

They Will Simply Continue to Sing



Artist Statement

I grew up with a love for reading and an interest in understanding how and why words are able to convey such strong and genuine emotions, swaying people into acting the way that they do. There is such a power in knowing how strings of sentences - or none at all - can manipulate people, crafting words into a potential weapon.

These poems try to explore more of that concept, how people can find a threat in books and stories, opinions and truths, facts and fictions. With the levels of censorship of all types of media that is being seen and worsened under the current presidential administration, I think now is the perfect time for that discussion.

I pulled heavily from news sources, citing them or their titles throughout multiple pieces, as well as official government documents and orders. I also spent a lot of time outside. I think that the exposure to something other than the inside of my dorm room is what allowed me to consider experiences far beyond my own, things that affect multitudes of people or even one lone individual. I hope my words can aptly convey these stories.

Mrs. Newgard

As a child, I adored Harry Potter. Recently, I've started to distance myself from those books, mostly out of spite and disdain for the author. I'm frustrated by the hypocrisy that is her personal beliefs and the content she produced, and how one can be so blind to their own work.

Regardless.

I loved those books. I started reading them in second grade, with my parents' explicit permission. They've never cared much about what I read, trusting me to know what is in my own best interests. I appreciate them very much for it. I had always been an avid reader, and remain one to this day. My second grade teacher, however, believed herself to be a better judge of my own reading habits than myself or my parents.

She took my book away.

She kept it on a shelf above her desk, looming over me for the entire rest of the day and wishing me farewell when I left at 2 o'clock. I was enraged at this, as enraged as a seven-year-old can be. It wasn't a library book, but my mother's personal copy of *The Sorcerer's Stone*, the first book in the series which I was almost halfway through. She claimed it was too advanced and violent for me to be reading. It didn't make sense to me - why did she get to determine what I could and couldn't read? Why would she take something of mine, something from my home?

My mother was angry.

Beyond angry. The most infuriated I think I have ever seen her. She has complained once in my entire life to one of my schools. It was this time. I got the book back the next day, along with a handwritten apology and a 5 point increase to my school-determined "reading level." But my anger stayed, and has been something I've carried with me since. My indignance has only multiplied as this has turned into a greater and more national issue. I wonder about this every time I see a new headline, a new article, a new story about a public school tearing another book off the shelves.

I wonder about her all the time, my teacher. I hope she's doing well.

Curriculum Guide

Honors English I:

~~*To Kill A Mockingbird*~~¹

Honors English II:

~~*Things Fall Apart*~~²

~~1984~~³

~~*The Book Thief*~~⁴

AP English Language and Composition:

~~*The Crucible*~~⁵

~~*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*~~⁶

~~*A Raisin in the Sun*~~⁷

AP English Literature and Composition:

~~*The Handmaid's Tale*~~⁸

~~*Song of Solomon*~~⁹

~~*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*~~¹⁰

Footnotes:

1. Themes of racism, violence, and depictions of rape
2. Portrayal of colonialism and imperialism in Africa
3. Social and political themes, discussion of censorship
4. Themes of violence
5. Reflection on American politics and McCarthyism
6. "Teaching critical race theory"
7. Portrayal of struggles with racism, poverty, and the american dream
8. Depiction of sexual content, feminism, and material that may "discomfort" students
9. Themes of racism, violence, and sexual content
10. Themes of sexual violence and murder

Humanities Rant

My mother is a teacher, a Latin teacher; she knows firsthand what it's like to watch a program get dismantled in front of her eyes; I know what it's like to watch; I know what it's like to care; resources get shifted away, instead gifted generously to STEM endeavors, "the future of our country," that will be educated in math and science and won't know how to analyze the words being fed to them; my English teachers face the same dilemma, and their students pay the price; how many conversations I've had with people that don't understand that there is so much to lose in the loss of humanities; I have seen much discussion around AI art recently, people who cannot grasp that art is a process, not an outcome; people who don't think see writing as a skill that they need - they can pawn that off to a computer, too; but at the crux of it all is the loss of analysis, the capacity to make informed decisions about the truth or lack thereof; knowing how to research and identify fact from fiction is such an essential task when our leaders are trying to force their words to come out of our mouths, shoving them so far up our asses that they have nowhere else to escape from; chipping the humanities away piece by piece by everloving piece leaves the people unable to make those informed decisions for themselves, fed only what you want them to hear until that is all that is left for them to regurgitate.

PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

[REDACTED] FEDERAL CENSORSHIP

The White House

January 20, 2025

By the authority vested in me as President [REDACTED] the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America [REDACTED] is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1.

[REDACTED] Government interference [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] trampled free speech rights [REDACTED] censoring Americans' speech [REDACTED] exerting substantial coercive pressure [REDACTED] to moderate, deplatform [REDACTED] suppress speech that the Federal Government did not approve. [REDACTED] the Federal Government infringed on [REDACTED] speech [REDACTED] of American citizens [REDACTED] in a manner that advanced the Government's preferred narrative [REDACTED]

Sec. 2. [REDACTED] It is the policy of the United States to:

[REDACTED] ensure that no Federal Government officer, employee, or agent [REDACTED] facilitates any [REDACTED] free speech of any American citizen;

[REDACTED] taxpayer resources are used to [REDACTED] abridge the free speech of any American citizen;

[REDACTED]

Sec. 3. Ending [REDACTED] Protected Speech

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the activities of the Federal
Government [REDACTED] are inconsistent with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
appropriate [REDACTED] actions [REDACTED]

Sec. 4. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(c) This order [REDACTED] does not, create [REDACTED] benefit,
[REDACTED]

THE WHITE HOUSE,
January 20, 2025.



THE WHITE HOUSE

Student Journalism

Reporting live from the scene,

On her way to meet friends

But the words have been ripped away,

Arrested and physically restrained

Words promised, protected by this founding document

Did not show their badges

That you are sworn to enforce.

No charges have been filed against her

What law was broken?

Trump administration has revoked hundreds of visas

What protections are left?

"The university is doing everything in our power"

What use are they?

Friday, April 11th, 2025: On the Charles River Esplanade

There is someone next to me holding up a rock.

I think they just like rocks.

I wonder if they know that scientific research about
things like those rocks is being defunded and flagged.

I hear someone, distantly, speaking another language.
I hope, for their sake, that there aren't any ICE agents around.

Do they live in fear, day by day, wondering if or when
someone is going to come and take them away?

The weather is nice today.
It's finally starting to get warmer.

But our weather services are being dismantled,
NOAA going under, so that research will soon die, too.

And *The Hunger Games*, in that girl's hand over there,
that one has been banned in schools across the country.

I worry for the queer couple on the next bench over,
and for the woman whose sister is a librarian.

I worry for the international students I know,
and for those jailed for speaking up about it.

I worry for the students in public schools,
unable to access certain books once considered classics.

But amidst it all, the river still flows. The birds still sing.
And life goes on.

Control

Your books are full of empty pages,
the words ripped off and burning.
Your libraries are full of them,
these empty, wordless books,
because what else is left?

You don't know how to read, to write,
without the assistance of your robotic friend,
this friend that is easily manipulated,
frequently wrong. What lies does it tell you?
What better does it know?

What do you see on the internet?
What do you learn in school?
The Andrew Tate you consume must undo
all you learn in your English classes.

You live in a wordless world, where you
are easy to control, to manipulate,
voting for paranoia because you don't
understand complexity or reason.

You can't read the words, since there are no words.
You can't write the words, since you don't know how.
You can't argue, since they won't let you speak.

These Words Are Disappearing

You could not silence the birds,
ruin their song, rip the music
from their throats.

So you killed the birds.

You could not stop the river from flowing,
the rocks from making waves,
the fish from swimming.

So you polluted the water.

You put tariffs on the penguins,
melted the homes of the polar bears,
ripped the trees from the soil,
fracked the earth,
fucked us all.

The world speaks. You strive to silence it.
We cannot write, cannot say, cannot research.

~~Biological, clean energy, biodiversity.~~
~~Pollution, climate crisis, climate science.~~

These Words Are Disappearing in the New Trump Administration

Why do words offend you so?
Are you aware of their power?

Are you aware that you are only putting
a spotlight on these issues? That the more
words you add to your list, the more people
you affect, you include, you anger?

Do you know that, despite your efforts,
your crimes, your power,

you'll never stop it all?

You cannot silence the people,
ruin their speech, rip the protest
from their throat.

For, like the birds, they will simply continue to sing.

Ms. Hickson

My computer screen-saver is a lighthouse
in Cape Elizabeth, Maine.

It is strong, the sea and sky blue,
the grass around it green as ever.
It is sturdy, and it is stable, and it
stands tall above the dark water.

There is a certain power in the capacity
to stay strong amid a storm,
to continue to fight your fight,
shine your light, protect yourself
and the boats that you watch over;
in persevering through both the dark
and the day, when the good outweighs the
bad, and the bad outweighs the good.

This lighthouse is a watchtower, guiding
sailors home safe and secure and feeling protected
by its golden glow and constant presence.
It is beautiful, and it is brave, and it is strong.
And the people look up to it, a beacon of light,
broadcasting hope out to an expansive sea of darkness.

Critical Afterword

This project was focused on drawing more attention to the growing amount of media censorship in the United States, and more specifically on the impact that it could and will have on varying aspects of people's lives. I found myself growing more and more alarmed by the way that specific words were being flagged on government documents, the barring of research, and the arrest or deportation of those who simply spoke publicly about their beliefs.

Although not exactly the intended purpose, this was also used somewhat subconsciously as a sort of cathartic release, an area where I could express my feelings and concerns and worries about the state of the world in a controlled and creative space. It was an expression of anger and of fear, but also of hope and of joy. I don't think you can be truly scared to lose something if you don't first love it in some capacity, so in a way, this was also a sort of declaration of love - love for the people around me being able to express themselves freely, love for the books I was privileged enough to be able to read, and love for a language itself.

I was really inspired by the poet Reginald Dwayne Betts and the way he was able to take documents and redact them into a more coherent and truthful story. I ended up doing a form of redaction poetry with a government document in this piece after having read some of his work, but the concept of looking at something and finding a further and simpler truth within it is something I really tried to carry into a lot of the other poems I wrote as well.

I believe that the layout of this project is incredibly important to understanding it. It took me quite a long time to really nail down the order I was going to place them in, and I think that there is a sort of storyline that can be followed, starting in fear and ending in hope. It mirrors the personal journey I went through while doing the research and writing for this project. I had started feeling consumed by anger and worry, and ended up feeling slightly more at peace about it, although certainly not entirely so.

I think my concern stems mostly from being someone who deeply values challenging my own thoughts and opinions, as well as having a decent understanding of the sheer power and value of words themselves, but it goes far beyond myself. I worry for people who have the strength and bravery to speak loudly and publicly despite all of this. I worry about the research that is getting defunded and the impact that those gaps in knowledge will ultimately have. I worry for future generations of people who will grow up unable to read and comprehend at a higher level. All of that worry drove this project, and all of it is mine.

This project is completely political, but its strongest moments are outside of the direct ties I made to government figures. By addressing the very things that they aim to censor and ban, my words are inherently resistant. I wanted to bring attention to the things that I saw and the opinions I have, and that in and of itself is an act of politics.

Citations and Notes

Presidential Actions:

Poem was inspired by [this](#) document, an executive order released in January. Format of poem was inspired by Reginald Dwayne Betts' redaction poetry.

Student Journalism:

Quotes (italicized and indented lines) were taken from [this](#) CNN article about Rümeyşa Öztürk, a student journalist at Tufts University whose op-ed published in their student newspaper led to her arrest and potential deportation.

These Words Are Disappearing:

Title and repetition of title were taken from the headline of [this](#) New York Times article that showcased just how many words have been flagged or removed from government documents and databases since President Trump has been in office. The crossed out words are also taken from that list.

Ms Hickson:

My high school librarian, who has been [nationally recognized](#) for her (successful) efforts to keep challenged books on our shelves.