

MIND --- MURALS



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Notes From the Editors

When I think of the phrase “Mind Murals,” I think of a splatter. I think of this collage of different paints, words, and images combined into some fantastic piece of art that should be digested by as many people as possible. I firmly believe this was accomplished with this edition of *Mind Murals*. It is a mixture of phenomenal pieces that truly represent the artistic and literary genius of the Eastern region. I hope you, the reader, can connect with these pieces on a meaningful level and awaken or strengthen your own talents, whatever they may be.

The first person I have to thank is Sara Stammer, my lovely Senior Representative for the Eastern Region. We made a pretty great team and I’ll miss texting or emailing her at 1:00 a.m. about something related to this magazine.

Next, I want to thank Glen Brewster for keeping *Mind Murals* up and running every year, and for pushing us to do our absolute best. Also, I would like to thank the Central Office for everything they do in regard to not only this publication, but also for Sigma Tau Delta in general.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone who submitted to *Mind Murals* and to the editors that helped us in the editing process. We could not have done this without you.

Best,

Emily Spangler

One piece of advice I carry with me wherever I go is to collect great thinkers, to surround myself with people who can contribute and collaborate on great endeavors. *Mind Murals* this year has done just that. Not only has it given me the opportunity to work alongside talented people but it also has given me the opportunity to share in discussions of powerful works by powerful thinkers. *Mind Murals* is a unique project in that it bridges the distance between the Sigma Tau Delta chapters and students across the entire Eastern Region and allows collaboration on a personal level.

I cannot think of a more fitting person to work alongside than my Associate Student Representative, Emily Spangler. Emily not only was an influential force behind this project but also a curator of great ideas. Beyond presenting me with directions in which we could take this project, she took even the most abstract ramblings of thoughts I sent her and made them into something beautiful. We set out to make this edition of *Mind Murals* better than before, and without her it could not have been done. It truly was a privilege and a pleasure to work alongside her!

Next, I want to thank Glen Brewster for supporting Emily and me in every idea we sent him. Glen gave us the creative authority to take *Mind Murals* to where we wanted it to go. That being said, I would do this project no justice without recognizing the hard work of the Central Office. Thank you for all of your help and support with *Mind Murals*! Despite all the work to do for the organization, they helped two girls from the east produce a journal!

Last, but by all means certainly not least, I would like to thank our editors and everyone who applied or submitted to *Mind Murals*. This journal would be nothing without your dedication! The enthusiasm Emily and I have witnessed from this region has been second to none. Your continued participation in Sigma Tau Delta and specifically the Eastern Region is commendable!

Without challenge, there is no change!

Best in all you do,

Sara Ashley Stammer

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| poetry |

I: Seedling | *Meghan Barrett*

Push past leaf litter
environ mental factors,
this heavy silence, cold wind
ripped two-thin leaves

And I am young,
a white worm, worried,
forced lashes outside and
out of my control
I am almost regrounded,
a crushing invisibility
I feel

As I grow older,
my branches carve new space
while you air out hum
hardening, I lean more
a reflection of you, even
my vascular cambium:
I stare past
evaporative
wonder about

it's my first time
too much pressure on me
laid on my newly-knobbed back
trembling

young and
willowed, so affected by
you, bowing me; you
bending me, horizontal;
made lean, under your weight
even when you aren't there,
you

I curl away from you
but I am rooted in,
us, still
while I become less;
when you are not around
sheltered golden rings:
escaping
spectre of
us, knows no

future

Dicotyledons | *Meghan Barrett*

Sugar
maples
are dicots
meaning, among other things that
they have two seed leaves inside the embryo
two seed leaves that absorb nutrients until photos
of sinful theses can occur. Leaves are broad and
round, e x p a n s i v e as the seed germinates &
when the samara falls in a is born, strong bluish white
forest, it is likely to end radicle root pushing out
up in siltlayers of humus: down through seed's coat
most nutritious soilsheath and gives rise tissuesweet
composed of decaying plant apical merry stem snaking
& animal dusted dark matter, towards our center: the earth
mummies thrusting new searching water's sprig
life; mother, let go I'm my own song

I: Matured | *Meghan Barrett*

Thirty and yellowed
as scalesong ripples fruit,
flesh full, pre-vibrant heavy
while each gentler pulse of wind
kneaded and swept

I knew you, that cold wind;
I remember you carrying
me to be born; old silence
whisperlaughs in
and together we make flutter
samarafall

As you whip pollenspore,
press inflorescence
in me, you steal – still
and I become less, weighted;
when you are not around,
strong sheltered rings,
missing your shouldermold,
my evaporating yellow wonders
if I'd known this all along: our

and it's my first time
ready for sharing, ripening
embryo; I sway in time
I remember when you, pruned
my lithe branches clean

you worried me but now -
my young self, a seed then -
now, filled in with our primordial
jests, old scars are forgotten.
feelings, new heartbeats, we make
love again

curl around my ovulation;
you carve new space,
hardening you air out us again
and I, growing, sit and lean more
a reflection of our symbiotic need in
my vasculature, drooping heavy
I stare across our past and
aloud, a scarce spectre of us,
questions our doubt in our

future

Duality | *Isaac Kulp*

My fingers are naked and drunk.
Fumbling and rummaging for a cigarette.
My brain is wet with alcohol
My heart is full of love and lust.
Which dog to feed?
Naked and bruised, I can see you lying.
Shameful and crying, holy, holy, holy.
Sacred and sacrilegious.
The dichotomy rages on in our hearts and minds.
Do we stay sober and miserable, or drunk and merry?
Do we stay abstinent and love, or do we fuck and feel pleasure?
I am no moral philosopher
I am writing you drunk and filled with lust.
Mother, Father, Brother save me.
Bring me back to the womb, let me start again.
My words flow, from loose lips.
I drink to alleviate sadness.
I am sadder, yet, when I reach the end of my glass and my head is dull and my fingers drunk too
I am sadder, yet, when I find you are nowhere near brother.
I am sad too, when I am alone.
Lustful, and alone.
Waking moments at 2 a.m., revelations from God, from Ginsberg, from Manson.
God Almighty, I have not been to church in years.
I've sinned the Seven Deadly seven times a day for seven years.
And yet I am promised a grave, but no right hand seat next to Christ, Muhammad, Buddha,
Allah...
Holy, Holy, Holy
I would like to get into the Pearly Gates
I'd like to sober up now.

The Boy Who Shot His Cat | *Isaac Kulp*

I'd like to forget some things.
Like when I raised my voice to you and shook my angry fists
and ordered you out of the fucking house.
Or when you told me we might have a baby
and I told you to go to hell.
We never had a baby.
You know I shot my cat when I was a boy.
It got hit by a car and was lying in the road.
I shot it.
I'd like to forget that.
I'd like to forget all that. Get good and drunk and write a good story. A really good one.
Sex sells.
But it always sold me a bunch of shit.
Just a bunch of misery when it's all said and done.
What do you want to hear from me? That I'm sorry? That I'll come back home?
Bullshit. Bullshit.
I am sorry Blondie. I would come home if you left me.
But you made your bed, and I am not in it.
So it goes.
There's a case of beer waiting for me. Warm stale beer.
A pack of Red Pall Mall's in my breast pocket.
Come on baby, get my beer and join me on the porch.
Sit down with me, let me kiss you on the cheek.
Don't mind my yellow teeth,
my beer-stained eye balls.
Floating around in warm beer and cigarette smoke.
Don't mind my raunchy breathe and hacking.
My foul mouth when I drop my cigarette in my lap.
Or talk about the state of affairs.
Let me kiss you once on the cheek baby.
Don't forget the beer on the table.
Walk my stumbling ass home from the bar.
Where were you all those nights anyway?
When I came home drunk as hell.
Bloodied up and lamenting.
Probably at your mother's house.
I never liked her.
She never liked me either.
Well, so it goes.
I won't be angry this time. We can have that baby, you can buy that apartment.
Just sit with me on the porch, I won't ask any more questions.
I'd like to write a story about a boy

who shot his cat.
And grew up to be an angry drunken wash up
that chases away every god damn living thing that gets in his way.
Then, one night he'll get good and drunk on the porch.
Drunk as hell, and his wife will be at her mother's.
He'll sit on his typewriter with a shotgun in his lap.
Wife will come home and find him there
and his final words on the page.

"I am sorry.
For all the things I've done.
All the things I didn't do.
I never was good
at being alive."

Best,
the boy who shot his cat.

A Penny Thought | *Raven Jones*

We have spent too much time watering the tiger,
And not enough tending to the lily.

Baggage | *Raven Jones*

If the rings of Saturn are made up
Entirely of lost airline luggage, then
You and I must be made up entirely
Of splintered wood and dried markers,
Definitions and connotations.

We've got to unlock our bones just
To explain the things we think we know.

Yet it serves us right to wonder, to
Guess where we came from in terms
Of how that may affect who we one
Day become.

And all that space in between.

But give me a sign that says
"You mean more than the things *behind* you."

Give me a yard I can grow something new in.
Give me a memory I can use for something good.
Give me a reason to keep creating.

Hands | *Raven Jones*

When I think of my childhood

I think of hands—

Striking,
Caressing,
Unapologetic hands.

Hands made for punching holes into
My hand and wringing out the sun.

My own hands,
Too small to hold onto
Damn near anything.

*

I've quit this life dozens of times.

But I always come back —
To the paint chips, to the blank mattress, to the hands.

*

Isn't it wonderful how the brain only
Absorbs the days you just survived?

When I think of the hands,
I think of suffering.

I don't think about roller blades on
Hot cement and peach rings at the County Market.

It's easiest to recall only misery.

*

I'd like to peel back the skin of these hands,
Allow every part to grow and multiply until
They become something worth having a
Day after tomorrow.

Hair | *Leah Santucci*

It's the fifth of December,
and your hair started falling
out in chunks.

It's sprinkled around the tub,
and for once it's not my
hair you're complaining about
clogging up the drain.

On the following day
you took an extra shower
because it's scattered all
over your clothes, and it's
sticking to your skin.

After your shower,
you brushed back the remainder
and it's so thin now that your
scalp is peeking through,
and I feel more bothered
by this than you.

I lost count of the lint roller
sheets I used on your sweater,
trying to eradicate the multitude
of strands on your shoulders.
I tell you now you don't
have to worry about the
gray scattered in the front,
and you laugh—even though
you were always proud that
your hair never aged like
the rest of the elderly population.

It's the end of December now,
and the only pieces left
are the ones that are growing
out from being buzzed away
by the razor blade, so that
maybe, just maybe,
your hair could leave you alone,
unlike the medication screaming
through your veins.

Papier-Mâché | *Samantha Miller*

My best friend is made of papier-mâché.

I found her that way and she is fine. Content, I'd even say, to be a real girl trapped in her coffin of hardened paste and mismatched paper, happy to be silent and still in this world that moves too fast and forgets where it placed the newspaper yesterday. She let me make her hands so we could latch fingers—I crafted her knuckles and wrists with love, and the lifelines, carved so deep across her palms that she almost bled ink, were made with ripped pages from her favorite book that melted in the rain when the blue screen sky split and crackled into peppery static. She liked them anyway. She likes everything these days.

(I fear the real girl has long since rotted away, but I know better than to say it out loud.)

The Collector | *Samantha Miller*

The stone mirror absorbs your image and traps you under its skin. It's been empty for far too long, and you fit perfectly in the holes. I watch from a distance as you disappear. You're made of pretty colors, reds and pinks and blue-purple veins that tug down your eyelids and pull up your drooping lips, and now you splatter the mirror with that paint. It does not reflect you, but takes, takes, takes your blush, your off-moonlight teeth, your eyes. You look a bit like a painting. Maybe something modern. I don't understand art, but I think I'll hang you on a wall.

Wisdom Teeth | *Samantha Miller*

My wisdom teeth came in when I was seventeen
and I wouldn't have noticed
if not for the vague feeling of too much matter in too little space,
too many marbles cracking around my head, too many neurons stabbing
into my skin, a trillion ants begging for the same stale vanilla cupcake crumb—
Sometimes I wonder why humans have things
like knowledge of the sprawling, twinkling universe
when we can't even handle a few extra teeth.

Humbug | *Jamie Hayes*

ladies, gentlemen,
the things you are about to see aren't real
and never have been.
that's the humbug—the lie.
but visitor, should you grip the leading gloved hand,
you may find more than you bargained for
in the after-hours carnival tangle.
behind closed doors—locked but
easy to pick, knock in the right way—
a man pulls out his beating heart
and presents it with a blood-stained smile.
if you know the right tent,
the sharp-toothed boy proposes cards
with more than money on the line.
for the right price, the star-eyed girl
gives a glimpse of your own most private soul
through the cards, but not the one you choose.
tread softly stranger, through the
singing in a foreign tongue that fades
to animal snarls, with knife in hand.
remember, torch-bright visitor, we won't forget,
you don't belong here, out of the cage,
and truths—not lies—have dagger claws
you can't pull out
when the curtain closes.

Stuck in Countdown | *Jamie Hayes*

late night insomnia dreams—
it's still night if you don't go to sleep,
if they don't put you back in your cage—
i am caged, wrapped in your straightjacket embrace,
my throbbing heart in its prison of bone.
the protest has already begun, sluggish slosh
through treebranch veins only enough to pin and needle
limbs to sleep. too much. not
enough.
a gift you don't seem to have, what luxury.
your pulse has been given full reign, to beat unbridled,
to assault—audibly, palpably—the fallout shelter reject
to whom sleep has laid no claim,
like a bomb stuck in countdown.
we are a bomb stuck in countdown.
and i have to wonder if you even notice,
if you even care. the detonation—
beeping, blaring—a cry stuck in
my raw throat, flooding my silent mouth,
trickling like blood down my chin.
are your eyes closed, lover? are your ears too full
of the sound of your own steady breaths?
not selfish, no, just fucking oblivious.
you can't ignore it anymore, this imminent explosion scream.
diffuse or destroy, in your hands.
remember, the clock is ticking.

The Invisible Thing | *Jamie Hayes*

dying star explosions shatter overhead
with a bass-heavy echo in our chests
and off concrete walls claustrophobic
with the nervous twitch percussion.
on shatterglass feet in the broken shell, we stand
throwing ash on the invisible thing.
flick finger apologies through fog:
i can't be of more help even if it is mine;
you know just as well as me.
(i know nothing.)
nothing more than the smear of ink
bruised knuckles brush across rough cheeks
with feral grins hiding whatever beneath
the world needs protecting from
ready to issue from the silent-scream throat
through lips taught to stitch shut.
(a hero in the painted picture you see something else in.
is lying heroic?)
all i know is the thing i need to find,
before sparkler eyes snuff out and away,
from choking stifled hourglass fistfuls of ash.

Beneath My Mother's Quilt | *Amanda Gaines*

Beneath my mother's quilt
I lay placid, bunched between my small sisters

Whose warm, sweet breath tickles my neck and
Whose tight-coiled ringlets weave seamlessly into my own.

Emissions from the TV set glow softly above our faces,
Creating a cohesive halo of gold.

Six eager eyes poke out from between folds of
Indigo spotted triangles, purple dragonflies, and tangerine petals blooming in boxes.

A searching hand emerges to my left, fumbling in the quiet darkness for
A buttery bite—

breaking the hush of the room,
Meticulously crunching, emitting a low sigh.

Thirty tiny toes wriggle beneath a sea of
Pink and white paisley, dancing cherries, and lavender-licked lines

Set into squares.
Layers of batik, cotton, damask, flannel, and plush sewn in pressed patterns—

Our limbs threaded together – legs with suntans layer legs with sidewalk scrapes—
Our living, breathing embroidery.

Handmade seams warming our slow-blinking bodies
Beneath my mother's quilt.

An Open Note to the Girl Who Wanted to Wait Until Marriage | *Melina Bourdeau*

You wanted to save it not so
Much because God deemed it so
But because it was a gift that you could give
With a natural phosphorescent glow around it.
It was to be shared with one other body
And them alone.

“We all know Jesus hung around
prostitutes and basically dated Mary
Magdalene,” at least that's what your
Mom told you in defense of why she
never went to church on Sundays.
“If Sunday is the Sabbath and I should
rest, let me sleep in and decide what I
want to do with it. I pray to God when
I need to and if he's the man the bible
says he is then he'll forgive my sins.”

You wanted it to be special and perfect
You daydreamed about flowers, not roses,
No, but tiger lilies and off-white sheets.
In fall or winter when the temperatures
Dipped below skin that could sweat at dusk,
Which was when it would take place, of course.
You didn't know what you would wear or
Which gender they'd be or
What would happen after (Sleeping? Cuddling?)
But it would be on your wedding night.

Mom told you that she had lost hers at 18,
But that was the 90's and “people did things so
Differently then. I was in high school and
It was the man that I later got engaged to,
Tim Shay. We were together for four years,
Before I met your father.”

You explained why you didn't want to do it
Several times to boyfriends,
Their clammy hands touching the edge of your skirt or
The left pocket of your jeans where
You kept your flip phone where you kept
A self portrait as your background. You
Wanted to wait until marriage,
That worked 33% of the time.
You didn't feel ready,

That worked 40% of the time.
You liked going to third base, both parties came,
Wasn't that enough?
That worked 17% of the time.
You hadn't been dating for very long,
Rushing things was bad for relationships,
That worked 10% of the time.
You didn't want to, don't ask again,
That worked 0% of the time.

"Your body is a temple, whoever you let inside it
might mark the place up with footprints
or track in mud or tear the shades. You need
to treat your temple the way
that you would behave in church.
It should be clean, quiet, and beautiful.
It should be holy and sacred.
You wouldn't deface a church,
would you?
You're responsible
for anything that happens to your church,
and it will be your fault if something does.
Take care of your temple, it's the only one you get,"
your mom told you when you were too
young to understand what she meant.

You thought she was referring to
Legends of the Hidden Temple
on Nickelodeon.

You were dating for five months,
you wanted to be together for at least a year.
You consumed two coke and rums in a Camelback
water bottle, three shots of whatever Lexi had, then
You finished Kate's handle of whip cream vodka.
you wanted to stay straight edge.
He told you that you couldn't talk to Adam anymore
or Jessica or Hope or Devon or Kyle and especially
not Kara.
you would tell all your friends about it
the morning after, maybe you would start
a family.
Eric drove you both back to school,
It was only about one in the afternoon
At the Blarney Blowout and you were
Drunk. You don't remember how you
Got into his building or if anyone

Was even at the desk. You don't remember
Why you went inside. He blew four lines
Of coke off his desk, you laid on the bed
In a haze. You could see the little white
Pellets that collected in his nose, because
Contrary to what you had seen on TV, not
All of it gets into his body. He blows his nose
So he can kiss you, that was your one request
From him, aside from asking him to stop.
You're both on the molasses colored hardwood
Floor, but it goes back and forth between the
Wall and floor while you straddle him or he, you?
You don't remember where the female condom
Came from or how it got inside of you.

He told you, "Come sit on me. Just sit on me."
 you wanted him to tell you he loved you.
You were on the hardwood floor, by his dresser.
 you wanted to be on a bed, with the covers
 draped over you.
You were still wearing most of your clothes, the
only thing missing were your Walmart purple cotton
underpants that were two sizes too big.
 you wanted to be naked with another person.
You don't remember how you ended up bent over
the side of his bed.
 you wanted to look into each other's eyes like
 Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams did in
 that chick flick. Such a stupid, shitty movie.
And when it ended, you were still drunk,
but also vacant.
 you wanted to feel planetary, whole.

When you told Mom, she told you that,
"I had my first abortion when I was 19.
Your grandmother brought me to the
hospital to have it done.
Before that
point I had only heard about what it was
as a concept.
It got rid of a pregnancy.
They didn't tell me it was going to hurt
so badly I wouldn't walk for two
days. They didn't tell me that my fiancé
would leave me after it happened.
They didn't tell me that I would
have cramps and the worst
menstruation there ever was. I wasn't

ready to have a baby.
The second time,
when you were in sixth grade,
the doctors told me the baby
wouldn't make it to term,
it was so sick from the pollution
in my body from the appendicitis.
I didn't want to kill my baby
but I couldn't lose them
a few months later.
I know that God will forgive me,
I pray for my sins every night."

Now you cry in the shower every
Wednesday.

O- | *Melina Bourdeau*

When the phlebotomist drew your blood
you had more than 2/3 lymphocytes
originating from the stem cells in
your bones.
You were fighting off shingles
with your agranulated white blood cells. Raising the
body temperature like I used to, but they beat
in your Aztec heart, through your Atlanta-air lungs,
up and around your aorta into that Boston brain.

The cells last 120 days inside your
body, circulating then getting filtered
out, away from your veins and arteries.
We lasted a little over twice as long, but your kidneys
filtered me out, too.
They must have produced
more erythropoietin to try to warn you.
Like you tried to warn me, tried to warn me.

Lymph nodes pushed me to the surface of your
skin, warmed by the infection, throbbing the
epithelial tissue.
It turns Georgia-O'Keefe-flower pink.
Now I lay in your hair like lice.
I weave among your black homemade vinegar shampoo hair, rubbing
the morning sweat you sweep away under your
beanie. Even they shrink away from my touch.

Now I can no longer feel your soft, round capillaries squeezing me
unassisted in the hours where only smooth and cardiac muscle persist.
I can no longer carry your oxygen for you or run to collect you more in
your favorite dull red velvet cake batter.
I can no longer pass your slender neurons and hear the thoughts snapped
through your synapses.
I can no longer weave through fascicles of skeletal muscles in your legs
when you run through the Rat City.

Your temperature is now at 96.8 degrees. Your lymphatic
system has pushed all of the wounded white blood cells out
of your body through exocytosis. They have chewed away
at the virus, biting out what their cell could contain, which
wasn't much, and valiantly died. They don't record their history
in the nucleosis. The only memory of the virus in your body
is the anti-bodies that will protect you
for next time.

Homeostasis begins
without me.

The Rabbit | *Melina Bourdeau*

There are a couple centimeters of skin
that you can pull off of my arms,
where muscles have atrophied
for two years from underuse.
The skin is soft, but when
you pinch it you can feel a
grid of tissue intersecting and
connecting like a network of
swamp vines.

What no one tells you when
you're on crutches is that
you can't let the rubber head
at the top dig into your
armpit too much. Your
skin will get red and swollen.
your hands will get
tough and sometimes have
little ghostly blisters
that will fade, but never
disappear completely.

Every movement that you make
will require your core,
suck it in, suck it up,
you use upper body.
It isn't like walking
at all. Your leg is a point
on a mathematical compass.

When you try to be
independent from your
crutches you're
forced to learn how to
maneuver yourself around
by using stable objects.
You become a leech
and the only nutrient
you yearn for is
movement.

When you have to get to
the fields that are behind
your high school, for
soccer, you have to leave

right after the last bell.
You wear your practice
clothes, because you've
adapted, little leech, you
know what you can fit onto
your metamorphic body.

You know the trail that
would be fastest for your
weak fleshy body so you
can get to practice on time.
Coach would never accept
it if the captain was late,
he was already upset that
your transformation out
of the cocoon was into
a leech and not a moth.
You weren't attracted to the
lights. You stayed in the dark
away.

When you pass the fenced
track, carrying the weight of
blood movement that you
sucked out of people for
six hours, eight including
when your mother had to pull
down your pants for you to
pee, you pass a dead rabbit.

Its grey fur looked like
your leg, fading in color.
you stopped your extend,
pull, hop pattern to stare at
it.

For a calculated eight
weeks you passed by
the rabbit. It never ran,
hopped, pulled its long
legs apart and together.
It bloated. The rabbit
burst, infected with other
parasites that ate away
at its movement. Fiber
by fiber, the skeletal
muscles to tendons
dissipate into the

creatures. You watch
in horror every day you
pass, but you don't
change your route to
get up to the field.
The moths never see
the rabbit.

Moths fly into lights
all the time. They bump
off their dust. If human
hands touch the tiny
scales made from hairs
that allow them to fly,
their movement
is seized and they are
crippled. They kill
themselves in
order to get light. They
blind themselves, fly
into flames or cars.
Eventually, light
mars and kills them.

Your bite does not cause
pain. You rely on people
in order to live. You
need help in order to
survive.

And you do survive.

Fifteen | *Chelsea Hahn*

Mom

That was what I yelled
at fifteen years old
at midnight
after the worst phone call of my life

It's Grandma

Running up two flights of stairs
my feet couldn't move fast enough
from the chilling basement
to the vacant living room
up the dark stairs
hoping not to miss a step

She can't breathe

Neither can I.
Normally my grandmother is
the life of the party
always yelling
telling dirty jokes and crazy stories
about her cat in heat
or her song Bye, Bye Cherry
not to be confused with Bye, Bye Blackbird
but today, the Fourth of July,
I didn't hear her voice
towering over everyone else

Mom? I'll be right over

My own mother's voice
filled with worry
as I stood in the dark,
Immobile.
Terrified.
My mother rushed out of the house.
My dad and I waited.

Call Dino

The first words my mom spoke to me
over the phone
I searched
for the number
fingers frantically finding it
and punching panicked in the numbers of cousins

Hey Sweetie

The soothing sound of my cousin Erica
walking through the door
with her worried eyes fixed on me.
Now my dad leaves
hardly speaking a word
slamming the door closed.
I hear the engine start
on his way to meet my mom at the hospital.

Why didn't we call 911 first?

This is what we say now.
It's all we can think about,
that week that marks the age of fifteen.
The week of hoping
it would all turn around,
and she would get better.

Artemis and Actaeon | *Stephanie Rubright*

In the heart of a hidden clearing she waded, stowed
away beyond the depths of man, save for one witness.
Upon a break from his bow, a scent of rainwater, too
prevailing for worldly senses, brought him to a brilliant
blue grotto. Much more than a single glimpse, he
watched her bathe in moonlight. The stars showered
porcelain skin filled with red wine. Misty, silver luminescence

stuck on wet locks, the hair fanned as she submerged. The
fragile light replenished naked skin, the cove shrouding in
its fine steam. The voyeur's tongue slacked, hedonism
and a slash of awe flowing over, thinking himself a mortal
Dionysus. Acoustics of the forest amplified the pleasure she

sought from tense muscles. It was a play that demanded
no audience. The sounds of splashing and the humming
in a smooth contralto made a goddess seem human.
Waves of fresh-milled soap and damp earth spiced with
jasmine and myrrh drifted through the forest. She emerged
pink and soft, bare limbs glistening as small feet touched the
ground and made flowers sprout. Breasts were hidden

under raven hair as droplets hung from flesh like diamonds;
forever an adept distraction from contorting lips and a beastly snarl.

Giving Thanks to the Boys in Blue | *Stephanie Rubright*

It was barely a kiss,
one quick and dainty
on his cheek.
But his eyes still crinkled
and a smile grew
wide with just
a sliver of teeth.
He felt the peach
fuzz from her
nose and welcomed
the inferno erupting
within his chest.

It was a shock when
she stepped into him,
an intimacy of bare
skin touching and his
pulse fluttered like wings
of a trapped
bird. The girl,
anonymous,
named abandoned
in that dreamlike moment
she broke from the depths
of obscurity
and strolled along
a street corner.

She laughed against
his cheek, hair gold
and eyes bright like
a creek that sparkled.
The kiss was weightless,
a guarantee of no promises.
There were sirens
in the air, but his badge
laid forgotten in
his pocket.

Wind | *Stephanie Rubright*

A surge of waves in an open sky,
it caresses the earth countless
times, sighing through
valleys and raging along seas.

But it also makes a child cry
when it plays with his balloon,
and it ruins a date as a girl walks,
fluttering her skirt and leaving

shining hair tangled like a bird's
nest. It presses against your car,
pushing it to the center of the road,
brushing branches against

windows late at night in an
unsettling tease. The same
gust that steers paper boats
and allows kites to kiss the sky

chose which city
settled, buried, under
the ash and rock of Vesuvius.
Powered by whims of spontaneity,

clever Zephyr tugs at your
thin coat, breathes on your neck,
and drifts beside idle thoughts.

Confessions of a Fraudulent Bigfoot | *Thomas Lubben*

A legend dies with me—
and all of Oregon.
The sleepless nights, the flashlight rites,
the campsites by the stream
are moving past my gnarled trees
to other visions.

Oh, I would stay ahead—
when I was younger.
Holed deep within September woods
my costume wilded,
I'd patch an arm, the hairy head,
and watch the news.

Another day, and see—
I'm on the trail:
the trail I mapped so long ago,
the campsites by the stream
the dusk-fed loons and gnarled trees;
the deadstill night.

When I began, the dark
would often scare me.
That shock of "up": the wild sky—
I'd stare through prison bars
of curled limbs and peeling bark
and trample home.

Before I die, I'll climb
a tree and pull
its crisping branches back, and breathe
breathe in that blue-white sky.
I lived a myth, but never primed
an honest one.

I know myths do exist,
much more than I.
To find them takes a journey, though,
and sleepless nights, and flashlight rites,
and campsites by the stream.
And all my life.
It's time for me to die and move along.

Iowa Corn | *Thomas Lubben*

With such hills, Iowa corn's an ocean
that splashes blue and gold along the tumbling green

and flashes fresh in the dawning

The corn opens free in the morning wind
and flings the sparrows, winging bards,

dancing above the coursing fields that seep into hills and valleys sweeping
endless

In summer, you'd take to the silkwet grass
bare feet skimming, sliding

cross hedges of horseweed, roads of early gravel too damp for dust
alfalfa steaming incense at the roadside

By the time winter dries you up,
the birds take warm songs elsewhere.
The tree in the morning questions itself
When all it sees is its same self back
in the mirror of the snow.

The sea is sunk into frozen sand, and only stalks stretch the lonely ground;
plumes, the foam of a million waves, now scattered bones and bristles

But what before would break horizon in a thousand showering colors,
that would deck the valley in post-storm red

and challenge the Old Man Thunder,

releases itself to a fearless sun, to frozen hilltops sinking by

and what before was endless ocean

is now eternal sky

What Shrinks in Autumn Wind | *Thomas Lubben*

The time when the gray barn slouched in the autumn stiff,
when the dead leaves gold, red, orange flurried through its windows,
the time when the old goat, restless, trotted back and forth, forth and back, as if
his pen had somehow shrunk in the coldwind blows,

It was then, in a battered jacket, to the field east,
where a few trees stretch the sky over still-green prairie,
that you left the house, that seemed so somehow shrunk, to make a rush that dared to freeze
your fingertips and your eyes, stung bright with air.

It was miles since, with your jacket slung behind,
with the forest snow clumping under your shoes—in the evening—
when you reached him. And the travel there, you questioned once—but never once denied.
And you see the world behind you somehow shrink.

I Once Slept on the Floor | *Anna Schless*

I once slept on the floor of my love for you
For seven hours.

And I had a dream of an existence

Where the world

was bright pink

And God was real.

but then God ran out of paper And we all drank death
to eu lo gi ze

the desperate death of desperation

And waking up was the best part of a dream I'd waited for
which seems to be the way things go anymore.

| fiction |

The Time Given to Us | *Elena Macias*

It was a quarter after five when the funeral services had ended but because of daylight savings, it felt much later. Halfway through the services, Wyatt Chase decided to opt out of the family dinner that was to be held at his Aunt Janet's house, feeling emotionally drained and exhausted from the entire day. Accepting half-hearted condolences, sitting through several eulogies, and realizing that he would never see or hear his beloved grandmother again took a toll on Wyatt's mental health. When he told his father his intentions to skip out on the dinner, his father gazed at him disappointedly.

"You need to go," his father said lowly. "Your aunt has worked hard putting this dinner together. You need to be there."

Wyatt closed his eyes, trying to keep his temper under control. He figured his father would react in this manner, would try to make him feel guilty for wanting time alone.

"I know that, Dad," sighed Wyatt. "But I really need some time by myself."

Everyone was mingling around the church's entrance, some speaking about the upcoming dinner while others spoke fondly about his grandmother. His father's eyes swept over the room before he took Wyatt firmly by his upper arm and steered him toward a secluded area where no one would overhear their conversation.

"You don't need time by yourself," his father said. "You need to be with your family. This is a difficult time for everyone."

"I understand that," Wyatt replied. "But I just need space. I promise I'll head over to Aunt Janet's once I've pulled myself together. I just need a couple of hours to not be around anyone."

His father inhaled sharply, pinched the bridge of his nose, and turned away from Wyatt. Wyatt felt like he needed to say something to him, to comfort him, to make him understand his point of view. These last few days had been especially hard on his father and Wyatt knew that. But when he opened his mouth to speak his peace, his father rounded on him and pointed a threatening finger at him.

"Wyatt, you need to stop being selfish," said his father sternly. "This is a hard time for everyone—*everyone!*" He emphasized the word with a jab to Wyatt's chest. "You are not the only one hurting!"

Wyatt jumped at his father's tone. He clenched his fists and tried to keep his tears at bay, his body buzzing with anger. When Wyatt felt a fat, salty tear roll down his cheek, he knew he failed.

"No, I'm not the only one hurting," seethed Wyatt. "But I'm the only one expected to keep it to myself and play the obedient son!"

With that, Wyatt spun on his heel and stormed off before his father could react. He maneuvered quickly through his family members, ignoring their questions and curious gazes. As he drew nearer to his car, he dug through his pant pocket for his keys. Once inside, Wyatt turned on the engine and sped away from the church.

He knew he shouldn't be driving in his emotional state but he had to get away. He had to get away from all of them, his family and their pitying glances. He hated pity, always had, and today was filled with it. He could see it in their eyes and hear it in their voices. All he wanted to do was to get away from it.



Wyatt didn't know how far he had driven or even where he was going. After a while, he stopped at a rundown gas station near a rickety, wooden bridge. He stepped out of his car and made his way over to the ledge of the bridge and looked into the murky water below. He gazed unfocusedly at the reflection of the crescent moon and let his mind trail into darker depths.

It would be easy, he thought somberly. So easy... to just climb onto the ledge... and...

"Ooh, that's quite a fall, isn't?"

Later, Wyatt would deny jumping out of his skin and screeching in a very unmanly manner. But that was precisely what he had done when he realized he wasn't alone. Standing next to him was a girl, never mind how old, with almond-shaped brown eyes, dark hair streaked gold, and olive skin. She leaned over the ledge, both her palms pressed down as she tilted forward on the tips of her toes. Wyatt eyed her with a mixture of curiosity and annoyance.

"Who the hell are you?" exclaimed Wyatt.

She turned her attention to him, startled, but smiled widely.

"Astrid," she said brightly. "My name's Astrid. And something tells me you need someone to listen to your troubles."

"Where did you come from?" asked Wyatt.

Astrid turned, hopped onto the ledge of the bridge and sat down, leaning slightly toward Wyatt.

"Around," she replied vaguely.

Wyatt snorted and turned away from her. He sought seclusion from the world and instead it followed him. He had no idea who this girl was, had never seen her before in his life, and yet she continued to gaze at him with sincerity and patience. He cleared his throat and avoided making eye contact with her.

"Look, I don't know who you are or why you followed me," started Wyatt, "but I'm really not in the mood to be around people. I've had a long, exhausting day and just want to be alone."

She didn't respond. Wyatt wanted nothing more than to hop back into his car and drive away from here but he was too ashamed to face his father and the rest of his family and, despite his irritation toward the girl, felt it would be rude to just leave her alone at the side of the road. He didn't even know how or when she got here since he hadn't heard another car drive up.

"You lost someone."

Wyatt felt his heart leap at her gentle tone. He turned to look at her, expecting to find the same pitying look in her eyes that he had seen all day, but was relieved to see that she appeared to look more pensive than sympathetic. It eased his irritation toward her and he found himself nodding.

"Yeah, yeah I did," he confirmed, voice cracking slightly.

"Who?"

"My, uh, my grandmother."

"You two were close," said Astrid softly.

He was surprised to hear her words coming out as more of a statement and not a question. Wyatt didn't understand why but he suddenly felt compelled to pour his heart out to this girl.

So that's what he did.

He confided in her the last week or so after being told his grandmother had died, how her death was unexpected, and blindsided all of them. He told her how stressed out everyone was these last couple of days leading up to her memorial services. He explained how guilty he felt when it came to being involved in the grim preparations and his desire to go back to school where he had several assignments for three different classes due.

Astrid did not speak during his confessions. She listened patiently and with the utmost attention. She spoke only once to inquire about the kind of a woman his grandmother had been in her life. Wyatt's somber tone grew lighter when he discussed his grandmother, smiling softly when he remembered how she used to shoo everyone out of the kitchen when she cooked or chuckling with deep fondness when she used to yell at the Dodgers when they were losing. He told Astrid how she cursed like a sailor and loved her family fiercely. He felt this invisible weight being lifted from him with undeniable relief as he told Astrid of how his grandmother loved to travel and how she would talk to anyone who would listen.

"My grandfather was in the army," Wyatt explained, "so he was always being stationed somewhere new and obviously my grandma, dad, and aunt would follow. My grandma loved traveling and exploring new places." He paused, his smile dropping as he gazed at his clasped hands. "It's something she wished for us to have. But I don't know if I even have it in me anymore."

Astrid tilted her head.

"Why not?" she asked.

"She's not here anymore," Wyatt answered, shrugging one shoulder. "She was always the first person I would tell everything to. Now who am I going to tell?"

Astrid sighed deeply. She slid off the ledge and went to stand beside Wyatt. She looked up into the inky, glittery sky.

"'To die is an awfully big adventure'," she quoted softly.

The quote conjured up a childhood memory of Wyatt listening to his grandmother reading *Peter Pan* to him with rapt attention, her soothing voice encouraging him to clap his hands to save Tinker Bell.

"J.M. Barrie," said Wyatt promptly. "If I'm not mistaken."

"Quite right," said Astrid absently. "The man was onto something." She shook her head, snapping out of her trance and turned to Wyatt. "Your grandmother's adventure on this Earth may be over but now she's on another. And you? Putting your own adventures on hiatus? I don't think she'd be very happy with you if she knew the kind of thoughts you've been having lately."

Wyatt swallowed the lump in his throat and looked away. "No," he admitted. "I don't think she would."

"She wouldn't want you to wallow in despair," Astrid went on. "She would want you to honor her by using the time given to us to do something extraordinary. Don't waste it."

Astrid placed a warm hand on top of Wyatt's. Startled, he looked at her questioningly.

"Live," she said emphatically. "For her."

She took her hand back and smiled. Wyatt felt the tears prickling his eyes but they were not tears of sadness anymore. Afraid to speak and lose his cool, Wyatt simply nodded to convey that he understood. Astrid's eyes brightened.

"Great!" she said, delighted. "Then my work here is done."

Wyatt blinked, confused. Astrid gave him a firm nod, spun around, and began walking away. Wyatt made to follow her but something in him told him not too—at least, not just yet.

"Wait!" he called. "Where are you going?"

Astrid turned back to him, walking backwards as she did. Her lips were curled in a sphinxlike smile alongside a mischievous glint in her eye.

"On an adventure, of course!" Astrid exclaimed.

Wyatt grinned. He bowed his head and gave one last short wave.

"See you around, Wyatt Chase," she called to him, waving.

Wyatt waved once more before heading over to his car. It was just as he was beeping his car open when he realized he did not recall telling Astrid his name. He spun around, brows furrowed.

"Wait, how do you know—"

His question died on his lips when Astrid was nowhere to be seen. Perplexed, Wyatt scanned the area around the empty gas station and the bridge they previously occupied for any sign of Astrid before ultimately giving up. He shook his head and got into his car. He did not immediately start the engine but simply sat and pondered the past hour. For the first time since his grandmother's passing, Wyatt felt at peace and the sorrow he had been experiencing did not suffocate him as it once had. His discussion with Astrid truly did help him. Perhaps all he needed was someone to confide in. He breathed in deeply before finally starting the engine.

He had a family dinner to attend, a grieving father to apologize to, and wild adventures to start planning.

He would make her proud.

He Kindly Stopped for Me | *Jaclyn Reed*

“911. What is your emergency?”

The operator’s breathing was so gentle, crackling against the speaker and into my ear, a mechanical static. I wanted to respond, but I couldn’t force my mouth to move. My hand trembled against the cold, clicking the phone against my diamond earrings.

“Hello? This is 911. Do you have an emergency?”

I’m here. I really promise I am.

I searched desperately for my lips, using the cold smoke that rose from them as my guide. They choked on the air, or maybe on the blood. I could taste it crawling up my throat, hot and rusted.

The pain was gone now, drained out on the sticky, cracked asphalt.

“Hello?”

Don’t hang up. I’m here.

I could hear her fake nails tapping—the hallow sound of acrylic against a hard surface.

Don’t get impatient with me, please. I’m trying.

I closed my eyes and begged my lips. Just one word. I only needed one word. The seconds ticked by. I clenched my side, no longer able to feel where the fabric ended and the inside of my stomach began.

“Help.” I think it came out. I couldn’t feel my lips move, but I’m positive I heard something, some hushed, painful sound, escape.

The tapping stopped, and the crackling static. I said it again, forcing the word out into a dry puff of smoke.

“Ma’am,” she said, and a new clicking started in the background, “can you tell me your emergency?”

I can barely tell you I need help.

I sighed, feeling my chest collapse in the sudden release of trapped air, crushing my lungs. “Hurt,” I growled, my teeth clenched together. “Alley.” Words. Key words. Need key words.

I looked past the garbage, the rats, the chipped bricks, and the fire escape. I looked at the street, at the green sign under a dead lamp. My vision twisted and confused the white, block letters. North? South? No, North. Definitely North.

“North...” I told her, forcing my eyes to stay open. “North Cameron...Street?”

It might have been avenue.

“All right, ma’am. Just hold on while I triangulate your call.”

You couldn’t have done that earlier?

“Stay on the phone. The ambulance is on its way.”

The phone slipped into the red puddle around me. Muffled noise and inhuman clicking escaped the drowning speaker. I looked down and found my right hand limp on my lap, pale and open with a palm full of blood.

In a city this populated, you’d think someone would have passed by. You’d think someone – a junky, a party girl, an insomniac, would have seen me, or seen him, running away with my purse.

I'd settle for a dog. A leashed dog running from its careless, high-heeled owner in a fur coat. It'd smell the blood, maybe. Come over and lick my cheek until it warmed up, lie on my hand until I could feel it again.

I thought death would be quieter, less painful, warmer maybe. I thought I'd be in my bed or a hospital, or maybe nowhere—die on impact in a car crash or from a bullet to the head—but not in an alley in this damn city. Not from bleeding to death. I'd thought I'd see a white light, see the Grim Reaper materialize beside me, long cloak, scythe, and all. Like a poem—a carriage drawn by horses. A quiet slipping into eternity.

The numbness overtook me. I was thankful for it. The cold ceased and my senses faded, until I could no longer feel the wound, and I could no longer smell the garbage or hear the rats' nails scratching up and down the blacktop.

Why did I move here? Everyone told me it was a bad idea. Everyone told me it was dirty and loud and full of crime. They told me not to go out at night, not to walk alone, not to do anything alone. And what did I do? I went out alone, ran away from my roommate and her incessant moaning, her incapacity to close the door while her boyfriend was over, her horribly annoying laugh.

But I carried a knife like they told me to, and I had pepper spray in the purse he took. Ironical, the knife I carried to protect myself was the one he used to kill me.

I liked that knife, too. It was a good knife. It had a blue handle.

I looked at the phone, dim but not dark yet. Seconds ticked by on the call timer; the muffled instructions and calm reassurances carried on, but I could barely make them out. A word here or there. Ten minutes and counting.

How long have I been here? When did I leave the house?

I followed the creeping line of my black puddle. It was pretty, really. There was so much, and it just kept going. It seeped into the cracks and flowed away like tiny streams.

I closed my eyes and couldn't open them again. There it was: the exhaustion, the fading of life, the peaceful drifting. It'd be over before they could get here. All over. All done. It's not so bad now. The pain's gone. The cold is gone. The blood crept up my throat, but it didn't taste so bad.

The sudden cry of a distant siren. It approached sluggishly, winding down many streets. I couldn't open my eyes. I let my head rest on the red bricks behind me, let my breath slow until my chest barely moved.

At one point, it sounded like the siren passed me, like it drove on and disappeared, but then I heard it again coming closer.

I hoped it would stop for me.

Three Diamonds | *Jaclyn Reed*

They sat at the very back of the restaurant with a tea light lit between them, the flames dancing in shadows around the glasses of red wine. Her teeth shone white every time she smiled, even in the dim room, and with every flash of them, his eyes lit up. He tugged carefully at the sleeves of his charcoal suit jacket, trying to hide the sweat collecting on his palms.

The box weighed down his entire leg, snugly packed into his pocket, waiting. The waiter came around with more water, and she thanked him in her magical little voice, one that simultaneously whispered a secret and echoed through a room. It was impossible not to listen to, impossible not to love more with every gentle syllable. He swallowed hard as the waiter left, and gave the maître d' a subtle wave. Suddenly, from out of the waiter's corner, a tall, thin man appeared in an elegant black tuxedo and began playing "A Thousand Years" on a cherry wood violin. The restaurant quieted as everyone turned to see what was going on.

It took less than a minute for her to realize what song was playing. She looked back at him with astonishment, and before she could ask for an explanation, he was on his knee in front of her, holding the liberated box in his warm hand, open and presenting a white gold band imprinted with small accent stones and three diamonds, two slightly smaller than the third, mounted on twisting prongs. The violin hushed, fading into the background like the score of a movie, just loud enough to enhance the moment.

Her hand clasped quickly around her mouth, and her eyes watered. She wished she would have worn waterproof make up; if only she'd known.

His mind both raced and stood still. Countless memories flooded back, memories he'd long since forgotten in the course of his life. As they came to him, he said them aloud. He told her of the first time they met, of their first kiss, even of their first time in the small motel by the shore. He chuckled as he recounted the time they walked home from church in the pouring rain, the time they went on the Tidal Wave at Hershey Park during the dead of fall, when it was only fifty degrees out and they had no change of clothes. She laughed with him, and a tear fell from her cheek and faded into the blackness of her skirt. He reached up to wipe away another as he told her how proud he was of her, of how much she had overcome.

His eyes went to the ground only for a moment as he collected himself, took a breath, and uttered the words, "Will you marry me?"

Something between a startled squeal and a cry of joy escaped her throat. She nodded rapidly, unable to even speak. He took her hand from her lap and slid the size five band on to her left ring finger, rolling it slightly to make sure the diamonds were perfectly centered. As it moved, the candle flames and yellow light from the dimly lit chandeliers above them glinted off of the stones. It showed the white light and the rainbow colors that came out of it, showed the depth and precision of the princess cut.

She fell to her knees and threw her arms around him as the diners raised their glasses and applauded the young couple. Several women wiped their eyes, careful not to smear their mascara.

He helped her to her feet as the maître d' brought a complimentary bottle of champagne to the table and poured them each a glass. The pastry chef, a young, blonde woman, presented a plate of assorted macaroons, truffles, and bite-sized cakes she made herself, also free of charge.

The staff slowly returned to their stations and the diners to their meals, all glancing now and again at the blissful couple at the corner table, sipping their champagne and sharing bites of dessert. They overheard many eager plans. Linen colors and flower bouquets, bridesmaids and wedding dresses, catering and invitations. He laughed and listened with open and accepting ears to the dreams his love had of their big day, of the day they'd both waited for so long.

She admitted that their new apartment, the one they only just moved into the week before, would become the headquarters of wedding planning, that her mother would want to be involved in everything – that they must let her celebrate them as much as she pleases because they both knew how she could be. She admitted her surprise over his proposal as she twirled the band around her finger and moved it continuously, watching the colors dance and disappear. For an hour they continued this way, every so often being watched or listened to without a care in the world.

He paid the check without letting her look at it. When she tried to reach across the table, he snatched her hand up and kissed it several times as he handed the book and his credit card to the waiter. Upon receiving the receipt, he stood and helped her put on her coat. They walked to the lobby, congratulated by numerous people along the way, and she waited by the glass revolving door until the valet brought around the car. He held the passenger door of his silver Taurus open for her, the heat already blasting her cold hands, the November air raging outside. He got in and began down the road.

It was a quiet time of night with few headlights on the road. She continued on about the phone calls she had to make once they got home, about how excited her mother would be, and her sister and her friends, about how they would all say it was about time, that they'd waited six years already.

He couldn't stop smiling. Occasionally, on a straightaway, he would steal a glance at her excited face, staring back at him with such happiness. He couldn't believe he'd put it there, that this woman would be the one he'd spend the rest of his life with. He couldn't believe how lucky—They're all lucky. The high school sweethearts. The best friends turned lovers. The couples that resemble something from the fairytale books. And how will it all end for them?

Would they be struck on the dark, winding mountain road on their way home from dinner? An 18-wheeler hydroplaning on the wet asphalt, tumbling down, knocking their Taurus into the divider. The windows shattering, spraying glass over the couple's faces, frozen in fear, screaming out for something to save them from the anticipated impact. Her hand hitting the dashboard, the diamonds flying loose, and when the authorities finally arrive, amidst the chaos, the Jaws of Life chewing off the mangled side panel, the three diamonds, detached from their twisting prongs, reflecting the white light fading into all the colors of the rainbow.

Would they get married quickly—set the date for the dead of winter in a small cabin perched on the top of a mountain? Only the nearest and dearest invited to celebrate their union, their magical day. Cutting the cake with an engraved silver knife and serving it with a matching crepe spade on to carefully chosen dishware. Dancing through the night by the soft purple up-lighting along the walls and the white gleam of the moon bouncing off gently falling snow and fragmenting in the wall of aged windows. Crawling into bed at the nearby lodge to pretend to make love for the first time, to

rekindle the same love they had when it really was the first time, when they were just kids playing house in an old motel room.

Would they live happily ever after in a house by the shore? Having children who spoke perfectly and never cried, until the third is born and comes down with a horrible case of colic. Sleeping a little less every night as the infant screams from her cradle, coughs and chokes. Banging their heads off the wood-paneled walls, trying to find an answer to the incessant noise, to sooth the little monster they still claim to love, to pay enough attention to the other children.

They're all lucky—all the sweethearts and lovers and characters. But all their stories have to—

| art |





| non-fiction |

The Present is the Place Where I Watch Movies | *Abigail McBride*

*The connection to the friend is secret
And very fragile. The image of that friendship*

*Is in how you love, the grace and delicacy,
The subtle talking together in full prostration,*

*Outside of time. When you are there,
Remember the fierce courtesy of the one with you.*
—“Fierce Courtesy,” Rumi

In order to get any kind of gravitational traction, the thing has to be biting you in the face. The earth only orbits the sun because right now great concentrically magnetic hugs pull in. No matter how many years the earth revolves around its star, the instant those hugs stop the relationship ends. Relationship, whether it exists between two orbiting planets or two people, can only exist in the present. Relationships of the past are history; relationships of the future are imaginary.

This relational present is the place I make mistakes. Take yesterday, for example. I called the Pennsylvania Farm Show to reserve a room for a field trip. I organize logistics for a program called Poetry in Place that teaches middle school children how to write poetry, and in January, the students will explore the farm show and write poems about the smell of cows; the taste of fried cheese; the colors of roosters. As soon as the events coordinator picked up, my phone started playing “Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go” by Wham!, starting with the song’s first few drumbeats and background chant of *jitterbug, jitterbug* while the singers snap their fingers. It was playing loudly as the woman on the other end of the phone said “Hello? Hello?” I hurriedly hung up. After I got my phone to stop playing, I called again.

To me, this incident became a story I told other people—a funny and memorable anecdote. It was a momentous deviation from my normal character: organized, timely, in control. But to the woman on the other end of the line, it was nothing. It meant nothing about me or my character, nothing of lasting value. She’s forgotten it, preoccupied in a daily maze of manila folders, stamped papers, stapled receipts.

More notable to her was her own classic mispronunciation of Monongahela, her emphasis on the strangest syllables. “You will be in the MON-on-ga-HAY-leh Room.” Her tongue slipped on the word. She laughed. “I never know how to say that word.” *That’s just so like me*, she thought. *I waste no time on complicated names, and look, I did it again. I focus on straightforward facts and schedules. Well, at least I got a good laugh out of it.* She’s starring in her own movie right now, a fully developed character who works amid paperwork but has a vivid inward life, an off-beat sense of humor. When she moves through her life, sometimes she is struck by visions of herself as this momentous movie star, a glorious Grace Kelly.

I’m not part of her movie; I didn’t really think her mispronunciation was funny. I didn’t even start laughing until I realized she was. *Of course, another person who can’t pronounce Native American names,*

I thought. *Another symptom of arrogance, the way we distance ourselves from the memory of history.* I started thinking about jitterbug again. At least after mistakes I can return to my room.

The present is the place I make my messes. When I walk in and open this door, wade through the clothes, and drop onto my bed, I survey the mess: bundles of clothes and underwear, crunched over papers, and a naked tampon just lying on the floor.

At the beginning of the semester, I didn't unpack for about five weeks. That's how immediate the tempest of work was. An unavoidable storm of six classes, three jobs, and social proximity. It felt so good, early this fall, when I finally got a chance to clean my room. It meant I had time to myself, and the cleanliness created space and kindness when I came back to my room. But the mess crept back.

A dirty room is a ritual at this point, moving through seasons of cleanliness but always gravitating back to entropy. Regardless of my resolve, my room dissolves to shit. I remember last year I took a big swallow of my new green tea only to realize I had mistaken it for a bottle that had been sitting on my desk for weeks. The thing growing in the bottle that I almost swallowed is one of my most grotesque memories.

When I look at this mess, I see an unavoidable weakness in a life that has to be, otherwise, impenetrable. We can only do so many things well. If I were to do this room well, something else would falter. Perhaps I actually view it as a badge of pride—a symbol of how consumed my time is. As long as my room is dirty, I know that I am going to my job; getting good grades; calling ladies who cannot pronounce “Monongahela.”

But to my roommate, my best friend, I am sure the situation appears differently. *Abigail is probably hanging out with Jon Barry tonight, makes sense why the room isn't clean. I don't mind if it's like that on her side, but I just could never live that way. I just couldn't do it. I don't know how she ever finds any of her clothes or homework.* I can see Madi's grimace now, the way she always says things like this—eyes wide and amazed, lips open and slightly turned down. What to me is an equation for success (dirty room = academic achievement) is to her an alien life form. *How does this inhabitant manage to find life within such an unwelcoming terrain?* She is just as busy as me, but somehow her side is always tidily active—shoes might be out and strewn, a desk drawer might be open, but space and freedom prevail. It stares at me from across the room, a symbol of a different way of life.

Unlike the lady on the telephone, in Madi's story I am a player—a character. If they made a movie about her life, I feel sure I would be there. Yet my presence must still be so distant to her, signified by mysterious messes while she continues moving through her own mysterious universe of intersecting movie plots. In her movie, I am there and alive, but my perspective is gone—it's only her perspective of my perspective.

When I say “my best friend, Madi,” she's mine. She's the series of jokes I've told or that have made me laugh. She's my advice and my listener. I often tell the story of first meeting her: “She's the first person I've ever become friends with instantly.” She pulled up outside of my dorm in a red Audi to give me a ride: a complete stranger. I entered her car, her space, and immediately fell in a complete, comfortable kind of love with her Beastie Boys CD and her rollicking, full-body-gestures humor: conniving, loony, self-deprecating. She's an oasis of complete understanding.

Meanwhile, away in the art studio, Madi says “my best friend, Abigail” and I’m hers. I’m the messy roommate, the person who can live with unintelligible piles of clothes. I’m the turner-on of lights, the paper rustler late at night. Her anecdote. I’m the one who came into her space, her car.

We’re both writing the scripts for our own movies. If the audience watches her version versus mine, the sympathy changes. They’re sucked into her world, partial to her orderly room and easy temperament. If I watched her movie, I would be sucked into her perspective, too, viewing myself as a stranger in a messy wardrobe. But in my movie the camera shifts, and suddenly the only way to be is slightly rougher, slightly more pessimistic, slightly more dubious of trust and commitment.

We live in this kind of magnetic double vision, each one of us trying to pull the other into our story while magically fulfilling their version of us. How can both ownerships be compatible? We walk hand in hand, each one of us believing we hold the other.

She’s right, though: part of the reason my room is always a mess is because I am with Jon Barry.

The present is the place I love. One of the smallest, most expansive comforts is just sitting with another person. In a world and a time when I schedule my days down to my fifteen minute breaks, watching TV feels like a kind of drug. I can’t really imagine anything that feels better than sitting close to him and relaxing my head against his shoulder. There is something so important, so vital about being wrapped up like that, feeling warmth behind and around you, being held. Surely everything else is smaller than this. In my movie, he is the person who holds, and everything is contained in the act of being held.

And yet his movie is playing, too. *Nothing is more important than holding someone else. Surely everything else is weaker than this feeling of going above and around another person. The whole universe shrinking into a moment on a couch where my arm protects another. In this world, she is the person-to-be-held, and everything completes in that moment.* He loves that I am short because he can pull me in; I love being short because I can be pulled in.

In his movie, I am more than a character; I am a plot point. I don’t know really how major or lasting, but wherever he is now, for the rest of his life, he has to know me. He has to mention me when recounting his college years; a girl he held on the couch while watching *True Detective*. If the audience were to file into that movie, I would be the female leading role, still not myself but consuming large sections of screen time. I become a fulfillment, where in my movie, he is the fulfillment.

These endless kaleidoscopic repetitions confuse any sense of absolute presence and layer me with expectations; lines to recite; perfectly timed entrances and exits. Nothing about relationships is objective or stable or even safe. Relationships work because of incompatible differences; if being held was best for everyone, no one would experience it. The double vision is the relationship; contradiction is unity. Sacrament is going to the movie theater every day and accepting roles in other people’s scripts, humbly watching unfolding stories and confronting my own slavery. Abdicating a desire to constantly put “my” in front of friend, boyfriend, stranger; but instead letting them claim me and seeing the vision that emerges from the chiaroscuro.

But I was not made to be endlessly significant, to figure in every story. As much as I am destined for the big screen, I am designed for anonymity.

After long days of playing roles in everyone else's movies, in holding tightly to the title of star in my own, there is nothing I find so relaxing as driving past long rows of countryside filled with small, glinting houses. The camera pans from all the cameos, characters, and co-stars to a land of pure oblivion, where my name will never be heard. All of this significance becomes muffled by darkness and unknown personalities, and misplayed songs, rumpled beds, and wrapped arms are couched in the secrets of seven billion people. In this realization, there is absolute release. It's like my consciousness is sublimated in a great sea, another universe suspended in aquatic space, where whales weighing many tons move endlessly through the shadows crossing the ocean floor in hundreds of miles of underwater tartan. I am one granule of plankton viewed through different shadows; different angles; different eyes of creatures strange and completely alien to my microscopic mind.

Punching Bags | Abigail McBride

Okay, so I have a question for you—when you look back on your life, is there any moment you can think of that is emotionally unambiguous or unadulterated? I know that’s kind of personal. A memory of a time when you felt purely sad or purely happy?

The key to an organic conversation is picking up on silence. Silence is urgent and absorptive. It expands when you push on it. Silence releases seeds into the air, seeds that are panting to be grown. Silence equalizes, and silence demands. Silence has its way.

All good questions grow out of silence. Questions are a creative way of probing; they are born from a sense that not everything is being told. They are echoes of the unspoken, reflecting things unknown, the power of silence that prevails over fragile connections. And questions create more mystery; the things left still unsaid, the hardness of saying.

I started asking my unadulterated moment questions because of a vast geographical kind of silence, a sensitively spatial one: a long distance relationship of mine with an emotionally distant furniture maker. I asked his silence to give me some purity; I asked for a memory. He told me a story about when he lived on the beach for the summer, a story about going to Cape May with other young people. As he was telling me, we were lying on his bed in Brooklyn, and I could hear the sound of his voice being overlaid by a stereo across the street. His voice continued with the beat, describing a day when he rode around in a jeep with his friends, close to the sun.

As he was telling, other voices also played in my mind. They reminded me why he enjoyed the beach so much: wild parties and girls on the beach. He never included those stories, but I made sure to mentally insert them. It was a silence carefully preserved and understood between us. He asked me the question in return; I also told him about summer.

When I was a child, my family went to Myrtle Beach for vacation in September. We were homeschooled, so we got away with it. The beach would spread itself out for us, and the warm air grew tired; sweet; *laissez-faire*. All eight of us climbed into our beach house, and we were like a tempest in this open airy house with breezes travelling all the way from the ocean, billowing the gauzy curtains, cooling the couches.

That summer, my two little brothers and I had collected Monarch caterpillars for a science project. I was flattered that my caterpillar was the only one that survived; I thought I was unlucky and was expecting the opposite. My brothers were all good at video games; my sister was a knife when it came to decisions. I was just “the queen of boo boos,” and I expected this experiment to follow suit.

One brother’s caterpillar simply died. The other climbed to the top of the jar—we gathered to witness a chrysalis—and promptly vomited a string. A tiny pupa slid out. “It looked almost demonic,” said Mom. Some wasps lay their eggs in the mouths of these caterpillars, eat out the inside, and crawl out, deserting the corpse. Homeschooling at its finest. Meanwhile, my caterpillar chose a quiet night to turn in a little green bag hanging from a delicate chain, crowned with tiny gold spikes.

At the beach this bag became like a clear plastic bag with an orange and black body inside. I watched when it squeezed itself out of the husk. If I had helped, blood would not have been pushed into the new wings. After this eruption, it had to lay silently, resting and pumping its wings. I had

always been fascinated by butterflies and longed to touch one. Now, I felt I was doing it a favor by letting it sit safely on my chubby, childish finger. *This is magic*, I thought. I was helping something else by receiving something I had always longed for. We went out to dinner; I placed it on a leaf. When we came back, it was gone.

The question proved good; I asked it again.

“Eddie, can you tell me a time, a memory, that is unambiguous for you? Just pure emotion? Happy or sad, I know that’s personal.” If a caterpillar was pure, it was about to get purer.

Eddie’s dad is a guy who likes hunting; Eddie is a guy who does not. Eddie’s dad is also the kind of guy who likes his sons to be the kinds of guys who like to hunt.

“I’ve never liked killing anything,” Eddie said. Eddie speaks quietly, studies medicine, and reads Vonnegut (if that makes a difference). “I couldn’t swat at bugs or even flush spiders down the toilet for my mother when she found them in the shower.” I immediately picture a screaming woman in a towel and Eddie sneaking a spider downstairs; surreptitiously sliding the door; faking a flush in another bathroom.

Eddie had perfected the art of pretending to be the kind of guy who likes to hunt. He missed shots; he never saw any game. He would hide in the woods, going a separate direction from his father, sitting in blinds while passed over by hawk shadows; squirrel talks; deer glances. But the day Eddie told me about was not like those other days, those peaceful ones. He was with his dad when a magnificent, huge racked buck leapt in front of them. Eddie’s dad wanted to surrender the kill to his unlucky son; the father felt proud of himself as he yelled for his son to shoot. He didn’t understand why his son sat there, just staring for so long. These two great silences plucked at Eddie: the peace in life and the absence in death. It was a moment of diamond-like pressuring. *I’m alive*, Eddie thought.

“That was the first time I realized that,” he told me.

“Did you shoot it?”

“Does it matter?”

The father carried the dead deer home over his shoulder with pride for Eddie; carried the story through the family of the day Eddie shot his first buck with eloquence.

And so it goes and starts again—if this father was pure, it was about to get purer.

“Casey, I have a question. Can you think of an unadulterated moment from your past, a moment of complete sadness or happiness? As we get older, things get so mixed. Happiness and sadness combine. In our childhood, it’s more likely we have experiences that are just one or the other, what do you think?”

Casey gave me a small gift, a small token of greatness; he told me a story about dads and forgiveness.

“I think it would be the first time I realized my dad wasn’t my biological dad.” His dad works for the Salvation Army; he sat with his son in this place of charity. Casey, a child, said he thought he got something, something genetic, from his father. I can imagine the way his father sighed, something deep to the bottom of his bronchioles, bronchioles with little proteins in them, little proteins that looked nothing like Casey’s.

“Well, you know, that...is not really how it works.” Parentage and biology from a man to his son: the talk. The talk at Ernie’s snack stop, a good place for talks. *Someone else has your bronchioles, someone else has your genes*, Dad thought. He told Casey about stress, about distance and silence. Even in marriage, people move apart. Even in love, people grow quiet. He said he loved Casey like a son, and Casey heard him. And Casey cried, for a long time. And Casey ate ice cream. Ernie’s snack stop is a good place for snacks.

He’s my dad, Casey thought, staring at the tired face across from him, and then back to the cherries and chocolate. *Real dads buy ice cream*.

“It was about who I chose,” Casey told me.

As a gift in return, I wrote a story in Casey’s notebook. He was working in the art studio, sewing a long suit jacket that symbolized weight. Two heavy bags were at the bottom of the closed sleeves, swinging from extended arms. The piece was about things that weigh us down, keep us back. I don’t think he’s ever read the story I wrote back.

A sense of gloom gathered in my household during my pre-teen years. I was mystified because I was innocent; moral compunction and easy love kept me ignorant. But my brother, my Jacob, was doing things I couldn’t explain, couldn’t understand or even name. When the rest of the family was gone for a weekend, Jacob branded himself with the word *RESIST*, carved into his left inner arm. *Resist the devil and he will flee from you*, Jacob thought, in the basement, smelling flesh. He would habitually come home with red circular craters orbiting his arms, scented like my chain-smoking grandpa. He fought with my parents; he swore on the phone in his bedroom; he shrouded mysteries in silence.

“You think I’m like Superman’s little brother,” he told me one time he was drunk. *No, you’re superman*. When others teased me, Jacob defended me. When I cried, Jacob hugged me. When I had a birthday, Jacob wrote me cards that called me “little darling.” Jacob was perfect. If Jacob sat at the table, I gave him a backrub. If Jacob needed a pencil, I ran and got it. If Jacob didn’t like a chore from my parents, I did it for him. He was a butterfly on my finger, a miracle I wanted to watch. *My brother of sorrow*, I thought while he slept on the couch. *I love you*.

One day, when I was about ten, I walked down into the kitchen of my house. The garbage can was full of various patterns of blood, soaked onto paper towels. My little brother emerged from the basement, whispering “go down there and look.” Weights pulled my body down as I walked.

Jacob’s new punching bag was in the basement. Punching bags are woven metal fibers; they won’t burst but will grate naked knuckles. The surface of the bag, before a solid silver, was now big banged into thousands of galaxies of red stars. Some galaxies were sheets of nebulous gases, blocks of filled color shrouding the surface. Galaxies are great oil slicks polluting the puddle of the silent universe.

I sat on the basement steps for hours. My stomach was hot.

The punching bag sat in my basement for years. Its supports started to creak so we removed it, but I still knew its secret. *You universe, you endure under my comfortable house—your memory won’t ever leave me*.

The Shadows of Paris | *Anika Maiberger*

We were sitting on the train with buzzing phones in our pockets—home screens light up with messages from concerned family and friends—messages telling us to be aware of our surroundings, messages filled with wishes for our safety, messages asking us if we were confident in our decisions. Who would have guessed that such worry would be expressed over a group of friends visiting “The City of Love” during their semester abroad? Stepping off the train and being greeted by both undercover and uniformed, gun-wielding officers is a sobering experience. It is hard to decide between feeling protected and feeling as though you willingly walked into the middle of a war zone.

You keep rationalizing it in your head with sayings such as, “Paris will not be attacked a second time,” or, “It is the safest city in Europe at the moment,” but as soon as the anxiousness slips from your mind, it is greeted with an assault weapon being carried in the hands of a soldier. Once on the streets, everywhere you go there are reminders that you could be in potential danger. Everywhere you look there are French flags hanging out of windows and on office buildings in commemoration of the victims. The more you fall in love with the home of the Eiffel Tower, the more your empathy grows for the wonderful city of Paris and the people in it.

Walking the crowded Champs-Élysées, knowing full well it would make an adequate target for mass destruction makes you feel as though you are a person who is afraid of their own shadow—always looking over their shoulder. The danger of the unexpected became all the more real when an abandoned backpack in the park caused a crowd of armed and ready police men and women to assemble. Members of our group got separated from one another, causing us to meet in the entrance to the Arc de Triomphe. I never imagined an underground hallway would serve as a bunker, or much less, that I would be happy to be there. It is jolting to come upon the realization that something as mundane as a forgotten book bag has become an instrument of fear. It is no longer as simple to fully appreciate The City of Light when it feels as if it were surrounded by darkness.

I have been forever changed by my weekend in Paris. Not only is my mind now filled with memories of frequent security checks, swarms of military forces, and anxious feelings, but more so of strolling through the many intricate halls of the Louvre with some of my best friends, going to Sunday morning mass at Notre Dame Cathedral, and falling in love with the enchanting city of Paris. We sit on the train and leave Paris with a unique experience behind us and buzzing phones in our pockets—home screens light up with encouraging messages from family and friends, messages expressing the happiness that we just lived the best, most impactful weekend of our lives.

When I saw the Sistine Chapel in Rome, there were 400 other people seeing it with me. Every one of us had our own story, but that afternoon they ran together like the sweat on our faces. We stood, back to back and stomach to stomach, craning our necks to see Michelangelo's famous ceiling. "Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh," the recording played every three minutes. "Please move toward the back."

400 unique stories had gone into the Chapel, but the room was a mold, and it squished us into conformity. Our experience would be what we were given, or more precisely, what we had paid fourteen euros for. We were no longer people who journeyed from around the globe, but a herd. Mouths agape and eyes drooping, the mass shuffled its feet. But I wanted no part of this, so I stopped walking and focused on looking.

There it was, Adam one inch away from life. The muscles of God's extended arm strained as he reached out, and Adam's perfect body languished for the spark that would give him existence. What a beautiful balance.

Someone bumped me, and I jolted back down. The man looked at me, confused. Why was I just standing? A woman pushed a stroller over my foot, and I knocked into someone else when I jumped back. Defeated and claustrophobic, I shuffled along through the narrow cattle-chute out of the Chapel. From there we would exit the museum.

I turned back around and looked at the small, twisting hallway that spit people out of the Chapel. I had come so far. I had been in it. But I hadn't seen it. 20,000 people a day walk through the Chapel. How many of them see it? I was angry, angry that the only thing I would be able to tell people about the Sistine Chapel was that it was too small. I didn't have a story.

I now know what it feels like for salmon to fight their way upstream. I squeezed my way into the hall, flattened against one side, and pushed my way back into the Chapel. Eric Whitacre was a better soundtrack than the endless shushing of the museum, so I put my earphones in and fought my way along the wall. I leaned against it, setting my feet and bending my knees so I wouldn't get knocked over, just like my basketball coach had taught me.

Thus began my fight for beauty.

It is a sad reality of human existence that our stories often smother each other. We are drawn to beauty like moths to the light, but hide the light by casting shadows for those who come after us. Seeing beauty should not be a battle against others, like it was in the Chapel. Beauty should be enhanced when we share it.

But we see as in a mirror dimly, unable to encounter beauty or know how to relate to each other in it. Nowhere is this paradox better presented than in tourism. Every year, millions travel to experience the beauty they know the world has to offer.

Most people travel to see hotspots, like Big Ben or the Louvre, rather than to experience cultures as a whole. Governments and tour companies have adopted assembly-line mentalities as they look to efficiently manage the millions flooding to these spots. The result: overcrowded, cookie-cutter experiences. The stories of millions blend into one. Beauty becomes impersonal.

But the impersonal doesn't fill us. Pre-packaged beauty doesn't speak to our hearts. Mass consumption leaves us empty.

Tourists who feel trapped in the assembly line do fight to make their experiences personal. They fight with their cameras. But no matter how many photos are taken, there still has to be a story to give them meaning.

There are more than twenty-seven million selfies taken in front of the Eiffel Tower every year. This year, three of those are mine.

I remember taking those pictures, but all that I remember is taking them. There is no story behind them. The stories that I have from the tower, I don't have pictures of. I think that makes them stronger.

Becca wanted to go up to the top of the tower. If I had been able to step right on an elevator and go up, I would have done it. But because of the 45 minute wait and a long line to think about just how high that tower was, and how very transparent the platform floor looked, I jumped out of line right before we had to buy our tickets and sat on a bench near the lawn. It was dark, and I watched people stroll down the gravel paths, hugging tight to keep away the chill, and also to keep away the vendors.

I had done my time in Rome, getting chased around the Colosseum for asking the price of a scarf, and I sat smiling as I watched the same thing happen to everyone else. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

A vendor saw me laughing and came over, holding out his ring of Eiffel Tower key chains.

"Miss, would you like to buy?"

By now, I knew how to end this conversation in about three refusals, but it would take Becca over an hour before she was back down.

"No, I wouldn't," I answered. "But I would like to ask, where are you from?"

Clearly, he had never been asked this before, and he smiled as he told his story. He missed his family in Africa. He was only twenty-three, and hadn't seen them since he'd left seven years ago. He spoke his native language, French, English, and better Italian than I did after two months of classes. He asked me about my life too, and he shook his head like I'd come straight out of a fairytale. I lied when I told him how much our room in Paris cost, cutting the price down by two-thirds. It was still more than he paid for a month's rent.

After about twenty minutes, he had to keep selling. He took a keychain off. "For you, beautiful," he said. "Thank you for talking to me."

I had long conversations with others after that, and even as Becca and I left, another man approached with the keychains. "We're all set." I smiled and looked him in the eyes. "But thank you for asking."

He backed off right away, giving a small bow. "No, thank you, sister." Thank you, he was saying, for taking a moment to be kind, and to acknowledge that I am a person. It was one of the most beautiful expressions of thankfulness that I have ever heard.

Here, in the eyes and words of these men, the beauty of Paris was individual to me.

Talking with those men is never on a tourist's itinerary. In fact, there were flashing signs throughout the park that said for safety, not to buy from illegal vendors. Funny, that those signs were next to official gift shops selling the same things. My subversive act of an ordinary smile gave me a story, a story that has meaning because beauty found me through it.

It is amazing though, how easily our desire for beauty can become warped.

Before I went to Italy, I bought a Rick Steves' travel guide. "Cinque Terra," it said, "the undiscovered gem of the Italian coast." Well, Rick and I have very different ideas about what the word "undiscovered" means. What I thought was a top secret travel hint to only me was, I was sad to find out, the same travel hint he gave to hundreds of thousands of readers. The five small towns along the coast, and the beach in front and the mountain trails behind, swarmed with tourists.

Those towns were filled with people's homes, and the mountains were their vineyards; but their homes no longer belonged to them. They had been conquered, overrun by consumers who all felt entitled to their slice of public pie.

An "undiscovered gem" deserves to be treated with respect and viewed with wonder. In a public space, everyone feels they deserve a piece of the beauty. There is no wonder, just demand. A public space holds no pride or respect. This unfortunate reality causes locals to flee, leaving the masses to feed on the beautiful corpse they leave behind.

But beauty cannot be scavenged or overrun. It simply hides to present itself to those who truly love it.

We stayed in a hostel in the third city, Corniglia. It is a mountain town, sitting on the edge of towering cliffs that disappear into white breakers below. The train station is at the bottom, and a bus, or three-hundred and sixty-five platform steps, will get you to the top.

After a day of exploring—touristing, admittedly—we were tired, hungry, and hoping for an early seafood dinner. We were fools to look for an open restaurant before eight. Defeated, we hopped on the crowded train back to Corniglia. When we got to our stop, the bus driver informed us that this was her last run up the mountain. The bus was already full. We headed for the stairs.

As soon as we began to climb, the thunder started. It echoed off the cliffs, bounding away over open water. Wind whipped the fruit trees, and we dodged low-hanging branches. With only a single, thunderous beat in warning, the skies opened. Lightning hit the water, sending purple razors through the ocean's grey. The path was rock and mud, and we had to go straight up.

I took off running for the top. It was absolutely contrary to everything in my being to run up an exposed mountain face during a thunderstorm, but the sooner I was inside, the sooner I would be safe.

I wound my way up, and I suddenly found myself alone. Lightning struck somewhere at the top of the mountain, and I ran towards it. My dripping curls bounced around my face in time with my footsteps. *Dead, dead, dead, you're dead*, played through my mind in rhythm. Then I switched to the Lord's Prayer, and that helped.

Branches had fallen over the path above me, and I jumped them. Around the corner, I could finally see the tops of the houses. The people were opening their shutters.

The noise of tourists constantly bombarded their homes. During the day, the shutters stayed closed, a final layer of defense.

But now the storm was giving them safety. I saw children's hands poking out of windows to catch the raindrops. At another, a woman looked out over the sea. Her hair danced. The town was breathing again. The beauty of the rain and lightning had given the town back to its people.

The thunderstorm wasn't for me. I watched as an outsider, only able to recognize the reclaimed moments given to the people of the town. I witnessed the resilience of beauty—against tourists like me, and for tourists like me. It was a reminder not to give up.

I don't have pictures of the thunderstorm on the mountain, and I don't have pictures of the men below the Eiffel Tower. That's how beauty often works. You get caught up in it and don't realize till you look back that those were the real moments. Beauty defeats the molds and cookie-cutters we try to shape it with. If we rigidly plan for beauty, we will not find it. We might have endless pictures, but no stories. We may remember taking pictures of beautiful things, but nothing more.

But if we are lucky, we will look back to find that we have been tricked—tricked, despite our best efforts, to meet beauty on its own terms. We will have stories that give meanings to the pictures in our heads, not our cameras, and we will find ourselves filled.

| drama |

Bleach | *Alison Pascale*

Characters:

LUCY: A little girl around 9 years old.

A: A woman. Very pale and very thin. Mid 30s

SIMON: A man. Broad shouldered, mildly intimidating.

Setting:

April, 2015. An alley in a city you know well

[At rise LUCY stands alone center stage, dressed for the winter in a purple jacket and knitted hat. There are noises of a city street. She is solemn and contemplating something in the middle distance. After several seconds she is startled, suddenly, and runs off stage right. A moment later A enters from stage left, carrying a pile of tattered, dirty rags, which completely obscure her hands and forearms. She is humming the tune to Frère Jacques. She is dressed shabbily in a ripped pair of jeans and a t-shirt]

A

(Under her breath)

Dormez vous. . . dormez vous.

[Enter SIMON from stage right. He is dressed in a black suit jacket with just a t-shirt underneath and trousers. He is tired.]

SIMON

Do you have my product? It's going on four months late.

A

(startled)

No, not as of yet. I just, I just need to do some more salvaging.

SIMON

You said you'd be done today. I have to keep moving this up the food chain or we both get fucked.

A

Language! (Beat) I know, it's only, well, suffice it to say the thing will be done.

SIMON

Done when? I can't just sit here and wait for you to finish twiddling your thumbs!

A

I'll have it done! Give me a few hours, okay? I'll get it all sorted.

SIMON

You have until sundown.

[Exit SIMON]

A

(Singing)

Frère Jacques. . . Frère Jacques

[Enter LUCY from stage left]

LUCY

You have a very lovely voice.

[A gives a startled yelp, turning quickly to face Lucy]

A

How, how did you get here?

LUCY

(frightened)

I don't—

A

You can't be here. Leave.

LUCY

Why?

A

Just leave.

LUCY

But, why?

A

Because you need to leave. You shouldn't be here.

LUCY

Is this your house?

A

What, no, of course not. (beat) Why?

LUCY

I don't know. . . it just seems like you might live here.

A

This is an alley, kid, people don't live in alleys.

LUCY

Some people do. My mom told me that there are people who live in the streets and I mustn't give them my money.

A

Do you listen to your mom?

LUCY

Yes.

A

Then listen to me and get out of here.

LUCY

But wh—

A

LEAVE! (Beat) You shouldn't talk to me.

LUCY

Why?

A

Because I am a very bad person.

LUCY

I don't think you are.

A

I will do very bad things if you don't leave.

LUCY

Why?

A

Because I am a very bad person.

LUCY

My psychologist would call that circular thinking.

A

(Turning to face Lucy, perplexed)

Why do you need a psychologist?

Don't know. She's dull though.

LUCY

Leave. I'm telling you to leave.

A

(gesturing to rags)

LUCY

Only if you tell me what all that's for.

No.

A

But—

LUCY

Leave.

A

But I just—

LUCY

[A approaches LUCY, physically threatening her. There is suddenly something animalistic and feral in her.]

LEAVE!

A

(terrified)

LUCY

I'll come back later, then.

[LUCY exits, quickly, off stage right. A exits off stage left and as she does, the light changes, indicating a change in the time of day. It is now past dusk. A enters carrying an old style metal basin and a wedding dress.]

Frère Jacques. . . Frère Jacques

A

[Enter SIMON from stage left.]

Is that it?

SIMON

A
Yes.

SIMON
I've been waiting 3 years for this?

A
Yes.

SIMON
Well, is it done?

A
Almost, just give me a minute more. It still isn't quite, quite, right.

SIMON
Well, what the hell happened?

A
He left her.

SIMON
And?

A
The girl, the wife, she was dependent. He made her dependent. Now, this, this is not inherently so dirty. Just a bit of dust, almost unnoticeable. It got the dirt, though, when he left. Up and left, got bored, got horny, got gone. She couldn't take it, couldn't make it in the world without him. She starved to death under an overpass. Blood, dirt, grime, oil, and grease. Where it gets tricky, though, is the guilt. He felt guilty, in the end.

SIMON
What are you talking about?

A
Straight sin, blood, isn't so hard to clean.

SIMON
So then what was it?

A
Guilt. He felt guilty.

SIMON
And?

A

Guilt is the only thing harder to clean than red wine and tomato sauce.

SIMON

So can I move this product then?

A

No! You know what will happen if I don't get it all out.

[A moves from the basin, finally giving a clear view of her hands. They are a startling and sickly shade of white, reaching all the way up her arms. SIMON looks at them, uncomfortable, but unwilling to ask. She picks up the dress and fluffs it out.]

SIMON

No, I don't. I'm not allowed to know jack shit. I come, I pick up the stuff, I leave. All day, every day, new place, new people.

A

Excepting me.

SIMON

Excepting you.

A

So many people, many people leave quickly?

SIMON

It's rare to see someone more than once. How much product have you moved?

A

(quietly, ashamed)

Twenty three.

SIMON

Damn! That's. . . that's impressive. So what'd you do?

A

I thought you were here to pick up this dress.

SIMON

I am. But you've piqued my interest.

A

Will you please? I hardly think this is appropriate!

SIMON

But twenty three? I don't purport to be no expert or anything, and no one's more than an expert than you, but that seems impossible.

A

(angry, ashamed)

Are you here to pick up this dress or make assertions?

SIMON

I just wanted to know—

[Enter LUCY from stage right. She sees SIMON and is intimidated, halting after entering. A sees her and looks over, causing SIMON to look over his shoulder at her.]

SIMON

(aggressive, moving towards LUCY)

Hey, hey kid. Get the fuck out of here!

LUCY

I was just—

SIMON

OUT!

[LUCY becomes scared and leaves, scurrying away.]

A

There was no need to be mean.

SIMON

You really want a kid hanging around here?

A

Well, no, but you didn't need to petrify her.

SIMON

So, what'd you do then? To make you so nice?

A

I'm not nice, trust me.

SIMON

Fine, maybe not nice, but you're something all right.

A

Thank you.

SIMON

You know, you're probably the prettiest girl I've ever seen. Doing this, I mean.

A

Well, taxing physical labor and chemical use doesn't exactly lend itself to a radiant glow.

SIMON

The usual response to a compliment is a "thank you," you know. (Beat) You know, I really can't give you the full fee for a product this late, I'm going to get five off the final at least.

A

I don't care about the money. I'd do this for a very different sort of fee. The same one everyone else gets.

SIMON

You know that won't happen.

A

Why?

SIMON

Because I can't give you that. It's an impossibility.

A

My psychologist would call that circular thinking.

SIMON

You don't have a psychologist.

A

You don't know. . . You know what (fluffing the dress) just take the thing.

[SIMON moves forward to take the dress, grabbing it out of A's hands. He recoils when he sees them.]

SIMON

I'll see how much of a fee I can get. . . I'll be back for the next product, when it's ready.

[SIMON starts to exit, stops]

How much longer do you have, really?

A

Guilt is the only thing harder to clean than red wine and tomato sauce.

SIMON

So?

A

Some stains are so hard, so painfully hard to clean, you have to work on others instead.

SIMON

You're guilty, then?

A

You have the damn dress, can you please leave?

SIMON

I thought you might want some company.

A

No. Leave.

SIMON

But—

A

Go.

SIMON

All right.

[SIMON exits with the dress, stopping to glance one last time at A before exiting.]

A

(humming to herself)

Frère Jacques. . . Frère Jacques, dormez vous, dormez vous.

[LUCY emerges from stage right after several seconds]

LUCY

Hello.

A

Oh, oh, hello.

LUCY

Why are your hands like that?

A

It is rude to ask such questions.

LUCY

But why?

A

Because I am a very bad person who has done very, very bad things.

LUCY

But, why do you have to stay here?

A

You just, you wouldn't understand.

LUCY

Oh.

[A turns away from LUCY for a moment and LUCY leaves.]

A

Bleach, it's because—(noticing that LUCY is gone). Oh.

[A long pause. Then another wedding dress drops from the sky. It is filthy, covered in blood, dirt, red wine, and tomato sauce. A picks it up, covering herself in the grime. She sniffs it.]

Regret. Easy.

(Beat)

One day they'll get to mine.

[Lights down]

Thwarted | *Morag Hastie*

Characters:

BECKY: 32, stay-at-home mother

LANDON: 37, husband

Setting:

Split Stage: 2/3 is a homely living room with toddler's toys littered everywhere, 1/3 is a half-bath.

[BECKY and LANDON enter stage right. BECKY leads LANDON who is holding a golf umbrella over them both. BECKY bursts through the door and stamps her feet to warm up. LANDON stops at the door, shakes the umbrella off before entering. BECKY takes off her outer layers and hangs them]

BECKY

Your Mom is batshit crazy! I mean any woman that goes through childbirth more than twice is crazy but to do it eight times ... that's certifiable. How did you grow up sane in amongst that rabble? And why do we have to do such a huge party for her every year? I mean, I get the *big* birthdays, but every year?

LANDON

Makes for plenty of relatives to take Maia off our hands!

BECKY

True....

LANDON

Speaking of which—a beer to toast our weekend of freedom?

BECKY

Nah.

LANDON

Oh, come on. Indulge a little!

BECKY

I had way too many cupcakes at the party. I feel positively sick.

LANDON

(talking over his shoulder as he exits)

I'll get you one. It'll counteract the sugar!

[BECKY grabs her backpack and pulls out a cell. She rapidly taps out a text, then places it on the coffee table and sits at the end of the love-seat, legs tucked underneath her. LANDON re-enters from the kitchen carrying two glasses of

whisky, places one on the coffee table in front of BECKY then sits in the arm chair holding the other.]

BECKY

(beat)

What the? Thought you were getting a beer?

LANDON

(smirking)

I figured what the hell? Nikki has Maia till Tuesday. Gives us three whole toddler-free nights we've got to celebrate. Sushi! Let's get sushi for dinner!

BECKY

(too quickly)

No.

LANDON

Why on earth not? You love sushi.

[LANDON moves to the desk—rummages through a draw

I know we've got an old menu for that place on Central...

BECKY

Really, I'm not in the mood. That frosting was ridiculous—I don't think I can eat anything else today.

LANDON

Here it is!

(smoothes out paper menu)

BECKY

Anyway ... I had a sushi lunch with the girls last week. Can't we do something else?

LANDON

What girls?

BECKY

The Mom Mafia...

(cell vibrates)

LANDON

Tell me you didn't text Nikki? We barely left twenty minutes ago!

BECKY

I was just checking in ... but look she sent a selfie of the two of them!

(holds up cell)

LANDON

Good lord, would you look at her? Our baby girl isn't a baby anymore.

BECKY

(smiling warmly)

No, she is not.

LANDON

Three next month! (beat) So, when we having another one?

[BECKY stands and busies herself tidying]

BECKY

You always start in with this when we've spent the day with your family...

LANDON

No I don't. Anyway. We said we'd talk about this when Maia hit three...

BECKY

She isn't three yet.

LANDON

Oh, come on. She's three.

BECKY

You said it yourself—we've got a toddler-free weekend. We should go to the movies. When was the last time we got to go to the movies? Isn't that new comic book movie out? The one you've been going on about...

LANDON

The timing is perfect. Maia is basically done with diapers, and she'll be starting with pre-school in the summer. You're gonna need something new to fill your day.

BECKY

(with a flash of anger)

I do have something to fill my day. Classes, remember! We agreed I could take on more once Maia was at pre-school.

LANDON

But didn't you see how she was with Andrew's baby today—doting over him and rocking him—she'll make a perfect big sister. She'll be your little helper.

BECKY

(non-committal grunt)

LANDON

And once there are two of them they will totally entertain themselves. I'm getting old. I don't think my knees can handle playing *puppy* for hours on end much longer. For the sake of my aging knees we have to do it.

[cell vibrates and BECKY rushes to pick up but LANDON reaches it first...]

It's Nikki again.

[LANDON swipes the cell—a video starts playing. They huddle to watch it]

Mama, I paint with nik-nik ... I paint for you, mama.

Say 'Love you mama and dada.'

Looooove yooooou mamadada.

[LANDON smiles looking at the phone but BECKY smiles sadly]

This whiskey has made me hungry—I'm gonna get a snack. We still got that great Stilton?

[LANDON exits and the clattering of drawers/cupboards can be heard. BECKY stares at her untouched whiskey then dumps the contents, ice and all, into a vase of flowers. She returns the empty glass to the coffee table]

LANDON

(Offstage)

I saw this great mini-van at the dealer the other day. It was fire-engine red! You and the *kids* are going to rock driving around town in one just like it.

BECKY

You know what I think about bloody *minivans* ...

LANDON

(Re-enters carrying a tray of food)

I'm totally playing with you ... I found that Stilton and some liver pâté at the back of the fridge ... what happened to your whisky?

BECKY

I drank it.

LANDON

What? You ...

BECKY

Why?

LANDON

Huh. (beat) I gotta pee.

[LANDON enters the half-bath—makes a show of pretending to go to the toilet—noisily lifts the seat, starts loudly singing out-of-tune. He goes to the under sink cabinet. BECKY snatches her phone and makes a call while standing with her back to the bathroom]

BECKY

He knows ... No, I didn't tell him but somehow he knows ... He has to know. He has been offering me whisky and sushi! ... I don't know, perhaps ...

[LANDON reappears from the cabinet empty handed. Looks around the bathroom annoyed. Grabs the trash can and starts pulling out wads of tissues. He finds and holds an at-home pregnancy stick aloft, triumphantly]

LANDON

I knew it!

BECKY

I know, I know, Nikki, but I'm not ready to talk about it, if I tell him it's real ... I don't know what I want yet ... No! I haven't decided anything ...

LANDON

What's going on?

[BECKY sharply turns to find LANDON standing in the bathroom doorway still holding the pregnancy test]

BECKY

I have to go.

LANDON

You told Nikki before me...? When ...? (brandishing the test like a weapon) When did you take this? How long have you ... you told Nikki before me?

BECKY

This ...

LANDON

And what do you mean you don't know what you *want*? What the hell does that mean? You don't know what you want? Becks?

Will you let me speak!

BECKY

Please, speak.

LANDON

This morning. I took the test this morning.

BECKY

And you told Nikki before me? Why would you do that?

LANDON

She walked in on me being sick at your Mom's.

BECKY

When were you going to tell me?

LANDON

I don't know. Soon. I just needed a minute.

BECKY

A minute for what? This is great news! This is what we want.

LANDON

It's what you want.

BECKY

You don't?

LANDON

(pacing)

BECKY

I don't know.

LANDON

You are pregnant. We are having another child.

BECKY

But are we? We have, you know ... options.

LANDON

(angrily)

What the hell do you mean *options*? We don't have *options*. ... You can't mean ... No. You don't mean (angry hiss) abortion!

BECKY

I ...

LANDON

Abortion! You want to get rid of our child?

BECKY

No ... I mean ...

LANDON

Who are you? This isn't you. You are a mother. And you love being a mother. You love Maia. (beat)
Don't you?

BECKY

Yes! Of course I do. I love her completely. This isn't about her.

LANDON

Then who is it about?

BECKY

It's just ...

LANDON

Abortion? Why would you even? We aren't people who get abortions!

BECKY

What on earth does that mean?

LANDON

Come on, you know what I mean.

BECKY

No, really. What *people* is abortion for exactly?

LANDON

Not us. You know, teenagers, or poor people. People who are ... Are you worried about money?
Cause we are fine.

BECKY

I know we are fine ...

LANDON

Stupid people! That is who abortion is for.

BECKY

We were *stupid*. We got trashed on whisky and forgot the fucking condom!

LANDON

And that is reason to *kill* our baby?

BECKY

It isn't a baby. Not yet—it is just a bunch of cells!

[LANDON sits down on the armchair in dumbfounded silence.]

BECKY

I'm sorry.

LANDON

(suddenly concerned)

Oh God, you're scared.

BECKY

What?

LANDON

Of course you are. How could you not be. It's Lucy, right? Oh, Becks. I totally get it now. Losing a baby like that—so late in pregnancy. I just can't even imagine. It's horrible. But we aren't them. It's not going to happen to us.

BECKY

You can't know that. We aren't special. (beat) But no, I'm not scared. Not of that.

LANDON

Then what are you scared of?

BECKY

What if we have this child and I resent it? I resent it so much that it destroys this perfect family we already have?

LANDON

Don't be stupid. You aren't going to resent it. You are going to love it. And nurture it and teach it. Just like you have with Maia.

BECKY

But can't we even talk about it. Is it really so terrible to think about all the options?

LANDON

There are no *options*. We are not killing our baby. Period.

BECKY

(angrily)

You aren't listening to me. I don't know if I *want* another baby. I don't know if I can do it all again. I had plans. There are other things I want.

LANDON

(with venom)
Perhaps you should have thought about that three weeks ago.

BECKY

That's cold.

LANDON

It's the truth though... right? (beat) So, this *is* the plan now. We are having a sibling for Maia.

BECKY

But what about me? When is it *my* turn?

LANDON

Your turn for what?

BECKY

A life outside of this! (gestures the toddler-centric room)

LANDON

What are you talking about? You have a life. I would think it could be considered a bloody good life, too.

BECKY

It is always about anyone *but* me. It was about you and your work and what opportunities came along for you. So we ended up here, in this God-forgotten town that doesn't even come close to the list of places we talked about living. And then it became about Maia and I had to quit work cause I earned less, oh and well, I have the boobs. Right, that was the rationale, wasn't it?

LANDON

You said you wanted to stay home. You said you wanted to move here! And now you are going to use it against me?

BECKY

I did want it. Mostly. And I have loved it. I have loved being at home with Maia. But you know that I've wanted to be a social worker for years, you know this, and finally it was going to be my turn. I was going to get my degree and not have to spend my day thinking about the color and frequency of my child's poo or constantly impaling myself on Lego bricks. It was *my* turn. My turn to feel like a functioning adult again but then we get drunk on whisky and before I even know if I want to do it all again I'm staring at another year of nursing for forty-five minutes every two god-damn hours and spending my days with other moms one-upping each other about what milestones their precious darlings have reached. I don't think I can do it all again. I just don't know. I just need a fucking minute.

[BECKY runs to the bathroom, slams the door then angrily hits the toilet seat closed—she sits down and places her head in her hands. LANDON grabs the cell and makes a call]

LANDON

How could you not tell me? You should have told me! ... What? ... Jesus, Nikki why did you let her play with marbles?

[LANDON hangs up abruptly and sighs heavily, hanging his head. Then shouts to BECKY in the bathroom...]

We have to go. Maia has a marble stuck up her nose.

[Blackout]

| literary criticism |

Delineating Kawash's Color Line in *The Black Girl Next Door* | Andrew Ryan

Culture is defined by the means with which we separate ourselves from one another. Slavery was the incision, grisly and deep. Segregation was the infected scar. Integration was the makeshift band-aid administered too late. Now here we are, worrying desperately at the lacerations in our nation's fabric—its bleached white skin. Not all wounds heal with time; not all lines can be erased. In her text *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative*, Samira Kawash employs the metaphor of the color line to explore the pervasiveness of racial division in modern-day America. Kawash's color line is at once abstract and resolutely real. Its persistent influence can be perceived throughout the social realm, overtly and covertly impacting ontology, social interaction, and the distribution of privilege, wealth, and power in society. Furthermore, Kawash's concept of the color line may be applied to the conflicts of identity recounted by Jennifer Baszile in her memoir *The Black Girl Next Door*. Essentially, Kawash's text provides a framework that may be utilized to analyze and more thoroughly comprehend the racial implications of the formative experiences Baszile imparts in her memoir. Moreover, these two works together demonstrate that—even in today's supposedly post-racial cultural climate—fundamental aspects of life such as ontology, interpersonal relations, and the distribution of goods in society still remain demarcated by the color line.

Early on in her text, Kawash refutes the widely-held supposition that the color line—that is, the pervasive social and cultural disparity between whites and blacks—has disappeared or otherwise been surmounted in our ostensibly progressive era. Kawash explains:

Thus, the color line is not simply a limit to thought or action that can be recognized and traversed. The stubborn persistence of the color line in representation and experience is not a problem of false consciousness or anachronistic thinking; rather, it indicates the power and continuity of the cognitive, discursive, and institutional workings of the color line as simultaneously the limit and constitutive condition for cultural and social life. (6)

In other words, there is no escaping the limits of the color line or its societal and cultural effects. The color line is more than a figurative concept. Kawash elucidates: "Although the color line originates as a spatial metaphor for the persistence of racial division and tension in U.S. culture, this metaphor is always more than a metaphor, operating to enable and justify the social and spatial distribution of power, wealth, access, and privilege" (13). Ultimately, Kawash contends that the color line continues to divide our nation on ontological, social, and institutional levels.

Furthermore, the omnipresent influence of the color line can be observed in multiple incarnations throughout *The Black Girl Next Door*. First and foremost, the color line impacts Baszile on an existential level; it forces her to grapple with her own sense of being as a black individual. In one sense, Baszile is comfortable with her identity. Baszile relates, "I knew that I was black, felt good about it, and never questioned it" (174). However, while on a family cruise, Baszile is confronted with a racial and ontological dilemma. Her parents scold her for only befriending a white boy and demand that she and her sister get to know all of the black kids on the cruise ship. Contemplating this daunting task, Baszile realizes that her parents "were not merely saying, 'We

don't *think* of you as black.' They were saying, 'We *know* that you are *not* black enough.' 'Blacken up.' Our assignment was to learn some names. But the point of the assignment was to prove to our parents that we were really black" (175). As this passage conveys, the color line has such a complex and domineering influence that even Baszile's middle-aged parents are highly alarmed that their children are not actively mingling with other black kids. Though the young Baszile knows she identifies as black, her parents thrust far more intricate existential questions upon her. Is she black enough? How can she become blacker? What does it mean to "blacken up?" These questions are rooted in an awareness of Kawash's color line—the deep-seated, historical and ontological divide between whites and blacks.

The manipulative pressures of Kawash's color line can be further observed through Baszile's experiences with dating. In her work, Kawash explains, "Expressions for racial transgression, such as 'passing,' 'crossing over,' or 'marrying across the line,' suggest that the individual racial identity of black or white remains demarcated by a symbolic color line that is conceived in geographical terms echoing the spatial divisions instituted by segregation" (2). In the same vein, many figures in Baszile's life consider "dating across the line" a severe transgression. Baszile reflects upon her father's assertion that "he wasn't raising me for a white man." She also explains how conversations with her white guy friends about dating black girls brought her "face to face with the limits of integration" (209). The deeply ingrained influence of Kawash's color line has the potential to dissuade whites and blacks from dating outside of their race or make the prospect of doing so an oddity. In her memoir, for instance, Baszile recounts the way in which her friend Mark had considered bringing her along to his father's company holiday party "just to see what would happen and how everyone would react." She further reflects, "This guy, who I at least considered a friend, had created a space in which I was a novelty, cherished like a sideshow freak for my shock value" (210). This tragic occurrence demonstrates just how overbearing Kawash's color line can be in the realm of interracial social relations.

Finally, *The Black Girl Next Door* exhibits how the manipulative reach of the color line extends to institutional levels—governing the distribution of privilege, wealth, and power in society. While applying to colleges, Baszile is harassed by friends' ignorant comments about affirmative action—a program to some extent designed to compensate for the existence of the color line. Baszile writes, "The college application process was already straining the bonds of some of my friendships, and I didn't want to hear any more talk about my slam-dunk chances for admission because I was black" (277). Soon after, while on campus, she hears a white man make the racist assumption that she and her friends "must be the scholarship kids" (279). Moreover, even on the collegiate institutional level, the color line factors heavily into social perception and interaction. Virtually every aspect of social and cultural life is impacted by the color line, which has been developed, altered, and continually reinstated through centuries of racism. As Kawash teaches us, "The color line is absolutely real, both as a source of power and as a condition of material effects. The problem in grasping this reality lies in its complexity: the reality of the color line is split and doubled between the color line as historical product and the color line as ontological ground" (13). Fundamentally, the lines drawn by history are the same lines that keep us divided today.

At the end of her memoir, Baszile and her father achieve an unspoken, ontological bond. Her father agrees to send her to Columbia, and she supposes profoundly, “Maybe he finally understood that integration had been as hard on me as segregation had been on him” (307). The implication here seems to be that Baszile and her father’s struggles were essentially one and the same; they were both forced to cautiously navigate Kawash’s color line on a daily basis, consistently encountering ignorance and racism. This changed them both; it shaped their ontological identities, just as it does for all people of color in our social, racialized world. All things considered, Kawash’s color line continues to take heavy cultural tolls. Nevertheless, by collectively acknowledging its existence and its disenfranchising effects, we may make progress toward a more racially conscious and respectful social world.

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Manipulation of the Witch: Lord Byron's *Manfred* and the Fight Against the Feminine | *Kimberlee Roberts*

George Gordon, Lord Byron's psychodrama *Manfred* is an exploration of internal conflict, illuminated by his manipulation of feminine characters. The Witch of the Alps is the chameleon character who the author, as well as Manfred, manipulates to emphasize specific elements of Manfred's emerging feminine identity. In masculine hands the Witch serves as a plot device for Byron, and an ideal enemy for Manfred.

The psychodramatic element of the poem relies on the interpretation that all characters and spirits who Manfred interacts with are bound within his mind, unable to exist in a physical world. These manifestations of spirits embody elements of Manfred's personality, particularly his masculinity. Manfred constructs his identity early with the statement of his attributes, having "no dread, / And feel[ing] the curse to have no natural fear, / Nor fluttering throb, that beats with hopes or wishes" (1.1.24–26). Being emotionless, heartless, and fearless is how Manfred distinguishes himself above humanity; by stripping his humanity away. By constructing this superiority complex aloud, Manfred is able to convince himself of his own authority while also influencing the impression of the spirits. When presenting himself to the dark council he boldly states, "without power / I could not be amongst ye" (2.4.74–75). These spirits surprisingly respond to Manfred's "power" as it exists to him, and not to them. Their validation of his "power" results in Manfred's increasing perception of being more than human. It is only with Manfred's persistence in projecting his self-constructed image to the spirits, that the first Destiny states, "This man / is of no common order, as his port / and presence here denote" (2.4.51–53). Regarding Manfred's self-created importance, the first Destiny further reassures Manfred's ego by saying, "his sufferings / Have been of an immortal nature, like / Our own" (2.4.53–54). His suffering is internal and hidden from the physical world with the highest precision. Therefore, the Destiny is able to deduce their similar sufferings only because it is truly the suffering of Manfred, as recreated in the manifestation of that Destiny. Each character is an embodiment of Manfred's constructed image and offers no objection or argument for independence: except for the Witch.

As Manfred interacts with his subconscious reflections, he feeds himself the delusion of stability and strength. The nature of his interaction with his masculine manifestations challenges him to become more masculine, asking him to defy more odds, demand more respect, and ascertain greater power. Upon entering the council of the dark spirits, a Spirit calls out to him, "Thou most rash and fatal wretch, / Bow down and worship!" (2.4.28–29). The Spirit's challenge to Manfred's purpose and power allowed him to affirm his superiority, stating, "I kneel not" (2.4.36). Validation, through challenges of his masculinity, is how Manfred believes his self-delusion. There are only two characters in the dramatic poem who he cannot effectively use for himself. The Witch of the Alps and Astarte are the barren reflections of the feminine element of his character he has heavily suppressed. Through his interactions with them he becomes gradually more grounded and understanding of his weaknesses leaving him wounded, vulnerable, and entirely human by the end of the poem.

When Manfred interacts with the Witch of the Alps he presents himself as “a Son / Of Earth” (2.2.28–29) who was victimized by his masculine “abstruser powers” (2.2.29). He needs the Witch to see him as a victim of the masculine spirits to evoke compassion and sympathy from her as reparation of his ego. Though the Witch is conjured to repair Manfred, she does not grant him the satisfaction of success. As they continue to interact it becomes clear the Witch is his embodiment of transcendent beauty and patience. He invokes her by begging her to let him “call [her] thus, / And gaze on [her] a moment,” seeking her ethereal beauty as a distraction from his wretchedness (2.2.31–32). Realizing she won’t amend his ego, he hopes, at the least, her beauty will. Upon the Witch being summoned, however, she receives him more honestly than the masculine spirits, greeting him, “I know thee, and the powers which give thee power; / I know thee for a man of many thoughts” (2.2.33–34). Immediately she knows Manfred’s purpose for calling her and squanders his superiority by reminding him he is human despite his perception of power and immortality; knowing the elements that raise him above humanity are constructed by thought, not truth. The Witch, seeing all of his “deeds of good and ill, extreme in both” (2.2.35), acknowledges his weaknesses; humbling him for a moment and stripping away his persistent false armor. The other spirits knew of Manfred and the evils he committed, but from a less personal and distant perspective as if they were outsiders to his past. However, the Witch employs the use of familial language to keep him humbled and human. She calls him “Son of Earth” (2.2.33), thus assuming a maternal role. The familial sentiment allows Manfred to be vulnerable and express himself intimately without consequence. She is the only character who comforts Manfred into relaying his memories of Astarte, working minimally and without magic. Though Manfred summoned her to repair his ego, he ultimately manipulates her presence into a therapeutic session allowing him to exploit her maternal personality for self-revelation.

The interaction between the Witch and Manfred is heavily reliant on Manfred’s disclosure of his feelings. The Witch leads Manfred to evaluate his life and tell her the story of Astarte’s presumed suicide. She already knows his suffering, but Manfred needs this interaction with her to reach a resolution. The manifestation of his feminine element allows Manfred to return to memories of Astarte that were too unbearable to alleviate his guilt. Though he tries to employ the Witch to grant him his desire for forgetfulness, her truest purpose, to him and the overall narration, is to lead to the resolve of Astarte’s death as Virgil led Dante through his *Inferno*.

Despite her guidance, the Witch is unable to exercise her superiority over Manfred; she cannot become the primary element of his character. She makes the attempt: “but if thou / Wilt swear obedience to my will, and do / My bidding, it may help thee to thy wishes” (2.2.155–57). His obedience to her will would be the sacrifice of his masculinity for a more balanced, feminine composition. Her bidding would be acts of maternal or familial affection, rather than plundering and killing. Instead of seeing forbidden knowledge, he would know more of beauty: ethereal and natural. To this Manfred immediately replies, “I will not swear—Obey! and whom? the spirits / Whose presence I command, and be the slave / Of those who served me—Never!” (2.2.158–60). Manfred, having deluded himself enough, cannot grasp he is at war with himself. Thus, though he abhors the idea of being enslaved, he is already both slave and master. Manfred’s exchange with the Witch regarding power and obedience is the feminine element fighting against his destructive masculine

elements. Only later can Astarte's ghostly image reflect to Manfred his dire need for a feminine understanding of the world.

A physical reading, or manipulation, of the Witch is one where she serves as a distraction for the title character after his realization that the seven spirits cannot bestow upon him forgetfulness. Manfred invokes the Witch saying,

No eye
But mine now drink this sight of loveliness;
I should be sole in this sweet solitude,
And with the Spirit of the place divide
the homage of these waters.
I will call her (2.2.8–12)

Manfred, in knowing the beauty of the scene in which he stands, cannot experience it in solitude but longs for female company. In isolation Manfred would ceaselessly dwell on his failures, longing even more desperately for forgetfulness. But, for a brief moment, he wants to appreciate the beauty of nature with the spirit that embodies that beauty. The Witch is the only object Manfred explicitly perceives as aesthetically pleasing. Astarte, her foil, used to be Manfred's object of beauty, but after life she is too ghostly to recognize.

Manfred is not the only male figure to manipulate the purpose of the Witch. Byron uses her as a lure and a plot device both for and against Manfred. She is able to lure details of Astarte from him, supplying the audience with details of his character. Byron uses her as a tool to relay the interesting backstory of Manfred's lover. She does not console Manfred when his story becomes overwhelming; instead, she urges him to "spare not thyself" (2.2.104). She is the catalyst to the plot, forcing Manfred to reveal his greatest mystery. She holds power in that position commanding an entire scene of the poem.

Byron bestows the greatest power held by any character of the poem to a female. However, she is called the Witch for a reason. She is not of usual appearance or intelligence; hers is intuitive, emotional, and accurate to the point of being uncanny. She transcends the intelligence that was commonly expected of females and, in turn, frightens men to superstition. The Witch is strong willed and demands obedience from her male counterpart. She is unwavering in her position to Manfred as displayed by her forceful demand to be released from his presence. She exists as the epitome of attraction and beauty that Manfred claims cannot belong to human women. Her character is fundamentally greater than standard expectations of females, and Astarte is her foil in this respect. Astarte exists successfully only in the physical world. Once called upon by Arimanes to speak with Manfred, she is not as she was in life. "Can this be death? there's bloom upon her cheek; / But now I see it is no living hue, / But a strange hectic" (2.4.97–99). Her interaction with Manfred is limited to only what Manfred is telling himself he needs to hear. When she states, "To-morrow ends thine earthly ills" (2.4.151), she grants Manfred the permission to expire in the last scene. She does not challenge him as the Witch challenges him because the Witch is the stronger feminine element of Manfred, and Astarte is an external perception that has been internalized.

Additionally, Byron uses the Witch as the means of revelation and enlightenment. It is in the presence of the feminine element that Manfred's eyes are opened to his hideous suppression of guilt

for Astarte's death. In Manfred's most vulnerable moment of solitude in the Alps, he desires a feminine spirit to lead him to his moment of enlightenment. Byron is implying that the mind needs a feminine element to reach true equilibrium—to no longer deceive itself from its deepest mysteries but to face those mysteries gallantly and gracefully with equal parts masculine and feminine.

The feminine is easily interpreted as the object that is manipulated; however, with every new transformation of the Witch, she resides in a position of power. She is molded by Manfred into a psychological representation of his elemental feminine enemy, yet does not waver under his stress and dismissal. Byron uses her as a narrative tool to reveal Manfred's story of Astarte, yet without her, this component of the narrative would have to be disclosed elsewhere, and, most likely, less effectively. She is conjured forth by Manfred as an ideal of beauty to distract him from his failures and to provide him company in his moment of solitude, yet tells Manfred when she is ready to be dismissed. She is the strongest character of the poem in this metaphysical and physical reading. Byron beheld the power of the feminine as a necessary component of a healthy human existence which Manfred, for all of his flaws, failed to recognize.

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Meet Our “Mind Murals” Editors!

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>>ART & PHOTOGRAPHY<<

Alexandria Rivera has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2015 and is a senior at Gordon College anticipating graduation in May 2016. During her time at Gordon, Alexandria has greatly enjoyed studying British and American literature as well as studio art; her recent excursion to Italy opened new doors to creativity and appreciation for both literary and visual arts. She also has participated in a Literary Journal course which entailed creating one's own literary journal and assisting in judging a poetry contest. When not being a full time student, she can be seen working the front desk as an intern at the Global Education Office at Gordon College, encouraging students to participate in studying abroad.

>>DRAMA<<

Keegan Brewster is a senior at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, WV. She is majoring in English with a concentration in literature and is minoring in journalism. She is Vice President of her chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, a writing tutor at Shepherd's Academic Support Center, and assistant managing editor of *College Lifestyles*. After graduating in May 2016, she plans on working in publishing. Her favorite books include Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, and the *Harry Potter* series.

>>FICTION<<

Marissa Capuano is a current student at State University of New York at Oswego, set to graduate in May 2017 with a double major in English and Creative Writing. Marissa has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since spring 2015. She also is one of the head editors of Oswego's literary magazine, *The Great Lake Review*, and hopes to attain the Editor-in-Chief position soon. Her genre preference is fiction and some of her favorite writers include Paul Coelho and George Orwell. Following graduation, Marissa hopes to become an editor in New York City.

Emma Lamberton is finishing her senior year at Geneva College in Pennsylvania where she will graduate with two undergraduate degrees in Writing and Music. Emma's editorial focus has led her to serve on the boards of both Geneva's literary magazine, *Chimes*, and award-winning newspaper, *The Cabinet*, of which she currently is managing editor. Finding success in the journalism field, Emma has written for both state and national news organizations. Gaining the attention of Foxnews.com, she was republished in her coverage of Vermont's controversial health care initiatives. A member of Sigma Tau Delta since 2013, Emma currently serves as her chapter's President.

Andrew Ryan, a senior at The College of New Jersey, will be graduating in May 2016 with a major in English and a double minor in Creative Writing and Philosophy. Andrew has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2013. During his undergraduate career at the College, he presented an award-winning academic paper at the Sigma Tau Delta 2015 International Convention and contributed regularly to the College's literary magazine, *The Lion's Eye*. Andrew's literary research interests include identity politics and contemporary satire. He especially enjoys studying the poetry of Claudia Rankine and the fiction of George Saunders.

>>LITERARY CRITICISM<<

Halley Alberts is a 3rd year Chemistry student at the University of Rio Grande located in Rio Grande, OH. She plans to enter medical school in fall 2017. Though pursuing a career in science, Halley has a strong love for literature, as she serves as a reference associate at a public library and leads a young adult book club. She has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since spring 2014 and is excited to be presenting for her first time at the Sigma Tau Delta 2016 International Convention. Her academic papers explore a wide range of subjects from African American authors during the Civil Rights Movement to findings in her personal research in computational docking of aromatase. In her free time, Halley enjoys riding horses, beekeeping, and exercising her rights as a crazy cat lady.

Katie Valenti is a third year student at Baldwin Wallace University in Cleveland, OH, and is expected to graduate in December 2016. She currently is pursuing an English degree with a 7-12 Licensure, so she can teach at the high school level. Katie is very active on campus, with her involvement in Sigma Tau Delta, Kappa Delta P (International Honor Society in Education), and serving on the executive board of the Education Technology Club. When she is not focusing on her schoolwork, Katie can be found reading and reviewing novels or writing one of her own.

>>NON-FICTION<<

Lindsey Moses is a senior majoring in English at SUNY at Oswego. In addition to serving as a member of Sigma Tau Delta and Phi Kappa Phi, she also edits for the student-run literary and art magazine *The Great Lake Review*. Lindsey has worked as a writing tutor since her sophomore year of college, providing helpful feedback on peers' academic papers and offering useful advice for revision. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, traveling, listening to music, and attending concerts. Lindsey hopes to one day achieve a successful career in the publishing industry, where she can help fellow writers reach their full potential and ultimately make their dreams come true.

Jessica Paton loves all things writing. She currently is between graduating from English and Criminology as an undergraduate and being accepted to graduate school for an English-related program with an emphasis in some aspect of reading or writing. As a writer Jessica focuses on blogging and sharing her opinions on the hot topics of the day. As a reader she is in love with paranormal fiction and supports all "genre" fiction. As a *Mind Murals* editor, she wants to see her fellow writers' visions come to life.

>>POETRY<<

Emily Keith is a senior double majoring in English literature and philosophy at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. She currently serves as Vice President of the Pi Delta Chapter after a tenure as President. Emily has enjoyed work at multiple editorial positions and internships, and currently works at her university's Writing Center as an undergraduate consultant. She plans to pursue a doctoral degree in either literature or educational theory with an emphasis on literacy. She often finds herself preoccupied with all things James Joyce and hopes to incorporate his work into her graduate research. In her free time, Emily writes poetry, spends time with her pet cats and tortoise, and reads *To Kill a Mockingbird* for the umpteenth time.

Amanda Gaines, a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2014, is a senior in the English/Creative Writing program at West Virginia University, minoring in Foreign Literature and Culture. While pursuing her B.A., she has stayed involved as a poetry reader for *Calliope*, the Jazz director at U92 radio station, and a tutor with accessibility services. She hopes to continue her education at UCLA for Screenwriting, where she hopes to elucidate and complicate the social dynamic between those repressed and those repressing them in Soviet Era Europe. Some of her favorite works are *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut, *The Glimmering Room* by Cynthia Cruz, and *Deathproof* by Quentin Tarantino.

Bridget Sheridan Shaffrey is a Film and Media Studies undergrad at Bucknell University. Bridget has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since spring 2015 and recently has been accepted to present her paper "Ancient Lovers: How History's Greatest Heroes Might Be Their Gayest" at the Sigma Tau Delta 2016 International Convention. Bridget also has been a runner up for the AFF film competition, a member of Bucknell's literary magazine, Bucknell's Sketch Comedy Group, *The Bucknellian*, and a member of Bucknell's Division 1 lacrosse team. Her hope is to eventually write and edit for sketch comedy groups such as *Saturday Night Live*.

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Meghan Rose Barrett is earning her B.S. in Biology and Creative Writing from the State University of New York at Geneseo in May 2016; she has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since 2014. Meghan plans to earn her Ph.D. in Biology studying bees, brains, or both! Meghan currently is a Phi Beta Kappa Writing Intern, a member of NeuWrite, and president of Alpha Delta Epsilon sorority. Meghan currently is engaged in a forest community ecology study, which inspired all of her poetry on Sugar Maple trees. Meghan’s favorite bees are of the family Megachilidae, because of their fuzzy scopa.

Melina Bourdeau is a senior English major at Framingham State University in Framingham, MA. She has a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Photography. She has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2013. Over the past four years, she has been published in two editions of Framingham State’s literary magazine, *The Onyx*, and three editions of Creative Writing Club’s zine. She also is an Associate Editor on Framingham State’s award-winning independent student-run newspaper, *The Gatepost*. In her spare time, Melina plays full-back on the university’s rugby team. Her favorite novels include Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.

Amanda Gaines, a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2014, is a senior in the English/Creative Writing program at West Virginia University, minoring in Foreign Literature and Culture. While pursuing her B.A., she has stayed involved as a poetry reader for *Calliope*, the Jazz director at U92 radio station, and a tutor with accessibility services. She hopes to continue her education at UCLA for Screenwriting, where she hopes to elucidate and complicate the social dynamic between those repressed and those repressing them in Soviet Era Europe. Some of her favorite works are *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut, *The Glimmering Room* by Cynthia Cruz, and *Deathproof* by Quentin Tarantino.

Morag Ann Hastie currently is working toward her B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing at the University of Toledo, OH. Before embarking on her writing career she completed her Ph.D. in Astrophysics and worked as a professional astronomer until 2011 when she left her career to raise her daughter. Morag has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since spring 2015. Her short fiction and non-fiction essays have been published in *The Mill* literary magazine, and have been shortlisted for The Write Practice annual contest. She is a two-time winner of the Shapiro Writing Contest for her fiction and drama. Her published works can be found at her website: moraghastie.com.

Jamie Hayes is a senior at Merrimack College where she has a double major in Forensic Science and English, and a double minor in Chemistry and Women's and Gender Studies. Next year, she hopes to pursue her studies in English Literature at the graduate level. Jamie has been President of her Sigma Tau Delta chapter since spring 2015, and presented an academic paper at the Sigma Tau Delta 2016 International Convention. She placed second in the Aherne Poetry Contest in 2015 with her poem "Unfiltered," and currently is acting as the poetry editor for *The Merrimack Review*.

Raven Leigh Jones, a second-semester Junior English Writing major at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, has an anticipated graduation date of May 2017. Raven was inducted into Sigma Tau Delta in fall 2015. Within the past two years, she has had four poems published in *Chimera*, Edinboro's Journal of Art and Literature. Her favorite poet is Gertrude Stein and a lot of her work emulates a similar style to Stein's abstract wordplay. She also enjoys writing poems that reflect psychological and sociological theories. After graduating from Edinboro, Raven plans to attend The University of Pittsburgh to get an M.F.A. in poetry writing.

Isaac Kulp studies English and Secondary Education at Alvernia University, and was inducted into Sigma Tau Delta in fall 2015. Isaac works as a tutoring assistant at Alvernia in accordance with the Reading Collegiate Scholars Program, a local program that helps low-income high school students gain college access. His interests include writing poetry and music, co-editing for his university's magazine *Zephyrus*, and existential crises coupled with conspiracy theories. Isaac's two favorite works are Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* and Charles Bukowski's *Love is a Dog from Hell*. Maybe in the next life-

Emma Lamberton is finishing her senior year at Geneva College in Pennsylvania where she will graduate with two undergraduate degrees in Writing and Music. Emma's editorial focus has led her to serve on the boards of both Geneva's literary magazine, *Chimes*, and award-winning newspaper, *The Cabinet*, of which she currently is managing editor. Finding success in the journalism field, Emma has written for both state and national news organizations. Gaining the attention of Foxnews.com, she was republished in her coverage of Vermont's controversial health care initiatives. A member of Sigma Tau Delta since 2013, Emma currently serves as her chapter's President.

Elena Macias recently graduated from the University of Maryland with a B.A. in English Language and Literature where she wrote essays on the literary works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Jane Austen, Jonathan Swift, Julia Alvarez, and William Shakespeare. Her academic excellence and dedication to her undergraduate career garnered her an invitation to join Sigma Tau Delta, which she happily accepted during her last semester in 2015. Her love of books about whimsical adventures with a cast of diverse characters inspired her to begin writing at the age of 11. When writing, she rocks out to music and always has a big cup of warm tea or hot chocolate within reach. She hopes to share her stories and words with the rest of the world someday.

Anika Leigh Maiberger, an English Literature major and German minor at Heidelberg University in Tiffin, OH, has an anticipated graduation date of May 2017. Anika has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2015. She plans to spend her spring 2016 semester studying English Literature at the University of Oxford in England. Her favorite genre is Noir Fiction and her favorite texts include *Laura* by Vera Caspary and *Daisy Miller: A Study* by Henry James.

Abigail McBride is a junior at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, PA, double majoring in English and Psychology. At Messiah, she works as a student leader for the writing center, discussing writing like a chef discussing mushrooms, cheese, pudding, etc. She has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2015 and currently is studying Chaucer as well as Psychology and Literature during a semester at Oxford University. Main interests include Rumi, Quentin Tarantino movies, and yoga.

Samantha Miller is a current junior English Secondary Education Major at the College of New Jersey and has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2014. She is attending her first conference this spring to present a critical essay on young adult literature, and is very excited. Though she enjoys exploring many topics in literature, she is particularly interested in intertextuality, the cultural impact of texts, and classical allusions. Samantha spends most of her free time working with theater and has directed, stage managed, and written for productions. Some of her favorite texts are *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt, *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Alison Hyde Pascale is in her senior year at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, CT, studying Art History and English. She is her chapter President of Sigma Tau Delta. An aspiring playwright; Alison had her first piece produced in fall 2015. She's worked both with her own university in their theater department and with other area colleges, in addition to community and regional theaters. She hopes to receive her M.F.A. in playwriting. Alison's main interest lies in adaptation; her first produced work was an adaptation of the novella *Return of the Soldier* by Rebecca West and she currently is working on a series of short plays based on the stories of Mark Twain.

Jaclyn J. Reed, a junior Writing and English Literature major at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta for only a little over a year, but is excited about the literary community she has entered. She has published several times in poetry, creative non-fiction, and short fiction categories, and was awarded the Academy of American Poets Colleen M. Brown Memorial Award for her poem "Death" in 2014. Jaclyn uses the majority of her writing to explore the darker edges of the human condition with subjects including abuse, murder, and mental illness, as she believes that only through the true understanding of suffering can beauty be found in the most hellish places.

Kimberlee Marie Roberts, a junior undergraduate at Widener University, has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since spring of her freshman year in 2013. During her undergraduate career Kimberlee has participated in international conferences for 18th-century Romanticism, presented at undergraduate editorial conferences, as well as served as President of her University's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. Her favorite experience with literature was working from William Wordsworth's manuscripts in Grasmere, England, to help one of her professors edit an anthology of British Romanticism. The texts she finds the most rewarding are William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Alastor*.

Stephanie Rubright, a recent member of Sigma Tau Delta as of fall 2015, will be graduating as an English major at Penn State, Harrisburg in May 2016. During her time at Penn State, her work has been published in *The Burg* as well as her campus's local magazine, *From the Fallout Shelter*. When she's not writing, she's reading absurdist fiction and local poetry collections.

Andrew Ryan, a senior at The College of New Jersey, will be graduating in May 2016 with a major in English and a double minor in Creative Writing and Philosophy. Andrew has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since fall 2013. During his undergraduate career at the College, he presented an award-winning academic paper at the Sigma Tau Delta 2015 International Convention and contributed regularly to the College's literary magazine, *The Lion's Eye*. Andrew's literary research interests include identity politics and contemporary satire. He especially enjoys studying the poetry of Claudia Rankine and the fiction of George Saunders.

Leah Santucci is enrolled at Misericordia University in Dallas, PA, as a Nursing major and English minor. Leah has been the Head of Typesetting and Design for her university's literary journal, *Instress*, since the fall 2014. Most recently, she has obtained an internship for working on this annual publication through Misericordia's Department of English. In 2015, she assisted her Sigma Tau Delta chapter in creating and publishing the second volume of a poetry anthology entitled *The Wonder of Words*. Leah exhibits a strong appreciation for literature, especially the works of William Shakespeare, and, as of late, has been delving into the art and craft of poetry. Leah's graduation date is May 2016.

Anna Schles is an undergraduate student at West Virginia University studying English and History. In fall 2015, she became a member of Sigma Tau Delta. In her spare time, she enjoys listening to the Beatles, reading, making short films, playing chess, and drawing. She enjoys discussing literature with others, and some of her favorite works to discuss are those of John Lennon, Oscar Wilde, and David Foster Wallace.