**Jabberwocky Cover Art Statement**

Sophia VanHelene is a UMass Amherst Honors student on the Pre-Med track graduating with dual degrees in Art and Biology. Since childhood, she has enjoyed capturing the world around her in her artwork. Currently, Sophia is completing her honors thesis by combining her love of art and biology in paintings of Mouse MEF cells photographed in her lab courses.

“Talk to the Foot” is a part of her recent exploration into a new, stylized interpretation of the figure. She was inspired after learning about the lines of Blaschko, which are the invisible patterns created in human skin from the migration of skin cells during development. Sophia has since incorporated this style into her ceramic work as well as her watercolor paintings.

**About Jabberwocky**

*Jabberwocky* is the official undergraduate literary journal of the English Department, published by students of the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Named after the whimsically terrifying creature from Lewis Carroll’s poem “Jabberwocky” and famous fantasy novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, our journal features the best of the undergraduate student body’s art and literature.

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All opinions expressed in the journal are the authors’ and do not necessarily represent the interest of the journal itself. Additionally, the pieces are included as originally written by UMass students, and may contain content that is difficult or unsuitable for some audiences. Please read at your own discretion.
A Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

I never thought I’d be an editor in chief. Not like a seasoned actor explains how they never thought they’d be holding the award they spent their life trying to get their hands on. Nor do I mean that like the legend of Sir Isaac Newton whose world-changing claim to fame fell from a tree and hit him in the head one day.

I mean that like how Alice never thought she’d fall down the rabbit hole and vanquish the Jabberwock.

I joined Jabberwocky as a freshman and got curiouser and curiouser about working on a publication. This curiosity got me closer with the upperclassmen executives and I was lucky enough to lend a hand with operations far beyond my job description. As much as I felt in over my head sometimes, learning about the ins and outs of the publication industry while working to improve the journal exhilarated me. Creative problem solving fueled my sophomore year when I was Managing Editor of an edition produced entirely over Zoom. We faced a world of new challenges and left our bedroom-classroom-dining hall-hybrids resilient, innovative, and slightly mad.

Now that this edition is complete, I realize that madness can be a revolutionary asset. It was mad of us to recreate roles while learning how to fulfill them, and madder still to rewrite the rules while learning how to follow them. It was mad of us to reimagine our social media presence with new brand standards, content campaigns, and outreach strategies all at once. It was mad of us to review 443 submissions, more than we’ve received in the past two years combined, and still assemble a product to showcase on time. All of this and more was mad, and it made for a spectacular journal produced by an unforgettable team. It was an honor to fall down the rabbit hole with you.

Curiously, creatively, and madly yours,

Marina Goldman

Marina Goldman
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The woman I see
in shadows, my dozing brain
calls Poetry instead of Ghost;
The way she’s shifting
moments, the amorphous
place between
dreams and between dreams
and morning,
they change her. I’m sorry, Poetry,
that I cannot give
you a solid form, but you’re
more beautiful like this.
Pretty slips from solids,
and you’re already
a galaxy in the space between
blinks. You’re a philosophy,
now a vampire, now
a blunt rolled between careful
fingers on a South LA playground
bench, and now, you’re the lips
around it. Poetry, I’m sorry,
but you’re my mother,
whispering goodbyes by night
like in 2500 mile messages.
You’re the sharp springs of
a shelter bed and the snores of
LA’s homeless. And you’re
my mother again.
Poetry, I can’t explain this one,
but you’re a bisexual
cowboy alien.
A second, you’re
darkness - not shadow anymore,
but her mother: absence.
I’m sorry, Darkness:  
It’s always about mothers. 
It’s always about absence, 
and I’m sorry I shake 
in your hold: it’s the emptiness, 
I’m afraid of. 
I’m afraid of Nothing, 
and I’m afraid 
of ghosts unless I call them 
Poetry 
or Mother.

You Got This, Baby!  
Cailyn Beamenderfer

On the morning of April 16th 2020 I got a call from my dad. The caller I.D. immediately caused a pang in my stomach. I don’t talk much to my father, and there was no reason for him to be calling me at nine in the morning. I knew it was bad news. And the bad news washed over my entire body. A cold current of shock made my stomach tighten as I asked him if he’d already told my sister, Hailey. I told him to let me do it. So I called Hailey and I listened as she exploded into tears while driving down Route 9. She had to call out of work. 

My Auntie Stacey was dead. 

In my next therapy appointment I cried so hard. I scarcely managed to describe her and her presence. How she accented every sentence with “baby!”, how she couldn’t use an inside voice, and how she switched so rapidly from happy to sad to happy again. Yet somehow she was always happy to see me and my sisters as she would exclaim “Aren’t you a hot shit?” everytime we did something different with our appearance. Then there was the way she’d always see the best in us. Her love was unconditional and she always praised us for being smart, for being beautiful, and doing almost anything at all, within the realm of safety. 

She was a firecracker and a bombshell all in one. She was beautiful, kind, loud, insufferable, and she was addicted to several different kinds of drugs. In her post mortem toxicology report it was revealed that she had 8 different substances in her body at the time of
her death. My babcia claimed Auntie Stacey had been getting clean up until the time of her death. This was evidently not the case.

It didn’t make headlines or anything. Prior to her death a Google search on her name rendered results of various bowling tournaments in the central Massachusetts area. Any pictures one would find of her would likely contain a bulldog by the name of Meatball. As everyone knows, love is stored in the bulldog. Other than that there were a couple DUI reports. There was no social media. She was there and then she was gone, and all that remained was ancient bowling tournament records, a bulldog, and an obituary.

What I’ve written about my aunt came out of a place of love (sadly, not a bulldog in this case). This is not always how I have regarded my aunt. Loving an addict is very difficult for several reasons. The longer an addiction goes on, the slower you watch your loved one fade away. It’s impossible to reason with a wet brain that has been permanently changed, and which would likely die if it went a single day without alcohol. You can try to argue with psychological dependence but you cannot argue with altered brain structure. Despite this, it’s impossible to just let go of them. Fear, frustration, and mourning all come out as anger when debating with someone who isn’t rational. I was mad at her and I let her know it. I was mad that she let her brain go. I was mad that we didn’t mean enough to her to keep her afloat. More than anything, I was mad that I was losing my Auntie Stacey. Her date of death is April 16th, 2020, but she had been diminishing for at least a decade before then.

When my father called me on that Thursday morning I was on my couch doing online classes because it was the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown. I was a business administration major at a community college. At that general time I was struggling a lot with an introductory accounting class. I ended up needing to withdraw from two classes that semester, derailing my graduation date. I started to hear my aunt’s voice in my head, as she was at her best, with unconditional love. She told me she was proud of me no matter what I did and I was doing a great job, baby! Her voice was as clear in my head as the last time I spoke to her a month ago. I had joined the business major for the same reason anyone else out of high school would: job security. I remembered how my aunt would work odd jobs when she couldn’t hold one down. I remembered her listening intently to me whenever
I tried to explain a business concept to her. And now, I wish I could explain my essay to her.

The next semester I switched to an English major. My passion had always been with literary analysis but I had let fear divert me from something I could actually enjoy doing for four years. With every decision I made she relayed a “Yeah, baby!” and listened to me as I explained my insecurities surrounding something new and unknown. She told me I was a “smarty-pants” and that I would figure it out. She was right.

So I changed course in college. I’ve come to realize that job security isn’t what I value in life. My perspective on school and love shifted to a broader sense of what is acceptable and what isn’t. This wasn’t limited to how I see myself but it spread to how I see the world and everyone else in it.

For example, two weeks ago I was working at my retail job when a woman came up to the register next to mine. As I rang out my own customer I listened to the woman suddenly go off on a tangent to Aisha, the girl ringing her out. The woman had looked at Aisha and suddenly warned her not to take birth control. She explained that her daughter had passed away five years ago from cervical cancer due to complications from birth control. The woman explicitly said that she was sorry, and she didn’t mean to bother, and that she just really misses her daughter. Aisha assured her that it was perfectly okay, that she was listening, and again that it was okay. After the woman left, Aisha commented on how looney she was, along with my manager who had been listening in. I stayed quiet. In my mind all I could see was Auntie Stacey when she cried to a waitress in a restaurant because the leaves in her salad were too soggy and she felt bad for complaining. Additionally, I remembered how often babcia asks us to leave visits because she feels a crying fit coming on and she doesn’t want us to see it.

I don’t think that woman was crazy. I think that five years isn’t enough time to grieve the death of one’s daughter. I also think that people must sometimes behave in strange ways in order to cope with their strange circumstances. I know that before Auntie died I would have looked down on that woman. Like my aunt, she couldn’t keep her vibrancy under the surface for the general sake of common decency. They both couldn’t maintain themselves and it has to be the family that
suffers. Now though, my aunt is dead, and I know that turning things around isn’t always the solution that the world presents.

The death of my Auntie Stacey has permanently altered the way I see the world. There are ways to live that are viable but which will never make you happy. Then there are ways to live that shatter the mold in the worst ways possible. People have the option to ignore the context of a human being that does drugs and alcohol everyday. I could look at a homeless person on the street and I could think “Well at least I’m not homeless!” Yet in reality, I am scarcely a few major life events away from being seated right beside the homeless. In fact, everyone is. Having known the highs and lows of loving an addict, and knowing that you don’t have a choice in how they behave, but that you don’t have to fill the role of the berating family member, gives me the opportunity to view everyone who comes into my life in a new light. The choices I’ve made and the circumstances I’ve met have had the incredible result of landing me in a Bachelor’s degree English program in one of the biggest colleges in Massachusetts. Yet I’m no better than the homeless, my aunt, or the woman who lost her daughter to cervical cancer—and neither is anyone else.

_Carter Reaching Up_
Amalia Wompa
Photograph
Puzzled Identity
Leilani Pucci
Photographic Print
I. The Pendulum
Shoilee Banerjee
Growing up, I was sometimes called a pendulum
Because I would swing back and forth from one mood to another
I can’t lie, it made me mad that they said that.
One, because I knew they were right
But more importantly, why couldn’t they have picked a prettier metaphor?
Like a day versus night kind of thing?
Then I realized, it’s because people can look forward to days and nights
The only time they think about a pendulum is when they’re waiting for it to go back to the middle
and stop its noise

II. The Clock
Shoilee Banerjee
Just twelve hours ago, I screamed at the top of my lungs that I was never gonna die
Now, it’s 3 AM and I’m hoping the coffin that I call my bed swallows me whole
In another twelve hours, I’ll be resurrected
I go around in circles and circles
And that’s when I realize
I’m not just the pendulum
I’m the whole damn clock.

“I want aamras”: An ode to Summers in Jaipur
Barkha Bhandari
Our silence is beautiful
Like that time we were all lounging around in dada-dadi’s room and no one was really talking to each other
Under the bed lay an orange colony of aam and the smell of their slow ripening filled the room This wasn’t just the smell of aam though
It was the smell of summer
Of lazy afternoons and lazier evenings
Of inhaling *thandai* and exhaling heat
    and more heat
Someone tell me why the sun shines so brightly on Jaipur
I would try to chase it away but what would we complain about
during dinnertime conversations if I did?
Ah, it was the smell of Jaipur summer
Of dust that finds its home on every one of our old books
Of yellow saris and lemongrass tea
Of watching birds argue with each other from our verandah
Or buttermilk mustaches and hair dripping with coconut oil
Of running around barefoot on dry, cracking, blackened heels
    Of heat,
    Yes! Even more heat
And finally,
Of lying down on the stone cold floor, glancing at the *aam* and
politely asking them to ripen faster
Yes, our silence is beautiful
Because if we talked to each other all time,
Tell me, who would talk to the *aam*?

Translator’s key for this poem:
Aamras: Mango juice
Aam: Mango
Thandai: A sweet cold drink made of almonds that is traditionally consumed in the summer Dada-Dadi: Grandfather and Grandmother

**Unquiet Slumbers for British Writers:**
**Literary Darkness, and how it Pervades 18th-Century British Literature**
Christopher Govang

On July 18, 1817, the author of several seminal works of English literature, Jane Austen, passed away. Her sister, in a letter to her niece immediately following Jane’s death, writes the following: “When I asked [Jane] if there was anything she wanted, her answer was she wanted nothing but death, and some of her words were: ‘God
grant me patience, pray for me, oh, pray for me!”

Despite the loss being incredibly tragic, Austen had effectively immortalized herself through her works. Only four years earlier, she had published arguably her most famous novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, a psychological horror in which Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters are forced to find husbands in a society which considers love to be largely transactional before it is too late, lest they subject themselves to poverty and suffering for the rest of their lives. To this day, it sends chills down the spines of readers all around the world, reminding them of the divine power of fate and how one wrong choice can result in the entirety of your life being changed for the worse.

*Pride and Prejudice*, although it is by no means as horrific in reality, does what many other British texts around this time did as well; the novel includes some elements of existential horror. What if I don't find a good spouse? What if I die alone? Would I have to sacrifice lifelong happiness to provide it for others? Austen asks these questions and others to paint a picture of what life was like for many young women in her time, and similar queries can be identified in numerous pieces of literature from this era. Poverty, solitude, unhappiness, and similar topics seeped into almost anything one could read during this time. No matter whether it was intentionally morbid or a series of romantic mishaps, darkness was the ink that dripped onto the pages.

The late 18th Century, with the introduction of gothic literature, saw a lasting schism in what was considered truly horrific, resulting in the birth of two major types of literary darkness. The earlier part of the century, towards the beginning of the Enlightenment, saw a widespread departure from religious fears such as the fear of God or Hell perpetuated by authors like Milton and Bunyan, and the latter half of the century saw an even further shift towards more tangible fears: the effect of death, misery, loss, and disease. Although the writing scene was changing, there were many who opted to continue creating works that put a greater emphasis on structure as opposed to symbolism, thus creating a distinction between textual and metatextual darkness.

Textual darkness is that which can be read directly from the work itself, that is, the negative emotions or imagery are a crucial part of the text and are therefore inextricably tied to it. Generally, anything that discusses death, disease, doom and gloom can be understood to incorporate textual darkness. This form is much easier to notice than
its counterpart considering there is less of a need to think outside the bounds of the poem in order to draw a conclusion about the author’s intent.

Written in 1800, “The Haunted Beach” by Mary Robinson is a prime example of what textual darkness entails due to its abundance of miserable imagery. The poem depicts a beach (a haunted one, no less) forever associated with not only the loss of several sailors in a terrible shipwreck, but also the grisly murder of the ship’s captain by the fisherman who lives there. Robinson has no fear of revealing all the gory details of the deaths, including that the sailor was given “ten wide gashes in his head” in the literal darkness of nighttime, and the scene is one of unadulterated terror as a result. The fisherman himself is an intriguing figure in the poem, as he is simultaneously one who is miserable and one who has caused misery in others. The speaker heavily suggests that the fisherman murdered the captain for his riches, and as a result, the spirit of the sailor will effectively haunt him for the rest of his life, as ghostly imagery often represents. Living the rest of his life in his decrepit shack, the fisherman’s fate is detailed in the closing stanza of the poem:

“Bound by a strong and mystic chain,
He has not power to stray;
But destined misery to sustain,
He wastes, in solitude and pain,
A loathsome life away.”

In essence, the man is a ghost himself, forever bound to the beach plagued by the screaming birds and the crashing waves and forced to live with his horrible deed. This conclusion is a desolate one, exemplifying horror portrayed directly in the text.

Another poet who embraced this medium is Jonathan Swift, seen in his poem “The Progress of Beauty” from 1719. Swift, writing almost a century before Robinson, was one of the pioneers of this type of writing and specialized in the grotesque. Although he had not yet reached the level of nauseating detail included in his later works, most notably 1729’s *A Modest Proposal*, the poem invokes textual darkness through its use of harrowing visuals rather than discussion of dismal or sinful events. Swift utilizes this throughout to describe, rather misogynistically, the image of a woman, Celia, after her makeup has worn away over the course of a day. The speaker uses words that
naturally have strong negative associations to describe her: She has “Crack’d lips, foul teeth, and gummy eyes…” and then he immediately goes on to discuss how whatever she used to darken her hair has ended up on her chest in “A mingled mass of dirt and sweat.” This use of vile words to describe Celia in the morning exemplifies this form of textual darkness as images versus events.

The word “metatextual” quite literally means “above a text,” referring to something that is just as much a part of the story as it is separate. As a result, metatextual darkness is the opposite of textual darkness; it is misery that can only be discovered through inference and thinking beyond the words on the page (it is, more or less, “reading between the lines”). It is much more invasive, and is the primary reason that nearly all of British literature around the 18th Century has some sort of underlying desolation to it. This form usually involves fears that are less tangible, ones which stem not from a shocking event or image, like murder or dead puppies, but is more conceptual and generalized. Above all else, death as an idea and not an event is the most common use of the device, though similar topics like poverty, suffering, and fate are written about often enough to be included.

As mentioned before, *Pride and Prejudice* is by no means a frightening or morbid novel, but as a satire it pokes fun at parts of society which are inherently bleak. The institution of marriage is one that finds itself being looked at more closely as time goes on, with a growing number of people questioning whether it is necessary to uphold at all, but in 18th-Century England, a life without marriage was not an option for young women. The crux of the novel is marriage for love and not transaction, but at the same time, Elizabeth Bennet is still essentially forced to marry rich in order to prevent herself and her family from being destitute. Austen gives Bennet a happy ending, falling in love with the exceedingly wealthy Mr. Darcy, but undercuts her happiness by surrounding her with characters such as Charlotte Lucas, who reasons that “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least.” Charlotte’s view is somewhat shocking in today’s society, but was very logical for its time; it was a grim reality for women like Jane Austen and her contemporaries. As long as you had money, you would suffer less, and the best way to accomplish this was to marry
someone who had wealth, regardless if you were happy with them or not. *Pride and Prejudice* is a definitive example of a novel whose horror stems largely from the deeper meaning behind a text as opposed to what is written on the page.

What makes metatextual darkness especially interesting is just how malleable it is. It can be used throughout a text to weave a sub-narrative into the story being told on the surface, or it can only be incorporated through the use of a symbol that presents itself at crucial moments. Although it can be shaped much more with novels, which dedicate much more time to a story than a poem, it is by no means exclusive to the medium. Poems which utilize this device are likely to start out positively, then either use a volta to drastically change the tone of the poem as Swift did in “A Description of a City Shower,” or gradually introduce darker themes before ending the piece on an unhappy note.

Though it may seem almost like the 1790’s equivalent of a fight song at first, Anna Lætita Barbauld’s poem “The Rights of Women” demonstrates this slow-burn variant of metatextual darkness in poetry. The poem starts out by encouraging women to stand up for themselves and to tear down the oppressive systems of power that are keeping them held back. It is a very progressive message for its time, and would resonate with people to this day, however this sentimentality does not last for very long. Soon afterward, Barbauld begins to write about how women, despite being able to take over the world with their strength, “never canst be free” from having to watch their backs for men who will keep trying to stifle their voices. The poem continues to get more depressing from there, suggesting that one of the major responsibilities women would have after taking over would be to “Awe the licentious, and restrain the rude; / Soften the sullen, clear the cloudy brow…” In other words, women would be responsible for managing the emotions of men instead of the men being able to do it themselves, something which is not nearly as progressive as the beginning of the poem would suggest. At the very end of the poem, Barbauld assures the reader that being above anyone else would not be a pleasant way to live, and that it is impossible to maintain the lifestyle she was just promoting stanzas before. This subversion of the meaning behind the poem results in an unsettling end to what could have been an otherwise uplifting poem, using the metatext to deliver an unhappy message to the reader.
The beauty of textual versus metatextual darkness is that the two are not entirely separate from one another; they can often be used in tandem. There are many situations in which the text will be painting a picture of horror for the reader (for instance, 1818’s *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley, which is on the surface about a monstrous reanimated man who goes on a murderous rampage) while the metatext will be drawing upon more amorphous fears in the background (the loneliness of the monster due to him being rejected by society is his motivation). Often, the implementation of both results in the most effective attempts at horror.

In 1798, the poet William Wordsworth composed the beginnings of a collection of poems called “The Lucy Poems.” The five poems each describe a young woman, Lucy, whom the speaker had loved and lost, and use both forms of literary darkness to comment on both death and loneliness. The second poem, “She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways” begins with an introduction to Lucy and transitions into a description about how lovely Lucy is, calling her “A violet by a mossy stone / Half hidden from the eye! / —Fair as a star, when only one /Is shining in the sky” in the second stanza. However, as soon as the reader is introduced to Lucy, the speaker goes on to lament her death, crying “The difference to me!” Not only does the poem directly discuss death, the poem also revolves itself around loneliness and generalized loss. The latter being metatextual, the poem touches upon a deep-seated human fear of losing love, raising unsettling questions similar to those in *Pride and Prejudice* revolving around future happiness, and whether you are fated to live pleasantly for the rest of your life.

Finally, the text and metatext are both extensively used to relay dark themes to readers in the poetry of William Blake, specifically his collection, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* published in 1794. Although many of the poems are short and pleasant reads, some of the poems Blake includes are drastically more unsettling. Take, for example, the plethora of lost children, specifically “A Little Boy Lost” in *Songs of Experience*. The poem is about a young boy who is burned at the altar for heresy simply for asking a priest “how can I love you / Or any of my brothers more?” and questioning God’s authority. This poem reflects a similar metatextual fear of God to that of Alexander Pope’s “An Essay on Man,” but is also textually dark due to the image of a child being murdered in front of his parents. A different poem with the
same title from *Songs of Innocence* sees a child getting lost in the woods after following the ghost of his father and crying “O do not walk so fast! / Speak, father, speak to your little boy, / Or else I shall be lost.”

The fear of being lost is one that many children are forced to face at a young age, though it remains in adults as a fear of helplessness, making the metatextual aspect of the poem reflect this as well. Overall, Blake’s poems blur the line between the textual and metatextual darkness, using the two simultaneously to bring forth fear in the reader.

Throughout British prose and poetry, darkness always seems to pop up in one way or another; even when a reader thinks they are safe, pain and suffering is right around the corner. Whether that is within the work itself, with ghosts flying around and blood everywhere, or meant to be extracted from the work, with deep-seated fears being played into, it is undoubtedly somewhere waiting to be found. As seen in poems like “The Haunted Beach,” the words alone can create a dismal atmosphere, whereas with works like “An Essay on Man” it is the meaning behind them which instills a sense of dread in the reader. Regardless of who is writing or what is being shown, chances are there is some element of darkness between the lines to get the reader to think about the more upsetting side of life.

6 Wordsworth, William. “She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways” Lines 5-8, 12.
7 Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. “A Little Boy Lost” Pages 63-64, Lines 5-6
8 Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. “A Little Boy Lost” Page 12, Lines 2-4
Incandescence
Sophia VanHelene
Digital Painting
Young Hungers
Clay Arble

In those days
We built fires in our bedrooms
To keep the cold outside our doors.
All night each night we slept in cold dreams
As the windows steamed
And frosted on the other side.
Sometimes, we snapped our paint brushes
In half for kindling.
Other nights, we burned books.

Elaphebolios*
India Anderson

No one speaks to me— the lonely bitter stag
It is cold outside of Athens
It is without city without it.
I am wind and you’ve come to claim me
I am angry but your hungry seeks to win
You dress me well
Have forgotten the lines made to draw a city
You spit on my flesh
The lines made to draw a city

*Ancient Athenian festival held for the worship
of Artemis; the shooter of the deer

A Drunk Cannibal Sunbathes On The Beach
(With Friends)
Jorge Biaggi

“¿Hola Vampiro? Lo siento, estamos aquí en Culebra pero olvidamos de traer sangre.”

Leaning back in a chair like this feels great when you’ve got some beer in your guts
Not those prissy, expensive, beach chairs that folks like us can’t afford with their “collapsibility”
But those cheap, white, plasticky pieces of shit with their (let me gesture a little)
Bendy rubber bands that melt right into your skin after you’ve been staring at the sun smiling.

Practically, basically, um, I brought El Vejigante out here today because I like the way he looks.

In the coastal sun of the islands by Vieques, he really glows when it’s about noon,
And the sand goes bone white so it starts to serve as a backdrop.
He’s got this massive fucking mask, something really fruity, covered in pink drooping flowers,
Band stickers, smoke stains, dazzling horns that frame his yelling face like a lion’s mane,
And the fresh phone numbers written in stenchy permanent marker of the people who find him,
_Sexy._

His eyes are glossed over as he lays back on a towel by my right, his hands protruding upwards,
Like a sleeping mutt,
Whimpering names of men and women I’d never thought he’d remember,
Like a bastard,
If I’m lucky he’ll start groaning about needing another drink as soon as he sleepwalks,
Like Zombie,
Digging his hands into the skin-warm sand of a 4-o’Clock bender, crawling mannishly,
Like Wendigo,
To the frost breathing cooler, his wooden teeth hushing whispers of Cerveza... Cerveza.

_How can he always be so _thirsty_?_

Chupacabra sleeps soundly despite our blaring speaker,
Curled up into a ball of scales, spines, and fangs, 
She rests (as dogs do, unlike mutts), 
To the rumbles of Yankee’s Reggaeton and Bunny’s Accent. 
She’s had a full day of chasing frisbees and playing catch with goat heads from the market, 
And even though she’d never pass up on the opportunity to stretch her aching incisors out, 
She sleeps, happily, in the warmth of the too friendly sun. 
Its orange tendrils like fingertips petting her scaly form into slumber, 
The sunset coating her dreams of running amok in Baja as she’s lounging on this island, 
Thousands of miles away from (and into) wherever she calls home.

But, with just one whiff of scented seltzer breath, 
And the distant country acoustics of some late night dixie anthem drawls, 
Beneath the light of a freshly risen Moon, 
I could sense the tide of something gringo coming.

White, blond, and tomato red, these walking pasta plates marched up from the east of the beach, 
Underneath a star spangled sky, they brought this sense of presence once again, 
(Though their rifles now look more like expensive folding chairs and clamped up umbrellas, 
Their mechanisms lying in wait to SPRING and shock you with a microdose of colonization) 
Flags planted on the sand, 
Smiling faces above some land that isn’t theirs.

I almost let them live.

But one came over with his bleached, sultry, sand dusted hair, past our roaring trash fire, 
His achillean body beckoning me to ask him what he keeps under those red swimming trunks, 
And then, politely, like a fucking dick, he asked me to turn down the music. 
Chupacabra beat me to it as she uncurled like a whip and lunged right
at his bulging neck,
His jugular exploding into a mist of red moonshine as his throat, in
rattlers, fell onto the sand,
And then,
Right into my cocktail.

“¡Vamiro, ven aquí!”
Crave
Sophia VanHelene
Digital Painting
The shooter’s name is Charlie Ritter, and here is what I know about him as I lie curled up underneath a school lab bench.

Charlie Ritter has light brown hair and green eyes which, my mother always used to tell me in a somewhat impressed voice, are very rare. Charlie has a scar on his left thumb from when he fell off his mother’s trellis. Charlie’s voice is raspy when he speaks but soft when he sings. Charlie is allergic to tree nuts. Charlie finds clowns hilarious. Charlie wants to travel to Japan. Charlie is fascinated by butterflies. Charlie has a green thumb. Charlie was my best friend growing up.

Charlie is holding a gun.

As I lie underneath the table, my head is throbbing and suddenly all I can remember of Charlie is the fact that he has a row of miniature flowerpots on his windowsill and how we made up swear words as children while rollerblading down Plainfield Street.

I start crying.

Mr. Cooley is dead on the floor a few feet away from me, and his head is tilted towards me, a thin stream of blood connecting his mouth to the floor. He is not alive to speak, but if he was, he would most definitely say, “Dara, you screwed us all. You get an F.”

The barrel of the gun finds my forehead, and I scream even louder, frantic. I spent my entire life going to church, reciting the Lord’s Prayer, and I can’t remember a word now. The doors to heaven and hell stare me in the face. I scream even louder.
Mr. Cooley rolls in his grave. Nobody ever listened to him anyway.

“Come out from under the table,” says Charlie, and I think back to the list of things I know about Charlie Ritter and remember that the last time he saw me in the hallway, he smiled at me. I think.

I get out from under the table and try to use my hair as a curtain. I cut it off recently because my mother insisted that I look better with it short. It falls like a greasy shield in front of my face and does a terrible job of hiding my fear.

I wish that I had not listened to my mother.

“Why are you hiding?” asks Charlie, as if we’re having a simple conversation over coffee instead of him standing in the middle of a Washington High School classroom holding a rifle.

I don’t respond, but I can feel myself getting dizzy, so I lean against the wall. I knock over Mr. Cooley’s pen-holding mug on the shelf nearest to me and the whole thing shatters on the floor. I know in the land between earth and heaven Mr. Cooley is repeatedly pissing himself in rage. He always liked to keep things neat and clean.

I wonder where he will shoot me and how long it will take to die depending on the location. The neck might leave me half-dead for a good while, choking on my own blood. Straight between the eyes might kill me right away, which would be ideal. In the stomach would definitely leave me struggling, like in the movies.

“How’s your parents?” Charlie asks, scanning the classroom. I wonder why he’s taking so much time, and I’m not sure what else to do, so I squeeze the fabric of my shorts between my fingers and choose to respond to him. “My parents are fine.”

Amy Larson chooses this moment to run for the door. The distance must’ve looked closer than it really was, because she is dead in an instant. I don’t even see the bullet fly - it’s much too fast. Charlie’s got excellent aim, and she falls down like a sack of rice, and her scream is stolen out of her mouth before it’s all out.
Charlie finishes off the classroom like a sprinkler, shooting everything in sight. Kids, the whiteboard, Mr. Cooley’s desk, the fish tank, the framed photographs of Mr. Cooley’s elementary school twins and his pet poodle, Ivy. I don’t know how many people are dead or alive, I just stare at the shattered photos and how half of Charlie’s shirt is tucked in while the other half is not and try to piece together what’s going on.

When I start crying again, Charlie places the barrel of the gun against my forehead. My view of him is partially concealed by my hair hanging in the way, but I still know he’s close enough for me to smell his sweat. “Why are you crying?” Charlie asks calmly. His voice sounds like poison. “Why are you crying? You have nothing to cry about.”

I reach up to push the barrel of the gun off my forehead, but I can’t bring myself to touch it, so I just let my hands hang there, around my face.

“You have nothing to cry about!” he shouts in my face, and a wad of spit hits the side of my mouth. I’m too terrified to make any sudden movements and wipe it off.

“Nice mom, nice dad,” Charlie whispers in my ear. “Nice house. You’ve got a real nice life, Dara, there’s nothing to cry about. One minor inconvenience and you start bawling?”

Charlie leans in so that his forehead is touching mine, and he parts the curtain of hair. Seeing him clearly now, with the shadow of the barrel still balanced at the top part of my vision allows me to see exactly what’s going to happen to me next.

His eyes are so green.

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At Leigha Miller’s funeral, my parents and I sit in the third row.

I twist around in my seat to survey the rest of the church. The air pulses hot and thick, and the wooden benches are slimy with sweat. Dad smells like cigarette butts and Mom smells like Dior. I lock eyes with Charlie, who sits next to his mother in a row all the way at the
end. She’s bent over and wearing a hat, which my mother always says is extremely impolite in church. I can see her spine sticking out from the top of the sleeveless pink dress.

“Don’t turn around in church, it’s bad manners,” says Mom, pinching my arm.

When I turn back around, Mrs. Hammond, who sits on Mom’s left, leans in towards her. “Rest Leigha’s soul. God doesn’t take suicide lightly.”

“No, he doesn’t,” agreed Mom, who has already planned out her life, which doesn’t include suicide.

“But it isn’t her fault,” adds Mrs. Hammond. “You know why she killed herself, don’t you?” When Mom doesn’t respond and only stares back at her with dinner plate eyes, Mrs. Hammond smirks and adjusts her shawl. “Mr. Miller had a huge affair with Mrs. Ritter for nearly a year, while Leigha was struggling to manage her autoimmune condition. While that poor woman was struggling at home to stand up and take care of the household and put herself through countless hospital visits, Mr. Miller was screwing Mary Ritter in her own house. Right in front of Charlie, too.”

“Affair?” I whisper to my mom. I know the meaning of the word, but didn’t know that even married men could engage in such actions.

“Mary Ritter?” Mom squeezes her arms around my shoulders, horrified. Her nails dig into my skin. “My daughter’s Sunday School teacher?”

Mrs. Hammond clucks her tongue. “Not everyone named Mary can be as pious as the Mother of Jesus.”

I turn back to look at the row where Charlie and Mrs. Ritter were sitting. Mrs. Ritter is no longer there, and Charlie is sitting alone, staring back at me with gigantic eyes.

They’re green and they burn into mine.
When we pass him in the aisle, my mother doesn’t lean over him to fluff his hair or mention that he should come over for dinner and that she is making corn on the cob and isn’t that your favorite, Charlie, honey?

As we make our way down towards the double-doors at the end of the church, I hear Charlie softly call my name, but my mother gives him a look that would send anybody straight to their grave.

“That’s done, Dara,” she says, when we exit the church.

---

His eyes are locked onto mine, and they won’t let go. I still remember the child in the church, the uneasy remnants of an affair gone sour, and the whispers of all the seemingly good Christians that huddled in church, smelling of Dior.

I remembered how all of a sudden the children at school who were friends with Mrs. Miller’s son, Kegan, suddenly began to target Charlie, the closest way to hurting Mrs. Ritter. I realize this is the first time I’ve really looked at Charlie for more than three consecutive seconds, without flitting my eyes away. I want to catch him up on my life since I walked out of that church and into my house and slammed the door on our friendship.

I want to tell him I like the new ear piercing he has, that maybe if he wasn’t holding a gun we could’ve had lunch together one day, or maybe he could come over and meet my new Newfoundland puppy.

“There’s no one left to kill,” whispers Charlie, raising the gun to his temple.

I try to say something, but the gun drowns me out.

After Charlie shoots himself, he crumples like paper into a mess of combat boots, oversized jacket, sparkly earring, black mask, twisted fingers, trellis scar. I sit against the wall and hold my head in my hands. The next funeral will be Charlie’s, and everyone will sit and mutter
about his mother and the terrible things he did and stare at the empty row where he will not be sitting. The air will be hot and smell like coffee-stained whispers, and the world will be a little bit less green.

**Snuff**

**Molly Hamilton**

I want to cut you out of me,
red and damp and soft on the floor.
I thought I could get someone else to hold the knife,
another man, one who wouldn’t think twice —
but you were buried too deep for that.

In my kitchen, video tape in the
soft summer light, half-open shades,
your smile so wide I couldn’t capture the whole thing.
Did you feel it then?
Before your ten a.m. flight?
The flight you were always too eager to take,
too eager to run away, always

I said I’d wait for you, always

October: you make a phone call without thinking,
I tell my mother a joke that doesn’t land.
This is so funny.
Hold the wick between two fingers, careful
it doesn’t burn.
Were you afraid, that if you held me too long
it would leave a mark?
**Escalators**  
**Michael Naeger**

Escalators!  
Escalators!

I shouted  
Nobody doubted

I ascended each escalator  
And cruised with excitement!

When I went up  
I shouted...  
Escalators!  
Escalators!

A crowd of people cheered  
Something that didn’t feel weird

Again,  
I shouted...  
Escalators!  
Escalators!

People smiled!  
People laughed!

I glided up the stairs  
And met a crowd of glares

Once more,  
I shouted...  
Escalators!  
Escalators!

The crowd muted  
The crowd glared  
No one smiled
No one laughed

I plodded up the escalator
   My feet heavy
   My heart wearied
   My soul thirsty

The crowd never changed
   I never gained
Nothing ever changed
I am back where I started

Feminism in Film
Samantha Meagher

To BitchMedia,

Growing up, my notions of what it meant to be a “woman” were incredibly warped. They still are, in a sense. I went from watching movies about young, beautiful, innocent princesses, who are rescued by a charming prince, to movies that depicted women as filthy, usable objects. As a child, it was clear to me which type of woman I wanted to be: the princess. What I didn’t recognize is how this double bind shown to me in the media would affect my growth as a woman. It released unreachable standards that would result in social consequences in either direction I chose, and created the illusion that women must be one or the other, or else they are not worthy of a story. This double bind and harmful depictions of women affected my confidence, my relationships, and my journey towards feminism.

At my university, I took a course with Professor Sut Jhally titled *Gender, Sex, and Representation*. The course evaluated different ways women are ritually and stereotypically portrayed in and influenced through media, from something as subtle as a pose in a magazine, or as blatant as films such as Amy Schumer’s *I Feel Pretty*. In many women-centric films, such as *Mean Girls*, women are portrayed as skanks, foolish, and mean. The characters clearly struggle with self-image, reflected through their cruel actions, but according to *Rogue Feminist*, they are this way because the misogyny that is unrepresented in the film surrounds them in everyday life. Many films put the blame
on women for feeling and acting the way they do, which can be valid. However, they omit the misogyny that contributes to these actions. In films that mainly depict men as the protagonists, women are rarely main characters with an actual storyline or personality. They are used for the boy’s/men’s sexual needs and are often objectified (Bulman, 95). I’ve been taught a difficult lesson; I must act, dress, and portray myself in certain ways to find love, but doing so will also open me up to become an object.

Media portrayal of women has affected my romantic relationships. My outlook on men is very wary thanks to the media. Films, like Superbad and Project X, where boys talk about women in crude ways can create the illusion that this is the standard and prominent view that men have of women. Pretty girls are wanted for sex and sex only, and “ugly bitches stay home” (Project X). Even the men who are considered “perfect” and “dreamy” can’t always be trusted with your safety. As explained by Constance Grady of Vox, the dreamy, popular, perfect Jake Ryan of Sixteen Candles contributes to rape culture. “‘She’s so blitzed she won’t know the difference.’ The poor Geek has had no luck with girls, so Jake illustrates his generous magnanimity by installing the Geek in his own fancy car, with his own fancy unconscious girlfriend next to him, and says, ‘Have fun’” (Grady). Too many films use women as pawns to please their lovable and entertaining male protagonists. It is difficult to trust men when they are constantly portrayed as sex-hungry and misogynistic (another separate issue regarding sexism).

Luckily, I recognized these issues in film very early in my life, and noticed how these messages were impacting me. So, instead of focusing on how females were objectified and insulted in film, I started to identify with female characters that were able to defeat that double bind of having to be one or the other (slutty or a virgin). Ones that had their own life and personality outside of trying to please men or fall in love, and who vouched for female empowerment. A character such as Leslie Knope from Parks and Recreation is one of my favorites. With sarcasm and comedy, the character addresses the misogynistic views of her coworkers and peers. Hermoine Granger taught young girls that women can be beautiful, smart, strong, and kind all in one. Shuri, from Black Panther, is a young Black woman in a position of power, who is independent, smart, and strong. Matilda Wormwood taught me, even
as a young girl, that you can stand up to those in power. The presence of real and flawed women in media is a powerful way to counteract the negative portrayals that are so common.

Film is a powerful part of our culture. According to Imran Siddiquee, empathy is the most prominent lesson taught through all forms of film and television. If the media continues to use its main characters, whom the audience is meant to empathize with, to portray misogynistic ideology and reinforce women stereotypes, women will continue to feel insecure, objectified, and submissive. It is important to encourage filmmakers and writers to truly think about their portrayal of women. Are they being used as pawns for other characters? What is their main purpose in the film? Are they reflecting old stereotypes? Or are they breaking through them, empowering female audience members?
An Ode to The Women I Work With
Claudia Maurino

The women I work with stand all day long.
Their feet wear out sneakers quickly
from cups of soup dropped on the laces
toes stubbed on bar furniture older than they are
and so many strides taken to customers and tables
and the bar and the back and the ice machine. They complain
about everything and everyone, all day long
but rarely, somehow, their feet.

The women I work with have broad shoulders
and big hands. They paint their nails bright colors
to distract from cracked skin. They are strong
and muscular in a way I almost don’t notice
until an errant elbow nearly knocks me off my feet.
But when they pass behind me in the crowded spaces
we call home at work, they are gentle. Their hand is soft
on the small of my back as they pass by.

The women I work with want to lose weight.
I know this because they talk about it constantly.
They point to the soft places on their body, the underarm
and thigh, with disdain. “This’ll never go away
if I keep eating so much bread.” they say. I want to say
“Good!” I want to say, “Keep it! Your softness
is a reward for surviving so long in a world
bent against you.” But I keep my mouth shut.

The women I work with sing while they fold napkins
or make salads, or deliver dinners, or pour drinks,
or mop spills, or clear dishes. They hum snatches
of songs lifetimes older than I am, and when they catch me
watching, listening, they grin sheepishly. They did not realize
they were singing aloud, they say.
Moments later they are dancing again to their own music
in the back, where no one can see.
The women I work with are rowdy and jocular, they are quick to spread a salacious rumor, or provide color commentary on the customers they know. They are world-weathered women with old souls who have been around the block a time or ten and aren’t afraid anymore. Outside of work they fight battles bigger than I can imagine. They’ve lost children or beat illnesses, addictions, or bad marriages. And they’ve come out kicking, dancing, and singing.

The Kingdom of Favorite Parts
Maya Durham

Let me start here by saying that this is probably not quite the kind of love letter you might want to read. It’s been four weeks since I moved in here according to the notches I’ve made on my windowsill, but if it wasn’t for these markings I’d tell you it had been many months. As we planned prior to parting, you’re supposed to come visit from Edinburgh in only two weeks now. I’m excited to see you again, but I’m worried that many years will pass before these next two weeks do.

I know you probably wonder why I’m only writing now, why I haven’t texted you sooner. To be honest, I lost my phone drunkenly the very first night I moved in here with my cousin and her collection of friends in the countryside, and I haven’t thought about it since.

The day I moved into my cousin’s house was the last time I saw you. Of course you must remember it clearly—it mustn’t feel as far off as it does for me.

When the plague first started ravaging in the Spring it brought us together in a way that felt for a moment guaranteed if nothing else, but long distance during a plague? Hopeless. Even though this little parting of ways had been my idea, now I found myself doubting. But then - during the whole eight hours of the drive away from our apartment I watched the sun slowly creep out from behind a quilt of gray, I watched it make the shadows longer and longer, and eventually I was smiling, because I’d done the hardest part and I felt hopeful that I’d be ok without you.

Edinburgh was long gone by the time I saw the turn of for the address Beth had given me. The driveway was long and spiraled like a slinky up a large hill speckled in sheep. I had to rattle my way over about six cattle grids to get to the top, and when I did finally reach the top of the hill where the house rests it was dusk, and the entirety of the Scottish countryside that sprawled below me was
blushing like it had a crush on the impending night. I got out of the car, locked it, then looked up at the house...

And! You wouldn’t believe it - but it’s really more of a castle than a house at all! I don’t know why Beth didn’t bother mentioning that last Christmas, maybe she wanted to keep it a fairytale surprise. All the windows were tall and arched and out of them flooded the warmest glow.

I stood there gawking for what must’ve been a good couple minutes until Beth rushed out the front door to greet me. Her voice had a sing-song quality I hadn’t heard since we were children together. She took me inside by the hand to a candlelit dining hall filled with the other women who lived in the castle with her. She poured me a glass of whiskey, tossed my phone and my car keys into a basin somewhere and I haven’t seen them since!

What commenced was a night of merriment and laughter I hadn’t experienced in a good handful of months, or possibly ever. I was overwhelmed by new names and new faces and a little too emotionally drained myself to even begin to process that this was going to be my new home for a while. After several glasses of whiskey, though, the nerves faded a little and I let my guard down. I took off my shoes, chatted with some of my new housemates and marveled at the grandness of the castle’s many rooms. Maybe it was the exhaustion, maybe it was the excitement, but for some reason that first night it never occurred to me to ask how or why all of these people found each other and this castle, or why my little cousin Beth glowed like a candle and seemed to act like she was running a cult or a kingdom or something of the sorts - I was really just excited to be there.

I’ll admit it was refreshing to be around all these women and laughing so much. You did always say that I needed more female friends. At the feast I ate two bowls of grapes, a whole chicken, and five slices of pound cake, and I still felt ravenous despite the deep food coma that swept me off my feet and made me think it was probably time to call it a night.

As I was creeping up the winding staircase to my empty bedroom that first evening, tipsy all the way down to my toes and grinning like a madwoman in the dark, another girl, who I later learned was called Josephine, passed me by on her way down. She had wispy ginger hair and the cutest little horns budding out of them too, and a smattering of freckles. As she passed me she turned a little and caught my shoulder with her hand, then pulled me in just a sigh closer and whispered, ‘You’re going to love it here, you’re going to bless the plague like you bless a sunny day, we sure all do.’ She then smiled a smile that made my tummy flutter all the way up, and kept down on her way.
Now, as odd as it may sound, she wasn’t half wrong. To my greatest surprise, that first night I didn’t even dream of you at all.

I’ve been here four weeks now, or however long it’s been to you, and I never would have thought I’d feel so at peace surrounded by the threat of plague. There are twenty-something of us women who live here; none of us leave the hilltop where the castle sits so we’re all healthy and safe, don’t worry about that. We’re all a little different from each other too, in the best of ways.

There’s Lucia with the leopard spotted skin, Rosalita who has all of her old lovers’ souls kept in a locket that dangles around her neck, Josephine with the little horns, Eilidh who makes an arc with her magic wand every evening to call in the night sky, my own dear Beth who lights up rooms, quite literally... and that’s only a few. I could list them all here, but I fear you would become too jealous. We bathe together in the mornings, and after we bathe we all go to the hill to catch the morning sun, and lie naked on the grass, the whole school of us drying like beached sardines.

Hiding out together has become a welcome excuse to indulge in our home and each other. The castle and the surrounding hillside is our kingdom and ours alone. We have horses, one for each of us in the stables which we ride every morning on the great hunt. There really is nothing more glamorous than bathing in the morning with your dearest friends, then, fresh faced and dressed in a few silky layers, mounting a horse with a bow and arrow on your back. We ride across the hill as a herd, and Beth leads the way glowing aggressively like a lantern in the already sunny day. My horse is called Chester, he’s chestnut brown and patient as a clock. It took me a little while to get used to the whole bow and arrow affair. It was quite frustrating really, all the other girls would come home lugging behind them dear or foxes perfectly pierced through the heart, and I’d come back empty handed, with only scraped knees to show I even made any attempt at a kill at all.

I began to find myself at night in my chambers dreaming like a dog of chasing after golden hairs and badgers, and waking up hungry and desperate for blood.

What felt like many hunts later I finally took my first kill. I was alone on top of Chester in the brush of the nearby woods. I wasn’t even in too deep, I could still hear the sheep from the field nearby baaing and smell their wool wet with morning dew. As I paused for a moment to breathe in the sweet scent of the forest and catch my bearings, I saw something move between the crack of two trees.
in the distance. As we crept closer, quiet and careful not to snap any twigs under
the weight of hooves, I saw it more clearly. A snow white elk. I found its profound
beauty appetizing, and without a second thought of the creature’s life, raised my
bow, let fly an arrow slick, and took it.

More mornings came and my kills accumulated, I became known in the
castle as Miriam, swift of shot. That first elk was probably my most fabled kill
of all, some of the girls even made a painting of it and hung it in the great dining
hall. Now every night as I eat I can look up and see myself all smoothed by the
hue of oil paints taking down a creature that looks like a god. Normally I don’t
gravitate towards that kind of attention, but in the form of immortalizing my
fiercest moment I don’t mind at all.

One evening it was my turn to help cook the feast. I was in the kitchen
as the sun set, pounding flour and dough with tired fists, my friend Giselle beside
me folding the dough into little heart shaped savory tarts. Giselle wasn’t one of the
first people I noticed when I moved in... you see she doesn’t have any features at all.
She got rid of them all after lockdown started, she figured they were useless and she
couldn’t wait to one day emerge from everything again looking like nothing at all.
She seemed to notice I was troubled, maybe from my quietness or maybe from the
bruises emerging on my knuckles, and she asked me what was wrong.

For a moment I was unsure what to say, I felt afraid like I might drop
something delicate and watch it shatter around me. But when I looked at Giselle
and her featureless face I felt safe in her absence and I found myself asking ‘Do you
ever think about life before the plague, or even after it too?’

I looked at the blur that suggested a mouth on her face as she began to
talk. ‘I remember some I suppose... I remember what it felt like to be dancing in
a crowded room, swaying to the music hoping someone would get hypnotized by the
pendulum of my hips. I remember being seen - thank goodness that’s over. Isn’t it
insane how heavy a body can get after a long day of strangers, guys especially, just
seeing you? Eyes would stick to my clothes like bristles and wouldn’t leave until
I was finally alone.’ I asked her if she ever had thoughts of afterwards, and she
looked at me with what suggested confusion, then simply replied that no, she didn’t.

Well - truth be told, whilst rarely, you have crossed my mind on the
strangest of nights, and afterwards has too. A few days ago, I tried to talk to
Rosalita about it all. Rosalita is the one who keeps all of her old lovers’ souls in
a locket around her neck, so I thought maybe she’d have words of wisdom about
relationships and long distance and drifting apart and all that. She took me to her room, closed the door behind her, took down and rolled up one of her long lavender curtains and put it along the crack of the door to clog it. Then, she unclasped her chain and took the locket down from between her olive collar bones. She opened it up, slowly like a clam shell, and out poured seven colors.

Each of the colors was shaped like a person, or a part of a person. There was a yellow leg, a blue face, a singular silver eye and a whole torso made of pink. The colors glopped together in ridiculous forms, trying to piece together like a puzzle. The result was a mess of limbs and faces woven together that looked something like a monster, but a beautiful one at that. She told me then as we marveled together at her creation that despite what everyone else in the house gossiped, she didn’t keep full souls in her locket, only parts of them. She found the parts she liked and the parts she didn’t want to say goodbye too, and simply decided to keep them. I suppose this was meant to be a lesson, because she said little more than that. She then rounded all the colors up and used her hands to mold them like clay back down to locket size and closed it tightly once again.

This idea of only keeping part of someone was running through my mind during the great feast that next evening.

Sprawled out on the table was a boar, roasted until it was charcoal pink and biting down on a large granny smith apple. Before carving into the beast, all of us took up each other’s hands around the great table. As Beth stood filling the room with golden light like one giant wax candle and toasting the meal, we grasped each other’s palms so tightly that nails began to draw blood. And then, bloody handed, we dug into the meat fingers first.

I can think of so many reasons I love every single one of the women I live in the castle with. I know because I counted every single reason instead of sheep last night when I couldn’t fall asleep. I climbed high up into the hundreds. After that, I tried to count all of the reasons I love you, and there were not nearly as many.

Don’t think that this means I don’t love you. If my heart were a beating globe, you’d still wrap around it like the ocean. It’s just that I can’t live in the ocean, I get seasick.

So I have a proposal for when you come to visit. I propose we each bring with us a little pouch or chest or box, and that once we’re face to face again we do a little negotiating. I’ll trade a few of the parts you like most about me, for a few of the things I like most about you. Just enough things to fit in a handful, then we can store them away in our little containers and take them with us once we part ways
again. They can be any bits you want, my nose, my encouragement, my best joke, anything! Then it doesn’t have to be breaking up does it?

Heavyside Bash
Maya Durham
Watercolor

to the father who did not want to stay
Rachel Prince

memories of that summer sleep unafraid
 tucked in that space between my ribs
 that you touched and turned to dust

sand littered my wasteland body
 and you held me like i was a woman
 but i was just a child of nine, with a jam-smeared mouth

when you think i am asleep
you cry into the wind so that your sorrow is carried away
i reach for your hand but there is nothing left but ghost

so i crumple like a new dream that wants to be remembered
how silly of me to think you’d revisit this memory of us
heavy-lidded by whiskey and laced with exhaustion

the roaring of the sea, unbroken by light
as it watches you stumble towards the hotel
staying within the shadows

so no one sees the crumpled remnants of a girl
that you have left behind
to the mercy of the quiet

**Party Foul Miracle Worker**
Marina Goldman

No finer day was there in Cana of Galilee, and what better way to punctuate its beauty than with a wedding? Against a vibrant sunset, perfectly timed thanks to the overachieving wedding planner, the happy couple glow as gold as their rings. The guests, too, are washed in heavenly light, perhaps a little too much to handle for one particular attendee: Jesus of Nazareth.

“Please take off your sunglasses, dear,” whispers Mother Mary, shifting in her chair ever so slightly. “This is a special occasion.”

“So?” Jesus blurts, “it’s not about me today, it’s about them and their stupid love or whatever.” Folding his arms across his chest, he slumps in his chair and blows a scornful raspberry. “Besides,” he adds, “these are Christian Dior.”

“Be that as it may,” she replies, “your disciples are beginning to stare. You may be their teacher but I am your mother, and your ridiculous antics reflect poorly on all of us.” She tilts her head at a row of concerned, amused, and unblinking eyes which, despite being closer to the nuptials, have not turned towards the ceremony for quite some time.

“Ugh, fine,” Jesus groans, removing the glossy black and fashionably oversized glasses and sliding them up his cascading sleeve. The exchange he had been dreading for nearly an hour was about to
occur despite his best efforts, for nothing ever gets past Mother Mary.

“Are you drunk?!?” She snarls through gritted teeth. Nearly 30 years of practice have prepared her to disguise her grimace as a smile, which comes in handy as the ceremony is nearing its end. Just as the couple lean in for a kiss, the humble beginning to eventual consummation, Mary yanks her son to his feet as the rest of the guests stand to applaud. Love is truly in the air for the newlyweds, their families, and even their in-laws. For Mary, Jesus, and his ever-watching disciples, however, the tension is thick enough to cut with the daggers shooting from Mary’s eyes.

“No,” he hiccups, swinging an accusatory finger at her, “you’re drunk.” The glasses slip from his sleeve and hit the ground frame-first, the crackle of overpriced child-labor audible only to the nearest handful of guests. What tore across the ceremony, loud enough to even make the new death-do-they-partners wince, was a bloodcurdling wail of agony.

“What on Earth are you doing?” Mary smiles sharply.

“MY GLASSES!” Jesus cries, falling on his knees.

“I’ll take you to buy a new pair,” she coos at him, eyeing the sea of sneering guests. “That is if I ever let you out in public after this.”

“But they were Christian Dior-O-OR!” He bawls, shaking his shoulders with each extra syllable. She cradles the weeping Jesus until enough guests trickle to the reception and out of earshot. Of course the disciples stick close, giddily hiding and peeking out from behind each other some cubits off to watch the scene unfold. Mary can do nothing but roll her eyes.

“Who cares that they’re Christian Dior?!?” Mary hisses, jumping to her feet and dropping her son to the ground. “You’re Jewish! Get a grip and stop acting like a GODDAMN child!”

“Why are you bringing Dad into this?!?” Before Mary can answer, as if she wanted to have THAT conversation, a skittish finger taps her shoulder. She whirls around and faces the party planner, glistening with panicked sweat.

“How may we help you, dear one?” Mary inquires softly. The planner cups a hand around her ear in a jittery whisper, then leans away and lowers his head. They silently look upon Jesus, one peering up at him and the other staring him down. “They have no wine,” she says flatly.
“Woman,” Jesus burps, “what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”

“Oh, son,” Mary beams, “it’s not about you today. It’s about the lovely couple and their bondage in holy matrimony.”

“Bondage...” The Lord smirks, “that’s hot.”

“Do whatever he tells you,” sighs Mary, walking off in defeat.

“I’m gonna go get a facial or something.”

“Saddle up, boys,” he calls to the buzzing group of disciples, “I’m about to blow your freakin’ minds.” With the party roaring in the reception canopy, the disciples carry Jesus out back to the prep tent, lowering him to his feet before a row of seven stone jars.

“Fill the jars,” he gurgles at a group of servants, “with water.” They scramble to the jars and begin carrying them off to the well outside, until Jesus, slightly greener than before, shouts, “WAIT! LEAVE THAT ONE HERE!” Acquiescing to the orders from The Lord, a servant leaves the seventh jar and the remaining six turn back towards the well. “Bless you, my child,” he lurches, gripping a tent sheet to stay upright, “avert your eyes as I work my magic.”

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“Now,” Jesus announces at last, “draw some out, and take it to Mr. Stuart.” The servants exchange confused glances, not knowing any Stuart working at the wedding. “You know,” he continues groggily, “the guy running this whole gig. Chief Stuart.”

Once the servants connect the cross-eyed dots, they take some to the steward and anxiously await his reaction. His eyes widen and he calls for the bridegroom, eager to impart sage advice to the obvious party novice.

“Everyone serves the good wine first,” he slowly instructs the bewildered young lad, “and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus, overhearing the praise for his miracle, proudly gathers his disciples to listen in.

“Come now,” the steward laughs magnanimously, “it’s not all bad. You have this huge batch of green detox smoothie to perk everyone up after they’re hungover tomorrow. That was very considerate of you.”

Jesus’ heart drops to his already upset stomach, and he slaps a hand over his mouth for more than one reason. “The eleventh hour is
upon us,” he mutters to his disciples, “there’s more than just writing on the wall.” With that, the disciples carry Jesus off into the night as the chief steward screams from the prep tent. Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

*Barometz*

Maddy McGwire

Digital Sketch
I.
A drift of snow
fell, unburdened, from a tree
where the fabric of the day
had finally coated the ground
and all the snow was blue

the trees are ranging
in their disposition here – many
maple and poplar,
typical of Massachusetts forest
some yew

II.
The moon sometimes
shines cruelly in the winter
I miss spring – when
it cast a sweet apricot orb
over all the trees, the fields
the sleeping hills
as if it dripped honey down
onto the apple blossoms

III.
Our house resides by a small
creek and I’ve finally
stowed the van away between
two canoes
There is a barred owl who
continually rests outside my window

I feel like he’s waiting for something

IV.
One day it was crystal cold
and I walked outside with my bucket for maple sap
and there was evidently
(maybe around mid-night)
a fox that had run over the snow
leaving small footprints
Every fiber and atom of my being
was suddenly transmuted
into kindness

V.
Tell me why
I first came here, to the clearing
a month ago
And all I’ve wanted
ever since I met you
is to sleep –
in a tree
in the moonlight

Snowy Owl
Matthew Roberts
Acrylic Paint
White
Nathaniel Holden

A color always associated with good
To the man so pure, minor evil withstood
Yet what lies beneath, the shrouding of light
To actually expunge a plight

One can be blinded, the light all reflecting back
Underneath is shielded, the brunt of an attack

Illusion
Rachel Prince

the girl just turned ten,
and bursts forth from the bathtub smelling like orange blossoms and vanilla her mother always yells at her to dry her hair properly but the girl likes it when it’s dripping wet creating rivers running down her back weaving between the soft brown hairs, tumbling over the ridges of her spine tickling her shoulder blades like she’s a great, proud mountain she stands in front of the foggy mirror, clearing a cold window with her hand she’s as thin as a reed with soft cheeks and chapped lips she is not woman-shaped like her mother the girl sucks in her waist and twists in the mirror a tiny dancer her hair flies as she spins, and it rains in the bathroom smoky fingers of mist rise to the ceiling there are fresh blooms in her armpits her stomach has grown softer the past few years and her belly button carves a path to the center of the universe as she stands upon the countertop, pressing peach hands to the mirror breathing smoke into the glass the girl becomes a dragon she studies the power behind her body thin muscles swimming under skin, rippling and knotting
an intensity in her eyes that she did not carry last year
suds still cling to her body like gossamer clouds
as she rises into the stratosphere
she is a planet

Portrait Practice 4
Sophia VanHelene
Digital Painting

Selene Reflects on Fashion
Arunendro Dutta

I’ve decided that— when it comes to pants— having pleats
is always better than the alternative. This isn’t some kind of grand
realization, or really very significant at all, I guess. Fashion is quite
subjective. But I think that while examining myself in the mirror every
morning I’m always a little prettier when my trousers are pleated,
which I suppose is all that matters in the end. Well, maybe that’s the
wrong way of putting it. I think it’s probably disingenuous to suggest
that my own opinion is the only one that matters to me. It seems like
people go much further out of their way to compliment my choice in legwear when that choice is pleated. And as much as personally loving how I look is important to me, other people feeling the same way is nice. There’s something about being admired that feels very good, even though it involves being perceived, which I hate.

This is all just a rather long winded way of saying that the pair of trousers that I picked out to wear tonight were, in fact, *avec* pleats. I actually thought I might even launch into an anecdote about my first pair of pleated pants, but that would almost certainly bore you—which I, of course, would never want to do. But yes—tonight. I’ve got tickets to see Joshua Redman at Memorial Hall in Harvard, and such an occasion demands that I look my best. There’s always the possibility of running into some long-forgotten acquaintance from college, and if this apocryphal acquaintance were to see me looking anything other than my best I don’t think I’d be able to forgive myself. Certainly, I wouldn’t want to. I do love a spot of self-hatred after socializing.

My philosophy, when it comes to outfits, is to build out from the pants (or skirt, I guess, but it’s been years since I last left home comfortable enough with my own femininity to wear one). I first check the weather, and that information dictates the materials I work with. Tonight, for instance, it’s supposed to be a cloudy 47 degrees Fahrenheit—which to me is ideal weather—suggesting corduroy. I’m always inclined towards earth tones, but given that it’s the height of autumn, I don’t feel guilty at all wearing nothing else. All of these factors combined led me to one conclusion: the dark brown, pleated, corduroy pants that I’d inherited from my mother. Made by Margaret Howell in the early 90s, my grandmother had given them to my mother to celebrate her doctorate. When I earned my Bachelor’s degree, my mother passed them onto me. I suppose if I ever have a daughter, she’ll receive them when she does the same. My plan is still to die childless at thirty-seven though, so that does seem unlikely. Regardless, it was this family heirloom that served as the foundation for tonight’s outfit.

I’m very fond of knitwear in autumn, and given that the forecast was 47 degrees and cloudy, a sweater seemed most appropriate. Green and brown go together nicely, and I’d only just purchased a wonderful forest-colored wool sweater. It’s very well made—substantive, without sacrificing comfort or beauty—but I’m not sure by whom. I found it at a thrift store, and whoever owned it before had chosen to remove all
of its tags. It is also possible that it never had any branding information on it, but that seems unlikely. I don’t really care though. I have it and I can wear it whenever I want to—who designed it means very little to me. It seemed quite obvious that this sweater was the perfect one for tonight, which meant my next decision was how I wanted to wear it, which begins with the question of whether or not to tuck. This was answered fairly quickly, as I felt like wearing a belt. The only time I wear belts is when they’re visible—all of my trousers fit me well enough that they stay up without help, so belts are a purely cosmetic accessory in my wardrobe. And so I pulled the sweater over my turtleneck (my standard upper-body base layer for nights out), then my trousers up and over its bottom edge.

Most “rules” in fashion are very stupid. Or at the very least, they’re overly proscriptive. I do, however, fully believe that one’s belt and shoes should always match. If I want to wear a pair of brown loafers, I must wear a brown belt. If I am drawn to my black boots, my belt must also be black. It’s only natural, I feel. Of course, this compulsion only applies to leather—it vanishes on the very rare occasion that I wear a belt and sneakers, or, I suppose, sandals that aren’t leather. Tonight, I wanted to wear a pair of derbies—specifically the black ones I used to wear to gigs in high school. It felt like an appropriate connection to make, outside of the fact that I was in the audience tonight, not performing—and of course that I never was and never will be anywhere near as good at bass as Joshua Redman is at the saxophone. I therefore had to wear a black belt. I settled on my grandfather’s. I’d always loved it as a child, and so when I turned 18 he gave it to me, saying that I’d be able to use it more than he would. He died two months later.

I was very careful while buckling the belt and tying my derbies—both are old, and definitely well-loved, and if they were to be damaged I can’t imagine how sad I’d be. It is, then, always a risk to wear them. But I think it would be a greater tragedy to leave them rotting in the dark of my closet forever. So, to recap: I’m wearing my dark brown, pleated, corduroy trousers, a deep forest-green sweater over a cream turtleneck, my grandfather’s black belt, and my black derbies from high school. Oh, and a pair of black wool socks. I didn’t mention those because there wasn’t much thought put into their selection. Usually I just match my socks to my shoes, or, less frequently, my shirt. I don’t
care much about them as long as they aren’t the same color as my pants. All I had left to do was select my earrings and decide which coat I wanted to wear, and then start walking to Memorial Hall.

Both of my remaining choices were decisions in name only— I own very few pieces of outerwear, and I wear the same jewelry every day. My closest friend from high school hand made a set of mushroom earrings for me, and I don’t think I’ll ever be able to buy a pair that means more than they do. I haven’t spoken to her in years, and I miss her much more than she misses me, but I can’t let go of the mushroom earrings. Sometimes I think it’s a little pathetic, but I also feel guilty whenever I don’t wear them. I can’t let myself let go of her. I put the earrings on— almost as carefully as I’d put on my grandfather’s belt and my old shoes— and I felt very loved.

At this point I really had to get going, or else I’d miss the beginning of the concert. I wore a balmacaan coat— my father’s, actually. I really love wearing clothes that used to belong to older family members. It feels like a way to keep them nearby. Better for the environment, too. I grabbed my keys and my Boston Globe tote bag (both of which I never leave my apartment without), into which— just to be safe— I stuffed a scarf. I wasn’t sure how long I’d be out after the concert, and weather in Massachusetts is always quite variable.

And so I left my apartment ready for whatever the night held for me— and for the first time in a while, excited, too.
Queering Austen: Mary Bennet, Aromanticism and Asexuality in *Pride and Prejudice*
Madeline Andrews

Marriage in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is like space in *Star Wars* or magic in *Harry Potter*: so obvious it ceases to be worth mentioning, but I am going to have to mention it again. Charlotte Lucas marries for financial security. Elizabeth Bennet marries for companionship, where the wealth and status are (seemingly) secondary. From their cases, we can extrapolate a binary on love: pragmatic and romantic. This binary is gendered; men had a different type of agency. Women of Victorian England married within that binary with what assets they had, like beauty, wit, or status. They married because marriage meant protection, accomplishment, and ascension into power or status. *Pride and Prejudice* makes it very clear what kind of marriage it prefers: Elizabeth’s. Romance wins the wealthiest man with the highest status.

Readings that interrogate the copious marriages in the novel
have exhaustive conclusions on the moral or critical nuances of the novel. I take this exhausted discussion of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* further to explore the ways an “unconventional” sexuality appears and functions in the novel. While Charlotte Lucas proves that marriage can happen without romance, she is not so radical as Mary Bennet who chooses to forgo marriage entirely. She does not want to participate in any aspect of the marital contract. I believe that Mary Bennet is an asexual aromantic character, and that she is punished more severely for being a nonconformist.

To clarify, Victorian society did not have these labels to describe modern identities, so while I will take the liberty of labeling Mary as “aromantic” and “asexual”, I am using these terms in the explicit sense that she does not desire romantic nor sexual companionship.

In order to better approach the truth of Mary’s character, a brief discussion of bias and how description and perception operate in *Pride and Prejudice* needs to take place. Mary is often described as a very studious, diligent girl concerned with accomplishment. She “can be found, as usual, deep in…study” (Austen 42). This is a stated fact that subsumes her character. When the family attends the ball at Netherfield, Mary “after very little entreaty, [prepares] to oblige the company [with her singing]” (98). Mary’s performance, however, is overshadowed by Elizabeth’s mortification: “Elizabeth’s eyes were fixed on her with the most painful sensations [because] Mary’s powers were by no means fitted for such a display; her voice was weak, and her manner affected- -Elizabeth was in agonies” (98). The strong language like “weak”, “affected”, “painful” and “agonies” describing Mary’s performance, and Elizabeth’s reaction, convey a tone of embarrassment. Why would Mary be embarrassing and have no “powers” if she spends every available moment studying and practicing? We have no way of judging for ourselves how good Mary’s performance is, and are forced to accept the narrator’s words. The third-person narrator in the novel possesses hegemonic authority and I question that authority because I believe the bias is unfair to Mary.

The base of my argument lies in the fact that Mary likes books. Her sister Elizabeth likes books too. She is well read and praised for carrying out intelligent conversation. What makes Mary’s preference different is that she prefers books over all other company. She says so herself when Lydia recounts activities of her outing, to which Mary
“gravely replied, ‘Far be it from me, my dear sister, to depreciate such pleasures. They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of female minds. But I confess they would have no charms for me. I should infinitely prefer a book’” (214). This line explicitly introduces Mary’s disinterest in the activities her more flirtatious and eagerly-romantic sisters enjoy. Her preference sets her apart from “the generality of female minds” and so can be construed as aromanticism and asexuality.

Again, when her sisters travel to Meryton to visit the officers stationed there, Mary makes her disinterest plain as “every sister except Mary agreed to go” (70). The visits to Meryton always result in romantic and sexual pleasure for the sisters, and Mary choosing not to go indicates her disinterest, a sign of her aromanticism and asexuality. In fact, the only time Mary expresses interest in a man is the cousin, Collins, and it is because “there was a solidity in his reflections which often struck her” (122). She remarks nothing about his wealth nor his appearance, and she goes on to say “if encouraged to read and improve himself by such an example as hers, he might become a very agreeable companion” (123). She considers Collins to strictly be a potential intellectual companion. When this line is taken in among the romantic context of the novel, it is easy to group Mary with her sisters because “companion” is a vague term. But Mary has no desire for Collins to be anything but an intellectual companion. This highlights her aromantic and asexual propensities. Additionally, the reader gleans this information in Mary’s thoughts, not speech. She does not say these things out loud. Therefore, it is a bit ironic and a little odd when Mr. Bennet says at the end of the novel “If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite at my leisure” (357). It seems like a misjudgment or an oversight that he would think Mary is entertaining candidates for marriage, when nowhere had she expressed any interest in anyone. This misjudgment also supports the claim that Mary is a queer character, which I will elaborate on presently.

The novel punishes Mary for her aromanticism and asexuality. The women in *Pride and Prejudice* “earn” a narrative reward of married or single but eligible based on their level of romance and heteronormativity. Despite Lydia’s elopement causing a scandal and nearly ruining the family’s reputation, because she still acted within heteronormative bounds, Lydia is rewarded with marriage and the promise of wealth in the future. And even though Kitty is left single at
the end of the novel, she still desires the “promise of balls and young men” (365). Mary is the one who is still single without any mention of prospective suitors. This is narrative punishment because in the Victorian era, single women had no power or protection.

While to the rest of society, Mary’s existence confounds, she subverts her narrative punishment by encouraging her family’s behavior. She has made it plain she “studies so much, that her hours of repose should not be broken in on” because she does not want to be bothered by the match-making squabbles the rest of her family contend themselves with (277). However, as a minor character, she gets little screen time, she is spoken poorly of, and when she does appear, she is not truly heard. She is ignored by Lydia (214). No one replies to her line about pride and vanity (21), nor when she responds to Elizabeth’s declaration to walk to see Jane (33), nor when she comments on Mr. Collins’ letter to Elizabeth (63). While these instances can be interpreted as Mary interjecting her unwanted opinion, they can also be interpreted as Mary being punished for her nonconformist asexuality and aromanticism, her “Otherness”. Mary is often relegated to the offscreen position of her room to study in isolation. Under the hegemony of narrative authority, the reader can easily assume, as I have just done, that Mary wants to be left alone, when truly she does not even have the agency to voice an objection and be heard if she wanted differently. Her family’s misunderstanding and ignorance of her character is a manifestation of the struggles queer people and characters face. Mary’s punishment becomes a symbol of queer erasure and ostracization in literature and society.

Mary Bennet is aromantic and asexual in the aspect she does not desire romantic or sexual companionship. Her sisters Elizabeth and Lydia are examples of how desiring either type of companionship ought to result in marriage. Thus, Mary decides to abstain from courtship because she would rather pursue a life of accomplishment. She prioritizes intellect, self-advancement, and study. She finds no diversion in the activities her sisters like and they do not understand how she derives so much enjoyment from books. Aromanticism and asexuality are convenient modern labels for complicated, fluctuating feelings. Mary, like many queer characters of history, may be forced to present a certain way because of the constraints of society. There is always the possibility that her feelings will change over time (and over
our time, as queer identity scholarship and understanding progresses). Truthfully, whether Mary abstains from marriage because she dislikes romantic/sexual companionship or because she abhors the inhibitions on her time and freedom that marriage exemplifies, it is unclear. More can be said about the character of Mary. There is an argument to be made about neurodivergence and how that appears concerning her character. There are more examples of her relations with her family that demonstrate how toxic family behavior has been subsumed and normalized. Even though she is one of the least mentioned characters in the novel, the character of Mary has much to contribute to the discussion.

peeling lavender
Esther Muhlmann

I.

angels drip from the lamplit highways,
   or maybe from behind my eyelids,
or maybe from my mother’s breath
that’s soft and deep
with sleep and dawn heavy on her tongue.

i blink them away and continue driving,
   but the cars around me turn into
seraphim and lift into the stillness
   of a city
   still asleep.

arms wrapped around her frame,
   chin hung
   over chest,
it was her turn to drive an hour ago but,
   rest, mother, rest
i whisper, and
wonder,

would she wake if i reached out and swept aside the
gray curl that
has fallen
   across
   her paling face?

II.

at the top of the mountain in argentina you
took off almost all your clothes,
felt your
   feet upon
   the purple campanulas, and let your
pale breasts be warmed by the sun.

laughing madly with the wind,
you wrapped your arms
around the sky, and
swayed back and forth as if
   traveling between two worlds.

four children held tightly to your legs,
trying to keep their mother
   on the mountain
instead of teetering
   into space.

later that day you threw my gift from tía perla into city traffic.
it was only a teapot, and you cried afterwards,
   enough tears to
   fill the kettle and
drown the campanulas.

III.

my mother’s floral sheets are cool
on my back and our legs are
halfway out of the blanket,
a way she taught us to fight
sticky august air.
my sisters say i’ve taken up too much space, so i
shift closer to my mother,
play with the rings on her speckled fingers as she wraps her
arms around me.

and then she’s laughing, loud and full,
at a joke my sister has made,
and i’m laughing because she’s laughing,
bumping heads
with my sisters and
breathing in my mother’s lavender.

i fall asleep with the hum from the
half open window on my skin,
and she does not wake me.

IV.

i keep my toe nails
on my bedside table,
specks of red nail polish remain on the torn skin and
you’d never believe how messy my floor is,
clothes from first grade hiding under
the sweater i wore yesterday and the
pants i can’t find and your
yellow skirt-
the one i told you not to wear
and the one i realized
was beautiful only
many years later.

i borrowed the delicate fabric without asking,
tore it from its hanger like the way i
tear off my toenails
bits of flesh coming up, and blood.

my nails aren’t sharp enough to scratch you now
and so tonight
i lace my words with
spiders. and
you dump your bag of medication in the trash,
wrap one hand around your wrist and
bite the flesh under your thumb,
hard and so you leave marks,
the way you’ve done since i was little.
i fish out the medicine and
bite my own hand too,
then i tuck you into bed and
fold the corners tight so you
can’t take flight
or bite your flesh
or breathe
to death.

V.

i adjust the fallen curl, and
she lifts her head slowly,
is startled awake that it’s already
5 am and we’ll be home in
3 hours,
begs me to pull over and let her drive,
like she knows
i’ve been drunk with the thought of sleep
this whole time.

we change seats carefully on the side of the highway,
and her half awake eyes
can’t get the buckle in.
i do it for her, and keep the spiders in my mouth.

she drifts us home safely, and
despite the sunlight
we are both heavy with fatigue. so
i drop into bed, but without the lull of the car
cannot fall
asleep.
so i crawl into my mother’s blankets. 
her even breathing soothes and 
soon the angels 
surround me.

i dream of 
laughing mountains, 
of open windows and of fabric, 
of toenails on walls and of 
as arms wrapping themselves around 
everything and just 
dust all at once.

_I Came in from the Cold_

Ula Grabski

Acrylic on Canvas
The phone rings, *Toxic* by Britney Spears invading the small trailer. The sound is unbearable, swelling dangerously in her eardrums. She goes to smash the phone until she realizes she left it in the bathroom earlier. A headache blooms behind her eyebrow. Miserably, she grabs on to the couch and pulls herself up. Yet, her legs do not seem to work, and she plummets to the ground. The cold metal of the floor fills her with no comfort and neither does the stench of rotting food. She spies a week-old sandwich sitting idly under the couch.

That’s where it went, she thinks.

The bathroom seems like a perilous journey, an unwinnable battle, like the three hundred Spartans that perished in their fight against the Persian Army.

“That’s not really comparable, but okay,” she mutters, every footstep causing a thunderclap to awaken beneath her feet. *Oh, shut up. I’m the one telling the story. She shakes her head, trying to shake me off. You can’t get rid of me that easily.*

It seems as if enough time has passed for the phone to stop ringing but it doesn’t. She looks out the window. No, the seasons haven’t changed, the sun hasn’t exploded, humans haven’t gone extinct. In fact, the clock by her coffeemaker reads 3:35 pm. Exactly thirty seconds has passed since the phone awoke her. Well thirty seconds for me at least. I can’t say the same for her.

“Hello?” Somehow on her hands and knees she has reached the phone. “Is this Ms. Winters?”

“Who’s asking?”

“We’re calling about a Mr. Winters, your father? He wandered out again last night and I’m afraid if he does so again, we’ll have to ask you to discharge him.”

Her eyes film over, staring blankly over the trailer park right outside of her window.

“Hello, can you hear me?” Silence.

“Ms. Winters we really need you to—”

*Click.*

“I told you that we don’t have enough money to buy her lunch.
I know… I know… Look if we can work something out, please…” Her mother pushes her along while speaking harshly on the phone. Her daughter’s unworn hands are tucked neatly into her thin coat, a coat that cannot protect her against the harsh winds of winter. She thinks her mother knows this.

Her eyes feel blinded by the sun, harsh rays piercing her delicate irises, contracting her pupils. She senses me, has for a while now. Her fear wraps around her bones. It leeches into her skin, opens her pores. It cuts deep, deep, deep. She screams for me to leave, but I won’t.

At school, she goes hungry. She watches the other kids eat their turkey sandwiches, chicken nuggets, pizza, or some other food they brought from home. Her stomach grumbles but only I hear.

She hates me for it. Hates that I’m the only one that listens, that watches, that cares. She hates when my thoughts overpower her own or when she can’t remember what happened because I stole her memories. She hates when I tell her story because it isn’t her own.

“Hey, where’s your lunch?” A scrawny eight-year-old lumbers up to her, swinging their lunch box.

“What?”

“Your lunch…” “I already ate.”

“Oh. Well do you want to play with me and my friends at recess? We need another player on our kickball team.” God, these insufferable children. They never leave her alone.

Tell them to leave. Tell them how there’s someone else in your mind. Tell them how you’re a crazy little freak that no one loves. Tell them. Tell them. TELL THEM!

“SHUT UP!” She screams, her voice breaking through the chatter of the lunchroom.

Everyone stops and stares. A teacher hurries over but the damage is done. The child has scurried away with fear blooming on his cheeks. Tears brew in his eyes, threatening to spill over. He must have heard the rumors. Maybe he didn’t believe them or maybe he thought he could be the difference. Well…

“Honey,” the teacher urges. “Please we need you to—”

Click.

Her girlfriend leaves, slamming the door. She trembles like a wet bird or like a bird without its wings. She sometimes wishes she could fly, as if my words wouldn’t exist in the stratosphere. As if I am
just a machine being broadcasted, and not a piece of her, of us. We are one. No, we are two. One. Two peas in a pod. Two peas—two peas—who is talking? Who is there?

“It’s just us, dumbass,” she hisses, skating her shoes against the sidewalk. At some point she went outside. I cannot recall when. I can feel her mind pushing against mine, like molasses against a cement wall. It’s slow but I can feel myself withering away.

For safekeeping, I take one of her memories. Five years old: winter. She’s sledding down a hill. The wind whips at her face, threatening to rip off her hat, but she maintains her grip. Her laugh bubbles up, pops like a carbonated soda. I was young, weak. There was no ruining this memory so instead I just take. Happy memories are poison. Seeds implanted by humans to feel more than this life allows. For that reason, I take—take—take—

*Click.*

“How has your sleeping been? Okay?” Her psychiatrist asks, chart in hand. Worry lines crease her forehead as she crosses her ankles. Silence.

“Look, I’m worried about you. Your parents say you haven’t been to your job in over a month. You missed the last two sessions.” Silence.

“I’m going to up your Olanzapine to 25 mg/day. And I am recommending you meet with a counseling group at least once a week. You need more of a support system, Katie. You can’t spend all day locked in your room alone.”

*She’s not alone. Don’t you know that? You’re a psychiatrist, after all.*

“I—I just want the voice in my head to go away.” She trembles, like a leafy tree in a hurricane. One more gust and she’ll be hurled up by the roots.

“It will. Just give it time, okay? And no more going off your meds.”

*When will she get it? I’m here to stay. I’m here to take, take, take—* 

*Click.*

It’s chemistry, fourth period. The teacher scrawls messily on the chalkboard as her classmates rush to jot down the notes. Her pencil does not move. The clock ticks.

“I’ve been here before,” she says. The beat of the clock continues. Tick. Tick. Tick.
“Katie, did you say something?” The entire class turns to her, some filled with curiosity, others wanting to see her humiliated. She is not very well liked.

“I—” she stutters, her/my/our mind going a mile a minute. The air feels cold, much colder than she likes. The window is open. This she knows because she remembers this moment. She experienced it fifteen years ago in tenth grade. “I—think this has happened before. No…I know it has.” She stands up then, pushing the table away from her. It screeches loudly as it grates across the floor. Some of her classmates cover their ears.

“Look, I’m going to need you to sit down so I can continue the lesson. Do you want to take a walk and come back?” It’s a shame really. This kind teacher having to deal with the likes of you.

“No!” Her hands cover her head, as if warding off bees. She scratches, pulls, kicks, screams, but she can’t get me out of her head. She can’t stop what she’s become.

“STOP, STOP, STOP. GET OUT OF MY HEAD. GET OUT!” Her arms flail wildly, and several classmates try to detain her to no avail. I watch and watch and laugh and she hears. She knows.

“STOP! GET OFF ME!” she yells, trying to take their hands off of her. “PLEASE, I NEED TO—”

Click.

“This is why you have no friends, Katie.” Her friend/classmate/stranger storms away. She doesn’t know what she has done. She doesn’t remember. She begs me to let her go.

Click.

“Do you feel anything? Regret, remorse, anything at all?” the teacher asks, shaking her. She looks up at him blankly. Her victim sits on the ground, being comforted by another teacher. The girl’s arm shows angry welts, fingerprints deep within her skin. She wonders: were they my fingers or her own?

Click.

“Late again? You know I’m going to have to write you up.” Her manager stares disapprovingly down at her. She/I/We grab his neck roughly. He tries to shake us off, but he can’t.

“Please, I don’t even know who I am. Don’t do this,” she cries. Color leeches out of his skin while his eyes widen like saucers—like dinner plates—like—
Squeeze him. Yes, squeeze him until he pops! Her hands tighten, tighten, tighten

Click.

“We’re calling about a Mrs. Winters, your mother. She wandered out again last night and I’m afraid if she does so again, we’ll have to ask you to discharge her.”

She looks down at the phone in her hand. 3:35 pm.

“Hello, can you hear me? Ms. Winters? Are you there?”

Her hands shake uncontrollably, the phone tilting dangerously off her fingertips. Her eyes roam up the bathroom mirror in front of her where she begins to stare. Observes her cheekbones. Her mouth. Her nose. Then finally her eyes. And when she gazes deep into them, she knows.

And I smile.

“Yes,” I say, into the phone. “I’m here.”

Click.

**The passenger says**

**Lu Chen**

It’s been awhile,
For some time where I sit at a window seat.
I stick my face on the clear glass,
Mixture of sunlit warmth and air conditioned shivers,
Looking out to the casted clouds.
I float.

It always amaze me how babies can cry out loud without shame.
For someone.
For rescue.
I seem to have lost that ability,
Studying people only to get versed screaming in silence day and night.

I come second when the oxygen mask drops.
So I ask
Who’s safety vest can I wear to pull myself out?

I’m afraid of falling, of roaring, of emptiness.
Sometimes I immense myself in the turbulence,
I persist that the outside force can shake off loads on my body.

Just now, with the headphones in,
I look the other side to another window.
I hear a different song singing behind my drums,
A lullaby of silence.
“Baby, find peace”.
I float, once again.

Last Bus to Saturn
Jeremy Patrick
Digital Photography

this weekend was kinda a blur ngl
Livvy Krakower

friday 11:04pm
I do not know why I am thinking of the green couch my family used to own as I enter the frat. I do not mind the thought. It is better than my usual intrusive thoughts of what if I start to scream, what if
I cut the ponytail off of the girl sitting in front of me in lecture, what if I start hopping on one foot and never stop until I break my ankle or touch the Big Dipper – whichever one comes first. In the constant swarm of those thoughts, the idea of the green couch actually seems pleasing. It was a nice green couch, a bit ugly and a bit tired. I don’t know why we got rid of it -- maybe it became too ugly and too tired.

The frat is a sauna, with sweat and hormones dripping off the walls together in strange harmony. It is hard to explain the meshing of bodies other than it seems that everyone is trying to mold together into one force -- one beautiful drunken force.

The truth about frats is that they are just like everything else -- boring. A strange cycle is created of frats trying to replicate the movies and the movies replicating the frats. I wonder if anyone is really having fun or if everyone is thinking about a green couch too. I really don’t know why we got rid of it. It’s not like our family grew -- it has always just been my mom and me.

My head begins to hurt, not from the strobe lights or the apologizing bodies of other girls trying to get past me. My head hurts because it doesn’t know anything else. I take a sip of my drink. I take another sip. I think of the green couch again. Another sip and more.

**saturday 3:21am**

Hugh snores. It is the type of snore that if I was dating Hugh I would find endearing and a cute little quirk I would tell my friends over a wine night, but I am not dating Hugh, I am not even sleeping with Hugh, I fucked Hugh, and he fucked me, and now I am listening to him snore.

The dorms on this campus haven’t been renovated despite my ever-growing tuition for evermore dull classes. The popcorn ceiling above could be mistaken as constellations if I was runk enough, just like Hugh could be mistaken for being handsome, but now I am sober, and the ceiling is just a ceiling, and Hugh is just a guy. I have never minded being sober, but I have always hated the transition from drunk to sober when you open your eyes and realize that nothing was really that funny at all. There was a tear in one of the cushions of the green couch, but it wasn’t that noticeable.

**friday 11:57pm**
The strangers next to me are kissing like two giraffes with awkward and long purple tongues. I try to dance. I try to pretend, but when I look around, I realize that everyone is too drunk to see me. I begin to sway. My body teases with the idea of falling. I start to whisper confessions into the thick air, the rhythm of the music masking my secrets. I turn to the girl next to me. She mouths the words to the song playing. I tell her that sometimes I imagine what it would be like to wake up and have all my bones turn to water. She smiles and responds with the following lyrics of the song.

Right before my body can fully liquify, I feel a hand on my waist.

I turn my head -- he is handsome.

“I’m Hugh,” he whispers into my ear, and I let him push my body to his.

saturday 2:56am

Hugh tells me that his roommate is home for the weekend. We sit on his bed. He tells me his major -- marketing. He tells me about his parents -- divorced. He tells me about his dreams -- they are boring, realistic. He tells me that I am beautiful.

“My family used to own a green couch,” I tell him.

“Really?” he says as he undoes his belt.

“I used to sleep on the green couch because the shadows in my room scared me.”

“Oh,” he says and tugs to take my shirt off.

“I’m still afraid of the dark.”

“We can keep the light on,” he says as he stumbles with my bra.

“I really wish we never got rid of that green couch.”

He kisses me, I try to kiss him back, but even though the movements are there, I feel as if we are only two dolls that a child is making kiss.

“I really miss that green couch.”

“Enough about the couch,” he says to me between breaths, and suddenly I am on his bed. I want to tell him that when I was in elementary school, sometimes as a treat, my mom would let me eat dinner on the green couch, and we would watch the news together, and even though the world was terrible, I was sitting with my mom and it was nice -- but I don’t tell him that.
saturday 3:03am
I hate sex.

saturday 3:05am
I hate the smell of sex.

saturday 3:10am
Why am I having sex?

saturday 1:49am
It is cold, Hugh grabs my waist, but he does not keep me warm.
“Hugh?”
“Yeah?”
“Why are you taking me back to your dorm?”
“I like you.”
“You don’t know me.”
“I can still like you.”
I look at him, and he takes a cigarette out of his pocket.
“Drunk cigarette?” he offers me.
I inhale as he lights it and think about my grandpa who died of lung cancer. When he died, my mother would only stop crying to breathe. She laid down on the green couch all day. I would sit by her side and turn on the TV, but the news was too sad, so I put on cartoons.
Road Runner played in the background when my mother looked at me and said, “Never smoke a cigarette, promise me that you will never smoke a cigarette.”
“I won’t, I promise I won’t,” I said to her and kissed her cheek, and she held me as we watched Wile E. Coyote fall off a cliff.
I cough -- I don’t remember how long I’ve been inhaling the smoke.
Hugh laughs a bit, and I see that he is smoking too.
“Nothing like a drunk cigarette right?” he smiles
“Are you even drunk?” I ask.
He doesn’t respond.

saturday 12:34am
Hugh is behind me, pushing me towards him even more. There is no space between us. I fear that I will become stuck to him, but
then I remember that I am just a girl, that I am nothing -- my body as permanent as the adhesive of a post-it note.

I wonder if we could ever fall in love.

“Did you ever love Dad?” I asked my mom. She sat on the green couch when I came down to show her my outfit for the sophomore dance, a short purple a-line dress. My mother motioned to me to sit down next to her so she could braid my hair more easily.

“Why are you asking me a question like that?”
She pulled my hair back, brushing it between her fingers.
“I was just wondering.”
“I loved my father and I love you,” she said.
“What about everybody else?”
“I don’t think much about everybody else,” she said and kissed the top of my head. Hugh begins kissing my neck. He is bruising it -- leaving a mark like a dog pissing on a tree.

saturday 7:23am
It snowed while we slept. I get up and don’t bother kissing Hugh goodbye as I leave. He is asleep. I wonder if his brain is tired too.

saturday 7:30am
As I walk back to my dorm, I notice a bruise on my arm and wonder how it got there, if I did it to myself. There is so much to do. The features of Hugh’s face start to disappear as I think about all the assignments to complete, the emails to send, and the people to see. Even the memory of the frat fades. I try to recall last night, yet I find myself mistaking the songs played for ones I heard last month; different people were around, and yet it was all the same. It will happen again later tonight -- a repetition of nothing.

I pull out my phone and call my mom.

“Good morning,” I say. The campus is empty except for other girls in tops that still smell of last night -- clutching their stomachs against both the wind, a hangover, and their returning memories.

“Morning,” my mom says, “Why are you up so early?”
“I just am” there is a moment of silence, “Remember the green couch?”
“Yeah, of course.”
“Why did we get rid of it?”
“You hated it”
“I don’t remember hating it.”
“You practically paid me to get rid of that couch. You thought it was the ugliest thing in the world” my mom laughs a bit and then begins to cough. It sounds like how I coughed last night after smoking a cigarette.
“I miss the green couch,” I say and stop. My feet forget how to walk. I reach out for a hand to stabilize me, but no one is beside me, only a phone next to my ear that offers no support.
“How’s school going?” she asks me, the topic of the green couch disappearing from both of our limp minds.
“It’s great,” I say and laugh a bit, “I really love it here.”

**saturday 8:00am**
I vomit.
I really did hate that green couch. I remember always wanting to light it on fire.
I go to sleep.

**saturday 11:18pm**
I feel my phone buzz in my back pocket as I enter the frat. I’ll check it later -- sober. The music is mixing into my blood with the alcohol, and already I can feel my brain going dark, just like the lights in whatever attic space I am walking up to.
As I enter the room, I think of the green couch again, but this time I see a fire. My mother is standing behind the green couch smoking a cigarette, the couch is up in flames, and my mom turns to me as I see her.
“Wanna sit down together?” she asks me, and I nod.
The green couch is soft and warm, and my mother holds me.
“How was your day?” she asks me.
“Tiring. I’m just very tired,” I say to her and rest my head on her shoulder as we burst into flames together.
I take another sip of my drink, and the image begins to fade.
Another sip -- green couch -- sip -- fire -- the green couch, another sip, another sip. I start to dance.

**sunday 8:14am**
I wake up in a bed I don’t recognize next to a body that is no longer familiar. I pull out my phone. The text from last night was from my mom.

_Happy to hear that you are doing well <3_

I don’t respond. I want to puke, I want to cry, I want to let my body fall and not have a stranger’s hands catch it, but instead, I get up, find my shoes and start walking back to my dorm again. It is a sunny morning, freezing still, but gosh, does the sun feel nice.

**Sex (Reprise)**  
**James Duffy**

Go to bed  
Have him or her  
Make sweet love  
Or, simply,  
Make it.

Do the deed  
Shoot a seed  
(Or catch one!)  
If you please.

It’s all the same!  
Just watch your aim!  
Seriously.  
I’m tired of cleaning the drapes.

**Mike McCormack’s Solar Bones: A New-Age Irish Classic**  
**Eryn Flynn**

The Irish literary tradition holds claim to such keystone authors as James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, and J. M. Synge. The more contemporary works of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Irish writers may go underappreciated in the limelight of these illustrious forefathers. Yet the works of Claire Keegan, Seamus Heaney, and Mike McCormack have much to contribute to the Irish tradition they hail from. Mike
McCormack’s newest installation, *Solar Bones*, fits uniquely into the framework of Irish literature, by continuing and advancing those traditions set before it, as well as by offering a particular commentary on the nature of life.

*Solar Bones* follows Mr. Marcus Conway, a ghost who finds himself back in his kitchen for one hour on All Souls Day. Throughout the novel, he recalls his life in pieces at a time. His memories include moments spent talking with his father as a young boy, visiting his daughter’s art exhibition, caring for his sick wife, and, ultimately, even his own death. The reader gets to know Marcus as a son, a husband, a father, a civil engineer, a countryman, and, above all, a good—but flawed—human being. Marcus’s experiences touch upon themes such as family, rural life, citizenship, art, infrastructure, religion, life, and death.

Initially, McCormack had difficulty finding a publisher for *Solar Bones*. Known as an experimental author, it was not until he found Tramp Press, an independent Irish publishing house, that he found a team willing to accept him. McCormack’s experimental nature, however, ended up fueling his success. *Solar Bones* won the 2016 Goldsmiths Prize, an award specifically meant for fiction that “breaks the mould or opens up new possibilities for the novel form” (Armitstead). It also won the International Dublin Literary Award, NPR Best Book of the Year, and Longlist for the Man Booker Prize. Critics have hailed the book as an “extraordinary hymn to small-town Ireland” (Sansom). Institutions such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist*, and others have also given the novel glowing reviews.

Experimentation has become an increasingly significant aspect of Irish literature. Joyce experimented with the novel form in works such as *Ulysses*, told in a stream-of-consciousness style. Brian Friel’s Translations experimented with language and perspective in a theatrical setting. Beckett constantly acknowledged and fragmented the discourse of his works (Murphy 2). In the last few decades, more and more Irish authors have experimented with form and narrator. In an interview with Stephanie Boland, McCormack discussed the nature and goals of his own dedication to experimentation in fiction. With it, he hopes to “illuminate something new about the world and also, about what books are capable of.” He feels that “Beckett and Joyce and Flann [O’Brien] are giving [him] the quest: go forth and experiment”
In this way, McCormack views experimentation as a mission given to him by the Irish greats, and, as his success has shown, he has made considerable headway in his attempt to follow that legacy.

The nature of McCormack’s experimentation lies, in part, in the style of Solar Bones. Written in a new form sitting somewhere between prose, poetry, and proper English, the novel is structured like one everlasting sentence. Though this may easily have come across jumbled and breathless, many critics praise McCormack’s mastery of such a challenging strategy. Since there are no periods to signal breaks, paragraph indentations “act…like breaths,” and keep Marcus’s stream of consciousness clear and precise, “one [thought] cascading into another” (Riker). Indeed, the persistent, lyrical mode of Marcus’s thoughts takes on a sweeping, captivating effect so that, after a time, “it would be quite possible to…not notice this device at all” (“Irish Song: A Joycean Novel”). This nearly hypnotic aspect of the novel’s form was part of it since its conception: McCormack himself humorously confesses that he has no memory of writing the book, as “it flowed right through [him]” (“Mike McCormack: I don’t remember”). Moreover, as McCormack explains, the never-ending nature of the book gives it life beyond its pages. He says, “as far as I understand it the book is an excerpt from a sentence that extends from before the beginning of the book, and after it has closed” (De Loughry).

Many have noted that this style feels related to Joyce’s stream of consciousness, most prominently displayed in his key work Ulysses, which is often regarded as one of the great masterpieces of Modernism. Although it uses periods, Ulysses also displays pointedly modified sentence structure for the sake of showing the inner workings of its protagonists’ minds. However, compared to the “rat’s nest” chaos of Joyce’s stream of consciousness, McCormack’s is more articulate, even eloquent, marking it as a “distinctly contemporary book, with a debt to Modernism” (Riker).

Another aspect of McCormack’s experimentation is found within his narrator, Marcus Conway. The novel recalls his visit to his old home on All Souls Day. He is a ghost, yet he is caught somewhere more complicated than a usual ghost between life and death. At his kitchen table, he experiences a remnant of pain that his fatal heart attack caused him; he waits for his wife to return home; he describes
his footsteps at the end of the novel (McCormack 2-4, 217). In these things, he seems unaware of his death or he is not quite removed from his body. However, at the end of the novel, he narrates his own death as if it were like any other memory that he has yet rehashed. The transition from Marcus’s ignorance to awareness of his own death is seamless and mysterious.

Neil Murphy looks at how Marcus Conway differs from other unusual narrators in the Irish tradition in his essay “The Novel as Heartbeat: The Dead Narrator in Mike McCormack’s Solar Bones.” He notes that unusual narrators are a common occurrence in Irish literature, including animals, a symbolic train, the mentally ill, and the deeply traumatized. Even more common are undead narrators. Some are unaware of their death, and some begin the novel describing how they died. McCormack, once again, participates in this tradition while adding his own flair. Marcus is somewhere in between, as has been discussed. He is “pre-death and post human consciousness.” Marcus enjoys a certain posthumous freedom: he freely jumps from memory to memory, unbound by human modes of thinking, and his whole story takes place within a single hour, at slight odds with the natural flow of time. He has moments of confusion or lapses between thoughts, as many ghost narrators do (Murphy).

However, despite all these markers of death, Murphy notes that Solar Bones seems alive: the novel maintains a commanding tempo throughout, and Marcus’s emotions, encompassing the entire human spectrum, give vivacity to his musings. McCormack incorporates this unique liveliness in the manipulation of pattern and rhythm. The book begins with the ringing of the Angelus bell, and periodically it draws Marcus’s focus again. A trademark “triadic tempo” governs the book, both in sonic and symbolic rhythm, in lines such as “ploughs, harrows and scufflers/ pounds, shillings and pence” (McCormack 17). McCormack, in his strategic construction of these patterns, infuses a heartbeat within the very text itself, one that continues to beat even after Marcus’s heart does not. In this way, “life…becomes the true subject of the dead narrator” (Murphy).

The significance of Solar Bones’ protagonist is not just in his narration, but in his identity as well. Marcus is, as McCormack sums up, “a white middle-aged man who has no material want, who loves his wife, son, and daughter, and he lacks nothing.” He says, “the real
experiment” was to take “a decent happy man and make a novel out of that” (De Loughry). Here again, McCormack offers his own twist on an Irish trope. As the style of Solar Bones recalls Joyce’s Ulysses so too does the protagonist. Marcus is an ordinary man, much like Joyce’s Leopold Bloom, yet they both become extraordinary through the vivid detail their authors infuse them with (“Irish Song: A Joycean Novel”).

Beyond a conventional father and husband, Marcus is also a civil engineer. McCormack has talked extensively about this decision. When he began his higher education, McCormack initially wanted to become an engineer himself. Though he ended up pursuing philosophy and writing, a certain admiration stayed with him for engineers as being responsible for constructing the world, whereas writers and artists describe it. He says, “I’ve had a sign hanging outside my imagination saying, ‘engineer wanted.’” Finally fulfilling this inner call, he means to combat the underrepresentation of the field in literature by declaring Solar Bones as a “hymn of praise to engineers” (Parsons).

All of the heretofore discussed points, including McCormack’s experimental, flowing style, Marcus’s undead narration, and his position as a typical man and engineer, come together to cast a profound and haunting lens on the nature of life. Marcus, inclined to machinery and mathematics, desires to see the world as an organized, structured organism. He explains his religious beliefs in such a perspective on page 76, describing how “the whole world built up first from principles, towering and rigid as any structural engineer might wish, each line flowing necessarily from the previous one to link heaven and earth step by step, from the first grain of the first moment to the last waning scintilla of light in which everything is surrounded in darkness, the engineer’s dream of structured ascent and stability bolted into every line of its fifty pages, so carefully laid out that any attentive reading of it should enable a man to find his place with some certainty in the broadest reaches of the world, a tower of prayer to span heaven and earth and something which a part of me has never grown out of…” (McCormack).

In such a passage, he imagines God himself as an engineer and the world like any other building project, “built up…towering and rigid as any structural engineer might wish”. Whether he believes God thinks like him or vice versa, Marcus certainly believes that he and God share the same basic method of construction, working “step
by step” with “stability bolted into every line”. Interestingly, Marcus’s own continuous narration mimics his imagined process of the world’s creation, “each line flowing necessarily from the previous one.” This implies that Marcus’s own existence may be evidence of this method of divine assembly. Moreover, the book’s mysterious beginning and ending also seem in tune with Marcus’s sense of time in the universe, lasting “from the first grain of the first moment to the last waning scintilla of light in which everything is surrounded in darkness” (McCormack 76). Though McCormack testifies to the continuation of his story beyond the pages, the ringing of the Angelus bell strikingly begins Marcus’s narrative, like that first grain, and his story ends with a literal descent into darkness, into a “vast oblivion in which there are no markings or contours” (McCormack 217). Once again, Marcus’s experience mirrors and legitimizes the universal layout he describes.

The consequence of such an ordered world as this is the ability for “any attentive reading” to “enable a man to find his place with some certainty” within it. Many people struggle to find their place of belonging in a world that seems to them complicated and messy, but Marcus, in his mathematical world view, perceives life almost like a simple equation to be solved. He overwhelmingly presents as a man who is content with his life, reflecting on the many accomplishments, mistakes, and chance happenings that brought him where they did. His confidence remains unshaken in his structured view of God, life, and the world, as he “never [grew] out of” it (McCormack 76). Even as his death approaches, he hopes “God might hear [him] and come looking for [him], recognizing a fellow engineer” (McCormack 215). In conclusion, Marcus’s fervent zeal towards order and God are the same, and they help him navigate both life and death.

Under this gaze, McCormack’s admiration of engineers, championed in Solar Bones, takes on a new meaning, one that applies to everyone regardless of the literary tradition they hail from. He says, “I think god is no less visible in our machines than he is in our plants, and he’s no less invisible in our machines than he is in our poetry and literature” (De Loughry). Order and chaos, life and death, machinery and nature, mathematics and art—each has something unique to contribute to the human experience. McCormack delivers, in Solar Bones, a story rich in its Irish literary roots, refreshing in its bold experimentalism, and remarkable in its universal message.
Bibliography


Parsons, Cóilín, and Mike McCormack. “Mike McCormack talks of his experimental fiction.” YouTube, uploaded by Hocopolitso, 23


Amorous Metallic Romance
Preston Green

(Read right side only, Left side only, then alternating lines right to left… “Acid Rain Drops”)

Acid Rain

Drops

Made

Of Silver nectar -

A mess, that

Leaked from her lips, Flowed through her bones and

Onto the floor; He knew

A ventriloquist had snatched her

76
At the masquerade party, where
Her expressions grew infuriating;
The steel strings that pulled her
violently shook her around;
Everything collided with the ground.
    She fell through the transparent floor bed; while up in flames.
As if nobody realized that

His eyes could be a grand blue ocean:
In her lips of gold,
A supernova of lust, gushed
Into his dented grey cheeks, while
She cried tears of metal,
The smelting blissfully burnt him.
She caressed his titanium face,
With her frozen, sharded, hands -
His face developed platinum snowflakes
That incinerated on his cheek from
Her sulfuric saliva -

By her golden face,
She would be known by him, For
what transpired:
Still
Intoxicated by poison...

In any circumstance,
Enveloped in sapphires,
A plasma river crashing through
Flagrantly out of his rusted skull, and
Scalding tears fell from her opal eyes.
Smiling,
They laughed at their lunacy, while
softly
She abraded him.
Like multifarious gold and silver,
The immense feeling of
pure wealth.
Beavertail 1938
Jacob Harwood

Before the storm, I like to imagine the lighthouse
Was as it is now: the cliffs smarting
With the smack of breakers
Children grabbing at the sallow foam and
Poking starfish in the tide pools while
Water slides over the orbicular rocks like a white tongue.
Fat seagulls hounding fat suburban dads
Who thrust baloney sandwiches straight into the air like beacons

They wouldn’t have known the hurricane
Was stirring itself off the coast of West Africa.

Late evening the wind whips itself up
The keeper, swabbing the Fresnel lens
Is disturbed by a hammering:
A lone seagull driving itself against the glass
Pulling back, driving again toward the golden glow
A most insistent Icarus
Its crumpled body slides down the lantern
As presently the gales would swipe the lighthouse And
the surge wash down the granite scarp

Picture the beacon clenched in winds
Picture the saltwater bursts raking the windows

Midnight and the storm worsens
The tower groaning
The keeper’s house buckling
The engine room beginning to shred itself in chunks of plaster

What is the keeper to do but witness?
The coast transmogrifies
Curling off sods and livestock
In a frantic imitation of the sea.
The assistant keeper pitches himself over the precipice
Choosing the easiest way to die.
Does he sense that, not far off
A school bus battles with the wind and loses
Falling into the sea as inevitably as salt spray?

A crash and it thumps down, chugging water
Clunking rapidly rapidly past dull sunlight and
Shivering towers of seaweed.
The passengers unattended by deep voices singing and violinists sawing
But still traveling nearer, my god, to thee.

The ocean smooths over the tunnel left by the sinking school bus
As effortlessly as the track of any pebble.

Meanwhile, at the lighthouse
The waves slink back into the bay
Polishing the crags as they retreat

And the keeper, drenched assistant, and drenched son
Stare dazedly, absently scraping gristle from their eyes,
At the foundation of the old lighthouse, circa 1749,
That has risen stolidly out of the deep.
Providence 2086
Jacob Harwood

In Burnside Park where children used to filch
Pennies from the fountain and college students used to doze
In pits of rumpled grass the tulips ferment
Like flooded weeds in a rice swamp.

The general fords the new lake uncertainly
His horse unusually resolute in the neck high water
Himself unusually unperturbed by the barnacles
Clinging one to each sideburn.

In neighboring Kennedy Plaza the derelict
Superman building is bustling again
Shoals of fish patiently roaming the lobby
Gulping water, reading blank walls like magazines.

Perhaps if Smith Hill floods soon enough they can have a tour
Ooh and aah at the rotunda
Spiral up to the fourth-largest- standing-dome-in-the-world
Tap some barrels in the booze bunker.

And a sharp-eyed young fish might spot a human child
Engulfed in a neon orange vest in a neon orange raft
Questioning their mother where all this water’s from
And why the great big roaring wall is silent.
“The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.” - African Proverb

Towards the horizon, there is a beautiful bridge that connects two wide cliffs. In the far distance, a body of people approaches, seeking to cross the elegant structure into the oasis. But when they arrive at the bridge, they are shocked to encounter a troll who denies them passage. Drawing power from stereotypes and biases, the troll only allows those he deems worthy to pass. He tells the newcomers that until they change their skin, and become more like those in the oasis, will they be granted passage. Fueled by the injustice done to them, the newcomers try to fight the troll, quickly discovering that they cannot touch it, for what they are fighting is not a material thing, but an idea. An illusion created by those who live in the oasis, and those exact people who the newcomers cannot reach.
Albert Einstein once said, “It is harder to crack prejudice than an atom,” and in our society, illusions and false perceptions take the form of stereotypes and biases. In trying to escape from these prejudices, people who are considered “different” by society are condemned to wander, looking for a place where they can freely be themselves without having to shed their skin. For me, as a Mexican, I find refuge in the place where I was first shown the rawest form of love, the kitchen. As a little girl growing up in Guadalajara, Mexico, this was the place where I was taught about my culture, about our food. In my grandmother’s little kitchen, we would all come together and become a tight knit community. It was a place without borders where everyone would be passing plates, sharing stories, laughing, all in the company of food.

When I was seven years old, my mother got a job offer within her company to relocate to the US, and embracing the new adventure that was before us, we moved. My excitement to meet new people and to learn about this new culture was quickly extinguished as my classmates labeled me; stupid, weird and foreign. And since I was still learning to speak English, I was subject to much humiliation as my classmates ridiculed me, not knowing that although I could not speak, I understood every word that came out of their mouths. Everyday after school, my spirits would be rekindled as I would come home to my little kitchen where I could temporarily return to my country, and my family.

After I finished first grade, we moved to a town nearby, and as I began my life again in this new Texan town, my little kitchen shifted from being a refuge, to a place where I could share my culture with my friends, and vice versa. Through food, my friends and I became closer than ever, each one of us learning from each other, becoming more aware of our diversity and at the same time becoming more alike. I have a Nepali friend who’s mom makes the best curry I have ever tried, and even to this day, I miss her mother’s cooking. Likewise, we have family friends of Japanese Canadian descent, who absolutely love my mother’s homemade chilaquiles, and are constantly wanting to try more of our food. It is through the food that we cook in our kitchens that brings people from all walks of life together. Food encourages us to embrace our differences, it is universal.

To my dismay, even when I was sharing my culture with my
friends, even when I was educating others on what my culture and country were like, I was still subject to stereotypes. And this time, it did not matter whether or not I spoke English, it all had to do with my skin and with my features. I experienced disrespectful comments regarding my race and my country. Words seemed to no longer have any significance as people would make jokes about serious national problems. I tried to maintain a calm demeanor, to be patient, but many times it would be taken too far. I left like I was constantly having to fight to prove and tell everyone what my identity was before they had the chance to label me. It was plain exhausting. My race would be stereotyped as less intelligent by some of my schoolmates because of the types of jobs many latinos had in Texas. Students would make jokes about illegal immigrants and about crossing the border, when in reality there were people and children, from multiple countries, who were dying trying to cross all because they wanted a better life. My country at times would be misrepresented in our school lessons, and as a young latina sitting in class I would be completely humiliated. School, the one place outside of my house that I counted on to help educate my peers, was just starting the cycle all over again. How was I supposed to change my classmates’ minds if I was just being contradicted by their school lessons?

My hope was dwindling....
I was no longer angry, I was just disappointed.

My little kitchen was slowly shifting back into a refuge, the only place where my love for my country and my race could be rejuvenated.

After a few years, my mom’s company offered her a position in Massachusetts, and so we embraced the northern culture of the US. For the first time in a long time, I felt accepted. My classmates in my new school would actually smile when I would tell them where I was from. They would ask me questions about my heritage, and be genuinely interested in what I had to say. I started to feel hopeful again, that there could be some form of change. But nothing could have prepared me for the shooting of latinos in El Paso, Texas in 2019.

I watched the news in horror that day. It was a nightmare come true, something that I had suspected one day would happen, and to my disappointment, did. I was afraid to leave my house. I was afraid to leave the comfort of my kitchen because if I did, I felt like I would have to shed my skin. It was no longer just about stereotypes and
biases, it had to do with my life. Shed your skin or die.

As an immigrant, as a permanent resident of the United States, I do not have the privilege of voting, of having my political views acknowledged. And although I accept the limits that my status grants me, I am unfortunately put at a disadvantage, seeing as my future, my safety and my way of living is decided by others. I have learned that it takes courage to embrace your identity in a world ruled by stereotypes, biases and labels. It takes courage to be patient while educating others about race and culture. Above all, it takes courage to have hope, even when you are continuously being disappointed. I hope that my determination to educate one day really does make a difference. And I hope that by speaking up, it leads someone to take my voice into consideration when they have the opportunity to vote.

These trolls, these stereotypes, they impede connections. They block our paths and prevent us from meeting and learning about new things, new people. They block our understanding, our empathy for others and other cultures. They generate hate and anger from both sides. Perceptions and illusions can at times, be just as real as the truth, and if we are not careful, we will be condemned to live in a broken world. A divided world, where we don’t progress, where we can’t progress.

Bridges provide connections, they allow us to leap boundaries, and many a time, if they are well structured, they can last generations. There are a lot of prejudices afflicting many cultures, and although food brings a lot of people together, even if it gives people the chance to have something in common, it does not eliminate biases and hate. Interestingly, I had a lot of classmates who loved tacos and Mexican food, but that did not mean that they accepted the Mexicans that were responsible for those recipes. That did not mean that they were not being influenced by stereotypes and biases. Food may not be the cure to the world’s problems, but it can provide us with the opportunity to open our eyes, and appreciate one another, appreciate what each culture brings to the table. We can slowly build new bridges, bridges built on common ground, where we can all accept each other wholeheartedly.

My little kitchen is a small slice of my country. A place where I can share my food and culture to those who wish to learn from it. It is a place where others can bring their cultures with them, and share them with me. It is an oasis where there are no labels or stereotypes,
no trolls to block the way. My little kitchen honors my heritage by combating these issues through the act of compassion, love, empathy, and most importantly, food.

**No Accent or No Service**  
Alejandro Barton-Negreiros

A mother of four has been through hell and back,  
Worked on all fours till she stood on her own two feet,  
And walked through the ceremony of citizenship.  
She could drop her name, drop her heritage,  
But nothing could hide her skin and her accent,  
A flower to me, a foreigner to anyone else.  
She stands in line at a supermarket, her cart filled to the brim with food,  
Her ears attached to her home country and the voice of her hermana,  
She speaks in her own world while ours observes and criticizes her.  
An old couple, standing in line behind her, wonder about her;  
Could she afford all that food?  
Does she know the language?  
Who does she think she is?  
She turns to them, taking her native Peru out of her ear;  
Would you like to go before me?  
A quick stop and red cheeks on old white faces,  
They have never been more ashamed, she had never been more raged.  
On the border of Canada, after two towers were struck by planes,  
She is pulled aside and interrogated,  
Her passport had to be fake, her car had to be a bomb,  
She just wanted to go to Quebec,  
Shop in the antique stores of her husband’s favorite summer escape,  
Four hours later she is let go, as the sun starts to meet the horizon,  
She no longer wants to go to Canada.
In a rural town in northern Maine,
A mother and her family go to a restaurant,
A group of six, mixed and mostly American,
The husband’s childhood favorite,
But still the servers only see the skin and accents.
The family sits there for forty-five minutes,
People pass by without giving a glance,
While the kitchen staff peer out from behind the counter,
Anxiously waiting for the party to leave and give away their table.
The mother gets up, the family follows,
They will never pass that restaurant again.
As she waits with her son to get her passport renewed,
The postal office worker stands in confusion;
What did you say, dear?
One attempt, We’re here to get our passports renewed,
I’m sorry, what?
Two attempts, we are here to get our passports renewed, I can’t understand what you’re saying.
Three attempts, We Are Here To Get…
… We’re here to get our passports renewed, says the son.
Ah, ok, thank you. I’ll go get the forms.
The mother stands there, a body without a voice,
In a country she is 25 years familiar with,
Without an accent to be heard in her tone,
But still she receives no service.

In the back seat of her car, I watch as she shouts,
At the police officer and the white teenage boy,
Who got a girl killed in a car crash six months before,
Who was speeding and stripped off the bumper of my mother’s car,
While she was driving me to school.
I had never seen my mother so outraged, so loud, so fierce before,
My eight-year-old mind will carry that memory of her,
Remembering the pain in her eyes,
As the police officer let the reckless boy go,
And told her to calm down, as if she was a crazy lady.
She wasn’t a crazy lady, she was a mother,
A mother no one would listen to because she had an accent.

Their Rococo Chaise Lounge
Christopher Govang

The Mullens have such great taste, they do!

Their
fleur-de-lises
look superb on the azure-painted wall,
And the
antimacassaries
look so neat… despite being too small.
The ridges of the birchen trim, no, not the trim with “these,”
Yes, that! It looks so good, the trim with all the gold Greek keys!

Grandmother’s house looked just like this
When I was but a child,
And though I see they share her taste,
Why ever is this room tiled?

Their chandelier hangs proudly from the nicest iron chain,
The kind that you can only ship from Denmark or Ukraine!
The candleholders on the wall were styled to be French,
But I’d never stoop to place below a Louis XVI bench.

I’ve never seen a study so
Luxurious as this,
Nor have I seen a drawing room
That was this much amiss.

I love the painting on the wall with the purple wildflowers,
And the grandfather clock of cherry wood which ticks away the hours,
But I can’t say I like the horrid wallpaper design,
With all those angel baby faces staring… “oh, hah! It’s fine!”

“Ms. Mullen your *acoutrements*,
Are so *décolletage*,
Do I know what that means? Oh, well…
I do love your corsage!”

Of all the busts and paintings all around, of each side table,
And more than all the buttresses and arches, or the gables,
What I find most sublime about this little parlor here
Is the chaise lounge they put in the wrong place, but not to fear.

A nice rococo chaise, I’d say…
An eighteenth-century?
Yes, I know when the *era* was,
I want to feel smart, let me!

The cushions are of silk, the body feels like matelassé,
But underneath the trompe l’œil, it won’t see the light of day.
How criminal of them to keep it tucked away back here!
I have to take this into my own hands, my dear, I fear.

Its eggshell white upholstery
Is such a pretty sight,
It should be over here, and—oh!
It’s so shockingly light.

If I just put the detailed leg with all of the gold leaf
Beside this Grecian urn then… damn! It’s blocking the relief.
Well over here beneath the flood light should do just the same…
And here we go… two steps… and—snap! Oh God, I’ve rent it lame.

“Miss Mullen, I apologize
Profusely, dear, I do.
What’s that? You hated it for years?
Oh, Grandmama gave it to you…”

And so I took the *chaise lame* home, and did some carpentry,
And after a *grueling* hour of work, it stood again for me!
And though I’m truly grateful, yes, I’m happy to have toured,
I think next time I’ll have to smash the Ruckers harpsichord!

*Gradient Dream*
Freya Johnsen
Photograph of Handmade Jewelry
Dear Mr. ———,

We have reviewed your application, and we’d like to express some concerns.

First of all, many of our staff had questions regarding “Skunky.” As you know, we ask that our candidates list their hobbies. Your two entries under this category, including “Skunky” and “scaring birds with Skunky,” raised a few brows. Is Skunky a friend of yours? What kind of company do you keep? Similarly, we were surprised to hear about your past work experience. Though we admire an entrepreneurial spirit, “invasion” strikes us as legally ambiguous. To clarify, when we ask you to list an employer, we require a name and an address. The phone number you left without context directed us to a man named “Wunk Terell,” whose thoughts on trespassing were questionable, to say the least. It is our sincere hope that you did not, as Mr. Terrell informed us, “nae nae on the Zoo World security.” Any crime committed against an established institution is strictly prohibited by our organization. The position for which you applied demands a certain level of responsibility, which we do not see reflected in your lifelong endeavor of running a “reptile fight club.” While your collection of over 40 snakes is impressive, among other things, it begs the question of how you attained such a number, as well as the ethics involved in their capture.

It is your transcript, however, that we found most interesting. I am sure we do not need to inform you that “I smarter” is not an official educational institution, just as “toe braiding,” “rat charming,” and “Boom Boom Rocket Time” are not official courses. Although we consider ourselves an open-minded organization, after considerable effort we failed to uncover the educational value of such pastimes. Each year, we search for talented, dedicated individuals among our pool of applicants. Your interests and experiences, though undeniably unique, cause us to question how well you would integrate with our team.

Above all, we value the safety of our workers. Your passion for “fire, feasting, and foot-grabbing” causes me to think that you might
present a threat to the wellbeing of our staff. We would like to inform you that we are rejecting your application, and we ask that you please do not apply again in the future. Furthermore, we’d like to direct you to a number of resources you might find helpful. Attached is the number of a local center for psychological counseling, as well as the name of an on-call neurologist who specializes in personality disorders. Should you be in any immediate danger, given your relations to Wunk Terell, we advise that you call the police. We’ve also included the number of an exceptional animal shelter near your home address, which we sincerely hope you utilize in the near future.

We hope this message finds you well, and we wish the best for your health and prosperity.

Respectfully,
Make-A-Wish Foundation

P.S. I was sorry to read about the death of Tiana. A spider who talks through walls is a rare friend to have, and I’m sure her loss is – as you put it – a devastation. You’ll be in our thoughts.

Stacks
Lauren Gonsalves

The silver box of the elevator slips quietly up through the core of the twenty-eight-story library. At busy hours like this, I am pressed into the corner, flattened against the dark sheen of the steel wall with my cart under tight grip. Each person is filed snug up against each other like volumes on a shelf bursting out of place. With each floor, a student or two cues out, loosening up the compression within the mass of people until I am the only one left: a student, but not one for the next 4 hours. My destination is the 19th floor, which I remind myself of as the shining gray bullet quietly rockets upwards.

The cart wheels roll with a loud, slow thud over the crack dividing the elevator from the stable linoleum floor. Behind me is the open mouth of the elevator lobby. Before me is the endless march of metal shelving. Slipping between aisles, I feel the hot, dusty air fill my lungs. I have a simple task ahead of me, but the air feels drowsy and the lights are dim as I center in on the correct aisle. The stacks stretch out infinitely and relentlessly on either side in the warm dim of the
19th floor’s concrete envelope.
This time, I neglect to turn on the LED overhead light. This time, I am drowning in the dimness, watching the midday sun flicker across the laminated floor as I shuffle through volumes. Each window is a slit peering out into the valley, and the valley peers back. The sky is mountains upon mountains of bug-sized buildings and blue haze, leading me through to the valley beyond, but I dutifully stay in place as I work. The light from other aisles squints at me through the shelves, as if it knows my mind is elsewhere.

I am slid into place like another book on the shelf pressed between the metal scaffolding of the stacks. The books confront me, inches from my face, a 10-foot wall of jewel-colored spines, cracked and yellowed and bruised. Some shelves stand proud supporting neat rows of slim volumes, some buckle like aluminum cans under the heave of centuries of leather and ivory-colored paper. Paper binds to paper in plastic envelopes, a rhythm of spines marching down the row like keys on a piano. Centuries of cultural texture flatten out into a spread of black text on printer paper. My hands feel the roughness of aged silk; My eyes see only progressions of little white labels, a matrix of black ink digits and barcodes, binaries and booleans and exact matches and mistypes. In this catacomb, hoisted up by coffered concrete, I am in my own space surrounded on all sides by the alphanumeric codes of the national catalog.

Hanno Caldo
Danielle Marrocco

Your dad’s truck was color I can not remember today
But I swear, I practice clairvoyance
Looking at me, you laughed and that was enough
As the summer sun rained down on our skin
Leaving mine red and yours tan
That was enough for me

You asked your dad if we could sit in the back
In the trunk, with no protection, just wind
And he smiled, crinkles by blue eyes
Smooth legs bend and jump to make the trip
Sat outside, the cadence of bugs and cars
Whipped around in my ears

My mother called me on the phone that night
The television flashed colors I still can’t recall
Her somber voice, though, still rings with the nature ambiance
Asking me how I was, what I was up to
Who was I with?
Eyes flicked over your frame
And I realized this wasn’t enough for me
Your face stared at the screen
While I sat there, experiencing the epiphany of my adolescence
Staring, at that stupid screen
My hollow tone rang out repetitive answers
You and I had already heard before
And that we continue to hear, even still to this day.

**Woman**
*Adrianna Crowell*

Womanhood is men who buy
my $7 vodka crans and think that means
I’ll let them take me home,
and womanhood is that I do,
that I don’t say no
when I’m puking margarita pink
on the carpet. Womanhood
is that they still want to kiss
the bile on my lips,
and womanhood is that I let them. If
I want to spin until I’m dizzy,
skirt swirling cotton candy, I’ll let
Prince Charming feel me up underneath,
lie in the dorm room bed and pretend
I like the feel of wet hands. If
I want to weave my hair in princess
braids, or paint my skin in fairy pinks
and reds, I’ll smudge the lipstick
on his stubble chin, I’ll make a ruby ring around him. Women say sex is a reclamation, but I can’t take back what never belonged to me. Womanhood is all about the body, that used to dance to Taylor Swift and scrape knees playing tag in the garden. Now the scratches are nails claiming the back, Now I’m not in the body myself, now he is. Womanhood is all about forgetting the body. You walk me home and text me in the morning you didn’t realize I was so drunk, and womanhood is forgetting you fucked me when I couldn’t stand up. Womanhood is letting you buy my drink again, because it wasn’t a violation. 

*I said yes.* Womanhood is that you brought back my favorite sweater, and left another girl with shaking hands, hands that once brewed potions from backyard leaves and played with plastic Barbies, left her shaking because I let you walk her home. She wanted to kiss me, but I said she was too young. Womanhood is men who decide when girlhood ends, when femininity stops being fairies and sparkling dresses, when girl becomes woman becomes sex.
*Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson is a slice-of-life following two sisters in the sleepy town of Fingerbone. Although marked by tragedy from an early age, shifted around by different caretakers, the protagonist Ruth appears surprisingly indifferent to sudden change in life. With sparse dialogue, opting instead to focus on Ruth’s rich inner world and thoughts, the novel presents isolation and loneliness as pervading feelings in her daily life. While Ruth claims to find solace in solitude, the novel hints at the distinct differences and fine line between being alone and being lonely.

Fingerbone itself is an incredibly isolated town, accessible only by train and haunted by a tragedy. Ruth’s childhood home, a cabin secluded in the woods is even more remote. Built by her grandfather, the house is littered with “travel literature’ and paintings of “Africa, the Alps, the Andes, the Himalayas, the Rockies’ and more world wonders (Robinson, 4). Ruth blames her grandfather “[putting] us down in this unlikely place” and settling generations of their family in such an austere place, yet this travel memorabilia suggests he too
looked beyond Fingerbone and fantasized about what rich settings and stories the world could offer him (Robinson, 3). Ruth is very similar in this regard. She interacts with very few characters throughout the narrative, and often is not privy to important information, forcing her to fill the gaps in her knowledge with her imagination. At one point upon discovering a letter explaining her aunt Molly’s sudden departure, Ruth begins to fantasize about her aunt’s new life as a fisherman. She imagines Molly “leaning on the small side of her boat” awed at “her catch and gleaming rainbows” with no discernable transition from what Ruth knows as fact, and what she envisions for amusement (Robinson, 91). Because of her geographical isolation, Ruth must have a rich inner world in order to explore and understand her surroundings as she does not have the ability to gain that experience in reality in an area so physically remote and sheltered.

Instead of holding contempt for this isolation like her sister Lucile, Ruth views independence and being by yourself in a positive light. She claims “once alone, it is impossible to be otherwise- loneliness is an absolute discovery” (Robinson, 157). This “discovery” may be the inner peace one finds after confronting inner conflict and doubts in solitary reflection. It is an entirely internal process as no one can truly understand your deepest concerns quite like yourself. After finding this sort of contentment with one’s self, it can be difficult to be anything “otherwise” than lonely because it takes a great deal of effort to create healthy boundaries and reintegrate into society without letting others disturb your inner peace.

Yet in Ruth’s lifetime loneliness is not a “discovery.” it is all that she knows. Abandoned by her mother, multiple aunts, and most recently her sister Lucille, Ruth has no consistency in her life. And although her solitude is something Ruth finds pleasure in, she struggles to fully isolate herself from all people and connections. She later describes memory “as the sense of loss, and loss pulls us after it” and as she has a countless history with loss, Ruth uses this “sense” to process the grief in her life and come to terms with loss through her inner world (Robinson, 194).

This is most apparent in the final passages of the novel, where Ruth is no longer in contact with Lucille yet she fantasizes about what her life looks like. From her memory Ruth is aware of Lucille’s cynical personality as someone who “does not listen, does not wait, does not
hope” yet Ruth holds a belief that these traits do not apply when, or if Lucille thinks about her or their aunt Sylvie (Robinson, 219). This stems from an innate human need to feel valued by and cared for by others. Though no longer in her life, Lucille is the closest companion Ruth has ever had; she needs to believe Lucille loves her to feel a sense of belonging and value, even if it’s just in her imagination.

In this regard Ruth has a difficult time defining her identity. As a society we mainly do this through comparing ourselves and experiences to others, and depend on our connections to people as validation. Because of Ruth’s isolation, abundance of loss and later tranciency she cannot define herself in a conventional way. When looking retrospectively at the beginning of the novel it becomes clear that Ruth is attempting to understand herself and the story. She opens simply with “My name is Ruth” a plain, concrete fact that builds a foundation for Ruth to expand and explore less straightforward elements of her life and identity (Robinson, 3). Her minimal relationships make it difficult for her to piece together different moments of an inconsistent upbringing because she is so immersed in her own interior world, and cannot discern where reality blends into fantasy. This is most apparent when Ruth later follows Aunt Sylvie in transient living, where she loves hearing other people’s endeavors, but grows concerned when “her own silence seems suddenly remarkable” (Robinson, 214). It is clear Ruth does not have any significant anecdotes, or at least not any she would willingly share with strangers without exposing some of her deep-seated trauma. This brings to question if Ruth is truly satisfied with her life and solitude. Is she content with her silence, or has a lifetime of abandonment left her unable to form enduring relationships? Although she is now among people, does her silence leave Ruth feeling even more lonely than in the seclusion of Fingerbone? The only person who can define what is a fulfilling lifestyle for Ruth is herself.

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Loneliness is a feeling that I, among many others, are all too familiar with. Especially after two years of an ongoing global pandemic that forced people to isolate, it is a source for depression, burnout, and agitation in ways many never experienced previously. Quarantine, lockdown, self-isolation, working from home, zoom-
pocalypse, whatever you labeled it seclusion became a necessary action that brought upon a new type of dread.

The pandemic took many things away from me, a conventional graduation, a senior prom, vacations, friendships just to name a few. Despite this, I never felt truly alone when I was at home. I was surrounded by love. Every day I would go on a nature walk with my dad, bake something new with my mom, or lose to my brother at Mario Kart. Even though I couldn’t physically see my close friends, they were also stuck at home and available to phone call at essentially any moment. There was still a sense of community, something I took for granted until my first semester on-campus where I was truly left to my own devices.

Living on-campus during the spring semester of my Freshman year is a choice I have no regrets about. Even if it was at times soul-crushingly lonely. After over a year of schooling from home I was desperate for a change of scenery and a chance to grow. Classes were entirely on Zoom, Dining Halls were to-go only, and there was a mandatory quarantine upon arrival. These conditions made it virtually impossible to meet new people. And although I tried my best to make friends, as a lifelong introvert I found myself slowly secluding myself to my dorm room and not interacting with others unless necessary.

On the offhand I did click with someone, and had the opportunity to bond either by going into town or walking to the dining hall, I realized I did not know how to introduce myself to potential new friends. At home, I spent everyday with the friends I’ve had for years and did not realize the codependency that had developed. Any way I described myself was in relation to their personalities. When I shared an anecdote with someone new it inherently began with “My friends and I,” it was never about me but us. But no one in Amherst knew my hometown friends and they didn’t care. Why should they befriend someone who was presenting themselves as one piece of a package deal, and not a completely new friend? Once I realized this habit I made an effort to only talk about my own individual experiences. For a while, much like Ruth “my own silence seemed remarkable” and I was forced to dig up and recall moments, mishaps, and misadventures I had forgotten about (Robinson, 214). This process gave me a deeper understanding of who I am as an individual, and the type of person I wanted to be in the world. Yet this character development would not
have occurred if not for deep self-reflection and desire for connection that arose through isolation in my dorm.

As the weather warmed up I developed a daily schedule for myself. And although I spent these days mainly by myself, I felt at the time more satisfied than ever. Each morning I would stretch for twenty minutes before getting ready for classes. I worked on assignments through the afternoon and even had time to read for leisure- occasionally out on the grassy hill. I became obsessed with to-do lists. There was one for school, for shows to watch, finances to manage, people to text, books to buy e.t.c. Whether it was truly contentment or a coping mechanism I still am unsure of, but I have never been as productive as those 3 months. Like Ruth, I was seeing loneliness as “an absolute discovery” as I could spend all my time each day exactly how I wanted to without the conflict of interest that arises when planning to spend time with others (Robinson, 157).

Yet despite how accomplished or content I felt most of the time, it only took a single moment, sound, or doubt for it all to fall apart. I still wanted friends. And so when I heard laughter, watched a pack of students pass by, or liked a post of two friends grabbing coffee in town I couldn’t help but have a sinking fear that I was missing out on something important. I had reached a point of inner peace, but at what cost? Once you find that place of serenity how do you risk that for the potential of a new connection? Part of me blamed it on the pandemic, no one was having a normal college experience, and even the people I was observing as instant friends may be struggling to not feel alone here. But another part of me believed I had been my own company for far too long and I was incapable of meeting new people. Looking back on this point of my life a year later is weird. This school year in general has been an entirely different experience. I have a roommate and friends, I joined clubs, and classes are in person. Even though it is now more so the “normal” college experience it feels so foreign after two years of uncertainty and inconsistency. Some days I think about this time and miss it dearly. I miss my people watching, sitting by my window with a cup of tea. I miss finishing books in one sitting, or TV shows within a week. Sometimes I remember how much I cried, how I wanted to delete all my social media so I couldn’t see people having fun without me. Yet even though I now have a great group of friends and social gatherings that bring me more joy than ever,
I can’t help but yearn for the serenity that came with independence and isolation. This brings me to a deeper understanding of my personal needs, and the importance of balance. So even in the busiest days, I can have a small, intimate moment in my personal world.

“My Name is Josephine,” Said the Duck
by Samuel Kim

The sun was long gone, the unfamiliar pond was silent, and the other ducks were fast asleep. But I was still awake, adrift on the water. I missed my family. It had been days since I had seen them.

A harsh voice spoke behind me: “I know that look. That’s the look of a lost duck, that is.”

I turned around. An incredibly ugly face was poking out of the water. Two crusty, half-lidded eyes blinked at me.

“Hello,” I said. “Do you know where my family is?”

“You need a name,” the turtle said, as if it hadn’t heard me. “Everyone needs a proper name, and you can’t be goin’ around calling yourself Duck no longer. It’s indecent, it is. You swim in my ocean, you need a name.”

Just to be polite, I said, “I’d like a name. I’ve never had one of those.”

The turtle nodded, and it was the first bit of affirmation I had received in days. It felt nice to be acknowledged.

“Sex?” it asked.

“Um...no thanks.”

“Your sex,” barked the turtle. “Most ducks have one.”

“Oh. Female,” I said. “I think.” I had never really needed to know until now.

The turtle thoughtfully ducked its head under the surface. The moon was out now, and its pale shape wobbled on the water.

The turtle’s head reappeared. “Josephine.”

“Josephine?”

“That’s your name, that is.”

“What does it mean?”

“It means you, stupid.”

“That doesn’t mean anything.”
“Not yet, it don’t.”
I considered this briefly. Then I said, “Thank you,” because it seemed like the right thing to say.
The turtle snorted wetly. “Stay in my ocean, that’s how you’ll thank me.”

“This isn’t an ocean,” I said. “It’s a pond. I mean, it’s a rather large pond, but–”
The turtle shook its squashed head. Before I could finish, it ducked back underwater and I was left with the moon.

*** ***

“Who?” asked one of the ducks. It was morning, and I had drawn a small crowd. “My family,” I repeated. “I’m looking for them. I was hoping to find them at this pond.”
The ducks said that they didn’t know of anyone looking for a lost duck, and that they were terribly sorry to hear I was lost.

“It’s alright,” I said, even though it wasn’t. “I have a name now. It’s Josephine.” It felt odd, saying it aloud like that.
The ducks exchanged looks. “You’ve been talking to Fat Snapper, haven’t you?” one of them asked.

“Is that the turtle’s name?”

“She doesn’t have a name, it’s just what everyone calls her,” the duck explained. “She’s fat and she snaps. It’s appropriate.” The other ducks quacked in agreement.

“She’s convinced this pond is an ocean,” a duck said. “She’s never even seen a real Ocean.”

“I’ve been to the ocean,” said another. “Turtles don’t live in oceans.”

“Yes they do,” said a third. “But they’re way bigger, with huge flippers, big as wings.

They’re basically birds.” The ducks laughed. I wasn’t sure if I should laugh too, so I didn’t.
Then one of the ducks said to me, “You’d best forget about Fat Snapper and her names.

Ducks don’t have names. That’s just not how things work.”

“Says who?” I asked, and I was genuinely curious. But none of the ducks had an answer that satisfied me. Then the conversation ended awkwardly, and I apologized, because it seemed like the right thing to do, and I moved on with my day.
“My name’s Olivia. Are you new here?”
I blinked at the duck who had just approached me. “Your... name?”

“I know, I know, most ducks don’t have names. But I do! I’m Olivia.”

“I have a name, too. It’s Josephine.” It still felt odd to say aloud. Olivia looked pleasantly surprised. “Well, I’ll be! Nice to meet you, Josephine. I take it you’ve met Fat Snapper?”

“Why does everyone call her that?”

“It’s her name.”

“It’s not a name, though,” I said. “It’s a description that people came up with.”

“Descriptions can be names, silly,” said Olivia. “Anything can be a name, if it sticks around long enough.”

Olivia’s friends were waiting at the water’s edge. “Everyone! This is Josephine!” Olivia announced. They welcomed me enthusiastically, and they all had names of their own. There was Eli, and Sarah, and Pierre, and Ms. Habib, and Justin McArthur, and many others.

“We’re all lost birds,” said Olivia. “Or at least, we were. Fat Snapper gave us all names, and now we’re friends. There’s more of us around here. You should hang out with us.”

“I’d love to,” I said, and I meant it. “But I’m still looking for my family. Do any of you know where they are?”

None of them knew. “I’m sorry, Josephine,” said Olivia. She sounded genuinely sorry.

“We can help you look, if you’d like.”

“It’s alright,” I said, even though it wasn’t. “I’m starting to think they aren’t here.”

“People call you Fat Snapper,” I said. It was night, and the old turtle was peering up at me again.

“People call me all sorts of names,” the turtle rasped. “Sometimes they stick. We’re lucky to have names at all, you know.”

“It isn’t lucky. It’s just made up.”

“Everything’s made up, stupid. Even my ocean.”

“It’s not an ocean,” I said, for what felt like the twentieth time, even though it was only the second. “It’s just a rather large pond.”
“You even listening to me?” snapped the turtle. “None of your childish whining changes a damn thing in the world. It’s made up, so what?”

I asked her, “Why did you give me a name?”

The turtle squinted at me. “Because the world has enough nameless birds flapping their wings, flapping their beaks, doing absolutely nothing with their lives besides making noise and crapping in the grass.”

“But I’m just a random duck,” I said. “And I’m lost. I’m lost, and alone, and there’s a million other ducks, and all of us are exactly the same, so why even bother with names at all?” I heard my voice echo. I hadn’t meant to shout.

For a moment, the pond was quiet. Then the turtle said, “You ain’t a random duck. You’re Josephine.” She shut her eyes and hummed, and she said, “Good luck finding your family.” Then she slipped under the water, under the rumbling reflection of the moon.

I stayed there for a while, staring at the spot where Fat Snapper had been.

Then I looked out across the pond, and I listened to the wind, and for a brief moment, in the dark, it seemed that the pond was a vast, moody ocean.

Then I thought about my name, and I wondered if I was the only duck named Josephine in the entire world. I decided that at the very least, I was probably the only duck named Josephine in Fat Snapper’s ocean.

I decided that even if I wasn’t—even if every duck in the world was named Josephine—then I was definitely the only duck named Josephine who was me.

And then I decided that I would talk to some more ducks tomorrow, and that each time, I would introduce myself by my name. I would tell them, “My name is Josephine,” and it might feel odd every time, but I would still say it, because it would be the right thing to say.
The Quacken
Matthew Roberts
Acrylic Paint
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