New Voices
Lander University's Student Journal

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**New Voices**

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Margaret Gustafson,
Winner of the 2019 Creative Writing Award,
and

Berrenger Franklin,
whose artwork *Heart* was selected as this year’s cover.

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# Table of Contents

*Sunset across the Lake* by Diamond Crawford ........................................... 3

“More Human than Human” by Devon Bowie........................................... 4

“Tachycardia” by Margaret Gustafson.................................................... 7

“Unsolved” by Margaret Gustafson....................................................... 9

*Aerodynamic Decline* by Valencia Haynes ........................................... 10

“I Own You” by Haven Pesce ............................................................... 11

“Revival” by Jesse Cape ........................................................................ 13

*Youthful Devastation* by Valencia Haynes .......................................... 17

“Walls” by Dale Hensarling ................................................................. 18

“H.U.D.S.” by Dale Hensarling .............................................................. 24

*Doors at 8, Show at 9* by Valencia Haynes .......................................... 25

“The Commute” by Sophie Oder ............................................................. 26


“The Lights That Disappeared” by Ashlyn Wilson .................................. 35

*Haze Reaches Heights* by Valencia Haynes ......................................... 36

Acknowledgements .................................................................................. 37

Dedication .............................................................................................. 38
*Sunset across the Lake*

by Diamond Crawford
In the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, there is an overlying debate over what it means to be human. Throughout the novel, Victor Frankenstein emphasizes how his Creature is inhuman—sometimes superhuman, sometimes less than human—but the reader is shown time and again that the Creature possesses an intense, pure, unfiltered form of humanity. The fact that the Creature was born through science is Victor’s argument against the Creature being human, but it is possible that his birth by science and, therefore, his distance from society actually gave the Creature a chance to exhibit a more honest portrayal of humanity.

Throughout *Frankenstein*, the Creature is shown to be barbaric, violent, and angry and to have no control over his emotions. Victor uses the horrific actions that the Creature commits while in these moods to justify his labeling the Creature as an “abhorred monster” (Shelley 123), but it can also be argued that the Creature commits these acts because he was never taught to control his emotions. Each of the feelings that lead to the Creature’s crimes is a very human emotion; the problem is simply that the Creature does not know how to handle these feelings. Because he was never shown how to behave, the Creature’s emotions, especially in instances of passion or rage, are unchecked, presenting the reader with an unfiltered view of natural human reactions and instincts.

The book often brings in the debate of nature versus nurture in regards to the Creature. During one instance, the Creature claims that he used to be “benevolent” (124) and later mentions the past “mildness of [his] nature” (176), but says that the cruelty he was shown by humans corrupted his natural goodness and turned it into “gall and bitterness” (176) and “vice and hatred” (278). The Creature seems aware of this predicament, for he even pleads with Victor for help in becoming a better person: “Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous!” (124). Perhaps, if Victor had attempted to raise the Creature—if the De Lacey family had not chased him away—if the little girl’s father had not shot him—if he had once been shown kindness—he might have turned out differently.
The two main driving forces for the Creature are also very human motivations: revenge and loneliness. It is natural for someone who is betrayed to want revenge on the person who betrayed them; what is unnatural is the extreme vengeance the Creature plots for Victor, having the intention to leave his creator fully as alone and miserable as the Creature himself has been since his birth. This emphasizes the purity of the Creature’s emotions and impulses and harkens back to nature versus nurture: if the Creature had been taught to find a healthier outlet for these feelings, he would not have killed Victor’s family. The Creature’s revenge quest to leave Victor totally alone is in direct response to the intense loneliness the Creature has experienced his entire life. The Creature’s need for companionship, for love, is yet another thing that makes him so irrevocably human. He believes that “the love of another will destroy the cause of [his] crimes” and that it will rid him of his “evil passions” (185). This idea of love as a life-saving and life-changing occurrence has always been common among humans, and the Creature clings to that idea desperately.

Even in situations where it would benefit the Creature to lie or to conceal his emotions, he is always painfully honest in his thoughts and reactions to different situations. For example, after the De Lacey family rejects him, he shows his impulsive and uncontrolled anger by surrounding the De Lacey house with explosives and destroying their garden (174). He tells Victor this without hesitation or any editing of his tale. Because the Creature knows that Victor will think of him as a monster regardless of how the Creature paints himself, it gives him a greater freedom of expression. This knowledge of how Victor and the world as a whole view the Creature releases him from normal societal expectations that cause humans to constantly watch what they say and how they act. He already knows he will be judged, so he does not feel that it is necessary to filter his emotions and actions. This also allows the Creature to be more open in his lamentations to Walton. The Creature unabashedly admits to his horrible deeds, corroborating Victor’s story, and is also able to invoke pity and sympathy from Walton by bemoaning his hopeless desire for acceptance. The Creature asks Walton plainly, “Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all humankind sinned against me?” (280) and, in the next paragraph, admits to every nefarious act and acknowledges that he deserves death.
for his crimes. Due to his isolation from society, the Creature is more in tune with his emotions and thus more willing to show them as they are.

Whether in spite of or because of his unnatural creation and constant isolation, the Creature in *Frankenstein* exhibits a raw and open form of humanity that is not seen in any of the other characters in the novel. Although his seclusion and rejection from civilization alter the way he expresses his emotions, he is still proven to be more honest and unashamed of his feelings than the characters brought up in society. Through his unnatural birth, he is able to escape the conditioning of behavior that forces humans into rigid expectations. Thus, instead of science making the Creature inhuman, it allows him to be a more sincere portrayal of humanity than any of Shelley’s other characters.

**Works Cited**

No one had died. Or, at least, no one had died before lunchtime. This rare stroke of luck delighted Adrian and gave him the false sense of hope that he needed for an actual break.

Lying on a half-barren patch of grass near his hospital’s ER, he watched clouds go by, occasionally remembering to eat in the limited time he had. It was summer, and the pleasant weather offered a breeding ground for accidents, fights, and disasters—both natural and man-made. The hospital staff were all lucky that the Fourth had already past or the sheer number of alcohol and gunpowder-related incidents might end up killing them. Still, getting paid was nice, and the feeling of saving a person’s life, actually helping them, was unforgettable. If only he knew enough to save more people. Perhaps he should take those paramedic courses that the continuing education seminars always offered.

Dried grass crackled behind him and tore him away from his thoughts. He propped himself up on an elbow to see a man in a double-breasted black overcoat approaching him. The man wore a three-piece pin-stripe suit under his overcoat and had a scarf wrapped around his neck, only highlighting just how gaunt his face was. The man stopped beside him and put his hands in his pockets.

“Mr. Pin-Stripe Suit.”

The man smiled and began rooting around in his overcoat before pulling out a pack of cigarettes and holding one out to Adrian.

“Mr. EMT! Might I offer you a cigarette? I can attest to the content and quality of these lovely little cancer sticks!”

Adrian laughed and waved him off. “Nice try, Grim. Buy a guy dinner first.”

Grim shrugged and returned the cigarettes to his overcoat. “Alas, it was worth a shot. Who knows? One of these days you might just accept my offer.”

“Yeah? Over my dead body.”

“Oh, if only you’d commit.” Grim sighed in false lamentation before flopping down beside him. “So, Mr. EMT. How goes the battle?”
Adrian grinned. “Oh, you know. Still working on running you out of business. At the rate today’s going, you might never have overtime again!”

“So you say. I guess we’ll just have to see about that.” Grim pat him on the shoulder, his hand running down to touch the jacket’s embroidery. His fingers traced over the medical emblem as Grim questioned Adrian, yet again. “Why must you fight me like this? What have I done to wrong you?”

Adrian shrugged his hand off, returning his attention to the clouds overhead. The sky had grown overcast during the past hours, the bottom of the cloud cover becoming reminiscent of ocean waves.

“It’s nothing personal, Grim. I’ve got bills to pay just like everyone else. Rent and food aren’t exactly cheap, you know.”

Grim shifted to his side, looking at him. “You could just stay with me; my door’s always open. You’d never have to worry about bills then.”

Adrian smiled sadly but kept focus on the sky, watching clouds roll and reform overhead.

“I appreciate the gesture, really. It’s thoughtful coming from you. I just can’t accept it at this time. One day, maybe. But for now, I’ve got people to look after. I have to fight for them.”

Grim shook his head. “Why can’t you be more selfish? It’d certainly make things easier for you.”

“Step off. Like I’d drop all the years of altruism I’d gotten drilled into my head for some guy. Besides, if you wanted an easy target, you should’ve visited the cardiologists and neurosurgeons. Or better yet, stop by a government office. Plenty of people who’d take up your offer there.”

Adrian sat up and stretched out his shoulders, feeling the stiff pull of his sore muscles. He turned to face Grim, looking at him before continuing his speech.

“Face it—you’re not getting rid of me that easily. You want me to stop getting in your way? Fine. Just try to match the dopamine rush of someone wholeheartedly thanking you for saving their friend’s life. Go ahead. Give it your best shot. I’ll probably die of natural causes before you manage anything halfway decent.”

Grim went quiet for a moment before chuckling.
“You want me to try my best? Very well, Mr. EMT, I accept your challenge. And if you don’t mind me saying,” He stood up, holding a carnation out to Adrian, “I can guarantee you’ll have a good rest of your day. Farewell, Adrian. Until we meet again. Just don’t keep me waiting.”

Adrian watched the Grim Reaper walk off, disappearing between oncoming traffic. He sat up and stashed the carnation in his bag before getting up and heading back to his ambulance, ready to face the rest of the day.

“Unsolved”

Creative Writing Award Winner

by Margaret Gustafson

There in the snow lies a man
out where the cold wind blows
and leeches life from freezing flesh.

There in the snow lies a man,
hidden amongst skeletal brush
under the canopy of pale gray sky.

There in the snow lies a man, lacerated
with many gaping mouths.

There in the snow lies a man.
I knew him once before
the fire of moonshine
and flash of steel
ripped our partnership
into a bloodstained memory.

And as it stands,
the cash is mine,
the still is safe,
the fallen snow cloaks my rage.
Leaving you there,
lying,
just like you used to.
Aerodynamic Decline

by Valencia Haynes
“I Own You”

by Haven Pesce

I remember the first time it happened. Maybe it was because my jeans were a bit tighter than normal that day. Maybe it was because softball conditioning was increasing my body mass. These are the only explanations I have because I was always taught never to give a boy a reason to touch my body. As a precaution, perhaps I should have worn a shirt that read “Please do not grab my ass.” Revealing clothing is the only reason men need to act on their primal desires. No consent required. No release forms or permission slips. A pair of tight jeans on a classmate passing by. That was all the reason they needed to make their move. I made a move of my own: a dead sprint to the bathroom trying my hardest not to let my tears hit the ground. The scenes from that day come in incomplete flashes. I cannot tell you what he wore, but I can describe the half-smile paired with menacing eyes on my classmate’s face. It told a story of its own. The look meant “I own you.” I did not know that, after this day, I would slowly lose ownership of my own body.

The next was a friend of mine. I felt horrible for being such a tease. My top was incredibly short, and my skirt tended to make its way up my thighs when I danced. I should have never given him the idea that this was okay. I should have showed up to the party in a sweater and my mom’s jeans. I assumed that the party was full of friends and that I would be safe. He took our friendship as an invitation into my pants. To him, the way we showed our affection was through aggressive smacks and placing our hands on one another’s bare skin. People come from many different cultures, and I guess I have to respect other cultures’ definitions of friendship—even if that means losing all feeling in my toes and coloring in my face. I would never want my actions to make others feel uncomfortable.

I stopped buying shirts that showed my stomach or that were cut too low. I feel uncomfortable in skirts that don’t reach past my knees. My complexion has grown paler because I no longer wish to allow even the sun to see me in promiscuous clothing, in fear of leading him on. The whispers still occur. I hear them as I walk to class. The bar scene is a breeding ground for barbarians with
crude tongues. I have completely lost possession of my own body. The decision on my outfit for the day depends more on how many inches are visible instead of how they make me feel. I used to not see any harm in feeling confident, or even sexy. Now I understand that sexy is just another way of telling guys to feel me up.

My interactions with the space around me have changed over the years, especially the years that followed changes in my body. As my hips widened and my chest grew breasts, more eyes paid attention to my movements. Teachers, coaches, classmates, fellow athletes studied how my now developed body bounced and curved in new places. Perhaps this was how women were supposed to feel: like frogs used for dissection. The female body is an object, meant for pleasing the male species. No consent required. No release forms or permission slips. Only the sheer act of breathing in close proximity invites men to assert their dominance. I know that I am not alone in this loss of ownership, and many have far worse stories to tell. In light of the #MeToo movement, more women have come forward than ever before about the ways in which men use their positions of power in the workplace and the patriarchal society that we live in to act on primal desires. More than ever before, individuals are coming forward and bringing attention to a topic that was historically overlooked. Michelle Goldberg, an opinion columnist for the New York Times, writes about how she feels bad for the men of the movement. It is an interesting opinion to pity those who have sexually assaulted (for some) countless women. In her article “The Shame of the #MeToo Movement Men” (The New York Times, 14 Sept. 2018), Goldberg’s opinion is logically sound. She explains that it must be completely disorienting for these men who have never been taught differently and now cannot continue to do the things they have always done. It is difficult to imagine, one day, being unable to do the things that everyone has always tolerated. Goldberg says, “Shame, in my experience, feels even worse than injustice.” To be shamed for daily activities must weigh heavy on the soul.

I feel the same pity towards the men in my narratives. Until someone tells them otherwise, until they learn that their actions make the women around them strangers in their own skin and a threat to public space, they will continue with their daily antics and shenanigans. I would never want to be the bearer of bad news. I cannot imagine how bad I would feel after telling them.
“Revival”

by Jesse Cape

I don’t know why, but I felt I should start this essay with zombies. So here it is—zombies. And now that that is done, allow me to introduce myself for those dear readers who do not actually know me: I am Jesse, and I am queer. There, I’ve said it. It feels nice to be so open and so free. Saying that is my proverbial “taking a bra off at the end of a very long day.” I was born a man, and I’m going to die a queer. Ha, take that, mother!

Ok, so I am queer. But let me be much more explicitly and overbearingly detailed about this label. I’m aromantic, asexual, and non-binary. I don’t feel much. I don’t form sexual attraction, I don’t form romantic attraction, and I don’t feel like any gender box actually fits who I am. I am just me. I don’t like any pronouns that put me in any gender box. Hell, I’m not much for “they,” but it’s what I’ve got that is gender neutral. Thankfully, I’m dating a great guy who understands my needs, and—though he gets a bit pushy wanting my affection and attention—he still gives me the space to let me make my own choices and decide when and if I want to be affectionate.

“But you look and act like any other gay guy,” you may be thinking. I present in a masculine way because I grew up in a household of all males save for my mother. I have an older brother, and my dad, and most of the pets we had when I was growing up were male. We went fishing, and we went to NASCAR races and high school football games. I was taught hypermasculinity from the very minute I was born it seems. I’m honestly self-conscious because of it. I learned to not show my emotions—that to cry was to be weak—and that I had to be manly. If I deviate in any way other than the masculine demeanor in which I was taught, then I fear for my actual life.

Wait. . . . Ok, let me slow down right now to bring you some context. I haven’t been the most honest with you. I said hypermasculinity, but let’s face it: it’s blatant bigotry. My mom was, and still is, the “good Christian girl.” She grew up in a little white Baptist church. Her daddy was the preacher, the choir director, and
a lead singer. Her two older brothers were tithe collectors. Her mom was a stereotypical preacher’s wife: quiet, calm, gentle, and the absolute sweetest woman around. My grandfather, like most little white southern Baptist church preachers, preached fire and brimstone and the “you’re going to hell if you even consider sinning” nonsense. And, though my mom had a bit of a temporary wild streak, she learned this attitude—this belief. It stuck. And because of it, she’s adopted a more conservative outlook on life. She believes that anyone who is “gay” (the one word she uses to encompass anyone not cisgender and straight) is going to hell.

My dad, on the other hand, is a quiet man with a sharp wit and a quick temper. He grew up with a lesbian sister that my paternal grandparents completely accept. And they completely accept me. And maybe my dad is more tolerant than my mom because of this, but that didn’t stop him from settling into the role of a God-fearing man that believes men should be with women and women should be with men.

So, as I said before, I fear for my life. My mom even threatened to kick me out of their house, take away my car, take away my phone, take away my health insurance, and take away all the funding she and my dad provide towards college. And this is all because I hung out with a gay guy one time and was dumb enough to tell her his name. So what if I will never be able to connect with my mom on any intimate level like so many lucky individuals get to? So what if I can’t tell my parents the most important aspect of my entire adult life? So what?

I’ll tell you what. I learned to hate myself every day that I ever spent with them. I learned that I should be ashamed of the person I was growing to be. I learned to hate. And I learned to hate them because of that. They taught me so much hate that I never truly learned to love. Cliché, I know. I can’t give my boyfriend what he definitely deserves because I just cannot produce what I don’t have. I have strong feelings for him. But I have no concept of love.

I never learned love.

Do you even understand how hard that is?

I’m sure by this point you—if you’re even still reading—are thinking, “Jesus, go get therapy and just shut up.” And honestly, I feel the same way.
Go get a drink, wash your sorry crying face, pick yourself up, and move on. It’s life. So what if you can’t love like you think you ought to? There’s nothing you can do. There’s nothing you can fix because nothing is really broken, is there?

Quick check—hands clearly still good if I’m typing, arms working, legs just fine, chest still there, stomach steadily telling me to get food, head still attached to my body, and my brain still telling me to breathe and do this essay—yep, all systems are good. See, you sorry P.O.S.; you’re just fine. You are doing everything you can just as well as you can, and—if you think otherwise—then you’re probably just feeling the depression lying to you.

You’re special and loved, and even though there are many things that aren’t good in this world, you aren’t one of the bad things. You may have gotten a few nicks and scrapes and bruises along the way, but you are still you, and you are still whole.

Okay, back to reality. I think I’m starting to understand why I felt the need to start with zombies. Zombies seem to be one of the most popular of all sci-fi or horror creatures. With movies like I Am Legend and Hocus Pocus and TV shows like The Walking Dead and even books-turned-movies like World War Z, zombies are everywhere in mainstream culture. And yet I still hate them. They’re slow and dumb and overwhelmingly underwhelming. They bore me. And yet I feel like I am a zombie. I feel slow and dumb and just overwhelmingly underwhelming compared to the rest of humanity.

Sometimes I feel like I’m drifting through life, meagerly attempting to be a human, but my decaying flesh just can’t be hidden behind my fading mask. I feel the world turning and moving and happening all around me, but I’m stuck in my small plot of land six feet from seeing the sun. I feel like I live hour by hour and all other people live minute by minute, and it makes me feel just so slow.

I don’t like romance and don’t understand love, and that feels like it should be really special because it’s always portrayed as special. I don’t like sex that much, and there’s a whole social construct created surrounding sex—having too much sex makes you a hoe, not having any sex makes you a prude, virginity is regarded as sacred. . . . This list could go on and on. And I don’t feel any certain gender even though we literally start our kids’ lives out by labeling them—“it’s a
girl!” But I don’t understand any of these things. I feel like all of these things should mean something to me, but they just don’t. I feel so dumb because of it.

And I feel so plain. I feel like I am just another face in the crowd which would be quickly forgotten. I’m the flower that doesn’t get picked. I remember every person I’ve ever cared about—and even some that I didn’t know. But god only knows if they remember me. I’m an apparition, a phantom, a wandering soul destined for nothing, and I suppose a special few see me, but the rest know not of my existence. I feel so underwhelming compared to, well, everybody.

But despite my personal feelings against zombies—and by extension myself—I know there are people out there that love them and me. So maybe I am a zombie. Go figure. Born a man, die a queer, and get reanimated as a zombie. Such is life. So, here’s to you, zombies; may you shamble on into people’s hearts and take a good bite.
Youthful Devastation

by Valencia Haynes
“Walls”

by Dale Hensarling

I arose from the rubble with a ringing in my ears and the smell of blood filling the air, half-dead from the impact. In a daze, I looked to my left and right, slowly, not really able to focus on anything, although I did hear muffled moans many yards away. Otherwise, the air was silent like the vacuum of space, and I crawled toward a tree about ten feet in front of me, hoping to pull myself up, so that I could look for my family. My village was now a hill of broken glass and cracked adobe bricks, and not a bird flew in the sky or sang a song.

Just moments ago, I was playing a game with my cousin on my bedroom floor, and I knew he was cheating because he never wins like that. My mother was making enchiladas in the kitchen below us, and Auntie Maria was helping prepare the meal, while both took turns singing long forgotten lullabies. The smell of the sauces cooking was making me hungry, and it was hard to think about the game. I remembered how Papa used to laugh, seated at the table while we all ate until we were sick, with enchilada oils dripping down our chins and onto our shirts. We looked like circus clowns, and he just laughed. Those were the wonder days, before he was carried away by the police and put in a prison for people who did not support the President. He died there two years ago after months of starvation and beatings by the police. His last words to me still rang in my ears, “Ysidro, take care of your Mama. Be a good little man.” But I cried more than I helped when he was taken away, and Momma mostly carried the burdens of the family.

When I made it to the tree, I held on with all my strength, and I pulled myself up, so that I could see down the hill, but everything I knew was gone. All the homes and buildings in my village were now piles of stone and dust. I saw a few people I hardly recognized hobbling in the rubble. Some were crying into the sky, walking in meaningless circles, and others called to family members who were nowhere to be found, perhaps asleep forever in the dirt. One young girl clutched her torn doll in her hand, and she had a cut over her left eye. The blood had run down into her eyes, so she stared at nothing without blinking. A lady nearby called for help, but no one responded. A puppy cried to be freed from its rubble trap,
whimpering for its momma, its little nose pushing between shattered boards and wire.

I called out. I called for my Momma, my cousin, my aunt. No one answered. And where were they? Which part of the mountain of broken stones was my home? It was hard to tell. Had I been thrown about by the explosion like an old dishrag? Where were my village friends? Were they mingled with the blood and dust all around? Were they beneath my feet and along the road, or beneath the shorn hillside? Would I play in these streets again? Would I hear my Momma’s voice? Would my cousin cheat at the game again?

“Momma!” I cried, over and over again. “Momma!” But there were no sounds, no responses, and my hope faded. My face lost its feeling, and I became a zombie, crawling through the rubble, staring ahead in a daze, my eyes emptied, but my family was not to be found. Other than the handful of neighbors I had seen, there were no survivors at all. In a moment, my life had been changed from laughing and games to torturous rings in my head and emptiness.

It’s hard to explain why I did what I did next. I kept crawling over the mountains of wood shards and leftover buildings. Some walls were still left standing. Some still had photos on them, memorials now to the families who had lived there. Walls had made them all feel safe, defining “family” as a space, holding treasures within them, and hushing the inside from those outside. Inside was “us.” Outside was “them.” Walls were safety, whether the times were terrible or uplifting. But now those safe walls were broken, reminders of what had been and would not be ever again. I knew many of them from the colors and pictures crushed near them, but I continued in my daze through the village, over bricks and over copper kitchen pots, over dolls and pieces of broken glass, over shoes and over worn, woven hats. I stumbled, but I kept walking.

Somewhere along the way, I saw a small flag sticking out from a beam. I recognized it from Ms. Rodriguez’s class. It was a United States flag. I picked it up and held it as I walked, seldom looking at it, but it was something to cling to. My trance drove me onward. I left my village that day, not because I thought to do so, but because I simply walked and walked and walked. Again, I do not know why I did it, but I did. Behind me, a past lay buried, and I was too afraid to unearth it.
Who had done this? Who had taken my life? Was it the military or the rebels or the drug lords? Who had taken such a decisive toll against all that I loved?

I kept walking, still holding the flag, and the miles stretched before me. At first, I did not realize that I was not alone. But, yes, there were others, and all of them were in a death-trance, walking with no real direction, down the dirt road, over hills and through wooded tree tunnels. They followed me, as if I somehow knew what I was doing or where I was going, or perhaps they thought me their leader. Occasionally, a lone truck would pass us by, but no one looked up, and no one came to help us as we journeyed that day. We were a mindless caravan with nowhere to go.

The night rolled in with a soft breeze, and with it came a beautiful sunset. I thought it to be beautiful, and I wondered how the sky could paint itself in such colors above us all while so much destruction was behind us. Did the sun not know? Did the clouds ever care? Were the stars and moon blind to our hurt? Such peace. Such agony. Such a mocking sky.

I paused along the roadside, exhausted from the journey, and I sat on a large rock nearby. As if on command, those following me did the same, and as I sat there looking at them all, the overwhelming pain of it all came to my mind, and I cried out from the depths of my broken soul. “God, why?” I cried out. But God did not answer, as if He ever would. The emptiness was more than I could take, and the others with me cried, also. One even shook his fist against the night sky, as if to threaten the stars. Everyone was angry, searching for the demon who had done this, yet we did not speak that night to one another. Eventually, we all figured out where and how to sleep along the roadside, and we fell into haunted dreams as the stars danced above us with no mercy, the last souls of a lost town on a forgotten road to God knows where.

The morning sun awakened us like warm feathers upon our cheeks, and we all arose hungry and distressed. It was not long after that we realized that we had camped near an orchard, and several of the men had gone into it to pick fresh oranges, and they brought them back to us all. We ate in silence, our hunger driving us more than our pain or our questions. Personally, I hate oranges, but not this time. I must have eaten six or seven, while others hardly took one. I
recognized two people in our small crowd of twenty or so. They were covered in smut and bloody gashes, eating oranges like starved animals at a zoo, but standing some distances from one another, a sort of loose collection of desperates, afraid of touching one another but afraid to drift too far apart.

The smell of oranges filled the air; the spit seeds fell to the ground softly. We had not really noticed the fence at the edge of the road surrounding the orchard, and most of the group did not care at all. It was a wall, but desperation drove us to ignore it. We needed what was on the other side, more than those who claimed to own it. We hoped not to get caught for crossing it, but the evidence was bare upon the earth in piles of orange peels, and we were guilty. So, what would anyone do to us? Lock us up? Put us inside jail walls to keep the world safe from us? Or, would they shoot us and lay us under a concrete covering, a wall upon us keeping us in the ground so that we could not come back from the dead? Some walls I did so hate.

Without saying anything, I picked up my flag and continued down the road. The heat was unbearable, but I stayed focused, as did those behind me who still followed. We passed by a farmhouse in the afternoon, and the people inside came out to speak to us. They were kind, and they offered us food and water, so we stopped for a bit. They asked us where we were from and where we were headed. We told them what had happened to our village, and they looked at us as though they had seen a ghost. It turns out that their daughter and family had lived in the village and word had travelled fast through the countryside. The drug lords had been caught transporting a large drug shipment on our village road, and suddenly fire and bombs erupted everywhere, levelling the town. We were the lone refugees. Their daughter and all her family were not to be found, as their son had driven into town the day before to look for them.

“I don’t know where I am going,” I said. “This road is the only path I found.”

“If you keep walking, you’ll reach the border,” the man said. He pointed down the road as he spoke, and his wife nodded her agreement. Yes, the border was that way, to the right, over the hill about a day’s journey. He had seen my flag that I still clutched, and he remarked, “It is the United States.” He pointed to my flag. I still had no reason why I held it closely, but now I thought it had a new
purpose, so I took notice of it. I tried to be strong in all this, but I must admit it was hard not to completely fall apart, and I did not really want to leave the farm, as they treated us all like family, but after some small time, I thanked them and started walking down that road and over the hill.

“America,” I thought. “Just another day.”

We made it over several hills before sunset, with a renewed energy in our steps, a caravan of refugees headed north with a vision of Eldorado, that golden city, in our heads. We passed through a canyon along the way, a sunken road with stone and earthen walls painted in reds and purples. Those walls pushed back against us, holding us to the road as it wound along a dry creek. Above us circled large birds, spying on us. They watched our every step to see if we would stumble in our weakness, so that they could swoop down for our carcasses. They called from above as they circled. We decided to stop for the evening, not having yet seen Eldorado, that great United States land, and those winding walls became our sanctuary. The birds gave up on us as the sun went down, and we did not hear their calls again. We kindled a fire from scrap wood, and for the first time we stood facing one another, warming ourselves in the heat. Some of us spoke, but not all. Recollections of that day, questions of who or why, were mentioned, but no one had answers. Most just looked into the fire, with visible tears running down their cheeks. This seemed not the time to get political, as they were all still mourning, but the words of the farmer and his wife were certainly in our thoughts.

The following morning, the air was crisp, and we each got up slowly. We were hungry and thirsty with nothing to eat or drink. One of the men skinned a cactus and was sucking on the piece like a melon, and he cut a slice for each one of us who asked. I had never eaten raw cactus before, so I did not know what to expect, but it was good, and I realized that it had water in it, and it was also edible. We ate most of the cactus before continuing our journey, and the canyon walls stood above us like an eternal shelter. Some walls are made by the gods.

The winding road led us to an open desert with little vegetation. It disappeared into the sand and the rocky soil, and as it did, we saw something in the distance. We were unsure what it was, but having no road to follow, we just walked toward it for what seemed like hours. The winds drove the dust around us,
and it was difficult to breathe at times, and our vision was blocked. I tried to shield my face from it all, but it was hard to do it and still keep my footing, as the ground was not solid or level. I had no idea what was ahead, as my sight was blocked at times, and it was a good distance away. Still, I pushed forward, as did those who followed me. Eventually, I was close enough to see it.

It stretched for miles, to my left and to my right. It was tall, perhaps 30 feet or more. It was metal and strong, made of piping, and I could see through it to the other side. A wall.

Along its path, I saw a flag, larger, but identical to the one I clapped. This was Eldorado? This was the United States? On my side of the wall, I stood in a desert, and on the other side of the wall the desert was as far as my dusty eyes could see. If this were indeed Eldorado, it seemed no different than the land I stood in. There was no golden city, and from where I stood, the only difference was the wall. I did not see what was beyond the distant mountains. I thought perhaps the city was over their towering heights, but the wall was here separating us from it, and we all stood staring through its metal columns to those distant mounts. We thought that if we could stare long enough, we might catch a glimmer of those shiny Eldorado spires, but we didn’t. The wall would not let us.

A wall as far as the eye could see framed my life once again. It was built to keep me out, a threat to those inside. It was built to keep them in, a safety in their minds. It was built to separate our worlds, mine of turmoil and fear, and theirs of solitude and family. Our worlds could not meet, though the desert had no lines of its own and the sand blew across it with no repose, yet we stood before this wall, our loss behind us, and we lost all hope of what was before. The promise of Eldorado was now a myth, a story passed down from ancestors who had heard but who had never seen. The promise of a flag in my hand was just a myth in a song and a pledge to an unknown hope. We stood for what seemed a day, not knowing what to do. The flag, which hung above us on the wall spoke of freedom, but I let the one in my hand fall to the ground, and I did not reach to retrieve it. Freedom was their wall, but not mine.

I felt my desperation build, with nowhere to go and no home to return to. I made a decision. I decided to see Eldorado, or die trying, so I held tight to the
metal wall columns and slowly pulled myself to its heights. Others in our group tried, but they failed to reach its summit. I alone made it, and they cheered me on, but once atop the wall I saw no such city.

I heard the approach of a truck from my left, and someone yelled to us all to get off the wall, but that was not an easy task. I was exhausted and could not make it down. Shortly afterward, I heard the gunshots, and I felt the burn in my chest as I huddled forward and fell to the ground from the wall.

“Eldorado,” I thought, as I faded into blackness. “I made it to Eldorado.” A loose American flag blew past me as my eyes grew dim, and I breathed in the smell of freedom.

“H.U.D.S.”

by Dale Hensarling

A sea rising
   of infinite youth---
Solidarity.
*Hands up! Don’t Shoot!*

Guilt upon all,
   speculative proof.
Clarity.
*Hands up! Don’t Shoot!*

Generations
   coerced to choose.
Slaves or traders?
*Hands up! Don’t Shoot!*

Talking heads
   twisting truth---
No parity.
*Hands up! Don’t Shoot!*

Kneel, the anthem,
   politically bruised---
Disparity.
*Hands up! Don’t Shoot!*

Fear the future,
   anger pollutes.
Love is a rarity.
*Hands up! Don’t Shoot!*
Doors at 8, Show at 9

by Valencia Haynes
The problem with having a strict plan about the way her life should go is that her life has rarely stuck to said plan. She was supposed to be better off than she is now. At eighteen, twenty-six had seemed like a lifetime away. She had thought she had all the time in the world to change herself into someone she wasn’t.

Her plan was to be engaged by this point. In her head, she would be engaged and working at a firm and weigh ten pounds less. Instead, she’s single, cleaning herself up in a dirty bodega bathroom, and on her way to her shitty ten-dollar-an-hour secretary gig.

She presses concealer into the zit forming on her chin. Sleeping in her makeup—add that to the list of bad decisions she had made last night. She feels disgusting. When was the last time she had done this public restroom shower routine? Wet paper towels and extra deodorant. Jesus, what is she doing with her life?

“C’mon, miss!” The bathroom door shakes with the pounding fist. A streak of vicious irritation whips through her, and she yanks the door open right before the third pounding knock lands. Just as quickly, she feels terrible at the sight of a surprised teenage boy on the other side.

“Sorry,” She says to him and brushes past.

She should have been headed to work fifteen minutes ago, but she couldn’t bring herself to go in looking the way she did. Not going in isn’t an option. She can’t afford to be fired, and there’s no way her mediocre performance will save her if she doesn’t show up. Plus, she needs the money, really, really, needs the money. Without it, she will have to ask her mother for money, and then she truly will be a failure, won’t she?

In an effort to conserve some sense of propriety, she buys a pair of cheap, scratchy panty hose. She’s not going to cry, she tells herself on the busy sidewalk. She’s not going to cry because she is not a girl who cries, and she has done enough pretending for the day.
She swallows as she roots around in her purse for her card while she waits in line. She steels herself for the inevitable harsh buzz of her card being declined. She should be used to having no money by now, but it still takes her by surprise at moments like this. She checks to see if anyone is watching and receives a tight-lipped smile from an Asian man sipping his coffee. She turns back, her face hot with shame, and swipes her card. She crosses her fingers and prays to every god she can think of that it will go through, despite the definitively negative balance in her bank account. It turns out that someone must be listening, or, at least, not paying very close attention because there’s a green checkmark. And so, she pushes through the turnstile into the throngs of people.

The real rub of the whole thing is that she had known that it was a bad idea. She had known going in that things would end up exactly like this. She had also known she would wake up hungover and regretful, and she had done it anyway. She’s almost certain that it’s not normal to do things that she knows will be bad for her, but she’s also almost certain that she’s the biggest fuck-up known to man.

It didn’t help that the guy hadn’t been particularly special: he wasn’t handsome, really, but attractive enough, and he had liked her. Their eyes had met over the rim of his martini, and for a moment she almost believed that she was someone else, the girl her mother wanted her to be, someone that men stayed for. Almost. Now, five minutes before her shift and still waiting for the subway, with some man yelling at her to just give me one smile, sweetheart, she wants to crawl onto the third rail.

The subway doors slide shut, and she slumps in her seat. The light makes the space between her eyes throb, and she has to breathe through a wave a nausea. Her penance for this will not involve three Hail Marys, it seems. Father Mathew would disagree with her, of course, because a hangover is not really penance, but she’s not planning on telling him any of this. She’s not stupid enough to believe that he won’t judge her for her myriad of sins, and she feels bad enough as it is.

She’s not upset because she thinks God or whoever will care about the cheating. All of the hours she spent kneeling in Mass has taught her nothing because she can’t remember if cheating is a mortal sin or not. It doesn’t matter
anyway because she can picture the look her mother would give her if she knew, and it is nearly as awful as what Saint Peter would look like refusing her entry into the Pearly Gates.

It’s not that it was cheating, exactly. It occurs to her, two stops from work, that Charlie isn’t anything serious. In fact, Charlie is about as far from serious as he could possibly be. Charlie is a thirty-seven-year-old attorney who specializes in tax law. When she met him, he had been working through a divorce. Now, four months later, he’s back with his wife and shows no signs of leaving her.

Occasionally, it seems like he might actually care for her, like there might be something more between them, but most of the time, he just likes that she is young and pretty and his client’s secretary. She may mean nothing to him, but she won’t kid herself into thinking that he won’t be angry. She’s something that he owns—a play thing—not an equal. He always gets upset when he realizes he doesn’t have her full attention, and a one-night stand definitely counts as a distraction.

That’s the one place that she has the upper hand with him. Getting his interest had been hilariously easy. Keeping his attention, however, has been an uphill battle. The men in her life never stay, and Charlie is no exception. He gets to have a wife; he gets to flirt with the waitress at every restaurant he takes her to. She does not, if she wants to keep him. She doesn’t want him because she loves him; she doesn’t love him. Half of the time, she’s not even sure if she likes him. But she’s twenty-six, and he’s the kind of person she is supposed to be with, and so she is.

She could do without him, theoretically. But then she would end up alone and unloved, all that good breeding gone to waste—like her mother. And what, exactly, is the point of Mass and private schools and all this self-loathing, if she ends up exactly the way she’s always feared she would?

She squints at the sun when she exits the terminal. The cold air is calming her stomach and she shivers. She had picked her dress last night for its shortness, but, today, the fabric is too thin to keep her warm. She wraps her arms around herself and sets off at a brisk pace.
Usually, she would bring her boss, Gloria, that sugary coffee she loves—but has sworn off for the New Year—as a bribe. She’s too late for that today anyway, and her masochistic streak is making itself known. She wants Gloria to rage at her for anything and everything. Bribing her will not have the result she needs—not that she has ever successfully bribed Gloria in the past. The elevator dings, and she steps out of its confines, removing her fingers from their place pressed into her eyes.

“Good morning!” Valerie says from her desk.

“Good morning!” She replies, slipping a perky smile onto her face as she passes by.

by Eden Weidman

“Off with her head!” screeches the red-faced queen at the little girl during a court trial (Carroll 121). It seems odd—even cruel—to have a small girl at the stand and a ruler calling for a brutal sentence in this scenario. Yet both Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass* present their laws in unusual ways. The *Alice* texts existed during a period of great change for England that spanned from increasing territories to widening social classes. Nevertheless, England was mismatched between the rural Medieval and the industrial Victorian: “knights and railways, monarchy and bourgeois existed side-by-side” as society continued to grow (Siemann 432). English law found itself caught between the two worlds, and Carroll took notice of the disorganization by offering a whimsical proposal. He created illogical governments and their nonsensical laws through his Wonderland and the Looking Glass countries; these countries act as warnings of what could potentially become England during the Victorian reign.

At the time, the British legal system had begun the process of changing laws between absolute monarchies to the bourgeois (MacMillian 3). Wonderland presents itself as the former with a small minority who can exercise the law to their benefit. Before Alice entered Wonderland, a trial occurred between the Mouse and a Fury. The Fury threatens to prosecute the Mouse as the mad being has nothing to do on that particular day (Carroll 29). The Fury acts as an unchecked prosecutor who is abusing his power to charge innocent individuals on a whim. The Mouse pleads that a trial still needs a separate jury and judge to occur fairly (Carroll 29). The Fury rebuts the Mouse’s plead by claiming that he will “be judge, jury . . . and condemn [the Mouse] to death” (Carroll 29). He destroys the division in the justice system by intertwining the powers of all three major branches together— prosecutor, judge, and jury. In an orderly world, the prosecutor works for the state, the judge “serves as a neutral arbiter between the prosecution and the accused . . . and the jury is independent of the judge and prosecutor” (Landman 166). The Mouse failed to
receive a lawful trial as he faced an unjust power that wants to harm him out of sheer boredom. Carroll’s suggestion then is that, if Victorian England chooses to continue absolute monarchy, then the average Victorian might face the same circumstances as the Mouse. Although the audience lacks information about how the Mouse escapes from his unlawful trial, the audience can deduce that the incident left the Mouse deeply shaken.

Alice herself would understand the Mouse’s dismay soon; she participates in a lawless game of croquet with other Wonderland denizens. Alice notes that “they [do not] play at all fairly . . . and they do not seem to have any rules in particular” (Carroll 82). Everyone just focuses on themselves instead of playing by the rules. They only come together because of their fear for one person—the Queen of Hearts. The queen threatens to behead everyone throughout the game. Her execution threats act as “a ceremonial of sovereignty [as] it uses the ritual marks of vengeance to the condemned man, and it deploys before the spectators an effect of fear” (Siemann 437). The threats work because even an outsider like Alice becomes fearful of her. However, that fear vanishes when she learns that the queen fails to act on her threats. Although the monarchs control the individuals throughout the game, this scene demonstrates that the laws need a powerful enforcer that enacts on their orders. The queen is currently feared by a majority of her citizens, but there is rising concern that “no one [will] pay attention to the queen as no one [will take] her execution threats seriously” (Landman 166). She threatens her people, but she fails to actually carry out her threats. Carroll believes that if the rulers appear weak or fail to carry out their tasks, then the public ignores the government and its laws.

Yet Wonderland already seems to be falling apart at the trial of the Knave. On the surface, the court looks as Alice expects a court to appear. She recognizes “the judge because of his wig, the jury-box, and those twelve creatures as the jurors” (Carroll 106). Yet she fails to see the flaws hidden between the judge and the jury. The judge is the King of Hearts; he constantly tries to manipulate the law into his bidding. He invents rules to ensure the trial goes his way. When an unsigned document is presented as new evidence, he tells the Knave that “[he] meant some mischief, or else [he] would have signed [his] name” (Carroll 117). He
acts as an unchecked judge who is biased towards the defendant. The audience can see that a king as a judge lacks neutrality. A ruler places his order over justice. The jury is no better—they write down anything anyone says without a thought. The court additionally fails to assure that the defendant has due process. The Knave lacks “the right to a lawyer, to a neutral decision maker, to question witnesses against [him], and to present testimony in [his] favor” (Landman 166). He stands in the same position as the Mouse—defenseless and powerless against an unjust court. The trial ends in uncertainty, but it is clear that Carroll rejects absolute monarchy. He presents dire consequences from an unchecked ruling class.

If Wonderland appears chaotic with its monarchy government, then the Looking Glass country acts as its counterpart—a bourgeois society. There are a wide variety of characters at different levels: rich flowers, orderly knights, a sheep shopkeeper, and an egg orator to name a few. This world mimics a chess board, and “the rules of chess represent the law of the land” (Siemann 431). These individuals are separated into their respected squares. This separation indicates that the denizens follow laws that restrict them to a certain space and to their roles. The White Knight would rather create inventions and recite poetry, but he “insists on following the Rules of Battle when he engages with the Red Knight” because he is expected to follow his knightly protocols on a Square (Siemann 449). The country itself seems constricted to rules as well. The country moves backwards instead of forwards. An individual who commits a crime has their “punishment before the trial, and the crime follows last of all” (Carroll 194). A person may look at this justice system as unfair as a potential innocent person is locked up for a nonexistent crime. Carroll parodies a Victorian thought that “if there is imprisonment and no crime,” then that transaction benefits social good (Siemann 448). Carroll points out how absurd it is to have legal and social restrictions on everyone.

Despite the restrictions, the Looking Glass country reveals an opportunity that was nonexistent in Wonderland: social mobility. There are certain opportunities for people to move up and down the social ladder even though “chess pieces are more hierarchical than playing cards” (Siemann 446). The hierarchy only exists in social expectations; the Looking Glass denizens do act accordingly based on nursery rhymes or game rules. However, the Looking Glass world demonstrates
that anyone can upgrade their social position if they strive to earn a new class (Siemann 447). After Alice wishes to become a queen, the Red Queen tells her that she can earn her crown by being “the White Queen’s Pawn” and traveling to the Eighth Square to receive her crown (Carroll 158). She happily becomes a Pawn and enters into Looking Glass government. Alice therefore enters a contract “consisted of two people concerning the matter” of becoming queen (MacMillian 19). Alice must now follow the Red Queen’s directions to achieve her new status, which includes encountering different individuals and landscapes. Her willingness mirrored “the Victorian bourgeoisie who [hoped] to rise within or beyond the middle classes” (Siemann 447). If they can overcome social stigma and hardships, then they can achieve a better life. This movement could not have happened in Wonderland as everyone was bound to a certain status to be either a creature or a playing card.

However, social mobility becomes two-faced as Alice continues her journey. No other citizen appears to move along the chess board—only Alice moves from a pawn to a queen. Furthermore, social mobility means that it is possible for the rulers to lose their prestige. The fight between the Unicorn and the Lion reveals that the White King is fearful of losing his crown. He reacts frightfully when Alice questions if the winner receives his crown, and he appears nervous around the two strong contenders (Carroll 225). It is not just the kings that need to worry about their status. Queens are generally more powerful than the kings in the game of chess with their unrestricted movement. Yet the Red and White Queens claim Alice cannot be a ruler until “she [passes] the proper examination,” and they lecture her on a variety of objectives: speaking, thinking, manners, and even arithmetic (Carroll 248). The queens subject Alice to another set of regulations because the Looking Glass country acts like a bourgeois society with strict constrictions. Their lectures reveal that “even a queen must follow prescribed procedures,” which indicates that a ruler must follow the laws as well (Siemann 451). A bourgeois society limits monarchs with its protocols, but those limitations render them weak. Additionally, those same laws control average citizens by keeping them in their respected class through social expectations.

Although the Victorian era lasted for a long time, law regulations were still disorganized as England continued to evolve (MacMillian 3). Lawmakers had to find
ways to create laws that satisfy all the classes without losing the law’s respect, integrity, and control over the country. Carroll saw those attempts at establishing different laws to satisfy the classes, and he presented two extremes to show what could happen in England. He showcases one place that acts illogically because both its laws and lawmakers are weak; he creates another place where laws are so strict that no one can act freely as everything has been predetermined by social class. He creates Alice as the Victorian guide, and it is through her that any person can see the effects that two potential governments could have on the average Victorian. These parallels make the reader realize they cannot pick one government and its laws, but they must find a medium between the two options to gain both a strong government and a set of equal laws.

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I grew up near the mountains.  
Not in them, or rather, on them—  
But I grew up beneath them,  
Far enough from the base of these  
Hovering giants that the pinnacles  
Of each one were visible from my home.  
That may not seem important,  
But those mountains taught me so much.

My father always said  
That he loved the lights at the top  
Of each of those green and blue peaks  
But he always found himself asking  
Why they tended to disappear  
When you went to look for them.  
The twinkling and shining white lights  
That shone down on Earth’s children  
Or the blinking and changing red lights  
That seemed to shout danger  
But sent waves of protection  
At the exact same time.  
These mountains may have been  
Just the background in my childhood photos  
But they were not the background  
Of my childhood.  
They taught me so much.

And they stood tall above my childhood  
And they kissed me goodbye when I left.
Haze Reaches Heights

by Valencia Haynes
New Voices

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Cheers to the class of 2019!
The faculty sponsors and student editors of *New Voices* would like to dedicate this year’s issue to Lander graduate Bobby Suit, one of our favorite contributors.


A born storyteller and all-around Renaissance man, Bobby will be missed by all those who knew him.
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