

Three Generations Prize for First-Year Writing Spring 2020

with essays by

Sophia Angus '23 and Emily Lu '23



Writing Program



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Preface | 3 |
| Comments from the Judges | 3 |
| Sophia Angus (tied for first place) Imagining <i>Storm in the Mountains</i> Submitted by Barbara Lynn-Davis (Art) | 5 |
| Emily Lu (tied for first place) Reflections on Grief, Remembrance, and Race in Yusef Komunyakaa's "Facing It" Submitted by Jeannine Johnson (Writing Program) | 14 |

Three Generations Prizes for First-Year Writing

The Three Generations Prizes are supported by three generations of Wellesley alumnae: Judith Stern Randal; her daughter, Judith Randal Hines; and her mother, Sybil Cohen Stern. By providing a means of publicly recognizing excellence in writing across the disciplines, they demonstrate the enduring value that Wellesley College and its students place on the ability to write clearly and effectively. Their gift has contributed much to foster rich, engaging writing at Wellesley.

Each semester, a prize is awarded to a first-year Wellesley student for outstanding written course work. Students are nominated by their First-Year Writing course instructors based on work completed for those courses. These prizes recognize Wellesley College's commitment to fine writing in all areas of study. Each prize is judged by three faculty members who taught First-Year Writing during that semester.

The winning papers show the development of a full and complex argument that is clearly stated and well-supported by evidence, argumentation and analysis that is accurate and appropriate to the discipline, a level of diction that is sophisticated yet comprehensible to an intelligent reader, and excellent presentation of source material, data, and other evidence.

Comments from the Judges on the Winning Papers

Judges: Jeannine Johnson (Writing), Lizzie Krontiris (Writing), Marilyn Sides (English)

Two essays tied for first prize: Sophia Angus' essay, "Imagining *Storm in the Mountains*," written for Barbara Lynn-Davis's course, WRIT 107: *Introduction to the Histories of Art*, and Emily Lu's essay, "Reflections on Grief, Remembrance, and Race in Yusef Komunyakaa's "Facing It," written for Jeannine Johnson's course, WRIT 144: *What's in A Name? Investigating What We Call People, Places, and Things*.

The judges agreed to award two prizes in this round of awards due to the high quality of both pieces, and also because they reflect the variability and scope of first-year writing at Wellesley. The two essays tied for first place together represent different ways of combining the personal and reflective with the public and analytical. The judges found them, individually and as a pair, to demonstrate well the possibilities of the essay form in the acutely challenging days of 2020.

We picked Sophia Angus' essay, "Imagining *Storm in the Mountains*," for its sharp, funny, and subtle take on a great assignment that's a little off the beaten path of the typical academic essay. Sophia, from her quarantine desk at home, imagines driving into an Alfred Bierstadt landscape. Her writing excels on all counts of what good writing entails: it possesses terrific detail, elegant structure, and a real voice that brings everything together. It also contains sentences that feel truly shaped, such as, "I'm cemented to my desk chair, my eyes are straining to focus on my computer screen, staring at a painting that somehow captures my not-really-regretful feelings of regret for moments past when I didn't stop the car to look, to pause, to feel, to smell." The reader gets a wonderful feel for the Bierstadt painting, but also for Sophia's own lively, thoughtful, and moving quarantine-scape.

Emily Lu's essay, "Reflections on Grief, Remembrance, and Race in Yusef Komunyakaa's 'Facing It,'" interrogates Komunyakaa's poem about visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial by focusing on his engagement with the memorial's reflective surface. Lu's incisiveness allows for a rich and insightful reading of the poem's tensions and contradictions – how Komunyakaa's contemplation of his "distorted reflection" expresses a complex ambivalence about being a Black veteran of the war. The argument is beautifully articulated, and Lu does a graceful job interweaving an analysis of Komunyakaa's reception of the memorial with Maya Lin's own statements about her intentions in its design. The reader comes away moved and unsettled by the question of what it means for Komunyakaa to mourn the war.

**Fourth paper assignment:
The significance of landscape**

Guo Xi's *The Significance of Landscape*, an 11th-century meditation on the role of landscape art in a person's life, is a remarkable text. There's nothing like it written in the West for hundreds of years.

We have a sense of the artist's deep familiarity with the natural world around him: the voices of apes and call of birds ... the glow of the mountain and the color of the waters ... clouds and vapors that differ through the four seasons ... wind and rain.

But what's most amazing about this text is its articulation of how imagination of these places, through landscape painting, is a balm for the weary soul: *Without leaving your room you may sit to your heart's content among streams and valleys.*

He was addressing civic officials who worked in the emperor's government, doing their duty day in/day out for the sake of family and social honor.

It occurred to me, each of us right now is a weary trapped soul in need of a balm!

We will use a selection of American 19th-century landscape paintings related to the Hudson River School as jumping off points to imagine ourselves outside in wide nature, and beyond our current predicament.

Please choose one painting to escape into:

Thomas Cole, *Sunset in the Catskills*, 1841 (MFA)

Thomas Cole, *An Italian Autumn*, 1844 (MFA)

John Frederick Kensett, *Mt. Washington from the Valley of Conway*, 1865 (Davis)

William Louis Sonntag, *Autumn in the White Mountains*, 1865 (Davis)

Albert Bierstadt, *Storm in the Mountains*, about 1870 (MFA)

I have provided photographs of each of these paintings on our Sakai site: Resources > Research and Writing Tools > Resources for paper #4

I have also included two short, general readings about the Hudson River School if you'd like to get more grounded in the style.

Approach:

Your paper will be 3-4 pages. Because the assignment is unconventional and we're all in a muddle right now, I'm outlining specifically below what to include. However, this is not intended as a strict box. Add, subtract, as the painting speaks to you.

Introduction.

Tell your reader in first-person where you are based, what your daily life is like. Can you go outside? If so, where do you go? What draws you to this place, what is it giving you right now? Conjure it for your reader with rich and generous descriptive language, so we can go there in our minds with you. If you're confined to a room or house, tell us about that space. What is it like?

Body of paper.

Part 1 (probably, a paragraph): Identify your painting and tell your reader what drew you to it: its aesthetic or visual qualities? A memory? A desire or fantasy?

Part 2 (probably, several paragraphs): Wander through it with Guo Xi's sense for detail. What do you encounter first, second, next? What do the textures feel like on your fingers? Is there wind on your face? What's the sun doing, how does it feel on your body? Might you go for a swim? Take out a sketchbook or your journal? Take pictures, or be glad to dump your phone after quarantine?! This is a visual analysis with a "*3D I'm in the painting*" twist. I suggest you review *Terms for Formal Analysis* on Sakai > Research and Writing Tools, to get your wheels turning.

Part 3: Finally, tell your reader about a place you most dream of going when this is all over. Why? Have you been before, or it's a new destination? Once again, conjure it for your reader with rich and generous descriptive language, so we can go there with you. What do you imagine yourself seeing around you, and doing there? Small moment description will probably work best (Like, "I'm at a cafe in Paris ...")

No formal conclusion is needed ... your conclusion is in essence, a dream or vision ... your own "heart's content" at Guo Xi puts it.

Important Dates:

4/21: Assignment given. Be sure to watch the 30-minute video lecture by James Cahill. The first 12 minutes discusses the reading relevant to the paper topic; the next part looks closely at Guo Xi's *Early Spring* and will help introduce you to the idea of wandering through a painted landscape.

4/28: 10-minute phone meetings with me to discuss the paper. You must have chosen your painting and I'd like to hear about the other parts you envision.

5/1: First draft due to me by email. I will provide early feedback.

5/5: Virtual editing groups with your pod.

***5/10:** Final draft due.

*Note: All work for the course must also be completed by this date.

Sophia Angus

Professor Barbara Lynn-Davis

WRIT 107

31 May 2020

Imagining *Storm in the Mountains*

7 am, I gently wake up (by my alarm obviously. Definitely not by my mother). Delicate light streams into my small room, illuminating the contents of my four-walled box; a crisp and soothing wind creeps into my room from my cracked window to hug my arms as I stretch, lulling me back to sleep. My parents call for me again. They're ready to go on our morning family walk. With my teeth brushed, shades on, and hat snug on my head, we head out. It's my favorite time of day because it's before the day has started-- even the sun has yet to heat the world around me. My family and I walk along the side of the road, up the hill, talking about nothing in particular. I keep my eye out for snail tracks glistening on the dark asphalt; making up stories about the snails makes my dad laugh. At the crest of the hill, I look past the fields of alfalfa, or some other grassy thing, to the hills of California, fresh green turning into liquid gold. They cradle me. I look to my right to the open space and greenery of the golf course we live on. My life could be a lot worse. We pass the sweet-smelling bush, the one that my brother says reminds him of jasmine boba tea. The tree leaves are glowing from the yellow sunshine, and it reminds me of that summer feeling when Still Woozy plays in the background.

I return home, just enough time to pee before my only synchronous class of the day at 8:20, then after, I que this month's playlist of artists and songs I discovered in the last few weeks. I now enter a cycle of 50-10 Pomodoro sessions. 50 minutes of dense work followed by a ten-minute intermission; rinse and repeat. After a few sessions, I'll

stretch my legs and chill with my dogs outside, staring at my neighbor's tree that is always buzzing with bees, hoping to get my eyes to focus on something farther away than my screen. Today, I sit at my desk staring at Albert Bierstadt's *Storm in the Mountains* (1870) [Figure 1], getting ready to write my fourth paper.

I guess I chose this piece because it reminds me of home, Hollister, California-- not to be confused with Hollister Co. by Abercrombie & Fitch Co. Hollister is a rural community with a rebellious flavor: we are very popular in the biker community thanks to the 1953 film *The Wild One*, which shot a few scenes in our downtown. Just like in *Storm in the Mountains*, bushy trees tickle the fields that surround my hometown, appearing kelly green in the warm light, an idyllic haven protected by mountains. Different plots of farmland slice the valley into small sections. When I look out into the distance in any direction, I see that same atmospheric perspective Bierstadt paints so beautifully, only instead of restrictive mountains with frozen caps, I see the expansive troughs and crests of the hills that roll around me. And in the wintertime, I look forward to watching the encroaching storm clouds. Nothing obstructs my view. After a good rain, the smell of sweet California dirt wafts through our city.

Looking at Bierstadt's painting, I am reminded of the many times I would glance out the window of my car, driving back from whatever I was doing, and I'd be drawn back to the reality that exists outside of my head to witness the passing scene. I would consider maybe trying to take a picture. But I knew that it could never capture what I'm trying to capture: nostalgia of years of driving in this distant oasis, tranquility and warmth from the sunlight of many lazy days outside, awe because there is nothing quite like this anywhere else in the world. Feeling insignificant-- not in a bad way, but in the way that

reminds me that the problems that occupy my mind aren't as big as they feel, so why worry. Also, I'm driving, so I really shouldn't be using my phone.

As I look at this painting on my screen, I can feel myself wishing I could drive toward the warmth at the center of its light, lay on the grass, do nothing. Let's pretend I was driving, and I did what I've always wanted to do: drive off the main road and ride into the heart of the light. Peering through my window shield, gazing at the incredible scene before me, I'd chase the deep olive mountains ascending toward an innocent blue. I would drive onward, eventually passing the classic crimson barn that seemed so small before, unable to see the livestock, but definitely smelling them even with the windows rolled up. The once-little trees would tower over me, lining the paved road that carries me farther and farther away from the main street, from my normal life. Eventually, the lane would become a dirt path, wonky, so I would slow. I might roll my windows down, listening to the crunch of rubble rolling under my tires. Now, the warm air brushes the hair out of my face, and I imagine it'd smell the way things smell after being left out in the sun for too long. The buzzing of evening insects might fill the air, the looming mountain on my left would track my journey across the little valley to its neighbor. Maybe "Foreign Fields" by Kacy Hill percolates into the world I drive past, the gentle last chorus coming to a close before I park to explore.

After a beautiful eternity of driving, I plop onto the thick grass, those evening insects greet me, frisking over my arms and legs as I stretch out. The grass is soft and slightly wet, the kind of wet that would make my pants damp and frustrate me when I was younger, but not anymore. Even my hair is going to be wet. I lay for a while, not having anywhere to be or anything to do, not having much to think about, focusing on trying to focus on nothing. My arms push me back up to a sitting position, but my eyes

close and my head lolls back. I open my chest to the sun in the sky, still bright and radiant. Giving my face a break from the smothering kisses from the sun, I look to my right. The billowing clouds approach, pristine white swirling with deep silver and imperial blue, bringing with them a chilly breeze that pulls out the heat that is stuck in my hair and on my arms and legs. The trees that line the base of the mountain rustle, shaking out leaves and whatever flowers sprinkle their branches. With the wind picking up, my baby hairs brush into my eyes in the most annoying way. I reach for my phone to play something by Hippo Campus, maybe “Monsoon”? But I hesitate. I’ll just enjoy this. Unwilling to return to reality, I wait until the coldness is too much to bear, until there is no more decadent California sun to indulge in, until my hair is cold and won’t smell like sun, until the shadow of the dense clouds swallows me. My hands sink into the once perky meadow, now a sea of inky green hidden from the sky. Do I feel sprinkles of rain? It smells wet.

I drift into my car, leaving my phone silent in the passenger side cup holder, driving back to the main road. Music doesn’t break the harmony of silence. I leave the window rolled down, hoping to make my car smell like the fresh rain or warm grass. It’s a fruitless attempt to take a small part of the valley with me. The mountains look more magnificent and intimidating now that the shadow envelopes everything. I wonder what it would be like to roll down the hillside, if it would be like a golf ball rolling along the putting green into the hole. The bright cardinal barn now a little grayscale. My car steadies, driving over even pavement, and with the radio off and the crackling sound of my tires on the dirt path dissipates, I feel like I’ve entered a void of silence. But my head remains stuck in the hazy valley that now falls asleep, blanketed by fog. There’s a different image to capture, one of the valley smothered in smokey grays.

In reality, I'm home at my desk. I know that if I were to drive past those mountains and the valley I see in the painting, I wouldn't have stopped. I would have kept driving, all the way home, saving the moment for "next time." And what's worse is that I don't even get to make that decision to keep driving. I'm cemented to my desk chair, my eyes are straining to focus on my computer screen, staring at a painting that somehow captures my not-really-regretful feelings of regret for moments past when I didn't stop the car to look, to pause, to feel, to smell. Somehow Albert Bierstadt, without knowing anything about me, probably without ever seeing the maternal hills that shelter Highway 25 (though he did explore the West), has taken the picture I always tried to, or thought about, capturing with my phone, in a futile attempt of immortalizing a feeling. He has brought warmth, peace, excitement, serenity, loneliness. One day, I'll venture off-road, feeling the asphalt morph into loose brown dirt. I'll experience this moment, this freedom, no longer saving it for a "next time" that might not come. But for now, with Still Woozy's "Vacation" playing in the background as I write this paper, I'm waiting for the next ten minute break when I can go sit outside on my lawn.



Figure 1: Albert Bierstadt, *Storm in the Mountains*, 1870, MFA

**WRIT 144: What's in a Name?
Spring 2020**

**Paper #2 Assignment
REVISED AS OF 3/23/20**

Topics

Citing R.W. Emerson, the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines the poet as “the Namer, the Language-maker,’ who converts the world into words.” With this idea in mind, write a thoughtful, well-supported paper of about 4-6pp. (1500-1750 words) on one of these topics:

1. Choose one of Dickinson’s poems for which we have two or more versions. Provide a thorough analysis of one of the versions, citing the other as warranted to help you illustrate what she is trying to say (or “name”).
2. Write a thorough explication of one of Hayden’s or Komunyakaa’s ekphrastic poems. Fully examine the poem in order to illuminate the story that it tells (through language and form), and the relationship that it has to the work of art to which it responds.
3. Write a comparative analysis of a pair of Shakespeare’s sonnets. (With permission, you may choose a sonnet or pair of sonnets not included in the reading packet.) Look at each poem separately before examining the interesting parallels and/or contrasts between them.
4. Lexicographers may not convert the world into words, but they certainly reflect it through language. Choose any one poem by Dickinson, Hayden, Komunyakaa, or Shakespeare. (With permission, you may choose a poem not included in the reading packet.) Write a thorough explication of the poem, making liberal use of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*, the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*

Marching Orders

For all topics, you should:

- aim for a plausible, illuminating interpretation that, as necessary, acknowledges alternate interpretations and ambiguity
- examine the poem more or less in sequence
- quote frequently from the sources (both your poem and supplementary material)
- use MLA citation style.

You may do research, but it is not required. If you do research, use these databases available via LTS: Literature Online, Literature Resource Center, or MLA International Bibliography. You might also find some useful information on poets.org and poetryfoundation.org. **DO NOT READ ANY LITERARY CRITICISM OF YOUR POEM**

BEFORE DRAFTING YOUR ARGUMENT.

Due dates

Friday, March 27:

Submit a brief description of your working plans by email.

Tuesday, March 24-Tuesday, March 31

Have a zoom meeting or email exchange with Professor Johnson to discuss your paper plans.

Friday, April 3:

Submit a paper (a first best effort) with citations as a Google doc by 11:00 p.m.

Friday, April 10:

Share back comments on your on peer's FBE by this date.

Friday, April 17:

Submit a substantially revised paper with corrected citations and revision summary by 11:00 p.m.

Emily Lu

4/20/20

WRIT 144: What's in a Name?

Paper #2 Revision

Reflections on Grief, Remembrance, and Race in Yusef Komunyakaa's "Facing It"

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial's nontraditional approach to grief and remembrance has made it the center of national controversy. It was certainly a departure from most war memorials at the time: instead of the typical heroic tableau of soldiers in battle, the memorial cuts a black V-shape into the earth, creating a tomb-like underground area where viewers can approach the thousands of names inscribed on its reflective granite walls. Detractors condemned it as a "black gash of shame and sorrow," which erased the accomplishments for which these veterans gave their lives (Lin 35). However, Maya Lin, the memorial's designer, refutes this reading of it. Instead, she sees the memorial as a solemn space to mourn, an acknowledgement of pain as the first step toward healing (Lin 33).

In his poem, "Facing It," Yusef Komunyakaa, an African American Vietnam War veteran, takes that first step toward healing as he approaches the memorial. The poet confronts the unresolved pain of his own experience through the memorial's distorted reflection, which becomes a central motif of the poem. Lin describes the reflection as "an interface between our world and the quieter, darker, more peaceful world beyond" (Lin 33). For Komunyakaa, the reflection creates a boundary between many sets of contradictory worlds: living and dead, black and white, past and present. He struggles to reconcile these contradictions, and ultimately is forced to choose where he belongs.

One of the contradictions that Komunyakaa reckons with is that he is a Black man serving a country that oppresses him. Throughout the poem, he hints at his discomfort with his role as a Black veteran. This echoes Maya Lin's experience as well: some of the criticism against her was based on the racist conflation of her, an Asian American, with the Asian enemy. However, while Lin insisted that her race was "completely irrelevant" to the design (Lin 35), Komunyakaa immediately centers his race in his experience of and connection to the memorial, beginning the poem with, "My black face fades / hiding inside the black granite" ("Facing It"). He mirrors himself with the memorial, describing them both as "black." However, this connection also "hides" him and makes him "fade" into the background, evoking the common experience of Black veterans who are not acknowledged with the same honor as their white counterparts. He becomes invisible in the memory of the war.

As Komunyakaa continues to face the memorial, he tries to keep control over his emotions, but he is forced to confront their intensity. Although the poet "said [he] wouldn't," he starts to cry. The rhythm of these lines is short and clipped, punctuated by sharp "t" sounds in "wouldn't," "dammit," and "tears," creating a sense that the speaker is trying to close himself against his emotions. Komunyakaa's tearful reaction to the memorial is one that Lin anticipated: in her design process, she said, "I knew a returning veteran would cry" (Lin 35). However, Lin admits to being reluctant to share this prediction, likely because crying subverts the traditional stoic, hyper-masculine image of a soldier, and it reveals a deeper anguish in the experience of war. The speaker continues with, "I'm stone. I'm flesh," expressing the contradiction between the stoicism he attempts to maintain and the vulnerability of acknowledging his emotional pain (Komunyakaa, "Facing It"). This line also identifies him again with the stone wall, tying

his emotional state to the physical space of the memorial.

Komunyakaa faces his reflection again, which traps him, demonstrating his inability to move beyond the trauma of the war. He describes himself in the mirrored surface: “My clouded reflection eyes me / like a bird of prey, the profile of night / slanted against the morning.” His own reflection takes on a menacing character, hunting him. He again emphasizes his Blackness, describing his face as “the profile of night,” which contrasts with the light “morning.” The speaker paces, trying to free himself: “I turn / this way—the stone lets me go. / I turn that way—I’m inside / the Vietnam Veterans Memorial / again, depending on the light / to make a difference.” Komunyakaa’s agency is limited: outside forces, like the light or the stone, can choose to either trap him or release him, but he cannot choose for himself when to enter and exit this state of mourning. Until this point, the lines have been end-stopped, finishing on natural separations of phrases, marked by a comma or a period. Here, however, the line breaks mostly come in the middle of sentences: this enjambment creates a rhythm that never finishes a thought, which points to the endlessness of the memorial’s hold over Komunyakaa, as well as the rambling of his thoughts.

Komunyakaa now sees his own reflection in the names, which brings up his guilt about being on the living side of the boundary. As he views the names on the wall, he is “half-expecting to find / my own in letters like smoke.” Komunyakaa’s instinct is to count himself among the dead; he feels he is no different from them. He singles out an individual: “I touch the name Andrew Johnson; / I see the booby trap’s white flash”. Andrew Johnson was a soldier from Bogalusa, Louisiana, Komunyakaa’s hometown (Ekiss). Komunyakaa and Johnson are reflections of each other, with very similar trajectories in life, but Komunyakaa lived while Johnson died, which puts them on

opposite sides of the wall. The speaker singles out Johnson by touching his name, a practice that Lin encourages through her design. She describes being inspired by the Memorial Rotunda at Yale, which contains names of Yale alumni who died serving in wars. The tactile experience was central to this memorial's impression on her; she says, "I had never been able to resist touching the names cut into those marble walls, and no matter how busy or crowded the place is, a sense of quiet, a reverence, always surrounds those names" (Lin 33).

The poem goes on to describe a woman who interacts with the memorial: "Names shimmer on a woman's blouse / but when she walks away / the names stay on the wall" (Komunyakaa, "Facing It"). While the woman can escape willingly from the memorial, the names remain trapped (Ekiss). This echoes Komunyakaa's entrapment in the wall, which again places him closer to the side of the dead than the side of the living. He is so deeply connected to the soldiers who died, and cannot reconcile that connection with his survival, which separates him from them.

Komunyakaa experiences a flashback, conjuring images of the war which mingle with images of the memorial to blur the boundaries of time. He sees the "brushstrokes" of the names on the wall along with a "red bird's wings" ("Facing It"), which is a slang term for a helicopter used in the war ("Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War"). The red bird "[cuts] across [his] stare," interrupting his contemplation at the memorial and plunging him into the past (Komunyakaa, "Facing It"). Lin deliberately curated this experience of locating veterans in the time of their service by listing the names chronologically by date of death rather than alphabetically or by rank. She emphasizes temporal continuity, allowing a veteran like Komunyakaa to stand at one spot and see all of their fallen comrades at once, immersing them in

memories of when they served (Lin 34). The poet continues, describing “The sky. A plane in the sky,” an image which could come from either the past or the present, contributing to the sense of temporal blurring (Komunyakaa, “Facing It”). This line is repetitive and rhythmically choppy, which highlights Komunyakaa’s confusion.

Komunyakaa now witnesses a white veteran’s experience of the wall, which he contrasts with his own to underscore his sense of being overlooked due to his race. As he describes, “A white vet’s image floats / closer to me, then his pale eyes / look through mine. I’m a window.” The poet emphasizes racial imbalance by highlighting the man’s whiteness and “pale eyes.” Komunyakaa and the white veteran do not connect in the way that Komunyakaa connected with Andrew Johnson; in fact, the white veteran does not notice him at all. Instead, he literally looks through the speaker to see his own pain: “He’s lost his right arm inside the stone.” The veteran ignoring Komunyakaa echoes the description in the beginning of the poem of the poet’s “black face” blending into the black walls of the memorial. He becomes a blank slate in which the white veteran can see himself, while Komunyakaa remains hidden.

In the last lines of the poem, Komunyakaa creates vivid imagery of a woman and a boy and their reflection at the memorial, juxtaposing the tenderness of life with the grief of death. He describes the woman on both sides of the wall: “In the black mirror / a woman’s trying to erase names: / No, she’s brushing a boy’s hair.” By negating the first image, the poet allows us to consider both and wrestle with their contradiction. The image in the mirror is one of grief and futility: the woman is trying in vain to erase the deaths of thousands of soldiers, perhaps including a loved one. The image on the other side is one of maternal love, taking care of her still living son. Komunyakaa mirrors the boy with the dead soldiers, pairing life and death in one final contradictory reflection.

Notably, he ends with the image of life, perhaps indicating that, after facing the memorial's multiple worlds, he has chosen the side of life, hope, and the future.

In Komunyakaa's prose commentary on "Facing It," he hopes that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and other memorials like it can create "something instructive that we can measure ourselves against": in other words, the memorial's reflections contain a goal or lesson for humanity (Komunyakaa, "Commentary on 'Facing It'"). Lin echoes this hope in one of her previous projects, a design for a hypothetical World War III memorial, which she purposefully crafted to be a "futile and frustrating experience" (Lin 33). She intended these emotions as a "deterrent" against ever waging a World War III at all (Lin 33). In a way, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial follows along these lines, not only honoring the suffering of the past, but warning against the suffering of the future. This future manifests in the boy at the end of the poem. Komunyakaa presents us with the reflected images of him and his mother: one in which she tries to undo his death, and one in which she expresses maternal tenderness toward her living son. These two images are two possible futures for this boy and for the nation. Both Lin's memorial and Komunyakaa's poem remember the war with solemn grief rather than triumph. This grim, sorrowful legacy urges us to avoid repeating it: to protect our children, we must choose life.

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