God, like indulgence, media, and spending. Just as culture's gluttonous habits draw Christians away from an appetite for fasting, the same occurs when believers accept the body-skewing principles of gnosticism. Many Christians accept gnosticism's detachment of the body from the soul which favors the spiritual and neglects the material. Those who accept this belief assume that one day they will literally fly away, "oh glory", as our spirits rise up, and that their sordid bodies will be left behind, suddenly unnecessary in a solely spiritual paradise. This common misconception leads believers to detach all things physical from their "Christian walk," because, in their minds, approaching God is done using the soul exclusively. Christians affected by these gnostic views overlook fasting because it requires our apparently unnecessary bodies.

Alas, flawed attitudes from our culture and the church cause Christians to accept gluttony and gnosticism. Though they may seem contradictory, in reality, they both sever the body from the soul, and privilege one over the other. The good news is, however, fasting binds the division of body and soul, and balances the importance of each. By challenging this trend of secular consumerism and religious gnosticism, we can revive wholesome fasting, enabling Christians to encounter a deeper connection with their bodies, their neighbors, and their God.

In the selfish culture of America, Christians can be reluctant to admit that gluttony is even a problem, let alone an immoral one, which causes believers to often choose a pattern of voracity over simplicity. Americans are consumers, infatuated with instant gratification, and fearful of any deprivation. Gluttony indulges in these desires, appeases without restraint, and avoids want. No wonder it is such a tempting choice. Especially when fasting, in contrast, obstructs cravings, inspires patience, and gives the false impression of self-punishment or self-mortification. Unfortunately, gluttony only produces an illusion of contentment; our desires are never fully satiated, thus we perpetually crave for more. America's infatuation with the self feeds these American ideologies: consumerism, capitalism, and instant gratification. Obsessed with themselves, it is no wonder that Americans are compulsive dieters. Note that this does not refer to dieters who seek to make healthier exercise and nutritional choices, but to those whose self-concept seems so wounded that it may be bolstered only through the remedy of a flawless physique, and who obtain it through excessive amounts of self-focus. Fasting may not seem too different than dieting because both practices limit the amount or type of food consumed. In reality, it is quite the contrary. Those who diet hunger for more attention, while those who fast hunger for attention to be taken from themselves and given to God through their submission. Though their means are similar, their motivations are contradictory. Dieting is compelled by selfishness, fasting is compelled

by selflessness. Because of motivation, a self-absorbed diet resonates more with gluttony than it does with fasting. America is a land of dieters and workouts and gyms. Fasting diverts such focus from oneself and the body, while gluttony obsesses over them. It is no wonder Christians have lost their disdain for ego-boosting gluttony and have adopted it instead of fasting.

Cultural gluttony and religious gnosticism both deter believers from a healthy view of fasting because they create a dichotomy of body and soul, separating the two entities and privileging one over the other. The gnostic view is that upon death or Christ's return, the believer's soul will be redeemed to Heaven, leaving behind the unnecessary earthly frame of the body. Thus, Heaven is considered only a spiritual realm, and because of this imbalanced view of paradise, Christians today often view their bodies as inconsequential. In assuming that God will destroy this earth when Christ returns, Christians don't value their bodies, or anything else in this tangible world for that matter. This gnosticism, this detachment of the body from the soul, that is so widely assumed by current Christians in America, makes fasting seem like an unnecessary practice for a necessary means. Most Christians agree about culture's need for humility and generosity to one's neighbors, but we certainly do not need to bring our bodies into it. They resist physically restricting themselves when they think the same ends can be met through spiritual fervency. However, this picture of heaven "represents a serious distortion and diminution of the Christian hope" because the foundational Christian belief in a bodily resurrection "gives every other component its reason for working" (Wright 148). In Romans 12:1, human bodies, not just human spirits, are regarded as 'living sacrifices' (Berghuis 96). Further, "the soul sins in and with and by the body and the body sins under the direction of the soul. If the body sins, then it is immediately obvious that the body also needs to be redeemed from sin" (Bainbridge 576). With this hope of the bodily resurrection, Christians need not just exist today in hope of something better tomorrow, but rather should

be empowered to live in hope, causing a transformational impact on the world today. By rejecting gnosticism, Christians may more fully embrace communion between the soul and body during a fast.

*Fasting in Christianity is only truly itself when it realizes the sacredness of the body... [We must] regard the body and human life as holy, good, and capable of wonderful transformation. Fasting is the door to that transformation. (Dugan548)*

Indeed, fasting expresses that our bodies are good. God expressed this too when He made Himself manifest in a body, in Jesus, the Son of Man. Let us embrace this connection we have to our Lord and Savior who did the most beautiful justice possible to mankind at His death and Resurrection. In a beautiful way, as Christians cross the threshold of fasting, a newfound selflessness encourages them to do justice too. Those who fast can experience a deeper understanding of their future resurrection. "People who believe in the resurrection, in God making a whole new world in which everything will be set right at last, are unstoppably motivated to work for that new world in the present" (Wright 214). Not only is fasting purposeful when it aids in the body-soul connection, but it compels people to act justly in this world in anticipation of the next. A strengthened connection between the soul and the body, aided by fasting, creates a more vibrant hope for the future in eternity and infuses the current situation in this world with purpose.

As seen in the vice of gluttony, food consumed to the extreme can be destructive to the physical and spiritual health of Christians, yet with the rejection of gnosticism, this tangible world begins to contain more worth. Food, when used correctly, can in fact be God-honoring. Though gluttony is a serious detriment to individuals and communities, that does not mean that food, in and of itself, is bad. After all, Christ's Body ritually gathers around a table of bread and wine as a symbol of unity amongst believers, a unity made possible only through Christ's sacrifice and victory on the cross. The Eucharist is a modest helping of

a simple meal, clearly a healthy use of food. "It is not for nothing that [the Eucharist] was instituted as a meal and as food. The body and blood of Christ are the food of the hungry and thirsty soul; the sacred species in their materiality are also a corporeal nourishment" (Bainbridge 576, 577). Thus, the Lord's Supper and fasting both engage and nourish the body and soul. Additionally, Christians fellowship together at food-centered events which can create wholesome alternatives for youth, bonding opportunities for families, and a sense of home for visitors (Sack 208, 210, 214). Food can be a central means to build community within the Church body. When coupled with a practice like fasting (which makes one keenly aware of others' hunger), food can be selflessly utilized as a resource to spread Christ's love to the hungry outside the congregation.

*No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. (Isaiah 58:6-7)*

Food in the church can be life-giving, especially so when executed with a humble, fasting mindset.

Even though American culture is an adverse environment in which to practice fasting, God still expects it, for the effects of a heart-felt fast far outweigh the difficulties. First, the intention of a fast must be to glorify God; all other purposes and benefits fall subservient to that (Foster 48). God cares that His children have a proper motivation for fasting, one rooted in seeking Him, as seen in Zechariah 7:5: "When you fasted [...] was it for me that you were fasting?" (Baab 26, Foster 48). Pure intentions organically bring about beautiful benefits. Going into a fast with the wrong intention will misguide the entire process. Fasting is not designed for holy attention, a pious pat on the back, or as a means to divine favor. God does not favor certain people

over others just because they fast, but one may be transformed by God, and begin to love Him more purely through fasting. By choosing to fast, people decidedly replace the ordinary with the uncommon, which produces an acute awareness of themselves and their surroundings. Certainly, fasting is not glamorous. During a fast, a person denies consumption temporarily, experiences some degree of hunger, and lacks instant satisfaction of the desires that arise; however, the fast will create an environment in which a believer may come closer to understanding what it actually means to be hungry and Who wholly satisfies. Contrary to certain misunderstandings, fasting is not holy self-mortification, but partially self-discipline, self-realization, and self-purification. In fact, it allows God to beautify the soul, not man to hurt his body (Baab 15). Though fasting creates uncomfortable hunger, it is not an excuse for self-pity. In fact, during a fast, "inwardly [one] will be in prayer and adoration, song and worship" (Foster 49). Thus, fasting provides an opportunity for celebration, not cursing. Life does not always seem a celebration, however, and fasting is an aid in these times as well. In a state of sorrow, the physical body tends to lack pangs of hunger, and mourners do not eat as much as usual. Just as there is a selflessness in fasting, there is a selflessness in the process of mourning for another. Fasting is a natural way of coping with tragedy (Baab 38); it acts as an intentional embrace of God in a time of complete confusion, when life feels as if the everyday tasks, like eating, insensitively persist. Just as the process of pain changes people, so also can fasting help people grow because it "reveals the things that control us [...] We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface" (Foster 48). Denying instant gratification, a person who fasts can experience growth of strength and patience. Fasting with a sincere heart properly oriented towards God produces humility and strength in spite of pride and pain

Fasting also provides benefits to those beyond the discipline, because it conjures up altruism in individual believers. While gluttony places

a person in a state of apathy towards others' needs, drawing all attention to his or her own stomach, fasting compels a person to become more aware of hunger; this realization allows for true sympathy for truly hungry people. Certainly, there is a difference between fasting and starving; while a fast perpetuates hunger for a specified duration, those without food are unsure when their hunger will cease. Fasting offers a hope that is absent from hunger. Those who fast do not all the sudden comprehend the devastation of aching hunger, but they may have a clearer "glimpse of the human condition that we all share", and have all the more reason to do justice in the world (Dugan 546). Interestingly, Saint Augustine and Gregory the Great speak of fasting as significant only if accompanied by giving to the poor and hungry (Baab 55, 56). According to their opinion, gluttony produces not only lack of self-control and thick waists, but also unsavory injustice. Note that it isn't only the obese who indulge without thought; gluttony is something in which most, if not all humans partake to some degree. Gluttony distracts attention from the impoverished while fasting directly battles apathy to the world's hungry. "In an economic order in which there is not food enough to go around, in which starvation and famine are always lurking about, gluttony's moral stakes ratchet up[...] The more [one eats] the less someone else [does]. And any ingestion beyond what [is] necessary for the maintenance of life [is] an act of injustice" (Miller 97). Therefore, overindulgence causes detriment to the glutton as well as the poor. When a lifestyle becomes a source of injustice, not only do Christians view it as a problematic sin, but all Americans may view it as an offense to the nation.

In a culture of greedy acquisitiveness and purposeless detachment, where people are submitting to their bodies rather than to God, fasting provides a remedy of hope. If believers began, once again, to be inspired by the discipline of fasting, our faith would be a different faith, our love would be a different love, our witness to the world would be a different witness. If our witness is enhanced, justice is in reach. Those changed through fasting would no longer be the gluttons who

once hoarded their food, their possessions, and their time, but the generous souls who share them. When influenced by gnosticism, Christians attempt to reach God using their souls, and not their bodies. However, this is ironic because most people do not even comprehend what the soul is. To most, the soul is an indescribable, yet obviously present part of their beings. Usually, when difficult concepts need to be clarified into approachable terms, analogies are used, and that's just what fasting is -an analogy. Fasting uses our indisputable bodies to describe what our undefinable souls are longing for, and allows us to engage with God in a way we more tangibly understand. Through fasting, where the soul and body equally engage with one another in communion with God, these bodies at this time in this world profoundly matter. Undoubtedly, we need food to exist, but something deeper undoubtedly sustains us. Our bodies and spirits are nourished thanks to Christ, who accepted a bodily death and a spiritual burden of our sins. It is because of Christ that Christians fast, to make a bodily and spiritual sacrifice in remembrance of Him. Fasting denies food because it creates the realization that the One who sustains us is what we truly hunger. When we sacrifice in hope of the Kingdom, we sense its nearness. Every second, every hour, we get closer to its coming, and yet it breaks into every present moment. We know not to panic, not to give up, because this world is worth abundant hope. Nothing shatters the pains in this world like a faith in God's hope, a faith manifested in our sacrifices, sacrifices like fasting. If full cleansing will come in Heaven, if love will be complete at Jesus' return, and if absolute justice will prevail at God's open gates, then why not mirror these truths today? Instead of waiting, we must embrace Heaven's cleansing, mimic its love, and anticipate its justice today through faithful fasting. Christians may not be complete and whole until the Resurrection, but through hopeful fasting, we may draw nearer to our true sustenance while we wait.

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# portrait of a lady

by *Megg Rapp*

hair, almost black with wet,  
wrung tight, dripping  
over white porcelain

beads of water slip  
down ridges of  
bright bent back

towel falls  
away from hips,  
onto the floor.

# Waiting for the Autumnal Equinox

by *Bailey Buckner*

The air smells like rain tonight;  
the heaviness of the evening  
makes it hard to breath,  
and the sweat stains our sleeves.  
A hellish sort of tease,  
the trees drenched in the drowning  
heat waiting for the respite of rain.  
As are we, even though we know  
that the heat will rise once again  
out of this muddy ground,  
heat so thick you can see it seeping,  
you can even hear it's sound –  
a wet retreat, sighing leaves,  
a suffocating resound:  
the sickening sound of summer.

# Turnkey

by *Brendan Hawkins*

I use the key smoothly, and walk into the apartment as always. I haunted the doorstep a tad longer than anticipated, but some thought paused my legs for a moment. What? Huh? I turned on the lights and waved away the thought with the groceries in hand. I walked down the hall to the kitchen to hide everything in its proper cubby. A new fall chill hung in the air and cooled the room; more lights were needed. With the pulsing electricity and the friction grinding in my skull, heat was now plentiful.

I suspected that the cogs were milling too much.

Not even sure what the problem was that had my focus forming, clutching to itself, I stole a bottle from my roommate. I tipped Lethe up and diluted it all. Maybe, I thought, I could get some of this out. Something had to give way and leak out of a crack somewhere. The beer only tempted the thoughts to whirl faster and added to the pressure storing underneath the skin. Thoughts fermented and bloated.

Rob, roommate, older brother, found me half asleep on the sofa with two more fires of forgetfulness burning under my half-lidded eyes. He tried for a smooth tiptoe to his room but stepped in the middle of the last floorboard in front of his bedroom. It always gave away someone going in or out of his room.

Damn floorboard, I either heard or echoed in my own mind. I got up and washed my face to wake up again. The city had just opened its eyelids that wink late-nighters into stores of this or that. Pubs relaxed their eyes, lulling customers into mellow games of billiards, while other shops winked with an elusive feminine eye. Grocery stores had finished their business by this time.

Thank goodness I bought bread before I fell asleep.

"Hey, Rob, I'm going out for a walk. Okay?"

"Yeah, sure."

Creak. Creak. Creak. Creak. Flat: curve around. Second Floor. Creak. Creak. Creak. Creak. Flat: curve around.

As I see it, only the esoteric are out now. Everyone shuffles with their collars flapping up on their necks in the cooling late October breeze. Long, square city streets tunnel the wind into the necks of everyone walking up 51st Street. I turned down 42nd Street. Still fewer people braved the evolving cold of autumn. Voices spoke through my open mouth, but I barely regarded the words that escaped. I painted a watercolor war with emotions in my head. Red is anger, orange is baffling honesty, yellow is sunshine, green is peace-at-mind, blue is sadness, indigo is lighthearted, and violet is sensual. Whoever this Roy G. guy is, he's all screwed up in the head. Sometimes thoughts don't get words: some aren't good enough for words and some are too good for anything words I have stashed away—even for emergency words. Red sometimes skipped to indigo and 37th Street, or sometimes indigo backtracked to orange and Washington Street. Finally, orange melded with violet and winked back at me from blue-green eyes.

Give me something with teeth. I need a bite, a sting, a scratch to wake me. What I want, though, is conviction.

"I'll give you anything you have money enough to pay." She knew. She must have known all along. I'll wager anything that she saw me walking down the street with my mind teetering off of my lips every so often.

I wondered if she was sparked here by some fatalistic turn of phrase, some ill-humored god of sorts who granted her wish for a man. Now, he must surely be laughing, she had plenty of men. She was good. She was physical enough so I could forget. Something gripped us both: for her it was the chore of going to work, for

me I was tossed about by the flicker behind her eyes. Between mine and her thoughts there glowed a fire stoked for business, a flaming veil to entice some and to wall out others; but between the red twists that garnered yellows and oranges at times was a fraction of why she was here.

I saw a little girl.

Instantly thoughts of dear Rachel flared up within those black moments. How much she looked like her mother; how far her mother walked with her to the bus stop. She greeted me. I said hello. But her mother was busy now. Child, leave mom alone.

“Turnkey”

What uncorks the thoughts?  
Where do they go,  
All up in the mind?  
Surely they go and go and go  
Grinding out images and worries alike.  
Milling out ideas and fears  
Grips the outer edges of mind  
Something pulls them inward  
Into the current way and wash.  
Certainly it must.  
Grind out corn mush for me—  
Mush of my outer thoughts.  
Feed me again what I have forgotten  
And let me taste them anew  
For they have, by now, fermented  
Along a rich, distant vine.  
Pull these dregs to me  
And drown out the eyes.  
Fill my sight with the past.  
Memories can now float  
In tune with the present,  
Only too drunk to know  
Do I see the cause of it all.

# Good China

by *Brendan Hawkins*

It's printed on my face

In smoky blue that spreads

Out like a deep, foggy mountain

And etches my eyes like the

Crisp, cool stream that beautifies

And erodes the same hillside.

The answers are printed on my face

With a circular cursive hand that

Beautifies and erodes my porcelain body.

The answers are there, but try to see more

I sit here with a crevasse tattooing my body

But they don't see me

Because they fashioned an iron holder

And placed me high out of their minds

Free to fracture more or to heal as I may.

But even then they come and see me gleaming and flawless

Whenever they want to read the letter-burns melted onto my face.



# A Strange Alliance

by *Tim Laurio*

The creation of the sexes  
seems such a dumb idea  
when you think about it.

Let's not make one species,  
let's make two! except  
not two, but one cut up into

two halves! a whole species  
hobbled together running  
a three-legged race, because

half can't run alone, nor can it  
live or make life alone, nor  
love or make love. We're stuck.

Yes, it was a hare-brained scheme.  
In making two-headed monsters  
one always faces risks. And yet

the arrangement in practice

is oddly poetic. In fact,  
my dear strange one, I find  
that despite or because of  
our awkward predicament  
I love you, and now admit

that this enormous prank—  
one species made of two—  
was pulled to prove the point

that when one is one you have  
one shapeless thing, when two  
are two you have two lonely things

but when two are one you have  
a living thing, and then with life  
and only then comes love.

# a song about rain

by *Rebekah Honaker*

Water droplets awaken, kindle, provoke  
all the noisy potential of a tin roof.

Robins wait. Sorely plump-  
confidently expecting their rich, intricate portion.

Marigolds, melons, oranges and reflective copper-  
saturated, callously sanded down, smoothed out around the edges...

Remnants consumed and filtered through a common gutter,  
emerging below as a humdrum, familiar soreness.

Earth-stained, vulnerable, bony heels and toes splash and scatter moisture,  
numb and naïve to the cold sting coupled with raw exposure.

# Goochland, VA

by *Rebekah Honaker*

Here's my exit.

My sleeping right foot lifts, tingles, and nods in agreement  
on the axis of a tensed ankle joint.  
Knuckles release tension allowing natural color to return,  
Eager, willing, impatient to cut ties  
with the inevitable aggression of hurried humans  
traveling at high speeds in straight lines...

Muscle memory claims jurisdiction  
Making eye contact with familiar dark and unruly pavement  
calling out and daring me to coast eyes-closed.  
A worn-down pick-up truck sleepily grins  
embracing and dissolving into roads it was born to travel.

I can still put my finger on the timeless stillness here,  
in even the newer structures.  
Pure, pristine windows clothe a library on its first birthday  
revealing the wrinkles of card holders who like moths on their back porches-  
are drawn to the light of high speed internet.

The inaugural summer after of an eternity of carwashes and bake-sales  
a swimming pool less appealing than the sticky plastic chairs that surround it-  
not at all a broken effort.  
Blotchy pink neighbors gather on common ground  
basking in conversation that is exclusive to poolside lounging  
and grocery store aisles.

Not much to gain by rushing or forcing, and  
no harm in lingering, growing old  
in a place like this.

# Domestic Affairs

by *Bailey Buckner*

September began elegantly,  
the turbulence of August having melted away sometime during the night.  
The heavily dewed blades of grass waited  
silently in the cool of the morning,  
profound in their knowing of what had come to pass.  
And the cloudless blue seemed to rest,  
recently released from the mountains and the trees,  
a slight breeze the only remainder of summer's weighty oppression.

# Two Weeks

By Corri Richardson

Before I eat a peppermint patty, I have to break it. I have to hold it close to my ear and break it in half. The sound it makes as it splits down the middle is my favorite sound in the world. I don't really know how to describe it. I'll just say you have to hear it to believe it.

I pull it out of its shiny silver foil. I lift it to my ear and Seth, who's sitting beside me on the curb, shakes his head a little. He doesn't understand my ritual, but I go on with it anyway.

We're sitting in front of the drugstore just outside of our neighborhood. This has become another ritual since summer ended: go to school, carpool home, then ride our bikes the mile back out to the CVS to buy and share a bag of candy. On his days, Seth picks Skittles. But today is my day, and, as always, I went straight for the York's.

Seth takes a bite of his mint. What a waste. He could've at least let me break it first.

He hasn't said anything since we left school. From what I saw, he had a good day. He smiled and he even cracked a joke in class, just like the old Seth. But I guess the act has worn off for today.

He's been like this since the beginning of summer. After years of borderline misery, his parents finally called it quits in May. I'm thoroughly convinced that he is better off living with just his dad, but he's still not buying it. He hates, hates, hates the fact that his parents are divorced. It's turned him into a zombie.

"I just don't understand," he said the night after his mom left. The two of us stayed up all night on my porch. "I thought that things were looking good. Better, anyway. But it just fell apart and I don't know why. I hate this." He kept talking in that circle, a broken record.

And all I had to say to him was "So do I."

I hated it, too, more than anything. I felt guilty thinking about my own complete family, my mom and dad asleep inside in the same bed. I felt helpless; nothing I said was enough.

But what I hated more than anything was that I didn't understand his pain.

He hadn't responded to any of the few words I offered that night with more than a blank stare into the blackness. He didn't understand why this had happened; I didn't understand how it had come as such a shock. To me, it all made perfect sense. The divorce had only made legal what had been true for years: his parents' marriage had failed. Seth just couldn't see that it had failed long before the papers were signed.

I look over at him. Seth Hopkins, my best friend for the past ten years. Seeing him like this, remembering all of the junk he went through this summer, it's hard to imagine the boy I grew up with. I've never seen someone so shaken.

Summer was a nightmare. After the all-nighter we pulled on Divorce Day, I spent a solid month trying to pull Seth out of the dark hole he'd fallen into. Some days he refused to leave his room – that's kind of how the candy thing got started. I worked morning shifts at a coffee shop downtown, and when I got off at lunch time I would call him to see how he was doing that day. After two straight weeks of asking to be left alone – meaning two straight weeks of me spending afternoons on my couch with Mom's stack of Martha Stewart magazines and Gilmore Girls reruns – he finally said that he would like it if I came over. I sped through town, only stopping at the CVS to buy the biggest bag of Skittles they had.

When I finally got to Seth's house he didn't say anything, but he held on to me like I was

the only thing keeping him from sinking into the floor. We sat and ate Skittles and decided to do the same thing the next day.

The next day was a little better. And so was the one after that.

His "good days" – and by that I mean days during which he didn't demand complete solitude – became more frequent after that. I always brought candy, always Skittles until Seth caught on and insisted that I start choosing my favorite candy sometimes. We sat and ate.

After two more weeks we moved to eat our candy on the front porch. As the summer dragged on, he talked more. Nothing substantial, really; he didn't talk about his mom after Divorce Day, but on especially good days he would talk about his dad and how things were going at home now with just the two of them. Seth's smile, something that I had taken for granted since the day he moved in next door when we were seven, became a rare treat, something that I savored whenever it came around.

It was a long and painful process for both of us, but by the time August finally came, I thought that maybe Seth was on his way back to normal. He was smiling and laughing. He was coming over for dinner with me and my parents again. He was talking more, and he was actually starting to sound excited about school and our senior year. I was excited that I was going to have my best friend back.

I look at him now. He isn't eating any more candy. His arms are folded over his knees, his chin rested on them as he stares at his shoes. I can't think of anything to say, as usual. A little bit of old fury arises in me as I remember what knocked him back down.

Two weeks ago, during the last week of summer vacation, Seth came into the coffee shop right at noon. My replacement had just walked in, too, and I was getting ready to clock out, so it was a bonus to see him standing there. I was so excited to see him out of his house that it took an extra moment for me to notice the look on his face and the envelope in his hand.

My smile disappeared. "What's wrong?" "Go clock out."

I did. I rushed into the back to hang up my

apron. I almost knocked my boss out with the door on my way back out. When I made it back to Seth he turned and walked right back outside, and I followed.

As soon as we stepped outside, my eyes immediately noticed that his car wasn't there. Neither was his bike.

"Seth, did you walk all the way here?" I asked.

His expression was still as he leaned against the passenger side of my car. "Yeah, I did."

"Why?"

"I needed to think."

"What's in the envelope, Seth?"

He let out an audible sigh before turning around and opening the car door. He sat in the passenger seat and closed the door back, which I read as my cue to get in on my side. I wasn't sure if he wanted to drive around or go back home or what until he reopened the envelope and pulled out a folded piece of plain white paper.

"I got a letter," he said, "from Mom."

Bad. Really, really bad. Seth's mom is horrible. I had thought so for a long time, but I had never said anything, and I had repeatedly promised to myself that I never would. I was secretly thrilled when she disappeared after Divorce Day, and I just knew that, eventually, the separation would do nothing but good for Seth and Mr. Hopkins. I never imagined that she would contact him after she left. Now she had a way out, an excuse to be completely absent from his life, just like I'd suspected she'd always wanted.

Seth kept flipping the letter over in his hands, feeling the edges with his fingers. I had no idea what that paper said, and I wasn't really sure that I wanted to know, but I had to find out.

Then again, maybe he didn't want me to know. Maybe he didn't want to talk about it. Maybe he just wanted to be with someone – I was at least glad that he had stopped trying to deal with everything on his own. But just to make sure, I had to ask.

"What does it say?"

He flipped it over one more time and said "Nothing."

"Huh?"

He was frozen. "Yeah. No apologies, no explanations, no well-wishes, no 'I love you,' – she basically said goodbye. And that I won't be hearing from her again."

He hasn't said much about it since then. The last two weeks of summer went on as planned. He didn't lock himself away in his room anymore, but the time we spent together was difficult. He doesn't mean to let on that something's wrong but he gives himself away with every word and action. Everyone at school has noticed that he just isn't the same guy. He doesn't ever bring it up and I don't know how. I'm out of ideas.

I stand up, thinking that sitting in silence will be just as easy to do at my house.

"Let's go home, Seth."

He stays where he is. "You go on, Cara."

"I'm not leaving you here –,"

"Go, Cara," he says. "I'll be fine. I'll be at dinner like I promised. Just go ahead."

I don't want to, but I know that nothing will change if I do stay. I grab the bag of remaining mints and shove them into my backpack before walking over to my bike.

Before I sit, I look back at him. He looks up.

"I'm not going to be that easy to get rid of, Seth. You can push me away all you want but it's not going to work."

Something in him says an inaudible thank you.

I cry all the way home, wiping tears from my cheek whenever I can spare a hand. The mix of anger and frustration and helplessness is too much. But I meant every word I said. As difficult as it is and is going to keep getting, I'm not about to quit on him. I wouldn't expect anything less from him.

But there's nothing I can do right now, and sitting home crying isn't going to do anyone any good. The only thing that's going to take my mind off of everything, at least for a little while, is homework. I park my bike and pull my car keys out of my bag.

I dig through a backseat full of straw wrappers and extra clothes until I find my math book. I pick it up and underneath it there's a piece of paper.

A folded piece of plain white paper.

That letter's still in my car.

I know that it won't change anything. I know that it won't make any difference to Seth. I know that nothing I do will ever get those words out of Seth's mind, but it doesn't matter to me right now. Something breaks loose inside of me and I snatch up the letter and run inside to Dad's office.

I don't open it. I don't read it. I don't say anything for Seth or his mother or his dad or myself. I just flip the switch and shove the letter into the shredder.

## a handful of berries

by *Megg Rapp*

there is something friendlier, more homely in  
uncultivated wood, plucking a pleasure, a happy  
surprise on an unknown bush or nibble of soft oak  
acorn to bring a smile. and to call all by their right  
names, well! so many words, yet enough for all the  
berries? nature's roots grow faster than the tongues  
of men and we are more like the delicate wings  
of grasshoppers than the sturdy trunks of trees.  
humble carpet beneath our feet, soft and  
unnoticed, blooming in secret virgin silence,  
a pilgrimage to worship in the high green cathedral.

## road map

by *Megg Rapp*

lines black blue red softened to grey with unfolding and  
shuffling and refolding stained with grey dirt of grey  
earth. wormy lines of once-were place and name and  
people imprinted onto the backs of shiny brook trout  
swimming in once-were rivers cascading down through  
once-were hills. a holy red heart painted with dark  
hieroglyphic words mysterious in the black forests and  
dangerous on the open road. a name is a name is a name  
when it is not a name but riddle of memory plunged into  
a bitter soak of survival-wrinkled pages holding together  
the four unraveling corners of a universe already gone.

# Before children

*by Lauren MacGrath*

I moved swiftly  
down roads of my own  
toward the coast though  
never actually  
making  
it there.

My hair reflected hues of youth  
and my hands had yet to develop  
the broken fissures and thick cracks  
filled with motor oil and  
pale shades of wall paint.

I lived then for myself.

Driving, I was not then aware  
that the road passing quickly beneath  
the tires of that van  
was unfolding as quickly as my life's journey would develop.

That soon enough, I would be driving children  
to piano, hockey, and ballet  
instead of driving friends cross country.  
I left that open road behind me.

Images of children  
darted through my concentrating-on-road eyes;  
glimmers of future children,  
hamsters, fish, and cats.  
Along with them, swept days filled with fixing bicycles,  
making boxcars with  
toothpaste-polished wheels,  
and removing splinters from  
pudgy pink finger tips and toes.

I live now for them.

And the cracks in my hands have  
begun to soften again, anyway.