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JOURNALS

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2018–19 WRITING AWARDS
FOR THE SIGMA TAU DELTA *REVIEW*
AND THE SIGMA TAU DELTA *RECTANGLE*

Frederic Fadner Critical Essay Award

Mary Welch: “Pedagogy with a Purpose:
Using Dialects to Prepare Students for Diverse Futures”

Eleanor B. North Poetry Award

Grayson Chong: “Language Lessons”

E. Nelson James Poetry Award

Rebecca Santiago: “When I Was a Little Girl”

Herbert Hughes Short Story Award

Anna Jankovsky: “The Right Side of the River”

Elizabeth Holtze Creative Non-Fiction Award

DeAndra Miller: “Dead to Rights”

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SIGMA
TAU
DELTA

RECTANGLE

POETRY

When I Was a Little Girl

Rebecca Santiago

My mother woke up one day
and told us we weren't Puerto Rican anymore.
Spic and span wasn't a cleaner
but something hollered out car windows;
a drive by slinging hollow bullets aimed for olive skin,
seven years in the making.

A woman at a museum called me
a little boy but she
walked away too quickly
for me to tell her
my then frizzy, tangled hair was
too much work and my mother didn't have
the time or patience to kill the lice.

When I was a little girl
my mother said we couldn't be
Puerto Rican anymore.
The stain of my skin was a reminder
of the three uncles who
gang raped her, a crime

to which my grandmother said
“bullshit.”

A walking stain
a reminder of shame
and a Spaniard father
who chose a pale wife and two kids
to replace us.
My sister got his pale card
and used it to pass
while the sun spat on my shoulders and darkened
the pigment; I made a lateral move
from spic to nigger.
Because an other is still an other.

When I was a little girl,
my mother said we couldn't
be Puerto Rican anymore.
I thought we were
because she played Celia Cruz on Sundays,
made pernil for Thanksgiving,
and called me pendeja
whenever I walked past.

My mother taught me only the essentials
of our language:
Maricon, hija de puta, stupida, flaca, golda, puneta,
bendicion?
Que Dios te bendiga.

When I was a little girl,
my mother said we couldn't
be Puerto Rican anymore.
She turned the pages of books
in the department of records,
pacing the halls like she was waiting
on the delivery of a new life.

Tedious labor led to factual fiction;
the story is so real but doesn't wholly
belong to us.

She stole a baby from that nursery
of yellowed paper and broken spines
and called it "Native American."

Seminole from a father she never knew,
Apache from a bloody handshake she made with a stranger,
Taino from her mother.

When I was a little girl,
my mother said we couldn't
be Puerto Rican anymore.
Lynched voodoo dolls
dangling in a coat closet
in the name of black magic.
Meanwhile, smiling to a tribe
weighted down in turquoise and ivory
jingle dresses, owl feathered headpieces,
a wingspan to free this caged bird
made of fabric and fringe.
Smudging the shit out of the four corners.
Prison walls built around me
with bricks from her story.

Celia was replaced
with the Arawak Mountain Singers.
Pernil was replaced with bison.
Bibi Atabei became her mantra.

Blacks were lazy, Whites were evil, Hispanics were
bottom feeders—opportunists willing to scheme and violate
in word and deed.
Asians and Arabs served a purpose—nail stylists and bodega owners.
But none could ever be as pure
as the Native stereotype.

Her DNA 50% culture and 50%
coquito, she swore it was one and the same
because a stereotype can become truth
when an excuse turns into a reason.

Puerto Rican? We never were.
Her lack of identity
came from her lack of security.
A sad child searching for a new life,
a new dress, a new skin.
To erase the scars left on body, mind, and soul.
Puerto Rican became a synonym
for pain, danger, betrayal.

I would be better off, she reasoned—
a naked soul with a fighting chance.
Dead set on salvation
she sent me out with no destination
and no return address.

When I was a little girl.

Language Lessons

Grayson Chong

I learned to speak this from a
Woman who molds her mouth
Into *eeeees* and *ooooos* so I may learn
What the soothing sea sounds like. So
I may memorize the easy breeze
Making music with the coconut trees.
I learned to speak this from a
Man marking mangroves in his head
While teaching me about Anansi
And de duppy dem. My timid
Tongue twists into plantains and palm
Trees to imitate the songs of their voices.
I learned to speak this from my
Grandparents who always asked: *Who*
You is? Yardie. Yardie. Yardie.
You is. You is. You is.

But here, language is strict. Tight teeth. Tongue
Tries to teach itself to abandon -in' for
-ing. *Guh* like a punch to the gut. Uh!
Ouuuuu like bruise and abuse. *Ee?* confuses

Itself with *Eh?* Here, *yuh* and *oonuh* morph
Into conjoined twins as *you*. *Is* becomes *are*. R
Like rasta. Rawtid. Rupture. Tongue becomes
The best backside. Beat it enough, and it will
Learn to forget the sound of the soothing
Sea. It will forget the easy breeze making music
With the coconut trees. Anansi. The duppy.
This learning. Re-learning. Re-reading. Re-
Vising. I bury the melodies until I cannot
Hear the voices singing any longer. Then, one

Day, when I lose myself among “proper”
Vowels and consonants, the voices, vex
And abandoned, rise from the ground,
Chanting *eees* and *ooos* to the beat of steel
Pan drums. I laugh loudly to myself,
What is this obeah? I remember. I
Remember I learned to speak this from my
Grandparents who always asked: *Who*
you is? I answer them back:
Yardie. Yardie. Yardie.
You is. You is. You is.

A Sonnet for Prosperos

Grayson Chong

You love me enough to teach me your art,
Taking my tongue and twisting it into
Shapes, unnatural and base, so I may mark
The rhythm of your song. Yet, when I screw
Up the syntax, you curse me, torture me,
Beat my lips into submission until
I sing your song again. Byron, Shelley,
And Keats fill me with amnesia. I will
Forget my mother tongue, my ancestors
Suffocated by conquerors who build
Plantations in my mouth. Imitators
Transform the fruits of your labour, malaise.
 Deep within memory, parts of me die.
 Language becomes foreign; ancestors cry.

Widow's Routine

Grace Larson

January has only silence to offer.
The sky is empty, still, more often than not
I will wake up to find this planet
a little more deflated than the night before.
Someday I expect to wake up to nothing at all
and I wonder if that is what happened to you.

The cross above your nightstand is crooked
like a dog with his head cocked
asking "do you still want to believe in me?"
and your glasses filter the light of the alarm clock
dusted with the weeks since you left everything.

If you were here, you would tell me to believe—
send me to sleep with the rhythm of your prayers.
God was the only one you loved more than me
which must be why he took you and left me to be
swallowed whole by this widow's routine.

The picture I put in front of your urn
sits on what was once our dresser.

It captured a you that still knew how to smile
and I realize now that it had been a long time.
Your body was failing you and so was your brain.
I knew that soon you'd forget my name.
Sixty years of marriage wasn't enough
to prepare me for your decay.

Every day pieces of you were disappearing
but I still never let myself believe
that you would eventually leave this Earth

and me.

The Gift

Grace Larson

I know that it may not be a gift
to present a child to this forlorn world
but still, I ignore the throbbing instinct.
I am pre-programmed for procreation.
The recklessly in love part of myself
so selfishly wants to create something
that is totally and completely ours.

Still, I'm afraid we might shatter our child
the way that my father fractured my faith
when he left *I love yous* that stank of booze.
Or the way that your father broke your bones—
ruining the safety of your only home.
I am afraid that our innocent child
might ask about my poignant, pinkening scars.

And still, I can't help but to imagine
the distant dream I'll get to awake to:
to fumble over one another in
the shadows of a magic winter night.
Scheming to stuff stockings and steal cookies

while granting our children the fleeting gift
of genuine, pure, and man-made delight.

I got lost in the wrong idea of love,
but I still found you without any map.
If it's possible there could be someone
in my life that I will love more than you
then I will and I will trust and I will
love because you gifted me with a world
that I could finally find beautiful.

Pothole Pollock

David M. Doyle

The first time I crashed my car was much like this painting:
abstract.

Red paint chips thrown hard into a fog-metal earth,
bawling babe blues, leitmotif for art and accidents,
jaw agape, Hapsburg, rich, dim, indigos
black and blue bruises, thorns, scorn
door agape, half-dangling on a tethered limb,
screws dripping into the lawn like dew.

I, ajar

half my ghastr soul leaking out the trunk, half-smiling,
engulfed in yellowed winds on fairway greens, all the while when
hell sulfur spoke sweet scent of oil, cinnamon, rubber mallets,
because this was a fire
because the road became jealous:
got heavy handed with the paint,
expressed, impressed, ruined a Chevy
cursed that S-Curve on Northlake.

Hemingway's Key West Cabin

David M. Doyle

Blowdart acupuncture was costing an arm so I dead legged to the seaside
street,

 bathed myself in milk and honey, mercury,
I became some saltwater, sidewalk priest.
I buzzed a whimper little tune and I waited, fishing for bees:

 Leviathan fish scales, tar and rooted together,
 fossil records, recording, like a VCR on loop and forth,
 creationist documentaries sprawled with gray-moon tape like waves,
 sporting fins, films upon the surfaces,
 sticky waters rolling frothy forth.

Poseidon blows of hooks and scars and sport:
 carbon copy of myth, deep within hydrogen and oxygen and fish.

Whales, fish, serpents, snake,
 each lake that roots to the sea old men cast:
 Jonah and Job and Oysters you cannot eat without salt
 or the abolishment of Leviticus rules, givers of law,
 slabs of sand solidified to stone, made commanding;

drop in a bucket, or a bucket dropped,
 Noah, and an ark with every animal
minus the Leviathan, an ark within its own.

Pieces

C. Bougie

When you are not thinking about fucking people, you think about the papers you ought to be finishing, and how asexual-coded Enjolras is in Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and Rimbaud, and your father who wouldn't understand, and the summer, and your dead mother, and how pretty Dr. Whatsername looks when she lectures, and how your hair is messed again, and what boots to wear while studying at the library, and coffee from the seventy-five-cent machine, and Alfred Hitchcock, and your lack of a solid post-graduation several-year plan. It maybe sounds obsessive but this is likely just coincidence; it's the major not the man.

Identities slip from your fingers wet leaving you uncertain of thing after thing after thing. What is it called when you get coffee together and share life stories from the day your grandparents met to your mother dying or you running off to England? What is it called when you'd maybe like to kiss her, but aren't quite sure, and too afraid to ask? The lack of words for you, maybe, contains hot pink multitudes.

You are asked, *if not romance and not sex, what drives you? What is your meaning?* You desire to turn the inquiry on its head. *What are you?* you think to ask back, tilting your head to the side in question and revealing the sharpest

of jaws under library rectangle light. You cut them with your counters and the black ring on your finger.

Aromanticism is an unfelt lack. It seems strange to you that any other manner of existence might feel normal under the skin. A lack of desire isn't sadness but inconsequential/the manner of thing that isn't made relevant until it is placed in contrast next to its opposite, and its opposite, and its opposite, and its opposite. Made alone, ugly, and freakish by the sheer addition of numbers.

What is aromanticism? (Asexuality?) You could say, maybe, that they are every little thing in the world save the feelings of romantic/sexual attraction (multifarious).

You used to be able to count on your pudgy fingers the number of times another person had turned you on. It used to be six. You could remember each moment, and half of them were the whisper press of lips against your pinked ear. You never told her, but, once, she asked, *are you bi?* Once, she asked, *is me eating this apple turning you on?* And it hadn't been, but you had been looking, and, for whatever green reason, you blushed.

You find yourself with her self (J) on the third floor of the campus library, 11:30 p.m., lying on the tile floor reading Rimbaud in the original French. Each sitting on a footstool, you graze bare knees, both leaned over the pages of the hundred-year-old text. You can hear the building's water rushing through its plumbing, sounding like the internal digestion tracts of a Wisconsin, proverbial whale. You will never return to God, or leave the library, for the sake of Jonah's aim. She looks too pretty, and reads Rimbaud's rakish hell sweet.

Perhaps in Tunisia

Rebecca Pickard

Oh, there is a hope somewhere
out there. It's resting in a purple
bottle in a forgotten shop about
to close. The shop keep
picks it up and shifts it
in his hands, almost
crushing it (it is so
delicate) before
hiding it
again.

Ode to the Hercules Cluster

McKayla Conahan

It presents itself like a soul. Or
a thousand souls dispersing.
Glittering orbs of possibilities,
Perfect logarithmic distribution,
flecks of platinum and copper,
revealing age, morphology,
histories of contact and loneliness,
whether or not they have been stretched
and kneaded together like
two lumps of fresh oily dough.

This is the future.
In the approaching eons
Andromeda will slip into
the spilled bucket of milk
that is our home. To live
through that merger
will be to bear witness
to the brightest night sky
in galactic memory.

In the show we watch
it is possible for two souls to fuse. I often
wonder what the melding
of our atoms would feel like. Who
would we become?
What is the stability of our orbit,
celestial swing? What is the choreography
of our stars? Can I compare our gravity,
strained by mental black holes
and blazars, to the era in which
there are new constellations every night?
In space, it is mostly empty space,
all increasing with the universal expansion,
moving apart like points on a balloon.

It is so lucky, then, that your vector intersects mine,
even if they carry us, redshifting, away.

A Flower for Me (A Little Algernon)

Benjamin Kim Papham

Some days are a little Algernon.

darkness light eyes closed
nativity white coats
 gifts of myrrh and
 cheese now gone

Dead ends haunt me
 beaten paths
 familiar turns
 familiar
 familiar . . .
Cornered. Cold hands lift me
 by the stomach.

I fly.
 Wings—
 wings to sail over fresh
 cut grass
 wings made of molten asphalt

poured into a
pudding cup
wings to see chalk scratches
on a green board
diagrams of a mouse
arrows shooting to the
farthest edges:
charts, graphs, numbers.

I see the cheese in numbers.
The weight in carats.
The luster in pearls.
I know the difference
between
gouda and brie
ricotta and mozzarella
and if that means I should open
merlot or chardonnay.

I no longer eat the cheese
to satisfy myself.
It makes the people
in the white coats
holding clipboards
shouting to the others
writing on the green boards

—happy.

But some days are a little harder
to run the maze, knowing
the reward is
only cheese,
to feel like I'm contributing
to the success
of their experiment

or
if I will simply be
another disappointment.

Some days I don't finish on purpose.
At least, that's what I tell myself.

I no longer eat the cheese.
The taste reminds me
that I could fly.
I remember when I could find it
whenever I desired.
Today, I felt cold hands again,
the first in a long time.

Cheese makes me sad.
All, except—
The flavor of a brighter sun
Light hatched inside an egg
Rolled into a tiny ball.
Tail curled
above my head.

A flower in a paw.

A flower for me.

The Art of Silence

Maeve Quinn

In the morning we wake, walk to the beach,
onto the broken boardwalk traced in rope,
scattered puddles the lone remnants
of last night's storm. We contemplate

the mountains through fog
in a landscape of white and black,
black enough to be blue.
You want me to paint it for you
in the spaces where our skin doesn't touch,

so white and black and blue
fill the air between our thighs, the gap
at our hips, the emptiness
from hands to shoulders.

Approaching in the fog, the outlines
of five people: two tall, three small,
a red coat, a red hat. Do they see us
through the haze, or have we
already melted into the landscape?

They approach us, hands clasped,
a five-man chain of barrel monkeys,
and when I leave you there on the boardwalk,
your skin stained white and black and blue,

I follow red hats bobbing into the fog.
You reach after me, a mime teetering
on blue stilts, white pants billowing
around your legs, white suspenders, white face
painted with regret.

i already mourn the birth of my unborn son

Keturah Hancock

because he will be born into a world,
where the religion of the day is racism.
where white supremacy is *god*
and color is *sin*.

i already have to be strong for him.

because i don't know what i'll say
when he sees me crying in front of the tv.
and i have to tell him that
yet *another* black boy was *murdered*.

i already have his eulogy memorized.

because i can already see it,
them zipping up the body bag.
i can hear him begging for his life,
hating where his blackness has gotten him.

i already have a speech prepared.

for when i am surrounded by microphones,
begging pharaoh to let my people go.
asking for justice i know i won't receive.
because to them, his skin is a declaration of *war*.

Crocodile in the Bathtub

Rachael Crosbie

You don't know how you got here—wind whipped through a violet sky, and you coughed up wired air by the little lake. Trout carving brown water, a heaviness stilled. The dying sun haloed copper on your hair.

Black rushed through and reflected ripples in the water, reaching the patch of dirt and dry grass where you sat cross-legged and numb from the damp earth. You left and let your body walk you into a parking lot buzzing with people. You followed them.

You followed them to mint hydrangeas—plastic still sheathing—and kneeled before the dead, too. You whispered a goodbye to him, signed your name in the guestbook, and dipped your fingers in the water cased in gold leaves and coins. You didn't know him.

A blood-colored coyote lay sliced open outside on the road—gutted like a poached crocodile on a twig and grain swamp. Two years after the fact, and you don't think back to these moments.

You wake up cold in the bathtub, water splattering on the tile when dawn projects in your motel room, and peach plunges back in your skin.

You don't know how you got here.

The Eclipse

Tori Shelton

I. Carl Whittaker, High School Drama Teacher

An evening curtain slides across the sky while
silence ripples over the crowd. The wind slips
through the dry grass next to me as I watch the
moon take center stage. Someone next to me
starts clapping and soon the silence is filled.

II. Daniel Walker, Ethanol Hauler

I can see the thousands in the rented land behind Walmart
staring skyward. Their cell phone screens make up new
constellations as the light changes from midmorning to
evening. My CB radio crackles while the fuel flows into the
buried tanker. My wife calls and I tell her I wish she were here to see.

III. Lena Truong, Gen-Ed Major

My body is lighter than ever, my feet barely touch the
ground. The cornices lengthen on the asphalt.
Birds tuck their heads into their bodies as the air around

me cools. I don the credit union eclipse glasses
and join my neighbors in looking at our star.

IV. *Sylvia Jennings, Stay-at-Home Mom*

Our children pinch each other, grinning and howling
as premature night falls. Their father points to the sky,
explaining why the sun is playing hide-and-seek. He
sees me watching and calls for me to join them. I take
my hands out of the soapy water and step outside.

V. *Mariana Ochoa, Target Employee*

I-15 is bumper to bumper for the first time in ages. The air
grows still while everyone stops their cars to watch the sky. A
woman in front of me steps outside her car, squinting at the eclipse.
I grab an extra pair of glasses and run to her, placing them in her
hand. She thanks me, and I see a tear fall as we watch the moon cross the
sun.

You Can't "Kill Your Darlings" If They're Already Extinct

Solana Warner

When I was four, I chose to be a paleontologist.

I loved the way it rolled off my tongue like
tree sap melting to amber—
how classmates asked me to spell it after school.

I owned every dinosaur toy
and knew them all by name.
Cera, (the triceratops)
often lolled in my messy fingers,
while other girls dressed up dolls.

I never liked folding myself into doll houses.
Pink and yellow cages,
plasticized imagination
that spanned less than a hundred years—

I hungered for motley millennia.

I lived in the soft curve
of velociraptor talons,
stereoscope clutched in tiny hands.

Meteors before dinner,
T-Rex before boys,
the sweet, concise impact of
pachycephalosaurus butting heads.

But dreams morph, reality settles.

Scalpel the skin of red mesa rock
can never bring them back.

I am an English major now.
I live in the creases of history and fantasy.

But I *still* thirst for cretaceous sunsets.
Oozing across the summer green.
My reflection subsumed
in trilobites' flat luster.

I want to drain myself
through jurassic yellow sand,
sink slowly on mesozoic moss.

I want to reach deep in earthen graves,
dirt soft like archaeopteryx feathers, and
collide softly with skeletons
I sought so fervently as a child.

Valentines

Kara Travis

1.

The equation is simple:
a blink is the sum of two winks.
There's no way
you're not flirting with me right now.

2.

I'm allergic to flowers, but
you have tulips and we've got
bleeding hearts—isn't this
a beautiful bouquet?

3.

Your smiles are face-up
pennies in the parking lot—
good luck, shiny treasures,
easy to step on or discard
for a wish in the next fountain.

4.

If the letter “h” plays leapfrog

“heart” will turn into “earth.”
We’ll only ever be
a clever trick with Scrabble tiles.

5.
I am the slow tabby cat;
you are the bright laser beam.
I should know by now
you’ll always move away.
I only wanted to touch.

And the tomatoes, they tasted like sunlight

Milena Velez

The summers were longer than an exhale
after you've held your breath under water.
We often ran barefoot on the dirt mountain roads,
not because we didn't have any shoes,
but because we didn't deem them necessary.
Our weathered toes gripped the bicycle pedals
and pushed, pushed uphill only to wiggle
through the air on the way down
as the bikes rattled, heavy with the weight
of water jugs filled with cold, fresh water
from the stone fountain up the road.

Grandma only used stone-cold water in her garden
for the rosy raspberries, the tangled green beans,
and the fat beefsteak tomatoes.
She cooled them off in the mid-August sun,
but knew the juicy insides would stay warm.

And the tomatoes—they tasted like sunlight.

My Mother Saves the Wishbones

Jessie Box

Every time we dine on winged things,
she takes the furcula to break with me,
and I wonder what these wishes bring.

From pygostyles to mortal ending,
she cleaned both chickens and turkeys,
every time we dined on winged things.

“Happy Birthday” a fervor, a reckoning,
the song becomes a fever dream,
another wish to keep me wondering.

I never asked her if it helped pretending
when twisting vertebrae for our family,
so we could dine on winged things.

I wished for him, a bird-like thing,
I’ve dreamed of him three times this week,
but I know what wishing will not bring.

They connect the keels, connect the wings,
but they can't reconnect a breaking family.
Still, we dine on winged things
and I wonder if this wish will bring—

Missing Fragments

Jeddie Sophronius

My English teacher says don't start a sentence with *because*,
because you will likely end up with a fragment.

Something will go missing. A Lego piece,
grandpa's towel, or a noun, like father.

Still, I refuse to follow the directions.
I don't want to ask for help.

I stumble my way through my childhood bedroom
that has now turned too dark to see.

I call out the same person in different languages,
hoping to get an answer.

Ayah, Baba, Abba.

When my eyes have adjusted to the darkness,

I can see that the scribbles I've made years ago
have been painted clean.

My old toys have been thrown away
along with the family photographs.

I believe if you wait long enough
a shadow will turn into something

you no longer remember,
like the rose you plucked

and tucked around your father's ear
when you were five. Someday,

I will understand my mother's words:
Some things are more beautiful
when they are missing.

The Last Carrier Pigeon

Robin Gow

If I leave my window open will the ghosts
of all the carrier pigeons know where to find me?

I roll up letters—ribbon tied in bows

press my thumb to envelope lips

sealed shut

I want to make pen pals with all the extinct animals

A letter to the woolly mammoth
about how I empathize with her size

About how sometimes when I wake up
it happens to be from inside a block
of ice within a cave

A note to the Tasmanian tiger
who died alone at Hobart Zoo

Did he fill his marsupial pouch
with stones?
An attempt to replenish
the emptying blood of his species?

I want to tell him
that endings are no one's fault

That they leave
us fly-leaf dazed and
writing letters
for carrier pigeons

I practice their call

Up late at night
hoping to coax one out of death
eyes: glossy and dusk-orange

At one time they were the most
plentiful bird in North America

The trees still ache with their migrations
reaching in the air for grey feather spirits

letters written in cloud

and there I am
sitting beneath the great
big oak tree in the playground

a pile of letters in my lap
asking the leaves

if they know that the
last carrier pigeon died in
a zoo in 1914

She never laid a fertile egg

each labor making empty children

Planets without gravities

Holding them close
to her body she would
pray that something inside
them would start to grow

Told them bedtime
stories of all the places
her letters had gone.

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Dead to Rights

DeAndra Miller

I remember when I first learned I was black.

That is not to say that I did not know I was black before. I know what I see when I look in the mirror. I have come face-to-face with stereotyping and negative expectations. I understand my race in a passive way—in a way that involves microaggressions—large-lipped, wide-nosed, shuck-and-jive comments by people I try to ignore, the way I try to ignore the reflection that is forming in their image. Gods.

My race, however, was not at the forefront of my life until I became an adult, and the thing about color is that once I saw it, it is all I could see thereafter.

I am a lover of all types of music: rock, hip-hop, classical, alternative. If it has a rhythm, I will listen to it and sing along—loudly and badly. My favorite time to belt out ballads is when I am alone in the car. I sing at the top of my lungs, perform for my audience, take a few bows, and ready myself for the next performance with no judgment. Every time I get in my car, I connect my phone to the radio and play all my favorite songs—the songs I know all the words to. I tune into a good playlist before I begin driving so I do not have to fiddle with it while in motion.

I was nineteen and I had to make a trip to the grocery store. I only needed bread and Gatorade. I walked outside into the sweltering, Florida summer heat, approached my slightly messy, silver Corolla that was sitting in my driveway, and settled into the front seat. I started the car and sat idly in park, waiting for the air conditioner to kick in. Then, I did what I always do: I pulled out my phone and opened Spotify. I quickly engrossed myself in the task of scrolling down my favored playlist wanting to find the perfect song to begin my quick car ride. I lingered on “To Love You More” by Celine Dion: the chorus is great to belt out and my car acoustics were decent enough to fool me into thinking I sounded good. I was blissfully unaware of my surroundings until I heard a loud tapping on my window.

I looked up, startled by the sudden noise, and saw a police officer standing there—hand resting on his gun. He motioned for me to wind down my window and I quickly complied.

“You’ve been sitting here a long time,” he said abruptly. He gave no introduction and there was no patience in his tone. He looked at me closely and eyed my car. He craned his neck to look inside while fiddling with his holster.

My heart raced in response. I was confused. I had never even been pulled over before, never broken a traffic law, never even gotten a parking ticket. I had no record of wrongdoing. In high school, I had always been the “teacher’s pet,” the “goody two-shoes.” I hated being in trouble and this officer’s presence at my window made me feel troubled.

“Hi officer, is something wrong?” I asked, voice shaky and barely audible.

“You’ve been sitting here too long. Get your ID.”

“Did I do something?” I asked, while looking for my license.

“We’ve had break-ins with people of . . . your description. Do you live here? Is this even your car? Why have you been sitting here so long? Step out of the car.”

I touched the cool handle and moved slowly out of my car even though everything progressed so quickly that my racing heart gave way to panic. I felt scared, upset, and started to cry, but even in my panic I knew that every move had to be deliberate and my demeanor had to be non-threatening. Countless thoughts raced through my mind. I was sitting in my own driveway, in front of my own house. I had not moved my car. I just wanted to find a song on Spotify. Yet somehow, I was being accused of robbing my residence.

I stammered as I tried to explain that I lived in this house. The officer

ignored me as he took my extended ID. As he studied it with increasing scrutiny, I looked up at my house—the house I had lived in for a few years with my husband and in-laws. It was a nicer home: seven bedrooms, four bathrooms, a pool. My husband and I lived here while we saved money to move out. My kids lived here; they were inside. My mother-in-law lived here; she was inside.

This was my home. And I was being made to feel like I didn't deserve for it to be.

My mother-in-law came outside, surveying the situation with measured anger and caution.

"What is going on?" she asked.

"This is none of your concern," the officer replied, still scrutinizing my license and frowning.

He looked me up and down and walked around my car, inspecting it closely.

My mother-in-law grew more upset at the situation and began questioning the officer again: "This is my house, this is my daughter, what is the problem?"

"So, she lives here?" the officer asked.

"Yes. Like I said: this is my daughter," she responded.

"Whose car is this?" he asked.

He had not looked at my mother-in-law since she came outside. He busied himself opening my car doors and checking my backseat as I stood there, silent.

"It's her car. Why else would she be in it?" my mother-in-law replied in an aggravated tone.

"I see," he replied, finally looking up. "I need to go run her ID." He then looked directly at me: "Don't move."

He then walked to his car at an agonizingly slow pace, while I stood in front of my car, doors open, innards exposed. I stared at my mother-in-law and she looked back at me with a look in her eyes that I could not place. I did not know if it was pity or understanding.

I cried. Here I was, on my own property, and even then, I had no rights, no say. Anytime I had attempted to open my mouth and give any explanation, I was silenced. I was not allowed to defend myself to this man. In his eyes, I had no business being in this affluent neighborhood, in front of this nice house, while being black.

He took an excruciatingly long time to come back with my ID. In that time, I did as he said. I did not move; I stood there, stiff to my core, and waited for whatever judgment he saw fit to pass. Whatever judgment he felt that fit the crime of being black in a nice neighborhood.

He walked back with a frown on his face, hand still resting on his gun. "Didn't see a record. You can go. Don't do anything stupid."

He walked away. That was it. No apology, no acknowledgment of the time taken from me, the dignity taken from me, the humiliation. Nothing. He found nothing and could do nothing else, so he was leaving.

My mother-in-law opened her mouth and looked as though she wanted to speak, but thought better of it. He left with no protest.

I looked down at my ID, reading my address a few times, and looked back up at the house and wondered why I deserved to be treated as a criminal in my neighborhood. I looked around and I saw a few of my neighbors who stood, surveying the scene. I had not noticed them before. I was too busy focusing on myself to notice my captive audience.

"Are you okay?" my mother-in-law asked.

I looked at her and there was so much I wanted to say, but words could not form. I shook my head.

Finally, I said the first thing that I had been able to in the thirty-two minutes I had been trapped in my driveway.

"Can you please run to the store and get me Gatorade and bread? I don't want to drive."

My mother-in-law nodded, went in the house for her keys, and left.

I learned that I was a minority.

I was the underbelly of society—the graffiti-riddled trains and alleys, the drug-filled streets of the local hood, the underwear showing over the top of baggy pants. I was nothing the majority wanted to see, especially not if I appeared successful.

The moment eternally branded me—like the iron I touched when I was four; like the marked slaves who did not know any better—and I still feel the ache from the burn. I am supposed to be "free," but I still feel the manacles gripping my wrists: a pressure I am so used to, I wonder if I will notice when it finally fades.

I still stiffen in the presence of an officer, still hold my breath until I am

out of a cop's sight, still notice every cruiser on the road and pray to every god I know they will not notice me. I see the way cops eye my husband—a large, muscular, dark-skinned man—and picture the threat they see in him. I picture him as a memorial, a hashtag, a GoFundMe, a lawsuit that drowns the pain in dollar signs and pacification. I picture him as protests and anger that flare for days, then quiet until the next man like him bears his torch.

That moment branded me.

I learned that I was a minority and that has become my primary truth. It comes before my intelligence, my accomplishments, my ambitions. It precedes all because there are some, like that officer, who will not see past it. The truth that says I cannot be a 118-pound black girl, in front of a big house, in a decent car, and deserve the right to have those things. The truth that sparks fear from those I should look to for protection. The truth that reminds me of my place in this world.

Though I get angry at this life I did not ask for, I revel in strength it has gifted me that I did not deserve. The passion it has instilled in me that I cannot ignore. The place I have taken that I will advance.

I may be a minority, but I learned that the experiences of being a minority have made me anything but minor.

Blood

Melanie Jade Raybon

Long past midnight, 1959. Fulgencio Batista kisses his eldest son goodbye before sending him on a plane to Jacksonville, Florida, alongside some 60 military leaders and political aides. He stands on the shore, his feet sinking into the pale sand as water laps over his ankles, watching the plane rise into the dusty purple sky. Soon he will be rising into the sky as well, heading to the Dominican Republic as just another refugee. In the streets of Havana, riots will break out while Fidel Castro and his merry band of revolutionaries celebrate their successes. Cuba's revolution has come to an end.

"I heard it a lot growing up, heard it over and over and over. They would tell it to *anyone*. Friends, family, strangers if the topic came up, they would just rehash it and rehash it. But, you know, it happened mostly when they would reminisce. They would all get together and start talking about, 'oh, do you remember?' and, '*ay, pobrecita Cuba.*' I never really paid attention when they talked about how great Cuba was. I mean, I was a teenager then. So it was a lot of rolling eyes and, 'ugh, this again?' But inevitably, *inevitably*, you would get drawn in. It's just such a story; it's hard to resist.

And part of it, too, was that I don't remember it. It's not a memory, it really is just a story to me. I mean, it's like when I tell you a story

from when you were a baby. You know? It feels like they're just describing another baby. All I would have was my imagination."

Seven years later, 1966. Lourdes Frades, better known by her popular nickname "Ayi," lies on a hospital bed, perspiring and exhausted, with a deep and throbbing red slash across her lower abdomen. Her husband, Ernesto or "Abo," weeps on his knees on the floor next to her, begging God to keep his wife alive long enough to meet their new daughter, long enough to help him raise their already-seven-year-old son. One week and three days later, Lourdes stands anxiously behind the kitchen wall in her husband's apartment, coddling Mercedes (aliases "Mercy" or "Mom") as a pot of rice boils over on the stove. Ernesto stands in the doorway, listening to the armed men in green uniforms as they read off the cleared names one by one: Ernesto, Lourdes, Alejandro, Mercedes.

"It was always in a more general way that I heard the story, and Ayi would start farther back than Abo did with you. She would tell me about how she almost died giving birth to me, how she had to have an emergency C-section, and how the doctors told Abo, 'You can pick one or the other, but not both.' So then a week later, when the police showed up at their door to tell them they were leaving in an hour, Ayi was still recovering, and she actually had gotten an infection on the surgery wound. So here she was, packing up everything they owned and everything she needed for your uncle and me, in so much pain. And then when they finally got to the airport and they were held there for a whole 24 hours, the guards took everything from them. All their clothes, even my baby formula. I mean, everything, everything, everything. They left her with one blanket only.

And so, when we did finally arrive in Florida, they had nothing. No luggage, nothing. Abo had less than a dollar in change in his pocket."

Thirty years later, 1996. Mercy Raybon holds her newborn daughter at her breast, smiling softly at the blonde-haired, blue-eyed wonder. Her husband Mark, a.k.a. "Dad," blinks his watery eyes very fast, stroking back the sweat-drenched hairs that have fallen onto his wife's forehead. Raybon daughter number one is finally given permission to enter the hospital

room, which she does slowly, shyly, while firmly grasping the fingers of her Ayi. She peeks up from beneath her lowered lashes to catch a glimpse of her baby sister, alias “me.” Mercy is in awe at how lucky she is to have given birth to such perfect little American girls.

“No, I have no desire to go back. I mean, they really instilled in me the hate of Castro, of what he did to our family, our country. And you know, your grandparents always said that as long as the Castro family is in power, they wouldn’t go back, because basically all your money is going right into the hands of the government. So, as weird as it is for me, having never even stepped foot in the country I’m from, I know that I could never go back. This Cuba today is not their Cuba.

Not that I don’t enjoy my heritage and my background. But it’s a distant connection, a second-hand connection. It’s kind of a question mark for me, because I only really know it through the emotion coming through them. You know, I grew up in American culture, I married an American man, and I’m so happy I was raised here. I love it. I mean, I grew up wanting to be like the Brady Bunch, so even though it’s part of my past, a lot of that Hispanic tradition is kind of lost from my life. And I think I have a lot of resentment toward Castro for that.”

Twenty years later, 2016. Fidel Castro lies on what will soon be his deathbed, with brother Raúl at his side. He has already outlived Ayi. Mom is on the phone, explaining to me why she does not want me going to Cuba, even if it’s to research for my writing. I wonder if she has ever stopped to consider that Fidel Castro wouldn’t, couldn’t have existed if the United States hadn’t forced him to exist. I wonder if she knows that I love being in the sun because I love it when my skin begins to brown into a more olive tone, that I’m proud when I tell people I get so tan because I’m half Cuban. I wonder if there is another version of me somewhere, singing along to Celia Cruz and dancing *bachata* with my father on the shores of Havana, happy.

“There is a hole there, yes. It’s hard. I feel like I’m a second-generation Cuban American, but I know I’m a first. Especially after having visited Spain with your father, which is supposedly very similar in a lot of ways to Cuba. Walking around the streets and seeing all the architecture and the

history, it made me—I don't know. I felt like part of me belonged there. You feel a calling, if that makes sense. You wonder. It's blood."

I don't want to hold my mother responsible for my failure to connect with my heritage. I don't want to admit out loud that she encouraged my whiteness to blossom and left my *latinidad* to wilt within me, watered only by my own curiosity and my grandfather's insistence on teaching me Spanish. I don't want to resent the fact that I will never be able to cook good, authentic Cuban food the way my brown cousins can.

But who is to blame, then? My grandparents, for leaving Cuba? But without them I wouldn't exist. Castro, for forcing my family out of Cuba? But without him I wouldn't exist.

America, for telling its immigrants that whiteness is the only road to success? But without it I wouldn't exist.

Is it wrong that I get to enjoy all the privileges that America has offered me while also complaining about them? Is it wrong that I don't correct my mother when she reminds me how fortunate I am to look like *una gringa*?

Is it wrong that I wouldn't exist without racism?

Instinct

Jeanette Marie Warren

The blinds seal every crevice of the wooden frame, blocking out light and life from my small room. Reaching for a pen, I stick it down the tight space between my leg and a snug soft cast, wincing as the dry skin flakes away. The displaced bones grind against one another each time I shift the tower of pillows upon which they rest. A deep, guttural moan echoes against the sound of nostalgia—Disney movies playing on my laptop, dark memories swirling about my head. Every fearful, insecure part of me feels alert in this empty place—returning to college after a six-year hiatus stretches my self-reliance, my confidence, my will. That was before a broken ankle. The only friends I’ve made so far are on the rugby field: today they practice without me as I wait for my ankle to fuse. Nobody’s come to visit; no one will. I dance on one foot with Loneliness. Isolation whispers wicked ideas in my ear.

A furtive glance at the bottle of narcotics prescribed for these grinding bones reminds me of days I’ve tried to forget. I wrestle demons alone in my dark, sealed room, trying to drown their voices in Aladdin songs and crunchy Cheetos. But I know all too well the futility of my efforts. Every ounce of energy spent on resistance is a wasted endeavor. I’ve seen this war before: opioids win.

In sleepy southern Maryland, houses rest upon beds of rolling farmland. Creeks lap in wooded backyards, etching paths into the earth. Rivers lead out towards the Chesapeake Bay. Outside of the natural beauty, though, there's little to interest passing travelers. A quaint antique shop. A forgotten historic landmark. A barren bar on a boardwalk. About an hour south of Washington D.C., this rural ghost town lacks entertainment, history, and culture. It compensates for its shortcomings with fatalities. A sign tracking the year's fatal overdoses greets visitors at the county line, and K-9 cop cars inhabit every other side street. Residents call it Calvert County.

On a leisurely drive through this unassuming place, few would stop to pay homage to its deceased. But if anyone began to wonder who of the county's constituents have fatally overdosed, the local homeless shelter owns a beautiful Wall of Remembrance. At Project Echo, pictures of the fallen hang along the wall where residents line up to receive medications. Since many of us are no strangers to addiction, staff keep and provide prescriptions in their appropriate doses. To instill a healthy reminder, they set up this Wall of Remembrance—we scour the wall while we wait. Reading and re-reading names. Calculating age at time of death from the birth and death dates listed. Straining to recognize faces. Hoping not to recognize faces.

Propped against two crutches with my ankle dangling, I study their smiles. Their misfortune snaps me out of my own. As a commuter student living in a homeless shelter—due to the inaccessibility of my college—self-pity becomes a daily snare. Yet here, the faces of more than thirty Calvert County natives, young and old, hang on a dingy wall to commemorate their untimely deaths. I wonder how many died alone.

The resident in line next to me whispers something about pain medication. She's on the prowl. I lie and say I have none. Pain medications are like gold: why share?



I remember Jamie. We met on a trampoline, though we perhaps passed one another a few times in the hallways of Patuxent High School. Jamie and I spent what seemed to be hours one afternoon jumping on a backyard toy with our mutual friend—or maybe we were falling. We were stoned

and quite truant. Testing the limits of impaired motor coordination on a trampoline seemed a far better lesson that day.

A few hours passed (or maybe only thirty minutes), and the marijuana wore off as drugs tend to do. I don't know that I ever spoke to Jamie again, but I can still recall the way our laughter echoed against the trampoline's metal springs. It's no esteemed memory, but certainly not arbitrary. Perhaps my acquaintance with Jamie falls somewhere on the same spectrum: not an important person in my life, but he sure showed me a good time on a trampoline once!

Ten years later, I spotted Jamie's face on the Wall of Remembrance. "Died suddenly," the obituary states, at the great old age of 22.

Opioids are the most commonly abused prescription medication, per the Calvert Alliance Against Substance Abuse (CAASA). I believe them—they should know. People in their county insist on dying with pain pills pulsing through their bloodstreams. Also called narcotics, opioids treat physical pain by altering the brain's reaction to pain stimuli. They bind to opioid receptors in the brain and spinal cord, depressing the central nervous system. The effects of opioid narcotics include numbness, euphoria, and sedation: mouth open, drooling, hunched over on the couch, blank stare at the TV sort of sedation. These are the side effects we hope for. This is the relief we crave. Prescriptions from the opioid class include oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, and morphine.

Some people commence their opioid obsession as legitimate patients seeking to manage acute or chronic pain. Opioid relief comes at the price of physical dependence, however, transforming "treatment" into "addiction," often unintentionally. Patients can only stop taking these powerful medications closely monitored by a physician, and the medication must be decreased in small intervals to avoid dangerous withdrawal symptoms. Severe injuries, car accidents, major surgeries, and chronic illness all can trigger an unexpected addiction, for the lawyer, fast-food worker, and full-time mom alike.

Others join the opioid epidemic in search of the high. Short of shooting heroin, taking an opioid is the closest anyone can get to nirvana. Plus, opioids are "less dangerous" because they're prescribed, or so the rationale goes. Teenagers craving more than marijuana and alcohol raid their

parents' medicine cabinets to find what they believe to be a safer alternative to street drugs. In fact, prescription drugs are the third most commonly used drug—after marijuana and alcohol—among 12th-graders in the United States, per the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Many of these teenagers will graduate high school and move on to heroin instead of college. Prescription pain medication and heroin have much in common: they both fall under the opioid classification and produce similar effects. Heroin is a cheaper alternative, especially when prescriptions are hard to come by or too expensive, making pain medications a fast gateway to heroin use. The only real difference between these drugs is that prescription opioids can be obtained in a fancy office, with receptionists and *People* magazines and educated doctors. No need to traverse a dark alley in Baltimore to score heroin: there's a pain management clinic up the street.

We met on a random night outside my sophomore-year dormitory. Rain pelted against the throngs of smokers huddled under a New York City awning. As I brushed a droplet of rain away from my cigarette, we fell into a conversation about marijuana. I don't remember how it happened, but the conversation produced a useful associate. Days later, I found myself texting this person in search of drugs. Just a normal college boy in a normal college dorm. No dark alleys. No backdoor deals. Just a few floors below my dorm room to happy endings and high nights. It was perfect timing: I was fresh out of pot dealers and couldn't believe my good fortune. His weed was exquisite; his oxycodone was better. Somehow during our acquaintance, my purchases graduated in risk, reward, and cost. Hundred-dollar collections of pills soon replaced twenty-dollar bags of pot. Where did I even get the money? Probably from an unsuspecting mother somewhere.

I know he was cute and in college. I just can't recall why I allowed him to make so much money off me.

Mom knows when I'm getting high. The familiar tones that haunt her dreams reverberate from the bathroom. She also gave me the money two hours ago—the money I now crush with lust under my fingertips. Crush, cut, sniff. Crush, cut, sniff. Crush the pill under something hard, maybe a lighter. Cut the powder with my Maryland state license—sloppy or precise

lines, depending on my state of mind. Lick the license clean; can't waste powder. Sniff the sedation into my lungs, up my brain, throughout my central nervous system. I am beyond the point of significant high anymore. I need many pills to produce the same effect of that first pill. Seeking nirvana, chasing the ghost. The first high eludes me every time, but I continue to try. I am in the bathroom for a century sniffing things. When I emerge, my eyes glaze to the horrid world around me, and all grows quiet within. The pain subsides, not that my body was ever hurting.

My father was a faithful drug addict until his death at 49. I always wanted to be just like him. Perhaps I carry his memory in my subconscious somewhere. I distinctly recall rides home from school, when we would take naps at the stop sign near our house. My eight-year-old self knew it was strange to stop and snooze in the middle of the road, but it was a lazy southern Maryland street, so no one seemed to mind. I wondered why Dad was always so tired, always nodding off, drooling a bit now and then. I wondered why his eyes were always glazed, as if staring at some distant place he wished to be that was far away from me. I never saw him shoot the needles in his arm. I never saw him forge prescriptions to obtain pills. I never saw him harass my mother for drug money. Yet somehow I managed to learn all these tricks and more, as if the motions were ingrained at birth.

If I pause too long to reminisce upon my Calvert County youth, the pain of abandonment at the hands of drug addiction and divorce becomes insufferable. But if I crush quickly enough and sniff long enough, maybe these medications can do some good. Maybe they can bind to pain receptors in my brain and stop the internal bleeding. They *do* slow circulation . . .



The Calvert County Sheriff's Department reported 63 overdoses from January to July of 2016 alone, an average of nine people per month. 75% of them were judged as opioid overdoses by first responders. Most victims were between the ages of 18 and 25. Nine fatalities total. By the end of 2016, the Behavioral Health Administration reported that 66% of Maryland overdose fatalities were opioid-related.

Opioid overdose—or opioid intoxication—occurs as result of exceeding the recommended daily dose of a prescription medication. For someone purchasing opioids off the street, the risk of overdose increases as it is impossible to gauge the “maximum daily dose” outside of a doctor's

care. Combinations also increase the likelihood of an opioid overdose: combining pain medications with alcohol, benzodiazepines (a psychiatric medication used for sleep and anxiety), sleep medications, fentanyl, or heroin. Various forms of misuse can also contribute to overdose: snorting, chewing, or injecting a tablet instead of taking it orally.

Opioid overdoses are easy to accomplish and can be fatal. The central nervous system decelerates when affected by toxic opioid levels, decreasing and sometimes halting respiration. Circulation slows and the skin turns blue and cold. Persons may become unconscious and unresponsive, inhibiting their ability to respond to life-threatening circumstances. For example, opioids often cause upset stomach and can induce vomiting. Someone experiencing an opioid overdose may choke to death on their own vomit while unconscious. For obituary purposes, “died suddenly” may suffice.

I once snorted thirteen high-dosage oxycodone in less than 24 hours; the max dose is two. We were driving home from New York City, where I had just withdrawn from my first college on account of “health concerns.” A few days later, I stole ten Dilaudid—a high strength opioid for treating severe pain—from my terminally ill father. I devoured them in twelve hours. I don’t know the max dose, but the next day a fearful father told me I should have died and shipped me to treatment.



Do doctors read those intake forms? I know I confessed my opioid addiction somewhere in the massive packet. After four years clean time, I’m diligently honest. I have to be, especially if I want to finish college this time around. I suppose he didn’t even look at it. After torturing my broken ankle with twists and turns, pokes and prods, the doctor sees my tears and offers a quick fix. “Want some Valium?” No, I do not want some Valium. I already have a prescription for codeine that I shouldn’t. Sobriety is a flimsy thing—there’s only so much gold a doctor can dangle before a recovering addict. Wait, come back. I want some Valium.



The codeine limits my breath capacity. I try not to panic. I forgot about the asthma and allergies, the already stuffy sinuses and closed airways. The powdery golden flakes flurry through my nostrils, clogging at the bridge of my nose. I lie back against a pillow, streaming saline spray up my nose

in desperate attempts to breath. Every few seconds, I let out a loud inward snort to draw the substance up my sinus cavity. The chunks of medication release into a post-nasal drip, rehabilitating my capacity to breathe. My frontal lobe burns, like my brain cells are being scorched on a red-hot stove. My head grows heavy. The Disney songs morph into some distorted remix. The flaky skin and grinding bones—I can't feel them anymore . . .

Relapse. The relief never surpasses the hype. The powder burns my nose. The papers don't get written. The friends disappear. I fall away. And all the while, death stays close—my world imploding in one small pill. Four years of clean living later, it seems this instinct will never die. I've seen this war before: addicts lose.

all fags go to heaven

Nick Malone

The first-grade perv was named Zachary Cordova. It wasn't that he was ever mean to girls—like boys who like you are supposed to be—but that he was just *super* handsy, and those hands were always covered in hot Cheeto dust. He had spiky blue-and-blond hair and T-shirts that said things like “EAT. SLEEP. RAWK. REPEAT” and “WILL TRADE PARENTS FOR VIDEO GAMES” (the latter of which *really* shows a profound lack of self-awareness on the part of both six-year-olds and the people making these shirts). Making girls squeal and running away was his vice. He'd sidle up to Sally or Becky Anne or Nina and say things like:

“You like my *bawwwdy*?”

“Let's go somewhere we can be *alooooone*!”

Or, my personal favorite, “Do you know what SEX IS!?” often paired with a gap-toothed smile and wocka-wocka arms.

I was forced into a playdate with Zachary once, and it all made sense: his Playstation had games where girls in bikinis played volleyball and people shot guns out of cars and said “*Fuck you, kike*,” whereas my dad had to have a thirty-minute talk with my mom before he would let me buy the clean version of the new Britney Spears album.

Regardless, I somewhat unwillingly assumed the role of the Protector of the Girls, the guardian angel who liked the things that girls liked, and sort of talked like a girl too. Girls felt safe with me, away from Zachary's

Cheeto-tinged advances, and I felt safe with them—they didn't want to play baseball when they came over; they wanted to pretend stuffed animals were getting married. Some of them even guest starred on my under-the-bed radio show, which had recently expanded to include collapsible blanket studio walls and a very comfy beanbag chair from IKEA.

Zachary strolled up and wiggled his fingers like he was casting a spell on My Girls, and they shrieked and squirmed and buried their faces in the crook under my arm. *This is what being a boyfriend must be like*, I thought to myself, and checked my fingers for Cheeto dust before I vomited in my mouth.

When I was nine years old I grew an affinity for reading things that I shouldn't have been reading. I suppose it was better than what some other kids do to rebel at that age—*reading*, what a badass—but I was determined to learn about things on my own. My mom tried to have the birds-and-bees talk with me, assisted by a colorful book featuring a fat couple with ludicrous amounts of pubic hair that went on a date, took a bath together, and then copulated in a way that was all smiles, almost goofy. I was *not* having it. I sprinted into my room and shut the door, completely uninterested.

"You're going to have to learn about it someday, and the computer isn't going to tell you the right stuff!" she called upstairs.

Fine, I thought. If the computer was wrong, then the book with the hairy Italian butcher and *the* lady who inspired the phrase, "it ain't over till the fat lady sings," was most *certainly* wrong. I had seen the sorts of things that were sex before, and that was *not* it. My best friend in the third-grade class—who had recently taught me the word "cunt" behind the bushes at recess—was of the school of thought that sex came down to peeing in or on someone's vagina. This seemed to be the most reasonable explanation I'd heard thus far.

It started off innocent enough: I was at an advanced reading level in school and I struggled my way through every book that hinted at giving me the insider knowledge I needed to decipher sex.

Cold Mountain: Mountains meant boobs, and boobs meant sex. Nothing there.

1984: Surely someone born in 1984 was old enough to know something about it. Not much in the way of sex there either.

Moby-Dick spoke for itself.

Then I stumbled upon *Tropic of Cancer*.

My jaw dropped as I read, knowing that I had found the truth about everything.

It was a nightmare. Lizards and bats shoved up the ass, ripping off pubic hair and pasting it on the chin of a friend, chewing up and swallowing parts of someone's vagina, in public or in private. It remains unclear what "come" is, but there is a terrible lot of it. After a good fifteen minutes of frantically searching for the stork that eventually delivered me, I closed the book and knew that I could *not* tell the friend who thought it was *just* about pee. It was about so much more than that. Sex was about *pain*.

"Do you want me to choke you?"

"What?" he asks, through a grunt of pleasure.

"I don't know if you're into that, but I mean, do you want me to choke you?"

His hand cradles my face and tilts it to meet his dark eyes as his head lifts slowly off the pillows.

"Look at me," he says.

"Do I have a choice?" I say, half-laughing, my hand gliding up and down his thigh, not wanting this to end, not wanting to have ruined my first time.

"I'm serious," he says, squinting as he stares directly into my eyes. "You don't have to do anything you don't want to do."

"I know," I say, shrugging off his earnestness. Who knew the next time I would be able to practice the make-or-break skill of having real sex with a person?

"Hey," he says with an urgency I'd never heard out of him before. He is always so relaxed, so nonchalant about what he wants from the world. Things come to him and he accepts them as they do. What a crazy thing.

"I really like you," he says, his voice soft again.

"I really like you too! What's the big deal?"

"Come here."

I do as I'm told and come and join him, feeling the rusty cheers and squeals of the futon ripple through my joints. We share a moment of silence with our faces mere millimeters from each other. I can't tell whose breath is whose. We lie staring at each other for a moment too long.

"You're shaking," he declares, draping his arm over my shivering body and pulling me in, matching up our limbs.

"Yeah, I'm just really nervous that my breath smells like dick now."

He kisses me over and over, mumbling and laughing, "Shut the fuck up!"

I want to stop my mind from running off the rails, but it feels like little bolts of lightning are bouncing off the plates in my skull, zapping synapses and flooding my brain with chemicals, like my nervous system is hosting the Puerto Rican Day Parade.

"Don't you want me to finish? I mean, don't you want to finish?" I stare right at him, inquisitively, almost frustrated.

"I want *you* to relax. And I am not gonna stop kissing you until you do."

He keeps his promise.

"Better?"

I take a deep breath in, survey his room and begin searching his eyes for the catch.

"Yeah."

"You should come over again tomorrow. And you should call me tonight," he says nodding, as if speaking to a toddler.

There is no catch.

"Seriously. I get it," he says. I feel like he really does.



In the seventh grade, every Friday after school, we walk to the grocery store and get a package of raw cookie dough and two Shasta colas for twenty-nine cents each. Once everybody has their goods stored away in their backpacks, we get on our bikes and pedal as fast as we can to the park with the plastic turtle and the sandbox in the middle. We have a special tree there that is only structurally sound enough to carry the bodies of eight middle-schoolers, so each of us has a dedicated spot. Caroline is in gymnastics, so she goes all the way up to the top branch, which we all secretly think is a little much. Michael likes to be in control of the cookie dough, because he usually buys it—he is the only one of us with a job. He walks two Pomeranians and one Newfoundland, never at the same time. Benny sits on the bottom branch, because he is afraid of heights, but he's probably my favorite of the bunch. I'm somewhere in the middle, and my girlfriend, Mazie, sits next to me. Michael and Caroline are also boyfriend and girlfriend, but they fight a lot.

"Truth or Dare?" Jennifer, the only blonde in our group, pokes me and wiggles her eyebrows. She talked to me earlier in the day—Mazie and I have been boyfriend and girlfriend for two weeks. It was time to hold hands and she was gonna make it happen.

"Dare," I say, ignoring the blaring sirens going off in my heart and the sticky lagoon of sweat forming under my arms, which has only very recently started to smell bad.

"I *dare* you to hold hands with . . ." Jennifer pauses, which is a really good disguise to make sure Mazie doesn't catch the trickery, ". . . Mazie! For fifteen seconds."

All is silent in the tree.

I turn to Mazie and shrug, clenching my teeth and flashing a look that probably reads somewhere between having just chomped on a canker sore and actively shitting myself. She sort of smiles and takes my hand. The countdown begins and I do not squeeze or show any interest in her, or her hand, whatsoever.

". . . Three, Two, One! *Awww!*" goes the chorus.

Later, I walk Mazie home and we do not hold hands. "I'll see you tomorrow?" I toss at her, and she nods. She understands what I really mean is, *thanks for letting me sweat in your palm.*



Something about seventeen made me feel invincible. The world was so big and beautiful that it seemed all but impossible for it to be against me. I was full of this wild energy that made me want to dance and be seen and play it cool. Shoulders back, eyes harsh, arms up to the ceiling of every room, like I'd been electric since the second I was born.

My mom would drop me off in front of my friend's house and I'd hide in the backyard until she drove away. I'd round back to the front and perch myself on the front steps, waiting for Matty to roll up in his steel-blue station wagon with rust on the fender. He'd jump out, open the door for me, blast the White Stripes on the highway, and sing to me like we were the only people in the world. His voice was my favorite thing about him. It was my favorite thing in general.

"Hello operator!" he'd scream. "Can you gimme number nine!? Can I see ya later?! When ya gimme back my dime!?"

He'd drive us into the city and we'd ride the trains all night until we

found just the right hole-in-the-wall pizza place or donut shop to satisfy our sweet tooth, then we'd run around again and keep on satisfying it. He held my hand the whole way and I felt my love for him start in the top of my head and spiral all the way down my spine with a *plunk* at my feet, like a gumball machine.

We dove into bars on Halsted where they played live blues and the median age was 50, sneaking through the back door and standing tall, leaning on the bar like we were regulars. We swiped half-full gin and tonics and slammed them before anyone saw. He swung me around on the dancefloor and we did the twist and we slow danced like grownups—his left hand on my waist, mine on his shoulder, our hands clasped together leading our bodies as one on the right. We fooled around in the bathroom stall while the line stretched down the hallway, our eyes wild with drunken delight. We didn't mind a crowd. I never stopped smiling.

It came time for me to go back to my friend's house where I slept over as a decoy to lead my mom off my trail, and we sauntered through the Blue Line tunnel, his arm around me, planting messy kisses on my neck and pulling me in tightly. Our legs crisscrossed over one another, stumbling and laughing through the fluorescent light.

"We get it, you're fags!" gurgled a brown-haired man in a Cubs jersey, walking behind us, brown-paper-bagging a 40-oz of Corona. He was stumbling even more than we were, propping his limp, thin body on the filthy walls of the tunnel.

"Suck a cock, I don't give a shit, but don't make it my business."

I turned to Matty, smiling big and bright. I loved scaring them.

"I'm *done* being polite! I'm fucking tired of being *nice*!" he hissed, spilling his beer for the rats.

I leaned forward and kissed Matty on the mouth with gratuitous tongue. I reached down and groped him, took a pull out of my flask and passed the shot into his mouth, making sure to keep eye contact with The Guy Who Is Done Being Nice. My face drips with sweet, dark gold nectar and I spit at him. He swings his arm at us somewhere between aggressively and dismissively, and returns to rest in his delirium. Those poor people.

I sit across from Matty on the train back home. He's drifting in and out of sleep, taking breaks from passing out with his head resting against the glass divider to open those sweet eyes just barely at me, casting a face

saying everything that I always wished somebody would say without saying anything at all.

He says *you and me together makes being alive real*. He says *you are not dirty and you are not broken*. He says *I do not have to do research to know how to like you*. He says *you can get most things you want if you just ask*. He says *you can take your time*. He says *you make me feel warm and that is most of what matters*. He says *you are sex and you are love, even if who comes after you may not be both*. He says *we have been through so much to get here*.

The world beneath me rushes and rumbles, gliding with a silver fluidity that begs to be heard. All fags go to heaven, even if we can only have it on Earth.

Living in the space between words

Louise Hoy

It was meant to be a different kind of year. In March 1998 we said our vows, held our dreams. My first marriage at 43.

He was sick. I was well. We had a plan.

We considered and pondered his chronic illness. It was gradually absorbing days and months, but was not usually fatal. At least not for five to ten years. A large space for us to fill.

And yet . . . unrelenting tiredness. My blood test results a week after our wedding.

A new word for my life: tumor. Then a stream of other unexpected words. On the ovary. Abdominal surgery. Benign or malignant and its close relative, malignancy. Hysterectomy and oophorectomy.

Cancer arrives with a lot of words ending in the letter y.

But it was a benign cyst. Large.

We celebrated in April. Holding my hand over the fresh incision. I re-read the initial ultrasound report:

“A large complex cystic and solid mass is seen, deep in the pelvis lying posterior to and to the right of uterus . . . The mass measures at least 6 x 10 cm in diameter and is rather difficult to measure due to its heterogeneous nature and shape. The uterus is unremarkable. IMPRESSION: Large complex cystic pelvic mass. This could represent a large dermoid cyst.”

May 1998, the blossoms were like a party on every street. It was before patients could see a digital picture of exactly how the body was attacking itself. Instead, an opaque medical report dotted with the word “large.” I learn that in medical lingo, “unremarkable” is a good thing.

(I get out a ruler and look at 10 centimeters and 6 centimeters and imagine that inside my body. I am glad it’s gone.)

June 1998, the longest day of the year arrives. Yet my recovery is sluggish. Trips to another specialist. Then delays.

More unfamiliar words arrive: mammogram, biopsy, false positive, invasive or noninvasive, carcinoma.

A memory emerges of my 40th birthday. A trip to my then-doctor to say, “please may I have a mammogram, just to be sure.” “Oh no,” she says, looking over the top of her glasses, holding up three knowing, well-trained fingers and tapping a reason on each one: “*You are healthy, you have no family history, there is no need.*”

Three years later, in July 1998, waiting for results after a startling, burning biopsy. Holding onto those words: healthy, no family history, no need.

August 1998, when one season begins its slow, subtle flow into another, the words I didn’t want finally arrived. For the second time, a large tumor had appeared.

The surgeon’s call: “Surgery is necessary . . . breast cancer . . . a significant bottleneck at the hospital for operating rooms . . . yours is a priority case . . . could be two weeks.”

Riding a wave of tears.

Cancer connects and disconnects. Before cell phones, sad words go to my father and stepmother. They temporarily move to our city and stay very near, very present, very careful.

Waking in my hospital bed with tubes and throbbing, my husband silently holding my hand and the surgeon’s painful words: “*very sorry . . . dark prognosis.*” My spouse did not give me those words for some time. In September

1998, as the leaves prepared for descent, he chose space and grace. He told me a little, part of the truth. The rest he kept inside his prayers.

I meet the thoughtfully assertive oncology nurses: *"You have to take charge of your health—for the rest of your life. No one can do that like you."*

Then the bright scarlet chemo drugs flow in and trash my veins to save my life.

Nurses make me focus on survival, on living beyond the cold ache in my arm, somehow helping me not to notice the hazmat gear they wear when handling the medications.

A card from my best friend: *"I know you need help to get through this illness. I am not that person."* Remembering that her mother—with whom she'd had a difficult and unresolved relationship—had died of breast cancer. Like a lunar tide my friend was gone, never to return.

Oh no, please no. My husband and mother now have their own cancer words in October 1998.

Cancer generates schedules. The ideal time for the next chemo treatment, right at the sweet spot between me being too weak to tolerate it and the cancer growing again.

My stylist cuts off a foot of hair to relieve my tender scalp. Then another appointment in a week, where in a back room he gently shaves off what is left, because my scalp is on fire, quietly handing me tissue after tissue. My husband shaves his head that night.

Time to meet the oncologist, who reviews my blood counts and after four treatments says all too perkily: *"We are very pleased with your progress because most patients on this treatment regimen are hospitalized—a lot."* Her words are a surprise.

Time to see my counselor, to coax me through another week of inner darkness brought on by the drugs. He tells me about a book, *Full Catastrophe Living*. I wish I was not a candidate for such a title.

Time for my husband's chemo treatment so that I can be strong enough to accompany him.

When my mother can sit with me during chemo: a difficult companionship at best. When she comes, I am stunned at how tiny she is, how the

cancer still growing in her has consumed her body. She flits about like a hummingbird, her words like tiny jabs.

When my father can be with me during chemo: he comes only once because he is fighting desperate tears.

When other loved ones and friends can come and see us: they are unfailingly dumbfounded at my puffy face, my bald head now too sore even for a hat, and my shuffling body.

Cancer pushes and pulls. In the light-filled medication room, another chemo warrior, a blonde woman in her 50s sits across from me. Her blue eyes look all around the room, brimming pools of fear. I feel the pull of her riptide as nurses try to find one vein in my arm that still functions.

Words swirl in my mind.

My family doctor with her steadfast gaze and healing touch: *"Think of the infusions not as your enemy, but as an ally in the battle, defeating an invading army cell by cell."*

All of the clinicians in my circle of care, with skilled words and eyes that urge me to reach, strive, keep trying: *"Welcome and work with the drugs."* The drugs . . . such a horrible feeling in my arm, in my body, my mind.

My counselor Michael, salt-and-pepper hair, unhurried encouragement: *"Own this journey. Walk deliberately down into the dark valley into a place without answers. Carry your peace and your faith."*

Cancer is about numbers. The size of a tumor, in centimeters. How many tumors. How many nodes. What stage. The lower number, the better.

How many lymph nodes were "involved." To me, "involved" had always enjoyed a warm, personal meaning: *she was involved in a book group; he was involved with a new flame; they were involved in volunteer work.* I think of a better word for medical reports: "invaded."

The more invaded nodes that are cancerous, the lower the survival rate.

Many words were shed over my nodes. The surgeon: *"Enlarged, at least four, more likely six, could be nine. I am so sorry, this is a very bleak prognosis,"* my husband collapsing on the floor of the recovery room. Later, the examining

pathologist disagreeing. My oncologist siding with the pathologist. I was rooting for three invaded nodes.

My oncologist: *"Let's not focus on defining the numbers or the stage of cancer but rather on the best possible treatment and recovery."* Yes, let's.

Summer 1999, I continue surviving and am gathering medical records—a report written by my oncologist:

"Mrs. X is a very pleasant 43-year-old lady with a T2 (2.8 cm) M1 (4/6 nodes involved) M0, infiltrating ductal carcinoma of the left breast treated with lumpectomy and axillary dissection in September 1998. Completed six cycles of CEF chemotherapy in April 1999 and current therapy consists of Tamoxifen. Radiation completed on May 19th. She was last seen on August 16th and was doing quite well except for some minor arthralgias post-chemotherapy . . . Socially Mrs. X also has a number of things that are of concern to her and she is seeing Michael Boyle."

(I get the ruler again and look at 2.8 cm and am glad it too is gone.)

Cancer is about words with unseen poundage.

"Minor arthralgias" . . . evolved to nearly crippling joint and muscle pain that lasted several years.

"A number of things that are of concern" . . . the deteriorating condition of my husband, the terminal prognosis of my mother, and the emptying of savings and retirement accounts.

Other words float in, glimmering feathers. Words of energy and survival, courage and encouragement, optimism and grace, realism and hope.

From Michael, my counselor, a source of support and wisdom. He says the valley of despair will be hard, very hard, but I am strong enough for the path across. A powerful listener.

From the many doctors, nurses and other clinicians at the cancer center: magnificent, compassionate professionals.

From work colleagues. A deep well of kindness, sending me cards and financial help when bankruptcy seemed real.

From friends: earthbound angels. From my sister: angel with a
wounded heart. So much given.
Words like open fields after a tunnel.

Winter 1999, gardens are settling, quiet, the earth sleeps. We move away
from my family, friends, and colleagues to a city with better care for my
husband. His chemo stops working. At the hospital, visits from our new
pastor, his face caring, sad. I find a job. My sister calls: *"There is no more
treatment for mum. She is going into hospice."*

SHORT FICTION

The Right Side of the River

Anna Jankovsky

The other bank of the river held a pretty landscape with a small crop of trees hiding the modest structure from the view out of the picture windows. It was a Jesuit center that specialized in providing lodging for local students. The man knew this, first, from the deduction he'd made based on the small cross outline cut decoratively into the river-facing end of an outdoor service framework. This pavilion sat at the edge of the grass pasture that dominated the retreat center's land, and the man imagined that it must have had a beautiful view of the cliffs before the modern houses—in one of which he now perched—were constructed on the river's opposite end.

He knew this, second, because a few weeks after moving into their new house he had walked into the living room on a Sunday morning to find his wife standing in front of the picture windows, looking off across the water. Her left hand was clutching her robe around her waist and the other was cradling a mug of steaming coffee. She turned and smiled when he walked in and pointed to the window.

"You know, I think I've been there before," she said, her voice amused with nostalgia.

"Where? On the other bank?"

"Yes." She put the coffee down on the mahogany side table and walked over to the man, kissing his cheek when she reached him in the

familiar way that he'd grown used to over the years of their marriage. "Do you remember in college I used to go on those church weekends sometimes?"

He remembered.

"I think that land over there is one of the retreat centers we stayed at. There was a little Jesuit grade school or something right next door and we had Mass outside one night right by the shore. I remember it because I thought the river bank was really beautiful."

"Mmm," he sighed. "How much of a coincidence is it that we own a little part of that bank now?"

"It's quite the coincidence, I'll tell you that." She walked back to the window. "I've had such a nostalgic morning. It's been so nice."

"How long have you been up?"

"Oh I've just been watching the center all morning. There are some students there. I keep seeing them come out from behind those trees and do different things in the yard. It's been pretty interesting, actually."

"Why do we even own the TV with such an entertaining view," he teased. "So, what have they been doing?"

"Well when I woke up and came down to make the coffee, there was just a line of kids standing over on the shore. Just standing there. That's when I first started watching."

"Huh. Well that's strange."

"Not really. That's the thing that jogged my memory." The man had walked up to the window next to her and she reached out her arm to wrap it around his waist. "I remember that—lining up on the shore way back in college. I guess some things never change."

"Especially in the Church," he laughed again and she grinned at the reflection of her husband that glinted in the sunny window while keeping her eyes focused through the glass on the river. "So why do they line up, then?" he asked, trying to take an interest in his wife's observation.

"Well . . . I guess I'm not really supposed to tell you."

"No? Why not?"

"Because it's a secret tradition. Something they don't like to tell people who haven't been there on their own." She turned her head this time when she smirked and they laughed together.

"But you don't believe that stuff anymore. Can't you spill the secret now?"

"I know but . . . I can't help it. Maybe some things are worth preserving." She grinned again. "Even if they're stupid."

He dropped his hand from her shoulder where he had been holding her and walked to the kitchen to pour a coffee mug of his own.

"Refill, please," she lilted from the window and he heard her giggle at his exaggerated sigh.

The next Sunday she slept in and the man made coffee on his own and stood to look over the river and watch the morning sun. Out on the bank was a line of students just like his wife had described. They walked slowly along a thin path and dropped a single rock into the water.

At first he didn't pay much attention, but an hour after the students crawled back up the hill and the bank was left empty, the man still stood at the window with his eyes trained on the shore. A calmness had overtaken his mind without him even noticing. He shook the trance off and walked to the kitchen to refill his mug with an empty gaze.

The path down the stairs and up to the picture windows had become routine enough to the man's feet quickly after the couple moved into the house. His morning route to the coffee maker stopped religiously in front of the glass where the man could view the riverbank and subtly scan the shore for retreat-goers.

He couldn't describe to his wife what it was that so fascinated him about it. Every time he saw the spectacle, it reached him like an ethereal experience—like the pebbles tossed into the water landed on his heart and weighed him down in a distant way that he didn't quite understand. They left the pebbles like a release of energy, expelling them from their clutches absently, like it was their fingers dropping into the river free from all tendons and nerves. It looked painful.

Why? The man would ask, all through the day—a constant little ticking filling the silence in his cranium with a never-ending question. *Why. Why. Why . . .* It kept him staring blankly through the glass for hours at a time hoping absently for enlightenment. On the rare occasion they came during his watch, he would press his fingers up against the glass and squint his eyes determinedly at the shore.

They bounced away with lighter feet when they left the bank, but there was an unmistakable baggage behind. They left their fingers there in the riverbed, marking that they'd been there. He explained this to his wife one evening over dinner, but she rolled her eyes and changed the subject quickly. She did not see the fascination in the scene, only the obsession.

After some months the topic had become more and more frequent dinner-table conversation. The woman just smiled and sealed her lips with a metaphorical zipper, or pursed her mouth and wiggled her eyebrows with a stifled giggle. Slowly her mood turned less playful as the man's inquisition became more pointed. Finally he slammed a tight clenched fist onto the table and rattled the silverware against the sharp, square plates.

"Dammit woman, why are you playing this game?"

She stared at him for a moment. Then with shivering fingers she lifted her fork and chewed the last of her chicken slowly.

"Are you going to let this become a fight?" He screamed the words and a vein of bright pink sprawled his right eye in a spidery thread. He hadn't been sleeping. He tossed the sheets around their bed while he lay awake and pelted the dark ceiling with stray thoughts and worries.

"Are *you*?"

"Don't get high and mighty with me. You're throwing me away just to hold onto a stupid secret. Why?"

"Some things are important to me. Can't you understand that?" Precipitation threatened to drip off her chin and she swiped hard at her face and tickled her nose to contain it. The man unclenched his fists and softened his shoulders when he saw his wife's watery face.

"Why can't you just tell me what they do with the rocks?"

"Enough," his wife snapped as she slipped out of her chair and rinsed her plate in the sink before stomping up the stairs and out of the man's angered sight. She retreated to their bedroom and sat straight-backed at the foot of their bed, scratching the coverlet gently with her nails and staring into the shaggy strands of the rug. The woman sighed a heavy, weighted breath. She dug her nails in and bent her head as if to pray. No words crossed her mind, but rather she remembered the long hours she used to spend in sanctified buildings sending hopes out of dark-stained pews toward a tormented crucifix.

Some things are more important than others, she thought. *Some things are deeper*. Those *some things* were also gone, though, she remembered and closed her tired eyes tightly.

The distant sound of football clicked to silence and dragged footsteps sounded up the stairs. She looked intently at the door as if her gaze alone could prevent her husband from entering. Then she crawled into the sheets and covered her head before the knob squeaked in its socket and the man pushed gently into the room. He stepped over the laundry basket clumsily and placed a wet kiss lightly on her head.

Some things are too far gone.

On the right side of the river, the flowers grow in brighter patches than on the left. This is one observation the man made as he stood yet another Sunday morning, waiting for the line to come.

On his side of the river, the flowers were difficult to see from the high angle of his windows, but after so many hours standing in a warm sun patch next to the glass, the man fancied himself master of his view. He began to appear to his wife much like a slinking, spying house cat in his crooked position as she snuck up behind him. The slowly nursed tumbler of scotch in his right hand was the first detail that ruined the feline allusion. He turned as she touched his shoulder and, speaking for the first time of the day, he declared aloud this horticultural observation: "The flowers on the right are brighter than the left bank."

His wife, by then used to his silence and growing wearied by his obsessive introspection, only asked him at which angle he was looking at the banks when he determined which was on the right and which was on the left. *Which bank is right?* It struck his foggy mind like something very profound and he blinked the sunbursts out of his eyes while he wandered through the kitchen to the bar in the corner.

By the time he was ready to answer her question, he had already poured the amber liquid from the bottle to the tumbler and from the tumbler straight down his throat. He sputtered for a moment with the burn in his chest, and by the time he recovered he had forgotten already which bank had the better flowers. He wondered so ferociously that he nearly took his coat off the chair it rested on and hiked down to the cliff bottom to see in person.

"Don't go out there," the woman demanded from the kitchen.

"I'm just going for a walk."

"You're drunk." She stared through him with her arms in angry lines straight down her waist, ending in the tight knots of her fists.

"Okay," he said and walked back over to the window. A new obsession was rooting in his foggy mind that he hadn't fostered before. He had to see the river from the other bank. He had to know for himself the experience he watched so religiously from his window. He clutched the empty tumbler and stared into the darkening view of the Jesuit center with the new goal intoxicating his mind.

The man woke the next morning with a dry mouth and a headache. He spent most of the afternoon on the loveseat in the living room with the television on low volume and his wife seated on the large couch flipping slowly through a book.

"Don't you want to hear the TV?" she asked in a teasing tone that was void of interest.

"I'm listening to the rain." She rolled her eyes under her reading glasses and he knew the conversation was over. The rain slowed to a drizzle midafternoon and then stopped shortly after the woman stood and walked up the stairs, clamping her palm to her temple and claiming she suffered a headache. The sky cleared of clouds and the wall that housed the television glowed a bright yellow with the afternoon light. A rainbow glinted in the sky above the retreat center and the man had taken his coat off the kitchen chair and slipped into his shoes with such haste that he neglected to shut off the television.

He felt quiet and calm as he walked on the other side of the river, looking upon his own home from a new angle that made its sharp, modern peaks appear alien and aloof. He bent down and picked up one of the damp rocks and, feeling silly, quickly stood and whipped his glance around to ensure no one had seen him. He brought the rock up to his eye and let the afternoon sun glint over it.

Nothing happened. He chucked the rock into the water and looked at the entry ripple until it faded into the current. Then he stood and looked

toward the reflection for another few moments before he bent down again and took another handful of rocks and picked them one by one out of his palm. When they hit the water his spirit jumped a little with satisfaction, but then the ripples halted and the river returned to normal, with no evidence he had ever disrupted it in the first place. When the full fist of rocks lay under water, he bent down again and again and kept the steady stream of pebbles flying over the bank into the ripples.

The students stood on the shore so peacefully. They walked away with the light steps of the dazed, but with each stone the man released, he felt an ounce of anger build in his chest and perspiration grow heavy on his neck.

He slumped down again to grab more pebbles, but this time he stayed on his heels for a moment to catch his breath. He looked down through his hands at the river again and felt the anger wash away to be replaced not by contentedness, but by nothing at all. He could still see his house from the bank and saw that light glinted on the windows in a serene rainbow in the afternoon sun. The slight outline of his wife barely brushed through the reflection of the glass. Slowly and mechanically, instead of picking more rocks off the ground, the man unlaced his shoes, pulled off his socks, and walked waist deep into the water.

Dissolve

Scott Ziegler

Flicker.

A memory.

On VHS Tape.

Setting: A small town, but not too small. Two high schools, a church on every other corner, the town split by a single highway. Some parts of the town are poor and some are rich. Focus on the part in between, a new development with used cars in every driveway. It fills the empty space in the older part of town. The trees are young and thin. The mailboxes are filled with credit card bills and get-rich-quick schemes. One long side street ends in a cul-de-sac.

Fade in.

High-angle shot. A middle-class neighborhood.

A red Honda Civic hatchback turns into the cul-de-sac, and the headlights broaden on the road. Inside are a woman and two children. A boy, two years old, with stringy blonde-brown hair and pudgy legs is sitting in a car seat. A girl, four, with brown hair and blue eyes sits next to him with the seatbelt hanging loosely across her flower-print blouse. In the back are two bags of groceries. On the passenger seat is a red

rose the woman received from a nice man at work who knows she's going through a tough time and who also has intentions. It's Valentine's Day.

One of the street lights is out on the right side of the street, and the car passes underneath. The shadow moves across the hood and roof like a reverse spotlight. A pair of worn Reeboks hang from the light's arm. The lawns are patchy and overgrown. One lot is empty, and a dead Christmas tree lies just beyond the reach of the light.

Interior of the car.

On the radio is Whitney Houston, "How Will I Know."

"Is daddy going to be home," the girl leans forward and yells over Whitney.

Volume up.

"Is daddy home!?"

"We've talked about this," the woman says. "He won't be staying with us for a while. He'll come get you next weekend."

The woman turns the wheel slowly toward the house. The headlights move across the dented and dirty cars parked at the end of the cul-de-sac. A hubcap is missing on the front wheel of the last car. The light moves up the side of the house and crawls through the picture window.

Pause.

Rewind.

A flashback in Technicolor.

A man comes down the stairs carrying a suitcase. He is in his early forties with thin black hair and bushy sideburns. He's wearing a light brown oxford with the top two buttons undone. His jeans have a light spot on the right front pocket where he puts his keys. In the living room on the man's right is a couch. It looks like it's been reupholstered, but there's just a clean sheet thrown over and tucked in. On the couch are a teenage boy and girl. I'm the boy. I'm sixteen. The girl is my sister, Sarah. She's fourteen. We're doing homework and trying to pretend like this isn't happening.

At the bottom of the stairs, the man puts down the suitcase and looks around like he's lost. Behind him on one side of the stairs are pictures. Four children, a wedding picture, a family photo where everyone smiles. On the other side are our baby pictures in order of birth. I'm at the top and his son is at the bottom closest to him. To the left of the man through the dining room in the kitchen is a woman—his third wife, and his third divorce.

I start to get up, but Sarah says, "Don't."

"We can't just sit here."

"Just," she says and her eyes move off.

I push Sarah's papers and go back to my math. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see her giving me the look that was captured in a hundred faded photos. She turns one ear to me and points her chin like a gun. Her eyes are squint nearly shut. She kicks one socked foot at me then turns away. This is how we show love and discomfort.

"Well," the man says to the us around the corner, "I guess I'll see you guys in a couple weeks."

Sarah chews on her lip. She rocks to get up, but stops to wait for me. I put my homework on the ground to go to him. I cried when they told me, but I'm too uncertain now to be sad. Sarah grabs my shirt while I walk to him. I can hear her feet shuffling behind me. He reaches out a hand before I can give him a hug.

"You're the man of the house now, bud."

"Yeah, okay."

His hand feels damp like a pile of leaves. I let go and move aside for Sarah. She moves with me. His chin quivers.

"I'll see you guys in a couple weeks," he says again.

Sarah comes out from behind me and gives him a hug. He pulls her close with his right arm and gently pats the top of her head with the left. Her long brown hair covers her face. Our half siblings run in from the kitchen, and Sarah pulls back but stays close. The chandelier in the dining room hangs above her head like a halo. Thick static lines run through the image.

The man walks out the front door and some of our hope clings to him. He cuts across the lawn to a white Datsun pickup truck filled with a nightstand, a set of weights, and a recliner. A December breeze catches his hair, and it moves from one side of his head to the other. He puts the bag in the passenger side and pets the cat before he gets in the truck. He sits looking

at the closed garage door for a few minutes before starting the car and backing out. It's late afternoon. I go back to the couch, but Sarah stands in the window watching the taillights move away. She goes into the kitchen and settles into our mother.

When they told us they were separating, Sarah hit her on the shoulder and ran out of the house. She didn't come back until dark, and when she returned, we watched her walk up the driveway from the living room window. The alternating colors of the Christmas lights changed her from red to blue to orange and back to red before she stepped into the blackness of the front porch. She sat on the porch swing, and we heard it whine as she pushed it with one foot.

Play.

The headlights move across the house and catch the plastic wreath still hanging on the door. The woman thinks about the Christmas decorations stacked in one corner of the garage. She doesn't have the energy or strength to put them away alone. She'll have to bribe her oldest boy.

The porch light is off. Sarah was sent home early from school for fighting, but the whole house is dark. She'd better be inside, the woman thinks and thumps the steering wheel. The lights move onto the garage door. She lets the steering wheel roll gently back and straighten. On either side of the car are bikes and skateboards and sporting equipment. A metal garbage can is on the far left of the garage, half on the concrete and half on a gravel pathway. A calico cat slides between the can and garage and sits by the door. From inside the car, it looks like the cat is saying hello when it opens its mouth.

On the radio, the Miami Sound Machine's "Conga" starts playing.

Come on, shake your body baby, do the conga

I know you can't control yourself any longer

The two kids bounce and throw their hands in the air. The woman turns up the radio and sings along. She puts her hands up and snaps to the music. They're making the car shake and the headlights are moving up and down the garage door. The woman sings louder.

Better get yourself together, and hold on to what you've got

Once the music hits your system, there's no way you're gonna stop

She cut her hair last week to just above her shoulder and it floats around

her neck and across her pink cheeks. She closes her eyes and thinks about the man at work and starting over and feeling sexy again even with two young children and two teenagers. She's let herself be defined by her motherhood, but she's holding on to that little part of herself that is still something else.

Washout.

Mainstreet.

Interior, a kitchen.

I'm working my first job at the Pizza Pirate. The owner is a friend of the family. But nobody likes the guy here, and we can't wait until he leaves every night around seven. I work in the back rolling out dough and cooking the pies and trying to watch the girl at the cash register. The dining room is a giant pirate ship with a mast in the middle through a big table. After we've closed some nights, she puts in a B-52's cassette and dances on the table and begs me to come out. I usually blush and pretend like I can't hear her while I clean the kitchen.

"Large Pep," she yells across the counter. "Hey, are you going out to Hastie's tonight? Can I get a ride?"

I know nothing about Hastie's. He's a senior, so that means a party. I wash my hands and try to figure out how to answer. My mom has been really strict since the separation, but she's always asleep when I get home from work. My options are ask and get turned down or just go. I wipe my hands dry on my apron and look toward the cash register. She's in a black polo shirt with the skull and crossbones over her left breast. Her hair is permed curly and falls over both shoulders. She has cheeks that are too thick for how skinny she is.

"Oh yeah," I say, and my throat goes dry.

It's just past five. I'll have to play it cool for almost five more hours. We can be slow on Friday nights, but it's Valentine's Day, and the boss says it could be a big night. If he leaves at his normal time, we might be able to get out early. She catches me looking and smiles and walks over to clean tables. The boss yells from the office.

"Large pep! Let's go!"

Dissolve.

Inside the car.

Come on, shake your body baby, do the conga

The woman turns the radio down and takes off her seat belt. She pushes open the car door with her foot, but leaves the car running. The girl undoes her buckle.

"No, you stay right where you are," the woman says.

"I want to help."

"No, just stay put. It's not safe."

The woman knows this makes no sense. It's something she's learned to say to keep order. Her life at home has become a series of tricks designed to do the work of two people. She asked the man to leave, because she needed to get some space. She hadn't considered how it would work.

She gets out of the car. It's a cloudless night, and a waxing crescent moon is low in the sky. She walks to the garage door, and the calico rubs against her leg and walks back to the corner. Between the brightness of the headlights, she bends and grabs the cold handle and pulls with her whole body. The door rolls up and the two lights hold firm pushing past her on both sides wanting to get free. When they finally escape past the bottom of the door, they fill the garage and angle up from the car sitting in the driveway running with the two children sitting in the backseat and the radio is quietly playing Neil Sedaka's "Laughter in the Rain" and the girl and the boy are playing a made-up game in the backseat where they try to touch their fingers as lightly together as they can and they don't pay attention to their mom standing between the headlights.

The first thing the woman thinks is the girl is wearing socks. They're thick and bunched up around her ankles. The feet are at eye level and pointing at the ground, and the woman can't understand why the sock feet are there. The light insists on capturing every other detail. The long wooden beams of the unfinished garage ceiling cast shadows that look like spider webs. There are two shadows on the back wall from the one body. When she closes her eyes, she can see the image inside, the outline fixed on her retina. She will remember the hum of the engine and the smell of exhaust and darkness when she returned to the car and turned off the headlights.

Fade to black.

Fade in.

The pepperoni pizza comes out of the oven with giant dough bubbles on

one edge. I poke them and slide it onto the big metal pizza spatula. While this one was cooking nobody has come in, and I think the boss might be wrong. Everyone's going out to the movies and fancy restaurants tonight. We'll be able to leave early.

"Hey, come here," he yells at me from the office. I go to slice the pizza, but he yells again, "Just leave that."

I try to figure why I'm in trouble. My shirt is tucked in. Maybe he heard her ask about going to Hastie's and he wants to give me advice or make sure I have a condom or something. I hate going in the office.

"Hey," he says looking right at me and closes the door. "The phone's for you."

I listen to my mom. She sounds like the radio when we get too far into the mountains, fuzzy and the words cut out. I need to come home. Sarah. I can't find your dad. I set the receiver on the desk and turn around and open the door and walk out, and stand with my arms loose. My boss puts his hand on my shoulder—his mouth moves, but there is no sound. The camera pulls away. We get smaller and smaller and the image fills with other people and the town, the poor part and the rich, one side with newer lights and cars and people seated at their dining rooms with mom and dad and two children and a savings account. It keeps going and the highway becomes a long line of light like a glowing artery until it is swallowed by the farms and trees and hills. And in the end it is just a black screen with tiny white lights that disappear, but I keep watching and hope just one of the lights will come back on.

Housework

Cassandra Santos

Yes, he was here again today. Sitting in his favorite armchair where he liked to read the paper and smoke. I told him to leave, that he was no longer welcome here, that I just had that chair reupholstered yesterday. He said nothing. As always.

He comes and goes as he pleases, without so much as a knock or a word. Sometimes when I make my morning coffee before work, he'll stand beside me like he used to. I almost expect that little goodbye kiss on the cheek like when we were still sweet and happy. But he never says a word, and then I leave for work.

I don't know what I'll do if this keeps up. The house is mine now. I've made that much clear to him. It was such a struggle to get the place to myself, and I'm sure anyone in my position would understand that. We used to fight all the time about who was going to move out of here. I knew I could never part with the place. It's so close to my work and the neighbors are so sweet, despite all the racket our arguments used to make. Besides, I always spent so much time cleaning and decorating that I really did deserve the house. Him? He didn't lift a goddamn finger the entire time we were together, and that was one of the things that eventually split us up. Always "Honey, did you see my tie?" or "You moved my book again, don't lie to me." I had to put my foot down. I was NOT going to move out of this house, so I did what I had to do.

All of his mess made the whole separation easier, of course. He always used to leave things in such a terrible state. When I would finally get home from work, I would *always* clean up after him before going to bed, no matter *how* tired I was. Dirty dishes stacked on the counter. Books and papers littering the floor. Cigarette butts anywhere but the trash. Oh! He was such a pig. A *pig*! He used to use his coffee mugs for his ashes and leave them wherever. I wouldn't find them until much later. I hated that about him. The ashes stained all our nice mugs and I had to scrub like hell to clean them out.

I always get a little noisy when I clean. I can't help it if there's so much stuff to put away. Couldn't help it either if I hated how messy he was. I guess that may have made me a little noisier than necessary, but he got used to it over time. Didn't yell at me to knock it off when the dishes clinked in the sink or the broom toppled back on the floor after so long.

Now there was one time our sink had gotten backed up and we called our usual plumber, Dave. Except we didn't get our usual plumber that day. Dave had transferred to a new company, so they sent some new employee instead. Very young, first week on the job, I think. Y'know, I liked our usual plumber because he was so polite and so clean! Can you imagine, a plumber being clean? But this new kid! He gave me the usual "hello ma'am, where's the sink" spiel, but he went straight into the house with his muddy shoes! Didn't even bother to wipe his feet before stepping into my home. Oh! It was terrible. Just a *terrible* mess. I sent him right out after that. He didn't even get a look at the sink before I kicked him out. My husband got upset, of course. He couldn't understand why I would do something like that, but if he had *seen* those muddy boot prints! Oh! We had a big fight about it and he ended up having to fix the sink himself . . .

Your shoes? Oh, don't worry about it! An honest mistake. Besides, I've gotten so wrapped up in this whole issue with my husband, it didn't bother me as much. I *promise*. You're here to help me anyways, so it wouldn't do me much good to kick you out just like that, would it? Haha!

The night it happened? Well, I don't remember much. I hardly remember if I was loud or not, if the bedroom door was already open or closed, not even if there was a mess in the sink again . . . I remember how it happened, though. I came home from work, maybe around 11. I was *so* tired that night. And then with everything . . . I went for his sledgehammer. I thought about

using that favorite shovel of his, the one with the silicone grip handle. Very sturdy. I think that would've made things easier, but the sledgehammer wasn't caked in dirt, so . . . He did have quite a variety of tools to choose from. And he always did love landscaping. Y'know, he wanted to be a landscaper when we were in high school, but he ended up in pharmaceuticals somehow. Kept that dream of his as a hobby. It got him out of the house where he could make a mess as he pleased and I never bothered him about it. The neighbors can't see over the fence anyways, so as long as the house was shipshape, I was content to keep my mouth shut.

There was one time, though, that I was having the girls over for some coffee. We were sitting in the kitchen, talking about work, and my friend Tabitha—we call her Tabby; she's got the fighting spirit of a feral cat, too—was looking outside in our yard and she saw my husband out there and y'know what she said to me? She said it looked like a pack of moles had been through my yard. Oh, I was so embarrassed! And then I had to explain how he had his space and I had mine and everything . . . I mean, the girls understand me better than my husband, but . . . It was just so embarrassing. So embarrassing.

In the end, it didn't matter, though. I mean, Tabby's a pig herself. That was the last time she came over and that was three months ago. I haven't talked to her since.

Why? Like I said, she's a pig! Let me tell you, we were having biscotti and coffee that day. I had the biscotti out on a little tray with some lovely silver tongs for serving. I even had small china plates and dainty little dessert forks for the ladies to use. You know what Tabby did? She picked up the biscotti with her hands! When the tongs were *right* in front of her. She didn't even use a plate! She just kind of ate it over her coffee cup and the crumbs fell all over the place! I couldn't believe her! Everyone else took a plate, but her. I always knew she was a pig. When I saw Tabby after that, she didn't say anything about it. Like she was oblivious to what she had done. How could I be friends with someone like that? And then to make such an insensitive comment when she *knew* how my husband and I were . . .

You know, that's another reason I hated how messy my husband was. He was my husband, not one of the girls! He was married to *me*, so he really should've reflected the same standards in cleanliness I had! But he couldn't do even that!

He used to try being tidier—early on in our marriage, at least. It was never up to my standards, though. He'd use the wrong disinfectant for the dishes or the wrong wipe for the counters. It was chaos whenever he tried to clean the house. And, naturally, I had to stop him. His "cleaning" was just extra work for me. We never lived together before getting married—my parents were *very* conservative—but if I had known he was like *that* back then . . . I suppose he would've become someone else's problem, then.

That night, though, oh right . . . I remember that I was just so tired. Work had just been too much and when I got home, with his mess everywhere as always and our fights only escalating, I simply had had enough. I went straight into the room with that sledgehammer. He looked so gentle in bed. Peaceful. I don't think he suffered any pain. He went without a noise. Just *whack, whack*, and it was done.

That must be why he's still around. He didn't get a say in the matter. He always just *had* to get the last word in our arguments. Oh, I hated it. He didn't get it this time, though, and that must be why he's still bothering me. *That* must be why he comes every single day, without fail. I thought maybe if I changed things in the house, he'd leave. As a sort of signal that things had changed for good. This is my home now. Not his.

What else . . . well, that left the matter of moving him from the bedroom to the backyard. Of course, that wasn't as easy as it sounds with the house still a mess from his day in. He was heavier than he looked, too. Nearly knocked over that dainty little porcelain vase by our door when I was dragging him out. It's perfect where it is. I don't know what I'd replace it with . . .

Once he was out on the backyard, the rest was fairly easy. Luckily, he was going to have two fish ponds installed on each side of the yard. A pretty idea. He showed me his sketches and everything. The astronomical cost of contractors for all the digging and installation brought that idea of his to a halt. \$3,000 per pond? Ridiculous. Well, I made him stop, of course. Then he tried digging out the trenches for the ponds himself. Almost got done with both holes until he got tired of me complaining about all the dirt he kept tracking into the house. The last time we had that argument, he said to me, "Sometimes I think you love this house more than me."

That wasn't true. I loved him once, but . . . how could I keep loving such a pig?

I hardly remember what else happened after all of it. I at least made sure he was lying in there properly and that the trench was filled neatly. The cleanup was the easiest part. I've read a few of those crime stories and they say the cleanup's the hardest part, but it wasn't too bad for me. I was already cleaning up after him anyways, so this wasn't much different. Just a lot more mopping and wiping, I suppose. I called sick into work the next morning, rested a little, and then went out and bought flowers for our new garden. Some yellow carnations and daisies. Bright and happy.

Do you think he's trying to tell me he doesn't like the flowers? Sometimes, when I'm washing dishes, I see him through the kitchen window—hovering around there. I have half a mind to throw one of the mugs he stained right at him through the kitchen window, just to see if he's really there and really . . . well, y'know. He looks so out of place there, lingering in the daisies with that ugly dent in his head from the sledgehammer. Really sours the entire garden, in my opinion.

It's either the flowers or the fact that I've been slowly getting rid of all of his stuff in the house. He never liked it when I was touching his things. I wiped down all of his books and donated a few to a book drive outside of town. His clothes? I made it a point to bring a few, good bundles of them with me when I visited my parents last month. I just dropped some shirts and pants to some Salvation Army and Goodwill shops along the way there. Of course, I washed them all before that. Wouldn't do to give away clothes with my husband's germs all over them.

As far as anyone else knows, we've separated and he's left. I'll admit it, everybody knew we were having . . . issues, so our separation came as no surprise. His mom died last year and he was an only child, so there's been no one really to look for him. His work called me a few days after the whole thing and I just told them he'd ran off without saying a word and I had no idea where he'd gone. The neighbors have been as sweet as always. When my friend, Susanna, was here yesterday—she lives across the street from me, the little house with that kind of burgundy-red trim—she said I looked five years younger now that my husband and I were separated! I couldn't believe her. Laughed it off. She's just too much . . . She even complimented my little garden. The funny thing is that he was right out there when she

said that! I still can't believe she didn't see him. Y'know, I think maybe I'll get the other trench filled out and buy more flowers, and then maybe even have a little garden party with the ladies . . . wouldn't that be something? Eating cucumber cakes and talking fashion while the body of my former husband is lying three feet away from us? And they'd never know! That's the rich part. I don't know if you can tell, but I've enjoyed having the house to myself. It's what's tided me over the whole ordeal. It's so much more peaceful without him and I think I'm happier now. I know I am.

I'm just a little annoyed that he's still around in other ways. At least *this* will be the last mess of his I'll have to clean up.

But, of course, that's why you're here. You're a specialist in such matters. An "exorcist," right? Well, titles aside, you're my last hope, y'know. I trust you. You understand me, don't you? And you understand what I had to do. There really was no other way. Now that I've answered all of your questions, perhaps we should go to the garden now?

Yes, this is around the time he usually shows up. If this doesn't work, I really don't know what I'm going to do . . . I really do hope you understand my predicament and how much I'm relying on you. If not . . .

Ah, never mind. Let's just see if we can get this thing sorted out first, hm? Now, the backyard is here through the double doors.

The flowers? I suppose you're right. Wouldn't want them to get mixed up in this dirty business, would we? I should probably get his shovel, just in case I need to move some dirt again.

Open Heart

Ali Landers

“I want waffles!”

Devon startles awake, raising her head off of the Formica table. Two young boys in matching marshmallow-puff jackets are bouncing around in the next booth, demanding waffles and pancakes “with the dough runny.” The older woman with them whispers, “Shh,” and winces at Devon. She shrugs.

Her coffee’s cold. She doesn’t even like coffee—she took two sips when she ordered and had to rinse her mouth out in the bathroom—but it kept her warm for a little while. Now she breathes through her teeth and tries not to shake. Raindrops spatter on the window and her teeth chatter in spite of her thick sweater and jeans.

The red-haired waitress pauses at her table after distributing menus and boxes of crayons to the shrieking toddlers. “Can I get you anything? A refill on that coffee?”

Devon laughs, quickly, and says, “No, thanks. I’m usually a hot-chocolate person. I don’t know why I ordered coffee, honestly. I feel like I’m acting out someone else’s life.”

“You’re doing a decent job if you drank most of it.” She smiles, and Devon leans over to catch a glimpse of her nametag. “I’ve had days like that myself. This music probably isn’t helping you get back to yourself any, is it?”

"No," she agrees—it was something she'd noticed at the edge of her hearing when she walked in, but now feels curling around her like mist. "What song is this?"

"Rosa," the waitress says, eyes fixed on hers. "By Grimes. You heard of her?"

"Is the diner's playlist based around your name?"

Rosa laughs at her, eyes smiling, and Devon feels the dampness around her fade with the warmth of them, feels her smile relax into something natural, something she hasn't felt in a long time.

"Not on my name, baby. Something else. Maybe I have a string of admirers, who knows?" The eye-smile again. "So, a hot chocolate?"

Devon watches her walking away past the orange neon lights and into the back, feels her heart pounding in her wrists.



Rosa's apartment is warm. Dark floorboards, rag rugs spread in each room, amber light falling across sweater quilts piled on the futon. Devon burrows into the pile, somehow knowing that it's too early, and rolls toward Rosa, expecting a body, but only meeting folds of fabric.

She pushes herself onto her elbow and covers her eyes against the light spilling through the curtain to the living room. The clock strikes a half hour. She hasn't been up this early since their first meeting at the diner, months ago.

Through the gap in the folds she sees Rosa sitting at the small kitchen table, head bent over a needle and thread. She stitches slowly, gracelessly, thread flopping onto the tabletop after each pass.

Rosa's singing, she realizes. Crooning to the music. "Oh, I am not in love . . . I am not in love . . ." She's sewing to the rhythm, the silver needle sparking every few seconds, a lighthouse beacon in the dark.

Devon watches, her eyes following like a cat entranced by a laser. She loses track of how many times the clock bongs, but knows that it's past the quarter hour when Rosa's eyes meet hers and suddenly, drained and exhausted, she falls down into the blankets and back to sleep.



The next morning counters the night. Devon feels bright, watching Rosa

scan the news with her hair mussed. Sometimes she sews instead, tailoring button-downs or fixing beat-up pants, but today she's just reading—here, present, and bleary.

Her presence after last night relieves Devon more than anything else could.

Their relationship grows in snapshots, clicks of a camera. Devon lying on a beach covered in all the sea-glass she could carry. Pretending to munch on an old-man cactus. Swaying to Kelela in the dark of the TLA. Cream and crust covering her face after a triumphant pie-smashing.

Devon only has one of Rosa, in her uniform pouring coffee at the counter. Rosa was still, in the moment, but for some reason her face in the photograph is blurred out, indistinguishable. She holds on to it. In the mornings, she makes herself hot chocolate while Rosa sleeps, pieces of thread clinging to her fingers. She teases her when she wanders in, yawning: "You drink coffee all the time, Ro, and you're still tired?"

"Apples wake you up more than coffee does," Rosa mumbles, grabbing a piece of bread out of the bag. "So does water."

"So . . . ?"

"Show me the apples, Devon, and I'll destroy them. I'll gorge myself on apples. Three of them every morning. Three breakfasts." She shoves the bread in the toaster and glances around blearily. "Until then, only coffee, coffee, and sometimes a coke."

"Maybe apple-flavored coffee is in your future," Devon suggests a few minutes later, trying not to smile.

Rosa chokes on her toast and coughs up crumbs. "*Apple-flavored coffee? Apple-flavored?* Creamer is bad enough. Do you know what a monster you've just unleashed on the world?"

A few weeks pass between the first night and the next, and when it comes, Devon tries to remember anything similar about the days. Had Rosa acted differently? Had she done something wrong? The song whispers into her ears, and as much as she wants to understand, nothing makes sense. She falls asleep watching Rosa mouth the same words, move to the same rhythm, feeling numb.

On that morning, and on the ten that follow, Devon's sense of relief at

Rosa's presence ebbs away. Instead, she feels unfamiliar. The concerts and the trips and the dinners and the nights laughing—were they really with this Rosa? A past version? A different person altogether?

When Rosa reaches out and squeezes her hand, Devon looks at the long fingers and rings with surprise. How many times has she held Rosa's hand in the year they've been dating? One thousand, maybe, or two?

"Hey," Rosa murmurs, looking over at her. "You okay, Devon? You look like you've woken up in a stranger's house and you're trying to figure out where you are."

"I'm fine," Devon says. "Just . . . distracted, I guess."

Rosa smiles and reaches out to push the hair out of Devon's eyes.

She doesn't say anything about rolling over to find Rosa gone, or that she always wakes up at three in the morning now, hoping to stretch out and find her still there. She doesn't say anything about the music that haunts the corners of the room like a prophecy. Nothing about the feeling that her girlfriend is slowly edging out of her reach.

Tonight, Devon stands up. She pulls a blanket around her like a cape and shuffles to the curtain.

"Rosa?"

Their eyes meet and Devon grabs the doorframe as she feels her body stop. Feels her chest empty, her body so still, so quiet.

"You have to leave," Rosa whispers. "You have to. You can't—" She pushes her chair back and tries to hide the project in front of her. Blue-green stitches pull muscle flaps shut, raindrops spattered across red. "You weren't supposed to know about this. I thought you would fall asleep again, like you always do."

Devon's heart pounds on the table between them, crisscrossed with thread.

"What were you—" Her voice chokes off. "What are you doing to it?"

Rosa looks down at her hands.

"I was scraping myself out of your heart," she says. "I was taking myself out, slowly, you can't do it too fast because they notice, you know? People always notice, and I hate doing it, but I have to, and you won't even remember, or feel anything, I promise, this'll be over and you'll be okay with someone else, hopefully not a sewing witch—"

"Rosa, I—" She stops and hears the music thudding in her ears. "I don't understand. I don't *understand*. How . . . how are you doing this?"

"It's magic," Rosa says, twisting her hands into the tablecloth. "It's a spell to keep you . . . connected to your heart, sort of, even when it's outside of your body. This other part, the love-removal thing, it's all about finding the little bright places in the ventricles that are newer than the others, the bits that shine and sparkle, and chiseling them out."

Devon stares at her until Rosa looks down at her beating heart.

"Why are you doing it if you hate it? Why are you doing it to me when you're the first person I've felt safe with in five years?"

Rosa's crying now.

"Someone did it to me." She wipes her face. "But they messed up. They took out too much. They took me out of my own heart, and they took out anyone I would meet. Anyone I might love. The least I can do for you is take myself out of yours, so you won't have to love a husk."

Devon shakes her head and whispers, "You're not a husk, Ro. I love you. I do."

"You won't," Rosa answers. "You won't. You've already started to feel distant. I've seen you watching me like you can't tell if I'm there or not. You deserve more than that, Devon. Someone who's real, not a ghost."

All Devon can do is shake her head.

Rosa bites down on her lips to stop them from trembling: "The only thing you'll miss will be a memory."



A year later, Devon's still surprised when she wakes up with a haze of loss smothering her heart.

A Slow Burn

Rachel Holbrook

Judah Jackson was a creature of habit. At fourteen, he had the habits and mannerisms of an old man. He wore the same five shirts in a regular rotation, combed his short brown hair in exactly the same way every day, and, when everything went as planned, you could see a deep-seated peace in his calm blue eyes. When he got home from school, he always followed the same pattern: check the mailbox; kick his shoes off in the mudroom; drop his backpack at the bottom of the stairs; and make himself a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, which he ate standing over the kitchen sink, so as not to drop any crumbs in his mother's clean kitchen. On a surprisingly cold September day—late in the month, before the leaves had changed—his routine was interrupted by the hunched over form of his older brother sitting on the porch steps.

"Clint's home," David said, his face half hidden by the hood of his brown sweatshirt.

"Does Dad know?"

"He already left before Clint showed up. Mama says not to call him. She says she'll handle it."

"Clint probably knew he was leaving."

"Prob'ly."

"Is Mama inside?" "Yeah."

"Is Clint high?"

"Prob'ly." David sighed. "He ain't been straight in years."

Judah looked at his brother, not knowing what to say. So, he said nothing, taking a deep breath before entering the house. He pulled off his shoes and placed his backpack on the stairs with extra care, afraid to disturb the equilibrium of the silent house.

"Hey, Baby." His mom sat at the kitchen table, a thin, blue cardigan pulled tight across her shoulders, straining from the tension her crossed arms created. She held a cigarette between her fingers, trembling slightly and held precariously above the glass ashtray. "How was school?"

"Fine." Judah leaned against the counter, unsure of where his lanky body should be. He shoved his hands deep inside his jeans pockets.

His mother sighed and said, "Clint's home."

"I know." Judah stared at the cracked linoleum. "What are we going to do?"

"Maybe things will be fine. Sometimes he's fine." She closed her eyes and inhaled, releasing the breath in one long shudder.

"Mama, you know he's never fine anymore," Judah protested. "Daddy told him not to come back. He said if he came back to call . . ."

His mother cut him off with a dismissive shaking of her head, saying, "I know what he said, but I'm not having my own son arrested. It's not right."

"What's not right is what he's done to our family." Judah paused, as a wave of shame rushed over him, making him feel soft and loose in his belly. "We shouldn't be afraid of our own brother. Of your own son."

"I can't deal with this from you right now, Judah." His mother quickly stood, the long ash falling off her cigarette onto the table. She crushed the stub into the ashtray, grinding the embers into a wisp of smoke. "There's no point borrowin' trouble. He may up and leave tomorrow. He's done it before." She turned to leave, but stopped in the doorway and said, without looking back, "Not a word of this to your Daddy. His heart don't need no stress."

She left and Judah looked around the kitchen. The bread and peanut butter sat on the counter, next to its home by the toaster. He took a step toward it before the futility of an afternoon snack led him to the bedroom he shared with David. From the threshold of his room, he could see the end of the couch through the living-room doorway. His oldest brother's

grimy black boots rested on the arm of the couch. The boots were disgusting, but the legs attached to them were more disturbing to Judah. The sores he had seen on Clint's arms the last time he was home were all over his lower legs. Judah's view was obscured by the wall; he couldn't tell if his brother was awake or asleep. He hoped he was asleep. He wished he was dead.

As the light outside faded and the house grew dark, Judah emerged from his room, his homework complete, and hungry for supper. He couldn't smell anything cooking, which was unusual. His mother's religion was mostly feeding the men in her life and keeping a clean house.

"Kitchen's closed," David said, sullen and tired. "Mama's 'fraid of waking him up."

Judah just nodded, and began making a sandwich. "Where is she?"

"Sittin' on the porch," David answered, around a bite of his own sandwich.

"She okay?"

David shrugged.

"You think he'll sleep through the night?"

Again, his brother shrugged. "I'd like to go put a bullet in his head. We'd all be better off. Him, too."

"Don't talk like that," Judah lamely protested. "Mama hears you talking like that and we'll all be done for."

The screen door squeaked and their mother appeared, looking much the same as she did earlier. Another cigarette held between her fingers, this one unlit. "You boys find something to eat?"

They both nodded and she sat down at the table. Judah felt frozen in place as he stood at the counter, looking around the room, his eyes not finding anywhere to rest. His mother flicked her lighter. His brother slowly chewed. The black-cat clock over the stove ticked and swiped its tail, left to right.

A sudden noise from the living room caused Judah's heart to race. Clint was coughing, a wet, clotty sound. He silently prayed for his brother to go back to sleep. He let his eyes search out his mother's. She looked as panicked as he felt. The white scar above David's eyebrow, a gift from Clint a few years back, stood out in stark relief as his face grew pale.

A thudding sound of heavy boots on the bare, wood floors, and Clint was standing in the doorway to the kitchen. "Good God, fam'ly. What's

ever'body looking so damn down in the dumps for?"

When no one answered, he flipped a switch on the wall, flooding the room in a harsh fluorescent light. The scabs on his legs matched the ones on his arms. His face—what could be seen under his mangy beard—looked equally ravaged. His brown hair looked almost black, matted with grease that had probably stained his mother's couch cushion. He stank, Judah noticed, but not just the normal stink of an unwashed body. There was a sweet smell, cloying and dense, beneath the body odor, that made him feel sick.

"What's up, Davey? Judah? How're my little buddies doin'?" Clint boosted himself up to sit on the countertop.

Judah could feel the vein in his temple pulsing. His stomach roiled.

Clint crumpled a napkin he plucked from the counter and lobbed it at David. "I asked, 'What's up?'" When David ignored him, he chuckled, "You not talkin' to me now?"

"Go to hell," David mumbled.

"What's that?" Clint's eyes lit up as he slid off the counter.

"Stop it, boys!" Their mother's cigarette quivered between her fingers, causing a slow shower of ash to fall on the floor.

"I ain't doin' nothin'." Clint held up both hands and backed away. "Just tryin' to be friendly with my fam'ly, and look how I get treated."

David shoved his chair back, and left the room. The sound of a slamming door reverberated through the house. Judah wanted to leave too, but he didn't want to leave his mom.

"I think you oughta go now, Clint." Their mother's voice trembled. "You know your Daddy told you not to come back around here."

"Daddy ain't here, though, is he?" Clint pulled out a chair and sat down. "Ain't nobody here but us, and I ain't causin' no trouble."

"Please, just go, Clint." Her voice shook as she carefully placed the burning cigarette in the ash tray.

"Sure, Mama. I'll go, but I just need a little money. And a ride to the bus stop."

"I don't have any money to give you, Son."

"Now, Mama." His eyes glinted as he glanced over at Judah, still talking, "We all know that ain't true. It's Thursday. Payday."

"That money's done spent." Tears filled her eyes. "I paid the mortgage and the phone bill and your daddy's heart doctor. There ain't nothin' left."

"Don't lie to me." Clint stood up abruptly and left the room. Judah

knew where he was going.

"Did you hide your purse, Mama?" he whispered.

She just nodded, and wiped her eyes.

"Where is it?" Clint called from his parents' bedroom. "I know it's here somewhere."

The sudden opening of the bedroom door caused Judah's knees to go weak, as David barreled out of their room and into their parents' room. "Get the hell out of there!"

The ensuing scuffle brought the two young men down the hallway where they fell into the living room, but not before they had knocked a family picture off the wall.

"Stop it!" their mother shrieked. "Just stop it!"

Judah watched helplessly as they wrestled on the floor, grunting amidst the bangs of heads and elbows on the hardwood floor. David was seventeen and strong, but Clint was a man and had the upper hand. He had been a construction worker before he lost his job. His biceps still bulged beneath his shirt sleeves, the muscles still alive beneath the sick death of his skin.

David managed to roll on top of his brother, pulling back his arm and landing a hard right to Clint's jaw before being thrown off, his head hitting the doorframe. As Clint jockeyed for position, Judah eyed the phone. His dad said to call the cops. His mom saw where he was looking and shook her head, tears streaming down her face. He didn't know what to do. As his eyes scanned the room, they landed on the .22 rifle resting on top of the refrigerator. His dad's squirrel gun.

Clint was on top of his brother, landing hit after hit to David's head and ribs. He started coughing then, his sallow cheeks sucking in with each cough. David made his move, shoving him backward, and scrambling to his feet. They stood face to face now, David bleeding from a cut across his cheekbone, his knuckles split open. Clint made a hacking, throat-clearing noise and spit on the floor. He held his fists up, moving slightly to the left, before throwing a hard, left cross to his brother's temple. David staggered back, and shook his head hard, his eyes unfocused. Clint was on him in a moment, knocking him to the ground, and straddling his waist. He threw two punches, and David's arms dropped to the floor.

"Stop it!" Judah screamed. "He's out!"

Not hearing or not caring, Clint continued to hit his brother.

Judah didn't remember making the decision to grab the gun. He crossed

the short distance between them as their mother screamed. He swung the gun like a baseball bat at his brother's head, and felt the contact, not unlike the crack of pinewood and baseball. Clint dropped with a suddenness that surprised Judah, who stood panting over the limp forms of both his older brothers. A dark pool of purple blood spread beneath Clint's dirty hair, a glimpse of bone exposed at his forehead.

David began to moan, his eyes still closed, as Judah laid the rifle carefully on the couch, staining his mother's cushions with a streak of blood from the butt of the gun. He walked to the kitchen and picked up the phone, quickly pressing the three buttons as he carried it to the table where his mother still sat, sobbing. When the operator answered, he simply said, "We need help." He cradled his mother's head to his side, standing in the kitchen as her dropped cigarette slowly burned a hole in the floor.

Padre Nuestro

Rita Michelle Rivera

It was not the first time a child died under such conditions. And, certainly, it was not going to be the last. Everybody thinks I am the one responsible. As if I feel any type of *pleasure* in taking them. On the contrary, it does not satisfy me in the least. What these people do not understand is that I adopt them out of pity. I incorporate them into my family to stop their sorrow and their suffering. I am not evil and I have not ever been. And if the Father allows it, I never will be. Because in the end, He is the one that dictates these sentences. And me? I just follow the orders.

One day He called me and put me in charge of Honduras: a beautifully rustic but intrinsically poor place. And so hot! It seemed as if it was its own little hell. Misery and suffering corrupted every corner of every house. It was a country straight out of Revelation: brothers betrayed one another, mothers devoured their creatures, children punished their parents, and fathers tortured their daughters.

But not everything was corrupt. There existed, at the very least, goodness in the essence of some people. I witnessed this while I worked in a city called La Ceiba. The child was a young lady known as María José. Her beauty lured me to observe her even as she slept. But María José had this boyfriend who *loved* her. He would say, “*Amor*, you are mine,” and she would respond, “Yes, Ramón. I am.” And then he would yell, “I don’t believe you!” while he grabbed her with his left hand and slapped her with

his right. María José tried to calm him by crying, "I am, Ramón! I am." But the love of her life beat her over and over again until her lips savored her very own blood. However, María José's mother had taught her that "a *mujer* has to endure what she has to endure for the sake of her family." So the fifteen-year-old, determined to get out of the poverty of her own family, decided to keep living with Ramón and the money he made as a security guard. And for seven years, María José woke up next to him. And she cooked his breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. And she pulverized the nails of her fingers with a mixture of soap and the dirt of his pants.

One day, he yelled to her right ear, "These are dirty! Dirty! Dirty! Asco!"

"I am sorry! Sorry! So sorry! I will clean them! Look, Ramón! I am cleaning them!" she cried.

"It is too late, *estúpida*!"

"No! Ramón! Please . . . don't get the belt! Please . . . wait!"

And I started counting: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 23, 31 . . . It appeared he wanted to kill her. I looked at the scars in her flesh and heard María José beg. But she did not want me. She wanted him. She wanted to live. I could save her, but I would not be giving her what she desired: life. I could stop her pain and suffering. I could stop it forever. But she wanted to keep feeling. She wanted the pain. And that is the funny thing about humans: they want to keep living. They want their emotions and sensations. They yearn for life, no matter how bad it is. They all fear the peace they can obtain if they only stop feeling.

María José begged Ramón not to force her, but he did not care for her pain, her tears, her suffering, her virtue. And despite the abuse, she continued her life next to his side. And I never blamed her. How could I? Her very own father had forced María José to live with this man for money, and her mother had subjected herself to her husband for bread at the same age. I do not blame the mother either, as the same thing happened with their grandmothers. It was a tradition, generation after generation. And it probably would have happened to María José's legacy.

A few days after the beating, María José discovered she was pregnant. She visited the Virgin of Suyapa every day, begging Jesus's mother to give her a son so there was only one woman being abused in Ramón's house. But the Lady did not listen. It was a sad blessing that—within a few days of being

born, without being able to receive a name—the baby girl died. And they all regretted what happened, except the father of the *criatura* who still refused to accept his firstborn.

Months went by and María José was still tied to Ramón like what Hondurans call a *gallina culeca*. But one day, the miracle occurred. Ramón arrived to the house as usual, drunk. Only this time he brought with him that smell of a foreign woman wives can easily detect on their husbands. And before the man of the house made his entrance to the small room they shared, María José complained, “Where were you? Why are you so late? And who were you with? Do not lie to me because I know you deceive me!”

But as is typical of unfaithful men, Ramón denied being with women and assured her that he had been with Don González and Don Gómez: such a pair of faithful friends that if María José called them to ask for Ramón’s location, they would assure her he was still with them. But she had no need to call the lying *bolos*, because at the shrieks of his wife, Ramón confessed, “What if I was with another woman? It’s your fault for not being woman enough.” María José showed weakness when, in tears, she supplicated for the name of the lover. Soon her crying became resentment and bitterness, which led the young woman to pack her things to leave, for she was not going to share a bed with a damn unfaithful *cabrón*.

That day María José received the dawn lying on the sidewalk of San Isidro Avenue, on top of a piece of cardboard she had found laying on the ground. She watched as people left the sidewalk to continue on their way.

The day passed. No one spoke to her. No one asked her why she was there, desolated on the street. No one offered her money or food or help. No one even had the decency to look her in the eye as they walked by.

The week passed. María José was dying of hunger. Her only sustenance had been rain caught in a pothole, which she shared with the birds and dogs.

The month passed. María José lived on the leftovers she found in dumpsters. On a good day, María José managed to get 5 *lempiras* from the drivers who waited for a green light. But the faithful woman kept praying the “*Padre nuestro, que estás en el cielo.*”

And then, the miracle occurred. Doña Elena, owner of a food truck in the Barrio Inglés, allowed the Father to touch her heart.

“You. Yes, you. I am talking to you,” were the first words María José had received in a month.

She whispered, "Me?"

"Pue, who else? Come. Don't be scared. I am not gonna steal from you. Not that you have anything to steal, either. Come. I just want to talk to you."

Nervous, María José slowly walked to the truck. When she arrived, she fixed her eyes on the *baleada* Doña Elena had just prepared.

"You are hungry, *verda*?" Doña Elena asked as she noticed María José's eyes. "You want a *baleada*?"

"No . . . no . . . no . . . mo-ney," was the only thing her dry throat managed to say.

"Do not worry. I give it to you. But do not tell anyone else, because I do not want vultures to come flying. What are you waiting for? Grab it!"

María José placed her dirty fingers on the edge of the *baleada*. She brought it to her mouth, bit it, and swallowed piece by piece. However, she showed her desperation as she finished eating.

"Careful! Don't choke!" yelled Doña Elena. "What is your name?"

"Ma-ría . . . María. José."

"María José? *Mucho gusto*. I am Elena. So, tell me. What happened to you?"

"Happened?"

"Yeah. Why you are in the streets? Are you out of work?"

María José looked at Doña Elena. In spite of being a young woman, thirty-three years old, she had worn skin and hands, products of the hard work she had done since childhood. And it was Doña Elena's eyes that inspired María José to tell her story. It was no surprise that María José said Honduran women were too humble and trusting. To her surprise, Doña Elena did not feel sorry for her, but stressed the importance of María José getting a job.

"Look *mi'ja*, you can't just lay on the ground because that *pendejo* used you as dirty rags. No. You go and look for work and ask the Virgin to help you. Faith in God and honest hard work are the only ways to get ahead in this country."

María José complained, "How can I get a job? I didn't even finish fourth grade."

"Ah girl! What did I say? You already cried too much. Look, I am going to help you. Can you make *tortillas*?"

"Yes."

"Well, now you are going to make *tortillas* here with me. But I am going to pay you with food and one hundred *lempiras* per day. Okay?"

"Yes! Thank you, Doña Elena! God bless you!"

"Amen. You start tomorrow. I want to see you at 6 a.m. sharp. Not one minute late," Doña Elena warned.

"Don't worry, I will sleep here."

"You got no place at all?" Doña Elena asked.

"No, Doña Elena. I don't."

"Well, you can come with me. I live three blocks away. It is a little room, but it is something. You will sleep on the floor, but not on the street. But then I am going to pay you only eighty *lempiras*. Okay?"

"Bless you, Doña Elena. Thank you!"

An hour passed and Doña Elena cleaned and closed the food truck. "Here, we can go now. We are going to cross the street and then walk to my house, okay?"

And as she followed Doña Elena, María José crossed the street and met me. Her body collapsed into my arms and no one ever knew why. Malnutrition? The heat? Doña Elena turned back and cried for help as the middle of the street was no place for a decent woman. Soon, drivers honked at the growing group of individuals surrounding María José's body.

"All she wanted was help. I was going to help her," explained Doña Elena to the police officers that arrived three hours after the incident. "She was taken by *La Muerte* and she just wanted help to be happy."

Oh, Doña Elena. But she did receive help and was, for the first time in her life free of the pain and suffering, in the arms of her true lover.

The Trashman

Gregory Kassen

It was at 9:30 in the morning when the trashman finally arrived in the removed village of Migory. All the children who would usually wait to visit with him had ventured off to school, and starting on Jackson Street first that day, the trashman felt the glare of eyes upon him. Usually, the trashman assumed somebody or other was peering at him through a slit in their blinds or through some fogged window—he acted the most non-chalant doing his job in front of vacant-looking houses. However, on this morning, the weight of the gawks felt heavier.

Several doors down, in a picketed back yard, there sat Migory's Village President, his secretary, and a man named Steve. All three watched the trashman from their pale rocking chairs, and saw him emerge from his driver's seat, bend down to pluck hold of a trash bin from the weeds, and unload the contents into the truck's gullet. The tasks they peered at were routine, and the President remarked how he would hate to work such a job. With his own job operating the grain elevator, the President knew he was helping local farmers. The trashman, however, would perform the same tasks repeatedly from town to town without any purpose or a clear end goal. The work would perhaps be tolerable if he had company, but the unoccupied step and handlebar attached to the rear of the truck suggested the trashman was all alone.

Eventually, the trashman worked his way to Steve's yard, clearing house

after house to get there. He emerged from his seat, walked out from the door he never bothered to close, and met the three others approaching through a wooden gate at the front of the lawn.

"Hey," Steve said, walking through the gate. "We need to talk to you."

"Huh?" The trashman replied.

"We have exciting news!" The secretary waited a moment to let him prepare. "The Village Council voted, and, well, we thought it would be great for you to be Grand Marshal of our parade this year!"

"What?" His brow collapsed. "Why?"

"Not happy?" Steve said.

"Sorry. No, I'm happy. But, I mean, where did this come from?"

"You're just so nice to the kids," the secretary said. "We've heard all about how the young ones wait for you on the curb and give you drinks and energy bars. It's just so special, and they say you make their morning great."

"Yeah, speaking of . . . sorry I'm late today. Some stuff came up."

"It isn't the first time," Steve spoke quietly.

"But, that can't be the only reason you want me to be the marshal."

"Well, you're nice to other people too. You wave to me all the time when you drive by," the secretary said.

"You guys are that short on niceness around here?"

"No. It's, well, like—" the secretary took a moment to think, "you choose to be nice. We have to be."

"If you're going to be ungrateful about this, we have other people to go to," Steve said.

"No, no, thank you. It's an honor. I appreciate it. Unbelievable, actually. I just don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything," the secretary said. "Just be here on time next week and we can run through the details then. We're also planning to have Channel 9 follow you around for a bit—film you in action. You know, you can show them how nice you are to the kids. The whole thing will be great. I think we talked about conducting an interview too."

"Channel 9, huh? Do the marshals normally appear on the news?"

"Well, no. But this situation isn't all that normal to begin with," the secretary said. "You know, it would make a great feel-good feature."

The three walked back into the gated yard and watched the trashman finish up his work. "Whose idea was it to give him the title, anyway?" Steve asked the other two.

"It was your idea, wasn't it?" The secretary motioned to the President.

"I think I suggested it," he replied.

"For the publicity, right?" Steve said. "We give the award to a black guy to look good."

"Hey, now," the President argued, "let's not be saying stuff like that. No good publicity comes from it. Plus, he's one of the good ones."

A month later, on one of the cooler Saturdays in July, Migory's yearly parade came. As Grand Marshal, it was the trashman's duty to be presented, at the head of the ceremony, to the spectators sitting on the lawn chairs and blankets lining the sidewalks. While he passed, riding in a car driven by the President, the trashman saw adults (already buzzed on coolers of booze they brought) clapping, and the children, eager for candy, disappointedly joining in their parents' gesture. A few people who did not know the story were puzzled. Those who knew the trashman, though, were happy.

"Are you having fun?" the President asked from the driver's seat. Periodically, he waved out the window to his friends and family.

"Yeah," the trashman said, grinning. "I'm thrilled you asked me to be the marshal. I didn't realize you thought so highly of me."

"Of course."

"All because I'm kind-hearted, right?"

"We appreciate you for that."

He flashed his pearly teeth again and exposed his pale palm out the window.

After the parade finished its route, all the village VIPs headed to Migory Lake—the most scenic spot in the area—to immortalize the event with a photo. Later, the townspeople arrived with cameras in hand, as did Channel 9's crew. The Village President gave the trashman a certificate and let him know a formal plaque would be arriving at his doorstep soon.

In the pictures, the two stood side by side, each holding one side of the gray-toned certificate. Behind them on the opposite shore stood elevated, two-story houses, power washed to cleanliness. The President kept glancing at the trashman to see his response. He was proud of himself for welcoming the trashman and nominating him for the role, but he was also proud of Migory for accepting someone like the trashman into their community. My God, they were such good people. The villagers surrounded them as

they posed. The ones in the back were fighting for the chance to catch a glimpse. They loved him. Surely, they loved him. To the President, this was acceptance. To all the people writhing around behind one another, the man was no longer a trashman. No, he was a community member. They will not treat him as a trashman any longer, but as one of them.

The long expanse between each town, filled with tiny crops that would bloom to large stalks of corn, thinned out the closer the Village President got to the city of St. Joseph. In their place, innumerable vehicles populated the street lanes shaded by the looming skyline. Once he turned to go to the outskirts of St. Joseph, though, the traffic around him faded, leaving him alone with the city.

The President, out of curiosity, searched for a building that was fully intact within the community of dull, brick houses. Most seemed like they would crumble at a touch, and many had trash scattered throughout the yard. He would have assumed they were abandoned, if not for the locals that loitered on the steps and porches behind rusted, chain-link fences. The men and women of the neighborhood were, to him, agents of misery. All of them stared with white eyes, trying to figure out why the intruder had come. The President wondered if they had anything productive to do. To mow the lawn, perhaps? No, the chains in the fence and the smashed pottery lying in the dirt would stop the wild grass from growing further out of control.

The President's glances at his phone, the method he used to find his way, were becoming shorter and less focused as he headed into the heart of the neighborhood. As he drove, the shadows on and off the street concerned him. Eventually, though, he found his destination and stopped his car before the trashman's home.

The President spent some time crouched behind his steering wheel, avoiding the sights of the neighbors in hopes the trashman would come out. The pose he held was foolish and, not wanting to be suspicious himself, he decided to approach the home, exiting his car. As he walked through the open gate in the trashman's yard and stopped before the door of the house, though, a white vehicle pulled up to the curb, behind his own. He heard the sound of pumping blood.

Three men, built like boulders, emerged from all boundaries of the

bleached car. They each saw the President, walked towards him, and stopped before the fenced gate, obstructing most of the view of the vehicle. The men, like the rest, resembled the trashman. Quickly, the President jammed his hand into his pocket, feeling to secure his keys.

"Hey, Carl." He heard a familiar voice.

"Yeah?" He replied, hesitant what his words might trigger.

From beyond the men came the trashman, approaching Carl with a smile. "What are you doing at my house?"

He felt a bit more at ease with the familiar face. "I brought the plaque with your name on it." He wanted to say that he came to deliver it himself out of kindness, but he felt that the statement sounded stupid.

"Oh, well, why don't you join us inside?" The trashman approached.

"Thank you, but I'm really dumb and left it in my car." He gestured over to it. "I can just hand it over now. I need to go somewhere too. Came to St. Joseph's to do some President stuff."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, you know, I've come to meet with some breweries—try to get a beer sponsorship for the picnic next month."

"Well, that's a shame," the trashman said with a frown. He stepped to the side to allow Carl through the gate. He remained in his place, though. "Is something wrong?"

"No," Carl moved slowly forward toward his car. He passed by the trashman with ease, but when approaching the others, he glanced a crooked smile at them.

"You know what, though," the trashman began, "I'm still a little skeptical about this award?"

"Skeptical?" Carl fumbled with his keys. "The parade's over, isn't it late to be skeptical?"

"No, Carl. I'm a deontologist. That means I am interested in why you do what you do. I mean the reason you picked me."

"Well, you're so nice."

"There are plenty of nice people."

"But, most trashmen aren't as friendly as you."

"You have a low standard for us, then. I'm a sanitary waste engineer, do you think the rest have bad attitudes?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean it in that way," Carl searched his car, digging to find the plaque. "You know what I mean."

"No, Carl, I don't think I do. They are good people, better than myself. You haven't met any others, so you don't know."

"It was a compliment, though."

"I'm a deontologist."

"If I would have known the prize bothered you so much," Carl emerged with the wooden emblem in hand, "maybe I would have given it to someone else in the community."

"Your community isn't my goal. As you can see, I have my own."

Carl came close to calling him ungrateful. They can't ever be happy. Regardless of what you give them, they always think that they deserve more. He handed the other man the title. "You can hang this in that house," he gestured. "Display it with honor. Just like we'll be showing your picture on our wall."

"I was the mascot in school, too." He took the item and read his name, Lang, displayed in gold.

"That was funny," Carl said. "You didn't seem to have any jokes during the parade."

"Yeah," Lang agreed, "you all were the ones with the joke."

"Do you guys not compliment each other? You don't know how to be respectful when people are nice to you?"

"I'm the nice one, though."

"I have yet to be thanked for coming all the way out here."

"You're entitled . . . to a thank you."

"Two of us, then," Carl said, climbing into his driver's seat. "I don't want to keep you from your company, so I'll be going." He looked at the three men again. He couldn't recognize the expression each held on their face, but he noticed they were much younger than he had initially thought. Perhaps barely out of high school. "I'll maybe be seeing you this week. You know, when you'll be in Migory."

"Yes, sir. As Grand Marshal, I'm honored to pick up your waste."

As Carl drove out of the neighborhood, he felt the stare of the locals puncturing holes in his car and he saw, from his rear-view mirror, Lang place a hand on one of his young guests to lead them inside. For once, Carl noticed Lang's age. He thought back a bit to what Lang had said during his Channel 9 interview. He had talked about the youth he knew and how he wanted to lead them to a better society.

Season of Flight

Lynn Tamayo

I sat at the edge of the curb on an old wooden chair that my mother let me use and watched the boys race their bicycles. Duke, my brother's black and brown terrier, sat beside me. He struggled against the leash that tethered him to the tree. He barked and growled and tugged, but they ignored him. Eventually, he surrendered and fell asleep. I stayed alert and watched.

They circled their bikes—navy and green and red, banana seats and sissy bars, dents and stickers—and discussed their elaborate set of rules. The stickers—skull and crossbones, peace symbols, and band logos—covered scratches to prevent rusting. But they were more than that. They were badges of honor, like a Bronze Star or Purple Heart. The boys broke from their circle and rode to the top of the hill, looking cocksure and determined. They got into position and waited. One of the boys shouted, “Go!” Their legs moved quickly and efficiently, pushing the pedals and turning the wheels. After getting up to speed, a couple of boys rolled the rest of the way. The others continued pedaling. The bicycles moved swiftly, carrying their riders toward the finish line: the bronzed-metal manhole cover in front of the third house after the street levels.

The boys didn't mind me watching. I made it possible for all five of them to race at once. There had to be a judge at the finish line in case of a tie. The winner was usually the eldest boy, Aleš, but sometimes my brother

Gerald or his best friend Ernie. These races would sometimes end with one of the boys—usually the winner—crashing at the finish line and adding a new scratch to his bicycle and a new scar to his body. The boy would strut around the next day like Mr. Ortega's rooster, making sure the girls noticed.

The girls' bicycles were pristine. Mine was bright lavender with a white seat and shiny chrome wheels. My mother had purchased it on the layaway plan from White Front. I knew it was fast, but I didn't have enough space to test it. Girls were restricted to the flatland. We were told it was for our safety, to protect us from cars speeding down the hill.

Marci and Louise walked past me with their dolls. Later, Mary and Amalia asked if I wanted to play dress-up.

I let the girls pass. I got onto my bicycle and watched the boys race.

My mother would often watch me through the kitchen window. If I went into the house for any reason at all, she'd ask if I was having fun.

"Yeah," I'd say, and run out before the lie would make me cry. One time I ran out so fast, I ran right into Aleš, who had been standing on the front porch waiting for Gerald. I almost knocked myself down. Aleš looked down his nose at me and sat on the top step.

"Where are you going?" I asked and sat on the bottom step. "Are you riding your bikes?"

"We're going on foot."

"Where?"

"We're gonna try to see the old church from the top of the tree on the next street."

"Me first!" I said.

"You can't climb a tree," he said. "Even if you knew how, you can't climb in a skirt. Do you want us to see your panties?" He lowered his voice, flashed his big-toothed grin, and hunched over me. "Do you want *me* to see your panties?"

I sprang to my feet, ran inside the house, and slammed the door behind me. I dropped onto my bed, tearing a new rip in the bedspread. I felt like punching Aleš. I hated him. I hated me. I hated everybody.

I heard my mother's voice, "Aleš! Get back here!" A minute later, she came into the room. "I saw what happened. You did the right thing. I don't want you to play with that boy unless Gerald is with you." I felt her warm

palm on my back. "Your body is going to start changing. Remember what I told you about that?" She didn't wait for me to respond. "He might try to kiss you or touch you. Don't let him. Understand me?"

I hung my head over the side of the bed and tried desperately to disappear into the pink and gold-speckled linoleum floor.

"Understand me," she said louder.

I nodded, "Yes."

"I'll talk to his mother tomorrow," she said, and returned to her chores.

After that, I wasn't allowed to play outside in my skirt. I had to wait until my mother could make me a pair of shorts. That Friday, after cashing her paycheck, she bought a new sewing pattern. She dug into a large bag of old clothes she kept at the bottom of her closet, and chose a navy-blue dress. "I haven't been able to fit into this thing for years," she said as she checked the fabric for stains.

The next time the boys planned an on-foot adventure, I was ready.

"You can't go with us," Aleš said, "Don't you know? You're just a little girl."

"I have shorts on," I said and snubbed my nose at him.

"You can't climb trees," Gordon said with a smirk. "And what's gonna happen when we get to a wall we gotta jump?"

Angel said that he agreed with Gordon. "She might get hurt."

"Yeah," Gerald said. "You better not go with us."

I stood on the sidewalk and watched the boys run up the hill. I holered after them the most vile cuss words I could think of—one for each of them. "*Caca*, pee-pee, *culo*, f-word, asshole!" I was afraid to say "fucker," so "f-word" had to do. I didn't know what it meant, but a boy's "fucker" was usually met with an adult slap on the face or having to kneel in a corner until he cried.

"Lynn Ann!" came the loud, commanding voice through the kitchen window. "Get inside now. Right now!"

The days passed swiftly, each bouncing into the next like a red rubber ball, until it was the last day of summer. I woke early with a familiar knot in my stomach. The last day always had a dreadful feel to it, as if something was about to be stolen from you and there was nothing you could do about it. I looked, but the boys were nowhere around. The girls wanted to color

in Marci's new coloring book. Except for Mary. She had stopped playing with us. "I'm a young lady now," she had said. "I can't play with you kids."

I spent the day playing with Duke and watering the plants in the backyard. My mother chatted over the hedge with Doña Josefa.

"I don't think the boy will marry her," Doña Josefa said. "*Sinvergüenza*."

My mother shook her head. "I heard she'll put it up for adoption."

"That's for the best," Doña Josefa said.

"I know," my mother replied. "But it's so sad. Brenda's so young."

"That's what the little *puta* gets for opening her legs," Doña Josefa said. She got that expression on her face, the one that made her look like she was sniffing something bad. The one that said once, long ago, her family was something more than "lower-middle-class" working people. That somehow she deserved the title "Doña." "It is unacceptable for a woman with children to not have a husband," she said.

My mother lifted her head and raised her nose. Her tone changed to the one she used when she was explaining something that you sure as hell had better understand. "Unless the son-of-a-bitch is a cheater like mine," she said. "It's not like when you were young. Women don't need to stay married to men that treat us like doormats." Her eyes filled with tears and her voice cracked. "We can take care of ourselves."

Doña Josefa's expression softened. Her dull, wrinkled cheeks flushed as she adjusted the collar of her high-button blouse. She saw me watching and gestured to my mother.

The two women whispered, but their voices amplified against the metal siding on the open cellar door. I dropped the hose, turned my back to them and fussed needlessly with the dog's collar. My mother said something about a training bra. I heard my name and looked down at the two tiny sprouts. Doña Josefa seemed to be suggesting a tight undershirt. They agreed that "*niñas virgen*" have to use pads. Tampons are okay for "*señoras* and *putas* like Brenda."

"It might be soon," my mother said. "She'll be ten this year."

A strange feeling came over me. It felt like the Boogie Man was coming and I had to run as fast I could to get away.

The screen door squeaked. Gerald jumped off the back steps and the door slammed behind him. He ran to the garage, got onto his bicycle, and rode away. A strong breeze brushed against my skin and lifted my hair. I heard someone say, "Run." I looked around. My mother and Doña Josefa

were arguing about something. Another breeze and the voice was louder: "Run." I rinsed my feet and ran into the house. I pulled socks over my wet feet and slipped them into my school shoes. I ran out the back door, got onto my bicycle, and rode to the front yard.

The boys broke from their circle and rode up the hill in the middle of the street. I followed them, but stayed on the sidewalk. About halfway up the hill, my legs slowed. I struggled and huffed, but they stopped moving.

"Where do you think you're going?" Aleš shouted from the top of the hill.

I didn't answer. I jumped from my bicycle and pushed it the rest of the way up.

Angel was the day's judge. He hollered from the finish line, "No girls. Get back here!"

I wanted to holler back, "Shut up or I'll hit you like your father," but that was too mean.

I turned my bicycle to face the bottom of the hill and sat. My untrained chest heaved. I rested my left foot on the black rubber pedal and my right foot on the concrete.

Roberto smirked. "Are you kidding me?" he said in his thick Spanish accent and shook his head. "She cannot race."

"He's right. You're not gonna race," Ernie said. "You're a girl."

Gerald's dirty tanned fingers gripped his long chrome handlebars. He looked at me. "Are you sure you can do this?"

I aimed my thoughts far past the finish line, and nodded my reply.

"Okay, but be careful."

"Why does she have to do this?" Ernie asked him.

"Because she can," he said.

Aleš got off his bike, carefully setting the kickstand, and went up to Gerald. "No."

Gerald got off his bike, letting it fall to the pavement. His body stretched tall, but he was still a good four inches shorter than Aleš. "Is this what we're gonna do? Then let's do it."

Aleš shook his head. "Shit."

Gerald nodded at me and picked up his bike. "Don't go too fast," he said.

My tires hugged the sidewalk. Gerald said something, but I heard only the low drone call of the finish line. I listened to the sound of my breathing.

An unusual calmness enveloped me. I sat beside the tree-climbers and wall-jumpers—and waited.

The last cry of summer cut through the stillness like a starter's pistol: "Go!"

I pedaled fast and hard. My heart pounded to a riff in a Steppenwolf song. I heard Amalia and Louise cheering. My smile was so big it weighed heavily on my cheeks.

"Slow down! Gerald shouted. "Stop pedaling!"

His voice came from somewhere behind me. I ignored his warning and pedaled harder. I laughed at the nothingness beyond the corner of my eye. I glanced at the beautiful round finish line and pedaled faster. My tires hit the crack in front of the Mendoza house where a tree root was trying to escape. I lifted off the seat. When I landed, my heart was still floating above my chest and pounding hard. This was the season of flight. The wind rushed past my ears in a tranquil swoosh. I moved unhindered through the silence like a bowman's arrow toward a bullseye, until the sound of a solitary crack broke the spell. The crunch of a tiny, spherical Cypress cone lodging under my front tire brought it all to a sudden stop. The bicycle wobbled uncontrollably. I lost my grip, closed my eyes, and flew over the handlebars. The grey concrete sidewalk greeted my face. Pain radiated through my head. My lips burned. I tasted blood and heard the distant sound of my own tears.

Dirty tanned fingers checked my teeth. I thought I saw Gerald's mouth move, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. The air hummed with indecipherable sounds. He lifted me off the sidewalk and the sounds became clear.

"Fuck'n-a, man!" I heard one of the boys say.

"Dusted your ass, Aleš," I heard another say.

I cried loudly and defiantly. I caught my breath and yelled, "My bicycle!"

"I got it," Ernie said.

Gerald held me up and helped me toward the house. He got me to the living-room recliner and looked for our mother. She had been in the laundry room and hadn't heard the commotion over the labored agitation of the old washing machine.

Ernie hollered through the open living room window, "It has a scratch on the down tube. And one on the handlebars!"

My mother knelt in front of me. Gerald stood off to the side with wet

eyes. I winced as my mother's practiced hands checked my teeth and dabbed mercurochrome onto my upper lip. A hot, throbbing pain grew and spread from the broken skin to my entire mouth, to my cheeks, and through my face, until I was sure my face was on fire. My mother kissed my forehead and I breathed in the familiar comforting scent of cigarette breath.

By then, the rest of the boys had gathered at the living-room window to look in. The girls stood at the open front door with Duke.

"This is going to leave a scar," my mother said, and covered my lip with a Band-Aid. She wiped my knees, my elbow, and both of my palms with a towel dipped in warm water. Now I throbbed from head to toe. I held my breath as she put the medicine on the scrapes. She handed me the towel and went to the kitchen to get an ice cube from the tray.

I wiped tears from my cheeks with the back of my hand and spit blood into the towel. I looked at the boys and managed to whimper, "My bike is scratched."

Across the Water-Colored Sky

Via D'Agostino

The sky has been varying shades of dark for almost a week now. I light my electric lantern—my last set of batteries; I'll have to stop by the depository to recharge them all soon—and pore over the paperwork spread across my desk. My eyes itch with tiredness and I promise myself I'll sleep after I read another page, *just one more*. My fingers drum against the tabletop as I blink, trying to keep the black lettering in focus: *Janice Ingrid. 46. Over-user of non-renewables, under-consumer of renewables. Immediate action required.*

"Oh, Janice," I murmur to myself.

As of late, Ecotheology has been sending me the toughest cases. People like Janice are the reason we are in this mess. They refused to listen to the warnings of others before the End of Days. Even now, with the evidence of the damage caused to the Earth staring them in the face every day, people like Janice can't let go of the old ways. I touch my collarbone, just above my heart. I know just where the number is, though the texture is barely different than the feel of my own skin because it was pressed into my flesh so long ago, the day I became a Speaker. I trace the shape of it, increased by one just this past week: 298. Tattooed beneath it, this ink distinctly different from my skin because it was added only after I'd reached 100, is Ecotheology's motto: *Balance was and balance will be. Balance must be restored.*

Most of Ecotheology's Speakers for the Earth don't make it to as high of a number as I have. Many of them reach some personal goal and then

perform the final act. Some try to run or intentionally shirk their duties so their number count will never be reached, but these traitors are always caught and punished. By and far, though, we Speakers are faithful; we both live and die by the words we preach.

A faint tingle up my left arm reminds me I need to sleep. I check the meter on my wrist, even more ingrained than the number over my heart because, as is standard procedure, it was added the day of my birth. It's low—if I wish to keep myself in good health, I need to sleep soon. I sigh and shuffle the papers back together, keeping Janice Ingrid's on top. I'll deal with her in the morning.

The nutrition counter is on my right wrist, a mirror image of the sleep meter on my left. The number for calorie expenditure creeps up as I stand, undress, and carry the lantern to my bed. The number for the day's caloric intake stays the same. I lie down in bed and turn out the electric light. Darkness, darker than the shady black-gray of the sky outside, sweeps over the room as I tug the thin blanket up over my left shoulder and wedge it below my right to keep out the draft. I fall asleep tracing the letters on my chest. *Balance was and balance will be. Balance must be restored.*

When I wake, the sun has risen. I cannot actually see the sun—it has been absent for what feels like a small eternity—but the sky is a watery shade of blue-gray. Yesterday it was green, and the world was tinged in a sickly hue. Occasionally we'll get spots of purple or even orange, but most days the sky is somewhere between gray and black. This brighter, water-colored sky seems like a good omen as I dress.

I open a package of rations and pour in the allotted amount of water. Food and clean water are both scarce since the End of Days, so rations are carefully tailored to an individual's needs. The meal is mushy and gray, unappealing and largely tasteless, but I eat it without complaint. Three servings a day, every day, and my calorie intake will always total my expenditure. Some people protest the dietary restrictions, lamenting cakes and fresh fruit—regardless of region or season—and greasy cheeseburgers, but such things belong only to the past. The world could not support an economy of people who gorged themselves on delicacies. People like that—people

like Janice—are the reason we are here in the first place. Part of my job is ensuring they do no more harm to our planet.

I collect Janice's papers and set off for another day of work. My shirt collar is open enough to show off the number, per Ecotheology's regulations. Maybe today it will climb another number. Another convert. Another believer. All in a day's work.

Janice lives alone in an apartment just off what used to be Main Street. Workers pass by, headed all across the city. A few ride bicycles and fewer still board or rollerblade, but most walk. The days of cars and trains, buses and subways, have long since passed us by.

The main door is unlocked, so I let myself in and climb the stairs to her landing. I pause before knocking, taking a moment to adjust the pin beneath the 298. The pin is circular, with an emblem of a tree and Ecotheology's name and motto scrawled in a bright font. The tree is a lush, rich green and the sky is baby-soft blue. I have never seen a real tree before, only the scrubby, stunted things that have survived the End of Days. Their bark is black, trunks twisted at gruesome angles, leaves sparse and sickly. The sky never glows this shade of blue. Someday, I want to restore the Earth to what it was when the picture on these buttons was taken. That is my mission and the reason I am a Speaker. Reassured in myself, my goals, and my mission, I shift my briefcase to the other hand. Janice's paperwork and the tools I will need for the day weigh heavy inside. I raise my free hand, put on my best smile, and knock.

The knock at my door is firm and confident. Today is my day off—Speakers always get the day off after a successful mission—so I'm not sure who it could be. When I pull open the door, I do not recognize the woman on the other side.

Her eyes, dark gray like today's petulant sky, linger on my exposed number—299—before drifting up to my face. Her mousy brown hair is pulled into a tight bun and her clothes are as plain as mine. A pin that matches my own gleams on her chest, just below the number 213. The corners of her lips turn up, but the smile does not change her cold expression.

"Brin Eben Farley?" she asks.

"Yes?" I answer.

"My name is Ela Hale. I am the new chair of Ecotheology."

This brings me up short. For the first time, I realize how much news I've missed while I was working on 297, 298, and 299. I pull the door open wider and step back, returning Ela Hale's smile with one of my own.

"Why don't you come in?"

She steps into the apartment. It's small, just one room, with only a bed, a table, two chairs, and a small amount of counter space that serves as a kitchen. She nods her approval at my few belongings, requisite for being a Speaker.

"I take it you have not heard the news?"

"That would be correct, Ms. Hale. I've been very busy and, I regret to say, distracted as of late."

Her eyes again dart to my number—299. *Two hundred and ninety-nine*. It shines like a beacon.

"Ms. Hale?"

Her eyes find mine again. "Brin Eben Farley," she repeats, and I wonder why she insists on using my full name. It's been so long since anyone called me anything but Speaker that I've nearly forgotten I had a name at all. "You have served Ecotheology well these past few years. You have been one of our most dedicated Speakers, and you have risen quickly through our ranks.

"Last week, our previous chair reached his final count." Her eyes flicker down and back up. *Two hundred and ninety-nine*. "He served his last mission and ended his service in true Speaker style, faithful until the end. I was brought in to take his place, and I am here today to discuss your final mission with you."

"Final mission?"

"As you know, at Ecotheology we live and die by what we preach, because balance was and balance will be."

"Balance must be restored," I finish for her. I know where this conversation is headed and I am ready. She sees the conviction in my eyes and nods approval. My voice does not shake as I say, "I will do this last thing, this final mission, to further our cause."

She hands me her briefcase, though mine is within reach. I accept it, popping open the lid. Inside is a sheet of paper with my name and profile on it. Beneath that is the tool that allows all converts who pledge to their Speaker's cause to demonstrate their allegiance. I draw it out. It is cold and heavy in my hand.

"You have lived well. Ecotheology commends your service. I will be your

Speaker, and you will be remembered. This world offers, at best, murky clouds and dying trees, but your efforts are helping to restore it to what it once was. Across these water-colored skies, you will find bounty and blue skies in the next life.”

Her words, so similar to the ones I spoke to Janice just moments before she became my 299th convert, give me the will to equip the tool to serve its purpose. I lift it, my arms steady despite the weight.

The barrel of the pistol is cold against my temple. I am ready to embrace death. The world is too full of people and it is my mission to ease this problem, to salvage the remnants of the Earth that can still be saved. I live and die by my mission. Ela Hale, my Speaker, quotes Ecotheology’s slogan to me, just as I did for Janice before she blew her brains out. She died so others may live, the same as I will.

“Balance was and balance will be. Balance must be restored. Thank you for your service, Brin Eben Farley.”

I pull the trigger. For a moment, I am caught in the space between life and death that is somehow both and neither at the same time. The number on my chest ticks up one last time: 300. Mission complete. Ela Hale’s also increases by one as the gun falls from my hand, as my body crumples to the floor, as the remainder of my head rolls back.

Outside, the sun has risen. The weary, watery, brackish clouds have parted, revealing just a glimmer of sunshine. I can smell the scent of real, lush trees, thriving on an unblemished planet. At long last, the sky is blue.

A Sower's Parable

Kylie Mullen

Oddity Robinson is born to Sarah and Ben Robinson on the dreary midmorning of June 18th in Column, Illinois. She will die at thirty-four on the 21st of November in Riverbend, Montana.

In a misty, warmly lit world that lies not so much above Oddity's as Beyond it, Juphine the Spinster finishes winding a thin, golden thread around a spindle. She takes one end of the thread in hand and passes it to her sister, with enough slack to attach it to the loom.

In the sterile, brightly-lit birthing suite, a quiet falls.

Eywne the Weaver takes the thread, twining it with a deft and well-practiced hand into a tapestry older than the human concept of time. The third and final sister, Ocris the Unraveler, waits patiently at the other end of the loom, for everything comes to an end.

The delivery team now draws pause.

Juphine passes the other end of the thread—now a weft to be drawn across the lines of time and space—to one of her sowers, Lita, who takes it in hand and falls, falls, falls to Earth.

There is a fearful stillness in the hospital room, in between heartbeats. Humans are still so fearful of death.

Lita touches the glowing end of the weft to the small, shuddering chest of the newborn.

Oddity bursts into being with a plaintive wail, overwrought, and the rest of the room finds their breath. Lita turns, job finished, to return to her Beyond.

Sarah Robinson—born on the 5th of February and to die at eighty-four—takes her daughter in her arms, weeping with exhaustion and glowing with joy. Her breath catches, seizing in her chest as Oddity falls still and silent again.

Lita pauses in her departure, turning to see the weft drift free of its anchoring point and hang in the air. That won't do.

She takes the weft in hand again, pressing it to the soft, sticky skin of the child, and over the renewed cries, Lita hums. She reaches up, plucking at the taut thread, and a high-pitched, questioning *thrum* rings in her ears. Oddity will not die today; she will die in the early hours of a cold November morning three decades from now. Young for this day and age, but hardly the youngest Lita has known, or sowed herself. There are times when a sower and their reaper will arrive the very same day, raveling and unraveling the weft within hours of each other.

After a moment, the weft *thrums* in return. It is low and measured—as Juphine always is—yet curious. *Stay with her.*

Lita nods, neither irate nor disappointed, and settles over the child like a mantle. She has lived alongside humanity for centuries, seen millions live and die. Stuck on this plane, she settles heavily, for the next thirty years will be achingly long. But then, boredom is nothing new.

On the day of Oddity's fifth birthday, the Robinson family SUV collides with an army-green hatchback at the single stoplight in Column.

The hatchback driver, Evan Sullivan, dies when he should: at fifty-seven on the morning of May 8th in Column, Illinois. Sarah Robinson is unharmed and Ben Robinson is hospitalized, but he won't die for another twelve years.

Oddity, for the first—though not last—time, comes Unstuck.

The crash is front-bumper to broadside, deploying airbags and shattering windows. It happens faster than even Lita can register, and it is a moment after the white dust from the airbags settles that she realizes something is wrong.

The Oddity in the booster seat is still, cushioned by the side airbag, but

the Oddity in front of her is standing, blinking down at her short, ethereal body.

That Oddity looks up and sees Lita.

Lita can only imagine what she sees. Sowers to her appear only as other glowing, ethereal forms—sometimes humanoid, but often not; winged if it fits their fancy. Lita stares back.

“Hi,” Oddity says, raising a pudgy little hand in a mannerly wave. “Who’re you?”

Lita’s voice escapes her. She lifts the weft and notices a difference. The weft itself seems to bend, like light refracting through crystal, connecting soul to body to Beyond. It is impossible that the child understands. And yet.

“Oh,” Oddity says, flashing a bemused, gap-toothed smile. “Thank you.”

Sarah’s voice rings out, panicked, and the child’s soul sinks back into her body, blinking awake and reassuring her parents in a squeaky voice. Lita hums, curious.



At seventeen, Odd’s weft comes loose again.

She’s since grown into the smile, as well as her father’s height and gangling limbs. Her eyes, normally bright and blue as the open ocean, are dim this day. Benjamin Robinson has passed at fifty-three—a growth in the brain—and his funeral is wistful.

Taken too soon, they say, and Lita scoffs: as though their very existence doesn’t depend on precise timing.

The wake is at the family home, and Odd secludes herself, settling in the window seat of her bedroom and staring out without seeing. She draws a breath, and it shudders, as with a gentle tug she wanders free from her mortal coil.

She looks around, bemused at first, then searching, but Lita hides this time. Odd’s head tilts, quizzical and disappointed, but soon she discovers she can walk freely. She vanishes out the door. The weft trails after her, refracting, like string through a maze. Lita remains, knowing the weft is the only thing both allowing this and the only thing that can guide her back.

Rahe, one of Ocris’s reapers, joins her in Odd’s crowded, predominately purple bedroom. Ben’s reaper, then.

“Finished unraveling?” she asks simply.

The reaper nods as much as his form allows. Where sowers glow, reapers suck in light, hovering voids of various shape. "How's this plane treating you? Change of pace at least, right?" Rahe teases. Great, a void with a sense of humor.

Lita huffs. "Hardly. A change from slow to stagnant. How do they live like this?"

"It's all about perception, y'see," Rahe responds, drawing his edges up and slumping against the window. "To us a millennium is a lifetime. Their lives are mere fractions, but that's their entire existence. Like dog years."

"Woof."

In two years she encounters Rahe again, when Odd wanders off in the waiting room of a hospital in Burroway, the larger sister-city of Column, Illinois. She's been waiting for blood tests and Lita can't honestly blame her for leaving—the room is somehow both garish and painfully nonchalant. The Springy greens, content blues, and eyesore yellows are trying very hard to both comfort and not draw attention. The only other occupant is a sixty-something glued to the decades-old gameshow murmuring from the mounted TV. Any distraction is appreciated at this point.

"How's this one, then?" Rahe asks, motioning to Odd. She's gone slack in the seat, but to any onlookers it looks like she's nodded off in the impossibly uncomfortable square-armed chair.

"She wanders more and more," Lita sighs, draping herself across Odd's shoulders. Since college started, perching there has become more natural, oddly comfortable. "She leaves on a whim now."

"I've heard," Rahe says, and Lita perks up.

"You have?"

Rahe tells her that her ward has become a common sight in the flurry of movement that is Chicago, on the beaches of Lake Michigan when the weather permits, but most especially in between. Odd seeks out the few quiet nooks of the world, the natural scenes that can only be viewed without physical presence.

"Coming Unstuck isn't unheard of," the reaper says finally. "Once-in-a-century rare, though. And they always seek out the peaceful places."

"That's all?" Lita asks. "Adventure is a human trademark. They've been pushing frontiers for millennia. In the face of such wonder, they seek out peace and quiet?"

"And happiness. Resolution. Closure."

"Hmph," Lita responds, giving the weft a tug as the blonde nurse Odd was to meet enters the waiting room. "Closure must be easy for things that only live so long."

At twenty-four, Odd finds a career and falls in love.

She's hired by an old-fashioned, by-hand publisher as an editorial intern, but soon realizes she wants to pursue illustration. She switches tracks, but not before meeting Luella O'Neill.

Luella is another intern, an earthly soul with an easy laugh. She moved from Chicago to Burroway at the same time Odd did, hoping to escape the noise and bustle of the city while pursuing her career. She'll die at sixty-eight, full double Oddity's lifespan, but Lita can hardly tell them it can't last.

They meet every two weeks, every week, every night. They argue, make up, and move in. They get coffee, their first toaster, a Labrador named Nessy after some fantastic beast in Luella's grandmother's homeland. In the wee hours, their breath mingles. Whispers in the night rise with them in the morning—like a hazy dawn glow into solid sunbeam—and the shared word is *adoption*.

At twenty-five, Odd faints without wandering. A month later, a dark spot is found in the bright white of a cranial CT angiography. Inoperable due to size, the tangle of confused, misguided vessels has a thirty-percent chance of killing her if they ever burst.

Lita waits, day after day, for Odd to wander. For weeks she doesn't even know what she might say. It only occurs to her what it would be when the pair stop to coo over a baby carriage in the park. She would show herself, warn Odd, say sorry. *Sorry, I'm sorry*, ever on the tip of her tongue. And yet.

Odd doesn't wander. She's found roots in the now, settled in her skin. She's hired to illustrate a book about an otter with an empty heart.

One day Lita encounters one of Eywne the Weaver's shuttles: Tacita, who had twined Odd and Luella's wefts—their fates—together. An entwining is forever, even if they never see each other again; there is no breaking the weave.

"She'll die in less than ten years," she says, her voice trembling.

"She will," Tacita responds. They are the perfect middle of sower and reaper, but more solid, more watchful.

"Why would you draw them together, knowing how it will end?"

"Knowing," the shuttle muses. Her eyes are the brightest part of her. "What do we know, sower? When they are born, when they will die, but very little in between."

"But you—Eywne crafts the tapestry."

"We do not control the weave. The tapestry records, but the weft controls."

Lita's voice escapes her.

Today, Odd brings Luella cut flowers. Lu's favorite, a sunflower, wreathed with lavender and the delicate, multicolored bows of sweet peas. They will wilt and die in days.



At thirty-two, Oddity's illustrations of *Overflowing* are received with critical acclaim, though their renown doesn't grow far outside the surrounding states. The otter was a great draw for little kids, and the book helps Oddity and Luella get in touch with a foster home. They apply together and are matched with Elias, six, from Minnesota. His only aunt died from a heart attack eight months ago, and he *really* likes otters.

The day Oddity and Luella are to meet him, Lita sees another shuttle tag along. She stays quiet as their wefts are twined just moments after meeting. The little boy beams up at Oddity with fawn brown eyes. Elias will die at seventy in Austin, Texas, outliving them both, probably having children of his own. His and theirs and so on until . . . what? Will humanity last the test of time? Will sowers? The Sisters? Do gods grow old?

Lita feels like she has come Unstuck.

She pulls the weft taut and plucks it. The note is soft and melancholy. After a moment, the thread vibrates with a hum of response, but not an answer.

Later that year, Luella's grandmother leaves a ranch house in Montana to her granddaughter. All three move there together. While there are no horses, there is an acre of land for Nessy and a beagle newly dubbed Pork to run themselves ragged. Elias, short on otters, wants to build a hutch for rabbits.

Odd decides to start her own illustrated series. About bunnies or babies, she can't decide.



At thirty-four, Odd falls asleep on the night of November 20th in Riverbend, Montana.

In the early hours of the morning, her weft is pulled loose.

"I'm sorry."

Odd's eyes blink open, still sleepy, but when they fall on Lita she smiles. "I know you."

"Yeah," Lita says. "My name is Lita and I'm a sower—I attach the weft of a soul to the body. Soon a reaper will come to unravel yours. I'm sorry that . . . that I sowed you into a doomed life."

Odd is quiet. The ranch house around them is dark, eclectic with gathered odds and assorted ends. There are more bookcases than there are beds, and not one of them is quite full. The house creaks and settles and murmurs in sleep. Then, she counters.

"Lita, without you I never would have lived. When my father died, my mother would have been left alone. Luella, my love, may have found another. May still, and they'll be lucky to have her," she says, looking down. On the bedside table, a framed picture from the Riverbend conservatory shows the three of them, proudly displaying Odd's first publication next to the aquatic exhibit. "Elias would've been alone that much longer."

She sinks down to sit on the bed—in the bend of her own leg—and drinks in the sight of her and Luella's forms. Luella's features, always just a little tight with worry nowadays, are softened in sleep. Odd motions for Lita to join her, and for the first time in thirty-four years the sower lifts from the shoulders of the woman's body. She hovers, unsure, at the bedside before Oddity waves her closer with another smile. Lita's throat closes up as she sits.

"There isn't anything . . . after. You won't see them again."

Odd is quiet again, tangling her fingers in the silky afghan at the foot of the bed. Sarah had made it for her, day after day, in an overstuffed chair in her nursing home. "Did you know that my earliest memory is of my father's sneeze?"

"What?"

Oddity laughs. "It was so *loud*. I cried of course, but he laughed right after. My mom too. And if I can remember that, Elias and Lu will remember me."

"But," Lita says tightly, "to leave—"

“Would mean I belonged to begin with,” Odd says. They’re both ethereal, but Oddity reaches out and pulls Lita into a gentle hug, a cradle really. “The end is easy and the middle is hardest, but the beginning is the most important. Thank you.”

The weft slackens in Lita’s hand. Flowers wilt, people die, and gods age. And yet, Lita responds: “Thank *you*.”

SIGMA
TAU
DELTA

REVIEW

Pedagogy with a Purpose: Using Dialects to Prepare Students for Diverse Futures

Mary Welch

Compared to literary studies, the field of linguistics is a sapling. In the American grade school classroom, however, both fall within the academic subject of English. The English classroom changes constantly—both its curriculum and its expectations. For example, the new age of modern technology has introduced word processors, online research, and multimedia, reshaping K-12 English classes for students and teachers alike. But technology is not the only area in which teachers in the American English classroom can adapt to better serve their students. In *You Are What You Speak*, Robert Greene advocates for a revised pedagogy characterized by an understanding of linguistic principles. English Language Arts (ELA) instructors should not just teach the rules of Standard Academic American English (hereafter, “standard English”), but also why and how those rules function. One way English teachers in the American classroom can nurture a deeper linguistic understanding in their students is through pedagogy that recognizes dialectic variation. If teachers incorporate dialectic variation into their instruction, students will have a keener sense of metalinguistic awareness and, consequently, a stronger command of language. With a stronger command of language, students will harness the power of standard English—better preparing—but also learn to shape their personal voices to communicate more effectively with the diverse audiences and for the various purposes they will encounter outside the English classroom.

Education reinforces power-prestige dialects, with individuals' ability to reflect their education through language serving as access to or denial of power. Public education in the United States has strengthened standard English, and its prescriptions, as a power-prestige dialect. Mass standardization of prescriptions has slowed language change and deepened the social divide between those who succeed or fail to master this power-prestige dialect. Exploring this social divide in the modern U.S., Greene focuses on the community of "sticklers," or "prescriptivists," who promote the divide. Greene contrasts these "prescriptivists" to "descriptivists" (59): he defines sticklers as adamant proponents of the prescriptive rules imposed by standard English; in contrast, descriptivists prefer to observe language in use, and label rules that reflect effective language usage (74–75). Members of the stickler community are often wary of descriptivists, frustrated by the perception that the descriptivist approach to language rules is an attitude of "anything goes" (Greene 75). Sticklers fear that adopting a descriptivist approach to teaching language will allow any definition of proper English—hence no definition at all. Critics raise legitimate concerns that language requires students to learn some defined standards to properly prepare them for success in their academic and professional futures. To ensure the modern American English classroom's goals can still be met using a descriptivist approach to teaching language, one must first examine these goals.

A good teacher's goal should be to prepare a student for success beyond that teacher's classroom. To more clearly define this goal, the U.S. recently developed a system of education standards known as the Common Core. In the Common Core, standards are divided into content areas, then subdivided into more specific areas of instruction, then further clarified based on grade level. In the ELA content area, standards fall under three categories: "Conventions of Standard English," "Knowledge of Language," and "Vocabulary Acquisition and Use" ("English Language Arts Standards"). Two standards specific to the language instruction in grades nine and ten are especially important. The first standard, identified as CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10-1, is the ability to "demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking," while the second standard, identified as CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3, is the ability to "apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective

choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening” (“English Language Arts Standards”).

The Common Core rests on the notion that teachers who meet these standards will better prepare students for their future pursuits in the academic and professional worlds. Marc Prensky explains how—in order to properly prepare students for the real world—teachers must know what that “real world” will expect of students. Furthermore, good teachers understand the evolutionary nature of academic instruction: the best teachers recognize that pedagogy—like language itself—always adapts to meet its learners’ / users’ needs (Prensky 64). In the contemporary U.S., the “real world” American students enter is dialectically diverse. It is the duty of ELA teachers to train their students to enter this world, and the best method for such features a linguistics-driven approach. Such an approach will be new for many, but as Prensky maintains, good teachers are willing to adapt their teaching methods to best serve their students. By adapting their instruction to recognize dialectic variation while teaching standard English, teachers can more effectively meet both of the Common Core standards above. Not only will students who speak variant dialects strengthen their command of standard English’s conventions, but all students will gain a better understanding of “how language functions in different contexts” (“English Language Arts Standards”).

Skeptics doubt that a more linguistics-informed approach to teaching standard English will actually provide the best training for students. They fear a descriptivist approach to language education will lead to a decline in the American English language. When considering such fears, however, one must recall the history of American English. Our language has changed from the English immigrants brought to North America. If we use an understanding of our past to inform our present, we will recognize that American English has changed, is changing, and will continue to change. Students who understand the fluid nature of language will have a stronger understanding of language’s true nature—not an imagined static nature. Furthermore, Americans have historically belonged to varied regions and diverse backgrounds, yet still could communicate successfully with each other (Baugh and Cable 348). Recognizing variant dialects in the classroom will help American culture maintain this unique asset, raising a competent generation whose understanding of language and communication unifies its otherwise diverse members. To prepare students to navigate future

changes to the American English language and to communicate in their dialectically diverse nation, teachers can begin by providing their students with a stronger understanding of *why* and *how* language works. One way to help students understand these aspects of language is through exposure to variant dialects.

Using variant dialects in the American ELA classroom will benefit students who regularly use a variant dialect in their lives outside the confines of the classroom or an essay. Doing so also will show respect for students who speak in nonstandard dialects by revealing that language—including their various dialects—operates under systematic rules. Instead of labeling variant dialects as “wrong,” studying them and their rules will show students that variant dialects use systems different from, but equally legitimate to, standard English. Through a descriptivist approach to teaching language, teachers can value variant dialects and teach their students to do the same. Such an approach will improve the morale of students who, in the past, have been told to change their written or spoken language without a proper understanding of its legitimacy (Greene 108). Once students recognize the legitimacy of their own dialect, they can use that dialect to more easily access other dialects, including standard English. Involving both dialects allows students to draw on commonalities and better understand American English. Empowering students with a better understanding of language will allow them to see learning academic language not as a shameful gavel of correction, but as a tool and opportunity.

This broadened understanding of language will benefit not only students who regularly use variant dialects, but also their peers whose dialects are already more aligned with standard English. Students exposed to the operations of a dialect different from their own will be better equipped to meet ELA Common Core standard that calls for better understanding of “how language functions in different contexts” (“English Language Arts Standards”). By studying different dialects, students will understand why language systems differ and how certain language choices can be more effective for different purposes. As Vershawn A. Young explains, “when we teach the rhetorical devices of blacks we can add to the writing proficiency of whites and everybody else” (116). The more dialect exposure students get—both standard and variant—the better communicators they will be.

The reason all students—whether they use a variant dialect or speak standard English in their sleep—can benefit from variant-dialect education is

the development of metalinguistic awareness: students will understand why they speak the way they do. Rather than editing their written or spoken language simply to correct “mistakes” the teacher asked them to fix, students with metalinguistic awareness enjoy more independence with their language choices. John Rickford explains that students who compare varieties of a language can see similarities and differences between standard and variant dialects. Seeing these inner-workings of a language in its multiple forms allows students to shift their language as desired, making language choices consciously and purposefully. He cites a 1989 study by A. Hanni Taylor whose teaching of both Ebonics and standard English allowed students “to much more effectively negotiate the line between the two” (Rickford, “Using the Vernacular” 29). Students can shift their language use to follow standards and know *why* they make those changes. Considering purpose and audience, students may even choose *not* to revise their language to fit the standard dialect (Young 115). However, until students gain metalinguistic awareness, they may not know the choice exists at all. As they learn more about language and communication, they may realize variant dialectic language choices better fulfill communicative purposes. Studying variant dialects and increasing metalinguistic awareness can both improve students’ ability to identify the most effective language choices in different contexts and allow them to exercise greater autonomy.

Skeptics of using variant dialects in the ELA classroom may cite the Oakland Unified School District’s failed attempt to recognize Ebonics in 1997. The district planned to use Ebonics—a variant dialect also known as Black English or African American Vernacular English—as a teaching aid for instructing black students to recode Black English into standard English. The Oakland school board, however, misrepresented their endeavor by labeling Ebonics imprecisely, calling it a language instead of a dialect (Greene 102). According to the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), “the distinction between ‘languages’ and ‘dialects’ is usually made more on social and political grounds than on purely linguistic ones” (Rickford, “LSA Resolution”). Calling Ebonics a “language” implied a deeper social divide between speakers of standard English and speakers of Ebonics than exists in reality. The label led critics to conclude that the district deemed its black students speakers of a foreign language. Media coverage of Oakland’s experiment was extensive and mostly negative. Headlines suggested Oakland’s goal was to “recognize” and “teach” Ebonics by accepting it in place of

standard English (Greene 102): rather than help students master standard English, teachers would teach Ebonics as a foreign language. Oakland's actual goal was to recognize Ebonics as a "valid" language system, then use it as a tool to help students better master standard English (Greene 103).

Eventually, the LSA released a statement supporting Oakland's goals. Their execution was poor, but the LSA affirmed Oakland's true goals—not the misrepresentations in condescending media coverage—were wise linguistically and pedagogically. In their resolution on the issue, the LSA claimed "there are individual and group benefits to maintaining vernacular speech varieties" (Rickford, "LSA Resolution"). By attempting to recognize the validity of Ebonics, the Oakland Unified School District hoped to affirm their black students' vernacular speech variant, a positive step for helping students maintain their vernacular. The LSA resolution also recognized that, in the U.S., more opportunities exist for individuals with a mastery of standard English. Oakland's desire to teach its students standard English by first recognizing Ebonics was—in the resolution's words—"commendable" (Rickford, "LSA Resolution"). While the academic classroom may not be the proper setting for Ebonics to replace standard English, recognizing the dialect's validity encouraged students to value both their vernacular and standard English more fully.

Oakland's reassessed goals gained approval, and, while this particular experiment was executed poorly, there have been several other successful experiments that reveal the effectiveness of teaching dialectic variation. In the 1989 Taylor study mentioned above, students who studied Ebonics alongside standard English were more adept at navigating the differences between the two. Furthermore, studies using control and experiment groups in Sweden and Norway have found that control groups—who were taught only the standard dialect—consistently performed worse on reading speed and comprehension tests than students who were taught using both vernacular and standard dialects (Rickford, "Using the Vernacular" 33).

The collective body of research points to a *better* approach to education. For decades, traditional methods in the American ELA classroom have failed students who speak variant dialects. Brenda Smith elaborates on America's past failures, noting "since the post-Emancipation Period, Ebonics speakers have outnumbered Mainstream American English (MAE) more than ten to one in the Black community" (489). Attempting to teach MAE (or standard English) to Ebonics speakers has failed, rendering

children unable to successfully modify their own speech. Students' attempts to edit their own language "are random and incorrect because they are unaware of conflict points between Ebonics and MAE" (Smith 489). Since students lack a fundamental understanding of "conflict points," they cannot see where the expected dialect modifications originate, so they are unable to implement them (Smith 489). Consequently, Black American students have fallen behind in school (Rickford, "Using the Vernacular" 19). In short, past instruction approaches have failed. A new pedagogical approach employs students' vernacular dialects to educate them about the standard dialect, but also about language operation more broadly. Students whose dialects differ from the standard—such as Black American students whose primary dialect is Ebonics—will be better served by their education system than they have historically. Using dialect variation is not the only, nor necessarily the best, approach ELA teachers can use in the future, but it can be at least one pedagogical improvement over our past.

Essentially all American ELA classrooms hope to prepare their students for a better future. Students' academic and professional futures will require them to communicate effectively in a dialectically diverse world. And the students entering these classrooms are already dialectically diverse. To nurture this diversity and help *all* students become more effective communicators, teachers can use variant dialects in their pedagogy to increase students' metalinguistic awareness. While implementing variant dialects into lessons may be unfamiliar territory for most teachers, the new teaching style will give students—both those who speak in variant dialects and those already more inclined to speak standard English—a deeper understanding and more informed command of language. This new teaching approach will help students develop greater independence and autonomy in their language decisions and better prepare them to communicate in their world outside the classroom.

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The Revelation to Jane: Christianity and Apocalypse in *Jane Eyre*

Claudia McCarron

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write that while *Jane Eyre* employs “the mythic quest-plot” of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, it lacks that work’s “devout substance” (336). Not devout, perhaps, but deeply religious: while Charlotte Brontë appropriates biblical typology in a manner that was perplexing (and occasionally infuriating) to her conservative Anglican peers, her novel is still deeply informed by biblical tradition. The novel contains nearly two hundred direct biblical allusions and even more of its plot threads and imagery can be traced to biblical archetypes (Tkacz 3). *Jane Eyre* is a text as preoccupied with religious truth as it is freedom, feminism, and love, and Brontë’s biblical discourse intersects with these themes in eye-opening and potentially revolutionary ways.

Jane’s spiritual coming-of-age may superficially echo Christian and his journey to the Celestial City, but Brontë’s maneuvering of traditional typology is much more complex than Bunyan’s two-dimensional allegory. Arguably, her purpose is more complex as well. While Bunyan dramatizes the journey of a generic everyman to spiritual and religious fulfillment, Brontë endeavors to depict a feminine spiritual quest concerned with female independence and religious polyvocality. She achieves this goal through her flexible use of typology. Instead of conforming to rigid theological interpretations, her novel “break[s] biblical material into discrete elements that she can then reassemble in new combinations” (Jenkins 307).

These reassemblages allow for the combination, re-shuffling, and layering of types and characters to create Charlotte Brontë's vision of a female religious experience. Particularly important to this vision is the need to accept the authenticity of diverse religious experiences, encouraging a polyvocality that becomes a defining characteristic of the text's Christian feminism.

No biblical text resonates more strongly with this female-centered theology than the Book of Revelation. Many critics point to Brontë's reliance on eschatological and apocalyptic imagery, but few have focused on *Jane Eyre* as an apocalypse that takes its cue from the Revelation to John. A "revelation of dimensions or events ordinarily closed to human view," an apocalypse offers an unveiling—usually of spiritual and religious truths—often couched in abstract, subjective imagery (Harris 285). One of the most famous examples of apocalyptic literature, the Revelation to John relates visions of the struggles between Christ's followers and their satanic oppressors.

Jane Eyre also concerns itself with the invisible, spiritual sphere, and much of its imagery and plot parallel Revelation. However, Brontë's subversive typology allows roles to shift and change: Jane moves from observing apocalyptic visions to taking part in apocalyptic events, and from a servant to a savior. Her lover, Rochester, transforms from a dangerous tempter into a humbled and repentant Christian. I argue that by structuring her novel in a manner similar to and alluding to the Book of Revelation, Brontë creates a proto-feminist apocalypse with profound social and religious implications—one that ends with Jane as the Son of Man returning to Rochester, the reformed and redeemed Beast.

Apocalypses traditionally emerge during times of social and personal unrest. As Stephen Harris notes, they are reactions to "either severe persecutions . . . or to other forces that threaten [a] group's welfare" (286). The products of personal and social trauma, apocalypses often contain a core of pain and barely concealed frustration, two qualities shared by ten-year-old Jane. The novel refers to this unloved ward of the Reed family as a "bad animal" and a "rat" (7, 9). Constantly degraded and seething with resentment and anger, Jane appears an ideal vessel for apocalyptic visions.

These visions first occur in the red room, a space that fills Jane with horror. The room where her uncle died, it has been so mythologized that it becomes a "chill" and "silent" space the entire household avoids (11). After Jane attacks her cousin, she is locked in the room, where she retreats into

her own mind, experiencing a “consternation of the soul” that leads to her first apocalyptic vision (12). Remembering stories of vengeful spirits rising from the grave, she imagines her uncle returning in a similar manner, but the thought fills her with terror. The following eerie experience drips with apocalyptic imagery. Thinking a lamp beam is “a herald of some coming vision,” Jane hears “the rushing of wings” and screams for help (14). The substance of this vision, however, presents a startling subversion of biblical apocalypticism. In Revelation—and indeed most traditional Christian theology—raising the dead is regarded as a joyful victory. Christian martyrs receive “the breath of life” and are called to heaven while their murderers look on in terror (*Reformation Study Bible*, Rev. 11.11). Jane, on the other hand, finds the idea of her uncle’s reappearance “consolatory in theory,” but “terrible if realised” (13). Brontë transforms the typology of a victorious resurrection into a terror of death that dogs Jane through the rest of the novel.

Jane’s first apocalyptic experience opens her eyes to the cruelties and hypocrisies of the people around her. Like the prophet John, she becomes the speaker of a greater truth and the condemner of a corrupt generation, roles exemplified by her frank assessment of her aunt’s abuse and hatred: “they know . . . how you wish me dead” (23). Jane’s appraisal of Reverend Brocklehurst is quieter but no less eye-opening. Upon first meeting him, she sees only “a black pillar” with a mask-like face, revealing the man’s stony and predatory brand of piety (26). She rejects his teachings, refusing to conform to his false vision of heaven, hell, and salvation (27). By doing so, she sets herself apart from her corrupt contemporaries, further marking herself as a vessel of apocalyptic judgment. However, this rebellion brings her little satisfaction. Jane likens her mind after these encounters to a burning ridge “black and blasted after the flames are dead” (31). She leaves Gateshead empty and bitter, perhaps more scarred by her revelations than are those she meant to condemn.

Ironically, only at Lowood Institution does Jane learn how to balance her impulse toward judgment and condemnation with prudence and love. Her teachers are fellow student Helen Burns and Lowood’s superintendent, Miss Temple. From them, she learns how to “at least superficially . . . compromise” to her environment (Gilbert and Gubar 347). Yet, she never fully conforms to their model of Christian denial and sacrifice. Her outward behavior changes, but her spiritual purpose remains the same. As

an apocalyptic prophetess, she does not seek simply to survive the world; she seeks to escape it. To survive the world also means to die in it, as Helen Burns demonstrates. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, Helen is aptly named: she burns “with spiritual passion” and is “carried off by her own fever for liberty,” transforming her death into an apocalyptic account of consuming fire (346). Jane, who sleeps beside Helen as she dies, avoids another close brush with death. Helen’s death figures as the first of many local and personal apocalypses from which Jane will flee, and it eerily foreshadows her time at Thornfield.

Jane’s transition from Lowood to Thornfield mirrors her move from a seer of apocalyptic visions to an actor in apocalyptic events. At Thornfield Hall, she finds herself caught between her principles and the lure of a seductive, but morally decayed society. Although Jane recognizes the air of “stagnation” hanging over the house, she finds Thornfield’s owner, the enigmatic Mr. Rochester, less suspicious (99). This oversight nearly leads to her downfall, because, as other critics point out, Thornfield stands in for the city of Babylon condemned in Revelation (Tracy 61–65). Its inhabitants’ behavior embodies Thornfield’s corrupt and doomed state.

The typology surrounding Rochester and Bertha Mason links them to the beasts of Revelation and the Whore of Babylon, respectively. Much of the imagery surrounding Rochester ties him at first to the “black pillar,” Mr. Brocklehurst, as Jane ascribes to him similar darkness and inflexibility. He regards her “as a statue would,” and she comments frequently on his “dark face” and “sable” hair (102, 96, 112). While Jane immediately sees through Brocklehurst’s false piety, Rochester’s genuine interest in and gruff kindness toward her draws Jane. These similarities are deeply significant, however, because Rochester presents just as much danger to Jane’s spiritual growth as Brocklehurst does. He serves a role similar to that of the beasts of Revelation, who tempt humanity, leading them astray. Like the beast from the sea who is “given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies,” he twists scripture and creates a perversion of biblical teaching (Rev. 13.5). One of the most significant examples of this distortion comes during his proposal to Jane, when he struggles to justify his bigamy: “I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world’s judgement—I wash my hands thereof” (218). Not only does Rochester presume to have God himself give permission for his sin, he also uses scripture to justify his actions. “I wash my hands thereof” echoes Pilate’s words when he clears himself of

responsibility for Christ's death (Mat. 27.24). While we might read Pilate's response as an expression of genuine regret and fear, Rochester glories in overturning religious rules. Kissing Jane "repeatedly," he visits her room three times in only two hours, as if savoring the prize he has won (218–19). Despite these behaviors, Rochester remains partly aware of his doomed state, an awareness revealed by the "pain, shame . . . [and] detestation" with which he regards Thornfield and his place in it (121). This loathing suggests he may be on his own journey towards spiritual repentance—an opportunity Revelation's beasts are never granted.

The typology surrounding Bertha Mason is less flexible than Rochester's. She is given no hope of redemption, as the text links her rigidly to the Whore of Babylon, one of Revelation's most reviled characters. The Whore is closely tied to the beasts, since she rides on one of them, and—as "the mother . . . of the abominations of the earth"—she represents the worst of Babylon's excess and depravity (Rev. 17.3–5). Like this figure, Bertha becomes the embodiment of Thornfield's immorality. Although critics, like Gilbert and Gubar, emphasize how Bertha acts as a double for Jane, within the apocalyptic typology Brontë employs, Bertha also doubles for Rochester (359). Her murderous behavior and "virile force" manifest the sin he struggles so desperately to hide (250).

Although Jane remains shrewd enough an observer to recognize Rochester's moral ambiguity, she finds herself drawn into the degenerate society he represents. His true state forcefully introduces itself when their wedding is interrupted and Bertha's existence is revealed. Although Jane forgives Rochester "at the moment, and on the spot," she no longer lets her love blind her to the danger of their action (255). She thus resolves to "keep the law given by God" (270). This resolution leads to another trancelike vision, in which a heavenly figure emerges from the moon and urges Jane to "flee temptation" (272). Instead of recoiling from this figure—as she did from her vision at Gateshead—Jane promises to obey its instruction. The fear of physical death that haunted her childhood has transformed into a fear of the spiritual death she knows an affair with Rochester will produce. Jane flees Thornfield, once again avoiding destruction.

Jane's journey away from Thornfield leads her to the doorstep of St. John Rivers, a man who at first seems poised to be her savior. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes clear that, in fact, she holds the key to salvation for the Rivers family. In the text's final chapters, Jane

transitions from seer of apocalyptic events and persecuted believer to a Christ-like figure in what may be Brontë's most radical use of biblical typology. After receiving an inheritance, she can "free" and "reunite" her newfound cousins (329). Her actions echo the Christian gospels in several notable ways. For one, the discovery of familial connection emphasizes the kindness and charity of the Rivers family in caring for Jane. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ links family relations to pious obedience: "whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (12.50). Moreover, kindness to the needy demonstrates not only obedience, but also kindness to Christ. As Jesus himself notes, for those who help their fellow man it will be as if "I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in" (Mat. 25.35). Brontë compresses these allusions into a single scene in which Jane and the Rivers become literal blood relations, because of their goodness to her, and in which Jane redeems the siblings from poverty and drudgery, cementing her position as a Savior figure.

This new role ultimately allows Jane to return to Rochester, despite St. John's attempts to control her spiritual authority through marriage and joint missionary service. Just as she is about to give in to his insistent proposals, she hears a phantom voice (357). The connection with St. John is broken as Jane realizes it is her "time to assume ascendancy," so she vows to return to Rochester (358). Her rejection of St. John leads to renewed faith in her ability to interpret her own religious experiences, as, after hearing the voice, she prays and feels "a Mighty Spirit" working in her (358). Jane's final vision reveals her true purpose, saving her from spiritual stagnation and reuniting her with Rochester.

Jane's status as a Christ figure allows her to return to Thornfield, not as a persecuted servant, but as an embodiment of the Son of Man, the most beloved and anticipated figure in Revelation's apocalypse. A title claimed by Christ in the Gospels (Mat. 8.20 and John 8.28, for example), Revelation's Son of Man comes from heaven to judge humanity and wed the Bride of Christ after the apocalypse and "the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21.1). Jane embodies this typology by avoiding Thornfield's apocalypse and arriving at Ferndean, determined to be Rochester's guide and savior.

Jane's care for Rochester further confirms her position as the Son of

Man, and reveals Rochester's ultimate typological connection: he transforms from a beast into the Bride of Christ. Upon her arrival, Jane likens him to "some wronged and fettered wild beast" (367). Having survived the destruction of Thornfield and broken free from his dark mirror—Bertha—Rochester has been spared full punishment for his sins, though he still bears their painful reminders in the form of physical disabilities. His transformation begins when Jane reveals herself to Rochester, when he welcomes her back with religious devotion: "In truth?—in the flesh? My living Jane?" (369). Like the Apostle Thomas, who doubted Christ's resurrection, Rochester demands that she "be perceptible to touch" (369). He confides his growing understanding of his own sin to her, admitting that he "began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in [his] doom," but he also rejoices in God's love, declaring that his "heart swells with gratitude" (380). Moreover, Rochester explicitly links Jane to God, declaring that she is "the Alpha and Omega of [his] heart's wishes," an allusion to Revelation 21.6, in which the Son of Man declares himself to be "the Alpha and the Omega. . . . I will give of the fountain of life freely to him who thirsts" (381). Jane has indeed been a fountain of life for Rochester, his redeemer in a post-apocalyptic world. Their marriage signals their union together as the Son of Man and the Bride of Christ. They are now free to build a life on Jane's vision of personal, spiritual, and religious independence and love.

Jane Eyre begins and ends with personal and local apocalypses. Brontë moves the trauma and unrest of Revelation inward, revealing her character's psychological struggles, moral failings, and, most importantly, religious principles. These principles become a guiding light for Jane as she struggles to find a place in the world that will allow her personal and religious independence. However, Jane's spiritual coming-of-age requires accepting the beliefs of others as much as standing fast in her own. From Helen Burns to Mr. Rochester to St. John Rivers, she encounters figures on their own journeys toward spiritual fulfillment, journeys that are sharply different from hers. This polyvocality becomes one of the defining features of the text's feminist apocalypse. With its concern for female empowerment and equality, feminism is inherently anti-binary, and this need to accept a plurality of voices permeates *Jane Eyre*, breaking down the boundaries not only between male and female religious experiences, but also between fundamentalism and liberalism, love and duty.

An apocalyptic reading of Brontë's novel reveals an effort to create a uniquely female apocalypse that ends with a woman as the Son of Man, remaking *her* world into a new image. Such a reading has far-reaching implications, for in spite of its emphasis on sin, depravity, and fiery trials, Revelation ultimately serves as testament to a stubborn and unyielding hope: one day, the earth will be reshaped into a new and pure order, in spite of the destruction that precedes it. Jane's visions, trials, and Christ-like power work together, leading her to reshape her environment into a new world of love, freedom, and spiritual liberation—a world at the core of Brontë's revolutionary revision of biblical literature.

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Nasty Women: Grendel's Mother and Wealhtheow as Equal Depictions of Femininity

Karyn Keane

Works like the early-11th-century epic poem *Beowulf* challenge widespread modern misconceptions about women's status in the medieval period by presenting female characters from various backgrounds in powerful roles. In *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother and Queen Wealhtheow occupy opposite ends of the gender-role spectrum. As Helen Damico asserts, "Grendel's mother and Wealhtheow . . . exist in an antipodal relationship" with "Wealhtheow, the ideal queen, [as] the obverse of the half-bestial, half-human sea-wife" (21). Despite this contrast, both are strong women. Grendel's mother is a fearsome enemy with an ominous nature and physical fortitude. Similarly, Wealhtheow is an essential ally because of her composure as ruler and her loyalty as spouse. Damico remarks:

Whereas one woman attacks, the other welcomes; one kills a chosen champion, and the other bestows honor on another. Wealhtheow, the ideal queen, reigns over a hall resplendent with light and resounding in song; the sea-wife, an exemplar of savage, corrupt womanhood (as evidenced by her half-bestial, half-human physical form), inhabits a dank, forbidding underwater cave. (9)

Although these women depict two extremes, they are comparable in intensity and significance. The *Beowulf* author places women like Grendel's

mother and Wealhtheow on equal footing, suggesting that women are valuable partners in positions of power, but can also be dangerous foes.

Each character's strength lies in her place inside and outside of the Danish community, which the *Beowulf* author uses as a template against which contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon society can be judged. These women represent the possibilities for female power in peace and war. Wealhtheow rules effectively because she maintains authority over men and prioritizes her kingdom. At Heorot—after Beowulf defeats Grendel—Wealhtheow treats Beowulf respectfully while also asserting that he should leave:

Be bold and clever, and to these boys be
mild in counsel—I will remember you for that.
You have made it so that men will praise you far and near, forever
and ever,
as wide as the seas, home of the winds,
surround the shores of the earth. (lines 1220–25)

John M. Hill notes: “She approaches Beowulf approvingly but outside *comitatus* reciprocity—let him be like family, but not designated war-band leader and successor” (101). Hill suggests that—through her impartiality and ability to maintain amicable distance—Wealhtheow advocates for her kingdom, even when patriarchal authority refuses to do so. She asserts this power in a room filled with men, regardless of the patriarchal structure. Stacy S. Klein agrees, claiming “the truth content of Wealhtheow’s words is undeniable, and the credibility of both her voice and prescriptions for heroic masculinity remains unquestioned” (121). Wealhtheow’s emotional steadiness and widely accepted credibility in the face of dissenting male opinions make her a valuable asset.

Wealhtheow similarly maintains a delicate political and diplomatic balance in the community, reminding Hrothgar of his obligations to his heirs before he attempts to declare Beowulf as successor: “The troop, having drunk at my table, will do as I bid” (1232). Here, she reminds Beowulf and the other men of her benevolence, while reaffirming the strength of her position: while she works for peace, she will wage war if necessary. Peter Baker explains the dual role of Anglo-Saxon women and the modern tendency to overlook it:

If the answer to the question “what do women have to do with violence in Anglo-Saxon England?” is always “the good ones try to prevent it,” then we will look no farther; and we will also have a difficult time fitting Wealhtheow, Hildeburh, Freawaru, and Thryth—not to mention historical figures such as Offa’s daughter Eadburh, Ethelraed’s mother Elfhtryth and Ethelflaed of Mercia—into a European cultural picture. (125)

Wealhtheow has no problem inciting warfare for her kingdom’s benefit, even though she prefers to craft lasting peace. She controls the troops’ actions and, by extension, Beowulf’s future at Heorot. Significantly, no one challenges her assertion, and the king, his men, and Beowulf all follow her advice, suggesting this society recognizes and accepts the power of royal women.

Yet this power does not belong only to royal women or women of status. Grendel’s mother—an outcast who lives on the margins of society with her murderous son—establishes the potential of women to fight within the same system of retributive violence as men. Analyzing Beowulf’s revenge-fueled pursuit of her, Hill argues that “by seeking her, Beowulf becomes the aggressor and his motives, although high-minded, are something like hers,” affirming her influence over her enemies (129). The men of Heorot do not tell Beowulf about her and her retaliatory attack in the middle of the night is more terrifying because no one expects it. They underestimate her, disregarding her as a potential threat. The poem later addresses Grendel’s mother’s power directly, describing her as just as daunting as her son:

Right away she who held that expanse of water,
bloodthirsty and fierce, for a hundred half-years,
grim and greedy, perceived that some man
was exploring from above that alien land. (1497–1500)

The *Beowulf* author describes her in similar terms to other “monsters” in the text, emphasizing the attributes linking her to men who also seek vengeance: “bloodthirsty and fierce” and “grim and greedy.” Paul Acker contends “Beowulf’s confrontation with Grendel’s mother is every bit as horrifying, as life-threatening, as his comparatively easy dispatching of Grendel, if not more so” (705). Grendel’s mother appears a fearsome

foe, because she surpasses the abilities of her male counterparts—she is unconstrained by her gender, and the poem does not imply she should be. In addition, her attack on Heorot—though quicker than her son’s—causes tremendous damage and death as she singles out Hrothgar’s most trusted advisor, Æshere. As Andy Orchard notes: “The speed of the description of this hit-and-run raid contrasts sharply with the leisurely account of Grendel’s own foray into Heorot: Grendel’s mother comes and goes in the space of seventeen lines; her son took more than 120” (193). The success of her surgical strike on Heorot, especially in contrast to Grendel’s, testifies to her abilities as a foe. By capturing the interactions between these women and their male counterparts, the *Beowulf* author represents women as equal to men in their ability to maintain peace or wage war.

Part of Wealhtheow’s power rests in her respective control over Heorot. She controls this space when she tells Beowulf, “Here each earl is true to the other, / mild in his heart, loyal to his liege-lord” (1229–30). Hill explains: “She would not have Heorot now become a meeting place for the choosing of a successor. It should simply remain a bright-ring hall, in which Hrothgar distributes tribute from surrounding peoples” (101). Her dominance over Heorot rivals that of Hrothgar, even in a predominantly male space. Similarly, Christine Fell notes “Wealhtheow honors the hero with magnificent gifts exactly as the king does” (35). Wealhtheow wields authority equal to her husband’s, suggesting she is capable of the same feats as men.

Grendel’s mother is equally capable of these tasks, a power demonstrated by her control over her mere, which the poem describes: “the earl perceived / that he was in some sort of battle-hall” (1512–13). Calling the space a “battle-hall” indicates that it is equipped like a fortress or a hall like Heorot. The parallels drawn between her home and Heorot reinforce her intentions for merciless warfare and her equality to men. Additionally, Beowulf’s perception of the space as a “battle-hall” gestures to his understanding of how severe their impending encounter will be. In fact, Renee R. Trilling contends that Grendel’s mother is more formidable than her son:

We already know that Grendel’s mother is supposed to be less terrifying than Grendel; for a man about to demean himself by fighting a female rather than a male, Beowulf is surprisingly well-outfitted. His

sudden need for armour and weapons indicates that he is about to face a greater enemy than Grendel, not a lesser one. (14)

As Beowulf prepares to meet Grendel's mother and acknowledges her space as one for battle, he admits that fighting her is comparable to fighting a male enemy. He is concerned less about her than about her ability to fight—the danger she poses as an enemy.

Wealhtheow and Grendel's mother challenge modern assumptions about medieval gender disparities as they ensure their needs are met. Jacek Olesiejko argues "Wealhtheow emerges as a powerful and commanding figure. She uses strong, masculine language and challenges Hrothgar's authority by placing herself between her husband and Beowulf," implying her behavior is aberrant because she is a woman (104). I argue, however, that Wealhtheow does not have to "challenge" Hrothgar during this interaction. She enters Heorot with a commanding presence:

Wealhtheow went forth,
Hrothgar's queen, mindful of customs;
adorned with gold, she greeted the men in the hall,
then that courteous wife offered the full cup
first to the guardian of the East-Danes' kingdom . . . (611–15)

Throughout this scene, none of the men in the hall—particularly not Hrothgar—question her authority. As Pauline Stafford points out, "a man acquired a wife through negotiation with her family, but the resulting marriage was a partnership in which her counsel and her role in the household were accepted" (67). The *Beowulf* author confirms her role as socially acceptable when Hrothgar fails to protest Wealhtheow's control. Further, passing the cup marks her authority, not her servitude. As Alexandra Hennessey Olsen explains, "the role of the cup passer is in fact an active one, more suggestive of a person who serves communion than a servant" (314). Fell adds that "the woman who was born great or achieved greatness is shown in heroic literature as sharing in the ceremonies of the hall, courteously honouring warriors and distributing rings" (67). The poet's description of her appearance as "adorned with gold" also establishes the men's respect for her: "The gold-adorned Wealhtheow turns her body into 'a materiality that bears meaning.' She appears wearing jewelry and rings that constitute the

symbol of male power that objectifies and enslaves her. What she does to her body, to paraphrase Butler, is in a way ‘fundamentally dramatic’” (Olesiejko 105). I contend, though, she is neither “objectified” nor “enslaved”: in this scene, no man attempts to rein her in nor suggests she belongs under patriarchal control. By wearing these symbols, she exerts her bodily agency to remind guests of her influence within Heorot, just as any man in power might.

Likewise, Grendel’s mother challenges modern assumptions about gender, both as an enemy and as a mother. She attacks Heorot, determined to seek vengeance: “But his mother—greedy, / Grim-minded, still wanted to go / On her sad journey to avenge her son’s death” (1276–78). Her son’s death motivates her to kill Æshere and drives her to fight Beowulf. Baker contends that “while she does not go into battle, she is expected to contribute, like Esther and Judith, to her nation’s victories in her own way” (136). Although she is not a queen, she controls her victories in a similar fashion by singlehandedly avenging her son’s death. When she battles independently, she controls the situation, suggesting women’s abilities as fearsome enemies.

Wealhtheow and Grendel’s mother are women uncontrolled by men, making them powerful examples of female agency. After Wealhtheow intervenes—when Hrothgar wants to adopt Beowulf at the dinner at Heorot—“she went to her seat. The best of feasts it was— / the men drank wine” (1231–32). Hill argues, “by his silence, and presumably by joining in the renewed drinking, Beowulf remains . . . nobly in accord with Wealhtheow’s arrangements” (103). In this scene, Beowulf submits to Wealhtheow; he recognizes her authority and refrains from challenging it. Wealhtheow also regulates male power by maintaining Heorot’s social hierarchy: “She can read for herself in the fraught language of seating in the hall—Beowulf is positioned next to her own sons (1188–91)—that he has far exceeded the status of a thegn. Yet receiving him as a member of the Danish royal house would risk dangerously destabilizing the delicately balanced politics of the realm” (Baker 69). By balancing the obligations of a gracious host with her duty to promote fair and effective politics, Wealhtheow exerts authority equal to Hrothgar. When no one questions this authority, the *Beowulf* author implies that women succeed in positions of power because they are undaunted by the presence of male power; rather, they demand equality.

While Wealhtheow and Grendel’s mother assert equal power, the form

of power they wield is more ambiguous and thus more compelling. Baker contends, "Wealhtheow's reputation has always been high; but that, as we see, does not mean that she could never have, like Thryth or the Queen of Heaven herself, committed acts of violence" (154). By maintaining an air of mystery, Wealhtheow intimidates those unfamiliar with her reputation. After all, as she tells Beowulf, the troops will do as she bids. The mysterious nature of Grendel's mother increases her power over male characters because they do not know what to expect from her. She is nameless, and, thus, a greater threat. Shari Horner explains:

Grendel's nameless mother occupies a substantial portion of the poem—roughly 400 lines. She is identified only by her biological function of having given birth to Grendel (a role that links her to nearly all the other women in the poem). Her namelessness defines her place in the poem's symbolic order: if naming one's enemies is a form of controlling them, this particular enemy is initially beyond control. (82)

Grendel's mother lacks an individualized name, making her more daunting and, symbolically, harder to control than the typical enemy. As such, she is a relative mystery to the men of Heorot prior to her attack. Hrothgar denies knowing anything about her: "I do not know / where that ghoul went, gloating with its carcass, / rejoicing in its feast" (1331–33). Her questionable location suggests Hrothgar and his men did not investigate Grendel's mother prior to this moment, because they never considered her a threat. Like her queenly counterpart, Grendel's mother presents a powerful enemy, because they cannot monitor her. They cannot predict her actions, making her more formidable than the poem's men. She perpetuates the blood feud with Hrothgar and the men of Heorot because she is the only one left to do it, indicting the entire system in the process.

Grendel's mother stands alone in this feud, but Hrothgar places the responsibility for revenge-killing on another man in a moment of weakness. Her willingness to continue a potentially years-long feud indicates she wields more power. In order to stop her, they will have to come to her and fight on her terms. Gwendolyn Morgan argues "the warrior's trappings, like his own strength, have no power once he leaves the domain of light and air; he can defeat the ogress only with a sword which hangs in her own hall" (57). Grendel's mother controls Beowulf's power and access to

weapons, making her a fearsome and formidable enemy—as much as any man, even more so, because her vengeance appears unexpected. The men of Heorot underestimate her strength and capacity for vengeance, much to their detriment.

Not only do Wealhtheow and Grendel's mother prove difficult to control, they exert power over men by protecting their loved ones. When Wealhtheow speaks to Beowulf in the hall, she advocates for her sons' futures: "I expect that he would wish to repay / both our sons kindly, if he recalls all / the pleasures and honors that we have shown him" (1184–86). John Sklute observes that, "throughout her speech, the noble queen is preoccupied with what will become of her children, her nephew, and, one might add, herself after Hrothgar is gone" (207). Wealhtheow's determination to ensure her family's future preoccupies her, as it should, since her family's authority and the continuation of Hrothgar's bloodline—and hers—depend on it. Grendel's mother evinces the same fierce loyalty to her family: "that was no good exchange, / that those on both sides should have to bargain / with the lives of friends" (1304–06). The poem's use of "bargain" reinforces Grendel's mother's superiority by implying that her male enemies must make sacrifices to end the war. Additionally, she ruthlessly kills those close to her enemies: "Her attack on the Danes is not monstrous in the same way that Grendel's is, but rather motivated by sadness and anger at the murder of her son" (Trilling 7). By portraying Grendel's mother and Wealhtheow as equally protective over their family members, the *Beowulf* author connects them—they match each other's power and that of the men in the poem.

By portraying Grendel's mother and Wealhtheow as two opposite, but equally intense visions of femininity, the *Beowulf* author suggests women are valuable partners in positions of power, but they can also be dangerous foes. The poem thus reaffirms the need for strong female leaders when men seem weak and ineffectual. Ultimately, it demonstrates that women—on both ends of the spectrum, whether friend or foe—need not remain silent, nor be controlled by the men around them.

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The Death of the Performative: Language and Action in *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*

Aaron Akins

Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV* frame the nature of kingship in England through the lens of language. *Richard II* imagines kingly power as performative: Richard's language elicits action; his words become law. Language, in tandem with the power of the crown, yields a uniquely performative language where the words of Richard elicit change in the world through ordered decrees, which his subjects follow out of obligation. This relationship between power and language only works because all of the participants—even Bolingbroke—submit to Richard's political power as king, a requirement no longer met when Henry is king. The change begins at the deposition, which unravels the legitimacy of the crown (with Henry on the throne) and in turn neutralizes its performative ability. Whereas *Richard II* undermines the legitimacy of the monarchy—a change which manifests through the breakdown of language—*1 Henry IV* explores the nature of kingly legitimacy after language begins to fail.

This breakdown begins at the deposition, when Bolingbroke repeatedly asks Richard to resign. By carrying out the deposition, Bolingbroke enters uncharted territory. While the passing of power from king to heir has a proper structure and procedure, the seizing of power has neither structure nor procedures, which prompts Bolingbroke to rely on what he knows: Richard has the verbal power to pass the crown to him. In Act IV, Bolingbroke responds to Richard's compulsive monologuing by ensuring he still

plans to pass him the throne: "I thought you had been willing to resign" (R2 4.1.190). When Richard continues talking, and refuses to relinquish the crown, Bolingbroke prods him again "are you contented to resign the crown?" (R2 4.1.200). Bolingbroke seeks a performative phrase from Richard, which would officially pass power to him. According to J. L. Austin's speech act theory, performative utterances are phrases which, rather than describing an action, are themselves the action, such as saying "I do" in a marriage ceremony. Austin proposes circumstances that legitimate performatives, including: "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked . . . [and] the procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and . . . completely" (15). Given his status as king, Richard's subjects follow his orders—his absolute power satisfies Austin's first criterion. Had Richard said "I give you the crown," he would, through the statement itself, perform the action of making Bolingbroke king. Bolingbroke's need for Richard to legitimate his rule would be met and he would see the crown formally passed to him. However, Richard dances around the topic before officially resigning, making a point not to perform the speech act of giving the crown to Bolingbroke. He instead performs only the resignation itself: "I give this heavy weight from off my head, / And this unwieldy scepter from my hand" (R2 4.1.204–05). Richard goes on to sarcastically taunt Bolingbroke, acting as if he had fulfilled his wishes, saying "God save King Henry, unkinged Richard says, / And send him many years of sunshine days! / What more remains?" (R2 4.1.220–22). Here, Richard skirts the final criterion: power is not passed to Bolingbroke "completely." Rather, the crown passes from Richard to no one. Ultimately, Bolingbroke takes the throne without the proper performative act from Richard, thus becoming the illegitimate king Henry IV.

Without legitimacy, the crown's linguistic power fails. This altered relationship appears when the rebels decide, without formality, that Mortimer shall be their king. Hotspur first asks "did King Richard then / Proclaim my brother Edmund Mortimer / Heir to the crown?" (1H4 1.3.155–57). The question allows Northumberland to respond "He did, myself did hear it," confirming the claim (1H4 1.3.158). Though Northumberland stops short of saying "I name Mortimer heir" in a performative utterance

(since he lacks the authority to do so), the result is the same: Northumberland—through a speech act—effectively names Mortimer as heir to the throne. Though the claim functions like a performative speech act, it violates Austin’s first criterion: Northumberland lacks the necessary power, circumstances, and language to perform this action, yet Northumberland still accomplishes the result. This speech act also relies on an imagined utterance which may not have happened, making the claim’s legitimacy suspect. Thus, this imaginary performative fails to make Mortimer king—unlike if Richard had passed the crown while alive—and the rebels must support their claim with an uprising.

With language no longer able to determine legitimacy, the characters take action to validate their claims to the throne, though it is initially unclear what type of action they will take. Henry first plans to use violence to legitimate his rule, vowing to start “broils / . . . in stronds afar remote” (1H4 1.1.3–4). He wants to shift focus away from himself and England while demonstrating power through an iron fist. And, though the later rebellion presents a more direct challenge to Henry’s legitimacy, it still allows him to demonstrate power through combat. This solution has its merits: killing the opposition would allow Henry to appear strong and incite fear, but it does not solve his inherent legitimacy crisis. If it did, the play could simply show Henry marching around England slaughtering dissenters. In reality, there exists no clear path to his legitimacy, which leaves the crown in a state of limbo. Therefore, the play offers two options for the throne: the troublesome prince Hal and his rebel counterpart, Harry “Hotspur” Percy. It seems obvious one of them becomes Henry V, but how the play decides between the two has wide ramifications for the nature of kingly legitimacy.

As I noted above, speech acts no longer work in this political space, so both characters rely on action to seek legitimacy. Hotspur leads a rebellion to validate Mortimer’s claim to the throne. Hal, unwilling to rebel against his father, makes a series of empty speech acts, then retroactively attempts to validate them through his actions. First introduced as an irresponsible drunk, Hal promises to reverse his public perception and properly assume the role of prince:

So when this loose behavior I throw off
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,

By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
 And, like bright metal on a sullen ground,
 My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
 Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
 I'll so offend to make offense a skill,
 Redeeming time when men think least I will. (*1H4* 1.2.208–17)

At first, the promise seems unbelievable: given the play's political climate and Hal's irresponsible disposition, his words appear empty. Nevertheless, he repeats this promise to King Henry, saying "I will redeem all this on Percy's head" (*1H4* 3.2.132). The promise, a speech act, fails because, as Austin suggests, it does not qualify as a performative speech act. Though Hal's promise meets the first criteria—"persons and circumstances . . . appropriate for the invocation"—the speech act still "must be executed by all participants both correctly and . . . completely" (Austin 15). The promise falls short of this last criterion because the action required to validate it seems unbelievable—it is virtually impossible to envision such a drastic change in Hal's character. The notion that he could rise to the role of prince by defeating Hotspur in battle seems an idle threat, with little reason to believe the drunkard prince can accomplish it. Hal's initial troubles aside, speech acts no longer suffice in this political climate. Words require action for legitimization and Hal's idle promises are no different.

Nevertheless, Hal believes he must kill Hotspur to satisfy his promise. Because Hotspur serves as his immediate rival—he is introduced as Henry's preferred prince—Hotspur occupies the space to which Hal aspires, so Hal ultimately feels compelled to eliminate Hotspur so he can fully reconcile with his father. Hal reveals this impulse when he attempts yet another speech act, claiming that, by killing Hotspur, he will take "all the budding honors on thy crest" (*1H4* 5.4.72). Ultimately, Hotspur dies at Hal's hands, satisfying what Hal believes he needs to become the proper prince. The speech act of taking Hotspur's honor, Hal believes, legitimates him. But like his prior promise, this speech act fails because it relies on Hal *knowing* he killed Hotspur in order to be "executed by all participants both correctly and . . . completely," a privilege Falstaff later takes away when he claims to have killed Percy. Thus, even though Hal completed the action required to back up his promise, his speech act still fails in the face of uncertainty.

However, the real trouble with Hal's solution lies in its similarities to Henry's use of violence. Though Hal's approach is dressed up with promises and speech acts, his goal still boils down to killing his opponent. The problem with Hal's solution to his crisis of validity is that, like Henry's solution and the rebels' solution, it seems entirely manufactured. The act of killing Hotspur doesn't actually transfer honor, except that Hal claims it does. Moreover, killing Hotspur doesn't redeem Hal's princely status. These various routes to legitimacy seem wholly based on claims that have no merit. The rebels' entirely imagined performative speech act from the late king Richard is an arbitrary way of determining king, just like Hal murdering Hotspur arbitrarily legitimates his role as prince. Ultimately, the play ends in a place similar to where it began, with Henry vowing to destroy his enemies in battle: "Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway, / Meeting the check of such another day, / And since this business so fair is done, / Let us not leave till all our own be won" (1H4 5.5.41–44). The play offers no satisfactory solution to the legitimacy crisis. Even though Hal manages to eliminate his rival (and later becomes Henry V), he arbitrarily determines that it redeems his princehood, despite having no reason to believe so.

Falstaff warns of this breakdown in his "honor speech," when he says to Hal that honor is merely "A word . . . Air" (1H4 5.1.134–35), later adding "honor is a mere scutcheon" (1H4 5.1.140). While he fails to sway Hal, his speech signals that the transfer of honor from Hotspur to Hal means nothing. He muddies the water of an otherwise clear vision of legitimacy, and reminds us of the characters' arbitrary behavior. If we accept Falstaff's speech, then honor's lack of meaning completely undermines Hal's theory of kingly legitimacy, since he believes he needs Hotspur's honor to become legitimate. Perhaps, after the deposition, kingly legitimacy ceases to exist, and England could never have a legitimate king again. More likely, though, the play suggests that—after the deposition—kingly legitimacy becomes complicated: whereas in *Richard II*, Bolingbroke views Richard's performative speech acts as having the ability to legitimate his rule, in *1 Henry IV* there is no clear idea of kingly legitimacy. After language begins to break down, the characters invent their own methods for determining legitimacy, and, while a common thread of action permeates these methods, they all still rely on arbitrary interpretations of legitimacy.

The play ends with the nature of legitimacy unclear, and even though Hal reconciles with his father and later becomes Henry V, his claim to

the throne has no more validity than Mortimer's or Hotspur's. Hal wins because history demands it, not because his method for claiming the crown makes more sense than—or even differs from—the others. Falstaff's speech unlocks this reading, reminding us that the frameworks these characters use to evaluate kingship ultimately mean nothing, and that Hal becomes king in the end only by chance, as the last truly legitimate king died with Richard's last breath. This interpretation does not imply that legitimacy no longer exists, but instead that legitimacy requires a more complicated framework. Looking back to Richard, what made him legitimate (and therefore enabled the power of his performative speech) is that his subjects, for all his faults, accepted him. After the deposition, the country becomes divided about who it believes should occupy the throne. And rectifying that division requires more work than one side simply eradicating the other.

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“Round about her tomb they go”: Editorial Emendation in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Kyle Riper

Over the past four hundred years, there have been many notable iterations of William Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, including the printed first quarto, the first folio, and the contemporary Pelican edition. With each of these editions, something has been changed, whether in the dialogue or the stage directions. In this essay, I examine the changes in a specific scene: Hero’s epitaph and funeral song. By looking at this scene in each of these three printed editions—as well as in Josie Rourke’s live adaptation—I show how these changes evoke permanence and penance. These changes, I argue, implicate different characters, or sets of characters, in the role of Hero’s (false) death. I outline how the changes in Hero’s epitaph scene evoke feelings of permanence and penance as they pertain to both the textual life and characters in the play. To do so, I explore how changing the speaker elicits different emotions and senses of truth, as well as how other textual changes—including word changes and typographical separation—impact the options available to actors, directors, and readers. Every change—each divergence from the original text—influences both the epitaph and the funeral’s implications, especially regarding the responsibility male characters feel, or should feel, about their roles in Hero’s false death.

The scene in question marks a significant tonal shift away from playful revelry to the tragic Hero, a young woman who has faked her own death after the slanderous words delivered by Claudio—her young suitor—and

Lord Don Pedro. Her fake death, though, prompts a real funeral. At this funeral, one character—usually Claudio, but sometimes an unnamed attendant Lord—offers Hero's epitaph. While my concerns rest largely with the more prominent changes between various editions' versions of this epitaph, one notable feature remains static: the use of the word "epitaph" rather than "eulogy." In contemporary usage, a eulogy is spoken at a funeral or wake, while an epitaph is carved on a headstone or tomb. In this instance, Shakespeare uses the word "epitaph" to describe what we today would call a "eulogy." It is spoken aloud, but this vocal delivery does not mean the lines are not inscribed upon Hero's tomb. In fact, it implies exactly the opposite: the words are carved in stone.

In the printed quarto version of *Much Ado About Nothing*, there are several differences from the versions that succeeded it. In this version, the epitaph is given by an unnamed Lord—perhaps Don Pedro or perhaps just an unnamed attendant Lord—rather than by Claudio, as it is in the Pelican edition. Another divergence appears in the final two lines. In the Pelican edition, the last couplet is separated by a stage direction that directs the speaker to hang the epitaph, scribed on a scroll, upon the tomb. This stage direction implies the final two lines are not part of the epitaph at all. But in the quarto version, there is no explicit direction to hang up the scroll—only embedded directions—which allows contemporary actors and directors to choose what they do with the scroll or, indeed, if there is a scroll at all. This freedom allows the director to carve the epitaph on Hero's tomb as part of an onstage prop, rather than having the speaker hold a scroll. This change creates a sense of permanence regarding the retelling of Hero's life, which could be a form of penance from Don Pedro, if Don Pedro is the one to read the epitaph. Don Pedro feels at least partly responsible for Hero's death and, in this instance, could be atoning for his sins by writing, inscribing, and delivering an epitaph.

This ethos of the epitaph's delivery is complicated additionally by one minor change. In the quarto, the final word is "dead," while other versions use variations of the word "dumb." This change also signifies a sense of permanence: the epitaph will praise Hero long after Don Pedro and everybody else in the play are dead. The quarto envisions that the epitaph can, to some degree, atone for the slander of Hero. The other versions, however,

use only variations on “dumb,” which suggests the speaker of the epitaph is not as focused on the longevity of his actions. To complicate the quarto further, Claire McEachern—in the Arden edition—proposes an alternate, gender-specific interpretation. She suggests the epitaph is delivered by an attendant Lord, one kept on hand by Hero’s father as a “delegate . . . on Claudio’s behalf, and the collective behalf of the male community that has slandered Hero” (149). This reading places blame for Hero’s death not just on Claudio and Don Pedro, but rather on the play’s entire male population. If this play is read as a social critique, this passage could render all men complicit, regardless of whether they personally slander women for perceived wrongdoings without evidence or just cause.

McEachern’s reading, however, does not fully account for the implications of other editorial changes to the scene. Specifically, I find the change from the final “dead” in the first quarto to “dumb” in the first folio—which most editions follow—particularly important. McEachern notes that Elizabethan playhouse landlord Philip Henslowe, in one performance, indicated a tomb was used as an onstage prop, allowing the “possibility that a property monument may also have been used in Renaissance theatres where *Much Ado* was performed” (344n5.3.1). This choice could also allow for the epitaph to be engraved on a physical stage prop rather than an impermanent scroll hung on a wall. Both of these historically corroborated possibilities suggest—as I argue—that the words in the epitaph are intended to be permanent.

Take, for example, the typography and diction of the first folio edition of Hero’s epitaph. This version also has the epitaph delivered by an attendant Lord, indicating a sense of remorse for the male characters’ actions in the play, and it includes the final two lines, again giving a possible sense of permanence. The most notable differences between the folio version and the quarto version are small spelling changes (possibly standardizing spelling) and the change in the last word, from “dead” to “dombe” (dumb). One possible effect of this change is the addition of a rhyming element. “Dombe,” in this case, rhymes with “tombe,” which helps create sincerity from the Lord, because the end rhymes suggest greater effort. The rhyming also creates cohesion with the rest of the epitaph, indicating the final two lines could refer to an inscription rather than a simple scroll. Here, the final couplet is separated, but it is still connected to the rest of the speech, completing an overall sense of cohesion. Another effect of this diction

choice is found in the epitaph's inherent meaning. In the quarto, the epitaph's speaker announces the epitaph will praise Hero even after he dies. In the folio, however, the Lord claims the epitaph will praise Hero when he is dumb—when he is wrong. Here the Lord admits the claims of Hero's infidelities are false. Even if the men in the play were tricked into believing Hero cheated on Claudio, they still slandered her, leading to her death. In this moment, the stand-in for the male population publicly admits their failure and does what he can to make amends.

Contemporary audiences are more likely to encounter this play not in the various editions I trace here, but through filmed live-action adaptations, a form increasingly relevant with the rise of streaming video services. One such example is the 2011 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* directed by Josie Rourke at the Wyndham Theatre in London, which was recorded for distribution. In the epitaph scene of Rourke's adaptation, Tom Bateman portrays a repentant, sorrowful Claudio. Bateman's Claudio is very somber—in this version, Claudio seems a gentle man who genuinely regrets slandering Hero. Eventually he raises a pistol to his head—as if to commit suicide—but is stopped by what appears to him to be Hero's ghost (Rourke 2:23:00–2:25:00). The interruption of his suicide attempt implies another sense of permanence—in this case, longevity, rather than praise and atonement. In this version, Claudio gives the epitaph directly from a "scroll" or sheet of paper. Bateman's voice trembles and he begins to cry as he delivers the somber speech, evoking a sense of intimacy and vulnerability. By giving the speech to Claudio, more blame for Hero's death is placed directly on him, suggesting he accepts this blame unresistingly. He seems to understand it was his fault Hero died, so he accepts full responsibility for her death. Bateman's Claudio appears wearier, more responsible, more regretful than other versions of the character.

The Pelican edition of the play is similar to Rourke's adaptation in that both versions feature Claudio as the speaker of the epitaph. By having Claudio give the speech, the editors direct blame for Hero's death onto Claudio himself, thus forcing Claudio to confront the consequences of his actions, which might allow him both to accept Hero's love and to refrain from repeating his behavior. Another difference between this version and the quarto and folio editions is the "[Hangs up the scroll]" stage direction, which separates the final two lines. The stage direction is in brackets, meaning it likely was inserted by an editor after the fact, presumably to

aid clarity. Doing so removes some of the epitaph's verse elements: instead of four sets of rhyming couplets, there are now only three in the epitaph proper. The explicit addition of the scroll also removes the actor's freedom to indicate the epitaph is inscribed upon the tomb, which also negates some of the epitaph's permanence. In this case, the praise will last only as long as the scroll hangs. The added stage direction, the separation of the final couplet, and the character switch, make this version the most drastically changed iteration. Overall, the addition of the stage directions removes agency from the scene's actors, and the change of speaker creates a sense of penance from Claudio.

After the epitaph—in all versions of the play—a funeral dirge is performed, signifying that Hero is dead and her funeral has ended. Importantly, though, the song remains the same in most text versions, save a few minor editorial emendations that have little effect on its tone or meanings. Various performances interpret the song quite differently, however. In the Rourke version, the scene shifts from the epitaph to the song originally sung by attendants, here played through a boombox, bringing an acute sense of contemporaneity to the play. In addition, the song has been adapted to suit the adaptation's contemporary setting, transforming from a hymn to hard-rock ballad—harsh, almost angry—performed by Michael Bruce. While the song plays in the background, Claudio attempts to drink himself into an alcoholic stupor and nearly commits suicide, indicating a sense of regret. The song playing in the background converses with Bateman's portrayal: as the word "heavily" repeats, Bateman takes large swigs of his alcohol, drinking, as it were, heavily. Claudio's regret for his actions—for the lies he perpetuated—is brought to the fore in this version. In Joss Whedon's version of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the funeral song is played as background for a vigil procession in the wake of Hero's death (1:30:42–1:32:00). This version of the song—performed by Maurissa Tancharoen and Jed Whedon—is a mournful acoustic performance, which implies the characters are truly sorrowful for the apparent loss of Hero.

These various emendations, revisions, and performance choices have significant effects on the play's meaning. In the quarto and folio editions, either Don Pedro or an unnamed Lord delivered Hero's epitaph, and here we find the first suggestion of a carved-in-stone epitaph. In these versions, if Don Pedro had delivered the lines, he would be taking responsibility for slandering Hero. If an unnamed Lord delivered the epitaph, the entire male

population of the play could be viewed as responsible for Hero's death. Josie Rourke's live action performance shows us a new speaker for the epitaph: a truly penitent Claudio. And the ubiquitous recent Pelican addition removes the actor's agency by explicitly indicating the epitaph was merely written on a scroll and hung upon Hero's grave, only to deteriorate in a short period of time. In making these minor edits, editors have changed the meaning of just one small section of a single play by a huge amount, while only changing a few words here and there. In addition, the various versions of the funeral hymn immediately following the epitaph have been understudied, though they too have significant effects on the play's tone. Taken together, these changes give us new insight into *Much Ado About Nothing* and remind us of the importance of seemingly minor revisions.

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“We Meant It, Which Is the Bad Part”:
Tyranny and Consent in *The Handmaid’s Tale*

Abigail Scott

Margaret Atwood’s 1985 novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* endures as a critique of extremes: tyrannical religion, patriarchy, militant feminism, and apathetic political action are each criticized in turn as Atwood establishes the grounds for her dystopia, the Republic of Gilead. The name of this theocratic totalitarian state alone smacks with irony. A republic that does not recognize the voice of its people is no republic at all. However, in his 19th-century exploration of American society, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville argues a republic that acquiesces to the voice of its people too readily might find itself in a similarly tyrannical situation. Read in light of Tocqueville’s critique of majority rule, Offred’s description of the events leading up to Gilead’s establishment and the narrative of her life under the pseudo-Puritanical regime offer insight into the sociopolitical landscape of the Republic. Tyranny of the majority and the presence of a false sense of agency create in Gilead a society in which the people themselves perpetuate totalitarian rule, causing in Offred a tension between consent and complicity with governmental actions.

Throughout *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville wonders if America has left itself susceptible to tyranny: “what I find most repulsive in America is not the extreme freedom that prevails there but the shortage of any guarantee against tyranny” (294). He argues that tyranny in a democratic republic like the United States often wears a different mask than tyranny

in an aristocratic society, in which a select few might establish tyrannical rule. For a republic such as America, Tocqueville speculates that the most common avenue of tyranny comes from the majority: "If ever freedom is lost in America, blame will have to be laid at the door of the omnipotence of the majority" (304). Because rule is placed in the hands of the majority—Tocqueville argues—passion can be more powerful than any government institution founded by a few: "The Inquisition was never able to stop the circulation in Spain of books hostile to the religion of the majority. The power of the majority in the United States has had greater success than that by removing even the thought of publishing such books" (299). The political mob mentality of which Tocqueville speaks creates an implicit ruling class—the majority—and forces the minority in a democratic republic to comply or to fight: "[loss of freedom at the hands of the majority] will have driven minorities to despair and will have forced them to appeal to physical force" (304).

The flipside of Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority is the sort of passivity seen in Offred's description of Gilead's early sociopolitical climate. Tocqueville's suggestion that loss of freedom in America would come at the hands of the majority holds true, though in this case it is the passivity of the majority—their desire for things to remain as they were and their inability to act effectively against the looming totalitarian state—that allows the removal of their freedoms. While the founders of Gileadic rule were themselves a minority, the implicit approval of the majority allowed them to build their destructive republic.

Gilead maintains this climate through a pseudo-democracy that encourages its citizens to participate in governing the nation, though not through electoral means. Rather, citizens of Gilead participate in meting out punishments on criminals, whether it is actively through "Particutions" and "Salvagings," or passively, by simply observing the executed on The Wall. At one salvaging, Aunt Lydia notes "duty is a hard . . . taskmistress, and it is in the name of duty that we are here today," pointing to this participatory nature of Gileadic justice: "the torch of the future, the cradle of the race, the task before us" no longer rest in the hands of voters, but in the communal act of punishment (274–75). Here we see an emphasis on public duty—residue from the days of encouraging citizens to vote—that maintains

a false sense of autonomy and agency amongst its people (though within greatly restricted bounds). Offred describes the strict seating arrangements, noting “we take our places in the standard order,” but within this standard order the salvaging attendees are collectively responsible for the execution, regardless of their station: “There’s a long piece of rope that winds like a snake in front of the first row of cushions, along the second, and back through the lines of chairs. . . . The front end of the rope runs up onto the stage” (273). They pull the rope together, collectively executing the accused and enacting the sort of majority rule Gilead has carefully crafted: an emphasis on participation in governing, but within strict bounds—“There wasn’t a lot of choice but there was some” (94).

Offred emphasizes this communal participation in her description of the Salvagings, pointing to a particular tension between complicity and consent: “I’ve leaned forward to touch the rope in front of me, in time with the others, both hands on it, the rope hairy, sticky with tar in the hot sun, then placed my hand on my heart to show my unity with the Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman” (276). Here, we see her participate in the execution while emphasizing its communal nature—“in time with the others,” “unity with the Salvagers”—as well as her own acceptance of the event: “my consent, and my complicity.” One might argue that Offred cannot be held responsible for her consent and complicity, because of the clear governmental coercion, but it is important to note that consent and complicity are not mutually exclusive. Offred might be *complicit* in the execution, but she need not *consent* to the unjust punishment; for this reason, her consent points to the majority’s passivity, which allowed the rise of Gilead.

To extend the majority’s complicity in government actions, the regime’s architects allow their citizens at least an illusion of choice. The question of why then-American people did little to stem these changing tides of politics is answered simply: “They said that new elections would be held” (174). By maintaining the people’s sense that they would eventually exercise their agency through political elections, the new government was able to suspend the Constitution and slowly eliminate freedoms with little backlash: “There wasn’t even rioting in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction” (174). Offred’s descriptions suggest the people, like her boss on the day of her firing, were in shock: they knew neither how nor when to act.

In this transitional time, freedoms slowly disappear, beginning with those things related to sexuality: "The Pornomarts were shut, though, and there were no longer any Feels on Wheels vans and Bun-Dle Buggies circling the Square. But I wasn't sad to see them go" (174). Offred initially embraces the removal of these reminders of the culture's extreme sexual liberation. In fact, she suggests her feelings are shared by others: "We all knew what a nuisance they'd been" (174). The general response to these services' closing manifests as passive acceptance: "Who knows, who cares [what happened to these places, the corner store cashier] said. . . . Trying to get rid of it altogether is like trying to stamp out mice, you know?" (174-75). The cashier's *laissez-faire* response appears indicative of the general population's feelings toward the changing political landscape, and by the time the government enacts its restrictions on women, the regime has grown strong enough to enforce their discriminatory laws.

Offred mentions "there were marches, of course. . . . But they were smaller than you might have thought . . . the police, or the army, whoever they were, would open fire almost as soon as any of the marches even started" (180). By the time people begin to express their discontent with the new laws, Gilead is established enough to react defensively—and perhaps offensively, as Offred seems to believe some of the violence is government sanctioned: "A few things were blown up. . . . But you couldn't even be sure who was doing it" (180). By this time, the majority's initial fear-driven apathy—while leading a small minority to react violently—had already primed the sociopolitical environment for continually stricter laws. Moreover, by incorporating the majority into the punishment of the minority, Gilead implicates its citizens in the government rule, creating a tension through which citizens both find themselves complicit in the suffering and suffer themselves under the totalitarian state.

We find this tension between complicity and consent when Gilead's leadership uses an appeal to religious higher authority in the face of sociopolitical unrest. The architects of the Republic embody Tocqueville's claim about American religion's focus on the here-and-now (as opposed to the life to come): "But American preachers return constantly to this world and have some difficulty in detaching their gaze from it. So as to touch their listeners more profoundly, they show them every day how religious belief is beneficial to freedom and public order" (615-16). The Gileadic forms of religion function similarly: at Soul Scrolls, patrons have a choice between

“five different prayers: for health, wealth, a death, a birth, a sin,” all of which are thoroughly practical and focused on present conditions (167). Here, Tocqueville’s critique of American Christianity emerges: “Not only does self-interest guide the religion of Americans but they often place their interest in following it in this world” (615). The institution that should be the voice of the marginalized has been politicized and commercialized, becoming the very tool of tyranny and oppression; governmental self-interest guides it. Even the choice of prayers is guided not by the desire for true spiritual connection, but by political advancement: Offred notes the ordering of prayers from *Soul Scrolls* by commanders’ wives benefits their husbands’ careers, and, as with other facets of life in the Republic, choices are limited. The citizens’ consent of and participation in the very institution through which Gilead claims its power again signals the majority’s passivity and thus reinforces Gileadic pseudo-democracy.

Similarly, by creating in the people a sense of ownership over the Salvagings, the Particutions, and even the psychological abuse suffered by Janine at the Red Center, Gilead forces its citizens to perpetuate tyranny through their implicit acceptance of its governance. Offred highlights this distorted sense of ownership, pointing to the moment when the women at the Red Center taunt Janine and force her to take responsibility for her rape: “We meant it, which is the bad part” (72). Caught up in the excitement of the moment, the future Handmaids put themselves in a despotic position, not only passively condoning Gileadic rule, but actively participating in it, skewing their own perspective of the events: “For a moment, even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her” (72). The women, chanting responses to Aunt Lydia’s prompts, embody the Republic, providing an answer to Tocqueville’s question, “When a man or party suffers from an injustice in the United States [or, in this case, Gilead], to whom can he turn?” (294). In totalitarian Gilead—perpetuated by a passively tyrannical majority—“however unfair or unreasonable the measure which damages you, you must submit” (Tocqueville 295). Since the hands of the majority ultimately enforce such harsh measures, there is nowhere to turn for restitution.

While we do see the passivity of the majority maintaining Gileadic rule, Offred’s narrative presents glimmers of subtle subversion. As Offred and Ofglen stand outside *Soul Scrolls*, we find a counterargument to apathetic acceptance: “At last Ofglen speaks. ‘Do you think God listens,’ she says,

'to these machines?' She is whispering: our habit at the Center. . . . I could scream. I could run away. I could turn from her silently, to show her I won't tolerate this kind of talk in my presence. Subversion, sedition, blasphemy, heresy, all rolled into one. I steel myself. 'No,' I say" (168). Offred has the opportunity to choose: she can scold Ofglen, turn her into the Eyes, or participate in her subversive conversion. In an exercise of true agency, she chooses the latter. To whom can she turn when she suffers injustice? The passive majority will continue to uphold Gilead's rule, so the only place Offred can turn is within herself. Offred navigates the complicity-consent tension: she might be complicit in the government's acts, but she struggles throughout the novel to refuse consent. The choice the Republic gives its citizens is a façade, but Offred continually points to her own choice—separate from that of the majority—a subtle form of rebellion.

Tocqueville's warning against the tyranny of the majority in *Democracy in America* offers a provocative lens for exploring the sociopolitical climate out of which Gilead grows, and helps explain much of the apathy and aggression found in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The passivity of the majority in the face of cultural upheaval—in itself a sort of tyranny—allows the architects of Gilead to create a society maintaining the façade of agency by involving the people in governmental rule. This participation leads the already passive majority to consent implicitly and to become complicit in the government's actions. Offred illustrates the ease with which she often falls into this trap of complicity—both at the Red Center and the Salvaging—but she ultimately maintains her sense of agency through subtle moments of rebellion in which she refuses to consent.

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Tita de la Garza Belongs in the Kitchen (in a Totally Feminist Way): Unlikely Empowerment in *Like Water for Chocolate*

Meredith Stambaugh

The spaces women occupy historically have been deemed inconsequential. Relegating women to assigned roles is usually just another way to further the patriarchal system that disenfranchises and marginalizes them. In Laura Esquivel's magical realist novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, however, the protagonist, Tita de la Garza, gains power by embracing a typically powerless role. The novel is set in the years surrounding the Mexican Revolution, and throughout her life, Tita witnesses the growth and expansion of the rights of women. In other words, Tita is not the only woman empowered in the novel: the female characters are complex and nuanced, because they are allowed to have flaws. Esquivel primarily emphasizes Tita's role as the youngest daughter, confined to the kitchen. From Tita's perspective, "the joy of living was wrapped up in the delights of food . . . everything on the kitchen side of th[e] door, on through the door leading to the patio and the kitchen and the herb gardens was completely hers—it was Tita's realm" (5–6). Tita's entire existence revolves around the kitchen, yet the narrative suggests her power is not diminished by this restriction. As Tony Spanos argues, the kitchen—and, more specifically, cooking—are reclaimed "as a very serious domestic sphere which is the most sacred place in the house" (30). The novel explores the labor of cooking through Tita's literal blood, sweat, and tears, which empower not just her, but other characters in Esquivel's fictional world.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Mexico faced revolutionary upheaval, but the interests of women—particularly their equality and opportunity for personal autonomy—were not one of the revolution's priorities. Nikki Craske argues that women were feared and repressed, since they were “seen more as a threat to the national revolutionary project, rather than supporters and potential beneficiaries” (122). Whether or not women's interests were considered important to revolutionary ideology, the environment of social change offers a logical setting for a novel that subverts traditional expectations. While *Like Water for Chocolate* does not deeply explore national political attitudes, the novel's historical context and setting are essential for understanding characters like Gertrudis—Tita's oldest sister—whose participation in the revolution makes her liberation possible. Craske observes that Gertrudis does not “steer a fine line between being too radical and being too conservative,” but instead turns gender roles on their head and lives her life exactly as she sees fit (122). War's violence is paralleled with the violence of the kitchen and domestic life. The first time Tita has to kill an animal herself she hesitates, and “[realizes] that you can't be weak when it comes to killing: you have to be strong or it just causes more sorrow” (36). The novel does not relegate cooking to busy work or a step in the cycle of consumption; it represents cooking as an active process that requires courage and commitment. Joanne Saltz claims that, compared to other texts set during this era, *Like Water for Chocolate* “transforms the kitchen from an invisible, non-productive domestic sphere into an aesthetically and ethically productive sphere” (31). The novel's commentary on domestic spheres' significance emerges in part from its representation of the Mexican Revolution as mere background noise to Tita's story. As Saltz continues, the text offers “a discourse centering on feminine experience, and therefore a devalued, ignored, or silenced discourse in traditional literature,” which “contests novels of the canon set during the Mexican Revolution that center on male experience” (31). To further illustrate the contrast between male and female experience, Esquivel fashions a literary style that evokes a specifically feminine perspective.

The novel's central premise is rooted in its genre: magical realism. Tita's ability to influence the actions of others through her cooking has no clear basis in reality, yet it is indispensable to each character's

journey. By titling the book *A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies*, Esquivel signals the novel's focus on typically feminine, even frivolous concerns. Tita's and the other women's centrality to the story is unsurprising in light of this titular clarification. The text's reliance on magical realism foregrounds each woman's importance. Women writers in Latin America were often disparagingly seen as "dreamy women who were bored with life and who wrote short stories and poetry between breakfast and dinner" (Spanos 29). Such stereotypes only fuel the notion that women's work generally is neither serious nor important. Esquivel challenges this image of the female dilettante through Tita, who labors over each dish, each task she undertakes, challenging the assumed frivolity of women's actions. Merely by writing a novel about a woman fulfilling her traditional role, Esquivel asserts her own authorial power. As Spanos contends: "reclaim[ing] the kitchen as a place or space of artistic and creative power and not just a place of mere confinement and oppression" allows Esquivel to claim feminine literature as a place of "artistic and creative power" (32).

Tita suffers greatly under her culture's patriarchal dominance. She is constantly reminded that "being the youngest daughter means [Tita] has to take care of [Mama Elena] until the day [she] dies" (8). Tita cannot marry and, consequently, can have no children of her own. Turning Tita into a caretaker perverts—and sours—the mother-daughter relationship: the parent is obligated to take care of the child, not the other way around. Tita recognizes this injustice, often wondering "who would take care of her when she got old" (8). By enforcing an antiquated and cruel tradition that punishes daughters rather than sons, Mama Elena acts not as a figure for female liberation, but as "a follower in the web of hegemonic, counter-revolutionary forces, of pre-revolutionary repression and authoritarianism" (Saltz 32). While Tita's personal revolution allows for the empowerment of other marginalized characters, Mama Elena appears to be a woman who has prospered in patriarchal society by participating in the oppression of other women. Tita's status as a servant seems especially tragic in light of her love for Pedro Muzquiz. Maite Zubiaurre argues that "in a perverse narrative twist, [Pedro] ends up marrying Tita's older sister Rosaura in order to be able to stay close to Tita" (32). When Tita is confronted directly by her inability to marry and her predetermined lot in life as caretaker and cook, the food she makes takes on

magical qualities, becoming an outlet for her emotions and the way by which Tita asserts her power.

One of the most clear-cut instances of food serving as a proxy for Tita's emotions follows Pedro gifting a bouquet of roses. Tita's love for—and sexual attraction to—Pedro is given tangible form when she makes quail with rose sauce from the flowers, whose thorns had cut her and absorbed her blood. The blood—a physical representation of her emotions and an extension of her feminine power—“and the roses from Pedro proved to be quite an explosive combination” (37). This dish in turn creates a conduit for Gertrudis's sexual liberation, an act of literal liberation and consummation carried out by Gertrudis, whose “[insatiable] sexual appetite causes her to . . . enter a life of prostitution” (Saltz 34). Though Gertrudis acts, Tita's food serves as catalyst. While some characters—especially Mama Elena—pass judgment on Gertrudis for her sex work, neither Tita nor the narrator denounces Gertrudis or her profession. Later in the story, we discover that Gertrudis has joined the revolution and become a general in the revolutionary army. Whereas Tita serves as the novel's representative of traditionally feminine roles, Gertrudis opposes and rejects restrictions on women's sexual agency and physical frailty, revolutionary acts that would not have been possible without Tita's food.

Esquivel depicts a character who has the tools to empower herself, but can only fully utilize them as she matures and better understands herself. There are dark implications, however, about the extent of Tita's power and its association with repression and anger, specifically as it is implicated in the deaths of Mama Elena and Rosaura. Spanos addresses the origin of the novel's title, which comes from the Spanish expression “como agua para chocolate,” which means “to be very upset or ‘boiling mad’”: the title describes “candidly Tita's anger and resentment at being confined to the kitchen and house while she struggles to overcome the seemingly insurmountable barriers to her own happiness” (32). Both Tita's mother and her older sister are physical manifestations of these barriers: the former will never allow Tita to marry; the latter marries the man Tita loves. Tita does not actually poison her mother—despite Mama Elena's paranoid belief her daughter wants to kill her—but when she “was given some of [Tita's food] to eat, she immediately detected a bitter taste” (96). Ironically, Mama Elena dies ingesting too much ipecac syrup, the antidote she takes to purge Tita's supposed poisoning. Mama Elena dies by her own hand, though it

is unclear why she so sincerely believed Tita was poisoning her in the first place. If Tita's ability to transfer her emotions into her food is consistent, it may be that Mama Elena tastes the bitterness of resentment Tita felt toward her mother. At worst, Tita may have unknowingly exploited her mother's guilt until it killed her.

Mama Elena's death means the return of Rosaura and Pedro, who left the de la Garza ranch to live in San Antonio for a time. Rosaura begins gaining a ridiculous amount of weight for which "[t]here was no explaining . . . since she was still eating the same as always" (122). Since Rosaura feels guilt for having married Tita's "sweetheart," it remains unclear whether her guilt kills her as it did Mama Elena (109). Perhaps Tita's food—manifesting her deep desire to marry Pedro—eliminates Rosaura from the love triangle, or at least makes her sister sexually unappealing to Pedro. While both motives are possible, the true reason for Rosaura's death is likely connected to her daughter, Esperanza, whom Tita hopes to rescue from the same fate she has suffered:

When Rosaura explained . . . this little girl was destined to take care of her until the day she died, Tita felt her hair stand on end. Only Rosaura could have thought to perpetuate such an inhuman tradition. If only Rosaura had burned her mouth to a crisp! And never let those words leak out, those foul, filthy, frightful, repulsive, revolting, unreasonable words . . . if only [Tita] would live long enough to prevent her sister from carrying out such a dire intention. (108)

More than the sexual rivalry, Rosaura and Tita's relationship fractures because the elder sister claims her only daughter, Esperanza, for a life of servitude. Tita's life was made miserable because of an antiquated patriarchal tradition carried out by women. Although Rosaura's death does not immediately follow Tita's discovery of her intentions for Esperanza, it is likely the cause. Rosaura's death symbolizes the death of the de la Garza women's repressive traditions, and more broadly the beginning of the end of women's status as second-class citizens. A year after Rosaura's death, Esperanza marries and Gertrudis arrives at the wedding "in a model-T Ford coupe, one of the first to be produced with multiple gears" (168). The presence of changing technology suggests social change is not far behind.

Tita's ability to effect change through the act of cooking establishes

the often-marginalized domestic sphere as an important, influential, even central part of culture. The magic of her cooking offers a deep exploration of how traditionally feminine skills are complex and powerful. The novel ends with the revelation that Esperanza's daughter has compiled Tita's recipes and now tells her life story: Tita's grand-niece leaves us with the message that Tita "will go on living as long as there is someone who cooks her recipes" (158).

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Challenging Western Conventions
of Authenticity: The Power of
Autobiography in Chimamanda
Ngozi Adichie's "Jumping Monkey Hill"

Brittany Gardner

The body of African literature developing in the postcolonial era has been continuously encouraged to represent African life in a way congruent with Western ideologies of African authenticity. This concept of African authenticity finds its roots in Joseph Conrad and highlights characteristics that separate the Western world from the mysteries of "Third-World" Africa. As this body of literature grows, African authors have begun challenging these Western notions, asserting authentically African identities and denouncing misrepresentations of large groups of people through the lens of Western exoticism. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, celebrated Nigerian author of *The Thing Around Your Neck*, confronts these issues in her essay, "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience": "I do not accept the monolithic idea of authenticity. To insist that there is one thing that is authentically African is to diminish the African experience" (48). Adichie's works illustrate this sentiment as she emphasizes the importance of personal experience for enhancing the collective of diverse African voices. Adichie utilizes the power of autobiography to confront the issue of African authenticity in her short story "Jumping Monkey Hill" by countering binaries that prohibit the establishment of authority, offering multiple representations of the African experience, and challenging Western notion of authenticity from the postcolonial period.

Adichie establishes the problem of authenticity in "Jumping Monkey Hill" by exemplifying two binaries: expectation versus reality and education versus experience. Anthropologist Dimitrios Theodossopoulos describes authenticity as lying "at an inaccessible level below the surface of social life, deep within oneself or among societies 'uncontaminated' by modernity" (338). He goes on to explain that "from the Western philosophical tradition also emerges the expectation of discovering authenticity in those parts of the world that are still untouched by the superficial conventions of Western society . . . of realizing the true self among uncorrupted natives" (342). Adichie highlights this aspect of authenticity in her creation of a setting that conforms to Western expectations of Africa as a location. She opens her story with a description of Jumping Monkey Hill, a resort hosting a writer's workshop: "The cabins all had thatch roofs. Names like Baboon Lodge and Porcupine Place were hand-painted beside the wooden doors" (95). The thatch roofs and hand-paintings highlight the association of Africa with simple technologies and stunted cultural development. Adichie further comments on the resort as a reflection of Western expectation: "The name itself was incongruous, and the resort had the complacency of the well-fed about it, the kind of place where she imagined affluent foreign tourists would dart around taking pictures of lizards and then return home still mostly unaware that there were more black people than red-capped lizards in South Africa" (95). The story depicts Jumping Monkey Hill with the idea of the Western tourist in mind, catering to expectations of African wildlife and exotic jungle atmosphere. Its characters are surprised by the resort, because it does not represent the Africa they know. Even Ujunwa, the protagonist, expects to see wildlife at the resort: "Ujunwa . . . got up to unpack, looking out of the windows from time to time to search the canopy of trees for lurking monkeys. There were none, unfortunately, Edward told the participants later" (97).

As the story progresses, it weaves in elements of Western education and its effects on these expectations. Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia describes the difficulty of challenging standards of Western education systems and the implications they have for African cultural discourse: "The fact that African institutions have fallen on difficult times and have been unable to take a leading role in the productions of African history, and that the main

centers for development of the field continue to be in Europe and the United States, continue to haunt the enterprise of African historiography and African studies” (87–88). Adichie explores these concerns through her character Edward Campbell, Africanist and founder of the workshop. Edward is a narcissist who talks mainly “about himself, how African literature had been his cause for forty years, a lifelong passion that started at Oxford” (99). He represents the Western institutions of African studies and European authority for determining the authentically African voice. Ujunwa is aware she was only chosen to participate in the African writer’s workshop because “it was the British Council that had made the call for entries and then selected the best” (96). Edward discounts the experiences of his African participants when he insists that—as a matter of expertise—he is best acquainted with the African diet: “Ujunwa did not like the idea of eating an ostrich, did not even know that people ate ostriches, and when she said so, Edward laughed good-naturedly and said that of course ostrich was an African staple” (101). His Western education allows him to assert his authority over the real-life experiences of his guests, suggesting he has a better understanding of their culture than they do. The participants are even inclined to believe him, so each guest orders the ostrich except Ujunwa, who questions her decision when she is disappointed with her meal choice. Edward maintains power over the participants, an authority seen clearly in a Ugandan character who seeks validation from this Western mentor with “his toadying answers to Edward’s questions, the way he leaned forward to speak only to Edward and ignored the other participants” (98). Edward’s Western authority accentuates the struggle of the African participants to see their own experiences as authentically African.

Adichie challenges these hierarchical binaries through the transformative power of literature, specifically autobiography, a genre Jerome McCristal Culp acknowledges as an agent of transformation: through “autobiography we have tried to use our experiences to alter the stories that are told about society and the stories that are the center of public debate” (73). Culp argues further that autobiography maintains control of the “dominant stories being used to describe and construct reality” (71). Adichie reveals a personal connection to such “construct[ed] realit[ies]” when she describes her own experience with Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. She explains that “although Achebe’s characters were familiar to me in many ways, their world was also incredibly exotic because they lived

without the things I saw as the norm in my life: they did not have cars and electricity and telephones" ("African" 42). She recounts that "one of my new roommates told me that I just didn't seem *African*. Clearly, they had expected that I would step out of the pages of *Things Fall Apart*" ("African" 43). Adichie's personal experience with Western assumptions encourages her to represent the multiplicities of African experience in stories like "Jumping Monkey Hill," which begins with a story shared by a Zimbabwean. When the Zimbabwean shares her story of African daily life and superstition, Edward asserts his Oxfordian authority over the piece, denouncing it for not having enough cultural relevance: "There was something terribly passé about it when one considered all the other things happening in Zimbabwe under the horrible Mugabe . . . What did he mean by passé? How could a story so true be passé?" (107). Edward challenges the authenticity of the Zimbabwean's story for not conforming to Western expectations, while the other participants remain confused why her story—so full of African life—is invalid.

The story reaffirms this thread with the Senegalese's story, which is clearly autobiographical. The participants are aware of the story's autobiographical nature from the beginning of the workshop: "The Senegalese said her story was really *her* story, about how her grieving had emboldened her to come out to her parents although they now treated her being a lesbian as a mild joke" (102). The authenticity debate in the Senegalese's story circulates around its depiction of homosexuality. Edward boldly claims "'Homosexual stories of this sort weren't reflective of Africa, really,'" to which Ujunwa demands, "'Which Africa?'" (108). Analyzing this exchange, Ehijele Femi Eromosele asserts that "the writer is clearly of the opinion that homosexuality cannot be called alien to Africa; or at least, can no longer be said to be so, if it had been. Foreign 'experts' on Africa who still see her as still living in the age of innocence must take note of this" (109). Ujunwa defies Edward, who responds with a parental scolding, emphasizing the patriarchal nature of his educated denigrations: "Then he looked at Ujunwa in the way one would look at a child who refused to keep still in church and said that he wasn't speaking as an Oxford-trained Africanist, but as one who was keen on the real *Africa*" (108). He goes on to deny her autobiography's authenticity: "'This may indeed be the year 2000, but how African is it for a person to tell her family that she is homosexual?'" (108). While Edward's words

attempt to discredit autobiography's authenticity-determining power, the story discredits Edward throughout, stripping him of authority and imbuing the participants with a newfound sense of agency. The Senegalese's story, paired with Ujunwa's bold support of it, illustrate Adichie's stance on the issue of African authenticity and the wide range of African experience.

The most prominent example of autobiography in "Jumping Monkey Hill" is Ujunwa and her dual representative embodiments: Chioma embodies Ujunwa; Ujunwa embodies Adichie. The story connects Chioma—the character in Ujunwa's story—with Ujunwa, although it makes the story's autobiographical nature initially unclear. We find multiple pieces of evidence to suggest that Chioma represents Ujunwa. In Ujunwa's story, "Chioma gets a call from Merchant Trust Bank, one of the places her father contacted" (103). This call echoes back to Ujunwa, who earlier admits "that she had lost her job just before she left Lagos—a job in banking" (96). Ujunwa hints at her mother's somber disposition after finishing a phone call with her: "She . . . thought about how long it had been since her mother had really laughed" (100). The mother she creates for Chioma has endured serious heartache that mirrors Ujunwa's mother's implicit pain. Throughout the story, Ujunwa suffers unwanted sexual advances from Edward, while Chioma deals with parallel sexual treatment. The women are obviously connected, although Ujunwa does not reveal the autobiographical nature of her story until after it has been shared with the other participants. Once her story has been read by the group, Edward and the participants have opposing views about whether the piece is authentically African. While the South African "loved the realistic portrayal of what women were going through in Nigeria," "Edward leaned back and said, 'It's never quite like that in real life, is it? Women are never victims in that sort of crude way and certainly not in Nigeria'" (113). While a fellow African praises Ujunwa's authenticity, the white Africanist calls the story "implausible" (114). When Ujunwa finally reveals Chioma's story is her own, she exclaims, "'A real story of real people? . . . The only thing I didn't add in the story is that after I left my coworker and walked out of the alhaji's house, I got into the jeep and insisted that the driver take me home'" (114). Her method for revealing her work as autobiography heightens the story's impact, undermining Edward's views on what constitutes an authentic representation

of African people. She does not allow Edward or any of the other participants to evaluate her experience, merely asserting her knowledge of what it means to be African—how her life reflects her Nigerian heritage.

Just as Chioma serves as an autobiographical representation of Ujunwa, we find echoes of Adichie's life in Ujunwa. While some minor details do not obviously reflect Adichie's life, many of the broader concepts connect the author with her character. Both women are Nigerian writers facing 21st-century cultural expectations and enduring the critical eye of Western literary expertise. Adichie recalls when "a professor at Johns Hopkins informed me that [my novel, *Purple Hibiscus*] was not authentically African. My characters were educated and middle class. They drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore, they were not authentically African" ("African" 48). Ujunwa's experience at Jumping Monkey Hill recasts Adichie's experience. In response to this professor, Adichie crafts a tale in which a young writer must defend her authenticity to a Western Africanist. Other scholars have also made this connection, calling Ujunwa "Adichie's mouthpiece," the character she uses to express and defend her own philosophies (Eromosele 109). Whether or not Ujunwa is fully autobiographical, the impact remains: "The story compels us to question the white male expert's conviction that African writers must tackle civil war and corrupt dictators, that they must write stories that are 'urgent,' 'relevant,' and that 'brought news,' rather than treat familiar or person topics" (Ryan 1232). Adichie draws on personal experience to transform the hierarchical binaries of education versus experience and expectation versus reality, showcasing the power of the written word and challenging notions of Western authority.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie deploys the transformative power of autobiography in "Jumping Monkey Hill" to challenge Western conceptions of authenticity, exposing the flaws in the sustaining binaries, giving voice to African experiences, and defying postcolonial standards of authenticity established by Western institutions. Adichie asserts the importance of documenting the diversity of African experience to counter stereotypes arising from a singular perspective: "If I were not African, and if all I knew of Africa came from the U.S. media, I would think that all Africans were incomprehensible people perpetually fighting wars that make no sense, drinking muddy water from rivers, almost all dying from AIDS and incredibly poor" ("African" 45). She celebrates autobiography as a means for connecting the humanity within mankind, particularly through her examination of

the ordinary and the personal: "I feel very strongly that it is from the specific that universalism arises, that it is through anchoring one's narrative in so-called parochial details that universalism becomes possible" ("African" 48). Adichie's works stand as an effort to humanize people who have been repeatedly exoticized, and her use of autobiography reestablishes agency where Western influence has tried to limit it.

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The Role of Women in Shakespeare's Second History Tetralogy

Drake DeOrnellis

In recent years, Shakespearean scholars have paid more attention to the author's rich, complex, intelligent female characters. Rather than giving women secondary and one-dimensional roles, Shakespeare frequently depicts women with strong wills, independent of their male counterparts. Feminist scholars, thus, have taken a particular interest in his female characters. Nevertheless, the portrayal of women in Shakespeare's histories has been comparatively neglected, except to note the scarcity of female roles and their powerlessness within these roles, a relative weakness many critics attribute to their domestic roles. Upon closer examination, however, these female characters' domesticity imparts to them a powerful influence on the plays. Three women in particular stand out: Queen Isabel in *Richard II*, Lady Percy in *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, and Princess Katherine in *Henry V*. The plays characterize these women not primarily by their powerlessness, but by the alternative perspective their domesticity offers on the political realm, highlighting the interrelationship between public and private life.

Richard II, the first play in Shakespeare's second tetralogy, includes Queen Isabel, Richard's wife and arguably the play's most significant female character. Like the female characters in Shakespeare's histories, she appears "enclosed in domestic settings and confined to domestic roles" (Howard and Rackin 137). Unlike her husband, she lacks the power to make political decisions that shape the nation and its history. Rather, she

passes her time discussing her dreams with her husband's political advisors and conversing with her maid in the garden. In this way, the queen leads a domestic life centered around personal relationships. Critics often link this domesticity to powerlessness over her own affairs. Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, for instance, contend Isabel is "powerless to affect the outcome of [political] conflicts" (140). This often seems the case. For example, when the queen learns of Richard's impending danger and eventual defeat, she can do nothing but follow the Duke of York as he arranges for her safety, weep when she learns of her husband's demise from the gardener, and, finally, give her husband a tearful farewell. In this way the queen confirms the notion that women in these plays are both domestic and powerless.

Yet it is a mistake to assume that the powerlessness seen in Queen Isabel is limited to women: the play's male characters also appear powerless in the face of sweeping political changes. John of Gaunt cannot revenge his brother Gloucester's death, because doing so would mean rebelling against the king. Mowbray is banished and never seen again during the tetralogy. The gardener and the groom can discuss politics, but can do nothing about these events. Perhaps the most striking example of a man who ultimately proves powerless is King Richard II himself. While at the beginning of the play he believes in his own absolute authority as God's substitute, his lack of power becomes evident as he fails to persuade Mowbray and Bullingbrook to make peace with each other. Later, when Bullingbrook returns with more manpower, Richard fails to defeat him and is forced to abdicate his throne. Thus, though women like Queen Isabel do indeed find themselves helpless—due in part to their domesticity—this powerlessness does not apply to women alone. Men too occupy positions of weakness. By depicting women as powerless, these plays comment not on the nature of women, but on the immense power of political figures like Bullingbrook.

The main difference, then, between Isabel and Richard is not their levels of strength, but their focus: while Isabel focuses on the world of personal relationships, Richard focuses on the world of politics. R. A. Martin argues the queen's "primary concern is to preserve the dominant values of paternal authority as vested in her husband and her king," specifically when she criticizes her husband for not fighting back against his deponents (257). This interpretation seems, however, an overcomplication of her motives. While she does subconsciously embrace the patriarchal system, in this scene she does not concern herself with the play's political and ideological shifts.

Rather, her interest lies solely in retaining her beloved husband. She wants him to fight, but when he does not, she seeks merely to keep them together. In addition, her final protest bemoans not that she is no longer queen, nor that her husband lost his political power, but that she must be separated from her love: "And must we be divided? must we part?" (R2 5.1.81). She emphasizes preserving her relationships, which she views as more important than political concerns.

In contrast, throughout his reign, Richard consistently focuses on the political realm, as his consistently poor political decisions do not account for their effect on private lives. Irving Ribner argues that Richard fails as king because "he is utterly without the public virtues which make for efficient rule," even though "he is not lacking in private virtues" (34). While it may be true Richard was a weak king who made poor public decisions, the reason these decisions were poor is often rooted in the private sphere. For example, having the Duke of Gloucester killed affects the private lives of numerous individuals, and Richard's heavy taxation burdens his people. Perhaps, had Richard understood the relationship between the public and the private from the beginning, he would have been a better king. The play's inclusion of Queen Isabel foregrounds the presence of personal lives and relationships within the public realm and prompts the question, should the play's men be more concerned about the tension between the two worlds?

In the tetralogy's next two plays, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, Lady Percy takes Isabel's place as the predominant woman. Like Queen Isabel, Lady Percy (Kate) cannot control her own circumstances. Distressed over her husband's strange and distant behavior, Kate begs her husband to tell her what is wrong, but her husband refuses until she finally relents, knowing she is powerless to change his mind. Outside of a brief appearance in Act III of *Part 1*, Kate does not appear again until almost midway through *Part 2* when Northumberland asks his wife and Kate if he should join the rebels once more in their fight against the king. Kate biting reminds Northumberland that he abandoned his own son along with the other rebels in the previous play, leading to Hotspur's death, and she claims it would be a dishonor for him to join the rebels now (2H4 2.3.39–41). Here, Kate again attempts to use her power to obtain what she wants, and in this case, she succeeds, for Northumberland chooses not to join the rebels. Nevertheless, she does not ultimately change her situation: her husband is still dead. In

this way, though Lady Percy manages to exert more influence than Queen Isabel, she does not have full power over her circumstances.

As in *Richard II*, however, women are not the only ones who have little control over their situations. Perhaps the best example of a man who ultimately fails in his attempts to attain his desires is Kate's own ambitious husband: Hotspur. Furious that King Henry IV has scorned his family, even though they helped him ascend to the throne, Hotspur conspires with his family to incite rebellion against the king. Although they do draw support from the people, Hotspur's father, Northumberland, abandons the group before the battle, leaving them to fight on their own. Without Northumberland's support, the rebels lack the manpower to defeat the king's forces. In the end, not only do the king's forces prove more powerful, but Prince Henry also demonstrates his superior power, personally killing Hotspur in battle. Here, then, the powerful Hotspur still falls victim to someone more powerful. Once again, both female and male characters find themselves losing power struggles, elucidating not the power of men over women, but the power of kings over the lives of all their subjects.

The crucial distinction between Hotspur and his wife Kate lies not in their respective powers to obtain what they value, but in what they value, once again revealing a feminine emphasis on private life. Kate instinctively knows her husband is involved in some sort of conspiracy, yet when she confronts Hotspur, her attention falls on her relationship with her husband and his physical wellbeing, not on how his actions will affect the state. Hotspur, on the other hand, places greater value on his political identity than his personal identity, chiefly because he can prove his honor in the political realm. Hotspur's rejection of his wife symbolizes his rejection of private life in favor of the public sphere, as Martin explains: "[Women] also threaten male values because they have come to represent personal relationships and life as opposed to honor and heroic death" (259). Yet one wonders if Hotspur's choice of a "heroic death" has any real significance: England loses a fine young nobleman and warrior, and he puts his family through intense, personal pain. Thus, as in *Richard II*, women embody the personal realm and make obvious the consequences of political decisions on this relational, personal world.

The most prominent female in *Henry V* is not an Englishwoman, but the French Princess Katherine, who, like Queen Isabel and Lady Percy before her, has little power over her situation. Namely, she has no choice

in whether she marries Henry V, so she does not fight against marrying him. David Bevington thus argues that Katherine “seemingly embod[ies] the compliance and acceptance of occupation that men expect of them” (569). I contend, however, that, though she knows she has no power to change her circumstances, she still actively works to make her situation better. As Corinne Abate notes, “Shakespeare provides no scene depicting an exchange between Katherine and her father to suggest that it was a man or anyone else who prompted her to learn English; it appears that she devised this plan wholly on her own” (74–75). She is aware she will likely have to marry Henry V, and she knows she will have more power as Queen of England if she speaks English. So, she actively seeks to improve the situation into which she is forced. Nevertheless, while Katherine can better her circumstances, she cannot ultimately change them, and so, like Queen Isabel and Lady Percy, she occupies a powerless position.

Still, Katherine is far from the only character in the play who proves too weak to control her situation. Even the seemingly most powerful character in the play—the French king—finds himself helpless. Like Henry V, he is a strong monarch with authority over an entire country. One would think such a character could control his own circumstances, and, indeed, for much of the play he does. He commands the mighty French army, and it seems the French, with their greater numbers, will easily defeat the English. But the English beat the French in battle, a defeat that strips the French king of his control over his realm and over his own life. When he examines the peace treaty, he knows he has no choice but to agree to Henry’s demands, including giving his daughter in marriage to the English king. Like Katherine, the French king is powerless to change his own circumstances in the face of the powerful English sovereign, Henry V.

Although both the French king and his daughter Katherine end in positions of weakness, Katherine’s unique position highlights the tension politics create for personal relationships. Her understanding of the relationship between politics and personal affairs becomes clear when she responds to Henry’s wooing. Despite his claims that he loves her, Katherine knows that he makes a political move by marrying her. For this reason, she responds skeptically to his romantic language, only accepting his proposal when he says it will please her father. Marilyn Williamson describes Katherine’s attitude toward this courting: “A dutiful princess and an obedient daughter, she will do what is expected of her, but she will not pretend that she is doing

anything else or that she loves Henry” (331). Katherine concedes Henry’s power over her situation, but she denies him power over her private, emotional life. Facing political upheaval, Katherine nevertheless still owns her heart—with all its private relationships and affections—guarding it jealously. By doing so, she implicitly criticizes Henry V’s political motivations, again illuminating the effects of political decisions on personal lives.

Analysis of Queen Isabel, Lady Percy, and Princess Katherine, reveals that Shakespeare characterizes men and women not by their respective levels of power, but by where they focus their energies: while men are politically motivated, women focus on how public decisions affect personal lives and relationships. The women’s domestic roles give them this personal perspective, for, because women operate primarily in the domestic sphere, they see how politics affect it. Martha Kurtz emphasizes this role for Shakespeare’s women: “Confined to, but not sheltered by, their domestic existence, they emblemize the suffering that public action often inflicts on private lives” (270). These women provide “a kind of moral touchstone in the plays . . . to remind us of the senseless suffering these masculine activities create” (Kurtz 270). Hence, women’s domesticity lends them their strength, for it allows them to present a distinct perspective on the influence of politics.

Women like Queen Isabel, Lady Percy, and Princess Katherine play a crucial role, highlighting the tension between the public and private spheres in Shakespeare’s histories, interrogating how political figures make their decisions, and clarifying the nature of history. By juxtaposing women with the predominantly male world of politics and history, Shakespeare ultimately emphasizes the influence and responsibility of these powerful men, while also underscoring the importance relationships play. Personal lives and relationships lead to the sweeping decisions of powerful political players, and these decisions in turn affect more people. Thus, history is the story not just of majestic kings and conquests; it is the personal story of all individuals, men and women, and how they fit together to form one grand narrative.

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Topdog/Underdog: Employing Illusion to Procure Control

Maria Brizek

Suzan Lori Parks's play *Topdog/Underdog* explores the power dynamics in a contentious fraternal relationship, following Lincoln and Booth's ostensibly shared search for "what is" and "what ain't" and their struggle to survive under stifling social confines (80). Navigating the only reality they know—a money-driven world that denies them any social or economic stability and prevents them from progressing—the brothers survive by resorting to a life of hustling. Lincoln (Link) and Booth are defined by their struggle to survive—to obtain money and power. Parks locates the brothers within the power-based relationship of "topdog" and "underdog," suggesting one must perpetually dominate the other in order to fill the position of power: the "topdog." Lincoln maintains his position as "topdog" the same way he manipulates the money-centered society driven by the American Dream: he works around the system by means of illusion. Lincoln's reliance on illusion to gain control over his own life corresponds with Ta-Nehisi Coates's understanding of the American Dream in *Between the World and Me*. Coates portrays this dream as an illusion that perpetuates hegemonic white power. Parks presents Lincoln's "topdog" position as wholly dependent on creating illusions—obscuring "what is" to gain control—echoing Coates's denunciation of the American Dream. Her play does so with its depiction of the power dynamics in Lincoln and Booth's relationship, through which it not only criticizes the American Dream, but ultimately

the underlying mentality behind it: the ubiquitous notion that to possess power is to oppress or control others.

Between the World and Me is Ta-Nehisi Coates's visceral rumination on pervasive racial tension and oppression in America. In it, Coates focuses on the ubiquitous presence of white supremacy in the United States and the various tools used to preserve the hegemony. According to Coates, Americans live in a "goal-oriented era," aiming to achieve the American Dream, a life of equality and peace—of all Americans owning "perfect houses with nice lawns"—which is "the natural result of grit, honor, and good works" (12, 11, 98). He denounces the American Dream, however, as an illusion created by those "who believe that they are white"—and therefore ontologically superior—to justify their societal position as the result of good works, rather than a position marred by a history of racial oppression (7).

The foundation of the American Dream lies on the pre-established notion of race as "a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world" (Coates 7). Contrary to the implicit American belief that racism is "the innocent daughter of Mother Nature" resulting from the natural phenomenon of race rather than from men, Coates argues "race is the child of racism, not the father"—a force promulgated by those "who believe that they are white" (7). U.S. social structures are built upon the systematic, illusory notion that physiognomic features can "correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible," which grants a false inherent superiority to whites (Coates 7). Coates contends that if Americans were to consciously claim that race holds significance and that it gives hierarchical status, they would be forced to admit their part in the production of racism. In order to remain guilt-free, white Americans embrace this "new idea" of racism as the indubitable, direct result of nature. Considering racism as the product of nature, rather than the active method through which white supremacy is created, allows whites to continue believing in their superiority and in American exceptionalism, while overlooking white Americans' complicity in racial issues.

White hegemony perpetuates these illusions in order to obfuscate the harsh reality upon which white supremacy rests and which is, in turn, sustained by false perceptions of reality. Coates demonstrates that the racism deeply embedded in American society results from whites' "fear of losing

the American Dream,” of plummeting from the delusion of superiority (18). Regardless of any detrimental effects from the American Dream—the creation of a society that allows race to denote social status—Coates suggests U.S. culture is plagued by the desire to continue living in such a seemingly pleasant fantasy. The American Dream is alluring, because it promises people a happy life procured by their own tedious work. It is such a powerful tool because of the extent to which white supremacists were able to distort Americans’ ideas of reality and the future—a powerful illusion many wish to believe. Whites continually attempt to prove the truth of this dream, while blacks remain in a constant struggle to achieve the unreachable illusion. In his meditation, Coates implies that the process of manipulating others—distorting others’ perceptions by creating illusions to gain control—is an historically universal American method for obtaining and maintaining power.

At the beginning of *Topdog/Underdog*, we find Lincoln succumbing to the illusion of the American Dream. After a successful phase as a street hustler—working three-card monte scams—Lincoln has abandoned the hustle in exchange for working a “respectable” job as an Abraham Lincoln impersonator. He gives up the hustle, exchanging a life with “pockets bulging, plenty of cash,” for the “honest work” Booth describes as sitting around all dressed “up like some crackerass white man, some dead president and letting people shoot at you” (24, 26–27). Not only does Lincoln appear fully dedicated to working a menial job and earning an honest living—working toward the American Dream by earning one’s social and economic progress—but he also refuses to help Booth cultivate the skill to “throw [down] the cards” (4). Booth persistently tries to interest Lincoln in a joint hustle, so they can live a lavish lifestyle from hustling: “Oh, come on, man, we could make money you and me. Throwing down the cards. 3-Card and Link: look out! We could clean up you and me. You would throw the cards and I’d be yr Stickman” (24). Lincoln, though, repeatedly turns Booth down, because of his apparent dedication to the job as a Lincoln impersonator, convincing Booth he “cant be hustling no more” (26).

Parks establishes the brothers’ roles as “topdog” and “underdog” from the outset. As Patrick Maley argues, Booth is well aware he is the “underdog,” which propels him into “a quest to become top dog” by consistent efforts to develop his three-card monte skills and become a notorious hustler like Lincoln (187). Maley further notes Booth’s understanding that Lincoln is

what prevents him from moving out of his position as underdog: “here I am interested in an economic opportunity, willing to work hard . . . and you standing in my way. YOU STANDING IN MY WAY, LINK!” (Parks 26). Even so, Booth initially wants merely to work with Lincoln against the American Dream, hoping instead to be a hustling team, scamming others to live a lavish, easy life. Thus, when Lincoln loses his impersonation gig, Booth tries to comfort him, rather than relishing Lincoln’s loss of control. He tells Link “Yr free at last! Now you can do anything you want. Yr not tied down by that job. You can—you can do something else. Something that pays better maybe” (65). Once Booth realizes Lincoln is committed to giving up the hustle and sees there is no chance “big brother Link and little brother Booth” are going to “team up and do it together,” Booth strives to flip their relationship’s dynamics by assuming the position of “topdog” (25, 23). Interestingly, though, Booth turns to Lincoln—running to the “topdog” who holds the power in their relationship—for assistance. Even while attempting to invert the power dynamic in their relationship, Booth has no choice but to remain “underdog” as he relies on Lincoln to teach him the art of the hustle.

Booth and Lincoln both search for identity through their assertions of power. Booth tries emulating his brother’s power by aspiring to “throw the cards” and master the hustle in an attempt to establish his identity as the “topdog.” Scholars have focused on the significance of Booth’s self-naming, dubbing himself “3-Card” as he embarks on his endeavor to unseat Lincoln as “topdog.” Michael LeMahieu, however, emphasizes Lincoln’s struggle to determine “what is,” to separate himself from the legacy of Abraham Lincoln—the man he is named for and the man he impersonates—an identity Link relies on to earn the salary that allows him to remain “topdog” (41). Maley notes that “Lincoln always retains power and control” by earning “the salary they share and, more importantly for this relationship, he [still] has the skill to run a successful three-card monte hustle” (187). At the beginning of *Topdog/Underdog*, Lincoln seems to have completely abandoned the hustle, relinquishing the control he used to trick others with his illusions, only to retain control over his brother through yet another illusion. As LeMahieu accurately claims, the theme of “the fake, the phony, or the impostor” recurs in Lincoln’s impersonation job, notwithstanding Lincoln’s view that it’s an honest job (35). Even when it seems Lincoln has denounced the hustle, his control still comes from being an imposter,

relying on maintaining “thuh illusion of thuh whole thing” for the “folks [coming] in kill phony Honest Abe with the phony pistol” (54, 37). Lincoln’s “anxiety concerning his occupation is a symptom of his uncertainty concerning his identity, whether he is the real deal or whether he is, or has always been, an impostor” (LeMahieu 37).

Lincoln is fixated on finding his identity by asserting himself as the “topdog” and being “the real deal,” yet he ultimately resorts to using illusions to ensure his superiority. Lincoln’s power as “topdog” relies on creating an illusion in the same manner Coates claims white supremacists rely on the illusions of hierarchical race and the American Dream to maintain their power. The moment Lincoln refuses to continue capitulating with the American Dream and gives up surviving off of an honest job, he immediately falls back into the mindset that being “topdog” requires deploying illusions. After the disappointment at finding the American Dream fundamentally unachievable—losing his job and, momentarily, his means of control—Lincoln empowers himself again simply by reminiscing about hustling: “Shit, I was good. I was great . . . I was the best anyone ever seen. Coast to coast. Everybody said so. And I never lost. Not once. Not one time. Not never. That’s how much them cards was mines. I was the be all end all” (59). Lincoln abandons the hustle thinking “there’s more to Link than that . . . more to me than some cheap hustle,” aiming for the American Dream only to realize the impossibility of achieving this illusion through an honest job (60). In response, Lincoln “assimilate[s] into a hierarchical American society,” adopting the mindset that self-progress and power require employing illusions to hustle others (Dawkins 90).

We see the ultimate demonstration of Lincoln’s reliance on deception to maintain his power as “topdog” when he hustles Booth. Coates argues that the illusion of the American Dream creates white supremacy by requiring blacks to remain “the essential bottom of the country” (106). This element of the American Dream reveals a tool of control that ensures power for those atop a hierarchy by oppressing others—keeping them in lower positions. Lincoln’s use of illusion rests on the same foundation: to maintain his position as the “topdog,” Lincoln “asserts his topdog status by playing on his brother’s desire to unseat him,” both conning Booth and keeping him in the position of the “underdog” (LeMahieu 35).

Topdog/Underdog is essentially a play-length hustle Lincoln carries out on his mark: Booth. In three-card monte, the “dealer controls the game’s

result with one or both of its trademark sleight-of-hand moves,” so the hustle relies on the dealer’s ability to create an illusion through sleight of hand (Maley 189). Maley argues, however, that the hustle is more elaborate: in three-card monte, the “mark is most vulnerable when most confident” (192). An expert dealer will throw a few rounds to “[boost] his mark’s confidence progressively higher,” until the mark eventually raises the stakes (Maley 191). The entire play follows Lincoln as he hustles Booth: Lincoln’s pursuit of power—his need to remain “topdog”—prompts him to bilk Booth out of his five-hundred-dollar inheritance.

Lincoln seizes every opportunity to bolster Booth’s confidence—until Booth stakes his inheritance. Whenever Lincoln appears to be a nurturing older brother—trying to help Booth gain some sense of control over his life—he actually is manipulating the “underdog,” setting up this elaborate con. Lincoln is a master manipulator; he boosts Booth’s confidence by pretending to teach him the tricks of his trade. He simultaneously seems to relinquish some control by appearing vulnerable due to his job insecurity and the loss of his wife, Cookie. Lincoln expresses deep concerns about losing his job—the means by which he holds control in their relationship through his economic superiority—and putatively turns to Booth for assistance:

BOOTH: You was lucky with thuh cards.

LINCOLN: Lucky? Aint nothing lucky about thuh cards. Cards aint luck. Cards is work. Cards is skill. Aint never nothing lucky about cards.

(Rest)

I don’t wanna lose my job.

BOOTH: Then you gotta jazz up yr act. Elaborate yr moves, you know.

You was always too stiff with it. You cant just sit there! Maybe, when they shoot you, you know, leap up flail yr arms then fall down and wiggle around and shit so they gotta shoot you more than once.

Blam Blam Blam! Blam!

LINCOLN: Help me practice . . . (40)

Lincoln appears to slide out of his position as “topdog,” turning to his younger brother for advice and support, when typically the “underdog” Booth relies on Lincoln for guidance.

About midway through *Topdog/Underdog*, Lincoln ostensibly gives in to Booth's pleas and agrees to teach him the hustle. Lincoln, though, holds back the most crucial skills:

BOOTH: So them times I seen you lose, them times I seen thuh Mark best you, that was a time when yr hands werent fast enough or yr patter werent right.

LINCOLN: You could say that. (87)

Lincoln refrains from correcting Booth's assumption that the mark outwitted Lincoln, not providing him with the heart of the con: the dealer allows the "mark" to win occasionally, boosting their confidence so they will raise the stakes. Lincoln continues to teach Booth how to "throw down the cards," allowing him to think he is mastering the con: "Yeah, baby! 3-Card got thuh moves! You didnt know lil bro had thuh stuff, huh? Think again, Link, think again" (83).

Lincoln ultimately manipulates his brother through illusion to preserve the relationship's existing power dynamics. Although Lincoln's hustle is successful—cheating Booth out of the five hundred dollars—he does not succeed in maintaining the relationship's power dynamics: Booth kills Lincoln, eliminating the false sense of power that comes with being "topdog." Lincoln's destruction at the hands of the "underdog"—the one manipulated and oppressed by Lincoln's illusions and deceptions that obscure the "real deal"—emphasizes the falsehood of the "topdog's" power. Just as the white supremacists, according to Coates, use the American Dream to manipulate Americans into focusing on a fantasy, Lincoln embraces the notion that power comes through domination; both achieve power by controlling others' perceptions of reality, hiding the "real deal" and offering the "underdogs" a false image. Laura Dawkins suggests Lincoln "is 'scared' that his younger brother will upstage him" and knock him out of his position of power, and—since "every topdog needs an underdog"—Lincoln would then become the oppressed "underdog" (93). To avoid this inversion, Lincoln adopts the U.S. hegemonic power mentality, an ultimately fatal attempt to move from the position of manipulated to manipulator.

In *Topdog/Underdog*, Suzan-Lori Parks represents Lincoln and Booth as two men attempting to find their identities and to advance in society. Booth clings to his inheritance and resists capitulating to the American

Dream. Lincoln, on the other hand, turns to American society for the “real deal,” quickly accepting the American Dream before moving on to become an embodiment of the hegemonic beliefs that power is equivalent to success and that power comes from controlling others. Lincoln’s reliance on illusions to remain “topdog”—manipulating Booth for his own selfish ends—echoes Coates’s denunciation of the American Dream. More importantly, though, the play complicates Coates’s perspective by critiquing both illusions and the system perpetuating them. The play also undermines hegemonic understandings of power: with Booth’s eventual domination over Lincoln, Parks exposes Lincoln’s “topdog” power as itself an illusion, suggesting that power from domination is not true power. It will crumble once its foundation—illusion—fades away. By depicting Lincoln gaining power through illusion, then revealing that power is itself a fragile illusion based on false pretenses of superiority, Parks moves beyond Coates’s critique of U.S. culture. Whereas Coates focuses primarily on how the American Dream negatively affects those who are manipulated by it, Parks’s play demonstrates the deleterious effects of employing hegemonic methods for gaining power on both the manipulators and the manipulated.

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Fitzgerald's American Epic: Echoes of Homer in *The Great Gatsby*

Ashley Walker

Traditionally, literary critics have most often explored *The Great Gatsby* in biographical or historical contexts. And, when they have focused on F. Scott Fitzgerald's literary influences, they have only briefly noticed the Homeric influences in *Gatsby*. When critics do notice these influences—such as when Ward Briggs mentions Homer in relation to *Gatsby*'s “epic touches” (231)—they typically do not offer extended analysis (for instance, Briggs only addresses the influences of Petronius and Virgil in *Gatsby*). While many rightly view Homer and Fitzgerald in two discrete categories—because of the differences in their genres, styles, and times—Homeric literature's impact can be seen in Fitzgerald's novel.

In his essay, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” T.S. Eliot advocates for a “mythical method” he claims James Joyce uses in *Ulysses*: “In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. . . . It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (483). Fitzgerald fulfills the need Eliot identifies for control and order by using Homeric echoes in *Gatsby*. In his examination of Eliot's essay and letters between Eliot and Fitzgerald, John Irwin argues “that Eliot felt *Gatsby* had in some form adopted the mythical method” (162). Fitzgerald's claim in a letter to Thomas Boyd

that he would “read nothing but Homer + Homeric literature . . . until I finish my novel” further confirms this link (141). Ultimately, then, it is difficult to deny the Homeric threads woven through *Gatsby*.

By using the mythical method in *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald taps into the catalytic relevance of the past in order to add what Eliot calls “a shape and a significance” to his novel; he adds a level of depth and complexity. Fitzgerald is commonly associated with the Lost Generation, a term coined by Gertrude Stein to describe those left reeling after World War I. While the pre-war generation adhered to a set of objective and conservative moral standards, the war brought a sense of disillusionment for the generation who saw its horrors, and thus the Lost Generation began to reject these Victorian morals. Without these morals to guide them, however, they were left looking for purpose and meaning while rejecting outright the ways the previous generation had established their norms. Eliot writes from within this moment of confusion, proposing the mythical method as a structure necessary for addressing the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (483). Fitzgerald, seeking both relevance and structure, follows Eliot’s advice and turns to antiquity. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses Homeric echoes from the *Iliad*—both formal and stylistic—to explore the contrast between antiquity and contemporaneity. He uses this contrast and the eventual breakdown of the Homeric mythic structure to show that, because Victorian morality no longer suffices for the Lost Generation, they return to the past. They seek the structure and relevance modernity lacks, but ultimately they find only a cheap imitation of these qualities.

In *Gatsby*’s fourth chapter, Fitzgerald makes use of the epic catalogue—in a style that closely mimicks the Catalogue of Ships in Book 2 of the *Iliad*—providing a list of party guests that frequent Gatsby’s mansion. Fitzgerald’s line “From West Egg came the Poles and the Mulreadys and Cecil Roebuck and Cecil Schoen and Gulick the State senator . . .” (40) echoes Homer’s similar “Leïtos and Peneleos were leaders of the Boiotians, / with Arkesilaos and Prothoënor and Klonios . . .” (2.494–95). Fitzgerald stylistically integrates the guests’ names just as Homer weaves the names of warriors into the *Iliad*’s meter. Additionally, both Fitzgerald and Homer use geographic elements in their catalogues. While Homer, as Jenny Strauss Clay

suggests, uses geographic elements as a sort of spatial mnemonic, Fitzgerald uses them to comment on social class (249). In what Irwin calls his “symbolic geography,” Fitzgerald taps into the notion that the East’s established society is the better society, using geographic divisions in the catalogue to highlight the social divisions between old-money East Egg and new-money West Egg (88). Fitzgerald represents the social divide between Daisy and Gatsby through their respective positions in East Egg and West Egg. He similarly represents social division when he shows guests from East Egg associated with places like Yale, while guests from West Egg are associated with the movies. The connection to Yale represents the East Egg’s high culture, in contrast with West Egg’s pop culture. Fitzgerald adapts a literary form fit to the epic scale of war and applies it to shallow social ambition. These characters’ attempts to climb the social ladder through wealth show how the Lost Generation’s attempted return to the past amounts only to a cheap imitation.

Fitzgerald, further, uses the names of his party guests to characterize them in a manner similar to Homer’s use of warriors’ names familiar from mythical traditions—though he achieves something quite different. The rather clownish guest names—“the Fishguards and the Ripley Snells”—invite ridicule for people from both East Egg and West Egg (40). In contrast, the names in Homer’s catalogue, like “Aineias [Aeneas], whom divine Aphrodite bore to Anchises” (2.820), invite awe and sympathetic emotional involvement (Gaertner 304). The way the names in Fitzgerald’s catalogue invite ridicule reveals the impotence of the Lost Generation’s return to antiquity, as Fitzgerald uses the epic catalogue to subvert perception of the characters rather than to show them as heroic or admirable. By mimicking Homer’s use of the epic catalogue, Fitzgerald falls back on antiquity to structure his own narrative, taking an ancient literary form and adapting it to fit his own purpose—negatively portraying the characters who attend Gatsby’s parties. Fitzgerald subversively relies on elements from antiquity in his novel about contemporaneity, showing how a surface-level evocation of antiquity in the midst of the Lost Generation points only to cheap imitation, thus elucidating their inability to recapture past social and moral forms.

Fitzgerald also echoes Homeric myth in his construction of the relationships amongst Daisy, Tom, and Gatsby. Their relationships—along with Gatsby’s eventual capture of Daisy and Tom’s fight to win her back—are

similar to the relationships amongst Helen, Menelaus, and Paris in the *Iliad*. However, while these relationships are not a central focus in the *Iliad*, Fitzgerald makes his parallel relationships *Gatsby*'s main plot point. The structuring plot element in *Gatsby* directly echoes its narrower use in the *Iliad*, except that the two narratives direct sympathies along different paths. In the *Iliad*, Homer inspires sympathy for Menelaus, Helen's rightful husband, and presents him in a more positive light than he does Paris. In fact, when Helen talks to Paris after his fight with Menelaus, she reproaches him: "Oh, how I wish you had died there / beaten down by the stronger man, who was once my husband. / . . . / You might very well go down before his spear" (3.428–29, 436). Not only does Homer portray Menelaus as more heroic than Paris, but also shows that Helen is essentially Menelaus's possession, thus suggesting to ancient readers that they should sympathize with Menelaus's legal right to his wife. *Gatsby*, however, subverts this perspective, directing sympathies to Gatsby, with statements like, "When [Gatsby and Daisy] met again, two days later, it was Gatsby who was breathless, who was, somehow, betrayed" (149). Although Daisy betrays Tom by having an affair with Gatsby, Fitzgerald suggests Daisy betrays Gatsby as well, an implication emphasized by the novel's narrator. The novel offers a subjective narrator—Nick—in contrast to the third-person omniscience of epic poets like Homer. Since Nick is a subjective narrator, the revelation of Daisy's betrayal of Gatsby resonates differently: the novel portrays Gatsby as a victim of the situation, rather than portraying him as a villain in the narrative of Tom's victimization.

The significance of this inversion arises from the disconnection of Gatsby's actions from the preceding generation's Victorian moral standards: he has an extra-marital affair in direct opposition to the Victorian's conservative sexual morality. Yet, Fitzgerald still depicts Gatsby as a sympathetic character. By subverting the order established by Homer and garnering sympathy for his own "Paris," Fitzgerald shows the breakdown of morality in the Lost Generation. Fitzgerald can create sympathy for Gatsby because the Lost Generation identifies with Gatsby, despite his violation of a moral code. As the Paris figure, Gatsby constantly seeks, but never fully possesses, what Jeffrey Steinbrink calls "the rather ambiguous yearnings of the post-war generation" (160). The very term "Lost Generation" denotes the sense of lostness this post-war generation felt and the constituent loss of direction that leaves Fitzgerald's characters

unable to identify or pursue their yearnings. The yearning generation sympathizes with yearning characters—Paris and Gatsby.

In the *Iliad*, Homer portrays Menelaus as a strong warrior and depicts Paris as an idealistic lover, unable to survive—without divine aid—combat with Menelaus. As Helen says to Paris, “You might very well go down before his [Menelaus’s] spear” (3.436). Similarly, while Tom tries to maintain his image as a strong, successful man—reminiscing about his glory days as a football player and enjoying his current social and financial security—Gatsby spends the entire novel yearning for an ideal: Daisy. In fact, when Nick first sees Gatsby, he seems literally to be grasping for this ideal: “But I didn’t call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling” (16). Gatsby embodies the ambiguous yearning of the Lost Generation, a longing they seem unable to fulfill, an ambiguous yearning that produces subversive sympathy for Paris and Gatsby after a generation of Victorian morals that demanded sympathy for Menelaus and Tom. By echoing the *Iliad*’s plot, then subverting it, Fitzgerald shows how—when looking back toward antiquity—the Lost Generation can only echo it incompletely. They can never fully recreate it.

Fitzgerald also echoes Homer’s characterization, though he subverts it, as well, showing how old molds do not fit the new generation. Both *Gatsby* and the *Iliad* describe characters in relation to their material circumstances and their possessions. In the *Iliad*, for instance, one of Agamemnon’s trusted comrades, Nestor, explains that Agamemnon has dishonored Achilles by taking Briseis, a woman whom Achilles won as a war prize: “you, giving way to your proud heart’s / anger, dishonored a great man, one whom the immortals / honor, since you have taken his prize and keep it” (9.109–11). Agamemnon decides to offer Achilles material possessions to restore his honor, saying, “Before you I will count off my gifts in their splendor: / seven unfired tripods; ten talents’ weight of gold; twenty / shining cauldrons; and twelve horses” (9.121–23). Menelaus continues listing the possessions he will give Achilles, offering these possessions to restore the honor Achilles lost when he lost the woman he valued as a possession. Thus, Homer’s characters associate honor and its accompanying social standing with material possessions, specifically battle trophies and war spoils.

Gatsby's characters similarly rely on material possessions to gain social standing. For example, Myrtle surrounds herself with possessions she thinks convey an aura of wealth and give her a higher social standing: "The living-room was crowded to the doors with a set of tapestried furniture entirely too large for it" (20). Despite how closely Myrtle's material desperation for higher social standing mirrors the desire for trophies that bring honor in the *Iliad*, *Gatsby* does not blindly echo Homer. Rather, it uses the parallel to subvert common notions of materialism. In the *Iliad*, trophies bring honor time and time again, such as when Hector rallies his troops by promising "that man of you who drags Patroklos, dead as he is, back / . . . / I will give him half the spoils for his portion, and keep half / for myself, and his glory shall be as great as mine is" (17.229, 231–32). The certainty of receiving honor, however, is absent from Fitzgerald's narrative. Rather, *Gatsby's* characters remain entirely unable to gain honor from possessions.

Myrtle's development throughout *Gatsby* reveals a larger inability to gain honor materially. Ronald Berman asserts that Myrtle's materialistic desires are simply "a blueprint for becoming what she knows she is not," and she, like other characters in *Gatsby*, is doomed to fail (89). As Myrtle continues to surround herself with items she believes to carry social prestige, "the intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur" (21). Reeling from the ambiguous yearning left unsatisfied by the previous generation's Victorian morals, Myrtle and the other characters in *Gatsby* cling to a blueprint that mimics the honor-shame culture found in Homer's epics. Victorians' adherence to objective moral standards bears partial responsibility for modernity's culture of guilt, wherein individuals are driven to adhere to social standards so they can avoid guilt. In contrast, the trophy-driven culture of the *Iliad* urges individuals to pursue honor through actions and the trophies gained from—and thus symbolic of—these actions. *Gatsby's* characters reject the morality governing modern guilt culture and try to replace it with a trophy-driven culture that cheaply imitates antiquity. However, the characters' constant attempts to obtain and retain material objects never garners them the honor they seek. In this way, Fitzgerald subverts his parallel with Homer, showing that the old notion that trophies bring honor cannot function in modern society—it simply devolves into materialism without the accompanying honor.

Throughout *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald establishes the “continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” that Eliot discusses in regard to Joyce (483). His characters rebel against the preceding generation’s Victorian morals and try to distance themselves from the perceived constraints of the past, but the Homeric echoes reveal that his characters necessarily return to the past when looking for structure and relevance. Even so, they never attain the qualities they seek, but only cheap imitations and ineffective fragments. The Homeric mythic structure breaks down as *Gatsby* subverts its elements. This breakdown suggests that Fitzgerald’s novel—and modernity itself—lack structure, which explains why *Gatsby* appeals to the structure offered by antiquity, even when its structure is subverted. Fitzgerald’s characters are never quite able to emulate successfully the qualities of antiquity, so they remain insufficient imitations. Through their efforts, however, *Gatsby* reveals how looking back to antiquity for structure can provide at least a part of what his characters, and the Lost Generation, seek.

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Plaintive Restraints: Facing the Music of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Teresa Ramoni

As much as Mademoiselle Reisz's piano playing has the ability to "[shake] a man," her plaintive strains—alongside the various other musical references of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*—often fail to leave lasting impressions on readers and scholars alike (Chopin 67). The "strange and fantastic" music of Chopin's novel often gets drowned out by its more alluring depictions of sensuality and the idyllic Grand Isle, perhaps accounting for scholarship's resounding silence on music's centrality to the text (108). At the time of its publication, *The Awakening* was deemed a purposeless piece of "sex fiction" (*Chicago-Times Herald* 211). It told the tale of a protagonist who engaged in totally "unjustifiable conduct" (*Times-Democrat* 212). And Edna Pontellier lacked "the grace to repent" for the unforgiveable sins she committed against both her family and her womanhood (*Literature* 213). Chopin's contemporaries often responded misogynistically to *The Awakening*, classifying Edna's death as the proper and only ending for a woman who failed to live righteously. One writer even expressed being "satisfied" when Edna decides to take her own life at the novel's conclusion (*Public Opinion* 212). Early critics denigrated Edna for her passionate feelings, a sentiment that has not disappeared with time. Even modern scholar Joseph Church attributes Edna's death to her "fail[ure] to unify" passion and reason (21). Along with these misogynistic readings, generations of critics and readers have expressed frustration over *The Awakening's*

ambiguity, agreeing with an early reviewer who claimed if the novel had any “particular moral . . . or lesson” to impart, it had failed to do so (*St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat* 208). Both these misogynistic readings of Chopin’s novel and claims of its meaninglessness miss the text’s key elements. In order to properly understand the novel’s feminist themes, I argue we must “listen”—pay attention to and analyze—to the music that underscores both Edna’s awakening and her eventual demise.

Music makes its first of many appearances in the very first paragraphs of Chopin’s novel: “two young girls, the Farival twins, were playing a duet . . . upon the piano” (40). The piano—a common medium through which women of Chopin’s era presented themselves to others—becomes central to *The Awakening*, symbolically serving as means to comment on and to critique the conditions of 19th-century American woman. The twins play their piano duet at a Grand Isle summer gathering and, “at the earnest solicitation of every one present,” follow it with a second selection (64). The novel adopts an air of sarcasm in this description, indicating that the audience is not as interested in the twins’ performance as they outwardly suggest. When a parrot interrupts the recital, the narrator quips “he was the only being present who possessed sufficient candor to admit that he was not listening to these gracious performances” (64). The guests are not emotionally invested in the twins’ performance, yet it is unclear whether this interruption bothers the twins, because their viewpoints remain unknown for the entire novel. Indeed, the only person Chopin shows genuinely concerned with ensuring the twins’ music be heard is their grandfather, who grows “indignant over the [parrot’s] interruption” (64). Significantly, Monsieur Farival—an elderly male figure—is the one so concerned that his granddaughters’ music be heard. This Grand Isle gathering was thrown in order to “suitably [entertain]” a “number of husbands, fathers, and friends” who had just returned to their families (63). This party’s purpose—to entertain men—directly connects with the Farival twins’ role. Monsieur Farival ardently seeks to have his granddaughters’ music be heard likely because he is aware that showcasing their music helps guarantee them “a respectable place in the social order” (Pflueger 479). The twins’ performance will publically present them as skilled young women who will, if fortunate enough, eventually

be deemed desirable for marriage.

Madame Ratignolle's subsequent performance is additionally indicative of the phenomenon of women pursuing music to publically display their commitment to domesticity. Ratignolle "keep[s] excellent waltz time," a detail that reveals Ratignolle is playing a classical selection (65). Classical music's regard for tonality, meter, and form requires its musicians to adhere to rules while playing it. It is not coincidental that Madame Ratignolle plays a classical selection or that the Farival twins' selections—a duet from *Zampa* and the overture to *The Poet and the Peasant*—are also classical compositions. The two girls' names may remain unshared, but the titles of the pieces they play cannot. It is neither the girls' voices nor opinions Monsieur Farival demands be heard, but their classical music, which symbolizes their adherence to domestic social order. The twins are "prevailed upon to play the piano" and "solicit[ed]" to play a second piece—and they oblige, fulfilling their duty (64). Music to Madame Ratignolle is also a duty: she "keep[s] up her music on account of the children . . . because she and her husband both consider it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive" (65). While Madame Ratignolle "gaily consent[s]" to play—and the twins neither outwardly object nor express an eagerness to perform—all three females nonetheless remain unaware of their confined state as 19th-century women (65). During Madame Ratignolle's performance, "almost every one danced but the twins" (65). The twins are aware they "should be whirling around the room in the arms of a man," yet the idea of engaging in this socially expected activity does not interest them (65). They cannot "be induced to separate" (65). While the twins engage in this minor act of resistance—not dancing with men at the party—the novel notes "they might have danced together, but they did not think of it" (65). The twins are paralyzed by social expectations they are trained to conform to—not to question—so they remain unaware of their own power, not realizing they could participate in the activity without submitting themselves to a man's body. They do not realize the power of their own bodies.

The Farival twins' and Madame Ratignolle's relationships with piano playing represents their involvement with and acceptance of domesticity. Classical music becomes a medium symbolically representing unawareness of the dissonant expectations surrounding female expression. The dissonant demands of women's involvement with the arts mirror the limitations placed on all forms of female expression, as women are confined

to gender codes that dominate their lives and limit their opportunities to express themselves. Madame Ratignolle can keep up her music only because she doesn't "let everything else go to chaos" (101). When Edna takes up painting and sketching, Mr. Pontellier permits her pursuit of art, but she cannot "let the family go to the devil" by neglecting her domestic duties (100). Women of Chopin's era were encouraged to learn music for domestic purposes, providing "their homes with the harmony and community necessary" to ensure they ran smoothly (Pflueger 470). As Pennie Pflueger claims: "music instruction was embraced . . . for its domestic reassurance, yet musical knowledge posed an implicit threat" (471). Women learned music for the domestic sphere alone—not to become musicians.

These cultural expectations make Mademoiselle Reisz—"an artist" and woman who makes her living as a musician—all the more exceptional (67). The first time we see Reisz, she is "objecting to the crying of a baby"—she is aggravated by domesticity (66). While Madame Ratignolle's and the Farival twins' piano playing reflects their participation in doctrines of domesticity, the novel widens piano playing's symbolic purpose, presenting, through Reisz, music's "disruptive potential to domesticity" (Pflueger 468). Reisz tells Edna the summer was "rather pleasant, if it hadn't been for the mosquitos and the Farival twins" (92). Reisz is directly opposed to the girls. While the Farival twins' and Madame Ratignolle's connection with classical music symbolizes their unawareness of patriarchal society's dissonant expectations for them, Reisz's association with Romantic music becomes pivotal to her character.

Reisz plays Frédéric Chopin and Richard Wagner, influential figures in Romantic music. Romantic music was considered "a destructive force to which young female listeners were extremely susceptible," according to Melanie Dawson (qtd. in Camastra 155). Men expressed anxiety over Romantic music, fearing its ability to elicit passionate feelings in women would stimulate sexual feelings, which would perhaps, in turn, urge them to pursue deviant thoughts or engage in acts that directly opposed the domestic standards of decorum. The novel alludes to these fears, describing Edna's reactions to program music, pieces "evoking pictures in [the] mind" (66). While listening to these pieces, Edna envisions a "naked" man "on the seashore" and a woman "stroking a cat" (66–67). John Crowley suggests this last image could indicate "a repressed

masturbatory fantasy" (105). When Edna listens to Reisz play Frédéric Chopin—a figure whose "licentious music [was believed to] affront public decency" (Crowley 98)—she has an almost orgasmic response: she "trembled, she was choking," as "the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul" (67).

Edna's awakening has often been described solely in sexual terms and characterized explicitly by her extramarital excursions. However, Edna's reactions to Reisz's music are not confined to the sexual realm, just as Edna's awakening is not limited to—or, arguably, not primarily concerned with—sexuality. Only after Reisz's performance is Edna able to swim, realizing the power of her own body, determining to "swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (69). On the night of Reisz's performance, Edna rejects going inside to bed with Mr. Pontellier, whose persistence perhaps implies he had more than sleeping on his mind. Edna recalls how "another time she would have gone in . . . yielded to his desires . . . unthinkingly," but something in her has changed after hearing Reisz's music (72). Edna describes her newfound awareness saying, "she could only realize that . . . her present self . . . was in some way different from the other self . . . she was seeing with different eyes" (82).

Hearing Reisz perform this Romantic music becomes transformative for Edna. Reisz's music is more than sound. When Edna hears Reisz play the Chopin prelude, she finally feels "ready" (67). Perhaps for the first time she is able "to take an impress of the abiding truth" (67). The novel suggests truth lies inherently within Reisz's music, expressing a sentiment that speaks to Edna in a distinctive way. While her playing "arouse[s] a fever of enthusiasm" among the party's guests who say "no one [can] play Chopin like Mademoiselle Reisz," the pianist tells Edna she is "the only one worth playing for" (67). Reisz signals to Edna she is the only one who can understand her performance, perhaps implying it contains a message beyond its surface sounds—it is not simply about music.

Romantic music is characterized by its expressive timing, stark dynamic contrasts, emotional qualities, and dissonance. While the Farival twins and Madame Ratignolle play consonant music, Reisz plays these dissonant pieces. Reisz's music—with its dissonance, palpable tension, and emotive qualities—becomes the perfect medium to represent female oppression and the conflicting messages patriarchy sends to women. The Farival twins and Madame Ratignoll—playing tonal, harmonious

music—remain unaware of both the dissonant expectations patriarchal society has for them and the discordance of female oppression, but Reisz faces these disruptive facts symbolically by performing Romantic music. Edna's exposure to this music represents her own awareness of her subjugated state as a 19th-century woman—a painful, but necessary revelation. Only by being exposed to her restraints can she attempt to escape. Edna's awakening is a realization of her own oppression; her awakening relies entirely on the sense of awareness facilitated by Reisz's Romantic music.

Church describes Reisz as “self-serving,” behaving “insidiously” (20, 22). By doing so, Church unwittingly echoes the novel's male voices that similarly criticize Reisz. A former neighbor calls Reisz “the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street,” and Arobin says he “heard she's partially demented” (102, 129). Pflueger attributes her eccentricities—and thus the poor reception she receives from others—to her role as a “Romantic artist” (477). Beyond Reisz's position as an artist, however, she is also an independent woman. While Reisz defies many expectations, she still cannot escape judgment for being a woman who defies social norms. When Edna confesses to being in love with Robert—a strictly forbidden feeling for a 19th-century married woman—Reisz feels Edna's arms to see if her “wings were strong,” because she, more than anyone else in the text, is aware that “the bird [who soars] above tradition and prejudice must have strong wings” (129). Reisz doesn't want to see Edna “exhausted, fluttering back to earth” (129). She is aware how difficult it is to be a woman orchestrating her own journey. When Reisz tells Edna “be[ing] an artist includes much . . . to succeed the artist must possess the courageous soul” that “dares and defies,” her words are applicable to more than artistry (107–08).

Edna notes that, while Reisz's “personality was offensive to her,” she “seemed to reach [her] spirit and set it free” (124). The pain Edna experiences—the act of being offended—becomes both meaningful and necessary to her. Crowley argues Mademoiselle Reisz is prefigured in Chopin's short story “Wiser Than a God,” which centers on gifted pianist, Paula Von Stoltz (103). Paula agitatedly asks a suitor whether “music is anything more to [him] than the pleasing distraction of an idle moment” (qtd. in Crowley 104). To Paula, music should be more than distraction, and *The Awakening* expands this notion. Chopin believed in the necessity of confronting the world. She personally “illustrate[d] her rejection of convents and nuns,”

because she considered these women's choices to pursue cloistered living an attempt to escape the realities of their own lives (Wehner 158). In a journal entry from 1894, Chopin visited her friend Liza, a nun in a convent. Chopin wrote that she was grateful she had been able to experience the world—to have “suffered and been glad,” unlike Liza (qtd. in Wehner 158). This sentiment is strikingly similar to Edna's feelings towards life after her awakening. Edna is disheartened by Madame Ratignolle's “blind contentment” with life, her “colorless existence” (100). Ultimately she voices the quintessential revelation of her awakening: “it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life” (160).

Nevertheless, the novel does not condemn the Farival twins or Madame Ratignolle for their unawareness of oppression, but instead calls for the creation of a society where all women become aware of inequality and work to gain agency, becoming content only when none are confined. As much as music awakens Edna and makes her aware of her oppressed state, it cannot save her from the subjugation she faces. Edna says, “I am not going to be forced into doing things” and “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions,” yet she ultimately lives in a world that will never defend her from her husband (159, 156). This inability to enforce her claims of independence leads Edna to submit herself to the sea, rather than go on living in the “wasteland of domesticity” (Crowley 112). Edna does not die for Robert or for love—she dies to escape a life in which she will either be bound to Mr. Pontellier or face punishment for leaving him. Edna realizes “the day would come” when the “thought of [Robert] would melt out of her existence,” but during her last moments of life Reisz's words about artists possessing courageous souls remain with Edna (163).

When Robert returns from Mexico, Edna tells him, “I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself” (154). *The Awakening*, through its use of music, condemns a society that forbids female expression—that pretends it wants to hear the Farival twins, that limits Madame Ratignolle to the domestic sphere, that judges Reisz, and that leads Edna to feel there is no way she can live a life she finds meaningful while still being accepted. The novel ultimately mirrors Reisz's music—dissonant, tragic, and often unsatisfying, but inherently filled with “abiding truth” (67). Truth that is unpleasant, but essential to face if there is any hope to bring such levels of discordance into harmonic resolution.

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“For whom was built this special shell?”: Philip Larkin’s “Church Going” as Cultural Elegy

M. Elizabeth Geddy

If read as a cultural elegy, Philip Larkin’s poem “Church Going” suggests that while the three central functions of an elegy remain lamentation, praise, and consolation, the cultural elegy extends these elements to address broader concerns than we find in personal or pastoral elegies. Published in his first mature collection of poetry—*The Less Deceived*—“Church Going” is widely regarded as one of his greatest achievements. It follows a man who stops at a church while biking through the English countryside, where he meditates on churches’ fates in a progressively secular society. This poem is placed against the backdrop of declining church attendance: at the time of its publication in 1954, England was in the midst of a social and religious revolution. Larkin was a well-known atheist, and critics have argued over the statements about religion in his poetry. In his study of Larkin’s use of metaphysical imagery, Andrew McKeown notes that the “critical debate over Larkin and religion has been intense, raising questions over how and why Larkin’s meaning is appropriated, while also throwing light on the nature of his take on religion” (136). This observation is especially true of “Church Going,” and—although many critics interpret its meaning to be anti-religious—the poem’s construction reveals it to be a cultural elegy for the loss of institutionalized religion and belief, as well as a contemplation on the speaker’s mortality.

The elegiac mood “evoke[s] the pervasive presence of loss and the

transience of the things of this world," a theme to which Larkin often returns (Mikics 100). As James Booth argues, Larkin's poetry is "fundamentally elegiac" and focused on "mortality as our common fate" (172). Booth explains that Larkin wrote meditative elegies or *memento mori* poems: reminders that we all must die. Poems in this vein reflect on mortality and are "characterized by a tension between life and death, hope and despair, and consolation and melancholy"—dichotomies that all appear in "Church Going" (Booth 178). This type of poetry follows in the tradition established by "The Wanderer," one of the oldest poems—and cultural elegies—in the English canon. The last of his kind, the "lone-dweller" in "The Wanderer" mourns his lonely exile from his homeland, as well as his separation from his liege-lord and kinsmen (line 1). Several aspects of "Church Going" are similar to "The Wanderer": both poems examine the transient nature of life and the passing of generations; and Larkin's use of hyphenated words—"cycle-clips" (line 9), "rood-lofts" (41), "ruin-bibber" (42)—seems a loose allusion to the kennings found throughout the medieval poem. Larkin also echoes "The Wanderer"—as a cultural elegy—with his inversion of the *ubi sunt* motif. Stemming from a Latin phrase that asks "where are those who went before us?" this motif is found in many Anglo-Saxon poems, most notably "The Wanderer." Trapped in memories of past "bloody battle-grounds" (91), the speaker demands: "Where did the steed go? Where the young warrior? Where the treasure-giver?" (92). Larkin makes use of the rhetorical question in "Church Going," but instead of inquiring about those who went before, he focuses on those who will come after. For instance, in the poem's fifth stanza the speaker thinks about "who / Will be the last, the very last, to seek / This place for what it was" and if that person "will . . . be [his] representative" (38–40, 45). He already knows where those are who went before him—they are the "so many dead [that] lie round"—so he ponders the future of mankind instead (63).

David Lodge points out that Larkin sees his duty as a writer to "communicate as accurately as he can in words experience which is initially nonverbal" (73). Lodge also notes that Larkin viewed content as far more important than form. "Church Going" exemplifies this approach: the diction and tonal shifts in the final stanza work together to explain spirituality and its origins. The speaker is clearly not religious, yet he discloses

that he often visits churches, only to “end [up] much at a loss like this” (20). He spends the rest of the poem imagining what will become of the cathedrals and other houses of worship once the last person has “[sought that] place for what it was,” concluding ultimately that the feeling which inspired humans to first construct churches will not disappear with the deterioration of the physical buildings (40). Thus in the poem’s final lines, the speaker muses that someone will always have “[a] hunger in himself to be more serious, / And gravitat[e] with it to this ground, / Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,” implying that spirituality is an innate human quality (60–62).

Larkin wrote many drafts of “Church Going” before its publication, so it is important to consider how the poem’s language contributes to the speaker’s realization in the final stanza. R. N. Parkinson claims Larkin’s method often involves providing “more knowledge and feeling in his vocabulary and cadence than [in] the surface attitude” (227–28). Beginning with the speaker’s noisy entrance into the church, he is portrayed as disrespectful and uneducated. His language is vague about what he sees, mentioning “matting, seats, and stone” and some “brass and stuff / Up at the holy end” (3, 5–6). His only understanding of how to behave in a church seems to be his knowledge that he must show respect, which he does by removing his cycle-clips in place of a hat. Kateryna Rudnytzky Schray calls this action “socially appropriate but spiritually devoid of conviction,” a description that could also be applied to his departure from the building (62): upon leaving, he perfunctorily signs the book and donates an Irish sixpence, confirming his lack of interest.

As the poem progresses, the speaker’s language reveals him to be more well versed in Christianity than he first appears. He begins using specific liturgical terms, touching “the font” and climbing up “the lectern,” and wonders what will become of the “parchment, plate and pyx” (10, 13, 25). Basing his claims on notebook drafts of “Church Going,” Laurence Lerner argues Larkin “clearly thought carefully about how explicit the Christian references should be” and that the speaker’s knowledge of them indicates a deeper fascination with the nature of religion than his attitude reveals (19). The second stanza ends with the speaker’s remark that “the place was not worth stopping for,” yet the lack of sentiment in this statement reveals him as a habitual visitor of churches (18). He ponders the fact that he “always ends much at a loss like this, / Wondering what to look for,” which

introduces the poem's central questions: what leads the speaker to keep stopping at churches and what will become of them once they have "fall[en] completely out of use" (20–22)? In the third stanza, the poem's language elevates from a colloquial voice to a more literary one, employing alliteration for emphasis and using language reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land." Larkin also uses rhetorical questions throughout the poem, highlighting a desire to understand both self and humanity. As Lolette Kuby observes: although the speaker might at first glance appear uninterested in finding the answers to these questions, the poem's language shows the speaker to be "actively thoughtful, reflective, doubting, questioning, imagining, and resolving" (111).

The poem's elegiac mood is further established by Larkin's indecision about the phrasing of a crucial line in the penultimate stanza. Examining the textual variants, Craig Mackenzie notes there are two distinct versions of "Church Going": the one published in *The Spectator* in November 1954, and the one that appeared in *The Less Deceived* later that same month. In this stanza, the speaker ponders how, for so long, churches have been host to "what since is found / Only in separation—marriage, and birth, / And death, and thoughts of these" (49–51). In the *Spectator* version, the following line asks, "round which was built / This special shell?" (qtd. in Mackenzie 611). Evidently Larkin did not like this phrasing, as this question becomes "for whom was built / This special shell?" in *The Less Deceived*, an alteration maintained until the book's fifth edition, when Larkin changed "whom" back to "which" (Mackenzie 610). Mackenzie contends this change should not be taken lightly, noting the antecedent of "whom" would be Larkin's representative—introduced in line 45—implying that "the special shell [was] built for him (or people like him)," and maybe even for the speaker himself (612).

Nicolas Marsh explains why the speaker depersonalizes his queries about religion in "Church Going," arguing the "speaker's so-called meditation is an exercise in avoiding the puzzle within himself" (114). In the fourth stanza, the speaker wonders if "dubious women [will] come / To make their children touch a particular stone" and ponders what will remain "when disbelief has gone," switching the poem's focus to society (28–29, 35). This change distances the speaker from his original question: what motivates him to stop at churches? As Kuby argues, the cynicism expressed in this stanza is "[the speaker's] intellectual safeguard, [and] a

mental stance that enables him to test for validity and truth" (112). This deviation extends his central questions to all of humanity, validating spirituality's universal nature, just as the speaker does in the final stanza when he describes the church as a "serious house on serious earth," a place where "all our compulsions meet" to be "robed as destinies" (55-57). This statement gestures toward churches' purpose in the religious age, but does not give any sign the speaker believes they will be used in the same way by future generations.

The irony in the speaker's conclusion emerges from his failure to recognize that he becomes the imagined representative introduced in the fifth stanza. Although he is "pleas[ed] to stand in silence [there]" (54), he does not realize that he has been "pulled by a magnetism as powerful as that which earlier drew the dubious women" (Parkinson 228). Spirituality is an innate quality in humans that will endure long after "churches fall completely out of use" (22). All of this stanza's formal choices—the elevated language, the changed perspective, the heightened tone—all reinforce this notion of spirituality. As Richard Palmer asserts: "it is beyond dispute that [he] did not regard religion, whether biblically-based or otherwise, as a necessary concomitant of spirituality" (90). The speaker's cynicism prevents him from understanding that what causes him to stop in churches is that same inherent spirituality within himself, or that he is the one for whom that special shell was built. The poem's final line expresses this cynicism, referencing the "so many dead [that] lie round" the churchyard as a reminder to readers of the transitory nature of human life (63). This ending, however, provides no resolution aside from the knowledge of our own mortality. The change in tone between the fourth and fifth stanzas may seem jarring, especially because it occurs in the middle of a sentence. Andrew Foley, though, argues this shift is a structural device characteristic of much of Larkin's work. Foley identifies "a shift [which] occurs in the last stanzas . . . signaled by a change in the diction, register, and tone" (23). In "Church Going," this shift is marked by a sudden change from conversational style to a "much more complex, elevated register" and tone, which he uses to reveal an "alternative, more difficult perspective" (Foley 38). Lodge also discusses the significance of this shift, declaring that many of Larkin's poems end with "a kind of eclipse of meaning, speculation fading out in the face of the void," a trope he uses again at the end of his well-known "High Windows" (80). In "Church Going," the heightened tone exemplifies

Larkin's use of elegiac mood and emphasizes a central theme: life is fleeting in the face of such a grand eternity. The consolation in this poem lies in its pronouncement that church-going "can never be obsolete," because church grounds will always draw someone there "to be more serious" (58, 60). The repetition of the word "serious" three times in this section is crucial: not only does this repetition end the poem with sincerity and respectfulness, but in the 20th century "serious" also meant "religious," giving this stanza a tone altogether different from the preceding six.

Although many critics read "Church Going" as a poem that mocks institutionalized religion and its place in society, I contend the poem has a more nuanced perspective. Larkin's diction, changes in tone, and deliberate alterations between publications make it clear this poem stands as a cultural elegy for the religious age. By drawing from the traditions established by early cultural elegies like "The Wanderer"—such as the inversion of the *ubi sunt* motif—Larkin points to humans' innate spirituality. In its final lines, "The Wanderer" speaks of wisdom: "So said the wise man as he sat in meditation. / A good man holds his words back" (111–12). Larkin similarly speaks of someone who will always have a "hunger in himself to be more serious / And gravitat[e] with it to this ground, / . . . to grow wise" (60–62). Neither poem can offer a solution to the problem of mortality, but they offer consolation through an awareness of life's transience and a willingness to always ponder humanity's place in the universe.

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The Dangers of Performance in Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*

Brittany J. Barron

Eliza Haywood's 18th-century audience often thought of her "as [a] prostitute once-removed, selling seduction and sex through the medium of print" (Potter 170). However, Haywood's fiction contains more than scintillating sex: she critiques the society that supports a man's rakish conquests and a woman's dependence upon her masquerade of femininity. In *Fantomina*, Haywood depicts the equivalent of modern-day date rape. When Haywood's anonymous heroine suffers this injustice, she turns patriarchal society upside down, trading her femininity for masculinity. Usually, when a female character is raped and subsequently abandoned, she falls into hysterics and never recovers. Haywood's heroine conversely refuses to accept her ruined status. Despite her resolve, she possesses a weakness: she loves her rapist, Beauplaisir, and she pursues him with extreme ardor, assuming different disguises to keep their relationship monogamous. During these performances, she loses herself in her masquerade of femininity, wanting to please Beauplaisir and become his object of desire. Catherine Craft-Fairchild posits that the Lady "does not wear her femininity with conviction, does not take on the roles for 'real' [and thereby] maintains an ironic distance, a detachment from her representations" (63-64). I argue, however, that the Lady becomes *too attached* to her femininity and her disguises. Although she assumes power during her masquerades, her extreme

behavior undermines it, and she thereby ends up submitting to the role she challenges.

Bored with her life as a reputable, socially acceptable Lady, the heroine dons her first disguise. During the 18th century, society dictated how a woman should act, speak, and dress. These guidelines reflect Luce Irigaray's description of femininity as "a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation" (84). This role circumscribes a woman's agency and personality. The Lady understands this predicament; as a woman of "distinguished Birth," she cannot speak freely with a man (41). Rather than submit to these rules, she wishes to act without the restraints of social decorum. After all, her personality differs from these preconceived ideals, and she wants "every Thing as her Inclinations or Humours rendered most agreeable to her" (41-42). Acting accordingly on her own authority, she resists the limits of her ascribed femininity. The Lady casts off propriety and replaces it with a disguise she chooses, dressing as a prostitute and calling herself Fantomina. She receives men's attention, specifically the handsome Beauplaisir's, and she enjoys it: "she found a vast deal of Pleasure in conversing with him in this free and unrestrained manner" (43). The disguise offers her an escape from the rigidity of propriety; however, it comes at the price of her virtue.

Disguised as Fantomina, her performance precipitates her downfall: she is raped, and she assumes her role as an object. Although when the Lady meets Beauplaisir again, they retire to her "Lodging," she intends to maintain her virtue (45). Naïve to the danger, she mistakenly believes Beauplaisir will listen when she tries to stop his sexual advances. Once they are alone, he expects her to perform sexual services, and he ignores the Lady's protests: "It was in vain; she would have retracted the Encouragement she had given:—In vain she endeavoured to delay . . . *He* was bold;—he was resolute: *she* tearful,—confused" (46). The fragmented style conveys the Lady's horror and powerlessness during the scene. Here, they take on the typical roles assigned to men and women, which their genders determine: "The body's sexual specificity—or rather, the social meaning of its sexual organs—will position the subject either as having (for men) or being (for women) the phallus, and through its relation to the phallic signifier, positions it as a subject or object in the symbolic" (Gross 85). During the rape, Beauplaisir acts as the subject and Fantomina as the object. Beauplaisir obtains control, "bold" and "resolute,"

while the Lady remains passive, “tearful” and “confused.” Although Beauplaisir acts against the Lady’s wishes, his character remains untouched. As the subject in society’s hierarchy, he may act as an aggressor without facing repercussions. On the other hand, the Lady—the object—is considered inferior and at fault. The Lady’s performance has led to her ruin—at least, to Beauplaisir’s knowledge, Fantomina’s ruin. No longer sexually pure, “Fantomina” will lose her place among society’s elite. In order to repair her lost virtue, the Lady remains in disguise as Fantomina, choosing to keep her identity a secret. This disguise places her in a position of power.

Understanding her position, the Lady reclaims the control she loses during her rape. She contrasts to other women in her position, such as “neglected Wives, and fond abandoned Nymphs” (65). Wives accept their husbands’ wandering ways; Nymphs submit to their banishment from society, remaining subservient objects who succumb to men’s dominance. Instead of dwelling upon her ruin, however, the Lady uses it to her advantage, assuming the role of the subject. During the day, she lives as the virtuous, untouchable Lady; at night, she meets Beauplaisir as the adventurous, sexual Fantomina. Accordingly, the Lady blurs the line between a ruined woman and a virtuous woman: “The ‘two’ vastly disparate women of course are the same woman—the ambiguity of Fantomina’s temporary transformation unites the two parts of binary oppositions such as ‘mistress’ and ‘heiress,’ ‘prostitute’ and ‘virgin’” (Craft-Fairchild 64–65). This inability to distinguish between the Lady and her disguised self speaks to her power. She exposes the gender binaries as inconsequential, subverting patriarchal labels. Although Beauplaisir usually “triumph[s]” in his actions—satisfying his sexual desires, and then abandoning the women—the Lady robs him of the opportunity to spoil her reputation (49). When Beauplaisir grows tired of Fantomina, the Lady dons a different disguise, ensuring he will see her again.

The Lady continues to act as the subject, manipulating Beauplaisir with more trickery. During the rape—as Fantomina—she acts passively. In subsequent sexual acts—disguising herself as the maid Celia and the widow Bloomer—she becomes the active agent. When Beauplaisir pursues her as Fantomina, he wants to satisfy his sexual needs. Now, in her different disguises, she seeks her pleasure: “remembering the Height of Transport she enjoyed when the agreeable Beauplaisir kneeled at her feet,

imploing her first Favours, she longed to prove the same again" (51). Beauplaisir assumes a subservient position, "kneel[ing] at her feet" and "imploing her first Favours," and his supplication reinforces her role as subject in their relationship. Moreover, she becomes the seductress, following Beauplaisir to Bath as the maid Celia, and then to London as the widow Bloomer. Robbing him of the ability to seduce her, she reflects on her power: "I have outwitted even the most Subtle of the deceiving Kind, and while he thinks to fool me is himself the only beguiled Person" (59). She destabilizes the subject/object dichotomy, reversing their assigned roles, "beguil[ing]" him into the illusion he seduces different women with his artful womanizing. Duped by the Lady's costumes, he believes he takes Celia's virginity and that he assuages the widow's grief. In reality, he pleases only the Lady. After disguising herself as Celia and Mrs. Bloomer, she becomes Incognita, in which role she objectifies Beauplaisir and acts as aggressor.

Disguising herself as Incognita solidifies the Lady's power. When she disguises herself as the maid Celia and the widow Bloomer, Beauplaisir still must instigate the relationship, whether he kisses her, or he invites her into his carriage. As Incognita, however, she no longer allows him even that small performance. Taking the initiative, Incognita writes him a letter. Rather than Beauplaisir objectifying the Lady by remarking upon her beauty, she reduces him to a sexual object, writing, "[Y]ou are the greatest Charm in Nature to our Sex" (63). She refers to him as a "Charm," rather than a human being. By casting him in purely sexual terms, she treats him as an object instead of a subject. She also plays upon the double meaning of "Sex," referring to both gender and intercourse. Before he even consents to their meeting, she suggests he will surrender to her and that they will have sex. Moreover, he must comply with her demands. She not only tells him where and when they will meet, she also instructs him that he cannot inquire into her identity. On the night Beauplaisir and Incognita meet, the Lady wears a mask at all times, "evad[ing] the dominating male gaze entirely, while subjecting Beauplaisir to the discomforts of being the object of someone's unhindered and unobstructed looking" (Merritt 62). He becomes not only the object of her affections, but also the object of a *woman's* gaze. She flips the script, belittling his roles as libertine, rake, and voyeur. No longer a feigned prostitute, maid, or widow, she takes away his ability to know

whom he meets, covering up “the Sight of her Face” (244). Once more, the Lady fools Beauplaisir. In this moment, however, she undercuts her new position of assertive agency.

Despite the multiple performances through which the Lady reclaims the agency society tries to suppress, she acquiesces to her femininity. Although she seeks her own sexual satisfaction, she performs for Beauplaisir: “Her design was once more to engage him . . . to be sweetly forced to what she wished with equal Ardour was what she wanted and what she had formed a Stratagem to obtain” (51). Her “design” undermines her power when she disrupts established gender codes. Disregarding the agency she gains, she reassumes her feminine role. Irigaray discusses the dangers involved in these performances of femininity: “In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity. The fact remains that this masquerade requires an effort on her part for which she is not compensated. Unless her pleasure comes simply from being chosen as an object of consumption or of desire by masculine ‘subjects’” (84). Changing disguises takes tremendous effort—the Lady must ensure they fulfill Beauplaisir’s desires and maintain his affections. Spending all her time plotting consumes her life. As soon as he tires of one disguise, she concocts another. Beyond the disguises, her identity remains a mystery. Craft-Fairchild notes that “the reader never finds out Fantomina’s true name nor learns anything substantial about her identity” (67). “Los[ing]” herself accounts for her mysterious character. Seeking Beauplaisir’s constancy, the Lady focuses solely on him. Although she acquires sexual autonomy, she neglects other facets of her life and her identity suffers.

The Lady increasingly loses control of her identity, turning into Beauplaisir’s object of desire. She no longer cares about her safety. Disguised as Celia, she confirms that “no others of the Male-Sex [are] in the House, than an old Gentleman” (52). Here, she takes caution, ensuring no other men will take advantage of her. Now, however, she acts recklessly. When she throws off her earlier disguises and plans her role as Incognita, she approaches strangers to act as servants, whom she judges based on their “Physiognomy” (61). No longer taking precaution, she seeks only to secure her next meeting with Beauplaisir. Furthermore, she no longer cares about being inconspicuous. She writes letters to Beauplaisir as Fantomina, the widow Bloomer, and Incognita. As material objects, the letters leave a literal paper trail. The Lady cares only about Beauplaisir

visiting these women again, so she may see him as much as possible; she seems no longer to care about her reputation. After performing as the elusive Incognita—as she contemplates Beauplaisir’s possible indifference—she soothes herself. Rather than feeling detached, as Craft-Fairchild suggests, the Lady wants to keep up her disguises: “she comforted herself with the Design of forming some other Stratagem, with which to impose on him a fourth Time” (61). Her disguises, or “Stratagem[s],” become more comfortable to her than her identity as the reputable Lady. Desiring to “form” another disguise, she avoids her real life and changes herself based on Beauplaisir’s preferences. These disguises enable her relationship with Beauplaisir, which he would not otherwise permit. If not for her mother’s arrival and the Lady’s pregnancy, she would have continued wearing disguises. Her attachment to concealment continues when she hides her pregnancy—risking both her baby’s and her own health, barely eating—until she goes into labor. The Lady thereby transforms from the subject back into the object.

Although the Lady’s performances weaken Beauplaisir’s role as subject and break down his masculinity, her fate remains uncertain. Early in the text, the Lady resolves that “[Beauplaisir] should not have it in his Power to touch her Character” (48). Instead, the Lady “touch[es]” his character. Until the Lady’s mother calls Beauplaisir to her daughter’s side—making the Lady disclose the child—he believes he has completed four conquests. He learns, however, that he has seduced only one woman. The ordeal minimizes his reputation as a womanizer, leaving him “surprized” (70). He becomes an outsider, the “other,” a role prescribed to ruined women, and the Lady has made “a heterosexual space . . . potentially uninhabitable for at least one man” (Ingrassia 16). Despite the Lady’s newfound dominance in the patriarchal world, she mourns the revelation of her disguises, crying out, “Oh, I am undone—I cannot live, and bear this shame!” (70). The meaning of “undone,” here, remains ambiguous: she may refer to her disassembled identity, as she has become dependent upon her disguises, or she may mourn that her disguises and stratagems are “undone.” The Lady makes this statement after Beauplaisir—unaware that he has fathered her child—enters the room and discovers her deception. Now that he knows about her disguises, she can no longer fool him with more designs. Whatever she means, the Lady does not know how to move forward. As reparation for the Lady’s actions, her mother sends her

to a monastery, which may offer her space for further transgression—a chance to keep up her masquerades. Haywood leaves the Lady's circumstances uncertain—much like her identity—suggesting that the Lady's masquerade of femininity is unfinished and will further unsettle her life.

Although a Lady of distinguished birth, Haywood's heroine disdains society's strict rules, so she breaks them. She pursues Beauplaisir, a libertine rake, at her own risk. Then, after he rapes her, she takes the initiative to save her reputation. Despite her loss of virtue, she continues her life as a reputable young woman and her life as the disguised *Fantomina*. Moreover, rather than accept Beauplaisir's waning affection, she rekindles it again and again, dressed in multiple disguises. She follows him and seduces him, satisfying both of their desires—without his knowledge. She disturbs the dichotomy between men and women, becoming the active subject, rather than the passive object. Every time the Lady assumes power and challenges patriarchal rule, however, she reverts to her feminine masquerade—a disguise more dangerous than her other pursuits. By performing for Beauplaisir and becoming his object of desire, she loses herself. She becomes increasingly careless, hiding her pregnancy, refraining from eating. At last, Beauplaisir discovers the Lady's designs, and she despairs. Although the Lady has a chance to create a new identity based on the agency she acquires, she discards the opportunity, unaffected by her success at disrupting patriarchal powers. Without her disguises and Beauplaisir to pursue, the Lady feels undone, and she is no one.

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BACKMATTER

Contributors

Aaron Akins is a junior at West Texas A&M University, and will graduate in fall 2019 with a BA in English. He currently works on campus as a writing tutor and writes short fiction in his spare time. After graduation, he plans eventually to pursue a PhD, focusing on early modern drama and poetry.

Brittany J. Barron is a third-year MFA candidate in Poetry at Georgia College and State University, where she serves as co-assistant poetry editor of the national literary journal *Arts & Letters*, and teaches freshman composition. Her poetry has appeared in *Still*, a literary journal dedicated to publishing Southern-Appalachian writers, and in Z Publishing's anthology, *Georgia's Best Emerging Poets*. Her academic research has been published by *Anastamos*, *The Edith Wharton Society*, and *Gender Forum*.

C. Bougie is an undergraduate English Major at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, with focuses in Creative Writing and LGBTQ+ Studies. They have previously published poems and short stories in *Bramble*, *The Vulture Bones*, *Polemical Zine*, and *Passionfruit*. Find more of their work at cpbwrites.wordpress.com.

Jessie Box graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Oregon in

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Maria Brizek is a senior at Centenary University in Hackettstown, NJ, majoring in English with a Concentration in Professional Writing and a Psychology Minor. Her previous publications include two stories in the university's student-run magazine, *The Quill*.

Grayson Chong is a senior at the University of Toronto Scarborough, where she majors in English with minors in French and Creative Writing. Her poetry and short stories have been published in *The Scarborough Fair*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, and the *Poetry Institute of Canada* anthologies, among other venues. She plans to pursue a PhD and teach anything that allows her to incorporate Shakespeare and postcolonial theory.

McKayla Conahan is a queer nonbinary writer and astronomer from South Carolina. They have won the South Carolina Academy of Authors Student Poetry Prize, the Susan Laughter Meyers Scholarship, and the Sweet Inaugural Poetry Competition. They're published in *Fall Lines*, *Miscellany*, *Sink Hollow*, *Rabbit*, and elsewhere. They lived in Wyoming last summer, giving tours to the night sky, and began attending Virginia Commonwealth University for an MFA in Poetry in the fall.

Rachael Crosbie is a senior at Waynesburg University, where she is studying English Literature and Theatre. She is Co-President of her university's Sigma Tau Delta chapter, vice president of Alpha Psi Omega's Theta Theta cast, executive editor of *Muse & Stone*, and editor-in-chief of *the winnow*. Her writings have been published in *Chiliad Magazine*, *Mad Swirl*, *Persephone's Daughters*, and other venues.

Via D'Agostino is in her senior year at Ohio Northern University, where she majors in Creative Writing and Spanish with minors in Psychology and Literature. After college, she plans to pursue a PhD in Creative Writing.

Drake DeOrnellis is a junior English Major and Spanish Minor in the Honors Program at Liberty University. She serves as President of the Zeta

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David M. Doyle is a water-seeking nomad, having lived in Michigan cities such as Petoskey, Lake Ann, and Linden. He recently graduated with a BS in Medicinal Biology from Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, FL. He is an active hiker, searcher, and researcher, with a focus on biochemistry and chemical interactions.

Brittany Gardner is a senior at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams, MA, majoring in English Literature and Secondary Education. She has received recognition for excellence in literary analysis and critical writing, and is also a member of the National Honor Society, Alpha Chi. She is Secretary of the Alpha Phi Omega Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. Brittany focuses her research on the works of Thomas Hardy, exploring his influences on Victorian and modernist writing. In addition to literature, Brittany is also passionate about vocal performance, and has been a member of Ubi Caritas—a select choral group of the Berkshires—since its founding in 2012. She looks forward to pursuing a graduate degree in English Literature.

M. Elizabeth Geddy graduated from Georgia Southern University in May 2018 with a degree in English and French. She is currently pursuing an MA in English.

Robin Gow has had poetry recently published in *POETRY*, *Furrow*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, and *Corbel Stone Press*. Robin is an undergraduate student at Ursinus College, studying English, Creative Writing, and Spanish. He runs two poetry blogs and serves as production editor for *The Lantern* literary magazine. He is an out and proud transgender man passionate about LGBT issues.

Keturah Hancock studied Creative Writing at SUNY Oswego, graduating in May 2018. She recently published a flash fiction piece in the *Great Lake Review*. Keturah is also known for performing spoken word poetry at events for campus organizations such as Ozspeaks, Gospel Choir, Brothers and

Sisters in Christ, and Black Student Union. She plans to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing in fall 2019.

Rachel Holbrook writes from her home in Knoxville, TN. Her short fiction and poetry have appeared in *Burningword Literary Journal*, **82 Review*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Akitsu Quarterly*, *The Avalon Literary Review*, *The Society of Classical Poets*, and various other literary journals. She received an honorable mention for her short story "A Slow Burn" at the 2018 Sigma Tau Delta Convention. She also received the 2018 Springs of Helicon Award for Poetry, awarded by Tennessee Wesleyan University, where she is pursuing a BFA in Creative Writing. Rachel is also the founder and editor-in-chief of *the Same*, a literary journal with the mission of advancing and celebrating the voices of women and girls.

Louise Hoy is a senior at Prescott College. She recently transferred from Marylhurst University, where she was published in *M Review*. Her studies in English Literature and Writing reflect her lifelong interest in words as maps exploring the experience of body, mind, and spirit.

Anna Jankovsky is a senior at Miami University, studying English Literature and Film Studies with a Spanish Minor. She has served as Treasurer and Historian/Alumni Liaison for the Phi Nu Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. Anna is currently completing her honors thesis project, combining her love of literature and film. After graduation, she hopes to continue her research in pursuit of an MA in Literature.

Gregory Kassen graduated from McKendree University in May 2018 with a BA in English Literature/Writing and a Creative Writing Minor. He has held office in the University's Literary Interest Society, and his university's Sigma Tau Delta chapter, and he was co-editor for the 2018 edition of McKendree's literary magazine, *Montage*.

Karyn Keane is a junior in the Cormier Honors College at Longwood University. She is an English Major with a Concentration in Rhetoric and Professional Writing and a Children's Literature Minor. In addition to publishing several articles in undergraduate journals, she is also a reader for *The Omnimedia Review* and regularly contributes to the *Farmville-Downtown*

Partnership. After graduating from Longwood, she hopes to pursue a PhD in Composition and Rhetoric.

Ali Landers is a junior English Major and Technical Theatre Minor at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. She is her Sigma Tau Delta chapter's Vice President. After graduation, she hopes to pursue a Library Science degree and to use her writing and book obsessions to help people of all ages.

Grace Larson is a junior at Ripon College in Ripon, WI. She is working toward a degree in English and Psychology. Her work has been previously published in Ripon's literary magazine *Parallax* as well as *Wisconsin's Best Emerging Poets: An Anthology*. After Ripon, she plans to obtain her Master's in Clinical Psychology, but she hopes to incorporate writing—especially poetry—into her work as a psychologist.

Nick Malone is a junior studying Creative Writing and Filmmaking at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In addition to his confessional personal essay column for UIC, *Blahsmopolitan*, his work on sex, mental health, and LGBT politics has been featured in *Hello Mr. Magazine*, *TeenInk*, and more. He's currently working on his first short film and undergraduate thesis project, *Mad Dogs*. He resides in Logan Square, where he lives with the consequences of the choices he made in high school and his CD copy of *Spice World*.

Claudia McCarron is a senior at Shepherd University, pursuing a BA in English Literature with a Modern Languages Minor. She is Vice President of the Alpha Gamma Kappa Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, and a senior editor of *Sans Merci*, the university's journal of literature and art. She has presented papers at regional and national conferences, and has had two papers published in *Sparks*, Shepherd's undergraduate research journal. After graduation, she hopes to continue studying literature and language in a master's or doctoral program.

DeAndrea Miller is a senior at Minot State University, where she majors in English Literature with concentrations in Gender Studies, Instructional Science, and Spanish. She is editor of her school's newspaper the *Red &*

Green, President of her school's Sigma Tau Delta chapter, and a senator on her school's Student Government Association. She is a wife and mom of three busy boys. She endeavors to attain an MFA after graduation.

Kylie Mullen is graduating this spring from the University of Wisconsin La Crosse with a BA in Rhetoric and Writing and a Creative Writing Minor. One-time fiction editor of UWL's *Steam Ticket* journal, she adores both the evaluation and creation of literary works. Odd and Lita hold a cherished place in her heart-of-hearts, and she continues to pursue the publication of both short stories and long-form works.

Benjamin Kim Paplham was born in Busan, South Korea and adopted into a family of literature nerds and creative artists. Ben attended St. Norbert College in his hometown of De Pere, WI, graduating in 2018 with a degree in Creative Writing and Theatre Studies. He loves to write and perform in plays, and plans eventually to study playwriting in graduate school.

Rebecca Pickard is a junior English Major at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA. Her poetry has been featured in *LAMP*, Liberty's literary journal, and onstage at the Listening and at Lynchstock Music Festival. She is a student editor for *LAMP* and serves as Vice President of her Sigma Tau Delta chapter. She was also a lead writer of *Bloodroot: The Ballad of Clinch Mountain*, an all-woman play based on historic women of Appalachia.

Maevae Quinn is a Creative Writing and Spanish Major at Denison University in Granville, OH. She grew up in Chicago. Over the past two years, she has been published in several of her university's journals, as well as in the anthology *Ohio's Best Emerging Poets*.

Teresa Ramoni is a junior English Major and Music Minor at Manhattan College in the Bronx, NY, where she is a member of the Beta Pi Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. She has had her work published in Manhattan College's academic journal, *Logos*, and was a recipient of a Branigan Scholars Research Grant in summer 2018.

Melanie Jade Raybon recently graduated from Florida State University

with a BA in Editing, Writing, and Media. She loves Chuck Palahniuk, cuddling with her cat Fitz, and singing Stevie Nicks songs. She plans to work for a publishing house someday.

Kyle Riper is a scholar and writer with a vested interest in historical texts and early literature. Specifically, he examines the literary applications and social implications of adapting these texts to contemporary settings. He currently studies early modern English drama, and is also interested in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Kyle is working on a capstone project tracking the editing of grief from the first printings of Shakespeare's *Pericles* and Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* to more contemporary iterations, finding the intersection between affect theory and editorial emendation. He will complete his BA in English Literature with a Creative Writing Minor from Pacific University (OR) in 2019.

Rita Michelle Rivera graduated from Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBA) with a BS in Psychology and a BA in English. At PBA, Rita was the Alpha Zeta Mu Chapter's President. Rita was the recipient of the 2017–2018 Sigma Tau Delta Student Leadership Award. Her favorite author is Federico García Lorca, and her favorite stories fall into the genre of psychological realism, because it combines her two passions: English and psychology. Rita is originally from Honduras, but currently resides in Miami, where she is pursuing a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology.

Rebecca Santiago received her BA in English with honors from William Jewell College in May 2018. She resides in Liberty, MO, with her husband and son, where she plans to pursue her MA from University of Missouri Kansas City. Rebecca has been published previously in her college journal, *Inscape*. She will be featured in Arts Collide, an event sponsored by her alma mater and the Liberty Arts Commission.

Cassandra Santos is currently pursuing her MA in English at the University of Guam, where she received her BA in English for Education in 2018. She intends to pursue a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition in order to fulfill her long-term goal of teaching college composition. Cassandra is also an illustration enthusiast and integrates her digital art with her studies in the language arts whenever possible.

Abigail Scott is a recent English Literature graduate from Gordon College, where she served as President of Gordon's Sigma Tau Delta chapter. She attended the 2018 Sigma Tau Delta Convention and received an Isabel Sparks President's Award for her essay "Narrative Distance in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." Abigail is currently in the throes of graduate school applications and plans to pursue a PhD in Literary Studies in the coming years.

Tori Shelton is a junior at Idaho State University, pursuing a degree in Creative Writing with a Computer Science Minor. She loves iced chai lattes and aspires to write stories for video games. Whatever she ends up doing, she hopes she can continue writing.

Jeddie Sophronius was born in Jakarta, Indonesia. He is a senior at Western Michigan University, majoring in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Juked*, *Vinyl*, *Relief*, and elsewhere.

Meredith Stambaugh is a senior at Florida Southern College. She is pursuing a BA in English Literature and plans to continue her education in graduate school, eventually earning a PhD focusing on romantic and Victorian studies. She is the Event Chair of the Psi Epsilon Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. Meredith also works as a writing tutor at the Florida Southern College Writing Center and as a mentor to the English Literature Learning Community.

Lynn Tamayo is a writer living in the Los Angeles area. She is studying English/Creative Writing and Narrative Structure at the University of Southern California. Her work has been published in *Semantics Arts and Literature Magazine* and *The Underground* literary magazine. Lynn's creative work grows from a desire to encourage the elimination of stereotypes and labeling by presenting an intimate look at the individual.

Kara Travis received her BA from Ursinus College in May 2018. Kara was Vice President of Ursinus's Sigma Tau Delta chapter, and she wrote and copy-edited for their literary magazine, *The Lantern*. She currently teaches 7th-grade English Language Arts in Pennsylvania.

Milena Velez writes poetry and creative non-fiction that focuses on her experiences as a bilingual mother of a multicultural daughter, a higher education professional, a runner, and an immigrant. She is a graduate of Oberlin College's Creative Writing Program, and is currently working on a MA in Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Findlay. She's also the poetry editor of *Slippery Elm Literary Journal*.

Ashley Walker is a junior English Literature and Classics double major at Lee University, where she is an officer in her Sigma Tau Delta chapter. Last year, her essay, "The Most Enlightened of All Possible Worlds: Reconciling Reason and Emotion in *Candide*," appeared in *The Sigma Tau Delta Review*. After graduating, she intends to pursue a PhD in Literature, focusing on modernist literature, with an interest in classical reception studies.

Solana Warner is a recent graduate of Ursinus College with a BA in English. Her poetry has appeared in collections such as *Pennsylvania's Best Emerging Poets*, *Glass Mountain*, and *The Lantern*. She loves science fiction and aspires to work in editing and publishing in the future.

Jeanette Marie Warren is currently pursuing a BA in Creative Writing and Vocal Performance at St. Mary's College of Maryland. Her poetry, artwork, and essays have been featured in numerous local and collegiate literary journals, including the St. Mary's College *Avatar* and the College of Southern Maryland's *Connections* magazine. She plans to pursue an MFA in Non-Fiction and a career in vocal performance—she hasn't decided which to do first. When she's not experimenting with essayistic forms, Jeanette enjoys tinkering with watercolors, minor chords, and Liza Minnelli songs.

Mary Welch is a senior at Lipscomb University in Nashville, TN, where she is pursuing an English Writing Major with an Education Minor. She works as a writing consultant and assistant student administrator at her university's writing studio. Last spring, she presented "Oral Tradition and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" at the Pop Culture Association's National Conference.

Scott Ziegler is a senior English Major, with minors in Creative Writing and Theatre, at the University of Oregon. He has completed the Kidd

Workshops, Oregon's year-long writing program for undergraduates, and is conducting archival research on Ken Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion* for the McNair Scholars Program. He also serves as Program Support for the Alpha Tau Phi Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. He plans to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing and a PhD in English. He's previously been published online and in the student literary journal, *Denali*.

Judges

Judges for Writing Awards

Jennifer L. Lieberman is the author of *Power Lines: Electricity in American Life and Letters, 1882–1952*, which was published by the MIT Press in 2017. Her other research can be found in such venues as *Studies in the Novel*, *Configurations*, *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature in the U.S.*, and *History and Technology*. She is an associate professor of English at the University of North Florida, where she specializes in the intersections of literary and technological history.

Kevin Stemmler's fiction, poetry, and essays have appeared in *Writing: The Translation of Memory*, *Paper Street*, *Heart: Human Equity Through Art*, *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, and *Pittsburgh Quarterly*. He was a recipient of the 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Grant. He is a professor emeritus from Clarion University, where he taught literature and writing.

Jurors

Rebecca Bechtold is an assistant professor of English at Wichita State University, where she serves as the department's graduate coordinator and

Sigma Tau Delta Chapter Sponsor. Her research focuses on the role of sound and music in early American literary culture.

Michael Behrens is an assistant professor of English at Emporia State University, where he teaches courses in British literature and literary studies. His research focuses on early modern women and religion.

Kevin Brown is a professor at Lee University. He has published three books of poetry—*Liturgical Calendar: Poems* (Wipf and Stock, 2014); *A Lexicon of Lost Words* (winner of the 2013 Violet Reed Haas Prize for Poetry, Snake Nation Press); and *Exit Lines* (Plain View Press, 2009)—and two chapbooks: *Abecedarium* (Finishing Line Press, 2011) and *Holy Days: Poems* (winner of Split Oak Press Chapbook Contest, 2011). He also has a memoir, *Another Way: Finding Faith, Then Finding It Again* (Wipf and Stock, 2012), and a book of scholarship, *They Love to Tell the Stories: Five Contemporary Novelists Take on the Gospels* (Kennesaw State UP, 2012). He received his MFA from Murray State University.

Shannin Schroeder is a professor of English at Southern Arkansas University, where she teaches world literature, composition, and creative writing, and directs the Writing Center. Her publications include the monograph *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* and a solicited chapter on the development of Magical Realism in North America (forthcoming in a Cambridge UP series). She has presented on flag culture, superheroes, dystopias, graphic novels, and writing center theory. Her most recent creative writing delves into the young adult novel.

About Sigma Tau Delta

Since its inception in 1924, Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society has modeled its mission to confer distinction for high achievement, promote interest in English language and literature, foster exemplary character and fellowship, and exhibit high standards of academic excellence.

In 1972, Sigma Tau Delta was accepted as a member of the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS). Currently the Society has grown to include over 920 chapters with more than 1,000 Faculty Advisors; approximately 8,500 members are inducted annually.

Sigma Tau Delta has continued to flourish and expand, branching out in 1996 to found Sigma Kappa Delta for the growing two-year college system, and in 2004 it established the National English Honor Society for high school students and faculty. It is now the second largest honor society in the ACHS.

Through hard and dedicated work, Sigma Tau Delta has built upon the strong foundation of its founder Judson Q. Owen, whose initial foresight shaped the Society; two subsequent executive secretaries/directors—E. Nelson James and William C. Johnson—added their own visions to the Society, and many other individuals further shaped the vital, growing organization we are today.

Sigma Tau Delta's Journals

The Sigma Tau Delta journals publish annually the best writing and criticism of undergraduate and graduate active chapter members of the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society.

The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle was founded in 1931 as a quarterly publication highlighting the best creative writing of the Society's members. At the fall 1998 meeting of the Board of Directors, *The Rectangle* went to a once-a-year publication schedule, providing a more professional look and permitting the inclusion of more student writing in each issue.

The Sigma Tau Delta Review was added as a societal journal in 2007 and publishes critical essays on literature, essays on rhetoric and composition, and essays devoted to pedagogical issues.

Annual Submissions

The best writing is chosen for publication from hundreds of submissions. Not only do these refereed journals go to chapters worldwide, but they also honor the best writing in each category, with five awards totaling \$2,500. As of 2016, the Sigma Tau Delta journals are catalogued with the Library of Congress. There is also an annual reading at the international convention by any of the published writers in attendance.

All active undergraduate and graduate members of active Sigma Tau Delta chapters are invited to submit their work to *The Sigma Tau Delta Review* and *The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle*. Chapter Advisors, faculty members, alumni (including members of the Alumni Epsilon Chapter), and honorary members are not eligible to submit.

Submissions for the 2020 journals are due between April 8 and May 13, 2019.