

Winners of the Conference on Christianity and Literature's Student Writing Contest, 2011

Creative Non-Fiction

Judge: Debra Rienstra

1st place

Brittaini Maul, Wheaton College

“Doubt and Trembling: An Undergraduate Testimony in Five Parts”

Debra Rienstra writes:

This essay is essentially a conversion narrative that combines philosophical depth with well-chosen passages of scene and dialogue. It features an effective structure and fluid, polished writing. With truthful precision, the piece sidesteps cliché and remains compelling throughout.

2nd place

Paige Wallner, Abilene Christian University

[“Michigan: A Family Vacation Rerun”](#)

Debra Rienstra writes:

This essay succeeds through rich detail and irresistible voice. An organic structure distills years of experience while creating a sense of satisfying completion. The refreshingly humorous tone conveys that familiar combination of exasperation and affection we associate with family.

3rd place

Jordan Havens, Abilene Christian University

[“When You Walk through the Garden”](#)

Debra Rienstra writes:

This essay compresses a summer of remarkable experiences into a few pages of fine prose. A strong, self-reflective through-line along with well-placed instances of figurative language and metaphor make for an absorbing piece.

Academic Essay

Judge: John Netland

1st place

Erin Lynch, Wheaton College

“Grimm and Grimmer: *Lolita*'s Fractured Fairy Tales”

John Netland writes:

Ordinarily, one would not expect to find Hilary Duff and Dietrich Bonhoeffer cited in the same essay, but “Grimm and Grimmer” is no ordinary essay. Ranging widely through the scholarship on classical fairy tales, contemporary pop culture, and Nabokov criticism, the author builds a complex argument that situates *Lolita* against the backdrop of both the brutal world of ancient fairy tales and the sanitized (and therefore arguably more dangerous) twentieth-century retellings

of those fairy tales. Acknowledging that Nabokov explicitly eschewed a moralistic purpose to his writing, this essay nevertheless reads the character of Lolita as a “challenge to a culture stifled by the ‘sultry air’ of mass media, revealing the continued pestilence of fractured narrative.” Not only can readers expect a culturally and theologically informed reading of this novel, they will also encounter a skilled wordsmith, whose pleasure in the beauty of the English language is expressed in every sentence.

2nd Place

Jason Ahlenius, Wheaton College

[“On Vocation, Economy, and Order in the Industrialized United States: Reflections by Henry David Thoreau”](#)

John Netland writes:

Readers might not be startled to discover that Henry David Thoreau and Wendell Berry have found the Industrial Revolution to have had a deleterious effect on our cultural understanding of vocation, but they will find few better guides to understanding Thoreau’s and Berry’s views on vocation than the author of this essay. Conceptually sophisticated and expressed in clear, vibrant prose, this essay offers a fresh and spiritually-informed perspective on how we might recover our sense of human vocation.

3rd Place

Robert Duffy, Villanova University

“Where Nature Completes Grace: Mystical Experience in *Burnt Norton* and Degrees of Knowledge”

John Netland writes:

Against Jacques Maritain’s critique of metaphysics, the author of this essay invokes mystical experience, as expressed in T. S. Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*, as a possibility for helping us move beyond the aporia of our human perceptions. Balancing conceptual complexity with aesthetic sensitivity, the author leads us through challenging philosophical terrain in strikingly lucid, graceful prose.

Fiction

Judge: Linda McCullough Moore

1st Place

Jamie Wells, Westmont College

[“Swing Low and Sweet Cherries”](#)

Linda McCullough Moore writes:

"Swing Low and Sweet Cherries" is one of the finest stories I have read. The narrator, a young boy, and his little sister are people I want to know, to spend time with, be charmed by, and to learn from. The writing is accomplished, the characters and story elegantly developed, but even more remarkable, the writer explores the foundations of the very nature of creative work. As each of the siblings relates to the practice of storytelling, fact and fiction, recording and

invention, we come to understand more fully the motivation and sensibility of a writer. And this writer is one whose work I will follow with interest and pleasure.

2nd Place

Grace Crawford, San Diego Christian College
"The Interview"

Linda McCullough Moore writes:

"The Interview" is an inventive story in which video and stage performance are juxtaposed, revealing the public and private face of a character. This device serves the author well as it portrays the increasing disparity between the two.

3rd Place

Michael O'Malley, Union University
["Achilles"](#)

Linda McCullough Moore writes:

"Achilles" is a story willing to ask difficult questions without needing to rush to simple answers. The writer demonstrates both facility with language and intriguing aspiration.

Poetry

Judge: Thomas Lynch

1st Place

Zoë Perrin, Grove City College
["Lazarus"](#)

2nd Place

Bruce Merkl, Oral Roberts University
"Wednesday"

3rd Place

Erin Lynch, Wheaton College
"Sonnets for Dante"