



OC Oraciones

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January 2025 Issue



The theme of our inaugural issue is *home*. All rights to the works published here remain with the individual authors.

Editorial Board

Antonio Guerrero

Jocelyn Sanchez

Chris Tarango

Dylan Garcia

Managing Editor/Advisor

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Editor’s Note

The old saw goes something like, “College is where you find yourself.” This was true enough in my case, but it didn’t happen according to traditional expectations. It took me six years, not four, to earn a bachelor’s degree. I wasn’t motivated at first. I didn’t see the point.

This began to change when I retook Composition 2 with a professor who’d adopted an entirely different approach to the teaching of writing. It allowed for more creativity, and thus room for me to experiment with my own writing voice. With her encouragement, my confidence grew, and with it, my desire to succeed. After four years at college, I finally felt like I belonged there, and I made the most of the following two years.

I joined the student newspaper as a copy editor and contributed occasional editorials. As a result of the latter, I gained not a few enemies, including at least one professor. But my writing also resonated with some readers, and as someone who’d always wanted to be a writer, there was no greater feeling in the world.

These experiences propelled me forward, to graduate school, and eventually back into the classroom as an instructor. These days, I try to model the approach my professor took toward me. I try to make my composition courses spaces where my students become, above all, more comfortable expressing themselves in their own voices.

That was why I wanted to establish this journal—to give OC students a space to tell their stories, share their thoughts, passions, and work with the campus community.

The response far surpassed my expectations. Since August, I’ve been working with a fantastic group of students—and one tutor—who volunteered to serve on *Oraciones*’ editorial board. We asked for, and received, submissions from students, faculty, and staff, and have spent the last several months reading and discussing them with gratitude and admiration.

This first issue represents the culmination of those efforts. Its theme is *home*. The essays, poems, fiction, art, and photography included here speak to a diversity of experience on the subject. There are perspectives from people who have lived in Odessa all their lives, and from those who have ended up here for one reason or another. Each piece is unique and authentic in its own right. But taken as a whole, certain patterns begin to emerge that, like puzzle pieces put together, tell a larger, broader story about this place—a story of its beauty, joy, tragedy, pain, and hope.

The idea of a “literary journal” may be new or confusing to some readers. If it helps, think of this as a print version of Aaron Ganz’s Cabaret Nights—just a different venue for the same kind of wonderful self-expression that the Globe’s stage makes possible. When such spaces are made available, as they were for me when I was a student, something special happens. Risks are taken. Stories are told. Your confidence grows in ways you never imagined. If you’re a reader or audience member, something ends up resonating with you; you feel compelled to share your own story with the group the next time. In other words, there’s potential for real growth and change in these spaces. This is why that old adage—about college being where you find yourself—still holds true. It’s also why I hope this issue helps a few readers see the value of college much earlier in their lives than I did.

Thanks are in order: to the editorial board—Antonio Guerrero, Jocelyn Sanchez, Chris Tarango, and Dylan Garcia; to Creative Services for creating our call for submission flyers and getting the issue online; to Sigma Kappa Delta and its chief advisor, Dr. Karra, for their unwavering support; to my colleagues in the Communications and Humanities department for assisting in getting the word out; to the submitters themselves for being willing to share their stories; and to you, the reader, for taking the time to read them.

Josh Cook
Assistant Professor, English

Contents

Nonfiction

Antonio Guerrero, “What Is Art?”

Shelby H., “The Weight of Empty Pockets”

Aerial S., “Analytical Essay on the Bright Star Memorial”

Jocelyn S., “Shattered Perfection”

Kelly Smith, “The Home of Your Life”

Mallory Sanchez, *Wildflower in the Desert* (photo)

Sam Hval, “God’s Great Canvas: Musings on Living in West Texas”

Natalie M., “Madoka’s Lament”

Dr. Jon Ortiz, “Grieg Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16- Review”

Amber R., “The Water Lily Pond”

Antonio Guerrero, “Understanding Tennyson’s ‘Lady of Shallot’ through the Lens of Depression”

Jocelyn S., “Older”

Jesse M., *Moonlight* (photo)

Poetry

Danielle Collins, *Octoraro Creek* (painting)

Isaac Dominguez, “Return to a Hollowed Home”

Alexa R., “The House That’s Not a Home”

Josselyn P., “The Angel?”

Moises Banda, *The Bell* (sculpture)

Dylan Garcia, “Living in My Head and it Sucks”

Joshua S., “Homebound”

Dr. Laura Holder, *Desert Sunset* (photo)

Sachie Dominguez, “The Living Doll”

Dylan Garcia, “Leave the Posters Off the Walls”

Jordan Tarpley, *Serenity in the Shade* (photo)

Lucas R., “Backstabbed”

Mallory Sanchez, *Texas Thistle* (photo)

Fiction

Lucas R., “World of Sand”

Mallory Sanchez, *Sombrero* (photo)

Arnold Aswile, Selections from *Pandora: Origins of The Misfits* (graphic novel)

Nonfiction

What is Art?

Antonio Guerrero

What is art? Is it the paintings hanging in the Louvre? The movies I play to fall asleep? The words stated on Shakespeare's stage? Is it a rhyme or joke delivered on time? Why do we spend so much time writing poems, songs, plays, and skits?

Am I an artist? I traced my hand to make a turkey. I said my lines on a stage. I can be loud, but I don't own no Emmy. I can make jokes but not enough to be paid. Surely, I'm no artist.

What is art?

I take the art appreciation class and can tell you the difference of styles. The period it was created or mimicking. The use of geometry or vanishing line, the rule of thirds. But they can't tell me what art is, just how to describe it.

I think about art that has lasted the test of time. Why is the statue the Thinker so famous? Why is Shakespeare so renowned? Why does Beethoven have 6.7 million monthly listeners on Spotify in 2024? Why do we get on stage and share what we share?

I want to believe it is because when someone has such an understanding of the human spirit, they want to share it, giving the ability to infuse and evoke such feelings in writing, plays, music and any way to express oneself.

Feelings. It's what brings us humans together. Sharing our life. Our story. Empathizing with others that we are experiencing the same reality but with different eyes. Art is letting others into our shoes. To share a moment. Triumphs, pitfalls, suffering, our feelings and emotions that makes us human and the ability to invoke something is art. Art is created not for the many, but for one person. Someone to stumble upon and leave them different than where they found them. Lessons from the past about our feelings of today.

We are partaking in the oldest ritual known to man. Sharing. Voicing the art that we created by ourselves to share with any open ears. Not to get rich but to enrich the lives of others with feelings and inspiration.

We shouldn't ask "Is this art?" but "what emotion or feeling do I have about this?"

And after sharing this with you, I am an artist.

-performed at Cabaret Night on August 23, 2024 by Antonio Guerrero, who is a student and employee at Odessa College.

The Weight of Empty Pockets

Shelby H.

The scent of my mother's worry, a blend of cheap fabric softener and unspoken anxieties, still lingers in my memory. It clung to the hand-me-down clothes I wore, a constant reminder of our precarious financial situation. Growing up with empty pockets wasn't a singular event, but a pervasive atmosphere that colored every aspect of my life.

We weren't destitute, not in the traditional sense. We had a roof, a leaky one, over our heads and food, though often repetitive and bland, on the table. But the constant struggle to make ends meet cast a long shadow. Birthday presents were modest affairs, vacations were unheard of, and new clothes were a luxury reserved for the first day of school. Every purchase, no matter how small, was meticulously calculated, a silent negotiation between necessity and desire.

This constant financial pressure wasn't just about material deprivation; it was the emotional toll it took. I vividly remember the shame I felt when I couldn't afford to join school trips or buy the latest trendy sneakers. The fear in my parents' eyes when the car broke down, the weight of their unspoken worries pressing down on my young shoulders. It was a childhood punctuated by whispered conversations about bills, the ever-present threat of eviction, and the constant need to be resourceful, to make do with less.

Yet, amidst the hardship, there were invaluable lessons learned. I developed a deep appreciation for the value of hard work, witnessing firsthand my parents' tireless efforts to provide for our family. I learned the importance of resourcefulness, of stretching every dollar and finding creative solutions to everyday problems. Most importantly, I cultivated an unwavering sense of empathy and understanding for those facing similar struggles.

Looking back, I realize that those early financial struggles, while difficult, were instrumental in shaping who I am today. They instilled in me a strong work ethic, a deep sense of gratitude for what I have, and an unwavering determination to create a better future for myself and my loved ones. The weight of those empty pockets, though heavy at the time, ultimately forged a resilience and inner strength that continue to guide me today.

Shelby H. is a student at Odessa College.

Analytical Essay on the Bright Star Memorial

Aerial S.

Dedicated to the victims of the August 31, 2019 shooting

On August 29, 2024, the Bright Star Memorial Plaza in Odessa, Texas held a small event to honor the fifth-year anniversary of the Odessa mass shooting. Back on August 31, 2019, a mobile mass shooting occurred throughout the city of Odessa which ended in 7 deaths and 25 injured. This was a tragic event that impacted citizens, businesses, and emergency response crews. Although it has been five long years the memorial is finally ready to be presented to the public. The unveiling of a beautiful bronze sculpture is the latest annual event to be held in the city of Odessa, a dedication that was worth the wait. The memorial sits at the plaza located on the University of Texas Permian Basin campus and is always open to the public. The thoughts and efforts placed into this memorial art piece are a remembrance that the city of Odessa and many families were forever changed by a mass shooting.

The purpose of this art piece really brings honor, a sense of sympathy and imposes healing. Photos displayed in the news article from *Odessa American* show the bronze-metal sculpture is cylinder in shape and towering at 11 feet high and 5 feet in diameter. Another photo shows the green “Patina” put on the metal to protect it from the outside elements, so it may not present itself as bronze for that reason. Inscribed into the walls of the sculpture are names of those who were killed and injured, along with messages from their families. There are stone benches and some developing landscape that surrounds the sculpture for a more welcoming feeling. This memorial expresses remembrance of the grief that occurs among many families.

When you look at this sculpture you automatically see how massive it is, elevated 20 feet off the ground. The inscribed messages really capture the feelings and emotions of those who have spent five long years going through grief and healing. The city of Odessa, UTPB officials, other organizations and a Maryland artist all devoted their efforts to the memorial stating, “This is a piece where you really want to capture the feelings of the families who lost loved ones during this tragic weekend” (*Odessa American*). In the evening the memorial can also be admired as it will also emit light. Inside the center of the sculpture a lightbulb will project the names and messages inscribed into the walls. This gives another perspective of the art piece and can be symbolic to how we can find light in the darkness. We did unfortunately face a loss as a community, but we can come together to heal and move forward. Therefore, I believe the tribute in Odessa is also a great way to bring awareness about the loss that this community has faced.

The sculpture photos displayed by the *Odessa American* show a grand piece of art by the artist Jim Sanborn from Maryland. The mural is also shown in the photos presented by the *Odessa American* prior to being placed in the Bright Star Plaza. The photos show a metal sculpture that reflects grief but represents honor and remembrance of those who were impacted. The towering height of the sculpture reflects how big the loss was to our community and many families. It symbolizes just how big that impact was on the city of Odessa. The inscriptions on the walls reflect the grief and memories of the lives that were lost. The efforts behind the mural reflect the sympathy and healing from the community, for the community. The lightbulb that shines through the night was a cherry on top. For everyone to see this mural any day, any second, day or night to remember is a substantial element for this memorial. The memorial placement also creates connection with other families in the community to learn and understand the impact this event made. This is now part of our history, something to teach my children and my children’s children.

The memorial placed in this community is an addition to other exquisite art touches found in the town. This art piece will bestow great sentimental value to Odessa. We might forget but we can now take the time to remember that some families faced a very scary day. Even through the grief of five long years the loss can feel like it occurred only yesterday. The whole community would have faced the shooter, just as the victims and those who were injured. Death is inevitable and we can all take this opportunity to reflect on the thought that tomorrow is not promised. As I navigate through grief this past year after the loss of my dad, I think about what kind of impact a memorial makes. A memorial in honor of my dad would bring so much comfort to my sorrow. I can only imagine the overwhelming joy and impact these events and memorials from the last five years have had on both the families and the city.

This memorial makes a greater impact by being made available to visitors also. Anyone can take the time to visit the sculpture and learn more. I have taken my time to learn about the efforts and meaning behind this memorial art piece and it has been emotional to say the least. I hope to see it in person with my family and read the messages inscribed. I know that it will make a lasting impression on the community and families that were impacted. I believe it is important that this reflects on the positivity of healing and managing grief. This sculpture creates a foundation in the community to bring awareness and above all honor. If pictures are worth 1,000 words, then the pictures of the Bright Star memorial should be worth 2,000 words.

Aerial S. is a college mom of 3, continuing her education and working towards completing her bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. She has successfully obtained her Level 1 certification for Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement. Most recently she celebrated her first ever associate’s degree. She has really enjoyed being a student at Odessa College these past few years and she is looking forward to pursuing her future career in Juvenile Justice. She has always enjoyed writing because it is such a great way to express her thoughts and emotions. She is grateful that she is able to commit to learning so that she write more exceptional essays. Through great support she was encouraged to submit this essay.

Shattered Perfection

Jocelyn S.

The fluorescent lighting flickered overhead; the white sterile walls grew closer with every blink, my eyes struggling to stay open as I fought to focus in school. An unending cycle of assignments and quizzes occupied the hole in my life. I filled myself with unending knowledge, praying that it would give me the comfort I desperately needed, but it didn't. I popped like a balloon; my composure slipped through my fingers like sand, and suddenly the pressure hit. My chest was being crushed by the responsibility of being an honors student, being the perfect daughter, and being flawless. I sat there frozen, my hands shaking; it was becoming hard to breathe.

Suddenly I was 13 again and being lectured. "Grades are everything," my mother said. How could it mean everything when I couldn't do anything? Yet, I didn't dare talk back to her, it was my fault for getting a B- on my quiz. I pushed for the perfect grade and her approval. I searched for anything and everything to achieve her goals. I longed for simplicity to come back into my life even if I would never admit it aloud. It was too much to ask after she gave me everything.

Sleepless nights grew with the number of assignments I had due. I began to go blank, procrastinate, and cry over simple tasks. Still, I always returned to my mother's words; "Grades are everything," I'd whisper to myself as I sat in my room staring at my papers, determined to make her proud. However, my grades began to dwindle along with my self-worth. If it wasn't perfect then I wasn't either. My mind slipped in and out, I cried in my room failure lurking around the corner waiting for me to lower my guard. To pounce and sink its teeth and claws into me, to claim me as its prime prey.

In the middle of my spiraling chaos, I was asked "How are you?" by the examiner. I shrank, I felt small and helpless as I couldn't reply, for once I couldn't find the answer to a question. My mouth became bitter and dry as tears blurred my vision. I sat there crying as they tried to help me, yet all I could ask was what was wrong with me. "Is the pursuit of perfection costing me more than I can afford?" I thought to myself. My well-being and my peace of mind were growing distant with each passing day; they grew further and further out of reach until it just seemed like a hopeless dream. Everything was a beautiful mess that day, the day I realized my grades weren't who I was, the day no one could take their eyes off of me like I was a tragedy, the day I realized I finally burnt out.

Jocelyn S. is a freshman in college studying her major in psychology. Interests in the field of human behavior and mental health spur her to attain great things in the psychological sciences. Other than academics, she is an aspiring writer, developing her style and voice in writing. She maintains growth and evolution both personally and professionally, fueled by an immense love for understanding the human mind and ink-expressing her thoughts.

The Home of Your Life

Kelly Smith

When thinking of the ‘idea’ of home, there are many different perspectives. Home is where you grew up or ‘where the heart’ is. I am not so sure...I think that ‘home’ is a feeling and that it can be felt whenever you need it, wherever you are.

If I had to pick a physical space to call home, it would be my hometown of Lake Arrowhead. It is where most of my earliest core memories are. Where I spent hours singing ‘Part of Your World’ on a rock that was just like Ariel’s, the big scar still on my leg from where I didn’t quite make the jump over the wall while playing tag, and where I spent hours practicing my figure skating on the parquet floors. It is also the last place my family, my sense of home, was intact. It is where my mom made the curtains in my bedroom, where we watched *Baywatch* in the den, where my parents sat us down in the living room to tell us she had cancer. Standing in the kitchen hearing her tell me ‘I love you’ for the last time. It is where a family of four became a family of three on a cold day in March. I can still feeling the emptiness of a home that would never hear my mom’s laughter again.

It shifted into a home of a new normal. Where my dad made pancakes more frequently (they are still my favorite), where he helped ‘Sun In’ my hair in eighth grade, helped me with my homework, and eventually where we left to go to a new home on the other side of the country.

This move is why I think home is a feeling. Greenville never felt like home and I have lived many places since. But the friends I made along the way, they are home. The best friend who had Facetime coffee dates with me during Covid as I got over a guy and being alone in a new town, to my other best friends who let me become a member of the family, telling my godson stories and showing him photos so he knows his ‘Aunt Kels.’ Or the other best friend who sent you pages of encouragements from her desktop calendar during one of your hardest periods that now decorate your office door, hoping that they will give a student the same hope that they gave you.

Then you move to a new ‘home’ in a place so far removed from anything you’ve ever known. A new friend who give you a housewarming gift of the most beautiful bowls since you might need them (I did) or the friends who have come to fix things around your house because you asked. The friends who took you to doctor’s appointments during your cancer scare without you even having to ask. The friends who encouraged you to share your stories in a public setting. They, and so many others, have made Odessa home. The one who might mean the most is the friend who thought you needed a dog and found you a Gus, who you now cannot imagine your life without.

If you were to ask me the place that feels most like home, I think it might surprise you. It is the Grand Canyon. We used to vacation there when I was a kid; it was the last place we visited as a family of four and the first place as a family of three. I still feel my mom around me when I am there and it makes me smile. That she is still there. She, my dad, and brother are my always home.

When you think about the people who have made up your life, those who have been there from the beginning and even those who were just a footnote, they have provided that feeling of warmth. The feeling of what home should be. A home that is always with you, no matter where you are. The home that has allowed me to be brave and live furiously. Home is the people that make up the most beautiful life.

A native of California, Kelly is an avid traveler, photographer, and writer. An advocate for solo travel and living furiously, she runs The Next Great Adventure website. When not traveling, Kelly teaches Government and History at Odessa College. She lives in Odessa with her favorite adventure companion, Gus.

Wildflower in the Desert
Mallory Sanchez, OC Librarian



Mallory Sanchez is a librarian at the OC Learning Resources Center. She loves to take photos of plants and insects that she observes in nature.

God’s Great Canvas: Musings on Living in West Texas

Sam Hval

I will never understand the desert; it’s not in my blood. I’ve met strangers here who have the sun baked into the sags and wrinkles of their skin. Comparatively, I am a smooth, pale young man—a man of tall pine trees and mountains. My snow is deep and lasts for months. My sky is interrupted by tall buildings and rolling hills blanketed by forest. But here, in West Texas, the only thing stretched before you is God’s great canvas, full of baby blue skies and wispy clouds.

It takes about 150 miles before you see anything resembling those fabled hills from which I came. Even then, the colors are muted, drab, gray, with only specks of green shrubbery in small clusters.

When you drive through these small towns—the Brownfield’s, Tahoka’s, Garden City’s, and Crane’s—time stops its inexorable march and thrusts you into a place you seem to understand but never knew. Those old, beaten-down “GENERAL STORE’s” and “POST OFFICE’s” flicker past the car window like sepia-toned silent movies about the American West. You can see the folks trapped in these images stumbling down sidewalks, sitting in large porch chairs and watching the future cut through their slice of the past. These pictures, as Wordsworth said of nostalgia, “flash upon that inward eye”: an uncanny comfort, a stolen memory or forgotten world that had once been held together by the duct tape of Westerns and ‘good old American values.’ And then you hit the freeway, and those feelings dissipate into the vast plains once again, as if they never existed, and ahead of you are only cows and endless sky.

I find solace in the fact that everyone here seems just as disturbed by the enormity of the Texas desert as me. They frequently declare desires of escape and freedom from what they feel as a punishing, oppressive atmosphere. For a while I wondered, How could someone find freedom in the cluster of concrete and overpowering mountains I call home? But having lived here for over a year, I think I understand those desperate pleas to abscond from this so-called “armpit of Texas.”

The largeness of the sky and the absence of anything to hold onto is lonely. You are reminded of how little control you have over your surroundings. There is a reason you hardly see anyone walking outside here, instead tumbling along in tall trucks, compensating for their smallness with comically large vehicles. Going outside compels you to confront that great, big emptiness and the searing heat. Forces of nature are acting against you, not for you. There is nothing to hold onto, no easily graspable fact of reality or environment. All you have is the dusty grays of the plains and the midnight darkness which falls over everything like a black cloak.

How could anyone living here find meaning, when confronted with the overwhelming sense of vastness and lack of control? Where are we to go, when for miles ahead of us there is only more dirt and more sky? The brown pumpjacks and their autonomous pistons don’t help—a reminder of what keeps this place alive. The oil is the blood of the land, which brings forth both money and meaning in the absence of both.

I took an Uber to the airport during the summer. Once the triple-digit temperatures invaded the cool, familiar comfort of winter, I too became desperate for escape. The driver had the haggard look of someone beaten down by the very heat in which I, privileged and grateful, was ready to leave for a vacation.

He was older, looking to be in his 60s, but it’s hard to tell which wrinkles come from age and which from sun. We struck up conversation. He’d worked in the oilfields for most of his life, since he was 18. Uber was his escape.

We traded the usual stock words, “Man, this heat is crazy, huh?” “It seems to get worse every year.” “I can’t wait to leave.”

But here he was, driving strangers for money. Trudging along in the open west still searching for something to carry him along. What else was he to do? When you’re born here, you’re part of its fabric, tethered to the dirt.

Even now, when I drive and see how big, how strong, the sky feels in this strange and familiar place, I think about the way we continue to push through those discomforting anxieties, which so often threaten us into submission.

I think about the time I stopped for gas on the way back from Dallas. It was late evening, and the sun had dipped below the horizon, scattering across the sky those magnificent purples and pinks that seem to come from another universe. They exist for the briefest of moments, gentle reminders that there is still beauty in the places where you least expect it to be found.

I think about the aftermath of storms—those astounding, divine storms, so rare and so powerful—the way rain scatters across asphalt roads and shimmers as the clouds clear when light greets us again.

I think about the time a stranger smiled a great, authentic smile as we passed each other in the grocery store. In Washington, those smiles are faded and obligatory. Here, they’re radiant and kind.

I think about my students, with all their humor and wit, their dry acceptance of the circumstances in which they’ve been born into—the cruel and confusing world, with the cruel and confusing desert as their home.

I think about the time I asked a colleague of mine about why he moved back to West Texas. For a time, he lived in East Texas with his family, but recently returned in his older age. It’s a question many people who live here would ask: what were you thinking?

He told me that in East Texas, you can never tell when a storm is coming. The trees and the hills mask the oncoming dark clouds. In West Texas, you know the second you walk outside if it’s going to rain.

In the stupendous, overwhelming nothingness of the desert sky, there is, in spite of all its confounding power, a flicker of comfort. And when the scarce rain clears, God’s luminous fingers beam from beyond the clouds and light up the strange, sad world below it.

I will never understand the desert. But I have lived here long enough to know that the desert sun is just the condition of our life: beautiful but painful, punishing but graceful. Amidst the impossible enormity of the desert horizon, there is a shining face. Within nature and its mighty grip, there is loneliness, there is submission, and there is sustenance. I accept my smallness, knowing I am only another brushstroke waiting to be painted onto God’s great canvas.

Sam Hval is an English instructor at Odessa College, teaching writing and literature courses. He graduated from Eastern Washington University with a B.A. and M.A. in English. Originally from the much cooler temperatures of the Pacific Northwest, he has now found home in the heat of Odessa, Texas. When he’s not busy teaching, he writes short fiction and novels, as well as essays on film, literary criticism, pedagogy, faith, and whatever else is on his mind. You can find more of his writing through his Substack blog “Treading Through Dreams,” which you can subscribe to for free. You can also find him posting about his writing on Instagram: @sam_hval.

Madoka's Lament

Natalie M.

What begins as a run-of-the-mill “magical girl” anime quickly progresses into an exploration of fate, sacrifice, and the ultimate price of power and how they relate to one another. The story interrupts its initial light-hearted beginning by introducing young girls that are eventually subject to a series of trials and hardships that are psychologically grueling in nature. Through the use of bleak symbolism, deviation of genre expectations, and emotional manipulation, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* creates a compelling critique of idealism and the hidden dangers of wish fulfillment.

Visual elements are a significant piece in the show's narrative as they are used to highlight its darker undertones at certain points. When the art design drastically shifts from pleasant and colorful to the grotesque imagery seen in the witches' labyrinths, it is meant to represent their cognitive distress. This unique mixed-media approach is a combination of standard Japanese animation and surrealism techniques derived from Dadaist collages. The ending result is highly reminiscent of paper-cut stop motion, which was incorporated on purpose to emphasize the distortion between the glamorized view and real consequences of the magical world (“Puella Magi Madoka Magica: Russian and Czech Influence in Japanese Animation”). A sense of unease can be evoked from the audience that trumps the belief that possessing magic is for the greater good – instead reinforcing that the witch battles are essentially sinister.

Madoka Magica subverts the expectation of the “magical girl” genre by turning it on its head into a tale of tragedy and sacrifice. The plot follows ordinary middle schooler Madoka and how she unravels the dismal truth about her friends Sayaka, Mami, Kyouko, and Homura, whom were granted a wish in exchange for a contract of their services by a talking cat called Kyubey. They are then tasked to defeat forces known as witches in their world by harnessing their abilities and weapons from magical objects named “Soul Gems”. Rather than this transformation being an innocent endeavor, it eventually becomes a burden when one is polluted and turns into a “Grief Seed” – the egg of which witches are born (“That Would Be Truly Wonderful” 21:40). The audience is forced to evaluate idealism as a nuanced subject and reconsider the cost of power in this trope; the main catalyst of the girls' inevitable spiral into despair is directly connected to the wishes they make.

Author Gen Urobuchi masterfully manipulates pathos through his disheartening character arcs. A prime example is Homura's wish to return to her first encounter with Madoka when she discovered that her contract led to her death. She repeatedly relives traumatic events while struggling with her own internal conflict of being unable to save her from her fate in every timeline. The true feelings Homura has regarding Madoka illustrates the extent of her desperation that coincide with her endless attempts to prevent her from becoming a Magical Girl – to no avail. Another example is Sayaka's descent into hopelessness after she wishes to physically heal her childhood friend's injury. Her deluded judgement causing her to believe it will satiate the true desire she has of him reciprocating her feelings is what eventually turns her into a witch. These plot devices were implemented intentionally in order for viewers to understand Madoka's sacrifice and shatters the illusion of wish fulfillment (Wikipedia Contributors).

Logos dilemmas are introduced through hive-mind Kyubey's portrayal of utilitarian logic: by omitting crucial details of his contract, he can persuade the Magical Girls to carry out his philosophy. It is later revealed that the energy produced by their existence sustains the balance of the universe, posing a morally ambiguous argument for why their suffering is necessary. His true motive behind his actions involves countering entropy by utilizing the cycle of their magic to thwart the heat death of the universe – which is a real-life theory (“I'd Never Allow That to Happen” 6:22). Urobuchi's primary goal in writing this character was to highlight the ethical dissonance between Kyubey's callous perspective on human emotion and the girls' psychological turmoil (Wikipedia Contributors). This manipulation tactic is effective in raising questions about morality of the whole versus the morality of the individual.

Urobuchi successfully diverts from genre conventions through his dissection on the grim reality of idealism. His deliberate use of bizarre symbolism, complex rhetorical devices, and personal traits in the development of his characters are all intrinsic to the message he intends to communicate – be careful what you wish for. By stripping away the bright “magical girl” fantasy, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* illuminates the intensity of personal desire and how it correlates with the ramifications of heroism.

Natalie M. grew up in Midland, Texas, and moved here to Odessa in 2020. She is currently a Cosmetology major taking remedial classes towards her degree. Outside of school, she loves to draw and write in her free time. She lives with her two roommates and their cats that they enjoy spoiling. She enjoys listening to bands like Get Scared, Spiritbox, My Chemical Romance, Pierce the Veil, and many more. She's into an array of media, some obscure and others not. She has a Five Nights at Freddy's tattoo on her right arm because she lives the game that much. She thinks of herself as someone who has a big heart with big feelings, which she can only hope to be true to her friends.

Grieg Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16- Review

Performance by the West Texas Symphony, Dr. Andrew Cooperstock- Piano

Saturday, November 9, 2024- Wagner Noël Performing Arts Center, Midland, TX

Reviewed by Dr. Jon Ortiz

First performed in 1868, Grieg’s Piano Concerto in A minor is a favorite all over the world. I was extremely excited to learn that one of my favorite Romantic era pieces of all time was to be performed by our local symphony. This piece has a special place in my heart due to where I was in my musical development when I first heard and performed this piece. I was a Freshman at Texas Tech University when a doctoral student, who had been perfecting this piece for many years, was invited to play the concerto as a soloist with the Texas Tech Symphonic Band, under the baton of Dr. Eric Allen. A concerto is a type of musical composition for a solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra. It is quite the achievement to work a concerto up to a point that it can be played in public, as most of these types of pieces require virtuosic players to accomplish them. After performing this piece in a concert setting, I had a newfound respect and appreciation for the work that must be done by a soloist to perform this piece at such a high level.

Fast-forward to today, and you can imagine the great memories of college that came flooding back to me upon hearing this piece in a live setting once again. Dr. Andrew Cooperstock performed this piece wonderfully and brought a new perspective to certain passages of the music that have been interpreted in numerous ways- each with a personal touch that showed his years of study and dedication to the craft of piano performance. A performer of any piece has options on how to interpret certain parts of the music. They must make specific decisions on small nuances that make the piece come across in a way that they want. To portray a piece of music exactly as an intended by the composer or performer is such a difficult task to accomplish.

Dr. Andrew Cooperstock is Professor of Piano at the University of Colorado Boulder. He holds degrees from the prestigious Juilliard School as well as the Cincinnati and Peabody Conservatories. A world-renowned performer, Dr. Cooperstock has performed in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the United Nations. Maestro Gary Lewis, who currently serves as Professor of Conducting at the University of Colorado Boulder, invited his friend and colleague Dr. Cooperstock to join the West Texas Symphony this season and it was spectacular.

The first movement of the concerto was excellent! Beginning with the hallmark Timpani crescendo, the opening piano flourish was powerful and moving. Dr. Cooperstock was deliberate in his approach to the first notes which led to the conductor and members of the orchestra to approach their entrance with a similar unhurriedness. Departing from many recordings of this work that I have heard over the years, parts of the first movement were more rubato in nature and drew the listener in with anticipation of what was coming next. Even the piano cadenza at the end of this movement was broad, relaxed, and gave a sense of calculation, giving insight into the pianist’s preparation.

Movement two, labeled Adagio, is a slow and lyrical section of the piece that utilizes mutes to achieve a rich, warm sound from the strings. Before the piano entered, beautiful solos were passed around the orchestra with great care. Cellist Suyeon Kim and Horn player Scott Millichamp performed wonderfully and played their solos to perfection. Millichamp would continue to interact with the soloist throughout the work and there was a high level of sensitivity from everyone in the orchestra. The slow, longing lines written by Grieg came across beautifully in the main hall of the Wagner Noël. The orchestra played to the strengths of the acoustics of the stage to achieve a magnificent musical result.

The final movement of the work features a dance-like theme which moves around the orchestra. Dr. Cooperstock played with such prowess that it brought back the same deliberate impression first demonstrated at the beginning of his performance. Some of the flourishes were not as fast as other performers might play them, but for the first time I was able to grasp more of the musical material presented within those very flourishes. Once again, solos were written into the work by Grieg. This time a flute was featured, with each passage masterfully executed by Dr. Lyndsay Eiben of UTPB. The decrescendos throughout this movement came across very well in the hall and drew the audience members into the piece. By performing this piece at such a high artistic level, it is my hope that members of the audience who have never attended a symphony concert will look forward to enjoying another event in the near future!

Dr. Jon Ortiz is Associate Professor of Music at Odessa College. He serves as the Assistant Band Director, as well as Instructor of Music Theory Studies. He also serves as a visiting clinician for ECISD and works every week with the local school band programs.

Jon received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Percussion Performance from Texas Tech University. Throughout his time at Texas Tech (2012-2016 & 2019-2022,) Jon studied with Alan Shinn, Lisa Rogers, Mike Mixtacki, and Brian Kendrick.

Jon earned his Master of Music in Percussion Performance from Middle Tennessee State University where he studied with Lalo Davila, Julie Davila, and Brian Kendrick.

Throughout his degree-work, Jon has worked with multiple marching band drumlines, steel drum bands, salsa bands, percussion ensembles, and private lesson students. He has had many students throughout the years and strives to instill excellence and a love of music in each of them.

Dr. Ortiz is a Percussion Education Artist with Innovative Percussion and proudly endorses their products. Jon is loving his time as a professor at Odessa College!

The Water Lily Pond

Amber R.

Art is a concept that is present in many different forms. It is an important part of human nature to create, and almost everything that humans create can be considered art. An aspiring painter, in particular, may take inspiration from many different artists and indulge in many different styles of painting in order to truly find their own style. One artist that every painter should take notes from is Claude Monet. His pieces are truly the definition of impressionism, especially his piece *The Water Lily Pond*. Painted at the turn of the twentieth century, with delicate brushstrokes and brilliant colors, it is both an excellent example of the elegance of his art style and impressionism in general. The still scene on a “36.5 x 29 in.” canvas has the ability to move both artists and its casual viewers (“Bridge Over a Pond of Water Lilies”).

Unlike many artists, Monet was recognized for his brilliance during his lifetime, but only later in life. He received fame and fortune, but continued to paint and even built a garden for the purpose of inspiration for his paintings. Thus, *The Water Lily Pond* is notable for not only being one of the artist’s last paintings, but also for being painted in the artist’s own backyard. The piece is largely inspired by the pond that the artist built in his backyard which consisted of a “Japanese-style wood bridge” and, of course, water lilies (Groom). The painting effectively pulls its observer in and makes them wonder about the story behind its breathtaking brushstrokes. Monet’s decision to use vivid oil paints of different hues of greens, blues, and yellows brings the painting and its water lilies to life and pulls its observers into Monet’s eccentric universe. The greenery, along with the reflections on the water, make one feel as though they are able to take a stroll through Monet’s garden, smell the flowers, and truly be immersed in nature.

Impressionism is one of the most stunning among the different styles of painting, as it exhibits the way the artist sees the world. While Monet has hundreds of impressionist pieces, *The Water Lily Pond* is the perfect example of exhibiting how its artist sees the world, because it’s possible to compare Monet’s inspiration with the piece itself. One is able to take a peek at Monet’s painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, then take a flight to Giverny, France and take a walk over the bridge in his garden and truly experience what Monet experienced in his lifetime and see firsthand what inspired his paintings. This very aspect of the painting allows its viewers to truly comprehend the ways in which he saw fit to create his masterpiece. *The Water Lily Pond* immediately attracts its viewers to it with its romantic appeal and elegant scenery. His emphasis on the water lilies, attention to detail, but also the details he leaves out and the way the painting is realistic, but not so realistic that it can be considered realism is inspiring.

While the painting created in 1899 is his first take on his view of the garden he worked so diligently on, it is certainly not the last. Many may consider the other versions of *The Water Lily Pond* to be superior to that of the first, as they were made later and may exhibit more details or more accurate colors. However, in reality, all of them are considerably alluring and have their own attributes or changes that Monet made in his way of painting that make them appealing to the eye. For example, his “35.5 x 36.5 in.” painting titled *Water-Lily Pond, Symphony in Green* exhibits much more vibrant pinks in the water lilies, more bluish hues in the greenery, and more pronounced differentiations between the types of plants, but when comparing them, it’s not possible to pick a favorite (“Bridge Over a Pond of Water Lilies”). Their differences don’t take away from one another or make one less of a masterpiece than the other. Rather, they complement each other and give their viewers more of a glimpse inside Monet’s world.

Art, in general, is a way of expressing oneself and showing it to others. While painting *The Water Lily Pond*, it is likely that Monet simply wanted to share his perspective with those who see it, as he had a particular love for water lilies after “[seeing] them at the Paris universal exhibition in 1889” (Marsh). While Monet may not have meant for his painting to have any symbolic meaning, the very presence of the water lilies in his pond have it. Due to the fact that they are fast-growing plants, water lilies are a symbol of resurrection, and through his art, Monet and his mind are constantly being resurrected, especially in those he influences to take on the art of impression or mimic his style of painting.

Regardless of whether Monet meant for it to have any aspects to it other than being pleasing to the eye, *The Water Lily Pond* is a piece that transcends time and allows its observers to see into the mind of its painter, almost creating a connection between those who see it and Monet himself. Even though he is no longer with us, his legacy and his way of viewing the world remains through his efforts to “[capture the] beauty [of water lilies] on canvas,” his impressionism, and those he influences to paint in a similar way he did (Marsh). Simply put, Claude Monet will forever be a significant part of the art world and a master of impressionism.

Amber R. is an Odessa College Student.

Understanding Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott” through the Lens of Depression

Antonio Guerrero

Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s poem “Lady of Shalott” has been subject to many interpretations. Some delve into the treatment of women in the Victorian era, while others view it as a cautionary tale of social isolation. This review and analysis of the poem sheds light on an undertone that is hard to see but, once noticed, allows every stanza to fit together like a puzzle piece. That is, with the lens and metaphors for depression. The Lady of Shalott's isolation, yearning for connection, and the poem on her chest at the end are all clues to the inner monologue of a person who is depressed and seeks escape.

Isolation is used as a symbol of depression. The Lady of Shalott is physically separated from the world and from the people of Camelot. Those suffering from depression often feel different from their peers and struggle to form connections with others. They frequently seek solitude in seclusion, shutting themselves off from the outside world. The island of Shalott is the place she chooses to be, cut off from the world of Camelot. Because of this, the line “A curse is on her, if she stays” should be taken literally (Tennyson 39). If she remains in this tower, secluded from the world, the curse of depression and loneliness will consume her.

Her tapestry is the physical manifestation of her yearning for connection. The Lady is building, in the loom, a life that she thinks she cannot obtain from the reflection in the mirror—dreams that will never come true, places that she will never touch. The tapestries, being depictions of the outside world built inside the tower, could be a metaphor for a depressed person making sense of their emotions, their relation to the world, and understanding themselves internally. Building the world around herself in isolation, with a skewed perspective from the mirror, fuels her feelings of being stuck and lost. She knows this is not a way to live. Her being “half sick of shadows” is the self-realization that life is passing her by (Tennyson 71). Knowing that life is more than the tower but unable to face it. Building resentment to those who can walk and cast a shadow.

It is clear in the poem that she knows she wants something, though she does not know exactly what it is. That is, until she sees Lancelot in the mirror. Tennyson’s use of the line “She made three paces thro' the room” shows that she is contemplating her next move. She is smitten and desires a connection with Lancelot, but she will have to give up her tower, her art, and her outlook on life to be with him. When faced with this choice, she chooses not to look in the mirror but at reality (out the window). This simulates what a depressed person must endure: making a choice on their own behalf to pursue something they want. To escape the tower of depression, one must find something worthy of leaving for. For the Lady of Shalott, Lancelot was worth leaving the tower for. He was worth venturing into the unknown to understand herself and her emotions.

For someone to progress into a new life, the old one must perish. Leaving her old self behind to be made anew symbolizes her death—not as a death of flesh, but the death of the lady in the tower stuck in Shalott. The Lady of Shalott's dead body bears a poem to those who are still in Shalott (the state of depression), conveying that there is a path to escape. Ultimately, the poem reads: “Seek answers for your life; life isn't a fairy tale; it is happening right now. Go forth, enjoy it, and don't be afraid—take ownership of who you are.” She was the Lady of Shalott; now she is enjoying her life.

In conclusion, Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott” explores depression through themes of isolation and the desire for connection. The Lady’s journey from her tower to the outside world reflects the challenges faced by those dealing with mental health issues. Her tapestry not only symbolizes her dreams but also highlights the barriers that depression creates. Ultimately, Tennyson encourages readers to confront their struggles and seek meaningful relationships as a way to escape feelings of despair. This message goes beyond the Victorian era, resonating with anyone who has felt trapped by their emotions and urging them to find answers and embrace life beyond their fears.

Older

Jocelyn S.

I remember when my mom would hold my hand and walk me through everything, then life was clear. I knew what I was doing and where I was going. I miss the times she would sit me down and braid my hair, the times my sisters teased me, and when I was my dad's little girl. Now everything's changed. I'm 17, basically considered a woman. No one should be holding my hand, guiding me through life, and praising me for every little achievement. I should no longer need the comfort I got from my sisters, and I shouldn't need the constant reassurance I got from my father, right? It's bewildering how people can believe that simply because I grew up, I can handle any curveball life decides to throw. More than ever, I need a hand to hold, sisters to rely on, and a father to support me. Yet, here I am going through college alone, left to build a new home. I crave comfort, I yearn for stability. My home is deteriorating from the inside out and all I can do is watch. The memories are being suppressed by a caving ceiling, lost love seeping through the cracks in the walls, and laughter being carried away by a cool breeze. My home is crumbling, but once I'm older it'll change. My home will be rebuilt; this time memories will hold it high. Love will fill the holes and laughter will fill the air, keeping it safe and warm. However, the old memories will not be abandoned; they'll form the foundation, a stronghold to keep my new home from crumbling. A nostalgic landing for new memories to build. When I'm older, I'll hold my daughter's hand.



Moonlight
Jesse M., Odessa College Student

Poetry



Octoraro Creek
Danielle Collins, OC Staff

Return to a Hollowed Home

Isaac Dominguez

I went back to that house today,
Where shadows used to play,
Where laughter danced through every room,
Now swallowed by decay.
The ivy climbs the broken walls,
The glass is cracked and clear,
But in my heart, I hear the echoes
Of a time that once was dear.

The gate is rusted, barely stands,
The steps have worn away,
The door is hung with crooked hinges
That once would swing with play.
And all around, the silence speaks
Of moments that have passed—
The love, the loss, the fleeting joy,
The things we thought would last.

I pushed the door with trembling hands,
The wood was cold and dry,
And through the cracks, the wind did howl
As if it too would cry.
The hall once bright with morning sun,
Now dimmed and filled with dust,
The echoes of our childish feet
Lie scattered, broken, lost.

The staircase creaked beneath my weight,
Each step a whispered plea,
To remember days of innocence,
Of who I used to be.
The walls, they moaned of love and pain,
Of dreams that dared to fly,
Now chipped and faded, colored grey,
Beneath an endless sky.

The kitchen where mother stood,
Of sweetness, rich and warm—
Yet all that’s left are empty jars,
And the stains of years gone by,
The table where we gathered with father
For dinners, prayers, and fights—
Now only dust and fractured glass
Reflect the moonlit night.

I climbed the steps, with aching limbs,
To rooms where time stood still,
Where once I played, and hid my fears,
And ran through every thrill.
The wallpaper is peeling now,
The bed no longer soft,
Yet in the cracks, I swear I see
The ghosts of who I lost.

I remember nights of endless rain,
Of whispered hopes and dreams,
Of stories told beneath the glow
Of candlelight’s soft gleam.
Now shadows curl in empty space,
The fireplace is cold,
And in the hearth, the ashes speak
Of promises grown old.

I stood before my childhood door,
The one that knew my tears,
The one that whispered comfort,
When I was lost in fears.
But now it’s empty, hollowed out,
A portal to the past,
And in its frame, I see myself,
A memory too vast.

The breeze it calls me, soft and low,
To leave the past behind,
Yet still I linger in the place
Where once my heart would find
The warmth of love, the strength of dreams,
The bonds we never break—
But all that’s left now is the dust
And silence, wide awake.

I walk away with heavy heart,
The house fades from my view,
But in its walls, the whispers stay,
Of all that I once knew.
The bitter sweet, the joy and grief,
The tears that fall, the smile—
They linger here, in every crack,
And follow me for miles.

The house was hollow long ago,
Its souls already left this world,
But I, I carry all its weight
And walk this road now alone.
For though it stands in ruin now,
A place where none shall stay,
Inside my heart, it is alive—
A home that never fades away.

Isaac Dominguez is a history instructor at The University of North Texas and an adjunct instructor at Odessa College. He earned both his BA in Biology and History and his MA in History from the University of Texas Permian Basin. It was during his time at UTPB that he had his poem “Alone in Shadows” published in the student literary journal Sandstorm in 2020. His poem “A Hollowed Home” has recently been accepted for publication in the Odessa College literary journal for 2025. He is currently working on his PhD in history at The University of North Texas with a focus on energy trade economics within the Greater Permian Basin. Outside of teaching and writing, he enjoys reading and spending time with family. His academic interests include Legal history, energy trade line history, regulatory and conservation history as well as archival research regarding the western oil trade network and the role Permian Oil plays in globalized markets. Favored literature includes Paradise of the Blind and Permian Basin: Era of Discovery.

The House That's Not a Home

Alexa R.

I don't feel at home
When my family is being kicked out
When my neighbors are being massacred
I don't feel at home with a hateful xenophobe
Did I mention this was my home first?

This shared home of ours
It's not really anyone's property
It's all borrowed
We are to care for and respect it
We are all temporary guests
Of what could be a permanent home
But with the way the world is working
I think this home is crumbling

We are splitting our home into apartments
Locking up our roommates in the bathroom
Sending people to the garage
And leaving the car running

How can we call this a home?
Isn't a home, a place to rest?
Where you go to rest and seek shelter
When there's chaos and violence outside
Now the home is becoming just as corrupted
As the cruel outside world

The head of the house is mad
And the people inside are all sad
I hope this is all an ugly fad
And that soon we will be glad
Of leaving all this in the past

Alexa R. is a dual credit student at OCTECHS and Odessa College. She is also an artist. She expresses herself through many mediums like painting, poetry, and dancing. She is always seeking new experiences and ways to grow artistically and emotionally. She is passionate in everything she does and always leaves a piece of herself in her art. She is dedicated to becoming valedictorian and attending an Ivy League university when she graduates.

The Angel?

Josselyn P.

Did it really matter?
Could her answer have been worse?
The Pandora’s Box was Opened
Yet, only the bad came out.
Where was the good?
She questioned me with such Elegance!
My job is yet to say.
“What is home?”
Silent!
It couldn’t have been more loud.
Silent!
“I’m sorry” said the Angel
“Home?” Whispered was the word.
Snapped!
Reeled in from the rabbit hole.
Where had the therapist gone?
Wasn’t the Angel being questioned?
“WHAT IS HOME!” screamed the Angel
Was she an Angel?
“Home is my family,
It is not a place.
Not a thing.
Home is my mother,
My twin sister
My two brothers
My *absent* Father
My Father who stepped up!
My God
My Savior
My fuel
My soul...” I *rasped*.
“Home is within me” I barked back.
“It is me” right?
Snapped!!
Subject seems responsive.
Accurate results showed.
The Angel?
Or the wolf in sheep’s skin.

Josselyn P. is an Odessa College student.



The Bell

Moises Banda, Odessa College Student

Living in My Head and it Sucks

Dylan Garcia

Rent’s due, but no one ever pays
That’s just the start of the problems here
New tenants move in seemingly every day
And I just can’t get rid of them

Like that one by the broken window
That is inferiority complex
He moved out years ago,
but it looks like he’s back again

There sitting on the ledge is loneliness
He’s been here for a while
And just sits on that ledge looking into the abyss
It kinda looks like he’s contemplating something all the time

Oh man here comes THAT group
There is the intrusive thoughts gang
I swear every time I see them, they have someone new
They just love to bug people at the worst moments

And this insecurity guy won’t leave me alone!
Dude’s always pointing out things I do wrong
Like dude, chill, move the hell on
But no, he’s always right behind me

The living conditions are also terrible
There is so much junk around this place
Take that stack of unfinished projects for example,
The projects need finishing and to be moved

I’m sure ambition and drive would be up to the task
But it seems like they just come and go as they please
They supposedly live here, at least according to anyone you ask
May as well just leave the pile there

The lights go out here way too often
It makes things so sad and bleak
I’d open the windows to let some light in
But it always seems to be cloudy outside

The noise pollution makes it so hard to think
I blame the intrusive thoughts gang
Especially the negative thoughts with their buzzing
They seem to thrive in this place

Just like the pests that seem to swarm self-esteem’s place
That poor guy must deal with them all the time
Pests like doubt and regret that like to get in his face
Every now and then they get out and bother others too

I really should do some upkeep
I’m the damn landlord for god’s sake
I’m just too terrified of all these creeps
But I haven’t left for what feels like forever

This all just makes me think I need a break
To get out for a little bit and breathe
Maybe go visit a park with a nice lake
I just need to go somewhere else for a while

Hopefully, when I remember what it’s like not to live in a dumpster fire
I can encourage myself to do some cleaning of this headspace
Take the time to make sure living conditions here aren’t so dire
So that I can come and go without fear of what goes on inside

Dylan Garcia is a poet who has been living in West Texas for his whole life. He was inspired to start writing poetry in High School during the year 2011. Since then, he has expressed the highs and lows of everyday life through his work. Not only does Dylan write poetry, but he also takes every opportunity to perform them as well. One of his biggest goals is to put together a poetry book consisting of his work. Currently he is a student at Odessa College going after his bachelor’s in entrepreneurship and is also writing tutor at Odessa College. He aims to use the knowledge and experience he gets from his education to help grow some small business ventures such as a podcast and YouTube channel.

Homebound

Joshua S.

A remnant of a fire
A remnant of warmth
A remnant of a culling for me to come forth.
A spectacle landing in soft gentle hands
Little miracles guided and nurtured into beautiful green trails and dark brown sands.

The land is colored within a square bronze frame
A pungent memory soaked in oil and pain
The violence so deep rooted and awful
Found a voice from within that was thought to be thoughtful.

An eroded ideal casted in the iron formed from life's sweet crimson
Leaves a dark shadow of depression that chose to form a conscious reminiscion
Memories that will be the ignition.

The ignition for the flame inside, the one that burns orange hues so bright.
The embers will be left behind to tell tales and provide warmth for the plight of childhood that infects the night
A warmth as favorable as a hug, but as fading as a lost love.

Accordions playing in accordance with the voices that haunt my mind
Images flashing, causing panic between rhymes
Visions of where I used to try to forget, a town surrounded in dirt, trash, and sand.

Sounds that pound against the walls of my cranium
Reveal a place shrouded in crimson threads of which I myself have sewn
A **home** to which I am **bound** depletes the warmth
And makes me cold.

Joshua S. is seventeen years old and currently working toward his associate's degree in the STEM field. He has always aspired to become an author of some sort and has always gravitated to short stories, and writing poetry! He writes free verse and haikus, but would like to expand into more structured poetry as well. He hopes to learn more in literary arts in the future and thanks you for reading.

Desert Sunset
Dr. Laura Holder, OC Faculty



Dr. Laura Holder originally grew up in southeastern New Mexico before moving to Louisiana to pursue her doctorate in English. She loves coffee, cats, stickers, & discussing any & all pop culture.

The Living Doll

Sachie Dominguez

A doll of plastic to them I am.
Yet none see the spark within
A doll glitters and performs commands,
its dress beautiful, its smile ever glowing.

Poised with elegance and superiority.
“Do Not Touch” only see with clarity.
Head must be held high, never down.
And walk with swagger, a high ground.

Royalty resides in this false mansion.
So sire sons like a good doll
A suitor they search with greedy eyes
And agree with their call.

But...

Feelings dormant yet living within
How do I choose amid shaded clones?
Emotion churns and screams
Always acting and never truthful.

Bile rises as I am shown and revealed.
To be free is my dream.
Father and mother love me as me
As I am living not a doll to please.

Sachie Dominguez is an English instructor at Odessa College. She earned both her BA in Biology and English and her MA in English from the University of Texas Permian Basin. It was during her time at UTPB that she had her poem "Bitter Sweet Clover" published in the student literary journal Sandstorm in 2020. Dominguez has written numerous poems, including a series centered on the Seven Deadly Sins. Her poem "The Living Doll" has recently been accepted for publication in the Odessa College literary journal for 2025. She aims to pursue an MFA in creative writing, with a focus on poetry. Outside of teaching and writing, she enjoys spending time with her family, baking, and, of course, writing poetry. Her academic interests include British Literature (particularly from the 1800s), Creative Writing, World Literature, and Linguistics. Among her favorite books are works by the Brontë sisters, Eighteenth Century Women Poets, and Dante's Inferno.

Leave the Posters Off the Walls

Dylan Garcia

I no longer like the idea of putting them up
For fear that they may get ripped down soon after
A lingering feeling still after 5 years of rebuilding

Sometimes I get nervous watching the door
My mind still hangs onto a looming anxiety
Waiting for someone to come tell me it's time
I couldn't afford to pay for the day, so get out!

I still feel a need to be ready to pack up at any time
First the clothes, my laptop, my phone
I have to be ready to grab as much as possible
As fast as I can with shaking hands

I don't like New Year's Eve anymore
For many it's a joyous celebration or a fresh start
For me, sometimes I get flashbacks of staying in a trailer
Trying to stay warm as the broken pipes outside freeze up

There are just some things that stick
Like a bad dream, you wish would leave your brain
But it wasn't a dream and it never quite leaves

It follows you, from apartment, to hotel

To hotel, to hotel, to hotel, to hellhole, to...
Finally, a stable place once again
Still, it never leaves
Even after getting a desk to put your collectibles on

Even after buying, mass buying, so much buying
After tending to the lawn, fixing the pipes
Putting up decorations for Holidays again
Even after putting up a Japanese art poster

The walls still feel in jeopardy
This home still feels in jeopardy
The sense of security feels in jeopardy
All in jeopardy of being lost in a moment

It's so hard to reason with my mind
To convince it that I am different now
That my family is different now
And that we won't let those posters
Involuntarily be taken down again

Serenity in the Shade
Jordan Tarpley, OC Staff



Home, to Jordan, is where you find peace. It doesn't just have to be where you reside; it could be a good friend, your pet, a favorite vacation spot, family, or even your go-to Starbucks order. She chose this photo because it brings her a sense of tranquility. Hearing the leaves rustle in the wind, feeling the sun warm her cheek as it peeks through the canopy, and taking in all the shades of green that adorn the branches above her makes her feel at home.

Backstabbed

Lucas R.

I, sat down with a friend,
Wrote down a plan, start to end
Figured, with time I could bend,
Her heart, to help her mend,
Mine,
My friend said that he can,
Help me, he'll be my wingman,
Figured it'd, be a good plan,
Time to see if I can,
Shine,
But,
He threw the stone,
Out of his hand,
It broke my heart,
Crashed in the sand,
Chipped my bones,
I couldn't stand,
He took the art,
He didn't stay with me,
He, abandoned the plan,
He took her hand,
Instead of me...
I was,
Backstabbed,
By my very own best friend,
And it,
Sucks that,
Our friendship had to end,
I know that,
It's no use, I shouldn't pretend,
My friend wasn't loyal,
Thought there would be no toil,
Didn't expect any toil,
Think I'll lay down by the soil,
Tonight,
He threw the stone,
Out of his hand,
It broke my heart,
Crashed in the sand,
Chipped my bones,
I couldn't stand,
He took the art,
He didn't stay with me,
He, abandoned the plan,
He took her hand,
Instead of me...
I was,
Backstabbed,
By my very own best friend,
And it,
Sucks that,
Our friendship had to end,
I know that,
It's no use, I shouldn't pretend,
If I could,
I'd take the knife,
I'd run him through,
I know I should,
Not take the knife,
What should I do?
Because,
He threw the stone,
Out of his hand,
It broke my heart,
Crashed in the sand,
Chipped my bones,
I couldn't stand,
He took the art,
He didn't stay with me,
He, abandoned the plan,
He took her hand,
Instead of me...
I was,
Backstabbed,
By my very own best friend,
And it,
Sucks that,
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I know that,
It's no use, I shouldn't pretend.

Lucas R. is sixteen years old and a student at Odessa Collegiate Academy striving for a creative lifestyle. He aspires to earn recognition for his writing and to write a book and get it published before he turns 19. In 2024, he earned 5th place in a chess competition and wrote 18 songs with 16 currently in progress. He also wrote 23 short stories (most of which he has lost) and he is currently writing a book. He is emotionally led, but hides his emotions as best he can to not upset others around him if he's in a bad mood.



Texas Thistle
Mallory Sanchez

Fiction

World of Sand

Lucas R.

Jason gets home from school one day after dealing with another trip to the principal’s office because of another bully. Jason lives in a normal neighborhood right by his school in a 3-bedroom house. It’s not exciting and it gets lonely because his parents work late. Even though this isn’t the best life, Jason wouldn’t trade it for anything.

Jason decides to go to a pond a ways away from society to get a break from the world. When he arrives, the whole pond is replaced by sand. He freaks out for a minute, wondering what happened to the pond. He goes home to find his whole neighborhood replaced by sand. He thinks, and thinks, and thinks. He wonders what caused this... he wants to put everything back to normal.

He has a quest. His quest is to find who or what is responsible for this, restore his home, and stop this from happening again. He ventures off, determined to complete his quest, but without the slightest clue of where he is going.

He wanders off, meets someone, and they fight, getting close to killing each other until he realizes that this person might be able to help him, so he offers a truce. He accepts, and Jason finds out this person’s name is Minos.

Minos offers to accompany Jason on his quest with the condition that Jason will give him the quest’s reward, and tells him that if he agrees, he has to swear it on the river Styx. Jason thinking it would be something like gold or money, decides to swear to him the reward. Minos tells him that a powerful being, name unknown, caused this to happen.

They camp out, on sand (obviously) but Jason can’t sleep. He ends up going on a walk and finds a tree. He walks up to it, and it starts moving like an octopus attacked by a shark. Jason tries to back away, but the tree’s roots reach out from the ground and wrap around him, making him unable to move. The tree whispers to him, “Beware, for wind that blows with will soon blow against.” Jason freaks, he tries to wiggle free but is unable to. The tree whispers, “Don’t trust. Take the leaf. It has hands and a face, but no eyes nor arms.” Then shouts, “THE WIND WILL BLOW AGAINST YOU! YOU WILL DIE!” The tree disappears, and all that is left is a single leaf. Jason stares at it, then slowly approaches it and picks it up. “Don’t trust what?” Jason says. “What wind?”

Jason and Minos continue their journey, but Jason becomes more cautious around Minos. They approach a house, and Jason recognizes it as his house. “This shouldn’t be here,” Jason says. “Why?” says Minos, seemingly amused. “This is my home, but we’re, like, a million miles away from there.” Suddenly, a shadowy figure appears on the porch of Jason’s house. He slowly starts walking towards them, and Jason gets ready to run. “Don’t,” Minos says, “Don’t run. You can’t escape this.” “What?” questions Jason. The shadowy figure says, in a shaky voice, “Do it now,” then disappears, and Minos turns to Jason. “I know you may consider me a friend, but as the tree said—” “You know about the tree?” “Yes, the wind that blows with will soon blow against.” “I still don’t know what wind. There is literally no wind right now.” “It’s a metaphor. The wind isn’t wind, but a person.” “You? You’re the ‘wind’! Are you turning on me? But you helped me! Without you, I wouldn’t’ve gotten this far! I’d still be oblivious to what’s going on!” “I know, but you needed to get that leaf; I need it.” Minos grabs Jason. “Give me the leaf,” he says. “He won’t give it to you,” says a mysterious voice from above, causing Minos to jump back. The air above them shimmers, and the god of the wild, Pan, appears. “Begone, this isn’t your ordeal, and it’s against the ancient laws for you to interfere,” says Minos. “But it isn’t against the ancient law to give him something to help him,” replies Pan. “Now, dear young Jason, take this sword.” Pan summons a sword made of wood and tree bark, “This will help you defeat him. This sword has power over nature, but don’t abuse that power or the sword will turn on you. I will accompany you for the rest of your journey. I will be unable to help you directly, but I can summon an Arboris to assist you. Good luck, the Wild is depending on you.” Pan shimmers and disappears. The sand beside Jason starts moving, and out comes a tree person. Minos laughs. “He gave you a toy sword and a tree boy. Ha. That puny thing isn’t a match for the power I have.” “You betrayed me,” Jason replies, readjusting his sword in his hand, “Why?” “You don’t need to know that. All you need to know is that you’re going to lose, so make it easier on me and don’t do anything, just let me kill you without effort.” Minos shoots a spire of black obsidian out of the tip of his finger, but Jason jumps out of the way, sword in hand, without a second to spare. “I said don’t do anything, now I’m going to have to try to kill you.” Minos continues to shoot out spires of obsidian, but Jason keeps jumping out of the way, trying to hit Minos with his sword. Despite his efforts, Jason gets hit in the leg by one of Minos’ spires, causing him to fall to the ground, clutching his leg. “I told you. You can’t beat me. Goodbye, Jason.” Minos fires another one of his spires, but the Arboris put their hands on the ground, and in front of Jason, branches get in the way of the spire. “Really? Now I have to kill you, too.” Minos summons an obsidian spire from the ground underneath the Arboris, killing them instantly. “NO!” Jason shouts. “This is what happens when you oppose me. Now, I’ll say this again. Goodbye, Jason.” An obsidian spire hits Jason in the heart, killing him. “That was easy. Now, I summon my father so he can feed on this corpse. I honestly don’t know why he likes to eat humans, they taste terrible, but okay. Wait. I need to find that leaf.” Minos frisks Jason’s body but doesn’t find the leaf. “Curse it. Pan probably made it travel with his soul to the Underworld.”

In Jason’s eyes, everything is black. He knows he’s in a room and hears a sudden grunt. “Hello?” Jason asks, “I can’t see.” A flash of light illuminates the room, temporarily blinding Jason. “You need to pay coin,” says an old man in a white cloak. Jason ignores him and looks around, but finds nothing. Jason asks the man, “Where am I?” So the man explains that when people die, they go to the Underworld, Hades’ realm, to stand judgment that determines what that person does in death. Jason looks shocked, surprised that he’s dead. “Take me to Hades.” Jason demands. “I need a coin,” says the man in the cloak. “But I don’t have a coin.” “Then you can’t pass.” “There’s nothing I can do, other than give you a coin, so I can pass?” “There is one thing.” “Name it.” “Patience, dead one. As you might know, there are multiple guards of the underworld. Me, the 3 Furies, and Cerberus. If you can convince all of us to let you pass without payment, then you may speak to Hades, but if not, then you will be sent to the fields of punishment. Do you accept?” Jason thinks about it; Can I trust this dude? And if I can, can I convince him and the other guards of the underworld to let me pass? Can I even convince a three-headed dog? Jason sighs, “It may be hopeless, but I have to try.” The man smiles, pleased, then says, “Convince me.” So Jason tells the man his story and tells him his solution. “Bold plan, are you sure you can do it? Even if I let you pass, the Furies won’t care about the mortal world above. They help rule this realm, none other.” “I can convince them.” “What of Cerberus?” “I can convince him...um...her...them– I can convince Cerberus.” “Very well, I’ll allow you to pass, but beware of what you face, and beware of the river Styx.” The man gestures to a rowboat, and Jason reluctantly climbs in. The man waves a hand, and the boat starts rowing itself, without oars, through the cavern. Jason sits in the boat for what seems like an hour in total darkness when finally Jason notices a faint glow of red. What seems like another half hour later, Jason reaches the Underworld. He sees a crowd of skeletal creatures passing by, and strangely under, a huge shadowy figure. “That must be Cerberus.” The boat stops in front of a red-rock cliff. Jason climbs and starts heading toward Cerberus, but stops when he notices three things flying above. Suddenly, they drop down in front of Jason, and he realizes they must be the furies. “We heard you did not pay coin to Charon,” they say in unison. “Who?” asks Jason. “The man in the white cloak who asked you for a coin,” they say in unison again. “We also heard that you try to convince us to let you continue your little quest to save the world. Is this true?” “Yes.” “Then convince us.” He tells them his plan but didn’t mention his story because of what the man in the white cloak, Charon, said. “Ha!” says one of the Furies. “He will never allow that!” says another. “You’re going to get a special punishment just from him for saying that!” says the last of the Furies. “You may pass,” say the Furies in unison, “but good luck convincing Cerberus and Hades!” The Furies fly away, towards a palace Jason hadn’t noticed before. He stares at it in awe before remembering why he was there. He walks over towards Cerberus and covers the distance in a short amount of time. He picks up a stick to persuade Cerberus with a game of fetch. “Do you want the stick? Go get it!” Jason throws the stick, but Cerberus wasn’t interested. He barks once and moves out of the way of the tunnel, a clear gesture he wanted Jason to go through. Amazed by his luck, Jason walks through the tunnel, and out the other end, it is a nightmare. Skeletal creatures that resembled humans walk around, and dog-like creatures snarl at random things, he can hear screams of people as they are tortured, but the scariest thing is the palace. Even from a distance, it looms over him. He gulps and slowly walks over towards it. He sees the Furies again, cracking fiery whips at random Skeletal Creatures. They must be people’s souls, Jason thinks. When he reaches the palace, he stares at the nightmarish images carved into the polished obsidian. The fact that the door is made of obsidian worries him even more. His last experience with obsidian ended his life, and he doesn’t want a repeat of that. He walks up to the doors, and they open on their own. Slowly, Jason walks into the palace. “I knew you’d come,” says a booming female voice, “and I know what you seek. I know you have the blessing of Pan, the god of the wild. I know you, Jason.” “Who are you?” “My name is Persephone, and I can help you get what you want.” “What’s the catch?” “When you’re done, destroy the Sword of the Wild that Pan had so stupidly given you.” “Stupidly?” “That sword only brings hardships to the owner, and I don’t want you to get hurt or die, again, before you complete your quest.” Why are you so interested in me?” “Not you, but your quest. I am the goddess of Spring, but with all the sand that Minos has placed, I cannot control Spring anymore. You are my only hope.” “Will Hades agree to this?” “No, but I’ve brought multiple heroes back to life before, and he hasn’t found out yet. Please, destroy the sword when you’re done. That much power brings twice as much trouble. I hope you succeed. By the way, that leaf in your pocket can protect one person from one deadly blow. Just say the person’s name as you hold it, and that person will be protected. It only has one use, so use it wisely. Goodbye, little one, and good luck.”

Jason appears on a mound of sand surrounded by obsidian. “Great, I’m back here,” he says. He gets up and dusts off his pants. He looks around and notices the Arboris’ body lying nearby. He ran to it to check for a pulse, but he doesn’t know if plants have a pulse. Remembering what the tree told him and what Pan had said, he takes out his wooden sword and stabs the Arboris. Instantly, they come back to life. “Yes! It worked!” Jason shouts. “I am glad it did, thank you,” said the Arboris. Jason jumps, not knowing that the Arboris can talk. “My name is Arbor, and I am here to help you kill Minos. Let’s get moving.”

So Arbor and Jason journey onward. On the way there, Arbor teaches Jason swordplay and the power of his sword. When they reach a place made out of obsidian instead of sand, they stop until they see Minos approaching, and they start slowly walking towards him, stopping about 15 yards away. “So, I see you’re alive. Which god helped you? Hades?” Minos says. “No. Persephone.” Jason replies. “Well, she can’t help you now.” With that, Minos raises his arms. The world starts shaking as obsidian hands claw their way to the surface. “I can play that game,” Jason says. He sticks his sword into the obsidian ground and summons an Arboris army. The armies stare at each other, but when Minos draws his polished obsidian sword and starts walking toward Jason, the Obsidian army charges. Jason shouts “CHARGE!” The Arboris army runs to intercept the Obsidian army. Minos gets lost in the armies, and Jason looks for him to end this, but he has to fight some obsidian warriors. His sword slices through countless enemies, but then he spots Minos and charges at him.

He and Minos spar for a while, exchanging blows and blocking without missing a beat. Minos shouts “ENOUGH!” All the obsidian warriors turn to Jason. Minos then say, “Kill him.” The obsidian warriors charge him, but Jason uses his sword to summon another creature he doesn’t recognize. It instantly eats the obsidian warriors and the Arboris army, but Arbor is able to get out of the way just in time. Minos looks at it in horror.

“You’ve doomed us, all of us,” Arbor says. “What?” Jason asks. “That is a Monstrum Plantarum! It devours everything it can until it is killed or until there is nothing else to eat!” Arbor says. “We must stop it.” “I’ll help, but it won’t change anything.” Minos says. “Why should I trust you?” “If you don’t have my help, then you’ll have no chance to defeat this Mon- ... whatever he said. I can sense that the strength of this monster is enough to rival my own” Jason doesn’t have much time to think of it, but he’s not willing to risk the world. “Fine, but after, we’ll finish what you started.” So the three go off to kill the Monstrum Plantarum. Minos goes left, pelting it with shards of obsidian. Arbor heads right, using the arm of a deceased obsidian warrior as a weapon. Jason charges the monster head-on. It takes effort, but Minos summons an obsidian pillar tall enough to rival Mount Everest and throws it at the Monstrum Plantarum. It causes a cloud of sand to surround them. When it clears, the Monstrum Plantarum disappears. So does Minos.

Pan, Persephone, and Hades all appear in a flash of light, blinding Jason, again. They congratulate him. Pan lets Jason know that his job isn’t done, but he has allowed the world to start turning slowly back to, well, the world. Jason says, “Persephone, goddess of spring, I know you wanted me to destroy the sword when I’m done, and I will, but I’m not. I need to hunt down Minos and... and kill him.” “I know, little one, and I wish you luck, but you must know, there is a greater force influencing Minos. He isn’t entirely responsible for his actions. And before you go, my husband and I have a gift for you.” Persephone replies. Persephone and Hades grant him 2 diamonds, and Pan walks up to him and does something strange. Jason suddenly feels power coursing through him, and he realizes that Pan has given him more power. Then the gods and goddess disappear. Jason gets suddenly wiped off his feet, appearing back home. He and his parents reunite, trading stories.

Jason realizes that the power he now has comes with the responsibility of protecting the world and getting rid of Minos. He dreads when he has to go back to fight Minos, but he pushes it out of his mind, glad to be home with his family, ever so briefly.

“I guess,” Jason says, “that home isn’t about what place you’re at, but about the people you’re with.”

“My home is with you,” says Jason’s dad, “Both of you.”

“I missed y’all,” Jason says.

“We missed you too,” his mom says, “but you’re filthy. You need a shower.”

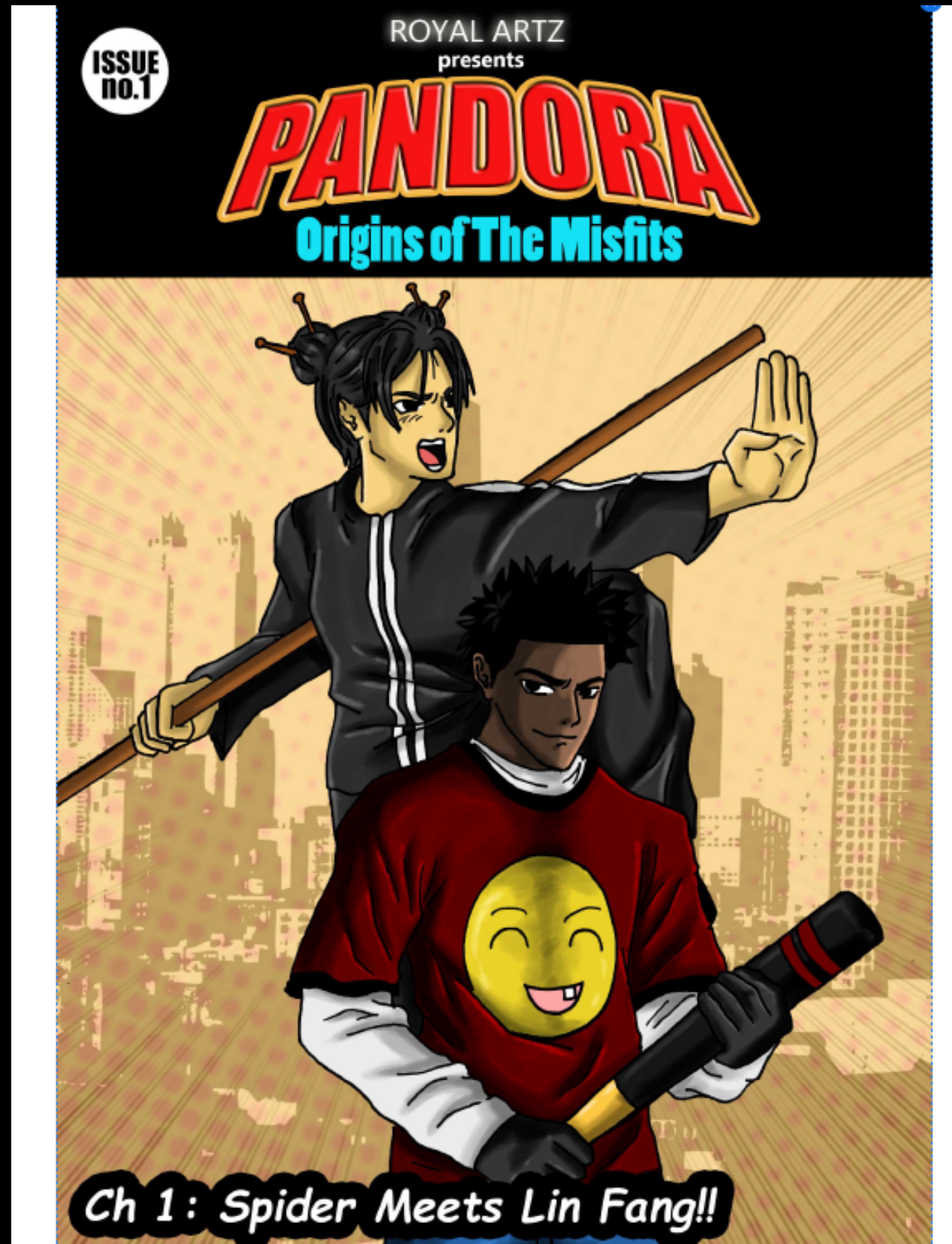
“That’s my mom,” replies Jason.

He starts going to his room, but when he sees the clock that his family had always had, he stopped. He says, “Has a face and hands . . .” He goes to the clock and takes it from the wall, and out from behind it falls a piece of paper. A paper that reads, “Hi, it’s me, Minos. You don’t trust me, but should you even trust your family? I bet they didn’t tell you the truth. They didn’t tell you why you have a room in your house that no one uses. That used to be my room. I used to live there. The next time we meet, I won’t be as helpful as I was with that monster. I do hope you realize your mistake, brother.”



Sombrero
Mallory Sanchez

Selections from *Pandora: Origins of The Misfits*
Arnold Aswile



STARRING



SPIDER McCALLISTER

A "somewhat" tough guy desperately looking for his kidnapped friend. Can be a pain in the ass.



LIN FANG

Practitioner of the almost forgotten art of Kung Fu. She has dreams of being rich without working hard.



VIRGIL McCALLISTER

Spider's uncle and mentor since he was a boy. Also a business man with very strict principles.



VERONICA EASTWOOD

A Junior Rank government official specialized in the Investigations Department. Always goes "by the book".



AGENT MAXIMUS

A mysterious government agent with an intimidating aura.



DINO aka THE HOUSE

A high rank gangster who owns a cafe which is also his "base" of operations.



GIOVANNI

An underboss of a powerful Crime Family. Dino's partner.



MAGELLAN

A mysterious president of The SOVEREIGN KINGS Biker Crew.



ATLAS

Seems to be the voice of reason for the biker crew.



TITAN

An enforcer for the biker crew eager to prove himself.





