Distinguished Speaker
Talks Leadership

LORI DRESNER
NEWS EDITOR

“One of my earliest childhood memories was tears streaming down my face, looking at my dad, saying, ‘I think I can do it. I think I can climb up the mountain tonight,’” told Sara Hannah, managing partner for Barry Wehmiller’s Leadership Institute (BWLI).

Hannah, the featured speaker at the Distinguished Speaker Series, was sharing the story of her first ever backpacking experience at five years old with her family. Her father had given her the choice to climb a mountain or camp out at the bottom. Hannah chose to climb the mountain, a decision that she says laid the foundation for her personal leadership journey in life.

A large audience filled the Century Rooms at 5:30 p.m. on March 17 to hear Hannah’s talk on Accepting the Awesome Responsibility of Leadership: Lessons Learned After Graduation. During her speech, Hannah, a graduate of Washington University’s business school, shared with the audience her personal life experiences as a leader and the leadership principles that guide BWLI.

Barry-Wehmiller is a global supplier of manufacturing technology and services, across several industries. As Hannah put it, “We make really big machinery that makes stuff!”

Hannah’s role as managing partner at BWLI is setting a long-term vision to help client organizations understand the intersection of people, culture, and business models. She also has a hands-on role in helping clients implement programs to help their vision become a reality and facilitating leadership training experiences. BWLI places a strong emphasis on human leadership, which is underpinned by several core principles.

“Leadership is a choice. And so often in business, we don’t look at it as allowing people to have the freedom to choose,” said Hannah. “And much of what we learn in high school, college, and our schooling is a lot more about personal achievement than it is about giving other people the choice to do what they want to achieve.”

While many businesses operate
Continued on Page 3
GAME CORNER

The UMSL MATH CLUB Presents Problem of The Week

A number twixt one and seventy-four
Is half its square root plus three more
In fact if its double you were to obtain
There would be no trouble to cause you pain
And a very even number should complete your chore.

Problem: What is the number?
will be using input from the forums to compose a statement of qualifications for selecting and recruiting candidates. The series of forums will be open to students, faculty, staff, alumni, and retirees. Each forum will also be livestreamed via a link with recordings posted at www.umsystem.edu/ps.

The Board of Curators’ student representative, Patrick Graham from the University of Missouri—Columbia, will also join the committee. The student representative does not have voting power, and since 2002, 27 bills to grant

Continued from Page 1

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Continued from Page 1

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Continued from Page 1

under the model that trust has to be earned, Hannah said that BWLL has the opposite approach. “We think that trust is really a generative act. If you give it, you’ll get it back.”

Hannah noted that above all, the number one determinant of happiness is a good job, according to Gallup. “More than health, more than wealth, more than a good spouse… although that is highly recommended,” she said.

“But the time that we spend—40, 50, 60 hours—is our chosen profession that will determine our level of happiness.”

Hannah specifically addressed the students in the audience, encouraging them to think more about the ‘why,’ and the ‘who’, in terms of who they will work for, instead of the ‘what.’

“All of you have to answer a lot of ‘what’ questions—what major, possibly what dorm, what roommate, what am I going to eat for dinner?” said Hannah.

“But when you think about this choice that you have as you leave this institution of higher learning, I would urge you to think more about the ‘why’ and understanding that the person that you are going to work with, in terms of your leader, is going to have a dramatic impact on your life, the ‘who’.”

She continued, “I never graduated from business school thinking that I would end up working for a manufacturing company,” said Hannah. “And if it wasn’t for a series of experiences and really following what I believed is my ‘why’ and the contribution I think I could have in this world, I wouldn’t have ended up where I am today.”

Following Hannah’s speech, Linda Godbey, an executive fellow at the Executive Leadership Consortium and former mayor of Clayton, held an onstage interview with Hannah, which was followed by the opportunity for audience members to ask questions.

Several students came forward to the microphone to ask more specific questions of Hannah about her leadership journey and how they can apply her guiding principles to their own lives.

“From listening to you, it sounds like your leadership skills started at a young age. You chose to climb up the mountain,” said Blake Kelly, graduate, business administration. Noting his experience working with children and noticing that some take the lead while others are more laid back, he asked, “Are leaders born or are they made?”

“I believe that leadership can be taught. I also believe that at a very young age, some of those behavior tendencies are going to start to come out. We’re all wired differently,” answered Hannah.

“And so we tend to characterize it very specifically as follow me to the top. When really, the moment there is my dad offering me the choice.”

Hannah’s speech marked the Silver Anniversary and 25th year the Distinguished Speaker Series has taken place at the University of Missouri—St. Louis. It began in 1991 with the first speaker, Michael J. Boskin, who was the vice president and director of marketing of Anheuser-Busch from 1977 to 1990.

The series took place in observance of Women’s History Month and was cosponsored by the UM System’s Office of Business Administration, E. Desmond Lee Professor in Developing Women & Entrepreneurs in International Business, Executive Leadership Consortium, and Gender Studies Department.

Reflecting on the event, Hannah said, “It was such an honor, certainly, to talk to business school students and position the talk in the context of my own experiences going through the business school program. Extremely well-organized, well-attended, great questions, so it was a huge honor to do it.”

The board meets about six times a year, not counting special meetings. Mulderig was on the board when unrest occurred at the Mizzou campus in November 2015.

Mulderig said, “Yes, there were a number of special meetings that occurred throughout the fall. If you look up stories by the Columbia Missourian and Columbia Tribune, you may see records of a few of them. I tried to travel to be face to face for these meetings because if it was possible, and also occurred by phone. Normally special meetings would be conducted by my phone to prevent travel, given that the curators (by definition) live in completely different parts of the state.”

Although the student representative has no voting power, they are present in committee meetings and regular meetings to voice concerns. Mulderig said, “I was included in discussions that occurred as a collective. At times my opinion was directly requested, but I was not timid about voicing it when necessary. I am by no means the loudest person in the room, but you don’t have to talk to be the most very influential. In fact, being slightly more reserved means that people genuinely listen on the times you choose to exercise your right to speak. In terms of having a voice, I was respected and appreciated like every other person at the table.”

Mulderig served on the Academic, Student and External Affairs Commit-tee and the Finance Committee during her term but she said, “I generally attended everything.” This included the closed executive meetings of the board. These were the times when I believe my perspective was the most valuable. I felt a great responsibility to attend all of these meetings because if I did not, the student perspective would be absent.”

Continued online at thecurrent-online.com
Individuals with disabilities have often found art to be a driving force in their lives, using creativity as an outlet to make a positive impact on themselves and those around them. However, his story has presented a variety of challenges for them.

"Normal is Overrated: Disability in the 21st Century Series" took place the week of March 14 with many events exploring the history and current status of individuals with disabilities in society. The first event, a film screening of art in the lives of such individuals, took place in room 313 of the Millennium Student Center at 5 p.m. on March 15.

Visiting scholar Dr. Brenda Jo Brueggemann from the University of Louisville was the presenter at the screening and spoke to about 15 students and faculty in the audience. Dr. Brueggemann herself helped produce both films, the first of which highlighted the life of artist James Castle called "Constructing James Castle." Although Brueggemann said she has no experience in art curation, she has done a great deal of research into Castle's life and works. She has gone through about half of the 22,000 catalog pieces of Castle's artwork.

Born in 1899, Castle was deaf and was not put into school until age 10 for unknown reasons. By this time, he was outside the bandwidth of language and was declared illiterate. He stayed in school for only five years, during which he learned crafts such as sewing and the printing press—skills that probably carried over into his artwork.

"[Castle] was treated as a person who couldn’t do things that other people could do. And it meant to those people, I think it meant that he was less of a person than they were," says John Derby from the Department of Visual Art at the University of Kansas, in the film.

In the time that Castle lived, deaf men were expected to learn trades. Castle, however, always saw himself as an artist. He was never interviewed during his lifetime nor was he ever asked about the meaning behind the symbols in his artwork. This in itself makes his life and artwork a mystery, according to Dr. Brueggemann.

In creating his artwork, Castle never used a brush; he instead whit-tled sticks and used them. He created many of his pieces by chewing up paper products such as ice cream cartons and using the product as a medium for his artwork. Some of his art reflects his experiences in deaf school. In one of Castle's drawings, students in a classroom are depicted with no arms. Brueggemann said that this represents Castle's experiences in school when deaf students had their arms bound behind their backs while being drilled on oral lessons.

Castle also particularly liked creating dolls from paper and cardboard. Derby says in the film that Castle probably created the dolls to have someone to talk to. Doors are also common in Castle's works. According to Dr. Brueggemann, in sign language there is a mythology around doors and not knowing who or what is behind them.

One take-away point of the film was the question of whether or not people always need words to communicate and if other forms of expression—such as behavior or body language—can convey the same meaning as words. "Maybe you don't have to have words to have a relationship. Maybe you don't need sign language for a relationship. Maybe it's based upon our behaviors, our actions. Maybe there was a language and it was body language, and body language is more powerful than we realize. Do we need to have words to tell us that a person loves us?" signs one of the individuals in the film.

"Voices Together: The Art as a Memory Project" was the second short film shown during the screening.
As primary season is in full swing, “House of Cards” offers a lot for the politically interested viewership. Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright once again boast strong performances in the show’s fourth season as the powerful and meticulous Frank and Claire Underwood, the duo that has continuously persevered through the grime and muck to rise to their esteemed positions. Intrigue pervades the show as always, and jowlers from the show’s early seasons have found their way back into relevance, serving as plot engines for both this season and possibly the next.

It is true that “House of Cards” continues to be a show worthy of binge-watching and has definitely improved on what was its third season—a low point for the series that focused more on the Putin stand-in than it needed to. However, the show is also increasingly embracing its role as more of a typical drama, and the soapiness is beginning to seep through the notion that it represents, in any way, the true machinations of the political world. Like the first three seasons, the fourth season of the Netflix series touches on several issues from our own political environment, including an ISIS substitute, references to the challenging task of filling a Supreme Court position, and, of course, the looming threat of a direct foray into politics, an easily-sighted allusion to Hilary Clinton’s transformation from president’s wife to much more. As much as the show would likely to be taken seriously, though, based on the immediate relevance of these and other plot points, it dips its toes too often into the realm of fiction that—especially for a binge-watcher—begins to feel very forced and especially fanciful.

In the one season alone, there are two instances where strong political opponents of the Underwoods, with obvious upper hands in these scenarios, have silly lapses of judgment that culminate in the dissolution of their presidential aspirations. It is a bit of a stretch to suggest that one candidate would receive such luck over the course of his career, especially one with as many dirty dealings as Underwood. Furthermore, Frank’s assertion that a politician would “drown a litter of kittens for ten minutes of primetime” seems doubtful at best. Either the show has deduced itself into believing what it shows of the political machine, or it is trying its best to provide an entertaining and scheme-filled drama.

The latter is probably more true. To be fair, this is not really a knock against “House of Cards,” as it has definitely embraced this line of play more as the show has gone on. For all the detractors that continually note the show’s false representation of politics and the fantastical situations that arise throughout, it is very likely that everyone has simply read the show wrong from the get-go. Because of the hard-hitting cast and the Emmy nominations, viewers and critics alike have been led to believe the show wanted to be seen as a mirror of our own corrupt government. It would seem that the series’ creators were always leaning towards more of a soap opera than anyone thought.

All this in mind, the fourth season does a very good job of keeping the plot moving and the content interesting. Frank gets to face off against a politician very like himself—cunning, ruthless, and utilizing social media to advance his image and agenda—and Claire gets to assert herself further as a political powerhouse. The big point this season failed to do, however, was provide a satisfying conclusion. It felt very much like a ‘Part One’ movie, wherein there is a massive buildup with little, if any, payoff. A plot point that in a normal weekly airded program would last months of viewership was left up in the air at the season’s conclusion. Obviously, this points toward a fifth season, but it would have been nice to see a story arc come to fruition. Despite this, the fourth season of “House of Cards” is pretty satisfying and quite an improvement over the third, moving the show in a promising direction.

The Current’s score: B+

‘If/Then’ at Fox Follows Two Life Paths Simultaneously

CATE MARQUIS
STAFF WRITER

The Broadway musical “If/Then” focuses on a woman at a turning point in her life, and then follows her along two possible life paths—simultaneously. One path leads to a successful career, the other to love. The musical opened March 15 at the Fox Theater, where it will run through March 27.

The musical might better have been called “What If,” which is the name of the opening song, in which the main character Elizabeth (Jackie Burns) talks about how her life would have been different if she had not lingered in a New York park. The lyrics are about the role of chance, or even fate, which is the recurring theme in “If/Then.”

Elizabeth has moved back to New York City, where she went to college, after 15 years. When she graduated with her PhD in urban planning, she had married her boyfriend and moved to Phoenix for his job. Now divorced, she returns to the city with hopes of starting her long-delayed career as a city planner. She has reconnected with a college friend, Lucas (Anthony Rapp), a serious guy and an activist in housing issues, and met a new friend and neighbor, Kate (Tamyra Gray), a free-spirited woman who teaches kindergarten. Will Elizabeth stay and listen to music with fun-loving Kate or go to a protest action with serious Lucas, as she promised? That is the pivotal decision, as the opening song tells us.

Elizabeth must choose but the play follows both choices: stay or go. If she stays, she meets Josh (Matthew Hydzik), a handsome military doctor just back from his second tour in Afghanistan. In the other storyline, Elizabeth leaves but takes a phone call that leads to her dream job.

The conventional way to tell Elizabeth’s two stories would be to follow one path in act one and the other in act two. “If/Then” makes the bold choice to do both at the same time. It is a clever idea but one that risks confusing the audience. The play deals with this by calling the character Liz, having her wear glasses, and using blue lights in the plot where she meets Josh, and calling her Beth, who wears contacts, and using red lighting where her career as a city planner flourishes. Still, with the quick changes within the same scene, it is still sometimes challenging to remember which Elizabeth we are dealing with at a given moment.

The characters dress like hipster millennials but they are in their late 30s or early 40s. The premise of the play—a group of close, diverse friends living and making life choices in an urban setting—might remind some of “Rent.” There is a good reason for that; some of the same people who created “Rent” were involved in this musical. “If/Then” is directed by Michael Greif, who directed “Rent” on Broadway, and the cast features Anthony Rapp, who was in the original cast of “Rent.” Some of the characters are very similar to “Rent” as are parts of the story arcs. Some have noted that “If/Then” essentially is “Rent”—or at least its more grown-up descendant.

The premise of “If/Then” is also a problem. The story of a woman choosing between career and love is very dated, even a bit objectionable. Still, the play has real drama, and is by turns funny, moving, touching, and heartbreaking, like real life. The best part of “If/Then” is its cast. The acting is strong, especially Burns as the two Elizabeths. Burns is wonderful but the rest of the cast is also good.

The singing is wonderful too, and Burns, Gray, and Rapp all can really sell a song. However, the tunes are not very memorable, despite lyrics and music by Brian Yorkey and Tom Kitt, who won Pulitzers for “Next to Normal.” The songs sound similar, with nothing hummable. The songs in the mind, and like many new musicals, there are probably too many.

If you loved “Rent,” you might like “If/Then,” but now that the dramatic, cleverly structured story is much more appealing than its unmemorable score.
The University of Missouri—St. Louis’ roller hockey team is the campus’ best kept secret. While most are probably familiar with the Triton basketball team’s games at the Mark Twain Athletic & Fitness Center, trying to catch an inline roller hockey game is a different story.

UMSL’s inline roller hockey team started back in 2006 and is part of the National Collegiate Roller Hockey Association (NCRHA). While there are no women currently on the team, the option is open for them to join. The 12-person team practices and plays most of its games at the Midwest Sports Complex in Ballwin. Occasionally, they will also play at the Matteson Square Garden arena in St. Peters.

Stephen Freund, senior, business administration, joined the team in 2012 after transferring to UMSL for golf. But had to wait a year due to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules. Roller hockey worked well for him and he has been captain of the team since 2013. Freund said, “I have had a great time playing for UMSL. I learned a lot from the older guys on the team my first year at UMSL. The team we have now are made up of a lot of guys that I have played with or played against since a young age. We also have some talented young guys that have helped our team succeed. It’s always fun playing and winning with teammates that you have played with for the last couple of years.”

The NCRHA team is part of the Great Plains Division. There are five teams in the Great Plains and 32 teams in the entire Division 1 league. While most of the inline roller hockey games are in spring, there are a few games in October and November. Future tryout dates have not yet been set, but are usually early in the fall semester.

Freund said, “I think the biggest challenges this year was some weeks the amount of games that we would have to play. Some weekends we would [play] 5 to 6 games and have 3 games on one day. Another challenge for us has nothing to do with hockey, it has to deal with raising funds for us to play.”

The team practices and plays their home games at the Garden arena in St. Peters. They will also play at the Matteson Square Complex in Ballwin. Occasionally, they play away from home at Lindenwood University. We believe we can win a National Championship this year as well.”

Freund wanted to thank the coaches for the team’s success this semester. He said, “Most importantly, I would like to thank our two coaches Andy Meade and Jason Holzum for the great experience I have had on the hockey team. Those guys have done a lot not just for me, but for all the guys that have been part of the UMSL Roller Hockey organization.”

UMSL Inline Roller Hockey Ranked 5th in Nation

UMSL Softball Sweeps Lincoln, Splits with McKendree

Continued from Page 1

complete game shutouts, including her 14th career no-hitter. With that no-no, she is now tied for third place all-time on the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II charts, and her 39 strikeouts over 19 innings this week bring her total to 142 on the year. The 1,408 career K’s is good for fourth place all-time for the NCAA DII history books.

The Tritons started it off early in the week by riding Perryman’s first two strong outings for the sweep on March 16. The offense capitalized off the excellent pitching and knocking 22 hits over both games against Lincoln en route to wins by the scores of 8-0 and 5-0. In the first game, five of the UMSL women tallied two or more hits, and Erin Walker, senior, elementary special education, and Reagan Osborn, freshman, nursing, each drove in two runs. This was followed up on March 19 and managed to take the second game away from UMSL in two contests dominated by pitching. Perryman only allowed four hits over the course of her third complete game of the week, striking out 12 for the 1-0 win. The Tritons didn’t even need an RBI to score as the Bearcats made a costly mistake in the sixth inning with a throwing error allowing Matthews to score off a Stupek double.

McKendree flipped the table on the Tritons in the evening matchup, shutting-out UMSL for the first time this season and snapping the team’s 15-game win streak. The loss was also UMSL’s first in GLVC play; they are now in a three-way tie for second in conference standings.

Carly Kinger, freshman, undecided, matched her adversary as best she could in her first loss of the season (5-1). She only surrendered two runs, one unearned, and struck out seven batters in the strong effort. Magre was simply able to keep Triton batters a little bit off balance and the team was unable to string anything substantial together.

After two more away games on March 20 against Illinois-Springfield, the Tritons’ next matchup will be against GLVC rival Lindenwood University in an away game on March 23 in Saint Charles, Mo. Be sure to come show your support as the team gets back to their winning ways.
Fear Not, Breasts Will Not Destroy Your Community

JESSIE EIKMANN
STAFF WRITER

Ever since mid-February, a coalition of angry officials and citizens in University City have attempted to tank Social House II, a restaurant that has recently opened in the Delmar Loop. Social House II, modeled after a similar establishment in Soulard, has topless servers, covered in body paint from the waist up. Before Social House II even opened in early March, it was in the crosshairs of, among others, University City Manager Lehman Walker and MayorShelley Welsch.

At first their attempts were focused on convincing the owner of the building, Dan Wald, to terminate the lease on the building earlier than the original date of March 2017. When that effort did not stop the opening of Social House II, University City revoked its liquor license on March 11. St. Louis County Circuit Court Judge Michael D. Burton issued a stay on that revocation a week later and the court battle are ongoing. Meanwhile, University City is pushing through regulations on, as the legislation words it, “sexually suggestive businesses,” to retroactively punish Social House II.

These efforts to shut down Social House II strike a paternity ban and are misguided—and not merely because I am thrilled that a restaurant full of topless women is just a short train ride away. The operating assumption that Social House II is a pariah that is morally degrading to the Delmar Loop and University City in general is a nonsensical and reactionary argument. Social House II would do no more moral damage to a community than a regular bar or a casino; to argue otherwise is to establish a nonexistent standard that says a woman’s breasts are inherently more sinful than drinking or gambling.

It is true that topless women are objectionable, they often play the bargaining chip of: “It is scandalous to the children!” But all these concerned parents would have to do to Plato’s concerns regarding uneducated mobs rule the problems inherent to party politics and representational government and we are left wondering: how did we ever expect our system to actually work?

Our system’s problems can be broadly divided into two categories, the ideological and practical. Ideologically, democracy harbors a number of (often unchallenged) assumptions. If we honestly and thoroughly question these priorities and values, we may just realize that our current system ends up hurting more harm than good. As popular phrases and cliched ideas (think, “vote or die”: or “not voting is unpatriotic”) make evident, Americans imagine high voter turnout a valuable end in itself. It is not uncommon to hear the politically-conscious encouraging people to vote, even if that person is likely to differ in their political beliefs. Even if a person is woefully un-informed on a number of the election’s most pressing political issues, they are nonetheless encouraged to follow their gut and cast their vote for the lesser of the two evils. Obviously, the idea underlying such attitudes is that the individual beliefs of the populace and the collective belief of the majority are goods in themselves. If you do not allow your voice to be heard, our reasoning usually goes, you are stifling the democratic process, and taking those with more time, energy, or motivation to decide on our nation’s fate.

The real goal of democracy in general, and universal suffrage specifically, is not the common good of the nation, but rather the freedom of the populace to make their own fate. The lesser of the two evils. To honestly affirm that universal suffrage is conducive to the common good, one would need faith in the populace’s ability to discern what is most conducive to that common good. Yet, as a familiar quote puts it, a five minute conversation with the average voter will quickly and surely put this belief to rest. Instead, under our current model of democracy, truth is deemed subservient to opinion and belief. What matters is not the formulation—through open, honest and intellectually rigorous discourse—of a rational decision on what is most conducive to the common good of the nation. Rather, giving people the illusion of choice has become paramount. Democracy has become our collective vision of the common good even if the belief underpinning this vision quickly devolves into tautology: democracy, devoid of its moral purpose, has lost its moral purpose because it ensures the common good. What is the common good? Democracy.

Even assuming the voting populace did have a firm grasp on the focal issues of each election, or that their irrational opinions were for some other reason valuable, evidence and history suggest that they often fail even to vote for the candidate that best represents these interests. Too frequently, those voters who imagine themselves committed to the nation’s common good fail to see through the specificity of their own circumstances, and imagine that what would work for their own personal problems would solve the nation’s. Your insurance went up under Obamacare? Vote against it, since it surely must have been bad for the nation as a whole. Over your head in student loan debt? Surely, federal student loan forgiveness would be a wise move. Further, because of the emphasis on candidates and parties rather than policies, the average American voter is easily swayed by both the personas of candidates and party politics. They are swayed greatly by how “likeable” a candidate is or by the party signifier that follows their name on a ballot. We are not doing our nation any favors by allowing the people to vote against the common good, and we especially are not doing individuals any favors by allowing them to vote against even their own interests.

Even worse, voters sometimes vote for a candidate (in a primary, for example) solely on the likelihood of them beating out their political opposite. This, of course, is tied to the impossibility of independent or 3rd party candidate success in major U.S. elections. Although such candidates may most faithfully represent an individual voter’s ideas, our two-party system ensures that a vote for them is a vote wasted.

In many senses, this year’s presidential race can be highly educational. Both sides, Republican and Democrat, make valid points in their respective caricatures of one another. For what Republicans are really talking about when they depict Millennials as “entitled” and what Democrats have in mind when they lament the “God and guns” Republicans is the very worst of the respective voter bases. And, no surprise, when ignorant voter bases gain enough in numbers, politicians will be only too happy to pander to them suddenly come crawling out of the woodwork. Whether it be Trump and his quasi-farsical campaign of love for the “unchallenged,” or Clinton’s faux adoption of and committment to the values of contemporary liberalism, what the candidates’ platforms reveal is the power our democrat ic process invests in those as they incapable of critical thinking. Universal suffrage ensures that every majority or plurality-held ideology, no matter how irrational or harmful, will be voiced and fought for by a willing politician. This means that our democratic system is thriving on the division and the caricatures of one another. For what decisions can be highly educational. Our system has also created the pathetic charade that is the election season. Every two or four years, corny flash and bang television spots insult our intelligence with a “he-said/she-said” attempt to paint political candidates as the bogeyman, rather than engaging with anything meaningful. Even more disgracefully, CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News alike pander to their Sunday Night Football, WWE, and Real Housewives-addicted audiences as they hint the most unimportant, weakly shows that are the presidential debates. What, exactly has been covered in any of these debates that cannot be exhaustively covered in an op-ed or, better yet, a rigorously cited formal essay? If the written word is too overwhelming of a medium for the average unchallenged, perhaps they should not be trusted with the nation’s most important decisions.

Continued online at thecurrent-online.com
St. Patrick’s Day may not be a day when most people think about Korean literature, but on March 17, Dr. Minsoo Kang, associate professor of history at the University of Missouri—St. Louis, presented his new translation of a classic Korean tale to a small crowd at Left Bank Books in the Central West End.

“The Story of Hong Gildong” is a story as well-known to Koreans as Superman or Mickey Mouse is to Americans. As Kang put it: “In an interview I was asked when was the first time I encountered Hong Gildong, I was like, when was the first time you heard of Superman or Mickey Mouse?” In fact, the name is so prominent in Korean culture that it serves the same purpose that John Doe does in America. Unlike those very American cultural icons, however, Hong Gildong actually resembles a ubiquitous English character: Robin Hood. Gildong is a classic, “noble robber,” as Dr. Kang outlined early in his talk, one who begins his outlaw life as a victim of unfair laws, “rights wrongs,” takes from the rich to give to the poor, never kills except in self-defense, and so on. On recalling his first reading of Eric Hobsbawm’s “Bandits,” which describes the ‘noble robber,’ Kang said, “As an undergraduate studying this, [I thought] that’s Hong Gildong! I know that dude!”

Kang’s Penguin Classics edition of the tale marks the first time that the full story has been translated into English. “I was extremely displeased with the [abridged] translation that existed,” Kang said. In the past, printers saved money by abbreviating the full tale, which in Kang’s translation, taken from the longest version of the tale that he could find, runs only 77 pages without notes.

The story itself follows the life of the titular hero, a son of a high born government official and a low born concubine. During this time period, the noted Joseon dynasty, men were allowed to keep concubines but these mistresses and their children had no legal standing. While highborn children usually studied their whole lives for the tests that would allow them to become either government officials or officers of the military, these “secondary sons” were not allowed to take the test or even call their highborn fathers “Father.” This leads to a passage that Kang says any Korean could recite: “I cannot even address my father as Father.” Gildong’s lament of his restricted status is the impetus of the tale.

Kang also addressed the various interpretations and adaptations of the tale created throughout the years. The question of authorship has plagued the story since it first appeared. Though popular theory had the book published in the 16th century by a radical politician, new research, some by Kang himself, argues that the tale fits much better in the 18th century as a pulp novel, not as any kind of radical proto-socialist manifesto. This becomes especially clear, Kang explained, when one considers that Gildong’s story ends with him becoming king of his own island and returning to all of the established social norms despite the chance to change them.

Continued online at thecurrent-online.com