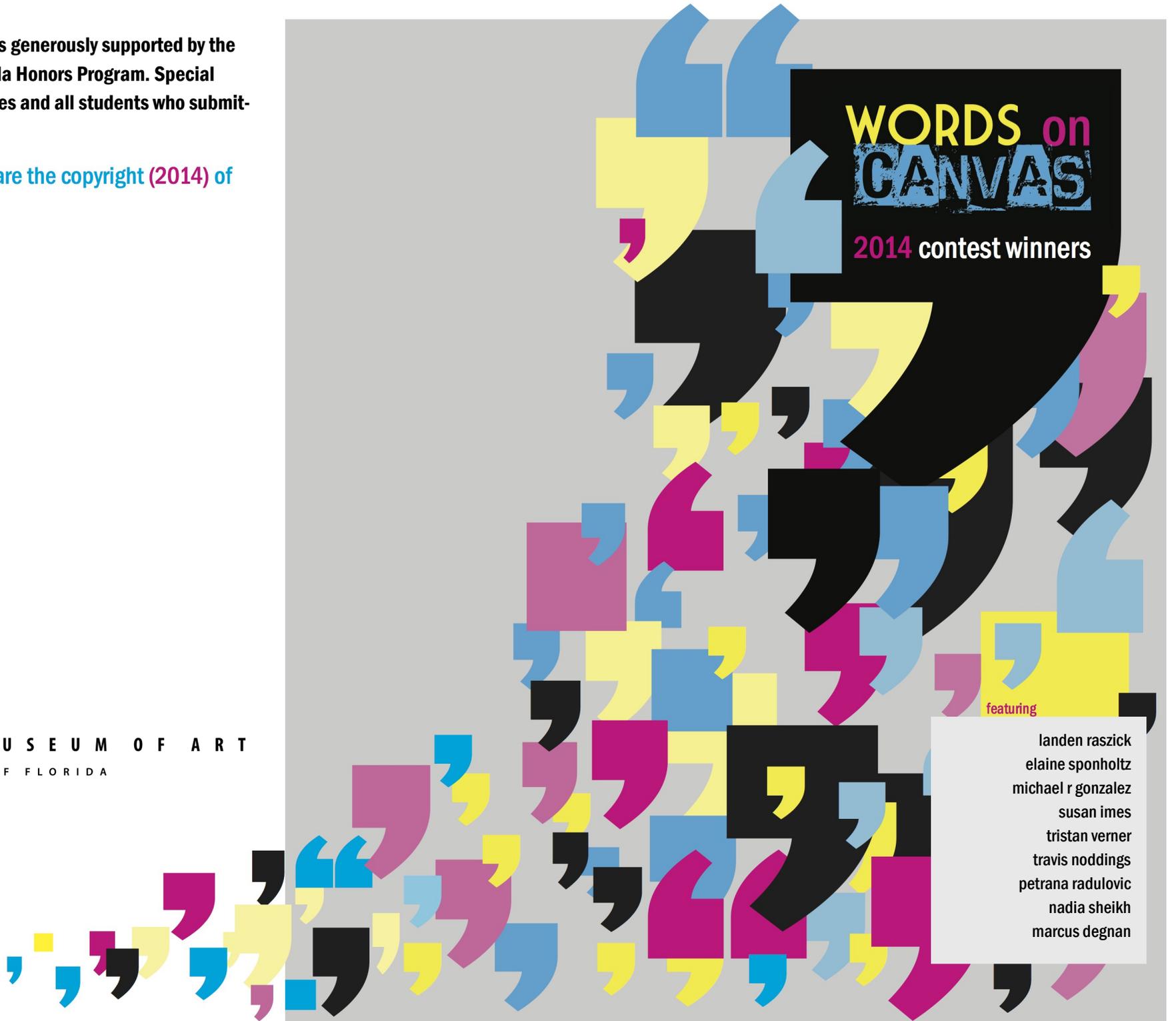


Words on Canvas is generously supported by the University of Florida Honors Program. Special thanks to our judges and all students who submitted their writing.

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UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



WORDS on
CANVAS

2014 contest winners

featuring

- landen raszick
- elaine sponholtz
- michael r gonzalez
- susan imes
- tristan verner
- travis noddings
- petrana radulovic
- nadia sheikh
- marcus degnan

wordsoncanvas

writing competition



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2014 Competition Judges:

Dr. Stephanie Smith, UF Department of English
Dr. Sidney Wade, UF Department of English
Dr. Jack Stenner, UF School of Art + Art History

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Booklet designed by Colin Bailey Williams.

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Landen Raszick
director's award for writing on african art

Reflections

The shape of the cow holds
the thinking Dinka, his elaborate coiffure.
In sleep he returns to the field, counting
his cows, herding over the plateaus
orange with iron. His mind wanders.
He's young again, knee deep in the White
Nile, watching the sleek, unbarbed
chieftain with his spear silently pointing.
Remembers his forehead slicing open,
becoming a warrior, not feeling a thing
but the thunderous numb chanting,
how his father wrapped him in a big leaf
and gave him his first oxen, deep brown
like the floodplains. The days of dancing
until the next day, throwing arms up as horns
at the bluish dung fire and spinning girls.
He is young. Diaspora isn't yet a word.
The only threats are seasons, brave hyenas,
puff adders full of poison and divinities.
His family would offer molten cheese
and move the happy snakes with respect.
The old man stirs. Everything is touched eventually
by war. Cows are sold for consumer goods.
He must go somewhere else. He's a Christian.
This stool is a glass-encased Sudan. I am
jur mathiang, light-skinned foreigner,
but I'm also an old man sleeping in the shape
of cow. You are the worshipped snake
that slithers off through the museum

Inspired by

Dinka or Bongo people
Headrest
20th century
Anonymous gift

lived in that kind of neighborhood. And how awful they were because
he was white. Don't ever get close to them again."

Being dragged away, Phuong tried to look down the hill at
the gathering one last time. Every man and woman radiated, simply
radiated, even if they had darker skin. They shined with life from the
colors and the robed man's speech, cutting through the dreary fog
formed in the graveyard by statues and stillness. But the farther
Phuong's mom dragged her the harder it was to see the funeral's
glowing light. By the time Phuong reached the gravestone, she
couldn't even see the yellow tarp.

Inspired by

Stuart Robert Purser
Funeral
1945
Gift of Eloise R. Chandler in memory of William H. Chandler

“We gather today to mourn the loss of a dearly beloved brother!”

Phuong thought his voice sounded like the cello her older brother currently plays in his high school band. It was deep, rich and sincere. She felt it warming her body, despite the chilly winds, encouraging her unwillingness to kneel with her family.

“Though we mourn, we must also celebrate! Celebrate the goodness of our lord as our brother makes his way to the kingdom of heaven.”

The gathering of people moved closer together. Some began to cry, taking napkins out of their pockets or purses to wipe away stubborn tears. Others wailed, yelling about the unfairness of life as they broke down in heavy downpours. Yet despite the sadness, they all stood close to one another. Arms slid behind shoulders, hands touched chests, everybody began to lean on one another in some way.

The robed man continued to talk about heaven and paradise. Of the “sanctity of God’s home” or the “loving embrace” God gives all. Hearing the ravishing descriptions compelled Phuong to walk down the dusty path and offer them the grilled pork and sticky rice. She wanted to ask the man what the kingdom of God was; from her point of view, his ‘heaven’ seemed to be everyone coming together in loving embraces beneath the yellow tarp.

Before she could take a step, she heard her name being called.

“Phuong,” shouted her mother, “bring your grandfather’s offering, we need to go home soon.” Phuong turned to see her walk across the dirt path with a smooth, stern face, which quickly wrinkled as if having just bitten into a rotten apple.

“Why are you looking at those mỹ đên? Get over here. I don’t want you near them.”

Phuong turned to them and blinked twice. She looked at everyone, especially the robed figure, realizing for the first time how dark their skin was. All of them.

“Get over here, now,” her mother growled pulling onto Phuong’s arm.

“You know your father grew up with them when his parents

Elaine Sponholtz
honorable mention, poetry

Traveler Palm

Close harmonies in a strange land,
Refuge from fragility, black ice, numbing whiteness,
A self-induced exile to regard the otherness,
Of the egret and the ibis, and the bitter calamondin,
The unfamiliarity of the singular palm.
Each shape must be designated,
Dictated by the fairy tale silhouette,
Crafted in brushwork to explain how that relate
To the curvature of the horizon.

Inspired by

Milton Avery
Florida Lake
1951
Museum purchase by exchange
Gift of William H. and Eloise R. Chandler

Michael R. Gonzalez
second place, prose

Teignmouth Electron

He had promised me true glory and adventure. Every day the sun would shine down and illuminate and warm my back. I'd be encouraged to stretch my wings out into the blustery ether and glide over the shimmering waves. He whispered to me of his extreme excitement and anticipation and the oncoming thrill of outstripping, outracing, and outlasting the other competitors on their little ships. I listened and felt my own hunger grow. I knew we were the best as the race around the world began.

I allowed him to guide us out as we launched from the bay. Expertly, he brought us out and already we had zoomed ahead of our inexperienced competition. I watched them floundering in the waves and already they drifted off course. We laughed together already sure of our victory.

In the beginning it was odd to have him traipsing along my back and adjusting my wings first one way then another. Unbounded by the water we cut across first one way and then back another. "We're making good progress," I'd say and he'd nod and laugh as we turned again.

He'd talk to me as well then, imparting his ancient wisdom in my young mind. Mornings began with him striding about and exclaiming, "How majestic is the Grand solar! How beautiful does the sea glow with its golden glint." He knew more about the ocean than I thought anyone could know. Under a moonless night he'd say, "The sea becalms itself with only us, and the stars above, to reflect on its brooding." His knowledge wasn't just limited to the sea below but of my airborne brethren who flocked above. He'd lie down across my back staring at them and say, "Teignmouth, my trusty vessel, the gulls ever circle above, until, Shwip," he'd slam his fist into my back then into his other hand. "The lonely cod finds itself in the belly of the bird." I always listened and nodded, never flinching away, never wavering in our course.

Marcus Degnan
first place, prose

Sunday Mourning

On her way to her grandfather's tombstone Phuong mistook a funeral for a tea party. When she passed the gathering, bright red camellias atop the beige coffin caught her eyes first. They looked like the expensive kind at the market, the ones she always wanted to snatch and put into her hair, and so she paused to get a better glance. From the flowers she moved to the men dressed in crisp white and blue suits. Then to the women on the outskirts dressed in purples and reds, everyone shimmering like royalty beneath the large, yellow tarp. The scene radiated, simply radiated, even while threatened by swollen clouds ready to burst with rain at any moment.

Smells of grilled pork and sticky rice drizzled in fish sauce broke Phuong from her trance as she remembered she still carried her grandfather's offering. She gripped the silver plate tighter, glancing at the meal, deciding that his spirit already waited a week; a few minutes wouldn't hurt, especially since her older brother and parents were already placing their offerings. She scanned their direction and saw them all kneeling amidst numerous meals and burning incense in front her grandfather's tombstone. As they sat in silence with closed eyes, they blended with the gray statues scattered throughout the graveyard. Expressionless and so, so still.

Phuong looked back to the funeral. She struggled whether to smile with how beautiful the ceremony seemed, or frown with how sad everyone's faces frowned. While fighting an urge to give into the beauty, a short, portly figure came forward. Dressed in white robes, ones more vibrant compared to the other men in their suits, Phuong had to squint to see him. Was he a priest? A bishop? A monk? Phuong couldn't remember the right word. Chubby and short, the robed figure had a round face, and from the lines he had on the sides of his mouth, he looked addicted to laughter. So much so that he seemed to have a permanent smile as his cheerful expression never changed, even as he spoke.

Nadia Sheikh
first place, poetry

variegatescape

these 2-D days
in gray-
panache
have got me jittering
itching for color
but monochrome
paint won't peel so
I've fled
to the lake
water lapping up smut
on the shore lined
with ceruleaning sea
foam and one lone palm
tree tealed beside
a man beneath
a hat bleeding blue
dripping the drab
in plain view of
my pastel solitude and his
feels real but stays a dream
not knowing who's
watching we

Inspired by

Milton Avery
Florida Lake
1951
Museum purchase by exchange
Gift of William H. and Eloise R. Chandler

I trusted him when clouds covered the horizon and water and light streaked down from the sky, and he folded up my wings. I tried to keep my feet in the water and not do the flips that the winds wanted me to do. I trusted him when we endured endless days of cumbersome heat and his face turned red and he muttered that the clouds would return soon. I trusted him as he radioed about our coordinates, giving them the wrong ones, even though I could not understand why. We had traversed over four hundred miles in a scant couple hundred days. Nobody could outrace me and nobody knew more about the sea than my Donald.

It wasn't long afterwards then he came to me with his shirt ripped. "They know Teignmouth," he said. "They have always known that it couldn't be us. You, maybe? But not with me. My hands were not meant to sail but to swim. Oh yes, I can swim and outstrip the seas and the others. This I can do alone. Old friend, we must part. Meet me back there where we began this cursed race." He patted me once on the back and then jumped overboard into the water. I couldn't understand why he decided to leave and I called for him. He didn't answer as he swam away.

My wings didn't work properly then, nor my feet. Although I strove to get back to that bay, I, alone, was powerless against the powerful breezes and indifferent waves. They mastered me and drove me towards a foreign shore. I struggled and tried to remain in my liquid home but it wasn't enough. I was thrown onto the dreaded earth.

That was years ago now. Still, I sit here, hoping to hear the tromp of boots that I know so well. All that I hear are the raucous calls of the gulls above and the silent cry of the cod inside.

Inspired by

Tacita Dean
Teignmouth Electron
1999
Museum purchase, funds provided by the Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund

Susan Imes
honorable mention, poetry

Manhattan

Busy busy busy
Streets intersect with lines intersect with limbs
A cacophony of urban proportions as
Colors and forms jam together to a tempo marked by a merciless
metronome

Yet
In these lines there is beauty;
From pigment comes harmony
From chaos, order.
In the darkness of the neon lights
Art grows on the stubborn cage of the human spirit.
From between the ribs the void is shaped-
For we were planted in the image of the gardener
And though we wander, the green paints stick to our thumbs.
So as the towers rise we look on fearlessly
For even Babel broke into a thousand languages
And a million poems.

Inspired by

George Grosz
Manhattan
1946
Gift of William H. and Eloise R. Chandler

She walks home after it happens and everything hurts, from her very insides to everything outside. Her mother asks her what is wrong, but she knows she cannot tell her. How can she describe it? The feeling that her body was not hers, the crawling sensation up her back when hands that she did not want touched her, the defeat. She knows her mother. Her mother will tell her it is her fault. What was she thinking, going over to a boy's house after school, wearing that?

That night, when she dreams, she is running, and behind her, chasing her, hunger in his eyes, is that boy. She runs, tries to get away, her heart pounds. And suddenly, she stops, because this is her dream, her realm, her domain. She stops and when the boy reaches to touch her, she grabs a spear (which has appeared just as she thought of it, as so often happens in dreams), stabbing him through the chest. The blood spurts out and he cries out, but she continues to plunge the spear into him. His blood is warm on her face. She breathes heavily and then tosses her head back to face the stars, a laugh filling the sky, her dreams, herself.

Inspired by

Indian, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon
5th-6th century
Museum purchase, funds provided by Michael A. Singer

The big cypress tree in her backyard drips with Spanish moss. In the dim evening light, it looks like the ghost of a bride, a tattered veil covering her forlorn face, her body bent and twisting. When she climbs the tree, her mother always yells at her because of the bugs in the branches and the tears she might get in her clothes.

She doesn't listen; she just climbs and climbs.

There's a nook about twenty feet up that fits the curve of her body and often, when she is angry or sad or happy (whenever emotion overwhelms her and clutches at her throat and she sometimes forgets to breathe), she climbs up and curls on the tree, closing her eyes.

She does it tonight, when she is fifteen, because she was sent home early from school and when she tried to explain to her mother that it was not her fault that the blouse of her uniform did not button all the way up and that the principal looked at her with greedy eyes.

Crickets chirp. The night is hot. She can feel the heat on her skin and the sweat trickle down the back of her neck. Her father calls for her. She closes her eyes. Her blouse, the same one from school, sticks to her skin. She likes the heat, but not with the damp fabric sticking on her skin, reminding her of the beady eyes of her teacher. She imagines herself somewhere else, in a jungle maybe, where it is evening too, and the air is moist and hot and she runs—bare-chested, barefoot, through the vines and the leaves—and watches the wide white moon across the horizon as she yells to the sky.

Her father calls her name again.

At seventeen, she trembles because there is with a cruel twist in his lips, who touches her when she doesn't want it and closes his fingers around the curve of her neck. He tells her he loves her but when she asks him to stop, he says that she said yes before so why should this time be any different.

"Who's going to believe you?" he laughs after she threatens to tell.

Tristan Verner
second place, poetry

durga the demon-slayer;

a diva's dance
palms pressing psalms
 into the body
a bodhisattva in light&
a bull brought down
apostle,
a shrine to the scathed
a scavenger,
a sacrosanct
ascension

Inspired by

Indian, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon
5th-6th century
Museum purchase, funds provided by Michael A. Singer

Travis Noddings
honorable mention, poetry

An Intimate Blur

A palm was born on the edge of thirst and drowning—
Blurring the lines that hold me apart from the ground,
That thrust me into the fore while my gaze bleeds into the back.
I sip from the waters that swallow my skin.
Together we join the sky as sand falls between glass chambers to
mark the hour.
There is no time in this middle,
Where mountains can form or mountains can fall.
You do not see that I am staring into my reflection,
An imitation of being that ripples with the ebb of an admonishing
grasp.
We long to trade our places in this landscape,
But my lips can only consume what they mean to release.
Life is painted with mildew and musk;
The canvas I wear begs to be stained.
Colors define, colors contain, colors invigorate
Colors cannot exist.
I am the black hills, the tan trunk that sprouts moss branches.
I am the blue lake that tints the crystal-mirrored ceiling
I am the child of all these things,
There can only be one color.
We find a lonely company
In sitting on the shore.
We melt together, the world and I,
Unearthing liberation in our ambiguity.
The still palm bears serenity,
And I can find no better comfort
Than this timeless moment of dissolve.

Inspired by

Milton Avery
Florida Lake
1951
Museum purchase by exchange
Gift of William H. and Eloise
R. Chandler

Petrana Radulovic
honorable mention, fiction

Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon

Once, when she is still a young girl, she asks her father why the princesses in the fairytales never saved themselves.
“Because,” says her father, leaning to kiss her forehead, “that’s the prince’s job.”
When she dreams that night, she is in a tall tower, all grey stone and ivy, and she looks out the window, at the misty horizon, waiting for someone to rescue her. She waits and waits (it is a very boring dream) and then, right as she is about to wake, she realizes that no one is coming. So she stands on the ledge of the window-sill—just as the light is hitting her and everything grows clearer and fuzzier at the same time. It’s silly, she thinks, so she reaches to her side and grabs a spear that is lying near right at the moment she thought it up (as so often happens in dreams) and with the weapon in hand, she climbs down the tower.

For the first eleven years of her life, she knows only of the Virgin Mary whose framed image hangs over her living room and who kindly and graciously holds the Christ child to her bosom. Mary is nurturing and motherly and reminds her of her own mother, when her own mother is not scolding her and instead holding her closely to her bosom.

She learns about Joan of Arc that year, Joan who wears armor across her bosom, who wields a sword, who commands armies. She likes Joan better than Mary. But as she flips to the next page in her textbook, she sees the picture of Joan tied to a stake, looking up at the Heavens (like Mary does), surrounded by burning flames.

“Why do they kill her?” she asks the teacher.
“They thought she was a witch.”