

SIGMA TAU DELTA JOURNALS  
INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH HONOR SOCIETY

SIGMA TAU DELTA  
RECTANGLE

*Journal of Creative Writing*

VOLUME 97, 2022



SIGMA TAU DELTA  
REVIEW  
*Journal of Critical Writing*

VOLUME 19, 2022

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2021–22 WRITING AWARDS  
FOR SIGMA TAU DELTA *REVIEW*  
AND SIGMA TAU DELTA *RECTANGLE*

*Frederic Fadner Critical Essay Award*

Kira Schukar: Saying “‘Nothing’: Cordelia and the  
Asserted Absence of Voice in *King Lear*”

*Eleanor B. North Poetry Award*

Fisher Sexton: “All You Can Take With You Is That Which You Have Given Away”

*E. Nelson James Poetry Award*

Shilo Virginia Previti: “When you’re cleaning the house”

*Herbert Hughes Short Story Award*

Amy Moczydlowski: “Vintage Memories”

*Elizabeth Holtze Creative Non-Fiction Award*

Stella Rothe: “Of Things That Fly Away”



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RECTANGLE

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POETRY

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All You Can Take With You Is  
That Which You Have Given Away

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Fisher Sexton

There's never much left when a father dies—  
apart from the mortgage  
the funeral bills  
watery eyes

a floundering business  
half-eaten fruit platters  
*Look George, this one even has pineapple;  
your father loved pineapple . . .*

The aching, money-grubbing hands  
of capitalists and lawyers

*You see George, this old Building and Loan is such a burden . . .  
why don't I take it off your hands?*

The aching, shattered knees  
of a mother praying away every waking moment  
The aching carpal-tunnels  
from signing her name for her

*George, can you sign this for me?*

over

*This one too dear, if you don't mind.*

and over



*Another one came today, George, be a lamb?*  
and over again.

*There's a stack of papers I need you to sign in the kitchen, Georgie.*  
There's never much left when a father dies—  
yet they leave so much behind.

## When you're cleaning the house

Shilo Virginia Previti

after, it is important firstly to remember  
that big dangers can nestle  
in small containers, like,  
for instance, that pepper jelly  
she so loved with sliced cheese  
on crackers, or, secondly, grape juice  
she drank from the bottle, or, still  
on the kitchen table and lurking  
leftover from dinner last night, thirdly,  
a crock of butter in the bell,  
a dish into which she very likely dipped  
her own knife before spreading it, thick  
like a disease, from garlicky, twice-bitten  
bread to that knife to this butter,  
or maybe, simply, finally,  
it could have gone  
and passed through the air  
as she breathed, just so, and—panic  
is extremely contagious

even when you don't have enough time,  
so really, in conclusion, it's just best  
to throw it all safely away.

# Unforgiveness sits in my brain like a bowling ball,

Rachel Finney

sinking into the floor,  
but I pick it up so easily.  
My fingers slip into the holes neatly:  
ring finger in anger,  
middle in sadness,  
thumb in bitterness.  
I have a firm grip on it,  
and it is not heavy when I lift.  
If I wanted to, I could bring it up  
higher and higher  
and throw it with infinite force.

Steady aim on the pins,  
but I'd crash the windows instead.  
Dent the walls.  
Trash the whole damn place.  
Those pins would stand  
in their perfect pack of ten.  
Those empty pins,  
no expression, no face  
on their smooth, painted bodies.

No smug pride,  
or triumphant relief,  
or condescension,  
or remorse.

I could crash the windows if I wanted to.  
And I almost do.  
But I just pick my unforgiveness up,  
and raise it high,  
and hold it there a while.  
I always put the ball back down.

## Aqua Vitae

Rachel Finney

To cope, my mother takes up two addictions:  
Coca-Cola from soda fountains  
and cigarette smoke.  
She says that coke tastes better  
freshly poured,  
caramel-colored syrup  
coating the teeth  
in a thin layer  
that cannot be wiped off the enamel  
with a finger—  
it requires Colgate and a brush,  
which will not be available  
for several hours,  
because mom stays at the nursing home  
every night until 5 a.m.  
I do not know when she sleeps,  
but I do know that,  
for whatever reason,  
A large coke is \$2.79

but the slushy version—  
same size—  
is 40 cents less.

## Saltwater Silicon Valley

Jessica Joudy

*a reflection on Alviso, for the conservationists  
of the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge*

forty minutes out from the city  
with its imported palm trees  
and carefully cultivated zinnias  
pink and red and orange  
amidst the sea of charcoal and gray,

sturdy wooden bridges stripped pale  
by sea salt winds, casting thin shadows  
over worn-out trails and thistles  
and a town that drowned  
who remember that here were once marshes:

now ponds bloated with salt, leaching out  
orange and red and pink  
rust that packed the coasts with latticework  
crystals, a deluge of a dead sea  
until the floods made us remember.



now a rail with an orange beak and white feathers beats its wings  
overhead as the ponds begin to turn to wetlands once more.  
women and men design levees of charcoal and gray  
and a tiny cinnamon harvest mouse curls up on a stem and chews  
on pickleweed: unfurling once more in the saltwater marshes, red as her  
coat.

## If I Ask Who Gets To Give Me The Answer?

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---

Jessica Joudy

automatic American: no work no  
fight to be i was born in this country so can i be  
an automatic American if my daily pledge of allegiance  
was shaped by double voice that  
accidentally forgot my place in the classroom  
called the teacher mama instead of mommy instead of ma'am  
nectar syllables dripping out an automatic American mouth  
joke that i am 'arabi-eh, not 'arabiah, automatic palestinian  
accent—the one a friend called arab cali valley girl—  
turning whiskey into *ara'* not *araq* & oil into oil form  
palm crosses on palm sundays same holiday but slant say  
our father who art in heaven sounding like  
*abana la'thi fi alsamawat* & one nation under  
Allah just meant God until you told me it meant  
something only a terrorist would say so smile  
at the boy saying "I didn't know  
Arabs could be kind and intelligent and helpful  
until I met you" jettison the hurt into thin  
air dust particles glittering in both homes'

hundred-degree heat & my people are your people  
are my people & we seek to be free so does that  
make me automatic American?

## Exhumed

Addy Mahaffey

Grandma's split-level on the mountain got eaten  
by a monster wearing a murky cloak of kudzu.

I never saw him but sometimes I imagine  
the creep of his feet on the floorboards  
or the raw, hot blob of his face twisted  
like a car around a telephone pole.

I heard he flicked the house's windows  
until they shattered and poured the glass  
shards down his throat like Pop-Rocks.

Then, he peeled the black tar off the roof  
and spun it between his hands like taffy,  
licked the shingles with his long, mossy  
tongue and stuffed the soft backyard clover  
into the pouch of his cheeks like green Skoal.

He spit snuffs of grass into the pink bathtub,  
clogged the drains with worms and the shredded  
edges of baseball cards and buried army men.

He scraped Bible pages and the World Book encyclopedias into a pile and flooded the house with sugared gasoline and spoiled Bottle Rockets, stirring the flames with a long, crocodile claw.

Afterward, he flossed the brown picket fence of his teeth with the rusted frame of a Schwinn before he sauntered off into the pit of the woods to decay and rot and wait for forty-eight years.

I never saw him but sometimes I remember my Grandmother never saw him either, because he ate her house and son whole.

i can listen to a song 1,000 times  
in a row and still not hate it<sup>1</sup>

---

Addy Mahaffey

this poem has background music and it's instrumental techno, baby  
this poem is a two a.m. wayward sequel to my five p.m. coffee<sup>2</sup>  
this poem has a writer who is all restless leg and paralyzed eyelashes

a nightmare of an anxious, vagrant estate sprawling across the bedsheets  
like spilled rice, scurrying across the floor like fat mice<sup>3</sup>  
like glass beads, like cockroaches wearing stilettos<sup>4</sup>  
like a fistful of children's teeth dropped from the palm  
tk<sup>5</sup>

this poem has a cat, woolgray and milkstached, ears twitching  
at the foot of the bed, irritated at very nearly everything  
but especially this; especially this. this poem's cat hates poetry

this poem's cat whittles her claws with a political ad emery board  
and rips whitman and dickinson and keats to birdfeather shreds<sup>6</sup>

this poem asks you to tilt your throat to the stirrups and swallow  
it all, guzzle down your mother's pearl necklace made of mud<sup>7</sup>  
to satiate the hungry catfish submerged in your diaphragm<sup>8</sup>

this poem was meant to match the music, which means:

a series of flashbulb moments, starbursting<sup>9</sup>  
brilliantly against a velvet backdrop. the writer here<sup>10</sup>  
writing. the cat, a character. the poem, a piece. then  
this poem becomes the future, a ragged and handsome thing<sup>11</sup>

shuffling a glossy deck, an ever-revolving orbuculum<sup>12</sup>

of deep, rich nights, of entire lakes swilling in wine glasses

of organically canned, veneered laughter, of women in steel  
livery and men in ball gowns of hollow chainmail, of stained-glass  
pages bound in ribboning phone cord, of a warm, raw power  
resting softly in the old adirondack rocking chair of your chest<sup>13</sup>

this poem is a series of fluid, shivering keystrokes<sup>14</sup>  
unbaptized in the bright winter light of day

this poem ends at five a.m.<sup>15</sup>  
laid bare as plainsong<sup>16</sup>

this poem has a witty little cat  
and a brutally carnivorous writer.<sup>17</sup>



1. Specifically, “Burns” by George FitzGerald, shazam-ed from the end credits of the 9th episode of the 2nd season of *Atypical* on Netflix. My partner wants it recorded that they only watch *Atypical* for the Casey/Izzie storyline.
2. Two cans of Diet Cherry Pepsi, but I absolutely cannot write that—what kind of poet drinks Diet Pepsi and not coffee? Fucking *Pepsi*? It’s so unironically, earnestly American.
3. I don’t like rhymes, in general. Or more accurately, I find them difficult. Seussian, minus the blatant racism, the saccharine elementary-school

- Read-Across-Goddamn-America-endorsement, the environmental Lorax memes on your timeline.
4. A fact you didn't need: *Animal Planet* once aired a live cockroach cam. Dozens of them oozing around a dollhouse. God, please put that footage on a golden record and send it into space.
  5. Half of a bag of stale jelly beans dropping into a crystal bowl at your Grandma's at Easter.
  6. Which she then stuffs in a cannon. Canonical cannon fodder, if you will.
  7. But don't do this, and definitely don't remind your mother of when she pawned her pearl necklace for Christmas presents the year your father anchored himself deep in a wet muck of bankruptcy.
  8. I want you to really feel this. Like, feel the massive weight of a 30-pound fish sliming around in your gut.
  9. Every flavor of Starburst tastes exactly the same to me. I know.
  10. I'm in bed, horizontal as Capote; dead-eyed as Dorothy Parker.
  11. Picture, like, a sexy Great Depression era ghost, wearing overalls, sitting on the edge of an old pier, with a crooked smile, eating an apple. You're scared but turned on. That's the future.
  12. A crystal ball, but the sound wasn't right, so I had to Guy-In-Your-MFA you. I'm sorry.
  13. A man has a gun to your head and asks you to choose your life: a full, light-filled porch attached to a yellow farmhouse or a balcony with gilded balusters and a sleek black cat.
  14. Default mouse cursors are set to blink at a speed of 530 milliseconds, or about half a second. The average lifespan contains 22,075,000 seconds, meaning 44,151,000 cursor blinks roughly equals an average lifetime, if my dyscalculic ass did the math right.
  15. There are some people who wake up this early on purpose. Is their shit statistically more likely to be together? Are they fulfilled?
  16. *Noun*. Monophonic chanting, sung by tonsure-headed men in eerie, austere monasteries.
  17. I eat a golden ortolan every morning for breakfast, and God just laughs and laughs and laughs.



## Glass

Mary Claire Zauel

I say I am stained glass and they think of churches,  
Regal and strong and vibrant,  
Windows washed in holy water and baptized in sunshine  
Creating golden blue shapes across the marble floor.  
But what if I meant that I used to be clean and now I am tainted?  
Look at me: I am sea glass,  
Taken hostage by the ocean,  
Tumbled and flipped and spat out onto the shore,  
Devoid of all my edges, having forgotten who I was.  
I have tied these broken fragments together with fraying string,  
Turned my shattered bits into a wind chime,  
Swaying in the gray summer breeze.  
My chimes ring out one simple song:  
I am glass, made to be shattered,  
Beautiful because I broke.

## Obelisk

Haley Powell

A monument stands in Fairview,  
clearer than day and  
brighter than my teeth,  
jutting from the earth  
and casting a shade over  
the Davis Museum.  
The park is pleasant  
with inoffensive picnic tables  
crumbling from age and  
brown from rain but  
the local church keeps them standing.  
Signs, green from time,  
whisper the names of  
Orphan Brigade soldiers  
in attendance at the meeting  
when the thought of this spike  
was driven in.  
Two water fountains stand  
side-by-side,  
their metal gleaming,  
and I wonder which was for

*colored* and which was for  
me. The steel of the slide  
burns the back of my legs  
and the message is seared  
into my white skin forever:  
United we stand.  
*Deo gratiam habeamus.*  
Let us be grateful to God.  
And to Jefferson.  
I want to be grateful  
for my mother waiting  
to catch me at the end.  
She is a great stanchion too.  
I let the slide sear my skin  
again, though I don't  
feel it now.  
The picket is too bright  
to look at in the sun.  
I am six and  
my eyes are too sensitive.  
Dips in the mulch could be  
where my grandfather rode  
through to burn barns  
with his posse. It was a  
posse, not a gang. The sign  
says so, and there is a picture,  
too. But rust means I can't  
make out one face from another.  
Jefferson's bas-relief is the same,  
but it is clear  
he is wearing robes like a saint  
and wings like an angel.  
If my right arm was long enough,  
I could reach out and touch  
that cabin in Hodgenville where  
Father Abraham was born.  
He only sits in the town square,

stiff in bronze and unknowing.  
*He has no obelisk. He was  
no Washington, no son of the South.*

But I am in Fairview,  
and my cousin Clay  
named for the Henry  
leans down from the slide's ladder  
to murmur, *Did you know  
they found John Brown's body  
under this here slide?*

A toy gun from the gift shop  
dangles from the pocket of his  
Wranglers. No. The bottom  
of the stock bears Dixie's colors.  
*Is he buried here?*

He's down the slide again.  
His laughter is so loud, but  
my mother cheers and asks  
without saying for  
me to be more like him.  
I am down in the mulch  
digging with my bare hands,  
dirt lining the crescents of  
my fingernails, digging to find  
nothing. I am crying. The body  
is long gone. A kind sheriff  
shoveled it up.

My mother says she'll  
whoop me for ruining the  
Sunday picnic. Her grasping  
hands leave red rings  
which read *silence* around  
my wrists.

Be so, so quiet,  
with malice toward none.  
Anyone can see the blue veins

leaping from my pale wrists  
trying to prove that I am  
full of something on the inside.  
Some blocks on the obelisk  
are darker from weather and  
frost. I want to rip them out  
so all the blinding white  
falls down.

## Fall of 2011

Hayley Simon

Somehow, all the boys  
managed to fit onto the  
bridge, their faces squished  
together like kernels of corn.  
From her tipsy, yellow kayak,  
she watched their puffy winter  
coats press into each other  
and thought of last night's  
melted marshmallows with  
graham-cracker bookends,  
the pop of sparks, and her  
pink, floral rainboots next  
to his muddy tennis shoes.

Across the half-frozen stream  
running beneath the bridge,  
she heard a teacher call out,  
requesting smiles on the count  
of three. All the boys complied  
with electric grins, except  
for one, who had no head.

It's true: she's the one that took  
It—put it someplace safe and  
left him, instead, a heart-shaped  
hole to balance on his neck.  
On hers, a locket.

## I Hate Picasso

Mary Buffaloe

When I sit in rooms filled with admirers of art,  
I often offer one of my many loud and controversial opinions:  
“I hate Picasso,”  
“I hate Gaugin,”  
“I hate Hitchcock.” Well you get the idea.  
You’ve redirected me to a myriad of arguments,  
pointed me to the masterpieces *I* could never dream of accomplishing.  
And as I consider these masterpieces,  
I wonder why nobody wants to care about the cowering girl  
in the corner of all of these works.

Young girls lured in by the promise of being beloved,  
tricked by men who knew better than they did.  
14, 15, 16, 17, 18—Girls!  
Young ballerinas who prayed that Monsieur Degas  
would not be coming in that day.  
Tahitian women huddled over the body of a young girl,  
whose hemorrhaging hasn’t stopped for a week.  
Actresses wringing their hands in the hallway of Polanski,  
unsure if they are prepared for this kind of audition.  
A young sculptor, who sits shaking in the asylum



as Rodin sells yet another one of her triumphs.  
The young muse, whose mother asked Picasso to paint her,  
but found herself lying naked and cold on his canvas.  
Black girls that hid in the fields of Monticello  
wary of Jefferson's roaming hands.  
And these—these are the ones we know of.  
What men have done to women openly  
will always live tenfold shrouded in darkness.

So when I say, I hate—  
I mean hate that is excruciating to bear,  
Hate that makes you sick to your stomach,  
Hate that makes you violent,  
Hate that makes you afraid.

I hate these men with every fiber of my being.  
These are not just men from the highest reaches of fame, oh no.  
These are men you find on street corners, in bars, in your homes.  
These are men who lead, who make rules, and who go on to live happy  
lives.

Because, every time the cowering girl dares to step into the frame,  
she is forcefully silenced for the sake of him.  
Her life is not worth his, her dreams duller than his.  
And so, he will continue to live, work, and thrive,  
in street corners, in bars, and in homes.  
In studios, offices, and theaters.

In the end,  
a rapist is a rapist.

There is nothing that can redeem one from  
deciding to hurt another just because they could.  
The rapists never change just as the victims never do;  
young girls cowering in the greatness of men  
who have never been held accountable,  
because that is the price of his success.

Is it worth her blood?  
Is it worth her tears?  
Is it worth the memories she hides away?  
Is it worth the liquor she consumes?  
Is it worth the nightmares?  
Is it worth her death?

Nothing in all of the world is worth that pain;  
the world's greatest masterpieces were made hollow  
when they were painted with the stolen blood  
of terrified young women, they lost their value  
the moment another life was sacrificed  
in a Faustian deal to achieve fleeting beauty.

And so,  
I hate Picasso.  
I hate Gaugin.  
I hate Hitchcock.  
I hate every man who has ever decided his life  
was worth more than another's.

But truly, I hate you art lover, I hate you the most,  
because you've let all of this happen.

## I Carry Rocks

Brynn Richer

I carry them so they can be seen  
as a boulder stuck in a pocket's canyon,  
or the last ounce needed for a rockslide to careen.

I let them know my fingertips.  
Reminding them I have grooves and pores too.  
Telling their fossil indents  
the history they've slept through.

They speak of their heroes:  
David, Jesus,  
Sisyphus & Michelangelo,  
while I inform them of the trail they were born on,  
and the plant they were preventing to grow.

Eventually, though, I let them go,  
to be someone's skipping stones  
or the tapping force on a lover's window.

## Reading “Elegy 19: To His Mistress Going to Bed” in High School English

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Melissa Lizotte

It must have been awkward for all of us—  
curious eyes roaming the rhymed couplets,  
covering our mouths and giggling. We glanced  
at each other in a classroom where  
no R-rated films ever played,  
where our frazzled teacher hit fast-forward  
through that bed scene in the 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*,  
blushed and apologized for having forgot  
that tattoo close-up in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.  
I had no idea  
what a spangled breastplate was, though  
on line 27 Donne shouts, “O my America!”  
so perhaps that’s where Francis Scott Key  
found inspiration for “The Star-Spangled Banner.”  
I tried searching between the lines  
where Donne’s mistress slides off her dress,  
unties her corset, kicks her shoes  
across the floor. But she winked at me  
before closing the heavy 17th-century door.  
Three years later she appears again  
in a college textbook, pausing

in front of a tall mirror, telling me,  
with her sly grin, that she knows  
I'm closer to understanding  
the meaning behind those unfamiliar words.  
How envious she seems now,  
sizing me up, knowing one day I'll write  
her mind into verses. The next morning  
she turns around in bed, gazes  
at her lover scribbling curses at the rising sun,  
wondering what it is about a straight-up pen  
that makes men think they wield all the power,  
though we're the ones they always  
write about, complaining of the lust  
fueling every dip in the ink jar  
but returning the same time each evening  
to reassure us with false certainty  
that once the curtains close  
they'll play the fool to all our commands.

for Lennon Lacy

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Katie Wooten

I am a child again.  
Or a child still, maybe.  
Feet wearing shoes that are too small  
are pumping the swing hard to propel me up  
higher. (Watch me momma!) My head peeks through  
the clouds. I win a staring contest with God.

Fire ants like sticky pearls (Momma!)  
—a second skin around my body. No amount  
of twisting and thrashing shakes them loose.  
(Watch!) They fill my pockets, but  
in this moment I am weightless.

I am strung up to heaven  
like a wooden marionette.  
How could I shackle my  
own wrists with  
thick black belts (Momma!)  
and still poke my head  
through the noose  
too?

Now watch me

dance,

Momma,

en pointe,

and see my toes drag against the dirt,  
tracing circles forever.

## The Anchor or The Balloon

Angelea Hayes

When I was four or five years old,  
Every time I went to the grocery store,  
I would beg for one of those red latex balloons,  
Who in turn begged for the sky.  
Sometimes, my mom would cave  
And for a couple dollars,  
Adopt one of the tantalizing helium-  
Filled bubbles, which she would tie  
To my small wrist so it couldn't escape.  
The ribbon leash pulled taut,  
My neck craned back, I'd stare  
At the captivating orb like a crystal ball,  
The orb that longed to be liberated  
From its earthly tether,  
To float up and up and up . . .

But alas it could not,  
For it was stuck on the arm of a child—  
A living ball and chain, who would cruelly  
Lift her wrist to the heavens as a tease,  
Before yanking the poor thing back down again,



Where it would bob for a second  
While it recollected itself, but ultimately  
Give in to the futile attempt  
Of ascension every time.

To be near it was to be understood.  
The only thing more satisfying than being the anchor  
Of this creature that aspired to be airborne  
Would be to join it in the sky,  
Two creatures of the same desire.  
With my new companion, I would attempt flight—  
I jumped and jumped, but with every landing,  
The crunch of asphalt would sound in defeat.  
If only there were enough helium for the both of us,  
We could silently sail into the clouds,  
Away from this place,

Away

Away

Away

From the cage that is the concrete ground  
From the confines of gravity, pulling  
Me close to this dreary asphalt parking lot.

## The Levant

Madelin Yousef

It is still,  
    over here.

Voices are only emphasized  
when they come from the mouths of men.

But here,  
    right here,  
    it is still.

The words of women are singed with ineffable acts,  
while their lips resemble the arid, Arabian desert.  
    Their eyes, what abhorrence they have borne witness to!  
    Their wombs, how they lament the warmth of their mothers  
    and wail hardships into the constellations to forge  
    a message for all women to read—  
    a message for women to take heed.  
        Because the men,  
        they are coming.

And they will leave nothing but scraps.

But the Levant, it will still scream of women.  
It will still scorch their backs of history with  
its brutal, flogging tongue of debauchery; femicide;  
misogyny; war rape; and yet denial of abortion for the  
women must remember what penetration truly feels  
like; trafficking; genital mutilation; prostitution; acid  
throwing—on her genitals, on her womb, on her breasts  
that served as sustenance for the man who created such an  
acid to throw—and in her mouth, so that her voice may  
finally be removed from the mouth that spoke such purity  
into the ears of those who hold the hurt of the world; and so that  
those men of the Levant may finally silence those women.

*But they will never stop screaming.*

## Convenience Store

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Caroline Geoghegan

You walk downtown to get groceries and come back sans tooth, hair, spit.

Lighter.

You're ecstatic. You're saving money.

You're reading each label and cackling, everything is so

cheap. A jar of pickles costs a

jar of fingernails,

hardened in the sun.

You need bread so you

eat pizza for two weeks straight and

forget to shower until your face shines

slick with oil. Cashier scrapes it all off

with a bobby pin, flicks it into the register,

*here's your change.*

Jam is some pimples, erupting like

firecrackers. Cashier must hate you but

it's ok. You're saving money.

She plucks your eyelashes when you

buy mascara. *no one will notice*

*with the makeup, dear*

Wipes your lips as you retch,

bags each can of

tomato sauce.

*thank you, come again!*

When you splurge on  
shrimp cocktail Cashier sighs  
and pulls out a hacksaw.

A bullet to bite.

*do you write with  
your right or your left?*

The pain is quick, and then  
it's like your pinky was always  
that short. Each shrimp lies cold  
on your tongue. You're ecstatic.  
You pick up your cousin's tenth  
birthday cake, blue with white  
fondant icing. Cashier frowns. Calls  
the manager. *just a second.*

Manager comes. Burly with a  
stern face. Puts his hand over  
your heart. Counts *one, two,  
three.*

Asks if you want a receipt. You  
shake your head. Stumble outside, cake pressed  
to your chest. The sun is shining. Icing is  
melting. You're lighter. Everything is so  
cheap.

## Oranges

Malaena Caldwell

My grandmother sends her condolences, ever year for Christmas, with a box of oranges. They are not offensive—not lusty like strawberries, not symbols of knowledge like apples or of purgatory like pomegranates, not bananas, not quick to rot like blueberries—nor unreasonably expensive. We haven't spoken in 15 years. My grandmother who wrote us out of her will before the orange flames could finish diminishing my father to ashes. My grandmother who had to hose down the dried blood from their driveway where her son was found. My grandmother whose orange rage that still burns my hand when I pick up the box of oranges left at our door from the mailman. My grandmother whose only role in my life is valued at a box of oranges. My grandmother who condemns us for my father's death because *her* son “would never do something like that.” My grandmother who still lives in Ohio, whose love is not even performative. Who orders the oranges from the Sunshine State and pays extra to include the handwritten note from the farmer who grows oranges we don't ask for: *I wanted to get you something you could use.* My grandmother who might think oranges are my favorite fruit because they make me think of her. Who doesn't know we let them rot beside my father's ashes in the garage. Whose grave I will visit to carefully lay a box of oranges at the headstone. *Something to fertilize the ashes.* And an orange tree will grow. Right in time for Christmas.

## Delilah

Sophia Ward

I want to burn everything she ever touched.

The chair she used to sit in when she came over.  
The brush she pulled through her brown hair,  
that cascaded down from her head to her waist.  
That cup which her lips pressed delicately against as she sipped  
water, slowly, while staring into my eyes.  
The tops of my thighs which she rested her feet on  
when we would read our books together on the couch.  
My hands she used to hold in her own and bring to her lips  
to blow warm air on when I was cold.  
My hips which she caressed.

Hips she touched with gentle, tender  
hands; hips that are now freckled  
with a galaxy of cigarette-butt burns.  
My own hands now rub each other, trying to massage life  
into icy fingers. Hands which picked up the letters,  
one at a time, from their place in my  
top desk drawer, before I lit their pristine  
corners on fire. That cup which,

when I smashed it, taught me that what  
was once a desire had festered in my chest until it burned  
its way out of my flesh. My skin aches for the warmth  
of her body beside me in the bed. But the thought  
of her—the thought of her at all, but especially here—  
is disgusting. Thinking of her silhouette, my mind  
refuses to conjure up her face, makes my body freeze over.  
So cold it can't possibly be mine anymore.  
I watch it burn just to know it's there.

I am burning everything she ever touched.



## The Colors of My Sister

Neysa Rogers

WHITE:

While our mother's paper stomach  
unwrapped your dark hair, dark eyes, pink skin  
I was waiting with a mermaid doll,  
her plastic beads loosening and slipping.  
I wish I remembered more from that day  
than the doll and her cluster of translucent beads.  
But I came to understand why our mother  
told me not to jump over her belly.

GREEN:

Your small hands slowly unfurled  
and learned to throw things:  
watches, shoes, toys, receipts  
out car windows and down open toilet seats.  
Soon your voice cradled the beginnings  
of songs and the promise of words  
But *thirteen, fourteen, fifteen*  
all sounded the same coming from you.

RED:

The gap of time in between our lives  
troubled the biggest parts of me.  
I knew loss so big I forgot to cry  
and how to be kind,  
until I pushed you into a table  
and the glass beads fell from my eyes.

PURPLE:

The color of our laughs at night  
and the light that diffused through the blinds.  
We covered wheezing laughs with blankets  
at the thunder of footsteps  
commanding us to sleep despite  
our magic tricks and loudness.  
Each joke an undeniable current  
calling us to joy like a gem only we kept.

PINK:

You have pink hair now  
and not all numbers sound the same.  
But your voice still knows a song  
that I hope you'll always sing.  
Remembering  
a jump, a push, a cry, a laugh  
as we unwrap ourselves  
from the same belly,  
the translucent beads soaking up every color.



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CREATIVE NON-FICTION

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## Of Things That Fly Away

Stella Rothe

When my best friend Michelle tells me that she's dying, I don't believe her. I don't believe she's dying, or ready to die, or unafraid. We sit side-by-side in her bed. Outside, it's snowing. She pulls a blanket over our knees, and I remember—

—It's the first summer after graduation and we are birds, free. Three of us lie on the cold stone pier, looking at the stars, listening to waves rising and folding just under our heads. If you look downward at us, you'll see us in this order: Michelle and me, our friend Chelaine, and all of Lake Huron stretching behind us, two hundred miles of fresh water cradling shipwrecks and sailors' bones. A few persistent gulls cry from some darkling nest, and nightboats send their elegiac moans over the water. A harbor light flashes green at the end of the dock, and I say to Michelle, "It's Gatsby's light," but neither of us yet knows the desperate desire to relive the past.

The air is damp. We stay, wrapped in the green light and the coolness of night, and watch for falling stars. I see one, Michelle sees one. Chelaine pretends the harbor light is a huge star winking wishes.

We've yet to experience loss, or true love, or the loss of true love; and maybe there's still time to change the outcome that's on its way. Maybe I can reach out and feel the little, unseen tumors in Michelle's neck and say, "See a doctor," and maybe they'll catch everything in time, and possibly

this moment could change the future. We're still twelve years away from Michelle dying, but we don't know that, and the lake doesn't know that, and the long, quiet night has no idea of anything. We all wait together, girls and lake, moon and stars; we wait here in the darkness and dream.

Hours later: we've stayed awake all night. We've borne the darkness for a promise of the sun. Michelle goes into the water, jeans rolled up, and I follow. Black sky is easing into dusky blue, and I take pictures of Michelle as she writes poetry in the water. The sun appears; it rises up so fast that our breath stops: one heartbeat, two.

And now, see—over there!—Michelle, in my grandmother's garden, trying to feed bread to a squirrel. She's laughing. (Can you hear her? Isn't it a beautiful sound?)

It's October now, at the Ark Theatre. We're sitting backstage with Joan Baez, our idol, who holds our hands, calls us her "little pickles," and—

—We're at The Dovetail, a coffee shop. Michelle notices the tumors for the first time. They start on her neck, but soon they are everywhere, an invisible army of intruders. She is nineteen years old.

Years go by. We understand Gatsby now. We wait for the green light to pull us backward.

It never does.

To pass the slow hours of her treatments, Michelle sews little birds out of yellow fabric and feathers. She hangs them from the ceiling. Whenever I visit, goldfinches float lazily over my head, and—

—There we are, 28 and 30 this time; Michelle and me, holding each other's hands at what will be our last Baez concert. Lean in close; we're whispering:

"Should we write her a note?"

"Do you think she'd remember us?"

"We should have brought a jar of pickles!"

We scribble a note on a scrap of paper, pester security, insist that we don't want an autograph. *It's just that we met her once, see . . . it would mean so much if you would give this. Yes, we understand, but . . . oh, thank you!*

Later. We're lying on the carpet in front of the fireplace in Michelle's living room. On the record player, Joan is singing about ghosts, rust, old memories. It's late. We don't say much. Words only take you so far, and our love is in the silences, the pauses, the life-sustaining intakes of our quiet breath.

There are still whole days for discussing Jane Austen, tattoos, the permanence of Keats on our skin. We count the yellow birds we've glimpsed in our lives, and we feel lucky.

Michelle's pronouncement comes on an ugly, knife-edged winter evening: "They took me off of the transplant list, but it's ok. I'm tired. I'm not afraid to die."

"Modern medicine is incredible. They'll figure something out," I say. "You're not going to die."

Would *you* have believed her; would you have *wanted* to?

Over there! We're getting swallowed by the crowd at a Bright Eyes show. Michelle is a few months away from dying. I want to go to the front of the crowd, to the edge of the stage. I ask if she'll go with me.

"I'll follow you anywhere." She grabs my hand.

One night—she doesn't have long now—she leaves my house, hugs me and says, "I don't know why love has to hurt so badly."

And then one morning: it's Chelaine. She's crying. She says one word: *Michelle*. And I know. We sit in silence for a long time, exchanging tears over the telephone, breathing in our new reality, this heavy air that chokes.

Now, Michelle's room, without her. Picking out her funeral clothes. Sending her off in secondhand furs and Frida Kahlo stockings.

Now, sitting cross-legged on the floor at her coffin, listening to Édith Piaf. *La Vie En Rose*.

Now, she's coming down the aisle of the church, in slow procession, attended to by all the boys who loved her. It isn't fair.



She should be a bride.

And every year that passes, finding her over again! I find her in France: she's twirling under the Eiffel Tower, smiling at Édith Piaf's grave, getting caught in the rain in Monet's garden. I find her in old letters, in sudden memories, in songs. I say her name when I'm at the lake, whisper *I miss you* before falling asleep. Sometimes she visits me in dreams, missing me, too. I wake up happy, remembering her.

And when I remember her, I think of wings, of yellow feathers, and birds—of things that fly away.

## Crisis Actor

Michaela Esau

When I was eighteen, a boy gave me a painting he made with his own blood. The canvas was off-white, the size of a palm, and patterned with rust-colored stains he told me weren't paint. I don't remember what I said when he handed me the scrap of fabric. I think I prayed he was lying as I stashed the painting beneath the seat of my car, hoping this dark art would keep its silence.

The blood painting was months in the past by Valentine's Day. It was unseasonably, unreasonably warm, and he and I went on a walk at Sand Hills State Park. The prairie grass was still charred from a recent wildfire that had swallowed the homes of our principal and several classmates, and patches of surviving plant life streaked the hills like wood stain. While we walked, he told me about the fresh pink tissue on the underside of his forearms that he usually kept covered with sweatshirt sleeves, about his bitch of a sister and bitch of a stepmom. I've never liked when people called women that, but by Valentine's Day I was losing feeling in my toes and my heart was slipping out of the back of my body. My mouth had memorized telling him it would be okay, and this was what I said as my thumb methodically stroked the back of his hand, my ears tuning in and out to his voice. The only thing I could really think about was how seventeen people had been murdered earlier that day at a school in Florida. When he put his lips to mine in the parking lot of the state park, it was Parkland on my mind. It

was my first kiss—I had always taken my time growing up—and I couldn't help but wonder what firsts those kids at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School died without having.

When I was eighteen, I wrote a poem about the Parkland shooting. I had another nightmare about my classmates' bodies scattered like dodgeballs on the gym floor, and I didn't know what else to do but to write. I can admit that it was a good poem. Lots of anaphora. Rhythmic. Powerful imagery. My teacher shows a video of me performing it to his classes every year when they start their spoken-word poetry unit. Seventeen people are still dead and I am getting compliments on a poem. I tried to justify my writing of someone else's trauma as a coping mechanism, even though I felt ridiculous believing some event in the news was something I needed to cope with. I tried to justify my performance of this crisis as activism, something that would compel people to vote for gun-control policies, to call their representatives, to protest.

Exactly one month after the Parkland shooting, students across the country walked out of their classrooms for seventeen minutes to call for gun reform. I was in AP Government. It only took six minutes and thirty seconds for a nineteen-year-old to murder seventeen people, but I couldn't leave my class for seventeen minutes. I sat at the desk I had been trained to see as a shelter, staring at the window glass I had been trained to see as a threat.

"If things are going to get any better, it's going to be at a policy level. That's what we're learning about in Government, so it seems counterintuitive to walk out of this class," I told my teacher as I sat uncomfortably at my desk. This justification sounded legitimate, but I worried I would have given similar reasons no matter what class I had been in. The longer I stayed at my desk, the more my poem felt like nothing more than performative activism.

When Emma Gonzalez was eighteen, conspiracy theorists called her a crisis actor. She watched her classmates at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas die. Then, she watched her face get attached to theories claiming she was hired to pretend to have been in a school shooting to push gun-control agendas. The conspiracy theories are all false except for their recognition of Emma Gonzalez's performance skills. She knows how to get attention.

I have watched her “We Call B.S.” speech over and over again. It’s a good speech. Lots of anaphora. Rhythmic. Powerful imagery. The speech wasn’t just good syntactically. The Parkland survivors made change—Delta Airlines boycotted the NRA, DICK’S and Walmart changed purchasing rules for weapons, Florida raised the legal ownership age for a firearm to twenty-one. Shootings have happened before with little more than candlelight vigils in response, but Emma Gonzalez and her peers were theater students at an affluent school, one that taught lots of AP classes about how to sound intelligent and how to get your words to matter. Now, Emma Gonzalez grips the attention of 1.5 million followers on Twitter because seventeen people at her school were murdered. I wonder if her quieter classmates hate her for it. I wonder how often she wishes this stage was never built.

A theater scholar named Meredith Conti wrote that she thinks Emma Gonzalez should reclaim the term “crisis actor.” It was Emma’s acting skills that made her such a powerful speaker, that gave her and her friends the confidence to speak to politicians as if they were peers. Emma’s grief was not an act, yet there is a reason that, when she spoke, people listened. She didn’t bleach clean the blood of her classmates. She took that blood and made a painting. It was artistic and horrific and refused to let us look away.

I went to my senior prom with the boy whose blood painting lived under my car seat. I had told my school counselor about his thin ribs like elk antlers on a wall, starving and shot. I told the counselor and I told nobody else. I told her about the cuts, but I was too afraid to tell her about how I laid awake thinking about him giving me fabric with drips of his blood like paint, a detail so melodramatic you might mistake it for a metaphor. He picked me up for prom and I nearly vomited at the smell of his truck, how it reeked of every late night I had sat with him, trying to bleach away the parts of him that terrified me. He told me he might kill himself after he dropped me off that night, a week after he had asked me to be his girlfriend and I told him no. I did not take the time to debate if the two things were correlated, but it no longer mattered. In this moment, he lost control of his audience, an audience that had always been dangerously small. I had to get out of the truck, out of the dress, out of any space where my ears could hear his voice. I yelled at him not to do anything stupid. I yelled at him to call 911 if he had to. I slammed the door shut and didn’t watch him drive away. His performance was not believable, but I still cried while I counted

the bobby pins I pulled out of my hair and watched my mascara melt into a bruise across my cheek. My fingertips smelled of hairspray and metal, and I wondered if this is what it would smell like—to have blood on your hands.

The boy I went to prom with did not die that night, or any of the nights that followed. I am worried that if something had happened, I would have tried to turn it into a movement. I worry that I would have harvested sympathy in the wake of a tragedy that I should have prevented. I worry that I would have made an Instagram post or written a poem or staged a walkout. It's been three years and I worry about walkouts. There are always many reasons that make it more difficult to walk out than to stay. The reasons sound like him singing my favorite song in the car because he learned all the words for me, like my quiet laughter when he'd whisper to me during class as his desk steadily drifted closer to mine. The reasons fit cleanly on a college application—two straight-A students, homecoming candidates, athletes, band section leaders. Lists of accolades showy enough to mask the real reasons we needed attention.

I pray I'll never find out if it was a real threat. When Nicholas Cruz posted on Instagram two years before Valentine's Day of 2018 that he planned to commit a mass shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, nobody thought it was a real threat. People thought they were empty words.

We have a hard time telling when words are empty and when they aren't. I don't think the poem I wrote about gun control was empty. I can remember shaking as I wrote it, muscles desperate for some kind of action or healing. Nobody teaches us what to say when we find out seventeen people were murdered at a school. Nobody teaches us what to say when a boy gives you a painting out of his own blood, or when someone who doesn't want to live asks you to be his girlfriend, or when you shut the truck door and are desperate to rinse away the most loathsome parts of yourself.

My sophomore year of college, I drove by Sand Hills State Park on my way home for Thanksgiving. The guardrails on the highway were mangled from where my middle-school art teacher had died a few days earlier. I stared at the crunched metal, cursing the roadwork crews for not erasing the aftermath a little sooner. When I got home, my dad and brother would debate the logistics of the accident until I could barely breathe. My dad and I grieve differently. He took photos of my grandfather's near-corpse as I worked to bleach the image from the fabric of my mind. He tries to

understand the not-understandable and I try to forget. Neither of us is ever successful. Nobody knows why shootings happen or why kids want to die or why cars sometimes go through guardrails. I will never wash these images or questions from my mind. They are the bile that bubbles up in my brain in the middle of the night, that only expels itself in a poem I feel guilty for writing.

I want Emma Gonzalez to reclaim the phrase “crisis actor,” not because her pain was inauthentic, but because her authentic performance created healing for herself and her community. She acted out her trauma to help people, not to hurt people. We have to learn that it is okay to want to be heard, to draw attention to ourselves and the crises that have hurt us. I am sad for the part of myself that will always wish I had stayed in the truck, listening to a boy who deserved to be heard but who did not deserve to hurt me. I also deserved to be heard, which is why I will always wish I had taken the blood painting out of the silence of my car and given it to anyone who would listen. I don’t want to bleach away the bad moments anymore. I finally understand why someone would make a blood painting, even though it is wrong to force such a burden on one untrained, unprepared person. There is a reason an audience is an assembly, not an individual. I am learning not to be afraid of writing poems or walking out of classrooms or walking out of trucks. I am learning not to be afraid of audiences. I used to feel guilty for writing about crises because I thought I was too dramatic, an insult we like to force on women to make them afraid of being difficult. Too many of us are desperate to be less difficult, and in this desperation we forget a difficult truth: good change will always be dramatic.

# Notes on Repression

Hannah Paczkowski

## **Introduction**

My earliest queer memory is playing house during kindergarten recess with Kelly. We would draw a pink-and-green smudged outline of a family home on the parking lot and pretend to live life as adults. Kelly was always the mom. I would play the dad. I would come home through the two-dimensional front door and get chalk on my uniform skirt from my poorly drawn recliner. Sometimes we would hold hands. We were performers, playing out the family roles we saw at home, on TV, and on the sidewalk. Once she gave me a kiss on the cheek. It was quick and innocent and make-believe. The teacher's assistant saw this from her post by the front of the school and suddenly we were not allowed to play house anymore. We were never told why.

## **Research Question**

I have internalized homophobia. If I admit that to myself, when will it go away?

When I was seventeen, I told my therapist about a girl I had a crush on. He didn't seem surprised. He knew about all of my fears and all of my dreams. I was going to go to college for biochemistry, then graduate school for microbiology. I was going to do laboratory research for several years

then teach at a university. I would receive tenure and then open my own research lab. He knew my life plan.

“So do you want to marry a woman?”

That was not part of my plan. I explained to him that I thought marriage was an outdated concept and that I didn’t think it was necessary for a healthy relationship. I started to talk about the divorce rate when I was cut off.

### Transcript

“Do you want to date women then?”

“No”

“Why not?”

“Because I can’t.”

“Why can’t you?”

“Because I can’t be gay.”

“Will your parents disapprove?”

“No they aren’t like that.”

“Then why?”

“I don’t want my life to get worse.”

“And being gay will make your life worse?”

“It’ll make me unhappy.”

“Unhappy?”

“I should end up with a man.”

“Will that make you happy?”

“It’ll make it easier.”

It turns out that in order to make yourself happy, sometimes life cannot go according to your plan.

### Methods 1: How should you respond when people ask “But when did you know?”

A. Lie and say you’ve always known

B. Embellish a story about a crush on an actress you had when you were in middle school



C. Tell the truth and say that you honestly don't know

The first time I was called a dyke I was almost twelve. I already was not well-liked at St. Aloysius and I had only one friend at school. A girl on the afternoon bus who had already called me pimply, fat, ugly, and weird, used the word as new ammunition. It was unknown to me, but I flushed and denied it vehemently. According to her, I was this word because when my friend had sprained her ankle during gym class I had put my arm around her on the way to the nurse. I didn't understand. I was helpful? Compassionate? When I got home that night I cried in my room and tried to convince myself it wasn't different from the normal name-calling I already had to endure. But this word stuck in my brain differently and every time I repeated it under my breath it sounded more sinister. When I came downstairs to eat dinner, my eyes were red and puffy. Luckily it was springtime and I have a ragweed allergy.

*Repression*: the action or process of suppressing a thought or desire in oneself so that it remains unconscious.

The first time I kissed a girl was an accident. It was the summer between middle school and high school. She was a charcoal artist, a year older than I was, and smoked cigarettes she stole from her brother, and she was out of the closet. I was equally fascinated by her and terrified of her. Her hands were always stained and they were calloused from her guitar. When she smoked in front of us she showed off by blowing rings. That night her hair was in a yellow bandana and her eyeliner was smudged with tears from laughing too hard. We talked under the stars on a baseball field behind the carnival that we were wearing paper bracelets for while we watched our friends get hoodwinked into playing unwinnable games. She made fun of my private Catholic school and my uniforms and made me laugh so hard that I smeared my eyeliner too. I pointed out Andromeda, Cassiopeia, and The Big Dipper above us and told her the stories that defined them. The carnival lights danced on her face and tinted her gold and pink and blue. I remember seeing her leaning in to kiss me and my brain going blank and serene. When I pulled away my thoughts started buzzing again and I had to go home to escape her. I made myself so sick from the guilt that I didn't go to school for the next two days and I ended up blocking her number. I do

not remember if I kissed her back or not.

### Note

Compulsory heterosexuality Looks Like:

- Needing a male date for dances
- Forcing yourself to wear girlier clothes
- Averting your eyes every time you pass a Victoria’s Secret

Growing up hating your sexuality means dating a lot. It means having a reputation for being easy in high school because you go from boy to boy in hopes that you’ll feel something for one of them. It means listening to your friends describe intimacy with their boyfriends over stale cafeteria food and telling tall tales about your own conquests to be part of the conversation. It means only dating pretty boys with eyelashes that curl who wear almost as much makeup as you do. But when someone points out this preference, you date a muscular athlete with a cut jawline to silence them. It means vomiting out of your date’s car window on prom night when he suggests buying condoms. It means tuning everything out when he does and praying for it to be over quickly. It means not knowing how to prevent yourself from telling a compulsive lie when he says he loves you. It means staying in bad situations with boys because you think this is all that you are worthy of.

### Methods 2: How should you respond when people ask “When and how did you come out?”

A. Tell them when you were eleven you broke down in your mom’s car and told her you were scared because your feelings weren’t normal and she had to pull over to calm you down

B. Tell them when you were thirteen while on vacation over breakfast when your dad asked you what you thought about gay marriage you responded with “I understand why women would want to get married”

C. Tell them when you were sixteen you accidentally came out to an audience of three-hundred people during an educational event for your production of *The Laramie Project* when someone in the audience asked what younger generations thought about homosexuality

Then there is “half coming out”: you don’t deny what you are, but you aren’t proud of it. You let the cute girl with the pixie cut that you work

with lead you on. You even go on what you think is a date with her that she uses to gush about the new guy she's seeing. She thought she was a lesbian, she says, but thank God this man came along that she actually likes. He is four years older than she is and works at the vape stand at the mall. He's not exactly a catch. But now, she can finally be happy. She can finally be normal. You still let her buy you ice cream after this and when she lends you her jacket you don't say no. When she kisses you goodnight you don't protest because it didn't mean anything to her, right? You even let her text you for three months and call you her "dream girl" without her boyfriend knowing because she's pretty and she pays attention to you. You will never be in a situation where a fully available girl will call you pretty. When she and vape-stand white knight break up she asks you out "for real" and you let her stand you up. Four times. The last time she stands you up she does not offer another raincheck.

**Methods 3: How should you respond when people ask "So who is 'the man' in your relationship?"**

- A. Tell them neither of us is the man and that it's kind of the point
- B. Call them out on their obvious attempt to pry into your sex life
- C. Walk away instead of continuing to deal with this shit

Next is the performative acceptance. The ceremonial purchasing of the flannel and the Doc Martens and the big haircut. You want to be identified and you want assumptions to be made. You pretend to be this new person who has just emerged. Your personality changes and you claim it is who you've always been. You want to fit seamlessly into the mold you've been given. You take online quizzes about what kind of queer woman you are, hoping for answers. You hope that if you join a softball team or build a shelf from scratch, a magical puzzle piece will snap into place and you will know who you actually are. Stereotypes do not make you happy and they alienate you from your true personality. When you return from stereotype purgatory you are still constantly reminded of it by your community. You visit an old family friend and his husband. You feel safe and tell them about the girl you are seeing. The family friend's husband asks if you are the boots or the lipstick in the relationship. You are neither butch nor femme, so when you answer that you are both he

laughs in your face and claims that that is impossible. A gay acquaintance you sit next to in Spanish class whose opinion you've never asked for tells you that he thinks you are faking it for male attention. He states that he believes this because you have dated men before. You do not bring up the fact that he has dated girls. Some girls you date get uncomfortable when you say you've been with men and fear that you might wake up one-day craving heterosexuality and a nuclear family just because you are not the coveted "Gold Star."

### Discussion

There is a biting loneliness you feel when you experience a uniquely queer problem. You want to tell someone who will not just listen but who will also understand. My suitemate is that person for me. We can understand each other. We were watching *The Bachelor* unironically at an absurdly late hour over a box of pizza bagels and we were both so exhausted that we made a game of asking each other hypothetical questions. He asked me if I thought I could ever skydive. I said no. I asked him what kind of soup he would be if he had to pick. He said chicken noodle. Then it was his turn again.

"If you could wake up tomorrow and be straight would you do it?"

I wanted my first instinct to be to say "no." I wanted to say that I was proud of who I am and that I wouldn't choose to be different. I wish that my stomach had not sunk before answering. Truthfully, if I could have magically turned myself heterosexual at that moment, I would have. Not because I am ashamed, but because I would not choose to make life harder for myself if given the option. I felt guilty when I said this out loud. I expected him to counter my answer. I expected him to be stern with me or confront me. Instead, he just nodded and we went back to our pizza bagels and reality television. At that moment he understood me. I realized I could have defended myself and said that with these hypothetical magic powers I would have the ability to eradicate homophobia which would also make my life easier. It would have made life easier for queer people as a whole. But I chose to use this scenario to save myself and eliminate my queerness instead of the things that made me afraid to be queer. I realized I saw my own sexuality as a nuisance. I realized that he did too.

**Note**

Other Things I Would Change About Myself If I Could To Make My Life Easier:

1. I would want to have unlimited wealth
2. I would like to not be an insomniac
3. I would want effortlessly clear skin

**Conclusion**

When I was eighteen I fell in love for the first time with a girl who lived down the hall from my freshman dorm room. She made me snort-laugh and we went on little adventures to New York City to go to museums. I was not afraid to hold her hand in public. I had met her family over winter break in Maryland and had stayed at her childhood home for three days. One Saturday I woke up in her bed with her arms around me and I silenced my alarm before it could wake her up too. I watched her eyelashes flutter and her breathing go back to its normal pace. Just looking at her messy morning hair made me smile. I remembered all of my previous relationships with men and how draining it was when I had to be close to them. That moment, lying next to someone and watching the sun color her hair golden through the blinds, I knew that being with someone who I truly loved felt easier. I would rather be with her on a Saturday morning than be straight. So, I decided to revise my life plan.

## Refracted Memories

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Renice Desrosins

It's impossible to know when it began, or why it started in the first place, but from the time I was little I'd have these . . . flashes. No, not flashes, they were more like *moments*. Moments that came and left so quickly, it'd be years until I realized what had happened—what was *still* happening. I was accustomed to the stagnant fog in my mind; it startled me when the smoke fell around my feet, a mirrored image of myself the only thing I could see.

It didn't matter how young I was the first time the smoke fell.

It didn't matter that other kids wouldn't see their own mirrors for years. And it didn't matter how angry I was looking back at it all.

All that mattered was the stillness of the moment, when I found my gaze locked on the whiskey of my eyes. Not a single thought spared to the large, vertical cracks in my mirror that split my image into three separate parts.

*Who are you?* a voice echoed.

I'm still trying to figure out to whom the voice belonged, but to the child I was, the answer seemed simple.

I was three different people and never all at once.

The sentiment wasn't literal, though on most days it may as well have been.

When I glanced at the split in the mirror to my left, I saw the Desi side I embraced at home. This image of myself was the first one I knew, and funnily enough it was the first to be distorted. I was used to the butter

that lingered on my fingers while I tore into fluffy white pieces of naan. People danced in the warm air of summer as the familiar rhythm of “Jhoom Barabar” spilled out the windows of Amma’s house.

*Amma.*

It was odd I never questioned why we called her that.

I knew India was home to thousands of dialects and languages, and most Indians—my mom included—grew up speaking at least two. Though my Hindi and Tamil weren’t as refined as my mom’s, I retained enough to know the Tamil word “Amma” meant *mother*, not grandmother. So why didn’t we ever call her *Dādi* instead?

The Hindi term was more accurate to her role in my life and my cousins’, and since Tamil was hardly spoken by the adults to the kids, the change in language would have been more familiar.

Still, I never thought to ask.

Maybe that was the problem.

Immersed in the realm of lenghas and Bollywood, it was hard to see the many inconsistencies in my upbringing. It wasn’t about Amma’s title, it was how small, harmless moments like these groomed my instincts to *normalize* the world’s distortions, not question them. I’m not saying I’m thankful for the ignorance I had, but if my childhood self could understand the weight of what she did, she would have seen how close to breaking the mirror really was.

At the age of twenty-one it was easier to see the hundreds of thin fissures that littered the glass. When my fingers brushed against them, the voices of my family rang loud.

*Don’t stay in the sun, you don’t want to get **dark**.*

*It doesn’t matter what you do, you’re not Indian, you’re just **half**.*

*My husband told me he would never want to be **Black**.*

My eyes locked on a single fissure that flowed and scattered across the other reflections.

Despite my best interest, I dragged my fingers along the fracture.

As my finger moved, the voices shifted from mom’s family to my white classmates and their parents. This time, since the fissure was thicker, I could recall the memories that came with it.

When I was told being Black meant I couldn’t be with a white boy, I remembered the evening rays of the sun danced outside my classroom, before nodding oblivious agreement.

When I was cast as a lead in my school's rendition of *Cinderella*, I remembered how I chose to focus on my lines instead of the mother that called my Black hair sloppy.

When I said the phrase, "I wish I were white," I remembered how nonchalantly those words left my lips. I remembered how I repeated them again and again. I remembered how I didn't stop until freshman year of high school. And I remembered how no one took two seconds to stop and give me *any reason* to think otherwise.

My fingers, not even halfway across the center panel, trembled as I removed them from the middle image in the mirror. Tears of salt pooled in my eyes and burned as nature begged me to let. Them. *Fall*.

My heart *thumped* and *thumped* against the chamber in my chest, while anger and shame pulsed through my veins, frying nerve endings one after the other. I focused my mind on the air in my lungs. Morbid curiosity urged me to look up, to stop observing the fractured glass beneath my finger and take in the person reflected before me.

I refused.

Instead, my eyes glared at the bottom of my reflection.

I didn't need to look up. I already knew what I'd see. The person in the center would be everything I'd allowed the world to convince me I wanted.

She'd be tall, hyper-feminine, and, most importantly, she'd be white.

I saw droplets hit the floor before I realized I was crying.

That girl wasn't me, and ever since I was little, my heart resented the truth that the whiteness I craved never existed in my veins. My soul cried out, powerless against the image that poisoned my thoughts. The aching wails boomed and echoed in the walls of my mind, building and building until I resented myself. Internalized racism clawed at my heart, baiting me to bleach the color of my skin.

It wasn't as outrageous as some believed.

The option of skin bleaching came and left. It didn't linger long. I was appalled I entertained it.

My brown skin. My beautiful, melanated, brown skin was nothing but a *hindrance* to my younger self. Though my mother was not passive in the blessing of my pigment, I owe my Blackness to the strength of my Haitian father.

For the first decade of my life, my mother's side, my Desi side, was the primary essence that flowed through my veins. The whiteness I strived for



came a close second. My Blackness was a distant third. My father had three brothers, none of whom were married or had kids. My mother was one of seven, all but one were married and had kids. The imbalance made it difficult to connect with anything besides India, and the lack of Black women in my life didn't help.

With my father, though I loved him, there was little I could connect to, so he did what he did best.

He gave me elements of *him* and the freedom to find *myself*.

It didn't change the fact that he and I lived different lives. He was born and raised in a country where he embodied beauty. The concepts of racism were foreign entities. He wasn't at fault for how I resented being Black. Neither was I.

"It's not my fault," I whispered to myself, fingers curling into fists by my side.

Through the corner of my eye, I could see the furthest reflection. The epitome of my Blackness represented in full. The image wasn't clear. The brown-skinned girl reflected was dull and lifeless, and bore the scars of my abuse.

I hated what I did to her.

What I did to myself.

The fissures on her panel were impossible to miss. Shards broke in so many places, I was scared she'd fall apart any second. Slivers of platinum coated many sharp edges, a piss-poor attempt at the art of kintsugi. I thought by emulating the technique used by Japanese artisans, I could follow their philosophy and find beauty in what I perceived to be the imperfections of my Blackness.

I stopped when I found more cracks than platinum to spare.

By habit, my eyes searched for hers.

Fire unexpectedly sparked around her irises. It left as soon as it came, and I wanted it *back*.

In the stillness of the moment, I found my gaze locked on the whiskey of my eyes, every thought given to the large, vertical cracks in my mirror that split my image into three separate parts.

*Who are you?* A voice echoed.

I didn't care to figure out whose voice it belonged to. To the child I was the answer seemed simple, but to the adult I've become the answer was clear.

I am me, and that is enough.

My father gave me his elements, and as my fist collided with the glass, I was thankful strength was one of them.

My knuckles hammered away at the false images I'd created. They were nothing more than jagged desires. I would not heed their distortion any longer.

Pain flared up as shards tore at my skin, but the ambition in my conviction helped me see through it.

I'd break my mirror for the kid doubting the beauty of their skin.

I'd break my mirror for the kid who felt unloved by their cultures.

I'd break my mirror for the kid whose own mirror broke long before they even knew it was there.

I'd pound away at the mirror until it *shattered*.

Then I'd melt down the pieces and forge a reflection I was proud of.

## La Misión

Cailan Owens

You and I joined the other students as we loaded onto the bus to travel from Lafayette to San Francisco to appreciate the murals in the Mission district. Filled with culture and beauty, *La Misión* displayed detailed depictions of Latin ancestors who immigrated and painted their souls and struggles upon the walls.

I was eager to form connections with my past as I contemplated how my own family arrived here. It was the middle of the sixties when my *abuelita* came to the United States, my grandfather following close behind. I always wanted a story like theirs. A love that makes someone leave their home country due to extraordinary yearning, a love that lasts fifty years and on. I was fifteen then, the same age my *abuelita* was when she moved to the States.

My crush, unlike you, opted to sit in the back row of the bus, texting his freshman girlfriend who was nothing like me. She was “cool,” the type to post photos of herself and the moon, drawing attention to the curves of her body rather than planetary beauty. How I envied her. I wish I didn’t waste so much time.

You were by my side as we arrived at the main mural walk. You walked close and took notes as I admired the art, not fully aware that I was viewing my culture. *La Misión*. My eyes traced the royal blue swirls of skies, the red of acrylic skirts, the tan of bronzed skin. I saw the mixture of emotions on

their drawn faces: joy, anguish, peace. Every single face, every single painted stance evoked strength and power. I saw faces like my *abuelita's*, like my mother's, like . . . *mine*?

I have never seen immigration, but I have heard my *abuelita's* stories about coming to America at fifteen. I am not those brave men and women in the murals, but walking around my *abuelita's* house and tasting the food of her family kept them in a comforting proximity.

I was always better at Spanish than you; maybe it's because I felt it. My mother's tongue rolled off my own as I repeated the titles to myself, while you tried your best to roll your r's. You'd never accept defeat, which is why I never knew you would listen to the way I spoke, soaking in the way Spanish sounded natural coming from my mouth.

You followed with a pen and notebook in hand. You'd write down the Spanish titles, putting their English translations in parentheses on the right side, asking me on occasion how to spell *bailar*, *paloma*, *esperanza*. To you, a new culture—and perhaps even your own—was like a school subject. You were an academic detective. I, on the other hand, wanted to feel my education, sense it in my spirit, but we loved all the same. You didn't want to miss a single detail even though we wouldn't be graded for anything. But everything was an assignment to you, everything was worth your meticulous study.

Sometimes, I felt like a subject to you. Those days when my posture dipped slightly and my smile was a bit weaker, I'd see your eyes squint, scanning me to find out what was wrong.

“Hey, how are you?”

“I'm okay, thanks.”

“ . . . Are you?”

“ . . . ”

“Come here.”

Routinely wrapping your arms around me, you held me tightly to your chest with your chin resting on my head. I never cried in front of you, perhaps because you thought it was your job to prevent it.

As we approached one of my favorite murals, I let myself separate from the group. You stood beside me as I contemplated the painting. Without looking away from the mural, I held on to your arm, leaning slightly on your side.

“Isn’t it just beautiful?”

“Definitely.”

“And the story just makes it all the more compelling. Can you even imagine experiencing . . . ?”

*Were you even looking at the mural?*

The class stopped at Mitchell’s Ice Cream during our break. I got vanilla with rainbow sprinkles as you walked over to say hello and talk about the murals. I mentioned the one with the *cadena* and *flores*, a woman gripping a chain that transformed into lilies. You liked the one with the mother and child waiting in the back of a pickup truck, her husband looking over them in the sunset. You didn’t really know what it meant, but it appealed to you. Sure, you understood the struggle of immigration, but did you feel it?

I never knew you’d watched me that day, watched me as I gazed at the murals, wanting to be part of one myself. I never knew you wanted to hold my hand and look on with me, to know how my heart was beating alongside the painted ones. But it was too difficult for you to speak your emotions—there was no objective answer, no way to universally define love or even “having feelings” and “like-liking someone.”

The murals and my family made my emotions seem so trivial—when my *abuelita* left El Salvador, her life was filled with sorrow. Only a teenager, she left her home and her hard-working mother. She moved to New York. She never stopped thinking and dreaming about her past. She would sit on the subway, yearning to be reunited with her mother and her home country. Struggling to read the billboards in a foreign language I call my own, she would cry for *la colonia* in the midst of skyscrapers.

The ride back on the bus wasn’t as bad as it was coming to *La Misión* because we were now seated next to each other, painted streaks of secret admiration spreading from our hearts down through our fingertips. I didn’t care that my thighs had stuck to the peeling pleather seat, or that our window simultaneously didn’t crack enough to cool us down, but bent to the windy tunnels that jostled my hair in my still-smiling face. My right hand rested gently on my lap, turned upwards so that my palm faced the sun. Yours was in the same position, centimeters away from my own, but they never touched.

## It's a Miracle

Aly Rusciano

Strangers bustled around me, their bags swaying inches from my cheek. Carts squeaked past my left side as I imagined myself sinking into the wall of bread to my right. The aisles were too small now. Everything was different, and I didn't understand the ramifications of it.

My palms were slick with sweat as the hustle and bustle of Walmart's grocery aisles rushed past me. I could feel their stares even as I looked down and tried to wipe my palms on my thighs, just as I could feel the heightened pressure of the blood pooling into my feet from the lack of circulation. I kept my gaze on the white tiles, finding an image of a flower as I connected the tiny gray speckles between them.

I was a flower. I had just started to bloom and was comfortable with where I had been planted. Nothing should have changed. I should have never been ripped out of my life in one garden and thrown into the next so abruptly. My roots were trying to hang on to the joys I used to have, but the soil was being washed away little by little. I was once a free-growing flower, a normal girl, until I was tagged and plucked out of the normal garden and replanted into another I had never thought existed. My petals, which had started to spread slowly as I began adolescence, were withering. I was different now. My identity had been changed with my first label, and I would never be able to return to the normal garden again.

I blinked, losing the image of the flower in the tile. My eyes watched as

the fluorescent light flickered across the frame of my wheelchair. Razzle-Dazzle Berry was the color I had chosen. A bright fuchsia that was coated in glittering sparkles had me jumping up and down during the fitting. Picking a color gave me a sense of control. My life had been turned upside down and would never truly righten again, but a simple color pick had given me one thing I was completely in charge of. I couldn't control the new lifestyle revolving around doctor appointments, hospital stays, medication, and homebound schooling, but the color of my first wheelchair was mine to control.

I had been excited at first. The whole process was fascinating. Someone came to our house and had me sit in odd positions to measure me. I asked questions throughout the fitting session, anxious to learn more about how a wheelchair is made for each individual. The new terminology and knowledge caught my interest, and I didn't stop talking about my wheelchair and all its dimensions for days.

I knew a wheelchair would give me a new sense of freedom, as I would no longer be bed bound when my legs decided to stop working. What I didn't foresee were the stares and immediate attention I would attract from strangers, friends, and enemies. At thirteen, life was already changing on a social level. My inner circle of friends was thinning as I remained a girl and others turned into women. I was already different. I was already confused, and being put in a wheelchair quadrupled that feeling. I was once the *skinny-girl-who-didn't-understand-the-happenings-of-life-no-one-wanted-to-talk-to*, and now I was the *girl-in-the-wheelchair-everyone-wanted-to-know*.

I had been out in my chair on a few occasions in stores where there weren't too many people, but I was going back to school for my monthly check-in in a few weeks. The stares of a few strangers were already enough to unnerve me, so I had done what I could to avoid high traffic terrain, such as Walmart. The long looks, quick glances, and stops of prayers and sorrow made me feel like I had done something wrong.

I've never liked to be invisible. I've always been the girl at center stage, but this was a new type of attention I didn't want. I didn't ask to be different. I didn't ask to be looked at like a freak.

My feet were starting to burn, blood rushing down my legs faster and faster. The infamous tingling started as my mother found the perfect loaf of sliced white bread. I rubbed at my thighs, knees, and calves as the pain grew stronger.

I must have made a face as my mother turned around, placed the plastic wrapped bread in the cart a ways ahead of me, looked up at me, and said, "Do you hurt?"

I nodded my head as the pain surged up into my hips, my legs falling into a burning, unforgiving numb.

"You know what the doctor said. You can't be sitting in the chair for too long. You need to get up and walk for a few minutes."

I bit my lip, peppermint ChapStick coating my tongue.

My heart sank as my worst fear had surfaced.

*People are going to stare. They're going to think I'm faking. They're going to make those comments: "You're just doing all this for attention," "You should be lucky you can walk. People like you don't need a wheelchair. You're fine," "Why are you able to walk? Why do you need a wheelchair? You don't look sick."*

My withered petals started to fall in slow motion. They floated down and down next to a seamlessly endless stem, wavering in the breeze.

My father returned to the cart after retrieving a bag of frozen vegetables further down the aisle. "Are you okay, sweetheart?" he asked after observing my mother's intense stare and my painful attempt to reposition myself.

"Your daughter is refusing to get up and walk," my mother said before coming over to me. "It's going to hurt more if you don't get up."

I folded my hands in my lap, squeezing my fingers. My shoulders were hunched over. If I could have folded myself into my chair, I would've.

I shook my head.

We were already causing a scene, as if I weren't a scene already. We were taking up over half of the aisle between myself, the shopping cart, and my mother and father standing on either side of me.

"I can't do this," my mother said turning back towards my father. She shook her head a few times before looking back down at me. I couldn't meet her eyes. "You're going to make yourself feel worse, and I will not continue pushing you. You know what the doctor said."

My mother was as frustrated and overwhelmed as I was. Her once healthy daughter was now in a wheelchair dealing with something we didn't even know I had. She was driving me to and from every appointment, trying to calmly deal with insurance and doctors, and doing research to better educate the whole family. She was, and always will be, my superhero and biggest advocate. But sometimes harsh love is what needs to be heard.

I could see my skin starting to turn red at my knees and knew it was



happening on my feet too. The pain was getting too much to handle. The only way to calm the millions of raging, biting ants running up and down my legs was to get up and take a few steps.

My petals flipped as a cold gust of wind rattled their edges, causing their free fall to hiccup for a brief moment.

I took a deep breath and met my mother with watery eyes. She gave me an encouraging nod.

I gazed past her at the numerous people in the aisle, many of whom were turned toward us. They stared with curiosity and confusion.

I averted my gaze to my father. He gave me his famous goofy smile and a thumbs up, a devious sparkle in his eyes.

I let out a shaky breath. I had to stand in front of everyone.

*"You're just doing all this for attention," "You should be lucky you can walk. People like you don't need a wheelchair. You're fine," "Why are you able to walk? Why do you need a wheelchair? You don't look sick."*

I set my burning feet on the ground and bit my lip as I placed my sweating palms on the arms of my chair. I held onto the arms tightly as I braced myself and stood.

My stomach swirled as I watched the curious shoppers' eyes widen and jaws drop out of the corner of my eye.

My petals were seconds away from hitting the earth.

I had every urge to sit back down immediately and not take the much-needed steps . . .

"It's a miracle!" my father shouted at the top of his lungs with his arms lifted in the air. He stared down at me with a huge grin, hands still raised above his head.

The strangers looked even more shocked, a woman's hands placed over her heart.

My mother was laughing hysterically, bracing herself on the side of the cart.

I stepped away from my chair with the biggest grin and placed my hands on my hips. I had just performed a miracle, according to the watchful strangers.

A warm gust of wind blew my petals back up to the top of the stem, and, like magic, they reattached themselves. Their wrinkled skin smoothed out into a silky and shiny satin.

I no longer felt like crying. I could no longer feel the burning pain in

my legs that was still present. I caught my mother's laugh, a joy I had once thought was lost returning. It was the first time I had genuinely laughed in months.

My father flopped his arms back down but didn't let his bright smile falter. "See? That wasn't so bad! Let them all think they just witnessed a miracle!" He had turned a scary scene into something humorous with our dry family humor, causing a positive development for us all. The position we had all been thrown in affected us in different ways, but the topic didn't have to stay grim. The new changes in lifestyle were serious and difficult for the whole family. But life continued despite the struggle. There was no point wallowing in the depths of defeat or fear of what others would think. We could still laugh and make light of the situation that would now be our new normal. Life continues, and I can't let the thoughts or stares of others stop me.

I took shaky steps to the back of my wheelchair and held on to the handles still laughing. "It's a miracle," I repeated as I shook my head and smirked. With my finger pointed at my father, I said, "We're going to have to use that one more often."

## Lilapsophobia

Megan Harris

According to the chapter introduction of the geography textbook glaring up at me, the 2011 Super Outbreak was the largest tornado outbreak in United States' history. I discovered my morbid fascination with tornadoes upon learning about them in elementary school, but what I'm reading now just seems like a cruel joke. Unrecognizable pictures of my hometown are waiting in the severe weather section of the chapter. Images of the radar scans sit next to proof of the damage, homes crushed down to the foundation, trees stripped bare, and landscape standing raw and exposed, leveled for miles without end. I read all the tidy little captions about the meteorological significance as nausea sways in the pit of my stomach.

Dr. Fleming lectures for the next hour about the Enhanced Fujita Scale, the conditions for tornado formation, and probably more. I don't hear most of it. *I know all of this*, I want to scream. *That's my street on the map*.

But I can't tell him. If I open my mouth, the horrors might not stop coming.

My foggy brain hardly registers the familiar echoing sound when I step outside of Propst Hall into the blinding light of day. It's 10:00 a.m. on the first Wednesday of the month, so the Jefferson County Emergency Management Agency is conducting their scheduled tornado siren test. I know because I've ingrained this fact into my memory, memorizing the moment

so it doesn't scare me like the first time. No one else knows or even pays attention on the golden-sun, blue-sky, precautionary testing days, but that never makes a difference for me. Described by those who have taken a direct hit and lived to tell, a tornado sounds like the deafening, rumbling, roaring sound of a freight train speeding toward you. In comparison, the siren is only a low wailing whine, rising and falling in pitch as it spins to deflect its warning in all directions.

Hearing it still makes me want to hide.

Every time, some small part of me goes back to another Wednesday still not quite healed in my memory: April 27, 2011. A day that only means something to the people who were here, to the people who have a story of where they were that day and what they survived. Because if such devastation happened then, it could happen again.

The morning begins like just another day of school, only because my mom turns off the news or switches channels when my sister and I enter the room. She does her best to keep us from hearing the dire predictions, filtering the information so we think it's only going to be another long day of storms, nothing for us to worry about. For the past two days, the National Weather Service has warned of danger across the entire state, pointing to environmental conditions that show development within the highest risk categories. Even the local broadcasters at WAFF 48 and WHNT 19 caution everyone to keep an eye on the weather throughout the day, but no forecast was going to sense the destruction on its way.

I hear whispered conversation between my parents as I crawl out of bed, barely awake but aware enough to catch the fear in their voices. Everyone has to go to work and school today, but if you've lived here long enough, you learn to read the signs in the morning that set you on edge for the day ahead. Before the blinding sunshine gives way to darkness, the sky settles on a pale, sickly green color. Thick, ominous storm clouds bring stillness, the very air heavy with humidity and expectation.

My mom pulls all our school things together and buckles us in the backseat, but we don't even make it to the main street of the neighborhood before the whine of the sirens reaches my ears.

This is the first round of storms, a handful of the 362 tornadoes that will

raze the state. Anyone who lives in the South can tell you about their “safe place,” whatever interior room or closet or bathroom provides the most protection from *potential* danger. Most of the time you never think those four walls are going to have to save your life.

We are still expected to come to school, so we drive during a lull that appears to be the end of the severe thunderstorms and tornadoes. Before we can set our backpacks down at our desks, the intercom buzzes with a static-filled voice from the front office calling everyone to an assembly. I sit on the cold linoleum floor in the large room that functions as cafeteria, gym, and chapel. Surrounded by the other classes, I push my worries down deep and scan the crowd for my younger sister with the other second graders.

“We’re going to dismiss immediately, so that everyone can get back home,” the principal tells us, trying to maintain order in the room but her calm expression telling a different story. The kids around me are chattering and excited about no school, but, even at ten, I know something is wrong. My fifth-grade teacher stands at the back, her face pale and her glance flickering often to the doorway. The other adults are held captive by their phones, either scrolling in brittle silence or talking on calls in hushed tones at the edge of the room.

My mom picks us up in the car-line. We drive back in an uneasy silence that she tries to gently shake by distracting us, talking about what we could do for dinner or where we could go this weekend—not knowing that we’ll huddle by candlelight instead. We spend the whole afternoon glued to the television screen for minute-by-minute updates of the squall line moving towards us, a swath of crimson and violet on the map for the bands of torrential rain and golf-ball-sized hail steadily creeping closer. The local station airs footage from storm spotters in the field covering a large, wedge tornado. Named for their broad bases, the low-hanging clouds of these funnels obscure their scope and danger in comparison to the classic, easily recognizable twister shape. The wall of darkness blots out the glaring sunshine, and a shaky camera recording shows the swirling vortex hovering above my elementary school, the fire station, my best friend’s neighborhood. Every moment a hazy, unreal nightmare knowing this was headed towards us.

We clean out our safe place, my dad’s closet, hurling his sneakers and boxes from the floor out into the bathroom. The space is small enough as it is, and I feel trapped as I scrunch myself against the wall to make room

for my sister, my mom, and our hesitant puppy, who is glancing at us with her head tilted in unmistakable confusion about why we're hiding in there.

Every channel is broadcasting the warnings for a new tornado—or the same storm in a new location—until so many red polygons flash across the radar that it's easier to see the few places not in danger. The weatherman standing in front of the multicolored map speaks with more urgency than I'll ever hear again.

"This is a particularly dangerous situation. This is a significant tornado emergency. This is a life-threatening situation." Even after he finishes saying the words, they scroll on a red banner across the bottom of the screen and loop inescapably in my head.

My mom cranks up the volume so we can hear the TV from the closet. "It's moving through Capshaw, Harvest, and Monrovia. This is going to do a half-mile wide damage path as it moves east-northeast."

Brad Travis stands in front of the map, monitoring what will earn the name "EF5 Hackleburg-Phil Campbell Tornado" for the first communities leveled in its path. Only one percent of all tornadoes in the U.S. are EF5s, top of the scale with winds exceeding 200 miles per hour. By the time this storm falls apart nearly three hours later, it will be the single deadliest tornado in Alabama history and the deadliest in the United States since 1955. Tracking across 132 miles, this monster alone stole 72 souls from their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces on what started as just another severe-weather day. I knew none of this then, and neither did the reporters chasing the storms, trying to save as many lives as they could.

Brad Travis is about to zoom in and call off street names and neighborhoods when the white radar beam falters. Its steady rhythm scanning across the screen stutters, zipping around a full circle rotation in half a second before ceasing to move entirely. He pauses and clears his throat, and the restless silence sends a shudder down my spine. The radar tower is gone, destroyed in a direct hit by the storm he has been covering for hours as it races across Alabama counties, and now he has no new data to track its movement. Not knowing now is a different kind of terror.

He keeps going anyway: "As we get in closer, some direct areas impacted are going to be areas along Jeff Road, Nick Davis Road, Capshaw Road."

*Jeff Road.* "Mama?" I ask, my voice breaking, betraying every ounce of terror welling up inside me. "He just said . . ."

Since I was younger, we'd already weathered dozens of tornado warnings. "Unless I'm lying on top of you, then you don't need to be scared," Mom always murmured as her way of soothing my fears each time we gathered in the closet.

Now, the sky is green through the cream blinds covering the narrow bathroom window. I catch a glimpse of eerie light streaming through before she eases the closet door shut. All we have is one bulb on the closet ceiling casting a faint electric glow to ward off the darkness.

"I know. We're going to be all right." She gathers us in her arms, pressing us against the carpet and covering us with her body. Our dog is lying next to us. I can feel her trembling underneath my arm around her as I run my fingers through her soft, jet-black fur in an attempt to calm us both. I don't know how long we lay there with the storm howling and buffeting the walls of our house. The winds scream so loud we can barely hear the news broadcast.

"What about Dad?" I manage to whisper my fear out loud into my mother's ear, quiet enough that my younger sister won't hear me. This storm is closer to us, but I can't stop thinking about him. His project group couldn't miss their presentation, so he is sheltering somewhere in the halls of his office building, far away from us.

"He's going to make it home soon." We wouldn't be able to stop the thought spiral if we consider the alternative.

I'm only ten and terrified, unable to really understand. But I'm not able to forget either. The air is thick and heavy and oppressive in all the unnatural ways that anyone who has lived in this area can read. The raging and roaring winds. The split seconds of agonizing, unearthly silence that sounds wrong after the fury moments before. The feeling like my heart is going to burst out of my chest because my mother is lying on top of me and my sister. The sole thought in my mind asking if this is how I'm going to die.

The power flickers with a flash of lightning and crash of thunder almost in the same instant. When sound returns to a lesser roaring of the wind and rain, suffocating darkness swallows us. My mom's phone screen casts a harsh glow on her face as she checks the radar and decides it's safe enough to move off of us, although I refuse to let go of her hand as we settle back against the closet walls. The worst of it has passed us, and lines are down

across the county. We don't know it then, but the light will not return for seven days.

I don't understand the science of it all, how tornadoes tend to track through the same neighborhoods and down familiar streets over the decades. 1974. 1989. 2011. The same places battered over and over again. Some people leave, but most rebuild, often on the very ground that has been wiped clean. Before our own days in darkness, I didn't understand how people could choose to stay.

It doesn't make sense to me now, why people across Alabama even bothered going on with life as usual that day. How no one understood the danger. Now classes cancel, schools dismiss, and businesses close even when the risk of tornadoes is far lower. Most of the time, I don't question why we do things this way, but ten years ago, life didn't stop for a bit of weather. The 2011 Super Outbreak was the first disaster that caused our community to rethink why we made the choices we did. From my fear for my family on Jeff Road and in Madison County to the courage of meteorologists across the Tennessee Valley, April 27th reshaped the land and our approach to each tornado after. No one could bring back the Alabamians lost to the storms that day, but they're in my mind every time danger comes again, every time we have to decide how to save even one person's life this time.

Only a few weeks later, I couldn't stop thinking about those who were gone when we woke before sunrise and drove to Phil Campbell with our church volunteer team for cleanup. The two-lane road into town wound back and forth across the tornado's path. Two months later, the landscape and the people cradled in its valley had barely begun to heal. Every tree for miles snapped in half. Churches and homes smashed to the concrete foundation. The ground either desolate or still covered in debris. Yet the open barn where we gathered was overflowing with bins of donated clothing, food, and supplies, all sacrificed for this community who had lost everything. People merely miles away who had lost just as much came too, serving with open hearts when they had nothing to give each other except their lives.

We walked through the place that gave the record-earning tornado its name, the beginning of the storm that would spare our home by the



thinnest of margins, though we didn't know until minutes later that we had escaped the worst damage.

“Lilapsophobia” is the abnormal fear of tornadoes, a fancy name for a fear I just have to live with because I made my home here on Jeff Road. Because I can't run away from it, not with geography textbooks or siren tests or more severe-weather days every year than I can count. Because this place is worth the storms we have to weather.

## A Collection of Unsent Thank You Letters

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Olivia Schaap

Dear Mom,

Being homeschooled was my point of pride as a child, and I never cared about those people who would side eye us in the grocery store. I was thankful for you, confident in your abilities with a childlike faith that was unshakable.

Nowadays, I cannot comprehend why you did that for us. Four kids. You homeschooled *four kids*, sacrificing twenty years of your life to breaking up childish skirmishes and making peanut-butter sandwiches. For years, we only left the house to go to church. The fact that we all can read seems like a miracle; the fact that you're still sane definitely is one.

You fondly recall the intangible fulfillment educating us gave you, and I at least know that I reaped benefits. Because of you, I spent my childhood buried in books, simultaneously losing and finding myself in their words. I wrote a hundred stupid stories and imagined a thousand more, safe and secure in my bedroom. I was never called cruel names like you were in middle school, nor was my awkwardness made a source of shame. Words are inadequate to express the monumental gift you gave me—the gift of being cherished. If I have ever witnessed unconditional love, it was under your sheltering wings.

And sure, things weren't *perfect*. But nothing is, right? Maybe being so sheltered made me close-minded, maybe I didn't know how to do long

division until I entered high school, and maybe my entire sex education came exclusively from secretly watching porn—but everyone has gaps in their education. I'll always be grateful for my roots and the path you set me on.

With So Much Love,  
Your Daughter

Dear Former Director of Kids Who Read,

Despite my mom's best efforts, it truly takes a village to raise a child. My love for learning wouldn't have been realized without your guidance. Thanks to your "homeschooler book club," my siblings and I got to learn about literature and writing twice a month with all our friends. We also *had* real friends and a reason to leave the house. I owe to you some of my social skills, as well as my writing experience.

Education was always your highest priority. I'll never forget your towering personal library of curriculum, or how the only games you bought your own two daughters were always instructional. Your passionate, wildly gesticulated lectures impressed upon our tiny, growing minds that *knowledge is power*.

I wonder sometimes about the challenges you faced in that tiny church-converted-library. To this day, you are *the only* secular homeschool educator I have ever met in my life. At risk of stereotyping, it remains true that in the rural South, many parents homeschool partially for religious reasons. Your atheism was anomalous for me. In my small, simplistic worldview as a child, it seemed as if you had replaced faith in God with your books and knowledge.

But that's completely unrelated to my expression of gratitude. So thank you for my golden-hued childhood, for first igniting a creative spark in me, and for helping me realize at ten years old that I would become a writer.

With Nostalgia,  
Your Favorite Kids Who Read Member

Dear Biology Teacher,

Thank you for the safe haven during junior year, and the endless compassion you exuded. You were the only good teacher my younger sisters had at our private Christian school, and I always looked forward to your soft-spoken biology lectures.

My fondness is only a *little* jaded by the fact that you taught me that evolution and climate change weren't real. That's no rare crime—it was expected teaching in our denomination—but I wonder how you ever believed it. After all, you would explain when arguments in our textbook were wrong, but you still said the main concepts were true for *different* reasons.

That was confusing for the black-and-white world I lived in. If some of the textbook was wrong, how could we trust *anything* in it? What did that mean for the weird contradictions I was beginning to see in the Bible? My upbringing hadn't left room for grey complications, and I didn't know how to cope.

Instead of thinking for myself, I made you the ultimate harbinger of truth. It's what we'd always been trained to do at our church. Neither of us were allowed to question anything our apostolic leader said.

I wish I could ask you why you've stayed at that church I have since left. You're one of the most intelligent men I've ever met, and I will never understand how you're able to look past the problems. Maybe that's not the point. Maybe these questions are futile.

Either way, your calming voice and my sisters' love for you will always remain in my memory. Thank you. We miss you.

With Loss,

Your Amateur Scientist

Dear Math Tutor,

It's an unspoken fact that I fell asleep *a lot* during your geometry classes. Thanks for never mentioning it. Your tutoring was the only reason I graduated high school, especially since math was my archrival. It felt like a language I couldn't speak, but you were a phenomenal translator.

Despite my disinclination, math became my reprieve as I got older—too many of my other classes were confusing and filled with grey areas. Scientific fact kept contradicting our church services, and every version of history I was taught was biased. Math was the one constant that wouldn't change. The numbers either worked out right or they didn't (and often-times for me they really, really didn't). I was never told one thing only to be disproved by the results. All errors were mine alone and I took comfort in being able to trust wrong answers. It was easier to deal with than abstracts.

It seems ironic now, given I chose to major in English—rife with inescapable subjectivity—but I'll always miss how straightforward Algebra 2 was.

With Garbled Geometric Proofs,  
Your Liberal Arts Student

Dear History Teacher,

I cheated on every test you gave us during junior year. Thanks for being so absurdly negligent that it was easy. And yes, I know it's petty, but please indulge me for a moment.

Firstly, I'll concede that your ineptitude wasn't entirely your fault. The presbytery's blind, zealous faith was misplaced when they put you in charge of the church's private school. You were a strict, disciplined ex-public-school teacher, asked to corral twenty homeschooled kids into one classroom. We were all at different stages and had no formal education. It was doomed from the start.

So you multitasked by making phone calls while I read the textbook aloud, you told us to answer our own questions, and graded homework while I taught myself. Those were poor returns for how expensive that school was, but negligence was preferable treatment. The alternative your younger students experienced was targeted humiliation, your favored tactic for gaining control.

You shamed kids for testing poorly, berated them for asking time-consuming questions, and were stone-faced to their frustrated tears. You motivated through fear and bullied your students into submission. As stressed, overwhelmed, and unprepared as I know you were, my sympathy only extends so far.

After all, one can hardly forget the day you called my baby sister *stupid* in front of her entire class. You humiliated her by telling everyone she had the lowest grades, and told her she would "never accomplish anything at her rate." She started crying in a room full of people, and you *kept going*. Words cannot articulate how despicable of an action that was.

How can you call yourself a teacher after that? You broke the spirit and confidence of a twelve-year-old girl in a baseless abuse of power. Your actions are all the more appalling compared to my many other teachers who have inspired me throughout my life.

I hate to let a personal vendetta interfere with my quest for gratitude, though. So, thank you for helping me cheat, because it saved a lot of

my time. I'm grateful that you're the only bad teacher I've ever had. I'm thankful you revealed our church's dysfunction to my family by being so unrepentantly horrible. And thank you for listening when I tell you that you are a disgrace to real educators everywhere.

Thanks for the easy A. You have still never apologized to my sister.

Fuck You,

You Highest-Scoring History Student

Dear Apostolic Leader,

I don't know how to write this letter. I've put it off for so long.

I intended to write and thank you for forgiving my parents of the debt they owed to you, but I don't want to. My parents were only in debt to you because you talked everyone into funding your unrealistic, expensive private school that crumbled to pieces within two years. You "forgave" them of debt you coerced them into taking on. And besides, weren't you told that the director was verbally abusive? I guess she learned from the best: in hindsight I see her classroom was a microcosm of your congregation.

I wish I could thank you for something. The idol I made you into loomed largest throughout my life. I loved our congregation, I worshipped in your services, I grew up with your daughter for sixteen years. I was forged in the fire of your ministry, and I can only be thankful for the burns because they have made me who I am.

Surely you realized how much influence you had over me? I am acutely aware of the heavy hand you played in shaping my life, with your impossible standards and endless judgement. I'll never fully forget the education I received in your pews. Your sermons on acceptance had good intentions, but opposite effects. You taught me love in the only way you knew, but it was a toxic love that scarred. The lessons about unconditional love were really about unconditional obedience. I've had professors show more compassion than you did, my own spiritual father.

That said, your rage-fueled, fiery Sunday services railing against the sinners of the world remain strangely nostalgic in their bittersweet way. They were bad times, but simple times where the world seemed clear and direct. Life is endlessly more complex than how you painted it, I'm learning.

Even years later, I still wonder who I am without you all. I lost a part of myself when I left, but you did always preach about dying unto oneself. I

wouldn't be who I am today without you, but I won't let you determine who I become next.

Thank you for forgiving the debt you got us into. Thank you for all the bittersweet memories. Thank you for allowing me to belong to something bigger than myself for a time. I still love you all.

With an Aching Heart,  
Your Former Follower

Dear English Faculty at My Local University,

Due to the recent vacancy of my previous role model, thank you all for being involuntarily selected to become my newest heroes.

Reaching college and meeting others who had my same passion for English was revelatory for me. I've always considered myself a writer, but I knew few who understood that love the same way. College unlocked a goldmine labelled "My Kind of People," and it assuaged the bitter ache from losing an entire church I'd once thought of as family.

But you guys don't know anything about that.

Speaking of other things you don't know . . . I'd like to thank you all for rescuing me from the hardest period of my life. Some of it was your fault: your classes destroyed everything I'd ever believed about the world. I'd never been shown humanity without a Eurocentric filter. I was never taught real *science*. It simultaneously thrilled and terrified me to see so much possibility in life beyond my previously narrow scope. Unfortunately, I struggled to discern what I could trust from my past, so in full-swing extremism I scrapped *everything* I believed. While decluttering my backwards notions, I accidentally threw out some important things, including my will to live. Pesky how that happens.

Few of you know this, but your classes and homework were the only things I found happiness in for a long time. It paid off in the long run.

The years I've spent in your English classes systematically reconstructed me in spans of sixteen-week semesters. I've been reborn into a zealot who would follow you all to the ends of the earth. I thrived in your classes, and I've taken hot pursuit after a fraction of your wisdom. My baptism into higher education has made me into your acolyte.

I'm aware enough to know that I've traded one idol for another, but I haven't lived much of my life without someone else telling me how to think. Self-determination is still a novel concept to me. While I figure it all

out, just know that I've staked my place on your side, and you're going to have a hard time getting rid of me now.

With Fervent Adoration,  
Your Biggest Fan

Dear Olivia,

You always turn to others before giving yourself any credit. It's your greatest virtue and deepest vice. You see your life's trajectory arching forward like you're an arrow that someone else fired, forgetting that you hold the bow. No man is an island, but you are not subject entirely to the whims of others. Too often you view yourself in the mirror of other people's eyes.

It requires careful addition and subtraction to decipher how much of us is *us*, and how much is the influence and guidance of others. I've never been great at math. But I can appreciate myself more when I see where all my fragmented pieces came from, putting me together like a living composite character. Gratitude and thankfulness are the best way I've found to process that image. Sometimes they're the only way I can cope.

That said, you can give yourself a *little* credit. You're trying this new thing called "being your own person." You're exceptionally bad at it right now, but I know you're still learning.

So thank you, Olivia. Thank you for dog-eared pages, for hastily prepared book reports, for scribbles on the corners of notebooks. Thank you for believing in yourself enough to pass math. Thank you for cheating on those history tests, because later you'll wish you'd done worse. Thank you for being angry enough to escape a toxic situation. And after all the nights you cried yourself to sleep, and the bleak days filled with directionless lack of hope, thank you for carrying on in spite of it all.

You're still young, and you have a lot left to learn. I hope someday you'll get to the point where you can, in turn, raise up others on the shoulders of the giants you stand upon yourself.

Just try not to forget everyone along the way who helped.

With Love,  
Yourself





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SHORT FICTION

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## Vintage Memories

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Amy Moczydlowski

Frank's bones ached. The ulna in his left forearm and the third rib on his right side, to be exact.

They always hurt when it rained, lasting reminders of his wild teenage years. He'd broken the arm trying to show off some skateboard tricks, and the rib in a car accident when he'd been going much too fast, high on the feelings of the wind tussling his hair and the sun on his face. Both times, he'd felt the same rush, the same certainty that this was the best moment of his life, the same feeling like he was flying. In the car, it had been followed by a chill of *déjà vu*, and he'd known, a moment before he failed to make the turn and went smashing into a tree on the side of the road, what was about to happen. The thrill of recklessness never lasted long.

He didn't remember the moment of the impact either time, though, just waking up in the hospital feeling like he'd traded living heaven for living hell. Maybe that was why he kept feeling it now, over sixty years later. He'd skipped out on the pain of the breakage, so the universe—God, if he existed—felt an extra need to remind him that he wasn't invincible.

It was laughable now, though, the notion he was invincible. He could barely walk the length of the house without getting winded. Sometimes it was difficult to remember what life had been like when he was young. Now it took a short lifetime to hobble from one room to another. And by

the time he got from his room to the living room, he'd have to go to the bathroom.

That was his mid-morning ritual, it seemed. Bumbling back and forth down the same hall a hundred times. In the past, he'd tried going to the bathroom before going to the living room, or killing time in his room for a while before setting off down the hall, but cutting corners like that never seemed to work. He always had to walk all the way there and all the way back.

Once he finally got there and finished doing his business, getting up off the toilet was one of the challenging parts of his day, especially when his bones were already aching. The heavier the overcast, the more laborious his grunts became. It was downright embarrassing, even when no one was around to hear. On weekends, when there were people around to hear, it was even worse.

There was a knock at the door. "You in there, Dad?"

The voice was significantly louder than necessary, and when Frank was already in pain it made him even more irritable. He glared at the door. "Yeah, I am. And there's no need to shout about it. My hearing isn't what's going, you know."

His son gave a hearty laugh. "I know, I know! The only thing that's going is your mind."

Frank scoffed. "And you're the one making me lose it!"

The exchange was too familiar to really be funny anymore, but his son still laughed out of habit. The sound softened as he backed away from the door. "Alright, I hear ya. I won't bother you anymore. Just holler if you need anything, okay?"

Frank mumbled an empty agreement, already knowing he wouldn't, and then waited for the sound of footsteps to fade before continuing his struggle to stand up.

A couple of minutes later, as he washed his hands, he looked into the bathroom mirror, peering closely at the hazy shape in front of him and trying to remember exactly what his own face looked like. He'd been thinking about these things more abstractly, lately. Did it really matter how sharp the hook of his nose was? Did it really matter how many wrinkles he had across his forehead, or how low his cheeks drooped on each side of his face? Surely the more important thing was the spirit. The physical things were still there, of course—he could still feel them with his fingertips—but

it felt like he was seeing past them, somehow. The pointless details faded with time, and the blur left behind in the mirror was getting closer to representing the real Frank.

That was all a load of bullshit, he knew. But it was interesting to think about, much more so than to wonder if this was another sign that his body was beginning to fail him.

When he'd first realized what was happening, when he woke up one morning and the blur was still there and not an indication that his eyes were tired after a long day, he'd thought, *perhaps I've seen too much, and the universe has come to collect my debt.*

He'd lived a very long life, after all. He had so many things and made so many memories that sometimes it was hard to remember where all of them fit into the timeline of his life. There were things like a room with blue walls where he'd met the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. Or a hike through the woods where he'd seen a great bird, some kind of hawk, sitting in a massive tree. He'd been born and raised in a city where there were so many people that pigeons were the only wildlife, but he'd apparently seen more than that, in a place he could no longer name.

When cut free of all context, he had to wonder which memories were real and which were lingering fragments of dreams. There was no way to distinguish between them, no one else who had been there at the time. No one he could still ask, anyway.



Sometimes, when he was lying in bed at night, unable to fall asleep due to heartburn, he silently relived the memories he knew were real, telling himself the stories he was most desperate not to forget. He reminded himself of his wedding day, when he'd seen his wife smile more brightly than ever before and wear a dress like freshly fallen snow. He reminded himself of the day his first daughter had been born, when he'd seen her come into the world in a mess of blood and then let out a cry in a voice that was ten times her size. He reminded himself of the day his father had died, his hand so shrunken and frail in Frank's own. That had been the day Frank realized no one in this world could live forever, and he'd suddenly felt every year of his age.

He sometimes wondered if it was experiencing the death of a loved one that really made people grow old and weary. If he had never seen what

death looked like, if he had never learned that people couldn't live forever, then maybe he would have.

He tried to tell himself that he had more to be grateful for than to fear. His mind was still as sharp as ever. He never forgot where he was or what he was doing or who his family members were. Even if he couldn't make out all the details in their faces, he had other ways of knowing who the person in front of him was. He never felt alone or confused.

But as his eyes weakened, so too did the vividness with which he could recall things he'd seen. He sometimes struggled to remember what his late wife's face had looked like. He had old photos, of course, but what good were they when he couldn't see them any clearer?

He'd had nothing to prepare him for getting this old; his own parents had never made it this far. A few friends had, but dementia had stolen everything from them. They had never been aware of their age, of every breath bringing them closer to the end. They hadn't known that they were much closer to the end now than they were to the beginning.

The thought made him so frightened of killing time that he couldn't stay in bed anymore.

His vision was even worse in the middle of the night, but he somehow managed to locate his glasses and navigate through his room without bumping into anything. He hobbled into the kitchen, turned on the small light above the sink, grabbed some milk from the fridge, and settled down at the table, gazing pensively into the foggy contents of the cup.

He heard the sound of footsteps and then the scraping of a chair being pulled away from the table. Looking up, he saw a tall and thin figure, too scrawny to be anyone but his grandson.

He had many grandchildren, from all his children, and this one was the youngest, the one whose name he never really bothered to use. *The kid*, he simply called him. Everyone knew who he was talking about, so why bother calling him anything else? He was last in a long list of names, of family members Frank barely knew and didn't have enough time left to get to know.

But his son insisted. *Jack. His name is Jack.*

And if Frank didn't use the name, then people would start thinking he was starting to lose his memory, and that was the last thing he wanted. So he looked at the vague shape of the boy in front of him and reminded himself that his name was Jack and not Kid.

"Hey, Grandpa. What are you doing awake at this hour?"

Frank grunted. "Fighting off heartburn. You?"

"Working on homework," he replied. "I needed a break, though."

Some old paternal instinct stirred in Frank. "What kind of homework?"

It might be one of those new fancy subjects, like calculus or genetics, and even if it wasn't, he wouldn't be able to see the text of the assignment, but suddenly he wanted to be doing anything he could for someone who still had a future beyond the next handful of years.

"Creative writing," the kid—Jack—answered. "I have to write a ten-page story, and I've only got about seven pages written so far. I started falling asleep in front of the computer, though, so I decided to grab some coffee. You don't mind if I make some, do you?"

Frank shrugged. "What's the story about?"

"The one I'm writing? I didn't realize you were interested in that sort of thing, Grandpa. In all the time since you came to live here, I've never seen you read a book."

Frank almost choked on his sip of milk, then cleared his throat, trying to hide his surprise. He'd assumed the kid was too young to notice patterns in people's behavior. And then it occurred to him that his grandson was not the ten-year-old boy whose image still existed in his mind. He couldn't see Jack's face anymore, but it certainly continued to age. Everyone got older, after all; no one was exempt from the passage of time, even if it affected everyone differently. While Frank was shrinking and withering, his grandson was still growing into the man he was supposed to be.

"That's just because publishers only ever put out garbage nowadays," he scoffed. "Maybe I'd start reading again if you had something good to read around here."

"How about my story?" Jack asked hopefully. "Will you give me some feedback on it?"

"Bah. My eyes are too tired for that right now."

"Then what if I read it to you instead?"

Frank finished his glass of milk. "I suppose that would be fine."

And so he listened as the kid—Jack—read him the story he'd written. It was a simple thing, about young teenagers doing the sorts of things that teenagers apparently did now, but there was something about the style that drew him in. A kind of poetry to the language. Frank felt, for just a



moment, as if he could suddenly picture it all in greater detail than he'd been able to see for years now. In his mind's eye, he could see the sunlight flickering through the leaves. He could see each blade of grass. He could see the smiles on youthful faces, the posture of kids who had never seen death nor the burdens of age and didn't have a care in the world.

He felt something wet on his cheek and lifted a hand to wipe it away.

"Grandpa, are you crying?"

"Ah, ahem . . ." He couldn't deny it without obviously lying, but he managed to brush Jack off with a wave of his hand. "Don't worry, kid. Jack. It's just that your story was moving to this old man. Not the plot necessarily, but the style. You have a way with words."

"Oh. Thank you!" Jack was clearly puzzled, but delighted.

"If you ever want me to give your work a listen again, just let me know."

"Okay . . . I will!"



It was about a month later when Jack brought it up again. Frank was sitting at the kitchen table again, when his grandson came over to join him. There was a clunk as he set his laptop down on the table, then halfhearted tapping at the keyboard. Then a sigh.

"What's up, kid?"

"Another creative writing assignment." Jack paused. "This time I'm supposed to write a creative nonfiction piece. Basically a story that's stylized like fiction, but really happened. But I don't know what to write about. It's not like anything interesting has ever happened to me."

Frank sat a little straighter in his chair.

He'd always struggled to put his own memories into words. He could describe them, but not what made them so important. The words were empty, the descriptions hollow. But, with a gift like Jack's . . . perhaps he could capture their essence before they slipped away. Only Frank could ever truly experience his own memories, but perhaps through his grandson's words he could brush away the dust and breathe some kind of life back into them.

*I'd love to see my wife's face again, the way I saw the sun and the grass in his story.*

"If ideas are the problem, then why don't you write about one of my memories?"

Jack looked at him hopefully. “Really? You’d let me write one of your stories?”

Frank scratched his head. “Why not?”

His grandson beamed. “I’d love to! I’ve always wanted to know what your life was like before you had Dad. There’s so much I’ve asked him that even he doesn’t know. You must have seen so many things over the years that we can only imagine.”

“You want to hear about when I was young . . . ? Well, then, did your father tell you that I lived a wild life when I was your age? I’ll tell you about the time I broke my arm . . . ”

# Poppy

Alexandra Salata

I hop in the van and buckle. The seat belt digs into my shoulder. The tag on my blue shirt scratches the back of my neck. The van is too hot and the light from the sun shines in my eyes and the other blue shirts make my ears buzz.

We turn. Yellow house. Tall pole. Stop. Green trees. Green trees. Green trees. Turn. Blue store. Black white silver cars. We go fast. I let my eyes go soft.

I'm going to see the big orange cat at the zoo with my class. Orange cats are my favorite. The big cats are like the cat in my house only bigger and with black on them. Mama calls our little cat Poppy. Little cat Poppy sits on me and makes a buzzing noise and rubs her soft orange fur against my skin. When she sits on me I am calm. When she sits on me I feel safe.

I WANT. TO GO. TO THE ZOO.

Does Poppy know the big cat's name? Maybe the big cat is Poppy's Mama. The cat at the zoo is big and Poppy is small. Mamas are big and babies are small. When I was small Mama was big but I am not small anymore. I am big like Mama but I am not a Mama. I am a Max.

One time Mama and I watched the TV and there was a big orange cat with black stripes like the one at the zoo. It was in a place not like home. This place was yellow and brown not green and grey. A voice was talking but it was not the big cat because cats don't talk just like I don't talk. But the voice was talking and the big cat licked her fur clean like Poppy does and walked around and then there were horses and the big cat chased the horses and jumped really high like Poppy does to get on the couch but the big cat was jumping on the horse and I laughed because I thought the big cat was going to ride the horse and I think I was too loud because Mama covered my eyes and when I opened them the TV was black.

I WANT. TO GO. TO THE ZOO.

Maybe there will be horses for the big orange cat to ride today. I will watch quietly and not be too loud so it doesn't go black again.

One of the blue shirts makes a loud noise and I jump.

He is too loud.

If he is not quiet then we might not see the big cat like when I didn't get to see the big cat on TV because I was too loud.

I was too loud at lunch today and I didn't get to finish that either.

I squeeze my eyes shut and I try not to hear lunch or see lunch but I hear lunch and see lunch behind my eyes.

*It's time to eat.*

In my head I walk to my locker and grab my lunch box. I sit down between the girl and the tall one both in blue shirts.

I count my lunch again. Six nuggets seven strawberries two cookies one

applesauce and one juice box. Six nuggets seven strawberries. *Max, what's wrong?* Seven strawberries not eight strawberries it's always eight strawberries not seven strawberries *Max* I don't want seven strawberries I want eight strawberries like always Mama packed it wrong Mama knows I want eight and not seven I throw them on the ground this isn't right I stomp on them this isn't right I want eight not seven not seven not seven not seven not seven not

*Max, how old are you?*

My face is wet

*Max, how old are you?*

There are too many different smells in here everyone's lunches

*Max, how old are you?*

I pick up my voice and press the buttons.

SIXTEEN.

*Max, what's your mom's name?*

The lights are too bright and buzzing it hurts my

*Max, what's your mom's name?*

LAURA.

*Max, what color is this?*

I can't

*Max, what color is this?*

BLUE.

*Max, look at me.*

I look at the man I think of as Red. Red like his hair.

*You need to calm down. Take a breath.*

I take a breath.

*Take another breath.*

I squeeze my eyes shut my hands shut my body tight and shut. I picture Poppy and I take a breath.

I am in the van I am not eating lunch. I am in the van I am not throwing my food on the ground. I am in the van and the seatbelt is digging into my shoulder and the sun is shining in my eyes and the blue shirts are so loud they make my ears buzz but it's okay because I am not at school I am in the van going to see the big orange cat.

I make my eyes see again. We are still going fast.

EXIT 173

The van slows down and we turn.

We're here. CLEVELAND ZOO.

Zoo. Zoo. Zoo. Zoo. Zoo.

There are so many cars stopped together. *Wow, it's packed today. It's free on Mondays, isn't it? Yeah, but don't people have to work?* I try to count the cars but the teachers keep talking and I can't think. We stop between a blue car and a red car.

I get out of the van and start walking to where the animals are. Red stops me. One of the blue shirts is on the ground making noise. They always do this.

I WANT. TO GO. TO THE ZOO.

*In a second. Stay with me.*

They are asking the blue shirt questions to make him stop yelling but he won't pick up his voice.

I WANT. TO GO. TO THE ZOO.

They keep asking questions until he answers the questions just like I answered the questions after lunch. The questions make a person who is crying or yelling stop thinking about the bad thing. He finally answers the questions.

Blue stops making noise and stands up. I nod fast at Red.

I WANT. CAT.

*I hear you, buddy. We'll go see the jungle cats. But we have to wait for our friends.*

They move so slow. I want to skip. I want to skip into the zoo and I want to see the big orange cat.

We move. Slow. But we move.

We stop and watch the big grey animals roll in the mud. They remind me of the blue shirts that roll on the ground and won't get up. *These are the elephants.* I watch for a minute and then I am done. They are not like the big orange cat who is soft and clean like Poppy.

I WANT. CAT.

Red doesn't hear me. He is stopping a different blue shirt who is trying to bite his teacher. Blue is silly. Teachers aren't food and you can't eat them. Not like strawberries.

I WANT. CAT.

I WANT. CAT.

I WANT. CAT.

No one is listening. I walk away from the blue shirts and the teachers and Red. I will find the big orange cat without them.

I walk and walk and walk.

I walk so far my legs start hurting and my feet start hurting. The sun is hot on my back and the tag itches. But when I see the big cat I will feel better just like I always feel better when I see the little cat Poppy.

I pass a really tall animal eating salad from the trees. I pass a bunch of hairy pigs and kids touching the pigs with their hands. When I see the big cat I will try to touch him too. I walk up to some horses that look like the ones on TV. I must be getting closer.

I look back to see if Red caught up to me. But it's not Red. It's everyone else.

There are people everywhere.

So many people.

People bumping darting screeching yelling loud louder not Red or the blue shirts or the other teachers but strange looking people pushing and bumping pushing and bumping there is a baby screaming screaming *excuse me* screaming be quiet it's too loud be quiet he dropped his food on the ground I threw my food on the ground there were seven strawberries not eight strawberries I need eight strawberries not seven and the tag *sorry* the tag is scratching my neck and I can't breathe *Is that guy okay?* I rip off the shirt and throw it on the ground my face is wet my nose is wet the people are looking at me *Max stop* I try to say stop looking be quiet stop I try to yell *Max, it's okay* no I want to see the cat I have to get to Poppy I run from Red

I can see them



The big orange cats

There are two of them

I need to get in there so they can make buzzing noises and rub their soft orange fur on my skin and make me feel calm and safe

I reach my hand through the hole of the fence they are so far down I don't think they will jump up to me I have to get down there

I pull myself up the fence it scratches me but I keep going I am halfway up the fence and when I am on the other side I will just have to roll down the hill like the time me and Mama rolled down the hill at the park and the world was spinning and spinning blue green blue green blue green and when I am down the hill the cats will sit by me and buzz and be soft and we will be happy

At the top of the fence it is still too loud and I can hear the people yelling there are so many people yelling I don't want to be out there with them I want to be in there with the cats like Poppy who only make noise when they are buzzing on you and sometimes if you accidentally step on their tails like I did that one time to Poppy but I won't step on their tails I'll be careful like Mama and Red always tell me and then it will be quiet and warm but not too warm and I won't have a tag scratching me and no one will be looking at me except the cats and I will feel how I feel when Mama holds me and tells me it's alright and my body will be soft and then I will be alright

My feet touch the ground on the other side and I am close all I have to do is get down the hill and maybe Poppy will be down the hill with the big cats

But no Poppy is at home I look down at the big cats but these are not cats like Poppy

These are big cats and have black stripes and huge paws and big teeth and

One of the big cats yells at me so loud and I start to yell loud too because I don't like this anymore I don't want a big cat I want Poppy

My foot slips and I start to slide down the hill a little but I am not ready to go down the hill anymore

Something pulls me back to the fence hard

My voice is tight against me and the strap that goes across my back to help me hold it without my hands is in someone else's hand on the people side of the fence *Max* it's Red *Look at me, buddy* he is wet and breathing hard *I need you to climb back up* but other people are looking at me and there are people yelling and one lady I don't know is crying and they are so loud and I don't want to go out there but I don't want to be with those cats anymore I don't like them I get on the ground and squeeze my eyes shut my hands shut my body tight and shut I can't

*Max, what's your cat's name?*

Poppy.

Red's hand loosens on the strap so I can press the buttons on my voice.

POPPY.

*Let's get you back to Poppy. Okay, Max?*

I look at Red and nod my head and climb up where I just came down.

I fall down the fence on the people side.

On my back I look up and see Red standing over me.

*Let's go.*

We pass the horses and the pigs and tall animals and the elephants. We

pass the cars but we're walking so fast I can't count. I get into the van between the red and the blue car. We wait for the other blue shirts and the teachers to meet us and we start moving.

We turn and go fast. When we are done going fast we go slow. Black white silver cars. Blue store. Turn. Green trees. Green trees. Green trees. Stop. Tall pole. Yellow house.

I WANT. TO GO. HOME.

Soon, *Max*.

I want to be with Mama and Poppy.

## Burials

Amber Wardzala

The day I accidentally killed a deer was the day my father died. I don't know who died first. I don't know if the deer jumped in front of my car because it felt my father's spirit leave his body and decided it could not exist in a world without him. He was Waawaashkeshi Doodem, Deer Clan. And since the Anishinaabe pass down clans through the paternal side, so was I. He took his clan seriously, loved his hooved relatives. The skin around his eyes crinkling when he saw them. He would speak to them in soft, loving tones, greeting them as friends, as relatives. And they would listen, would stare at him intently. They were not afraid of him, would never spook when he was around. Despite the laws against it, he had salt blocks in his backyard for them. As a child, I remember looking out the window and seeing a deer eating from his hand as his other hand stroked its head. He whispered into its black-tipped ear. I've always wondered what he told it and why it wasn't me he whispered those secrets to.

My father loved his clan so much that he did not even eat waawaashkeshiwi-wiiyaas, venison. And he would not go on hunts with his brothers and cousins who brought us the meat.

"Ayy, you're crazy, Virg," they said to him, pulling their camouflage hats down low and readjusting the guns resting against their shoulders. "The Anishinaabe have always ate deer. What's the matter with you?"

But my father would only give a small, sad smile and tell them to go

without him. Eventually, they stopped asking, even when it was birds they hunted.

But unlike my father, I was not a good Indian, because I did not care about my clan. Waawaashkeshi Doodem members were supposed to be gentle, soft-spoken, kind. I was none of those things. I was loud and brash and arrogant, always looking for a fight. I was a wanderer, never stayed long in one place. I hopped from town to town with nothing more than a duffle bag. I spent my nights sitting in bars, drinking beer, and waiting for someone to challenge me. People rarely did anymore. Maybe they sensed it on me, the violence, the anger. Even white people have instincts. Or maybe my reputation preceded me. Maybe word spread through the state to watch out for a mixed-blood Indian woman with a fox tattooed on her forearm spewing anger and looking for someone to punch.

I was like that since I was a child. I threw my first punch in kindergarten, knocking out a classmate's loose front tooth. Everyone on the rez wondered where I had gotten that fiery side of me.

"Nothing like her father," they used to say. "Virgil can't even hurt a fly."

They would lean toward each other, foreheads almost bumping, and lower their voices. But my ears were good. I could always hear them. "Probably gets it from her mother. Shouldn't have gotten together with some barely Indian woman. Probably has a Cherokee princess for a grandmother."

And they would laugh, as if this joke was new, as if no one had ever heard it before. As if other Native children at school didn't make fun of my blonde hair, make jokes about Pocahontas being my relative, of me being just like Nancy Reagan and that other First Lady, something Wilson. Indian children can be really creative with their nicknames, with their taunts.

The look on those adults' faces as they laughed at my expense just made me want to punch someone more. But I was too young to take on someone of their size. So I stuck my fists under my thighs, sitting on them until I was big enough to make my punches hurt.

My father used to try to make it better, to make me feel like less of an accident, less of an outsider. He would braid my hair into twin braids that reached to my skinny girl hips every morning until I was ten, until I cut off those braids with a dull kitchen knife. He told me I had sweetgrass for hair, that all the other children were jealous of it. He pinched my full cheeks and told me I was beautiful. He smiled, revealing his missing tooth. I stared

at that dark space between his smile and wondered how he had lost it. I wondered if someone had punched it out of his mouth.

He cried the day he discovered my braids on the kitchen floor. He knelt and gathered them up to his chest as if they were a slain relative. He looked up at me, brown eyes glassy from tears, still clutching those braids. I stood there, that kitchen knife in hand, and felt like a murderer. He should have named me Jackson.

Instead of burning my braids so that I could one day rejoin them in the spirit world, my father buried them in the backyard. I watched him from my bedroom window. The earth was still damp and wet from the thunderstorm the night before. Mud coated his Salvation Army jeans. I watched him lay my braids in the hole. He stood above that hole a moment, head bowed, as if in prayer, then he covered them up. I wonder if he buried them as a punishment for me. I wonder if he thought I didn't deserve to ever be reunited with my hair again, even in death. And if that's what he thought, if that's why he buried my hair instead of burning it, I don't blame him. I didn't deserve that hair.

My hair was never long again.

He taught me to bead, the size-eleven needles looked too small for his large, brown hands. They looked like needles a mouse would use to bead. He taught me the importance of the traditional medicines. He did everything he could, had enough kindness and love to fill both his role and the role of my absentee mother. Maybe that was part of the problem. Maybe he had kept all that kindness inside him and forgotten to pass any of it down to me. Maybe all that was left for me to inherit was my mother's blonde hair and her vicious temper. A temper that had slapped me across the face many times before she left.

"We sure Virgil is her father?" I heard one of my aunties say at a family gathering. She set her cigarette down into the ashtray beside her and picked up her beer. "With a mother like hers, anyone could be the father."

I was sitting in the grass, no more than ten feet away. I had done nothing that day, had punched no one, hadn't raised my voice. I had kept to myself, determined to go unnoticed. But it didn't matter what I did or didn't do. I was the black sheep of the family, always a good point of conversation.

"I always thought she was more marten or bear than deer," a different auntie said, leaning back in her lawn chair.

“You know who’s Waabizheshi Doodem?” the first auntie asked. “Marvin Redshoe.”

The two of them gasped and giggled. “She does look just like him! Same hooked nose, same scowl and everything!”

I got up from my place in the grass and went into the house we were all gathered at. Some cousin’s house, I think. I went into the bathroom and shut the door. I gazed at my reflection, at the way the corners of my lips pulled down, at the permanent line between my brows. I made my face smile, but the act made me look too much like her. Transformed my preteen face into something womanly, into something I hated. I stopped smiling, flushed the toilet, and left the bathroom.

Or maybe it was the deer who died first. Maybe the force of my car against the malnourished body of that deer reverberated through the earth and was carried to my father. The force of that brown body shattering my windshield enough to rip his spirit from his own brown body.

After the car stopped spinning, I climbed out of it, pieces of glass stuck in my face. Blood dripped slowly down my cheeks. I left the car door open, the keys in the ignition. I stumbled across the road, back toward where the deer had first appeared. The interior lights of my car and the distant light of the almost full moon were all I had to see by. The headlights had broken, no longer working after that body smashed into my car. After my car slammed into that body.

I found the deer crumpled in the ditch. Glass protruded from her ribs. One of her legs was bent the wrong way. Her breathing was labored and sporadic. Her eyes were already growing hazy, like the eyes of the old Indians with cataracts. I knelt down beside her. She turned her head just slightly, just enough so she could see me.

My hands hovered over her body. I wanted to comfort her, wanted to tell her it was going to be okay. I wanted to sing her soul to the afterlife like I had seen my father do for his parents. But I didn’t know the words. Could only feel the cadence like a second heartbeat in my own body, but it was growing fainter, was disappearing too rapidly for me to catch it, for me to remember.

I wanted to pet the deer, sooth her, but I was afraid to touch her. I was afraid I would cause her pain. I was afraid that she would try to get up and run, and I would only make her death more excruciating.

So I did nothing, just knelt beside her, not knowing what to do until her body went still, until there was no soul looking out of her eyes anymore. I stayed there a minute longer. It felt wrong to leave her like that, unburied, waiting for the vultures and crows to eat her, to pick her apart. But I had no shovel to bury her. I had nothing to give her. No songs, no comfort, no burial. No sweetgrass.

I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out a cigarette. I unrolled it and dumped the tobacco out into my left palm, the hand closest to my heart. I set the tobacco next to her, and then I kissed the deer on the cheek, some of my blood sliding down onto her fur.

Then I got up and staggered back to my car. When I got there, my cell phone was ringing. I picked it up, and before I could say anything, my father's girlfriend told me he had died. That his heart had given out. She asked me how far from the rez was I. She asked me if I could come home soon so I could be there for the funeral.

Or maybe they weren't connected at all. Maybe it was just coincidence that I killed a deer and then my father died. Maybe the world is just a bunch of random occurrences that have nothing to do with each other.

My mother was at the funeral. I didn't recognize her at first. The years had not been kind to her. Her body was bent like a question mark, and her hair was the color of snow, but not fresh snow. It lacked that healthy gleam. Instead, it had the dull look of the slush that comes off the roads, dirty with exhaust.

For some reason, I had not expected her to look like this, had believed if I ever saw her again, she would not have aged a day or even a minute. My blood still dried on her fist.

"Look how big you've gotten," she said and kissed my cheek. I was rooted in place, unable to avoid those lips. They were so dry. I could feel every crack in them against my cheek. "I see you've dyed your hair."

She reached up to touch my raven black hair, but I pulled away. Her brow furrowed, as if she didn't understand. As if she hadn't been the cause of so much of my pain. Her actions creating a twisted labyrinth to these deaths.

I didn't say a word to her, just turned my back and went over to my father's longtime girlfriend. She was sitting by herself in the front row. I sat down beside her. She reached across and took my hand in hers. She squeezed it and I squeezed back.



I stayed in the cemetery long after his body had been covered over. I stared down at that mound of earth, grass seeds sprinkled on top. It looked just like the grave for my hair from years before.

I wanted to speak to him, to tell him how I would miss him, to tell him I loved him, to tell him I was sorry. Sorry for everything. Sorry for killing the deer. Sorry for cutting my hair. Sorry for my marten temper. Sorry that I couldn't be the daughter that he deserved.

Instead, I said nothing. My tongue felt as swollen as that dead deer. It could not remember how to form words. I had never been good at talking, had never figured out how to express feelings with anything other than my fists.

When I turned to leave the graveyard, to return to my damaged car, I saw them gathered in the field across the road. They stood there like silent sentinels, watching me, or maybe they were waiting for me to leave. So they could pay their respects to their clan member. Their hide was the color of sweetgrass. Their ears perked, ready for the secrets of my father.

As I drove out of the cemetery, the one with that fresh mound of dirt, I looked in my rearview mirror. The deer's eyes tracked my progress, as if it was me they were protecting and not my father.

## The Fisherwoman's Wife

Dean Shinner

Once upon a time, there was a fisherman and his wife, and they lived beside the River. Nurturing as its name, the River provided all manner of goods the fisherman and his wife could have wanted: they had food when the salmon arrived to spawn in the spring and when their eggs hatched and grew, fat trout in the summer, and pelts to wear on their shoulders from the curious bears the fisherman had skinned, their fat keeping fires burning in the winter. They kept no animals of their own, no goats or sheep, for they had no need: their Mother gave them all she could provide. Each morning the fisherman's net was dry and empty, and by each nightfall it was full and proud, swelling as wide as the river's banks at the break of spring. Each morning his wife's hands were dry and empty, and by each nightfall they were the same, but rougher than the day before. While the fisherman may have spent each day with the River, she was kept isolated from it by separate duties in the house. Her palms were calloused and rough from spinning the river-grasses into ropes for the fisherman's ever-expanding nets, her eyes dulled from hours by the wheel and hearth-smoke. She had been given to the fisherman in her seventeenth year, and each year that had passed since, she had felt her heart twisted further on the sharp spindle, pushed down by the fisherman's demands and his clammy hands.

She was neither a happy weaver nor a happy woman, and neither of these things does a happy life make. Still, as close to the River as they were,

the couple was isolated: unhappy though she was, the fisherman's wife had no village to run to, no parent's house which would welcome her with open arms and tea, steaming-hot to ease her aching heart.

In the wintertime, their River froze, and in opposition the fisherman's heart burned. Kept inside by the snow and ice, the fisherman grew restless once he had no more pelts to tan, no more spare firewood to whittle when his wife was rationing what little they had. Burning in the freezing house, the fisherman's pelt-covered shoulders made him appear like a stalking bear, and one that far too often unsheathed its claws. At night, he would lie beside his wife and take her, but there was no love in it: though his hands were hot and stinging as overeager flames, his heart was colder and harder than the frost. He fucked his wife brutally, and each night of the long winter she slept worse. Bruises, she supposed, were hard to see in the dark—signs of hurt, dark finger-presses and dark sentiments only blend in with night's shadows.

Weak and bruised, the fisherman's wife became gaunt with the winter, the once-lovely curves of her thighs and stomach gone to worry and lost energy. What was left of them was battered, blossoming evidence the color of rotten figs, and she the fouled fruit. What steadfast spirit she had held was bruised, too, but this she kept to herself—tucked in close to her, she often dreamt reminders that it was still within her. When her exhausted sleep did bring dreams, they were of her spirit, healed and whole, and her body the same, bathed in the warmth of spring-clear waters, steady as the river-stones beneath her feet. These dreams often made the fisherman's wife wake in the night, waiting in the darkness for the days of healing to come—perhaps with this dawn, perhaps the next. She would not pray in these nights—not aloud, anyway—but she would close her eyes, trying to remember all that her dreams had promised her. They would come faster, she thought, if she did.

In the mornings, however, life continued the same—the smoke and the spinning-wheel, sweeping the floor and eyes not clear with dreams, but dark with reality. The wheel was a special scourge, its rough cord for his nets tying to her husband, yanked in any direction he chose to pull.

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One night, at the end of winter, the fisherman was more discouraged from the day's fruitlessness, and more discouraged with his wife, than

usual. The stew was not hot enough, though she had worked all day to keep the fire burning. The rushes on the floor were not sweet enough, though they were the only ones his wife could find close enough to the hut not to have frozen to death on the walking-back. The ropes that she had given him were not strong enough, though she had cut her fingers to bleeding with the rough, spiny flax that she had chosen for its utmost toughness. The fisherman's wife had worked far more than such a terrible man was due, and to him it was not enough. A punch landed on her belly, and another threw her into a wall. Her head felt ripe to splitting, and there were a thousand colors behind her eyes before blackness took her. In the blackness, it seemed to her that there was the voice of a woman, calling out—not a scream, not a cry, but a beckoning, urgent and burning. All roared in her ears, the panting of her enraged husband grew distant—it was the swelling of a river she heard, the bursting of freshwater over banks, the croaking of spring-frogs in the night. Behind her eyes was a leaping salmon, and in her ears, somewhere just behind her, was the woman's voice:

*When the time comes, it said, throw down a piece of rope, and he will be bound by justice. A salmon-scale, and he will not run from justice. A spindle, and he will know justice. Do these three things and I will come to you.*

When the fisherman's wife woke, the room was cold, the fire dead, and her husband sleeping deeply in the way the wicked sleep when they believe themselves to have gotten away with something. At the feet of the fisherman's wife, as she found when she stood, was a pool of fresh water—spring-warm and clear. Knowing it to be a gift, or perhaps an aftereffect, from the woman in her vision, the fisherwoman washed her bruised face with it, and closed her eyes on a pallet away from the fisherman's, determined to bring justice to him. When he next came upon her, she would be ready.



Many nights and days passed with little altercations more than words, but the fisherman's wife kept the dream-woman's voice in her head, and on her tongue when he was out of the house. "He will be bound by justice," she whispered to the flax wound 'round the spinning-wheel, plucking an errant piece for her pocket. "He will not run from justice," she murmured to the salmon she skinned for an evening meal, thanking it before tucking away a single, shining scale. "He will know justice," she said to the wheel

once more, removing its sharp-pointed spindle and slipping that away, too. All three things from her dream she gathered, and all three things were rustling inside her skirt pocket when the fisherman came roaring into the little hut, yelling for his meal and calling after his ungrateful wife. Ice-chip eyes met hers for a moment—a moment in which the fisherman’s wife had, for far too long, expected a beating and bruises, a battering of her body and spirit. It was with her spirit, and the spirit of her dream, that she spoke. Her eyes blazed and her voice was loud and sure, trusting of the words of her dream-woman far more than her supposed husband, who had been a man of nightmares. A fist flew toward her, and her hand flung the bit of flaxen rope to the ground.

“You will be bound by justice,” the fisherwoman pronounced, and so it was. Around the fisherman were strong ropes, sharp with spiny flax and thicker than any of the fisherwoman’s best work, knotted a thousandfold. Though he struggled, he could not move nor scream—one was around his mouth.

“You will not run from justice,” the fisherwoman pronounced, and so it was. A shiny scale fell beside her feet. Knotted in the tangle of flax-ropes was a large salmon, thrashing wildly in the dirt, shining eyes wide.

“You will know justice,” the fisherwoman pronounced, and so it was. In her pocket the spindle had rested, and in her hand, it gleamed, its point sharp and unearthly. It was a home instrument and a faery’s weapon, a simple spindle and the hammer of a god: it pierced the netted salmon in the side, and turned to a splinter, buried just so beneath the scaly skin.

Gathering the thrashing fishnet into her arms, the fisherwoman stepped forth from the dark, smoke-filled hut and into the winter air, arms full of her husband’s rage. Any instant, she could have chosen to kill him—to leave him on the bank to heave one last lung-full of newly poisonous air, but she did not choose so. Rather, seeking no true blood on her hands (for her husband had once held far too much of hers), the fisherwoman untangled the net, letting the thrashing, splintered salmon into the frost-kissed water, just beginning to thaw with the promise of spring. Fast, fast, faster the salmon swam from the fisherwoman’s sighs and fast, fast, faster the splinter that had been the spindle dug beneath his scales. It is still there, and the memory of that pain is why all salmon squirm so when we seek to catch them.

The fisherwoman watched the salmon disappear, and the empty net in

her hands, she imagined, was her heart: released and able to breathe for the first time.

A voice—a woman's voice—came from the water where the salmon had disappeared. Her voice was low and beautiful as a dream, for it was she who had told the fisherwoman what she could do to bring justice to her house and husband. She is the Water-Witch, and from her ribbons of dark hair flow all the rivers of the world, flowing out to the endless sea. She is old as the smallest grains of silt in the riverbeds, her heart as bright with loving as first sunlight on their waters. Her smile was endlessly old and endlessly kind: in the fisherwoman, she had seen a woman wronged, but a woman filled with strength. A mortal woman, but one with more promise than even her ancient heart had ever known.

*"You have done justice, lady. I saw the promise of it in your heart and offered its gifts to you. He . . ."*—deep eyes, deeper than the darkest pools, cast a glance downstream with a satisfied smile—*"He will know justice till the end of his days, when he returns every year to this place and sees the house that his sorrows left deserted."* The fisherwoman did not frown at this, for the truth was dawning on her—there was a proposition in the other woman's eyes, a question unspoken.

"Am I to go with you?" she asked. Then, bolder, curious, seeing the Water-Witch's beautiful hair, hearing her voice which was low and sweet, deeper than all the waters, the fisherwoman spoke again. "Will there be love where we go?"

The Water-Witch smiled as she held out her hand, and the flashing of her love-struck eyes was brighter than all the copper pennies tossed in all the wells, all the fountains in the world.

*"I promise it to you. Come, there is much of the world to see."*

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Once upon a time, there was a fisherwoman and her wife, and they lived beyond the River. In the oceans and the streams, the marshes and fjords, the lakes and thundering waterfalls, they were forever wandering. Wherever the fisherwoman wished to go, her wife, the Water-Witch, took her. They were married far more beautifully than the fisherwoman had ever been before, and every river for the next hundred nights was their marriage-bed, each more wonderful than the last. Beneath the Water-Witch's rule, the waters of the world had provided amply, but beneath the rule of a

Water-Witch in love, they flourished: thousands of tadpoles and fishes, jellies and great-bellied whales, sly sharks and snapping tortoises, were all given such stewardship as they had never known.

Over the time and years, the fisherwoman became the fish-woman, for to live and journey with her wife she had asked not only to breathe within the world's waters, but to traverse them as her wife did. As with the Water-Witch, beneath the fish-woman's legs was a great tail, sparkling with a thousand colors of scales, forever shining as if with the frost of the winter in which they had met. Born of the bubbles of their laughter were their daughters, and they are the mermaids called the sirens—their song so beautiful to the ear that, like their mother, they condemn the unjust seafarers of the world to their deaths. Any man or woman on the sea who has lived a just and loving life will hear only praises from the mermaid's song, and may even be so lucky as to see two among the young women who seem far older: one whose voice is dark and lovely, the other with a tail that shines like frost in the morning.

## At the Risk of His Life

Jamie Henderson

His swollen fingers trembled in the wind, mirroring his narrow shoulders and hips, worn down by age and never enough to eat. His gray mustache had not been trimmed in years, and it curled over his lips and down his face, making it hard to eat or talk. He curled his toes in his boots and missed the pair of socks he had used to make gloves. They had been stolen as he dozed, and newspapers were no substitute for a good pair of socks.

His eyes were too wrinkled for a man of his age, and most who saw him thought him closer to ninety than sixty. He tucked his hands into his armpits and watched his breath curl and freeze in the air above him. A passing car backfired and his vision slipped out of focus. The world spun around him, with flashing lights and screams clouding the world around him. His hands flew out and braced against the wall before he grabbed for his gun. He could not find it.

He started throwing the newspaper that covered him, exposing his thin frame to the elements.

His hands ran over the ground, through the cold, wet sludge that covered the alleyway. He was dressed in ragged and dirty pants and shirt, and the colors had faded away into a muddle of confusion many years before. He caught his good sleeve on a screw as he flailed and it pulled a large hole in the old fabric. He screamed and ran his fist into the wall before snapped



back to reality. Drool ran down his chin and he pressed his forehead to the cool bricks as he rubbed his knuckles. He slid down the wall as he cried, the years weighing him worse than the steady pain in his stomach. He had known for days that it was not just hunger.

He longed for sleep, stuck forever behind the dumpster in this filthy alleyway, but had not been able to sleep for years. The cold pushed past the fading rage and clung to his malnourished bones. He blew into his hands. His fingernails were caked with dirt and he called unintelligible words out to the setting sun. Over and over, he screamed obscenities to whatever god had put him in this hellhole, to whatever god had let him rot. Shoes clicked on the pavement at the end of the alley and he silenced, tucking his arthritic knees into his chest. He used his sleeve to wipe his wet mouth and waited as the police officer walked through the alley. She was young, with brown hair pulled back into a tight bun. She smiled softly at him and he looked at her, marveling at her quiet beauty. She placed a small paper sack in front of him. She did not speak to him; she just squeezed his shoulder.

After she left, he opened the sack and pulled out a turkey sandwich and a pickle and a small bottle of water. He tore into it, greedily swallowing the warm turkey, mayonnaise, mustard, lettuce, and tomato. The pickle was juicy and it leaked down his weather-worn hand and into his sleeve.

His stomach growled, ready for more, but he had no more to give. The food had warmed him though, so he sipped the water and watched the pigeons and rats root through the garbage near him. The pain gripped his chest and growled up his throat for a moment and he choked, but it calmed and he pulled a soft, dark bundle from his inside coat pocket. He unfolded a small piece of thick paper. The young man's face on the paper was hopeful and full of life, and the old man could hardly see himself in the image. He caressed the picture with his thumb and noted that his thumbnail had split down the middle. He could not feel it, but the skin was raw and pink. He felt another pain in his naval region and dropped his bundle. His hand twitched at his stomach and he vomited in the trash and on the blanket beside him. Blood dripped from his nose and lips and he dipped his fingertips into the puddle. He pulled them up to his face, examining the thick liquid as it ran down, following the path of the pickle juice.

He laughed and his voice rattled with the effort. A distant memory surged through his mind and he shut his eyes to ward it away. Men lying

around him, clotting blood coming out of every possible place and covering everything. He could name most of the men, even still.



The morning brought with it frost. The young policewoman pulled a blanket, a bagel, and a cup of coffee out of her car. Under her breath she sang “Joy to the World,” and she smiled at the small children waiting for the bus. Ice covered the garbage and the leaves crunched beneath her feet.

She called out to him as she approached, but he did not answer. Her bright face fell when she came abreast of the dumpster. His face was pale and dried blood covered his face and shirt. There was a heavy smell from the hemorrhaging and she sat her vittles on the ground before approaching. She pressed her fingers against his neck, then quickly withdrew them. He was cold, colder than the morning, and his jaw was slack. She looked over the area, his blanket, a small photo frame, and the bundle from his pocket. She turned the photograph over, seeing the resemblance even at a glance. Stuck behind it was a patch. Inside, a paper read that he was cited for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, in action,” and the medal with the light blue ribbon weighed heavy in her hand.

# A Nine-Step Guide to Navigating the End

Regan Clancy

## *One*

First, trust yourself. You'll know when it's time. It's morning. Light blasts into your bedroom signaling the start of another day. Rub your eyes and roll over. She's there—always there—oblivious. Oblivious to the sun; oblivious to you. Look closely and remember a time when her twitching eyelashes transfixed you as she dreamed. See, despite your recent conversations, that she's still wearing too much mascara and it's streaked black lines across your pillow. Wonder if she'll always sleep with her mouth open. Reach over and drag her hair out of her eyes. She'll swat your hand and flop to her other side facing away from you. That's when you'll know it's over. Trust yourself. That's step one.

## *Two*

Do not tell anyone. No one. Not your roommate, Chad; not your girlfriend's best friend, Claire. Under no circumstances should you talk to your mom. No. This step is about knowing you are right. It's enough at this point to simply know. Swim in your rightness for a while.

If you must, write down your thoughts on love and life and the apparent

incompatibility therein. Jot down your evidence. Sure, write it down, but don't leave these scraps lying around the apartment. It's not the time to share your feelings. Yes, it's over. You've known for weeks. But this is your special time to dwell on the past, to recall the signs that are so obvious now. Take this special opportunity to avoid the present and postpone the future.

Answer her concern with "Nothing's wrong" in an elevated pitch, and avoid her eyes as you spoon cold macaroni and cheese, which you blow on anyway. Watch a sexy movie and when she kisses you on the couch, tighten your shoulders, pat her upper arm and offer her your consolation smile, perfected over years of family photos taken in front of false hearths. Noticing your tension when she rubs your neck, she says, "Have you not been sleeping well?" She says, "You carry a lot of tension in the base of your head. Right here." Write in your secret notebook: *Too little, too late.*

When she spends the night, scrawl, next to her in bed, by the light of your phone. She's noticed the notebook—enjoy the danger. She thinks you're finally writing poetry again. Burn these notebooks. Bury them. Or at least ditch them at an estate sale and relish the thought of some singer-songwriter buying the lot of your rubber-banded bundle of journals for a couple bucks and turning your heartache into hymns. Remember, step two is your time. Don't share too much during this stage. Hoard details from your day. Deny her your french fries. Be stingy. Be a little mean.

### *Three*

By now you've learned to trust yourself. You've recognized it's over and has been for a long time. Carry this phrase with you and recite it in imaginary arguments, emphasizing the word "long." Revel in your knowledge, in your plain assessment of a hopeless situation. You're right, after all, and it's nice to be right once in a while. This process takes longer than you think it will. Watch her eyes and body for signs that she, too, feels the weight of finality. She won't, but that's fuel for your fire. Don't put a timeline on this process. It takes as long as it takes.

Next—this may surprise you—call your friends with trucks, get a stack of

pizzas and a case of Pabst, and move her in. Kick Chad out and move her in.

Rearrange the furniture over the next week and a half according to her Pinterest-informed whims. Get rid of the puke-green couch that's been with you since college. Yes, the couch where you learned to make out, where you'd crash after a long day of classes. The couch where you passed out after drinking too much on the day you dropped out at the start of spring semester of your junior year. The couch that's been there for you all these years—it's got to go.

Lugging it down the complex's stairs will be much harder than it was to haul it up, almost as if it's gained weight right along with you. Hunch over, waddle step by step, reposition your hands and struggle as she leads, unaware of your effort. Smash your hand on the wooden railing, startle your neighbors with unmuffled expletives. Sweat. And fight with your girlfriend because she never talks, so you never know what's ahead around the corner. You're not a mind-reader. But, and this is important, keep the fight on topic. No generalizing. Don't blow it up into something bigger. This fight is about the couch, that's all.

Step three is full of specific nitpicks about unwashed dishes and leaking trash bags left outside the door, cloudy with fruit flies. The way she clogs up your razor with leg hair. Never raise your voice, but always remind her that you had a system before she came along. Cock your head and sigh as you square up the duvet, whispering "We'll figure it out, hon." Now is not the time to tell her you never know what she's thinking, and it scares you. Or that she's careless with your feelings and it hurts. Now is not the time to explain, in your most sarcastic, wounded voice, that the proper way to respond to reading your poetry is not to say "It's really well written." Keep that to yourself. Write that sort of thing down in step two. Step three is for proving your resilience and carving out your own little space in a crowded arrangement. It's about showing yourself you're tough, that you don't need validation to self-actualize.

In the latter part of this stage start meditating. Read Eckhardt Tolle, taking notes in the margins. Pay for a mantra and talk way too much about Ram Dass. She'll praise you for taking care of yourself. Lose a little weight. Get a new job that pays. Meet each other's parents. Try new sex positions, which she'll enjoy too much. Start smoking pot during this stage, but cut back on your drinking so that it all balances out.

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*Four*

Start flirting with the new barista down the road at the coffee shop with the corrugated metal exterior. After you make eye contact, give her a fun little nickname. Banter about your favorite bands and how vinyl sounds so much better than digital. Make sure to tease her a little for her bourgeois musical taste. After a month or two, ask about the tattoo on her wrist. She'll slide into the booth next to you during a slow spell and tell her well-rehearsed tale of the fat bearded artist who fed her whiskey to calm her nerves as he misspelled her cat's name in permanent ink. It's just flirting, but one day, as she hands you your triple Americano, she'll touch your arm and hold your gaze. Drink it in. Start writing again. Start submitting. Nothing fancy, just online journals at first. Show the barista your poetry. Exchange numbers. After you stop returning her texts, switch coffee shops and wonder, as you lay awake at night, if the barista thinks of you.

*Five*

Each of the nine steps are important, but step five is mandatory: a couple's trip to Ireland with a group of friends who make more money than you. Save up, pool your funds, put most of the trip on the emergency credit card. It's all part of the process. And yes, by now you will have a shared credit card "in case." Trust the process.

Ireland will change everything. She'll be at ease with herself. She'll remark more than once how little she misses the city. From the time you land to the time you depart she will, without a trace of irony, talk about how many sheep there are. On foggy mornings outside the coastal bed and breakfast run by Donal and his broad wife, Fi, you'll drink coffee, shiver, and catch her sitting on a rock, thumbs poking through the sleeves of your favorite sweater, eyebrows arched, staring off into waves rushing the cliffs as gulls dive and glide, hand covering her heart as if she'd just watched a panda give birth.

She'll touch your thigh during dinners of lamb and cabbage and ask which distillery you want to visit tomorrow. She'll suggest you peel off from the group and spend a day alone, just the two of you, to visit the village where your great-great-grandmother emigrated from. It will be the best day

of your life. You'll walk vaguely familiar streets and try to learn the Gaelic word for "family." You will breathe the air of your ancestors and feel whole. Upon rejoining the crew the next day at a charming pub with improvised fiddle music weaving through stale air, you'll raise a clunky toast: "To good friends. To good days. May we recognize both when they're in front of us." You'll wipe away a tear and wonder if you'll ever believe in God again.

### Six

It won't happen exactly as you planned, but the time will finally be right. Around a bistro table at an unfamiliar downtown cafe, afternoon light fading over tall buildings, she'll sip white wine and push away an untouched salmon salad. She will cry. You will cry. Embrace her and offer a tender kiss. She will say "It's beautiful." She'll hold her left hand with her right and say "It's perfect. I can't believe you remembered." She'll say "I can't wait to start planning."

### Seven

Years have passed. You've gained your weight back and then some. You drink and bowl on Saturdays, mow the lawn on Sundays, and sleep is hard to come by thanks to the toddler who has taken over your bed, whose cries delight and devastate you. Sleep deprived and myopic, you both wonder if it's time to try for another child. You can't imagine sharing your love—Fiona is the center of your shared galaxy. But you've read about two-sun galaxies, and you remember what your old man used to say when his eyes went glassy after a night of scotch and cigarettes: "It multiplies, son. I don't know how, but love multiplies to meet the need."

Come home from work for lunch one day, and with the lingering smell of leftover stir-fry hovering, she will grab your hand and lead you to your bedroom. Make love. She will know instantly. "That's a keeper," she'll say with a laugh, uncovered and secure.

During this step you'll come across your old notebooks in the attic of your new home in your old neighborhood, the notebooks you never burned or buried. And as you sit cross-legged reading the words of a

younger you, chuckle at your amateur writing, full of contempt and self-pity. Then, look over your shoulder as your heart rate quickens. Crumple the evidence into little balls, cram them into a Walmart bag, and walk them to the neighbor's dumpster down the alley. Putter around the house, aloof, and stare out windows. Say "No really, everything's fine." She will kiss you, but hold back. Remember, you've known for a long time. Say "I'm just tired, I guess."

Eventually, start noticing things outside yourself again. Track the robins' nest-building progress and name the squirrels that run around the backyard elm. You will both cherish Samuel. Once he can hold his head up, Fiona will carry him precariously from room to room, pretending he's her new doll, singing made up songs as she prances on her toes. Watch it all and marvel at how wise your old man was. It truly does multiply.

## *Eight*

You won't see it coming. You'll be playing guitar in the basement and she'll walk down the stairs, the frill of that sundress you love bunched in her fists. The kids will be down the street at their friend's house. Forget to blow on your hot coffee and burn your lips. Forget what her appointment was for and make too big a deal of your burned lips. "Malignant," she'll say. "Everywhere," she'll say. "Three months, best-case." "Doc said maybe we should take a trip, with the kids." You won't hear anything after that, but you will wonder, as her mouth continues to move, why neither of you are crying.

Tell the kids that night after dinner at their favorite restaurant. Wonder how much they really understand. Witness the anger flash in Fiona's eyes, observe the passing of the anger, giving way to intelligent sorrow, and watch sadness age her five years in front of your eyes, in a matter of seconds. Once home, Samuel will hide behind the recliner and crash his toy trucks together, "Pshhh. Kshh. Crsshh."

After this, wonder how she is so strong. How is she so gracious? So present? Hold her often over the next few weeks, thigh to thigh. Wrap her in your arms and count her ribs through loose skin. Find her eyes, reflecting the warm green of her shirt. Don't blink.

Out of sheer pertinacity, she will start singing around the house while she sweeps. You will never understand why she's sweeping, and you will



want to throw every broom in the world into a wood chipper. You will lose weight too.

### *Nine*

It's morning. Sunlight bleeds through thick faded floral curtains illuminating dust, like stars, falling and floating with no destination. Lift your head and wonder when you nodded off. Neck stiff from your twisted position on the folding chair, the base of your head will feel like someone hit you with a baseball bat. Press a knuckle into the knotted muscle. Rub the crust from your eyes. Notice her open mouth and hear your heart pound. Look at her hairless eyelids and hate yourself for falling asleep. Hold your hand under her nostrils. Touch her hand because you have to. It's blurry like a dream, and you have to know. Push the red button with the cross on it. Say to the nurse "I think . . ." But you already know. You've known for a long time.

## Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome

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Annabelle Forrester

I can't believe she's convinced me to come out to The Tree House. The fucking Tree House! I hate Roswell. Hate all the Botox bitches with their ten-thousand-dollar handbags and overpriced Chanel perfume that smells like a damn funeral spray. But Katelyn says I need to get out more, so here I am.

This is the first time I've gone out since the breakup. Katelyn says that I "deserve better" and that I'm "too good for him." Typical things your best friend tells you when you're depressed over a man. I look down at my hands and the absence of my stunning ex-engagement ring sends me spiraling all over again.

*Why couldn't I just stay home and watch X-Files reruns? Fox Mulder would make me feel better.*

I pause in front of The Tree House, take a deep breath, and step into the club. I immediately regret it. I'm assaulted by flashing neon lights and the stomach-churning smell of top-shelf vodka. Well, it's stomach-churning if you've ever overindulged. Me in a past life.

*Why did I come here? Why didn't I just say "no" to Katelyn when she asked me to meet her? And where the hell is she? I swear, if she doesn't show, I'll fucking kill her. She knows I hate being out alone.*

I'm wearing a slinky black dress—one of my favorites, one that I get a lot of compliments in—and I hear a lazy whistle (*Was that supposed to be a*

*catcall? Sounds more like a wounded animal.*). Now I suddenly feel exposed and uncomfortable. I take a seat opposite the bar. The culprit of the sad catcall now tries speech.

“You should smile more, baby. You’d be a whole lot prettier.”

I take my phone out of my swanky black leather bag (not the ten-thousand-dollar kind) and start mindlessly scrolling through Instagram and shoot a text to Katelyn: *Where are you?*

A hand brushes my bare shoulder. I look up from my phone, expecting to see Katelyn, but instead, I find myself looking into the eyes of a stranger. He’s handsome, he’s tall, he has intense green eyes that say “I’m taking you home tonight.” He’s in a short-sleeve black button-up that shows off his physique, the defined biceps peeking out the bottom of his sleeves, and half of an elaborate Celtic cross tattoo exposed on his left arm. He has chocolate-brown hair that just brushes the nape of his neck, slightly tousled and casually swooped back out of his face.

“Can I buy you a drink? You’re too pretty to be sitting here alone and empty handed.”

The very thought of a vodka tonic with lime has my stomach doing cartwheels.

“No thanks,” I reply, “I’m the DD tonight.”

“I don’t see anyone for you to drive . . .”

“She’s on her way. She’ll be here any minute.”

“Come on. One drink won’t hurt.”

This guy doesn’t take “no” for an answer; he’s hell-bent on showing me some chivalry. I give in, just to get him off my back. “I’ll just take a water, thanks.”

He gives me a playful wink and starts off toward the bar. I look back down at my phone. No answer from Katelyn. I text her again: *Where the fuck are you?*

Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome returns with the water, ice clinking a light melody on the sides of the glass. Not the typical mini-bottle of Deer Park they hand out, but this works, too. He smiles and hands me this token of his affection. I take the cold, sweaty glass and bring it to my lips for a drink. He takes a seat next to me, reaches in his pocket for his phone, taps the screen, and starts typing. As it is in my nature to be nosy (I mean, we are in Roswell . . . I could witness some *Real Housewives* shit), I pause before taking a sip and read what he’s typing: *She took it. Gave her the good stuff,*

too. I adjust my vision and look down into the glass, inspecting the drink. It smells fine, it's the consistency of water, but the color is off. This water has a faint pink tint.

*What. The. Fuck.*

I sit up a little straighter. I locate my bag. I plan an exit strategy. I will myself to maintain my composure, keep my poker face. I pretend I get a text. "Sorry, I need to go find my friend. She just got here."

I make a beeline for the bathroom, drink in hand, heels clicking with urgency on the sticky club floor. Push open the door, get to the sink, dump the mystery liquid.

*Did that just happen? Did he try to drug me? Get out. Get out. Get out. You're in trouble now.*

Push the door open, step out. Can I conceal myself in the tangle of patrons waiting for the bartender?

*No time for strategizing. Get out now.*

I head to the front door, not checking to see if I am being followed. As soon as I'm outside, I reach into my bag, grab my keys, and slide a key in between each finger as I make a fist—the "Wolverine" technique. Learned that at a self-defense class Katelyn dragged me to after my ex hit me for the first (and last) time. I start walking. The car is only a block away.

An ice-cold hand grips my heart, preventing a normal contraction and release. I'm lightheaded and my breathing is shallow. My stomach is doing cartwheels again, and not from the thought of drinking. This is fight or flight. The scuff of a rubber sole on the sidewalk. The distant, soft vibrating of a cell phone in a pocket. I'm not alone on the street.

*He's following you.*

*Don't run. Walk. Just walk. Don't let him know that you know.*

*It's dark. Like, really dark.*

*Do we not have streetlights in this godforsaken place? Fucking Roswell!*

*Shut up. Focus.*

I feel him behind me, keeping pace with me. Do I call someone? Can I get my phone out of my bag without letting go of the keys?

*No. Just keep walking. Eyes front. Get to the car.*

I'm closing in on the parking lot. I see the pale-yellow glow of the only functioning streetlight in the lot reflecting off my car windshield. I hear the distant rumble of an engine turning over. This can't be good. He's still

following me, and he's getting closer now. I hear the footsteps behind me. Louder and louder. He's picking up the pace. The foreign engine sound is getting closer. And there's only about twenty feet between me and the car.

*Run. Now. Go, go, go!*

I make a break for it. I hear my heart pounding in my ears, my hands are shaking, I'm sweating. I hit the unlock button on my key fob, rip the door open, throw myself into the driver's seat, slam the door behind me, and smash the lock button.

*Start the car now!*

I push the start button and the engine roars to life. I hear a sharp rapping to my right. I turn to look and see white knuckles beating on my passenger window. I throw the gear into drive and step on the gas. He's yelling something at me, but he sounds like he's under water, a million miles under the surface.

*Pay attention. Be careful. There's another car.*

A black sedan squeals to a stop in front of me, no headlights on. This had to be the car I heard just a few minutes ago. They knew I would be here. They're not going to let me get away.

*Reverse, reverse, reverse. Throw it in reverse and get the hell out of here! Now!*

I change gears. Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome motions wildly to his accomplice in the black car. The passenger door of the sedan opens and another man charges out. This one is a little shorter, a little more muscular. He's wearing a white t-shirt and baggy jeans. His long black hair is stringy and greasy. Looks like he hasn't bathed in days. His black Converse slap the pavement as he closes in on me.

*Fuck it! Just run him over if you have to!*

I hit the gas and send my car lurching backward through the empty lot, finally shaking off Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome. The black sedan starts to move toward me, another attempt to block my escape. I hit the brakes, change gear again, and slam the gas pedal all the way to the floor.

*Drive. Do not stop. Get out of here.*

I whip the car around the sedan, bump over the curb, and gun it down the middle of the deserted street.

I turn onto Westside Parkway, going sixty in a forty, fishtail in the middle of the road, and cross the middle line. Driving like a blind 90-year-old woman on speed, I take Old Batesville to East Cherokee. I drive for several miles watching streetlights, road signs, and houses glide past my windows.

I obsessively check my side and rear-view mirrors. Nobody behind me, no suspicious cars.

*You're okay now. You can calm down. You're safe.*

The adrenaline is wearing off. I look around the inside of my car. The familiarity of the pineapple-scented interior, the Starbucks-napkin-filled door storage, and the empty Chick-Fil-A bag in the floorboard makes me feel secure. I feel the leather seat pushing against my butt and sticking to my legs and I feel the smooth steering wheel against my palms. I unclench my jaw, loosen my grip on the wheel, and let out a breath that I've been holding for what feels like hours.

I unearth my phone from the depths of my bag (half the contents of which are now all over the floor) and dial 911. It rings . . . and rings . . . and rings . . . *Goddammit! Answer the phone!*

"Nine-one-one, what's your emergency?"

The voice on the other end is that of a middle-aged Southern woman who smokes a pack a day. She's smacking on what I can only imagine is Big Red chewing gum. Each time she chomps, it sounds like a bungee cord snapping in half. I can almost smell the cinnamon and stale cigarette smoke radiating through the phone. She's a good listener. She offers me a "bless-your-heart-you-poor-thing-oh-gawd-I'm-so-sorry" and connects me to an officer.

A gruff voice comes through the speaker.

"Officer Sinclair."

As calmly as I can, I tell the officer about Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome and his sidekick. He wants me to make an official statement.

The next morning, I drive to the station. Parking as close to the front door as possible, I get out and fast-walk to the heavy glass doors. The lobby is deserted and I take a seat in a grimy government-issue chair. After I wait for eons, the receptionist waves me over and walks me through a set of double doors to an interview room. A man with friendly eyes and scruffy, graying five o'clock shadow is waiting for me. He gets up and extends a hand.

"Officer Sinclair. Sounds like you had quite the night."

I tell him about the water, the drugs, the pseudo-demolition derby in the parking lot, and give him a description of the guys and the car. He's attentive and jots down everything I say on a yellow legal pad. I know he can hear my voice shaking and see the tears crest in my eyes.

“You need a break?” he asks.

I shake my head.

“You’re doing great. I want to get a sketch artist in here. You did good to pay attention to what these jackasses looked like.”

As I leave the station and get back into my car, a muffled “ding!” rings out from my bag. It’s a text from Katelyn: *Are you okay?* You’ve gotta be kidding me. NOW she’s concerned? I hit the green phone icon next to her picture and after half a ring she picks up. I don’t wait for a greeting.

“Where were you? I almost got killed because you were late!”

“What happened?!”

She waits for me to finish before saying anything.

“Holy shit! So . . . I guess you’re not feeling so bad about yourself now?”

“What the fuck, Katelyn?”

“Look. You just dodged potentially getting murdered. If that’s not grounds for being a ‘strong, independent woman,’ then I don’t know what is.”

*Well, she does have a point.*

A few days of *X-Files* binging later, Katelyn sends me an article. The headline reads: “SUSPECT ARRESTED ON KIDNAPPING, RAPE, AND MURDER CHARGES.” The article continues:

“Federal agents have apprehended a suspect on multiple charges including rape and murder. Authorities say he has been active in the Southeast for at least 2-3 years. He allegedly has over 14 female victims ranging in age from 18-40. He is believed to have two accomplices who have yet to be identified. A BOLO has been issued for a black sedan in the Roswell area.”

There is a picture at the end of the write-up. The chocolate brown hair (a little more disheveled than before), the bright green eyes, and the Celtic cross are unmistakable. It’s Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome.

## To Lose Weight

Marisol Ciovacco

**A**na was seven years old when she decided she was ugly. Her hair was too frizzy to stay slicked back in the ponytail her mom always did for her, and her arms were hairier than the other girls in her class. However, the most clear-cut difference in Ana's mind was her size.

Her mother was determined Ana would learn how to dance, so she enrolled her in classes at the age of two. Even though Ana had been taking those classes since before she could remember, she always felt too different from the other girls in her class to make friends. When all the girls would stand in front of the mirror during class, one-by-one Ana would compare each classmate to herself.

*Skinny, skinny, skinny, skinny, skinny . . . me.*

It was plain as day that she was the only one with a round stomach that protruded from her pale-pink leotard, and that's what made her different. To Ana, that's what made her an outcast. That's what made her ugly.

The day Ana realized her body was the problem was the day food became her enemy. When she went home after dance class that night, her mom served a big plate of *arroz con pollo* with a side of lentils—a staple in their house. It was also Ana's favorite dish, and she couldn't help devouring the plate and asking for seconds. That was the first night she cried after eating dinner.



Ana was thirteen years old when her classmates started calling her fat.

A group of popular boys were pointing out different girls at the lunch table, but Ana wasn't paying them any attention until they said her name.

"What about *Ana*?" one of them asked, giggling uncontrollably.

The other boys hardly tried to stifle their laughter, and Ana saw a few of them from the corner of her eye making visible expressions of disgust.

"No way!" they laughed, adding in a quieter voice, "She's so *fat*."

Ana put down her half-eaten sandwich. Desperate to pretend she didn't know they were making fun of her, she bit back her tears and pretended to be interested in the nutrition label on the back of her milk carton.

*Serving Size: 1 container*

*Calories: 130*

Ana was fifteen years old when she began to change.

She tried dieting, but the weight seemed to be holding on desperately to her body, no matter how many cookies she swapped for salads, and no matter how many times she chose water over soda. Every day, Ana felt the glances of disgust from her classmates in gym class. Every night, she would wrap her hands around her thighs, measuring how much fat she would have to lose so that her fingers could meet. Tired of being an outcast, she became desperate.

The change started when she stopped bringing her lunch to school. "I left it at home," she said when her best friend asked why she wasn't eating lunch. If Ana was offered food, she said "I had a big breakfast." When her mom offered her dinner, she explained "I had a big lunch."

After a week of heavily restricting her calories and skipping meals, Ana messed up.

It was as if she was possessed by an incredible hunger that couldn't be satiated. Every type of food she had been avoiding was suddenly inescapable, and no number of calories would make her feel full enough to stop.

The end of a binge left her with an overwhelming wave of regret and self-hatred. She knew her reflection wouldn't get any better if she kept making mistakes like that, so she became desperate to fix the problem before the surplus of food could take an even bigger toll on her body than it already had. She tried to be quiet about it, but her brother heard her as he passed by the bathroom and offered to bring her medicine. She asked for water instead.

Ana made fewer mistakes over time, finding new ways to improve herself. *Drink more water. Go to sleep earlier. Chew gum. Pinch your wrist when you think of food.* Pinching was the most effective.

Her clothes eventually became looser, but her reflection looked the same. How could she do so much work and look the same as before? She tugged her shirt to frame her body better and pulled her sleeves lower to cover the rest of her arms.

*There are so many beautiful girls in the world,* she thought to herself, and she was determined to become one of them.

Even if it killed her.

Ana was eighteen years old when she passed out in public for the first time.

She had finally lost enough weight to justify buying a new wardrobe before leaving for college. It was supposed to be a fun day out at the mall with her mom, but she'd been dreading their shopping spree all week.

Terrified of the inevitable dressing rooms she would have to face with tight jeans and form-fitting shirts, Ana prepared herself by starting her longest fast yet. She was desperate to fit into a size two, and a little hunger wasn't about to keep her from that goal.

She was no stranger to the hunger pains, the cramps, and the light-headedness that always followed when she began a fast, but as she walked through the mall, every sensation became amplified. The fluorescent lights were blinding, the music playing on the speakers was deafening, and waves of chills mixed with flashes of heat ran up and down her body, overcoming her senses. Suddenly, she was too exhausted to feel anything anymore.

Keeping her lifestyle a secret was impossible after the episode in the mall. The following weeks brought on numerous doctor appointments, where they ran test after test to see what caused her fainting spell. At first, Ana tried feigning ignorance about the cause, saying her life was normal up until that point. It wasn't until her lab results showed she was severely malnourished that Ana was forced to come clean.

She confessed three times in total. Once to her doctor, once to her family, and once to her new therapist. It wasn't easy to explain what she'd been doing for the last few years. In fact, it was harder to tell the truth than it was to stay silent and keep doing the same things. She purposely kept it

a secret before out of fear that she would be forced to give up control to someone else, someone who didn't understand her body well enough and would just make her gain weight again.

*There's still so much weight to lose*, she would tell herself. The weight from the bullying, the weight from the loneliness, and the weight that had made her an outcast as a seven-year-old standing alone in dance class was still clinging to her no matter how many meals she skipped.

But once the truth started to come out, the weight finally began to dwindle. With each confession, pounds lifted off of Ana's shoulders. For the first time in her life, she finally felt lighter. Ana still felt the pull to return to her old ways before the day she passed out. Part of her still wanted to go back to when no one knew she was struggling and everyone was congratulating Ana on her new "healthy" lifestyle. But the weight wasn't strong enough to hold her back anymore.

Ana was eighteen years old when she finally started losing weight.

Fasts were replaced with home-cooked meals shared with her family, and painful memories once kept hidden were now being shared in safe spaces with someone who listened and helped talk her through them. Ana knew she still had a long journey ahead of her to find true health, and getting help was just the first step. But with the weight of her past being shared by the loved ones around her, Ana's burden didn't feel so heavy anymore.

SIGMA  
TAU  
DELTA

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REVIEW

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## Saying “Nothing”: Cordelia and the Asserted Absence of Voice in *King Lear*

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Kira Schukar

At first glance, Edgar’s speech at the conclusion of *King Lear* sounds simple: “The weight of this sad time we must obey. / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (5.3.330-31). If the play’s characters had aired their grievances, they might have prevented countless deaths. Looking closely at the syntax of Edgar’s command, however, we realize he replaces one flawed convention with another: “what we feel” is now what “we ought to say”; old or new, we must still obey. If nothing else, this tidy moralization illustrates just how strongly *Lear* focuses on speech and, more specifically, the difficulty of representing oneself with speech. For instance, Cordelia faces the gendered notion that feminine voices should be “soft, gentle, and low” and that she must accept men’s gaze (5.3.278-79). This male gaze—which, I suggest, can be used interchangeably with the “analytical gaze”—assumes the power to scrutinize the subject’s body and voice, while limiting her ability to convey her own intentions. Thus, in order to control the analysis of her body, Cordelia must control her voice.

Using an audio-feminist lens, we can explore the link between Cordelia’s vocal expression and her bodily autonomy. Michel Foucault’s theory of power’s micro-physics and Anne Carson’s work together illuminate how vocalization may enhance or detract from Cordelia’s gendered resistance. In the play’s opening scene, for instance, Cordelia asserts her voice’s absence both to resist Lear’s course of law and to maintain her femininity. By doing

so, she occupies a unique space: saying “nothing,” Cordelia vocalizes neither what she feels nor what she ought to say, yet the play still captures her resistance. This moment also carries legal significance Shakespeare’s early modern audience would recognize: in seventeenth-century England, any prisoner who refused to plead in court could be subject to *peine forte et dure*, torturous pressing that often resulted in the subject’s death. Although *Lear*’s characters do not literally inflict this punishment, the Gentleman’s description of Cordelia in the Quarto edition achieves the same metaphoric end by reducing her to a *speechless body*. Reading Cordelia alongside the life of a well-known sixteenth-century saint, I offer an alternate reading of Cordelia’s death, arguing that her voice leaves the confines of her body. Rather than disappearing from the stage completely, she retains a phantom presence in the final scene. Her voice, moreover, becomes disembodied, carried to the end of the play by Lear, allowing her to express suffering beyond her body’s gendered limitations.

Foucault’s theorization of biopower provides a useful frame for understanding the nuance of Cordelia’s silence, offering insight on the relationship between her voice and the male gaze. Foucault interrogates state mechanisms wielded against the body on a minute scale, which he calls the “micro-physics of power”: “Power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it;’ it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them” (26–27). This approach gestures toward a network of power struggles between bodies within a discursive system: bodies throwing blows and taking hits on a micro-physical scale. These battles “define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least *temporary inversion of the power relations*” (Foucault 27, emphasis added). In other words, a body may in one instance dominate and in the next submit, with the same mechanism wielded in both cases.

Cordelia’s mechanism is silence, which she wields as a gendered performance to either dissuade or intensify her autonomy in response to the analytical gaze. In her analysis of gendered sound, Carson explores the link between a woman’s body and her voice, implying one must control her voice in order to control her body. Ancient philosophers, for instance, thought that “a man can know from the sound of a woman’s voice private data like

whether or not she is menstruating, whether or not she has had sexual experience" (129). Candid speech, then, proves troublesome, as it purportedly reveals what a woman wishes to keep private. Carson extends this logic to women's sexuality, noting the apparent link between the "upper mouth" and the "lower mouth" (the sexual orifice): it was thought, she writes, that "defloration causes a woman's neck to enlarge and her voice to deepen" (131). To gain social power, then, a woman must silence and feminize her voice, while also clearly stating her intentions. In *Lear*, Cordelia may control perceptions of her public virtue by balancing assertiveness with silence.

In the play's opening scene, the young princess enacts Foucault's "temporary inversion of . . . power relations." Far from inviting analysis, the assertive silence makes her resistance clear, preserving her autonomy. During her father's interrogation, Cordelia delivers the play's first aside in the form of a rhetorical question: "What shall Cordelia speak?" she asks, as if imploring the audience to think on her behalf (1.1.62). If Cordelia's aside ended here—with a question—she would invite the audience's gaze. *What will she think to say? onlookers would wonder. That tensing in the actor's jaw, the adjustment of her lip, what does it imply?* we would ask, having been given—then denied—any verbal cue. But the young princess casts off the analytical gaze, redefining it as a sympathetic gaze: as she resolves to "love, and be silent," she leaves us with little space to reinvent her meaning (1.1.62). In fact, this speech appears an *asserted absence* of her voice. When she says "nothing" in response to Lear's command to "speak," she redoubles her resolve to "be silent" (1.1.87). Had Cordelia said nothing, Lear might interpret her silence as nervousness. Saying "nothing," however, makes plain her intention to disobey. By distancing herself from both the "oily art" and the "still-soliciting eye" of overzealous speech, Cordelia disobeys the state's power, while retaining the audience's sympathy (1.1.229–36).

To modern U.S. ears, Cordelia's "nothing" response to Lear's command recalls "pleading the fifth," an act of free speech enacted through self-imposed silence. In seventeenth-century England, however, "a prisoner who refuses bodily, emotionally, and cognitively to submit to the court's authority . . . takes on an outsized importance and cannot be ignored" (Temple 131). According to English law, a defendant who refused to plead and "thus exposes the social contract in all its fragility" was subjected to the *peine forte et dure*: they are stripped; a board is placed over their naked body; and weights are slowly added until the defendant is either crushed to death



or gives their plea (Temple 131). Taken further, the state insists the prisoner brings silence upon themselves, having first, as William Blackstone phrases it, “cut out his own tongue” (qtd. in Temple 125). The symbolic relationship between crime and punishment was central to *peine forte et dure* laws: “the prisoner has initiated the process by refusing to speak . . . and then is reduced through pain to a speechless body, at best able to speak only authorized, pre-scripted words” (Temple 136). The state recognizes a prisoner’s silence as resistance to its sovereign right to assert biopower, then replicates that silence as punishment. In *Lear*, Cordelia’s refusal to answer her father signals rebellion against Lear and the realm. According to the law, then, her silence takes on “an outsized importance” by exposing the use of a woman’s silence to resist corporeal subjugation.

The *peine forte et dure* appears metaphorically—in the Gentleman’s onstage description of an offstage Cordelia—through two mechanisms: in one, the Gentleman recaptures Cordelia’s rebellious silence as an image of *peine forte et dure*; in the other, he reduces her to a speechless body with intensifying scrutiny of her features. “Faith,” he says to Kent, “Once or twice she heaved the name of father pantingly forth, *as if it press’d her heart*” (4.3.26–27, emphasis added). The image of Cordelia heaving a name recalls her struggle to “heave my heart into my mouth” during the play’s opening scene (1.1.91–92). Both phrases suggest a hesitation—silence before an utterance—yet Cordelia’s heaved heart signals her “inmost being,” “soul,” or “spirit” (OED). The “name of father,” on the other hand, points to Lear: the force of law. The image *presses* Cordelia’s heart, just as stones placed on the prisoner’s body press into their chest. Recycling Cordelia’s language from the opening scene, the Gentleman mimics the reconfiguration of the prisoner’s silence in English law.

The Gentleman further reduces Cordelia to a speechless body with his analytical gaze. His description hinges on the disjunction between Cordelia’s features, suggesting she does not entirely comprehend her emotions: in his words, the Gentleman watches “those happy smilets that play’d on her ripe lip,” which “seem’d not to know what guests were in her eyes” (4.3.19–21). The structure of this scene is notable: Kent asks the Gentleman a series of questions, prompting him to magnify his description, and to search for “any demonstration of grief,” until Cordelia no longer seems human, but rather a collage of “smiles and tears” (4.3.9–18). Focus on her voice appears only when Kent asks, “made she no verbal question?” (4.3.25). Emphasizing

Cordelia's silence, Kent's query invites scrutiny of her voice as part of her body, recalling Carson's claim that a woman's voice is linked inextricably to her body. Simply put, the speechless Cordelia can express neither visual nor vocal emotions; rather the onlooker lays evidence of those emotions across her visage and her vocal cords. This moment, then, signals a reversal from Cordelia's use of her own voice in the play's opening scene and her loss of bodily autonomy.

Up to this point, I have focused on the connection between Cordelia's voice and her body. Indeed, when imagined as a physical expression of the body, the voice exposes itself to the same analysis, subjugation, and gaze as the face, torso, and legs. By viewing Cordelia in a spiritual context, however, it is possible to imagine a voice that leaves the body, ascending from the body's (gendered) limitations on expression. To better understand the function of the spirit, it is helpful to compare Cordelia to Saint Margaret Clitherow, a well-known sixteenth-century martyr. Clitherow was publicly executed shortly before Shakespeare staged *Lea*r, so the play's well-educated audiences likely would have been familiar with her story. Accused of harboring Catholic priests near her home in York, Clitherow refused to plead in court and was sentenced to die by *peine forte et dure* on March 25, 1586. Our collective memory of Clitherow comes from her only biographer, John Mush, who wrote an account of her life and death in 1619. Although meticulous, the account necessarily revises Clitherow's voice.

Megan Matchinske reimagines Mush's account, lifting Clitherow's absent voice from the pages, "creating historical fact at one in the same moment that we are contesting it" (56). Matchinske focuses specifically on Clitherow's actions, as her "performed negotiations among the various forbidden rituals and sacraments of a now-taboo Catholicism may prove no less flexible, no less empowering" than "rhetorical" resistance (74). Extending this analysis, I contend the saint distances her spiritual self from her feminine body to convey more strongly her devotion to God. This separation takes root before Clitherow's execution, when the court discovers she may be pregnant. Despite her friends' insistence she was with child, Clitherow "would never affirm it of any certainty . . . for that she could not tell certainly *whether she was or no*" (Mush 419, emphasis added). Interpreting this moment as gendered resistance, Matchinske suggests "Clitherow gives up her prerogative as a female subject" in order

to articulate her faith (76). Indeed, if she confirmed her pregnancy, the law would halt her execution and thus her spiritual ascension. Refusing to say “whether she was [pregnant] or no,” Clitherow dismisses what the court views as her most valuable attribute: her ability to carry a child. She detaches herself from the physical laws of the body by insisting she exists between two mutually exclusive states. This detachment, likewise, assures her martyrdom. The presence of Clitherow’s “lower mouth,” then, does not limit the expression of her “upper mouth,” nor does it obstruct the articulation of her values.

With Clitherow in mind, I offer an alternate reading of Cordelia’s spiritual presence and death. Although Cordelia dies offstage, Lear repositions the horror of his youngest daughter’s death onto the stage, allowing her to dwell between two mutually exclusive states: alive and dead. Like Clitherow, the detachment of voice from body allows Cordelia to express her pain more clearly from beyond the veil. Cordelia leaves the stage for the last time at the beginning of the final scene, yet she retains a phantom presence for the rest of the play. As soon as she disappears from sight, Edmund hands a note to the Captain, telling him to follow Lear and Cordelia to prison: “dost as this [note] instructs thee” (5.3.28–29). The mystery surrounding this note produces anxiety about the missing Queen. One by one, the play’s major characters pick each other off, but their deaths only point attention to the Queen’s physical absence, giving her—paradoxically—a greater presence.

By reenacting Cordelia’s offstage death onstage, Lear distances his daughter’s voice from her body’s gendered limitations. When he returns to the stage carrying Cordelia’s body, he voices her phantom presence, speaking to Cordelia as if she is alive while also acknowledging she is dead: “why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all?” (5.3.313–14). In nearly the same instant, he conflates his body with his daughter’s, delivering a line that implies he has lost his own breath: “pray you undo this button” (5.3.316). These two lines draw attention away from Cordelia’s body, while foregrounding her breathlessness: as Lear accepts his daughter has run out of breath, he too feels as if he is suffocating. With his final lines (in the play’s Folio version), Lear pleads for the other men to “Look on her! Look, her lips”—to watch Cordelia’s voice leave her body (5.3.317). Rather than seeing Cordelia die, however, we watch Lear

collapse with grief. Unlike the Gentleman's description—which directs the gaze to Cordelia—Lear pulls our gaze from her. All eyes lock on the father, yet we listen for the daughter's dying words and imagine her dying breath. In this sense, Cordelia's voice transcends her body's gendered limitations. Lear's reenactment of her death makes Cordelia's body unnecessary—thus eliminating the need for our analytical gaze—while simultaneously asserting her voice's absence.

Read through an audio-feminist lens, *King Lear* is still a tragedy: Cordelia's asserted absence of voice—though effective in the opening scene—quickly diminishes as more powerful male characters reinvent her silence as passivity. The comparison of Cordelia to Saint Margaret Clithero, though, offers some hope her voice may be free after death. The play grants Cordelia a disembodied voice with which to express her suffering without any inviting gaze. It is possible to imagine her saintly presence beyond Lear, as well. Mush aims to "imitate thy [Clithero's] happy life" (440). Edgar similarly offers a subtle prayer to Cordelia: "The weight of this sad time we must obey, speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3.330-31). Even in this moment, though, we find misinterpretation, for, if nothing else, Cordelia proves saying what we feel is far more difficult than Edgar suggests. While the feminine voice may be briefly wielded against powers that aim to subjugate it, speech (or its absence) is still sifted through the same forces operating on the rest of the body. If anything, the body's presence amplifies the suppression of voice. To obey Edgar's command, then—to say only what we feel—is to submit one's voice to another's misconception, to present one's body for another's gaze.

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“My legs go softly and the heart is stretching to break”: The Slave’s Quest for Desire in Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy*

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Anh Le

Breathless, an enslaved Black American girl visualizes flames illuminating a dim forge with their reddish-orange glow. In her mind’s eye, a brown-skinned blacksmith hovers over his anvil with a hammer, grunting and perspiring as he molds and anneals the iron into two fearsome cobras. This is the man she adores. Feeling the edges of rocks beneath her master’s old boots, the young woman struggles to make it safely across the snow-coated path. She clutches a letter written by her mistress—a slave pass—which she has fastened to her stocking. Overhead, the glistening moon has begun to eclipse the afternoon sun’s rays. The girl’s heart flutters with anticipation as she imagines reuniting with her beloved after many months.

In this section of Toni Morrison’s historical novel *A Mercy*, the adolescent protagonist Florens fantasizes about her unnamed lover as she journeys through the wilderness, having been sent to his hamlet on an urgent errand. Set in the late-seventeenth century, *A Mercy* depicts Florens’s experience of enslavement in the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam, following her separation from her mother and brother. Sensuous description, emotional language, and concrete diction typify Florens’s narrative voice. The construction of Florens as strikingly human underscores the humanity of enslaved Africans. For her, loving the blacksmith provides an escape from the trauma of family separation and a shield from unimaginable cruelty. By the end of *A Mercy*, however, Florens begins to see a way

out of her suffering. By rendering the protagonist as a young woman who gradually gains her footing in an oppressive society rooted in the transatlantic slave trade, the novel illustrates Florens's personal growth and her ability to persevere or "last" (189). Initially a vulnerable girl at the mercy of the blacksmith's affection, she develops into a more clear-sighted version of herself. Though Florens's identity initially mirrors the fluidity and insecurity of the New World in the 1600s, her self-understanding expands after she survives the arduous quest to the blacksmith's home.

Florens endures a bodily violation long before arriving at her unnamed lover's hamlet in Hartkill. This traumatic experience at the hands of a white stranger signals her vulnerable position as a Black girl. When Florens boards a wagon belonging to the Ney brothers, the driver immediately sexually assaults her: "The driver helps me, stays his hand hard and long on my back parts. I feel shame" (45). By recounting Florens's journey in the present tense, the novel formally mirrors its protagonist's feeling of alarm. The choppy rhythm, use of monosyllabic words, and unambiguous, concrete diction of this passage plainly establish the driver's intent, as well as a contrast between life on Jacob's farm and the outside world. As the Vaarks' helper and Messalina's surrogate daughter, Florens was safe. The narrator then shifts her attention to the other passengers on the wagon and to the tranquil snowfall (45–46). Though her passive reaction does not counteract the man's sexually violent act, the many details comprising Florens's description of the scene seem to bury the grave issue.

The distanced, unemotional narration that imbues this section shifts when Florens is treated inhumanely in the Widow Ealing's home. She observes her surroundings astutely as she endures this violation, but also returns her thoughts to her beloved blacksmith. A hostile group of Christians scrutinize Florens's body in the storeroom, as she is once again objectified. Unlike the man steering the wagon—who gropes her—the Widow and Jane's neighbors mistrustfully gaze upon Florens' body: "They frown at the candle burn on my palm, the one you kissed to cool. They look under my arms, between my legs" (133). Much like European conquistadors' destruction of Indigenous peoples' land, their eyes invade her physical body and privacy. Florens neither dissociates nor freezes, yet the events remain a scarring tribulation.

As this violation takes place, the blacksmith's voice—not a *minha mãe's*—conspicuously enters Florens's mind. Her recollection of him

suggests the blacksmith's presence is like a guiding light, and that he perhaps serves as a father figure. Florens observes, "[t]he women look[ing] away from my eyes *the way you say I am to do with the bears* so they will not come close to love and play" (133, emphasis added). She remembers the blacksmith's warning to avoid carnivorous beasts each time she enters the woods. More significantly, though, the novel invites comparisons between him and Lina, who acts as caregiver to Florens when she first arrives on the Vaarks' land at age eight. Lina is knowledgeable about "how to shelter in wilderness," making efforts to teach Florens methods for self-preservation (49). Surrounded by the zealots in the Ealings' storeroom, Florens not only finds solace in her thoughts of the handsome, freed African, but the vigilance he has taught her also illuminates the Puritan strangers' intent. As a possible representation of "the Black Man's minion," Florens's existence as a fellow human being is too difficult for them to believe (133). The protagonist's reliance on the blacksmith—an absent listener she views as her savior and the center of her world—defines her ability to survive this frightening encounter.

Shortly after this scene, Florens flees the village with Jane Ealing's assistance, continuing her journey through the treacherous woods. This episode in *A Mercy* suggests the blacksmith is integral to Florens's sense of self. Moreover, her victimization by privileged white settlers leads her to rely on and to trust the blacksmith. The novel vividly illustrates Florens's trauma by describing the countless, gawking eyes she notices everywhere: "Eyes that do not recognize me, eyes that examine me for a tail . . . Wondering eyes that stare." (135). As Markus Nehl argues, "[w]hile Florens manages to escape from the Puritans with Jane's help, she will never forget the racialized gaze of her white interrogators" (65). Florens's sense of helplessness—conveyed by the scene's sinister mood and the Puritans taking away her slave pass—inflames her desire for the blacksmith's company. His body and his embrace are her sanctuary. Thinking about their passionate bond quells Florens's fear: "Is the clawing feathery thing the only life in me? You will tell me . . . And when I see you and fall into you I know I am live. Sudden it is not like before when I am always in fright" (136). Perceiving the blacksmith as her reason to live amidst a menacing hierarchical society, Florens unintentionally makes him her master, a role that does not interest him. Her longings lead her to lose herself in the current of temptation—she is cast adrift.



Upon meeting Malaik, the orphaned child the smithy has volunteered to care for, Florens's stark disappointment accompanies a disturbing dream the very next night. Her dream implies she lacks any identity, for she sees herself near a placid lake, yet cannot see her reflection: "Right away I take fright when I see my face is not there. Where my face should be is nothing . . . I put my mouth close enough to drink or kiss but I am not even a shadow there" (162). Jean Wyatt claims Florens's sense of abandonment by the blacksmith reveals "her confusion of Malaik with the brother who displaced her" (136). Wyatt further contends the blacksmith's fondness for Florens signifies a "maternal matrix" that acts as a container (136). Florens cannot conceive of herself as a person who is whole, who can exist separately from her relationship with the freed African (Wyatt 136). Nevertheless, Florens is also coming to terms with the realities of social marginalization. These complex feelings lead her to attack the blacksmith. The novel's central character—with her racial identity and status as a slave—is invisible compared to Jacob, a landowning English settler whose human rights are never in question. She is also oppressed in ways the blacksmith is not: the blacksmith can be paid for his toil; he can travel, have a wife, and own property. Like Lina and Sorrow—who the kindhearted Vaarks took in as unwanted foundlings—Florens is bound by her gender, race, age, and lack of privilege. She exists only to serve and obey her owner. Earlier in the novel, she admits it is futile to pursue any loophole in the laws surrounding enslaved people, yet this realization does not fully crystallize until she embarks on her journey.

Her interactions with Malaik when they are alone seem to ignite Florens's helplessness. She remembers a *minha mãe*—who understood that Florens's sex makes her a target for systemic violence—and makes the painful choice to give her up: "There is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below" (191). Florens and her younger brother are the offspring of rape. The refuge Jacob provides Florens, Lina, and Sorrow lasts only until his death. The novel's illustration of Rebekka's grief-filled descent into Christianity and unexpected, violent treatment of Lina and Sorrow further suggests Florens is unprotected (186). Moreover, in her lake fantasy, Florens is joined by Jane, who reassures her she will soon find her face and thereby recover her sense of self (162). She then vanishes, forcing Florens to handle the predicament on her own. Jane's sudden disappearance parallels the

role of a compassionate reader, who might wish for a happy ending, yet ultimately cannot help Florens navigate the devastatingly cruel society of the New World.

At the same time, Florens has changed by the time she returns to Milton, a transformation made evident by her decision to compose her story. Her trajectory is the opposite of Mistress Rebekka's farm, which is falling rapidly into disorder after Jacob's death (155). By writing her account on the walls of Jacob's empty mansion, Florens slowly learns to adapt to a life without the blacksmith's care. This moment creates symmetry with the novel's opening: both represent instances of writing. Learning to read and write is part of Florens's childhood experiences on Senhor D'Ortega's plantation, Jublio, where notably she absorbs Reverend Father's lessons much more rapidly than her mother (6). Young Florens is eager to learn and possesses astonishing intelligence: "When the letters are memory we make whole words. I am faster than my mother and her baby boy is no good at all. Very quickly I can write from memory the Nicene Creed including all of the commas" (6). During her time in New Amsterdam, however, she mostly speaks—communicating verbally—with others (7). The urge to write her story, then, signals the revival of skills the Catholic priest from her past felt were necessary.

There remains uncertainty whether the illiterate blacksmith will accept Florens's apology for attacking him with a hammer, yet Florens's act of writing enables her to detach herself. Her personality contains contradictions, as the novel's conclusion emphasizes: "You are correct. A minha mãe too. I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving . . . Slave. Free. I last" (189). Penning her story initiates a journey toward the balance of reason and emotion. Previously, her impulses, her instincts, her response to incomprehensible trauma drove her behavior. The act of expressing herself in writing reveals her emotional and intellectual growth. In addition, she goes beyond transcribing Catholic doctrine from memory—a skill she was beginning to master eight years earlier—as she releases her feelings onto paper. Florens acts in a coherent, thoughtful manner, and, crucially, expresses her gratitude for Jane Ealing's help (188). People like Jane—who was thrashed by her mother and accused of being possessed by demons—are a silver lining in a sullen sky.

*A Mercy* offers a world riddled with exploitation, disease, misogyny, and the looming threat of physical and sexual violence. The unmoored

central character, Florens, passionately pursues the unnamed blacksmith throughout the novel. Her heartache illuminates her need for a father figure's guidance. As a group of Puritans invasively search her body for Satan's marks, thoughts of the blacksmith enable her to push through the trauma. From Florens's perspective, their close relationship shields her from the dangerous landscape of New Amsterdam. When she meets Malaik, she becomes jealous, clashing violently with the blacksmith. Then, several months later, she reflects on her actions. She writes her story to make sense of these events—and, perhaps, to forgive herself. In her narrative, she acknowledges she still desires the blacksmith, a person who gave her happiness, yet she is ready to forge a life without him. Florens's maturation challenges Lina and Sorrow's repeated prediction that her love for the blacksmith is a deadly "sickness" from which she will never recover (150). Though Florens endures great adversity, she is more than capable of healing those wounds. Her burgeoning awareness of the world outside the Vaarks' farm—accompanied by her loss of innocence—promotes introspection and fosters her growth.

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## Respectability Politics in Nella Larsen's *Passing*

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Annie Elizabeth Kreiser

Scholarship on Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* tends to focus on race, sexuality, and the associated power struggles. Frank Hering, for instance, focuses extensively on Irene's struggle for power in the context of idealized domesticity—what Irene calls “security.” According to Hering, “[t]he domestic ideal of the post-Reconstruction era novelists gave many African Americans hope when their civil rights were constitutionally sanctioned but socially prohibited” (36). Hering claims Irene is desperate to maintain her bourgeois domesticity, which he defines as a range of qualities linked to upper-middle class family life, which, in the 1920s, was associated with whites and desired by Blacks who hoped to improve their status by imitation: a tasteful home; a stable, economically advantageous marriage; children in school; domestic servants; and a socialite lifestyle. Hering contends Irene's desire to maintain bourgeois domesticity is influenced by the expectations of middle-class Black society in the post-Reconstruction era. Irene has achieved bourgeois domesticity and spends the novel maintaining it by any means necessary. Hering ultimately argues that the deadly consequences of this obsession signal Larsen's critique of this classist value.

Johanna M. Wagner and Deborah E. McDowell also each explore race in relation to class and sexuality. Wagner addresses the novel's gothic elements, arguing Irene's “resolve to maintain security . . . drives the action of the novel and . . . illuminate[s] what it ‘was’ in Clare that incites such

anxiety” (143). Clare is a destabilizing force threatening Irene by causing her carefully repressed Blackness and queerness to surface. According to Wagner, Irene kills Clare because Irene’s security depends upon denying queer sexuality and racial consciousness, which requires her identification with other Black women to be repressed.

McDowell, on the other hand, uses a historical-biographical methodology, arguing that *Passing* was a vehicle for Larsen to explore Black women’s sexuality and its consequences. This sexuality and its authentic depiction were constrained simultaneously by the era’s social regulations and by Larsen’s desire to represent Black women in a traditional middle-class manner: “Larsen wanted to tell the story of a black woman with sexual desires but was constrained by a competing desire to establish black women as respectable in black middle-class terms” (McDowell 80). According to McDowell, Larsen did not oppose the bourgeois ideal unequivocally, as Hering suggests, but was conflicted. She reads *Passing* as an attempted compromise between authenticity—an accurate and, therefore, potentially undesirable portrayal—and respectability, a sterile portrayal of idealized behavior palatable to a wider, whiter audience.

All three critics touch on what is now called “respectability politics.” Though none of them explicitly label Irene’s behavior as respectability politics, categorizing it in this way offers a lens for understanding Irene’s actions and her motivation. Here, I define respectability politics as a phenomenon in which members of an oppressed group adopt the values and behaviors of the oppressor to make themselves more palatable to the dominant group and, in turn, to gain rights. This approach differs from assimilation—conformity to the dominant culture—because respectability politics rely on a conscious decision to change one’s behavior for these express purposes.

This essay builds from previous scholarship while foregrounding respectability politics, thus offering a frame for understanding the dynamics between race, class, and sexuality in *Passing*, by illuminating Irene’s motives and the stakes involved. I argue, therefore, that, through its representation of Irene, *Passing* explores the pitfalls and ultimate tragedy of respectability politics amongst Black and queer people. Respectability politics appear in three key elements: Irene’s insistence on controlling those around her—especially Brian and Clare—to maintain her bourgeois socioeconomic status; Irene’s repression of her queerness to maintain the illusion of respectability; and Irene’s belief that Blackness itself is offensive enough

to white people—being perceived as queer would only do more harm to her reputation, so she represses her desire for Clare to appear a heteronormative, moral Black woman. Ultimately, Clare becomes too great a risk for Irene, because she jeopardizes Irene's respectability politics. Irene then pushes Clare from the window to maintain her own security. Together, these actions contribute to Irene's goals: making herself as palatable as possible to white people, thereby securing some degree of privilege amongst them.

Irene's strategic marriage to a doctor, and her carefully chosen living situation in Harlem, result in a respectable place in Black society, as evidenced by her packed social schedule filled with dances and teas with Harlem's elite. Her marriage to Brian is calculated: the two are not sexually intimate; they sleep in separate bedrooms. The absence of affection is notable, but so is the painstaking manipulation by Irene: "all other plans, all other ways, she regarded as menaces, more or less indirect, to that security of place and substance for which she insisted upon for her sons and in a lesser degree for herself" (61). The precariousness accompanying the period's assumption that, as a Black person in a white-supremacist social order, she is inferior, necessitates security, which manifests here as idealized domesticity. There is no room for ease or for compromise when navigating the dichotomous stereotype: the immoral Black woman and the distinguished Black homemaker-socialite. For Black women who wish to escape brutish, hyper-sexualized stereotypes—such as the animalistic prostitute—bourgeois married life is the path: a nice house, society friends, and a financially successful husband offer protection from negative stereotypes.

A conversation between Irene and Clare illuminates this dichotomy. Upon Clare's suggestion she might attend a charity event without a box seat, Irene responds, "[y]ou couldn't possibly go there alone . . . All sorts of people go . . . even ladies of easy virtue looking for a trade . . . you might be mistaken for one of them, and that wouldn't be too pleasant" (70-71). In Irene's world, either you can afford a box seat with a husband—the patriarchal ticket to idealized domesticity—or you run the unacceptable risk of being mistaken for a prostitute. Clare's recklessness threatens Irene's carefully maintained bourgeois lifestyle and, therefore, her respectability politics. In response to Irene's warning, Clare flippantly responds, "[t]hanks. I never have been. It might be amusing . . . if you're not going to be nice and take me, I'll still be among those present" (71). Unlike the tight-laced

Irene, Clare expresses a certain disregard for social rules, including Irene's respectability politics.

Beyond manners, Clare also threatens to evoke something even more destabilizing to Irene's respectability politics: her queerness. Scholars have noted the homoerotic subtext between the two women, particularly in the moment Irene reflects on Clare: "the woman before her was yet capable of heights and depths of feeling that she, Irene Redfield, had never known. Indeed, never cared to know. The thought, the suspicion, was gone as quickly as it had come" (66). Irene recognizes her feelings for Clare derive from Clare's ability to have "heights and depths of feeling" markedly different from the normative feelings Irene allows herself. Clare's emotions are ones Irene "had never known," because she estranges herself from them. She, "never cared to know" these feelings and, as a result, she blocks the desire to explore her sexuality. The passage's final phrase—"gone as quickly as it had come"—shows how swiftly Irene dismisses anything that might cause doubts about her sexuality to surface. Irene is attracted to Clare because she has such great emotional capacity, yet Irene represses this attraction to prevent herself from identifying with it. She frequently pays lavish compliments to Clare—"Her lips, painted a brilliant geranium-red were sweet and sensitive and a little obstinate. A tempting mouth . . . the ivory skin had a peculiar soft lustre. And the eyes were magnificent! dark, sometimes absolutely black, always luminous, and set in long, black lashes. Arresting eyes, slow and mesmeric"—which lie on the outskirts of what could be considered platonic (28-29). These compliments, coupled with the identification of Clare's emotional capacity, indicate this broadened emotional range also includes love for another woman. Irene must repress her sexuality because it threatens her respectability politics.

The intersection of Irene's identity as a Black woman and her queerness directly impacts the level of discrimination she might experience. Obviously, women of all races faced discrimination in the 1920s U.S., while Black people faced racial discrimination at the same time. These two facets of Irene's identity combine to intensify the period's sexist racism. And, though queerness was part of the Harlem Renaissance, revealing her desire for Clare would still make Irene vulnerable to homophobia alongside the sexist racism she already experiences. Furthermore, if her queerness were to end her marriage, her economic status would fall, making her vulnerable to class-based discrimination. As it stood, white people already held negative

attitudes toward Black women. To be a queer Black woman created a profound obstacle for those who, like Irene, engaged in respectability politics. The mere possibility of being a queer Black woman creates tragic internal tension for Irene that ultimately became self-destructive for her and fatal for Clare. The realization of this sexuality would threaten her marriage and social status, the pillars of idealized domesticity she hopes to preserve at all costs. Clare, then, represents the ultimate threat to Irene's security.

Irene's struggle to maintain idealized domesticity comes to a tragic end when Clare's husband, Bellew, discovers his wife is Black. If Bellew divorces Clare, she will be free to do as she pleases. Irene believes these events will destroy her security by endangering the marriage upon which her security depends. Consistent with the two options traditionally offered to Black women—purity in marriage or death in disgrace—Irene murders Clare since she cannot stay married to Bellew. Clare faces the consequences of attempting to dwell outside the sphere of respectability politics. Though Irene's role in Clare's death is ambiguous, Larsen twice foreshadows the death (as murder). First, suggesting her actions are premeditated, Irene thinks, "If Clare were free—But of all things that could happen that was the one she did not want . . . If Clare should die! . . . To think, yes, to wish that! . . . the thought stayed with her" (101). Second, Irene throws a cigarette from the window out of which she will later push Clare. The cigarette signifies Clare, whose red lips Irene notices frequently. The image of lips on a cigarette is suggestively sensual. Clare becomes the only spark in Irene's life. Exciting, alluring, and dangerous, Clare represents to Irene the very parts of herself she must repress to maintain her security. By pushing Clare out the window, Irene removes the spark—the danger—from her life. Irene sacrifices Clare, but also the parts of herself Clare excited, conforming safely to her chosen respectability politics.

In *Passing*, Nella Larsen's depiction of Irene explores the pitfalls and ultimate tragedy of respectability politics amongst queer Black women. To Irene, security is paramount. She defines this security as idealized domesticity, with a heteronormative family and a bourgeois social life sustaining it. Security is important to Irene because the only other cultural narrative for Black women is moral and financial depravity. To protect herself from racism and to pursue upward mobility, Irene chooses respectability politics, establishing herself as a pure Black woman, a bourgeois socialite, a wife and mother. Clare, an alluring and defiant risk-taker, rejects respectability



politics, and ignites in Irene homoerotic feelings that threaten her security. Ultimately, Irene must sacrifice her own sense of rebellion—and Clare—to maintain security and the respectability politics that enable it.

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## Single Detectives: C . L. Pirkis, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the Woman Question

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Joshua Vituszynski

The controversies surrounding the plight of women in Victorian society are integral to C. L. Pirkis's stories about Loveday Brooke. In "The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step," Brooke challenges the archetype of the domesticated woman who submits herself to patriarchal authority. The narrative, however, is saturated by social barriers surrounding unmarried women and their resistance to the patriarchy. These depictions of the burdens facing women in Victorian England are particularly pronounced in light of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about Sherlock Holmes, especially "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." "The Black Bag" and "The Speckled Band" sharply contrast Holmes's and Brooke's circumstances, demonstrating the discrepancy between the opportunities available to unmarried men and the prejudices faced by unmarried women during the Victorian era. This disparity elucidates the difficult plight of independent women in a period when women's virtue was linked strongly to domesticity and submission to patriarchal authority.

Early in "The Black Bag," Loveday Brooke is described "defied convention" by having "chosen for herself a career" as a detective "that had cut her off sharply from . . . her position in society" (4). She abandons the customary position of domestic, dependent woman to be a self-reliant professional. As an unmarried woman seeking independent success in "the flourishing detective agency," she refuses the mantle of a conventional

Victorian woman (4). In this manner, “Brooke is representative of a relatively new population of unmarried, professional women in the 1890s” (Miller 54). As this “new woman” became increasingly visible in Victorian society, the Woman Question—which concerned the relationship between women and the institutions of marriage and the patriarchy—became a prevalent debate.

Victorians often praised the domesticated, married woman, disparaging her undomesticated, single counterpart. Many believed that “so-called Women’s Rights movements” of the era idealized the unmarried, “unsexed woman,” finding its feminism at odds with the “healthy instincts” of women: “A woman ought to be ashamed to say she has no desire to become a wife and mother” (Allen 174). Condemnations of single, self-reliant women who purportedly become “real ‘traitors to their sex,’” by taking on “the burden of their own support,” demonstrate the scorn Victorians held for them (Allen 175). By defying the model of womanly virtue, Brooke challenges Victorian gender conventions, reflecting the “rise of the ‘New Woman’ figure” in a period when women’s movements “engendered a cultural and political milieu in which the model of Victorian womanhood seemed increasingly outdated” (Burke 48). These New Women—notable for their “rejection of men as partners,” as “[t]hey turn from claustrophobic patriarchal demands and find recompense in the social, professional, and vocational opportunities” of the world outside of the domestic realm—were in direct contention with the model dependent, domestic woman (Parsons 147). As this New Woman endeavored to break free of the conventions that undermined her independence, the obstacles she faced were captured in numerous literary works that represent the gender bias pervading Victorian England.

Establishing the ubiquity of Victorian prejudices against the New Woman—and its praise for her more conventional foil—allows us to better understand how the difficulties facing this new class of women appear in the Brooke and Holmes stories. The uphill battles for unmarried women, in contrast to unmarried men, become apparent in disparate representations of the character’s professional agency. Holmes’s independent, unmarried lifestyle poses no financial burden: his client Helen Stoner is free to “defray whatever expenses” Holmes charges for his services “at the time which suits [her] best” (133). He has no immediate need to be compensated for his work. Instead, he finds his “profession is its reward,”

rather than any monetary gain: he works “for the love of his art rather than for the acquirement of wealth” (133, 131). This financial independence affords Holmes significant professional freedom. As Watson notes, Holmes “refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic” (131). He answers to no one when choosing cases, and no financial need requires him to pursue regular employment or to tackle commonplace criminal cases.

Unlike Holmes, Brooke’s professional life is necessary to provide for herself. Before becoming a detective, Brooke was “penniless and all but friendless”—dire financial straits forced her into a life of self-reliance (4). Initially, then, she does not have the luxury of treating her professional life as Holmes does his. Instead, her work is tedious: she “drudged away patiently in the lower walks of her profession,” seeking undesirable, unrewarding detective work—that Holmes would have refused—to support herself (4). In this manner, Brooke experiences the hardships of rising from the lowest level of her profession, and, unlike Holmes, she cannot be financially independent. Only when Ebenezer Dyer “threw her in the way of better-class work” does she find professional satisfaction and respectability (5). Brooke’s financial wellbeing depends on Dyer, and the cases she can pursue are determined by his “sailing orders” (5). Since Brooke is subservient to Mr. Dyer—who refers to her specifically as “one of *my* female detectives”—the patriarchy controls her work life in a way unimaginable for Holmes (4, *emphasis added*). Patriarchal control allows an unmarried man like Holmes to flourish in spite of his independence, but it refuses an unmarried woman the same autonomy over her professional endeavors.

Dyer’s authority over Brooke appears incongruous given that Brooke is, seemingly, the superior intellect, demonstrating that even the most “[m]arketable accomplishments” would grant the New Woman neither recognition nor authority in an overwhelmingly patriarchal society (4). Dyer notably dismisses Brooke’s theory that the letters about the black bag share a connection with “the robbery at Craigen Court” as a “silly hoax” (8). Brooke ultimately, though, exercises “a chain of reasoning that led her in so remarkable a manner to connect the finding of the black bag, with insignificant contents” to the robbery (24). Despite his earlier dismissal of Brooke’s theories, Dyer is disarmed by “unmitigated admiration for his colleague’s skill” (29). Even though Brooke possesses “what amounts to genius”—an intuition that surpasses Dyer’s—her efforts warrant no recognition from the

patriarchy, as she allows the Lynchon Court Office, and, consequently, Mr. Dyer, to “have the credit” for solving the case (5, 21). Holmes garners respect for the “rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis, with which he unraveled the problems which were submitted to him” (132). Brooke’s perpetual subservience to and anonymity within an historically masculine institution, on the other hand, demonstrate that her value to the patriarchy lies less in her “genius” than in her “faculty—so rare among women—of carrying out orders to the very letter” (5). If she were to act more independently and to seek recognition for herself, rather than for Lynchon Court, her value to Victorian society would decrease.

The different environments in which Holmes and Brooke do their detective work pose a further challenge to the New Woman’s liberation. Holmes describes his case as involving a “distinct element of danger” (147). Watson’s and Holmes’s adventure entails mortal peril, with Holmes warning Watson to have his “pistol ready,” because their “very [lives] may depend on” it (149). Despite Brooke’s challenges to the Victorian woman’s status quo, the environment of her detective work—a strictly domestic one—perpetuates the notion that virtuous women should not involve themselves in dangerous exploits, but relegate themselves to the safe domestic sphere, while relying on men to navigate their world’s dangerous, dark dimensions. Dyer tasks Brooke with investigating the robbery at Craigen Court so she may work “within the walls to hob-nob with the maids,” to learn if any have been taken “into [Delcroix’s] confidence” (3). The nature of Brooke’s task—ingratiating with the household staff—contrasts with Mr. Bates’s task in the same case: to “stay in the village and collect all the information he can outside the house” (3). The practices of Lynchon Court reflect the gender conventions of Victorian society: male detectives confront the dangers of the outside world, while women remain in the secure confines of the home. Even though this dynamic allows New Women to contribute to these investigative endeavors by infiltrating environments men cannot, it still confines them to the household. Despite the New Woman’s struggle for independence, she cannot escape the domestic realm.

By portraying the subservience of unmarried women to male authority and relegating them to the domestic space, Pirkis highlights the New Woman’s struggles. When juxtaposed with Sherlock Holmes’s narrative, the plight of Loveday Brooke—and, consequently, the collective body of New

Women—becomes increasingly evident. While a New Woman like Brooke challenges the ideal conventional womanhood, she cannot liberate herself from the hardships the patriarchy inflicts on her.

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## “A Boat Against the Current”: *The Great Gatsby*’s Nick Carraway and Compulsory Heterosexuality

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Lauren Smith

In recent years, LGBTQ+ representation has increased alongside the increased freedom to determine one’s own identity. Of course, identities can change as people grow. Modernist theory famously asserted that nothing is fully stable. Daniel Singal explains that modernism’s predecessor, Victorianism, was characterized by control over instincts, predictability, and fixed truths (8). Writers during this period imagined human beings separated from their instincts: all identities resulted from upbringing, class, and social standing. Anything that did not align with social norms must be eliminated. For Victorian writers, “foremost among all those [cultural] threats was . . . sexuality” and therefore “all erotic temptations were accordingly supposed to be rooted out” (Singal 9). For modern writers who wished to challenge Victorianism—such as F. Scott Fitzgerald—this rigidity was “[un]desirable, for that would mean stasis,” limiting the possibilities for identity to evolve through “one’s ongoing experience in the world” (Singal 15). Victorianists clenched their jaws while attempting to prove that sexuality could be controlled. Modernists relaxed these views, embracing the lack of stability and embracing the idea that people can change. They believed humanity’s beauty lies in its ability to become, to evolve into well-rounded members of society. These beings have control over their instincts and work to find the balance between their heads and their hearts.

Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, presents a character

who reflects both the rigid Victorian limits on sexuality and the increasing openness offered by the modern world. I argue, therefore, he embodies "compulsory heterosexuality" and the effects it has on a queer person's psyche. Caught between the Victorian impulse to repress queer desire and the modern pursuit of growth, Nick lives in a state of "sexual orientation dysphoria" (Cohn and Nolan). This queer approach to Nick offers a new lens for considering his loneliness, sadness, and discomfort.

First identified by gay and lesbian liberationists in the 1960s and 70s, compulsory heterosexuality rests on "the assumption that each individual and society is heterosexual in orientation" (Cohn and Nolan). It places pressure on each individual to identify with the heterosexual identity aligned with the sex assigned at birth. As people conform to these rigid gender roles, "compulsory heterosexuality gives males dominance in society and percolates into other institutions, ideas, family dynamics, and individuals' sense of self" (Cohn and Nolan). Those labeled as male at birth are pressured eventually to become men, marry a woman, and have children, while those labeled as female are pressured to become women, marry a man, and have a man's children. Compulsory heterosexuality, ultimately, pushes everyone along these established paths, marginalizing non-normative individuals by categorizing heterosexuality as the only true sexuality and, thus, identifying anything else as a choice. Steven Seidman explains that compulsory heterosexuality ensures homosexuality is "exile[d] . . . to the space of the invisible and the voiceless—to the closet" (25). Queer individuals living under the hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality often experience sexual orientation dysphoria, an "emotional distress that results from a disconnect between an individual's sexual orientation and . . . awareness of cultural pressures to comply with the majority sexual orientation," (Cohn and Nolan). This dysphoria leads to "self-loathing, depression, and anxiety" (Cohn and Nolan). Compulsory heterosexuality directs everyone toward static, predictable identities, a tendency modernist writers, including Fitzgerald, challenged.

*The Great Gatsby* is not traditionally read as a queer novel, but many scholars have identified queer elements scattered throughout it. Nick in particular has inspired speculation about his queer identity. Queer readings of Nick often focus on the scene in which an intoxicated Nick leaves Tom



Buchanan's mistress's New York apartment party with Mr. McKee. The novel's diction is sexually suggestive with the two men "groan[ing] down in the elevator" and the phallic references to a lever being touched (37). An ellipsis immediately follows this exchange, with Nick then narrating the moment he stands beside a bed while McKee is "sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear" (37-38). The ellipsis suggests Nick omits something from the narration. Many readers view this scene as a revelation of Nick's queer identity. He seemingly removes selective moments from his narrative, and some read these expunged elements as shame and discomfort. Keith Fraser, for instance, describes these omissions as a "cultivated ambiguity . . . because Nick refuses to tell us the whole truth about himself" (331). Fraser adds that, through these gaps, "an uncertain sexuality becomes an unavoidable conclusion" (341). Even as Fraser and others have arrived at this "unavoidable conclusion," however, few consider the dysphoria resulting from the dissonance Nick experiences, or how these moments affect his view of himself.

Nick's efforts to ignore this dissonance fuel a self-destructive view particularly evident in his relationship with Jordan Baker, his ostensible romantic partner. The description of Nick's relationship with Jordan is filled with self-criticism, loneliness, self-denial, and deceit. Early in the novel, Nick characterizes Jordan as someone who "instinctively [avoids] clever, shrewd men" (55). His description implies, then, that her interest depends on him not being clever or shrewd. This observation is not sparked by something she says, but merely presents how Nick views himself, demonstrating a lack of self-esteem. Later, after they witness the confrontation between Tom Buchanan and Gatsby on Nick's thirtieth birthday, he describes the sadness he feels when with her. While in the car with Jordan, Nick senses death's approach as he drives "toward death through the cooling twilight" (121). While he earlier describes Jordan's touch as "reassuring," here he feels no meaningful support (121). In a trance, Nick drives the car toward destruction. His thirtieth birthday is full of anger and pain; Nick internalizes these emotions and continues toward what he describes as a kind of demise.

Early in their relationship, Nick presents himself as honest. By its end, however, Nick's dysphoria becomes too great to sustain these lies, so he begins to give up parts of his façade. When Jordan confronts him about lying, claiming he is not the "honest, straightforward person" he once called

himself, Nick does not deny her accusation (156). Instead, he responds that he is "too old to lie to [himself] and call it honor" (156). While putatively a response to Jordan's criticism, this moment also suggests he has been pretending, for their entire relationship, to be something he is not: heterosexual. His discomfort manifests as repression of his true identity. Nick then acknowledges he is "tremendously sorry" and needs to "turn away from her" (156). He literally cannot face Jordan after this revelation. Being forced to recognize the dissonance of his performed identity causes so much discomfort he must remove himself from the situation altogether. After this exchange and the summer's final events, Nick returns to the Midwest. David O'Rourke contends this act "is not only a geographical retreat, but an attempted escape into an idyllic past" (59). After Jordan forces him to face his dishonesty, Nick retreats from his present pain to a memory of simpler times.

Although Nick deceives Jordan, his understanding of his own suffering appears subtly throughout the novel. His sense of loneliness is evident while wandering around New York, imagining he could be invited into random women's lives: "sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness" (54). In these moments, Nick imagines he could enter their lives where no one would "know or disapprove" of his relationship all while feeling "a haunting loneliness" (54). Here and elsewhere Nick's façade slips, showing how alone he feels. His dream of a socially acceptable relationship illuminates his true desires, which cannot receive his world's approval. Daniel Herman notes "the loneliness—and marginality—on display here are breathtaking, and heartbreaking" (248). Nick stands alone physically and emotionally: his attempts to visualize a relationship with a woman only leave him haunted by loneliness and his true, unfulfilled desire.

Even people he considers family leave him with the same crushing loneliness. After Nick orchestrates a reunion for Gatsby and Daisy, he feels forgotten, sidelined by the other two's connection: "they had forgotten me, but Daisy glanced up and held out her hand; Gatsby didn't know me now at all. I looked once more at them and they looked back at me, remotely, possessed by intense life. Then I went out of the room and down the marble steps into the rain, leaving them there together" (87). The scene's subtext reveals Nick's inability to connect with women as Gatsby connects

with Daisy. Relationships with women do not possess Nick with the same “intense life,” so feeling forgotten by his friends mirrors the ways in which he is forgotten by the broader, compulsorily heterosexual culture. Kent Cartwright claims Nick “comes to accept the loneliness and isolation of human experience” (230). His life is dominated by loneliness, nevertheless, as it infects every aspect of his life.

Nick’s unreliability as narrator is well known. David McCracken cites his ideological self-deception as “the underlying reason for his narrative unreliability,” contending “the entire narrative of *The Great Gatsby* is essentially a chronicle of self-denial” (106, 104). But what causes Nick’s self-denial? And what cultural significance does it have? Early in the novel, Nick calls himself “one of the few honest people I have ever known” (56). The text, though, contains instances of his dishonesty: the letters he writes to his girlfriend while thinking of Jordan’s “mustache of perspiration”; inviting Daisy over without telling her the point is to see Gatsby (56, 77). His dishonesty is apparent, but it acts as a wall allowing him to avoid answering questions about his true desires. Nick’s repeated declarations that he is an honest person are designed to quell any fear that he is living a lie. He is in denial. Of course, he cannot see the situation from an objective stance, but his bias casts the summer’s events in a new light, one that reveals the depths of his suffering.

After Gatsby’s death, summer changes to fall and the world becomes colder. The story Nick tells—the narrative of his time with Gatsby—is not just Gatsby’s tale, but his own. It represents his own life: “a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family name” (155). His family’s name shapes his life, creating an image before he could construct his own. He internalizes the pressure of being a Carraway before he grasps what that means. Nick describes this feeling as complacency: he is stuck with the Carraway identity, whether he wants it or not. His lack of agency produces a solemn feeling, like he is trapped in an unending winter. Ultimately, the pressure of being a Carraway causes him to feel lost, trapped, cold, and alone. As Cartwright argues, Nick “lives in the image of an increasingly reductive melancholy” (232). As the novel progresses and Nick’s dysphoria increases, he falls deeper into sadness. By the novel’s conclusion, he loses all the relationships he built over the summer. He stands alone.

In this solitude, Nick remains attracted to resilience and strength, two qualities he evinces as a queer person living without the language to express his identity and with little chance of acceptance. The surrounding culture, though, leaves him without hope he can find joy. This combination of feelings explains his idolization of Gatsby. Gatsby embodies resilience, strength, and hope. Even after his low social status at birth, his military service, and losing the love of his life, Gatsby stands on the dock looking for the green light. He never loses hope. After his demise, Nick learns the lessons from this summer and absorbs the remainder of Gatsby's hope. He speaks for them both in the novel's final line: "we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (159).

Despite Nick's discomfort, his sadness, and his loneliness, he perseveres. Nick closes with a reminder that he will "beat on." He presses forward, upstream, against a culture that refuses him the language necessary to express his identity or the acceptance he craves. Still, he keeps paddling, trying to move forward, but unable to escape the memories and the social pressure that hold him in place. Put simply, Nick decides to tread water. Nick ultimately exemplifies the actions of countless LGBTQ+ people navigating an unaccepting world. When facing the pressure to identify within rigid boundaries, some understandably choose to live with sexual orientation dysphoria. Some push back against this pressure, however, just as many modernist writers pushed back against Victorian mores. Perhaps modernists like Fitzgerald saw the green light in the future, one we are still approaching today.

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Reading Music in Kazuo Ishiguro: Composition,  
Repetition, and Unresolved Dissonance  
in *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall*

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Anna Rose McIntyre

Internationally acclaimed author Kazuo Ishiguro has garnered global praise for over three decades with his bold experimentation and transcendent themes. When announcing his Nobel Prize, The Swedish Academy introduced him as one, “who, in novels of great emotional force, has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world.” Most scholarship on Ishiguro’s work has focused on his novels *The Unconsoled*, *Never Let Me Go*, and others. Anne Whitehead, though, recently turned to Ishiguro’s collection *Nocturnes*, which “complicat[es] the prevailing idea of the short story as juvenilia,” reconsidering how *Stories of Music and Nightfall* “emerge out of [his] novels, blurring the distinction between genres” (37, 21). Whitehead’s remarks on Ishiguro’s writing process—drafting, archiving, perpetual recreation—evinced an appreciation for the distinctive, yet repetitive nature of *Nocturnes*, both in the context of Ishiguro’s oeuvre and as a standalone musical composition. I contend, however, that *Nocturnes* collapses not merely the space between short story and novel, but also the terrain between stories and songs, between classical music and smooth jazz. Gerry Smyth calls *Nocturnes* “a musical text,” because of its “repetition . . . variation, evenness of tone, [and] the manipulation of meaning [by] the signifier” (152). I propose a closer reading of *Nocturnes*’ musicality that reexamines its musical elements in relation to its form and plot.

“One of the key things I learnt writing lyrics,” Ishiguro says, “[which] had an enormous influence on my fiction—was that with an intimate, confiding, first-person song, the meaning must not be self-sufficient on the page. It has to be oblique, sometimes you have to read between the lines” (“I Used to See”). This self-reflection provides insight into Ishiguro’s creative process, but also invites further consideration of *Nocturnes* in light of Whitehead’s call for continued *musical* attention to Ishiguro’s work (38). Whitehead claims Ishiguro’s collection alludes to “the American songbook as a repertoire . . . constantly being reinterpreted” (25). As Ishiguro says: “Yesterday’s corn, reworked by a maestro of today becomes tomorrow’s canon. The musician’s regenerating skill can put a stamp of immortality on some time-worn ballad or torch song” (qtd. in Whitehead 25). *Nocturnes*, accordingly, infuses the mid-century jazz tunes of Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra with a contemporary melancholy, embodied in Ishiguro’s flawed characters’ displacement, and enhanced by musical elements that the author—as maestro—reworks. However jazz-centric the book may be, I contend it cannot be viewed in isolation from the historical “yesterday” of musical compositions: the centuries of classical music filled with emotional potency and technical innovation.

Ishiguro himself compares *Nocturnes* to an album: “You don’t want every story to hit the same note . . . you’re pushed to write stories that contrast . . . a bit like doing an album . . . you mix the up-tempo song with the ballad and so on, and the catchy number with the more long and challenging track” (“*Nocturnes*: Part 1 of 2”). This description calls to mind a structure much older than an album; one that similarly shifts melody and tempo between each repetition of the refrains: the rondo. A popular musical form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these “round” refrains often appeared as the final movement in sonatas or concertos by composers such as Joseph Haydn and Franz Schubert. The most familiar rondos in western culture include Mozart’s “Scene with Rondo,” for a soprano with piano, and Richard Strauss’s “Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks,” an orchestral narrative of mischief. The shifting, episodic nature of the rondo—typically composed in sets of five—aligns with the form of *Nocturnes*, which exudes multiple atmospheric tonalities ranging from a farcical canine romp to an awkward turkey incident between face-wrapped divorcees in Beverly Hills. These comical scenes are strategically positioned between weightier passages, allegro interludes connecting one rhapsody to the next.

The Baroque era—often associated with emotive melodies and dramatization—ushered in perhaps the most significant advancement in western music’s evolution, popularizing various techniques: minor timbres, fluctuating dynamics, contrapuntal melodies, and unique ornamentations. One such musical embellishment, I suggest, is particularly important in *Nocturnes*: the appoggiatura, which comes from the Italian word that means “to lean” or “to rest upon.” An appoggiatura, sometimes called a grace note, occurs when a non-harmonic note sounds in an otherwise-harmonic melody, producing tonic dissonance that is only resolved by the sound of the regular, intra-chord note being struck. Amidst an arpeggiated note-progression (notes from a chord played singularly in ascending or descending order), the appoggiatura produces an air of incompleteness that rests upon the appropriate final note to resolve the chord. I argue *Nocturnes* contains several metaphorical, personal appoggiaturas in its characters’ lives, generating temporal dissonance for themselves in hope of achieving greater restoration.

“Crooner,” the collection’s first piece, reveals one example of this phenomenon. Tony Gardner—an American singer past his prime—and his wife Lindy are vacationing in Venice, where they honeymooned twenty-seven years earlier. The narrator, a young Polish guitarist, observes their body language on the Piazza San Marco, sensing strain between them. He later discovers the tension stems from the couple’s impending divorce. Upon returning to the U.S., they plan to separate, Tony explains, so he can launch a musical “comeback”: “The [crooners] who came back successfully . . . they’ve remarried . . . young wives on their arms . . . Lindy knows the score,” says Tony—as if their fate as a couple is pre-ordained in a musical score (30). “It’s best for her we [separate] now,” he continues: “she’s still a beautiful woman. She needs to get out now, while she has time . . . to find love again, make another marriage” (31). Lindy’s sobs echo through the canal after Tony serenades her with sentimental songs from a gondola. Tony, too, is saddened by the situation, but in his mind, the discord is necessary if he and Lindy are to achieve ultimate happiness. An appoggiatura must be played, an intentional dissonance must precede the harmonic resolution. That is the fantasy, at least.

“Nocturne” is set six months after “Crooner,” centering on an aging saxophonist, Steve, who longs for success and to regain his ex-wife’s affection. To do so, he takes drastic measures succumbing to his manager’s



pressure to undergo facial reconstruction. Steve reasons his way through his doubts, dismissing physical discomfort, self-proclaimed vanity, and inward shame as temporal deviations from the norm, which he believes will lead to fulfillment. Helen's words replay like a refrain in his head: "Once my face was fixed, there'd be nothing holding me back, she said" (132). For the desperate saxophonist, the bitter grace notes appear a stepping-stone to the grand finale, which will resolve his internal conflict. He seeks a life for himself as beautiful as the music he plays: to "rise up in intervals you'd never believe possible and then hold that sweet, very tender high B-flat . . . there are colors there," he tells Lindy Gardner, "longings and regrets" (154).

Robert S. Hatten claims the "appoggiatura is made to bear a greater poignancy (of yearning) by a leap . . . and by realizing the dissonant potential of the appoggiatura figure. The dissonance, like the expansion, is graded . . . the reversal (negation or denial of the yearning) is triggered by the bass move from A# to A $\flat$  [sharp to natural]" (101). Hatten's commentary positions appoggiaturas as disjunct leaps (rather than conjunct steps) that establish an affective yearning often utilized in the Baroque era. Appoggiaturas, however, are meant to be resolved through the fluid movement from discord to tonal congruence. Unlike Beethoven's sonatas, real life—and realistic fiction—do not guarantee the gratification of grace notes.

The protagonist's final lines in both "Nocturne" and "Crooner" begin with "maybe." Tony says, "[m]aybe I'll come by the square again before we leave. Listen to you playing with your crew" (33). Steve's final thought is "[m]aybe this really is a turning point for me, and the big league's waiting. Maybe she's right" (185). In my reading of *Nocturnes*, atmospheric appoggiaturas parallel David James's commentary on "the almost" in Ishiguro's work: "*almost* captures the provisional, often fleeting, yet nevertheless analysable attempt—an attempt enabled and embodied by style itself—to hold out the promise of consolation without necessarily fulfilling it, to draw affective blueprints for solace" (28). The proximity to fulfillment permeates *Nocturnes*, with characters suspending their imagination in the *almost*, the *not yet*, the *maybe*, by leaning into a dissonance they hope is their saving grace: a musical comeback, a new face, an untarnished potential.

*Publishers Weekly* declares *Nocturnes* "leave[s] readers anticipating a crescendo that never hits," a perhaps negative judgement that nevertheless speaks to the text's lingering resonance; the unresolved appoggiaturas hanging, haunting. Variants of the appoggiatura are common in

contemporary music, key for fostering a yearning, suspended sense of unfulfillment. A similar mood saturates *Nocturnes*, with the lucid unfulfillment of its characters, all of whom are “musicians who didn’t quite fulfill their dreams, or the ones who are young enough to think that perhaps one day their dreams will be fulfilled, but time is moving on” (Ishiguro, “*Nocturnes*: Part 1 of 2”). These apparent appoggiaturas—unfulfilled and ringing into the ambiguous void—function almost as painful fermatas, the musical term that comes from the Italian word for “to stay” or “to stop.” In sheet music, the fermata, when placed over a note or rest, signals the musician to hold the action for an unspecified number of beats. Fermatas build tension, create suspense for the listener, and even the musician, for neither knows how long the note, chord, or rest will persist until the conductor gives the signal to proceed—or, in some cases, for the song to end abruptly.

Along with these situational appoggiaturas or fermatas, *Nocturnes* incorporates the Da Capo al Coda. The Da Capo al Coda instructs the musician to return to the song’s beginning. Ishiguro’s collection contains numerous phrases that gesture back to the opening story. For example, “Cellists,” the final story, also takes place in Venice. Its first line—“It was our third time playing the *Godfather* theme since lunch”—clearly parallel Janeck’s complaint, in “Crooner,” that he had played the *Godfather* theme song nine times in one day (189, 5). Like Da Capo al Codas directing us back to the composition’s beginning, the stories contain multiple reprises. In music, a reprise calls for the repetition of specific measures, or even entire songs. Reprises create continuity within a piece, which *Nocturnes* does with dreamlike tropes resurfacing in the tales: broken marriages, latent potential, wasted time, and unrecoverable memories.

In his Nobel lecture, Ishiguro expresses passion for music, confessing that in order to “allow a vast and tragic yearning to be glimpsed underneath” he had to glean “crucial lessons from the voices of singers . . . catching something in their voices, I’ve said to myself, ‘yes that’s it, that’s what I need to capture in this scene.’” This vocal musicality does not go untapped in *Nocturnes*. Pi-Li Hsiao, for example, argues that the interplay of characters and stories in Ishiguro’s collection “opens up a double-voiced discourse” and exemplifies Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the “polyphonic novel” (23). Ishiguro has been widely celebrated for his blending of readable and (almost) audible art forms, but, as Smyth observes, the dishonest cello expert, Eloise in “Cellists,” serves as “the vehicle through which Ishiguro

articulates his own position as a writer about a form of emotional energy that is categorically unavailable (the reader cannot hear the music described in the literary text)" (153).

One important distinction between classical music and jazz is the former typically is performed as written, while the latter relies heavily on improvisation. Ishiguro's texts, I contend, operate like a classical composition because they are inscribed, fixed in print, and speak to human experience broadly. Ishiguro, however, has been extremely flexible when granting film producers and musicians creative liberty with his manuscripts, allowing his repertoire to evolve with the laid-back spirit of a jazz musician. In this manner, his work becomes multicultural in more than one sense. He, of course, brings to his writing the transnational background of a Japanese-born, Britain-raised author. In addition, though, his *Nocturnes* collection echoes composers from Beethoven to Sinatra, which, I suggest, calls to mind Whitehead's description of "culture" as something formed by the "circulation of copies," and strengthens "what potential for originality there is lies in the new interpretation of what already exists" (35).

As I have argued, various musical markers resound in *Nocturnes*: the hopeful dissonance of the appoggiatura, the suspended anxiety of the fermata, the Da Capo al Coda redirecting us to the beginning, and the reprises ringing through the entire collection. As a literary work, *Nocturnes* takes its place in the short-story canon alongside cycles such as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and James Joyce's *Dubliners*, yet stands as unique in its musicality. Interpreting *Nocturnes* as a musical opus reveals the classical elements which laid the foundation for jazz, rock, and indie music. Doing so also offers a fresh understanding of Ishiguro's genre-merging and his vision of the human condition.

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Women's Rights and Post-  
Revolutionary American Ideals in  
Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*

Darby Murnane

In 1794, Susanna Rowson's novel *Charlotte Temple* was republished for the American literary market after being poorly received in England. The novel stood as a moral guidebook for young women—particularly upper-class Anglo-Saxon daughters—stressing the importance of maintaining virtue as the key to a good life. The novel depicts fifteen-year-old Charlotte Temple, who, against her better judgment, succumbs to the charming soldier Montraville's seduction with encouragement from the manipulative temptress Mademoiselle La Rue. Charlotte's ruin is sealed as Montraville takes her from England to America, where, after months of turmoil, she gives birth to an illegitimate daughter, then dies. The text instructs its target female to avoid such a fate by staying on the path of faith and virtue, with the latter defined by late-eighteenth-century gender norms: the assumption that a woman's goodness should be judged by her sexual purity, her submissiveness to family and/or her husband, and her marital status. The novel upholds the divide between "good girls" and "bad girls" to illustrate the differences between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, morality and immorality, chastity and promiscuity.

In light of Rowson's biography—the values expressed through her academic pursuits and in her letters—*Charlotte Temple* reads not merely as a cautionary tale about a thoughtless, impassioned girl, but rather as the story of a girl who falls victim to gendered expectations, suffering from a

lack of autonomy that might give her some self-determination. The novel's narratorial intrusions—when the narrator breaks the fourth wall to speak directly with the reader—reveal Rowson's views on women's rights and post-revolutionary American ideals.

Scholarship on *Charlotte Temple* has explored these themes at length, yet little attention has been paid to the novel's presentation of women's experience of an impossible duality, and how this friction factors into Charlotte's demise. Carla Mulford finds the novel to have a "feminist but constrained message" that highlights the failure of girls' educations (vii). Marion Rust interprets Rowson's work through a wider cultural lens, examining how American principles of self-determination affect the stories of prodigal sons and daughters, both popular literary archetypes in the 1790s (51–52). Dana McClain analyzes Rowson's use of republican motherhood, finding a blend of post-revolutionary American ideals with the education of youth. According to McClain, *Charlotte Temple* establishes Rowson as a mentor—not a mother—a role through which she can exist outside of "restrictive maternal bonds" and gain more authority for her voice by denying the limitations of the republican mother, or simply the mother as teacher (344–45). McClain, however, casts Rowson's mentorship as something she does for herself and her own authority, rather than an act designed to open women readers' eyes to alternate paths.

Rowson's mentorship, though, forges new ways of living not only for the author, but for the young women reading her work. For one, her novel breaks the virgin-mother-whore matrix, which so often establishes the limits of women's lives (Heartney 9). Charlotte, her mother Lucy, and La Rue reproduce this matrix in *Charlotte Temple*, playing into readers' expectations, making the novel's subversiveness more subtle by maintaining some notion of women's "place." In addition, as founder of a "Young Ladies Academy" in Boston, Rowson sought to raise women up through education (McClain 350). Her collection *A Present for Young Ladies* also makes the case for allowing women to receive the type of education typically reserved for men: "Man is no less an enemy to himself than to woman, when he would confine her attention to frivolous attainments. The domestic affections and appropriate virtues of the sex, modesty, prudence, and conjugal fidelity, far from being superseded by study and the liberal sciences, are

on the contrary, both strengthened and embellished” (121). Though she tailors her argument to a male audience—persuading them of the value of women’s education by claiming it will improve their domestic abilities—Rowson makes clear that her primary loyalty is always to women, asserting that knowledge will elevate “the female part of the rising generation” (*Reuben and Rachel* 7). She notes that “the generality of books intended for children are written for boys,” thus she must write for young girls and women (*Reuben and Rachel* 8).

Rowson’s mentorship as narrator opens more opportunities for women at large; in *Charlotte Temple* she passes the torch of this responsibility to her young audience. The narrator’s intrusions stress the importance of female friendships, which may act as a guiding light and help women raise each other up through solidarity. In the “Author’s Preface,” Rowson flags one factor in the ruin of “daughters of misfortune”: being “deprived of natural friends” (vi). She calls for solidarity more directly when addressing mothers—explicitly addressing “my dear Madam” in a later intrusion—asking them to show sympathy for ruined girls who “would gladly return to virtue, was any generous friend to endeavor to raise and re-assure [them]” (69). Indeed, Mrs. Beauchamp—La Rue’s eventual daughter-in-law and Charlotte’s neighbor in New York—promotes this very notion upon seeing Charlotte:

Would to heaven I could snatch her from so hard a fate . . . but the merciless world has barred the doors of compassion against a poor weak girl, who, perhaps had she one kind friend to raise and reassure her, would gladly return to peace and virtue; nay, even the woman who dares to pity, and endeavor to recall a wandering sister, incurs the sneer of contempt and ridicule, for an action in which angels are said to rejoice. (71)

Here, the novel places particular importance on female friendships because the wedges that drive women apart can destroy them. Mrs. Beauchamp fears reaching out to Charlotte, because she knows her peers would chide her for associating herself with a “ruined” girl, illustrating both the startling isolation women suffer and their dependence on fickle reputation.

The novel’s formal deployment of mentorship delivers a subtle critique of the American ideal of self-determination. Despite the primary setting

and the characters in her novel being English (as was the author), Rowson held a fervent love for the young United States, noting in a letter to one of her students that, "though I am by birth a Briton, my heart clings to dear America" (qtd. in Rust 3). *Charlotte Temple* appears to find fault with the gender disparity in the idea each person is master of their own fate, given the widespread expectation of women's subservience to men. Montraville's father bestows upon his son a warning parallel to the novel's admonition to female readers. He is told he should strive to be unlike the many "young men [who] frequently rush into matrimonial engagements, and by their thoughtlessness draw many a deserving woman into scenes of poverty and distress" (39). The difference in this warning though, arises from what Montraville hears from his father just before this warning: "Remember, therefore, your success in life depends entirely on yourself" (39). Meanwhile, his father took care to make financial provisions for his sisters so, in the event of their father's untimely death, they would be protected from the "snares and temptations, which vice ever holds out to the elegant accomplished female" (38). Here it becomes obvious the rules of determination favor men; women can only hope to shape their fate by way of men, given the implication that, if Montraville's father had not prepared a safety net for his daughters, they would inevitably fall to ruin.

The novel's narrator later intrudes, commenting on male seducers' moral constitution and the privilege that saves them nonetheless: "A man who has been guilty of seduction, is but very feeble; he may leave her in a moment to shame and want; he may marry and forsake her forever; and should he do so, she has no redress, no friendly soothing companion . . . no benevolent hand to lead her back to the path of rectitude" (64). Whatever a man like Montraville might do, whatever sin he commits, he can erase his mistakes and move forward. Charlotte cannot. She is marked permanently by what she has done. What exactly is this mark upon women that would alter their ability to self-determine as a man would? Rust, in reference to Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, points to pregnancy: women are physically marked by past sexual activities as a man never will be, excepting the contraction of disease (52). Women's lives are bound to their bodies in a way that undermines the ability to determine their futures, as observers may glean all they wish to know from appearance. Men, on the other hand, have the ability to choose what they wish to express without fear their bodies will give them away.



Despite Montraville's father showing the double-standards of self-determination (and similar scenes), the novel still critiques Charlotte's tendency to sigh and faint when in distress, rather than to act on her own behalf. The chapter "A Trifling Retrospect" opens with a narratorial intrusion imagining a reader's response: "'Bless my heart,' cries my young volatile reader, 'I shall never have patience to get through this volume, there are so many ahs! and ohs! so much fainting, tears and distress, I am sick to death of the subject'" (97). Given Charlotte's complete lack of autonomy and knowledge of the world, though, what can one expect of a girl with no means for fighting against her circumstances? Numerous moments in the text suggest this lack of knowledge should bear blame for Charlotte's demise, because knowledge offers the means for autonomy. When Charlotte is evicted from the house Montraville provides for her, she is shocked: "she knew so little of the ways of the world, that she had never bestowed a thought on the payment of the rent of the house . . . how confined was her knowledge of human nature" (101). Charlotte had never been given the reason or opportunity to learn the practical aspects of life, so she could not imagine the dangers lying ahead or how to avoid them.

It appears Charlotte's shielding from the world begins at home. She tells La Rue, during the early stages of Montraville's seductive overtures, that she cannot read the letter he sent, having been instructed by her mother not to read such correspondence until her mother has seen it first (29). Without seeing such materials for herself and making her own judgments, Charlotte cannot exercise autonomous decision making or independent problem solving. Rowson indeed nudges readers toward this interpretation in the "Preface," which states that ill-fated girls who are "spoilt by a mistaken education, are thrown out on an unfeeling world without the least power to defend themselves" (vi). By acknowledging the defenselessness of sheltered girls like Charlotte, the text takes some blame off them, and puts it on the external forces pushing them down a path with little choice of their own. Rowson assures parents she has not written "a line that conveys a wrong idea to the head or a corrupt wish to the heart" (vi). She allays parents' fears of exposing their daughters to ideas that may lead them astray, but also implies that, if they keep children from knowing about things in the world that are wrong, they will not know how to identify or resist them, just like Charlotte.

Rowson also puts the onus on male readers to consider the privilege

and influence that comes with autonomy and knowledge of the world's workings. After Charlotte is first given Montraville's letter, the narrator intrudes, addressing men who might read the novel: "Any reader, who has the least knowledge of the world, will easily imagine the letter was made up of encomiums on her beauty, and vows of everlasting love and constancy; nor will he be surprised that a heart open to every gentle, generous sentiment, should feel itself warmed by gratitude for a man who professed to feel so much for her" (26). This intrusion warns any seducer—like Montraville—to beware the consequences of his actions, both for himself and others. While he may intend only to court a girl so long as his interest remains, he should not be surprised if his efforts have a greater effect than anticipated, for what else is a girl at this time expected to seek, but love and marriage?

Ultimately, *Charlotte Temple* works to capture the impossible, contradictory duality of women's experience. When Charlotte hesitates to read Montraville's letter, La Rue accuses her of being cold for not wanting to ease his suffering, knowing he will soon leave to serve with the British army in America (30). Though La Rue's manipulation is obvious, her words touch on a real, damaging part of the expectations placed on women: rejecting Montraville, with no consideration for his feelings as La Rue contends, would appear heartless, an unfeeling move even if done in Charlotte's defense of herself and her virtue. Later, when Charlotte seems resolved to cut off the relationship and has decided not to go to America with Montraville, La Rue steps in again, telling Charlotte she "shall not be surprised at any outrage which Montraville may commit, when he finds himself disappointed" at Charlotte's absence from their scheduled meeting (45). Given the responsibility placed on women to fulfill men's wishes, Charlotte—or any woman—would experience the very real fear of a backlash from the man she rejects. The specific phrasing of La Rue's warning—"outrage"; "commit"—gestures to the possibility of violent retaliation, recognizing the physical harm women experience at the hands of men they turn down.

The narrator's intrusions appear to confirm this manipulative victim-blaming: "no woman can be run away with contrary to her own inclination" (27). Coupled with language like "daughters of misfortune . . . without the least power to defend themselves" and the "wish for power to extirpate those monsters of seduction from the earth," however, the novel elucidates the impossible contradictions to which women are subjected (vi, 27). It makes clear that seducers are guilty of the destruction they cause while

illustrating how blame is redirected onto girls who have been seduced by directly voicing the words used to place blame: they can only fall into fates for which they asked.

*Charlotte Temple* becomes a cautionary tale targeting those who would protect their daughter's virtue by shielding her from knowledge—keeping her in the dark for fear that what she learns will corrupt her mind—as well as a plea to grant girls the autonomy to stand for themselves and others in need of help. The subtlety of the novel's argumentative strategies and its cautious ethos resist turning away contemporaneous readers who would deem the ideas too radical. Rowson, then, appears a woman writer defying the constraints holding back her gender and using her influence to raise up the young girls who so desperately need it.

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## The Complex Coherence of Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*

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Laura Joy Phillips

**O**f *One Blood*—a magazine novel published in 1902 and 1903 by groundbreaking author, editor, and journalist Pauline Hopkins—whisks readers on a dramatic journey from the “leaden sky” and “soaking streets” of Boston to the paradisiacal city of Telassar (30). The story follows Reuel Briggs, a white-passing Black medical student who pushes at the boundary between life and death while exploring medicine and mesmerism. Contemporary readers may find the novel’s sudden shift from ghost story to expedition account jarring and might find the entire novel disjointed and confusing. I argue, however, that the context in which Hopkins was writing not only explains her segmented style, but also melds the novel’s structure with its meaning. The novel’s relevant contexts include the nadir of American race relations, popular Victorian literary genres, and—perhaps most intriguingly—the story’s form of publication: magazine serialization. Reading *Of One Blood* as foremost a serial story offers a richer understanding of Hopkins’s novel.

Hanna Wallinger argues “Hopkins needs to be taken seriously as a political writer, a social critic, an influential editor, and a pioneer playwright and fiction writer. Her unconventional and manipulative voice was part of a tradition, her views and writings typical of her time and circumstances” (5). Wallinger describes her biography as “an effort to put Hopkins back into a context into which she belonged in the first place” (5). Certainly,

a number of scholars examine *Of One Blood*'s historical context. While considering Hopkins's cultural surrounding, scholars have also drawn a range of connections between her work and other texts. Ira Dworkin, for instance, explores Hopkins's appropriation of descriptions of Africa from a biography of Dr. Livingstone, noting her imitation of "white periodical culture and European exploration narratives" (Yarborough et al. 17). Nisi Shawl adds that *Of One Blood* "blend[s] two popular late-Victorian literary forms: 'society' novels of the doings of the upper classes and lost world adventures."

Despite this attention to historical and literary context, few scholars attend to the significance of the novel's serial form, except perhaps to explain Hopkins's prolific "appropriation" of other texts (Yarborough et al. 3). Introductions to the novel's reprints address serialization primarily as it connects to other literary conversations, such as the legacy of Black women publishing or twentieth-century conversations about race and psychology. Serialization deserves a more prominent place in this conversation, though, because, as Rachel Ihara concludes, "novels published as books performed a rather different function from their magazine counterparts" (131). Hopkins's serial novels were written for different audiences, with different goals, and in different styles than her first novel, a sprawling exploration of romance, gender, and mixed-race identity.

Serialization allows for breaks in the story that form natural subsections within the narrative, but this segmentation may seem confusing when reading the story straight-through. One helpful comparison for contemporary readers: the different storytelling techniques we find on television shows versus what we find in movies. When watching a movie, for example, one might find a fifteen-minute digression into the backstory of a supporting character strange. Television series, however, regularly contain entire episodes from marginal characters' perspectives. Television's serial form subdivides narratives into individual episodes, so we do not expect the tone—or even the subject—to be the same in each one. The audience simply has different expectations.

Since *Of One Blood* was written for serial publication, it is no surprise the story seems to stitch together disconnected segments. In fact, the narrative seems to preserve the distinct genres of ghost story and adventure account, rather than letting them bleed into one another. Wallinger argues the novel centers on Reuel's "composite" identity: for him to fully understand

himself, he must experience both America and Africa (212). The narrative's story, then, mirrors its protagonist's complexity. In the United States, the ghost story elements loom large, while in Africa the "lost world" narrative takes over. Wallinger notes that Reuel's association with the paranormal seems linked to his Africanness: "The point of contact between himself and his past is the power of second sight" (216). On the other hand, when he first arrives in Africa, "Reuel's position is that of explorer/conqueror; he is more American than African American" (Wallinger 214). The change of setting combines with a change in genre to highlight Reuel's multifaceted struggle for identity. The conventions of serialization allow the flexibility of different styles in subsequent installments, without entirely disorienting the reader.

Reading the text with a focus on installment breaks instead of chapter divisions allows a better understanding of how the narrative hangs together. For instance, after six chapters of gloomy weather, paranormal events, and Reuel falling in love, the seventh chapter depicts Aubrey—Reuel's friend—suddenly advising Reuel to take a two-year trip to Africa to earn his fortune. Later editions remove the magazine formatting, making this turn of events seem random. When *Of One Blood* was published serially, however, the expedition's introduction appears in at the opening of the third installment. Clearly, the novel's original divisions help explain the story's twists and turns.

When the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers first reprinted Hopkins's magazine novels in 1998, it retained end-of-installment "To be continued" notes, but these visual markers are hardly more attention-grabbing than a typical chapter break. In this edition, *Of One Blood's* sections continue in the very next line (while retaining the compact typesetting of the original), giving no sense of the strong temporal break, in which the original audience waited for the next issue. The Givens Foundation for African-American Literature's 2004 edition acknowledges, on its back cover, the story's original serialization, yet nothing in the text itself signals the section breaks. As Ihara indicates, though, Hopkins "strategic[ally] use[s] serial structure in order to maximize suspense and stimulate desire for subsequent installments" (133). Hopkins's use of suspense becomes clear when comparing the chapter endings of her non-serialized novel, *Contending Forces*, with the installment breaks in her serialized stories:

In the earlier work, chapters typically close at the end of a conversation, with a final comment on the action by the narrator, or with a character drifting off to sleep. Closure, not the creation of suspense, is the organizing principle. In contrast, the magazine novels' monthly installments (which sometimes, but not always, correspond to chapters) tend to conclude at a moment of high dramatic tension, with some shocking development that places the protagonist in danger. (Ihara 133)

Installment breaks that do not always line up with chapter breaks can make a non-serial reading of the novel confusing.

Perhaps the most dramatic example appears in the very first installment break. Only a handful of paragraphs into Chapter IV, the text reveals the woman from the accident is the same woman Reuel keeps mysteriously encountering. The installment reveals this dramatic twist in its final line: "He moved aside disclosing to Reuel's gaze the lovely face of Dianthe Lusk!" (40). Contemporaneous readers were left to wonder about this woman, but reading the story as an uninterrupted novel eliminates the suspense. Without so much as a scene break, the 2004 edition moves onto a long, philosophical paragraph contemplating the nature of life and death. Not only does the revelation of Dianthe's identity lose its mystery and power, but the abrupt shift seems jarring.

In addition, neither the 1998 nor 2004 edition includes the short summaries at the beginning of each installment. For early-twentieth-century readers, these blurbs reminded them what already happened or allowed them to jump into the story midstream. For contemporary readers, such summaries might seem superfluous, though they still might have several formal effects: slowing the narrative; drawing attention to the break in the story; and—perhaps most fascinatingly—revealing what details the author considered most important. The absence of these summarizing paragraphs changes how we read the story. For instance, Aubrey's orchestrated murder of his wife in Chapter IX. In the novel, they disappear beneath the water, with readers left to guess the outcome, finding no mention of the event until Reuel's vague premonition in Chapter XI. The text confirms Dianthe's death only at the opening of Chapter XIV. In the magazine, however, an installment break immediately followed Chapter IX. Again, readers were forced to wait. The next installment's opening summary, however,

explains plainly that Dianthe, Aubrey, and Molly “overturned in the river, and all three are supposed to have been drowned” (339). Intriguingly, the text’s suspense manifests differently for these audiences, with readers of the magazine learning sooner than readers of the novel.

Of course, these installments also appeared within a larger publication, sharing pages and readership with other material in the *Colored American Magazine*. As both a contributor to and editor of the paper, Hopkins knew in advance what would surround her stories. As Ihara notes, it’s “important to not lose sight of Hopkins’s shrewd attentiveness to audience” (129). Hazel Carby praises Hopkins’s ability as editor to achieve “intertextual coherence” through a “network of relationships between *Of One Blood* and other, nonfictional articles in the journal” (47). Hopkins also made strategic use of pseudonyms, sometimes publishing multiple pieces in one magazine (Wallinger 59). Clearly, she paid close attention to what her audience would read alongside her own work.

One way Hopkins pursued coherence for her readers was by writing parts of the novel to suit the season in which they would be published. This correspondence is strongest in *Of One Blood*’s first two installments, which came out in November and December of 1902. The opening sentences of the novel establish the setting as “the first week in November,” and the narrative repeatedly describes dreary weather: “the leaden sky, the dripping panes, and the sounds of the driving storm outside” (29–30). This dark season reinforces the gothic, ghostly tone, with Reuel’s strange vision of a woman’s face fading away “while a sense of sadness and foreboding wrapped him about as with a pall” (32). Chapter III takes place on “Hallow-ee” and features a group of friends entertaining themselves with ghost stories just before Reuel again encounters the mysterious woman (36–38). The installment ends, of course, with Reuel encountering Dianthe after her accident, finding her in a state of suspended animation.

These first few chapters suggest something in the tradition of Frankenstein—a gothic novel exploring the morality of trying to bring to life someone who should be dead. And yet, with a little of Reuel’s medical magic, Dianthe seems fully restored. The novel’s focus then, however, is not so much spirits and visions but parties and romance. Instead of Halloween, we have Christmas. In fact, most of what occurs in the second installment takes place on a “good, sensible seasonable day before Christmas, with frost and ice in abundance” (108). Reuel and Aubrey are staying at the Vance



manor, which is full of “[w]armth, gaiety, pretty women, luxury” (110). The novel toys with themes of advent and incarnation as Reuel recounts his meetings with Dianthe: “I saw Dianthe first, but not in the flesh . . . I spoke to her in the garden of the haunted house, but not in the flesh” (109). His story concludes with his desire being realized when he finds her in the hospital “*in the flesh!*” (109). Compared to the previous installment, these chapters exude “an atmosphere of peace and prosperity”—very fitting for a story published around Christmas (108).

If Hopkins’s repeated mentions of Christmas are not enough to confirm her seasonal attentiveness, we need only look at the era’s broader periodical culture. Charles Dickens—a hugely influential writer and editor of serial work—was enamored with Christmas. Though mainly remembered for *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens’s love of the season also prompted him to release special “Christmas Numbers” of his weekly *Household Words*. The first such issue, published December 21, 1850, is a veritable blizzard of Christmas. The usual Shakespeare quote on the mast is replaced with the words “The Christmas Number,” and every story and article contains “Christmas” in the title: “A Christmas Tree,” “Christmas in Lodgings,” and “Christmas Among the London Poor and Sick,” to name few. Though there is no definitive evidence Dickens’s serial novels changed thematically based on when they were published, we see a great deal of intertextual coherence in his cherished Christmas Numbers.

The December 1900 issue of *Colored American Magazine* reveals that, fifty years later, the holiday still loomed large in periodical culture. The cover and frontispiece were “The Sichel Madonna” and “After the Meals Came the Puddings and the Pies” respectively; and stories included “General Washington (A Christmas Story)” as well as holiday-themed informational pieces. Then, in the December 1902 issue, “The Test of Manhood: A Christmas Story” by Sarah A. Allen—one of Hopkins’s pseudonyms—immediately followed *Of One Blood*. Hopkins’s seasonal awareness helps us make sense of the tone at the novel’s beginning: refusing to treat the opening chapters’ focus on gloomy thoughts and paranormal occurrences and its seasonal relevance as indicators of the entire novel’s tone helps explain the adventure story that follows, and the drift from stormy nights to sunny days.

When examining what at times feel like a disjointed novel, we must recognize that narrative continuity was not Hopkins’s priority. In fact, she

actively disrupts the story with sharp turns in setting and plot. Hopkins's unity is thematic and intertextual—not limited to the novel itself. She creates coherence through the story's overall message and how each installment fits with the stories around it. Although *Of One Blood* now appears in attractive, accessible form as a paperback, it's difficult to understand it outside its original form. Future editions of the novel would do well to clearly delineate section breaks and include the dates of publication and installment summaries. Hopkins embraced the composite nature of serial novels, using this patchwork structure to craft a complex narrative. She paid special attention to the suspense at the end of each installment and provided readers with handy summaries of past sections. She even seems to have tailored the content and tone of some installments according to the season. To read *Of One Blood* divorced from its original format is to lose a significant portion of the novel's craft.

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## “More Fair Than Black”: The Performance of Whiteness in *Othello*

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Dalton Greene

In 1604, when *Othello* was first performed, notions of race were drastically different than they are now. To a modern reader, Othello, an African living in Europe, is plainly a Black man, but his treatment in the text points to a different, more nuanced conclusion. Through a number of actions—his service to the Venetian state, his conversion to Christianity, and his intimate relationship with Desdemona—Othello attempts to construct a racial and social identity akin to whiteness in what I will call a “performance of whiteness.” This performance, especially when considered alongside recent scholarship on race, is key for understanding the play’s plot and offers commentary on the dynamic nature of race. The performance of whiteness suggests Othello has, in some sense, abandoned his Blackness in pursuit of a white, European ideal that allows him greater freedom and acceptance in society. His performance, however, eventually goes too far to be accepted in Venice, prompting a retaliation that forces Othello to abandon this assumed whiteness and return to his Blackness. Othello thus is victim not just of his own irrational jealousy, but of other characters’ inability to understand or embrace the many, often overlapping identities of this “stranger / of here and everywhere” (1.1.134–35).

The first key to grasping Othello’s initial perceived whiteness is understanding how the play’s other characters treat him. We know, thanks to the work of scholars such as Imtiaz Habib, there was a considerable—though

often underestimated—Black presence in London during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries (163). Black people, of course were still categorized as Other in England and the rest of Europe: sources show people of African descent in Elizabethan London were explicitly racialized in many ways, with the term “blackamoor” a relatively common label for Blackness (Habib 166–70). Given the frequent use of such language, it is significant that Othello is never called a “blackamoor” during the play. He is called simply “the Moor” (1.1.39). The omission of the “black” label reveals a great deal about the way Othello is perceived in Venetian society, suggesting his white counterparts overlook his racial identity, to at least some extent.

I do not wish to suggest the play’s white characters never other Othello, but the precise nature of this othering is important. “Race” is a complex term, and my argument here requires a clear definition. Depending on the context, race can be physical or social, referring to the phenotypic characteristics of different ethnicities or the categories imposed upon these individuals by society (“Race”). When characters speak of Othello in ways that emphasize his Blackness, they always emphasize his *physical* Blackness. The moniker “thick lips,” the mention of his “sooty bosom,” and the dehumanizing metaphor of the “black ram”—reprehensible as they are—refer exclusively to Othello’s physical traits (1.1.65, 1.2.70, 1.1.87). His performance of whiteness, on the other hand, has little to do with physical whiteness. Instead Othello strives to imitate the social ideal of whiteness. From this perspective, the importance of the racialized language characters use to describe Othello fades, because, even when commenting on his physical Blackness, they overlook his socially constructed Blackness and accept him as an equal (i.e., as white).

It may seem Othello lacks agency in these matters—that his white peers alone dictate how he is treated—but an examination of his efforts to encourage a positive reception, by adapting to the model of an ideal (white) Venetian, suggests otherwise. One obvious way he does so is by aiding the Venetian state’s military efforts, something he manages adeptly, “humbly . . . bending to [the] state” and performing their whiteness so well that he rises through the ranks, becoming one of their most respected generals (1.3.235). On multiple occasions, he is lauded as the “valiant” hero in Venice’s wars with the Ottomans (1.3.47–48). Such striking

conformity—which even requires Othello to wage war against people from backgrounds more similar to his own than any Venetian comrades—fuels others' willingness to overlook his Blackness and welcome him as one of their own.

Another effort to perform whiteness and separate himself from Blackness occurs through Othello's Christianity. Embracing Islam when Venice is at war with the Ottoman Empire's Muslim population would single Othello out and undercut any positive reputation he might achieve. Since Christianity and whiteness were virtually inseparable in Europe at the time, any fully committed performance of whiteness required conversion. As Ian Smith points out, "blacks have always needed to know whiteness . . . while whiteness has been free of the burden of knowing anything about the cultural intimacies of blackness" (108). The double-edged nature of this statement rings especially true for Othello: white Venetians are allowed to view Islam as a monolithic, foreign evil, so Othello must convincingly adopt Christianity—and, by extension, whiteness—if he wishes to be accepted in Venice. Once again, he succeeds admirably, showing little hesitation. When he comes upon Montano and Cassio fighting in the street, Othello harshly inquires whether they have "turned Turks," fully embracing the stereotypes of primitiveness and brutishness white Venetians hold of Muslims (2.3.159). He positions himself as white, implying the two men inhabit a white space that wholly forbids such unseemly behavior.

Othello's disavowal of what may appear core components of his identity can seem extreme and puzzling, but Frantz Fanon's work offers an explanation. Fanon asserts "the black man wants to be white"—to adopt some of whiteness's qualities (xiii). By following white Venice's hegemonic model—serving in their military and rejecting his religion—Othello initiates a sort of racial reciprocity: he performs the whiteness expected from a Venetian man so he may shed some of the negative connotations normally attached to his Black African identity. In fact, following Fanon's logic, Othello's conformity is taken to the absolute limit: "there is nothing in common" between Othello and a true Black man, because Othello has taken a white woman as his wife, which Fanon recognizes as the ultimate indication of aspiring whiteness (xvii).

Othello's relationship with Desdemona, especially its tragic end, serves as a turning point for his performative whiteness. At the play's opening, Othello exhibits sincere love for Desdemona, "[his] soul's joy," which

perhaps proves his desire to assume whiteness, freeing him from the stigma of Blackness (2.1.184). While his Venetian peers accept his other aspirations to whiteness, however, his involvement with Desdemona elicits negative responses. When Brabantio learns of his daughter's marriage to Othello, Iago uses bestial imagery to characterize the relationship. Calling Othello a "Barbary horse" and saying he and Desdemona "are making the beast with two backs," Iago frames the relationship in the context of Othello's purported sub-human attributes (1.1.111, 1.1.115). The root of Iago's hatred for Othello is significant, as well, because it motivates him to sabotage the relationship: he believes Othello "[has] done [his] office" by sleeping with his wife, Emilia (1.3.380). In the play, Blackness is tolerated so long as it conforms to whiteness without encroaching on whiteness. As soon as Othello joins himself physically with whiteness—whether actually, as with Desdemona, or presumptively, as with Emilia—his Blackness can no longer be tolerated.

This transgression—by which Othello oversteps the boundaries of an acceptable performance of whiteness—precipitates his tragic downfall, pushing him into a sphere of Blackness marked by behavior that does not fit white, Venetian standards. When the handkerchief convinces Othello of Desdemona's infidelity, he declares his name is "now begrimed and black / as [his] own face," a telling acknowledgement of his Blackness (3.3.387–88). This moment signals Othello's awareness of Blackness's unpleasant associations and marks the transition from performing whiteness to reassuming the characteristics associated with Blackness at the time. Leo Africanus's *Geographical History of Africa* indicates how early-modern Europeans perceived Othello and other Blacks, claiming both that "no nation in the world is so subject unto jealousy" and that "[Africans] beleeeve matters impossible, which are told to them," stereotypes visible in Othello's behavior and Iago's plotting (183, 185). When Iago resolves to trick Othello, he leans into these prejudices, relying on them to ensure his plan's success. He notes that "Moors / are changeable in their wills," so they are easily fooled (1.3.345–46). Most damningly, though, he declares Othello is "of a free and open nature / that thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (1.3.391–92). Such statements would be understood by early modern audiences to mean Othello—despite his performative whiteness—is still fundamentally Black, a supposed fault on which Iago intends to prey.

Once Iago's deception unfolds, Othello plays into this trap, fully

abandoning his performance of whiteness and, seemingly, confirming contemporaneous assumptions about Blackness. By displaying immediate anger and intense jealousy—without questioning Iago’s claims—Othello moves away from proper conduct (whiteness) once and for all. His cry, “[a]rise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!” confirms his rejection of whiteness: his vengeance is black in that it’s sinister, but also Black in the sense it is inappropriate in white Venetian society (3.3.447). The play confirms Othello’s Blackness with Lodovico saying “this would not be believed in Venice” when Othello strikes Desdemona in a moment of jealous rage (4.1.236).

At the play’s conclusion, Othello’s inhabitation of Blackness is seen most clearly not in his actions, but in his words before he commits suicide:

And say besides that in Aleppo once,  
 where a malignant and a turbaned Turk  
 beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
 I took by th’ throat the circumciséd dog  
 and smote him—thus. (5.2.352–56)

Symbolically uniting his body with the Turk—the Muslim enemy of Venice; the fearsome Other—marks Othello as completely distinct from and diametrically opposed to the whiteness he earlier emulated. At this point in the narrative, he appears entirely what a Black man was imagined to be in seventeenth-century England, which precipitates his lamentable end.

*Othello* depicts a main character who, while attempting to navigate European society as an equal, becomes embroiled in a complicated battle between two identities. When Othello implores us to “speak of me as I am,” he suggests only the audience—more removed from the play’s action than his fellow characters are—can fully appreciate his situation (5.2.342). By modeling himself on his counterparts to gain legitimacy among powerful whites, Othello temporarily moves away from Blackness. He achieves respectability by shunning his Black identity and conforming to the standards of whiteness. When his relationship with Desdemona brings him physically into the sphere of whiteness, however, others react. Whereas his performative whiteness merely brings Blackness closer to whiteness (the assumed ideal), his marriage to Desdemona brings whiteness closer to his Blackness (the putatively inferior identity), an offense which cannot be

overlooked. The overly ambitious imitation of a white Venetian prompts Iago to fool Othello into believing his wife is unfaithful, which, in turn, precipitates Othello's desertion of the performance of whiteness. Iago assumes—likely along with Elizabethan audiences—that Othello is nothing more than a collection of stereotypically Black characteristics tenuously masquerading as white. The text's apparent confirmation of these stereotypes reveals that Othello is not just a victim of jealousy and trickery, but also of the period's overt racism.

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Ending the Cycle of Abuse: Intimate  
Partner Violence, Gender Roles,  
and Sisterhood in “Woman Hollering  
Creek” and “Sabrina & Corina”

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Felicia Jarrin

Sandra Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek,” published in her 1991 short story collection *Women Hollering Creek*, and Kali Fajardo-Anstine’s short story “Sabrina & Corina,” published in her 2019 collection *Sabrina & Corina*, narrate the stories of Cleófilas and Sabrina, respectively: two Latina characters who experience various forms of intimate partner violence throughout their adult lives. Both texts explore concepts of female dependency on men and restrictive gender roles that make the women characters particularly vulnerable to emotional and physical abuse in their Chicana and Mexican societies. Cisneros and Fajardo-Anstine emphasize sisterhood as an alternative to the Chicana and Mexican patriarchies, and the development of these sisterhoods reveals that generational cycles of violence against women can be broken by the formation of strong support systems amongst women and through a refusal to normalize gendered violence.

Both “Woman Hollering Creek” and “Sabrina & Corina” begin by exploring romanticized views of the future and the idealized views of love often prevalent in adolescent girls’ lives. In “Woman Hollering Creek,” the main character, Cleófilas, grows up in a small Mexican village watching *telenovelas* that establish unrealistic expectations for how love should look. By admiring the romanticized pain and suffering in *telenovelas*, Cleófilas internalizes the idea that conflict is an integral part of love. When she

marries Juan Pedro and moves from Mexico to a small Texas town, this unbalanced understanding of love and suffering follows her across the border: “to suffer for love is good. The pain all sweet somehow. In the end” (45). The *telenovelas*’ normalization of abuse in romantic relationships establishes the status quo for Cleófilas’s relationships and foreshadows the physical and emotional pain she suffers at the hands of her husband early in their marriage.

In “Sabrina & Corina,” Corina Cordova narrates the story of growing up with her cousin Sabrina in Colorado. Sabrina has never met her white father, who left her mother before she was born, but she inherited his blue eyes. Those eyes and her dark hair make her “the family beauty” (26). Sabrina and Corina are inseparable throughout their childhood, and the *primas hermanas* dream of moving to California and becoming Hollywood actresses. Just as Cleófilas dreams of passion and romance, Sabrina harbors hope for a future full of endless opportunity and love.

As the teenage girls grow into women, however, their unrealistic expectations for love contrast violently with their realities. Cleófilas’s husband begins to abuse her physically early in their marriage, which shocks her more than it frightens or angers her. While she always thought she would defend herself if a man were to touch her, when Juan Pedro’s fists bruise her face “she didn’t fight back, she didn’t break into tears, she didn’t run away as she imagined she might when she saw such things in the *telenovelas*” (47). Cleófilas has internalized the notion that suffering and pain are essential elements of love, so she does not defend herself when Juan Pedro strikes her. In “Sabrina & Corina,” Sabrina spirals into self-destruction after dropping out of high school in eleventh grade to work at a bar, as Corina observes her friend drinking too much and sleeping with a string of strange men. While Sabrina once dreamed of becoming a famous actress, she discovers the absence of parental support and the lack of opportunities as a high-school dropout trap her in Denver. Around the time Sabrina begins to show up to family gatherings smelling like a “barroom floor,” Corina goes to beauty school and starts her career (33). The *primas hermanas* grow apart until one day—in their mid-twenties—Corina learns that Sabrina has been strangled and killed by an unnamed man.

Cleófilas and Sabrina become victims of domestic violence as their

realities fail to match their romanticized expectations. Scholars and domestic-violence-prevention organizations widely recognize that domestic violence disproportionately affects women and occurs across all racial/ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes (Flores-Ortiz 268; Grossman and Lundy 1029; “Women of Color”). Domestic violence occurs frequently in patriarchal societies where men have power over women and occupy positions of authority in both private and public spaces. Cleófilas and Sabrina are subject to intimate partner violence in the patriarchal societies of Mexico and the U.S., two cultures that repress their agency from birth.

“Woman Hollering Creek” and “Sabrina & Corina” portray two different patriarchal Mexican and Chicana societies in which almost all female characters are dependent on men. When Cleófilas is growing up in her father’s house in Mexico, her life consists of “chores that never ended, six good-for-nothing brothers, and one old man’s complaints” (43). Her roles in the household are caretaker and homemaker, traditionally gendered roles. When she gets married, Cleófilas is “given,” with her father’s permission, to Juan Pedro, a patriarchal tradition that treats women as property to be transferred between men. Upon her arrival in Seguin, Texas, she discovers the town is “built so that you have to depend on husbands” (50-51). While Juan Pedro leaves early each morning for work, Cleófilas serves as a stay-at-home mother who spends her days taking care of the baby, cleaning the house, doing chores, and cooking meals. She dreams of a new and exciting life in Texas as a married woman, but on her wedding day she simply moves from being subject to her father’s power to being under her husband’s control. The story shifts from the patriarchal society in Mexico to a similar patriarchal society in the U.S., where Cleófilas’s role as caretaker remains almost entirely unchanged.

Sabrina is emotionally dependent on men throughout “Sabrina & Corina,” basing her sense of self-worth on men’s approval. This dependence on men can be traced back to Sabrina’s absent white father: this initial abandonment creates deep roots of insecurity. Fajardo-Anstine describes Sabrina as “double alienated,” explaining that Sabrina does not look exactly like Corina or her other cousins—which isolates her from the Chicana community—yet she does not feel she belongs in the white community either, largely because she has never met her father (“Latinx Vision”). Sabrina’s abandonment issues and identity crisis manifest in her numerous romantic relationships with white men. Corina describes Sabrina dating a

slew of “men who all looked alike: tall, thick-necked, green eyes or blue,” with “a continuation of the withdrawn expression I had seen in those old photographs of Sabrina’s father” (34). Sabrina can never understand why her father left. Her desire to fill this void drives her to seek approval from men who look like him. She also has “a way of talking to men like she was a gift, an offering of an expressive pretty face and a girlish giggle. It didn’t matter who it was, so long as they gave her attention back” (35). Sabrina finds reassurance in male approval; men’s interest fuels her self-esteem. This desire for attention creates codependency between her and her male partners.

Cleófilas and Sabrina evoke the dichotomous cultural models of *marianismo* and *malinchismo*. *Marianismo* refers to *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the model for Mexican and Chicana womanhood: “she is the mother, the nurturer, she has endured pain and sorrow, she is willing to serve” (Hurtado 141). Mexican women and Chicanas are asked to internalize the selfless, nurturing values embodied in the Virgin Mary, by prioritizing motherhood and family above all else. The opposite of *marianismo* is *malinchismo*, a term linked to *La Malinche*: the indigenous woman Malintzin who aided Hernán Cortés’s sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire (Hurtado 140). Malintzin was Cortés’s translator and lover, and their son was “the first *mestizo*, [a person] of mixed Indian [indigenous] and Spanish parentage” (Wyatt 248). A skillful translator and important strategist for the conquistadors, Malintzin became infamous for her betrayal of the Aztec Empire, as “Mexican storytellers pinned the blame for the Conquest on her complicity with Cortez and more specifically her sexual complicity” (Wyatt 248). As Wyatt astutely notes, Malintzin’s involvement with the colonizers makes her passively accountable for the oppression of all indigenous peoples. Chicana feminist scholars suggest “[s]kepticism about women [in Mexico] has its origins in the cultural and sexual violation of *La Malinche*. Historically, *La Malinche*, a woman, is the ultimate traitor of Mexico” (Hurtado 140). *La Malinche* is the submissive, yet guilty figure whose sexual complicity led her to betray her own culture.

Together, *marianismo* and *malinchismo* provide a frame for classifying Mexican and Chicana woman into groups of “good woman” and “bad woman,” based on their values, priorities, and sexuality (Hurtado 142). Cleófilas epitomizes the “good woman.” She is presumably a virgin until marriage, and, after marriage, she dutifully starts a family with her

husband. She quietly suffers her husband's abuse because she views him as "this rival, this keeper, this lord, this master, this husband till kingdom come" (49). Cleófilas mirrors the values of *la marianismo*, obeying her husband, submitting to him in God's name. In contrast, Sabrina fits the stereotype of *malinchismo* as a "bad woman." She is sexually promiscuous and reckless; she drinks too much; and she sleeps with a number of white men. These sexual conquests signify her abandonment, or betrayal, of her mother culture, as she attempts to compensate for her absent white father. Corina interprets her cousin's substance abuse and promiscuity as disregard for her own self-worth, noting that Sabrina's "carelessness disgusted me" (42). Cleófilas and Sabrina have fundamentally different values, yet—despite being characterized as "good" or "bad"—both are victims of intimate partner violence who suffer from a lack of agency in their restrictive patriarchal societies.

Cisneros and Fajardo-Anstine make clear that Cleófilas's and Sabrina's stories are not isolated incidents. Intimate partner violence is ubiquitous and is too often silenced. There remains a significant underreporting of domestic violence—especially amongst women of color—and women hesitate to seek help, due to a number of factors: "fear of isolation and alienation"; strong religious and cultural beliefs that seem to "legitimize the abuser's behavior"; "distrust of law enforcement"; and "fear of rejection from family, friends, congregation, and community" ("Women of Color"). "Woman Hollering Creek" and "Sabrina & Corina" amplify the issue of domestic violence by creating literary worlds that reflect the real one: violence against women appears in all shapes and forms, spreading across generations and space. Toward the conclusion of "Sabrina & Corina," Corina recalls "all the women my family had lost, the horrible things they'd witnessed, the acts they simply endured. Sabrina had become another face in a line of tragedies that stretched back generations" (44). Aunts and female cousins who died from suicide or addiction, who were left blind or had their babies torn from their arms, who were wronged by men repeatedly. Corina recognizes patterns of violence in which men assert dominance over the women in her family. Unfortunately, Sabrina is no exception.

In "Woman Hollering Creek," Cleófilas thinks of the newspapers filled with stories of women dying: "This woman found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car. This one's cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue. Her ex-husband, her husband,

her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her co-worker. Always” (52). She is hyperconscious of domestic violence—since she regularly experiences abuse in her own home—yet is still disheartened when she fully recognizes the frequent and various ways men abuse women in her community. More immediately, Cleófilas endures, or overhears, countless misogynistic conversations, like listening to her husband and other men laugh at Maximiliano’s sexist jokes. Beneath the banter there is brutal violence, as Maximiliano “was said to have killed his wife in an ice-house brawl when she came at him with a mop. I had to shoot, he had said—she was armed” (51). The men in her community cavalierly discuss violence, cruelly joking about the murder of vulnerable women. These stories’ social settings normalize the oppression of women, depicting a seemingly endless cycle of violence.

The solution to breaking this cycle of violence in “Woman Hollering Creek” and “Sabrina & Corina” emerges through forming sisterhoods that promote women’s agency, finding networks of support, and refusing to accept the status quo. Late in “Woman Hollering Creek,” Cleófilas accepts aid from the two Chicana women, Graciela and Felice. They help Cleófilas leave her husband and return to Mexico. In a town run by husbands and brimming with violence against women, Cleófilas receives support from a small community of more independent, resourceful women. She finds solidarity with Felice, who, without Juan Pedro knowing, drives Cleófilas and her son to the bus station. Felice defies the patriarchal social norms Cleófilas has internalized and exposes her to an alternate definition of what it means to be a woman. She is unmarried and financially independent, she drives her own truck, and she curses like a man. Felice subverts gender norms in a way that allows Cleófilas to reconsider her view of gender roles and her own identity as a Mexican woman.

As they leave town, Felice drives across Woman Hollering Creek shouting like a wild animal—hooting and hollering in delight—giving the creek’s name a new meaning for Cleófilas. She initially believed it was named after a suffering woman, a woman hollering “from anger or pain” (46). After hearing Felice shout “like Tarzan,” though, Cleófilas thinks differently: it could be a woman shouting with joy (55). This reinterpretation occurs at a crucial moment, when Cleófilas crosses the physical border, driving away from Juan Pedro and his abuse, while embracing a new liberty bolstered by Felice’s solidarity and resourcefulness. With the creek as

a symbol of escape and Felice as a model for female liberation, Cleófilas leaves her abusive husband, finding agency as she breaks free from his violent control.

While Cleófilas chooses to escape her husband's abuse with help from other women, Sabrina continues looking to men for admiration. This dependence on men eventually kills her when she is strangled by her boyfriend. Corina accepts that she could not save Sabrina's life or protect her from domestic violence, but she refuses to let Sabrina's story of abuse be forgotten. When her grandmother says Sabrina looks beautiful at the funeral, claiming it was "what she would have wanted," Corina speaks up, insisting "Sabrina didn't want any of this. She wanted to be valuable" (44). Corina advocates on Sabrina's behalf, arguing that she deserved more and suggesting she will no longer tolerate the normalization of violence against women. Sabrina did not want to be just another pretty corpse for everyone to cry over. She wanted to move to Hollywood and become an actress, find true love that would heal her deep-rooted sadness. Corina thinks of Sabrina and all her abused aunts and cousins: "The stories always ended the same, only different girls died, and I didn't want to hear them anymore" (44). By refusing to rationalize Sabrina's abuse or normalize domestic violence, Corina becomes an advocate who breaks the generational cycle of abuse against women in her family, amplifying Sabrina's voice in remembrance.

Although there is salvation in sisterhood, sometimes even it is not enough to save women from cycles of violence in patriarchal societies. Cisneros and Fajardo-Anstine end their short stories with hints of hope, but this hope is incomplete. The Chicana and Mexican characters still inhabit restrictive patriarchal societies that have profoundly harmed them. Sabrina will never live the expansive plans for true love and fame she dreamed of as a teenager. And, while Cleófilas chooses to leave Juan Pedro and his controlling abuse, she does not leave the confines of patriarchy. She returns to her father's house in Mexico, an environment free of emotional and physical abuse, but one still containing restrictive gender roles that limit her opportunities. While the process of dismantling restrictive oppressive hierarchies presents a formidable, complex, and extensive challenge, these stories linger as catalysts for this change.

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## Eat the Rich: Satire and Marxism in *Ready or Not*

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Tara Heimberger

Since the 2008 economic recession and the 2016 election, criticism of capitalism has increased and interest in socialism has risen. In this environment, commentaries on classism and allegories of the wealth divide have become more prominent in popular culture, most particularly in horror films. Rather than a ghost, demon, or monster, the antagonist is less otherworldly: the cyclical capitalist system that benefits “the one percent”—the U.S.’s top earners and/or those with the highest net worth—who uphold that system. For a genre often ignored by highbrow critics and considered a lower form of art, horror films participate in social commentary just as strongly as other genres, yet receive little recognition for the weighty topics they tackle.

One emerging horror genre is best captured by the newly popular phrase “eat the rich,” which is used to express contempt for and exhaustion with capitalism’s failures. This genre criticizes the one percent’s power and privilege, casting both capitalism and the humans who benefit from it as villains. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen claim “horror offers the clearest ground for general social criticism and analysis” (475). The “eat the rich” genre directs this social analysis toward the widespread frustration with late-stage capitalism, denouncing the one percent’s privilege. These movies often serve as a form of voyeuristic revenge against the capitalist system and those who benefit most from it. Typically, a relatable middle-class or

lower-class protagonist—who represents the ninety-nine percent—offers a vicarious catharsis for those living in a world where wealth inequality seems inescapable. Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett’s 2019 *Ready or Not* exemplifies this trend: a horror-comedy with Marxist overtones condemning capitalism, those who benefit from it, and the one percent’s moral code, all while satirizing the horror genre itself.

Grace, the film’s protagonist, serves as proxy for the middle- and lower-class viewers. Her rage enables cathartic revenge upon society’s wealthiest members. Grace marries into the immensely wealthy Le Domas family with a wedding on their ostentatious estate’s lawn. Rather than spend her wedding night with her new husband Alex, Grace is forced to defend herself as the Le Domases hunt her as part of a satanic ritual that solidifies their wealth and power. The family feels entitled to sacrifice Grace’s life to maintain their lifestyle—a common sense of privilege amongst the one percent. They feel the poor owe them labor and, ultimately, their lives, because the rich achieved success through merit and hard work. In reality—like the Le Domas family—the one percent often amasses wealth through inheritance and immorality (for instance, the “eat the rich” trope of satanic pacts).

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels compare “[m]odern bourgeois society” to a “sorcerer” who has lost control of their spells (17). Like this sorcerer, late-stage capitalism is an out-of-control malignant force that allows the wealthy to ignore everyone else. Capitalism permits the wealthy to participate in immoral acts—like breaking the law or profiting off slave labor—without consequence, maintaining their wealth by any means necessary, just as the Le Domas family does. They are willing to torture and sacrifice another person so not to lose their board game “dominion,” and they go to supernatural lengths to attain the lifestyle they desire.

*Ready or Not* criticizes the wealthy by addressing the flaws in systems of inheritance and by considering what, exactly, is passed down. On the surface, wealth is passed from generation to generation, but alongside wealth comes the family’s morality and their expectations for the future. Though the family has only played this sacrificial hide-and-seek on one previous wedding night, all members of the Le Domas family are raised to expect the ritual and, thus, to be willing to kill. This homicidal necessity is

inherited alongside the religious belief that Mr. Le Bail is a satanic figure intent on rescinding the wealth he bestowed upon the family. Daniel Le Domas, the family's archetypal bad seed, notes "[y]ou'll do pretty much anything if your family says it's okay," suggesting that violence and other immorality can be passed through generations. The Le Domas family accepts the human sacrifice of a family member's partner as a necessary risk to ensure the survival of their wealth, power, and board-game empire. Just as other religious dogmas are passed generationally, the Le Domas family teaches its children to fear Mr. Le Bail, and instructs them how to conduct both the satanic rituals that honor the pact and the post-wedding ceremony to initiate new family members. The one percent teach their children they are owed their wealth and power and that less wealthy lives are worthless, a perspective evident in the Le Domas family's normalization of human sacrifice. In the film, this sacrifice allegorizes the common practices of billionaires paying their workers meager wages, profiting from slave labor, and having the economic means to make systemic changes, but refusing. Superficially, *Ready or Not* appears a caricature of the one percent, but it provides a nuanced social commentary on capitalism's flaws and illustrates the power of horror films.

While attacking the rich's privilege, *Ready or Not* also satirizes the horror genre with a self-aware subversion of its tropes. Brady addresses this satirical practice, positing that each film must either uphold or subvert the genre's traditions: "Because of the existence of generic expectations—how a plot 'should' work, what a stereotyped character 'should' do, what a gesture, a location, an allusion, a line of dialogue 'should' mean—the genre film can step beyond the moment of its existence and play against its own aesthetic history" (111). Deploying common tropes creates expectation—a sense of what will come next—but genre films often reject this common path. *Ready or Not* includes several tropes from its horror predecessors: the "final girl" archetype (first identified by Carol Clover); the traditional horror setting; the "deal with the devil"; the less-than-innocent children; and others. Grace clearly appears a slightly altered version of the final girl who endures the Hitchcockian "torture the women!" trope (Williams 5). She serves as proxy for the non-wealthy audience: no connections, no family, no wealth of any kind—all in direct contrast with the Le Domases. Dressed in her lacy white wedding gown, she becomes the object of the family's scrutiny

while taking wedding photos, each member of the Le Domas “dominion” frowning in her direction. In response, her brother-in-law, Daniel, advises her not to “take it personally. They’re just trying to find out if you’re a gold-digging whore, like my wife.” The Le Domas family seems judgmental and cruel in comparison to Grace’s easygoing personality.

*Ready or Not* invites the audience to align themselves with Grace by contrasting her to the Le Domas family’s absurdity and framing their extreme wealth, privilege, and overall affect as off-putting. A character named “Grace” fighting a satanic family moves beyond tongue-in-cheek irony to evoke the good-versus-evil archetype, especially with Grace dressed in her white wedding dress—for the entire film—which is progressively ripped, blood-stained, and covered by the ammunition belt she wears as she fights her in-laws, who wear all black. The gradual change in Grace’s costume symbolizes the trauma she endures. By the film’s conclusion, her sullied gown reflects humankind’s duality: good and evil; grace and violence. As the film closes, Grace sits on the burning estate’s front steps, smoking a cigarette, covered in the gore of her exploded in-laws, gesturing to simultaneous triumph and grief.

The film takes place entirely on the Le Domas estate, deploying the horror trope of the massive Victorian mansion. This setting makes the Le Domases’ hunting ineptitude all the more nonsensical: the estate has been in the family for generations, so they should be adept at navigating the space. In addition, the Victorian mansion alludes to haunted-house films in which the antagonist is a vengeful spirit, though now Grace is the vengeful spirit fighting back against its inhabitants, effectively subverting the trope.

The Le Domas family builds their board-game empire after their patriarch makes a deal with the mysterious Mr. Le Bail. They believe the family will lose their wealth—and their lives—if they do not fulfill all specifications of this pact with the demonic figure. Every new member of the family must play a game on their wedding night, but if hide-and-seek is chosen, the new family member must be sacrificed to Mr. Le Bail or he will reclaim what is his. This pact with the mysterious Mr. Le Bail—and the satanic elements of the ritual—play on the popular “deal with the devil” trope. The film subverts the trope, however, to criticize extreme wealth.

*Ready or Not* also honors its horror predecessors by including child characters who defy expectations of innocence. The two youngest members of

the Le Domas “dominion,” Gabe and Georgie, participate fully in hunting Grace, and are just as violent as their older family members. As Grace cowers in the barn, Georgie approaches. Grace is confused, then relieved to see the young boy. When she moves to ask for his help, he shoots her left hand with a revolver. The shock and betrayal in Grace’s cries are evident just before she punches him in the face and screams “[y]ou little fucker!” The two young boys are taught about the deal with Mr. Le Bail and encouraged to participate in satanic rituals, so it is no wonder they find violence commonplace.

Braudy details the ways genre films reference and revise earlier films, noting “[t]he joy in genre is to see what can be dared in the creation of a new form or the creative destruction and complication of an old one” (109). *Ready or Not* does so by paying homage to—while deconstructing—the short story “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell. The story depicts a man shipwrecked on an island owned by Count Zaroff, an immensely wealthy man who has grown bored with hunting big game and turned to the “most dangerous” game: humans. In the film, one might think the Le Domases would prepare for the possibility the hide-and-seek sacrificial card is drawn, perhaps training to hunt and wield weapons. Their privilege, however, leaves them wholly inept at hunting Grace, so they appear a nearly comic distortion of the short story’s antagonist. The film satirizes the story—and the genre as a whole—by subverting horror tropes and incorporating comedy. Each member of the Le Domas family literally explodes as Mr. Le Bail exacts his revenge for their failure, a turn both shocking and ridiculous. The tone is comical, light-hearted, and vindictive as it represents retaliation against the one percent. These bumbling selfish people recognize their impending doom, then explode in a mess worthy of the horror genre.

Braudy argues genre films “arouse and complicate feelings about the self and society that more serious films, because of their bias toward the unique, may rarely touch” (105). *Ready or Not* unapologetically mocks the wealthy and the horror genre. It invites viewers to align themselves with the downtrodden Grace and recognize the inherent flaws in a capitalist system that rewards terrible people like the Le Domas family. The film offers commentary on classism, questioning a system that allows the Le Domases to thrive while feeling entitled to harm those less wealthy than them. *Ready or Not* and similar horror films suggest that wealth is not indicative of

character and that extreme wealth contributes to the systematic oppression of the poor.

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## Trouble in Paradox: A Spatial Analysis of Cynthia Ozick's "The Pagan Rabbi"

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Grace Hotz

The term "space" refers not only to physical spaces, but also ideological spaces defined by the cultural traditions, belief systems, and homogeneity of people occupying them. People of multiple cultural heritages navigate multiple spaces in which they shape their identities. In her short story "The Pagan Rabbi," Cynthia Ozick conveys the struggles of Jewish Americans to reconcile their Jewish heritage with American secularism through her representation of Isaac Kornfeld, a prominent Jewish scholar and rabbi who has committed suicide in a public park. In an effort to discover the cause of Isaac's suicide, his friend—the unnamed narrator—conducts an investigation. With the help of Isaac's widow, Scheindel, the narrator discovers Isaac's obsession with nature and his turn toward pantheism. In despair over his conflicting beliefs, Isaac hangs himself from a tree with his prayer shawl. Isaac's struggle to blend his Jewish heritage with his paganistic beliefs evokes the greater struggle of diasporic Jewish Americans as they attempt to solidify their cultural identities. While most scholars interpret "The Pagan Rabbi" in light of Ozick's historical and biographical context, supplementing previous analysis with aspects of spatial theory helps illustrate the questions of cultural identity permeating the story. Through Isaac's journey, Ozick depicts the Jewish American struggle to build an identity within American secularism, leaving them in a space where negotiation may be impossible, which can, in turn, lead to fragmentation.

Written and published in the 1960s, “The Pagan Rabbi” captures the pluralism that both characterizes American culture and tempts those of Jewish descent to embrace American secularism. Obviously, up to the sixties, minorities suffered rejection and discrimination, a “gritty corollary to the dominant politics of recognition that emerged in the sixties” (Franco 57). As the Civil Rights Movement gained traction, however, discrimination against minority groups faded slightly as those outside the majority population began to gain recognition. During this period, minority authors emerged in the literary mainstream with a new emphasis on multiculturalism, reflecting a growing culture of pluralism (Franco 57). The visibility of minority experiences in the 1960s helped produce, in some, the pluralistic notion that multiple experiences could coexist, rather than a single definition of truth—or reality—holding for everyone. Some in the Jewish community found this new pluralistic outlook appealing. The era’s Jewish American experience included “assimilation, conversion, intermarriage, and anti-Semitism, [leading to] the exploration of viable visions of renewal [becoming] a necessity for Jewish continuity” (Urban 402). Because of the difficulty finding their place in American culture, many in the Jewish community continually sought methods for renewing their faith and reasserting their identity. Gradually, 1960s pluralism influenced the Jewish community, leading many to alter their beliefs as they combined the liberalism of natural theology with conservative Judaism. This new interest in natural theology prompted efforts to counteract the threat of paganism in the Jewish community, as some feared the potential eradication of the Jewish faith (Cohn-Sherbok 328). The pluralism that marked the sixties in the U.S. produced conflict within the Jewish community—and Jewish individuals—as they struggled to establish a balance between their American setting and their Jewish heritage.

“The Pagan Rabbi” represents this pluralistic landscape’s impact on the Jewish community, exploring its pursuit of new ways of living and the separation from its original beliefs. For an ideology to prosper, it must create a “space” in which people adhere to its practices—an ideological space that exists to sustain and protect the belief system. However, when one encounters new ways of life, they may separate from an ideological space. Similar to breaking false consciousness in Marxist theory—which



ends “through . . . experiencing some other form of life”—separation from an ideological space occurs when an occupant is exposed to some new ideology (Eyerman 277). When people experience—and embrace—a new lifestyle, they separate themselves from their original beliefs. Separation manifests in “symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group . . . from a relatively stable set of cultural conditions” (Turner and Turner 2).

The Jewish community’s experience with 1960s pluralism created a drift towards secularism. Ozick depicts a similar separation in “The Pagan Rabbi,” one precipitated by Isaac’s exposure to philosophy. The narrator suggests Isaac “read everything,” including Saadia Gaon, Yehudah Halevi, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Thomas Mann (9). Isaac’s notebook contains random passages of English poetry that resemble the “elegiac favorites of a closeted Romantic,” a thread culminating with the exclamation “Great Pan lives” (16–17). As Scheindel recalls, Isaac’s study of these disparate texts inspired new behaviors, such as “going farther and farther into the country” and walking in the parks every day (13). Isaac’s exploration of different philosophers and genres introduced him to new ways of life, leading him to new behaviors and, ultimately, pantheistic beliefs, marking fully his separation from the ideological space of Jewish faith.

By encountering different ways of life and experiencing separation from their previous ideological spaces, individuals may inhabit a paradoxical space in which they attempt to combine the beliefs of their original space with a new space. They begin to disconnect from their original lifestyle, but are unable to detach themselves fully, thus inhabiting a space in which multiple ideologies exist in combination: “spaces that would be mutually exclusive . . . are occupied simultaneously” (Rose 140). These paradoxical spaces, though, combine aspects of already defined spaces, leaving the occupant with an identity split between multiple ideological spaces. The story elucidates the paradoxical space Jewish Americans occupied in the 1960s as they adhered to their Jewish faith while simultaneously moving toward American secularism, a shift seen in Isaac’s attempt to combine Jewish scripture with his new pantheistic beliefs. With his pantheism, Isaac believes all things in nature possess souls, yet he supports this belief with the traditional narrative of Moses. He asserts that Moses knew of the free souls of nature, and “it was not out of ignorance that Moses failed to teach about those souls that are free,” but rather “Moses never spoke to them of

the free souls, lest the people not do God's will and go out from Egypt" (22–23). Isaac attempts to reconcile his knowledge of scripture with his new pagan beliefs, showing him to be in a paradoxical space that combine his two identities.

The split between Isaac's physical body and his soul further reveals the paradoxical space he occupies. While he concerns his mind with issues of pantheism, his soul remains characteristically Jewish. Isaac's soul walks "on the road. He is half bent over the burden of a dusty old bag. The bag is stuffed with books," and he reads the Tractate of the Mishnah (34). His soul still participates in Isaac's Jewish past, showing that it remains Jewish, while Isaac himself has turned into a pantheist. The divide between Isaac's mind and his soul shows him occupying a paradoxical space containing both his Jewish heritage and his paganism.

Because paradoxical spaces acknowledge the presence of two different defined spaces, their occupants can imagine spaces in which these separate spheres combine successfully: one can "imagine spaces of transcendent potential . . . that move beyond reifications of rigid and punishing binaries" (Lesh 456). Whereas many defined spaces contain regimented social practices and ideologies, a paradoxical space allows for the possibility of new spaces transcending these social practices: paradoxical "space as the 'series of simultaneity' . . . offers an opening up of potentiality, heterogeneity and multiplicity" (Wilmott 57). Because a person can occupy two spaces simultaneously, they can imagine a space that tolerates differences, instead of defined ideological spaces' homogeneity. In the midst of the 1960s' burgeoning pluralism, the Jewish American population occupied a paradoxical space between their heritage and their surrounding American culture. This combination allowed them to imagine new spaces for combining their identities.

Isaac's belief that his paradoxical space might permit him to create something new signals the potential for the Jewish community to create similar new spaces. Remaining split between his Jewish heritage and his paganistic interests, Isaac attempts to combine his two belief systems into a new one. He believes the souls of plants exist in freedom, while the souls of humans are bound by human bodies. He fears his soul, then, will remain in captivity until his physical body decomposes, leading him to conceive a new method for freeing the soul. If Isaac can "couple with one of the free souls, the strength of the connection would likely wrest [his] own soul from [his]

body” (28). He reinforces this belief by combining his paganistic beliefs with scriptural references from “Genesis, whereby the sons of God took the daughters of men for brides” (27). In his paradoxical space, Isaac creates a new space combining pantheism and Judaism in order to free his soul.

Despite the potential for combination that paradoxical spaces offer, the exclusionary nature of religion makes combining multiple spaces impossible. Religious spaces are built from “the labor of ritualization and interpretation,” and are “created in and through the performance of ritual in set-apart times and places and the interpretive work of making meaning” (Chidester 36). In other words, religious spaces emerge from the practice of deriving meaning from disciplined acts, rituals, and traditions. Since religious spaces require disciplined behavior for meaning, “the sanctity of the inside [is] certified by maintaining and reinforcing boundaries that [keep] certain persons outside the sacred place” (Chidester 38). In order to remain homogenous, religious spaces deny entry to other belief systems; they are fundamentally exclusionary. And, within them, “troubling individuals have been subject to exclusionary pressures” (Philo 46). Exclusionary spaces tolerate only the homogeneity of existing ideologies and beliefs. They cannot allow any multiplicity of belief.

In “The Pagan Rabbi,” Ozick represents both Judaism and paganism as exclusionary religious spaces. When Isaac begins to dabble in pantheism, Scheindel declares “he was never a Jew” (13). Then, when Isaac begins to combine his Jewish faith with pagan beliefs, Scheindel refuses to acknowledge the possibility of multiple belief systems, so she excludes him from the Jewish ideological space. The story similarly depicts paganism as exclusionary. When Isaac encounters the being who resembles a flower-like child, the being rejects Isaac’s soul—the Jewish part of his identity—saying she did “not like that soul of [his]” (34). Despite Isaac’s effort to combine his two belief systems in a paradoxical space, each space remains exclusionary and opposed to the other.

When one attempts to occupy two exclusionary spaces simultaneously, the spaces oppose each other, resulting in conflict. Since religious spaces are inherently exclusionary, “conflict is inevitable between any two or more religious groups who try to inhabit the same site” (Chidester 46). While paradoxical spaces allow occupants to imagine spaces that tolerate heterogeneity, “conflict highlights a philosophical disequilibrium, one wherein space itself has been conceptualized by ‘negative difference’ rather than

'positive heterogeneity,' opposition as a sign of disunity, rather than a sign of potential" (Wilmott 58). Despite the potential paradoxical spaces promise, any multiplicity of beliefs within them is viewed negatively, resulting in conflict rather than unity, and undercutting the potential for varying ideologies.

In the 1960s, the Jewish American community often faced conflict from within their group, because of the opposition between Jewish faith and American secularism. "The Pagan Rabbi" figures this inevitable conflict in Isaac's effort to combine his Jewish beliefs with his paganistic ones. When Isaac attempts to free his soul by connecting with nature, he encounters a "nature being" that symbolizes his pantheistic beliefs. Despite his love for this creature, she leaves him, because his Jewish soul "conjures against [her]. It denies [her] . . . it denies all [her] multiplicity . . . it spites even Lord Pan, it is an enemy" (34). Isaac's Jewish faith denies pantheism, and, because each of Isaac's spaces remain exclusionary, they invariably oppose each other, producing conflict, not unity. In addition to the metaphysical conflict between his pantheism and Judaism, Isaac experiences a division within himself. When he sees the physical manifestation of his own soul reading Jewish texts, he challenges it: "You, who I thought yearned for the earth! You, an immortal, free, and caring only to be bound to the Law" (35). Isaac's soul and body cannot reconcile, because of the two exclusionary spaces he occupies. His efforts to dwell in a paradoxical space and combine his beliefs cause conflict between Isaac and his own soul as the spaces of paganism and Judaism oppose each other.

Ultimately, the conflict that results from attempting to combine exclusionary spaces causes the occupant of paradoxical space to possess a split consciousness that leads to fragmentation and despair. When a person possesses this sort of multi-faceted identity, "there is a danger that hybridity consigns some . . . to the very margins of cultural belonging and identity" (Jazeel 65). When the occupant of a paradoxical space contains two opposing belief systems that inform their identity, they experience fragmentation, a breaking of identity. In exclusionary spaces, "homogeneity results in fragmentation" (Stanek 153). So, if a paradoxical space contains elements of two spaces that remain homogenous, they will oppose each other, leading to fragmentation and despair. Isaac's suicide cautions against this despair. When Isaac encounters his soul, it attempts to convince him "the sound of the Law . . . is more beautiful than the crickets. The smell

of the Law is more radiant than the moss. The taste of the Law exceeds clear water" (36). Isaac's soul argues that his Jewish heritage is superior to pantheistic beliefs and nature worship. Isaac, however, calls to nature: "for pity of [him], come, come" (36). While his soul urges him toward Judaism, he continues to call out for nature, showing his fragmented identity. As a result of this fragmentation, he falls into despair and commits suicide, hanging himself from a tree with his prayer shawl. Both the prayer shawl—indicative of his Jewish faith—and the tree—suggestive of his pantheism—are necessary for his death. Both spaces take part in killing Isaac.

In "The Pagan Rabbi," Ozick illustrates Jewish Americans' struggle to reconcile their Jewish heritage with American secularism. This struggle leaves them in a paradoxical space where it is impossible to successfully navigate their two irreconcilable spaces, leading to a split consciousness, identity fragmentation, and despair. By exposing these identity struggles, the story gives voice to the Jewish American community, illuminating their experience of assimilating into a culture. The hardships of identity and split consciousness can be resolved by creating differential spaces in which heterogeneity is celebrated and people who are different can live together in unity. Through the development of a differential space, groups who once faced struggles of assimilation and identity no longer exist outside of mainstream culture. Rather, they find a sense of belonging and unity in a space that tolerates and celebrates diversity.

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## Maternal Connection and Paternal Dysfunction: Empathy in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

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Callie Martindale

In the aftermath of WWI—a world reeling from the destruction of the Great War—Virginia Woolf depicts London's new social atmosphere in her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her stream-of-consciousness style shows how the city's denizens differ in gender, social class, and sexual orientation, but also in how their minds and bodies function. After living through a terrifying war, many of the novel's characters are desperate to return to normalcy. Their differences, however, threaten the idealized image of society. As the ones with the most power, upper-class characters offer disparate approaches to reinvigorating the city's sense of community: men pursue seclusion and erasure, while women—such as Clarissa Dalloway—turn to connection and empathy. Men desperately cling to their claims of authority in a class system that is slowly deteriorating. Women, on the other hand, offer an opportunity for a more inclusive London, where the answer to social isolation is not conformity, but bodily diversity.

*Mrs. Dalloway* presents an English society in which male authority figures, such as Richard Dalloway and Sir William Bradshaw, perpetuate ableist ideals. It also, though, shows the opposing maternal and social values of Clarissa, allowing her to confront masculine ideals at the novel's climax, when she experiences her revelation about Septimus Smith. The novel's London contains a widespread ableism produced by men who enforce norms of appearance and social class. Fiona Kumari Campbell defines "ableism" as

“a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human” (44n5). The men in Woolf’s novel clearly hold ableist beliefs, as they deem only those they find physically and mentally desirable as worthy of participating in London society. Richard Dalloway, for instance, encourages the distinctions of an appearance-based society in which a conformity-enforcing monster—Sir William Bradshaw—can thrive. As a handsome, wealthy member of Parliament, Richard is at the peak of society, and he knows it: the sections of the novel that focus on him depict his internal consideration of how he might change the people around him. Christine Sizemore analyzes Richard’s interpretation of the world: “as he walks across Green Park and sees a variety of people, [he] immediately starts thinking of regulations and controls . . . For Richard, children and homeless women are not part of the community or a group with which he feels affiliation but rather social problems which should be controlled by a concerned patriarchal agency” (105). As an upper-class man whose word influences government, Richard imagines himself the “concerned patriarchal agency” who knows what is best for “children and homeless women.” He sees them as a stain on London. Knowing he has the ability to shape society into his image—thanks to his privilege—he will continue supporting the system that grants him power, no matter how outdated it becomes.

This same system allows Bradshaw to judge conformity and take responsibility for reforming those who do not fit in proper London: “Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth . . . made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion” (84). Bradshaw also embraces control, believing that for England to “prosper” the “unfit” must be hidden. Madelyn Detloff elaborates on the implications of Bradshaw’s position: “In *Mrs. Dalloway* . . . the law is literally on the side of the normal; it gives Dr. Bradshaw the power to commit Septimus Warren Smith against his will (and against his wife’s will) to one of Bradshaw’s rest cure ‘homes’—‘It was a question of law’” (105). Detloff suggests Bradshaw would wield influence if he were an average citizen, but as a psychiatrist he can make his view of normality “law.” Rather than being an objective,



scientific standard encouraged by British eugenicists and others, of course, normality is subjective. Society has simply given Bradshaw permission to shape normality as he sees fit.

Janet Lyon explains the novel's legal backdrop with her examination of mental health legislation in 1920's Britain:

Because it provided for local authorities who would alert asylum officers to the presence of untended feeble-minded individuals in local communities, the [1913 Mental Deficiency Act] implicitly promised a time, somewhere in England's near future, when defectives would once and for all 'be segregated under proper conditions so that their curse died with them' to quote Winston Churchill's endorsement of the act." (553)

"Local authorities" like Sir William Bradshaw are the first line of defense against "feeble-mindedness." By sending "defectives" to rest homes so "their curse dies with them," he believes he ensures England's genetic prosperity. The suppression of what Bradshaw defines as lunacy appears to him fundamental if society is to function. The concomitant pressure to adhere to masculine norms weighs heavily on Septimus thanks to Dr. Holmes, who reminds him "[d]idn't [his talk of suicide] give [Rezia] a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife? Wouldn't it be better to do something instead of lying in bed?" (78). Holmes urges Septimus to stop being passive and to rejoin society, taking on all the standards that come with it. He reasons that Septimus has a masculine duty to Rezia he must fulfill as her English husband. This notion shows the unrelenting pressure on men to conform to gender norms, but also conflates that pressure with ideas of what it means to be English.

Sizemore notes just how ineffective this method is on Septimus and others like him: "Dr. Bradshaw's theories of 'Proportion,' . . . have failed because no Acts of Parliament or of 'Proportion' can control difference" (105). Septimus's death signals that neither Bradshaw's "proportion" nor Richard's parliamentary legislation can enforce the uniformity they desire. Their failure is confirmed by Clarissa's realization that "[d]eath was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate" (156). Rather than the doctors succeeding in their efforts to suppress his voice beneath ableist norms, his message reaches Clarissa, precipitating the novel's climax.

Masculine methods for erasing disability are unsuccessful, which opens the possibility for women to serve in the men's stead—to offer something different. Clarissa thus encourages empathy and connection to combat the social separation of post-WWI Londoners. At the novel's opening, Clarissa clearly rejects the divisions her husband supports: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her" (3). Clarissa buys the flowers to lighten a servant's workload. Clarissa could the assign Lucy regardless, but her actions show awareness of the strife those around her experience. She hopes to ease their burden in some small way.

Sizemore describes the crucial aspect of Clarissa's understanding of her environment: "It is this ability actually to see the people of the city and to pay attention to them with a 'sympathetic imagination' that characterizes the cosmopolitanism of Clarissa Dalloway" (104). Clarissa possesses the unique ability to "see the people of the city" and unite them under a "cosmopolitanism," in which Londoners of all kinds are part of the same community. While Richard finds her parties silly, "[e]very time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another" (145). Parties are Clarissa's way of encouraging others to set aside their ableist standards, become "more real," and join her cosmopolitan milieu—the party is the instrument of connection. In a London where the war has terrified its citizens and encouraged prejudice against abnormality, Clarissa grows into a person who can temporarily relieve this tension by bringing differences together in a single space.

As a traumatized veteran, Septimus is ostracized, leaving him without the social connections he needs to recover. With no hope to be found in his unsympathetic relationships with men, women offer the only hope for being understood. Kaley Joyes discusses the importance of a listening ear (or a "witness") for trauma victims to begin healing, arguing that Rezia and Clarissa fail Septimus in different ways: "Clarissa's class and nationality give her more capital than Rezia, and therefore more capacity to resist domination, but her gender and her class privilege limit her witnessing ability" (70-71). Sizemore and Joyes diverge here, with the former contending that Clarissa's privilege can foster a unique affiliation with other Londoners, while the latter asserts that her gender and privilege prevent Clarissa from witnessing Septimus's plight.

While we must recognize the differences between Clarissa's and

Septimus's experiences, the claim that Clarissa cannot understand him solely due to "her gender and her class" is overstated. Clarissa spends most of the novel grappling with her decision to live by society's rules, from her choice of husband to her connections with the more abhorrent members of the upper class. For example, while Richard is on his way home from lunch with Hugh Whitbread and Lady Bruton, he reflects on his marriage: "But she had often said to him that she had been right not to marry Peter Walsh; which, knowing Clarissa, was obviously true; she wanted support. Not that she was weak; but she wanted support" (99). Richard suggests their marriage is mutually understood to provide "support"—they married for security rather than passion. Clarissa has lived the life prescribed to her, and Bradshaw wants to force Septimus into the ideal masculine equivalent for Rezia. Clarissa sees clearly the weight of her oppression when Bradshaw arrives at her party. He immediately unnerves her, despite his tidy appearance: "Why did the sight of him, talking to Richard, curl her up? He looked what he was, a great doctor. A man absolutely at the head of his profession, very powerful, rather worn" (155). Despite his successful appearance, Clarissa feels an inexplicable ominous energy that makes her want to "curl up." She sees through Bradshaw's illustrious façade and feels his unforgiving, oppressive nature. Contrary to Joyes's argument, Clarissa can serve as witness for Septimus because she lives fully in the oppressive, patriarchal society he wishes to escape—she can extend sincere empathy. Clarissa promotes empathy and understanding by giving others a space in which they can be themselves, unlike men's insistence on differentiation and separation. These masculine, ableist policies cannot help Septimus or others like him, a failure Clarissa's sympathetic imagination allows her to see in a way Richard never can.

Stuart Murray posits a biographical origin: "As Clarissa Dalloway has Septimus as her double, so possibly Woolf is attached to the shadow that Laura became for her, the 'feared and mocked' crazed girl who shared the childhood home" (246). Murray proposes that Woolf's depiction of Septimus was influenced by her mentally ill half-sister, Laura Stephen, who spent most of her life in asylums and under the care of psychiatrists. Perhaps Septimus parallels Woolf, who is "attached to the shadow" of her sister's struggles and the public reaction to them. Had Septimus lived, he would live the life Woolf watched Stephen endure: one of "sedation and physical punishment, locking Laura up in her room in the family

home before [their father] finally institutionaliz[ed] her, probably in 1892" (Murray 242). A clear view of how mental illness was treated in the late 1800s—alongside her own deteriorating mental health—produce a unique empathy for someone in Septimus's position, which helps explain Woolf's creation of the neurotypical Clarissa, who remains on the outside, yet still understands Septimus's cowardly (as Dr. Holmes views them) actions. Clarissa concludes "[s]he felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living" (158). Her realizations of how intolerable his life is, makes her glad for Septimus's freedom from Bradshaw and the regulations he represents. Septimus "threw it all away" while others "went on living" under men's oppression. Sympathetic imagination allows Clarissa both to see Septimus's point of view and to reject Bradshaw's twisted methods.

Clarissa's final confrontation with the news of Septimus's suicide marks her transition from proponent of patriarchal society to empathetic figure who gives his death a larger purpose. At first, she is frustrated the specter of death is brought to her precious party, showing the continued influence of male ableist policies on her ways of thinking: "What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws talked of death" (156). She is incredibly unsympathetic and resents Bradshaw bringing the gloomy aspects of his work to her party. Clarissa's opinions about Septimus shift, however: "Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress" (157). For a moment, Clarissa sees her willing participation in society. Septimus's death is part of "her punishment" for the obedient life she has lived. She stands comfortable in her upper-class life watching Septimus and those like him endure oppression and die. She does nothing to stop it. Clarissa resents this part of herself, leading to her definitive statement on Septimus: "The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him" (158). At last she breaks from patriarchal views of the mentally ill: Clarissa chooses not to "pity" Septimus for his decision as Richard or Bradshaw would, because she understands his actions. Instead, she accepts her responsibility: "she must go back. She must assemble" (158). She commits to her role as hostess, as symbol of love and empathy. The novel closes with Clarissa determined to improve the city's atmosphere. Septimus obtains value beyond himself, as his death reinvigorates Clarissa's view of her social purpose.

At *Mrs. Dalloway's* conclusion, Clarissa stands firm against the restricting, masculine view of social life, choosing instead connection with, empathy for, and understanding of all London's citizens. Men like Richard Dalloway construct a calculated, patriarchal system in which Sir William Bradshaw rises to power as the epitome of discrimination. Clarissa, on the other hand, tries to see others' perspectives rather than imagining herself as completely distinct from them. This approach leads her ultimately to understand why Septimus ends his own life.

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# BACKMATTER



## Contributors

**Mary Buffaloe** graduated from Pepperdine University with a degree in Creative Writing. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in Gender Studies at Lincoln University.

**Malaena Caldwell** is a senior at Oakland University, double majoring in French Language and Literature and Creative Writing with a focus on literary non-fiction. Never taking writing seriously until COVID-19 forced her to evacuate France, she now plans to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing. Recently, she published her first piece in *The Overseas Dispatch Magazine* and was interviewed by *The Macomb Daily* about the essay recounting her sudden evacuation. Her work focuses primarily on living with grief and the poignancy of lost experiences—most notably, the life of her father, who died by suicide in 2005. She hopes one day to write his life story, so she can finally reclaim her own. After graduation, Malaena plans to spend time travelling Europe before continuing her education.

**Marisol Ciovacco** graduated from The University of Texas at Dallas with a degree in Literature in May 2020. Although she favors fantasy and adventure stories, she also loves to study how literature can reveal so much truth about the human experience. She previously worked as a writing tutor, helping other creators share their stories, and she is currently pursuing a



master's degree in Marketing. While now pursuing a career in marketing, Marisol still researches and plans for the future stories she hopes to share with the world. She believes stories are a way for people to relate to each other, and she hopes to continue connecting with others through her writing.

**Regan Clancy** is a graduating senior at Carroll College in Helena, MT, where he majors in English Education. His stories and poetry have appeared in Carroll's creative writing magazine, *Colors*, where he also served as an associate editor. He currently works as a tutor in the college writing center and looks forward to teaching secondary students in the Helena area after graduation.

**Renice Desrosins** graduated from Sacred Heart University in 2021 with a BA in English and a minor in Creative Writing. She explored her personal voice through an internship with *Mud Magazine*, rising to the positions of staff writer and editor of the mental health section. She plans to pursue an MFA in fall 2022—she is determined to sharpen her writing skills and excited to push her imagination beyond its limit. As she works on her poetry book and fantasy series, she believes the stories she creates will inspire diversity, promote inclusion, and empower those who feel unseen. For more on her journey, follow her on Instagram (@renicedesrosins).

**Michaela Esau** is a senior at William Jewell College, where she double majors in Literature and Theory and Communication in the Oxbridge Honors Program. Michaela writes for her college newspaper, *The Hilltop Monitor*, and has published several poems in *Inscape*, William Jewell's creative arts magazine. She is spending her senior year studying abroad at the University of Oxford.

**Rachel Finney** is a senior at Westfield State University, studying English Secondary Education. She plans to become a high-school English teacher and share her love of literature and language with her students. Rachel also serves as poetry editor for WSU's literary magazine, *Persona*. This is her first publication, and she is grateful for the opportunity.

**Annabelle Forrester** received her BA in Interdisciplinary Studies from

Reinhardt University in May 2021. Her concentrations included History and English with a minor in Biology. She graduated magna cum laude and was awarded membership in Sigma Tau Delta, Phi Alpha Theta (national honor society for history), and Pi Gamma Mu (international honor society in social sciences). She has a strong interest in true crime and a passion for original research. She has written extensively on race relations in the post-Civil War South. She plans to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing at Reinhardt and to continue her historical research. In addition to being an aspiring writer, Annabelle is an emergency and critical care veterinary nurse and is certified by the American Association of Feline Practitioners.

**Caroline Geoghegan** is a junior at The College of New Jersey, where she majors in English Secondary Education with a minor in Creative Writing. She is currently the president of *Ink*, TCNJ's creative writing club. Her poetry has also been featured in her college's literary magazine, *The Lion's Eye*. When she is not writing, she can be found educating the public on proper hamster husbandry. She would like to thank her professors for encouraging her to submit to this publication.

**Dalton Greene** is a senior at Macalester College in Saint Paul, MN, where he majors in English with a minor in Classical Languages. He has served as an officer for his campus Sigma Tau Delta chapter for two years, and he is grateful to the faculty and students in the English Department for the rich and supportive community they collectively foster. Upon graduation, he hopes to continue his studies in a graduate English literature program before pursuing a career in education.

**Megan Harris** is a senior at Samford University, majoring in English with a Writing minor and a Creative Writing concentration. Outside the classroom, she tutors at Samford's Communication Resource Center and recently published a literary analysis essay in Samford's *Wide Angle: A Journal of Literature and Film*. "Lilapsophobia" is her first creative publication. Megan is excited to continue pursuing work in publishing and editing after graduation. Whether writing academic, non-fiction, or fiction pieces, she hopes to share stories that inspire and challenge readers to see themselves and their world in new ways.

**Angelea Hayes** is a senior at Pepperdine University, pursuing a degree in Creative Writing, a minor in Sustainability, and a Global Fellows Certificate. Angelea is a published poet and aspiring novelist and screenwriter looking to pursue a master's degree in Creative Writing overseas. Her work has been published by *The Expressionists*, the City of Malibu, and the anthology *Radical Beauty: Malibu After The Fire*. With her passion for travel and the beauty of the natural world, she hopes to use her gift for storytelling to cultivate positive change for a bright, sustainable, and interconnected future. Follow her journey at [www.angeleahayes.com](http://www.angeleahayes.com).

**Tara Heimberger** graduated from the University of North Georgia in 2018 with a degree in English Education. After teaching English and theatre at a public high school, she recently returned to school to earn an MA in English. She plans to pursue a PhD in fall 2022, with a focus on feminist theory, horror films, and postmodernism. Tara hopes ultimately to teach at the collegiate level.

**Jamie Henderson** is a senior at Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain, MS. She is from Cleveland, TN, and was inspired to write by her loving, storytelling family. Jamie is passionate about her family and history, and she intends to work dedicatedly to meld the two as her writing career progresses. This year, Jamie is President of her college's Sigma Tau Delta chapter.

**Grace Hotz** recently graduated from Cedarville University, where she earned a BA in Integrated Language Arts. As a reader and a writer, she believes in the power of literature to bridge gaps by exposing hidden discourses and truths about the human experience. As a secondary teacher, she hopes to help her students discover the same. In her free time, Grace enjoys drinking coffee, thrift shopping, and journaling. She served as Secretary for her university's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, and is deeply grateful to Cedarville's English Department for their dedication to teaching the joys of literature.

**Felicia Jarrin** is a recent graduate from Santa Clara University, where she double majored in English and Political Science with a minor in Journalism. During her time at Santa Clara, she worked as a writing partner

at the HUB Writing Center, was an executive director of the Santa Clara Student Alumni Council, and studied abroad in London. Her work won the English Department's 2021 Woodall Prize, and she presented her work at the 2021 Macksey Undergraduate Humanities Research Symposium. In Fall 2021, Felicia is moving to Spain for a year to work as an English teaching assistant through the North American Language and Culture Assistants Program. She then plans to pursue a PhD in English with a focus on Latin American literature and feminist studies.

**Jessica Joudy** is a recent graduate of Santa Clara University, where she majored in English and Computer Science with a Math minor. At SCU, she worked as a teaching assistant and research assistant in both her fields of study. She is recipient of both the Katherine Woodall Prize in Literary Criticism/Theory and the Undergraduate Library Research Award for her English thesis examining experimental and genre-fluid eighteenth-century women's literature. She was also awarded the 2021 Shipsey Poetry Prize, second place, for her poem, "Devoted." Her creative work is published or forthcoming in *The Hellebore* and *The Owl*, and her research on rare and unrecovered texts can be found on SCU's library blog, *Arthur's Attic*.

**Annie Elizabeth Kreiser** is a junior at Cedar Crest College, where she is double majoring in English and Secondary Education. Her work focuses on intersectional feminism. On campus, Annie Elizabeth serves as junior editor for *Pitch*, Cedar Crest's art and literature journal, where she has published creative works. She also serves as an advocate for religious inclusivity, a writing consultant, and a resident advisor. After graduation, she plans to pursue advanced degrees before returning to the classroom to teach middle-school English. This is her first academic publication.

**Anh Le** is an English MA student concentrating in literature at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York. She currently works as an English writing tutor at the College of Staten Island. This is Anh's first publication, and she is extremely thankful for the honor.

**Melissa Lizotte** is a student in Mercy College's online MA in English program, focusing on first-year writing studies and American literature. She previously graduated from the University of Maine at Presque Isle with a

BA in English (concentration in Writing). After earning her MA, she hopes to teach first-year composition as a college instructor and continue publishing fiction and poetry. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and most recently published poetry in Mercy's student literary journal, *Red Hyacinth*.

**Addy Mahaffey** recently graduated from the University of Arkansas, where she studied English, Creative Writing, and Gender Studies. Her writing has been published in *Watershed Review*, *Glass Mountain*, and *Crab Fat Magazine*.

**Callie Martindale** is a senior at Ohio University's Honors Tutorial College with an English major and History minor. Her academic interests are twentieth-century British modernism and disability studies. She serves as Vice President of the Alpha Theta Phi Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, a lead tutor at Ohio University's Student Writing Center, and an editorial intern for the *New Ohio Review*, Ohio University's nationally recognized literary journal. In her free time, she has served on the executive board of the Student Alumni Board, played clarinet in the University Concert Band, and joined a commercial photography club. Her academic work appears in the 2021 edition of the *Macksey Journal*. Following her May 2022 graduation, Callie intends to pursue graduate study in the hopes of becoming a literature professor. She would like to thank her tutorial professors for nurturing her talent and confidence, and for being dedicated mentors that make her dream of taking up their profession.

**Anna Rose McIntyre** is a senior at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, FL, majoring in English Literature and Secondary Education with an emphasis in philosophy through the Frederick M. Supper Honors Program. Anna Rose is a classically trained vocalist who enjoys writing about music, fine arts, and international fiction. In 2019, she spent a semester studying abroad at the University of Oxford, where she worked closely with professors in her creative writing and modern literature tutorials. She is currently pursuing a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Award and subsequently plans to attend graduate school.

**Amy Moczydlowski** graduated from Marist College in 2021 with a BS in Games and Emerging Media and a minor in Creative Writing. Though "Vintage Memories" is her first published work, she has been writing

stories for as long as she can remember. She is passionate about storytelling in all forms and hopes one day to push the boundaries of video games as a narrative medium.

**Darby Murnane** graduated with her BFA in Creative Writing from the University of Maine at Farmington in May 2020, where she also served as editor-in-chief of the *Farmington Flyer*, a newspaper that remains her first love of all of things hard news. She is now studying for her Master of Journalism from the University of North Texas Mayborn School of Journalism. She has been accepted to the Fulbright Berlin Capital Program, where she hopes only to report on international incidents, not cause them. Her creative work has appeared in *Open Culture Collective* and *Neuro Logical*.

**Cailan Owens** is a recent graduate of Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, FL. She majored in English, minored in Spanish, and served as President of the Alpha Zeta Mu Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. She plans to continue publishing her critical and creative work while teaching middle-school language arts. She looks forward to her next steps after graduation as she pursues her passion for writing both at work and in her free time.

**Hannah Paczkowski** is a senior at Drew University, majoring in English (with a creative writing emphasis) and Biology. Her work has been published in Drew University's literary magazine, *Insanity's Horse*. She is an alumnus of Christopher Bakken's program "Writing Workshops in Greece: Thessaloniki and Thasos." Hannah hopes to pursue a career in writing and editing.

**Laura Joy Phillips** recently graduated from Westmont College with a BA in English and minors in Writing and Religious Studies, but she also enjoys exploring other fields, such as computer science and Koine Greek. She received the Oxford English Dictionary Award for an Outstanding Graduate in English and is a two-time recipient of the Arthur W. Lynip Award. At Westmont, she has served as the storyteller and editor for the Center for Applied Technology, a peer tutor in the library, and a member of Writers' Corner. Her backpack usually brims with more books than she can read, and she hopes to pursue a career helping other writers tell their stories.

**Haley Powell** is a recent graduate of the University of Kentucky with a BA in English and Political Science. She served as the President of the Delta Epsilon Upsilon Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta and went on to serve as the Southern Region Student Representative. While an undergraduate at UK, she was winner of the 2019 Dantzler Award for Fiction and the 2020 Farquhar Award for Poetry. She is currently pursuing her JD at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law.

**Shilo Virginia Previti** was born near the marshy outskirts of noirish Atlantic City, NJ, and raised in a cedar bog during a natural pygmy-pines wildfire deep in the Pinelands Reserve. While completing a BA in Literature at Stockton University, they held various jobs on the east coast, including teaching English in county jails, assisting with writing workshops for Murphy Writing, and moonlighting as a waitress and a newspaper deliveryman, but in 2020 they moved away from the sea to pursue an MA in English at the University of North Dakota.

**Brynn Richer** is a recent graduate of Palm Beach Atlantic University with a BA in English and a double minor in Philosophy and Creative Writing. She has several other short stories and poems published in journals such as *Living Waters Review*, *Green Blotter*, and *Penumbra*. Currently, she is following her dream of working as a paralegal, and spending any and all free time still using rocks, statues, and sculptures as her writing muse.

**Neysa Rogers** recently graduated from Palm Beach Atlantic University with a degree in English, and as a member of the Supper Honors Program. She is currently writing in preparation to apply for MFA programs in Creative Writing. Her work has previously been published in *Living Waters Review*. She would like to thank the English faculty at PBAU for their encouragement and wisdom.

**Stella Rothe** is a dancer and writer from Metro Detroit, MI. She is a 2020 graduate of Oakland University, where she received a BA in English. Currently, she studies Creative Writing through Stetson University's MFA of the Americas program. Stella works at a bookstore—where she buys too many books—and studies Spanish and movement research in her spare time.

**Aly Rusciano** is a recent summa cum laude graduate of the University of Tennessee at Martin, where she majored in English, focusing in creative writing, and minoring in Theatre. Along with being an active member of Sigma Tau Delta, she served on the editorial board of *BeanSwitch*, UTM's literature and arts magazine, and founded the student writing club Authors Anonymous. Aly's love of books and passion for writing continues to affect her life positively as she pursues a career in the publishing industry. Her dream is to be a published author.

**Alexandra Salata** recently earned an MA in English Literature from John Carroll University, and will continue her studies through the Northeast Ohio MFA program in fall 2021. In addition to creative writing, Alexandra has a passion for human psychology and has worked with adolescents on the autism spectrum for four years, inspiring her story, "Poppy." She lives to teach others the power of language and hopes to do so in the courses she teaches at Kent State University.

**Olivia Schaap** is a senior at the University of Arkansas, studying English Creative Writing with a minor in Spanish. She is President of the Alpha Tau Kappa Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, and is working on her honors thesis, a collection of non-fiction essays exploring our personal biases. Her work has been published in *Hedera Helix*, Sigma Kappa Delta's literary journal. She thanks all her teachers, without whom she would be a far less successful human being.

**Kira Schukar** studies English Literature and Geography at Macalester College, where she serves as a senior officer for her Sigma Tau Delta chapter. She is currently working on her senior thesis, which explores queer aesthetics in the podcast *STown*. She co-edits the media section of her college's newspaper, *The Mac Weekly*, and plans to pursue a career in audio journalism after graduation. When she isn't reading a Toni Morrison novel or listening to *This American Life*, she can be found hiking along the Mississippi river. Follow her work on Instagram (@kiraspodcasts).

**Fisher Sexton** is a fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. While they were initially shooed away from the English major, their love of storytelling always brought them back. They are



Co-President of UTK's Sigma Tau Delta chapter. Their most recent project is a collection of poems that revolve around Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. In these poems, Fisher explores love, loss, nostalgia, and grappling with growing up. You can also follow Fisher's musical project, The East Valley Riflemonks (@EVRM\_band) on social media. Their work has been featured or is set to appear in *Deep South Magazine* and the University of Tennessee's undergraduate literary journal, *The Phoenix*.

**Dean Shinner** is a recent graduate of Ithaca College in Ithaca, NY, with a BFA in Fine Arts and a minor in English. He is a queer writer, poet, and artist, currently living and working in his beloved Pacific Northwest. He plans to continue a post-graduate career as a writer and visual creator, and is currently working on a collection of queer-centric fairy tales and poetry. You can view Dean's work, including a recently-awarded essay on the seventeenth-century poet Hester Pulter, on his website: <https://dshinner.myportfolio.com>.

**Hayley Simon** is a junior at Allegheny College, where she's pursuing an English major with a creative writing emphasis and a Psychology minor. She is a senior editor for *The Allegheny Review*, Allegheny's literary magazine, as well as a writing consultant. Hayley writes both poetry and fiction, and she aspires to be a novelist one day.

**Lauren Smith** is a junior at Emmanuel College in Boston, MA. She is a double major in Theater Arts and Writing, Editing, and Publishing, with a minor in Political Communication. She is deeply passionate about storytelling and dreams to one day serve as artistic director for her own theater. Thank you to Dr. Elliott for all his time and feedback, Jamie for saying "dude, it's time to just write," and Jett for the victory coffee and endless waffles. "A Boat Against the Current" is her first publication.

**Joshua Vituszynski** is a junior at The University of Scranton with majors in English and Philosophy. During his college career, he has tutored at the university's Writing Center and participated in the university's Sigma Tau Delta chapter. He is also a member of the university's Special Jesuit Liberal Arts Honors Program. He would like to thank the English teachers and

professors from his secondary and postsecondary careers for inspiring him to pursue his passion for studying literature.

**Sophia Ward** is a student at the University of San Diego. She aspires to become a high-school English teacher, which has led her to study English literature. In addition, Sophia has studied poetry for the past year, during which time, she has been working on a collection of poems.

**Amber Wardzala** is an alumna of Denison University with a BA in English—Creative Writing. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at Arizona State University. Amber is Anishinaabe from White Earth Nation and grew up in rural Wisconsin. Her poetry and photography have been included in various regional publications, and she has received several fiction awards including one from *Ruminate Magazine* in the 2021 William Van Dyke Short Story Competition. In spring 2021, Amber was a fellow of the Women’s National Book Association’s Authentic Voices Program. She is a hiking, biking, and canoeing enthusiast, and she was co-captain of Denison’s varsity fencing team. She is also an advocate for animal rights and, before COVID-19, volunteered at Licking County Humane Society.

**Katie Wooten** is a senior at Wake Forest University. She is an English (honors) major with minors in Secondary Education and Classical Studies, and is particularly interested in contemporary poetry despite the classics minor. She is also a peer tutor at the university’s writing center, a drum major for the marching band, and a brother of Kappa Kappa Psi. Her poetry has also appeared in *Little Old Lady Comedy*. After graduating in May 2022, Katie plans to pursue graduate studies in English literature with a focus on American poetry, or to teach high-school English. Either way, there is plenty of poetry still to come.

**Madelin Yousef** is a senior at the University of the Virgin Islands on St. Croix, majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. As a Muslim and Middle-Eastern/Hispanic woman, born and raised on the island of St. Croix, she has been witness to and victim of the inhumane stifling of women’s voices, an unnerving practice found all over the world, especially in the Middle East. She sees her writing as the path to motivational speech, which she intends to accompany her work. Madelin wants

her writing to attract readers' attention enough to compel them to change their hearts and the way they praise both earth's women and God.

**Mary Claire Zael** is a junior at Michigan State University, studying Creative Writing, Film Studies, and Musical Theatre. She currently serves as Vice President of her university's Sigma Tau Delta chapter and has won numerous writing awards, including the MSU 2021 Creative Writing Award for Poetry and the Arthur N. Athanason Scholarship in Creative Writing. Mary Claire recently interned for Michigan Radio and the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland. She hopes one day to write for the stage and screen.



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## Judges

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### *Judges for Writing Awards*

**Michael Frizell** is the Director of Student Learning Services at Missouri State University and holds an MFA in Creative Non-fiction from the University of Arkansas at Monticello. He is the author of *Bender*, a graphic novel about the first American serial killer family published by Oghma Creative Media. He also writes the introductions for the re-releases of Harold Robbins novels. As a writer with TidalWave Comics, Frizell has written over eighty comics based on the famous and infamous lives. His fiction comics with the publisher include *Stormy Daniels: Space Force*, *The Bold & the Brave*, *Ares: Goddess of War*, and the upcoming *Judo Girl*. He is the editor of *The Learning Assistance Review*, the National College Learning Center Association's peer-reviewed journal. He was also part of the editorial team for NCLCA's first book, *Learning Centers in the 21st Century*, and spearheaded their second book, *Rising to the Challenge: Navigating COVID-19 as Higher Education Learning Center Leaders*.

**Agnieszka Tuszynska** is an associate professor of English at Queensborough Community College-City University of New York, where she typically teaches African American literature and writing. She also volunteers as an educator in a prison with College Justice Program, teaching college-prep workshops and facilitating book discussion groups. Her research focuses on African American literature of the Jim Crow era and the Harlem Renaissance as well as prison literature.

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*Jurors*

**Rebecca Bechtold** is an associate professor of English at Wichita State University, where she serves as the department's graduate coordinator. Her research focuses on the role of sound and music in early American literary culture.

**Michael Behrens** is an associate professor of English at Emporia State University, where he teaches courses in British literature and literary studies. His research focuses on early modern women and religion.

**Kriss Kirk** is an instructor of English composition at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She holds degrees in Sociology and English from Middle Tennessee State University and an MA in Literature from Belmont University. She is a PhD candidate in the Arts and Humanities Department at the University of Texas at Dallas, where she serves as managing editor for the literary journal *Reunion: The Dallas Review*. Exploring the interplay between sociology and English is a central passion, as she seeks to integrate the popular with the academic. Her current work aims to demonstrate how popular culture, particularly rap and hip-hop culture, can increase student attentiveness in the writing classroom.

**Rebecca Stockham** recently graduated from Valparaiso University with a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing. She enjoys writing poetry, and she previously has been published in her alma mater's literary arts magazine, *The Lighter*, of which she was also the editor-in-chief during the 2020-2021 academic year. She hopes to pursue work in editing and publishing.

**Tayla Vannelli** is a student at Shorter University, pursuing a BA in English and a BBA in General Business. She has published poetry and short stories and has won awards for creative writing. She is currently editor-in-chief of *The Chimes Magazine*. Tayla plans to do missions work in Germany after she graduates in 2022.



## About Sigma Tau Delta

Since its inception in 1924, Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society has modeled its mission to confer distinction for high achievement, promote interest in English language and literature, foster exemplary character and fellowship, and exhibit high standards of academic excellence.

In 1972, Sigma Tau Delta was accepted as a member of the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS). Currently the Society has grown to include over 920 chapters with more than 1,000 Faculty Advisors; approximately 8,500 members are inducted annually.

Sigma Tau Delta has continued to flourish and expand, branching out in 1996 to found Sigma Kappa Delta for the growing two-year college system, and in 2004 it established the National English Honor Society for high school students and faculty. It is now the second largest honor society in the ACHS.

Through hard and dedicated work, Sigma Tau Delta has built upon the strong foundation of its founder Judson Q. Owen, whose initial foresight shaped the Society; two subsequent executive secretaries/directors—E. Nelson James and William C. Johnson—added their own visions to the Society, and many other individuals further shaped the vital, growing organization we are today.



### *Sigma Tau Delta's Journals*

The Sigma Tau Delta journals publish annually the best writing and criticism of undergraduate and graduate active chapter members of the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society.

*Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle* was founded in 1931 as a quarterly publication highlighting the best creative writing of the Society's members. At the fall 1998 meeting of the Board of Directors, the *Rectangle* went to a once-a-year publication schedule, providing a more professional look and permitting the inclusion of more student writing in each issue.

*Sigma Tau Delta Review* was added as a societal journal in 2007 and publishes critical essays on literature, essays on rhetoric and composition, and essays devoted to pedagogical issues.

### *Annual Submissions*

The best writing is chosen for publication from hundreds of submissions. Not only do these refereed journals go to chapters worldwide, but they also honor the best writing in each category, with five awards totaling \$2,500. As of 2016, the Sigma Tau Delta journals are catalogued with the Library of Congress. There is also an annual reading at the international convention by any of the published writers in attendance.

All active undergraduate and graduate members of active Sigma Tau Delta chapters are invited to submit their work to *Sigma Tau Delta Review* and *Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle*. Chapter Advisors, faculty members, alumni (including members of the Alumni Epsilon Chapter), and honorary members are not eligible to submit.

Submissions for the 2023 journals are due between April 11 and May 9, 2022.