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Donnelly College

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Thank You

dime would like to thank every student who submitted work to this year's issue. This publication exists because of your dedication and creativity.

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"El Atardecer en Mi Pueblo - 2"
by Jessica Diaz

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Cover Image: "El Atardecer en Mi Pueblo" by Jessica Diaz



Winner



Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award Nonfiction

An Analysis of the Confessions of Saint Augustine By Valdirene Pereira da Silva

The Confessions is a book that does what the name suggests: in it, Augustine of Hippo, born of Monica and Patricius Aurelius on November 13, 354, confesses to God all his doings and tells us how he came to believe in God and to accept the Catholic Church as the Church of God after a life of paganism. In the *Confessions* we see a man who was taught to seek wisdom, coming to find the Wisdom itself which led him to the answers for all the questions he had about himself and about love.

Augustine tells important parts of his childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. It was still early in his life when Augustine, although not wanting, had to learn the hard task of obeying his teachers, since it was at school that he would learn essential things for the society of his time, such as rhetoric, and gain the esteem of men. But school was not easy for him at all; as a young boy, he was more interested in playing than in learning and would get beaten as punishment, which was what made him pray to God for help, even though it was not a deep prayer. The playful characteristic of Augustine was not a mere passing childhood phase; it developed into curiosity and love for the vanity of victory. But the fact that he was pushed to study was used for his own good, as he says in the book. He had an unexplainable aversion for Greek literature, but ironically, it was by learning Grecian myths that he learned to love fornication and all the pleasures of the flesh. Augustine learned how to read and write, as well as the art of rhetoric, and got the status of a boy of promise for what, forcefully but willingly, he learned.

As a scholar, Augustine did not like to be deceived; he wanted the truth, honor, and pleasures, and he would look for them not in God, but in his creatures. He was looking for God in worldly love

Imaginary Love

By LaCherish L. Thompson

Give me a spurious kiss
One last hollow hug
Softly whisper bitter nothings
Is this truly love?
What is true love?
This isn't.
No, this is toxic.
My heart is on my sleeve
While yours suppressed in your back
pocket
Can't you hear me knockin'—
Please, let me in.
I'll bear your chilly blows again
I'll end my life for yours to begin
I'll relish your shadowy core
I'll empty my heart, to fill yours
Can't you hear me knockin'—
Let me in.
...
Fine.
I'll wait right here
And swallow my tears
Thinking back over the years
Before your soul disappeared
True love is weird.
But I'll stay.
And give myself away
I'll stand in your blistering rains
Drenching in your blinding pain
True love is vain.
But you can't let me go.
Your empty heart is home
Sure, it's cold, but I'm never alone
True love is tart.

Sure, it's cold, but I'm never alone
True love is tart.
Hope to die and cross my heart
Nothing will ever tear us apart
I proudly wear the scars
You scorned on my—
Don't you hear me knockin'—
When will you let me in?
...
Can't you see
My love endures whether or not
You're here with me.
My love is true enough
For the both of us
Can't you hear me knockin'?
OPEN THE DOOR—
...
Linger me a painful kiss
And one final bruising hug
Whisper in my ear
Genuinely of your illusory love.
What is love?
True love is futile...
feigned love is brutal.
It's worse than hate
So, am I pathetic or insane
To fall in love with you
Every. Single. Day.
Can't you hear me knockin'—
I need to hear from you
Whether our love is true
Because if it's not
Then I'll accept
That neither are you.



“Mother Mary Adorned in Flowers and Rosary Beads”

By Anett Amaya

because he could not yet understand what he was longing for. Lust, fornication, and all concupiscences became the aim of his life. He would love one woman today and another tomorrow. It was studying the books of wisdom that Augustine started opening himself to the true God. He, who had been a Manicheist since his teens, found in the exhortations of Cicero a magnificent occasion for divine intervention in his life. After he left Carthage, where he was teaching Rhetoric, he went to Rome and met Ambrose who was his mother's Bishop and beloved friend. At that time, Augustine was neither a Manicheist nor a Christian, for he had considered Scriptures too simplistic compared to what he had read before. It was hearing Ambrose every Sunday that Augustine saw that the calumnies against Scriptures could be unraveled. It is also very important to mention that it was through his mother's prayer, faith, and devotion that Augustine got to know the One who would freed him from the burdens of sin.

After all he had already learned about God and Jesus Christ, Augustine was still leaning more to the bad habits and old ways than to the good habits and virtue. He knew it would be hard to renounce the pleasures of the flesh, so he postponed it as long as he could. The dignity of continence was speaking to him, while chastity seemed to be delightful and cruel at the same time. He needed a profound encounter with the Lord, which he eventually had. Overwhelmed by Divine inspirations in his mind and heart, Augustine wept, and his tears became a sign of true and bitter contrition for all the time he had looked for wisdom and happiness where it was not. He heard this Divine command to open and read the Bible, and there he found the words of Rm 13:13, “no orgies or drunkenness, no promiscuity or licentiousness, and no wrangling or jealousy.” Augustine found peace and committed himself totally to God and to His holy will. God did more than what Monica had asked Him to; her son became a Catholic, a priest, a Bishop, and a great saint, just like Ambrose whom she so much loved, and like herself.

I personally love the Confessions. I had read it already, many years ago, and it had a powerful impact in my life. It still impresses me how Saint Augustine, by the grace of God, could go from being a miserable sinner to being a great saint, and it revealed to me the

merciful love of God who is always willing to make Himself known and present in the lives of all who let Him in. But, I believe that the life of Saint Augustine would not have been transformed deeply as it was without the prayers of his mother, Saint Monica. She is the silent beauty hidden behind his conversion and sainthood, and what she tells us is that a mother has the power to move heaven in favor of her children. Her persistency in prayer reminds me of my own mother and all the graces she gained for my siblings and I, through a devout life of love and trust in the only true God, and in His son, Jesus Christ.

Saint Augustine, Saint Monica, and Saint Ambrose are saints who lived so long ago but still speak to our society that for the most part is lost in a world of instant pleasure and darkness. The conversion of Saint Augustine not only shows the power of God's grace but open our eyes to a lifestyle of true happiness and pleasures. It is important to note that pleasure does not go away when we live for God; instead, it gains perfection and an eternal dimension.

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Aisle Eight **By Libby Turner**

Fluorescent lights glare brightly down
Upon highly glossy polished tile,
And a loud static-y voice from above calls:

“Clean up, aisle eight; clean up, aisle
eight.”

As I orient myself, I realize that
I am in Hell, and Hell is Walmart.

Accompanying me is my trusty dog
Mendel; ever vigilant and wise.
In life and death he never leaves my side.

I hear a loud crash and, as I want to help,
Mendel and I rush towards the noise.
We soon find ourselves in aisle eight.

There, we see none other than the
Westboro Baptist Church congregants
and
Those who follow them during life on
Earth.

All through the aisle, a fantastic musical
number
Song and dance fit for a Broadway stage
Is taking place: flamboyant drag queens

Strut down the center, whilst soldiers
In full military dress, pirouette and leap
In time to a patriotic big band melody.

Lost in their zest and glee, the performers
Knock items from the shelves:
Feathers fly, glitter fills the air in shining
cascades

And sequins and rhinestones are strewn
about.

Mendel barks, forwarning me of another
Announcement from the loudspeaker:

“Clean up, aisle eight...” A sharp-eyed
politician

Donning a manager's vest appears,
And, handing the church members mops
and brooms,

Orders them to start sweeping up the
mess.

With glaring looks and angry gestures,
The hateful Phelps followers grudgingly
acquiesce.

As soon as one spot is tidy, or shelf
restocked,
Inevitably it will be knocked off again,
And the floor re-covered with schmutz.

A second manager appears, and soon a
third
And a fourth! Urgently the politicians
press the
Westboro protestors to clean.

The faster they clean, the more of a
mess

Is created. Hurry as they might
It is impossible to make any headway

Against the glorious dancing procession.
Soon a circle of managers, laden with
picket signs,
Have closed in upon aisle eight.

They start chanting, yelling, and
shouting insults
Upon the Westboro Baptist Church,
Urging them to work harder, and clean
faster.

Backing away slowly, Mendel looked at
me

And cocked one wise eyebrow as if to
say

“One reaps what one sows.”

he writes about Aeneas. He shared how Aeneas was a wanderer and how he was one too, but oblivious to his actions. This circles back to how he needed God's help to become better. The only way someone can become better is through admitting their faults... confessing their faults. They're not just trying to change on your own, but also with the help of God. In some cases, it is giving situation up to God to solve it. The flesh can be weak and God could be the only one who can help us overcome the human temptation.

St. Augustine was very lustful and selfish in his life before the conversion. He did some bad things to see how much worse he could get away with, before getting in big trouble. One example of this would be the time he and some others stole from an orchard and let the pears rot. I

know I have done badly before just to test the boundaries. As a kid, I would do things that were not too great, but I wanted to know how much I could get away with. I did not really understand the extent of the bad or why it was so wrong. It felt like something I should not be doing or I felt bad afterward.... Yet I still did it to see how my parents responded to it. St. Augustine had done sinful things in his youth, felt bad about it, and gave God the opportunity to help him. God will always be there to give us another



Untitled Drawing
By Mercy Kumah

❧ **Winner** ❧ **Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award** **Poetry**

Apple Turnovers Made from Scratch in a Cast Iron Skillet **By Todd R. Kinney**

Gnarled and weathered from toiling away in the hot southern sun.
 Sharing the crops, picking cotton,
 killing water moccasins with a stone, rake, hoe, any old way. She never
 spoke of these things, I only
 heard from others. All she did was make me Apple turnovers made
 from scratch in a cast iron skillet.

Those same hands kneaded flour, and lard, and sugar a plenty, diced
 and spiced apples to perfection.
 The old pitch-black skilled, 'smithed ages ago, searing hot from the
 flames from the old gas stove. She
 did not speak as she pressed the dough. Spooning unmeasured filling
 in the squares.
 She did not ask if I was hungry. All she did was make me Apple
 turnovers made from scratch in a cast
 iron skillet.

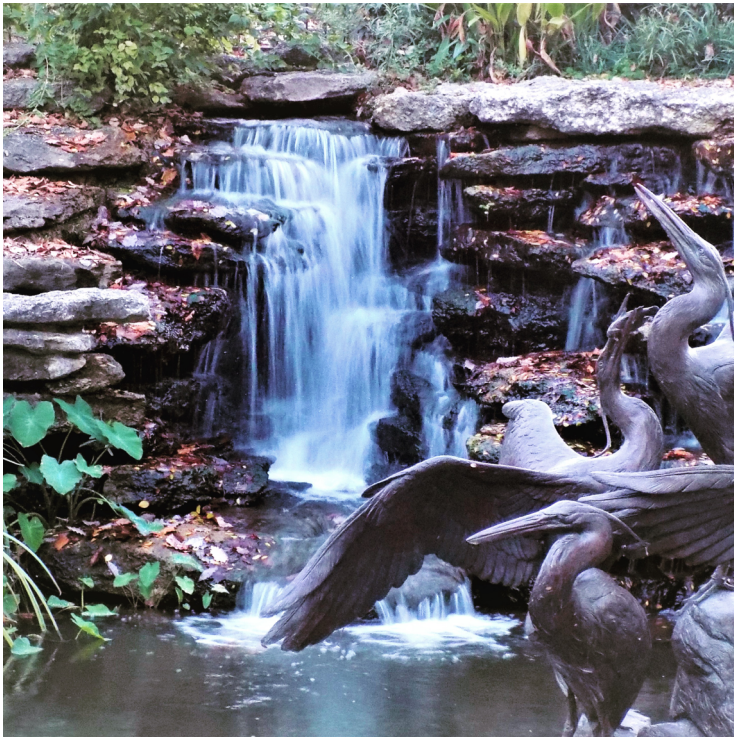
Mississippi, the South, the dirty South. When the dirty South was
 downright dirty and evil. She never
 reminisced about those times. Just run down to the liquor store and
 buy me a pint of Ten High. I could
 see in her eyes, she had seen mean things, but never, did she pass
 them on to me.
 All she did was make me Apple turnovers made from scratch in a cast
 iron skillet.

Run into my bedroom baby and grab my snuff. I didn't know what snuff
 was but knew it was in her
 bedroom. When I moved the pillow on her bed, I knew what the old
 worn revolver was. A quick check,
 though old enough to be from the Civil War, it's loaded, I'll leave that
 alone. I heard stories of what a
 deadeye shot grandma was, but she never troubled my soul with such
 things.

All she did was make me Apple turnovers made from scratch in a cast iron skillet.

Like magic, they sizzled and seared. A flip, a turn, here it comes, on a plate. Oh my God, perfect crust, flaky like snow, the filling sweet and tender you know. I didn't even see the cinnamon go in, but I taste it. Tastes so good it feels like a sin. It was the only time she cooked for me and I don't know why, she made me Apple turnovers made from scratch in a cast iron skillet.

Time passed, I moved away, and she died. I heard stories of the terrible time and unkind treatment she received from family that stayed close. I guess after time she was just a burden, like old baggage that has lost its value, a living ghost. To this moment I wonder how could they have treated her so bad. I think maybe she never made them Apple turnovers made from scratch in a cast iron skillet.



“TX Botanic Garden”
By Luz Calderon

Primary Source Analysis

By Angelica Perez

“The Confession,” by Saint Augustine, was interesting. It was St. Augustine confessing his past from childhood to adulthood. He shares the things he did, especially the immoral things he did before he joined the church. This confession is written similar to a diary; he lets all his feelings out from how he felt and how he feels now looking back. He also talks about his experiences and how they affected him. He feels like he has wasted so much of his life doing immoral things, and this is his way of getting this off his chest and confessing to God his sins.

From my Catholic education, I have heard a lot about St. Augustine, how he was somewhat of a playboy for his time and did a lot of what we consider vice. This biggest vice was that he was very lustful. Some of the saints that I like the most or appreciate the most are the ones who have gone so far into the deep end. In the end, they still find God and eventually follow him. At the same time, God never abandons us. I find it inspiring how a person could be so far removed from something and then turn his life around for good. It gives me hope to become a better person, and that is why I get inspired by reformed sinners. I can see their transformations and I know that God will always love us and want us no matter how far away from him we get. God is all loving and forgiving which is something that is fairly hard for us to be.

Another aspect from the Confession is that Augustine analyzes his life and it is similar to a diary being written. He is not writing soon after the events happened. It is more like looking back and breaking each situation down and reflecting on it. He finds that God is the answer to his problems. God is the one who can help him become better. God will help him control his lust. He speaks about how his mother would always pray for him to find his way. When he was young he was prideful and was more concern about teaching Rhetoric. He did not worry too much about religion and his destructive lifestyle. He did not come to reason that he was not living a fulfilled life or even a virtuous one at that.

He shared how he did not enjoy school in his youth, for the only reason he went to school was by force. The only reason he knew what he knew was because he was forced to go to school. He shares how he enjoyed Latin, but was not a big fan of Greek. Then

La Catedral

By Mariana Valles Meza

The focal point of the majestic building is the invigorating angel, who casts its shadow during high noon.

Two bell towers on each side of the edifice have a sheer canopy cascading down its sides to block the intruding fledglings.

The ancient building is surrounded by lively traditional music that enchants the people in the ambient.

Murmurs of the locals are whispers that bounced off the antique architecture.

The warm embrace of family brings a sense of belonging in a new place within the perimeter of the sacred grounds.

Across the street in a hectic restaurant, an ice cold mug left a tingling sensation on my fingertips.

Followed by a combination of exotic tastes from the city, such as sharp chile, tart lime, and spicy salsa along with the bitter flavor of beer that left a unique taste on the tip of my tongue.

The charred meat on the fiery grill added a hint of home in a foreign, yet familiar place, that is all within the confines of the old cathedral.

The musky aroma of the earth lingered in the air, while the overwhelming fragrance of multiple customary cuisine is a powerful symbol of national pride that binds both culture and history together.



Winner Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award Visual Arts



“The Ceiling of Mexico's Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe”

By Magali Rojas



Winner



Sister Mary Faith Schuster Award Fiction

Codename : NightShade

By: Todd R. Kinney

"Don't make a sound or it'll rip me to shreds," he thinks to himself as he stands back to the wall. Hugging the frame of the large glass window between him and the adjacent room, he extends just enough to see the glare from the red eyes coming up the stairs. The slow methodical taps and scratches sound in rhythm to the cyberdog's graceful rhythm as it slowly ascends the staircase. Its mechanical sonic ears listening with digital precision for its prey.

The gentle buzz and flick from the neon sign outside the window bolted to the building across the street is the only sound audible from the room. Peering again, NightShade can see the Cyberdog searching, sniffing with its environmental sensors seeking its prey. Behind it, a svelte shadowy figure, adorned in a full-length cape and hood that covers her face gracefully ascends the stairs and surveys the large room in the old abandoned warehouse.

"Morgan V, aren't you tired of running?" she asks in a calm, gentle voice. If not for the faint digitized trailing echo at the end of each sentence it would be almost soothing, hypnotic in fact, as it was designed to be. However, to his trained ears, he knows it is the song of the siren. A federation assassin who will not relent. "Would you prefer I call you by your new name, NightShade?" she taunts as she canvases the area. "Make it easy on yourself, NightShade, you know we will never rest until you have faced federation justice. Such a fine student you were," she reminds him as she slides open a closet and peers in to the dark corners seeking her prey. The Cyberdog waiting carefully by her side.

Through the glass between them, NightShade can see the neon light reflecting off the Cyberdog's golden exoskin. As a child, he once wanted one of his own. Suddenly the assassin looks towards the buzz from the neon light, Fresh Noodles, draws her attention.

"Be still, don't move, don't make a sound," he instructs himself again. His tension and stress high from the hour long chase through the city that has culminated in seeking shelter in this old warehouse that should have been demolished years ago. He doesn't notice the bead of sweat fall from the tip of his nose as he hugs the wall. He realizes it is too late, too late for even his trained reflexes to catch it. Gently, ever so gently the tiny drop hits the floor. "Splat." Inaudible to the human ear, the Cyberdog's ears immediately raise to attention.

In the blink of an eye, eight-inch razor sharp fangs extend in silence; four-inch claws accompany them as the Cyberdog lunges to the source of the sound. Tearing through the drywall the Cyberdog's head emerges less than an inch from NightShade's. Stuck in the drywall, fangs clawing in silence. "Fuck!" he exclaims as he draws his pistol and turns, placing the nozzle at the mouth of the Cyberdog



**Untitled Photograph
By Elizabeth Rodriguez**

individually and angry as well. People will hate the truth and the person that is trying to speak the truth. Plato realizes and has concluded that because of this reason, Socrates ended up in his grave fast. This is one of the most important points that can be received from reading "The Allegory of the Cave." Socrates lived a pious life and was later accused of living an impious life. Socrates lived a meaningful life revolving around the truth and was put to death by the Athenian society.

Plato, attempting to always live his life around the truth, knows that people do not want to receive the truth. He uses The Allegory of the Cave to explain this to the public because they do not know the place that he is coming from. Like Socrates and Plato, they tried to be the prisoner who tells the prisoners who are still in captivity about what is true and what is not. Since the prisoners that are still in captivity do not have open minds, they believe that the experience they have lived has made them stupid. That is not the case at all, the stupid one is who refuses to be freed. Besides the popular philosophers like Socrates and Plato, I believe that other great philosophers that preached anything significant or questionable in their lifetime felt this way as well. "The Allegory of the Cave" does not only make itself relatable to philosophers but to anyone or anything that stands up for the truth. In our modern day society, people are constantly refusing to hear the truth. The truth can be anything, big or small, and it is still being overlooked everyday by many. If this was an issue according to the days that Socrates and Plato lived, it has only become worse now. In our society, we are all confined to live in our own selfish worlds and make rules that seem appealing and convenient to ourselves. In reality, there is a truth that is waiting to be seeked but because we want to stay comfortable and silent we do not seek it. "The Allegory of the Cave" brings to light, in a general manner, the issue of ignorance and hostility that lives in our hearts.

Plato became angry and resistant toward the Athenian democracy because of what happened to Socrates. He knew that his teacher died out of the spite and anger of others. It was all because they decided not to open their hearts to what could have changed them for the better. "The Allegory of the Cave," is a work that tells a great and powerful message. It is an analogy of what disrupting the social order can do.

now fighting to tear itself free from the drywall. In an instant, its head explodes in a flash of blue plasma energy. He turns and runs to the fire escape as he sees the assassin motioning to two sets of glowing red eyes that quickly charge towards him crashing through the glass window.

"I'll never make it," he says to himself as he peers at the streets below; bustling-with the people of the night walking the streets, hover cars zooming by, and the noodle shop with its patrons closely guarding their bowls of noodles while expertly using their chopsticks, oblivious to the mayhem just above them. The animated arrow on the neon sign pointing to the noodle stand below. There's no more time to think, the Cyberdogs are upon him. NightShade leaps from the grating as the claws of one of the dogs tears into the Achilles tendon of his trailing leg, drawing blood but not severing it. It is as if life stopped for a moment and began again in slow motion as he reaches for the fire escape the noodle sign is bolted against. Just another few inches, "REACH!" he yells, unsure if his yell was real or only in his head.

"Got it!" he proclaims triumphantly, his lungs burning with adrenaline and exhaustion, heaving for oxygen.

The satisfaction of the leap and grab is short lived as NightShade looks back to the fire escape from which he came. The dark, shapely figure is standing silent and foreboding, his heart squarely in her laser pistol's targeting sights. The artificial blonde hair gently escapes from underneath the hooded cape in the night wind. The pink glow from the noodle sign giving it the appearance of being bloodstained. He knows there will be no hesitation. She has no emotion, only a mission, and a target, him.

Looking below at the foot traffic, "the noodle stand, three stories up, if I can break my fall with the awning a story below, then the canopy over the noodle stand, my chances are better than right now," he reasons in his mind. He makes the decision. He lets go.

SEVEN YEARS EARLIER

The Atrium is a spectacle to behold. Residing in the side of a mountain cliff, it's huge bay windows sit opposite a grand waterfall. The opposite wall is animated by equally huge LED screens depicting peaceful sense of nature. The ballroom floor can house over 300 guests. This evening's gala is to celebrate the re-election of Federation vice President McLemore's reelection.

The invitation list is the cream of federation society. Everyone is dressed in white tuxedos and gowns, diamonds and pearls. It is a spectacle to behold. The conversations taking place present a steady hum of activity over the room.

"Did you hear about head mistress Callahan? Her husband caught her fooling around with the groundskeeper. Her husband had him arrested and sent off to a mining colony."

"No way Morgan V got a perfect score on the simulator. No fucking way."

"Come on Jordan, you're just jealous."

"Jealous my ass. It's been proven by MIT that no human has the cognitive and physical reactions to attain a perfect score on the simulator. It's just not humanly possible."

"So what are you saying? You think he cheated?"

“Well, his mother is an ambassador.”

“Senator, is there more word on the rebellion building in the dark colonies?”

“Same old story, a few disgruntled youth who’ve grown a brain stem. If they organize we’ll quash them as we always do. They don’t have the technology nor the military know how to every penetrate our defenses.”

“I’m missing some of my diamond jewelry. Arnold’s going to interrogate the staff tomorrow. I can’t wait. He’s going to have an Elite Guard present.”

“What will you do if you find out one of them stole from you?”

“Well, I want to send them to a dark colony, that’s where they all belong, but Arnold wants to use them in the Guard simulator.”

“That’s a death sentence, for stealing some jewelry?”

“Darling, have you seen my diamonds? They’re pure perfection”

Beep, beep, beep, beep. The gentle beep tones go off throughout the ballroom as the Elite Guardsmen throughout check their wrist stat coms. Morgan quickly turns his writs to read the emergency message. All Guard, report to surface in full gear. There has been an assassination. You will receive your assignments shortly. “Mother, I have to go,” he calmly whispers in his mother’s ear.



“aesthetic?”

By Luz Calderon

The Allegory of the Cave

By Ada Sanabria

Plato, a very popular and well-known philosopher, wrote an influential dialogue named the *Republic*. “The Allegory of the Cave” is a work that is written and found within the Republic. Plato significantly talks about justice, truth, and beauty. These things mean a lot according to Plato because it is what the human being is faced with on a daily basis. To be able to decipher real justice, truth, and beauty makes a great man, according to Plato. Like most of Plato’s works, Socrates is an important character that is consistently demonstrated. Plato witnessed the lifestyle and attitude of Socrates and feels he is worthy of being a demonstration in most of his works. Socrates represents a wise and meaningful man to Plato and philosophy in general.

“The Allegory of the Cave” is an interesting analogy that ultimately represents what it is like to be a philosopher. It represents the ignorance that corrupts the hearts of many, and it most importantly teaches us that staying comfortable will not enable us to grow as people. In “The Allegory of the Cave,” a group of prisoners have been held in captivity since they were born in a cavern. The prisoners have their backs to the entrance and know nothing about the outside world. Every once in a while, they are able to see shadows of figures and many different things because people and animals pass by the cave. The prisoners are unable to turn their heads to the entrance and begin to believe that the shadows they see are real things. When one prisoner becomes free, he takes the opportunity to explore the world. As he is exploring the world around him with amazement and confusion he is taught what is real and what is not. He is not fully aware of what is real and what is not but his eyesight begins to adjust and he gradually learns the truth. He is able to witness and see for himself that shadows are only reflections of true objects. The prisoner goes back to tell his friends about the things he has experienced and is strongly rejected. The prisoners refuse to be let free and believe that what the freed prisoner has experienced is false. The prisoners, the shadows, and the outside world all play a different role in what Plato is trying to tell. Plato uses “The Allegory of the Cave” to explain how he feels as a philosopher in a world of ignorant and comfortable people.

Plato means to educate the public in a manner that will benefit them but is constantly facing resistance from society. He has observed that people will get resistant towards what can ultimately stretch them

This group mainly consisted of men, men of all ages. They too had picture frames. Except that they looked as if they were suffering ten times more than the first group did. Once again the picture frames contained live images.

My dad explained to me that this group was a group of rapists. Men that had raped children, women, and men of all ages. On the picture frame they saw the people in heaven enjoying the afterlife. As they stayed in hell forever.

That wasn't their only punishment though. The whole time they got to experience the same kind of emotional and physical pain their victims dealt with their whole life. I would have to say this was the scariest and saddest group of them all. I couldn't feel sorry though.

We walked away and I went back to holding my dad's hand because even being eighteen years of age at that moment I felt scared. We walked, and at last he hugged me and told me he loved me, and just as he kissed me goodbye, I woke up.



"Ok, sweetie, I hope it's nothing serious. Will I see you for dinner tomorrow night? Your father is looking forward to it."

"Sure mom, of course. I'm looking forward to it as well." Morgan then quickly navigates through the crowd of champagne and hors d'oeuvre-wielding socialites toward the exit.

Shortly after arriving home and donning his battlesuit, Morgan's stat com relays instructions. Morgan V, report to Franklin Park. Search and destroy assassin. Kill on sight, do not interrogate. You will be joined by Aric I. A picture of your target is transmitting now.

Morgan patiently awaits the download of his target. The photo slowly rasterizes and he sees a grainy picture of an unkempt young woman. "She's kind of young to be a killer," he thinks to himself as he heads out the door and jumps on his hover cycle.

It doesn't take long for Morgan to arrive at Franklin Park as non-emergency traffic is halted during search and destroy missions. Hopping down off his hover cycle the hum of another hover engine approaches quickly and subsides and Aric I swoops in next to him and jumps quickly to the ground.

"You ready for the hunt, teacher's pet?" Aric asks with a grin.

"Nah, this one looks kind of young, I'll let you pad your stats with this one," Morgan replies.

"Young, old, they're all the same. They want us dead from the time they leave the womb. That's how they're raided."

"Alright Aric, well, let's split up. You go North, and I'll go South. Let's meet up at the river bridge."

"Sounds good to me, and remember, this kill's mine. If you find her, just wound her, I'll take the kill shot."

"Whatever, let's go."

The men head in opposite directions and the park lights turn a dark purple casting an eerie shadow over the darkening park. The men's thermos-visors help them see in the darkness as heat signatures are highlighted even in pitch black.

The two meet again at the river bridge. "No luck, Morgan?"

"Nah, nothing. I don't think she's here."

"Doesn't look like it. Oh, wait," Aric says as he walks over to the edge of the river bridge. "There's one place we haven't searched,"

"Where's that?"

"Under the bridge," Aric whispers. The men exchange knowing glances then quickly launch themselves over the side of the bridge landing simultaneously in the two-foot park river.

Aric immediately notices a heat signature show up on his visor and quickly disappear behind a large column supporting the bridge. "Morgan," he whispers. "This way, I think I've got something." Aric pulls his laser pistol from his holster and holds it in a ready position as he leads Morgan over to the column. It is only seconds before they are upon her, huddled against the support column, shivering, clutching her knees to her chest clad only in a ripped t-shirt and undergarments. Her attempts to remain, silent and hidden have failed her.

"Well, hello killer, and goodbye!" Aric raises his pistol and begins to squeeze the trigger.

"WAIT," Morgan leaps to lower Aric's arm just as he squeezes the trigger. "Owwwarghh," the young girl screams as the misguided laser blast, aimed between her eyes, grazes and burns a scar under her left eye just below her cheekbone.

"What the hell Morgan. This is a kill on sight order. What the fuck are you doing?"

"Just wait a minute, look at her. She can't be more than 15 years old. And why doesn't she have any clothes on?"

"Come on Morgan, don't get soft on me man. No interrogation," Ignoring Aric, Morgan approaches the cowering and crying young girl. "What's your name?"

"J .. j ..Jazmine," she responds through tears.

"Why did you kill Ambassador Gish?"

"He, he," she begins to breath heavily as the words do not come out.

"He what. Speak." Morgan commands.

"He hurt me, he made me do things," she responds with her head down, holding the burn on her cheek. "LIES," Aric interrupts angrily as he raises his pistol and fires again. Morgan, aware this time, knocks his arm far off target as the laser ricochets off the concrete bridge sending pebbles flying. Enraged, Aric punches Morgan in the jaw. "You're under arrest Morgan V, for treason.

"Wha unghh," Morgan cannot finish his sentence as he receives another blow. Morgan's training kicks in as he quickly delivers a roundhouse kick to the side of Aric's head, followed by elbow to the kidney, doubling Aric over. Aric rises with his laser pistol, firing again, this time at Morgan, missing narrowly. "I'm going to kill you both tonight you fucking traitor." Morgan quickly leaps toward Aric, tackling him in the water. The two wrestle and punch. Aric appears to have gained the upper hand as he sits on Morgan's chest, raining down punches when suddenly, a large cavity in his chest opens. Morgan looks up to see the girl must have picked up Aric's pistol during the scuffle.

"Fuck," Morgan says when both stat coms go off. "Kill on sight. No interrogation. Morgan V. and assassin," the stat message reads. Morgan can't believe his eyes as the stat coms slowly render a photo of both him and the young girl.

Looking up at her Morgan says, "Put the pistol down. I'm not going to hurt you. They're looking for both of us know, we don't have much time. You're going to have to trust me or we're both dead."

The girl does not hesitate and lowers the gun.

"You're going to have to do everything I say, understand?"

"Yes." She answers.

"Come with me," Morgan extends his hand to her. Slowly she takes his hand. Morgan and the girl quickly make their way back to the parked hover cycles. Before turning on the ignition, Morgan lifts and panel, and removes a small circuit board with a microchip. He also removes the stat com from his wrist and tosses it into the purple darkness.

significant others being happy with someone else who treats them fairly.

At the same time the more they look at the frame the more they suffer, the more they fall in love and the more they regret their choices. He told me to learn from these people, that a significant other should be treated with

respect and love. He also told me that a person's actions mean more than their words. I hugged some of the crying people and we kept on walking. The light of the full moon was the only thing that allowed us to see where we were going. I could see the second group of people closer to me by now.

The second group caught my attention very quickly. It was a big group of only white people, speaking all sorts of languages; from Spanish to Russian and back to English. They were all doing some sort of heavy labor and they all looked very exhausted and hungry.

My dad explained this was a group of white supremacists. They had spent their life degrading people of different races and religions. They now would spend their time being slaves, just like they wanted people of different races to be their slaves.

I did not hug this group because I did not feel sorry for them. My dad told me to learn from this group that everyone in this world is created equal. Legal or not we all have the same human rights. He said that I should never forget that, and that I should treat everyone the way I would treat myself.

We took off once again and we continued talking about our lives. The more we talked the closer we got to the third group. I heard horrible cries and I could only think of what was to come. My dad reminded me that I shouldn't be afraid, but instead that I should learn.

Hell **by Goreti Chapa**

After working a double shift all I wanted to do was sleep. I gathered myself in my bed and I closed my eyes. Little did I know I was about to start the most life changing journey of my whole life. When I opened my eyes again I found myself in a dark cold forest.

I've always hated the cold, I can stand the heat very well. The cold on the other hand is the thing I hate the most. I heard footsteps heading my way, I didn't want to turn around because I was scared of who it could be. My fear went away once I heard my dad speak.

"Hola corazon" I turned around, and there he was. He looked beautiful and at peace. I was so happy to see him. He explained to me we were going on a life changing dark journey. He told me he was doing this for my well being, and that it would all eventually make sense to me.

He held my hand as we walked for what felt like hours. The forest was so dark and cold. You could hear the sounds and cries of strange animals. My dad informed me that the people that I was going to meet were scary but that they wouldn't harm me in any way.

We kept on walking until we saw some people. It was a big group of men and women who looked very sad and depressed. Each person was holding a picture frame. On the picture frame you could actually see live clips of people. The more the men and women looked at

the frame the more they cried. My dad explained to me that this was the group of people who in life had treated their significant other in very poorly ways. They were unfaithful, disrespectful, abusive, and jealous. They now would spend the rest of their lives looking at live clips of their

"Hold on tight."

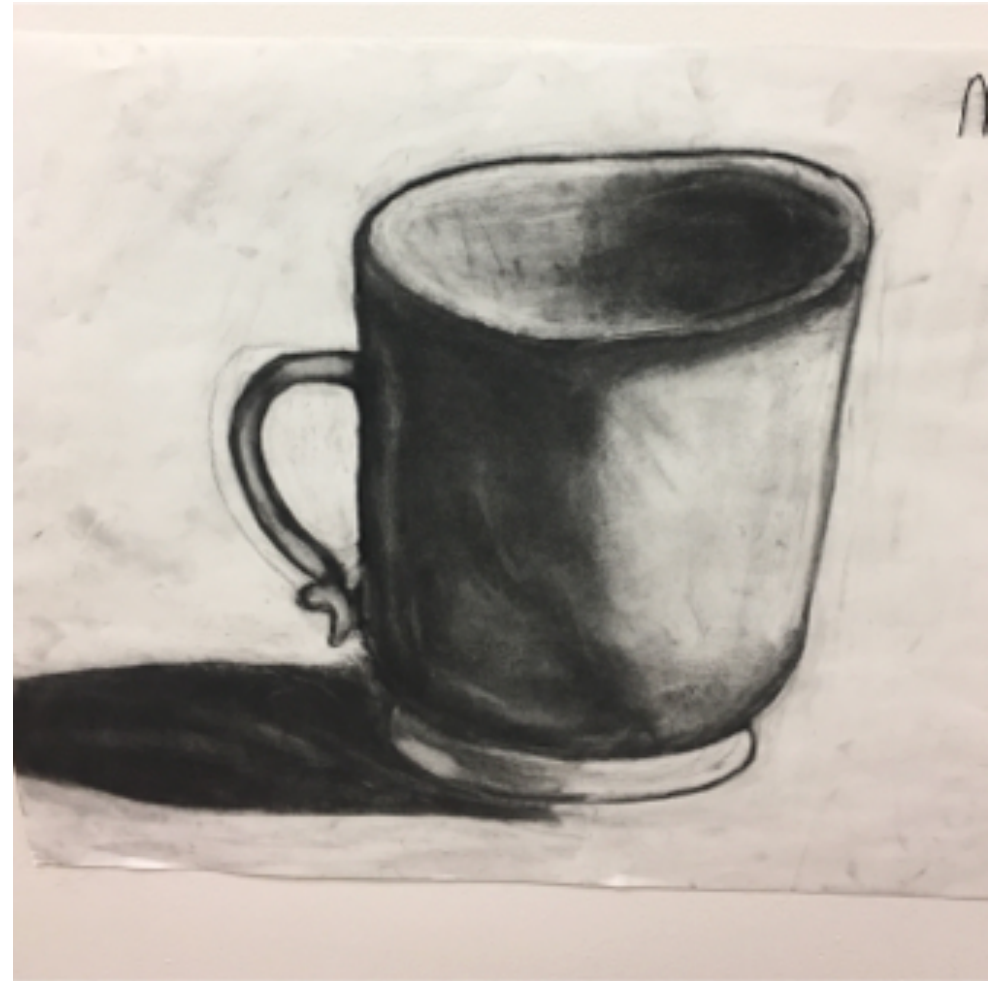
"OK." She says as she rests her head on his shoulders and they disappear on the hover cycle, into the darkness.

PRESENT DAY - RIGHT NOW

CRACK, BOOM! The sound of his body crashing into the wooden table echoes down the city block and patrons of the noodle shop scream and scramble at the sudden shock that interrupts their evening meal.

"Aaaaaargggh," he groans as he hears his left shoulder crack and dislocate as he hits the ground. "Ooowrghh!" he screams aloud in pain as he tries to lift himself to his knees, only to fall again to the ground and pain sears from his shoulder down his side.

Fading in and out of consciousness he can barely hear the shop owner



Untitled Drawing
By Mercy Kumah

yelling at him in English with a distinct Asian accent, "You owe me 79 credits for 5 bowl of Ramen and a ta..aabble ..." the old man's voice fades before he can finish his sentence before he turns and runs back into his restaurant. Still groggy from the fall, NightShade strains to look up to see what spooked the old man. At first, all he sees is a thick wall of steam billowing through the manholes in the street. He faintly hears commotion from the strip club across the street. "Get the hell outta here and don't come back. How many times we gotta tell ya, look but don't touch," the deep raspy voice chides as the burly security guard kicks an unruly patron halfway down the street.

As his eyes begin to clear, the silhouette appears in the steam. The same lithe figure that has pursued him through the city for the past two hours. It approaches slowly, deliberately, the feminine swagger in its movements belie its true nature, a relentless killing machine. Soon, it is over him. As he looks up at it, a gust of air from the sewers below blows away the cape hood that had covered its face. He has seen them before, but not this close. Where there should be a face, eyes, nose, and lips, there is nothing. Nothing except the gray camouflage exoskin comprised of thousands of scales, not unlike the skin of a snake. It is faceless, emotionless as it lifts its pistol and points it between his eyes. For a moment, it pauses, lowering its chin ever so slightly and freezing for a moment.

He knows it is receiving instruction. Based on the delay, he also knows this means the assassin is alone. The federation has cyborgs in all of the colonies searching for him, and this "one" found him. Still in shock, he cannot move. In a split second, the cybernetic humanoid assassin is back online and again speaks in the hypnotizing female voice, "You are being terminated Morgan V," it proclaims. Before he can react, her soft finger squeezes the trigger. The plasma blast is silent as the heat sears through the skin and bone, cauterizing along its path as it enters the base of the skull. The forehead explodes into a large hole as it exits. Both arms fall lifeless and limp as knees crash into the sidewalk. Through the cauterized hole in its skull, NightShade can see the hourglass figure standing 10 feet away, bathed in steam. He's not sure if he's slipping out of consciousness, dead, or just mesmerized by the gentle sway of her hips, clad in skin tight jeans that look as though they were painted on, as she sashayed towards him.

As he warily peers through the hole in the assassin's head he can't help but admire her. Her long straight black hair, disturbed only by the single braid on the left side of her face, neatly tied and capped with a feather. The red neon noodle sign flickers off the gold belly chain around her waist exposed by her midriff tank top. He listens to the rhythmic tap of her stiletto boots as she approaches him still unsure of his level of consciousness. He realizes she is the most beautiful woman he knows with the well-defined yet gentle bone structure of her face, and her large brown eyes and smooth perfect light golden skin; he thinks he must be dreaming. The only hint of imperfection is a faint scar on her left cheek from a burn that healed years ago and has almost faded from sight.

He notices the dreamcatcher bracelet on her wrist as she holsters her pistol and places a stiletto boot to the shoulder of the cybernetic assassin, still slumped lifelessly on its knees. "Terminate that! Bitch!" she says triumphantly while kicking it over with a wry smile.

"Jazmine," NightShade says almost in an adoring whisper.

"Are you alright?" she asks.

"Not this time Jaz, I think I'm going to need a doctor."

"Well, let's get you to one then," she says as she leans down to gently help him to his feet. "We better take an auto-taxi in case they've tracked our vehicles."

"I don't think there are more in this colony. The cyborg had to receive a wide area transmission. That means they are at least two colonies away. But you're right, we should play it safe. There's always one over there, around the corner from the club. Aaahhh." He bristles in pain as they begin crossing the busy street.

"How do you think they found ..." Jaz looks back with a frown as the old man from the noodle shop interrupts her. "Wait, you owe me 79 credits for 5 Ramen and table," the old man barks with a scowl on his face.

"Take the cyborg old man, it's worth 1000 times that, and that's the only deal I have for you," she offers. The dreamcatcher bracelet caught his eye as her hand dropped to the pistol on her hip.

The old man doesn't think about it long before he agrees, "Deal." He sticks his head inside the restaurant door and barks out some unintelligible orders in Chinese. A few seconds later, three younger Asians emerge from a side door and grab the lifeless cyber assassin from the street. The three of them lift the creature and quickly disappear back inside. The old man flips the sign on the door from OPEN to CLOSED and he gets in one parting barb, "You don't come here no more, assholes."

"How did you know I was in trouble Jaz?" NightShade asks as they limp around the corner and lift the door to the autotaxi.

"You think I don't know you follow me around, protecting me?"

"Mmmhrnmm."

"Well, for the past few years, I've been following you around, protecting you too."

"No shit?"

"No shit."

They laugh together as she enters coordinates into the auto-taxi navigation system. The whine of its antigravity engine hums loudly as it lifts off the ground and begins skimming down the street.

"You know I'm going to have to leave. They know I'm here," NightShade says leaning into her, resting his head on her shoulder. "But this is a nice colony, you should stay here. It's safer than where I need to go next."

"I already told you, I'll never leave you alone, no matter what. Just like you never left me. So where are we going next?"

"The dark colony, there's resistance there. It's time we fight. I'm tired of running," he says as he drifts off.

Jazmine gently rubs his bleeding forehead as the taxi disappears into the city night, "It's about time."