

Hobart and William Smith Colleges



*First Year Writing Prize
2023*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Hannah Dickinson, Amy Green, and Ingrid Keenan

JURORS

WINNER, HONORABLE MENTIONS AND FINALISTS

CAM CROWELL

*The Impact of Global Warming on North African Cork Oak Tree
(*Quercus suber*) Forests*

LAURA THÉRIEN

hole

HONORABLE MENTIONS: EXCERPTS

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an act that can report facts, share new knowledge, describe phenomena, develop interpretations, or argue a position. But in the act of writing, students also forge new relationships: relationships with texts and authors, with professors and peers, with audiences imaged and real. They forge relationships with ideas, with nagging questions, with new genres and forms.

Despite the richness of the relationships we develop with and through writing, it can often feel profoundly lonely. The First Year Writing Prize works to disrupt the stereotype of the solitary writer, scribbling madly in their garret or typing late at night in their dorm room. The cover letters submitted by writing prize finalists highlight the roles of their peers, Writing Colleagues, Writing Fellows, and professors in their writing practices. As these first year essays and cover letters make clear, writing is a fully social and embodied process, not the mere product of thoughts translated into words, but the result of relationship-rich forms of learning and inquiry.

The First Year Writing Prize celebrates not only the accomplishments of individual writers, but also the community of writers who support, challenge, and learn from them. It celebrates professors who ask students to write about things that matter; peers who help one another brainstorm, revise, and edit late into the night; and the Writing Fellows and Writing Colleagues who—through patience, perseverance, and skill—demonstrate the value of collaboration and revision. Together, these constituencies help shape a brilliant, collaborative, intellectually curious, and socially engaged writing community at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Like writing itself, the First Year Writing Prize is a product of collective efforts, and we would like to thank Kendralin Freeman, Joe Mink, Kelly Payne, and Daniel Schonning for their care and thoughtfulness in selecting this year's winners. Additional thanks go to the Writing and Rhetoric Department, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the First Year Seminar Program for their support of this prize and

commitment to creating a vibrant community of writers at HWS. We'd especially like to thank Will Hochman '74 whose celebratory spirit inspired this prize and Suzanne Rutstein '95 whose generous gift makes this prize possible.

We are equally grateful to the many students who participated in this year's First Year Writing Prize. It was inspiring and invigorating to read such diverse examples of first year writing and learn from the challenging questions, intellectual energy, creativity, and dedication that our students bring to the page. We can't wait to see what you do next!

HANNAH DICKINSON

*Associate Professor of Writing & Rhetoric
Co-Director, Writing Colleagues Program*

INGRID KEENAN

*Associate Director for Student Enrichment
Center for Teaching & Learning*

AMY GREEN

*Co-Director, Writing Colleagues Program
Writing & Rhetoric Department*

JURORS

FACULTY & STAFF

PROFESSOR HANNAH DICKINSON
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

SHANELLE FRANCE
Center for Teaching and Learning

PROFESSOR KENDRALIN FREEMAN
Department of Sociology

PROFESSOR AMY GREEN
Writing Colleagues Program

SUSAN HESS
Center for Teaching and Learning

INGRID KEENAN
Center for Teaching and Learning

THOM MASCIA
Center for Teaching and Learning

DR. JOE MINK
Assistant Dean, Hobart College

DR. KELLY PAYNE
Assistant Dean, William Smith College

PROF. BEN RISTOW
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

PROFESSOR DANIEL SCHONNING
Department of English

PROFESSOR MAGGIE M. WERNER
Department of Writing and Rhetoric

WRITING FELLOWS

LITZY BAUTISTA '23

ANGELICA KNUDSON '22, MAT '23

WILLIAM KOEPP '23

IRINI KONSTANTINOOU '23

JACKSON MISCHLER '24

KYLIE ROWLAND '24

ERIKA SIPOS '23

ELLA STIER '23

*WINNERS OF THE 2023
FIRST YEAR WRITING
PRIZE*

CAM CROWELL

“The Impact of Global Warming on North African
Cork Oak Tree (*Quercus Suber*) Forests”

*Nominated by Professor Robin Murphy
FSEM 078: Sustainable Living
and Learning Communities*

LAURA THÉRIEN

“hole”

*Nominated by Professor Kathryn Cowles
ENG 190: Creative Writing*

HONORABLE MENTIONS

CAM AMADO

Nominated by Professor Laura Free

RANDY HONG

Nominated by Professor Jess Hayes-Conroy

FINALISTS

DERRICK ABNOOS

Nominated by Professor Susan Hess

DAUD A. ADEN

Nominated by Professor Ali Safwand

LEIA BRUNT

Nominated by Professor Amy Green

EVE DESJARDINS

Nominated by Professor Ruth Shields

NICOLAS DIAZ-AGUILAR

Nominated by Professor Don Spector

FIONA FLOOD PAGLIARO GALLAGHER

Nominated by Professor Amy Green

HAILEY GALVAN

Nominated by Professor Michelle Martin-Baron

ELIJAH GOLDMAN

Nominated by Professor Don Spector

JOHNNY HILL

Nominated by Professor Ervin Kosta

NICOLA HUNT

Nominated by Professor Kathryn Cowles

HOPE JOHNSON

Nominated by Professor Chris Annear

MIRA LINDERMAN-VENTO

Nominated by Professor Steve Penn

LIBBY MARTZLOFF

Nominated by Professor Maggie Werner

INGRID MILLER

Nominated by Professor Colby Ristow

TALYA PETERS

Nominated by Professor Nick Metz

PHẠM NGỌC ĐIỀU LINH (ESME PHAM)

Nominated by Professor Jenny Tessororf

SPENCER PINQUE

Nominated by Professor Ruth Shields

ANASTASIA MARINOU RAITSEVITS

Nominated by Professor Ervin Kosta

KIRSTEN ROMAN

Nominated by Professor Michelle Martin-Baron

ABBY SHERWOOD

Nominated by Professor Nick Metz

SANDEEP TISSAARATCHY

Nominated by Professor Jenny Tessororf

LINH TRAN

Nominated by Professor Ali Safwand

CAM CROWELL

LETTER

In North Africa, a tree species specifically evolved to resist fire is burning. How can this be?

Over the course of several months of research, I found that the combined forces of direct human influence and anthropogenic climate change can overwhelm nature's design in a relatively short timeframe. Cork oak trees (*Quercus suber*) are, by all intents and purposes, ecologically hardy: they have specific biological protections to resist wildfire. Native to Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, these trees are accustomed to hot, dry conditions. Cork oak trees are vital to North Africa's environment, as they make up a keystone species for many woodlands, and North Africa's economy, as their cork makes up a considerable export. Left well enough alone, *Quercus suber* has been known to survive for over 500 years.

The flagrant hypocrisy of the cork oaks' existence drew me into further research. After all, I knew that *Quercus suber*'s newly acquired crisis of felled longevity couldn't have sprung up from nothing. I was determined to find a root cause — global warming, while technically correct, was both too short and too unsatisfactory an answer for both my piqued curiosity and the academic requirements for a passing grade on a semester-long research paper.

It turned out that the answer was complicated, which did not surprise me intellectually. The reality that the mechanisms of climate change were complex and entangled was an academic no-brainer. However, the specificities of the localized impact of climate change from the perspective of a single tree species caught me off guard emotionally.

Climate anxiety has been apparent in my life for years, long before I knew anything about cork oak trees. The fear that the planet will warm,

the plants and animals will die, and humanity will boil has kept me up at night since I was a kid. Without this climate anxiety, I might not have enrolled in college at all.

Quercus suber took my climate anxiety to new heights. Global warming is a slow-motion calamity, of which *Quercus suber* may be one of the first casualties. The various overarching consequences of global warming appear more like an overpopulated bulletin board and less like a clean Excel spreadsheet.

Quercus suber is ensnared in a violent maelstrom of detrimental stresses set in motion by humanity's hand. These stresses include fire, drought, invasive species and insect pests, pathogens, exploitation, and improper land use. These stresses compound and amplify each other, without any being immediately lethal. *Quercus suber* does not have the luxury of just one climate-change-induced problem — rather, it is caught in the crossfire of the amalgamation of many.

This is an agonizing and unjust death for a tree species that has done little more than be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Cork oak woodland, in fact, sequesters carbon dioxide from the earth's atmosphere. *Quercus suber* is being attacked from all angles, and cannot actively defend itself.

It has done nothing wrong, and yet it suffers.

As a writer, the process of composing this paper took my broad climate anxiety and focused it. My writing process made me want to weep for a tree. Yet at the same time, it was easier to observe and understand climate change when it wasn't a vague, looming sense of dread. *Quercus suber* upset me, but it didn't make me lose hope. *Quercus suber* acted as a cautionary tale rather than a recipe for despair.

This paper is not an invitation to succumb to the hopelessness that so often accompanies climate anxiety. This paper acts as a record of the uprooting of inveterate environs.

Thank you for reading my paper and considering me for this prize.

ASSIGNMENT PROMPT

North Africa is “Ground Zero” for many consequences of global climate change. These consequences are further exacerbated by the region’s unique socioeconomic and ecological characteristics. This assignment asks you to pick one country from this region—either Tunisia, Morocco, or Algeria—and to furthermore select one climate change-related problem that your selected country is currently grappling with. Your task is to write a 10-page Documented Research Essay about this one problem within the context of this one country.

ESSAY

THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL WARMING ON NORTH AFRICAN CORK OAK TREE (*QUERCUS SUBER*) FORESTS

A major consequence of global warming within the 21st century is the devastation of forests worldwide. Forests in the Mediterranean region have been no exception, as forests in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia have experienced severe loss. Cork oak (*Quercus suber*) trees are a species native to these forests that have specific adaptations to resist and endure forest fires and periods of drought. Despite these evolutionary advantages, regions of North African cork oak trees are still experiencing substantial amounts of degradation at the hands of natural factors aggravated by global warming. The factors most adverse to cork oak health today are primary stresses such as fires, drought, and habitat loss incurred by rising temperatures and falling precipitation rates, as well as secondary stresses such as insect pests and pathogens. Cork oak trees are vital to their local ecosystems and are used in the manufacturing of several products: their loss would reverberate worldwide. This paper examines the primary characteristics and value of these trees, the current state of cork oak stands, the contributing factors of *Quercus suber* loss, and the recovery and future outlook for these trees.

Cork oak trees occupy large amounts of land in Northern Africa and have specific qualities that make their continued survival important for our planet. Forests of these trees occupy over 700,000 hectares (2,704.71 square miles) of land in Northern Africa (Baraket et. al, 2019). Of the Mediterranean region’s 2.2 million hectares (8,494.24 square miles) of cork oak forest, 31.8 percent are located in Northern Africa, with the other 68.2 percent located in France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal (Baraket et. al, 2019). 230,000 (888.03 square miles) of those 700,000 hectares reside in Algeria, with the rest located in Morocco and Tunisia (Roula et. al, 2020). Cork oak trees are a staple of the Mediterranean region. One way to identify cork oak trees is by their “evergreen broadleaved tree[s]” (Roula et. al, 2020). *Quercus suber* has intrinsic value in its unique and “remarkable capacity to create suberose tissue from its inner bark” (Chorana et. al, 2019). Suberose tissue is highly insulative and provides great natural fire protection for its internal tissue and dormant, internal buds, which have evolved to foster crown regeneration after a tree has experienced a fire (Roula et. al, 2020).



Figure 1 - A cork oak stand in Tunisia (Mechergui et. al, 2021)

Cork oak forests have inherent environmental value. North African *Quercus suber* forests occur as mixed stands, often interspersed with other trees, such as holm oak, with a variable and richly diverse undergrowth composed of shrubs (Maghnia et. al, 2019; Roula et. al, 2020). Cork oak woodland serves as a biodiversity hotspot: “*Quercus suber* forests are of the highest cultural and ecological value and sustain a great variety of floral and faunal diversity” (Chorana et. al, 2019). In Northern Tunisia, for example, cork oak woodland is a habitat for over 400 species (Baraket et. al, 2019). The loss of these cork oak woodlands would force these creatures to migrate or die. Furthermore, forest ecosystems are also important for their contributing role in carbon sequestration (Maghnia et. al, 2019).

Cork oak trees are of high economic value to the North African region. Due to the nature of human-focused cork production, *Quercus suber* forests also occur as near-monocultures wherein cork oak can be exploited (Maghnia et. al, 2019; Roula et. al, 2020). Cork oak trees are highly prized for their bark, as it is primarily used in the formation of wine corks (Roula et. al, 2020). Cork oak trees can live for over five hundred years, but generally live between 150 and 200 years; they are first harvested for their bark when the tree “attains a circumference of 70 centimeters at breast height” (approximately thirty years old), and are harvested 12 to 20 times within their lifetimes (Roula et. al, 2020). Cork production is an incredible asset to North Africa’s economy, as it “strengthens the otherwise fragile production regions” (Mechergui et. al, 2021). Cork is invaluable to the bottle stopper industry— cork’s natural properties, such as its durability and compressibility, make it irreplaceable as other resources simply lack cork’s benefits (Chorana et. al, 2019). Cork exports generate over 1.5 billion euros (1.45 billion USD) of profit annually (Roula et. al, 2020). Cork oak forests are also economically valuable as their diverse undergrowth makes them able to support livestock grazing (Khalfaoui et. al, 2020). A 2020 study of Tunisia’s Ain Shoussi Forest found that the total economic value of the services provided by the 3,787 hectare (14.6 square mile) region amounted to a rate of €0.55 million per year (0.53 million USD per year) (Khalfaoui et. al, 2020). In short, cork oak woodland provides several renewable sources of income that North Africa should protect.

Quercus suber needs to be protected from a wide variety of obstacles to their continued existence as a result of climate change. The first evidence of cork oak die-off can be found as far back as the 1960s; however, this pattern “was not clearly recognized until the 1980s and 1990s, and seemed to accelerate as early as the 2000s” (Younsi et. al, 2021). Oak decline during the late twentieth century saw (and continues to see) lower regeneration rates among cork oak trees despite the species’ high germination rate (Maghnia et. al, 2019). *Quercus suber* loss can be broadly rationalized under the vast explanatory umbrella of forest dieback. Forest dieback is almost never attributed to a single root cause— rather, it is the culmination of interdependent intrinsic and extrinsic factors on an area of cork oak woodland (Younsi et. al, 2021). The challenge to resolving cork oak’s issues therefore is a quandary of allocation: the laundry list of climate change issues overlap continually

and are difficult to extricate from each other. According to several studies published since 2018, current challenges to cork oak and their habitats are plentiful. Cork oak forests will face habitat loss as a consequence of climate change induced droughts and prolonged dry periods, which will be more intense and more frequent due to reduced precipitation rates and extremer temperatures (Baraket et. al, 2019; Mechergui et. al, 2021). Severe wildfires are still detrimental to cork oak woodland despite their evolutionary advantage, especially among farmed trees that are less able to protect themselves (Roula et. al, 2020). Invasive species better suited to a warmer Mediterranean region courtesy of global change will overtake current cork oak-populated regions (Mechergui et. al, 2021). Cork oak trees are also susceptible to damage caused by insect pests, pathogens, overgrazing, and improper land use (Younsi et. al, 2021). While those last four factors are not specifically a result of global warming (as far as can be ascertained, a rise in the global temperature shares no direct causality with the freneticism of harmful North African beetle populations), their effects will almost surely be equally damaging or worsened by the maelstrom of feedback loops catalyzed by global warming — that is, cork oak trees left vulnerable by global warming will be further susceptible to secondary stresses. The consequences of forest dieback are unpleasant — facing *Quercus suber* is the threat of “higher tree mortality, reduced cork productivity, and a decrease in tree regeneration and density, leading to a decline of cork oak distribution area” (Maghnia et. al, 2019).

Climate change is a leading cause of drought, and in turn, drought is a leading contributor to the current decline of cork oak populations. According to a recent study, water availability is “the most constraining growth factor” to cork oak growth, with spring precipitation having the greatest effect (Leite et. al, 2019). Median precipitation rates in the North African region are expected to drop between 4.8 and 12.7 percent between 2030 and 2099, and the temperature in this region is expected to rise by 5.0 degrees Celsius within the same timeframe (Almazroui et. al, 2020). Just as *Quercus suber* has an evolutionary response for fire, it too has a response for drought — in drought conditions, cork oak trees will minimize their water usage by reducing their leaf water potential and specific leaf area and increasing the temperatures of their leaves in order to release excess heat energy (Maghnia et. al, 2019). Future increases in temperature and decreases in precipitation predicted for the southern regions of the Mediterranean

are expected to drastically reduce the amount of habitable area for cork oak— “40 percent of currently environmentally suitable areas for cork oak may be lost by 2070, mainly within Northern Africa and the southern Iberian Peninsula” (Mechergui et. al, 2021). Additionally, “almost 90% of new cork oak stands are predicted to lose suitability by the end of the century” (Mechergui et. al, 2021). The predisposition of drought conditions in cork oak forests will spur the adaptation of bacterial community that abate drought stress within plants; however, this alone will not be able to “halt forest degradation and cork oak decline” (Reis et. al, 2019). “With these harsher conditions, revitalization of existing cork oak stands appears less than hopeful: “an increase in the intensity and frequency of summer drought with climate change might have a negative impact on natural *Q. suber* regeneration” (Baraket et. al, 2019). Migration to regions of cooler temperatures or higher altitudes will prove difficult for cork oaks, as *Quercus suber* differs from other successional species as it has “extremely slow migration rates” (Mechergui et. al, 2021). Future cork oak plantations intended for cork production, therefore, should be “established in more humid zones (e.g. higher latitudes) to ensure the production... of cork planks thick enough to produce cork stoppers” (Leite et. al, 2019). Damages endured by drought are far more difficult to mitigate than damages endured by fire: reduced human interaction can at least diminish wildfire’s effects, but the same cannot be said for drought. North Africa’s current trajectory indicates that cork oak trees will die or migrate to cooler, wetter areas, and species such as the Aleppo pine will invade regions they once inhabited.

A fire response is already ingrained with cork oak trees’ evolutionary adaptations; however, it is unable to fully combat the heightened environmental issues brought about due to human interference. Fire causes severe loss among cork oak trees, the surrounding understory, and the soil’s microbial and fungal communities as well (Maghnia et. al, 2019). The loss of these miniature communities is nontrivial as fungal communities native to cork oak woodland aid in water transfer between and increase water availability to plants, and promote plant nutrition in low-nutrient soil (Maghnia et. al, 2019; Reis et. al, 2019). Thus, the collapse of these fungal communities due to fire will compound the effects of drought on *Quercus suber*. Without human interference, cork oaks are incredibly resilient in the face of natural wildfires, and can protect themselves through “vigorous regrowth of their stump shoots”

(Younsi et. al, 2021). *Quercus suber*, for all its resistances to fire, is drastically weakened by human interaction—untampered cork oak trees have over a ninety percent survival rate, yet mortality rates “can be very high in exploited trees, particularly if they were recently debarked and have a thin bark” (Roula et. al, 2020). When cork oak trees are damaged or charred, the value of the bark drastically decreases, as does the bark productivity, increasing the minimum time to resume cork harvesting to forty years (Roula et. al, 2020). This is significant because it could cause severe loss or fluctuation within the North African (and, by extension, the global) economy. As cork oak trees are exploited for their cork, they are left more susceptible to be damaged by fire, decreasing the overall number of healthy cork oaks. Processes to minimize this damage are not ideal: cutting less cork oak trees immediately springs to mind, but this would theoretically incur economic loss. Humanity’s exploitation of cork oak trees has caused a particularly vicious cycle.

Pests and pathogens are also pertinent threats to the continued survival of cork oak trees, particularly trees that have already been weakened by human influence or natural causes. While their existence is not a direct result of global warming, global warming has made cork oak trees more vulnerable to their interactions (Roula et. al, 2020). Just as the effects of wildfires aggravated the effect of drought, wildfires similarly magnify the effects of insect pests — “burned trees will be more vulnerable and can be colonised by bark and wood pests, leading to insect epidemics” (Younsi et. al, 2021). Wounds to cork oak bark imposed by improper harvesting act as a similar weakening function to fire damage. When cork is harvested erroneously, parts of the phloem (the tissue within plants that transports photosynthetic products) are detached and the wood is exposed, providing favorable conditions for the subsequent colonization of xylophagous¹ insects (Roula et. al, 2020). Defoliation induced by insect pests is a cause of mortality for some cork oak stands, and only “facilitate[s] the attack of pathogens” in others (Maghnia et.

¹ Xylophagous is a term that does not refer to any specific species of insect; rather, it is a blanket adjective for insects that feed on wood. Some xylophagous insects affecting *Quercus suber* forests are ambrosia beetles, oak pinhole borers (*Platypus cylindrus*), and longhorn beetles (*Cerambyx spp.*) (Maghnia et. al, 2019; Roula et. al, 2020). The larvae of several other species also make their homes within cork oak bark (Younsi et. al, 2021).

al, 2019). Holes in cork oak bark created by xylophagous insects or humans open the door for fungal diseases, which disturb the flow of water and nutrients within the tree (Roula et. al, 2020; Younsi et. al, 2021). Pathogens² can cause a medley of fatal symptoms which include root rot, canker formation on trunks, and the drying of branches, potentially resulting in tree mortality (Maghnia et. al, 2019). Trees that are afflicted with these fungal pathogens have lower cork growth and are more vulnerable to fire (Roula et. al, 2020).

In conclusion, the future for cork oak trees in the hands of global warming does not bode well for the economic future of North Africa, the ecosystems for which cork oaks are a keystone species, or the cork oak trees themselves. This is, however, part of a larger issue. Global warming poses a multitude of direct threats to *Quercus suber*, and these threats' impact is subsequently compounded by additional, pre-existing stresses in cork oak trees' native environment, to which cork oak trees are now more vulnerable. Cork oak trees are caught in a vicious cycle of decline that was originally set in motion by human influence — the interaction of multitudes of gratuitous feedback loops is overwhelming, as the threats to *Quercus suber*'s existence overlap without seamless, easily identifiable cohesion. Human exploitation of the planet has left its arboreal inhabitants to defend themselves from threats caused by rising temperatures and falling precipitation rates that they were never evolutionarily prepared to deal with in the first place. The pessimistic outlook dictates that, in the face of such innumerable danger, this tree species will not be able to wrest itself free from global warming's grasp; however, such a sordid outlook diminishes the march of human progress to a dull trudge. Human influence is the prevailing cause of *Quercus suber*'s predicament, and it is now humanity's responsibility to extricate them. Climate change is an issue that must be addressed globally, even with regard to a relatively small region of Mediterranean evergreens.

² Several pathogens are known to affect *Quercus suber*, including *Biscogniauxia mediterranea*, *Botryosphaeria stevensii*, *Diplodia corticola*, and *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (Maghnia et. al, 2019). *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is known as the main contributor of root rot; however, recent tests have indicated a “wider range of pathogens implicated in oak decline” (Maghnia et. al, 2019).

Works Cited:

- Almazroui, M., Saeed, F., Saeed, S., Nazrul Islam, M., Ismail, M., Klutse, N. A. B., & Siddiqui, M. H. (2020). Projected change in temperature and precipitation over Africa from CMIP6. *Earth Systems and Environment*, 4(3), 455-475.
- Baraket, M., Fkiri, S., Taghouti, I., Kachout, S. S., Ennajah, A., Khaldi, A., & Nasr, Z. (2019). Effect of Water Deficit on Gas Exchange Responses to Intercellular CO₂ Concentration Increase of *Quercus suber* L. Seedlings. *Journal of Agricultural Science*, 12(1), 73. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jas.v12n1p73>
- Chorana, A., Dehane, B., & Santiago Beltrán, R. (2019). Characterisation of the cork growth and quality of cork oak woodlands, North-West Algeria. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 76(3), 507-522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207233.2019.1594290>
- Khalfaoui, M., Daly-Hassen, H., Stiti, B., & Jebari, S. (2020). Toward Decision-Making Support: Valuation and Mapping of New Management Scenarios for Tunisian Cork Oak Forests. *Forests*, 11(2), 197.
- Leite, C., Oliveira, V., Lauw, A., & Pereira, H. (2019). Cork rings suggest how to manage *Quercus suber* to mitigate the effects of climate changes. *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology*, 266, 12-19.
- Maghnia, F. Z., Abbas, Y., Mahé, F., Prin, Y., El Ghachtouli, N., Duponnois, R., & Sanguin, H. (2019). The rhizosphere microbiome: A key component of sustainable cork oak forests in trouble. *Forest Ecology and Management*, 434, 29-39.
- MECHERGUI, K., JAOUADI, W., ALTAMIMI, A. S., NAGHMOUCHI, S., & AMMARI, Y. (2021). Effect of climate change on the spatial distribution and cork production of *Quercus suber* L., the risk of exclusion by the Aleppo pine expansion, and management practices to protect *Q. suber*

habitat: A review. *Notulae Botanicae Horti Agrobotanici Cluj-Napoca*, 49(1), 12218. <https://doi.org/10.15835/nbha49112218>

- Reis, F., Soares-Castro, P., Costa, D., Tavares, R. M., Baptista, P., Santos, P. M., & Lino-Neto, T. (2019). Climatic impacts on the bacterial community profiles of cork oak soils. *Applied soil ecology*, 143, 89-97.
- Roula, S. E., Bouhraoua, R. T., & Catry, F. X. (2020). Factors affecting post-fire regeneration after coppicing of cork oak (*Quercus suber*) trees in northeastern Algeria. *Canadian Journal of Forest Research*, 50(4), 371-379. <https://doi.org/10.1139/cjfr-2019-0181>
- Younsi, S. E., Adjami, Y., Ghanem, R., Bouchaib, B., & Ouakid, M. L. (2021). Impact of different factors degrading cork oak stands in the Mediterranean region: A case study from Algeria. *Journal of Forest Science*, 67, 570-581. <https://doi.org/10.17221/77/2021-jfs>

LAURA THÉRIEN

LETTER

My focus for the revision of this piece was to condense the language while keeping the poem's repetitive form. To condense the language, I cut articles and small connecting words such as "the", "a", "my", "and", etc. I removed excess description and turned similes into direct metaphors. I also chose to get rid of all punctuation except for the last period. I wanted the poem to flow quickly without being interrupted by punctuation. These changes helped the language in this piece sound more vibrant, more poetic. Even though these modifications seem small, they allowed the poem to take on a wild momentum of its own.

I had a specific goal for the form of this poem. I wanted to slowly introduce the fog, similarly to how fog can suddenly appear without much warning. After the initial introduction, I chose to bombard the poem with fog, hoping to create a feeling of suffocation by the excessive use of the word "fog". Towards the end of the piece, I stopped directly mentioning the fog for a couple of lines. I then brought the fog back one final time in the last line of the poem. It took me a while to figure out how to achieve this form without cutting some of my favorite lines. I spent a while playing around with the placement of certain fog descriptions to find a way to accomplish my goal. I also tried out different formats for the poem. I didn't want to cut up any lines because that could halt the poem's momentum. In fact, I decided to justify the text so that it didn't look like I was intentionally cutting any lines.

After workshoping this piece there were a few more things I wanted to add. One of them was the mention of color. I wanted to emphasize the boring grey and white tones of the fog and contrast them with the bright red of the blood. In some areas, I tried to "weird up" the poem. For example, I changed the "dark bruised black blue" to "dark blue black bruised" so that the common "black and blue" saying is inverted. I also used both spellings of the word "grey/gray." I chose to use the non-US spelling "gray" in "every gray thought" because when read

fast it sounds like “everyday thought.” I later used the spelling “grey” in “grey glass waterfall” to call attention to the fact that I spelled it differently earlier in the piece. I also changed some words such as “neck” to “throat” and “warn” to “wail” in order to sharpen up the diction. I did a lot of reading out loud during this revision. The beat and flow are essential elements to this poem, and I wanted to make sure the edits I was making were a good fit.

ASSIGNMENT PROMPT

Each student will present three creative pieces for workshop with the full class over the course of the semester. For your first two workshop pieces, one must be a poem and one must be a prose piece (you choose which to write first and which to write second). Prose pieces can be short stories, creative nonfiction pieces, or other sentence-based pieces of writing. The third piece can be either a poem or a prose piece, your choice.

ASSIGNMENT

hole

there is a hole someplace in my head heart or soul so small unapparent
i may have made it up fatal though oh a miniscule crack in the last
oxygen tank a whistling fissure in the plane window deathly quietly
something got inside of me stifling smothering suffocating fog from my
throat up over my head cough fog cough lungs fog in out ear drums fog
curling over retinas fogging perceptions every color a boring fog fog
droplets stick to my every gray thought until they turn dark blue black
bruised hazardous storm-inducing fog in late afternoon foghorns wail
harshly i am so fogged up feelings pushing shoving in my mind
incessant smoke alarms scream as big ugly tears stream down my body
a grey glass waterfall at the white mall and as time passes my fog goes
on for miles spreads until i bleed bleed red on the color-deprived
shower floor tiles.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

CAM AMADO

“The Function of the Extraterrestrial in
Modern Popular Culture”
Nominated by Professor Laura Free (FSEM 083)

FROM CAM'S LETTER

My fondest memories from childhood are of nights spent avoiding sleep in the bedroom I shared with my sister, as my dad told us stories of Invader Zerg, the evil alien overlord who commanded his fleets to infiltrate Earth with sonic beams and powerful rays of light. The stories were exciting and engaging, and he would never forget to place my sister and me within them, as a duo of intergalactic warriors defending Earth and fighting for the good of the universe. I was comforted by the idea of my sister and me as heroes, and I never failed to believe in these triumphs because they felt possible in a world outside of our own. I couldn't fully comprehend the possibilities of life beyond Earth, and this made it all the easier to believe that those powers existed for me in some parallel universe. I recognized even then how powerful the vastness of the universe could be in telling stories, and in providing freedom within the unknown.

FROM THE ESSAY

The possibility of extraterrestrial life has seemingly always permeated life on Earth, predating modernity with the ancient notion of multiple worlds beyond our own. This theory of cosmic pluralism likely began as early as the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Anaximander, who took a

metaphysical approach to the philosophy of pluralism, theorizing the infinite generation and regeneration of worlds and therefore the infinite principle of being. Later, the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries brought a more empirical understanding of the Solar System, and the knowledge of the universal processes existing outside of Earth allowed for speculation about life beyond it. Cosmic pluralism, then, had minimal relation to theology and philosophy as it was now largely informed by astronomy and biology. The new Copernican cosmology modernized the plurality of worlds to the belief in numerous worlds in addition to Earth that explicitly stated the possibility of extraterrestrial life. This speculation and the skepticism it was met with informed the conceptual fiction of the Enlightenment; the French philosopher and satirist Voltaire's 1752 novella *Micromégas* is one such example, where his fictional aliens serve to intimate the minuteness of Earth and its inhabitants as part of the much greater universe. These fantastical stories allowed people to grapple with the idea of extraterrestrial life through a more scientific lens before the genre of science fiction truly found its form. In the 19th and early 20th century, this form began to solidify with the publication of early science fiction novels like H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), which gives rise to the concept of the Martian invasion and depicts aliens as "vast, and cool, and unsympathetic", posing a threat to mankind. The novel's publication was met with a great deal of success that can chiefly be attributed to its underlying political implications regarding the international tensions between European Imperial powers. Wells' Martian invasion reflected increasing feelings of anxiety and insecurity over the British Empire's potential subjugation by foreign forces; there was ubiquitous concern that Britain would finally experience the colonialism it had long since been subjecting other nations to. This is only one early example of a specific cultural fear that translated into the creation of fictional alien entities.

These preliminary works of science fiction helped to popularize many culturally-apprised tropes outside of the foreign invasion that have since pervaded modern "alien" media, such as the alien abduction, the humanoid alien, aliens resembling Earth animals, etc. These tropes laid the groundwork for later popular depictions of extraterrestrial life in film, television, literature, music, and, eventually, web media. These more recent alien adaptations increasingly reflect shifting cultural anxieties, more so than earlier scientific and philosophical speculations

that questioned the greater nature of the universe and humanity's relationship to it. Scholar of science fiction Gary Westfahl presents a useful mode of considering extraterrestrial media; he states, "To survey science fiction aliens, one can classify them by their physiology, character, and eventual relationships with humanity". The notion of the alien, specifically in more recent Western popular culture, can reveal a great deal about cultural fears when classified through a similar methodology. To determine the specific cultural function of individual alien inceptions in contemporary media, it is most beneficial to concentrate on the third method of classification – the relationship between aliens and humanity – and its two distinct subclassifications: the friend and the foe. Any alien will almost certainly be designed to embody one of the two, whether benevolent and seeking to help or befriend humanity through their relationship, or seeking to harm humanity and destroy or assume control of Earth. The former can be seen as a way for us to experience a future where current cultural fears are somehow dissipated, while the latter realizes the worst-case scenario should humanity ultimately bring about its own destruction. Regardless, a cultural fascination with the strange and fantastical in combination with an innate human fear of the unknown positions aliens as the most literal 'Other' in Western popular culture, as they are nonhuman beings from outside of our world. The alien's function as the 'Other' in the modern world has shifted from projecting fear, specifically surrounding sociopolitical change and conflict, to embodying attraction, acting as a vessel through which we can explore identity and bodily autonomy.

RANDY HONG

“Generational Trauma:
Understanding and Healing From the Past”
Nominated by Professor Jess Hayes-Conroy (FSEM 148)

FROM RANDY’S LETTER

“The personal is political,” a phrase often used in feminist theory to illustrate how issues in one’s personal life undermine a larger political issue at hand, acted as my guidance when researching. I had always learned about racial injustice from a socio-political and socio-economic perspective when growing up, understanding racism through objective measures such as the relationship between race and law. However, in learning this way, I miss stories and experiences that helped me digest the damage that systemically racist policies have inflicted over centuries of history. While I could understand shallowly, it wasn’t until I started listening to experiences from these communities that I was able to relate with my own personal emotions.

In an attempt to create a beginner’s guide to modern-day racism that dissects the modern-day aftermath of American slavery and segregation, I looked for a source that helped me explore the personal, a source that would help me further understand how racism defines communities, families, and the individual. Eventually deciding to write on Kendrick Lamar’s Grammy winning album, *Mr. Morale and the Big Steppers*, I used this album as a way to explore the role of generational trauma from racism in defining a community and Lamar himself, who wrote this album as a way to heal from psychological trauma he had accumulated over his lifetime.

FROM THE ESSAY

Many Americans believe that racism is no longer a problem in the United States; this belief is reinforced by how the American educational system teaches the history of race and civil rights, presenting racism as a thing of the past — gone as a result of the progress America had made toward equality and freedom. Examples of events often cited as signifying the end of racism include: the end of segregation through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the creation of the 13th Amendment to abolish slavery, and the 15th Amendment guaranteeing male African Americans the right to vote. In addition, American students are taught about historical events that were monumental for the rights of African Americans such as the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement, resulting in a demographic that might remain resistant or hostile to the idea that racism still thrives. Of course, this is not to discredit or disregard the positive progress that has been made towards a more inclusive America — in fact, at the surface level, it does seem like we've reached an America that no longer systemically oppresses any demographic, with the termination of previously discriminatory laws. From African Americans once being viewed as no more than property to the eventual election of Barack Obama, America has undoubtedly made significant progress in regard to racial injustice over the years. However, believing that modern-day America isn't deeply rooted in racism is dangerous and promotes an ignorant culture that continues to permit the existence of racially-motivated behavior, hate crimes, and systemic oppression.

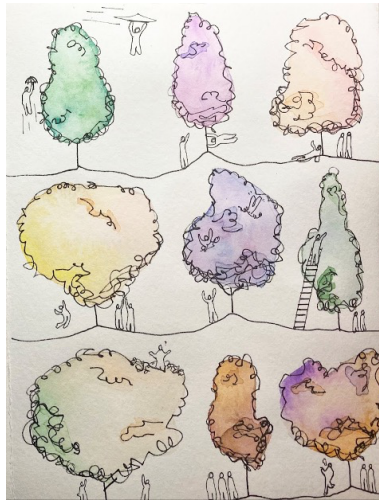
[...]

Institutional racism creates a society where “African Americans have fewer chances of acquiring jobs, housing, and loans than whites with similar qualifications” (Delgado and Stefancic, 10). These inequalities stem from the normalization and acceptance of racial biases within America, making it incredibly difficult for African Americans to climb the socioeconomic ladder, as the system itself places them in a disadvantageous position. It doesn't take much explanation as to why it's principally wrong that African Americans struggle to find jobs, housing, and loans — all basic essentials for life — at rates much higher than White Americans. Other consequences of institutional racism

include people of color living shorter lives, receiving worse medical care, completing fewer years of school, and occupying more menial jobs than do White Americans (Delgado and Stefancic, 10). A recent United Nations report showed that African Americans in the United States [if thought of as compromising a nation of their own] would make up the twenty-seventh ranked nation in the world ... [in terms of] social well-being” (Delgado and Stefancic, 10-11).

The criminal justice system is a particularly important institution through which to understand institutional racism in America. Notably, “the prison population is largely black and brown ... [and] the disproportionate number of prisoners of color in this country has encouraged, if not created, the misconception held by many White Americans that a disproportionate number of African Americans are criminals, in other words, that criminality is an African American trait” (Tyson, 368). Instead of understanding the prison system as fundamentally racist, Americans are encouraged by media representations of crime and violence to believe criminality as an essential characteristic of Blackness. There are, however, stark examples of the racism that is embedded within the criminal justice system. As one of these examples, Tyson explains that “it only takes five grams of crack cocaine (used predominantly by Black Americans) to trigger a five-year mandatory prison sentence. However, it takes five hundred grams of powder cocaine (used predominantly by White Americans) to trigger a five-year mandatory sentence” (Tyson, 150-151). As one of many discriminatory laws and practices within the criminal justice system, such conditions also create a butterfly effect where poorer black communities face higher police surveillance compared to white communities, furthering the incarceration rates for African Americans (Tyson, 368). Not only that, but these policies also contribute to unstable housing and a lack of family cohesion for Black Americans, exacerbating financial hardships for families and creating trauma for Black children (Roberts 2012). In this repeating pattern, African Americans are incarcerated as the stereotype of criminality thrives even more, creating a self-sustaining cycle of abuse towards the black community which leads to discriminatory behavior, further racially-motivated policies, and many other downstream consequences of institutional racism.

SPONSORED BY
THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
AND THE WRITING COLLEAGUES PROGRAM



*Cover art by Elle Desjardins, '24
(from AMST 202 Drawing for Study and Storytelling,
taught by Prof. Kirin Makker in Fall 2020)*