

The Writing Center Review

Spring 2021

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After a hiatus, the Writing Center newsletter is back – and rebranded to reflect our new publishing schedule! For the spring issue, we bring our dear readers a splendid display of writing from students, faculty, and staff. Although these works reflect only a fraction of the literary talent here at Isothermal, it is our sincere hope that the works in this issue will serve as a welcomed distraction from the year-long accretion of anxieties related to COVID. Reading and writing can offer an unparalleled diversion from the entire spectrum of human suffering. Despite this payoff, writing is hard, sometimes really hard. To this, we urge you to remember the words of author F. Scott Fitzgerald: “Nothing any good isn’t hard.” Keep reading and writing, friends! - Writing Center Staff

Explicating “Nothing Gold Can Stay” By Dallas Nicholas

Robert Frost’s “Nothing Gold Can Stay” manages to speak volumes in just eight lines. At

first glance, this short poem seems to refer to a fleeting day that has gone too soon. However, the reader cannot be fooled by the brevity of this piece. Frost manages to encompass so many themes and symbols in this short poem.

The first symbol worth noting is the reverence to the hue of gold. Across the universe, in every known culture, gold has been known as one of the most valuable and desirable elements. Frost uses the beauty associated with the color gold to give the reader a sense of euphoria, depicting a beautiful yellow light emerging at daybreak. He goes on to say, “Her hardest hue to hold,” which is also a very key element to this poem. It evokes the concept that beauty, light, and happiness are quite literally hard to hold onto.

Frost also brings up the idea of youthful innocence being lost, hence, “Her early leaf’s a flower; But only so an hour.” The concept of innocence can be aligned along with the beauty of nature’s golden hue. There are also feminine undertones throughout this poem, such as nature being a “she,” much like Mother Nature. She blossoms, like a flower, but only for a short time before grief takes over. This could be taken as a commentary on the female menarche, where a female child leaves adolescence and joins womanhood.

Frost’s next line only reinforces the idea that nothing is absolute. “Then leaf subsides to leaf,” meaning that that flower that bloomed previously will eventually subside to a leaf once more. He is stating that a blossomed flower is only around for a short period of time before it becomes once again, just a leaf. This can be taken as a metaphor for the value of youth versus the worthlessness of the elderly. Taken a step further, with the previous explication of the blooming flower mirroring a young woman coming of age, this can be a commentary on society’s view of aging women and their loss of value and societal contribution.

Frost is attempting to explain that nothing lasts forever, in the lifespan of the flower. In the line, “So Eden sank to grief,” there is a clear reference to the Garden of Eden. In the Bible, Eve eats the apple that represents sin and consequently pushes Adam and herself from paradise. Biblical text alludes to the fact that women committed sin first and therefore were sentenced to the pain and burden of childbirth. Childbirth is the next physical

step for a young woman who has reached a certain age, at least during Frost's time. Frost is commenting on the natural cycle of a woman's life.

Tying all the lines together, we can see a linear representation of a woman's life. This is unfolded to us from the very beginning, when Frost makes an obvious reference to Nature being feminine. The poem takes us through the stages of womanly growth and the loss of innocence. The transition from an innocent child, being the flower, to an adult, being the leaf, is a form of symbolism. The poem evokes an emotional response by tapping into the nostalgia of our own childhood memories by presenting the golden hue of innocence. Sadly, as nothing gold can stay, he is also speaking of the imminent and inevitable end.

Amateur Hour: Greek Dawn

By Cory Lowery

Amateur Hour presents reflections on history and philosophy by an enthusiastic amateur. Questions and critiques

– *polite and civil ones, anyway – may be sent to clowery@isothermal.edu.*

To the untrained eye, reality presents itself as a complex of sensations separated by space and time, full of seemingly clear distinctions: living and dead, past and present, solid and liquid, and so on. Given the evident fact that reality is multivalent and complex, it seems little short of insane to suggest that everything we see is really fundamentally one thing. What kind of madman would argue that, deep down, a rock and a human being are made of the same stuff when they are so obviously different?

It turns out that the madmen were Greek: they were the Presocratics, so-named for having preceded the more famous triad of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. These thinkers were the first known advocates of monism, the philosophical position that all phenomena are derived from a single principle or substrate. Though many people associate Greek philosophy with Classical sites like Athens, the Presocratics hailed from the fringes of the Greeks' seafaring

civilization, from city-states like Miletus and Elea, located in modern-day Turkey and Italy, respectively.

This earliest stage of Greek philosophy is often credited with bringing about a revolution in human thought. Whereas the earliest human civilizations explained natural events in terms of the acts of various gods or spirits, the Milesians theorized that all visible events could be reduced to a single, physical element governed by intelligible laws. Thales, the first and most famous of the Milesians, wrote “All is water,” and his successors attributed the multifaceted phenomena of the material world to other fundamental principles: Anaximenes identified air as the basic element, while Heraclitus pointed to fire. Though each of these hypotheses strike the modern reader as obviously false, their importance lay in their attempt to explain the world in a purely naturalistic way, without reference to the caprices of personages like Zeus, Apollo, or the other denizens of ancient pantheons.

Later Greek thinkers further refined these first drafts of

physical monism and developed ever more strange and enigmatic systems, Democritus devising one of the most counterintuitive. He argued that, despite the appearance of things – color, taste, shape, and solidity – in reality, only two forms existed: indivisible bodies he called “atoms” and void. All of the things we think we know: the foods we eat, the buildings we inhabit, and even the people we love, are merely the consequence of the random collision and agglomeration of atoms within the all-encompassing vacuum. We moderns are primed to appreciate this view due to our acquaintance with contemporary particle physics, but in Democritus’s time, atomism was thought too far-fetched, so was largely ignored.

As different as all of these theories may seem, they share characteristics common to most Greek thought and would go on to influence the history of all Western philosophy and science. One of these attributes consists of a division of the world into two aspects: the world as it seems, and the world as it truly is. In our daily lives, we are

confronted with a sort of chaotic churning of events, sensations, and misfortunes, many of which come and go without any warning or apparent meaning. Even the tenuous security offered by modern infrastructure is liable to be upset at any moment by causes as diverse as natural disasters, political foment, and – one that has become very familiar to us all – infectious disease.

The Greeks were no strangers to the potential chaos of daily life, and in many respects, Greek society in the time of the Presocratics was infinitely more vulnerable than our own. Their city-states clung tenuously to the rim of the Eastern Mediterranean, easy prey for emerging empires like the Persians in the east, and had only just emerged from the Greek Dark Ages, a period of depopulation and ruin brought about by famine and apocalyptic earthquakes (some trace the roots of the Atlantis myth to this period in Greek history). Greek philosophers, so well acquainted with the constant prospect of disaster, sought to discern some order behind the

chaos. As different as their conclusions were, they shared a faith in reason's power to pierce through the confusion of the world and the erroneous "private understandings" life's torments inflicted on everyday people. Though Greek philosophers had little esteem for normal people – many were aristocrats, so you'll find few populists among them – they believed the truth of things was available to anyone willing to carefully observe and reason about the world around them. Life's misfortunes are many, but truth is one and available to all.

Further Reading:

- *Early Greek Philosophy* by Jonathan Barnes
- "Presocratic Philosophy" at the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- Academy of Ideas channel on *YouTube*.

As the Piano Tumbles Down

A Poem by Sydney Wilkie

The streets smell like flavored cigars
And multi-colored flowers line the
windowsills

The old paved roads still hum with
practically broken down cars
And the announcers shouting over the
radio
Men and women
Women and men
Stumble out of clubs and bars
But they make no fuss
They walk as far as they can home
But they always end up catching the
bus
The sun comes up
The roads are repaved and the gates
are flung open
The flowers, once sitting on the
windowsills, now line the single way
street
The petals falling under and all the
people's feet
The cars now up and running,
Whisper their course down forgotten
alleyways
The town is awake
The town is alive
Since the horses began racing
The town has thrived
And I, I stand at the corner of an
antique warehouse
Waiting for the piano to fall three
stories to the sidewalk
With my cotton ivy cap in hand
I painstakingly walk down the street
The flowers are withered
The poor have bare feet
The twilight of the late afternoon
gleams throughout the now rich town
And I watch above me as the piano
tumbles down

Golden toward the center

Like when the leaves change and the
sun comes out
And fills the streets with beautiful
people propagating more, beautiful
people
Laughing, parading, dancing through
the streets gaily
And greener as you get farther away
Vast and glassy
But they clash in the middle
dense, opaque and that's where my
words lie,
Stuck in the middle, muddled with no
meaning
And you ask me if I'm ok
And I look at the golden and green
together
And I realize they don't clash
And suddenly I'm not ok
Because the air I'm breathing isn't my
own
And the thoughts I'm thinking are
foreign even to me
I watch the colors change like the
seasons as the world swims around
me in a pool of its own
I watch the green start to twinkle and
I watch the gold start to shimmer and
I wonder if stars know that they shine
And I forget about the seasons
And I forget about autumn because
now I'm stuck in the gold
My breath grows shallow
And my eyes grow wide
As the colors glow and explode like
the tide
But pulling me in instead of pushing
me out
And I notice the way the green looks
when light hits it

And then I'm drowning.

Lives, Times, and the Creative Spark

By Erin Balmer

In 1929 Virginia Woolf famously lamented that women must have “money and a room of one’s own to write.” Men had their universities and libraries, studies and drawing rooms. Women? Their designated spaces were the kitchen and the nursery. The spaces women inhabited then were indicative of the roles they were expected to fulfill: wife and mother, or, in other words, cook, maid, homemaker, caregiver. While Woolf undoubtedly would beam with pride at the educational strides women have made over the last ninety years, I can’t help but wonder if anything to her central complaint has indeed changed. Women still inhabit the same spaces, with the addition of an important one: the workplace. Now we are wives, mothers, caregivers, and employees whose lives are spent in service to our

families and employers. Our space to write and think creatively has, oddly, shrunk. Rather than needing a room of one’s own, today women need time and lives of their own.

I started thinking about this dilemma when Wes Byers and Cory Lowery approached me about contributing a piece of writing to the Writing Center newsletter. Surely, they assumed, I had something of value to say either in poetry or in prose. Yet I couldn’t remember the last time I had put pen to paper. I told them I had nothing, and they looked doubtful. But I, like many other women, am so overwhelmed with this thing called life that there is only time for doing, not thinking. I hadn’t put pen to paper because I had been taking care of my children and now my parents. My summer passed in a blur of all-day hospital visits and doctors’ appointments with my ailing mother. When I was free, my kids ran the rest of my agenda with friends coming over (so I had to keep the house constantly tidy) and places to go. I truly felt like my head was empty of anything save a constantly

running and ever-changing to-do list.

I possessed no time for idle thought, an essential attribute to the writing process, as Woolf points out. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf rather insistently implores women to think, saying:

Therefore I would ask you to write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or however vast. By hook or by crook, I hope that you will possess yourselves of money enough to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream.

It seems to me that her vision is out of reach for most women in today's society.

And when we do find ourselves with idle time to think, what are we contemplating? A simple glance around any room reveals our addiction to our phones, and the statistics bear out our addiction to social media. According to *Statista*, "In 2018, an estimated 2.65 billion people were using social media

worldwide, a number projected to increase to almost 3.1 billion in 2021." And the time spent on social media is staggering. *Statista* studies indicate that social media users spend an average of three hours and nineteen minutes on social media each day.

Are we edifying our minds or mindlessly passing our time? Studies also show that our attention spans are shortening as well. Moreover, McClinton makes an ominous prediction regarding this trend: "If nothing changes, topics that are discussed publicly will reduce to a minimum amount of reported information before moving to the next, almost certainly hurting the quality of information about the topic." Common sense would suggest, then, that today we are much less likely to "to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream." We may be students of life, but is anyone out there actually thinking?

The problem is that we are not these days inclined to let our thoughts meander down quiet

country lanes or bustling city streets, seeing the people we meet and in our imaginations putting on their skins for a brief moment to think what they may be thinking, or to experience what they may be experiencing, or to feel what they may be feeling. Woolf could never have predicted the rapidity with which we receive and process information today, nor could she have anticipated the fast-paced lives women lead today. Nearly one hundred years ago, Woolf waxed optimistic about the future for women and their ability to express creatively:

My belief is that if we live another century or so — I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals — and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think...then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down.

Sadly, the opportunity, and surprisingly that freedom, never came. We won our rights to be admitted to universities. We can go into the libraries unescorted, as Woolf could not. We broke through the glass ceiling of the workplace. However, the opportunity to write and to think has been overtaken by old and new duties: now we go to work and then come home to the same roles Woolf bemoaned nearly one hundred years ago, consigning ourselves to the greatest tragedy of all in Woolf's estimation, the lack of "freedom to think of things in themselves."

So do I have anything new to add to the newsletter? I guess I do. Just think how many women, like me, let their busy lives overwhelm their light, their creative spark. We don't simply need rooms of our own today. Today we need the inclination to think rather than to escape; we need time to ourselves to contemplate more than the next item on our never-ending to-do list. In short, today we need lives of our own.

Further reading:

Clement, J. “Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2021 (in billions).” *Statista*, 14 Aug. 2019.

McClinton, Dream. “Global Attention Span is Narrowing and Trends Don’t Last as Long.” *The Guardian*, 17 Apr. 2019.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*. Hothgar Press, 1929.

The views and opinions expressed in the *Writing Center Monthly* do not necessarily reflect those of Isothermal Community College or the Writing Center staff.

ABOUT THE ICC WRITING CENTER

The Isothermal Community College Writing Center is a free service where ICC students can receive help on all aspects of the writing process.

The Writing Center’s location and fall hours are:

ADM 211 (2nd floor, beside the Arts and Sciences offices)

Monday/Wednesday: 8:30am – 4:30pm

Tuesday/Thursday: 8:30am – 6:00pm

You may also submit papers and ask questions on the Writing Center’s Moodle page, the Online Writing Center. Further contact information:

Phone: 395-1407

Email: writingcenteraticc@gmail.com

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