A collection of works by Calhoun Community College students, faculty, staff and alumni.
(poetry)

The Face of God  Amber Nicoll  2
Parents  Caleb Holoman  3
Residue  Christian McCarley  4
A Farewell  Jillian Oliver  5
fire  Jillian Oliver  6
hush  Jillian Oliver  6
Journey  Jessica Lesch  7
Sore Throat  Margaret Buckner  8
the long road  Jillian Oliver  9
Pieces  Jillian Oliver  10
Not Enough Water  Kollin Muenstermann  11
Roaring Above  Kollin Muenstermann  12

(essays)

Blurring the Lines  Melissa Brown  14
Opa  Lance Voorhees  15
How do I speak different styles of English?  Huishuang Zhu  16
Hotel  Lance Voorhees  17
Limited Connections  Kendra Griggs  18
Struggles of the Human Heart  Kendra Griggs  19
A Son Becomes a Man  Kevin Walter  20
My Greatest Adventure  Lance Voorhees  21
Fighting for the Right Not to Bear Children  Megan Moland  22

(short fiction)

A Letter Home  Christian McCarley  25
A Nuisance  Christian McCarley  28

Student Success Symposium  Christian McCarley & Jillian Oliver  30
Daniela Altamirano in the Spotlight  Melissa Brown  31
Gifts from the Heart: Calhoun’s 2018 Chorale Holiday Concert  Christian McCarley  32
Black Student Alliance in 2019  Jillian Oliver  33
Mr. Marty Kellum in the Spotlight  Blake Wallace  34
Interview with Dr. Burke  Christian McCarley & Jillian Oliver  34
Sigma Kappa Delta Shines  Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea  36
A Busy Day with Kevin Young at Calhoun’s 18th Annual Writers’ Conference  Jillian Oliver  37
Calhoun Theatre Presents All in the Timing  Christian McCarley  38
Calhoun Writers’ Conference Writing Contest  Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea  39
The Face of God

By Amber Nicoll

Desperation falls like after-shower dew from the tips of his fingers.
“You’re alright,” he breathes, his voice
Hot. Hot. Scalding. “I’m sorry, sweet girl—it won’t happen again.”

Divinity gathers in my belly and oozes from yellow-tinged bruises.
His chapped lips tell lies that crawl, itching and cruel
Like the weight of the wall against my back.

His calloused hands, his crying eyes. Over his shoulder
I see the face of God—eyes averted, looking away. He does not
Want to see what my child-eyes have seen, what I have known.

For I have seen the truth of the world--
I have seen the face of God, twisted in anger and cruelty,
Fists curled with rage and eyes yawning with that deep
Deep hunger. That is God.

I call him “Papa” and he cries.
Parents

By Caleb Holoman

I am the smoke from the last drag of the cigarette
ashy and full of fire choking you of each breath.
I am from the lips soaked in alcohol
Sweet and tangy, the memories echo.
I am from the blood-soaked mattress
from the lies to keep my innocence.

I am from the orange translucent bottle
where fun takes shape.
I’m from the small cacophony of colors
the get betters,
the feel goods.
I am from the screams followed by nothing
from the chair left in the woods
where you spent your last moments at home.

I am from the fear of abandonment
from the moments of prayer,
a defector from Him.
I am from the chains of memories that I inhale through the pipe
to convince I do not deserve.
I am from the darkness of late night car rides,
the smoke and exhaust burning my throat.
I am from shadows you cast on my heart.
I am from that house on the hill
where my childhood laid to rest with both of you.
Residue

By Christian McCarley

Of me, in you, there is only residue.
Those finer tracings of our memories together
Are a weak gradient of lead beneath the eraser
Of me, in you, there is only residue.

Of me, in you, echoes too faint to hear.
Asked to draw your face, not scribbles, but a blur.
The hardest thing for you is remembering who you were.
Of me, in you, echoes too faint to hear.

In me, and you, exist mortality.
But it is not the greatest enemy, cancerous or disaster.
Memory is the nemesis, staggered through life with nothing left after.
In me, and you, exist mortality.

Of me, in you, I see the laughter.
If we were both to forget, the pain would fade.
But it is only me, left holding the life we made.
Of me, in you, I see the laughter.

Of me, in you, there is only residue.
Dances, fights, tears, and chuckles… my name is the last to go.
We have stood together, but in your head, you face the end alone.
Of me, in you, there is only residue.
A Farewell

By Jillian Oliver

It hit me like lightning during a spring rain;
you frowned and said sorry but didn’t mean it and
left with words that were too loud

you weren’t interested in secrets,
in keeping things quiet,
but with her you smiled when you whispered
and swore you would steal horses and build carriages to take her away
where she could see the stars,
a place untouched by me or by you

people say that place has the most wonderful view
she talks about it, and I hear her
the moon is a wild shade of purple and the stars are a pale grassy green,
she has everything she ever wanted,
built with stone and sparkle
in the magnificent shade of her favorite tree
I think it must be beautiful
I know she must be happy

So, I sent you through some forgotten door and locked it tight
And I turned around and gave her the only key.
fire
By Jillian Oliver
	heres a power within me
that you could only
dare dream of

echoes of distant drums are
the pounding of my blood
in my veins
the might of armies and their kings
waiting to scream their battle cry

my ribs are steel not bone
unbreakable
those who try
quickly find out why it is that
I am my mother’s daughter

behind the shy smile you have grown so accustomed to,
there dwells the daring to take on the world
and wage a final reckoning against
the heavens that hold the stars

a goddess without a temple
a siren with no song
a bird without wings that
abandoned its cage
in favor of a sword

I am not what I seem and though
you may mistake my kindness for weakness,
I am not naïve
I see you for what you are

look closely.
test me and see
find out just how deeply I was forged in
fire.

hush
By Jillian Oliver

depth in the night
the stars hold their breath
lost in the wonder of you
Journey

By Jessica Lesch

The familiar sounds.
The familiar smells.
The familiar feelings.
They all come rushing back to me.

They awaken something deep within my soul,
bringing me back to a feeling of safety and belonging.
Feeling that snug warmth of comfort wrap around me like a hug,
a feeling that was once lost but has found its way back to me.

The Christmas lights and smell of the tree.
The gentle hum of the fish tank.
The creaking of the floor and chairs.
The silence in a house that was once bursting at the seams.

It’s replaying the sounds of childhood laughter in my ears,
old memories projected like a movie before my mind’s eye.
“Tag, you’re it!” and “Ready or not, here I come!”
Happy and nestled, a family of seven, in the house with two front doors.

Ohio.

Trembling nerves.
Crowds of strangers.
Foreign languages.
This is not my home.

Tear streaked face, I leave it all behind,
boarding a plane to the unknown.
Swarming dark faces, none familiar.
Out of place, I stand out.

“Bonswa. Koman ou ye?”
“Good evening. How are you?”
Beyond the mountains there’s a light glowing in the distance.
Welcome.

Tiny hands grab my own,
large bright eyes contrasting the darkness of complexion.
Words fail at the language barrier, but love speaks all languages.
This is my home.

Haiti.

Heart thumping.
Palms sweating.
Risk taking.
Should I do this?

A journey to the great unknown,
perhaps the scariest yet.
“I love you” and “Marry me?”
Planting roots, becoming stationary.

Calming fears and looking forward,
a road with endless possibility.
Excitement and uncertainty,
walking hand in hand.

This is where I’ve settled in,
I’ve said goodbye to many loves.
Being embraced by your arms,
I choose your love each and every time.

Alabama.

I call home to many places
Expanding far and wide.
I am made up of all these
Each adding to and taking away from the person I become.

These are where I’m from.
Sore Throat

By Margaret Buckner

She said that we are not saved
Because we are good
We are saved because we are His
And through this
We get to go out and serve and help
We get to go out and love
And there were tears in my eyes
Not because I was moved by the pastor’s Easter Sunday Sermon
But because I was unable to sing along
With the congregation
  The church’s holiday members
  Filling the pews
  More than one-hundred voices
  Singing Hymns
And the church choir
  Old men and women
  In red robes
  Croaking, wailing, howling,
  Cooing, shrieking, yapping –
  Squawking with the organ
Frightening angels
Unable because my voice was recovering from
Silence and hacking

The light through the stained glass windows
Was soft
And dim and bright
And bright and dim
And every word of the service
Stabbed at me for crying over my lost voice

And I stabbed at myself too
Regretting my feelings while feeling them
I sat through the service twice
the long road

By Jillian Oliver

there are years that play back in her mind
broken records,
a montage of wrongs that no one
can ever make right

she remembers the embrace of arms that constrict,
the sound of voices in her ear
hissing lies swift as poison
soft like thunder while they sewed doubt
that clawed at her reason
breaking her down,
waves upon stone

but there are moments now that
cloud out the rest
with blinding brilliance and where there were storms,
she shines

she dances down darkened streets,
hand in hand with her dream,
making promises with the intent to keep
staring into eyes that drink her in boldly
past the broken bones, right down to the soul
and both know
all the rest led them here.
This poem won first place in the 2019 National Sigma Kappa Delta Poetry Contest.

**Pieces**

*By Jillian Oliver*

Time goes by,
So much, so long
Stealing the years from me;
A thief

Framed in light,
You were smiling, reaching,
Just beyond a door, standing on the front porch,
Talking to my mother, sitting in my room,
Handing me flowers, laughing, calling my name,
Dashing for the car after a movie in the rain,
Asking for all the things
I’d never given anyone ever before

Love, trust, you wanted
Pieces of my days,
Dinner, coffee
A smile

I blinked
The light was gone, faded to grey, all the doors closed, locked,
Your voice an echo, distant,
Dark, carried back so far

You took
I gave
until it was all just –
Not Enough Water

By Kollin Muenstermann

A Meta hero of danger
Shifting through peril
Not at all the laughing stranger
Rafting
Shafting
Never Lacking
Indecent exposure of the brain
For his constituents
And off brand flight milling over
Under shot blowtorches
And the girls just love him
And men hold jealousy within
For the hero of danger

Once he rolled into an underwater cave
Deep with the fish
What cold, murky waters traversed
By this wonder man?
And the days are numbered, cry the sharks
   Behind this cave in a door of stone
Sits Lazarus, aghast
   “Where is the bearded fellow?”
He asks, stroking his own beard
The Wonder hero of grandeur cannot make
   Out the words in the deep water
Though he can see the dead man

And with laser vision dissolves the water
The ocean waters lift up to the clouds
The dead man’s bones are no match for the heat
The dead man’s skin goes to where matter is no longer
And the hero grows thin from hunger
Thin from grief
Roaring Above

By Kollin Muensternann

he sang on a wooden dock
no water underneath
yet plenty of skulls and bones
after the flood
came a drought
and down with the buildings
the satellites and flags
squishing the frogs
and thunder reigned in the distance after flashes illuminated
what the men did to each other
the beats of that mighty cry in the sky
were no mere motivation
but pure reason to ignore
distilled like fine wine
and drank
as the muddy water was devoured by that dry ground

the suns back now he sings
temptations chime no longer rings
tile hallways of schools are broken
students of disregard have spoken
and no longer chalk speaks on the metal
or feet on the pedals
but moss on the pavement
freed our enslavement
meek have given away the earth
to spasms of disease locked at birth
yet the system now clogged
even more fog
from overheated smoke
what’s left of us choke
Blurring the Lines

By Melissa Brown

Society defines masculinity as strong, non-emotional, independent, and brave. Femininity is typically thought of as dependent, nurturing, soft, and emotional. Most media have begun to redefine the way society thinks of typical characteristics of men and women. Disney/Pixar appears to be a big part of this redefinition. Lieutenant Shane Wolfe, played by Vin Diesel, in The Pacifier defies his masculine role by showing his nurturing side while taking care of the Plummer children, becoming Lulu’s den mother, a daunting task of taking care of others’ children while also trying to teach them important life lessons. He does not handle caring for them well at first. He still struggles with listening to the children and once again assumes his role as a masculine, military leader. As the movie progresses and he embraces his feminine side, he begins to communicate better with the children. Wolfe and his Firefly Scouts believe self-defense is a priority since the girls are being tormented by a rival boy scout troop. He spends time with them in the yard practicing different defense techniques. Furthermore, he takes them out to eat after their meetings, and he grows to love them as if they were his own.

While caring for the Plummer children, Wolfe acquires the role as Lulu’s den mother, a daunting task of taking care of others’ children while also trying to teach them important life lessons. He does not handle caring for them well at first. He still struggles with listening to the children and once again assumes his role as a masculine, military leader. As the movie progresses and he embraces his feminine side, he begins to communicate better with the children. Wolfe and his Firefly Scouts believe self-defense is a priority since the girls are being tormented by a rival boy scout troop. He spends time with them in the yard practicing different defense techniques. Furthermore, he takes them out to eat after their meetings, and he grows to love them as if they were his own.

While Wolfe is not teaching the Firefly Scouts defensive techniques, he is helping Seth produce his musical. The Sound of Music is something that Seth wanted to do, but he thought no one else would understand. Instead of shaming Seth for wanting to participate in the musical, Wolfe takes a stand to become the new director after the old one walks out on the production. Wolfe not only choreographs the dance numbers, but he also produces the musical. In order to participate in the production, Seth needs to quit the wrestling team, something Seth’s late father wanted him to do. Wolfe takes a stance for Seth when Seth decides to quit the wrestling team. In doing so, Wolfe shows his protective side and his military excellence when he wrestles Seth’s old coach.

While Wolfe is embracing his femininity, Mulan begins to blossom in masculine ways as she shows her independence when she leaves her family and her home. Daphne Gordon cites Roberto Gomez, a recent graduate from the University of Southern California’s school of animation, “Since Beauty, female characters are going out and looking for something, whereas before they were victims of circumstance.” Mulan is one of the female characters who is looking for something, honor. Mulan is an only child from a father who has been in war for their nation before and
was injured. When the Emperor sends orders for one male from each family to step forward to join the Imperial Army against the Huns, Mulan feels herself drawn to uphold her family’s honor in place of her father. Despite knowing the consequences of impersonating a male warrior (death), Mulan decides to go in place of her father. After cutting off her long, dark hair and putting on her father’s warrior uniform, Mulan steals away in the middle of the night on her father’s horse. Mulan leaves everything she knows behind in order to find her own independence.

Mulan’s independence from her family ignites her bravery as she is thrown into the Imperial Army’s training camp. Mulan introduces herself as Ping and trains under Captain Li Shang. Mulan’s guardian dragon Mushu advises her how to act like a man. This advice is misguided and causes a camp-wide fight the first day. In the beginning, Mulan struggles with keeping up with the other soldiers. She struggles to the point where Shang tells her to go home. However, Mulan proves her worth by completing a task set forth by Shang. She figures out how to climb to the top of the pole and pull out an arrow, something the “real men” could not do. Despite being in an unknown place, surrounded by unknown people, Mulan perseveres.

Mulan’s bravery in joining the army is further accented by her strength in battle. When Mushu forges a letter from the General sending Li Shang’s men into action, Mulan sees her chance to bring honor back to her family. The men soon discover they are too late; the Huns have killed the General and his men. The sorrowful men begin to descend the snowy mountaintop when the lurking Huns ambush them. Mulan, utilizing her quick thinking, uses the last cannon and is okay for women to be emotional AND independent. This gender redefinition affects the viewers by allowing them to be more neutral when they see reversed gender roles. The delicate balance of the roles is important for young children in order to help them achieve all of their dreams. They need to have the skills to accomplish all things, not just the skills that an old society deems appropriate.

Works Cited


The following piece was written in response to an assignment in Dr. Randy Cross’ class.

By Lance Voorhees

He walked with a cane at a slow pace, but he was not frail. His heavy-set build was more a testament to a thickly muscled youth than a fat, old man. Coke-bottle glasses blurred his calm, steady eyes, and his smile touched every part of his bald head. People were drawn to him inexplicably. Strangers seemed to find him just so they could tell their story to someone who would listen and make them feel loved. None of his mannerisms betrayed that he was once an Army Special Forces operator during the Vietnam War. He was the embodiment of gentleness and the perfect counterpart to his firebrand of a wife, Josephine. Her favorite story to tell was also his, the one of how he fell in love at first sight at a small pub in Germany. A previously broken back kept him from physical activities, but he kept his mind in perpetual motion, always learning and expanding. When the cancer came for him, he never complained. Rather, he believed that every day he was alive meant there were still people whom he needed to love. For the last seven years of his life, I was one of those people, a twelve-year-old boy that he took an interest in. We shared no blood, but he loved me as if we did. His name was James Cochran. He was my Opa.
How do I speak different styles of English?

By Huishuang Zhu

People may argue that there is only one way to speak English, but there are at least three different styles of English that I speak in my daily life. Often, I speak broken English unconsciously when I am home with my family, and I speak Chinese-English, so called “Chinglish,” when I stay with my close friends. However, I always try my best to speak relatively formal English when it comes to a situation that requires me to express my thoughts clearly. Thus, the language I speak is decided by my environment.

As I mentioned, I speak broken English unconsciously at home. I am an immigrant. I originally came from China, and Chinese is my native language, and my husband is from an immigrant family, as well. We have two children, and sometimes I speak English to them the way that only our family members could understand. Just last night, I had a conversation with my daughter about the daily routine that she did not follow. I said, “Meimei, you no listen Mama saying, Mama told you before, no watching too much TV , is 8 o’clock now you should close the TV and go brush your teeth, wash your face, take a shower, and go sleep.” “I am sorry, Mom. I will get ready for bed in a minute,” my daughter responded in a regular style of English, which is more standardized by comparison to my tongue. I speak a lot of English this way at home, and my family members understand what I say, although this kind of English does not sound familiar.

Sometimes I do speak some Chinese style of English, so called “Chinglish,” among my close friends or within a group of people who have the same or similar background as I do. Just last week, one of my friends, whose name is May, invited me to a party for her 8-year-old daughter’s birthday. During the party my friend arranged some very attractive activities for the guests, such as T-shirt painting, making bead bracelets, drawing, and jumping on the backyard trampoline. My friend was so excited to see all the kids jumping and flipping on the trampoline, and she really wanted to perform a cartwheel, which she was good at when she was a little girl. She put on her exercise clothes, got on the trampoline, and joined the kids without realizing that she had left the
gymnastic team almost thirty years ago. Without any question, she hurt her arms and legs. After making sure she was not injured too badly, I said to her, “You can you up, no zuo no die.” She quickly grasped my point and laughed out loud at what I said. Yes, people might never have spoken this kind of English and not even know what it means. This sentence was translated directly from one Chinese character to one English word or mixed up together. It basically means that sometimes people strongly feel that they have the ability to do something challenging and just go for it without thinking twice, but cause bad consequences due to a lack of awareness. I usually only speak this language among people whom I know very well or someone who knows exactly where I am coming from and will not get offended easily.

I deeply understand that I am here in the USA, and English is the official language in this country. Therefore, whenever I am in an environment that requires me to express my thoughts clearly in order to make sure people understand what I try to say, I always try my best to speak English as clearly as possible, as well as possible. Last month I was invited to an online forum discussion about beauty, love, and marriage. This event was held by a local media organization, which is pretty formal. During this discussion every invitee was expected to express his or her own opinions about the topic to others. I felt so honored to be invited to be part of this event. I realized that this is a relatively formal environment and every invitee’s tongue was supposed to be in a formal style, so I prepared my speech in a way that is completely different from the way I talk to my family or my close friends. When I was asked to answer a question about the differences between 1980s beauties and modern girls, I said, “The good looking women in the 1980s are not the same as the modern girls we help beautify with advanced technologies.” Another question I was asked was about my feeling of meeting my husband for the first time. I responded, “Almost the moment I met him, I ran the risk of being obsessed with him the rest of my life, total love at first sight.” Honestly, I was surprised for myself that I can talk this way, but I know that this is the tongue I am supposed to use in certain situations.

The language I speak can be in a variety of styles according to the different environment. I usually speak English in a freestyle tongue with my family, and I might speak English with pure Chinese logic when I stay with someone who knows me very well and always gets my points quickly. However, I use formal English when I am in a place that requires me to do so. The language depends on the setting.

---

The following piece was written in response to an assignment in Dr. Randy Cross’ class.

**Hotel**

*By Lance Voorhees*

Some called it “Hotel Hell.” Cold grey concrete greets me in memory. That deck is kept cleaner than any hospital in the world, and I know every inch of it. Two black lines run the length of the rectangular room creating a path, a gangway for the tormentors of “Hell” to walk upon. A door stands solitarily at the end of the gangway. At night, its exit sign spills a blood-red glow through the lonely darkness. On either side of the path stand metal bunks. The mattresses are dressed so neatly they seem to have never been disturbed by a human being. Two wooden chests sit at the foot of each one, bearing names that the tormentors know by heart. Directly behind the bunks stand grey walls, broken only by perfectly spaced windows. Light passes through those solemn portholes, but not warmth. The air is tainted by the stench of bleach, starch, and brass polish. Fluorescent lights hang overhead, filling the room with harsh, sterile light. It is a forlorn and unwelcoming room, yet well occupied. The occupants are the voluntarily tormented who seek what the “hotel” can mold them into. When I finally checked out, I was changed forever.
Limited Connections

By Kendra Griggs

It is impossible for humans to fully understand the emotions of others due to barriers between each person’s direct experiences. These barriers often halt effective communication and lead to feelings of alienation. Various authors and poets have sought to interpret certain sources of alienation in order to identify the effects that they may have on the human psyche. Some of the sources of alienation include physical, cultural, and psychological barriers that limit one’s desired level of connection.

In some cases, individuals may be separated by physical barriers that prevent intimate conversations that are necessary to form relationships and combat alienation. Poets such as Robert Frost and Edwin Arlington Robinson describe forms of physical separation that lead to loneliness and discontent for their characters. In Frost’s “Mending Wall,” the narrator and his neighbor actively separate themselves from one another by rebuilding the wall between them each year. The neighbor believes that “good fences make good neighbors” and does not question his beloved truism (line 27). This physical barrier prevents a close relationship and proper communication. The wall symbolizes the emotional alienation between them. They will never be able to work toward making a connection until there is no physical barrier between them.

Robinson similarly portrays a physical barrier that causes alienation in “Mr. Flood’s Party.” Eben Flood is physically separated from his friends from the past because he has outlived them. “In the town below,” there are only “strangers” where his friends had once lived (54-55). He is forced to entertain himself because he has the physical inability to connect with his old friends. This barrier of separation serves as a form of physical alienation that causes loneliness and sadness for Mr. Flood. Frost and Robinson emphasize the negative feelings of discontent and loneliness that arise from a lack of ability to connect with others due to physical limitations.

In addition to physical barriers, societal and cultural barriers may limit one’s ability to connect with others. In Black Boy, Richard Wright describes an autobiographical event in which he and Harrison cannot completely trust one another because they live in a racially unjust environment manipulated by Mr. Olin and other white men who have power over them. These social norms of black submission are so strong that, even after Richard and Harrison explain that they have no desire to harm one another, they fall into the cycle of manipulation that intensifies real feelings of distrust. Even though they talk about a shared distrust toward the white men who are manipulating them to fight, each continues to “ask himself if he could believe the other” (1247). Clearly, Richard is alienated from whites, but he is also emotionally alienated from other blacks due to his forced adherence to social norms.

The real fight that results from the fake fight is the product of feelings of alienation and a lack of trust toward everybody. An additional form of alienation arises due to basic psychological limitations in which the mental capacities to understand the emotions and experiences of others prove to be inadequate. In “Richard Cory,” Edwin Arlington Robinson suggests that humans create further alienation by assuming that they have made the correct judgments about individuals when they have, in fact, failed. The idealized imagery of the seemingly perfect Richard Cory leads the reader to feel as if she, like the townspeople, understand the character even though there is more to him than his divine appearance. The townspeople envy him and believe that “he was a gentleman from sole to crown” and that “he glittered when he walked” (line 3, 8). Shockingly, Richard Cory commits suicide despite having an idealized life. This poem illustrates a form of psychological alienation caused by a failure to understand others apart from direct experience.

Similarly, in Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken,” the narrator suggests that a source of alienation is the inability to fully understand what is outside one’s direct perceptions. Humans must make decisions every day that necessarily involve forgoing the possibility of experiencing other options. Each person may never know what lies down the paths that were abandoned. The narrator can see part of both paths, but he may only truly know a path by experiencing it firsthand. He is forced to make a single choice while leaving the other path behind because he “could not travel both” (2). This may be a possible source of alienation because one can only know certain emotions through direct experience. Due to the infinite possible paths that each person may take, one cannot possibly understand every situation that others experience. This fact causes feelings of alienation due to an inability to relate apart from potentially faulty inferential knowledge.

As a result of physical, social, and psychological barriers, humans must struggle with the fact that each one may never fully be understood. This alienation may cause negative feelings and incomplete relationships because of the basic human desire to connect with others.

Works Cited
Struggles of the Human Heart

By Kendra Griggs

Humans experience conflicts in daily life that exercise the heart’s capacity for intense emotions such as sorrow, hatred, and love. Authors evaluate these complexities by creating characters who experience competing desires in order to reveal the frustrations and emotional disunity that result from conflict. These stories reveal that human feelings and desires, although intense, are sometimes in conflict with one another and are mutually exclusive. This disunity of thoughts and feelings is represented because “she had loved him-sometimes” (540). This statement suggests that although her marriage might not have been perfect she was at least occasionally satisfied, which leads to thoughts of sorrow about his passing. After mourning, she comes to accept her independence through imagining her freedom in which her “body and soul” will be “free” (540). This shift in emotional states may indicate those that Louise experienced in her daily life, but might not have attended to properly. Her emotions conflict because she desires both independence and the presence of her husband, but she cannot have both. Through this emotional struggle, Chopin reveals that conflict is difficult to sort out and is sometimes fatal.

In Hamlin Garland’s story “Under the Lion’s Paw,” the nature of the human heart is exposed through Mr. Haskins’ conflict concerning the desire for family unity and the desire for justice. He believes that hard work leads to rewards. He is honest and expects that of others. After he is taken advantage of by Jim Butler, Haskins comes near to killing him. This shows how important the idea of justice and truth is to him. He believes that Butler is a “thief and a liar” and is willing to go to great lengths to uphold his perceived meanings of virtue (685). Although he wants to murder Butler, he realizes that his family matters more when he sees “the sun-bright head of his baby girl” (685). The consequences of his murderous actions would negatively affect his family, and his family is the reason why he works so hard on the farm. After all, he is working harder than a “slave in the Roman galleys… for his wife and babies” (683). His familial desires prevent him from striking, but he informs Butler that he will kill him if he returns to the property after it is purchased. Two competing strong and mutually exclusive desires battle in the head of Mr. Haskins until one overpowers the other. Through this conflict, Garland exposes possible simultaneous extremes of the human heart by showing his hatred toward Butler and the love and appreciation toward his daughter.

Sarah Orne Jewett exposes the mutually exclusive conflicting desires of the heart through the young and innocent Sylvia in her short story “A White Heron.” Sylvia is torn between her love for nature and her desire to help her family monetarily and to provide a friendly relationship with the ornithologist. Jewett illustrates the joy and peace that Sylvia gets from immersion in nature with no intent to harm. She has an unlikely admiration for the ornithologist who desires to add the white heron to his collection. Sylvia has the skills to locate the bird in order to gain admiration from the boy and to help her family. However strong these desires may be, the action of assisting the boy would be in direct contradiction with her desire to preserve nature because the bird would be killed. Although she is emotionally torn, she cannot “tell the heron’s secret and give its life away” (537). Sylvia is disturbed that she has to make this difficult decision and wonders if she made the correct one. This emotional disturbance indicates the desires of the heart in conflict.

By providing opposing extremes of emotions within individual characters, authors such as Chopin, Garland, and Jewett reveal that the desires of the human heart are often in conflict with one another. Each of the major characters experiences strong and mutually exclusive desires. The characters often feel trapped between one decision and the other. Each possible decision provides some sort of satisfaction to the character, but it also provides a tradeoff that includes sorrow. Therefore, the human heart has the capacity for many emotions as a result of the mental turmoil involved in conflicting decision making.

Works Cited
A Son Becomes a Man

By Kevin Walter

The summer sun was already bringing its promise of misery by the time we reached the parade ground and took our seats. The two-story, red brick barracks across the street might have been office buildings if placed somewhere else on Earth, but here, on this island, they had served as a home for the young men and women marching in lock-step behind the drill instructors. Amid a sea of green and khaki with brass buckles polished to miniature suns and covers perched atop shaven skulls was my son. In a few minutes, he would complete his training and officially become and forever be a United States Marine. As the marching band played a martial air and led the platoons to their places, I remembered the baby who had come into my world late one May night, wet and red and angrily screaming. The National Anthem played, and I thought of the baseball games I had taken him to see, teaching him to stand and hold his hand over his heart. Now as the strains of our nation’s anthem hung over the assembly, he raised his hand in salute to show that he would support and defend his country. When the chaplain offered up his guiding prayer, asking that our troops at home and away at war be kept safe, I recalled the nighttime ritual of bath, pajamas, story, and prayer. As the pomp and circumstance played out in front of me, a military ballet well rehearsed by its officers, I thought of school projects and field trips and nights spent beside his sick bed. All of the memories of his childhood came to me, and I knew there would be no more. With the ceremony concluded and the newly-made Marines dismissed to return home for a short leave, families rushed onto the parade ground to find the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters who had been surrendered to service months ago. Joe found me in the fray, and as I held him close and told him of my pride, I realized, no matter neither his age nor the accomplishments of his life, I would always see a straw-haired boy with a little grin.
My Greatest Adventure

By Lance Voorhees

“Are you ready?” he asked. I smiled at him. Time slowed as we took those first steps: my shoes gleaming in the light, uniform perfectly pressed, chest tall. The storms of doubt and fear that wracked my mind the day before were gone. As I climbed the steps to the platform, I had never been more ready or sure of anything in my life. My men came and stood by me, and her ladies waited for her to arrive. Nothing could prepare me for the next moment. When she stepped into the room, my dress-blues wilted. All of the light in the room rushed to her, begging to be in her presence. Her green eyes held mine and never wavered as she drew near with balletic steps. As soon as I held her hands, the day accelerated to a dizzying speed. It all blurs in my memory, but the face of my bride remains clear: free of stress and full of joy. Her relieved laughter still rings in my ears. The day of days drew to a close as I started the car. It was our greatest adventure, yet we knew it was just the beginning of a bigger one. “Are you ready?” I asked. She smiled at me.
Fighting for the Right Not to Bear Children

By Megan Moland

Throughout history, a change in society’s view on a controversial subject has taken a large movement. During the 1700s, this was the aspect of freedom. In the 1800s, it was the freeing of slaves, and for the 1900s, it was a split between birth control and segregation. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes, “[F]reedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed” (485). This was also true for a woman’s right to birth control. Margaret Sanger was one of the greatest advocates for women’s control over their bodies and reproductive health. She was inspired to help women control their futures after seeing her own parents struggle to feed a large number of children. Even when faced with imprisonment and ridicule, she still persevered for the legalization of birth control. Margaret Sanger revolutionized women’s rights by educating women on family planning, creating Planned Parenthood, teaching women across the globe about their bodies, and assisting to create the first hormonal birth control pill.

During a time when women had no choice in the size of their families, Margaret Sanger faced severe ridicule and even imprisonment to educate women on their options regarding family planning. Since the Industrial Revolution was currently in full swing, families no longer needed ten or twelve children to farm the land. Instead, families were living in cities in small apartments, and the parents worked in factories nearby. Even though there was no longer a need for such large families, there was no way to educate young women on ways to prevent pregnancy. Doctors and nurses were forbidden from telling women ways to prevent conception since doing so was illegal. One young woman who inspired Sanger to fight the crusade of women’s rights was Sadie Sachs who had acquired an infection after having an illegal abortion. She begged Sanger to tell her how to prevent another pregnancy. Since speaking of such things was illegal, Sanger was unable to tell her. Sachs later died of complications from another abortion. Sanger was haunted by this death for the rest of her life, feeling partly responsible even though she had no knowledge herself. Caroline E. Katzive observes that “Sanger felt
powerless and angry and resolved to somehow share knowledge of contraception with the women who needed it” (128). After Sachs’ death, Sanger educated herself on ways to prevent pregnancy and made it her mission to inform as many women as possible. Even though she faced imprisonment for many years if her teachings were found out, Sanger knew that women needed the information. She did not care about laws or police arresting her. She cared about all the women who were unable to represent themselves because they were oppressed or had already died from having so many children. With the knowledge of family planning, women were given options for their futures. They could wait to have children and instead pursue a career or only have a few children whom they would not struggle to feed and clothe. This revolutionized women’s rights and influenced the equality women currently have.

Sanger knew that many women who wanted smaller families were poverty-stricken, so she opened an affordable health care clinic, the American Birth Control League, which was later renamed Planned Parenthood. Sanger was inspired to open the clinic after she realized how well known she had become to the public. She realized women needed something greater than lectures and articles. Katzive notes that Sanger “recruited her younger sister, Ethel Byrne, and a translator named Fania Mindell to open the first birth control clinic in America” (130). Katzive adds that together the women posted advertisements across New York City reading, “Mothers: Can you afford to have a large family? Do you want any more children? If not, why do you have them?” and “Do not kill, do not take life, but prevent” (130). When the clinic first opened in 1916, it was used to educate women about family planning and birth control. On the clinic’s opening day, over one hundred women arrived, and even twenty men, who wanted to learn about birth control; however, today it offers both those things and many other services needed by women, including mammograms. The clinic was only open for ten days before a woman who was working undercover for the police caused the clinic to be shut down. At this time Sanger was taken to trial and jailed for thirty days. If she had never opened the clinic, quite possibly birth control could still be illegal today. Sanger understood the risk she was taking by opening the clinic; however, she knew that women needed education about birth control. By forcing the legalization of birth control, she illustrated to the federal government how much women desired to choose the size of their families.

In the 1900s, many women across the globe did not understand how their bodies worked, and Sanger, often remembered as the crusader of birth control, wanted to change that. One of the first articles she wrote was “What Every Girl Should Know.” The article explains the maturity of a woman’s body and why these biological processes happen. Due to the Comstock laws at the time, the article, however, was censored. This did not stop Sanger; instead, she told women by word of mouth, wrote other articles, and eventually opened the clinic. She was encouraged to go on a speaking tour to teach women about birth control and their bodies. Kristie Yasunari notes that Sanger decided to begin her speeches with “‘The first right of every child is to be wanted,’ since no one could object to that” (622). While making the tour, Sanger gained a great deal of popularity. Yasunari writes, “In Pittsburgh, she was approached by a group of women who wanted to form the first state birth control league” (622). Seeing the impression made on women locally in the United States, Sanger decided to travel outside the country. She traveled to countries like Japan and China to teach women about their bodies and the use of birth control. She knew that a great deal of research and common knowledge was known of the man’s body at the time, yet women were often left in the dark. Sanger knew that if women were educated about their bodies they would be better able to discover disease and ailments in time for treatment. The women would also be able to teach their daughters, which would eliminate some of the ignorance regarding the body. By obtaining this knowledge, women would be better educated, and in turn, men would see them as deserving of more rights.

While Sanger is often celebrated as the crusader of women’s rights to their body and the availability of birth control, some believe she was not as inspiring. Some believe she was lawless because she was so willing to be jailed for her beliefs. She is accused of encouraging others to commit crimes to achieve her agenda, yet this is untrue because Sanger believed the laws unethical and knew they must be changed. Sanger’s nonviolent actions encouraged many activists in the Civil Rights Movement. Planned Parenthood’s website states,
“In 1966, the year Sanger died, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: ‘There is a striking kinship between our movement and Margaret Sanger’s early efforts. Our sure beginning in the struggle for equality by the nonviolent direct action may not have been so resolute without the tradition established by Margaret Sanger and people like her’” (2). Even though she broke the law, Sanger was not lawless. She encouraged others to help educate women and to help those women achieve natural rights. Some may say that Sanger only desired birth control due to her stand on eugenics. Even though she supported some ideas illustrated by the American Eugenics Movement, she believed that family planning should be voluntary. The movement also denounced women’s basic rights to their bodies. Sanger did not wish to reduce the African American race. She wanted to help those in poverty have fewer children to lessen their financial burden, not eliminate a group entirely. By helping women in poverty obtain birth control and family planning, Sanger was able to help these families eliminate some of the factors keeping them below the poverty line. She also believed in aiding those with debilitating genetic diseases to prevent passing down the disease.

Sanger knew that women would be better able to make choices regarding their family size if they were able to control it with an oral contraceptive. She encouraged scientist Gregory Pincus to create the pill. She wished for it to be “an inexpensive oral contraceptive that would have a guaranteed success rate with minimal to no side effects,” Katzive writes (131). The pill was released in 1957 and used natural hormones to suppress the menstrual cycle, preventing pregnancy. It was marketed as a means to treat menstrual cycle with the side effect of not being able to bear children. The pill would not be legalized as a contraceptive until 1960. It is now used by millions of women every year to prevent pregnancy, but it also helps with many other diseases that women face. The pill currently also helps women regulate their menstrual cycle and treat endometriosis and ovarian cysts, which can all cause severe pain. It allows women to have the freedom that men have been able to experience for centuries. The pill continues to assist women in modern society to achieve goals in their lives that would have never happened without it. By helping to create the pill that women so desperately needed, Sanger revolutionized women’s lives.

Margaret Sanger was a women’s rights activist, who believed that women should have control over their bodies. Without her modern society could be very different, and the average family might still be having ten or twelve children. Today, the average number of children within a household is two. The revolution of birth control modernized the world by allowing women freedom over their bodies and allowing them opportunities in the workforce. Without Sanger, these things might never have happened. She was an inspiration to American leaders and to common people.

Works Cited
A Letter Home

By Christian McCarley

*The parchment, dry and brittle with age, cracks open*

Whispers—whispers from the grave were what called us home. Now, I’ve heard many a boy new to war say that it was their family that called them back. Those caught up in the romance of bravery and heroism so often ramble that it was the relief of knocking off old work boots at the front door or the smell of a night out on the harbor that gave them strength to do what they’d come to do. I know that to be nonsense. There are no thoughts of home when you’re that close to dyin’. There is only the tragedy of lives lost, and I’ll tell you, we have killed many and have died by many. Every footfall forward is one spent furthering itself to an early grave. Lying breathless in a pool of someone else’s blood, somewhere in the middle of the night, a man’s box cries out from six feet under and sings an eerie song.

The year is 1865 as I write you this. A few days ago, I and those with me rode hard through the night to tie the noose around the Confederacy. We were there to take the only kind thing in the midst of all of this away from them. We’d come to take their food and starve them to death. Our brothers—if not by blood then by the mere thought of drawing in the same air—were to be slaughtered by our hands.

On the day, I stood amidst a pile of men, breaths ragged and scared. Funnily enough, in the midst of the fray, I can remember the exact moment that I sputtered, batting away the smoke in my eyes coming from ole’ William Taylor’s cigarette. Call it brevity or lack of originality, but I simply called him Taylor, and he called me Dixon. We weren’t friends before. I’m writing you this letter for a reason. In it, lies the enraged ramblings of a man furious at the way things are. However, I would not have it be said that I couldn’t see the beauty in trying times, because it was, in fact, the cruel hand of war that landed Taylor in my life. I fear that without him I’d be a dead man. Hell, even now, I feel as if I’m living on stolen air.

Of course, it is with his sacrifice, his blood, no matter how dark, that I am able to write this. For you. I do not think that noble thought even comes close to balancing the scales of my pain and my inept ability to pull truth and reason from chaos, but with these weary hands of mine I will push on in the endeavor to deliver you some truly life-saving advice.

*The letter rustles*

Perhaps first, I should go back to the heart of this letter. Bare hours before we were to set out on the ride through the night to close the gap between us and the enemy, we were commanded to get some modicum of rest. Taylor and I wandered some ways away, trying to gather our thoughts in the silence and at least try to fortify our stomachs against the thought of more bloodshed, as opposed to resting. I remember telling Taylor, as I made myself a comfortable spot in the dirt, that there was no way in hell I was gonna get any sleep. Turns out I lied.

From the next line on, may your eyes peel the very ink from the page. Forgive me, but I dare say that it is vital.

On that unusually cool spring evening, I was stolen over by a dream. Some, including myself, would prefer to call it a nightmare. I can only ask that you would set aside your concerns to my honesty long enough to listen. I know that it is hard to believe. The decision to believe in it myself nearly claimed my sanity where even war failed in the effort. If you’re still here, what I am about to tell you is the absolute truth, best I can tell it.

I was shown the future when I dreamed that night. It doesn’t serve the validity of my story the fact that I find it hard to recall the details, the specific advancements of technology and the human race. I was
there for what felt like an eternity, but I could only stand in awe. Put the pieces together, though, and I can say what I saw was so far-fetched, yet liberating, that it irrevocably severed my sense of reality. The world of the future is breathtaking. I do not stand to deny it, here in this letter.

What I aim to tell you is what happened next. In the midst of all that I had been shown, I was sucked from my stupor with something colder and ruder than a bucket of ice water to the face. Everything became extremely focused in the same second that I decided I no longer wanted to watch. The paid dues from millions of those before you, the very essence of beauty that I so poorly described to you before, became tainted in an instant. I would not bare your soul against the awful truth that I saw, but I would have you embrace the implications.

I found a country, for a lack of a better term, backslidden, to a point that I truly found it hard to breathe. I was choked by the audacity of the hatred. If there is but one word I can use to impart to you the bleakness, it would have to be division. Men and women hated men and women without principle or reason. Thousands of people tried to say that the other thousands of people’s lives around them held more or less value. Communication happened through half a hundred barriers, and by the time it reached the intended individual, it was so watered down and filtered out that it was next to nothing of its former self. Tradition could not be trumped by love, and love could not be tarnished by tradition. I saw a country literally tearing itself apart. The true crime of that lies in the fact that I just so happen to be a part of that same country doing it the first time. For what? Are our mothers’ tears or our self-mutilation of our own souls as we take the lives of brothers not lesson enough? If not, then what will it take for the future to lay down the hatred and mend the seams?

I leave that for you to decide. Now, I know you probably have questions. My attempt to describe to you what I dreamt of took all of myself and was still half-hearted. There simply isn’t enough parchment, enough time. I pray that where the words fall short, the meaning carries through with all the weight that it needs to. If you’re reading this, it is my ultimate prayer for you to make a change in the face of the unchangeable. Maybe to make a difference, or maybe just to scream so loud and so long that someone else can take up the torch. In light of that, there is but one thing I can leave you with, moving forward. For the remainder of this letter, I will describe to you what happened on that day in 1865, when Taylor and I stood as thieves and murderers to one and good men to another.

I woke up two hours later, sweating like a guilty man awaiting his sentence. Taylor saw, but Taylor just chalked it up to nerves. I let him. He was a good man, probably a better man than myself, but I dare to tarnish his memory by telling you that he was a part of the problem of that wicked future. I couldn’t bear to bring that before him, coward that I am. Listen and decide for yourself.

*The page turns*

Returning to where I began, I sputtered, batting the smoke away, and then came the haunting sound of artillery fire raining down to claim the young and the old, without reason or reserve. Taylor’s cigarette tumbled out of his mouth, burning his hand, and onto the ground, where it was almost instantly crushed by a boot. Our screams were mingled. We ran.

The fight had been going on for hours. I had waded through the bodies of boys and men, my side and theirs, for hours. I had listened to the terrible crashes and ensuing agony as bullet and artillery fire claimed life after life… for hours. Every one of them felt like it had my name written on it. In that lull, where Taylor smoked because his bloodlust was up, and I recalled the dream, the air was warm but I was increasingly cold. I found it hard to move. Yet, war has its demands. We’d had maybe five, ten minutes to stand still, and then with that return fire, I forgot all about the romance and followed hot on the heels of ole’ Taylor.

I’ll save you the grizzly details of the pursuit through the building, for the sake of getting to the point. Really there isn’t much to tell. Men died. Blood poured freely. Every breath was measured, just waiting to be the last. In the end, the terrible thunder outside began to withdraw. Slowly, we were winning. I could feel it in my bones.

As we drew upon the door, I nearly crashed into Taylor. He stood stock still, musket raised and aimed at a cowering man, the last of the soldiers standing between us and the exit. I could pace it. I
could describe it in such a way that you would truly feel the very air of that moment. The only purpose it would serve would be to scare you into action, but if the thought of our home descending into a barbaric imitation of its former glory doesn’t give you cause to tremble, nothing will.

The man had surrendered. A Confederate soldier—a figure that had been demonized over the span of the war to resemble a vicious creature—knelt on the ground, with fear in his eyes. He begged for mercy. For my part, I was moved to oblige. Taylor had other plans. He screamed at the man, telling him repeatedly to just lay down and die. Before I knew it, my own rifle was aimed at my very best friend. I told him to put down his gun, turn around, and just simply go get some air. It’s hard for me to remember the look in his eyes. Not in the sense that I have any lack of clarity, but it was hard to bear the way he looked at me then, and it still is. He couldn’t believe it. He took a step back, and I made the mistake of thinking it was over. I guess it was the relief in my eyes that was the final stab in his hatred, but he raised his gun again and fired. I screamed, knowing the kneeling man to be dead, but no—another bullet struck Taylor in the head first. I have no idea where it came from or who fired it. The who or how didn’t matter; I watched my brother in arms collapse to the ground, never to walk the earth again. I would be a fool to try and convey what that felt like. All I have to answer it are a whole lot of ‘why’s’. However, there’s only one ‘why’ that you should take with you from this letter.

Taylor died because he allowed his hatred to win. He was a good man, and I came to know in the days that followed that the Confederate soldier who had escaped with his life was also a good man. Rather, in them, both existed some good. There was also evil in them. I speak not any further on the man who surrendered. As far as I know, he will live a long and fruitful life. The war is over. We won. And because that Confederate soldier decided to let his goodness prevail, he in some way won with us. The story, this letter, ends with Taylor and his reason why.

It wasn’t the differences between him and the enemy that drew out his evil. It was his inability to stand among those differences and be kind. War isn’t the hardest thing a man can do. I don’t seek to prattle on about who was right and who was wrong. If this letter finds itself to the future and you, where it belongs, then you will know that history already told you who was right and who was wrong. It is safe for you to assume that I fought for what I believed in. To me, it isn’t about that. It’s about life and acceptance. It’s about fighting for the ability to both change and accept change. This letter is, in fact, about home, about the individual duty we all have to building and preserving that home. I know it’s hard. Despite that, I hope that my sometimes disjointed and incoherent ramblings will serve the purpose I intend them to. May the words be inconsequential. May I, the man, be not integral to the story. May you, whoever you are, find strength in the fact that we all play a part. I guess the question is: will you?

*The letter crackles, settling softly on the table*

The old man folds his hands across his chest, peering into the eyes of his son. The letter sits on the table between them. It had fallen into the hands of the old man’s own grandfather, several generations removed, and was now his. He was a descendant of the Confederate soldier, who had written his own letter. He’d gone to great lengths to castigate himself for hating another man simply because of color. The Union soldier that had saved him had been covered from head to foot in soot and blood. That didn’t change the strength of his character or his actions. Through the generations, all the way back to that fated day in the Civil War to present day twenty-first century, the letters and their inherent message had been passed down. It had set the foundation for the love that was this old man’s family legacy. He laughs again.

“You asked me how I felt about our country.” He says to his son, reaching out his withered hand. “Do you understand?”

A single tear falls from his son’s eyes. “Yes.” His son answers. “Yes, I do.”
A Nuisance

By Christian McCarley

John Smith sat in a booth, the vinyl cracked from age eating into his thigh. He swirled his coffee, served black in a chipped mug, and sighed. The grounds stuck to the porcelain, petulant and stubborn, but he counted them one by one, all the same. Each single piece was like a bated breath between the repetitious clack of waitresses’ heels and the stuttered rustle of customers as they ate their breakfast. With disgust over his obsessive ticks, he slammed his coffee down and focused again on the newspaper in front of him.

Four thousand, four hundred and twenty times, John had read the newspaper in this very same diner, at this very same time. Four thousand, four hundred and twenty times, he had taken the wretched commute to the center of this behemoth city. Four thousand, four hundred and twenty times, he had read about something terrible on the front page, a slave to the wage and a passive observer of tragedy. However, he was just that, an observer, and horrific history could not touch the mundane reign in his life. No, his greatest fears and worries were the nuisances of everyday life.

For instance, the cracked vinyl cutting into him like the moment before a tooth pierces the skin of an apple. There was also the fact that his eggs exceeded the average benchmark in only one solitary way: they were cold. One could even take into consideration his poor waitress, whose left heel was slightly uneven on the bottom, causing her to walk with a certain sway. These things were the smallest of things, but they were goliaths on a battlefield to John.

He shook his head, dumping the errant thoughts of his pugnacious mind into his bitter brew. Once more, he turned his eyes to the paper. The headline was just another big font scroll, blabbing on about scientists urging a bigger supply of stem cells to further their research, just another humdrum September day. It was all so… usual. Where was the mystery? Where was the magic of something new, or the terror of catastrophe? John’s life had just been one extensive list of ordinary things: his first girlfriend’s name was Sarah, his name was John, his degree was in business. Ordinary. Plain and simple. Like his off-white coffee mug or his insipid breakfast.

The only things to terrify him or entrance him were everyday nuisances. And they were naught but mosquito bites, no grandeur about them. With a scoff, John upturned the mustard bottle and gave it a squeeze. The mouth of the bottle spat at him—with a sound one could only accurately describe as flatulence—and spurted its contents all over his button down. His white button down.

John laughed, a haughty, bitter laugh.

Giving it up for a loss, he draped the newspaper over his plate, grabbed his blazer, and headed for the door. The walk wasn’t but two blocks over; he’d make it to work early.

The inhabitants of The Big Apple weren’t cold or cruel, like so many believed. They were subjugated. Every person John passed was a being bent to the will of the dream, the Great Dream, the lure for millions of immigrants. Endlessly chasing after something that kindled little faith in their hearts. His thoughts weren’t of judgement; he was one of them. A daydreamer and a slave to monotony. So, it was no bother to him that no eyes met his, that none gave a care for him if he tripped or stepped in gum. Minor nuisances, plagues so persistent they were ignored.

The heart and binding thread of this titanic city was its grid, the laces of a map. John turned off Greenwich St. onto Fulton St. at a brisk pace. His prison chain rose above him like a mighty steel monster, or simply a tower to a realist. The building rose like a god, yawning so close to the sky that it seemed like a second sun. Each of its four faces were riddled with thousands of windows, every one the slightest pried view into the lives of a million different people. It was both demon and deity to him.

John entered the building with the same dignifying bent head as the other passerby and rode the elevator to his floor. From there, it was a race to the water fountain and the windows of the far wall to avoid all the mindless chatter.

He sipped his water and stared into the rising sun.

John’s last and greatest nuisance on that humdrum day would be a low-flying plane.
Though their comments were brief, each of the three speakers remained honest and straightforward about their experiences and struggles on the road to success. Their words filled the room with courage and a renewed sense of confidence.

Daniela Altamirano, a Calhoun Community College student and one of the keynote speakers, admitted, “The road to success isn’t perfect.” All students must find and pick the path that works for them. Daniela also encouraged students to get involved on campus. Calhoun is a community if the many resources provided are taken advantage of to the full. Marty Kellum, a current instructor at Calhoun, assured the attendees, “You can always ask for help.” No single set path for a college education exists. No one knows this better than David Battle. A beloved alumnus of Calhoun, he sagely reminded students, “It isn’t about asking for help but accepting help.”

All three speakers managed to debunk the myths of college success with experiences that struck a chord within all in attendance. They spoke brightly of their time at Calhoun, encouraging everyone not only to make Calhoun their school but also to make it their family. When asked what she took away from the symposium, first-year college student Kassandra Woodall said she now understood, “Your situation doesn’t define you.”

The masses swarmed Kelley Gymnasium, some in groups of three and four, some in scrubs, and some walking in as their very own entourage. Diversity was rampant, yet every student, whether a fresh high school graduate or a mom coming back years later for her degree in secondary education, had a unified purpose. Half a million reasons for half a million choices stood between each person, but seeing success and learning every measure of it drew them in. The Student Success Symposium of 2018 awaited to inspire them all.

Once inside, the majority took their seats reserved for comfort zones; a brazen few set aside their inhibitions long enough to meet someone new. Despite the compartmentalization, connection thrived as the latest and greatest Billboard-topping tunes played overhead. Bare minutes passed, and the races were off. Introductions were made, and the applause was abundant. Calhoun’s Interim President, Dr. Burke, opened the event by advising students, “Never let a stumble be the end to success.” And the Symposium began.

David Battle, an alumnus of Calhoun, took the stage in a sharp suit with a warm attitude, his presence demanding the respect of silence. His story started at a moment when he was at rock bottom—when his sole plan of action and dream of being in the NFL had fallen through. A knee injury. Something so simple saw him go from a young man with high aspirations to a warm body on the streets, selling drugs. He carried the gathered students through that time of pain, careful to keep them right alongside, to see the extent of the damage and to see the margin of where his growth could be the most appreciated. Fresh out of prison, Mr. Battle made a decision. He would return to college at Calhoun and become something greater. He went on to achieve a degree at Calhoun and then proceeded to earn a few more. The man built a career, a family, a life. His admiration and appreciation for the sense of family he’d received at Calhoun boiled over as he described the path he took. His desire was to inspire the student body, and no one stood to deny that. When he had finished, the silence remained.

David Battle’s segment of the symposium stood hard to follow, but Marty Kellum refused to back down from the challenge. He, too, started his story on a note of failure. He originally attended the Univer-
University of Alabama, where he found himself thrust into a party atmosphere. He acknowledged the mistake he made in taking that road. In a short time, he’d flunked out of the university. Later in his speech, he said, “The first time I failed, was not who I was.” That statement rounded out the journey that followed. Mr. Kellum enrolled himself at Calhoun, where through perseverance he earned a degree in math, but he didn’t stop there. His Master’s degree came next and then an entirely separate degree in physics. The man wouldn’t quit. By the end of his speech, Mr. Kellum let it be known that he still wasn’t done. Until he was VP at Calhoun, the very place he started, he didn’t consider his initial journey complete. This earned a cheer from the STARS crew in the back of the gymnasium—Calhoun’s very own moral support.

The ending note was delivered by none other than Daniela Altamirano. Her voice stole over the gym, and as she spoke, the concentration became palpable. The drop of a pen wrapped in memory foam could’ve been heard. Her story rooted itself in the same foundation as the others, but the circumstances were vastly different. Daniela was born with Cerebral Palsy, a disorder widely known to so easily define someone’s life. The triumphant moment, the final blow to drive the meaning of success home, lay in the fact that Daniela did not let the disorder define hers. To this day, she attends and thrives at Calhoun Community College. Her words of wisdom to the student body were to use the resources available, not to be defeated or stalled by barriers, and not to back down, no matter the reason. She left the crowd with a ‘mic drop’ phrase: “You’re not meant to fit in, but to be there and stand out.” She was the final person to take the stage, the keynote, and her words defined the symposium. The applause was deafening.

To say that the gymnasia was left standing beneath the weight of strong people who inspire and persevere would be an understatement. Suffice it to say, the students left at the very least thinking about success and the work required to achieve it. As when the event started, half a million reasons drew everyone back out of the building. Perhaps they had another class. Perhaps they were headed to lunch or to home. Perhaps they were going straight to the drawing board to map out their future. Dream big, right? Regardless of the reasons, everyone’s coals seemed to burn a little brighter.

Daniela Altamirano in the Spotlight

By Melissa Brown

Recently, I had the pleasure of reconnecting with Daniela Altamirano, one of the speakers at the 2018 Student Success Symposium and a current Calhoun student. Daniela expressed that in her four semesters of college she has learned that students can always be themselves at Calhoun. Whenever a student needs help, he/she just needs to ask. Someone is always more than willing to help. She feels that Calhoun has prepared her for her time at a university. She will be transferring in the fall of 2019 to pursue a bachelor’s degree in Hard of Hearing/Deaf Sign Language with the goal of becoming an interpreter. She wants to continue her education to obtain a doctorate. Daniela spoke to me about her superb support system. Her friends and family have “always kept [her] going.” They helped her realize that her condition should not get in the way of her hopes, dreams, and desires. She wants to inspire other people with her story of determination and perseverance. I asked Daniela who was someone, dead or alive, she would like to meet. She confessed that it would be Nyle DiMarco, a deaf actor and model, who—more importantly—started a foundation to provide resources to deaf children and their families. She would love to hear his story as well as any problems he has encountered throughout his career. Daniela is an amazing student who shows everyone that anything is possible. Her Calhoun family wishes her the best in the bright future that awaits her.
Gifts from the Heart: Calhoun’s 2018 Chorale Holiday Concert

By Christian McCarley

In our modern day, information travels as quickly as the flippant buzz of a notification and the soft press of a thumb. Weather alert? Swiped and noted. Missing person? Swiped and noted. The tragic death of a beloved celebrity? Swiped and, you guessed it, noted. However, word of the raw power and genuine magic being created by the Calhoun Chorale, helmed by none other than Granville Oldham, Jr., has not traveled fast enough. To hear witnesses tell it, the concerts have shocked and awed for several preceding years and only continue to grow. The event should doubtlessly be front page news. This Musepaper editor was honored to have Dr. Sheila Byrd sit for an interview regarding the performance, as one of the many people helpless against the captive chorale in 2018.

Q: Can you describe the location, atmosphere, and audience?

A: The concert was held in the Recital Hall in the Alabama Center for the Arts, the perfect location where there is not a bad seat in the house. Concertgoers feel close to the stage, almost as if they are a part of the performance. The audience this year was eagerly anticipating the show, having heard about the fabulous performances Director Oldham had orchestrated before. To define the event in one word... it would have to be eager. Whether the people were excited to see their own children perform or just living in the moment, there was this powerful buzz that everyone felt.

Q: Can you describe the most memorable moment for you?

A: Actually, I have to tell you about two. To start, playing on the Christmas theme, Director Oldham conducted incredible pieces that the average individual wouldn’t know of without some training in classical music. The Chorale performed pieces by Giovanni Pierluigi de Palestrina. For instance, “Exultate Deo.” Mr. Oldham had students from several outer lying counties performing these difficult pieces in entirely different languages. To push the envelope further, he moved on to compositions by Joseph Haydn. Their talent and hard work were awe-inspiring. However, the most defining moment for me had to be when Mr. Oldham had a group of young women perform “R.E.S.P.E.C.T,” which I speculate he did as a nod to the “Me Too” movement. This group strolled right up to center stage and gave a driving performance, but
there was one girl who was showcased during the height of the song. The voice that came out of her was completely unexpected, and the crowd roared. I said to myself then and there that I would never forget that moment. She sounded just like Aretha Franklin.

Q: What were the reactions around you, if you noticed any?
A: The crowd was just as awestruck as I was. Now, I’ve seen shows directed by Mr. Oldham before, and what fascinates me is that not only is he a fabulous artist but also a gorgeous conductor. You can tell that the music is in every part of his being. You know, the art of being able to take students who can’t pronounce some of the words in the varying languages and transform them into these powerhouse performers is beyond magic. I approached several of the students after the concert who all gave me the, “No, I’ve never sung before” response after I complimented them. During the concert, the audience members around me were all either amazed or lost in disbelief as they became party to the performance in front of them, which is hard to do in a crowd.

Q: Were you able to evaluate and appreciate the amount of work necessary to put on the show?
A: I can’t speak for other people, but I absolutely did. Granted, I’ve been in musicals and concerts, playing music all of my life; therefore, I know how difficult even putting on a simple show can be. For Director Oldham to have limited time restricted to a class and deliver such a striking performance had to have been just short of impossible. It still floors me.

Q: What was on your mind as you left the event?
A: I felt like my soul had been fed, and not just because the performance was wonderful. More importantly, the concert was proof to me that education and what I’ve been spending my whole life doing matters. Especially the arts and humanities. Those things are places where people can be transformed and enjoy something that isn’t entirely their niche. I was in awe of that because it gave me such validation and continued belief in education. Even a week later, the staff and faculty who attended couldn’t quit talking about it. They each had different favorite moments, but they all felt that sense of, “Wow, that was unbelievable.” In the end, it was hard not to walk away thinking that Calhoun has such a powerful program for students and for the community.

Black Student Alliance in 2019

By Jillian Oliver

Each semester, the Black Student Alliance (BSA) hosts inclusive events that promote fellowship and respect, something everyone at Calhoun can feel a part of.

This spring, BSA kicked off an eventful semester by hosting a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on January 15. The featured speaker at this event was Dr. Robert Smith, professor of Christian Preaching and the Jr., Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama. Smith previously served as the Carl E. Bates Associate Professor of Christian Preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He was recognized in 2017 as the E. K. Bailey Expository Preaching Conference Living Legend and received Southern’s 1996 Findley B. Edge Award for Teaching Excellence. Currently, he is an ordained Baptist minister, having served as pastor of the New Mission Missionary Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, for the last twenty years.

In celebration of Black History Month, the BSA hosted a film fest featuring Black Panther, The Hate U Give, Black Klansman, and Detroit. Midway through the month, BSA warmly welcomed Peggy Allen Towns, author of Duty Driven: The Flight of North Alabama’s Afrcians American During the Civil War and Scottsboro Unmasked: Decatur’s Story. Towns is a local historian of African American history and a native of Decatur, Alabama. This visit was followed shortly by an excursion to Montgomery for a visit to the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial of Peace and Justice. Wrapping up the month, BSA hosted a Black History Paint Party followed by sponsorship of the 29th Annual Gospel Fest held on the Huntsville campus.

The BSA continues to look for excited and appreciative participants at their events. Students interested in the organization can easily search BSA on Calhoun’s website and contact one of the sponsors listed or simply join by filling in the fields on the page.
Interview with Dr. Burke

By Christian McCarley and Jillian Oliver

As Calhoun Community College’s Interim President, Dr. Joe Burke remains a busy individual. However, he and Belinda Noe, Secretary to the President, both were more than welcoming to the Musepaper editors as we inquired after an interview. Within a single phone call, we had an appointment. On the day, his office stood at the top of the Math and Science building, both warm and formal. We’d barely set foot in the door before we were ushered into his office, sitting down to a defining interview.

Q: What are some of the defining steps that led you to become the interim president of Calhoun?
A: Essentially, I think my being here is the result of having been Vice President and Academic Dean at Northeast Alabama Community College. I’ve been in that position for several years. I taught psychology for fourteen years and was a chief student services officer. My experience in so many different areas of community college work led the Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System to ask me to become interim president of Calhoun. So, here I am!

Q: Did you always see yourself working in administration, or did it find you?
A: That’s a good question. I guess it would be more that it found me. Part of what led the higher-ups to recognize my willingness to do whatever it took to get the job done had to be taking on other duties and responsibilities, accepting duties beyond faculty work such as accreditation and extra hours in advising and the admissions office.

Q: Your favorite pastime, name it.
A: Just one? Well, I guess number one would be taking day trips with my wife. Day long dates. Another thing I like to do that’s good therapy for me is to get on my tractor with the mower behind it and just go out across the field cutting weeds. I also enjoy gardening.

Q: What steps are you planning to take to integrate the next President into your position?
A: The most important thing, I think, about being president is that I’ve changed positions over the years. Every step I take removes me from student contact, and that’s the sad part of my job. It’s what I miss the most. I would hope that the next person here would put the students first in every decision that he/she makes. I think as long as the new president keeps that in mind, he/she will do well.

Mr. Marty Kellum in the Spotlight

By Blake Wallace

Mr. Marty Kellum, a math instructor at Calhoun Community College and the 2005-2006 president of Calhoun’s Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD) chapter, was one of the featured speakers at this year’s Student Success Symposium. The range of his academic achievements speaks to the breadth of his intellect. As Calhoun student and an SKD member, he won the National SKD Poetry Writing Contest in 2006.

Many know who Mr. Kellum is but few have had the privilege of being taught by him. He is an extremely smart individual—so smart that he has a total of eight degrees. First, he has five Associate’s Degrees in General Education, Math, English, Pre-Engineering, and Pre-Law. Then he has a double Bachelor’s Degree in Astrophysics and Math. Lastly, he achieved a Master’s Degree in Math.

With these achievements, Mr. Kellum could have easily pursued a different career, but he chose to be a teacher. When I asked him why he chose this profession above everything else, he responded, “I just love teaching. This job is phenomenal. I get to interact with a different group of students every semester and just knowing that I can change how students view math is the reason I do it.”

Other than being a fantastic math instructor, Mr. Kellum is also a funny guy. When I asked him about the funniest thing that has happened to him, he
Q: Could you describe to us some of the challenges you face in your day-to-day workload?
A: A continual question I ask is “What can we do to make students successful?” which comes to be a major topic and concern. That would be the biggest challenge.

Q: One of Calhoun’s key values is the integrity of both its students and faculty. How would you personally define integrity?
A: The first word that comes to mind would be transparency. I think decisions that affect students should be made with the reasoning explained. Part of my leadership style is collaborative, in that I get input from different people. I take those ideas and concerns into consideration when I make a decision. That way, more people have a say in the decision and there are more people who understand the reasoning behind it. Transparency and integrity go together.

Q: Who do you think has lived according to your definition personally, professionally, or historically?
A: The person I like to read quite a bit is John Maxwell. He writes about leadership and values like integrity. Although he isn’t someone I know personally, from what I know of him and his writings, he would exhibit that.

Q: How do you view the role of community colleges as opposed to universities?
A: Primarily, community colleges are more focused on learning and teaching, as opposed to universities, which are more focused on research. That’s why I think a community college is the best place for any student to start a college career. Instructors truly care about whether students learn. I think that makes a world of difference.

Q: How do you feel Calhoun performs in its own role as a community college?
A: I think Calhoun is excellent in its role and what it does. Since I’ve been here, since last May, I’ve been amazed at the people who work hard and who care about student success. Calhoun is the largest community college in the state. Even though it is so large, it still has a small college feel to it. It has more of a family feel. That’s what makes Calhoun special.

Q: You finally have a minute in your busy schedule for lunch. Where would you go?
A: Let’s see... although I haven’t been there in a while, I’d like to go back. Moe’s Southwest Grill.

Q: What mark do you hope to leave here in your time at Calhoun?
A: That’s a good question. One thing would be that I always wanted to do what was best for students. That is what we’re about.

answered, “When I was younger, I went to Jiffy’s in Athens to get some chicken. I saw a guy I went to school with and I knew he was a cop, but I didn’t think anything about it. Then a police officer car pulled in behind me to block me in. The cop got out and asked, ‘Are you Marty Kellum?’ I replied, ‘Yes,’ and the officer asked, ‘Do you have some overdue library books?’ I was thinking I was just being punked, but he was dead serious. He said, ‘Normally we would cuff you, impound your car, and take you in, but since it’s just library books, you can go home but show up for court.’” People who see Mr. Kellum on campus should be sure to ask him about this story.

Finally, I asked him if he has any advice for college students. He replied, “I know this sounds cliché, but find out what you like. So many students come into college already having their minds made up about what they want to do, and although that’s cool, I think everyone should leave other possibilities open. Take a class that has nothing to do with your major just to experience new ideas. Use that time to really experience life and to make sure that what you are doing is right for you.”
Sigma Kappa Delta Shines

By Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea

Theta Beta, Calhoun’s chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD), the National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges, has had a year full of excitement and camaraderie. The Decatur campus meetings continue to grow under the guidance of sponsors Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea and Ms. Julie Sneed by enriching the college experience for members, and under the guidance of Dr. Christie Burney and Mr. Jordan Taylor, SKD members on the Huntsville campus have had more opportunities to participate in the organization than ever before.

In addition to monthly meetings, SKD on the Decatur campus organized and hosted a donation drive for a local nursing home in the fall semester of 2018. Members celebrated the holiday season by honoring the elderly, specifically those who are too often forgotten. Items, such as word searches, small stuffed animals, books, health care products, and socks, were generously donated by students, faculty, and staff. SKD members gathered each week in November to wrap these gifts, while also enjoying food and music and while becoming better acquainted with one another. Dr. Sheila Byrd and Julianna Menefee (pictured above) then delivered the packages to Valley View Health and Rehabilitation in Madison. SKD hopes to orchestrate similar opportunities in the upcoming year to continue both the chapter’s fellowship and fun, while also building bridges between the college and its surrounding communities.

SKD members who attend classes on the Huntsville campus also had a busy year. During the fall 2018 semester, students gathered each month for discussions with authors and artists published in Muse, a source that showcases work by students, faculty, staff, and community members. These meetings then allowed them to share that work with a more intimate audience. Members also hosted the SKD Writers Series on the Huntsville campus during the spring 2019 semester. This series highlighted the works of Tina Mozelle Braziel in February, Philip Shirley in April, and Gayle Young in June. SKD plays a vital part in the continued growth of campus life on Calhoun’s Huntsville campus.

Most significantly, Calhoun is well represented each year by SKD members at the Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta International Convention, and this year is no exception. Melissa Brown and Jillian Oliver, Calhoun students and Theta Beta members, traveled with Drs. Byrd and Rhea and Ms. Sneed to St. Louis, Missouri, at the end of March. Sigma Tau Delta selected Melissa’s paper “Blurring the Lines” for presentation at the convention. Given that it competed with papers written and submitted by junior and senior university students, this selection is quite an honor for Melissa and for Calhoun. Her paper also received the Best SKD Convention Paper Award. The accolades, however, did not end there. Melissa received the Dr. Sheila H. Byrd Service Scholarship presented by SKD, and Jillian’s poem “Pieces” was awarded first place in the National SKD Poetry Writing Contest. Virginia Woolf concludes A Room of One’s Own by stating that writing requires not only a room of one’s own and money but also “the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think.” Congratulations to these exemplary students who took a chance on themselves and on their work! Let them serve as examples of the possibilities that may be available for all of us.
A Busy Day with Kevin Young at Calhoun’s 18th Annual Writers’ Conference

By Jillian Oliver

On March 7, 2019, Calhoun students, faculty, staff, and community members were thrilled to welcome Kevin Young, poet, author, and poetry editor for The New Yorker. Young is also the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. His ten books of poetry include Blue Laws: Selected & Uncollected Poems 1995-2015, Book of Hours, Dear Darkness, and Brown, his most recent. At the morning session held in the Advanced Technology Center, Young focused on his book Dear Darkness. From it, he read “Ode to Chicken,” “Ode to Grits,” “Aunties,” and more. He also shared selected poems from Book of Hours that he does not normally read to audiences. Between poems, he often spoke about what compelled him to write the poem. This information served as mini history lessons for listeners as they learned more about southern food and, most importantly, about the injustice suffered during the Civil Rights Movement by people like Emmett Till. Young is a kind, humble, and enigmatic soul who continued to engage and astound his audience from the moment he took the stage. Aubrey Flack, a freshman student at Calhoun, said of the morning session, “I enjoyed hearing Kevin Young speak very much and was intrigued by his view of things.”

Toward the end of his morning visit, Young took the time to answer questions from the audience. When asked how he knew when a poem was finished, Young said that it was less about the poem’s idea and more about its sound. He encouraged all aspiring poets in the audience to first write down their poems and then spend time reading them aloud. After listening to a poem, the writer should then consider form. In Young’s experience, meaning comes after the sound and the form are right. Having generously dispensed wisdom to the audience, he went on to sign books with a smile.

The morning session was followed by a small luncheon attended by the student winners of the Writers’ Conference Writing Contest and college administrators, staff, and faculty who actively support the event each year. That same evening, Calhoun’s Foundation hosted a Meet and Greet at the Carnegie Visual Arts Center in Decatur. Guests included the conference’s sponsors, Project XYZ, Redstone Federal Credit Union, and Textbook Brokers, as well as local literary enthusiasts who purchased tickets to the event to benefit the Wendy Williams Scholarship, named in honor of a former Calhoun English instructor. Following this reception, Young headed to the Recital Hall of the Alabama Center for the Arts for the evening session. Calhoun sophomore Grace Walker reported that her mother so enjoyed Young’s poetry she laughed almost uncontrollably when he read “Ode to Chicken.” Kevin Young was an inspiration and a joy for all who attended the 18th Annual Writers’ Conference.
All in the Timing by David Ives stands as a five-piece comedy, magically painting the irony and laugh- ingstock that is our modern social interaction. Borderline satire, it manages to illustrate both the shortcomings of human communication and the beauty of bravery born from the people putting in the effort while failure is imminent. It thrusts upon the audience the hilarity of how easy it is to erect barriers between ourselves and others, by offense or by desire. Words, facial expressions, and all that is body language can communicate to another person in a million ways. How easy it is to become stuck on the barest detail. These comedic pieces dive headfirst into the enigmatic pool, unafraid of getting their hands dirty.

With this endeavor hanging overhead, people pressed into the theatre at the Alabama Center for the Arts, all clamoring for a seat to see Calhoun’s rendition. The audience found themselves in an environment set up to be at the height of personal—the seats pressed in from all four corners of the room, surrounding the stage and set pieces so close audience members could touch them. Murmurs thrummed across the masses, some animatedly recounting previous views and others expressing curiosity at what was to come. The lights dimmed, the actors and crew popped into existence right out of the seating, and the voices hushed. The five-segment play of the night took its first step, and the show began.

Each of the individual acts revealed a powerful insight, but together, they painted a genuine picture. The five of them sought to etch smiles on faces, but to also plant a seed. From “Sure Thing” where we watched a pair of strangers fight to get the message across, earning a reset when they said the wrong thing to the “Universal Language” where we witnessed an entirely made up language overcome differences and inspire love, sides were in stitches every step of the way, and minds were spinning right alongside. The irony is that we were all learning, or at least being once again exposed to, the idea that positive connection between people is imperative—and we were doing just that. We connected through our smiles and wheezing chuckles. I don’t think that any of us knew it then, but I know we all felt it.

A few days later, the MUSE student editors had the privilege of interviewing the director and helmsman of Calhoun’s rendition, Mr. Bill Provin, perfectly summing up the whole ordeal. The conversation was more than enlightening and served to further reiterate the underlying insight. He described it best by saying, “It’s really about ordinary, everyday people.” In his beginning notes in the play’s program, he touched on several of the inherent roadblocks in modern communication. Altogether, he was very passionate about his crew and their intent with producing All in the Timing. After getting to see the play in action, I’d have to say they accomplished all they set out to do.
In conjunction with Calhoun’s Annual Writers’ Conference, the Student Government Association (SGA) and the Black Student Alliance (BSA) sponsored a writing contest for Calhoun students. The timing of this year’s conference and the featured speaker Kevin Young, his poetry, and his work as the Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture coincided perfectly with Black History Month. The contest challenged students to consider reflections of black culture in Kevin Young’s poetry. Students were instructed to explore the relationship between one of Young’s poems and his description of poetry as “the thing that bridges the gap between us, that brings us together and binds us.” Submissions were judged anonymously, and since more students entered the contest than ever before, a special thank you goes to the Calhoun faculty judges, Mrs. Bernadette Jones, Dr. John Gaines, and Ms. Barbara Wright, for taking time out of their busy mid-semester schedules to read and score the entries. At the luncheon with Kevin Young following his morning session in the Advanced Technology Center on the Decatur campus, Mr. Ernest Williams, a sponsor for BSA, presented certificates of recognition and monetary awards of $100 for first place to Morgan Bryson for her paper “Connected,” $75 for second place to Benjamin Thompson for his paper “Unity in the South,” and $50 for third place to Christian McCarley for his paper “Misery and Company.”

**Connected**

By Morgan Bryson

*1st Place Winner of the 2019 Writers’ Conference Writing Contest*

The hole in my chest was growing. The beat of my heart was racing. Gasping for air, I did not know how much longer I could continue my facade. I felt as if I were carrying the world in my hands, and it was crushing me. But I had to keep going, keep pushing, keep fighting. I reminded myself everything would be okay, no matter the outcome, because the deep breaths only helped so much. One slight misstep and the picture of perfection I painted would crumble to pieces. No one understands the overwhelming pressure of perfection. Being brought up in a world where a “B” on a report card meant failure or the wrong shade of lipstick meant depression took its toll on my sanity. However, that is only in my world. The problems I face are nothing compared to what some people must overcome. Still, I have to face these anxieties, no matter how big or small they seem to others. I did not understand that anyone could feel the same way until I read “Hive” by Kevin Young. In the poem, the boy carries the bees across his yard, hoping to make it. In his hands—his precious, innocent hands—he holds an entire universe. One slight misstep and his hive will crumble to pieces, so he walks carefully, slowly. That is when it hit me. This boy is taking one step at a time, trying to hold this world together. Just like me. Just like so many others. Because of a few words in a poem, readers across the world are connected, not through shared experiences, but instead through a shared feeling only to be expressed through poetry. Did I face the same problems as a young immigrant girl in New York City? No, I did not. Did she face the same problems as a homeless man from San Francisco? No, she did not. Did he face the same problems as Kevin Young from Nebraska? No, he did not. But we all have those same, anxious feelings. No matter how different our backgrounds or the magnitude of our problems, we are all connected through words. We are all that little boy carrying the beehive across the back yard. Our chests closing. Our hearts racing. We are all gasping for air so that the worlds we hold do not crumble to pieces, and though we are all different, carrying different hives in different backyards, we are all the same because we are connected by the poet’s work.

**Unity in the South**

By Benjamin Thompson

*2nd Place Winner of the 2019 Writers’ Conference Writing Contest*

Although it is a prevalent thought in the minds of many African-Americans across the country, slavery and the Confederacy have a specific and physical relationship to the people of the South, both black and white. Physical monuments litter cities and government buildings such as the monument to the leaders of the Confederacy in the vein of Mount Rushmore. Kevin Young mentions some of these statues and, specifically, a plaque that “declares war” in the poem “For the Confederate Dead” (line 15). Young speaks of the physical testaments to the South’s most shameful and criminal atrocity that was slavery and the war fought to maintain it.

(continued on next page)
In the South, the specter of the Confederacy is still omnipotent. Confederate imagery remains in my very own state’s flag as well as many other state flags. For many white southerners, the Confederate flag is a cultural symbol. Many of these people do not realize the horrible atrocities of slavery and post-emancipation slave labor many southern states maintained for decades. Plenty of southerners who sport the flag are entirely ignorant of what they are doing, or more likely, they are subscribed to the Lost Cause. They believe the Civil War was simply an honorable war for states’ rights and defense against northern aggression, with no relationship to slavery. Anyone who has studied American history, however, knows the Civil War and slavery are inextricably linked.

America has historically been an abusive country to non-Anglo-Americans. From sea to shining sea, the native people and immigrants have felt the wrath of the American government, American elite, and even the local populace. The majority of America’s black population still lives in the South, more specifically a region called the Black Belt. African-Americans live in the heart of a society that held, and in many cases still holds, them in contempt. For true unity in the South to come about, those who tolerate Confederate symbols will have to understand why their very existence propagates racism. They will have to understand that if a person is not vehemently against the Confederacy and slavery those who support both will have an outlet for public discourse. Martin Luther King, Jr. may have said it best when he explained that the white moderate “who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action’; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom” is the greatest enemy of unity and justice.

Unity is achieved through understanding. Southern black Americans see and hear so much evidence, it would be foolish to claim that they do not already understand whites. As for Southern white Americans, something must be done to educate them on these symbols and the brutal history of the South. Through mutual understanding, a binding unity may finally be achieved in this land of “fleeing draftees” who are “burrowed beneath the dead” (39, 43).

Misery and Company
By Christian McCarley

3rd Place Winner in the 2019 Writers’ Conference Writing Contest

Prose holds a mantle in presiding over the weathered hands of weary souls aiming to draw passersby close to a situation with naught but words, yet poetry is the sovereign god of displaying the vicious emotions. In those tattered lines exists more agony than sadness, more rage than anger. Humanity is fractured, defined by an infinite amount of minuscule lines labeled as “boundaries.” The titan that is raw emotion, however, bleeds across those lines with all the audacity of fate. The way people feel connects them in such a way that is both inexplicable and frighteningly close to tangible. In furious hearts, rampant are those moments of suffering and bliss, all beating maniacally in the time preceding death—and it is death that cuts the thread of mingled and mangled lives in the end. No matter how long the thread has grown, no matter how many knots or graceful twists, no matter how many lives it has haphazardly sewn together... death remains the monster to make humans finite. In Kevin Young’s “The Mission,” that wicked death whispers in the lines simultaneously as a hideous fiend and a stern patriarch drawing family close.

At the onset of the piece, Young explores the more haunting aspects of switching off the biological clock. People huddle with hushed voices, faces ashen as if the end of life is something to be ashamed of. Cars creep in, the solemn squeal of an errant brake clinching down, practically alien in the quiet of the neighborhood. Some thing lingers there, mocking the seemingly futile efforts of life to endure. The children play, traffic just on the edge of this little macabre bubble roars forward, and the adults make plans for dinner, giving strength to the silent killer that is the idea: life goes on. Everyone gathered paints on this mask of grim acceptance, playing at having it all figured out. It’s in this ridiculous attempt to smother that aching child within them that they alienate themselves from one another during strife.

In an exceedingly clever scheme, Young rings out this eerie sentiment in the beginning lines only to lend strength to the idea that follows, the idea that says loss, though brutal, has the power to connect people so deeply it’s borderline primal. The speaker moves on from how unfazed the world seems to the essential might of a hug or handshake over poorly phrased, empty apologies. He draws up the thoughts of fathers and sons, letters etched out fresh from the soul and the prospect of a hot meal prepared and consumed by a family sharing the same anguish. The world is moving on, but those people, at that moment, are truly alive.

Young endorses poetry as a means to connect. With that specific brush, he illustrates a wealth of emotion and human interaction on a necessary level. That effort is evident in all of his work, yet “The Mission” speaks volumes. Death is the nemesis, but it draws broken hearts ever closer.
muse /myuz/ v. To ponder or meditate; to consider or deliberate at length. 2. To wonder. N. (Greek mythology) Any of the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom presided over a different act of science. 3. In general, the spirit, or power inspiring and watching over poets, musicians, and all artists; a source of inspiration. 4. (Archaic) A poet.