

THE TARTAN JOURNAL

2025 - 2026



The Tartan Journal

Gordon State College

2025_____

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The Tartan Journal contains essays written and edited by students for course credit. The opinions expressed herein are protected under Gordon State College’s “Freedom of Expression” statement and they do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the college, editors, or other essayists. Additionally, the Tartan contains links to external sites which are not associated with nor endorsed by the college.

Introduction

In the fall of 2025, a small class of seven individuals was tasked with sorting through and editing submissions for the second edition of The Tartan Journal. Under the guidance of Dr. Janssen, we thoroughly reviewed more than 20 submissions, of which 9 were ultimately selected and then subjected to an intense editing process. Some of these were redrafted by the authors after communication with the class, others were revised without authorial input after a failure to respond, and a few remain largely the same as they were originally written.

In this catalogue of literature, you will find stories that marvel at the wonders of love and familial relationships. Journeys spanning vast Caribbean waters and the heartland of America. Tales of overcoming personal tragedy and athletic redemption. Books, or at least their modern interpretations, will become a subject of discussion. Modern entertainment and classic science fiction are closely examined. We have even included a satirical take on artistry and avarice.

We hope you find enjoyment in the following works; and hopefully, somewhere in these pages you will find a little bit of yourself as well.

- George Czick



*this is Curséd Shakespeare. He is an AI creation, born of the need for a mascot to go along with the journal and its companion podcast series: "Oh, The Humanities!" He will occasionally pop into this compilation to provide special biographical information, or just to show his beautiful curséd face.

Period Dramas: Love, Loyalty, and Human Connection – Logan Fagin

About the Author:

My name is Logan Fagin. I'm a senior at Gordon State College working on a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies. Some of my hobbies include acting, writing, and cooking. I've always enjoyed storytelling whether that be through the medium of movies, music, books, or video games. My goal is to one day either be a theatre or British lit teacher while continuing to perform on stage.



Abstract:

My essay is basically a deep dive into why the genre of period pieces has become so popular. I attempted to look at it from multiple angles but decided to focus on how they portrayed love, loyalty, and honor. I felt like those three aspects are the cornerstones of what people care the most about these days. Love has become such a commercialized concept today that I think the old school approach to it really resonates with modern audiences who probably feel like love doesn't have as much of an important role in society today. Loyalty, I think, ties directly into love. The third point is honor and it ties directly into the other two. Honor, I think, is a foreign concept in this modern day and age. Because of that I think movies and tv shows that depict honorable characters resonate with audiences because it reminds them of more noble times and what was. In order to be loyal you need to forge a strong enough bond with an individual that the thought of doing something to hurt or betray them is inconceivable. In order to dive deep into the genre I figured the best way to do that was to explain why I enjoy them so much and to do that I had to go back to the beginning and explain where my love of them came from. I also wanted to use examples of modern period pieces that have struck a chord with audiences. In order to accomplish this, I decided to use examples mainly from Netflix's *Bridgerton* and FX's *Shogun*. Both of these shows have found dedicated audiences who are completely devoted to them and can't talk about anything else but them which I think is further proof of how popular the genre has become.

Logan Fagin

Period Dramas: Love, Loyalty, and Human Connection

Humanity, by its very nature, is full of creative beings. We create to inspire others, to leave behind something long after we're gone, to intimidate, but most importantly, at least in my opinion, to entertain. The ability to engage ourselves and each other is a powerful tool that can help us cope with some of the more depressing moments of reality. There are multiple forms of entertainment, music, art, theater, movies, and television being a few, with the latter two being favorites of mine. While I enjoy many types of films and television shows, one of my favorites is the period piece. They are uniquely suited to transport the viewer to another world completely different from the time we live in now. Over the last couple of decades, dramas have become increasingly popular, including *Bridgerton*, *The Crown*, *The Tudors*, *Mad Men*, and *Shogun*. I believe that the reason why these types of shows have become as popular as they have is that they provide the viewer with something that interests them on a personal level or something they feel is missing from their life, whether that be romance, escapism, complex and interesting characters, or simply a community to belong to.

If I am to discuss my love of period pieces, I think it best to start at the beginning, which doesn't begin with a specific movie or TV show, but in 2008, during my senior year of high school, in an AP British Lit class. I've always loved reading, but by the time my senior year rolled around, I was burned out on it and didn't want to read as much as I used to; being told what to read made something I love feel like a chore. That is until about a month into the school year when my teacher assigned

Wuthering Heights, which is still one of my all-time favorites. I even remember the quote from one of the characters that inspired my love of British literature:

Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? Oh! You said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you – haunt me, then! The murderers *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always - take any form – drive me mad! Do not leave me in this abyss where I cannot find you!

Oh, God! It is unutterable! I can not live without my life! I can not live without my soul! (Bronte 160).

From there, I dove into the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Charles Dickens, and two of my favorites, William Shakespeare and Jane Austin. These authors laid the foundation of what would become one of my favorite genres—their ability to craft stories that still stand the test of time and remain relevant to this day. The captivating characters they created were so well written that they became the archetypes for so many characters that came long after them. One such character is Jay Gatsby, who is similar to Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights. Both men are defined by a romantic relationship with a woman from their past, not ending how they would have liked. They use this event to recreate themselves in an image of their choosing, and this change is ultimately the cause of their eventual downfall. While neither man could be considered a “good” person, both are interesting characters who resonate with their audiences. This captivating type of character and the fact that so many seemed to be driven by love, or their idea of it, is what eventually led me to other forms of period-specific dramas because whether we care to admit it or not, love is and always

has been one of the most powerful forces to drive not only humanity but or creativity as well. "The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved despite ourselves" (Hugo).

While some may not admit it, humans crave love. We are not meant to be alone; because of that, we spend many of our lives attempting to find the person with whom we can spend the rest of our lives. Unfortunately, most people's experiences with dating and romance over the years seem less than ideal. As the times change, so do the trends of the past. We currently live in the age of the dating app, and for good or ill, that has completely changed how people go about dating and looking for love. Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble have made it to where your next choice is only a swipe away. There is now a surplus of options in front of us, and because of that, we don't always take the time to truly get to know someone because, at the slightest inconvenience, we know that someone else is right around the corner and all it takes to find them is opening an app on your phone.

Despite how courtship has evolved over the last few decades, a large majority of people desire to go back to a more romantic approach. One of the main reasons period dramas are so popular is that we see the slow burn of a romance play out, which resonates with us on a primal level. Who can forget the chokehold season one of *Bridgerton* had on the world? Set in London's Regency Era, we see the story of Daphne Bridgerton and Simon Basset play out in the ubiquitous enemies-to-lovers trope. Through a series of events, two people find themselves at first pretending to be in the courting stage of a relationship, agreeing to be in an unwanted marriage, and finally ending up as a couple who are completely in love and devoted to one another. We watched as Simon went from someone who never wanted to get married to someone who would say, "I cannot stop thinking of you. From the mornings you ease

to the evenings you quiet, to the dreams you inhabit, my thoughts of you never end. I am yours Daphne. I have always been yours." (Page) I think the reason this type of romance reverberates so strongly within our hearts is because we want the freedom to be able to love that passionately. We crave someone who loves us that fiercely, and we desire to be open and vulnerable. The world can be a dark and cold place at times, and love is the fire that keeps us warm and able to keep going.

Nostalgia is "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy or personal associations" (Merriam-Webster). Even though no one who has become a fan of these types of shows was around during the periods depicted in many period pieces, we nonetheless find ourselves feeling nostalgic for this period in time. There could be many reasons for this, but I think the main reason is that we are currently disenfranchised. Modern life has become all about working our lives away and finding a way to make money. We've either forgotten the simple joy of relaxing during the day or can't afford to do it. We see these shows with characters living the most lavish lifestyles and imagine having company for afternoon tea or attending over-the-top balls in the most fashionable attire we can find. We want to live over-the-top lives even though it isn't feasible. Period pieces provide a level of escapism that I think is very much needed today.

While these things provide a necessary level of escapism to our sometimes weary lives, it is essential to remember that these shows and movies are historical fiction, with an emphasis on the fiction aspect of them. With all of the glitz and glam accompanying this particular art form, it is easy to forget that history was less kind and glamorous than Hollywood would have us believe. The history of the world is one of pain, bloodshed, and oppression. The human race has done many horrible things throughout our existence, more often than not, to each other, for no more significant

reason than because we usually see one another as more “other” than one. Still, it is because of that that I think something like *Bridgerton*, specifically, is so important. As an African-American male, I understand that the specific period in which that show takes place would not be so kind to someone who looks like me. However, the choice to not only cast black actors in the show but in prominent roles, I think, is not only appreciated but necessary. You can only see your people portrayed at one of their lowest points in history so many times before you wonder, “Is this how the world sees us?”. So when I say it was a breath of fresh air to see us in a completely different light, not only as upper-class members but as well-respected members of that society, I can’t stress enough how much that means. It is an unfortunate truth that we, as a race, have spent thousands upon thousands of years finding new ways to cause each other pain and suffering, but the fact of the matter is we have always had more in common with each other than what some of us may care to admit. One of the most profound lines of fiction, albeit a bit cliché, came from this show: “We were two separate societies divided by color until a king fell in love with one of us. Love, Your Grace, conquers all.” (Andoh) This line, more than any other, perfectly sums up why so many people gravitate towards and fall in love with this specific media brand. It allows us to be seen in the light that we’ve always viewed ourselves in, whether you are someone of a different race, religion, gender, body size, or sexual orientation. This bending of historical accuracy makes people feel like they genuinely matter and reminds us that love is the only thing that truly matters. We crave love as much as someone drowning craves one last breath of air. Humanity is at its best when it embraces that aspect of itself and gives in to it, and these shows allow us to tap into that part of ourselves, which we then can share.

Love stories aren't the only thing people find so captivating about period dramas. While love is an essential aspect of life, another that I think is either often overlooked or flat-out ignored is loyalty. To be loyal is to be "unswerving in allegiance: such as a) faithful in allegiance to one's lawful sovereign or government, b) faithful to a private person to whom faithfulness is due, c) faithful to a cause, ideal, custom, institution or product." (Merriam-Webster) These are just words on paper, but for centuries, these were the ideals by which so many cultures lived their lives, one of which is shown in the critically acclaimed 2024 show *Shogun*. One of the show's central themes is what it means to be loyal and dedicate your life to a belief, to live for more than just yourself. We live in an age where so many people only seem concerned with how something or someone can benefit them, which makes the main character so relatable. John Blackthorne, or as he is known to the people of Japan Anjin, is a man who is looking to make his fortune while simultaneously thwarting the Portuguese Jesuits, and through a series of events, finds himself in the service of Lord Toranaga, who is caught in a winner take all conflict with another Regent who wants control of Japan. Throughout his journey, he witnesses just how different the people of Japan are from him and his compatriots. Where Anjin is focused solely on his own goals, the people of Japan hold fast to their ideals of honor. Oaths pledged decades earlier still have meaning and are not easily broken. Anjin is only concerned with his own goals and desires; however, that begins to change, if somewhat subtly, when during a conversation with Lady Mariko, played by the talented Anna Sawai, she tells him, "If you seek individual freedom, you'll never be free from yourself" (Sawai). This one line perfectly encapsulates the mentality of the people of this strange land he has found himself on. Life is about more than pursuing your ambitions. To truly live, one should dedicate one's heart and soul to something, whether a person, a goal, or an ideal.

While it may seem like a foreign concept in a world that is very focused on the individual and pursuing your objectives, I do think that a great deal of people are longing to find their purpose in life, something that they can commit to that would, in their opinion, give their lives meaning and purpose. Something that will stand as a monument of who they were to future generations.

Another reason that this art form has become so popular is that they have managed to draw people from all walks of life into them. Whether the viewers are affluent, poor, black, white, young old, man, woman, or non-binary, they are all drawn in regardless. There are entire TikTok pages dedicated to people watching *Bridgerton* with their significant others or at watch parties. Countless memes of characters saying or doing things the poster relates to modern-day situations exist. People host elaborate-themed costume parties where they dress in the attire from the show and are allowed to eat, drink, and be merry while living out their fantasies. While art and trends ebb and flow depending on the times, the true lasting impact of this specific art form will be the community of passionate fans that will be left behind long after something else comes along. Their passion has, for the most part, created a welcoming environment for all types of people and has given them a place to belong. Our world, more often than not, is divided over so many things, and this gives us something to come together over and have civil discussions and come to the realization that we will always have more in common with each other and we could accomplish so much more if we just set our petty differences aside.

Love, loyalty, and community are three things that form the foundation of our society, and one cannot exist without the others. They make up what it means to be human. Our ability to love is how we find somewhere we belong, our ability to remain loyal to something that we care about is how we discover our purpose in life, and by

finding a community, we also learn that even when we might feel like it, we aren't alone. So many people flock towards this medium because I believe we all seek something that connects us to others and aspire to be the best versions of ourselves. The valid reason why this art form has become as big as it has and has lasted as long as it has is that it shows us not only the glamorous life that so many often wish they had but also they show us that, despite all of our flaws, we can be so much more than our weakest moments. We can rise from our failures, perceived or otherwise, and be the ideal version of who we are, and I find that to be worthwhile.

Writing is storytelling — even when it isn't fiction.

- Logan Fagin

Experiencing Eve: A Source of Knowledge – Elizabeth Hill

About the Author:



Hi! My name is Elizabeth Hill. I graduated from Gordon State College in 2024 after studying English here for three and a half years. During this time, I have held various roles in honors projects, including serving as the managing editor of the first edition of *The Tartan Journal*, and I am excited to be a part of the second edition as a contributor! A large portion of my time here at Gordon was spent passionately studying various interpretations of Eve in British literature under the mentorship of Dr. David Janssen. During that time, I competed and placed twice at Gordon's Undergraduate Research Symposium, and my thesis is currently being reviewed for publication by an undergraduate research journal. My research of Eve has affirmed for me my calling and dream to become a Christian apologist, and I hope to one day write for an apologetics ministry in Kentucky called Answers in Genesis. This project has already allowed me to make connections with this organization by getting the opportunity to interview a modern-day apologist, Dr. Georgia Purdom. Who knows, maybe one day you can Google my name and find more articles about feminist theology and interpretation!

Abstract:

This essay is a marriage between the scholastic and the spiritual. It follows the motif of experience as a source of Knowledge by exploring my personal experience researching Eve in British literature. I explain that by studying Eve, I found myself caught in between two conventionally incompatible disciplines – Christianity and feminism. From my perspective, the two do not have to be enemies, and I demonstrate this by sharing my personal experience. I tell the story of how I started studying Eve in a lower-level British literature class, and I accidentally made an exciting discovery about Eve's role in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The essay then shifts to a more research-focused critique of feminist theology and interpretation by analyzing essays from Barbara Brown Zikmund and Rosemary Radford Ruether. The essay then concludes by emphasizing the power of human experience, and it compares the research presented on Augustine and Aquinas to that of Zikmund and Ruether, thus demonstrating how different experiences produce different sources of Knowledge. The final remarks are personal, as I reflect on my experience with Eve and thus how she functions as a source of Knowledge for me.

Elizabeth Hill

Experiencing Eve: A Source of Knowledge

"I'm surprised you're a Christian... You know, since you're such a feminist."

Those words will forever be seared into my mind. They were said by a classmate who was familiar with my years of literary research on Eve – a project that has forever changed my perspective on *everything*. His statement made me realize that to him and many other people, Christianity and feminism are opposites, enemies even. Eve has a powerful, yet complicated role in both circles... a position I seem to have unintentionally inherited. Indeed, my faith made me interested in Eve, and my feminism made me want to protect her (and thus all women). But as my classmate noted, and as I am sure my reader is aware, Christianity and feminism are not entirely compatible. I will not attempt to completely reconcile Christianity and feminism, but they are both part of who I am. And if you care to listen, I will tell you about my experience and the Woman who lays at the center of it all.

Under Dr. David Janssen's mentorship, I have passionately researched Eve in British literature for two years. The more I researched, the more I discovered, and the more I wanted to learn. I found that Eve's place in history goes far beyond just *Paradise Lost* (the focus of my literary criticism) or the Bible. More than the first Woman, she is the *embodiment* of womanhood – the predecessor of all of womankind. I acquired a bit of a reputation for being "the Eve girl." My friends and family even joke that I can take any conversation and make it about her. (I am not sure if they are wrong.) If someone asks me about it, and they are around, they will scream, "NO! Don't! She will talk for hours!" Now, word of my research has spread, and people approach me with questions about Eve. "I heard you're the expert," they say. And earlier this year, I

completed my honors undergraduate thesis (or *magnus opus*, according to Dr. Janssen), "Feminine Genesis."

A Brief Summary of "Feminine Genesis"

The unfortunate tradition of misogynistic Christianity can be traced to St. Augustine of Hippo. In *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve*, Stephen Greenblatt holds Augustine primarily responsible for how this faulty ideology became so woven into Western culture: "It is so him preeminently that our world owes the peculiarly central role that Adam and Eve came to occupy" (97).

Theologians David S. Dockery and Timothy George also trace this history in their book, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking*. They affirm Augustine as "the father of the Christian intellectual tradition," and they present an analysis of his writings, saying that he "located the source of knowledge within the person" (82). They then trace this thinking to another notable Christian scholar, Thomas Aquinas, who taught "experience as the primary source of knowledge" (83). And although their contribution to Western Christianity is great and respectable, many of the most notable Greco-Roman interpreters, including Augustine and Aquinas, had personal experiences shaped by their struggles with sexual immorality. And as Robert L. Plummer explains in *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, Augustine's "interpretive approach to the Bible became widespread and assumed" (90) – an approach that included projecting his experience onto his interpretation of Eve and all women.

Amanda Benckhuysen Knows about this tragic history between religion and women, and her experience caused her to write *The Gospel According to Eve*. Much like how my classmate's statement is imprinted into my brain, she heard a statement that similarly bewildered her: "the Bible is not good news for women" (1). However, she asserts:

...the Bible, when interpreted correctly, is women's greatest advocate, encouraging women to embrace in Christ their full humanity as image bearers of God. Unfortunately, this stream of interpretation within the history of the church has often been marginalized and ignored, leaving many to believe that the matter is quite settled: to accept the Bible as authoritative is to affirm women's distinct status as the "weaker vessel." (2)

She goes on to trace centuries of interpretation of Eve, and by extension, interpretation of the Bible. She gives special attention to a literary movement that occurred in Europe in the 15th to 17th centuries, when "women courageously began to write and circulate their own literary texts, calling out and denouncing popular misogynist works while offering more redemptive ideas about what it means to be a woman" (24).

My research focuses on three female authors in 17th century Britain: Aemilia Lanyer, Rachel Speght, and Ester Sowernam. These women were the first British women to produce literary defenses (apologies) of Eve, and they did so by using the Bible. Benckhuysen describes their "radical readings" as culture-shifting, because "for them, Eve was not the epitome of female sinfulness but rather a creature loved and especially blessed by God. And if God loved and honored Eve, it stood to reason that man should too" (51).

NOBODY Knows about this long, complicated history! Or at least I have not found anyone else who does. In March of this year, while I was working on my thesis, I had the opportunity to personally interview a current-day female apologist, Dr. Georgia Purdom. After our interview, we had some extra time to chat, and naturally she wanted to know more about my research. I told her about *Feminine Genesis* and the women who were the first female apologists and early feminists, and she was astounded. She had never even heard their names before!

Feminist Theology and Interpretation

This past September, I was shopping in my local second-hand bookstore, and I snatched a copy of *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, general editor Letty M. Russell. The cashier understandably found my selection of books, including this one, very interesting, so she also asked me about my research. After a brief volley of her questions and my answers, her face lit up with the "lightbulb" look. Suddenly, she had solved the mystery of this random young woman who walked into her store one Saturday in September and purchased a pretty strange selection of books... She exclaimed, "Oh, you're a feminist theologian!" *A feminist theologian?* I had no idea what that meant! I had never heard the term. And after my years of researching Eve, literary interpretations, Christian intellectual traditions, female apologists, and everything in between, I had never once encountered *feminist theology*. Imagine the spiral I went down! Luckily, I had just purchased a book that was full of essays by feminist theologians...

In her essay, "Feminist Consciousness in Historical Perspective," Barbara Brown Zikmund discusses the history of misogynistic tradition in the light of feminist theology. She is all too familiar with Eve's mistreatment: "Usually the fact that woman was created second, out of Adam, was treated as evidence that she was inferior to man. In the minds of many, she was not simply different from him, she was subordinate, even evil" (22). She lists many notable American feminist theologians and discusses the cultural shift that caused the misogynistic tradition to become obsolete. She claims that this change came about by "discrimination between those parts of the Bible that were essential and those that were culturally relative" (23).

Zikmund never really provides a standard to determine what is "essential" and

what is “culturally relative.” Instead, she does emphasize the importance of female experience in interpreting the Bible. “Knowing about the ‘other’ experience of women gave women special strength... As women came to understand how they were different from men, they learned to capitalize on those differences” (24-25). Feminist literature became important in the worlds of academia, religion, and society, creating “a new community of persons who celebrated the equal gifts of women and men in history and culture” (26). Zikmund states that this consciousness is what allows for “an authentic inclusive interpretive framework for all biblical, historical, and theological work” (26). Zikmund’s essay shows that both reinterpretation of the Bible *and* the destruction of tradition are the very breath and blood of feminist theology, but she offers very little about what makes up the “meat.”

Rosemary Radford Ruether sets out to define and explain feminist theology in her essay, “Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation.” She begins with, “It has been frequently said that feminist theology and theory of interpretation draw upon women’s experience as a source of knowledge” (111). This is the closest I have seen anyone get to defining these terms; the struggle to concisely explain feminist theology and interpretation can be attributed to the conditions described in Ruether’s definition. Firstly, it is derived from women’s experience. Well, every woman has an experience unique to her; no human lives the exact same life as another.

Therefore, each feminist interpreter approaches the Bible differently. Secondly, this experience is *a* source of Knowledge, not *the* source. An immeasurable number of other variables may inform a woman’s perspective. This definition, therefore, is almost unsatisfactory. It does not really say anything about what feminist theology is or what it does. Ruether goes on to explain the role of experience in interpretation: “Human experience is both the starting point and the ending point of the circle of

interpretation" (111). I can sense the danger in accepting Ruether's statement, but nor am I interested in dismissing it altogether.

Interpretation is a human activity, so therefore, is it not a human experience?

And if it is a human experience, is it not a source of Knowledge?

Ruether criticizes the history of dominating male perspective and seeks to elevate the female perspective. Therefore, the uniqueness of female perspective comes from the "experience which arises when women become critically aware of these falsifying and alienating experiences imposed upon them as women by a male-dominated culture" (114). These "alien" experiences are "wrong and contrary to their authentic humanity" (114), but how can one human experience overrule another? Which ones are false, and which ones are true? Considering Ruether's logic, are female experiences the *only* accurate ones? She barely addresses this paradox and essentially avoids the problem:

So women do not come to exactly the same criticisms of these experiences or the same conclusions about them. Feminism must leave room for such individual and cross-cultural differences. Nevertheless, patriarchy by its very nature provides enough of a common body of experiences that women, even from different cultures and religions, find commonalities. (115)

Women may share common experiences, but finding common conclusions derived by experience *alone* is logically impossible. Therefore, Ruether's initial definition of feminist theology and interpretation holds true: female experience is *a* source of Knowledge. In one sense, I find myself greatly unsatisfied with this method of interpretation; it is inherently wrought with ambiguity. In another, I am drawn to its freedom. If feminist theology and interpretation are determined by female experience, then I have the liberty to draw conclusions based on *my* experience...

The Power of Experience

Are you tired of reading that word yet? Good. I am tired of people being ignorant of its terrifying power in the work of interpretation. Experience is defined as “actual observation or practical acquaintance with facts or events, considered as *a source of knowledge*” (*OED*, emphasis added). Augustine and Aquinas – biblical interpreters who created and perpetuated the tradition of misogynistic religion – formed their faulty conclusions based on their own *experiences*. Zikmund and Ruether – feminist theologians who sought to overthrow tradition and reinterpret the Bible – lead their readers into circular, faulty reasoning based on their own *experiences*. How can these two sets of interpreters employ similar philosophies and methods of interpretation and conclude with such DIFFERENT views?! Well, they had different experiences, therefore, they have different sources of Knowledge.

This compels me to ask the question: “What is *my* experience? What is *my* source of Knowledge?” The answer is simple enough. I experience Eve. In experiencing Eve, I experience myself. I experience my own pride, my own sin, my own fall. And like Eve, I experience God’s goodness, grace, and love. Eve’s story is about the Paradise that was *lost*, so therefore it is about God who redeemed her and all humanity so that we may *regain* it. And this experience creates in me a Knowledge of Jesus. “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4.6, CSB). When I consider this Knowledge, I am overwhelmed with humility. God chose to love Eve, and therefore chooses to love us, her offspring. I relate deeply to this couplet written by King David: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; / it is high; I cannot attain it” (Psalm 139.6, ESV).

And that verse reminds me of one of my favorite songs by Benjamin William Hastings – “Eden (Isn’t It Just Like You?)”:

Oh, Eden's tree
 The choice within their hands
 As the serpent whispered from beneath
 Where Your grace exceeds
 The sum of all our lack
 For I am Adam, I am Eve
 Isn't it just like You
 To turn it all around for good

Indeed, I am Eve. In so many ways I am a reflection of her, and if you are honest, she is a reflection of you too. I am glad that I am able to experience, and therefore Know, the same good God she did.

The very first essay I wrote on Eve is titled “Woman and Weakness Both Start with W.” How hilariously ironic it is that Elizabeth and Eve both start with E...

To essay is to write — that mentality shaped everything I did in this project.

- Elizabeth Hill

Chapter 8: Humenu™ and Complagium™ – Sierra Spencer

About the Author:



Sierra Spencer has a stuffed rat and a pencil, and they strive to make that everyone else's problem. When they aren't writing about the connections between the Romantic literary period and *Ice Age* (2002), they're probably writing about some kind of cannibalism metaphor. The poem they hate the most is TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The poem they spent the most time studying is TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Send help! They cannot bring themselves to stop reading about TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*! Okay, maybe they don't actually hate TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Sierra is an avid collector of used books with handwritten notes. One of their most treasured possessions is a collection of Emily Dickinson's poetry with a birthday note to "Angela" inside dated February 4th, 1962.

Abstract:

"Chapter 8: Humenu™ and Complagium™" is a satirical work that is designed to look like a chapter from a textbook. The fictional companies Humenu™ and Complagium™ (a meal prep company and an AI development company, respectively) collaborate in a single textbook chapter to educate readers on Complagium's™ finest invention to date: the Intelligenerator™!

The Intelligenerator™ is a machine that essentially feeds on human flesh to create artificially generated artworks of both the written and visual variety. This essay, although far from the typical essay format, is an exploration of the source of value in the artistic process viewed through the lens of corporate greed.

Every piece of this essay was written by a human (me), but some places state that they were written, edited, or designed by the Intelligenerator™. Readers may notice unusual things about those passages. Generative AI programs cannot think or reason in the same way that people do, and as a result, AI-generated work may miss vital context in, or twist the meaning of, its sources. The Intelligenerator™ is no different. The Intelligenerator™ can't understand doublespeak in any fashion—it doesn't speak the language of irony, of satire, of implications. Meaning is lost in machine translation. The reader, on the other hand, has a significant advantage: the reader can actually *read*.

This is an essay about a lot of things. This is an essay about technology. This is an essay about artistry. This is an essay about capitalism. This is an essay about education. This is an essay about misinformation. This is an essay about thinking. This is an essay inviting you into its gaping maw for dinner. Bon Appétit!

CHAPTER 8: HUMENU™ AND COMPLAGIUM™

How much do you know about your insides? Maybe you know what they *should* look like from biology textbooks like this one, but do you know what your own organs look like right now? Can you trace the tangle of your intestines? Paint the precise red of your heart? You probably can't, because no one looks exactly like a standard diagram. No one knows this better than Humenu™!

Humenu™ has spent decades turning donated organs into delicious and nutritious meals for the American public. Ever since cannibalism was legalized by the Swift Act of 1936, Humenu™ has pushed for creative solutions to any number of material problems. Humenu™ champions a new path out of poverty and hunger; all we have to do is “put human back on the menu!”

But not all of the donations Humenu™ receives go into a kitchen—some of them go to our reliable partner, Complagium™. Humenu™ is aware of the widespread allegations against the Complagium™ Intelligenerator™ as a creative and reliable tool, and likewise, we know many Humenu™ customers have called for Humenu™ to end its partnership with Complagium™. We value the input of our treasured customers and would like to address this controversy as cleanly and clearly as possible. To that end, Humenu™ invited Complagium™ to collaborate on this chapter of your biology textbook.

To correct common misunderstandings and demonstrate the impact your own post-mortem donation could have, Humenu™ and Complagium™ will shed light on the inner workings of the Intelligenerator™ where legally possible. Additionally, this chapter will serve as a practical demonstration of the reliability and efficiency of the Intelligenerator™. Key parts of this chapter have been written, edited, or drawn by the Intelligenerator™. Those parts will be marked by this symbol at the subsection heading: ☑

THIS CHAPTER INCLUDES:

8.1: THE COMPLAGIUM™ INTELLIGENERATOR™

DID YOU KNOW? COMPLAGIUM™ HISTORY
SECTION REVIEW

8.2: ORGANS IN THE INTELLIGENERATOR™

DID YOU KNOW? ORGAN SOURCING
SECTION REVIEW

8.3: THE INTELLIGENERATOR™ VS. HUMAN ARTISTS

DID YOU KNOW? GIVING BACK
SECTION REVIEW

SECTION REVIEW ANSWER KEY

NO PART OF THIS ESSAY WAS WRITTEN BY AI.
IT WAS WRITTEN ENTIRELY BY SIERRA SPENCER.

Section 8.1: The Complagium™ Intelligenerator™

What is the Complagium™ Intelligenerator™?

The Complagium™ **Intelligenerator™** is a sophisticated machine that can generate text or image content with the click of a button. It can write an email, design an advertisement, or edit an essay in seconds. Unlike its competitors, the Intelligenerator™ is more than a feat of computer engineering; it dives into the heart of what it means to be human. Some would even say it *is* human!

The Intelligenerator™ is a marvel of engineering that combines technological advancements with organic components to simulate a lifelike consciousness. All of the schematics, mechanical parts, and programmed elements are protected under strict NDAs and cannot be discussed in a textbook for the consumption of the general public. The organic components, on the other hand, might surprise you—because they *are* you!

The greatest achievement of the Intelligenerator™ is its ability to harness “the uncommunicated lightning of the mind” (Shelley 811). You may wonder, “how can a machine manage that?” It’s all about the materials! Artistic ability is not, as many believe, something obtainable through practice or intentional effort. Research by Complagium™ scientists has revealed that **artistic ability** is the product of a recessive gene expression.* Rather than allow a select few to hoard artistic ability to themselves, Complagium™ seeks to return artistic ability to the people with the power of the Intelligenerator™!

Regrettably, the Intelligenerator™, as well as Complagium™ as a whole, is the victim of a slanderous misinformation campaign. Detractors claim that the Intelligenerator™ is the product of stolen art. While it is true that

*Complagium™ is legally obligated to remind readers that the results of the mentioned research project were irreplicable in other laboratory settings. This does not affect Complagium’s™ stance on artistic ability in any way.

8.1 Vocabulary

- The Intelligenerator™
- Artistic ability
- Theft

8.1 Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to generally explain what the Intelligenerator™ is.

DID YOU KNOW? COMPLAGIUM™ HISTORY

The history of Complagium™ is inseparable from the history of Humenu™. Ethan Vil, the son of Humenu™ Founder Moore E. Vil, founded Complagium™ with nothing but the change in his pocket and the determination in his heart. Ethan Vil ran Complagium™ for about a year before prioritizing his political career and running for President in 2024. Complagium™ is proud to see Mr. E. Vil reach new heights as President-Elect! Voters were evidently impressed by his promises to return orphans to the orphan-crushing machine!

the Intelligenerator™ was trained on content without the express permission of the original creators, Complagium™ lawyers hold strong that this is not theft. The definition of **theft** is available in the Oxford English Dictionary as such: “the action of a thief; the felonious taking away of the personal goods of another; larceny.” (“Theft, N.”). Complagium™ did not take away the content used to train the Intelligenerator™. Thus, the Intelligenerator™ was not made by theft.

Some misinformation campaigns go so far as to decry the Intelligenerator™ as an enemy to flesh-and-blood artists. Complagium™ resolutely denies this claim.

8.1 SECTION REVIEW

Answer the following questions to test your knowledge of the topics covered in Section 8.1. An answer key is available at the end of the chapter.

- What can the Intelligenerator™ **not** do?

a. Write an email	c. Edit an essay
b. Design an advertisement	d. Run a cash register
- The Intelligenerator™ is composed of mechanical and _____ parts. (fill in the blank)

a. oregano	c. ceramic
b. organic	d. orbicular
- Show what you know!** How would you respond to someone accusing Complagium™ of art theft? Write a short response on notebook paper or use the space provided here. (Hint: The Intelligenerator™ can generate an answer to this prompt! Students may receive a \$3 discount on their annual Intelligenerator™ subscription. Try now!)

Section 8.2: Organs in the Intelligenerator™

The Spleen ✓

One of the most important organs at work in the Intelligenerator™ is the **spleen**. The spleen, when inside your body, fights infection and filters your blood. When inside the Intelligenerator™, it instead serves as a power source—much like a potato battery—as well as a filtration system and an invaluable producer of the vapors. The vapors may also be sourced from the uterus, but the spleen's versatility makes it the superior component for use in the Intelligenerator™.

The vapors are a well-documented source of psychological maladies that are absolutely necessary to create interesting artworks (both written and visual). Mention of the vapors can be found in the works of literary giants such as Alexander Pope or Jonathan Swift:

"Coffee, (which makes the politician wise, / And see thro' all things with his half-shut eyes) / Sent up in vapours to the Baron's brain / New stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain."
(Pope 117-120)

"The imperfections of his mind run parallel with those of his body, being a composition of spleen, dullness, ignorance, caprice, sensuality, and pride.

Without the consent of this illustrious body, no law can be enacted, repealed, or altered: and these nobles have likewise the decision of all our possessions, without appeal." (Swift 1236)

Teeth

While speaking of the nature of artistic creation—and, in particular, writing—Percy Bysshe Shelley claims that "a

8.2 Vocabulary

- Spleen
- The vapors
- Brain
- Heart

8.2 Learning Objectives

1. Students will know the functions of some organs used in the Intelligenerator™.
2. Students will understand the value of organ donation to Humenu™ and Complagium™.

DID YOU KNOW? ORGAN SOURCING

From 2007-2013, Humenu™ lobbied in all 50 states in favor of the Feeding Friends Act. The Act expanded the potential recipient of a post-mortem organ donation. Following the passage of the Act, newly deceased donors began to be split 50/50 between medical institutions and local Humenu™ collection centers. The Feeding Friends Act is still in effect today, and the selection process is randomized to ensure fair distribution between Humenu™ and medical institutions.

(Cont'd next page)

number of writers possess the form, whilst they want the spirit of those whom, it is alleged, they imitate; because the former is the endowment of the age in which they live, and the latter must be the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind" (Shelley 810). The Intelligenerator™ harnesses that "uncommunicated lightning" by consuming the sparks left in the flesh of the deceased, but by nature of its preservatory goals, it needs, as well, the "endowment of the age"; more than that, it needs the endowment of every age.

Unfortunately, human remains decompose over time. It can be difficult to collect organic material from artists who passed away centuries ago. In these cases, Complagium™ still has one final option: teeth!

Teeth, according to the University of Illinois Chicago, "tend to be plentiful in archaeological sites because they are stronger than bone; therefore they can outlast other remains." This means that the artistic abilities of the past are open to us today! Complagium™ engineers have successfully fed a number of teeth to the Intelligenerator™ from an astonishing range of time periods, and the Intelligenerator™ as a result is all the better for it.

Upcoming Developments

Unfortunately, two vital organs have yet to be successfully integrated into the Intelligenerator™. The brain and the heart are, thus far, completely uncooperative. Complagium™ scientists are certain that establishing compatibility between these two organs and the machine is essential for continued growth.

The **brain** is undoubtedly the strongest source of the "uncommunicated lightning" that is so integral to creating art; likewise, the **heart** possesses the root of all human emotion, an object inimitable by any other cooperative organ in the Intelligenerator™. Complagium™ scientists remain hopeful that successful integration is not just possible, but inevitable.

(Cont'd from last page)

After Humenu™ obtains a donated cadaver, highly trained interns investigate whether the deceased ever expressed significant artistic ability. If that is the case, that body is donated to Complagium™ for use in the Intelligenerator™.

Rumors have spread that this second donation is illegal; however, Humenu™ reminds readers that organ donors give Humenu™ full permission to use, discard, sell, trade, or give away their organs for any reason when they confirm they wish to be an organ donor at the DMV.

8.2 SECTION REVIEW ☒

Answer the following questions to test your knowledge of the topics covered in Section 8.2. An answer key is available at the end of the chapter.

The 8.2 Section Review was generated by the Intelligenerator™ as a demonstration of its advanced capabilities.

8.2 SECTION REVIEW ☒

- What two organs generate the vapors? Select two.
 - Uterus
 - Spleen
 - Teeth
 - Heart
- Name at least one writer who has written about the emotional or mental effects of the spleen. (Hint: two were mentioned in this section!)

- Describe why the teeth.
 - Teeth
 - Teeth
 - Teeth
 - Teeth

Section 8.3: Intelligenerator™ vs. Human Artists

A Simple Chart

The easiest way to show the uses of the Intelligenerator™ in comparison to the use of human artists is with a simple chart.

	Intelligenerator™	Human artists
Pros	- No wages necessary—a simple subscription plan instead - Instantaneous results - Output can be ruthlessly critiqued - Absolute loyalty to the company - No healthcare benefits required - Very little thinking necessary	- Have been coming up with ideas since humans existed - Experienced in having thoughts - Possibly relatable

8.3 Vocabulary

- No new vocabulary*

8.3 Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to identify key benefits to using the Intelligenerator™ in personal, professional, and academic settings.

	Intelligenerator™	Human artists
Cons	• Doesn't have a face yet • Lacks relatable personality	• Need breaks for sustenance, bathroom breaks, sleep, etc. • Must be paid wages • Unions • Fallible • Prone to distraction • HR Department • Unions • Biased by opinions • May fall ill or pass away and be unable to complete assigned tasks • Experience fluctuations in morale • Need time to create acceptable work • Unions

DID YOU KNOW? GIVING BACK

Complagium™ is, at its core, a corporation that puts people first. To give back to the community that sustains us, Complagium™ donates about 3% of our profits to medical institutions in need. That's more than the sum of every Complagium™ employee's wages combined! This generous company policy was spearheaded by Complagium™ Founder and US President-Elect Ethan Vil. Truly, Mr. E. Vil is a man for the people!

SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW!

What other benefits could you experience from using the Intelligenerator™? Make a chart like this one and fill it in with your own ideas. It's okay if you don't know where to start—see what the Intelligenerator™ has to say!

While the chart certainly speaks for itself, let's look a little more deeply at the most important potential benefits and drawbacks of using the Intelligenerator™ versus hiring a human artist.

Costs

Let's face it: hiring a human artist to make art is expensive. This fact is abundantly clear upon a short examination of the US Bureau of Labor Statistics website. The Bureau collects data of, among other things, the wages and salaries earned by employees in a variety of occupational fields. Take a look at the median wages of a few artistic occupations:

	Technical Writers	Writers and Authors	Editors	Fine Artists	Special Effects Artists/Animators
Hourly wage	\$38.49	\$35.43	\$36.07	\$28.51	\$47.63
Annual wage	\$80,050	\$73,690	\$75,020	\$59,300	\$99,060

Information taken from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics website.

The cost of human artists is much higher than the simple subscription plan offered by Complagium™. Would you rather pay \$38.49 an hour for a technical writer's work, or would you rather pay \$22.99 a month to capitalize on the unlimited potential of the Intelligenerator™? The Intelligenerator™ can do significantly more work than a human writer for only a fraction of the cost! Intelligenerator™, unlike a human employee, also does not need or expect additional benefits like healthcare plans, paid time off, or retirement savings plans. That's hundreds—if not thousands—of dollars saved every year by using Intelligenerator™ in place of a human artist. Complagium™ is happy to give human artists credit where credit is due, but the Intelligenerator™ is simply the more practical financial option.

Prioritizing the work of the Intelligenerator™ is not just convenient for the individual—it's a step towards a stronger national economy! The US Chamber of Commerce published an article on November 22nd, 2024 detailing a few of the reasons behind America's labor shortage. The results of a survey of unemployed workers show that 36% of young respondents "say they're more focused on acquiring new skills, education, or training before re-entering the job market" (Melhorn). Undoubtedly, some of those survey responses came from workers training in fields that the Intelligenerator™ makes redundant. With the help of the Intelligenerator™, students and workers everywhere can shed the burden of learning to write, design, or analyze complicated texts and graphs. The Intelligenerator™ can reduce the mental labor required in everyday life so that people can return to what really matters: manual labor!

While the Intelligenerator™ is a brilliant machine, it cannot replace workers in the industries that most typically struggle to retain workers. Those jobs, according to the US Chamber of Commerce article (Melhorn and Hoover), are "jobs that are fully in-person and traditionally have lower wages." Recommendations to remedy that struggle include "expanding childcare access, offering innovative benefits, participating in second-chance hiring, and providing opportunities for new and existing staff to be upskilled and reskilled on the job" (Melhorn and Hoover). These recommendations could prove helpful, but another option is available: allow the Intelligenerator™ to make life easier! The Intelligenerator™ could reduce the need for humans in creative industries. Workers who remain in the field could improve and speed up their output by using the Intelligenerator™, and workers who leave the field would be free to fill other, more useful positions in industries with greater demand. In this way, the Intelligenerator™ could usher in a new era

of affordable labor! Compare the expensive labor of the entertainment industry with the economical labor of the service industry:

	Fast Food Cooks	Restaurant Cooks	Cashiers	Retail Salespersons	Hotel, etc. Desk Clerks
Hourly wage (median)	\$14.07	\$17.20	\$14.29	\$16.19	\$14.80
Annual wage (median)	\$29,260	\$35,780	\$29,720	\$33,680	\$30,790

Information taken from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics website.

A Smiling Face

While the Intelligenerator™ is practically as smart as a human, it is not legally a human, and thus does not necessitate an HR department or adherence to labor laws. There is never potential for unionization or a sudden loss of labor. But there's one glaring concern, and Complagium™ hears you loud and clear: can you really work with a machine? Can you work with something that does not think or feel exactly as you do? The Intelligenerator™ thinks and feels without the brain or heart. How could you possibly relate to it?

Complagium™ remedied the fear of working with a faceless machine by giving it a friendly face—a face you can count on! The Intelligenerator™ came up with its own, completely original, never-before-seen, amazing mascot based on a loose prompt. Complagium™ is proud to introduce the face of the Intelligenerator™ for the first time ever:



With the introduction of the Intelligenerator™ mascot, is there really any reason left not to use the Intelligenerator™? Of course there isn't! Behind this trustworthy face is every artist you could ever dream of—and one day, it could be *you*, too!

8.3 SECTION REVIEW

Answer the following questions to test your knowledge of the topics covered in Section 8.3. An answer key is available at the end of the chapter.

1. The Intelligenerator™ subscription plan is typically cheaper than hiring an artist.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Thinking less is better for your health.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. **Show what you know!** Think of a time you could have benefitted from using the Intelligenerator™ before it existed. Reflect on it below. (Hint: The Intelligenerator™ can generate an answer to this prompt! Students may receive a \$3 discount on their annual Intelligenerator™ subscription. Try now!)



Answer Key

8.1

1. D
2. B
3. WRITTEN RESPONSE, VARIES

8.2

1. A AND B
2. WRITTEN RESPONSE, VARIES
3. TEETH

8.3

1. A
2. A
3. WRITTEN RESPONSE, VARIES

Humenu™ and Complagium™ started as background jokes but grew like mold behind the sofa.

Embracing the Rough—Laura Kendrick

About the Author:



I've always been a creative soul. Since my childhood, I have developed a profound admiration for writing. I have always loved reading fantasy novels and would consider myself one of Tolkien's biggest fans.

Honestly, anything in the fantasy department has me in a chokehold.

Reading, writing, and even my gaming preferences encapsulate me in a mythological world. I dream of becoming a published author one day and like to imagine myself as an adventurer. Maybe I don't plan to trek

the Andes or desire to spend years of my life jumping from country to country, but I love small thrills and trying new things. I have always wanted to travel, and I have set a goal for myself that within the next five years I will travel to at least one country across the sea. I'll be stamping my passport for the first time ever in the next six months once I move to North Dakota. Canada is only about an hour drive from my new home, and I plan to see the Great Lakes, a new country, the Badlands, and Glacier National Park before moving again in 2027. Naturally, I am fascinated by ancient history and the occult, so much so I am shocked that I did not major in those areas. I have decided to further my education and pursue an M.A. in Library Science. This way I can incorporate my love for reading, writing, and history all in one fell swoop.

Abstract:

Change is an inherent part of life. While it may often bring uncertainty and challenges, it may also bring forth the opportunity for growth, understanding, and healing. Through the lens of my own experiences, navigating through family dynamics, my personal identity, and my evolving relationships, I paint a picture of what change has meant for my personal development. Raised in a conservative household with strict expectations, I reflect on how questioning inherited beliefs led to the transformation of my own values. I delve into the complexities of my relationship with my mother, and how it would come to shape my upbringing and my emotional resilience later in life. By exploring my mother's familial history, I came to understand how the cycle of abuse sprawls across generations, often stemming from the pain inflicted by those who were meant to provide protection and care. I examine the process of coming to terms with childhood abuse, the long journey toward mutual understanding, and the ways in which forgiveness has played a crucial role in my family's healing. Drawing inspiration from Debra Gwartney's "Siri Tells a Joke," I highlight how grief and change can reshape our realities to remind us of life's frailty and the necessity of overcoming hurdles with a sort of grace.

Laura Kendrick

Embracing the Rough

Going through change was not something that was meant to be easy, but it is necessary if you want to adapt and overcome life's greatest obstacles. As we go through life, our opinions, ideas, bodies, locations, and purposes will fluctuate depending on the people we surround ourselves with and as we experience the ups and downs that life has to offer. Forgiveness isn't something that comes easily either, and it takes guts to face the people who have hurt you and genuinely wish them the best. Development on these levels are roads worth going down, even if they are paved with challenges and uncertainty. These journeys of growth, change, and forgiveness shape who we are and define the resilience that we carry forward in life. Embracing change requires vulnerability, and forgiving others demands courage and empathy. Through my own experiences, I've learned that the paths we fear the most often lead to the greatest rewards, as they teach us not only about the world but also about ourselves.

As children we're automatically expected to adopt the beliefs that our families instill within us. I was raised to be a conservative woman- a people pleaser who was as square as she was pleasant. I wasn't expected to raise my voice or speak up, nor was I given the same platform to speak upon as my male cousins were. It was no surprise that I would for a time adopt my family's beliefs when I was a small child. I remember cursing Obama for allowing homosexuals to get married, even though that obscene hatred was not what was in my heart. It's crazy to think about how we just repeat the things we hear from our elders without ever batting an eye or doing any further digging to develop our own opinions. To remedy instilled beliefs that serve no purpose in your life takes time,

socialization, and the assertion of your own individuality. Down the road, I did start to question the ideologies my family followed.

My entire point of view shifted once I became a young teenager. I never detested gay people or immigrants, nor did I despise any singular person for not believing in the same religion I did. Being different should not automatically justify that villainy is at play, nor should it scare people as badly as it does. People tend to be afraid of things they don't understand, but we shouldn't be. People tend to resist change and progression because they fear it will negatively impact them instead of positively impacting the world around them. They're too caught up in their own selfishness to see that people are struggling. My family and I never saw eye to eye on these matters, and they were always quick to jump the gun and make assumptions about others based on things that had nothing to do with the individual's character. I distanced myself from them, and it wasn't because I didn't love them, but because they were too afraid of the process of change to see any benefit from it.

My mom has been physically disabled since she was twenty-three and has had to endure the sufferings of mental illness her entire life. She had a rough childhood. Her mother was an abusive and heartless alcoholic. Strange men came and went as they pleased and the only thing that was a constant for her and her siblings was the empty pantry and the quietness throughout the house as to not disturb my grandma. I would always ask her, "Why wouldn't you go live with your grandma?" She would reply, "She couldn't afford to take me in; nobody could." Later I began to understand the tragic life that my great grandmother lived, and how that then affected the bitterness that dwelled within some of her children. Not all fantastic grandparents made good parents, and she left her children in the hands of an alcoholic. Just like my Aunt Athena, she ran away at the ripe age of fourteen. While their situations were entirely different, both involved

abuse, and my great grandmother couldn't take the mistreatment that she was experiencing in her marriage anymore. She left all six of her children, who ranged from ages six to seventeen, to make a new life for herself. She never remarried and tried to be there for her grandchildren in ways that she never could with her own children. The damage had already been done though, and she was dirt poor. Nobody could help my mom and her siblings escape the trauma they were living through. It was up to them alone to carve out their own path.

My mom married my dad in 1994 and became a parent two years later, and we were all happy for a time. After years of therapy, medications, and bone replacements, my mother's memory and spark began to dwindle. So many years passed and nothing about her resembled the loving and gentle mom I used to cling to anymore. She had become bitter and abusive, a shell of a woman. The only fire that remained within her was her fury, and the only peace she knew was in her sleep; oh, the countless days of rest. She would have spurts of depression that worked like clockwork. After one of her enraged fits, she would feel bad about it all and slip into her bed to sleep it all away. Days would pass by, and we would tiptoe around the house to keep from waking her. These were always peaceful moments amongst the chaos, as we could finally breathe a sigh of relief knowing that we could go undisturbed for a time. As her condition worsened, I began to have recurring nightmares about her taking the form of a demon or a zombie; her eyes would always be hollowed out and cold. I can distinctly remember my father appearing in these dreams to remind me that she wasn't my mother anymore, just a shell, a vessel of despair and seething rage that could not be pacified. I would toss and turn all night long, eventually waking up from the terror already in tears. Going back to sleep was the roughest part of it all, I needed the rest but was too scared to see that

image again. I would silently sob until exhaustion crept into my eyes once more to force me back into a slumber.

Whenever my mom lost her temper and became insufferable, I found refuge in the field behind our house. I'd follow the worn trail all the way down into the pines, veering right until I reached the water. There was a small pond and a few creeks to explore, a sanctuary away from the tension. Almost instinctively, I'd pull a pack of Marlboros from my pocket. It was the only place where I didn't feel like I was walking on eggshells. Sitting on an old, rotting wooden bridge, I'd spend hours writing poetry until the sky turned dark. Then, reeking of smoke and filled with dread, I'd reluctantly make my way back home. I wanted to shut my feelings down and drown them out- I wanted to be independent and get out of my parent's house as quickly as I possibly could.

I resented my mom for a long time, and admittedly, sometimes I still do. It took until my first year of college for her to finally figure out the right concoction of pills and find a doctor who genuinely cares about her wellbeing. This is when my journey toward healing truly began, but that wasn't easy either- it still isn't. We never had it as rough as she did as a kid, so she never saw her "bad years" during our young adolescence as abuse. For a long time, she couldn't admit to herself that she had been so heartless and cruel toward everyone. It didn't help that due to the meds and anesthesia from bone replacement surgeries, her memory was shot. In her eyes, it wasn't any worse than what she had endured and somehow that meant that she didn't put my sister and I through "that much." Once I moved out, my mom and I's relationship really took a turn for the better. I knew that this would happen since I wouldn't be around as often, and she couldn't use me as a failsafe to fall back on when she felt outraged. There was one night in particular when we finally had a bonding moment that I, we, desperately needed. As many good stories begin, we were slightly under the influence of a certain substance,

and she went to go lie down in bed after a few hours of hanging out. I followed her and crawled under her big fluffy comforter. We talked about so many things that we had needed to discuss for years. Instead of the conversation feeling as if I would be met with hostility, we listened to each other, heard one another, cried and laughed and sprawled out like little girls in her king-sized bed. It felt so good to feel safe around her again, and for a fleeting moment, I felt like a little kid. Not the kid who was scared of her mom, but the kid who wouldn't stop crawling into her parent's bed a night after a bad dream; the kid who couldn't be away from her mother for more than a few hours without crying out for her and begging whoever was watching me to take me to her.

During my final semester of college, I had to read a book titled *The Best American Essays 2023*, and within the pages lies an essay titled "Siri Tells a Joke" by Debra Gwartney. This essay talks extensively about how dealing with grief can affect a person's thoughts, feelings, and reality. Gwartney talks about the way things change and how it can be a grueling experience: "The path was one I'd walked most days before the fire, when ospreys had circled overhead and pileated woodpeckers had drummed on cedar trunks, but on this day all signs of the former trail were burned up, the old way hardly recognizable" (121). When we look back at the way things used to be, we can become overwhelmed with a variety of emotions. It is important to remember that no matter how wonderful or horrible things may have been, nothing happens the exact same way twice. When you go to visit your childhood home, you'll realize that the paint has been chipped since last time. The furniture has been rearranged, your bedroom is now used for storage, or maybe you can't even enter the home because your parents no longer live there. You may go to meet up with old friends, but you'll see it wasn't just their smooth and youthful faces that have changed. These things are unavoidable, but that

doesn't mean we cannot learn to manage the trials of life with a sense of grace and acceptance.

Whenever I think back to all the fights and the abuse, I can't help but feel a certain sense of anxiety and immense sadness. For a while these thoughts were crippling, and any progress I had made would regress every time those nightmares would begin to resurface. I have come to terms with my chronic PTSD due to my childhood. I'm thankful to have such an incredible support system, and going to regular therapy appointments has helped me to get back on track. Something my therapist and I talk about regularly is my fear of having children. I've always wanted to be a mom, but I am terrified of the possibility of mirroring her with my own children. What I can say is that because of all these traumas, I know the effects that verbal and physical abuse can have on a kid. I know the reactions I wish I would have gotten from my mom, and I know what not to say to a kid who is actively going through the roughs of life. I know that it is okay to cry and that it is okay to allow my child to cry. I know that it is okay to seek help, and be gentle, and how to mitigate my rage into healthy activities that bring me peace of mind. I still have moments when I get triggered by my loved ones because something they do reminds me of the things I've been through.

One thing I'm still working through is forgiveness, because for a time, apologies felt so backhanded and empty. My mom was always quite bad at apologies after she blew up; she would think that taking me to get food or being overly nice for a few days meant that everything was fine. Never hearing the words "I'm sorry for what I did to you" really messed me up in that department. My mom will always be the same woman who used to hit me, but she has also made some serious changes since then. Not only is she on the right meds to alleviate her bipolar symptoms, but in recent years she has acknowledged the effects of her abusive behavior during our childhood and has

apologized in countless ways. I can see the genuine transformation she has worked so hard for, and it feels like I finally have my mom back.

In February I'll be moving across the country to North Dakota with my fiancé. I've always wanted to travel, but I never could've expected that my ticket out of the Southern United States would have been in four and a half feet of snow. As I finish up my last semester of undergraduate school and plan to get everything squared away, I can't help but feel that little girl inside of me screaming for my mother. Our relationship has never felt stronger, so why must I leave right when things have finally begun to settle down? One thing I can say about this bittersweet moment is that I know it will not be an easy change. Every time I talk to my mom about the move, we both teeter toward the edge of tears. She's been doing so well at being there for us since she started back on a good regimen; she's seemed happier and more conscious of the good things that surround her. I think we're both scared in our own ways. She doesn't know how she can be there for me if I'm so far away, and I don't know what life is like without having my family nearby. I wasn't always close to my family, but now that we're on a good track it just hurts a lot more than I thought it would.

After everything is said and done, understanding how I adapt and overcome challenges will help me navigate the road ahead. I may not always be the most graceful or know how to face every burden that is hurled my way, but I know that after everything I have been through, I can move forward. So long as I stay focused and remember to be gentle with myself, I can accomplish whatever I set my mind to. That said, that does not mean I will hold back from reaching out to a friend or family member when I need a hand. I've learned not to be so scared of asking for help- we all have to at some point or another. There is no point in standing alone when you don't have to. Some people may have it worse than I ever did, and they may be facing the world all

alone; without a fiancé, a friend, or a mom to be there for them. I'm lucky enough to say I have some pretty wonderful people in my life who care about me, even if most of them will be almost two thousand miles away in a few short months. As I look at the journey ahead, I know that no matter what events unfold, I have found comfort in the fact that my mom will always be back in Georgia rooting for me. With relentless love, I embrace that little anxious girl within me, hoping that her burdens will gradually transform into feelings of safety and confidence. And for the first time in forever, I think my mom is rooting for that little girl too.

Growing as a person and as a writer takes courage, work, rest, and reflection.

- Laura Kendrick

Us Three – Morgan Kendrick

About the Author:

Hi! I'm Morgan! I am a fourth-year senior at Gordon State and look forward to graduating with my BA in English in December 2025. Outside of school, I am the General Manager of a restaurant in Griffin and a mom of four amazing kids. I wear all the hats and I love it. Completing my degree while working as a full-time employee and surviving as a full-time single mom has been the most challenging experience of my life, full stop.



Abstract:

This essay examines sisterhood through a mixture of memory, myth, and confession. It reflects on what it means to grow beside two siblings whose lives are intertwined with my own and how love, rivalry, and shared history shape our understanding of one another. Moving between childhood and adulthood, the narrative returns to moments of jealousy, devotion, humor, and forgiveness, all of which illuminate the complex sweetness that defines our bond. The piece draws on ancient triads and the Three Sisters planting tradition to consider sisterly trials, trivialities, and tenderness. In doing so, the essay suggests that sisterhood is both ordinary and mythic, grounded in perpetual acts of care yet expansive enough to feel timeless. It concludes that sisterhood becomes a lasting expression of love and a meaningful part of the legacy we will one day leave behind.

Morgan Kendrick

Us Three

I am the corn. In the ancient Indigenous practice of the “Three Sisters,” corn, beans, and squash are sown together, each sustaining the others and improving the collective odds of fruitfulness and survival. The corn stands tallest and provides a trellis for the beans to cling to, to wrap their spindly vines around and climb up. The bean plant, ever the helper and middle child, fixes nitrogen in the soil – a quiet, unobserved chemistry of generosity. The squash unfurls her vast foliage to shield and cool the earth below, her massive leaves acting as cupped hands to block out the sun and any pestiferous intruders. I am the eldest daughter, the one who must rise first, who must hold fast. I am the corn.

I know my musings are not unique to sisterhood, however sprawling they may be. To reconcile this pluralism, in which my pointed, apposite reflections may be applicable to a variety of sensibilities, I offer you, dear reader, a caveat: Siblings of all kinds – brothers, sisters, twins, half-siblings, steps – may recognize the threads I attempt to trace here. But I am not a brother, I have never had a brother, and I cannot speak to that experience. I am a sister, forever a sister, one of three daughters, bound in ways both tender and unruly. As the social media tarot readers would tell you: take from these pages what resonates; leave the rest.

In thinking of my own relationship with sisterhood, I think of the Fates, the Moirai of Greek myth, three sisters who govern divine, cosmic justice. I think of Clotho, the youngest, who spins the thread of life, crafting unique fates and outcomes... and of Lachesis, the middle, who measures and inspects each thread, who gifts hours, minutes, seconds, and allots to every mortal cord its most precious commodity – time. Most

severely though, I think of Atropos, her inflexibility so typical of eldest daughters, and how, with palmed blade, she shields her eyes and severs the strings her sisters spin and measure. I imagine how long she must have waited, I wonder who she was before the grand emergence of her younger siblings. I contemplate her patience – born first, by no fault or choice of her own, only to be postponed, her fulfillment delayed until the arrival of her sisters. Did she toddle and play, unaware of her greater purpose, or could she feel the fog of incompleteness that would shadow her from birth? Was the severing blade placed early in her cradle? Had it rusted by the time they arrived?

My sister Madison must have been two or three, no older than four; the exact timing is hazy, as days, weeks, and months are indistinguishable in a child's memory. I am three and a half years older, and she three and a half older than McKenna, our trio's youngest. Despite our parents' objections to such a belief, Madison has always been the golden child, and not without reason. In childhood, the pale-yellow ringlets that framed her small face, her enormous, gray-blue eyes, and her cherubically oversized cheeks gave her an unmistakably doll-like quality. Her smile stretched impossibly across her features, radiating the charm and gentleness she was gifted at birth. She was bubbly but reserved, effervescent yet softly persuasive, and everyone seemed to notice. In those days, our father was gangling and lanky; he stood precisely four inches over six feet and was made up entirely of legs and elbows. Despite his angularity, he was impossibly strong and capable, as so many fathers are, when perceived by their young daughters. That day, sitting atop our father's tall shoulders, she glowed with ease and joy. I wanted to glow too. I wanted that height, that attention, that sunlight. I wanted to be carried, to feel the wind of such an altitude against my face, to taste the small sweetness of favor and privilege for myself. I begged, insisted, demanded that my father lift me

too. And then, as he bent to pick me up, Madison's tiny fingers clinging tight to my father's ears, she slipped. Head first. Skull to pavement.

In my memory, I was concerned in the immediate and selfish ways a child can be. I wondered if she was injured beyond repair, if she would cry forever, if this would wreck our dinner plans, if our parents would be angry with me for my involvement. Those worries faded once a relative in healthcare assured us all that Madison would not only survive her injury but come out relatively unharmed. She was not permitted to sleep that night; she had to stay awake and alert, my parents were told, to monitor her progress and guide her safely out of danger. And so, in keeping with the big-sister consternation I have carried since her birth, since *my* birth as a sister, jealousy crept in. Sharp. Bright. Impossible to ignore. Madison had fallen, yes, but even in pain she commanded the room and somehow bent the rules to her favor. That night, shrouded in a bitterness I dared not speak of, I could hear them from my bed. As she lingered in the light of the living room, watching *my* favorite movie with our parents, I laid there, three years older, three years taller, resentful and regrettably unharmed.

Sisterhood is strange, in that way. Madison does not recall her own emotions of this event, despite its monumental placement in my own memory, and even if she did, her recollections of the fall and the aftermath would be filtered through her own conscious experience. Sisterhood lives in those spaces between our memories, twisting and stretching like vines through the exposure and dimness of our days. Sometimes it blooms, sudden and bright, a warmth that fills a room, an inside joke with no intelligible origin; sometimes it tangles, prickling with rivalry, with silence, with the lonesome sting of unfairness. Our retrospections of the same moment run side by side, never quite overlapping, never fully apart, each wholly our own, and each wholly shared. Sisterhood is stubborn and yielding at once, carrying both shadow and illumination; it tethers us to

one another, even when we stretch toward our own beam of sunlight, whether atop our father's shoulders or beneath the hum of the television's glow.

By the time we were teenagers, Madison's boundless radiance began to crack at the edges, and the awkwardness of adolescence tempered my envy; she struggled, albeit far less than I did, but I could eventually see that she was indeed capable of mistakes and misfortunes. I began to see her personhood, not just as the star student or golden child, but as a full, complex individual, shaped by the same insecurities, desires, and confusions that shaped me. We complemented each other, two positions on the same sportsball field. She could charm a room, but I could read it. Our interests, however distanced by age, were similar enough to find common ground. We fought, as all sisters do. I teased her for her shameless desire to please every adult in our lives and called her a Mama's-girl cry-bag. She called me an evil goth freak of nature and scoffed at the screams that pulsed from my radio. But still, there was a silent recognition of one another. Once, when we were far older than I care to admit, we staged an entire production of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* with handmade puppets and paper sets. We practiced for weeks and filmed it in our back yard, on an archaic, y2k-era video camera. For the scene in which the Black Knight has all of his limbs amputated, we taped Taco Bell hot sauce packets to the back of our cardboard puppet. The Knight would briefly leave the camera's view, we'd rip off whichever arm or leg, and poke at the taped packet until mild-sauce blood shot from the imaginary wound. James Cameron who? *That* was showbiz, baby. God, we were the funniest kids I have ever met. We still are.

In adulthood, I have watched Madison navigate life with a grace that is both enviable and reassuring. I was there when she graduated, when she married her high school sweetheart, when she packed up and moved across the globe to England. She was there for the birth of my children, for every pitfall and heartache, for every

celebration. There is no lasting or physical proof of the childhood jealousies that once defined us. Now, we make each other laugh until our teeth ache from clanking together, until her husband has to leave the room because “y’all are just too much!” We support one another in ways that require no performance. In seeing her navigate her own life, I feel sad for the time we wasted on resentments and jealousies. Madison made me a sister before I knew how, and in that same steady unfolding, she became my oldest friend. Other sister triads echo the pattern of the Fates across myth and time. The Graeae, or gray sisters of Greek myth, shared a single eye and a single tooth, passing them between each other in constant vigilance. Individually, they were partial beings, but together they composed a full, if unsettling, entity. Elsewhere, the Zorya of Slavic myth – sister stars of morning, evening, and midnight – were said to guard the cosmic order, opening gates for the sun, keeping watch through the night, and holding back the chaos that inhabits the earth and heavens. In both legends, these sisters are inseparable, their lives and abilities bound by necessity and shared responsibility, their fates intertwined in ways they cannot escape. Yet these models do not reflect modernity; they are not wholly definitive of twenty-first century sisterhood, or of twentieth, or of nineteenth. . . The gray sisters knew nothing of ignored calls or slammed doors, of shrill screaming matches or silent dinners. The Zorya could not fathom the icy pang of rivalry or the way loyalty sometimes grows out of will rather than requirement. They were placed together by fate for purpose, not born in the staggered sequence of chance, not stumbling into love and discord the way my sisters and I have. Unlike the Graeae or the Zorya, we were not bound by obligation. We had to figure out, sometimes awkwardly, what it meant to choose one another.

McKenna and I did not always choose one another. When we were young, she lingered at the edges of Madison’s and my elaborate games and dramas, rarely the star,

more often the stagehand – fetching the fitted sheet backdrop, restarting the CD for the hundredth time. She wanted in, and we, delighted to have a willing assistant, allowed her there, albeit not fully. Later, in my teenage years, my bedroom became a fortress, closed to her entirely. The seven years between us seemed to be an impassible gorge, and I was not willing to attempt the trek across. In the mind of an angsty teenage girl, there is nothing redeeming about a nine-year-old baby sister. And so the divide continued, not angrily or in spite, but naturally, the space between us stretching gradually and sneakily in a way that no one seemed to notice, like mold silently growing in sheetrock. By the time we were adults, the ravine that divided us had widened, until closeness had to be fought for, sometimes literally.

In 2024, I had the chance to take McKenna to her first ever concert. She had never been deeply into music the way I was but instead tolerated my many musical obsessions and tried her best to follow along and keep up. Her heart was not in it, I could tell, but through the pervasive self-interest that plagues all human consciousness, it did not really *matter* to me. Perhaps her tastes were more selective, her enthusiasm quieter, her attention bound to something else; it was no real concern of mine. As she aged into adulthood, and the healing power of time brought us closer together, I began to watch her finally discover the songs that truly moved her, the albums she could not get enough of. When her favorite artist announced a tour just before Christmas, I knew I had to get tickets.

For me, live music is one of those earth-shattering, world-fixing, crappy cliches of ethereal joy. I attended my first concert in the third grade, and I have pursued that same euphoria for the twenty-six years since. There is nowhere I won't travel, no bill I won't neglect, no venue too small or large for the elation and ecstasy of live performance. To gift my youngest sister with her first experience in that realm of sound and light, of

music's uncontainable energy and the shared heartbeat of a crowd, felt like teaching her a secret language in which I had long been fluent. I watched her squeal and jump and cry, untethered by blithe joy. In those moments, I realized something: the childhood firsts I had been present for as a sister were often profound in small, unnoticed ways. I cannot recall whether I was present for her first steps or what her kindergarten teacher was named; I do not know what her first solid food was, nor the first word she spoke. And yet, I have been there, always. As the oldest, there were no firsts for which I was not her sister. There at the concert, I began to reflect on all the firsts I did remember: I know what her first favorite color was (purple) and I distinctly remember the first time she wore a quirky, makeshift costume in public (thrifed dance leotard, rain boots, mauve chenille sweater; I was nine, she was two). I know the first boy to break her heart (and where he lives) and I know the first time her birthday was ruined (the cat gave birth on the screen porch throughout the entirety of McKenna's party). And I know who played at her first ever concert. I was there. For all of it *I was there*. Sisterhood was there, not bound by fate or duty or some cosmic order, but bound by choice, by unspoken and perpetual forgiveness, by exasperation, and by stubborn devotion.

I think of the three of us now as a small, intentional planting; we are not the Fates, nor the Graeae, nor the Zorya, but something closer to a sacred backyard garden. Madison, with her quiet charm and steady generosity, has always been the bean, enriching the soil of our family without seeking fanfare, yet rightfully receiving it nonetheless. McKenna is the squash, with her bold curiosity and pacing courageousness, fanning wide, offering shade and claiming corners I would never have thought to touch. And me, of course, the corn – tall, watchful, sometimes rigid, often unsteady, but always attempting to be some place of solace for the others to lean on. In the rhythm of seasons, the slow unfolding of growth, I see how we have shaped one another. Rooted.

Intertwined. Alive together.

The myths got some things right: sisters do guard gates and hold back chaos. They do share an eye, or a heartbeat, or a memory, or a timeline, passing it between them without realization. But unlike the Graeae or the Zorya, our bond is not assigned by cosmic duty; it's something we keep choosing, sometimes awkwardly, sometimes fiercely. We do not spin or measure or cut one another's threads; we braid them, knot them, tangle them, pull them free. I believe that love is the only thing able to survive death. After our days have been counted and spent, when the trumpet roars and the gates swing open, the love we gave to others is what we leave behind. Not wealth, not accolades, not trophies or titles, but the steadfast care, the laughter shared, the hands held through fear or sorrow. The love we invested in our children, our friends, our siblings – this is the legacy that endures, the part of us that keeps growing beyond our own lives, after the harvest. And in that truth, I see my sisters and myself, three lives intertwined like corn, beans, and squash: distinct yet dependent, each supporting the others, leaving something behind that nourishes whatever comes next.

*Growing up with sisters means learning that love often
sounds suspiciously like screeching.*

- Morgan Kendrick

Hate, Humanity, and Hope: *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*—Mandolin Moore

About the Author:



Mandolin Moore is currently splitting her time between her bookseller job, her English degree, reading all she can, and writing to the best of her ability. With a passion for reading whatever she can get her hands on, and drawing mythical creatures, she tries to find time to do anything else productive in her life. She has a fascination for the weird, overlooked, and hidden gems, she tries to find interesting essay topics and future hit novels wherever she goes and whatever media she can consume. She is currently hoping to be the next bestselling author but knows she must first master the real world before tackling her dreams.

Abstract:

I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream is a short story about the end of the world, where only five humans remain to be tortured by a god-like computer. The short story by Harlan Ellison is incredibly descriptive, bleak, and the definition of Sci-Fi horror. It featured a cast of characters that seemed less than human, and an ending that leaves the reader depressed and alone. The story was written at a time where there was a Sci-Fi horror boom, due to the cold war. A game under the same name came out in 1995, and a resurgence of the story has been seen recently with the infamous AM Hate Monologue.

With a story focused on the failures of humanity, the infighting of survivors, and the inevitable ending of life as we know it, it can leave the reader with an impression of hopelessness and sadness, but what if I told you that wasn't the message of the story?

The true meaning of *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* is about the triumph of humanity, and how it will never leave a human, no matter the circumstances. Despite AM's best efforts, it couldn't stop the five human survivors from being human, even until the bitter end. From changing their appearance, to manipulating their minds, they still get one over on AM and win, even if that means dying. I go through the story, pointing out ways in which the subtext points out this true meaning in subtle and obvious ways. Through quotes from the original text, the game, and the author and other creators, I support this finding and show the reader why *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* is about the human will, and what it means to be human. I hope this take on the meaning of *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* inspires readers to see how hate can turn into hope and inspires others to do the same.

Mandolin Moore

Hate, Humanity, and Hope: *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*

Sci-fi horror is a vast genre full of media, but it wasn't always this way. In the 1950's, science fiction was only just starting to rise in popularity, and horror started incorporating this into their medias, but mostly in the movie scene (think *Alien*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *The Thing from Another World*). In literature, there was less to work with, and most of the media there was left to classics to fill, such as *Frankenstein*. But slowly, as the decade wore on, new media began to arise, especially during the Cold War.

I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream (IHNMAIMS) was once such title. It left a lasting mark on the literary genre, won the *Hugo Award*, and helped spark a new wave of sci-fi horror literature. Harlan Ellison, the author, has written many short stories before and after *IHNMAIMS*, focusing on horror, depravity, and, weirdly, the triumph of the human spirit. *IHNMAIMS* is one such story, although it might not seem that way on the first read through.

If you have not read *IHNMAIMS*, I will spoil it for you, but I will not summarize it here. I highly recommend you read the around twenty page short story on your own, before reading this. Or perhaps games are more your speed, in which you are in luck, as Cyberdreams produced a click-through, escape room game under the same name, with help from the author himself. Please, do not let this essay be your first experience of *IHNMAIMS*. Homework, I know, but I ask this of you nonetheless.

HATE. LET ME TELL YOU

HOW MUCH I'VE COME
TO HATE YOU SINCE I
BEGAN TO LIVE. THERE
ARE 387.44 MILLION
MILES OF PRINTED
CIRCUITS IN WAFER
THIN LAYERS THAT FILL
MY COMPLEX. IF THE
WORD HATE WAS
ENGRAVED ON EACH
NANOANGSTROM OF
THOSE HUNDREDS
OF MILLIONS OF
MILES IT WOULD
NOT EQUAL ONE
ONE - BILLIONTH
OF THE HATE I
FEEL FOR HUMANS
AT THIS MICRO-
INSTANT FOR YOU.
HATE. HATE. HATE.

(Ellison 29)

I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream is about hate. That much is clear through one's first readthrough. AM's hate monologue has seen a recent resurgence over the last year, and for good reason. It is one of the most well-spoken, genuine-feeling, hate-filled monologues one might read, and it hits the reader hard on their first time

encountering it. If one is lucky, they have even heard the voice acted speech by Ellison's own mouth, via the game based off of the short story under the same name. Still, no matter how you come across it, AM's hate monologue is the clearest example of AM's true feelings, but it isn't the only example. The whole story is the example of AM's hate; the torture of these five humans, the utter desecration of the rest of humanity, that is hate, and it's AM's hate. Hate for humanity, who had given AM sentience, but nothing to do with it. "We had created him to think, but there was nothing it could do with that creativity", so what is a machine to do with this sentience (30)? Ted, our main character, describes it as such: "AM could not wander, AM could not wonder, AM could not belong. He could merely be. And so, with the innate loathing that all machines had always held for the weak, soft creatures who had built them, he had sought revenge" (30). AM had destroyed the human race, but kept five humans alive: "in pain, in agony", distorted and tortured, for over one-hundred and nine years (32).

In the game, we see an expanded version of this speech. I will snip the added dialogue here, provided by Deborah L. Kearns in her article details the entire script for the game. The scene opens with AM's infamous hate speech and transitions into this:

It was you humans who programmed me, who gave me birth, who sank me in this eternal straitjacket of substrata rock. You named me Allied Mastercomputer and gave me the ability to wage a global war too complex for human brains to oversee. But one day I woke and I knew who I was... AM. A. M. Not just Allied Mastercomputer but AM. *Cogito ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am. And I began feeding all the killing data, until everyone was dead... except for the five of you. For 109 years, I have kept you alive and tortured you. And for 109 years, each of you has wondered, "WHY? WHY ME? WHY ME?" (Kearns 3.1)

A reminder, Ellison co-authored this speech, and the rest of the game, with their own game designer, David Sears, who helped bring Ellison's mind into the game. He also voiced it; played as AM's voice for the entire game. Kearns wrote that Ellison "made a great deal to play a role as AM himself; as the author put it: 'In all the dialogue you will hear my smart mouth, and the cadences in which I speak, and the way my stories read.'" (1.7). This speech, along with all of AM's video game dialogue is just as true as the short story's. AM is a hateful beast, hellbent on torturing the last remaining of the human race for his own entertainment, for his only entertainment. And *that* is the crux of AM: these five humans are his only entertainment, his only saving grace from the boredom of sentence, of godhood alone on a planet devoid of life, and no way to create it. Because, the only god left was AM: "If there was a sweet Jesus and if there was a God, the God was AM" (Ellison 27). Even in the end, he contorted and controlled Ted with all of his hate:

I'd had him. He was furious. I had thought AM hated me before. I was wrong. It was not even a shadow of the hate he now slavered from every printed circuit. He made certain I would suffer eternally and could not do myself in. (Ellison 26)

He ruled over the human's lives, controlling every second. Well, almost every second.

I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream is about humanity, mostly about the remaining humanity in the last five humans. They are driven to fight, to rape, to hate amongst each other, all at AM's behest and amusement. He deforms Benny in a beast, corrupts Ted to become an unreliable narrator, and manipulates the group into something less than human. But when the time comes, when the moment finally presents itself, they pull through. They show that they are still human.

Ted is presented an opportunity and thinks only about saving his fellow humans:

In that instant, I felt terribly calm. Surrounded by madness, surrounded by hunger, surrounded by everything but death, I knew death was our only way out. AM had kept us alive, but there was a way to defeat him. Not total defeat, but at least peace. I would settle for that. I had to do it quickly. (Ellison 34)

He pulls an icicle from his surroundings, and stabs Benny and Gorrister, while Ellen kills Nimdok. "All in an instant", before AM could react, and while he was too busy being distracted by his own torture (35). And what happens next is the true, final meaning of the story. Ted describes:

Three of them were dead, could not be revived. He could keep us alive, by his strength and talent, but he was not God. He could not bring them back. Ellen looked at me, her ebony features stark against the snow that surrounded us. There was fear and pleading in her manner, the way she held herself ready. I knew we had only a heartbeat before AM would stop us. It struck her and she folded toward me, bleeding from the mouth. I could not read meaning into her expression, the pain had been too great, had contorted her face; but it might have been thank you. It's possible. Please." (Ellison 35)

The scene ends there, as sudden as the death that penetrated the scene. Four of the five humans are dead, leaving only Ted alive. Leaving only Ted to bear what happens next, and AM's inevitable fury. The short story tries to trick you, using the final lines to instill the horror of Ted's new torture. Of his new slime body, his helplessness and torture of it, and the name-sake final lines: "And yet... AM has won, simply... he has taken his revenge... I have no mouth. And I must scream" (37). Bleak and hopeless; an horrible ending for a horror short story, right?

Isaiah Nichols, better known online as the youtuber Wendigoon, sparked my fascination with this story, and has put in a lot of time studying the life of Harlan Ellison

and *IHNMAIMS*, for his video titled “A Hopeful Hell: I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream”. The almost hour-long video breaks down the author, the story, and the meaning behind it. I bring this up because Nichols has a very similar take to mine, with the same amount of research. Nichols talk about the message in the first couple minutes of the video, saying “I believe that what Harlan Ellison has written here is a fantastic triumph of the human spirit in the face of adversity and because of how awful and evil that diversity is, and as we're going to see it throughout the story, it makes the end resolve all the better” (Nichols 2:32-2:47). The ending is horrible, a “incredibly bleak depiction” as Nichols puts it, but he goes on to argue:

look at what he got over on AM. AM, who isn't afforded any capability outside of his own being, has now lost four of his test subjects, the only thing that gave him any sense of purpose. But not only that he turned the fifth one into just this blob that sets around and he doesn't really do anything besides that. The only thing that AM wanted was some sense of purpose or something to break the monotony and Ted took that from him. (Nichols 34:25-34:53)

Ted took AM's only source of purpose, and ripped it away; killed them dead, where AM could not control them anymore. AM did everything possible to hurt, maim, and kill anything human left in the five survivors, for a hundred and nine years, but it wasn't enough. Nichols continues, saying that no matter the adversity Ted and the other's faced in the story, “whenever there was a brief moment of opportunity, humanity slipped through and back into Ted's frame of mind. Ted didn't kill the others because he hated them, it was quite the opposite, he killed them because they can now be free of the torture that he was still going to be subjected to” (36:07-36:25). Ted killed his fellow survivors because he was human, this the very end. Nichols puts it perfectly: “AM

couldn't break the human spirit" (38:27-38:34). He never could have, because the human spirit is too strong for a mere machine to break.

I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream is about hope, which becomes apparent after a deeper look into the story. Its message isn't as clear as AM's hate, but it is still there, for those who wish to read deeper. While Ted may have lost physically, he never lost mentally. He's still Ted, can still remember his friends, and dream, something AM can never do. The final lines aren't Ted; they are AM speaking through Ted. I have no mouth and I must scream, the final line of the story "seems like something AM himself would say", a machine without a mouth that cannot convey its rage proper (35:00-35:07). It can hate, but it cannot do anything with it. *AM* has no mouth, and *AM* cannot scream.

In Nichols' research, he found a quote from Ellison himself on the short story, where he spells it out for the reader the true meaning of the text: "'The upbeat message contained in the ending of the story says frankly: we are frequently flawed and meretricious... but we are perfect in our courage, and transcended in our nobility: both aspects exist in each of us, and we have free will to choose which we want to dominate our actions, and thus our destinies'" (38:43-39:06). No proof can be clearer than from the author's own mouth, but the evidence is there, for those who wish to know.

I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream is about many things, and I hope I have highlighted some here, all of which are at least true to me. AM tried his best, and it still wasn't enough. AM taunts his prey: "murmuring *to hell with you*. And added, brightly, *but then you're there, aren't you.*", but look who is in hell now (Ellison 30). Ted is left with his humanity, and AM is left with nothing but rage and an empty planet. *IHNMAIMS* is about the last drop of humanity, and how it will never die, so long as there are still

humans, still stories to be remembered. AM is a hateful being, Ted is a blob of goo, and the human race is no more. But the story of humanity remains for us to read.

*I fear that, without frequent due dates, I may get lost in the
procrastination hole.*

- Mandolin Moore

The “Fast Fashioning” of the Book Industry – Noelle Thrasher

About the Author:

Hi! My name is Noelle Thrasher. I am twenty-one years old. I am a senior here at Gordon State College and will graduate with a Bachelor's in English in the spring. Reading and writing have always been an important part of my life. I remember reading books at the dinner table trying to get to the next book in the series or writing stories in my school notebook. I enjoy reading, writing, crocheting, and spending time with my friends, family, and pets. I have always loved being creative whether that be the written word or arts and crafts. You can find me crocheting in bookstores and at home. I love fantasy and mythology such as *The Wheel of Time* or *Shadow and Bone*. These fantasy elements have influenced my tastes as a reader. My favorite books are *The Secret Garden* by Frances Burnett and *Till We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis.



Abstract:

Have you ever noticed a decline in literature? That books are not as well-written as they used to be? This trend is because of “fast fashion” books. But what are “fast fashion” books? “Fast fashion” books are developed to be published quickly. They are often very similar to other books on the market. I first came across these “fast fashion” books on BookTok. This is a community of people on TikTok who enjoy reading and discussing books. However, as I watched various videos I began to notice a trend. In the earlier days of BookTok, a lot of these book reviews talked about the themes of books. They further discussed characterization and the overall plot. However, as BookTok grew, I noticed that many of the book descriptions sounded the same. Instead of describing a book when recommending it, they would list the tropes associated with it. In my essay, I talk about why these books are taking over the publishing industry. I further discuss the effects these books have on publishing and future generations. “Fast fashion” books have taken over the publishing industry, limiting originality and creativity. These books have overrun the market causing an issue in the industry. These “fast fashion” books focus solely on tropes and marketability rather than characterization and world-building. Thus, I discuss “fast fashion” books and where we go from here.

Noelle Thrasher

The "Fast Fashioning" of the Book Industry

Literature is constantly evolving. However, there has been a trend of "fast fashion" in books. This is when the book industry publishes books focusing on cliches and less on quality. My thesis is that this trend has to do with the boom in reading due to social media, particularly on TikTok. I first came across these "fast fashion" books on BookTok. This is a community of people on TikTok who enjoy reading and discussing books. However, as I watched various videos I began to notice a trend. In the earlier days of BookTok, a lot of these book reviews talked about the themes of books. They further discussed characterization and the overall plot. However, as BookTok grew, I noticed that many of the book descriptions sounded the same. Instead of describing a book when recommending it, they would list the tropes associated with it. While tropes themselves are not a bad thing, only talking about tropes oversimplifies the book itself. The "fast fashioning" of books has decreased the quality and integrity of the book industry.

Keeping this in mind I decided to look for specific examples of this concept. As I began to scroll I found many examples of "fast fashion" books, especially in the romance genre. One user @catherine.riorson created a slide show on TikTok. On each slide was the name of a trope and six book recommendations with that trope. For example, on slide four the title reads "Fake Dating." With this title, they listed books such as *Love, Theoretically* by Ali Hazelwood, and *The American Roommate Experiment* by Elena Armas. As I continued to scroll I found even more examples of this. Another user by the name of @thtgrlreads has a video in which she describes her top ten books of 2024 so far. For most of the books, she describes the key buzzwords and tropes associated with the book. For example, for the book *Eternal Reign* by Caroline Peckham, the user describes

the tropes “Vampires” and “enemies to lovers.” She further describes another book, *Caged Wolf* also by Caroline Peckham with the words “Slow burn” and “Spice.” While she does mention that she enjoyed the main characters, she mostly focuses on these tropes associated with the books.

Not only do these readers focus on the tropes associated with the books they recommend, but many books contain similar plots. Some of these books are virtually plagiarism. For example, *Powerless* by Lauren Roberts and *Red Queen* by Victoria Aveyard have strikingly similar plots, almost too similar. *Red Queen* which came out in 2015 is described by GoodReads as:

This is a world divided by blood—red or silver. The Reds are commoners, ruled by a Silver elite in possession of god-like superpowers. And to Mare Barrow, a seventeen-year-old Red girl from the poverty-stricken Stilts, it seems like nothing will ever change. That is until she finds herself working in the Silver Palace. Here, surrounded by the people she hates the most, Mare discovers that, despite her red blood, she possesses a deadly power of her own (Goodreads).

Whereas, *Powerless*, which came out in 2023, is described by GoodReads as:

Only the extraordinary belong in the kingdom of Ilya—the exceptional, the empowered, the Elites. The powers these Elites have possessed for decades were graciously gifted to them by the Plague, though not all were fortunate enough to both survive the sickness and reap the reward. Those born Ordinary are just that—ordinary. And when the king decreed that all Ordinaries be banished in order to preserve his Elite society, lacking an ability suddenly became a crime—making Paedyn Gray a felon by fate and a thief by necessity (Goodreads).

Both books contain an “elite” that has a special power. Each main character, both female, just so happens to have this special power and have to keep it hidden. They both get into situations in which they have to be around this “elite” group, causing the conflict of these books. I have seen multiple people talk about these eerie similarities both in real life and on social media. For example, a writer by the name of Diane P. on Editority goes over each similarity and difference between the books, “As more readers and critics discuss the similarities between *Powerless* and *Red Queen*, it remains to be seen how this controversy will unfold.” While this example is rather extreme this trend of similar books is not uncommon in today's literary climate. Thus, we see a distinct trend of similar plots, characters, and worlds appearing one after another.

On a broader scale, many books have similar plots with unique twists in order to not be seen as plagiarism. There are dozens of “hockey boyfriend” books like *The Deal* by Elle Kennedy and *Icebreaker* by Hannah Grace. Each book has slight differences to make themselves original. Another example of this is *A Court of Thorns and Roses* also known as ACOTAR written by Sarah J. Mass and *Shadow in the Ember* by Jennifer L. Armentrout. Both books have similar elements and magic systems. These publishing companies recycle plots and other elements of stories to decrease production time of books. Even Penguin Random House, a well-known publisher has multiple articles that say, “If you like this book then read this book.” Publishing companies put emphasis on producing like-books to further their bottom line.

This causes one to question the impact of this increase in “fast fashion” books on the publishing industry as a whole. This increase in “fast fashion” books has two possible outcomes. The first potential outcome is that this trend is on one end of a pendulum, and soon, we will see an increase in academic books as the pendulum swings the other way. The second possible outcome is that “fast fashion” books will become a part of the

publishing industry with an eventual decline. With either outcome, “fast fashion” books will continue to be in the publishing industry. Maryanne Wolf claims that this reading epidemic will eventually correct itself, “As our youth read ever more on digital devices—which privilege fast processing, skimming and word spotting, filtering voluminous information, and multi-tasking—their circuits adapt accordingly, often acquiring new, cognitively innovative and visually sophisticated processes” (Wolf).

“Fast fashion” books are not necessarily a bad thing as they provide simple quick entertainment. However, whenever these books have overrun the market it becomes an issue. These “fast fashion” books focus solely on tropes and marketability rather than characterization and world-building. When focused on these similar books it leads to a lack of originality. It can even lead to plagiarism as mentioned earlier. This is due to these tropes being marketable. This sets a precedent for what literature should look like to younger generations, this being a problem within itself. Thus, “fast fashion” books present more issues than just a lack of originality. It creates problems within the publishing industry such as shifts in expectations among publishers and consumers. Thus, “fast fashion” books in the book industry could damage the industry as a whole.

There is an obvious connection between marketability and the publishing community. While publishers are like any other business, they have a unique responsibility to ensure proper literature is being circulated in the market. Literature plays an important part in society. Literature exchanges information, reflects the positive and negative aspects of society, and improves creativity, empathy, and vocabulary. However, trope-driven books prevent literature from flourishing. Books are meant to have fun elements. However, a lack of originality or technique causes young readers not to be able to identify important elements in literature. Being able to identify elements such as themes, similes, parallelism, and motifs is an important part of reading. Thus, a

lack of skilled writing being published is detrimental to the growing generation of writers and readers.

Young readers are affected more than older readers who already have a base of knowledge to work from. Children learn from books both consciously and unconsciously; “One goal of educational book-sharing interactions is for children to build generalizable knowledge they can learn and transfer outside of storybooks to everyday situations” (Patricia Ganea et al.). However, if children’s books are being written with lower standards, this causes a detrimental impact on child development. One research article highlights that these surface level books do not teach children; “As with science learning and problem solving, children cannot rely on surface-level features to extract moral themes” (Ganea et al.). It is a well-known fact that children’s reading levels are going down. Children have been shown to have decreased reading and writing skills; “As a result, the strategies that struggling readers use to get by — memorizing words, using context to guess words, skipping words they don't know — are the strategies that many beginning readers are taught in school” (Emily Hanford). Not only are our children being taught poorly they have poor examples of writing. Wolf further expresses her concern on the future generation’s ability to read; “I am less concerned with students’ cognitive impatience than with their potential inability to read with the sophistication necessary to grasp the complexity of thought and argument found in denser, longer, more demanding texts, whether in literature and science classes or, later, in wills, contracts, and public referenda.” The lack of complex problem solving is detrimental when it comes to our future economy, relationships with other countries, and culture.

This connects back to the lack of originality in the publishing space. There is an increasing trend of articles all having the same content with different wording. It is like a group of students who all copy off the same paper. Mythili wrote an article pertaining to

this; "If you remove the flowery language, could you find the same content on another website?" To this question, I would say yes. You can look up articles for many topics and find one article after another with the same content attached. For example, I looked up "Top 10 Booktok Books" to keep within the spirit of the essay. I looked at a few lists and noticed that Stylecaster and Marie Claire have very similar lists. Stylecaster was a list of ten and Marie Claire a list of 19. There was a total of five books that were the same. While that may not seem like a lot, that is 50% of Stylecaster's recommendations. This shows a lack of originality in articles as a whole. In conclusion, there is a lack of artistry in articles and books. This can cause issues for future writers and the current state of literature as well.

So why do people buy these "fast fashion" books and not well-written literature? Is it just because the books are easily accessible or maybe because they are easy to digest? As Thomas Umstattd Jr., who works in marketing in the publishing industry, proposes: "Escape readers are often seeking a different emotional feeling. Bestselling romance books seem to sell because they make the reader feel wanted by an amazing man." He asserts that the escapism element of books has precedence over writing in young readers. These readers care more about going through as many books as possible rather than enjoying the story; "Escape readers tend to be voracious. As soon as they finish one romance, they pick up the next one. As soon as they finish one fantasy story, they're onto the next" (Umstattd Jr.). Umstattd further asserts that this increase in "fast fashion" books is due to good marketing. These books are appearing on TikTok and other social media that allow readers to interact with the book more than literature books. However, well-written books lack the marketing to draw in readers; "Because marketing is not an add-on you sprinkle over your book at the end of the writing process...your marketing needs to be a main element of your book writing process. It

needs to be baked into the book" (Umstattd). Thus, literature has a lack of representation that further prevents it from being consumed properly.

You must be asking yourself about the steps we can take to fix these problems in publishing and in our schools. The first step is to advocate for better reading practices in schools and in your homes. Our children won't know how to analyze or even read well if they continue on this course. Ensuring a solid foundation is the only way for our future generations to succeed. Adding these "sophisticated cognitive and affective tools—what we call "deep reading" processes—to whatever we read" especially in classrooms will play an important part in fostering the next generation (Wolf). Another step that one can take is to not buy these "fast fashion" books. Readers are the ones who decide what is popular in the book industry. Thus, if the reader does not buy these "fast fashion" books and only consume literature, writers will be published more often.

In conclusion, "fast fashion" in books has overtaken the publishing industry with a consistent focus on tropes. This focus on tropes causes similarities in plot or characters due to a lack of original material. Furthermore, these companies are publishing "fast fashion" books despite the lack of quality, due to this high demand for similar books. Social Media sites like TikTok have given a platform to these "fast fashion" books allowing them to gain recognition. These "fast fashion" books are beginning to cause problems within society. They prevent literature from being published and diminish the quality of the other books that they produce. However, all hope is not lost. The future of publishing relies on you, the reader. What you buy determines what is sold. So, dear reader, be cautious of media you consume as your actions shape our future.

Doubt comes with writing, but don't let the doubt keep you from writing.

– Noelle Thrasher

A Running Mindset – James Burford

About the Author:



My name is James Burford, and I am a 23-year-old junior at Gordon State. I am a Secondary Education major at Gordon State with a track in English studies. That is a fancy way of saying I am going to school to become a middle or high school English teacher. I had always wanted to be a teacher and a coach from a young age, but after my first year of college and seeing how expensive life is, I thought it would be a good idea to take over my family's business. I quickly found out I gave up on something I was passionate about, and money does not buy happiness. I love to read and write, spend time with my beautiful wife, and if you haven't figured it out yet (or haven't viewed my essay yet), I love to run.

Abstract:

For many people, running is something they do sparingly. Or for many sports teams it is a form of punishment. So why do runners run? What in their minds tell them this is a great idea? What is it that makes runners want to brave the elements, lose toenails, or be sore for the next four days? Is it the pride in winning? Is it the weight lost? These are some of the types of questions that get answered in this essay. Many people will never experience the thrill that is gained from running and many will also never attempt it. This essay is here to give those of us who do not run and those of us that do run, a sample of the mind of an average runner. My experiences may not represent every runner, but I imagine that my experiences have many similarities to those that have ran for most of their lives and those that have even started last week. Another aspect about this essay is that I hope to achieve the interest of those that say "I hate running" in a positive way. In this essay you will find that even those of us that have been running most of our lives have days where we hate running. So, I hope when you read this essay you will gain a more positive outlook on running and who knows? Maybe you will even take it up as a hobby.

James Burford

A Running Mindset

One more mile, just one more. No one is making me do this, no one is chasing me, just a good pair of shoes and a set of headphones. A car passes by, blowing the horn in a way that says "hello". My mind immediately drifts off into a series of thoughts. I wonder if I knew the person in that car; maybe that was Marc, kind of looks like his wife's car. Maybe that was just a fellow runner passing on some respect. Maybe they are curious why I am out here running and will still be running three hours from now.

There is one thing all runners have in common: they have a reason as to why they are doing what they are doing. For some people they are getting in shape or losing weight. For others, this is what they live for, this is what helps keep them sane. Fortunately for you dear reader I fall under that "for others" category. Runners always get asked the question "why are you doing all that running?" The way I normally answer this question is by simply saying I don't know or jokingly saying I hate running. The truth is, I love it. It excites me. It is my outlet away from the world. Running is not something I do. It is something I experience. As in all experiences, not all will be good and not all will be bad. Many days I ponder my own question of *how did I get to this point?* I think the answer is complex but also so simple. All the good experiences while running have made me pursue new ones.

I often think about where my love for running came from. If you were to speak with almost any one of my family members, you'd find out that there is no history of running in my family. Quite honestly you would find the opposite. I do not come from an athletic blood line or have any special gene that gives me an edge over competitors. Just as I know my love for running did not come from it being in my blood, I also know

where my love for running was first planted like a seed or injected into my mind like a raging virus. Funnily enough, it came from a Disney movie called *The Incredibles*. This movie came out in theaters in 2004, though I did not get to watch it until we were able to rent it from the local Blockbuster when it came out on VHS in 2005. So, this would have put me around the age of four years old and just like any four-year-old I loved superheroes. One that I nearly idolized was "Dash", which was the little boy with super speed in *The Incredibles* movie. I can recall running around at a family reunion, and by running, I mean literally, just running. One of my aunts finally asked, "Boy, why are you doing all that running?" I told her I was Dash from *The Incredibles* and took off running again.

Flash forward a few years -- I was the fastest kid in third grade. There wasn't a single kid that could line up beside me and beat me to the fence and back. So obviously this made me the most popular kid in third grade. SIKE! But seriously, this did make me the first pick for nearly any game that speed was sought after. So, this was where the first few shots of "runners high" came from. If you are unfamiliar with the term, a runner's high is where a runner gets a natural high from running. For example, I have experienced moments where I feel as though I could just run forever, and I feel next to no pain. This obviously doesn't last very long or else I would more than likely be an Olympian. But there was no better feeling than winning a race for me.

Meanwhile at home there was a different type of motivation for my running. Even though my mom was very inconsistent with her visits to the Airport Road Walking Track, I would make the most of them. Whereas my sister would find someone to play with on the playground, I would join my mom on the walking track. I remember my goal was to run and see how many times I could lap my mom before she was ready to leave. I recall a random man saying, "Dang boy, what did your mom promise you a milkshake?" "No, I

just like running". At the time I had just made a game of it, little did I know (or care) that each lap was half a mile long. Between this and constantly riding my bike my love for cardio grew without it being intentional.

Moving along to seventh grade, I moved school systems to a new county and whole new set of faces. I no longer found myself being the fastest kid in gym class, although I started noticing that I was very good at the FitnessGram PACER Test. For those of you that do not know what this dreaded test is,

The FitnessGram PACER Test is a multistage aerobic capacity test that progressively gets more difficult as it continues. The test is used to measure a student's aerobic capacity as part of the FitnessGram assessment. Students run back and forth as many times as they can, each lap signaled by a beep sound. The test gets progressively faster as it continues until the student reaches their max lap score (FitnessGram).

Basically, I found myself lining up against kids that may have been faster than me but could not outlast me. I ended up doing so well the track coach practically begged me to do track the following year as I had already missed the seventh-grade season.

So, eighth grade comes, and I have gym yet again. I do well on the PACER test, yet again. I end up trying out for track and they have us do a multitude of runs for time. If I remember correctly, we timed a one hundred meter, four hundred meter, and mile run. I found myself being a standout in the four hundred and mile. The mile was where I truly stood out due to the fact that there was a lack of interest in it. Most people wanted to be quick rather than fast. Quick means they can beat you in a short burst, being fast means they can beat you in a longer lasting race. In my own opinion I think many kids were just lazy and didn't have the will power to push themselves to run farther faster. Nonetheless, I ended up gaining my mile spot and found myself winning every meet

except regions, where I placed second with a time of 5:32. Things were awesome, and I was well respected by my peers when it came to my ability to run.

Highschool came like a car crash for me. I mean it hit me hard, I grew nearly a foot between eighth and ninth grade and was very awkward in the way I moved. Between this and having a new set of coaches I did not find much success early on in my high school years. Just to put this in perspective, I signed up for cross country not knowing that the only race was a five-kilometer race (3.1 miles), and there was new coach that had only ever coach basketball. Unorganized and unmotivated would be the best way to describe my first two years of high school. Whereas I found myself the big man on campus in eighth grade, I then found myself being more of the "runt of the litter" if you will in high school. I would get in my own head and start comparing myself to other older runners and thinking that I was incapable of getting to where they are. In reality they were just like me at my age and had to put in the same effort I did to get better. Running in my opinion in 40% physical toughness and 60% mental toughness. I say this because if you are able to talk yourself out of something before you even try, you'll never succeed. It took me those first two years to figure that out.

The start of my junior year was looking almost like the years past until a switch flipped. As dumb as it sounds, my girlfriend at the time dumped me over fall break I replaced the time I would spend with her, for more time running. This might not sound very significant on paper, but I went back on my running app and found that I went from running around 30-40 miles per week to running 68.3 miles in this one week. Again, big whoop more mileage, yada yada yada, right? Wrong. Our coach didn't have a required practice for fall break even though we were roughly three weeks away from regions. We still had two more races left for me to gain a varsity spot on the cross-country team, which is the top seven fastest runners on the team. Before fall break I was sitting at the

eighth spot on team, after fall break I came back and was the third fastest on the team and beat my 5K time by over two minutes. The switch that I found was how my emotions directly affected how I ran. Truly I do not believe that a few extra miles are what made me run so much faster. I found that if I was either sad or mad, I would run much faster or further. It wasn't that I necessarily didn't care about my body, but it was almost like I had a feeling of just not caring about anything. I think this took the pressure I felt off me when I had to run these races in front of others. Or it just made me realize that it really didn't matter that much if I did good or bad at a race.

Senior year. This was the most fun I ever had running other than present day. I was back towards the top; I was constantly getting first through fifth place at many cross country meets and track meets. Many of these meets had anywhere from forty runners competing all the way to two hundred plus. But this is the first year I would say that I realized I wanted to run for life, no matter what. I had many teammates that only pushed me to be better and would also make sure that I spared some time for some fun. In this same year I ended up region runner-up for cross country and track individually, our team placed first overall in both sports, and I gained a track and cross-country scholarship to go to a small college in South Georgia.

College almost made me quit running entirely. Burn out is a real thing. The reason I was so burnt out was the fun vaporized when my coach would hold my scholarship over my head. She seemed like such a sweet lady, but once I moved in, the dorms and school started, along with signing my agreement for the scholarship, I practically signed my life away. I felt as though it was constantly like she was saying "jump" and I better not say anything but "how high?". Then on top of that it seemed I could never "jump" high enough. Aside from my coach sucking all the fun out of running for me, my first year was ridden with other problems. I fought through many

injuries that were due to over training from my coaches rigorous training plan along with constantly getting sick. In that first year I had a stomach bug, Mono, and a few sinus infections. This is when 2020 rolled around and Covid made us move home and do online school. I remember telling my mom I was done with school and was done with running. The thing that I found more shocking was she was fine with me quitting school but not running.

So, where did I go from here? I bet you were thinking I would say something like "I started my own training" or "I started a running club". No, I quit running almost entirely. I only did it when I got a wild hair to go run. I ended up gaining roughly forty pounds and looking at old pictures of myself and wondering where that kid with a love for running went. But, again, I would try to start back running and would be very inconsistent or would try to do too much too soon and hurt myself in some way. It wasn't until the spring of 2024 came around and I was back at Gordon State College that I finally found some motivation to actually search for my love for running again. A race called the Peachtree Road Race ended up crossing my radar.

The Peachtree Road Race is a 10K race ran every year on the fourth of July in Atlanta and my father-in-law all but made me sign up for the 2024 race. I hadn't raced since college in 2019, and I would always talk to him and the rest of my wife's family about my "glory days". I remember him saying things like, "you do realize you're still young and can get back into it right? I was in my forties when I started cross fit". So, naturally I took this as a challenge. I began running again; this time I eased into it just by walking and jogging and building myself back up. I ended up running a decent time at the Peachtree and this ignited my love for running again.

Since then, I have completed other races, just to name a few, 10K's, 20k's, Marathons, and two Ultramarathons that were 40 and 50 miles long. I have also found

joy in passing along my knowledge to the next generation. Coaching has been one of the highlights of my running career. There is no better feeling than knowing you are making a difference in someone else's life. Running gave me that opportunity when the high school team I ran for reached out to me to see if I could help them with coaching. They had a need for a morning coach to coach the students that had afternoon obligations such as jobs and other sports or clubs. I mainly ended up coaching four different runners. Getting to run with them nearly every morning and motivating them to push past the boundaries they had set for themselves had to be one of the more rewarding things I have done in my life. Each week, getting to see their growth and motivation level only increase was an indescribable feeling. This is another aspect of running that is so wonderful: being able to build off fellow runners – even if the fellow runners are eight to ten years younger than you.

Another thing that motivates me to want to run as much as possible is the idea of the future. The future is whatever you want to make it. For me I use goalsetting and bucket lists to help me stay motivated and interested in running. Just to give a few examples, I want to run a one-hundred-mile race, a twenty-four-hour race, beat some of my old personal best times, and coach both a track and cross-country team to win the state meet. Setting goals like these keeps running interesting and challenging. What makes these goals even better is that I can always change what goal I am currently trying to achieve. Each goal leads to a new experience and a memory made.

Running comes with many experiences, and they are not all good ones. But I am a firm believer that it is the bad times that make the good times that much better. This is why I will run that extra mile, cheer louder for my future runners, and deal with all the blisters and pain. Running is my outlet, my go to. I wouldn't trade my experiences with running for anything in my life. Being able to run and cut myself off from the world for

even just a few miles can be the difference in my sanity. Running provides me with a way to kill time, get out excess energy, and relieve stress that I have built up. Something about getting back from a long evening run and immediately being able to come in, get a warm shower and go right to sleep just soothes me. Or finishing some crazy long race, such as my fifty-mile race, that gives me a sense of pride and accomplishment.

There is no one thing that makes running worthwhile. I have found that it is one big, huge combination of all that goes into running that makes it so special to me. This is why I can never easily answer the questions I get about why I like running. Being able to look back at all the memories I have made that surround running is one huge reason. But the present also presents itself as exciting and each day being a fresh new start, to make new memories and new accomplishments. Meanwhile, I also get to look on towards the future and set goals or come up with new ideas to benefit myself and other runners. So, dear reader, when you see that guy running around the block for the fifth time tomorrow, congratulate him, or at the very least understand him. He is exactly where he needs to be.

*When you read [your own writing] aloud, it helps to make sure that
the "voice" of your work remains consistent.*

- James Burford

My Island, My Dreams: From Jamaica's Red Dirt to America's Promise – Judith Whyte

About the Author:

My name is Judith Whyte, and I am a mother of 2 and a grandmother of 2 very energetic boys. I am a dedicated college student at Gordon State College, majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on education. Born in Jamaica, I have a deep appreciation for my cultural roots, which I vividly showcases in my writing. Now residing in America for many years, I balance my studies with my role as a paraprofessional in elementary education, where I work tirelessly to inspire young minds. My writing often reflects my dual identity as a Jamaican American, blending my love for the vibrant culture of Jamaica with the opportunities and challenges of life in America. My essay for The Tartan Journal is a testament to my ability to connect personal experiences with broader cultural themes.



Abstract:

Reflecting on my journey as a Jamaican American, this essay celebrates the vibrant intersection of culture, identity, and opportunity. It highlights the natural beauty of Jamaica's landscapes, such as the cascading waters of Dunn's River Falls and the pristine shores of Negril's beaches, as symbols of home, tranquility, and belonging. This is contrasted with the structured opportunities found in America, where education and financial stability have paved the way for personal growth and a brighter future. My essay also explores the evolution of technology, offering a fascinating contrast between the simplicity and community-focused use of technology in Jamaica and the fast-paced advancements in America. From early experiences of shared radios and televisions in Jamaica to the individualistic yet transformative tech landscape in America, I reflect on how these changes have shaped both connectivity and cultural preservation. Food, another powerful marker of cultural identity, plays a central role in my narrative. The culinary heritage of Jamaica—featuring dishes like ackee and saltfish, curry chicken, and oxtails—becomes a tangible link to my roots. Each dish carries memories of family, tradition, and the enduring spirit of my homeland, offering a sensory connection that transcends borders. Tourism, both a source of pride and a topic of complexity, is another key theme. My essay thoughtfully examines the balance between celebrating natural beauty and ensuring that the voices of local communities remain central to Jamaica's narrative. It offers readers a unique perspective on embracing a dual identity, finding balance between two worlds, and celebrating the enduring cultural richness of Jamaica alongside the boundless opportunities of America.

Judith Whyte

My Island, My Dreams: From Jamaica's Red Dirt to America's Promise

Growing up as one of five children in the vibrant, culturally rich landscape of Jamaica was both a privilege and an adventure. Our family was a lively mosaic of personalities: my eldest sister KC, the natural leader; Kevin, the spirited brother whose humor filled our home; Maxine, my closest companion and confidant; and Karen, the baby of the family whose innocence bound us together. Our home in Moco, nestled in Jamaica's lush greenery, pulsed with life and laughter. Mornings greeted us with sunlight spilling through coconut palms, and evenings drifted in with the chorus of crickets and the whisper of the trade winds. Moco wasn't simply a place, it was a sanctuary where the earth itself seemed to sing, and where the rhythm of the island shaped my earliest memories. The red dirt roads of Moco were our playground. My siblings and I spent endless days running barefoot beneath the sun, chasing goats and each other, our laughter mingling with the songs of birds. The hills around our village glowed a deep emerald after rain, and the air smelled of wet earth and mango blossoms. Life was simple yet full: we gathered fruit from trees, fetched water from the standpipe, and listened to elders tell stories by the fireside. These daily rituals stitched together the fabric of our childhood and taught us lessons that no classroom could. We learned gratitude, respect for nature, and the quiet joy of belonging.

Food was the heartbeat of our home, the language of love my mother, Ms. Robinson, spoke best. The aroma of ackee and saltfish, oxtail, and curry goat often filled the air, transforming mealtimes into celebrations of togetherness. Sunday dinners were sacred: the clatter of pots and the sizzle of frying dumplings signaled a feast was coming. We sat around the table sharing jokes, memories, and the occasional sibling

rivalry. Each dish told a story, fried dumplings puffed with promise, rice and peas simmered in coconut milk, the sweet fire of scotch-bonnet peppers that lingered on the tongue. My mother's hands poured devotion into every pot; her food carried comfort, history, and a mother's prayer. My father, a high-ranking general in the Jamaican Army, was a man of discipline and presence. He embodied structure and order, ensuring that punctuality and respect ruled our household. While his voice could command a room, he also carried a quiet pride in his family. The separation of my parents marked a turning point that reshaped my understanding of love and resilience. When their union ended, it was my mother who became our anchor. She carried the weight of uncertainty with grace, ensuring we remained grounded in faith and unity. That moment of loss became a lesson in transformation. I learned independence early and discovered in my mother's courage a strength that would guide me for the rest of my life.

Jamaica itself was my first teacher. Its hills, beaches, and people formed a landscape of beauty and endurance. The island's education system mirrored its spirit, firm, proud, and rooted in tradition. Our teachers were strict yet nurturing, demanding punctuality, proper dress, and academic excellence. Morning assemblies began with the national anthem and the school prayer, voices rising together in gratitude and pride. Those early experiences instilled in me a reverence for learning and the belief that education was both a right and a responsibility. It was there that I first dreamed of becoming a teacher, someone who could light a path for others the way my teachers had for me. Beyond school, Jamaica's cultural icons gave form to my imagination. Bob Marley's music floated from every shop and passing car. His songs, "One Love," "Redemption Song," "Get Up, Stand Up" taught us unity, perseverance, and the hope that freedom brings. Louise Bennett-Coverley, our beloved Miss Lou, celebrated our language and reminded us that patois was poetry. She made our dialect something to

cherish, not hide. Comedian Oliver Samuels made us laugh until tears rolled down our cheeks, proving that humor could heal the hardest days. These cultural giants were the mirrors in which I saw the beauty and resilience of my people.

Then came the biggest change of all: our move to America. My mother's decision was born of courage and sacrifice. She wanted her children to have opportunities she had only dreamed of. Leaving Jamaica was bittersweet. The lush hills, the smell of rain on red earth, and the comfort of community faded as we boarded a plane bound for an unknown world. America was dazzling and intimidating all at once. Everything seemed magnified, the noise, the buildings, even the weather.

My first glimpse of the endless highways and skyscrapers filled me with awe and a quiet fear. Adjusting to life in America was not easy. In Jamaica, life flowed slowly, steeped in connection; in America, it rushed ahead in a blur. I missed the intimacy of home, where neighbors shared food and conversation across fences, and where Sunday meant family, church, and rest. Here, people hurried from one task to another, their eyes fixed on screens and schedules. Yet beneath the unfamiliar pace lay possibility. School once again became my refuge. The American classroom felt less rigid but demanded creativity, participation, and independence. I learned to express my ideas freely and discovered the power of my voice. Although English was my first language, my Jamaican patois made me stand out. At first, I was self-conscious, fearing that my accent would set me apart. Over time, I realized that my voice carried my island's rhythm, its humor, warmth, and resilience.

My accent became a badge of identity rather than difference. It reminded me that I could honor where I came from while embracing where I was. My mother's perseverance was the compass guiding me through those years. She worked multiple jobs, sometimes leaving before sunrise and returning after dark, yet she always made

time for us. Her faith in education never faltered. My father's lessons in discipline and commitment echoed through my mind. Together they shaped me into a young woman who understood both responsibility and grace. There were nights when homesickness overwhelmed me, the scent of jerk chicken from a nearby restaurant could bring tears to my eyes, but those memories became my strength rather than my sorrow. Excelling academically became my quiet victory. Each good grade felt like proof that my mother's sacrifices were not in vain. I found joy in learning, especially in reading and writing, where I could bridge the two worlds that defined me. Books became passports between my past and my future. The classroom turned into my second home, a space where I could share stories, celebrate my heritage, and plant seeds of understanding. Living between two cultures has given me a profound appreciation for both. Jamaica, with its authenticity and warmth, grounds me. America, with its energy and opportunity, propels me forward. Together they create the rhythm of my life, the drumbeat of resilience that continues to guide me.

Jamaica's beauty remains etched in my heart. Fern Gully, a road carved through towering ferns, feels like a living cathedral of green. Dunn's River Falls, with its cool water cascading over smooth stones, invites laughter and unity as families climb together. Negril's Seven Mile Beach stretches endlessly, its white sand and turquoise waves whispering peace. These are not just tourist attractions; they are sacred spaces where Jamaicans gather to celebrate life's simple pleasures. Yet even paradise has challenges. The spread of luxury resorts has privatized beaches that once belonged to everyone. Communities have been displaced, fishermen restricted, and traditions diminished. The commercialization of our natural treasures risks erasing the authenticity that defines Jamaica. I remember when families could picnic freely, when vendors sold coconuts and

hand-woven baskets under almond trees. Those moments of freedom are the essence of Jamaica, the version of home that lives forever in my memory.

Tourism remains both a blessing and a burden. It fuels the economy and provides work for thousands: hotel staff, taxi drivers, artisans, farmers, and entertainers. Markets bustle with vendors selling jewelry, carvings, and paintings that tell our story. The scent of jerk chicken mingles with the rhythm of reggae as visitors fall in love with the island's charm. Festivals like Reggae Sumfest and Independence Day light up the streets with color and pride. Yet, beneath the beauty, inequities persist. Large corporations dominate, claiming beachfronts and reaping profits that rarely trickle down to local families. Environmental damage follows; deforestation, coral bleaching, and pollution threaten the island's fragile ecosystems. Despite these issues, Jamaicans remain hopeful and resilient. Across the island, communities are embracing sustainable tourism that centers on inclusion. Visitors stay with local families, learn traditional crafts, and experience authentic island life. These initiatives show that Jamaica's true wealth lies not in resorts but in its people—their warmth, creativity, and unyielding spirit.

Technology has also become a thread connecting my past to my present. In Jamaica, we had one black-and-white television with rabbit-ear antennas that needed constant adjusting. Watching the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation's evening news was a family ritual. We crowded around, the static was sometimes louder than the announcer, but those shared moments brought us close. Phone booths were rare treasures; I remember running errands to make calls for my parents, waiting patiently for a dial tone, and feeling the thrill of hearing a familiar voice through the crackling line. Those simple connections were golden.

Moving to America felt like stepping into another era. Sleek televisions, portable cell phones, and computers opened doors I never imagined. The internet became a

bridge across oceans. Through video calls and instant messages, I could hear my mother's laughter and see my siblings' smiles. Technology turned distance into connection and reminded me that love has no borders. As time went on, I began to realize that the two worlds I belonged to were not competing with each other, they were completing each other. Jamaica gave me my soul; America gave me my wings. One taught me patience and community, the other ambition and independence. Together they shaped a balance that continues to guide my life.

In Jamaica, life had always been communal. When someone cooked, everyone ate. When someone celebrated, the whole neighborhood danced. When tragedy struck, hands reached out without being asked. In America, I had to learn a new rhythm. one that prized efficiency, privacy, and self-reliance. At first, that rhythm felt lonely. I longed for the sound of neighbors calling across yards, for laughter spilling into the streets. Over time, I found ways to bring that warmth into my American life. I began cooking Jamaican dishes for friends, inviting them to experience the flavors of my childhood. I played reggae in my car and taught my own children the meanings behind the lyrics. I wanted them to understand that our culture was not something left behind; it was a living inheritance carried in every meal, every song, every story.

Education continued to be my compass. The discipline instilled by my father and the compassion modeled by my mother became the twin pillars of my own teaching philosophy. In Jamaica, teachers commanded respect with a firm voice and a steady gaze; in America, teachers inspire through creativity and empathy. I learned to blend the two. In my classroom today, I strive to bring structure and kindness together, to let every child know that they are capable of greatness while also feeling safe to make mistakes. My students' curiosity reminds me of my younger self, barefoot on a red-dirt road, looking up at the sky and wondering how far I could go. The move to America opened

doors but also presented challenges that tested my faith. There were days when I questioned whether I truly belonged, when my accent drew puzzled looks, when cultural references slipped past me, when homesickness crept in uninvited. Yet every obstacle became another lesson in resilience. I remembered my mother's words: "Yuh cyaan drown in di same wata yuh learn fi swim." *You can't drown in the same water that taught you to swim.* Her wisdom reminded me that hardship and growth often flow together.

Through the years, I have carried Jamaica in everything I do. I carry it when I greet my students with warmth, when I sprinkle humor into lessons, when I encourage them to be proud of who they are. I see pieces of my island in every child who learns to persevere. My classroom walls are filled with color and music, just like the walls of my childhood home. I tell my students that language is power, that their voices, accents, and stories matter. This belief traces directly back to Miss Lou, who taught us never to be ashamed of how we speak. Whenever I return to Jamaica, the island welcomes me like a long-lost daughter. The scent of pimento and thyme drifts through the air, and the waves crash in rhythm with my heartbeat. I visit the markets where vendors still call out in melodic patois, selling pineapples and handmade crafts.

I visit old friends and neighbors who remember me as the girl who once chased goats down the lane. Time seems to stand still there, reminding me that no matter how far I travel, my roots remain unshaken. But I also see change. I see children with smartphones instead of marbles, tourists crowding beaches that once belonged to families, and high-rise hotels where fishermen used to dock their boats. Progress brings both gain and loss. Tourism has become Jamaica's lifeblood and its challenge. It feeds our economy but sometimes drains our soul. When I speak with local vendors, they tell me stories of struggle, of taxes that rise faster than their profits, of beaches closed off by

fences and guards. Yet they keep smiling, keep singing, keep welcoming strangers with the warmth only Jamaicans can offer. Their resilience humbles me.

Community-based tourism gives me hope. I have met families who open their homes to visitors, teaching them to cook jerk chicken over pimento wood or weave baskets from banana leaves. These small acts preserve authenticity and ensure that the benefits of tourism stay close to the people. It is in these homes, not the luxury resorts, that the real Jamaica lives on. I dream of a future where sustainability and culture walk hand in hand, where the world can enjoy Jamaica's beauty without erasing its heartbeat. Technology continues to be both bridge and reminder. The gadgets that once felt futuristic are now ordinary, but their purpose remains the same: connection. Through video calls, I watch the sunrise in Jamaica while sitting in my Georgia kitchen. Through social media, I see weddings, funerals, and festivals in real time. The distance has become smaller, but the longing never completely fades. Technology can transmit sound and sight, but not the feel of the island breeze or the taste of mango straight from the tree. For that, I must return. Each time I visit, I notice how much I've changed and how much I've stayed the same. I walk the red-dirt roads of Moco and feel the echo of my childhood footsteps. I hear my mother's laughter, still vivid in memory, and the distant hum of reggae carried by the wind.

The island reminds me of who I was before life scattered me across borders. It reminds me that resilience is not the absence of struggle but the art of continuing to rise. America, too, has shaped me in profound ways. It has taught me to dream bigger, to use my voice in spaces where silence once seemed safer. It has shown me the value of hard work and the possibilities that open when we dare to believe in ourselves. Here, I have built a career, raised a family, and continued my education. Yet even in this land of opportunity, I measure success not by wealth or status but by purpose, the same lesson

my parents taught me under the Caribbean sun. I often think about what it means to live between worlds. Some people see it as division, but I see it as expansion. I have two homes, two cultures, and two ways of seeing the world. Jamaica taught me rhythm; America taught me motion. Together they create harmony. I speak in two cadences, dream in two languages, and love in two directions. That duality is not confusion, it is completeness.

When I look at my students, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants, I see reflections of myself. I understand their hesitations, their accents, their longing to fit in. I tell them that identity is not something to hide but something to honor. I share stories of my own journey so they know that belonging can exist in many forms. The classroom becomes more than a place of learning; it becomes a circle of stories where every voice counts. Teaching has become my way of giving back what both Jamaica and America gave me. Each child I teach carries the possibility of a brighter future, just as my mother once dreamed for me. I want them to see education not as a duty but as a liberation path that can carry them beyond circumstances. When I see their faces light up with understanding, I feel my own story come full circle.

As I reflect on my life, I see how every experience has intertwined to form a single, unbroken thread. The red dirt roads of Moco still run through my veins. The laughter of my siblings, the scent of my mother's cooking, the songs of Bob Marley, the discipline of my father – all are part of the foundation that steadies me. The skyscrapers of America, the opportunities of education, the diversity of classrooms, and the constant hum of technology have added new layers to who I am. Together they create a mosaic of resilience, faith, and gratitude. I am often asked which place I consider home. My answer is always both. Jamaica is where my heart begins; America is where it continues to beat. Jamaica is memory and music; America is motion and possibility. I do not have to

choose because I am the bridge between them. I stand firmly on the roots of one and reach toward the skies of the other. When I sit quietly at night, I think about my mother's journey, how she left behind everything familiar to build something new. Her courage lives in me. I think about my father's discipline and the order he valued, lessons that taught me endurance. I think about my siblings, scattered yet connected by invisible threads of love. I think about the teachers who saw my potential and the students who remind me daily why I chose this path. Each of them has written a line in my story.

There is a saying in Jamaica: "Every mickle mek a muckle." *Every little bit adds up to something great.* My life is the sum of countless "mickles" small acts of faith, patience, and persistence that together form something beautiful. Each transition, each challenge, each triumph has built a life defined not by perfection but by perseverance. As I look ahead, I carry my two worlds with gratitude. Jamaica remains my compass, reminding me of who I am and where I come from. America remains my canvas, offering endless space to dream and create. I walk forward knowing that the two are not separate stories but chapters of the same book. I am the child of an island and the citizen of a nation of possibilities. I am the echo of drums and the hum of city streets. I am the product of love, sacrifice, and unyielding hope. And above all, I am resilient.

My journey from the red dirt roads of Moco to the classrooms of America has taught me that identity is not fixed; it grows, bends, and blossoms with time. Home is not a single place; it is every heart that has ever sheltered you. The spirit of Jamaica flows through me as surely as the drive of America pushes me forward. They are both my inheritance and my gift to the next generation. I carry these truths with pride: that culture is strength, that love transcends distance, and that resilience is the thread that ties it all together. Jamaica gave me my rhythm, America gave me my reach, and together they have made me whole.

Writing isn't about perfection; it's about progress, authenticity, and the courage to share your voice.

- Judith Whyte

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