

2007

## Gabriel

Charles C.M. Kellom  
*University of Dayton*

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GABRIEL

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Arts in the Department of English

by

Charles C.M. Kellom

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

April, 2007

APPROVED BY:



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Carrillo, Albino  
Thesis Advisor



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Wardle, Elizabeth  
Faculty Advisor & Committee Member



---

Strain, Margaret  
Director, Department of English Graduate Program & Committee Member



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Morgan, Tom  
Committee Member

## ABSTRACT

## GABRIEL

Name: Kellom, Charles C.M.  
University of Dayton

Advisor: Mr. Albino Carrillo

GABRIEL explores the emotions, thoughts, and experiences of a young couple before and after they chose to have an abortion. Each of the book's three sections contains a different part of the narrative. The first describes the couple's innocent love, and exactly what social and personal pressures led them not just toward abortion, but toward pregnancy as well. The second takes place during the day of the actual procedure, Gabriel's "birthday," and the emotions running through all three characters. In this section, one of the major themes becomes apparent, as the experience of abortion sends the characters off on a search for truth. The third and final section follows the lover's lives after the death of their child; exploring what happens to infant souls when they are turned away from the gates of life, and what happens to adult souls when weighed down by the regret of missed opportunities.

Using the texts, myths, and lore of the Abrahamic traditions (Judeo-Christian, and Islamic) as a primary source, GABRIEL unites the each religion's understanding of the archangel in to an aborted child bitter with all mankind. These images only add fuel to the fiery debate across America, hoping to inspire more understanding and conversation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my family and those close enough to know, for their patience and courage with me in the publication of this personal subject.

Thank you to Dr. Wardle for your patience, understanding, guidance, encouragement, and imaginary deadlines just to motivate me. Thank you to “Dr.” Carrillo for letting me pursue this project as far as I could. Dr. Strain, thank you for your patience, reading and of course, even allowing this to happen. Finally to “Dr.” Morgan, thank you for being so willing to read my work, though we had only met a day before, and for your honest feedback.

A special thanks to Woodland Cemetery & Arboretum – especially Sherry Pesut, whose wisdom of Woodland Cemetery was providential.

Finally, I thank you, the reader, just for being.

Preface:  
A Note on the Thesis Version

*If you would rather read the work blindly, that is, if you would want to avoid "spoilers," then read this Note after completing the book.*

GABRIEL attempts to do many things, but first and foremost it tries to tell the truth about abortion. This is why Gwendolyn Brooks' quote is so appropriate to open the first section, and thus the entire book. It is the story of a man, a woman, and their aborted child, who comes to be called Gabriel. The final version will take the reader from the simple and innocent love at the start of their lives together; to the bitter and brutal end, when their lives in general begin to crumble as a result of their experiences.

With that said, one thing this version of GABRIEL does not attempt to do, however, is pretend to be complete. Time and natural talent, honestly, have hindered me from giving this story all it deserves. Certain parts of the plot and corresponding poems – such as Gabriel's actual conception, or the companion poem to "A Father's Keepsake," informing the reader that the purchase receipt for the abortion is the topic at hand, have been left out. But that does not mean that what this version has is not significant; rather, I believe it is important any reader of this version know that they are not getting everything, and thus deserve a general footnote to help anchor some of the images and ideas.

story are repeated – first explained in a physical sense, and then in a metaphysical, or an emotional sense. I've chosen the dramatic monologue voice, in hopes readers will be able to better understand each characters' mind-state, and search for their own truth by wondering what they would do in similar situations; questioning their own beliefs and ideals. When completed, each section will also invoke imagery from all three Abrahamic religious traditions, one religion for each section. I do this, first of all, to properly honor the title's namesake, but also in honor of truth. It would be hypocritical to call a book like this GABRIEL, and not at least attempt to transpose actual stories of the angel in to it.

Each of the three sections, I believe, has an apparent plot, but in this version the second section is the most clear. Opened by a quote from Thylias Moss, it is the most character driven – if you're looking for a clear example of what the final draft hopes to be, the second section is it. Currently it is the longest section, by the time the work is complete, I imagine it will be the shortest. The second section also has the most symbolism, another theme I hope to increase by the final draft. A small appendix listing and explaining these symbols is below.

For me, this thesis is more of a preview than a feature-length film: it hopes to interest you enough to make you wait for the rest. I'm glad The University of Dayton was the place I was finally able to explore my creative voice and ambition. If this edition could accomplish only one goal, then let it simply be a good read of poetry, worth your time, interest, and imagination. Thank you again for reading.

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"oh,

what shall I say,

how is the truth

to be said?"

~Gwendolyn Brooks, "the mother"

The Truth

is the world moves  
to its own rhythm  
and we're just trying  
to keep the beat.

Society lies  
still at its feet  
like dandelions and daisies:  
awkward, and stiff,  
not quite sure of what to do.

Standing there til'  
the wind comes along,  
or something comes along,  
and makes us dance.

The truth is society  
is just a shallow dance:  
trying to let the wind,  
or whatever it is,  
out of us.

A Kiss

Let me kiss you with my eyes,  
make you feel my adoration  
inside the bones of your soul:  
the purest imagination.

Staring at your bare shoulder,  
dancing over each tiny hair,  
I'm enthralled in your existence;  
captured in to a stare.

I want to show you my world:  
the metaphors surrounding us.  
Society has bound your spirit,  
life's despair – pounding us.

Forget the false walls!  
Look past the painted disguise!  
I love you! I love you!  
Let me kiss you with my eyes.

## Jasmine in the Sun

I've never seen jasmine  
swinging slowly in the sun.  
I've never even seen a sunrise  
when the day has just begun.

I've never watched the shining stars  
or clouds in the sky;  
never thought about watching beauty,  
just let it pass me by.

I've never trusted someone this much,  
never let them in so deep.  
Never wanted to kiss someone  
while watching them drift off in to sleep,

but if you stay here with me,  
lay here and be true,  
then I think I'll see all those things,  
I'll see them all in you.

The First Time

was awkward –  
we had waited so long:

A special dress-up dinner,  
an old D'Angelo song.

We danced around her efficiency  
in our underwear,

being silly. Both of us acting  
like the other wasn't there.

Not nude, but naked: curious –  
and hesitant to see

if our love was as real  
as we both thought it to be.

Plan B (0.75mg levonorgestrel)

Plan B for emergencies only, Plan B.  
My doctor said she'd always give me one,  
Plan B if I needed.

So I did, and I never thought I would,  
but with him it's different,  
everything is different.  
There's no need to be safe.  
I know we should use condoms but we're in love –  
We haven't said it yet, but I feel it.  
When he looks at me I feel it, getting all hot inside,  
my temperature rising from 92 to 115,  
my skin getting all hot, I feel nervous when he touches me:  
I get all excited and calm at the same time,  
I want to be dangerous and  
I feel safe all at the same time;  
When he kisses me I feel it,  
and when he comes I feel it then too,  
more when he's inside me.  
And I trust him, he said it was an accident and I believe him:  
Heat-of-the-moment-type thing  
just one time,  
and my doctor said Plan B for emergencies only so its okay.  
My doctor gave it to me so its okay and we'll be more careful next time.

But there isn't a next time,  
Or there is.  
I feel it again and take the Plan B again but its okay –  
I love him and we say it now, he tells me all the time:  
Quietly before he falls asleep or –  
right before I leave in the morning, walking out  
still holding on to his front door knob.  
It feels good to know he loves me, it feels good.  
I play his words back the rest of the day.  
And I told him that was the last time,  
we've taken it twice now and he wont have a choice anymore because I said so.  
Its my body, and if he wants it he has to use a condom.  
I'm in control and I said so.  
Condoms are always better – Plan A, always better.

But we've been together so long and,  
I've never let anyone in this close before.  
Usually the only Plan B is another guy, a friend,  
someone to kill the time when Plan A isn't around.  
Nothing serious or sexual, just someone to talk to:  
Plan B, always waiting for me to leave Plan A on the dresser.  
But he's all my plans now.  
It's different, I feel it, it's different.

We're *in* love, and that's different.  
That's why I don't mind when we forget sometimes, I don't mind.  
It feels good to forget – like every other rule,  
everything else everyone expects me to do.  
He pulls me closer and says whatever he says to make me forget –  
Plan A still on the dresser.  
And it's like I can hear myself screaming from the back of my mind sometimes:  
"Don't be stupid! He doesn't care! I'm the one who has to take that pill not him!  
All he does is talk..."  
But that's all he has to do.  
He talks and it feels good.  
He tells me how much he loves me;  
writes poetry and tapes it to the side of my computer;  
doesn't mind listening to my stupid stories, or just being quiet;  
we go out together and he opens my doors;  
walks on the side closest to the curb and I never even had to mention it;  
we watch sunsets,  
and then the sun rises and it feels good.  
We rise together. *We're* together.  
And I can hear myself saying "I shouldn't..." but I don't listen.  
And I know it's stupid but...  
I don't know.  
I love him,  
and he loves me.

My doctor wants to know why I'm asking for the pill again.  
I say it was an accident, but she doesn't understand.  
I can never seem to explain it to anyone the way he explains it to me.  
She says I should just get on birth control, but that's different.  
I don't want to gain any weight, I'd rather stay natural.  
No side effects.  
She says being a mom is a side effect. Birth control's better than a baby.  
And I know I need it but I can hear him saying we don't.  
He says we can do better, and I believe him.  
I trust him –  
I love him and we *can* do better.  
We're together and I *know* he won't leave me.  
I *know* he wouldn't lie, it was just a bunch of accidents,  
we don't *need* birth control, we just need to do better:  
use condoms and plan better.  
But somehow I always forget,  
we always forget.  
"Next time." he says, "Next time." we say.  
But after the next time I don't feel good.

And I try Plan B again but it makes me vomit this time.  
Maybe it was something I ate, maybe.  
Maybe it's the flu but it's the summer and,  
maybe it'll go away but it doesn't and maybe I'm just late  
but I know I'm not.  
So I get a test and sure enough, no maybes.

I'm pregnant and I don't know what to do.  
I took the Plan B but it didn't work.  
I don't know if it was too late...  
or if I did something wrong ...  
I got it from a different doctor this time – couldn't go back to the same one,  
she probably wouldn't have given it to me anyway.  
But whatever, it didn't work and now I'm afraid it could hurt the baby.  
He says it'll be okay but its not okay.  
I'm scared and all he does is talk about how it'll be okay. I'm scared,  
and there's no Plan B for this. Or there is.  
I don't know what to do, I don't know.  
And all I want to do is forget again, like all those other times.  
I want to forget and feel good again but I don't.  
I don't know what to do.  
And he says it'll be okay.

And I trust him.

“or can any time

become the right time to control

or revoke  
a birth...

...we will still survive termination,

not all of us

but enough to ruin eugenics, politics, sport, and convenience.”

~ Thylas Moss, “After Reading *Beloved*”

## A Vision

*Leviticus 16*

A bull in purple robes stabbed a goat  
in its side, then stood up tall like a man.  
From the goat's wound rose divine white smoke  
manifesting a small and weak male-calf ram.  
The bull spat the goat's blood on the altar  
and burnt the ram – all his people praying,  
banishing the goat: a living martyr.  
An angel then appeared to me saying:  
"I am the Ram, offered to your nation:  
The shame of your sad, grave, generation.  
You have cursed the Goat to wander alone,  
Barren in the desert, her fate unknown.  
Blessed is the Guide chosen to set her free,  
Unlike the proud Bull: the Bull, is thee."

## Offering

The cashier's chamber  
is as bleak as the next  
"...30 minutes..." she promises.

Florescent clouds brighten our transaction:  
my plastic prayer sliding through the offering plate.  
With approval, Mother Superior scribbles down  
the date, time, and method of payment in a book:  
a cross and boulder emblazoned on the cover.

She rips out my copy: it has everything  
except the child's footprint and name,  
then explains the ceremony.  
Back in the Temple, oblate acolyte nurses  
make sure everything is prepared –

Collection always comes  
before communion:  
the priest must wash his hands  
before any miracle can be attempted;  
offering must be made  
before any sacrifice  
can become significant.

## A Father's Keepsake

Wellll, first I hung it over your crib.  
It would spin around in the air  
and you would just laaaauugh.  
Sometimes you would tear it down  
so I started laying it over you while you slept  
and it became like a...uh...security blanket for yuh.

Ya never let it go after that.  
Everywhere you went you just had to drag that thing –  
don't know how many times I told you to keep it outta your pants  
but you didn't listen.  
And every night before elementary school  
I would tuck it in your lunch box  
underneath your mom's turkey sandwiches –  
much as you loved it  
you all-ways seemed to forget it in the mornings,  
too busy rushing to that rusty ol' school bus.

Then we tied it to your handlebars  
when you first started bike riding:  
remember that?  
It used to flap down in the wind  
like a broken bird wing  
every time you came down the hill.

In high school you acted like you didn't want it anymore  
so I framed it,  
put it on the mantle.  
My friends would come over and we'd look at it over coffee or somethin –  
they were all proud of you too ya know,  
reading it saying little different things –  
I was proud of myself.

And you'd be proud too  
every time you came home from college  
you'd walk right in there and look at it,  
reminisce about all those times growing up –  
remember when your mother tried to make me throw it away,  
and I said: "Naw, he's gonna wanna keep this."  
Really I just wanted to keep it at that point ya know? Ha-ha-ha...

Here why don't ya –

why don't ya take it with ya, hah?  
Hang it up at work  
let all the bosses and the big whigs see

the human side of ya ya know?  
Something to talk about at the office – take your mind off the things, hah?  
Would you like that?

It is yours ya know.  
Here –

I don't need it anymore,  
what am I gonna do with it anyway hah?  
All the fellas have seen it enough now.

Here,  
take it –  
what am I gonna do with it anyway?

## X-Ray

The nun doesn't smile while  
smearing my side with jelly,  
only smirks.  
Her hand slides the sensor squishy  
side to side.

Three women sleeping  
on a stiff-stale couch stare  
back at me:  
paint peeling off the walls.

(For some reason,  
I thought this place  
would be nicer.)

Ultrasounds scan for souls:  
demonic screams searching for my sin.  
"It's probably a boy," she says still smirking,  
"since it's sitting so low."

For some reason I thought,  
this place,  
would be nicer.

## Delivery

*Ezekiel 10:6*

Wearing a white cotton coat,  
the priest reaches inside her heavenly kingdom.  
Two cherubim ovulate a small pile  
of coal burning white with life,  
pulled from among the wheels of the throne.

He hides it in a biohazard bag,  
perverted triquetra,  
orange and plastic laying clumped  
on the floor,  
then ascends from the altar,

his sad substitute for wings  
glides over a linoleum earth  
as he scatters another divine gift  
all over the city  
of men waiting below.

Waiting

Sitting between the arms  
of upholstered metal wombs,  
our fear and shame cuts off  
the umbilical cords of communication:  
Isolated men slowly dying,  
too underdeveloped  
to know,

We face the sorry-truth of our choices,  
peeking through the paint  
as it peels off the walls,  
while the anesthetic cries of a holocaust –  
our women and children,  
float over head like phantoms.

## Altar

In this stirrup altar  
praying for piety,  
I give my child to you,  
My country tis of thee.

May vacuuming angels  
suck him in to the bile:  
a cluster of grapes  
smashed over each pile.  
He is my blood; drink him  
America, and smile.  
Forgive my trespasses,  
let me keep my lifestyle.

Deliver me from the  
pain and cruel misery  
young mothers suffer in  
this land of liberty.

You say I have a choice  
but I know the truth:  
I'm too poor to have a  
child while still in my youth;  
too poor, too young, too smart,  
your law is absolute:  
break his little body;  
red stripes over your tooth.

My Mother Liberty,  
hear my desperate plea:  
Take him, and eat him –  
Do this, and remember me.

In The Waiting Room

That dark basement is still,  
filled with parents who aren't expecting.

Only the chairs along the wall face each other:  
no tales of passionate sex or happy-accidents,  
just accidents.

One proud pappa looks out to his left,  
wearing his content like his black leather coat,  
rubbing his chin so cool.

A grandmother reads quietly,  
her head slumped over, forsaken,  
jean-legs crossed, guilty.

I sit patiently,  
trying to let the TV drown out the cries,  
the arguments, and the sad relief:  
but the silence,  
that silence,  
lurks through us all.

## That Silence

laid on my chest like her weeping head – crying out for so many things, to list them

would be insulting.

stared at me like shame, proudly boasting its knowledge of my truth: cruelly excited to watch me pretend that my staring back somehow made things even.

kissed me, and dissolved.

No one will warn you of a sound so empty;  
the anger you will face;  
the regret;  
the sense of sickness that overcomes every being wanting to call itself a man at least once,  
leaving his soul to wonder  
why it ever chose  
to enter this world.

Birth

Grease, receipts and syringes  
surround a small orange bag –

inside little legs are flailing  
begging to be comforted  
by the slightest rub,  
an even slighter sigh.

Cold echoing walls contract  
around the little plastic womb –  
gum wrappers, protest signs  
and plastic flowers crowning the child

out in to a green receiving vault  
filled with flies and broken glass:  
afterbirth spilling on to steel,  
souls spilling.

a stomach aches for  
another's heartbeat –  
quivers, and stops.

The World of an Aborted Child

has four corners like this one:  
deep, hollow, and sad.

smells of slowly perverted  
substances –  
the unique stench of disregard.

is cold, dirty, and hard,  
its paint peeling off  
bit by bit.

hums an electric grunt,  
echoing as it crushes  
and compacts its children.

tastes like it smells:  
of broken things,  
sour milk, waste;  
stinging the tongue  
like forced truth.

## Little Cardboard Boxes

Falling asleep in my designated seating cell;  
forgetting about dances and dreams,  
    desperate pleas, death and despair;  
finding new truth in choice, status,  
    opportunity and the American way;  
forging out peace through the woodland cemeteries in my mind,  
    outlined with little cardboard boxes, each one  
    wrapped by a receipt for the slain child inside, each receipt  
    chanting names never given; and those are the same  
    as the mausoleum's caskets – flags and shrouds, obituaries  
    draped over each of them; or the grave's cribs,  
    rocking each of us to rest; the only difference  
    is in how much they process the wood;  
feasting on some sick self-made kind of Content  
    with the worst decision I've  
    ever made,

and she comes down stairs  
holding back tears, or just finishing  
wiping them away – grips her small  
brown paper bag like an anchor,  
and asks me  
if I'm happy.

Mah Nishtanah

Why is this night different from all other nights?

Why on all other nights is every moan of my stomach answered, but on this night,  
you ignore me?

Why on all other nights do I hear your heart beating, but on this night, you  
whisper bitter sounds?

Why on all other nights do I feel cotton over your belly, but on this night, only  
steel?

Why on all other nights, does the world feel so vast, but on this night, so narrow?

“And when the earth shall claim your limbs,  
then shall you truly dance.”

~Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

Cry Because

the tears of her thighs  
cannot be wiped away  
so easily.

She cannot forget:  
every time we come,  
to bed, and we pretend  
to make love like  
nothing is wrong.

She cannot forget  
the pain in her womb;  
the empty lacking of life:  
a vacuum left by the vacuum-tube  
raining down acrid over salted and spoiled pork,  
hanging like meat slabs from her  
thin, hook-like knees.

## Meeting MLK in A Dream

As I sleep, his right hand rises from out my comforter,  
gripping the air then the back of my shirt,  
yanking me down through the mattress in to the dark.

Wearing his stereotypical-grey suit,  
pointing his finger at my lips,  
he screams out the voices of every black American that lived before him.  
Muddled and disappointed,  
they create a tunnel of sound  
surrounding me,  
piercing my spirit.

One voice among them is clear and crisp:  
young, and angry.  
It rises to the top of the tunnel,  
then flies forward,  
finally resting in the middle.

Together  
they all say:  
"Pay  
What You Owe."

Hidden

In the other room,  
hunched over my shame  
rocking back and forth,  
tugging and pulling  
dry, limp,  
breaking skin,  
I grit my teeth and call out eulogies:  
shivering pants of breath,  
skin-breaking;  
like the crow cawing outside:  
my instinctive response  
to the new day.

Second Attempt

In a shallow grave on the side  
of some Columbus Ohio road,  
my car becomes a casket,  
catching drunken tears  
crying out for death.

Spared by some cruel miracle,  
spitting blood and rum on the radio,  
headlights flash over head  
with contempt, like phantoms:  
my broken fingers reach out,  
trying to take control.

If

If I would've been smart I would've wore a condom,  
and then this poem would've never happened.

If I would've been brave,  
I would've ran up the steps of the Clintonville Women's Center and busted you  
out of there.

Darting past the sleeping guard,  
I would've punched that smug nurse in her face and spit  
on that damned doctor.  
I would've caused a ruckus so loud,  
every sleeping mother in there would've realized the truth;  
scooped you up in my arms like that guy in all the movies – when he saves the  
damsel from the burning building,  
and we would've ran out the front door as if we had jumped out a tenth-story  
window: screaming and afraid, but happy to be free –  
flying and falling on the righteousness  
that comes with having the wind in you,  
and the contentment  
that comes with an uncertain future.

Instead I ran up the steps of the OSU/Barnes & Noble Bookstore, rather I rode  
the escalator,  
and wrote about it,  
like I'm doing right now.

If I wouldn't have been so selfish he would be here right now,  
drooling as he nibbled on his own fingers,  
and we'd be at home: him watching me watch TV.  
Months ago he would've stopped waking up in the middle of the night;  
yesterday he would've laughed.  
He would've leaped from your womb like that same guy in all the movies:  
He would've leapt like his father:  
responsible and courageous –  
free from the peaceful prison, into chaos.

Instead he sleeps somewhere between hell and here, waiting for me,  
whispering my name in the breeze –  
calling out all my failures and short-comings.

Instead I'm in a library,  
alone,  
writing.

R002593028

## APPENDIX – Symbols Explained

The following are popular interpretations of symbols found on headstones – obviously making them very pertinent to this work. Specifically, I've relied on those symbols most popular within Woodland Cemetery & Arboretum in Dayton, Ohio. One of the nation's oldest, and final resting place for the likes of Paul Laurence Dunbar amongst others, Woodland shares a border with my Alma Mater, the University of Dayton.

Symbols not explained in this appendix can be found in the appropriate text referenced at the start of the poem.

An Anchor – Symbolizes hope.

Books Around the Cross and Boulder – The Book of Life with the deceased person's name applied.

Clusters of Grapes – The Blood of The Lord; Holy wine; The Eucharist

Daisies – Typically found on the gravestones of small children.

A Gate – Representing the passage from one realm to the next.

A Hand Pointing Upward – The soul ascending to heaven

Lambs – Typically on the gravestones of small children.

Pine Cone – Symbolizes immortality and incorruptibility.

Rose – Red for martyrdom, white for purity; during Victorian-era, women's gravestones often adorned with them

Thistle – Represents earthly sorrows; thorns sometimes associated with the crown Christ wore

Tree Stumps – A life cut short.