

Announcing the Results of the 2019

William George Prize for Poetry

Named for English teacher Bill George, whose poems continue to move the SLUH community with their wit, their honesty, and their generous good will, this prize is given annually to recognize excellence in student poetry at Saint Louis University High School.



First prize: \$100 and a subscription to *Poetry* magazine.

Second prize: \$50 and a subscription to *Poetry* magazine.

This year twenty-two poems submitted by twelve students were judged anonymously by Lisa Ampleman, author of *Full Cry* (2013) & *Romances* (forthcoming in 2020), winner of the Stevens Manuscript Competition sponsored by the National Federation of State Poetry Societies.

First prize: “Floor 104” by Cam Glynn

Second prize: “Ripples (the Dynamics of Flight)” by Joe Mantych

Honorable Mention: “Mother Water” by Philip Hiblovic

Honorable Mention: “Sunburst” by Joey Dougherty

Honorable Mention: “The Color Black” by Zak Stevenson

Floor 104

Floor 104 is a reimagination of Dante's fourth circle of hell in which he details the avaricious and the prodigal. While this canto specifically details the mercenary, those who placed money above ethical behaviour, their sins are indeed avaricious in nature. Contrary to Dante's Inferno, Cameron's inferno is set above ground, far above, actually, on the top floors of a skyscraper. While the first 100 floors are home to bustling businessmen, the hidden 101st floor is home to the door to hell. With each floor comes a new set of sinners who couldn't fend off their feelings of incontinence. On the 104th floor, Cameron and his guardian angel, Elon, the former at the prime of his entrepreneurial career and the latter an entrepreneur himself who first brought man to mars, journey through the halls of an office rattled by the croaks of the toadish shades that inhabit the floor. They gather the names and stories of two sinners, Martin Shkrelidze and Charles P. Bianchi, the first of which they both recognize immediately whilst the latter maintains a shrouded identity. The Canto ends with Cameron fainting in fear of presenting himself to the bellhop who guards the business of Dis.

I hummed along to Bruno Mars' bars
Featured in Travie McCoy's *Billionaire*
As our elevator ascended to the 104th floor. 3

"I wanna be on the cover of Forbes magazine, Smiling
next to Oprah and the Queen."
I sang, reminiscing on my teenage times. 6

My herald, Elon, interjected immediately Questioning
my mindless money mindset:
"If you listen carefully you'll soon hear 9

The pain of those who croak for more.
Look and listen, yet hold back all desires
To touch their wretched, witch-like skin. 12

Not the treasures of the village Woolpit,
Nor the treasures of their worldly pursuits,
These are the shades of Mercenary." 15

Just as my valiant guide concluded,

| | |
|--|----|
| The robotic voice of the elevator, Lifeless as those of the 104th floor | 18 |
| Announced our arrival. I wish, Readers, To describe in depth the horrid howls That harrowed the halls of the office. | 21 |
| However, so intense in amplitude And so varied in frequency, they proved Imperceptible to ears of my own. | 24 |
| Yet, I could feel the vibrations Of the wretched echoes of the croaks Of pain emitted from the avaricious. | 27 |
| Elon, who had yet to be bothered By the shades we had encountered, Hid his ears, mirroring those around us. | 30 |
| He glanced towards a man, whose Short stature and youthful grin, Paired with his familiar Bronx accent | 33 |
| Made him appear all too approachable. With a timid face, the shade questioned me: “You, who converse in my own tongue, | 36 |
| Whose skin is not afflicted like my own, Who confused heaven and hell? Why do you visit the eternal rat-race?” | 39 |
| With my guide still crazed, By the deafening croaks. I was forced to answer for myself: | 42 |
| “Confused I am certainly not, For I am sent through hell To journey to the heights of heaven. | 45 |

Lost, I felt, but found, I feel.
Working overtime Sunday eve,
Lacking all purpose and pleasure, 48

Mid-way through my career,
Elon beckoned for me, and I,
Trusting his innovative nature, followed. 51

The elevator closed on earth
And opened many floors above,
Revealing this ever-hidden 54

Yet ever-present, never-resting place,
A Motel 6 shrouded in a Four Seasons.
Although check-in is cheap, 57

Check-out is non-existent.
I come to share your name
And bring your story to fame. 60

So, please do, share you name
So that I can proclaim your presence
To my co-workers below us.” 63

The shade knew very well
That I knew his infamous identity.
A man of my time and profession, 66

Yet not of my moral conscience.
“You and I both know fundamentals
Of Economics. Supply and Demand. 69

The consumers consumed, and I,
The producer, produced in ample amounts.
Have you ever played Monopoly? 72

I won. Monopoly. Supply and Demand.
That’s what did it! Multiplying the price,
Over, and over, and over again. 75

Fifty-six times in fact! Amazing!
But Lady Liberty conspired against me;
Insecurity secured by my newfound wealth, 78

Led the former queen of green
To lock me up, for years, and years,
And years again. Seven years exact! 81

Warn your boss of the envies of the gods,
For what once was gain only leads to loss.”
While my intellect calls me to understand 84

His attempts to outsmart the strong,
I am lost allowing my heart to open
To his attempts to profit off the weak. 87

Elon, still stuck with his ears plugged
And his arms overhead tornado drill style,
Shot me a look to continue down the hall. 90

Cubicles, riddled with the frames
Of family photos, faces long forgotten.
Against my guides will, I stopped abruptly, 93

Hypnotized by a heap of burning stamps
Featuring faces of those who stamped Italy
Through politics, art, and science. 96

For a short stint, I saw the dictator Caesar,
Next I found the Florentine flatterer, Dante,
And as if through a lens, a clear image of Galileo. 99

Attempting to salvage the singed stamps,
A sole shade hopped around the flaming mound.
Struck on the side he knew not, 102

His right-half was stuck paralyzed.
With skin more toad-like than the rest,
Rough, dry, and warted beyond recognition. 105

Yearning to discover the cause of his affliction,
I spoke: "I recognize your accent as Italian,
Yet you speak English broken as your bones. 108

Share your story with me, you shameful soul,
So that I can redefine your wordly image."
And he responded, albeit crudely: 111

"I am Charles P Bianchi, and I am here
For reasons beyond me. I lived a life of charity,
Promising lucrative rewards to the patient. 114

It was simply arbitrage, t'was not arbitrary.
Sure, I shorted a few, but I boosted a great many.
His money paid his money paid his money, 117

But there was no money to pay him back.
He, envious of my deeds of goodwill,
Called up the feds, then it was all downhill." 120

I told them not to worry, everyone gets a share,
But little did they care. Despite the demise
Of my syndicate, I still showed them I'm there. 123

No food or drink was enough to repay them,
And I died a beggar, just as I was born."
His pitch proved to sway me to sadness, 126

I sympathized with his collapse. Elon,
Witnessing my weakness, warned me, saying:
"The shades here sell nothing but empty stories, 129

Promises they can't keep, seeking profits
That would make even a rich man weep.
You shall speak no more to shades of this floor. 132

Schemers, swindlers, and scammers galore,
They feed off your attention, time, and money

Until they run you dry, just as they stay eternally. 135

Come now, follow me to the door,
Before we rise again, the bellhop asks
Where we must go, journeying through Hell, 138

With you still alive and well. Tell him
Of your divine destination, prove to him
You are worthy ascending to heavenly heights.” 141

My mind clouded darker than the shades
Of this office. I struggled to keep my footing
As my knees locked, eyes shut, and I fell, 144

Out like a light, no chance for a goodnight.

—Cam Glynn

Notes on Floor 104

1-6: The Canto begins with an allusion to the 2010 hit song, *Billionaire*, by Travie McCoy, a song which would have been popular through Cameron’s teenage years. The song has a catchy flow, one that would be easy to catch yourself singing along to. However, the song boasts money obsessed lyrics, with the pre-chorus chanting “I wanna be a billionaire so fucking bad.” This promotes the idea that money motives penetrate all aspects of our lives, an issue still prevalent in modern times.

7: Elon Musk, Cameron’s guide throughout his journey to heaven, was arguably the most prominent figure of the 21st century. In the year 2035, ahead of his previously announced schedule, Elon sent man to mars for the first time in the history of humanity. This marvelous feat, along with his humanitarian efforts and focus on providing energy to all of the earth, leave Elon remembered as arguably the most ethical business leader of the modern era.

10-12: The sinners of Floor 104 have been turned to toads, a common symbol of avarice. In essence, they are the sin that they committed throughout their lives. Hence, they **croak for more** and suffer from **wretched, witch-like skin**. Cameron is urged to not touch the toads due to the widely believed myth that if you touch the skin of a toad, you will be afflicted with warts like those

of the toad.

13: **Woolpit** is a village in England where it is told that during the 12th century, two children mysteriously appeared, both afflicted with abnormally green skin.

15: **Mercenary**: (of a person or their behavior) primarily concerned with making money at the expense of ethics (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mercenary>).

30: While the croaks were imperceptible to the ears of Cameron, Elon was capable of hearing them due to his deceased nature. The ability of the croaks to bother Elon, whom Cameron paints in a seemingly divine image, proves the disturbing power of the croaks.

30: Elon is **mirroring** the shades of the 104th floor because like them, he too turned a great profit in life; however, he confronted this potential issue and decided to use his excess wealth for the goodness of others, thereby separating himself from these sinners.

33: Cameron, who tends to note the accents of the shades and proceeds to use this knowledge to judge the shades, encounters a man from the same city as his workplace, New York City.

37-38: In these lines, the yet-to-be revealed shade recognizes Cameron's human nature noting Cameron's skin which **is not afflicted like mine own**. He goes on to tell Cameron that he belongs in heaven, not hell.

39: **Eternal rat-race**: hell represents a never ending climb to the top, a lifestyle which engulfed the sinners who reside here.

46-51: **Mid-way through my career**: Cameron explains the origin of his story, explaining how it started with him feeling lost during the middle of his career. This places him at age 43 and sets his visit through hell in the year 2043. **Lost, I felt, but found, I feel**: Although he was feeling empty, his journey has provided him with a new sense of purpose.

56-58: **A Motel 6 shrouded in a Four Seasons**: While the business world may appear sexy and glamorous, like a fancy hotel chain such as the Four Seasons, at the core it is dirty and unenticing, like a cheap motel. **Although check-in is cheap / Check-out is non-existent**: It is easy to be tempted and drawn into committing hellish sins, but there is no true refuge from the grips of the Devil.

64-65: **The shade knew very well / That I knew his infamous identity:** The shade, which will soon be indisputably identified as Martin Shkreli, is a man that Cameron would have known well through his profession and while there is no evidence other than a few mentions in tweets, it is likely the two would have been acquaintances.

73-74: **Monopoly. Supply and Demand. / That's what did it!:** Shkreli blames the market for his sin, refusing to take responsibility for his wrongdoings, a trend we notice throughout all the entirety of Cameron's *Inferno*.

74-76: **Multiplying the price, / Over, and over, and over again. / Fifty-six times in fact!:** Martin Shkreli was infamous for raising the price of Daraprim, an antiparasitic drug for which he possessed sole ownership, from \$13.50 to \$750 per pill, increasing it by a factor of fifty-six.

77-79: **Lady Liberty:** Cameron uses the Statue of Liberty as a symbol for America. Martin believes that the whole of America was against him. Martin refers to Lady Liberty as the **former queen of green** because he believes that he dethroned her as the king of green (green as in money).

78: **Insecurity secured:** Martin was criminally charged with securities fraud, a charge unrelated to his manipulation of Daraprim.

84-87: While Cameron, as a businessman himself, can understand Martin falling to the temptations of securities fraud in which he screwed over the rich (**the strong**), he emphasizes that this is not the primary cause of his placement on the 104th floor, rather his deprivation of the poor and needy (**the weak**) from a life-saving drug is what led to his eternal damnation.

92: **faces long forgotten:** The mercenary of the 104th floor placed profit above even their family, causing them to forget even those who they claimed to love.

97: **For a short stint:** One of the most notable political leaders of ancient Rome, Caesar, was only dictator for four years before he was assassinated.

98: **Florentine flatterer:** Dante, a well-revered Florentine poet of the late 13th and early 14th century, was well-known for his love poems dedicated to a lover he yearned for, Beatrice. He is also remembered through his *Commedia*, which features the *Inferno* which inspired Cameron's *Inferno* (this can be seen through the many parallels between their works).

99: **as if through a lens:** Galileo, a prominent scientist of the late 16th and early 17th century, most well-known for his invention of the telescope.

102-103: **Struck on the side he knew not, His right-half was stuck paralyzed:** The shade was paralyzed on his right side because in life he preferred to chose wrong over right.

112-115: **Charles P Bianchi:** The shade identifies himself using his alias, Charles P Bianchi, however we know very well that the shade is actually Carlo Ponzi, for whom the term Ponzi Scheme originates. Ponzi is infamous for his scheme in which he took advantage of **arbitrage**, exchanging IRCs (International Reply Coupons) for more valuable stamps from other countries. Like Shkreli, Ponzi refuses to take responsibility for his sin, arguing that he had no choice (**t'was not arbitrary**).

117-120: Cameron keeps his description of the Ponzi scheme intentionally vague and confusing because it was this very aspect of the scheme that led to Ponzi's ultimate downfall. Ponzi used new investors money to repay old investors, and eventually, the complex chain collapsed.

121: **I told them not to worry, everyone gets a share:** In order to emphasize the similarities between the Ponzi scheme and Milo's syndicate from the novel *Catch-22*, Cameron echoes the words of Milo Minderbinder.

124-125: **No food or drink was enough to repay them:** While hiding from the law, Ponzi purchased a macaroni plant and a vineyard in an attempt to repay his investors. Unfortunately, like the rest of his grand schemes, his efforts failed and he died a debtor

135: **Until they run you dry, just as they stay eternally:** The mercenary shades of the 104th floor attempt to squeeze every last bit of money out of those they encounter, attempting to run them dry. This is fitting with transformation into toads as they are stuck with dry skin.

137: **bellhop:** The bellhop guards the entrance to the business of Dis. This character mirrors Dante's character of the gatekeeper who guards the entrance to the fifth circles and beyond.

145: **Out like a light, no chance for a goodnight:** Cameron, lacking the fortitude to approach the bellhop himself, abruptly faints, keeping in line with his habit of fainting under pressure.

“ripples (the dynamics of flight)”

startled: they shoot out of the shivering black, a sopping mass of
feathers flapping like fleeing footsteps, those feet that are flesh and that
fear flesh (those feet that drag dust into the depths of the
suburbs), those wings that wait and whimper
(those wings that streak into the reeking white of the sky).

groaning limbs hurl rocks with grass-stained hands,
these limbs that thump to the crackle of coronas under squealing
tires, the yelp of yellow lawns as the clouds leave them behind, the howl of
buzzing summer nights when dogs go hungry.

and as the wings watch the water blacken, their
bloated bellies can't tell that the water is still just bobbing water,
and the rocks and groans grow heavy as they
flee into the startled white above them all.

—Joe Mantych

Mother Water

As she trodded along the fickle creek,
She revelled in its viridescent heart.

The swell of current and porcelain swans,
Lily pads bore witness to mourning sun.
The evening air lingered as if to yawn,
Beneath lilac sky, awakening dun.

Pebbles, creek's rocky hands, cleaved to her toes.
Steadfast balancers clenched delicate frame.
But the body engulfed her wretched pose.
To Mother Water, she felt just the same.

Wanton girl birthed of wavering ripple,
Rose water mothered tongue in Rosa's cheek.
Rosa took suck from Natura's nipple.
The wisdom of mother she once had seeked.

If only she beheld the centerpiece:
Her own viridescent heart.
She would weep her rapture, then swiftly cease,
And restore within her what fell apart.

—Philip Hiblovic

Sunburst

The day is dead and so is she,
Brain and blood a soupy sameness,
Like the sunset-papier-mâché-color-collage
In the sky.

Her weapon is the purr of a nightjar,
In frightening tandem with a shot:
A *boom* finally free of the barrel,
Finally home in the skull.

Was she sad to go?
Undoubtedly... but so too the sun
Mourns at that hour when the azure
Surrenders the stars.

He swallows the sad and the sameness,
And sets the same as before.

—Joey Dougherty

The Color Black

It is known to be the absence of light
Or the color of Death
It is also known to be associated with the “Unknown”
Which is why when an officer sees this color 9 rounds are blown
To the back, Because of the color black
I live in a country where the color black is unaccepted
If any crime suspected with a black man or woman, without them even being present
The whole race is liable because somehow we are all interconnected
There are days that I can’t even walk out of my house
without an Officer asking me if I have a gram or a sack
Because of who I am, which is the Color the color black
In the land of the free and the home of the brave, I would have better expectations
But I must explain something for our indemnification
The color black is perceived as the color of sophistication, professionalism, power, elegance, and the
base color for the variation of Hue
For those of you looking for a purpose in the Lou
Pick up the power you seek and lack, which is the privilege to be the color black

—Zach Stevenson