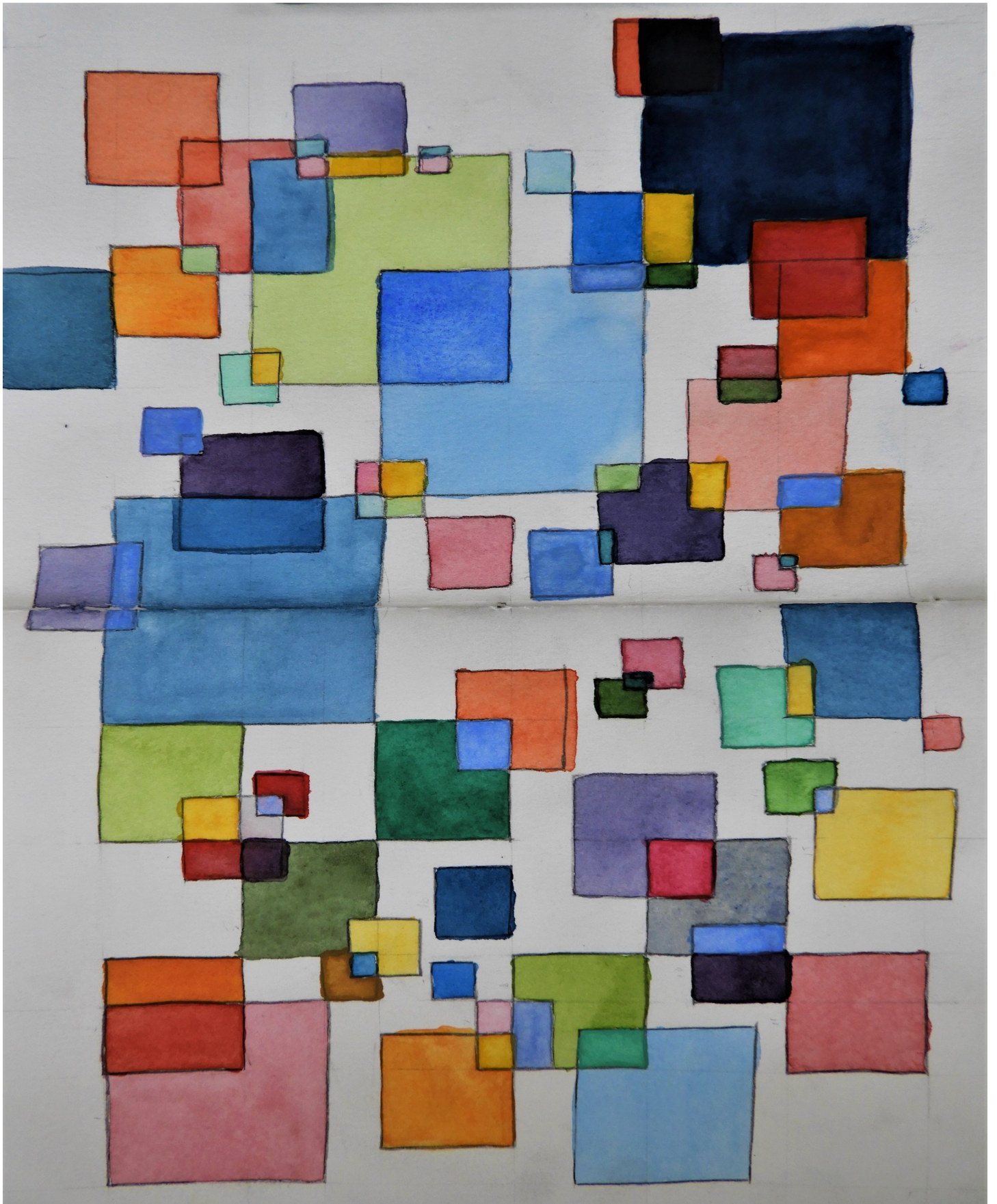


First Year Writing Prize 2019



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Introduction

Writing is a fully social and embodied process, not the mere product of thoughts translated into words, but a complex articulation of actions and interactions. We can see this process especially clearly when we look at the broad spectrum of genres that our students are exposed to during their first year. Like writing itself, writing genres are fundamentally social creations, made and unmade by the social actions of writers. When we engage with genres, we learn them, and we contribute to them. Thus, a large part of becoming a writer is acting like a writer. Both the cover letters and the final works by this year's winners vividly demonstrate not only the process of becoming a writer but also the unfolding *being*. Looking at our winners, we not only see a poem, but also a poet. We not only see a research essay, but also a researcher. We not only see an *amicus* brief, but also a...okay so the comparison fails here, but you get the point. Our students show us the many ways that writing makes writers.

Initially awarded for outstanding writing in first year seminars, the First Year Writing Prize has evolved to include all first year writing at HWS, broadening the range of genres and writers we recognize as exemplary. The prize celebrates writers, their writing processes, and the culture of writing at HWS. Our nominees learn how to be writers from faculty dedicated to innovative and challenging writing assignments, from Writing Colleagues and Writing Fellows, from their peers, and from their own reviewing, re-visioning, and revising.

Like writing itself, the First Year Writing Prize is a process rather than a product, and we could not do it without the dedication and labor of many in our community. Thank you to Alex Black, Tara Curtin, and Whitney Mauer for your care and thoughtfulness in selecting this year's winners. Thank you to all of the faculty who nominated and worked with their students on writing and revising their essays and to the Writing Colleagues and Writing Fellows for your support and mentorship of the nominees and your commitment to writing at HWS. Thank you to the faculty and Writing Fellows who helped us read and rank essays: Saedra Blow, Michelle Ellwood, Cheryl Forbes, Amy Green, Donovan Hayden, Susan Hess, Alex Kerai, Kevin Lin, Tatiana Loftus, Emily Perkins, Canieshia Phillips, Trevor Poisson, Makayla Pydych, Ben Ristow, Audrey Roberson, Will Samayoa, Leah Shafer, Liz Wells and

Chris Williams. Thank you to the Writing and Rhetoric Program, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the First Year Seminar Program for making this event possible with support for the prize and for writing across our community. Finally and most especially thank you always to Will Hochman '74 for your support in initiating this prize and to Suzanne Rutstein '95 for your support in sustaining it. Your gifts have enriched our community of writers.

We close by offering our thanks and admiration to all of the students who submitted essays this year. Reading your work, seeing you *be* writers, was invigorating and inspiring. We believe that readers of the winning works published here will feel similarly.

Maggie M. Werner

Associate Professor and Chair of Writing & Rhetoric

Ingrid Keenan

Assistant Director, Center for Teaching & Learning

Jurors

Faculty & Staff

Prof. Alex Black
Department of English

Prof. Tara Curtin
Department of Geoscience

Prof. Michelle Ellwood
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Cheryl Forbes
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Amy Green
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Susan Hess
Assistant Director of the First Year Seminar Program

Ingrid Keenan
Assistant Director, Center for Teaching and Learning

Prof. K. Whitney Mauer
Department of Environmental Studies

Prof. Emily Perkins
*Department of Writing and Rhetoric,
Writing Colleagues Coordinator*

Prof. Ben Ristow
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Audrey Roberson
Department of Education

Prof. Leah Shafer
Department of Media and Society

Prof. Liz Wells
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Maggie Werner
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Writing Fellows

Saedra Blow '19

Donovan Hayden '19

Alex Kerai '19

Kevin Lin '20

Winner of the 2017 First Year Writing Prize

Tatiana Loftus '19

Canieshia Phillips '19

Trevor Poisson '19

Makayla Pydych '19

Will Samayoa '19

Winner of the 2016 First Year Writing Prize

Christopher Williams '19

Finalists

Jack Arenberg

Nominated by Prof. Kim Todt

Ashton Ariola

Nominated by Prof. Kristen Brubaker

Juniper Asaro-Niederlitz

Nominated by Prof. Kristin Slade

Caleb Austin

Nominated by Prof. Stacey Philbrick Yadav

Julia Bellamy

Nominated by Prof. Leslie Hebb

Kaitlyn Brathwaite

Nominated by Prof. Amy Green

Dylan Robert DeNault

Nominated by Prof. Cynthia Williams

Grace Faulkner

Nominated by Prof. Justin Miller

Cade Frucci

Nominated by Prof. Liz Wells

Ashly Johnson

Nominated by Prof. Stacey Philbrick Yadav

Sarim Karim

Nominated by Prof. Chris Woodworth

Peter Gaudette

Nominated by Prof. Laurence Erussard

Margo Grapshi

Nominated by Prof. Amy Green

Mary Hanrahan

Nominated by Prof. Kristen Welsh

Ashly Johnson

Nominated by Prof. Stacey Philbrick Yadav

Sarim Karim

Nominated by Prof. Chris Woodworth

Emily Keane

Nominated by Prof. Rob Carson and Prof. Robin Lewis

James Kennedy

Nominated by Prof. Janette Gayle

Angelica Knudson

Nominated by Prof. Eric Klaus

Timothy LaPierre

Nominated by Prof. Laurence Erussard

Camille McGriff

Nominated by Prof. Kathryn Cowles and Prof. Cheryl Forbes

Nicole Miller

Nominated by Prof. Susan Pliner and Prof. Kim Todt

Molly Moore

Nominated by Prof. Mark Olivieri

Bryce Noel

Nominated by Prof. Ricky Price

Charlotte Peterson

Nominated by Prof. Matt Crow and Prof. Janette Gayle

Casey Pupek

Nominated by Prof. Kim Todt

Caroline Pustay

Nominated by Prof. Kristen Welsh

Blair Reilly

Nominated by Prof. Cheryl Forbes

Madeline Riester

Nominated by Prof. Chris Woodworth

Hailey Sanchez

Nominated by Prof. Leslie Hebb

Sofia Schuller

Nominated by Prof. Jenny Tessendorf

Mercy Sherman

Nominated by Prof. Emily Perkins and Prof. Ricky Price

Nuzhat Wahid

Nominated by Prof. Eric Klaus

Charlie Widing

Nominated by Prof. Cynthia Williams

Ashleigh Wilson

Nominated by Prof. Kathryn Cowles and Prof. Donna Davenport

Prize Winners

Sarim Karim

"On Ye Olde Drag Queens: The Subversion of Gender in Renaissance English Theatre"

THTR 220: Theatre History I

Nominated by Prof. Chris Woodworth

Camille McGriff

"après moi, le déluge"

ENG 190: Creative Writing for FYs & SOs

Nominated by Prof. Kathryn Cowles

Casey Pupek

"Amicus Curiae: The Dilemma of Dementia — The Legality of the Death Sentence"

HIST 111: Topics in Introduction to American History

Nominated by Prof. Kim Todt

Sarim Karim

THTR 220: Theatre History I

Professor Chris Woodworth

Prompt

For this paper, you will explore in great detail one specific moment, figure, style, or practice of theatre history that we addressed in class, delving deeply into a narrowly focused topic on the art and/or craft of theatre-making. The objectives are (1) to explore in detail one specific historical moment, (2) to refine research and writing skills, and (3) to articulate historical discoveries.

Cover Letter

The study of history, by nature of its very scope, involves a selection mechanism that is unintentionally discriminatory. Even specific concentrations like the history of theater must prioritize the acclaimed and the prolific. After all, history is a narrative written by the majority to explain its current position. Even the study of change is based on how minorities become majorities. From an educative standpoint, it is a matter of practicality that forces academic systems around the world to view the past from a lens that is widely accessible. This comes at the cost of painting history with the same heteronormative, gendered brush that current norms have tinged society with. Which means that the mere presence, let alone the influence, of minority groups is often overlooked if not outright ignored. My thinking process for the research paper was guided by this very notion, and in compiling the research I sought to bring to light the numerous ways in which sexual minorities existed, worked within, and influenced the Renaissance stage.

Initially, I began my research with the same constrained mindset I criticize above. I believed that the historical treatment of sexual minorities followed a simple progression: society

treated non-heterosexual individuals with contempt, and over the course of centuries advanced to our current status of relative toleration. Unknowingly, I had limited myself in a number of ways. I assumed the delineation of sexuality was concrete and that one can be categorized into and defined by terms as simple as ‘heterosexual,’ or ‘homosexual,’ or any of the multitudes of nomenclature of contemporary sexual study. Secondly, I assumed that gender was a similarly concrete concept that has remained unchanged since the dawn of European society. Due to these presumptions, my research felt contradictory and at times incomprehensible. The evidence didn’t coincide with the narrative I had believed, one that claimed oppression to be a thing of the past. What came to light was the ways in which definitions of gender and sexuality have changed over the centuries since the Renaissance, and this revelation allowed me to view my research from a lens I hadn’t thought of before. Instead of taking our modern focus on labels as a given, I sought to uncover the ways in which gender and sexual identities have changed. This allowed me to come to an unintended, yet more profound conclusion than my initial, expected one. If definitions of sexuality are so fluid that historically genitalia didn’t define one’s gender, why should we subscribe to modern norms surrounding sexual identity?

My objective is not to argue that sexual minorities didn’t face oppression, instead the research made clear that the nature of patriarchal oppression has simply changed. The gender binary constricts our view of the world and its past, and promotes an erasure of sexual minorities from history. Overcoming that mindset allowed me to come to fascinating conclusions while compiling my research paper, and in sharing it I hope to propagate further questioning of the restrictive status quo constructed by the modern patriarchy.

Essay

On Ye Olde Drag Queens:
The Subversion of Gender in Renaissance English Theatre

When studying the relationship between theatre and the construction of gender in Renaissance England, it is best to examine the most acclaimed performer of the time: Queen Elizabeth I herself. For why shouldn’t the concept of monarchy be considered a performance? An individual dons specific garments, uses a unique vernacular, and takes part in spectacular

rituals with entire nations constituting their audience. Their role is a tough one, for they must play the state, a singular and literal body politic. Elizabeth I adds a powerful dimension to this role because hers was not just limited to that of a leader, but a complex performance of gender. The Queen was feminine, as a wife and mother to the nation, but also occupied sites of masculinity in politics and war (Goldberg 40). Consequently, representations of the Queen on the Elizabethan stage occupied every possible gender position. In *Homosexualities in the English Theatre*, John Franceshina cites Elizabeth and her transcendent gender performance as a direct source of inspiration for the trend of cross-dressing onstage that is so unique a characteristic of Elizabethan theatre (27). In referring to the depictions of the Queen onstage, Jonathan Goldberg states “Her dazzling displays refuse the stabilization of gender...” (42). When imagining representations of the Queen, it is almost poetic to consider that it was men in drag who performed those roles. To reduce the concept to modern colloquial terms: drag queens would act as the literal Queen herself. Predictably, this became the cause of much controversy amongst Renaissance era English society. The notion of individuals being able to ignore the constraints of class and gender in theatrical performance was met with great resistance in a highly stratified society. By today’s standards, those critiques may be considered homophobic, but understanding their context reveals a complex construction of gender and sexuality – one that transcends modern binaries.

This may come as a surprise, because it is easy – perhaps even comforting – to view the past as necessarily more repressive than the present day. However, in studying the past as a narrative where societies develop increasingly progressive notions about identity, there is a risk of overlooking the nuances of the social constructions within specific cultural frameworks. Practices which might fall under the umbrella terms of homosexual or bisexual today were not necessarily considered such during Renaissance Era England. While there are a plethora of sources to track how non-normative sexual identities have been treated in different time periods throughout history, even a passing glance over English theatre from the Renaissance provides numerous accounts of such sexualities being depicted onstage. Therefore, to buy into the belief that heterosexuality has always been the predominant orientation erases centuries of non-heterosexual and non-binary identities that existed before such labels were even created. While it would be fallacious to argue that the existence of LGBTQ+ identities onstage meant that Renaissance Era England was more progressive than the modern day, it is still valuable to study the ways in which the social order has evolved and how the norms surrounding these identities have changed radically over time. Studying the reactions to cross-dressing in particular, provides a framework for the politics of gender, and its intersection

with class in Renaissance England. By doing so, it reveals insights into the ever-changing, continuous construction of the patriarchy and the ways in which its stratifying practices have changed.

In 1579, the satirist and writer Stephen Gosson made his attack on the English theatre, rooted significantly in homophobic narratives, through a pamphlet in which he cryptically argued that (alongside many other grievous harms) it effeminates the mind. This was not the first and most certainly not the last manifestation of a strong movement in English society that took issue with the mass appeal of theatre. This movement included Phillip Stubbes, who in 1583 outlined the ways in which theatre could “adulterate” the male gender via cross-dressing, and William Prynne, a puritan writer who believed that seeing men dressed as women would cause the audience to confuse their sexuality (Levine 5). The art form and institution of theatre has faced attack from religious, philosophical, and moral groups in all cultures throughout history. This collective hostility or opposition to theatre is referred to as antitheatricity. The popularity of the theatre during the English Renaissance also meant that there was a strong oppositional movement to it. While this was not necessarily an organized movement, many of the claims the different writers made were similar. One of these claims was how the prevalence of cross-dressing and representations of non-heterosexual identities could turn men into women. This fear of losing one’s masculinity depicts the social order’s view of women. They stood at the bottom, or as Orgel contends, “women were still, by nature, firmly ensconced below men in the hierarchy” (24). However, before this claim is further analyzed, it is important to understand that the contemporary constructs of gender and sexuality may not necessarily apply when analyzing societies of the past. In the case of Renaissance England, the constructed social order was one that valued the adult male above all else. Women were meant to be submissive and the youth were to be obedient. In turn, the sexual dynamics of this society were also considerably different from the modern day. Actions and identities that might fall under the spectrum of homosexuality or bisexuality today were not considered to be notably different from any other socially acceptable sexual act. Between 1541 and 1591, headmasters who engaged in sexual relations with their students faced no scandal. Similarly, it was common practice for tutors in Oxford and Cambridge to share bedrooms with their undergraduate pupils, all of whom would have been between the ages of 15 and 18. This policy remained unchanged until the 18th century (Franceschina, 20).

Student productions at Cambridge would reference such practices, particularly in the play *The Return from Parnassus*. The character Amoretto, once a student at Cambridge, talks about one of his experiences there: “I lay in a trundlebed, under my tutor” (Franceschina 20). Similarly, sexual relations between servants and their masters were considered acceptable. In his play *What You Will*, John Marston references the master as one who “swaggers in a wanton’s Chamber admirably, he loves his boy and the rump of cram’d Campon” (Franceschina 22). Such sexual activity did not fall under the legal or even socially constructed definition of sodomy – in fact ‘sodomy’ as a term referenced a vague category of condemned practices in Renaissance English society (Hammond 8). Sexual relations between two males were not considered sodomy or homosexual in every instance. Sodomy only became a matter of scandal for reasons other than the carnal act itself. In the case of Francis Bacon, a nobleman who gave lavish gifts to the male servants he had sex with, the subject of the scandal was his generosity to individuals of lower class status than him. Alan Bray, who has written extensively on the history of homosexuality in England, explains that Bacon’s actions would have not been considered scandalous “had it not been for his prodigal generosity to them, which was the subject of a good deal of disapproving comment” (49). This context needs to be kept in mind when analyzing the representations of non-heterosexual identities alongside cross-dressing on stage.

Student-teacher relations, master-servant relations, and other practices such as cross-dressing soon materialized into tropes and archetypes that became well known on the English Renaissance stage. For example, the prostituting of boys became so institutionalized that by 1593, numerous terms had developed to refer to young, male sex workers. These included ‘catamite,’ which originated from the Latin word for Ganymede, a character from Greek and Roman mythology so beautiful, he seduced the likes of Zeus and Poseidon. ‘Ingle’ was another word used to describe boy prostitutes, and even ‘Ganymede’ itself became a colloquial term to refer to them (Bray 55). Ben Jonson’s comedy, *Epicoene* describes the “boy prostitute as part of the staple diet of a Renaissance gentleman” (22). This institutionalized form of same-sex behavior was a popular trope in English Renaissance theatre, referenced even in poetry such

as that of John Dunne's *First Satire* and the acclaimed satirist John Marston's *Third Satire* (Franceschina, 23).

Often times, such depictions of same-sex behavior utilized an effeminate male actor. Particularly notorious for his employment of feminine male characters was Christopher Marlowe. In *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, a character fittingly named Ganymede is described as having girlish features. A similar character is presented in *Edward II*, where Gaveston is an effeminate man who uses his beauty to seduce older noble men in exchange for political honors (Woods 70-74). These two characters represent the trope of the wanton, effeminate young man who desires to be spoiled by older men. Cross-dressing was another practice of the Renaissance English stage that challenges modern notions of heteronormativity. To view cross-dressing as perverse assumes that Renaissance society constructed gender the same way modern Western societies do (Goldberg 108). The Renaissance stage is often called, by multiple authors, 'the transvestite stage' due to the amount of male actors playing female roles (Franceschina 25). In fact, "As proliferating studies in the history of sexuality have shown, the binary division of sexual appetites into the normative heterosexual and the deviant homosexual is a very recent invention" (Orgel 59). The descriptive and analytical clarity of modern interpretations of the past might impose a false clarity on Renaissance Era texts.

It is at this point that one must ask: if cross-dressing and homosexuality were so prevalent on the English stage during the Renaissance, why did they face such vehement criticism from antitheatricalists? To argue that these practices were condemned simply because they were a part of theatre ignores the specific attacks made towards them by authors such as Gosson and Stubbes. The actor, in assuming the mannerisms and dress of women, was also in peril of adopting that identity. This analysis is indicative of a belief that human behavior is a series of desires, which once acted upon, become increasingly deviant (Levine 12-13). What value system drove these attacks? According to Levine, the reasoning behind these attacks comes down to a model of the self that was held by antitheatricalists of the time. She points out that on one hand, these authors believe the self to be a fixed entity that is absolute and

should not change, and yet they argue that theatre has the ability to change that self. This underlying contradiction is what Levine sees as central to homophobic criticism of theatre. Levine argues that due to either an unwillingness or inability to reconcile the contradiction in the anitheatricalists' model of the self, they simply resorted to increasingly hateful rhetoric of the theatre. This analysis however, assumes that gender in English society during the Renaissance was constructed similarly to modern Western society.

If the idea of men lusting after other men was so problematic, why were homosexual acts accepted, even institutionalized, in places like universities or servant labor? Perhaps the answer lies in understanding the construct of gender in Renaissance era England. The fact that same-sex behavior was permissible only within the context of a hierarchy – for instance between masters and servants – suggests that perhaps boys were interchangeable with women because they both had to submit to the authority of adult males. The kind of patriarchal society that developed from the Middle Ages was one that strictly followed hierarchical structures of class, and gender was assigned not necessarily by genitalia alone, but instead determined at least partially by the relation to the power of adult men. For example, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* was criticized not because it depicted an effeminate man in Gaveston, but because Gaveston was an individual of lower class who gained political favors from men of nobility (Franceschina 45).

Therefore, it can be argued that the source of controversy was that cross-dressing on stage depicted a breaching of the social order. This is evidenced by the previously mentioned case of Francis Bacon. It is not necessarily the fear that the male audience will be attracted to the male actors who play female roles that drives antitheatricality. Instead, it is the fear that seeing men dressed up as women onstage might convince members of the audience to reject social roles constructed by Renaissance era society. This is perhaps exemplified by the fact that audiences allowed for female surrogates in theatre, but took issue with male actors wearing the dresses of upper-class women (Franceschina x). In fact, Renaissance society took issue with the lower classes donning the garments traditionally worn by the upper class. This

performance of class was banned under the sumptuary legislation, which "...said nothing about the wearing of sexually inappropriate garments. It was concerned with the violations of the sartorial badges of class, not those of gender" (Orgel 96-98). Most actors came from the working class, and so wearing the dresses of nobility involved playing a role beyond their status. It might be this subversion of the social order that served as the reason behind what is perceived to be homophobia in theatre criticism.

The play *Midas* by Lyly features the character Petulus claiming that the "masculin gender is more worthy than the feminine," and such beliefs are displayed in Lyly's other works like *Endymion* (Franceschina 36). These are indicative of the underlying misogyny of English Renaissance society, which constitute a major reason behind the perceived homophobia in antitheatrical criticism. However, what did it mean to be feminine if gender was not solely a matter of genitalia? In Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, the titular character was criticized for two reasons. Alongside his aiding Gaveston's ascension of social class, he is seen as being turned effeminate in the same way that the audience is supposedly turned effeminate when they watch theatre. Therefore, what effeminizes Edward II isn't that he participates in same-sex relations, but that he overturns the power dynamic that existed between him as a noble and the lower class Gaveston. This example represents the intersection between the two ideas so far mentioned, the "Elizabethan fear of transformation from one class or gender to another" (Franceschina 36-37). The vilification of theatre and cross-dressing in particular arose from its potential to subvert norms of stratification, not just sexuality.

Understanding the various ways in which the patriarchy has materialized in the past is important for two reasons. For one, it provides a context and therefore more holistic understanding to the modern day social order and in doing so may provide useful insight for how that order can be deconstructed. In viewing history through a heteronormative lens, where gender and sexuality are defined in binaries, it erases the experiences and contributions of those who would fall under the LGBTQ+ today. In studying their existence and influence on institutions such as that of theatre, the extent of their presence throughout history becomes increasingly clear. This strengthens the argument that individuals who identify as non-

binary, non-heterosexual, or anywhere within the spectrum of gender and sexuality have always existed and will continue to do so. Secondly, in studying how the definitions and parameters for what constitute normative gender and sexuality have changed, it becomes apparent just how arbitrary these concepts are. If the standard for acceptable sexual behavior can change radically within the same geographic location, what makes modern norms any less arbitrary? To view these norms as being the creation, perhaps even the tool of a patriarchal system that is advantaged by their propagation, ultimately gives legitimacy to those fighting to defy them and empowers their movement.

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Camille McGriff

ENG 190: Creative Writing for FYs & SOs

Professor Kathryn Cowles

Cover Letter

The only prompt I was given before writing “après moi, le déluge” was to write a poem. In Dr. Kathryn Cowles’s Intro to Creative Writing class, we are given the freedom to write one short story, one poem, and a piece of our choosing, and for my second piece, assigned shortly after a devastating hurricane season ended (Hurricane Florence in the Carolinas and Hurricane Michael in Florida), I thought it fitting to write about Hurricane Katrina, which I’d lived through thirteen years before on the Gulf Coast.

For the first iteration of the poem, I drew from my own experiences of coming back from a hurricane evacuation to find my home, if not utterly destroyed, then at least significantly damaged. After a hurricane the environment adopts a quality of returning to a “state of nature,” and with the memory of blackwater swimming pools and fallen trees, I wrote the poem from the point of view of a person who’d stayed for the duration of the hurricane after it had finally ended (in August 2005, the Gulf Coast weathered Katrina and Rita in a two-week period).

The first draft is where I established the poem’s rhythm, wanting it to quicken like an approaching storm as the speaker retraced their memory of the present back to the hurricane and finally returned to the present, where it becomes clear the kind of psychological trauma they’ve been through over the past few days. Throughout the initial writing process, I drew from medical research about the epidemic of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression in New Orleans and on the Mississippi Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina; one the primary aims of the poem was to show how deeply the hurricane embedded itself in the speaker’s psyche after returning them to such a literal state of nature that it drove the speaker to suicide.

After the initial draft, I researched Hurricane Katrina meteorologically and dug through the Times-Picayune archive of Katrina coverage that won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for

Public Service, scouring the different articles for visual details that I could use to make the poem more believable. The Times-Picayune is where I found the inspiration for my title; the Monday after the hurricane ended, the newspaper released an article called “Après le déluge,” meaning “after the storm” in French. When I researched the title, I found that it was the prophetic quote attributed to the King of France, Louis XV (1710–1774), meaning that after he was gone from the throne chaos would ensue—the French Revolution. This fit the quality I was trying to achieve with my poem; after Hurricane Katrina, all chaos did ensue, and New Orleans is a classically Creole city, so French title made perfect sense.

I also researched different long-term effects of hurricanes during the revision process, and was especially interested in what lurked in the storm surge after the actual rainstorm. This research is how I found the detail of “Tangled ribbons of fire ants/swarming in the surge,” because when flooded, ant colonies will clump together and float on top of the water scrambling to avoid drowning. I toyed with this specific detail several times, discovering that water moccasin snakes do the same thing in floods and finding a haunting photograph of a live oak tree draped in roof insulation that looked like a funeral shroud.

While I primarily worked with Dr. Cowles in her office hours to revise the poem, I was also attending Trias readings throughout the semester and had the opportunity to meet and talk with the poet Bin Ramke after his reading from his book *Light Wind Light Light*. Like me, Mr. Ramke is from the Gulf Coast and wrote extensively in *Light Wind Light Light* about his relationship with water, which caused me to think differently about the structural damage water can cause, especially in the context of a hurricane. I began to think deeper than just a house blowing away or felled trees—this stage in the process is when I began thinking of water as a powerful, destructive force, ripping up concrete and shredding through hardy coastal plants and reclaiming the land from humans. The hopeful metamorphosis at the end of *Light Wind Light Light* inspired my own dark one at the end of “après moi, le déluge”—the speaker themselves is engulfed by nature like everything else already has been.

It has been an honor to be nominated for the First Year Writing Prize for a poem I threw myself into passionately, and I love how a little piece of my history from home has been honed into a professional piece with the help of a community cultivated by Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Poem

après moi, le deluge.

His aqueous orbit is mesmerizing.
Floating up to the surface then
Submerging again.
Spines prickling
Snout twitching
Tail swishing.

In the black water of the swimming pool, he is
Hungry. He means
Business.
I am frozen, stricken as I see him
Through shredded palmettos.
I have a choice.

Days ago
In the flashlight glow
I took a sharpie and wrote
Three numbers dash
Two numbers dash
Four numbers
Across my collarbone.
Identification. Shoulder to
Shoulder I am a number. Then
10/29/79 across my
Stomach. A
Sequence.

Neither of us know
How we ended up
Here, in the
Desecrated sacristy of a
Swimming pool, and
sitting Indian style on the
Jagged concrete altar at its edge.
Alone. Pondering death.

I watched
The rain
First hit
Softly
Against the
Window.

I watched
The lights
Flicker.

*if you stay, write your social security
number on your chest,
so we can identify your body.*

I was not a bloated cadaver
Floating down the
Road. I only crouched
On the roof
On the third day of rain,
Kicking away the
Water's edge.

In the end it didn't matter.
What didn't wash away was
Looted.
How can you prove what you own?
Keep from restless drifting, like
Tangled ribbons of fire ants
Swarming in the surge?

Eye to reptilian eye.
We were never supposed to be here.
He doesn't belong here. Now, neither
do I.

I swing my feet in.
A tail smacks the water.
I taste snot on my lip.

Neck deep in black water.
Cicadas and frogs sing in the beating sun.
Not a soul around.

We lock eyes
And I
Brace.

Casey Pupek

HIST 111: Topics in Introduction to American History

Professor Kim Todt

Prompt

On October 2, 2018, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case of *Madison v. Alabama*. The Court will be asked to respond to two questions before it: 1) Does the Eighth Amendment and the Court's jurisprudence prohibit a state from executing a prisoner whose mental disability leaves him with no memory of the commission of the capital offense? 2) Does the Eighth Amendment prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment preclude a state from executing a prisoner who suffers from severe cognitive dysfunction such that he cannot remember the crime for which he was convicted or understand the circumstances of his scheduled execution? Write a brief as amicus curiae (a friend of the Court) in which you advise the Court on the law's constitutionality. You may wish to draw on broad historical trends as well as specific constitutional claims in your argument.

Cover Letter

What does Amicus Curiae even mean? When translated from Latin to English its literal meaning is "friend of the court." The Amicus Curiae asks me to inform the Supreme Court of my insight upon a controversial case which will soon make its way before the Justices. I had never been presented a writing assignment like this, it expected me to have an extensive knowledge of legal history and other trends within American history. It wanted me to play a game of ethical thinking and distillation.

To better understand the assignment at hand I began to research and discover what really constructs an Amicus Curiae. My Professor shared with me examples of Amicus Curiae's which were intended for a general audience. The Amicus Curiae is a style of writing with a specific methodology. It intends to dissect an argument into simple logic based upon the precedents of past decisions by the Court. This sharing of ideas can defend or criticize previ-

ous reasoning. It is a style of rationale refinement which allowed me to explore how a legal mind truly functions.

Using my own legal mind, I was able to paint a history of intrinsically interconnected ideas. These connections further helped to link my paragraphs, sentences, and words into a greater being. I organized my thoughts through a chronological ordering of legal proceedings. This outline surveyed as a basis for my thinking and from this I was able to create a narrative which exemplified the duality of legal writing—that of fact and reason.

Writing is a game that has always come naturally to me, it is a game I have known since the first time I swept inky blacks and blues streaks across a stark white background. But these were just meaningless moves, simplistic lines of nothingness. To bring meaning to my writing I had to investigate introspectively and outwardly the ways in which my pen hit the paper. The ‘why’ of my writing. Collectively, this helped me to improve upon the harmony of words, ideas, and intellect behind the fabric of my writing. The shocking bright reds made by my (sometimes) voluntary editors further aided in the refinement of my skills. These marks enabled me to become a dynamic player.

I view each writing assignment as a new set of moves to decipher, practice, and perfect. This paper illuminates the way in which I approach all writing challenges, it forced me to learn new ways of thinking and composition.

Essay

Amicus Curiae: “The Dilemma of Dementia—
The Legality of the Death Sentence”

Introduction

Unlike previous cases which have dealt with psychologically disturbed petitioners, *Madison v. Alabama* presents the uniqueness of vascular dementia which has a broad range of severity and presents no legal precedent in Federal Courts. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court has seen a broad range of cases which have dealt with petitioners on death row with limited mental capacity. When applying the Eighth Amendment to these previous cases, the Court has taken the position that the death sentence is a cruel and unusual punishment for

people with mental handicap. Vernon Madison was convicted three times over for the 1985 murder of a Mobile, Alabama police officer.¹ The officer was shot by Madison in the back of the head while responding to a domestic dispute between Madison and his girlfriend.² Over the years Madison has suffered from multiple strokes which have caused severe brain damage.³ Between his trials Vernon Madison had been seen by court appointed psychologists Dr. Karl Kirkland and Dr. John Goff who stated that Madison had rationale but suffered from limited memory skills caused by multiple strokes and vascular dementia.⁴ So, by the standards set forth by previous cases seen before the Supreme Court, the Eighth Amendment would protect Madison from cruel and unusual punishment. The Eighth Amendment defines the sentencing of a mentally handicapped person to death as a cruel and unusual punishment, this has been upheld by the Supreme Court in previous capital punishment cases, meaning that the State of Alabama should not be able to execute Madison on the basis that his dementia has caused severe loss of cognitive and physical function.

I. Court Precedent has created a definition of mental incapability, this definition is based upon English common law and the findings of *Ford v. Wainwright*.

In the 1974 case of *Ford v. Wainwright*, Alvin Ford's mental health deteriorated while incarcerated, however, he had previously been sentenced to death. Madison faces a similar predicament to that of Ford, multiple strokes led to severe memory loss, rendering him unable to remember his crimes. English Common Law defines the execution of mentally incapable people as "savage and inhumane," Justice Thurgood Marshall in his majority opinion upheld these standards.⁵ This court precedent means that if Madison is considered incapable of mental ability, then his death would be prohibited. In concurrence, Justice Lewis F. Powell stated, "the Eighth Amendment forbids the execution only of those who are unaware of the punishment they are about to suffer and why they are to suffer it."⁶ Madison exemplifies this—he shows limited awareness as to what the death penalty is and lacks the knowledge of his crimes. This absence of mental capacity clearly means that the death penalty would be prohibited under the Constitution. The Court should see that by the *Ford* standards, Madison cannot be put to death. If the state were to go against the *Ford* precedent, it would rewrite the application of the Eighth Amendment.

II. The Court has taken a broader definition in which Madison's mental ability should qualify him to be protected under the Eighth Amendment.

The Ford standard began the precedent as to who qualifies for immunity from the death penalty due to mental ability, but this definition was strict. *Panetti v. Quarterman* helped to further define what exactly gives people immunity to the death sentence as defined by the Eighth Amendment. With *Panetti*, the Court realized that the *Ford* standards were too restrictive. In his majority opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy decided that to receive exemption from the death penalty a person only has to exhibit their unawareness as to why they are receiving this penalty rather than the previous two step standard defined in *Ford*.⁷ As the Court must consider this precedent, Madison is then qualified for immunity against the death penalty. Madison's inability to remember his crimes means that he is unable to understand why he is being put to death. This definition defines Madison as mental incapable and therefore the death penalty under the Eighth Amendment would be a cruel and unusual punishment to inflict upon him due to his lack of mental clarity.

III. As founded by Dr. John Goff, Madison has no recollection of his crimes due to strokes

Following a series of strokes, Madison suffered significant brain damage. Additionally, as Madison ages, his vascular dementia continues to worsen as heart problems occur, creating more brain damage, in turn, limiting Madison's cognitive function.⁸ Furthermore, the severity of this damage is so great that Madison is unable to even remember where the toilet is located within his cell, leading him to soil himself.⁹ His level of memory loss is obviously challenging, leading him to be physically unfunctional. As stated by court appointed psychologist Dr. Goff, Madison has forgotten "numerous events that have occurred over the past thirty years or more."¹⁰ Meaning that there is a great possibility he does not remember his crimes. Madison's dementia has reached a point at which he can no longer perform basic tasks, his mental ability has deteriorated to such an extent that he is mentally incapable. But no case has ever presented dementia as a mental handicap. The group of issues which are

categorized as dementia cause deteriorated memory and fragmented cognitive skills. Since these issues can range from mild to severe, the definition of dementia must remain flexible and only applied in review by the Court when it is one of substantial severity. By defining dementia and considering it as a mental handicap, the Court will be able to use this precedent in future cases. As noted by Madison's psychologist, his behaviors are erratic, his mental ability changed at a drastic rate as indicated by a lowered IQ score and he failed to perform basic memory tests.¹¹ Madison's gross inability to function should qualify him and his mental issues caused by dementia as similar qualifiers to those qualifiers used in *Ford* and *Panetti*.

Conclusion

The Eighth Amendment protects people who are mentally incapable from the death sentence as defined by English Common Law. As seen in *Ford* and *Panetti*, the Supreme Court has protected prisoners with mental disability who have left them no memory of their crimes from the death sentence. Madison clearly has limited mental ability due to his strokes and Dementia. The Eighth Amendment enshrines in law the prohibition of the death sentence when applied to mentally disabled people, and this should be applicable to people with severe dementia. In lieu of using concrete language, the Supreme Court should define people which the death penalty is not applicable to as people with severe cognitive dysfunction, which renders their memory fragmented and unreliable. By using this language in the *Madison* case, the Court will be able to create precedent in dealing with elderly criminals who may face the same mental health issues as Madison faces, but caused by different factors. The Eighth Amendment naturally protects those with limited mental ability from the death penalty, however, the Court has yet to have a broad enough range of cases in which to define these people. Madison is the case in which the Justices will decide how the Supreme Court should approach mental ability in relation to the death penalty under the protection of the Eighth Amendment.

Notes

1. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-ol-enter-the-fray-vernon-madison-is-so-addled-he-can-t-1538673877-htmlstory.html>
2. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-ol-enter-the-fray-vernon-madison-is-so-addled-he-can-t-1538673877-htmlstory.html>
3. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-ol-enter-the-fray-vernon-madison-is-so-addled-he-can-t-1538673877-htmlstory.html>
4. *Dunn v. Madison*, 583 U.S. ____ (2017)
5. *Ford v. Wainwright*, 477 U.S. 399 (1986)
6. *Ford v. Wainwright*, 477 U.S. 399 (1986)
7. *Panetti v. Quarterman*, 551 U.S. 930 (2007)
8. Retrieved from [://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/types-of-dementia/vascular-dementia](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/types-of-dementia/vascular-dementia)
9. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-ol-enter-the-fray-vernon-madison-is-so-addled-he-can-t-1538673877-htmlstory.html>
10. *Dunn v. Madison*, 583 U.S. ____ (2017)
11. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-ol-enter-the-fray-vernon-madison-is-so-addled-he-can-t-1538673877-htmlstory.html>

"In no way is my writing process 'pretty.' It is ugly. It is messy. It is overwhelming. I spend countless hours on an endless repeating cycle: writing, revising, meeting with my professor, meeting with Writing Fellows. Although it is a lengthy process, I have learned from writing my final portfolio assignment for my FSEM that thinking, writing, and reflecting take time to articulate one's fullest capability."

Nicole Miller, '22



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