

An abstract painting with a dark, moody palette. A central vertical element, possibly a tree trunk or a branch, is rendered in warm, reddish-brown tones. To the left, there are swirling, textured forms in shades of brown, orange, and blue. To the right, a pale, yellowish-green shape, resembling a bird's head or a face, is visible against the dark background. The overall composition is layered and textured, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of depth.

The Falconer

on love

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From the Editors

Duaa Azim, M.A. Final, Morning

When I think of the all-consuming force of nature that is Love, in all its glorious shapes and forms, my mind wanders not to a person, or even a particularly cherished object for that matter; but to the countless microscopic details that join hands to piece together an average day in my life, beautifully simple and profoundly mundane in the grand scheme of things as we, the disciples of the English Department, really come to accept rather early on in the course of pursuing perhaps the most sought-after document of our lives.

My mind wanders, and I picture a walk from the department to the parking lot; I yearn for the quiet moments of a drive through the university shrubbery to get back home; I can almost feel the tantalising bits of hand-cooked gravy on my lips; and I envision myself cocooned by a quiet spot indulging in the read-of-the-week.

These days, with the hustle and bustle that is part and parcel of bringing a magazine issue to life, I have been thinking harder than ever. The pictures come and go as they please, and I wonder just when the act of losing myself in stanza breaks and line alignment, font size and paragraph structure became, for me, synonymous with Love.

Perhaps, that is the art of creation in its simultaneously most subdued and pronounced form. You come to appreciate it in a way you would a speck of a flower sprouting alongside an equally tiny strawberry from the plant you sowed rather inexpertly one morning — yet not without all the dedication in the world to show for it — into a red pot handpicked, then taken for polish. To you, it would taste the sweetest fruit in the world.

“Though she be but little, she is fierce!” You’d likely say of the strawberry born naturally adorned with a little white flower cap — and I would like to declare the same of The Falconer; as our proudly dedicated and beyond excited team brings your way the magazine’s ninth issue, a deeply-personal take ‘On Love’ and what, when our readers’ minds wander, they come to make of the four letter word dividing humanity since the dawn of Creation.

As you delve deep into the uniquely universal experience of the nuances and intricacies of all that the phenomenon encapsulates, know that we shall continue to revel in the plethora of diverse takes sent our way; each testimony to the fact

that at the very core of our existence, there it stands, for all our laments and ravings, indescribable to the last — Love.

Nimra Saeed, M.A. Final, Evening

As Tolstoy echoes through the words of Anna Karenina's titular heroine: "I think... if there are as many minds as there are men, then there are as many kinds of love as there are hearts." Staying true to this quote, we found ourselves with much to say for this issue. There were some poems that described the beauty of being known and seen, and others that described love as a soul-crushing force that left them trembling. The planning sessions for this issue gave birth to many insightful discussions and memorable meetings between the team.

The discussions that culminated in the form of this issue that features multiple perspectives and dimensions of love — with *Love is Between Two and Friendship is Between Three* exploring the difference and the sameness between Love and Friendship, *Why I Write (of love)* probing the absurdity of the act of writing, and loving, combining the two to write about love, each attempt ending up in frustration with language for never quite saying *it*, and *On the Sexual, the Erotic, and (Jude) the Obscure in Thomas Hardy* palpating the role of desire in love through the reading of Hardy's novel. We have a short story titled *Waves* which expands on life after love, and the subsequent loss of love, a meditation on grief and its effects.

We started looking for the cover art in the last few days, by the time the issue had already taken the shape that you hold it in, and we had a very clear image of what it would be, albeit, in mind. Looking through the potential covers, it was Edward Munch's *Eye in Eye* that arrested my attention. It presented itself as the closest realisation of the vision we had. The mouth-less people in the painting stand in front of each other, exchanging a look. Is it a look of horror? Is it a look of understanding, acknowledgment? The real answer evades me. But it was precisely this look that I wanted to be at the forefront of our issue. This wordless, incomplete communication of the two, to us, represents the impossibility of the two ever becoming one, of ever crossing the distance that there is between them, but the interpretation is open to debate. Which is precisely what we aim to do with this issue. Surely there is a lot we have said, but the purpose of *The Falconer* is as always, to create an itch within the reader's mind, prompt them to think, and open the debate, which is what we hope we have done.

From the Sub-editors

Ayza Malik, Third Year, Evening

What is Love? To me, it is the confrontation of the discomfort of ambiguity and the absurdity of human emotions. Love has been idealised, romanticised and celebrated in the history of Literature. This vision has also been challenged and subverted by canonical authors like Dostoevsky and Jean Paul Sartre. They portrayed a less favourable image of what Love can be and the apocalyptical power it holds.

The question still remains relevant, unanswered and contradictory. Is love a benevolent force? Is it malevolent? It is something we all have in common, but the nature of Love within us is fleeting in our everyday lives. The essence of Love is innate, primal and untamed.

We explore all the unnamed facets of Love as we navigate the labyrinthian paths of Love through the pages of *The Falconer*. Let us try and understand the complexities of Love or perhaps question the notion that if Love is everything felt and undefinable, then the incompleteness of love — whatever it may be — is what unites us.

Maham Owais, Third Year, Morning

To me, Love has, on every occasion — and I find entirely incidentally as well — managed to breathlessly transcend its given definition. How can decades of literature, encapsulated in countless languages, dead or alive, be contained in a word so anticlimactically monosyllabic?

How can Love be a mother's tongue, striking the room and catching you in the crossfire, and a beloved's doting caress at the same time? How can it be the same phenomenon that landed Anarkali in her claustrophobic purgatory and simultaneously the reason such revenant cathedrals are built? Elusive in its evocation, and almost entirely too inclusive in its denotation, Love seems to me a most baffling topic of discourse.

In this issue, Team Falconer and our extremely talented contributors dissect the emotion — if it can even be deemed as such without appropriation; the word itself, the act, its evocation, and all the circumstantial connotations that encase it.

With every entry we received, we found ourselves questioning just how many written forms Love could take in a representative sample so minuscule before it became too tiresome or too repetitive to read about. Turns out, that wasn't a concern we should have entertained at all, given how almost every submission we received detailed an account of Love that managed to strike into our hearts an urgency to see it published.

On the Sexual, the Erotic, and (Jude) the Obscure in Thomas Hardy

Moaz Ahmed Khan

One of the most pervasive themes of the Victorian novel is the scathing indictment of the institutions among which it emerged. From the Brontes to Dickens, there is a role that the particular structures of their time play in the formation of disunity – a restriction which must be bypassed. It is precisely this limit that many of these novelists sought to critique, albeit scarcely, for the Victorian novel has never been hailed as being adequately political.

This critical tendency of the Victorian writers has been highlighted by many critics, from Arnold Kettle to Lisa Rodensky, and even novelists like Charlotte Bronte and Charles Dickens. Yet these novelists seldom go the whole way, since the ultimate force of movement in most of the novels from this time is the force of love and unity that ultimately breaks the limits set by the system. From Dickens' Daniel Deronda, where the revelation of the titular character's ethnicity is the bypass event that bares the system's hollow 'NO!'; to Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, wherein "an invisible string" brings everything together. Love is the end of the novel, love *beyond* the limit. And this is perhaps what makes the Victorian novel so endearing – the struggles, the failures, and the many modes of abjection are taken to their absolute limit before they are resolved, and sometimes, even triumphed over. It is not a family here or a law there that limits the union of the two – it is an impossibility that is made a possibility because of the mutual quest for the two. It was never *always-already happening*. It is an indiscernible break in the normal movement of things, an event. One struggles to find this event in Thomas Hardy. Perhaps it can be said that there are quite a few of these events in his works, but never the Event of Love.

The urgent theme of his works, argues J. Hillis Miller, is not love and union, but the role of desire in this dance of the two. Desire not for the possibility beyond the impossibility, but desire for desire itself.

This is best expressed by Hardy in his final novel (and my favourite), Jude the Obscure. The novel starts with Jude Fawley as an "orphan" who lives with an aunt in the rustic countryside that seems increasingly suffocating to him. He dreams of getting out of there and becoming part of something less mundane –

the daily hatchings and fetchings. Aspiring to follow in the footsteps of his former school teacher, Richard Phillotson, he decides to move to Christminster – the hub for scholarly activity and “general progress of his generation.” But before he can do that, he finds himself caught up in a confusing affair with a “morally lax” Arabella Don, who, as Jude recalls, seduces him with the spirit of her sexuality. After spending months married to Arabella, Jude threatens to leave her before she lies to him about being pregnant with Jude’s child. Fraught with the dynamic that the two shared, Arabella runs away to live with her family in Australia. Finally free to follow his dream again, Jude moves to Christminster, yet not divorced. There, he meets his enigmatic cousin, Sue Bridehead, whose untraditional and free-spirited outlook on life enthralls Jude. He falls in love but is also aware that the two cannot be together officially since he is still married by law. Jude introduces Sue to his mentor, Mr. Phillotson, who hires Sue to work with her. He, too, falls in love and decides to ask Sue to marry him. In the meanwhile, Jude has still not found employment or admission into a university. He leaves town as Sue, who is disillusioned by Jude’s revelation of being married to Arabella, ties the knot with Phillotson. From thereon, the narrative spirals between Jude and Sue as the two try to find the right place and time – a complete union of the two.

When Jude and Sue meet after their aunt’s death in Marygreen, Sue confesses to Jude that she is miserable in her marriage with Phillotson. The two share a kiss before Sue leaves, which prompts Jude to burn his theology books and give up his scholarly aspirations. In the meanwhile, Sue tells Phillotson that she can no longer be with him, who reluctantly gives up his pursuit of Sue. Phillotson eventually divorces Sue and Jude divorces Arabella, and the two find their way to each other. But they quickly find that it is not *it*. So even when the two start living together, Sue does not allow Jude to consummate their relationship. That changes when Arabella returns and “threatens the hold [Sue has over Jude]”. Dejected to see the two in love - love that she craved – Arabella goes away to Australia to marry again, but not before she sends her secret son with Jude – Little Father Time, whom she had hid from Jude all these years – to live with him. Jude and Sue conceive two more children, and the family ultimately moves back to Christminster as Jude’s health starts deteriorating.

One night, after overhearing the conversation between Jude and Sue about their economic standing which does not allow them to have such a large family, Little Father Time takes matters into his own hands. The next morning, we find out that

he has killed both his half-siblings and then committed suicide himself, leaving behind just a sentence – 'Done because we are too menny'.

At this point, Jude loses all remnants of faith in a higher deity, while Sue becomes increasingly more religious. When finally Phillotson writes to Sue urging her to come back to him, she believes it to be her penance and returns, leaving Jude with whom she now finds herself incompatible. With Sue remarried, Jude also remarries Arabella who has once again returned after her husband's death. As Jude's health declines fatally, he visits Sue once again, who has by now become a mere shell of herself, mutilating herself for the choices she made. They confess their love for each other, which Sue sees as a sin that she is too used to committing. She then decides to finally give herself to Phillotson as her last shot at repentance for denying her husband his right. Soon after Jude finds out about this, he passes away – miserable, penniless, and also a shell of himself.

Throughout the novel, both Jude and Sue look for moments when their unequal lives would overlap. Their faith is in the power of love, even in a society like theirs, which would eventually deliver them. They keep moving from town to town even as poverty becomes part and parcel of their existence. They are in the pursuit of actualizing the event of love. But in doing so, the event emerges as that which is *not* love – the event of their aunt's death, when the two meet again; the event of Arabella's many explosive returns; the event of their children's death; and the event of Jude's death itself – it is the opposite of it.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Hardy seems to have an understanding that it isn't the society and its limits that keep love outside, but rather the way love is conceived of as outside-the-discourse that leads the protagonists to mutilate themselves beyond recognition. It is not that love has been made impossible, but that love itself finds a place within the structure as an impossibility. This is not the order of the Victorian society or the economic setting at large, but the structure that gives way to these structures and systems themselves.

For Jude, who comes from a boring town like Marygreen, the honour of love necessarily exists outside of the mundane – the state of being in which one is distanced from the real object of desire. For him, love is not sexual which is corporeal and disgusting. Sex could never be the Ideal of love. It must be more

than that. The act of sex is in the domain of biology and instinct, two things that are uncouth and undisciplined. His desire is for something grand, which is why he first leaves Margreen for Christminster. When he gets to Christminster, he realises that the town is in ruins and cannot represent the higher ground of religion. When the ideal of love for the church is undermined by the same smallness of scope which he worked so hard to leave behind, he shifts his gaze toward the unearthly, untraditional, and singular-minded Sue. She becomes the ultimate object of desire for Jude. Yet, already one can tell that his object of desire is not Sue, but rather what she comes to represent at that particular moment. She is of a higher order than Arabella, who represents sexuality and the everydayness of living which cannot be all there is to life. But the moment he meets Sue, his desire automatically becomes the opposite: he wants to *have* her. He dreams of marrying her, because marriage with her would be wholly different from his marriage to Arabella.

Jude comes to first admire Sue for not being interested in things of the ordinary order, so it becomes increasingly clear that she is not interested in fulfilling Jude's desire. Sue is unconventional because she finds the bodily matters of sex equally grotesque. For her, too, love is a structured, disciplined realm that nonetheless is not found in the institutions of marriage and religion. For her, if there is something that exists outside of what is, it is love. So hers is the spirit of that *which is not*. Martin Wilson has argued that in this sense, Sue is the ultimate victim of the novel, for her contradictions cannot be brought into the hold of language that always inflicts the body that it tries to give meaning to. She is an ontological other to the novel. But if her idea of love is not in marriage, it is not in any particular person. When Jude confesses his love for her, for him, that is the end of his goal; there is one way she can be his. For Sue, the same is true, but again, on wholly different terms.

Returning this love is impossible for Sue because it is the opposite of what she desires, which is freedom from the structures that shackle her. She wants to be seen beyond all the worldly desires, of which the sexual desire is one. She resists his advances but does not ever fully repudiate him because she hopes for the beyond, herself. So when Jude confesses that he is already married, that illusion shatters. He does not understand her, and has instead betrayed what she believed they shared together. Sue marries Phillotson out of spite who has unequivocally hurt her first – this is the first of her many contradictions that

confound the reader. To her, her marriage to Mr. Phillotson is not a “real” marriage. The moment she enters this contract, she wants out because she has not yet given up on the ideal. It was in fact the force of her faithfulness to her belief that she marries. As such, Phillotson comes to occupy the same place as Arabella – that intrinsic part of the mundane that is sexual and uncouth. In Jude, she still upholds the ideal of love.

Already, it becomes clear that while Arabella and Phillotson are assigned their permanent places in the organ of the ordinary, what Jude and Sue represent for each other is beyond. This is a way of investing one’s desire in the field of meaning. But what the two fail to see is that in assigning positions to the others in their lives based on how each of the two come to see one another – as the object of their desire – they are already all within the realm of meaning. This is the sexual and the erotic in the novel. That which is unsatisfying because it is corporeal – the sexual; and that which, even in the act of sex and body, is of a higher order – the erotic. As such, love becomes the ideal, the erotic, the ultimate object of their desires.

But if what Miller says is right – that the novel’s urgent theme is desire itself – that what precedes the inscription of the two as each other’s objects of desire – then desire will betray each of them. And that is what happens, keeps on happening. The desire, for them as well as the reader, is to see the union between the two – the ultimate event of Love. Yet this desire pre-exists their individual encounters and subsequent inscription of meaning for them. It is the insistence on the erotic through which another event emerges, keeps on emerging – the event of the Real – that which is truly obscure in their individual pursuits.

This seldom becomes apparent to the reader that the ideal of love that the two desired was never a possibility, for the ideal of love was never a shared ideal of love, though it seemed that way. Both Sue and Jude had desires that were incompatible from the beginning. Neither was Sue ever going to be the object that would realise Jude’s desire for something full and permanent; nor was Jude ever the out-of-the-ordinary companion that Sue wanted to achieve beyond the shackles of institutions. Sue-for-Jude and Jude-for-Sue are two readings, two texts fundamentally opposed to each other, whose union could only come about if one were to let go of the erotic.

But the obscure, the real is the event that emerges at the precise point that the ideals converge. When the two find themselves intertwined, they are each on their own. The event is that which is not quite the ideal that they had hoped for, so they keep moving towards something other than it. One can find reasons for this disunity in the reappearances of Arabella, the financial struggle, and the death of their children. But these reasons have also within the novel been continuously surpassed. It is not that these problems that negate their final communion are ever-present, but that they emerge as reasons. It is the mundane, the dissatisfaction, the not-so-ideal that insists in the face of a fantasy. A fantasy that becomes their ultimate shared goal.

Towards the end of the novel, we see Sue Bridehead as a bride, a wife, and a woman – things she desired to not be. She now desires, still contradictory to what she really desires, more institutionalisation because that was her first mistake – to defy god. And when the institution of marriage is not enough to quell her desire for that which is not it (the marriage), she flagellates herself for still wanting Jude. At the same time, we find Jude looking back at Marygreen “as the book of humanity infinitely more palpable than grown life.” At the end of a life lived in antagonism with the town, the town itself becomes the ultimate lost object.

One must ask: what becomes of love when it is realised time and time again (when Sue leaves Phillotson for Jude; when they move from an old town to the new; when the two confess their love for each other one last time) and is still not quite the thing that was desired? Hardy’s insight is strongest in the face of this – love is a fantasy that is by structure an impossibility. It is the illusion of unity that does not exist since the real goal is not one another, but that which we desire. And what we desire, that which is seemingly out-of-the-system is also very much within the system, for it is the distance between self and self. So love is always selfish. It is to fill the gap with a person, who is not quite it once we have come to have them.

Love oscillates between not this and not this, and that is the final goal of desire. For Hardy, love is not what one’s desire *desires*, but desire itself. And for desire to remain desiring, it must keep going on, even beyond the event of love. Hardy-the-author does not speak in the novel to supplement the text with a

bypass. He exists to remind the reader that he writes from a place of love. Love that exists not between unity but disunity.

Why I write (of love)

Nimra Saeed, M.A. Final, Evening

“Why do I turn once again to writing? Beloved, you must not ask such a question, for the truth is, I have nothing to tell you, all the same, your dear hands will hold this note.”

-Goethe

When asked of love, I had nothing to say. I could try and read a poem and say, “this is what love *feels* like” but what was it? I could say nothing at all. I had to admit that although words had been exhausted trying to explain and explicate Love, it hadn’t been explained at all. Poets write about the smile of the beloved, or that particular glance or a touch, but is any of that writing capable of encapsulating that one moment, that one glance, the touch? the untraceable?

The discourse of love, Barthes writes, is a site of discourse within the lover, addressing the Other who does not speak. Loving is a solitary experience, although it is a relation between two, the lover is unable to communicate fully to the Other just how he feels because the language he speaks is itself incapable of conveying total meaning. Something always seems to be left out. The absence of the Other forces me to speak, an always present I addressing an always absent Other. A cry of a child for recognition, a demand to be loved by the absent m(Other). There seems to be something in me that needs to be expressed, to be let out, yet all the words I have seem inadequate to do so.

The Other needs to be absent in order for the lover to speak of him, to address him, yet addressing him is also an acknowledgement of that absence, so to speak. The lover finds himself at a solitary place in language, he is at a loss for words, and yet he must talk about it, write about it, because how else could he lament his state if not in words? There arises also the question of whether the lover really laments his state or desires this lamenting? While writing to the beloved, calling out to him, does he really expect an answer? His is a contradictory position, writing about the Other’s absence while also desiring this absence in order to write about it. He addresses a non-place in language, an absent Other. The identity of a lover annihilates all my former identities, negates my selfhood. Language, as I had known it, appears to be altered. My desire, something I have always had, finds an image to be projected on and takes the shape of this image even in my retroactive memory.

I feel an intensity within me that frightens me. In order to not smother the Other with this intensity, I write. Kafka's letters to Milena are an exemplary explanation of it in literature. Language as a mediator allows the lover to express (and paradoxically conceal) how much he loves, and thus creates a distance that sustains desire on both ends. Love is mute, Novalis says; only poetry makes it speak. Silent though it might be, it demands to be written everywhere. I must write and must acknowledge the fact that I am not able to express what it is that I feel for you in words. I must write even if it gets redundant, I must continue to write, although I remain dissatisfied with whatever I produce because it would never come close to describing how I really feel for you. You leave multiple traces in the text I produce, but it's not you. You cannot be reduced to a poem, but all I have are words.

I love you — there is no answer to it, and *yet*. A redundant phrase that holds no meaning until an image is attached to it, and it holds all the meaning for the lover once it is. It compels the lover to speak, I speak so that You may answer. Although there is no perfect answer to 'I love you', I still yearn to hear the word. It's not a metaphor for anything else, the lover probes language at its limit. "To know that writing compensates for nothing, sublimates nothing, that it is precisely there where you are not — this is the beginning of writing", Barthes writes, yet you cannot help but write. It's a similar compulsion as that of love, one is aware of the destruction it anticipates but still. This brings to mind Oscar Wilde's book-length letter *De Profundis*. He wrote this letter to his beloved, Lord Alfred Douglas, in prison where he was being tried for his homosexual relationship with the very beloved he addressed it to. The impossibility of this relationship was heightened to the point of being criminal by law, but the lover's urge urged him to write, however futile it might have seemed. The book is in part a confession and to some extent an autobiography. It recounts his life and demands of the beloved to read, to acknowledge, to love.

It is a living force so to speak, as we see in Orwell's 1984. The course of Winston's life changes the moment he starts writing in his diary, addressing an absent Other who presents a promise to listen. He is aware of the futility of the act of writing and yet he writes. Winston doubts himself for being a madman, he is treated as if he has gone insane, similar to how the lover is treated by the world. He can no longer see what is good for him, "love is blind", he is a blindman, but Barthes argues that "the proverb is false" for love rather produces clear-sightedness, perhaps it opens the eyes to something indescribable, the seer sees it but is unable to talk about it therefore he appears blind, "I have, about you, of you, absolute knowledge", knowledge that I am unable to fully bring into discourse.

In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes brings the Lover and the Other into discourse, but what is between them, the love, is presented as being elusive, out of the grasp of language, showing itself in a myriad of metaphors and fragments in literature, but keeping something of itself always to itself. A joy beyond language, an intolerable joy or suffering, or joy *and* suffering, of which one cannot speak. As speaking beings, we still establish a symbolic system just for us. Everything I receive from the Other (a phone number, an invitation) is a sign to be interpreted, signifying something (love?) we continue giving each other signs and interpreting/misinterpreting them (references, associations, inside jokes), I keep myself from speaking the unspeakable through this discourse (i love you! but that's not it, it's redundant, it's inadequate, but i love you!). The illusion of something beyond this structure, the frustration with the inadequacy of language keeps the lover engrossed in attempts to express it better, find a more appropriate phrase, each time to get further entangled in the fabric of language. I only know him through his narrative of himself, the narrativizing delays knowledge, creates a distance between us and from this distance arises the desire to cross it, to attain who is behind the narrative. The Other is no more than "a text without a context", I desire him even if I am unable to decipher him.

I write about you but who are You that I write about? Who is the I that writes? My writing does not possess you, it creates of You, merely a symbol. What is this paradoxical having-nonhaving? I write of you, when you are absent. Am I not losing you by writing you? Am I writing a testimony of having lost you?

The lover's symbolic system falls apart when the Other no longer loves him. Losing the love object is also losing a language, I knew the Other as the one I loved, who is he out of that love, outside that symbolic system? I must mourn the loss of the beloved and the loss of the language we shared. It no longer holds any significance, is no longer spoken or understood by anybody. The lover finds himself faced with the loss of his linguistic identity, his place in language. And he is hurt, devastated, but no matter how much he talks about it, no words seem enough to describe his suffering. He encounters a lack of language to articulate his loss.

Barthes describes it as "I am an amputee, who still feels pain in his missing leg". Although a limb has been severed, the lack of it still hurts. This suffering is incomparable to any other, it's not even merely a physical ailment, rather an ailment that doesn't leave me capable of *being* as I was before, of speaking the language I used to, it is something that leaves me altered completely, a site of loss. A loss I feel compelled to address again and again.

In the words of Derrida:

“At every moment the order to write to you is given, no matter what, but to write to you, and I love, and this is how I recognize that I love.”

Love is Between Two and Friendship is Between Three

Aamna Motala

Love is between two and friendship is between three. In the relation of love, one desires the other and vice versa. A mutual desire exists between two lovers, regardless of its measure of equality. In friendship, the two friends desire not each other but a third object of desire — an idea, a concept, shared values, an ideology, maybe one of these, maybe all of these combined, maybe something else. There is a third element that two friends share the desire for and that constitutes their friendship. That is not to say that lovers cannot have a third object of mutual desire (a well-loved child between two loving parents is a classic example), and arguably, this third element is even necessary: what is love without friendship? But the primary desire between two lovers is located within each other, and this mutual exchange of desire encircles the couple. Thus all first stages of emerging love manifest as two people for whom the world and everyone else has shed away. Passion can be described as wanting to consume and pursue only that singular object of desire, which pales all other desires in contrast. And so ensue common complaints: “she’s changed ever since they got into a relationship” / “he’s hardly around anymore now that he has a girlfriend”. In this sense then, love is circular and two lovers sit across from each other, facing each other directly, their gazes enacting their desire. In contrast, friendship, as Lily Scherlis puts it, is “triangular”. Friends sit beside each other, focused on another desire, and the gaze between them carries this desire for something beyond them that they undoubtedly share a relation to, either in agreement or in disagreement.

I want to observe, however, this commonality between friends and lovers: the gaze that exists between them. Is the nature of the gaze the same regardless of whether the desire is within two people or beyond them? The commonality of the gaze is not the only shared experience between these two forms of relationships. Rather, the entire arena of physical intimacy enacted through intimate gestures of touch is something that is prevalent in both types of relationships. The gaze is merely one, albeit the most forceful, form of it.

For Foucault, intimacy in the form of intimate gestures is revealing of the true nature of relationships: “And by letting the relationship manifest itself as it appeared in words and gestures, other very essential things also appeared: dense, bright, marvellous loves and affections or very dark and sad loves.”

Intimacy, then, can delineate friendship from love, signify where the boundaries between the two are blurred, and also create new categories of love.

In love, intimacy is expected as well as anticipated but the same cannot be said for friendships. In contrast to love, there is no expectation of physical intimacy or touching between two friends. Yet one can hardly deny that in friendship, intimacy is still present, and its presence beyond expectation makes it more potent, not less. However, since intimacy in friendships is neither expected nor codified, it suffers the fate of being peripheral. While a love relationship can end on the basis of lack of intimacy (people who believe their love language is physical touch, especially, can never sufficiently attain intimacy), the same cannot be said for friendship. By definition, friendship can exist without intimacy, but hardly any true friendship manifests without it. There is always some level of intimacy involved between two friends. However, intimate gestures in friendships are not always mutual or egalitarian, but the nature of the relation of friendship is such that it survives despite this inequality. Arguably any friendship could be enriched with a mutual, reciprocal exchange of intimate experiences but the lack or inequality of it does not threaten the foundation of the relationship as it does to love.

Yet that is not always the case. It is not true that all friendships have existed without any attention paid to the level of shared intimacy. Conversations about the relationship and the level of intimacy shared are just as common and just as difficult among friends as they are among lovers. However, putting intimacy as a foundational component of the relationship is far more common in love (and rightly so) than it is in friendships. Most friends usually do not fixate on how much intimacy they share with a friend. But it is also true that inequality of intimacy or lack of touching can be observed or questioned by one or both people within a friendship. As mentioned above, since intimacy holds the capacity to delineate the nature of a relationship, anxiety about intimacy between friends can also have a revealing impact. If the nature of friendships is triangular, i.e. primarily fixated on an object of desire beyond the two, then anxiety about shared intimacy can reveal a hidden desire (on one end or both) that exists between them, rather than beyond them. Regardless of whether intimacy heightens or diminishes between two friends, any aspect of this intimacy, once put to question or challenged or fantasised about, reveals a desire in between. If there is, without any other reason, the conscious negation of desire — deliberately avoiding touch or being unable to look into the eyes of a friend — it too reflects a desire unnamed, as yet unobserved, and perhaps itself undesirable that nevertheless exists between two friends.

Since intimacy in friendships is not an expectation yet it exists nevertheless, it is mostly unthinking. It exists of its own accord, as one finds themselves in the comfort zone of a friend — I shake your hand, our shoulders touch, pecks on the cheek, tight hugs, casual shoves. Yet when I bring these gestures out of the realm of comfort and naturalness, and into the zone of fixation, anxiety and negation, I embed them with more meaning that is reflective of another desire, which may or may not be known even to myself.

This movement from unthinking intimacy to thinking about it, consciously, anxiously, desirously, undesirably or in dreams, is what blurs the distinction between friendship and love. Sometimes, if it is felt on the side of both friends, and if other circumstances permit, the desire becomes evident and manifests into love, which may then be formalised as such. If felt by one friend yet the other remains aloof or indifferent to this emerging desire, it manifests as the kind of unrequited love that is common amongst close friends. Sometimes, the acknowledgment of this desire can itself be disastrous to the fabric of friendship. Such a scenario occurs either when two people share the same desire but the impossibility of circumstance impedes it from becoming the primary desire between the two — the triangle cannot be restructured into the circle — and therefore the desire/s beyond them that they shared are no longer able to sustain themselves in the face of the more potent desire within that has to be suppressed. Or it occurs when this desire in between manifests for one person but the other is still fixated solely on the previous third desire beyond them that they shared — the triangle is effectively broken. The pain of knowing your friend no longer fixates on the same desire that once made friendship possible is just as devastating as the pain of knowing the other does not desire you back.

Yet the impossibility of this nameless desire is not always destructive to friendship but rather can also be productive. Whether acknowledged or not, this budding desire can enhance and enrich friendship as it allows the oscillation between triangular friendship and circular love. The intimacy behind which hides the real desire in between can emerge as sensuality, multiplicity, potentiality and what Svetlana Boym calls “homosexual heterogeneity”. This is possible because desire between two, especially a desire that is mutual yet estranged, possible yet impossible, familiar and strange, real as well as fantasy, is a potent force that can transcend the delineation between love and friendship, permanently blurring the two. It is this desire that finds its voice in the question: what are you to me and what am I to you? For this question is rhetorical; it is as much a statement as it is a question. As soon as this question interjects the space of friendship, it makes known its origin: a changed or changing desire and the anxiety of it, and the denial of the insufficient category of friendship that is concealed in the question

itself. By questioning the “what” one is in a friendship, I am automatically stating implicitly “not friends”, eradicating the presumption of friendship forever. Even unanswered, the question completes its role of manifesting or voicing a previously unbeknownst desire between two friends.

As soon as it manifests, the intimacy that preceded the desire is also affected, a difference most evidently felt in the gaze since it is that intimate gesture that most reveals what it desires. This desire, impossible, impeded and intractable as it is, if it does not destroy the foundation of friendship or necessitate the formal relation of love, can hang sustained between two people who stand at the threshold between friendship and love. In the face of an unachievable desire for intimacy, the common course of action is a complete avoidance of intimate gestures. But is avoidance of intimacy the end of intimacy or merely another form of it? In Jean-Luc Nancy’s tactile corpus, avoiding is listed as one of the forms of touching:

“...skimming, grazing, pressing, pushing in, squeezing, smoothing, scratching, rubbing, stroking, palpating, groping, kneading, massaging, embracing, hugging, striking, pinching, biting, sucking, wetting, holding, letting go, licking, jerking, looking, listening, smelling, tasting, *avoiding*, kissing, cradling, swinging, carrying, weighing.”

Thus the avoidance of intimacy is not the end of intimacy but an intimacy of a different kind. The desire which was initially revealed through a relation to intimacy transforms into what Derrida calls “the law of tact” where “one must touch without touching”. Since this desire permits neither the rightfully expected and anticipated touching of lovers nor the casual unthinking touching between friends, it is thereby touching where “touching is forbidden”, essentially replaced by the law itself. Derrida identifies the core of tact to be an abstinence or taboo on touch, thus wherever this unnamed desire leads to a conscious avoidance of touch, the law of tact emerges. Instead of manifesting as intimacy, the desire now manifests as the knowledge of “knowing how to touch without touching, without touching too much, where touching is already too much”. The gaze, however, is one of the most unregulated and insurmountable forms of intimacy, and it often lingers despite deliberate attempts to eliminate intimacy. In fact, the gaze is essential to the law of tact itself: “The untouchable is thus kept at a distance by the gaze”.

In this liminal space between friendship and love, intimacy takes new forms and even becomes paradoxical: the lack of intimacy, replaced by the law of tact, instead of diminishing desire, enhances it. For Derrida:

“Touching, in any case, thus remains limitrophe; it touches what it does not touch; it does not touch; it abstains from touching on what it touches, and within the abstinence retaining it at the heart of its desire and need, in an inhibition truly constituting its appetite, it eats without eating what is its nourishment, touching, without touching”.

And therein lies the fate of such desire: it becomes nameless as well as shapeless but it persists, tactfully. Just as the space between friendship and love rests between two orders, so it follows that the law of tactful intimacy manifests itself as the inherently contradictory “aporias of touch” Derrida speaks of: “do touch but do not touch, in no way, do touch without touching, do touch but do watch out and avoid any contact”. This intimacy that touches what it does not touch, therefore, “installs a kinship that is at the same time conjunctive and disjunctive. Worse than that, it brings into contact both contradictory orders (do do and do not do), thus exposing them to contamination or contagion. But what it thus brings into contact, or rather into contiguity, *partes extra partes*, is first of all contact and noncontact. And this contact without contact, this barely touching touch is unlike any other, in the very place where all it touches is the other.” The aporias of touch finds no better expression of all its complex, multitudinous, contradictory “madness” than in this elevated, liminal space between love and friendship, an ethics of touching, a touching that constitutes its own desire (“appetite”) that emerged from the questioning of an entire arena of touching itself — intimacy.

Thus this desire continually persists, reinforcing itself through the negation of its own desired intimacy. Its shapelessness is its constituent. It not only lingers between the relational fabric of love and friendship but also challenges and dilutes traditional meanings attached to both categories, and opens up the affective capacity for something more than friendship and less than love yet more like love and less like friendship.

Beach Trip

The sun
the sand
the calm sea
the cool breeze
are a balm
to the bruised, battered soul.
The waves hug the shore
the low roar
music divine.
Lulled,
all thought suspended
I float
at one with the universe

Nishat Wasim

Love does not cease to be love
When it boils and steams like hot coffee
The sweetness below the froth above
A cup of cappuccino from the heart's pantry

Love does not cease to be love
Nor does it lose its warm intensity
When dark water boiling over the stove
With sugar and milk becomes a cup of tea

Love does not cease to be love
But regains its rose like reddish beauty
When red syrup makes the white milk blush
The cold glass soothes the heart long thirsty

Love does not cease to be love, hot or cold
One must learn to love all its hues and moulds

Dr. Faisal Nazir

Sitting cross-legged upon the chair
Like a monk training hard to meditate
Sipping tea, crunching crisps, unaware,
You watch short reels and friends' updates

The random stroll through news-feed
The persistent scroll through short posts
The intermittent note of WhatsApp beeps
These brief moments I cherish the most

To watch you watch the clips of plays
To hear you laugh or yell at a scene
To ask you what a cunning character says
To hear you condemn a man being mean

This is the bliss the evening brings
After a day of chaotic jobs and chores
Soon the alarming doorbell rings
Or a car honks and we rush to the door.

Dr. Faisal Nazir

Bridges

Somehow I see the days I fear
Somehow I spent hours with it
The itch that causes me to run
Disowned on this voyage to stay
I met the brokenness that is left
Beyond the desire of another way
I sat beside the nothingness to all
And remained silent to its gaze
The waves of chasing haunt me
As the fear of belonging grows
For today, I met the self in erasure
Today, I felt the calmness of fall...
But,
Shame nearly will again force
Disgust nearly will again resist
I will again situate myself in the distant
living, palpating dreams of others

Ayeman Imran

what becomes of a force?

let us brand a brick in the way,
and all the way will be made.
the path is a pile of possibilities.

law is a letter, it needs adjustment.
it almost fits,
then it slits from behind.

the sequence will always shift,
so the final step becomes the first.
let us take a leap and find
the prairied corner of your sky.
we are already sound.

let us sit without rush or roar,
since nothing can be found,
and find time.

and find the pavement
that never has space
for both of us.

(since you and i are in total three
and find ourselves too often free).

Moaz Ahmed Khan

|—

Draught Wrought land, Ploughed
A Violent Affair.
Rigid, Cracked Language Upturned
Dead Metaphors.

This Land Can't Incubate A Thought Into Blossoming.
A Lack of Spring Waters
Disavowed Soil—
Gravity Seems To Work Here With More Efficiency.

This Flesh Clenches Itself.
Muscles Obstruct.
Intestines Choke.
Lungs Collapse.

A Force That Turns Onto Itself
Existing In Abundance
A Cracked Crust Seals The Land.

Yet Yet — A Recoiling
Around The Chain Links
The Cracks Of Abundant Force
The Cardinal Membrane Rises
—a liberation through wilting

Muhammad Yousha

Loved 'n Love

Like the morning sun in winter's embrace,
Neither scorching nor chilling,
A beautiful burn that you persistently pursue.
Sometimes beside me, other times trailing behind,
I gaze at you, then at my own reflection.

I wonder,
What is it to love as I do?
To cherish with such intensity?
What precisely defines,
The essence of being loved?

Tooba Shafiq, Second Year

I yearn for your gaze, your anger, your disdain,
to teach my body how to breathe again.
my heart, the shape of your silhouette,
thunders at proximity, calling for its better half.

your scorn a privilege gladly accepted, choking on soil, happiness perfected.
lower me down, turn away, my purpose, my dream, elated, at last—
free.

Rubab Amir, Third Year

غزل
ہم بھی نہ یوں کبھی پھر رلائے جاتے
عادت ہے اپنے زخم لیے مسکرائے جاتے

راہ گزر کو اپنی داستان سنائے جاتے
ان کو بھی اپنا رازداں بنائے جاتے

ہم بھی نہ یوں کبھی ستائے جاتے
گر انہیں بھی وہی خار چبائے جاتے

گر ہم پہ اور بھی ظلم ڈھائے جاتے
دن میں انہیں تارے دکھائے جاتے

اریبہ وہ گر روبرو نہ بلوائے جاتے
سینے میں راز ہم سے چھپائے جاتے

اریبہ شاہد -

And now, drowns my heart in a dreary place,
Silence beneath the chaos leaves no space.

A hole carved in my heart,
Like a purified rendition of art.

Lies perfectly sewn with delicacy,
They drive me back to lunacy.
Now I auction my love on walls,
Smeared in blood, through my veins, it falls.

Areeba Pervez, M.A. Final

later at night, i clutched my own hands, weeping.
my grief has no words, no language to turn to.
i must get up before the dark seeps into me, and bury your lingering existence
until
there's nothing left of me but you.
if i could put into words what my heart desires,
the world would chase me with its claws, sharpen their teeth, and eat my flesh.
the absence feels violent today,
the empty spaces bursting with silence.
my hands reach out to touch you without having to apologise for it.
the kitchen smells like your hands too.
distant, as if time has draped them in a dusted veil.
where do i go now?
heaven doesn't feel like home.
what do i do with these hands now?
hopeless, cold, hollow.
until when?
this quietness.
i can feel it; i cannot touch it.

Hania Afridi, Third Year

Shall I compare thee to a winter's day?
Your frostbite carves but a slippery way
For my limbs to sever in decay
And give in to your unearthly sway

Fog follows you, a reminder of the heat
You lost in your heedless, barren greed
But in the ice-cold still of your retreat
I heard you murmur a song bittersweet

Your air of contempt bathes me in blue
Your soulless guile a game for two
I was helpless as the ground took you
For men of honour are too far and few

Now I rest above you with scraped bones on white
Hoping some deity will bless me your sight

Maham Owais, Third Year

Catch your eye

I hope to catch your eye,
when I drink my first kashmiri chai
of the season and crack holes in the styrofoam cup.

I hope to catch your eye,
as I smile in the mirror,
and hope my eyeliner is the same for both eyes.

I hope to catch your eye,
when I stand at the entrance of a winter wedding,
close enough to throw petals at the couple in more aspects than one.

I hope to catch your eye,
when I'm in bed and I'm indescribably comfortable,

actually reading a book and not just on my phone.

I hope to catch your eye,
when I tape fairy lights to the ceiling letting their beams glimmer in mine.

And in that excursion I pretend I'm a fairy too,
decorating my home for a party of two.

I hope to catch your eye,
when mine are most open.
Searching for yours to share
this joy from mine.

Aasiyah Naim, M.A. Final

Your Brand

Bonded by a thread,
Lip for a lip,
All four glistening wet.
The way it can't quite at noon,
Your tongue searches its way
Under this moon, blood red.

We breathe
Collective heaves,
Hands clasped tonight
Hearts in sync,
Yet paying no mind
To sweet Innocence's grieves.

A scent for my sense,
Eyes close in mine,
Both aware
Of the one-way road ahead.
But as your neck reeks of lead
My hunger yet unfed,
It is either this
— Or be found dead.

(With you by my side,
For it is you who reside,
Deep within my bones,
My heart — You — You
Who make me whole)

Something about secrecy,
Akin, if tragically,
To childlike ecstasy.
Ultimately, predictably,
Side by side,
Hand in hand,
My mouth sinful, and
Soul, a canvas blank;
Sketched by tips deft
Upon my skin
Is boldly etched,
— Your brand.

Duaa Azim, M.A. Final

Dare can eve be?

The primal castration of my desires,
The void called love,
The sin of being a woman,
An object of never being enough.

d

Will i ever be loved?
Can i ever be loved?
Or is it my fate to be,
Suspended from the hanging tree?

i've burned in history,
Remained anonymous in mystery,
Since Adam is ubiquity,
Dare can eve be?

i need a female prophet,
To answer my plea,
To tell me if loved i can,
Ever be?

Ayza Malik, Third Year

Waves

Bushra Irshad, M.A. Final

“Till when will you run away from this loneliness?”

Tara and I were sitting on the ancient, unbalanced furniture at our usual chai shop, sipping in the falling dusk, when she asked me that. My vision swam ever so slightly, and I just looked at her and sighed. The first thing that I wanted to say to her was that I was terrified. Of the future. Of her questions that I had no answer to. I said nothing. Even if I could have spoken, it would have been in misfit sentences, as disjointed and misplaced as everything else. My thoughts lately have been like that too, filled with ghost-like gaps that I'm unable to fill with words.

She went on to say that I needed to accept it. I suppose she was right. I suppose she was also right when she said there was nothing right or wrong when it came to things like heartbreak. I sighed as silence stormed in my ears. In a single gulp, I finished my chai and hoped it would calm my pounding head.

Soon, I hopped on the bus home.

I cried a little then, enveloped in the restlessness of the commute. I saw a man beside me absently scratching the side of his leg, adorned in a shalwar the dirtiest shade of white, just like I fidgeted with the promise ring on my ring finger, now discoloured because I refused to take it off since the moment it was placed on it. I saw a girl standing like a brave leaf in strong winds. She held onto the metal pole from where the paint had long peeled off because of how many hands clung to it. Oblivious to my stare and the jarring of the bus, she didn't seem to mind her bad luck of not having found a seat as she smiled at her phone. I was luckier and had found one to ground me and my swirling head.

The man beside me was now looking at my face, one milky cataract-ridden eye and a gummy open mouth.

“Son?” he said.

I think he had seen my grief glisten in my eyes. I shook my head and looked away, shrinking back a bit more in my little bubble of misery. All people, all bubbles of misery or delight. So jam-packed together, partaking in such limited air and yet so alone. I opened my phone to see a get home safe message from her. I didn't open it.

“Till when will you run away from this loneliness?”

I don't think I have an answer. These days, when I begin to answer something, I immediately fall silent. My words shun me, and I scuttle away. I try to grasp at one meaning only to find that it is a mirage. No set of words feels close to the truth, and I get lonelier and lonelier in this limbo of wordlessness.

Relapses of any kind are triggered by a stimulus. That is a fact. Irony is getting triggered by the very absence of a stimulus. Grief is funny like that. I've long understood that healing is a scam, but grief, on the other hand, is something I learned to make room for. We were on cordial terms now, bearing the brunt of each other's existence. I guess I had accepted it. I smiled. Laughed without aching. Every now and then, I thought about something other than my loss.

Then, one day, an illusion presented itself when and where I least expected it. I thought I saw the perfect visage of my heartbreak in a completely different city. It was obviously someone else. I had seen it mid-laugh and felt the resounding sound choke to its death in my throat. And suddenly, I couldn't find that room in my heart, let alone my grief, and suddenly I was on my knees again, my sadness once again turning into denial, clutching at my newly abandoned heart with its venom-tipped claws.

Turns out ghosts follow you even if you run a geographical distance away. Ghosts make you lightheaded, and you tell the world it's because you couldn't manage to get earphones on the plane.

Dear reader, I am typing a lot of words, but I don't know what I am trying to tell you. Bear with me my wordlessness.

“Till when will you run away from this loneliness?”

It could come back like a wave.

I had paid heed to the warning. I thought I was prepared. But how do you prepare for a tsunami?

Could I even call it a pain if all I felt was a void and a portal mashed into one big gaping loose wound, bloodless, painless, but oh so so hurtful?

“Are you okay?”

It was Tara again. I was home now, seated on the kitchen island, listening to my mother recap her chat with her sister, chopping away at the spinach that she neatly aligned 20 pieces at a time. It was hard to pay attention, but the snip-snip

of the knife felt oddly comforting. I watched the faucet across the island drip; the sound of the muted clang seemed to harmonize with the chopping. Suddenly, I felt the same sharp dizziness and vertigo I had been feeling for a while.

“Just drink some ORS. It’s probably this damn phone you keep your eyes glued to.”

“Of course, mother.”

She mumbled something about me wanting to be away from home all the time since my trip up country. Apparently, I didn’t like to be with my family anymore. She was right. I didn’t like to be anywhere anymore.

“I am okay. Thanks for tea.” I wrote back to Tara four hours later. She didn’t mind the late replies. She was reliable like that.

I went to the doctor the next day because my vertigo didn’t seem to leave me alone. He gave me anti-depressants and told me something was making me unhappy.

“Till when will you run away from this loneliness?”

The meds do not lull the questions.

They do not give answers.

But I will keep on running. Again and again, perhaps. Maybe until someone chooses to love me again, or until I’m too tired even to move, and it comes and gets me. I sat down to write about it, and I thought maybe it would come to me.

What had I been expecting? An answer?

But that, too, was just a mirage after all — wasn’t it?