

**Merry Ann DeVaney Sauls**

**Academic Writing Contest**

**2014**



**Recognizing the best of academic writing at Cottey College  
in Creative Writing, Composition, Fine Arts, Humanities,  
Science and Math, and Social Science**

**The Merry Ann DeVaney Sauls Academic Writing Contest  
2013-14**

**Table of Contents**

Composition

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Sydney Santana, “A Smile Made of Many Pieces” – page 2
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Hailey Johnson, “Wanderlust” -- page 6

Creative Writing

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Caitlin Ball, “In the Pond, Not the River” – page 13
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Jessica Starkey, “Ashen Tree” – page 19

Fine Arts

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Taneisha Brown, “Where is the Dance?” – page 26

Foreign Language

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Ana Maria Lopez, “Poemario- Textos inéditos” – page 28
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Meghan Ford, “La Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos” – page 32

Humanities

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Caitlin Ball, “Wild Nights—Wild Nights: Emily Dickinson’s Poetic Gender Commentary” – page 33
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Beverly Matina De Marco, “The Second-hand Flute” – page 41

Social Science

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Christina Chamberlin, “Gender-Typed Toys in McDonald’s Kid’s Meals-- page 45
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Meghan Ford, “For the Public Good: Gender Portrayal in the *Felicity* Series”— page 53

## **COMPOSITION:**

### **1<sup>ST</sup> Place: Sydney Santana, “A Smile Made of Many Pieces”**

#### A Smile Made of Many Pieces

Each morning I wake to find myself before a mirror as I go through my daily routine. Within my reflection, I see a young woman with hazel eyes, brown wavy hair, and skin of tan complexion. While it would be easy to say that this is who I am, I would be telling a lie, for I am far more than what I look like. The person that I really am consists of where I come from, and is found within my experiences, the bonds that I share with others, and all that I am passionate about.

I am of Hispanic ethnicity and was born and raised in the central valley of Northern California, in a small town called Woodland. Driving from one side of town to the other only takes an average amount of fifteen minutes, but the town continues to expand by the year. Woodland is surrounded by agricultural land, which allowed me to grow up with views of cows and sheep upon farms, sunflowers and almond trees in bloom, and being able to purchase fresh and inexpensive fruit from a fruit stand on the side of the country roads. Despite its small size, Woodland holds much history, as its inhabitants seem to consist of families that have been around for many years. Because of this, everyone knows one another by name and eventually finds that they share mutual acquaintances. A majority of the time the youth of Woodland grow up together through school, community sports, and local organizations. While Woodland is perceived to be a place that does not have much to offer due to its size, the care and support that is shared among residents offers a sense of belonging.

My childhood came with some challenges, as my father walked out of my life when I was five years old. Growing up without a father being present on a daily basis took a toll on how I

acted towards those around me. I was afraid to trust others because I always carried the fear that they would get up and walk out of my life despite all of the love I showed them. I struggled to accept the fact that the “perfect” family picture I had always longed for would never be hung upon a hallway wall for my family. As I grew older, I learned to embrace the imperfections that lay within my family, because even though my father was not around, I still had a mother who never ceased to show me unconditional love and affection. My mother raised me to believe in the Catholic faith, instilled morals within me, and taught me the value of respect, kindness, and responsibility. She worked tirelessly as a woman of banking and real estate to provide for her children. Seeing all of the effort that she has put into raising my siblings and me has shown me that anything is possible with hard work and dedication. In the years to come, I can only wish to gain the qualities that my mother possesses, and show her that without her, I would not be who I am nor would I hold the hope for the person that I want to become.

Being the youngest of three children, I was given the chance to watch my siblings experience new aspects of life before me. I saw my brother drop out of high school, and constantly change his mind about what he wanted to do with his life. My sister graduated from high school but never showed any interest in attending a post secondary institution. While they had trouble deciding upon which paths to take for their life, they constantly told me that they did not want me to give up as easily as they did. They made it clear to me that they wanted me to make my dreams a reality. They encouraged me to never give up, and because of them, I pushed myself to my fullest potential academically so that one day I could receive a college admissions letter. In the fall of 2013, I became the first of my mother’s children to attend college.

As a young girl, while I was away from school and home, I spent my time at my grandparents’ house. It was my safe haven. It was where I could push my imagination to its

limits, as I would try to envision the stories that my grandparents would share with me about their lives in Mexico. Their home was where I could smuggle tangerines, pomegranates, and cucumbers from my grandmother's garden, make the biggest mess with toys and break the rosebushes with sports balls, yet never get in trouble. But most importantly, their home was where I discovered my passion for science, as I would spend hours under the sun, catching bugs and planting seeds. My grandparents allowed me to use their home as my own personal playground and because of this, they helped ignite the spark that fuels my passion.

Throughout my middle school and high school careers, I volunteered within my community as a teacher's aid and as a youth basketball and soccer coach. Along with volunteering, I spent most of my weekends surrounded by young children as a babysitter. I put my heart into all of my actions, expecting nothing in return. Being a teacher's aid at the middle school that I had attended was something that I thoroughly enjoyed. It was my way of giving back to my former teachers for all that they had taught me. I was given the chance to interact with students who were younger than me, decorated classrooms, graded assignments, and occasionally fought with an uncooperative copy machine. Eventually, my volunteer work at the middle school led to my encounters with the children that I coached and babysat. While I was the one in the position to teach and watch these children, they were the ones who taught me something valuable. They taught me to appreciate the beauty that is found within the "little" things in life. Seeing the way their eyes lit up when they finally mastered a certain skill, feeling their arms wrap around me for a hug, and simply hearing stories filled with imaginary friends, filled my heart with happiness. Each of my experiences led me to realize that while I had bargained for nothing, I had gained new bonds that were worth more than any jewel. Before my eyes, I had discovered that new friends and former teachers had begun to place trust in me, along

with believing in the power of my dreams. They open heartedly let me into their lives and showed me more love than my own biological father ever has. Their presence in my life has truly been one of the biggest blessings that I have ever received as they helped fill the emptiness that was created by my father's absence.

While I sit here today as a student of Cottey College in Nevada, Missouri, I cannot help but reflect upon the journey that has led me to where I am. I think about the tears that came with every challenge, the second-guesses that came with every decision made, the happiness, and the love that I have thrived on throughout my life. I cannot help but smile, knowing that all that I am, I owe to all that I have experienced and every beautiful soul that I have encountered.

## COMPOSITION:

2<sup>ND</sup> Place: Hailey Johnson, "Wanderlust"

### WANDERLUST

I have wanderlust. Every day, I constantly dream about traveling to new and exciting places in the world. I envision myself zip lining through the lush forests of Costa Rica, climbing to the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, riding a train through the Switzerland countryside, learning to dance the tango in Argentina, and soaking in the Tuscan sun while picking fresh grapes from the country's famous vineyards. These visions of travel occur because of my longing for adventure and spontaneity, as well as my desire to taste the many flavors of the world and bask in its diversity of culture, landscape, language, and ways of life. One destination that I've always wanted to travel to is India. India is a place of vibrant colors and culture, a variety of landscapes including mountains, deserts, coasts, plains, and plateaus, and is filled with outstanding wonders such as the Taj Mahal, the Brihadeeswarar temple, the Red Fort and so much more. However, travel to India, as well as many other places around the world, does not come without risks and precautions.

For example, if I were to travel to India, I should not forget about the common world problems of rape and sex trafficking. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, "a woman is raped every 20 minutes" in India (Bhowmick 1). According to the U.S. State department, "Rape is one of the fastest growing crimes in India" and "among large cities, Delhi experienced the highest number of crimes against women" ("India Tourism Down" 3). In December of 2012, a female tourist was gang raped while traveling on a bus, severely beaten, and eventually died of severe internal and external injuries (Bhowmick 1). Knowing the prominent cities that these problems occur would help tourists such as me to try to either steer clear of these cities or be extra aware of the mood and environment if I were to travel to these

cities. Additionally, even if I were not traveling to a big city, my awareness should constantly be active no matter where I travel whether this destination is to grand exotic place like India or to cottage town like Key West.

The process of traveling also deserves precautions. I learned this truth while traveling back to Texas from Cottee with my sister, Abbey, as well as our friends, Haley, Caroline, and Emily. While on this trip, we decided to stop at a gas station off the side of the highway in order to fuel up. This gas station wasn't as busy as other gas stations with only one or two other customers and four eighteen wheelers parked along the right side of the parking lot. While fueling up, we all got out of the car to stretch our legs for a moment which was when we noticed about six men who were looking our direction and getting out of their trucks starting to approach us. My friends and I immediately trusted our intuition of possible danger and we all quickly decided to get in the car and leave before the men made it any further toward us. As we drove off, I knew that my feminine intuition could be my traveler's safety net and help me to notice red flags in the environment even when I'm standing in front of the Taj Majal with its perfect symmetry, intricate design, and marble exterior.

Furthermore, travelers such as me should use their common sense and competence when making travel arrangements. First, travelers should ensure that their destination is not filled with "war, internal strife, or major disasters" because these factors all enhance the potential dangers such as bombs, shootings, and assault that can be imposed on a traveler (Leggat 46). When choosing a hotel room, the ground floor should be avoided because "most room thefts occur on the first floors of a hotel" especially if first floor rooms have a patio or "sliding doors" that would make the job easier for a burglar to break in (Brights 1). Instead, travelers should opt for

rooms located by the elevator between the third and seventh floors and no higher because “standard fire engine ladders can’t extend above the seventh floor” (Brights 1).

Travelers, women especially, should also opt to roam the city or village during the daytime where there are many more witnesses present, meaning more help if danger such as kidnapping were to occur. If one does feel the need to take a stroll under the moonlight, he or she should avoid using public transportation during this time and traveling in “less populous and unlit areas” where danger could be lurking around the dark corner and help is already tucked into bed (“India Tourism Down” 3). Clothing customs, culture, and respect to culture are other important elements that must be taken into account before traveling to a specific destination (“Adventure Travel” 2). For example, in countries such as Afghanistan, women are supposed to dress very conservatively only being allowed by society to show their eyes. My friend, [REDACTED] described this modesty to me expressed her extreme surprise when she came from [REDACTED] to America and saw women baring their bodies and showing their faces to the world with no restrictions. Now, [REDACTED] has conformed to the American standards and no longer hides her face and body behind clothing. If the table was turned and I decided to travel to [REDACTED], I would want to make sure that I dress very conservatively in order to fit in with this type of society so that I can cast attention away from me and avoid possible violence inflicted on me if I showed too much skin.

Along with these measures, travelers should also be aware of certain elements such as altitude and pollution in order to be prepared to counteract these conditions. Usually, in places like Peru, Coca is known to help the body adjust to the high altitudes and should be taken in order to avoid altitude sickness according to the popular TV show, Top Gear. Any painkillers taken should be checked before traveling to other countries because certain painkillers legal in

the United State may be illegal overseas. If travelers need a certain painkiller, he or she “should be advised to carry a doctor’s letter or prescription for their medication and keep a copy of this letter on the patient’s file” (Leggat 49). Also, if while on vacation either in one’s home country or another country, someone hands a traveler a package or gift to deliver, the travelers should decline to deliver this package “without seeing its contents” as illegal drugs or even a bomb could be within this package just waiting to explode (Leggat).

If women prefer to travel alone, they should take extra precaution with these all of these safety measures. Many such solo travelers do roam the world and find solo traveling to be very liberating. According to Daisann McLane, author of “Going it alone,” says “When I travel by myself, I feel more powerful than I do at just about any other time in my life. I alone decide what I will do and where I will go – and when (McLane 2). Heather Gibson, professor in UF’s recreation, parks and tourism, “interviewed fifty women between the ages of 20 and 63 from the United States and the United Kingdom” and found that these women considered “solo leisure travel to be empowering rather than frightening” (“Going it Alone” 16). If one wants to travel to another country, but is unsure of traveling alone, there are female only trips that gather groups of women interested in venturing out and tasting the many spices, flavors, and textures of the world (Power 1).

While traveling poses risks, the benefits of traveling such as gaining new cultural perspectives, meeting and connecting with people and places around the world, and basically having a kick-ass adventure should not be forgotten or clouded with worry about a country’s faults because every country has some type of strife they are dealing with. Travel blogger Candace, age 27, expresses her concern and heartbreak over the gang rape in India, but does not

let this concern turn into fear of the country. She says that she is “aware of the intense warmth and beauty of the country, and it breaks [her] heart to see it stereotyped and generalized in such a way...women – be smart, be sensible, be safe, but please do not stop going to India” (“India Tourism Down” 3). About six years ago, I sailed the Gulf of Mexico with my family on cruise to Cozumel and Costa Maya. This cruise was one of the best experiences of my life because I was able to become one among the rich Mexican culture, fiesta along the beach, and gain life-long souvenirs from the country, while also making friends on the cruise ship. After learning about the 2013 Carnival Triumph cruise that was powerless and stranded in the ocean along with its passengers for several days until help could come, I was worried. I thought about maybe not wanting to go on another cruise because of this incident, but then looked at the situation from another view and realized that I’m not going to let one incident and one risk ruin my love for cruise ship travel because the benefits of this type of travel for me are too substantial to be ignored.

If one is still having difficulty getting passed a certain incident occurring in the country he or she wishes to travel to, they could take into account the positive aspect and changes that are being made to improve the country. After the December gang rape in India, “Women’s activist Eve Ensler” began the One Billion Rising campaign “rais[ing] awareness” and “calling for an end to violence against women globally” promoting “hundreds of thousands of Indians” protesting against the patriarchy and “crimes against women in India” (Philipose 1). Along with this campaign, the *Vagina Monologues* and “I Am an Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls Around the World,” have given a voice to women whose struggles have been downplayed and ignored by the government and whose dreams and identity have been crushed by a society who puts men on a pedestal. Helplines such as 181, 100, and 1091 have been installed in India

which have tremendously increased the number of “calls relating to domestic violence per fortnight” (Philipose). However, officials such as Anju Talukdar claim that only one help line such as 911 would be far more beneficial due to its widespread popularity and commonality among the public (Philipose 2).

In conclusion, traveling comes with the benefits of adventure, new culture and ways of life, and lasting memories and connections. I do have fears of traveling, especially solo, because of risks such as possibly being kidnapped, robbed, or taken to brothels, but then I remind myself that these problems occur in the country I live in right now and are not designated to one sole country. I refuse to let the patriarchy define my life and weaken my confidence in myself to explore new horizons. I want to be safe while traveling which is why I must set out with the necessary skills of common sense, awareness, intuition, and precaution in order to keep sipping Piña Coladas on the Jamaican beach.

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## **CREATIVE WRITING:**

### **1<sup>ST</sup> Place Winner: Caitlin Ball, “In the Pond, Not the River”**

#### **In the Pond, Not the River**

Kerry stands at the edge of the pond, flicking her cigarette ash onto the pebbles, staring ahead at the scene unfolding. Her visage displays her thoughts on the matter, confusion, frustration, distaste, and perhaps a bit of indignation. It is cold. An overnight cold snap that has left its touch for too long permeates Kerry’s skin all the way to her bones. Her cigarette burns through; like it was an accessory to her outfit and not a sense of the warmth the nicotine would bring her smoldering lungs. Kerry watches the pond, and the pond watches back.

In the middle of the pond lay the two bodies of her childhood friends, fit together like shoes in a shoebox. The sun glistens on their wide eyed supine bodies, catching the ice crystals that have formed in their eyelashes and eyebrows, their frozen limbs half floating and half submerged in the iced over pond water. Their hair which was once splayed out in ethereal wisps, is now frozen in place by the bitter temperatures’ claim on the water. The two women are frozen in place, their deaths being trapped within the pond that typically houses fish, salamanders, frogs, and the occasional heron. Kerry contemplates the cycle of life as she smokes her cigarette and stares at the unmoving bodies in her pond. Autumn had not yet left the water and surrounding woods, though the bite in the air warned the inhabitants that the leaves which still clung to the winding branches did so in futility.

Kerry audibly sighs, and makes her way back to her house, winding through the leaf paved path and bramble bushes that blocked the outside world from getting in. Kerry is not a recluse in the traditional sense of the word, but she would never be thought of as particularly

welcoming to the occupants of the community that so wish to connect with her. Kerry enters her house, with its strange modern architecture, sharp lines and angles, removes her mobile phone from her long sleek jacket and calls Lucas. The phone rings a few times and Lucas answers, voice mottled by the effects of sleep.

“Kerry.” Lucas deadpans, for him this can be considered a greeting. Kerry hums under her breath.

“Lucas. You should come around. Rebecca and Hannah are in *my* pond, frozen and dead.” Kerry relays this information with a monotonic inflection, not flinching at the macabre situation. Kerry hears Lucas shift in his bed, the subtle sounds of his waking habits being dispatched through the speaker.

“Quite. I’ll be there in a half an hour.” Lucas states this blandly, no shock to be heard in his voice. Kerry hangs up the phone without a concluding remark and walks to her kitchen.

As a child, Kerry had always been interested in the macabre, often to the dismay of her family and teachers when her creativity and interests intertwined. Kerry was not a solitary child; she had friends and a social life. Her cool outward demeanor attracted friends in search of unraveling the mystery of Kerry, rather than make them take distance from her. Kerry had two close friends, who were also interested in the chilling and grisly aspects of life. Rebecca and Hannah with their ordinary names, and their ordinary lives, were perfect friends for the young Kerry, who lamented her “odd name” and reveled in her odd life. Kerry’s mother would always correct the misspelling of her name to others with the grand pronouncement of “Like the people of Ireland!” shouted with her flat Midwestern accent. Kerry’s mother was often eccentric, but those were different times, different days.

Kerry traipses to her immaculate kitchen to prepare a cup of tea, standing thoughtfully in front of the sink as she fills the kettle, as if an artist posed her slender body. Her tea making methods are clinical, economical in their movements, and Kerry stands waiting for the water to boil, rather than venture off to a separate part of the house to complete other tasks. The water boils, and Kerry leans against the counter as she crosses her arms and stares at the cup of tea as it steeps. Kerry watches the cup of tea, not considering the physical object itself, but allowing herself to gaze upon an object as her mind masticates on the scene she had just witnessed. Kerry is broken out of her reverie by the chime of her doorbell, short and pointed, not one of those long messy affairs that chime for ages. Kerry smirks for just a moment and strides towards the front door with purpose, her bare feet making minimal noise. Kerry opens the door and looks at Lucas, nods once and turns to walk back into the house, leaving Lucas to shut the door.

They walk quietly, Lucas following Kerry, and they meet in the kitchen. Kerry resumes her tea making, disposing of the tea bag in the compost bin, adding milk and sugar to her cup, and stirring it all a few times more than necessary. Lucas perches on the counter, watching Kerry perform her ritual and studies her tightly pinched eyes. She suddenly looks up at Lucas with such intensity it makes him break out into a lopsided goofy smile, one which showcases his perfect white teeth. Kerry is not frowning at Lucas, but her face which is devoid of any emotion (except deep scrutiny) is in stark contrast to Lucas' jovial countenance. Kerry may come off as intimidating, with her piercing eyes and stern expressions, but Lucas knows how to make her laugh. Lucas has a key to Kerry's house, and likewise Kerry has one for Lucas' flat, but every time he visits Kerry, he insists on ringing the doorbell as if he is some common acquaintance. The amusement this gives Kerry is strange, but Lucas will continue this ruse as long as Kerry finds it entertaining.

Kerry sips her tea while she leans on the counter alongside Lucas. The kitchen is quiet, still, vibrating with tension of an undistinguishable variety. Kerry acknowledges the change, but does not rush her leisurely contemplation as she sips her tea. Lucas sits unobtrusively, still observing the tight lines temporarily etched in Kerry's face, noticing the grimace set in her lips and the furrow of her eyebrows. Kerry puts on airs of indifference and aloofness for most everyone, but Lucas thinks he notices the subtleties of her emotions like the current hitch in her careful methodical behavior.

Kerry finishes her cup of tea and carefully washes her dishware, placing it prudently in her empty dishwasher. She turns to Lucas, narrows her eyes and then smirks as she pulls a hand up to caress his cheek. There is a glint of mischief in Kerry's eyes, one that makes Lucas lean into her touch, and Kerry lightly rubs his nearly stubble free face, catching her index finger on a thin line that his razor missed. It is quite abnormal for Lucas to be so careless with his grooming regimen; she can't help ponder over this little detail on Lucas' profile. Kerry is still taciturn and quiescent; she runs her thumb over his lips in a manner that renders the moment between the two of them hallowed and cherished. Kerry stops and removes her hands from his face, registering the look of beleaguered shame that washes over his features. Kerry steps away from Lucas' still figure, seeming to vacillate between fleeing and embracing him, and resolves to place a chaste kiss upon his lips. This sign of affection from Kerry is uncommon, but not completely new, and when Kerry steps away and heads towards her bedroom, the tacit agreement sits in the air and Lucas follows.

Lucas takes Kerry to bed, and they undress with disinterested precision though their eyes never leave one another. They make love with passion and intensity that shocks them both. Eventually, Kerry removes herself from the bed and walks out of the room to the large library

her house contains, approaches a tall bookcase and removes *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Kerry holds the book haphazardly and when she reenters the bedroom, she tosses the volume onto Lucas' chest.

“How poetic” Kerry states impassively. Lucas looks up at Kerry as he absentmindedly runs his index finger over the spine of the well-worn hard back cover.

“I thought so,” Lucas supplies, “though I suppose the stones in the pockets may have been a bit trite.” Lucas smirks as he responds to Kerry, watching her simper at him in return.

“I suppose I should say thank you, but perhaps murder is not the type of thing one should show gratitude for.” Kerry chortles, not managing to hide her amusement at the situation. Lucas remains silent and they redress together with the same passive precision as before.

The two walk down the private paths that lead to the pond, and the chill in the air has lessened, though the greyscale of the clouds that have recently made their way into town dampens the air. Kerry and Lucas reach the clearing, where the trees frame the murky water, and the two supine bodies still stick out like they are Ophelia, as if Sir John Everett Millais placed their bodies here instead of Lucas. Kerry stands, itching for a cigarette, as she gazes upon the peaceful and morbid countenances of her once friends.

“I suppose I should feel sad that they're dead.” Kerry mutters, as she gestures towards the bodies of Rebecca and Hannah, “They were once my friends, but I really just cannot get any of the emotion behind it. I mean, I lived for years, among those who abandoned me in my time of need. I lived among those who decided the town's reputation for football was more important than giving a girl her justice. I can't help but feel vindicated that my 'friends' found their just

reward. How dare they support David when the evidence was clear, right before their eyes?"

Kerry rushes through this emotional outburst and evades Lucas' eyes.

"So, should we call the police? It does look an awful lot like suicide." Lucas places his hand on the small of Kerry's back. Kerry and Lucas may not show their affection in normal ways, but Lucas "dealing" with David's main supporters does seem awfully romantic to her, in a gruesome way.

"Leave them." Kerry announces, with a finality even Lucas doesn't dare to argue with. "They can keep David company." Kerry turns swiftly away and walks towards the path that leads to the house. Lucas places the book on felled tree near the pond and rushes to catch up with Kerry.

And so would remain the bodies of David, Rebecca and Hannah, kept in confidence by the harsh realities of nature, the unending cycle of life and decay. The pond would flourish, the fish would feed, the herons would peck, and the trees would grow and become lush and full once more. What once was a simple copse and pond became a forested lagoon, full of life and death, exhaustion and rejuvenation.

## COMPOSITION:

### 2<sup>ND</sup> Place Winner: Jessica Starkey, "Ashen Tree"

#### Ashen Tree

Mother had a black mark under her eye again. I had heard father come in late that night from the bar, yelling about having only one child. A single born child that is not even a son. Apparently, he took his shame out on my mother again; all through his tirade, I pretended to be asleep to avoid being a target of his rage. Seeing the mark on mother's cheek was a reminder of the night. She would not be able to go out of the house until she came up with a believable cover story, but the entire village already knew that the butcher beats his wife nearly nightly. No one ever tries to stop him, because his wife, my mother, is his to do with as he pleases as long as the family line and tradition are kept, which means he needs a son—not a skinny daughter, not me.

I wish to be anywhere but there that morning, the house that smells like blood and sorrow filled with reminders of broken bones and a broken family. Making an excuse of gathering fruit from the forest, I left my mom in the house of despair, but I think she was happy to have one less item to take care of. I pretended that I do not see her tired eyes as she turned back to her work, and I started towards the forest that runs along one side of the village.

The forest is where I usually hid from all the pain that the village holds inside itself. A child here learns that becoming an adult is to not talk about the things you see. Even when the preacher says that we should speak up, we all know that if anything bad happened to a person beneath him, he would never say a word.

The forest is void of all human connections. The green leaves on the trees serve as protection, a barrier from the confusion outside of them. The colorful flowers act as a reminder that such a thing as peace and happiness truly exist.

I heard the rush of the water before I saw the river; most days this is where I stopped and picked berries from the bushes along the banks. An area close enough to the village that most animals could still smell humans and avoid coming near, but that day I kept seeing mom and the pain that she hid. I could not stop walking, because I was too near the man I hated. Following the river downstream, I watched the animals flee as soon as they saw me. Finally I came to a tree with bark the color of ash and broad green leaves mingled in the branches of other trees. I knew this tree; in the village we called the trees like this one Ashen Trees or Witch Trees. For the fact that the tree looks as if a witch had been strapped across it and burned alive. The tree was an oddity in the forest. Looking around I could not find another tree like it not the same large size, hauntingly beautiful color or with the particular mesmerizing way that this one seem to draw you closer and closer.

“It’s a beautiful tree, isn’t it?”

I turned to see a man. His cheeks were lined with age, his hair was pepper grey and his eyes were cold green. He was on the other side of the Ashen Tree sitting as if he was waiting for something or someone.

“Y-yes sar, et is,” I stammered.

The man started to laugh; it wasn’t harsh or cold, but rather kind and comforting. “Girl, there is no need for you to fear me. Come and sit the forest is beautiful this time of year.” He made a gesture to the forest floor beside him. I looked at him then at the floor where he clearly wished for me to sit then back at him again weighing my options. “Come,” the man repeated.

I sat down, careful to brush the ground before sitting in case there was a trick in this stranger’s ways. As I sat, I watched and listened to the forest, it was the same as always. The

birds sang the same song that they sing every, single morning. The small animals gathered food for winter as they did every year, and the trees were the same tall protectors blowing in the wind. Everything was unchanged except for the man.

“Do you know that in some countries staring at a person is considered rude?” the man asked without looking at me. I quickly turned away for the man I did not even realize that I was looking at him. He started to laugh again. “What is your name little one?”

“Alfrida, sar,” I said looking down at my hands. I was fidgeting with a piece of grass I found.

“Alfrida, huh... I guess that suits you well enough. Why are you here?”

That last question took me a back, it was seemingly simple, but the honest answer was complicated and depressing. The best answer I decided was to tell a half truth, “I’m gatherin’ fruit for moi mum.”

The man looked at me with cold, intelligent eyes and gave me a small smile.

“Girl, you are about nine, right?” He waited for me to nod my head. “You probably live in the village not far from here and probably will never leave it unless the village a couple miles away needs new blood. You will grow up and become a woman and marry a man that your father picks, whoever gives him the biggest pig or sheep. The man you wed will most likely be just like your father, and you will have to listen to him and give him...”

“Oi won’t. Oi won’t. Oi won’t. Yeh can go to hell.” I was now standing. The birds had flown away, and I was yelling, and could not stop. “Oi’ll kill’em! Oi’ll kill’em! Oi’ll kill’em!”

Grinning, the man waited for me to get all my anger out. When I finally stopped, I sat straight down back in to my original spot. He looked at me for a while before he spoke again, “Do you wish to escape your fate?” I just nodded. “It may not work and more likely will set you

as an outcast, but I can teach you about the ways of the world in hopes of you seeing them yourself. Would you like that?"

I can only image what I looked like back then with eyes wide, a huge smile splitting my dirty face and bobbing of my head so vigorously that I am, still to this day surprised, that it did not fall off. That was seven years ago; time has touched many things and changed them. I came back to the Ashen Tree everyday with different excuses, bringing things like my sewing to do as the man spoke. The man taught me how to read and write, how politics worked, the basics of number magic, how to trap animals, what herbs heal what ailments, and many other things.

But not everything was as joyous as the time that I spent with the man by the Ashen Tree. At home my father still beat my mother until one day he hit her just a little bit too hard. He came in drunk as ever complaining about ... I do not remember what he was complaining about that time; it could have been his old favorite about not having a son or how the crops were withering or how the moon was a full moon for all it matters now. He hit her over and over until she was black and blue. Then she when to bed and did not wake up the next morning; internal bleeding, he punctured one of her organs inside her stomach causing it to bleed, and it put pressure on her other organs until they shut down one by one. In the end, I was the one who told him to put her in the green with the village cows and to say there was a stampede and she was caught in the middle of it. In the end, I covered up my own mother's murder.

In the beginning of the following year, Collin came to my father about the possibility of marrying off his third-born son. None of Collin's sons know the difference between a fork and butcher's knife, and this third born imbecile is expected to take over my father's shop. He is considered handsome compared to most in the village and all the girls, who number about 12 of age, wish to marry him, but Collin is one of my father's buddies at the bar and probably comes

home each night smelling of mulled berries. I refuse to marry a man anything like my father, especially if he has picked up bad habits from his father like sleeping around with women other than his wife.

This morning I went to the Ashen Tree and begged the man beside it to help me leave this town to travel the world. He said that if I came back the next day ready for a long journey, he would take me away from the village to Fenonia, the country to the west. It is a three day journey in the best of conditions by foot, six if a rain storm comes and eight if it begins to snow, which means I must pack light for a nine day journey.

As I was walking back to my house to pack, I heard little Dissonantia's girl coughing. The sound stopped me cold in my tracks; everyone knows what a sickness could do to a small village with no immediate help. A deadly virus can spread like fire and kill people one by one. That cough was not the cough of dust and weeds. It was the cough of a girl about to die.

I walked into Dissonantia's house and entered the little girl's room. The girl was pale, with small blotches all over her skin. She was lying in her bed with her mother on one side with hands clasped as if praying to God for help. I knew then that I had to help the child; her sickness was one that the man had talked about and made me memorize the cure. The cure was simple—a few herbs placed in boiling water—however, I was the only person who knew anything about the disease or cure in the village. After about two hours, I left Dissonantia's house leaving her with the reassurance that her little girl would be safe.

At home, I started to pack all the supplies that I would need to start a journey the next day. Suddenly, there were three solid knocks at the door. As I walked across the front room, I hid the evidence of my plans to leave. When I opened the door, a bolt of fear ran down my spine as I saw what seemed to be the entire village on at my father's front door step. Each man and woman

had in hand either some object that seemed unnecessarily sharp or a torch. In the front of the group were the priest and my father. The priest stepped out of the crowd towards me cautiously as if he was afraid I might attack like a wild animal.

He talked clear of a village accent, because he originally grew up in a big city. “Were you the one who heal Dissonantia’s daughter today?”

Before he stopped I knew I was in trouble, and nothing I said would make a difference to a crowd looking for blood. They feared me, because I knew what they did not. It did not matter that I saved a village girl and likely the village as well, I was different and uncontrollable.

I decided to stop using my village accent when speaking to the priest. Years ago the man by the Ashen Tree had taught me to correct all my grammar in my speech. “Yes, I helped Dissonantia’s girl.”

There was a soft buzz from the crowd at this, and then a man in the back shouted, “Sie! Oi told ye she ei witch!”

With this outburst, the crowd started to shout curses at me and blame me for impossible things like bad crops and water shortages and my mother’s death. Two men grabbed me by my shoulders and started to drag me to the center of the square. It is odd to know, even for a short amount of time, the way you are going to die. It is even worse when you know that the people that you have grown up with and lived with will be the ones to slay you. To know the faces of the people who start tying you down while cursing your name. See, the face of the boy who when we were nine professed his undying love for me ready to spill my blood. Over there, the face of the woman that I had given food for sewing cloth twisted with hatred. In front of me loomed the face of the man whom I used to call father, but no longer.

Soon I was on blocks of wood, tied to a post with the faces of my childhood staring at me, and I was asked for my final words by the priest. I looked at him, and I realized what a sad shell of man he was. Next Sunday he would go in front of all these people again and most likely mention this night. He would say that we must all follow his God's commandments or this night would repeat over and over again. How holy are the words of a priest who is both liar and a cheat? He has broken more commandments than my father. What say his Gods about that?

Suddenly, my voice started to sound in my mouth of its own accord. "I feel no shame in the action I have taken. If you say that saving a little girl is the Devil's work, to have knowledge is evil and to do what this Godless priest says, then you are already damned and do not even know it. I feel pity for you."

With these words, someone in the crowd throws the first torch. I do not know who, but the flames start spreading across the wood faster than I would have liked. All I can think of now is how this story began. Of the man beside the Ashen Tree who was my friend, and taught me all that I know. Who, when tomorrow came, would not know what happened tonight, and would be waiting for me. A single question came to mind when the fire started to lick my feet— was the man beside the Ashen Tree the Devil or was he God, and at this point did it even matter?

**FINE ARTS:**

**1<sup>ST</sup> Place Winner: Taneisha Brown, "Where is the Dance?"**

Where is the Dance?

If I had a compass I'd ask myself,  
"Where is the dance?"

One part of my compass says O for Objective.  
There are things that me, my sister, my brother,  
and even the old lady down the street,  
can agree on in a dance.  
That the moves took a lot of practice  
and time to choreograph.  
It's fast-paced or slow and fluid.  
There are many turns and jumps.  
It has music to accompany it,  
so that it's not alone.

But then I look South toward Subjective,  
and there things only I can see.

This black and white video  
of Shirley Temple tap dancing  
reminds me of all the times  
my mother tried to get me to learn Tap.  
(She wasn't successful.)

I know the technical terms to the steps  
the ballerina does,  
because I was taught them.

I only like this dance because of the music they used.

My compass is spinning out of control.

Then I realize,

I can't find the dance north, east,  
south, or west.

It's not located in the Objective  
or down under in the Subjective.

It's somewhere halfway between them.

The Objective is there for everyone to share,  
and the Subjective is for me,  
and only me.

(What I see and feel might be different for the mailman.)

When I find them together,  
I get a wonderful performance.

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE:**

**1<sup>ST</sup> Place: Ana Maria Lopez, “Poemario—Textos Inéditos”**

Poemario- Textos inéditos

### **1. Mi Hermosa Rosa**

Yo tengo una rosa  
una rosa hermosa  
que se posa en mi jardín  
como una niña preciosa

En mi jardín hay una rosa  
grande y roja  
que se protege con espinos  
en su verde tallo

Mi rosa es la más bella  
no hay ninguna como ella  
grande y roja  
es mi rosa hermosa.

### **2. Lo que somos**

Estas tan lejos de mi  
que a veces no me puedo resistir  
y dejo lágrimas salir  
cuando lo unico que quisiera es sentir  
tus labios arrullándome al dormir

abrazada con tu rostro frente a mi

Si te digo que no todo se desmorona  
y siento que hace falta algo dentro de mi.

Si te digo que sí me siento infeliz  
no puedo soportar estar lejos de ti

Somos o no somos?

Tú y yo somos sin llegar a ser.

### **3. Tú**

Ellos decían que no eras para mi  
pero cegada seguí el paisaje que pintaste frente a mi.  
Con tu mirada me llevabas a un lugar lejos de aquí  
de donde deseaba jamás tener que volver

La cabeza siente y avisa  
pero el corazón se rehusa a entender  
y así fue como me fui  
sin apenas dudar  
caminando detrás de ti

Llenabas mis días de poesía  
y de pronto un día sin más te escondías.  
Entonces temí lo que sucedía  
que sea lo que ellos decían  
y aunque rogué para que no sea así

con pocas palabras todo terminó.

Ellos sabían que no eras para mí.

#### **4. El tiempo**

Con el tiempo aprendí que las miradas callan  
que las palabras dichas no se pueden extinguir  
que las lágrimas forjan su camino sobre la piel  
y huyen para no tener que volver  
al lugar donde una vez vieron una sonrisa aparecer

Con el tiempo aprendí que es mejor sonreír  
que los sueños que brillan se cumplen  
que los días oscuros se pintan de amarillo  
y tiñen las vidas de aquellos que sufren  
pues no hay por qué dejar que el tiempo no los cure.

#### **5. Sonríe**

Sonríele a la vida como si fuera tu madre  
con sus brazos extendidos para acurrucarte y mimarte.  
No dejes que los demás te hagan sentir diferente  
date la vuelta y sonríe en su frente.

Sonríele a la vida como si fuera un chocolate  
listo para ser devorado sin ser menospreciado.  
No dejes que las piedras interrumpan tu camino  
cruza al otro lado y lo demás es del destino.

Sonríele a la vida como si fuera tu último día  
nadie sabe cuanto más estarás allí adelante.  
No dejes que las puertas cerradas te dejen desolado  
sera quizas porque te necesitan en otro lado.

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE:**

### **2<sup>ND</sup> Place Winner: Meghan Ford, “La Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos”**

#### La Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos

Excelentísimo Señor Presidente Obama,

Me llamo XXX. Tengo diecinueve años y estoy escribiéndole de Nevada, Missouri donde soy una estudiante en la universidad. El nombre de mi universidad es Cottey College. Cottey es muy especial cuando se compara con otras universidades porque es la una de cuarenta y seis universidades de solo mujeres en los Estados Unidos. Estar rodeado de mujeres y vivir en un ambiente donde nosotras hablamos sobre la desigualdad que sufrimos, solamente porque somos mujeres, ha hecho darme cuenta, incluso más que antes, lo mucho que este país necesita un cambio. Personalmente, creo que este cambio vendría y debe venir en la forma de la Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos.

Como usted probablemente sabe, la Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos fue escrito por Alice Paul y se presentó ante el Congreso por la primera vez en 1923. Noventa años han pasado y todavía esta enmienda no es una ley. En 1972, las dos partes del Congreso pasaron la enmienda y se fue a las legislaturas estatales para su ratificación pero no tuvo éxito. La enmienda se ha introducido al Congreso cada año desde 1982 sin éxito y por eso, quizás usted se está preguntando por qué este año sería diferente. Como usted sabe, este Congreso nunca ha tenido más mujeres representantes. Presidente Obama, nosotros tenemos un oportunidad aquí. Tenemos que hacer uso de esta ventaja. Usted está en un posición para ayudarnos a pasarla. Con la Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos, las mujeres finalmente serían iguales en todos los asuntos legales. Sí, ya tenemos muchas leyes contra la discriminación sexual, como Título Nueve, pero no son suficientemente importantes porque no están en la Constitución. Ahora, el único derecho que existe para la igualdad de mujeres y hombres en la Constitución es el derecho a votar. Por eso, el Congreso puede debilitar las leyes de los derechos de la mujer existentes. Las mujeres han luchado por muchos años para la igualdad de derechos. Nosotros no podemos permitir que todo su trabajo se deshaga. Si la Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos pasa, la situación de los derechos humanos de los Estados Unidos podría mejorar en el mundo y también, en nuestro país. Mujeres tendrían igualdad de salarios y más tiempo de salida por maternidad si quieren trabajar y tener una familia al mismo tiempo. La Enmienda de Igualdad de Derechos no traerá nada malo a nuestro país.

Recomiendo que usted trabaje con los otros representantes quien la apoyan para gana más votos. Recomendando que usted hable sobre la enmienda en público e impulse su ratificación en los estados. Tiene que usar su voz y su poder para mi futuro, para el futuro de sus hijas, para el futuro de mis hijos, y para el futuro de nuestro país. Estamos tan cerca del éxito como para dejarlo así. ¡Sigamos adelantete! ¿No fue usted quien dijo que podía?

Saludándolo atentamente,  
XXX  
Nevada, MO

## **HUMANITIES:**

### **1<sup>ST</sup> Place Winner: Caitlin Ball, “Wild Nights—Wild Nights: Emily Dickinson’s Poetic Gender Commentary”**

#### Wild Nights—Wild Nights: Emily Dickinson’s Poetic Gender Commentary

Emily Dickinson is known to be one of the most influential and impressive women authors to emerge from the American literary canon. Her unique use of grammar, literary techniques and point of view encompass exemplary literature. Dickinson’s reclusive lifestyle and educated background helped her create deep and multifaceted poems that speak to the reader with each additional reading. Dickinson’s use of her background and educated view on the world that surrounded her give us a cutting yet subtle view on love and men in her poem “Wild Nights – Wild Nights!”

To comprehend fully the poems of Emily Dickinson, understanding the context in which these poems were written is imperative. Born on December 10, 1830, Emily Dickinson was the middle child of three children to an educated family. Spending much of her formative years being encouraged in her education (which was abnormal and far exceed that of the majority of young girls of that time), Dickinson spent seven years at Amherst Academy before attending Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Dickinson spent only one year at Mount Holyoke before returning home to live with her family once again. Considering herself to be one of the “lingering bad ones,” Dickinson never joined the church as the majority of her contemporaries did, in addition to her family members. Beginning her small rebellions against the social and cultural norms early, Dickinson cultivated her own autonomy against strict and gendered roles set out for her to adhere to.

After her withdrawal from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, Emily Dickinson began to write more seriously. Familial obligations in the garden, housework, and kitchen duties, kept Dickinson from committing the time she wanted towards her writing, though when the family moved in 1855 and was able to keep a housekeeper, many of Dickinson's duties were alleviated. Dickinson's younger sister Lavinia was also known to pick up many of the duties assigned to Emily, and Emily kept Lavinia as a close confidant through her years. Dickinson's ability to forgo many duties that would have prevented her from pursuing her interests allowed her to spend more time writing and exploring her creativity. As time went on, Dickinson gradually became more and more reclusive and private, spending hours in her room and declining to fulfill her entertaining duties that were socially required of her. Dickinson's refusal to continue to be a social being emphasized her desire for a private life, but also that of being her own person. While Dickinson may have physically cut herself off from the outside world, she continued to cultivate deep and meaningful relationships with friends, family, and mentors through postal correspondence. By keeping her relationships in such a manner, Dickinson kept her intense and protective private life, yet allowed her to pursue these relationships with the ability to regulate and control them.

While Emily Dickinson did reject traditional cultural and societal norms and expectations for herself by refusing to marry or bear children, her life was not without romance or deep romantic relationships. Through her deep personal relationships through correspondence, Dickinson created strong attachments, some romantic in nature. Many of her friends (both women and men alike) of whom she has been linked to write with fervor have been likened to romantic lovers of Dickinson (Showalter). These relationships may have been those of lovers, but all were never consummated in a physical manner. Dickinson's letters to a mysterious and

unnamed “Master” also prompt significant study and interpretation into the life and mind of Emily Dickinson. Where Dickinson was a resilient and independent woman, the tone in which her letters directed to this “Master” are subservient in nature. In contrast, Dickinson also challenges the Master’s abuse of his power he holds due to his gender (Showalter). Dickinson was also not without offers of marriage. After 1877, Judge Otis Phillip Lord and Dickinson began a semi-courtship, although once an offer of marriage was proposed to her, Dickinson swiftly turned down his proposal.

Emily Dickinson’s poem number 249, also known as “Wild Nights-Wild Nights!” is a clear representation of the inner thoughts that so often were not expressed in Dickinson’s correspondence and day to day life. While Dickinson held the notoriety for being an eccentric virginal recluse, her poetry showed a different side to her thoughts and feelings that upon her death, shocked many people. At three stanzas long, with four lines per stanza, “Wild Nights!” is a short poem rife with sexual and risqué undertones that shows longing for an unnamed figure. While the speaker of such poem is a contentious topic, the poem still demonstrates a sensuous and passionate sentiment that alludes to Dickinson not being so withdrawn from the romantic world.

The first stanza begins by addressing an unidentified “You” or “Thee” that Dickinson utilizes in several other poems in her repertoire (such as Poem 765). The first stanza reads;

Wild Nights – Wild Nights!

Were I with thee

Wild Nights should be

### Our luxury! (1-4)

Exclaiming “Wild Nights – Wild Nights!/Were I with thee” in the first two lines leaves the reader with a sense of understanding the enthusiasm that induced the exclamation, as well as setting the tone of the poem as breathy and flighty (due to Dickinson’s favorite dash between the first ‘Wild Nights!’ and the repeated term). Dickinson’s attention to the capitalization of night puts emphasis on the nature of the word, as in the intimate and sensual double meaning to night. While the first three stanzas set the tone, hearty exclamations from a rapturous lover, perhaps, their meaning is affirmed by Dickinson’s word choice in “luxury,” The definition of luxury can be identified as “an abundance of sumptuous enjoyment,” which would describe the feelings one may feel around their lover, but the historic definition used by Dickinson is “lasciviousness, lust.” “Our luxury” is a blatant allusion to the physical intimacy shared between the two lovers involved in this poem. While she may have alluded to sexuality and sex in the first three stanzas, Dickinson affirms the poem’s meaning with the to-the-point two-worded end to the first stanza in line four.

Stanza two takes advantage of the reader’s attention, steps back from the provocative language and risqué subject material, and expands on the speaker’s unfailing love for the unnamed “Thee.” Dickinson writes:

Futile – the Winds –

To a Heart in port

Done with the Compass

Done with the Chart! (5-8)

Dickinson shows the potential unfailing love of the speaker by using nautical terms (such as her use of “port”, “compass” and “chart”, all in relation to sailing and orienting on the sea) to relate the speaker to that of a changing and easily manipulated being (like that of a ship that is dependent on external forces). The speaker is somewhat detached from this stanza as the heart in question is not claimed as the speaker’s own. Up until this point, the speaker has shown no qualms in using terms to claim something as his/her own, but the possession of “a heart in port” (6) is detached and commented on objectively. The affections alluded to in this stanza are unchanging in the tribulations or circumstances that may befall it (“Futile – the Winds—“[5]). The speaker describes this state of affection and loyalty (as the heart is in port and is docked) as static and content (“Done with the Compass/Done with the Chart!” [7-8]). This owner of this heart is done looking and needs no further direction for his/her love, for the owner has already found it.

Dickinson ends this short poem with the final stanza that the speaker is involved in once again. This final stanza is what creates the conflict of the gender of the speaker of the poem as well as alludes heavily to intercourse. The third stanza states;

Rowing in Eden –

Ah, the Sea!

Might I but moor – Tonight –

In Thee!

Dickinson begins the third stanza with another reference to nautical themes and water. While Eden is known as “the abode of Adam and Eve” in biblical stories, it can also be defined as

“pleasure”, “delight”, and “a state of supreme happiness”. The speaker is awash and moving gradually through happiness and delight as a result of his/her lover, while likening the sea (which is a vast body of water for a rowboat) to love or being in love (“Rowing in Eden—/Ah, the Sea!”[9-10]). The final two lines are the most provocative of the final stanza. The speaker asks “Might I but moor – Tonight –/In Thee!” which is an unconcealed proposition for intercourse between the speaker and their lover. The ambiguous language choices in these two lines lead to controversy for the whole poem. The use of “moor” in this situation alludes to “fastening a ship or boat by cable,” and that the speaker asks to moor for the night *in* the referred to lover indicates a male figure who was speaking. Often in Dickinson’s poems, “pleasure is frequently aquatic” (Showalter). In this poem, the feminine qualities of water and water’s association with the tides can lead to a feminist interpretation of water. While likening love and pleasure to that to the every changing and moving water, Dickinson addresses the changing phase of love by showing the changing tone of the speaker, as well as the shifting gender perceptions through the poem.

The controversy and lack of clarity on the gender of the speaker seems to be a conscious choice by Emily Dickinson. Dickinson was very aware of the patriarchal stature to her life and society, and she resented the power men had over all situations. It can be argued that the speaker is a woman because many assume the speaker of all her poems to be Dickinson herself, but one may also conclude that the speaker is a male. Dickinson was very aware of traditional roles and views on women in society, and having been speculated to have been involved in at least one “romantic relationship” one can conclude that Dickinson would have observed some of the idiosyncrasies in her life.

Due to the fact that the speaker’s gender is never revealed, contextual clues become necessary to consider this answer, and if it is truly necessary to know the answer. If it is

concluded that the speaker is in fact a male, one can use the second and third stanza to support this point. Women during Dickinson's time period were taught to aspire, behave, and think in certain ways. Women were malleable and subject to falling in love and getting married and having children. A woman's worth was in her role as a wife and mother, and these roles were grounded in her love and loyalty to her husband. In the second stanza, the heart (which is detached from the first and third stanza) is immovable and done with further consideration, which can be easily likened to the role of a married woman. Conversely, the first and third stanzas contain the same tone in which the speaker communicates. The speaker is active in the roles of "Rowing in Eden" (9) and asking for sexual congress with the lover. The use of "In Thee" in line 12 can be construed quite literally if read from a male speaker's point of view.

If Poem 249 is interpreted and assumed to be voiced as a male, it is not read in a completely complimentary way. Dickinson was keenly aware of her surroundings and was not remiss to comment on them in her correspondence with family, friends, and the mysterious "Master." The poem goes from lust and rapture, to distancing oneself from love and devotion, back to love, lust, and sexual intimacy. This shows Dickinson's interpretation of men as fickle, detached, and using their power for their own whims.

Many historians and critics aim to find the man to whom this poem refers, and even the "Master" to whom Dickinson writes in her correspondence. In Dickinson's relationships with her friends and family members, she had instructed for her letters to be burned after her death. Privacy was a very important part of her life, and as her poetry was seldom published while she was living, Dickinson's poetry was written for her own expression, artistry, enjoyment, and fulfillment. Her lack of clarity of to whom this poem may refer and even to which gender it may encompass is an entirely conscious choice. This literary choice by Emily Dickinson has readers

question, identify, and encompass in her work, which allows us to understand Dickinson in just a small way. Emily Dickinson's gender commentary may be subtle, but when one reads and studies her work, it speaks volumes.

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## HUMANITIES:

### 2<sup>ND</sup> Place: Beverly DeMarco, “The Second-Hand Flute”

#### The Second-hand Flute

In Gabrielle Roy’s first book, the narrator is third person omniscient, an important aspect of the novel. It is because of the multiple perspectives this type of narration supplies, as well as its lucid detail, that the reader experiences many different characters’ “second-hand happiness.” This type of joy might be considered untrue happiness; it is not exactly clear what the real meaning of the term is, and thus it is up to the reader’s interpretation. Interestingly, the translator chose to rename Roy’s novel *The Tin Flute*, which seems like a drastic change from its previous title, *Bonheur d’occasion*, or *Second-hand Happiness*. Is one title a better choice than the other?

By making the title *The Tin Flute*, Daniel’s particular story, which can be interpreted as a form of second-hand happiness, becomes a focal point to the plot. In fact, it seems to be an axle on which other stories rotate. The main example of this used form of happiness, and the root of the metaphor, is when Florentine gives Rose-Anna two dollars. The mother is divided between providing this boy with momentary happiness: “a flute like a ray of sunshine in the hands of a sickly boy [...] or the daily bread for the family table?” (121). Ironically, Daniel finally gets his tin flute, as well as lots of other toys, when he is admitted to the children’s hospital with leukemia. “In a single day, he’d had more toys than in all his life, probably too many for him to love; or perhaps he felt too grown-up for any of them” (219). Conceivably Roy wrote this to point out the familiar feeling of outgrowing one’s desire for something. Something inevitably obstructs complete happiness, and in this case it is Rose-Anna’s “good intention- an intention repressed” (121).

As the plot progresses, the reader feels a haunting sense of déjà vu, even if the scene pertains to a completely different character. In essence, Danny's longing for the tin flute becomes a metaphor of "second-hand happiness;" all the other characters experience similar feelings of lust. When the story began, it delved into Florentine's work life, her boredom and disgust with the monotonous task of serving others and constantly being on her feet. She seems to see Jean Lévesque as a way out of misery while he sees her as just the opposite, a poverty trap. It is interesting how the author parallels Florentine's depressed inner thoughts with those of Jean as if to point out that everyone has their own second-hand happiness. For example, there is a passage where Florentine marvels at her extreme solitude, realizing "she was alone in the world with her fear" (250). This parallels a passage at the beginning of Jean's solitude in his dark apartment, alone with his conflicted thoughts about Florentine and rising above poverty.

Perhaps the most poignant passages concerning second-hand happiness are those in which Roy provides her readers with clear, sensory detail. For example, Florentine constantly daydreams about her nicest dress, and how she will win Jean's heart by wearing it. Unfortunately, at the party Florentine becomes disenchanted with the beauty of her party dress, as she is surrounded by wealthy people in much more expensive clothing. When a girl about her age asks her where she got her dress, she comes to a sudden realization. "She would never wear it again without hearing the crisp sound of the scissors in the expensive cloth or seeing it, half-sewn, with white basting thread, a dress of sacrifice, of work done by poor lamplight" (134).

During the bulk of the novel, Rose-Anna and Azarius are both living in the past, although the latter more so. A "melancholy smile" (100) comes to Rose-Anna's face when she allows herself to daydream about "a little room with windows facing south," (100) where sunshine shone through the dining room, brightening "the face of a little girl sitting in her high chair"

(100). She is so poor that she laments spending even pennies on items, and “re-spends” that money mentally. She “indulged in a moment of piercing regret” (238) after Eugène takes his ten dollars back from her, the money she relied on for rent, and tosses up coins for the children. Azarius cannot seem to pull himself from the memories of his earlier years as a carpenter, still zealously discussing it with anyone who will listen. He has “incorrigible youthfulness,” (348) and is “absent” (347) at times. It is not until the end of the novel that he really sees “his wife’s face, worn out by fatigue” (348) and realizes the role he has played in prolonging his family’s poverty and draining his wife of her youth and energy.

A wealthier character named Emmanuel is introduced to the story, perhaps to emphasize that everyone has their problems, no matter their class. Life is just not fair. Emmanuel seems to regret his choice to join the war. He walks “aimlessly” (299) through the rue du Couvent, pondering the futility of war. He knows that there are “ways other than war” to allay “suffering of conquered peoples” (299). Additionally, Emmanuel’s new wife, Florentine, is not truly in love with him. While they are dating, she thinks “she might even let him kiss her [...] so as not to forget Jean’s kisses” (124). Likewise, Emmanuel is attracted to Florentine’s vulnerability; “he liked the blind confidence she place in him” (125). This is not necessarily a “lovable” aspect of someone, and seems to reflect a hunger for dominance. Florentine is in love with Emmanuel loving her. She wants to be “spoiled and coddled” (126), but she does not truly want the person doing these actions, another example of false happiness. Roy espouses descriptions of nature with the characters’ emotions to illustrate a point. For example, while Florentine waits anxiously for Emmanuel to answer his door, there are snowflakes that “fluttered like moths around the lamp. Millions of flakes, soft and white, flew down and struck the windows, dying there, clinging to the light and warmth” (123). This seems to represent society as a whole, and its

search for happiness. Everyone is on their own journey to be content, and each person's problems are important to them, no matter if they are rich or poor, male or female.

Overall, the translator's title of *The Tin Flute* trumps Roy's title, *Second-hand Happiness*, because it is a prime example of this sort of used joy. By titling the novel with the metaphor present in the book, an abstract concept becomes tangible. Additionally, Danny's plight is more effectively emphasized this way. Presenting the concept of second-hand happiness through a child's simple wish not only makes it easier to understand, but also easier to empathize with. If the title did not concern him, his story would be lost among the numerous others in the novel, just like he was lost among his multiple siblings while alive.

## **SOCIAL SCIENCE:**

### **1<sup>ST</sup> Place: Christina Chamberlin, “Gender-Typed Toys in McDonald’s Kids’ Meals”**

#### Abstract

At a young age, children identify what toys are for what genders and McDonalds is harming young children’s development and skill building by only offering gender-typed toys. Unfortunately, McDonalds does not have any unisex toys to offer to kids. By subjecting children to an obvious or subtle form of prejudice in toys, kids attribute those sexist ideals towards other people and themselves. Also, by being limited for what toys a young boy or girl may play with, children lose possible learning skills in their development.

#### Gender-Typed Toys in McDonald’s Kid’s Meals

“Toys are a child’s medium of expression” (Peretti, 1984, p. 213). At a very young age, children are able to express themselves through the toys they play with. Unfortunately, whether it is a doll or an action figure, there is usually a gender stereotype of which toys are for which gender. When kids are given messages by parents and other peers, they receive a societal-based understanding of how gender works and how genders are different from one another. However, by limiting boys and girls with gender-typed toys, children can miss out on learning certain social, cognitive, and communication skills as well as development experiences. For kids, by playing with toys, they develop attitudes and behaviors that accompanied with that toy (Peretti, 1984). McDonalds is an unfortunate contributor to gendered toys for kids in their kid’s meals. When a child is presented with a gender-typed toy at McDonalds, and taught by parents and

surroundings that certain toys are for certain genders, children miss out on opportunities or gain negative responses and outlooks towards gender.

Walking into the doors of the local McDonalds, most people will first notice the kid's meal toy display and the first noticeable characteristic about the toy display are the selection of toys, and the colors. The difference in toy colors can be obvious or subtle. Whether or not people notice the gender-typed display, the difference is still present. One out of the two selections of toys is normally darker in color (black, blue, brown, green); vice versa, the other selection of toys is often lighter in color (pink, yellow, orange, white). Just by saying the colors, "pink or blue", most people will associate pink with girls and blue with boys. After all, when a child is born, one of the first things the nurses do is wrap the child in a pink or blue blanket based off of the sex of the baby. By categorizing children based off of their apparent gender using color, stereotypes are made. Especially for toys in kid's meals, people label a young boy or girl using the toys they play with.

The possibility of a child being judged in today's society if they do not play with the "right" toys is very high. It is more common for girls to be allowed to play with boy toys, than a boy to play with girl toys. Girls can be seen as "tomboys", but boys will be seen negatively as "fags" or un-masculine. If a girl wanted the new Batman toy at McDonalds in her kid's meal, some people may think that it is not feminine at all, but then assume that she was just going through her tomboy phase. This assumption can be sexist because people assume that the tomboy phase is bad for grown women, and will hopefully be outgrown and girls will naturally develop into the "normal" idea of what females act like in their teen years (Freeman, 2007, p.358). However, this would not be the same case for a boy if he wanted something outside of his own gender norm. When a little boy says he wants the new Bratz doll in his kid's meal, would he

receive positive messages? Most likely not. In a survey conducted to record the favorite toys that children played with, the survey results showed that the boys top three favorite toys were toy cars, Power Ranger models, and Thomas the Tank Engine sets. The girls' top three favorite toys were cuddle toys, Bratz dolls, and baby dolls. In the entire list of favored toys for boys, there was not one toy considered feminine. However, there was one toy, the Spiderman figure that was considered masculine in the girls list of toys. The researchers found that "while the choices for boys remain stereotypically gendered masculine, there is far greater diversity among girls' choices" (Francis, 2010, p.329). These negative messages are received by children at a very young age and will most likely develop into limited gender-typed cognitive images about sexes.

Boy toys are found to be more active and require physical movement; whereas, girl toys tend to require nurture and care. McDonalds is guilty of this difference in toys and categorization for boys and girls, and unfortunately, children notice the difference. When kids are able to distinguish their own gender compared to the other kids, they put others as well as themselves in a narrow-minded gender schema. Kids begin to categorize what is "for boys" or "for girls" early on, and attribute these schemas to their own growth and/or social life. On average, "gender-stereotyped toy preferences appear during the second year, and are established by 18 months of age" (Serbin, 2001, p.14). One may hear a two year old boy, when presented with a Barbie doll, say, "That's for girls!", or even a two year old girl say, "Eww! That's got boy germs!" when handed a soldier action figure. Surprisingly, however, studies have been conducted that show that early on, children do not have any natural gendered toy preference. In one experiment conducted to observe and compare the views children had about gendered toys, researchers found unexpected results. The experimenters found that "In neither the case of their own liking of toys nor in the predictions for others, however, did labeling a toy for the other sex completely

eliminate interest in the toy” (Martin, 1995, p.1465). By restricting and directing children to play with toys, or assuming the children want to play with certain toys may unknowingly limit the range of a child’s play experiences and social learning interactions. This categorization of gendered toys is established with the influence of the child’s surroundings, especially from the views and words of the parents.

Parents are limiting their children’s cognitive and social development by presenting a prejudiced and sometimes negative view towards certain gendered toys. It is clear that gender means a lot to today’s society. For example, when a woman becomes pregnant, one of the first things that people usually ask is “is it a boy or girl?” Once people know the biological sex, they buy presents, traditionally pink for girls and blue for boys. Girls tend to receive dresses, bows, “cute” stuff; whereas, boys tend to receive pants, action figures, “tough” stuff. Since children tend to learn through observational learning, and parents tend to be the most readily available model for children to follow, a child automatically assumes that this (pink and dolls for girls, vs. blue and action figures for boys) is normal. This categorization limits a child’s views, experiences, and possibly social growth with the opposite sex. Unfortunately, kids are not able to buy their own toys so early; it is the parents’ choice of what the child plays with in the child’s first stages of life. Gender-typing toys for children is so easy that a parent and son may walk into McDonalds and order a kid’s meal, and when the parent is asked if they want the boy toy or the girl toy, the parent will most likely reply boy toy. Of course, parents may think about what they would like their child to play with. When asked for the boy toy or the girl toy, the parent may think, “Would it be okay for my son to play with those dolls?” However, thanks to society’s pressures to control gender, the parent will probably give in to gender-typed norms, which will limit the child’s play experiences.

By gender-typing McDonalds' toys in kid's meals, children miss out on several skills. If a child is not given the opportunity to play with other toys, they do not gain the skills the other kids are getting. Studies on gendered toys have shown that girls tend to gain communication, and nurturing or emotional skills; whereas boys gain technical knowledge and active skills. In a study observing the toys that children played with in their early years, it was found that "didactic information, and aspects developing construction and literacy skills, were identified in the selected toys...for boys, and were lacking in those for girls" (Francis, 2010, p.325). Boy toys usually require more active movement and imagination. For example, when boys play with toy soldiers, they unconsciously learn about strategies, and in essence how war works. Boys tend to gear more towards violence, aggression, and learn "how to be a man." Girls, however, are raised to play with more gentle toys; for example, dolls, makeup and hair accessories, and pets. All these girl toys require "mothering" skills and teach young girls that it is important for girls to know how to take care of themselves and others, and that appearance is important for women. Children are very unconsciously aware of what their toys teach them, especially when they receive these toys along with their meals.

There are a couple of changes that McDonalds can make in order to modify the gender-typed selection of toys in the kid's meals. Since children are still developing, it would be better to change McDonald's toy selection now, rather than later when the kids are adults and have their minds made up of the world and have completely developed their gender schemas.

McDonald's first option to change their gender-typed toys is to combine the selection of toys for kids. Rather than bluntly asking customers if they would like a girl toy or a boy toy, the employees could generalize the toy selection. For example, when a parent and a child walk up to the counter and order a kid's meal, instead of the cashier asking would you like a girl toy or a

boy toy, they could ask “would you like the Batman toy or the Bratz toy?” This way there is no obvious gender difference presented to the parent and child. Also, by changing the presentation of the toys, McDonalds could rid themselves of the gender-stereotype display. For instance, the current toy display is one side with a black border and Batman toys, and the other side is a pink border with Monster High dolls; this causes segregation. Instead of making an obvious line between the two toys, McDonalds could combine them into one display, like having the batman toy and Monster High toy side by side with a neutral color around the border. This way there is no clear difference in which toy is designated for which gender.

The second option that McDonalds has is to rid themselves of the gender-typed toys all together. For example, instead of having the action figure and the doll, they could just have one gender-neutral toy. Action figures have traditionally been directed towards boys and dolls have traditionally been directed towards girls, and it would be very hard to convince society that it is okay for boys and girls to play with either toy. So by completely ridding the toy display of the natural gender stereotypes, McDonalds can offer children toys that will give boys and girls the new development and play experiences equally. Many different fast food restaurants that offer toys in their kid’s meals have used this method of gender-neutral toys. For instance, when the movie Despicable Me 2 came out, the entire toy selection for kid’s meals from some restaurants was all from that movie (i.e. Minion toys). With the Despicable Me toys there was no gender separation, and boys and girls were able to play with the toys without receiving negative messages from parents and peers. If McDonalds were to get rid of the natural separation between the girl toy and the boy toy, then children would not have to miss out on play opportunities.

Most people can remember what toys they played with as a child, but what they did not realize was how those toys shaped their attitudes and behaviors towards themselves and the other

gender. Which toys a child plays with has a huge impact on a child's learning development and construction of gender-schemas. As Peter Peretti (1984), a member of the Department of Psychology at Kennedy-King College, put it, "toys are associated with a child's expression, fantasy, interest, exploration, construction, education, cognitive development, and sex-role learning" (p. 213). Early on, a child receives messages given by family and peers about gender-typed toys and what a boy should play with and what a girl should play with. This causes a child to develop a narrow-minded view of the different genders. Girls learn that it is okay to play with masculine toys, but eventually they will be pressured to grow out of them and become more feminine and nurturing; whereas boys learn that they must always be masculine and tough. Also, when a child's toy selection is restricted, a child will lose the play experience and skills that are given when playing with a specific toy. McDonalds needs to either change their toy selection or display for kid's meals so children can equally learn and develop appropriate views and behaviors about themselves and others.

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## **SOCIAL SCIENCE:**

### **2<sup>ND</sup> Place: Meghan Ford, “For the Public Good: Gender Portrayal in the *Felicity* Series”**

#### For The Public Good: Gender Portrayal in the *Felicity* Series

“We should at least equal,” Ester Reed wrote in *Sentiments of an American Women*, “and sometimes surpass [men] in our love for the public good” (Evans 1997, intro). When pointing to who teaches young girls the expectations and roles that come with being female within their society, most people tend to over look the aforementioned public and label mothers as the prime influences on their daughters. While this judgment is not incorrect, when examining gender one must be careful to not forget how the public, composed of books, movies, school systems, and more, affect ideas of gender as well. One example of a corporation that has influenced girls across the country is Pleasant Company’s American Girl. Through their variety of products, American Girl has presented girls with ideas of gender roles in the United States during the course of history. Attempting to support the “public good” through education, Pleasant Company has taken on a very essential yet difficult role of striving to portray historical gender roles correctly while uplifting girls at the same time. In the *Felicity* series, through the portrayal of female friendships, separate spheres and political domesticity, American Girl is able to do just this.

Felicity Merriman’s story takes place in Williamsburg, Virginia beginning in 1774 as the seeds of the American Revolution are being planted. Felicity is nine years old in the first book, *Meet Felicity*, and even at this young age, the necessity of female friendship during the colonial times is apparent. Felicity is the oldest of three children and during the second book, *Felicity Learns a Lesson*, her parents send her to take lessons on how to be a proper gentlewomen with two other young women, Annabelle and Elizabeth. While Felicity and Annabelle immediately

take a disliking to each other, Elizabeth and Felicity form a quick and true friendship. Both relationships speak great volumes about female friendship during the American Revolution. Annabelle looks down on Felicity because Felicity's father is a merchant while the Cole family has just recently moved to Virginia from England. Annabelle believes herself to be above Felicity and yet she views her as competition for potential suitors, specifically Ben, the Merrimans' apprentice who Annabelle takes a liking too. Although Felicity never expresses a romantic interest in Ben, the two do have a unique friendship built on a secret Ben keeps for Felicity. One can assume that Annabelle sees this when she watches Ben and Felicity interact. Similar to the girls involved in the Salem witch trials, both Felicity and Annabelle "faced a shortage of marriageable suitors" (Evans 1997, 33) and the rivalry between the two reflects this. In *Happy Birthday, Felicity!* Felicity takes an old guitar given to her by her grandfather to her lessons in order to outdo Annabelle at the only aspect they truly have going for them: their skills at being a gentlewoman. Both girls' actions accurately portray how women during the Colonial times were often in competition with each other in order to secure their futures.

On the other hand, Elizabeth and Felicity's friendship reflects how strong female friendships could be. Because women during the Colonial times moved in separate spheres than males, their main source of companionship lie in their busy husbands, young children or close friends. Truly having no one else who understands her position, Felicity turns to Elizabeth for reassurance whenever she doubts herself. For example, when Felicity's mother becomes sick in *Felicity's Surprise*, it is Elizabeth who encourages Felicity to not lose hope that she'll be able to attend the dancing lesson at the Governor's Palace and finishes Felicity's gown for her. In turn, when Elizabeth's father is thrown into jail for being a Loyalist in *Changes for Felicity*, Felicity does all she can to support Elizabeth and her family. By standing by Elizabeth during her

family's shame, Felicity shows that she is in solidarity with her friend despite what the government has done. Her actions help to protect the Coles' reputations by attaching them to a well-respected Patriot family in the Williamsburg community. The two young girls also share their joys with each other, as shown in *Felicity Saves the Day* when on pages 23 and 24 Felicity pens a long letter to Elizabeth after she is reunited with her horse Penny, thanking Elizabeth for urging her to never give up hope. Felicity and Elizabeth's friendship is one that withstands the divide of politics. Although the two are young and do not fully comprehend all of the political affairs around them, their friendship shows not only how the war affected women, but also how vital female relationships were during the Colonial times since women held the power to "create or destroy reputations" (Evans 1997, 23) through gossip or support.

During the Revolution, Colonial men dominated "a public arena distinctly separate from the domestic realm" (Evans 1997, 43) while women's worlds consisted of household duties. Both these duties and the belief that women belonged at home are mentioned constantly throughout the six books. In *Meet Felicity*, the apprentice, Ben, replaces Felicity as an assistant at her father's store. Feeling resentment, Felicity states, "she knew where she should be helping—at home" (Tripp 1991, 5). Felicity is shown helping with the mending, sewing, cooking and gardening. Her lessons with Miss Manderly consist of learning about tea, handwriting, invitations, music, sewing and dancing. All of these activities are things a young gentlewoman during the Colonial time would have been schooled in. Her parents often scold Felicity for talking too loud and too fast, as well as fidgeting, being impatient and having dirty hands. These behaviors are all traits that would not have been valued in a gentlewoman during Felicity's time in history, seeing that Felicity is being prepped to be married off and become a housewife and mother. During *Felicity Learns a Lesson*, this goal is portrayed again when Mrs. Merriman says

to Felicity “caring for family is a responsibility and a pleasure. It will be your most important task” (Tripp 1991, 7). Keeping the two spheres separate is a responsibility that fell onto the woman’s shoulders and is shown in *Happy Birthday, Felicity!* when Mrs. Merriman interrupts her father, a Loyalist, and her husband, a Patriot, who are discussing politics during a family gathering and reunifies the family through music. The idea of separate spheres for women and men is shown again in *Happy Birthday, Felicity!* when Felicity, Elizabeth and Annabelle are all sent either to their rooms or outside when they return home one afternoon to find British officers at the Coles’ house. The girls protest and ask to be admitted to visit with the officers but Mrs. Cole dismisses them. Later in the book, Felicity overhears Mr. Cole talking to a British officer about the British’s plan to steal gunpowder from the magazine. When Felicity informs her parents and grandfather of what she heard, she is both chastised and dismissed, because politics is not where her place is seen to be. All of these examples show how accurately the gender ideal of separate spheres is portrayed within the *Felicity* series.

Despite women and men living in separate spheres and politics being “the province of men alone” (Evans 1997, 43), the Revolution began to change the ideas of gender and politicize domesticity as the war called men to arms. The first of these changes came with evolution of the idea of republican motherhood. Because society viewed women as having a “patriotic duty to educate [their] sons to be moral and virtuous citizens” (Evans 1997, 57), their levels of education increased. This is shown in the *Felicity* series not only when Felicity practices her script but also when she teaches her younger sister, Nan, to read. Another example of the accurate portrayal of how the domestic world became politicized is the boycott against tea. The boycotts not only affected what Mrs. Merriman did and did not buy at the store, but they also affected the social lives of women. This is shown when Felicity faces rudeness from Annabelle at their lessons in

*Felicity Learns a Lesson* because her father has stopped selling tea at his store and because Felicity does not drink tea at teatime. During *Changes for Felicity*, Mr. Cole has to leave Virginia for his safety but the rest of the Cole family stays behind to take care of their property. This act gives Mrs. Cole more legal power than she has before, as she has become a deputy husband, taking care of the family's belongs in place of her husband. Felicity is also allowed to start working at the store again, an act deemed in proper a year before, because of the increase in business due to the war. When her father leaves Williamsburg as a commissary agent, Felicity is again given more responsibilities at the store. These examples in Felicity's stores accurately portray how the domestic sphere became politicized and how women assumed "tasks traditionally allocated to men" (Evans 1997, 53).

Education is power. One could argue that only *good* education is power though and point to countless sources in society that have failed to educate scholars accurately. Luckily, American Girl took it under their belt to educate girls for the sake of the public good and did so in a historically correct way. I feel that I am able to evaluate the books better after studying this period of history. If I had not known about separate spheres, female friendships and the roles that women did play politically in the Revolution, I would have viewed the *Felicity* series as a story that took a very sexist society and created a rebellious and unrealistic heroine. However now that I have studied this period of history, I know that what I previously labeled as an unrealistic heroine is actually due more to Felicity's personality and age than the author's inaccurate portrayal of history. In this case, my education was both good and powerful. Ester Reed would be proud to know all that American Girl has done for the "public good" (Evans 1997, intro).

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