

Introduction

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Since beginning my upper level course work for my English major I have become intimately acquainted with the art of beginning; beginning classes and beginning research papers. The point of demarcation for a research paper is typically acknowledged as the thesis, around which the scholar builds their case through the analysis of the primary text, be it poem, short story or novel, the collection of supporting secondary criticism and other evidence.

Starting a research paper, collecting the—literally—dozens of books and journals (half of which inevitably turn out to be superfluous) is an arduous process that, even when well planned can leave a student frustrated, tired, and stooped like a Sherpa under the weight of twenty or-so books, a lap-top and the brick-like Norton Anthology. From Steen Library I've checked out over a hundred musty books on Shakespeare, travel writing, gender in literature, fairy tales, Romanticism, the feudal structure of the English monarchy, criticism and biographies of W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney, to name a few.

While stumbling in and out of the library, about once a semester, I get what I've come to think of as The Question. While the words tend to vary, a little of the essence of The Question remains the same: What the Hell is The Point of Studying English? Students of Stephen F. Austin should be familiar with the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow quote "great is the art of beginning but greater still is the art of finishing." A research paper is the finishing of not only weeks of research, but months and years of education, discussion and consideration.

“English studies,” Dr. Mark Sanders, Chair of the English Department, once said, “teach us what it means to be human.” The finished essays in the inaugural issue of *Theocrit*, are a cross-sampling of the diverse paths that each of these students has taken in their discovery of what it is to be human. From drug-induced non-fiction to sexy immortals, the range demonstrated by the eight authors of the works in this issue proves literature’s sustained ability to intrigue and excite.

M. Brett Gaffney’s “Gonzo Journalism: A Hybrid,” and Stephanie Mendoza’s “From Dawn to Twilight: The Byronic Hero,” though strikingly different, both argue for expanding the boundaries of two firmly established “conventions” within literary studies. Gaffney explores the emergence of a hybrid form of journalism, known as gonzo journalism, aptly named by the rebellious journalist who mixed fact and fiction in humorous, often graphic, ways, Hunter S. Thompson. Mendoza argues for incorporating Edward Cullen, the hero of the wildly popular *Twilight* series, into the roll call of the Byronic hero, and in so doing, traces the evolution of this hero from his earliest manifestations to his modern-day articulation as a lonely vampire seeking love and acceptance.

Meta Henty and Rene Jones examine several of American literature’s great Modernists in their essays. The perceived villainess of Henry James’s *The Other House*, Jones argues in her essay “Unraveling the Character of Rose Armiger,” actually acts out of noble intentions; by murdering a small child she is in fact keeping a deathbed promise to the child’s mother to protect the little girl from suffering at the hands of an abusive stepmother. Rose Armiger’s preemptive measure is traditionally interpreted within the context of desire: the child is simply an obstacle to her handsome father. Henty’s

“Modernist Fragmentation and Alienation through Expressionism” weaves an intricate relationship between the works of Hemingway, Toomer, Anderson, and Faulkner and expressionist art. Using expressionist style, each writer is able to more forcefully represent the alienation and despair that characterize the Modernist period.

Swedenborg and Yeats form the core of Julia Fonteno’s examination of J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Uncle Silas*. Specifically, Fonteno argues that there are clear affinities between Swedenborg’s philosophies and the belief in the supernatural common in nineteenth-century Ireland, and in turn, the Swedenborg “connection” links Le Fanu with other Irish writers, namely Wilde and Yeats. Andrea Locke takes the reader on another journey into the supernatural with her essay “Immortal Fixation.” Locke argues that the *Twilight* series is a *bildungsroman* rather than an *entwicklungsroman*, basing her assertion in Freud’s theory of psychosexual development.

As he concludes his essay “Two Stories as Dream States,” Luke Landtroop argues that John Cheever’s short story “The Swimmer” is ultimately more interesting than Ambrose Bierce’s “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” because Cheever treats the fate of his main character more ambiguously. Throughout the essay, however, he lays out the striking convergences and divergences between the stories, establishing that the central link between the stories is that both are structured as dream states. In the final essay, “Mixing Fantasy with Fact: Kurt Vonnegut’s Use of Structure in *Slaughterhouse-Five*,” Jennifer Moody examines the non-linear structure of the novel as it relates to time travel, noting how Vonnegut integrated his own personal experiences in Dresden during World War II in his creation of Billy Pilgrim. It is only through careful attention to the

narrative's timeline, Moody alleges, that a better understanding of the novel's anti-war sentiments can be gained.

With essays on angst-ridden American Modernists to Post-Modern journalists bending genre rules, writer Kurt Vonnegut contextualizing his experience in Dresden, to the all-too human struggles of the Byronic hero Edward in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*, the students bring their own voices to the dialog on the greater issues of being human. Taken together, these essays reflect the lively conversations about literature that abound within and outside the English classroom. Great, indeed, is the art of beginning, but greater still the art of finishing. It is with great pleasure that the staff of *Theocrit* presents to you in this inaugural issue the fruits of these laborious researches, discussions, ruminations, readings and interpretations.