

4-25-2019

## Corpus Callosum

Shelby E. Utz

*Auburn University*, seu0002@auburn.edu

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### Recommended Citation

Utz, Shelby E. (2019) "Corpus Callosum," *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*: Vol. 11, Article 3.  
DOI: 10.7710/2168-0620.1122

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## **Peer Review**

This work has undergone a double-blind review by a minimum of two faculty members from institutions of higher learning from around the world. The faculty reviewers have expertise in disciplines closely related to those represented by this work. If possible, the work was also reviewed by undergraduates in collaboration with the faculty reviewers.

## **Abstract**

This fiction short story parallels the function of the *corpus callosum* in the brain with the daily life of humans. It was inspired by the work of Ursula Le Guin, namely her piece "Schrödinger's Cat."

## **Keywords**

fiction, corpus callosum, Ursula Le Guin

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To anyone that glanced up at the two neighboring houses, they probably thought nothing more about them than the strangeness of how they mirrored one another. I knew the mysteries that were held inside the walls, for I am a resident. On the outside, the adjacent buildings stood sturdy with their matching layout and white, wood paneling. The only variation was the accent color of the shutters. While both showed the same features, the color around the windows was blue on the left house while red on the right. On the back side, each had a sunroom created to face one another. I took pride in the red hue that resonated throughout. Red pillows, red lamps, and in the center a red easel for me to create the paintings that called to me. Through the window, I could see that my neighbor Laura had a similar taste in hobbies.

From the moment we moved in, the two of us had set a time aside to create works of art within our matching sunrooms. She tended to paint with her blue and I with my red. At exactly one o'clock, we would set up our canvases on our easels and, without a word, we would begin painting. While people could not see or know it, we were in fact connected. Deep within the twin homes, there was a hallway that brought the buildings together. The two halves made one big functioning mechanism. The hall itself almost felt like a life line between my neighbor and I. Neither one of us said it, but we both knew there was something stronger within the walls of the hallway. Energy flowed in every inch; you could feel it as you meandered through the corridor aimlessly like a puppy looking for its owner. Is that normal for a house? Either way, the presence was undeniable.

Like any other day, as the clock struck one, Laura and I sat down to work among the paints. My hands quickly threw my brown hair into a messy bun atop my head to keep it from getting in the way of my work.

It happens more often than I had first anticipated. With my left hand, I picked up my brush and began to produce the picture from my mind onto the blank canvas. Slowly, one diligent stroke after the next, the picture began to appear. I glanced over at Laura to see how her own creation was coming along. For a moment our eyes met, and she gave me a wave with her free hand and a soft smile to match. I was prepared to return the wave but was interrupted by the lights of the house flickering aggressively. They wouldn't stop, one after another, on-off, on-off, like firecrackers going off inside of a dark closet. My eyes quickly skimmed the room in time to notice it wasn't only my house. Laura was having the same issue. As quickly as it started, the lights stopped their flickering and returned to their usual warm glow.

This persisted repetitiously for a while. There would be no warning, no cue as to what caused the strobing light to start, but with each incident that the episode took over, it encompassed both houses at the same moment.

Weeks went by without my acting on it. As each day started, I would reconvince myself that the wiring would fix itself on its own, but it slowly got worse. More rooms were affected. The rate of the flickering grew faster and the time in between became shorter. As the lighting settled on the twelfth day, I took the chance to call someone to come out and look at the houses. Within a couple hours, a lanky man pulled up in a gray civic. He pulled himself out of the car, his eyes skimming the setting around him. Something in his eyes said he already had a clue what the issue was. Maybe it was the way he looked at the two houses that made me uneasy. My feet inched down the driveway to greet him, only for him to slink toward me before I had made it halfway to the mailbox. He tipped his bowler hat at me while his eyes barely left the sight of my front porch. His dark mustache lifted as his lips

curled into what appeared to be a subtle smile, though I could not say for certain.

“Good evening, Miss Ross,” he said as he finally let his eyes drop to mine. “Would you mind showing me around a bit so we can make sense of your...issue?” His voice lingered on the word “issue” as if to hint that I should have been able to figure this out on my own by now. Condescending, don’t you think? I nodded a couple times in agreement before leading him through the front door.

Room by room we surveyed the house. I wasn’t sure what he was looking for, so I thought it best to show him everything at my disposal. There was a slight hesitation at the top of the basement stairs. No one knew of the connected hallway, and yet I was going to have to introduce it to a stranger. My feet made their way down the steps, and then around the corner to the mysterious corridor. At the end of the hall, there was a blue light to announce the presence of Laura’s home. The man stood in the middle of the frame work. His hands brushed against the wall. He could feel the energy too. I could tell by how his hand first recoiled at the touch of the wall. His head began to nod slowly. I could almost see the pieces being put together within his mind. He stepped aside before addressing me again.

“You have to seal off this hallway,” he stated plainly.

“Why would sealing off a hallway help with the electricity?” I asked. It didn’t quite make sense how one hallway could be the issue.

“As of right now, the electrical current that is running through both houses is too strong. The wiring is overactive, causing the electricity to run more aggressively than the houses can handle. The system was not built to withstand such pressures from all ends. Too much energy and the whole thing gets over-worked and its basic functions shut down.” I shook my head trying to

comprehend the words that fell from the man’s mouth. He continued.

“Cutting off the connection between the two halves will keep the electricity to one side. This way its effect will be less severe than when it was shared between both. It is the *corpus callosum* of your houses.”

My red painted nails tapped lightly on the side of my leg as the information sunk in. Disconnect the houses...why? I knew why, but for some reason the idea felt like severing a limb. The options swam through my head: I could either let the pain of the lights continue, or I could cut myself off from Laura completely. We wouldn’t be able to communicate like we used to, but she would still be next door to me. I looked up at the man, and with a small nod, I gave him the okay. In the end it was the better choice: localize the issue rather than suffer forever. He tipped his hat at me once more to acknowledge my decision.

“Cases such as this one are always so fascinating to me when they come up,” he stated as he swiftly made his way back up the stairs. “They expose pieces of things we take for granted. Once upon a time we had no insight into why or how things like this happen, and now we have the capability to understand and address the issue.” Per usual, his eyes never met mine. They continued across every detail they could soak in of my home. No more words were spoken by either of us. Instead, he sauntered his way out of my home and over to his car, oddly small for such a tall man. With his car now out of sight, I turned back to my house. A small sigh escaped my lips. What had I signed-up for? Will closing the hallway have as big of an effect as I think? A million possibilities came to view. Yes, the lighting would be fixed, but perhaps at the cost of a motion or function. It was simply one connection. It couldn’t hold that much power, could it?

A week later I stood in the basement staring at the now boarded-up hallway. Gray

concrete covered what used to be a path to a blue light. My hands shook slightly at my side as I realized what I had done. Laura was gone. The only thing connecting us now was our one o'clock painting session. With a heavy heart, I made my way into the sunroom to start on today's session. The shaking in my left hand grew worse the closer I got to the canvas. Something wasn't right. Through the window I could see Laura was painting the same blue automobile she had been working on, only this time her motions weren't as fluid. They didn't seem as determined as they used to be. In past sessions she always seemed so certain of where each stroke needed to fall along the painting, yet this time it was different. As for myself, I was having another problem.

I looked at the plate of fruit that I had been using as a reference only for me to forget what I was trying to paint. With all my might I could not tell myself what I was looking at. My eyes locked onto the bowl in front of me trying to make the connection between the image and my hand. The shaking progressed as my frustration grew with the situation. I shut my eyes and aggressively let the brush move as it pleased across the painting. I didn't care if I ruined my creation. It didn't matter anymore. If I could no longer imagine what I was trying to paint, then how could I ever paint again? The brush took on a mind of its own and painted on the reflective glint that the grapes needed to finish the artwork. I opened my eyes expecting to have ruined the piece I had been working on, only to find the paint in the perfect spot. My eyes blinking in astonishment at what I had done.