

JABBERWOCKY

**ABBERWOCKY**

"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.  
**"BEWARE THE JABBERWOCK,** my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
**Beware the Jubjub bird,** and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!" He took his vorpal sword in hand;  
Long time the manxome foe he sought—  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree  
And stood awhile in thought.  
And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came! One, two!  
One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.  
"AND HAST THOU SLAIN THE JABBERWOCK?  
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"  
He chortled in his joy.  
'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
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And the mome raths outgrabe.  
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And stood awhile in

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# ABOUT JABBERWOCKY

Jabberwocky is an undergraduate literary journal published by the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The student staff is selected by officers of the English Society, which is the official undergraduate branch of the English Department. All editors and contributors to Jabberwocky are undergraduate UMass students.

Jabberwocky is divided into four separate staffs for the purpose of reviewing submissions: poetry, fiction, criticism/nonfiction, and media. All submissions are anonymously reviewed by the respective staffs to be approved for inclusion in the journal.

All contributions by members of the Jabberwocky staff were reviewed anonymously without input by the submitting staff member.

Jabberwocky is not copyrighted. Any student work that is included in the journal remains the property of the artist. All contributors reserve the right to publish their work elsewhere in accordance with guidelines set by other publishers.

The views and opinions expressed in Jabberwocky are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the staff, the department, or the university.

We would like to extend a special thanks to the English Department, particularly Celeste Stuart and Department Chair, Randall Knoper.

Jabberwocky was printed with the extraordinary support of Amherst Copies.

Questions, concerns, and input can be sent to [umassjabberwocky@gmail.com](mailto:umassjabberwocky@gmail.com). Students interested being on staff for the next issue can contact the Jabberwocky email in Fall 2018. Submissions will open again at the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester.

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### Artist Statement for Cover Art by Madeleine Conover\*

Madeleine Conover is an emerging artist from Washington, DC. Born in Changzhou, China and adopted to the United States as an infant, Conover currently works in Western Massachusetts where she attended the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Class of 2018) and studied Studio Art and Sustainable Food & Farming. She works primarily in printmaking, installation, painting, and collage. Various motifs are repeated throughout her work in the forms of poems, plant-based patterns, postcards, and hand-printed elements. Within her studio practice, she juxtaposes imagery from her childhood and everyday life to indicate the correlation between the past, present, and future. By creating these spaces, she seeks to depict how certain people and places impact her ability to be present.

For more information please visit her website: [madeleineconover.com](http://madeleineconover.com) or check out her instagram @madeleineconover

### ABOUT THE COVER:

The image Summer Studio I is a double exposed film photograph that I took last summer when I was finishing my piano for the Free Keys Project, In the Garden.

\*The two fonts in which the above text have been set were designed by Madeleine, herself.

# The Art of Love

Isabelle Ness

We woke to find the Mountain Man had come down to meet his lady. We knew, first from the stench of dirt steaming the windows and second, from his footprints themselves, nothing more than patches of moss and dried up dragonflies. They say his lady is of the coast, daughter of the sea, and she crawls palm after scaly palm to where they meet at the inbetween. My father, through belches of stinking beer, claims to have seen them making love. He says their kisses wring rivers dry and their caresses hum like whale song through wild grasses of the valley.

Tonight my father waits at the edge of town with his rifle by his side. Not to shoot, he told us, but to persuade. He thinks the Mountain Man can teach him the art of love and pleasure, that this will be enough to win back my mother. I can see him there among the shadows of his delusions, one hand cemented to his bottle and the other his rifle, waiting for the Mountain Man.



DONTCALLMEAWO  
MANIAMAWEAPONDONT  
CALLMEAWOMANIAMAP  
ERSONDONTCALLMEAW  
OMANIAMAPOSSIBLE  
ENDDONTCALLMEAWOM  
ANDONTCALLMEAWOMAN  
DONTCALLMEAWOMAND  
NTCALLMEAWOMANIAMAV  
WEAPONDONTCALLMEAWO  
MANIAMAWEAPONIAMBE  
TERTHANPOSITIONDONTCA  
ALLMEAWOMANDONTCALI  
LMEAWOMANIAMAWEAPON  
AWOMANAWEAPONAWOMAN  
AWEAPONDONTYOUCALLM  
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allicchio — aim to close

# I. Eurydice

Tanvi Verma

We both made Skype accounts and decided to video chat because you didn't want me to forget what your face looked like. Talking on the phone and remembering your voice wasn't enough; you were adamant that we needed to be able to see each other.

My mother tells me that she thinks technology has ruined human relationships. From her bed that she never leaves, she rambles about how, in her day, connections were made by meeting face to face. As I bring her dinner, she talks about how my father would send her postcards from every place he ever went to, and how they framed all the pictures they took together for them to sit on our coffee table, collecting dust, after he died.

And it's funny, I guess, that we majored in computer science and exist to each other now only in pixels and soundbytes. When we first met, I showed you how Google Earth made it possible for us to take walks around the coast of Ireland and drive through the traffic of Delhi with ease. But I remember your frustration as you tried to zoom in on the details of any given scene, how the picture would grow fuzzy and nonspecific, eventually not allowing us to zoom in any deeper.

I remember how avidly you would watch videos of which new phone had the most storage, and which one delivered the clearest picture. And I remember you talking about a "crisp image", like the goal was to make the individual pixels melt into each other and deliver a fully believable and immersive world inside of a screen. As streaming in higher and higher resolutions became available, I watched you marvel at the clarity of footage of a waterfall, saying it felt as though you could see any individual droplet as it tore away from the water.

Seeing your face move and speak on screen does not make for a crisp image; the stream glitches, the picture becomes distorted as reception in this dismal, rainy place is patchy at best.

When you're on screen in dim lighting, the picture can be difficult to make out, details indistinguishable. In bright light, your face and the entire image turns a blinding white and I cannot recognize you until you tap the screen a few times to focus the camera. Your teeth, when you smile, look less like teeth and more like one, smooth crescent beneath your top lip.

My mother refuses to make a Facebook, claiming that the people she cares about will always be there for her, in person, when she needs them. She has not bought a cell phone. I ask who I am supposed to call when her condition worsens, and who she wants to be by her side. She says that the people who matter most will be there, and I don't know what this means. She remarks again on how frustrating it is that people my age cannot sustain relationships without their cell phones.

I wait for the images you sent me to load on Snapchat, and when I open them, they are fuzzy glimpses of a world through your eyes; a meal you ate, a place you drove to, a friend you saw. I hear a sliver of your voice in some of the videos. I replay them when I wake in the night and cannot fall back asleep. I save the images you send me of the clouds you've seen and I hold them up against the grey sky through my window.

I disagree with the idea that this grainy universe is somehow less immersive; I dream about living my whole life in it. I wake up, alone, and tend to my mother. I wash my hair in the shower, and watch the droplets streaming from the shower head tear themselves from one another as they hit my skin and the tub.



I draw a bath, close my eyes, and sink into the water, but the warmth does not penetrate. I feel the wet grass under my feet when I walk outside and the sour taste of the milk that I have let sit in the fridge for too long, but through a filter.

More and more, I feel myself making my tangible home out of the blocky pixels in the camera you can still see me through from time to time; I feel you watching me from afar, unable to touch me.

I don't know you at all anymore, but I don't know anyone better. I love the face I see, pixelated on screen, but I can't place it as yours. I love the voice I hear, patchy and distorted through the static of the phone, but I don't remember it as you. I love the world that I download as a series of attachments and zoom in on until I can't anymore.

When the Wi-Fi falters and the video of you glitches and eventually turns black for a moment, I feel myself completely immersed in the blank distance between us. All our love and messages are moving in the air above and around me, but none of it flutters in this dark, failed connection. I could crawl into it, on arms and legs, and live in its velvet forever, never seeing you or anyone again.



Untitled  
Monica Mazur  
Oil with gold leaf on canvas

# Intertwined Cosmos

Nathalie Amazan

I am not only a moment,  
I am all the moments that were, that are, and will be,  
I transcend these three to somewhere...  
something of a beautiful and spiritual dimension we all know.  
The way the bitternut hickory greens as it sings in the beginning of the March season, brings me its peace;  
and as the ocean rises and falls, my soul moves along with her,  
because we have known each other before I was born.  
Each ascending sunrise followed by the descending sunset, with distinct coalesced shades; The insects that  
bring life to these plants,  
These plants that bring life to me  
Beautiful cycle of humanity, this is the constitution of my anatomy.  
The motion of these waves I stand before, is the reason for my heartbeat,  
The gentle air hugging my body whispers oxygen to my lungs,  
and I listen to this oxygen move swiftly down the path they've made, and I think:  
"How beautifully elegant."  
Thoreau has become a part of me;  
"Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity," these simple things are of me.  
The laughter of my mother,  
Ambition of my father,  
The awe-filled defiant natures of my brother and sister  
each are inscribed on the neurons transmitted throughout my body,  
They come to make their home and color my DNA.  
The reflection I see of myself  
shows Saturn's rings circulating this body of mine in all of its glory,  
Pluto's newfound majesty in my own eyes,  
And stardust exhaling like a cloud from my breath.  
I am Water that keeps me live,  
I am Fire that burns deep,  
I am Earth that reminds me of my composition,  
I am Air I inhale,  
In all moments, I am.

# Art Is Pointless (Without Passion)

Stacey Cusson

I rejected Her—

Poetry—

the way She tasted like warm spit,

an endless pool of blandness

that you gulp down without breathing

and burp out later half-eaten

into the face of a stranger

as swamp-gas and sonnets.

There was no sustenance

in fantasy—

that's all She ever was—

the moon

in all its beauty

requesting sacrifices from ancient men,

a parasite that thrived

on rhyme

hosted by vacant bodies,

my mother's third

and favorite child

aborted

due to neglect

and submissive domesticity,

the telemarketer calling at all hours of the night when all I wanted

was to spend my life asleep.

There was always the lingering feeling

of being hunted by something I couldn't see.

When I couldn't stand being prey any longer,

I locked Her away so I could be alone.

And then one day, I discovered

I was

alone

in a world with no moon

and I had chosen this.

I confided in Poetry through the walls

of our mutual solitary confinement

and She listened.

We reminisced over the times

when a man sacrificing an animal for you

really meant something

and how She hoped we would be symbiotic



after we met for the first time  
as a bundle of cells embedded in my mother's womb.  
As a gift for her release,  
She fashioned a body for me  
where none existed  
and told me to visit a voice—  
one I could call my own—  
but I still like to spend my nights  
in someone else's mouth  
and watch in awe as it begins to change shape  
longing for this world.  
I sympathize, knowing that the hunger in everything  
eventually wants out.



*Twined*  
Jessica McKeel  
Pastel on Paper



*Perched*  
Jessica McKeel  
Watercolor

## Mary's Memory

Lia Ashe-Simmer

For the past six months, I have been working for a 94-year-old woman with Alzheimer's. Or maybe it is just general dementia. Or maybe it is just the reality of being 94. Technically I'm working for her daughter, Stacey, who lives a few streets over and has not dealt with the fact that her mother will die. She has told me this before, that she is trying to prepare herself but cannot. Mary, her mother, is the only family she has left, unless you include some cousins scattered throughout the northeast. I would be in denial too. How could you not be?

Mary lives in a two bedroom, one story house with a cat who she calls Ally. This is not the cat's name, Stacey told me once, but I don't remember his actual name. To me and Mary, he is Ally, and of course, the cat doesn't mind. He's a Persian longhair with a scrunched up face I can't help but associate with smugness. Stacey has to keep him shaved or else Mary will pull his hair out in clumps and risk getting clawed across the face.

Mary survives through routine and attention to detail. Everything has a place, and if it's out of place, she will put it back. She notices things that I never do – a pool of water on the kitchen counter, a crooked placemat, a ball of lint on the floor. She also has key phrases she says, over and over, and I know exactly when they will come up. It's like talking along to a movie you've memorized. When she has a Greek yogurt, she says, laughing, "Hope I don't turn Greek!" When she sees the sunset from her window, she tells me it's "right out of a magazine." If she sees my car in the driveway, she will be surprised that it's a four-door, and will want to know if I like driving it. When she sees it again a minute later, we will repeat the same conversation.

Often, we do puzzles. Twenty-four pieces is ideal, or maybe thirty. Sixty pieces is too difficult and frustrates her. We might play cards too, a version of Rummy lodged firmly in her memory. She enjoys it immensely, and I pretend I am enjoying it too, even though I'm checking my phone after every hand to see how much time I have left.

Stacey brings her coloring books after coloring book to color, but Mary is always very clear on her stance on coloring. "Silly activity," she tells me disdainfully. So the coloring books sit empty, the colored pencils stay sharp, and I don't get why Stacey keeps on bringing them.

Stacey leaves notes all around the house in thick black marker. By the microwave: DO NOT UN-PLUG. By the garage door: STOP. DO NOT LET CAT IN GARAGE. By her walker: ALWAYS USE WALKER. Before I arrive, she is usually holding a note that has been placed in her hand, or by her chair: LIA WILL BE HERE AT 6:30 TO VISIT. Mary sometimes argues with the notes when she reads them. "I never let the cat in the garage" she says loudly, or, "I don't need this walker." It is of no concern to Mary who exactly has left these notes: they are just there, almost as if the house is speaking to her.

When I enter her house, I need to remind myself to slow down. My movements are too rushed, out of sync with the slowness of Mary's life. Sometimes, too, my mind moves too fast. Why am I thinking about anything else than here, with Mary?

I have learned, in these six months, the best way to deal with the moments of chaos that happen on occasion. Sometimes, out of the blue, Mary will go over to the closet for her wallet, and I will know exactly what is coming. She will open the blue wallet with trembling fingers and she will see it is empty. She will turn to me. She will slam her walker on the ground and scream that I stole fifty dollars from her. She will tell me she is going to call the police if I don't leave her house.

I know exactly what to say now. The words are like the disarm code to an alarm, and have immediate effect. All I have to say is: "Stacey borrowed your money for ice cream." It has to be Stacey, and it has to be ice cream. She hears this, and she immediately calms down. "She did?" "Yes, she did." "Well, where is she? Where's the ice cream?" "She is going to drop it off later. She'll leave it on the porch and we'll go out and get it. Would you like to watch the news before she gets here?" "Yes." And that is that. To Mary, all TV is news. It doesn't matter if it's a Friendly's commercial or Judge Judy. This is all 'News.' By the time she sits back down, the missing \$50 has vanished from her mind.

Other days, she insists on returning to North Lane to where she used to live. She needs to get picked up, she doesn't belong in this house, nothing is familiar to her. The solution for this is usually to take her on a ride. Driving down Route 9 jostles her memory, and when she sees the street sign with MAPLE AVE she tells me, "Turn right here and we're back home." She recognizes it as her home only after we've left it for a little while, which makes sense to me although I'm not exactly sure why.

Almost always, before I leave, I make sure to give her the opportunity to say her favorite thing. It is dark by then, and I ask her when she will go to bed. "9 -9:30," she tells me, and I say, "That's a good time to go to bed. Because you know what they say, what's that saying again..." I pretend that I have forgotten, that I need her to remind me.

She smiles, excitedly, and widens her eyes. "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise!"

"That's it!" I say, and I head out the door just as the nurse comes in to take over. She pulls her earbuds out of her ears and says, "Good evening, Fran, how are you?" This nurse has been working for Mary longer than I have, but still calls her Fran. Always, Mary slips into this new name without issue, so I've stopped bothering to correct the nurse. After all, this nurse juggles a folder full of Mary's and Fran's and Blanche's, so who can blame her for mixing up the names?



It's impossible not to wonder, when you're around Mary, what it must be like to be old. It's a condition people my own age don't seem to think much about. Maybe there's a reason for it. What's the point of dwelling on the difficult reality that one day, we may all be like Mary? It's easier to exist in the present, where we are young and loud and energy is not something we run out of, when we take our memories for granted.

Sometimes, I wonder if Mary is happy. Part of me thinks, how could she be happy, when so much of her day is spent indoors, with not much to do? But maybe I am just projecting my own ideas of what happiness means onto her. She does not consider herself to be in a prison, after all. It's kind of like that saying, that one about the tree falling in the woods – if no one hears it, does it still make a sound.... If Mary doesn't think she is in prison, does that mean she is free?

When I was in middle school, I read a lot of sci-fi. Sooner or later, all that reading sci-fi turned into me writing some too. But maybe writing isn't quite the right word. It was more like creating. My favorite things to create were aliens, with distinctly structured societies and planets that defied the forces of our own.

One species, I remember, was something with an -X- in its name. Polcrax or Kroxen or something like that. I was big on the inclusion of 'Xs', since it made the names all the more alien-like. Anyways, this species was different than humans because they had no ability to remember. They lived entirely in the present.

What I quickly discovered, however, was that aliens without memory made them essentially zombies. They had no ability to love, because to love required that they remember. They couldn't have aspirations, because the future didn't exist. They were devoid of all emotion, progress, innovation.

In the end, they didn't make for very good alien material, so I had to scrap the whole concept.

\*

Mary has not lost her memory, then. It exists on a different plane than my own, but it still exists.

\*

How many sayings are there about memory?

\*

When I was ten years old, my Dad got me the Lord of the Rings box set for my birthday. The story was good, but my favorite part was the maps in the back of the book. You had to unfold them one, two, three times, before you could see it all, the black and red letters, curling around each other. When I saw Middle Earth on a map like that, it felt like it had to be a real place.

I think it was around that time I started creating my own maps, always with rugged coastlines and a compass rose. Rivers, too, drawn in blue colored pencil. At what point did I realize that creating made up maps and aliens was a waste of time, I wonder?

I don't remember.

Mary as she is now is not the same Mary as five years ago. She is not the same Mary that raised Stacey. The Mary I know is an entirely different person, a distant relative, a ghost of the person who lived on North Lane.

But then again, we are all ghosts of who we used to be. I used to be an alien inventor and an amateur cartographer of places that didn't exist. Mary used to be a secretary at the Town Clerk's Office and lover of golf. Both of those people don't exist anymore, but you still might find a stray golf ball in a desk drawer. I still own the Lord of The Rings box Set.

# Florence Weinstein 1.11. 2016

Ilhan Braxton

I want to say I love you  
but in this house,  
I love you means goodbye  
and I am not ready to let go  
because I fear my heaven  
will be different than yours,  
and I will abandon you to an unknown,  
a question only answered with  
empty gazes and  
cold flesh.

I look at the cactus on your window sill,  
sitting quietly, drinking the sweat  
that falls gently from your forehead.  
Your books release dust from their tired covers,  
begging to be read one last time.

The silence leaves my tongue deserted,  
bile rising to sooth the rawness in my throat  
and some woman asks if I need water.  
My stiff neck creeks with every nod  
as if relieved the muscles still work.  
you lay still, sleeping, or practicing,  
I can't tell which.

But then you look at me, mouth agape  
and you scream,

“Please don't leave me!”

Your words pulling me into a dream I had  
of a younger me running into your open arms,  
your eyes twinkling and alive.  
You told me you loved me and  
hugged my frail body as though  
it was the last time.  
Then I am back within white walled confines  
and your distant gaze brushes past  
my trembling body, freeing and anguished cry  
tucked deep in my bones,  
Please. Don't leave me.

“I love you.”

Then your screams stop  
as an arm pulls me away.  
Your hand extends out to me  
and I realize,  
you're already too far away for me to reach.



# Iridescent

Jenny Lu

in the moonlit waters Sweet Ophelia  
floating briefly w  
before sinking in  
tears  
as mad as the sea.

fair Ophelia  
swept ashore by high tide rue rue woven in her hair  
lunacy singing for Ophelia  
long flooded  
sucked in honey  
of music vows.

lured into the game  
opened up,  
a violet,  
petals spread wide.

sweet, sweet Ophelia  
under the brook,  
weeping into the river,  
lost and left  
waiting now forever  
for stars are fire  
but young love,  
like violets,  
withers first.

*The Ripple Effect*  
Emily Bevacqua  
Pencil on paper

# A Morning in March

Nicholas Conti

She awoke in a cold sweat. Calling frantically for her husband, she prepared for the worst. Was he gone already? Was she too late?

He walked into the room. It was still quite early, but he had been up for a while now. He was a man who required little sleep; sleep was a luxury someone of his status simply could not afford. Not if he wanted to keep that status, anyway.

He asked her what was the matter, though his voice did not reflect the horror with which his wife shrieked. It was not a lack of interest or love, and she knew it. Someone with so much on his mind could not always be bothered with such mundane things as emotion.

She said that she had had a dream, that same dream which had haunted her for many nights now. She told him for the thousandth time about his cries of pain, playing over and over in her head. She could barely stand it anymore.

He was calm, despite his wife describing his chilling demise to him yet again. Things like that could break a man, but not him. He told her to calm down, that it was just a dream, of course. Each day since these nightmares had begun, he had gone out against her wishes, and each time he had returned safely home. Hadn't he always come back to her?

She agreed that he had, but this time was different. The dream was more vivid. His blood was redder, darker. Today was the day.

Although he was a man of tremendous wealth and power, he always had time for his wife. She was not his first wife, but he truly did love her. He hated seeing her distressed like this, especially over something as incomparable as his own safety.

Having been across the world, fighting for the most powerful nation man had ever known, he was confident he could take care of himself. With the skills he had acquired in his travels, no one man could really hurt him. With the respect he demanded, who would even try?

An hour had passed, and his wife was still in tears. She held on to him, running her hand through his short-cropped hair. It was graying, a result of age, yes, but also of the stresses he had carried for so many years.

He said once again that there was truly nothing to worry about. It was just a meeting; he had been to countless events just like it. What was the worst that could happen?

His wife only grew more upset. He decided to take a different approach, reminding her of his many triumphs, and all the dangers he had faced in what seemed like another life.

For a moment, he was lost in thought, recalling with immense pride all of his great victories in far-away places. The battles he had fought, the glory he had earned. He was destined for greatness, he always had been. No one had ever stopped him, and no one ever could. His name would be spoken for thousands of years to come. He was invincible.

His grandiosity was interrupted by the arrival of his daughter. He and his wife had both forgotten she was coming by today. His gray eyes softened as she walked through the large doorway. He was a courageous leader and a ruthless politician and a loving father.

Julia, my love, come in, he said. Help your mother prepare for her day, she is not feeling quite herself this morning. Julia was not startled by the appearance of her mother; her parents had told her about the dreams a couple of weeks prior.

The three of them reconvened a short while later, gathered around the grand dining table. It was a breakfast fit for ten hungry men, with fresh fruit and vegetables, home baked bread, and a variety of meats cooked and sliced to perfection.

Julia gazed first at her father, filled with respect, and then shifted her eyes to her mother. She was actually Julia's stepmother, but her father insisted she call her Mother. It added to the sense of unity, he always said, and nothing is more important than sticking together.

Her mother was still shaking violently. This was the worst she had ever been after one of her nightmares. Julia did not know what to think of these terrible dreams.

The tension at the table was palpable. While Julia ate only a little, and her mother hardly looked at her food, her father ate a hearty breakfast. He had a long day ahead of him, after all.

Looking out at his company, he felt very grateful. What a life he had made, what a family he had built, what an empire he had climbed to the top of. His wife's desperation was the first and only thing in his life he seemed to be unable to take control of.

Knowing he had to leave soon for work, he prepared to tell his wife of his departure. He had not yet opened his mouth, and she was crying again, clawing at him. He had to go.

I can't skip this meeting just because of a few bad dreams, he said.

Not dreams, not dreams, she said, visions! The thought of losing her husband was maddening. She begged, please don't go!

He told her one last time that he couldn't do that. He said there is no meeting without me, there is no nation without me. Without another word, he stepped away, his wife crumbling to the floor behind him.

He did not tell his daughter how much he loved her. He did not tell his wife how much she meant to him. There would be time for apologies later. He walked out of the door, his head held high. He loved his job, perhaps above all else.

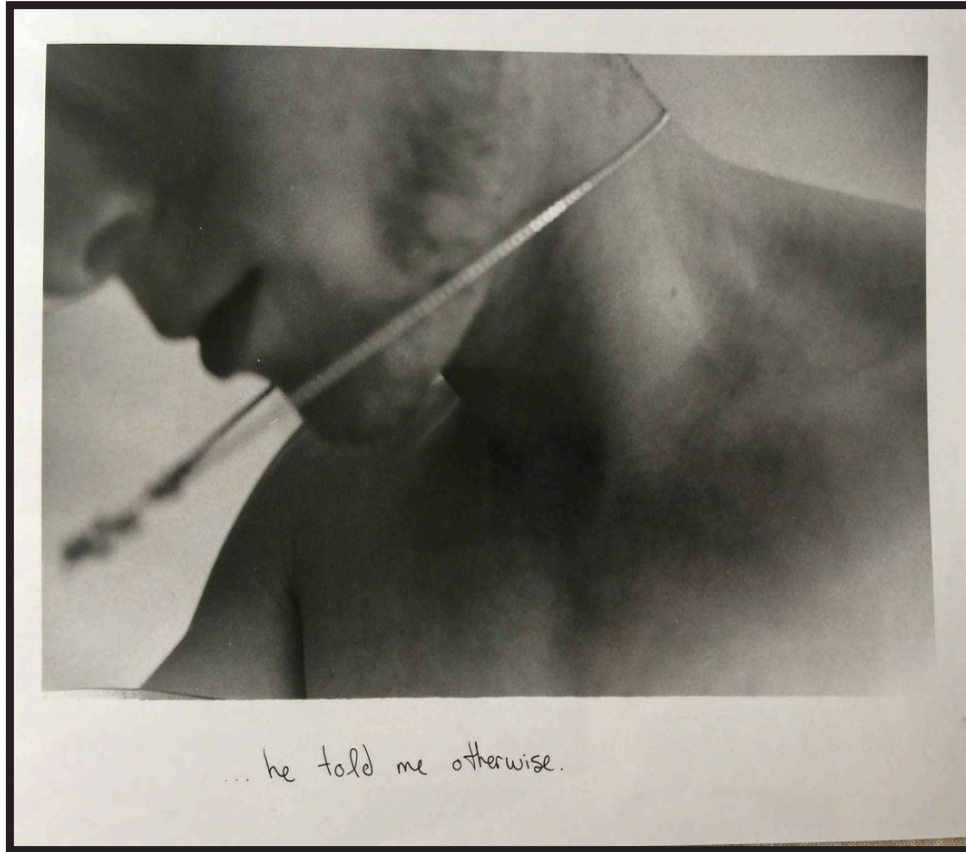
In the senate chamber, Brutus sharpened his knife.





my clothes weren't an invitation to my body...





*I Said No*  
Monica Mazur  
Analog Photography

## Punishment

Faith Yee

I wish I was raised by no one.  
The blood you washed out  
inside of the human body  
stained in the home.

The f\*\*d you forced me to scrape  
back into the pot was for  
my

stomach  
[forever stayed empty]



# The Fairy Hag: Queen Mab as a Fairytale Figure

S.X. Wong

**ROMEO**

I dreamt a dream tonight.

**MERCUTIO**

And so did I.

**ROMEO**

Well, what was yours?

**MERCUTIO**

That dreamers often lie.

**ROMEO**

In bed asleep, while they do dream things true.

**MERCUTIO**

O then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.

She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes

In shape no bigger than an agot-stone

On the forefinger of an alderman,

Drawn with a team of little atomi

Over men's noses as they lie asleep.

Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,

Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,

Time out a' mind the fairies' coachmakers.

Her wagon-spokes made of long spinners' legs,

The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,

Her traces of the smallest spider web,

Her collars of the moonshine's wat'ry beams,

Her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film,

Her wagoner a small grey-coated gnat,

Not half so big as a round little worm

Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid.

And in this state she gallops night by night

Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;

O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on cur'sies straight;

O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;

O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,

Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,

Because their breath with sweetmeats tainted are.

Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,

And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;

And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail

Tickling a parson's nose as 'a lies asleep,

Then he dreams of another benefice.  
Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,  
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,  
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,  
Of healths five fathom deep; and then anon  
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,  
And being thus frightened, swears a prayer or two,  
And sleeps again.

This is that very Mab  
That plats the manes of horses in the night,  
And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,  
Which, once untangled, much misfortune bodes.  
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,  
That presses them and learns them first to bear,  
Making them women of good carriage.

This is she—

**ROMEO**

Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!  
Thou talk'st of nothing.

Some of the earliest introductions to socially acceptable rules that people are exposed to are fairytales and nursery rhymes. They seem innocuous with their lilting rhythms and magical language, despite being filled with evil stepmothers, witches, and threats of curses. They also often embed a moral at the end (after all, where does the phrase, so simple and direct, “and the moral of the story is...” originate?) that directs the thinking of young children to perceive “rightness” and “wrongness.” The telling of a fairytale also features two distinct positions between speaker and listener: one is the child, pliant in the mind and easily captivated, and the other the adult, authoritative and wise. We readers become the former when experiencing the Queen Mab soliloquy, as its distinctive wording style, repetition, and, crucially, moral imbues us with the sense of listening to a fairytale.

“O then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.” Queen Mab, monarch of dreams, is introduced to Romeo—the “once upon a time”. Mercutio begins immediately with fantastical language, describing her size and her place among the miniscule and mythical. The words “queen,” “fairies,” and “sleep,” as well the segue into this soliloquy with mention of dreams, is reminiscent of bedtime stories told to children.

The repetition describing the qualities of her chariot is list-like, as in a nursery rhyme. Although the components of her chariot are conventional, they are made of components wholly unconventional to the human world: empty hazel-nut, long spinners' legs, wings of grasshoppers, smallest spider web, moonshine's wat'ry beams, cricket's bone and film; a small grey-coated gnat. Reading these particular lines aloud evokes a natural, sing-songy meter; these devices combined make the image of Queen Mab easily buildable and colorful.

We see again the use of repetition to draw parallels between the tangible/human and intangible/fantastical, specifically, about people and their desires. For lovers, courtiers and lawyers, they are fortunate enough to dream of what delights them. For ladies who dream of kisses, however, their dream comes with the “angry Mab's” plagues. This sudden turn of tone towards unwholesomeness, even aggression, denotes punishment for those who have physical desires towards another. Mab is kinder to those who want love, money, and so-

cial respect, but kisses are apparently off the table, invoking her ire and curse. The parallels between desirer and desired continue, albeit with a different structure. These desirables are monetary (in the courtier's case) and tributary (in the parson's case)—in essence, elevation of social position. It must be questioned, then, why these seemingly greedy desirables do not receive the same treatment as ladies do, with their sweetmeat-tainted breaths, telling of their sexual desires.

From there, darker and darker Mab goes—the soldier not having dreams of victory but of battle, the glory of it first and then the anguish, prompting him to awaken. The language, though still flowery and fanciful, now takes on an edge of fury when Mercutio speaks of sluts and their fate to painfully untangle their hair. Queen Mab is the “fairies’ midwife” (then, also “learning them to bear”) and just as she brings progeny into the world she makes them as well. The word “carriage” reappears, but in a different sense now. If a ringstone-sized carriage is what carries Mab through the night, then what is Mab when she makes “carriages” out of maidens? The impregnated women now carry dreamers—children—whose slumbering minds Mab can gallop through.

Mercutio refers to Queen Mab as a hag, and perhaps that is what she has been all along, dressed up with magical language. A queen, an image of elegance and royalty, is now revealed to be a witch, not unlike the villainous cronies of fairy tales (Snow White and the like, anyone?). Should there be any delight in her chariot-rides and dream-bringing before, the reader must now reconsider Mab's motives and what she does in penetrating the sleeping minds of people.

Just as any fairytale has its moral—particularly princess fairytales, which relates to the role of women here—the moral of the Queen Mab soliloquy (and to an extent, the meta-character Queen Mab herself) is to bring retribution on women who are promiscuous and sensuous. Ladies are not to be lovers, but to lie with husbands and be bearers of children. To desire love itself, as the lovers do (“Through lovers’ brains, and then they dream of love”) is permissible, but to be a woman dreaming of kisses, unbound from a man—a lover—is punishable by “blisters” and “foul sluttish hairs”.

The Queen Mab soliloquy is telling of the speaker and even of the audience. Mercutio becomes a storyteller; his spinning of language feeds readers’ intuitions so that this speech reads like a fairytale. Repetition, and in extension, the meter that comes with it, works in tandem with words relating to smallness, mythical creatures, a twisting, unbelievable sense of time (much like Santa Claus visiting the homes of all the good children in the world only in one night—what an efficient man), woodland animals and insects, and the conjuring of dreams in humans; they all point to a traditional bedtime story.

The most indicative feature that makes readers register this passage as a fairytale, though, is the pointed message that Queen Mab conveys. Purity has long been the standard for women to meet; deviation from that deserves punishment in the form of shaming and scorning. Readers are not only disturbed by Mercutio's passion at the end of the passage (so passionate he couldn't even finish his soliloquy) but are struck with the punishment Mab doles out, and the power she has to incite fear, as well as to create life. Like children, we are awed at the marvel of this tale, and secretly terrified of the moral. The words have a power over us like a looming authority would, and it is this that inspires us to listen to bedtime stories with chill and thrill.

#### Works Cited

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# Thorns

Jessica Mekeel

A shadow upon my mother's face cast,  
She looks to me with her bright composure.  
(What becomes of those thorny years now passed?)

The human mind is incredibly vast,  
And reflection stirs as we grow older.  
A shadow upon my mother's face cast.

But it is clear that her strength is intact.  
What life has left her is as a soldier.  
(What becomes of those thorny years now passed?)

Her acceptance, like a flag at half mast,  
Silently speaks as a grasp for closure  
A shadow upon my mother's face cast.

And how long is it that sadness can last,  
For all I can do is love and hold her.  
(What becomes of those thorny years now passed?)

Pain surfaces like a brisk, chilling draft  
And memories make her eyes flood over.  
A shadow upon my mother's face cast.  
(What becomes of those thorny years now passed?)



*Tribute to Holden*  
Jessica McKeel  
Ceramic

# Little Lost Boy

Nicholas Conti

one two  
three

miles from the steeple  
the sky pink ghost  
plays hopscotch  
behind the  
wildflowers.

have you seen  
Him? critics

claim Fate won't waste  
its  
hot white  
breath on  
something so  
small.

but picking up blunt  
sticks  
is no game to Me—

four five  
six

deep inhales ought  
to prove  
them wrong.

I am astounded at His  
brevity  
disheartened by His  
absence and

drowned beneath  
His melted chalky gaze.

seven eight  
nine

swings of my machete  
leave  
wildflowers baptized  
and reveal

a ghost  
glowing pink  
skipping among boxes  
labeled with forgive and  
numbers drawn backwards



# Optimism

Nathalie Amazan

Reality hits two fold,  
I am sinking into an abyss of  
Respectability Politics  
wanting to be consumed by a world that is not my own  
My identity is not my own  
Individuality is a myth among many of this great nation of hypocrites living with stereotypes of  
we  
But, I guess I must be We if We want to be Freed from Them  
Freed from the Others that have othered us into alienation  
I want to believe that our freedom is not isolation, that in all of X's greatness, he may be  
wrong in this  
Maybe we can exist as equitable equals  
Maybe this Nation is redeemable  
Maybe I am too optimistic, because  
Brown v. Board ain't do shit  
We still got segregated schools in the guise of neighborhood districts like how they silence our  
voices, our votes  
Because we got the largest prison population in the world  
Coincidentally they're spitting images of the ones imprisoned on plantations  
Their humanity stopped and frisked  
Shackled and shipped  
Stripped and caged  
But slavery is over right?  
Maybe I am too optimistic, because  
You stole the land and now killing it  
Mother Earth is crying at our indifference like  
Mother Martin, Mother Brown, Mother Gray  
Yes, it's 2017 but racism did not have an expiration date  
Because you say "Never Again" like you are not doing it again like bombing Syria for the  
refugees you won't let in, like  
You don't see Black and Brown bodies as objects of destruction disposable at will only after  
sucking it of all of its will to live  
There is no cultural appreciation under a system of exploitation  
Because you have demonized my unprofessional hair, my fat nose, and big lips  
You tell me Black is ugly unless it's on an Iggy or a Kylie  
Unless you can sell it  
Unless you can profit off our labor  
You have colonized my mind  
You have caused me to question what it means to be a human with value and purpose  
And then  
You tell Us to get over it

"Stop bringing race into politics"

Forgetting that you have politicized our very way of being

I'd be complicit if I were not to speak that truth.

And yet, I still can't shake my belief of the fundamental goodness of human beings

That in all of the evilness that has been inflicted

Maybe there is some moral oneness that can connect us

Maybe, I am too optimistic.

what is ~~it that~~ want oh I think ~~it's~~  
~~pretty clear~~ what we should ~~do~~ ~~just~~  
~~happy about any of this~~ ~~no~~ I do under  
stand how do you tell ~~me~~ you care  
about deeply how ~~you feel~~ how do you ~~can~~  
describe ~~how you feel~~ with your hands  
~~your eyes~~ let me see your lips I bet  
I can figure ~~out where they have been~~ what  
keeps you from ~~doing~~ your job your work  
your ~~life~~ who makes up the whole the bod  
~~day let me~~ try ~~some adjectives~~ ~~it's~~  
i love love love ~~the~~ azure it is ~~pre-~~  
~~posed~~ azork inArabic this makes me  
warm ~~and I don't~~ think about ~~the dark~~  
~~anyone~~ but I do feel good ~~when~~ I lie  
about how I feel ~~how~~ I breathe ~~how I am~~  
going to die ~~I wrote~~ two poems in the  
last few days ~~I think the~~ manic episodes  
this ~~past weekend~~ ~~and the~~ depressive  
state ~~that followed~~ ~~has done~~ the work  
the work the ~~work~~ repeat refuse deny

*and a one, and a two, and a-*

from TEXTHEAD

A.T. Halaby

Black ink, typewriter text

## II. Medusa

Tanvi Verma

“Should I turn the shower on?”

I’m not surprised by her silence, but I don’t know what to do with it. She’s sitting in the same bathtub we have showered in our whole lives, and there is something so inexplicably sad about watching someone sit in a place they usually stand. I think her eyes have been closed for the past few minutes, at least.

I put the clipper down on the counter and sit on the floor next to the tub. What remained of Ava’s thick, black ringlets cover the floor like small snakes crawling back home towards her. I can’t look at her bare scalp without feeling a tug of shame, like I am looking at a private piece of her that she never wanted to be seen, not by me at least. In fact, I’m sure that she never imagined it would have to be seen until she decided that she needed to shave her head.

The first thing to notice about Ava had always been her hair. Difficult to ever run a brush through, it was a wild, lush frame around her face. As children, this hair was any mother’s nightmare, constantly catching sticky food, dust, and grass with its long curls. Once, as I dug a hole in our backyard to bury some rocks in, Ava came screaming in my direction, saying that she could hear a bee following her. Upon closer inspection, I saw it wriggling around in her curls, frantically trying to escape. I untangled her coarse hair from around the bee, and, as thanks for my service, it stung me in the palm of my hand before drifting away.

In high school, I think it was the combination of her hair and her never-ending opinions that made her slightly off-putting at first, but eventually engaging. Everyone had a rumor about who they thought Ava had slept with, and none of them were right. She had a presence that we both knew I lacked, and always would. Perhaps it was jealousy that made my relationship with my sister so silent and strange, but perhaps it was the fact that I, too, never knew how to approach her. My memories of her are filled with images of her creeping past my bedroom, late at night, hearing her scream at me about trying to use her eyeliner, and smelling the cigarette smoke on her as we sat next to one another at dinner. This, and her constant presence in the bathroom, always examining herself from every angle. As we were only a year apart, we would be forced to brush our teeth and wash our faces together in the morning, and as we got older, this eventually turned into me brushing my teeth and staring at the floor while Ava patted blush and bronzer onto her face and inspected her skin in the mirror. I have never been as pretty as she was, but, in retrospect, I realize that Ava never wanted me to be pretty.

Admittedly, I was not close to my sister. My mother, obviously seeing the differences between the two of us, often overcompensated for what she must have imagined was a lack of attention on my part. Never really knowing what I liked, I often came home to find bizarre sweaters with heart designs on them, or drugstore nail polish kits sitting on my bed. At dinner, she made the obvious attempt to engage me, always asking me what I was doing in school to follow up on Ava’s most recent accolades.

So, I don’t exactly know how I found out about what was happening with Ava; she certainly never would have talked to me about it. I remember, a few times, having to catch a ride to school with my oddly greasy neighbor and his mother because of Ava’s doctor’s appointments. When I went to shower, I noticed more and more of Ava’s thick hair clinging to the shower drain and stuck against the white linoleum of the tub. But, these weren’t things I would have ever stopped to think about, not until I found Ava examining a spot in her hair, close to the top of her head in the mirror. But, as she heard me enter the bathroom, she leapt back from the counter, shoved me out of the room, and locked the door.

“Alopecia Areata,” my mother quickly explained to me under the noise of our vent fan in the kitchen, “It’s not serious, it’s just... happening.”

What I gathered from this and some internet searching was that my sister, for better or worse, was not dying, but was losing a fair amount of hair. She began wearing hats around the house, and spending hours and many cans of hairspray in the morning, working to get her hair set in a way that it wouldn’t move for the rest of the day. When this stopped working, as the amount of her hair in the shower simply continued to increase, she wore thicker and thicker headbands.

Without her loose, flowing hair, I almost found my sister unrecognizable, and I think she viewed herself that way as well. While she maintained her appearances for the people she interacted with in public, the private Ava grew more and more withdrawn. The time that she spent looking at herself in the bathroom, she now spent quietly holed up in her room.

“Mia?”

I jerked awake. “What fucking time is it?”

“It’s like two, I don’t know. Can you come to the bathroom with me?”

I heard her walk away. I trudged out of bed and towards the light in the hallway, spilling out onto the carpet and across the textured ceiling. My eyes still thick with sleep, I saw Ava’s frame in the doorway. I shoved past it and sat on the toilet.

“What do you need?” I asked, rubbing my eyes. My feet met something furry, and, looking down, I saw dozens of what I thought were snakes. I started to scream but Ava quickly crouched down to shush me. Seeing clearer now, I looked at her and realized that she had roughly hacked off what had remained of her hair. I could see the round, bare discs of her scalp showing through the weak roots of what had once been her mane. This is the closest I had been to my sister in years.

“I need you to just finish shaving it off”

“What is fucking happening? Do you need me to get mom? I don’t even get what’s...fuck...” I had no words. Ava watched me calmly as I struggled to find the reaction I was looking for.

“I just need you to finish it, I’ve already done most of it, but I can’t get the back with the clippers.”

“I was sleeping,” I answered lamely.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Okay, well... I don’t want to do this,” I finally said. It was the truth.

But she didn’t want to either. Ava had never had to work for her femininity, it was also something she so naturally possessed. Without her hair, Ava’s face took on a different appearance. The shape of her jaw was so much clearer, and the thickness of her brows was so much more prominent. My thoughts lingered for a moment on the football players who all lied about which one of them she had slept with, and what they would think looking at her now.

“Okay, yeah. I guess,” I managed, a few moments later. “What do you need me to do?” As she climbed into the bathtub, I rubbed my eyes again, hoping to see something that made more sense when I opened them. I realized that the absurdity of this situation was a feeling that was unique to me, and Ava must have been quietly, and calculatingly, working at her hair for at least a while. I wondered, as I grabbed the clippers and as she brushed the loose remaining curls off her scalp, if she had slept at all before deciding this.

“Does it matter which way I do this?”

“I mean no, not really. It’s all coming off anyway.”



“I actually really haven’t done this before, so I don’t know if I’m even-”

“There really aren’t a lot of ways for you to fuck this up.”

I wanted the sound of the clippers to wake our mother up, and for her to burst into the bathroom and take this responsibility away from me, and to gather all the hair up from the floor and magically glue it back onto Ava’s head. But it wasn’t a particularly loud noise. Ava was right, too, there really weren’t many ways to fuck this up on my part. The clipper made solid trails in Ava’s sparse hair, stopping abruptly at any of the bare patches it encountered.

It was quick work, taking not more than a few minutes. When I told her I was done, she said, “Thank you,” and stayed, seated, in the tub. She spends the rest of the night here.

Ava is going to lose the rest of her hair, and it will not come back. For some time, she will wear wigs until she grows tired and goes without them. Many years from now, she will wear purple to my wedding, and clap and smile as though she has always wanted to see me this happy, as though she never shoved me out of a room, slamming the door in my face. She will laugh as though she never spent a night in a bathtub with her sister, sleeping amongst bottles of shampoo and surrounded by her own hair. My mother will make a toast and cry happy tears, as though she never shrieked upon discovering the two of us in the tub the next morning. She will hug me as the night ends, as though she never slapped me across the face for shaving my sister’s head and like she never looked on, horrified, as Ava stood between the two of us and screamed at her for touching me.

One day, my hair will turn grey. My skin will sag. I will need to squint in order to read menus at restaurants, and I will eventually need glasses. My daughter will love me and then hate me and then love me again. My husband will just love me and then hate me. I will gain weight, and my knees will hurt. At times, I will wake up in the middle of the night from a dream that I only remember in shards, glimpses. While walking to the bathroom to drink water from the sink, I will catch a glimpse of my reflection which, at first, startles me with its disheveled hair and folds of skin. But, I will feel foolish for fearing something so familiar, and this will happen time and time again.

# Gray or Less

Halle O'Brien

soft & tired  
(that's how I want to be remembered)

nothing distinct,

just that easy in between  
where you can't open your eyes  
but you're not quite asleep

that quiet, comforting,  
unconscious consciousness  
never remembered in the morning,  
but back every night

that's my aim:

my contribution- forgettable,  
just relevant enough to  
not permit a second thought

my name escapes you  
you pronounce it wrong  
but that's fine,  
it doesn't make a difference to me

in fact,

I love the illusory almost correctness  
the way it turns into a question at the end,  
I hesitate just to lengthen this in between

the desire inspired  
by wet, gray, heavy days  
to just crawl into bed-  
so easily satisfied

that's all I want to create  
(small, personal, simple satisfaction)

# Monroe County

Isabelle Ness

Dad spent his time building those days  
a stab at stability,  
a past-time turned  
profession.

This was before I had tits and a  
sense of shame  
and often ran shirtless through wheatfields by the cabin.

I suppose my brother was  
busy building in those days, too.  
Instead of cabins,  
a closet.  
We'd go out together and  
look for where the stalks laid flat  
and he'd say  
*This is where the deer sleep*



*Untitled*

Charles Mosley

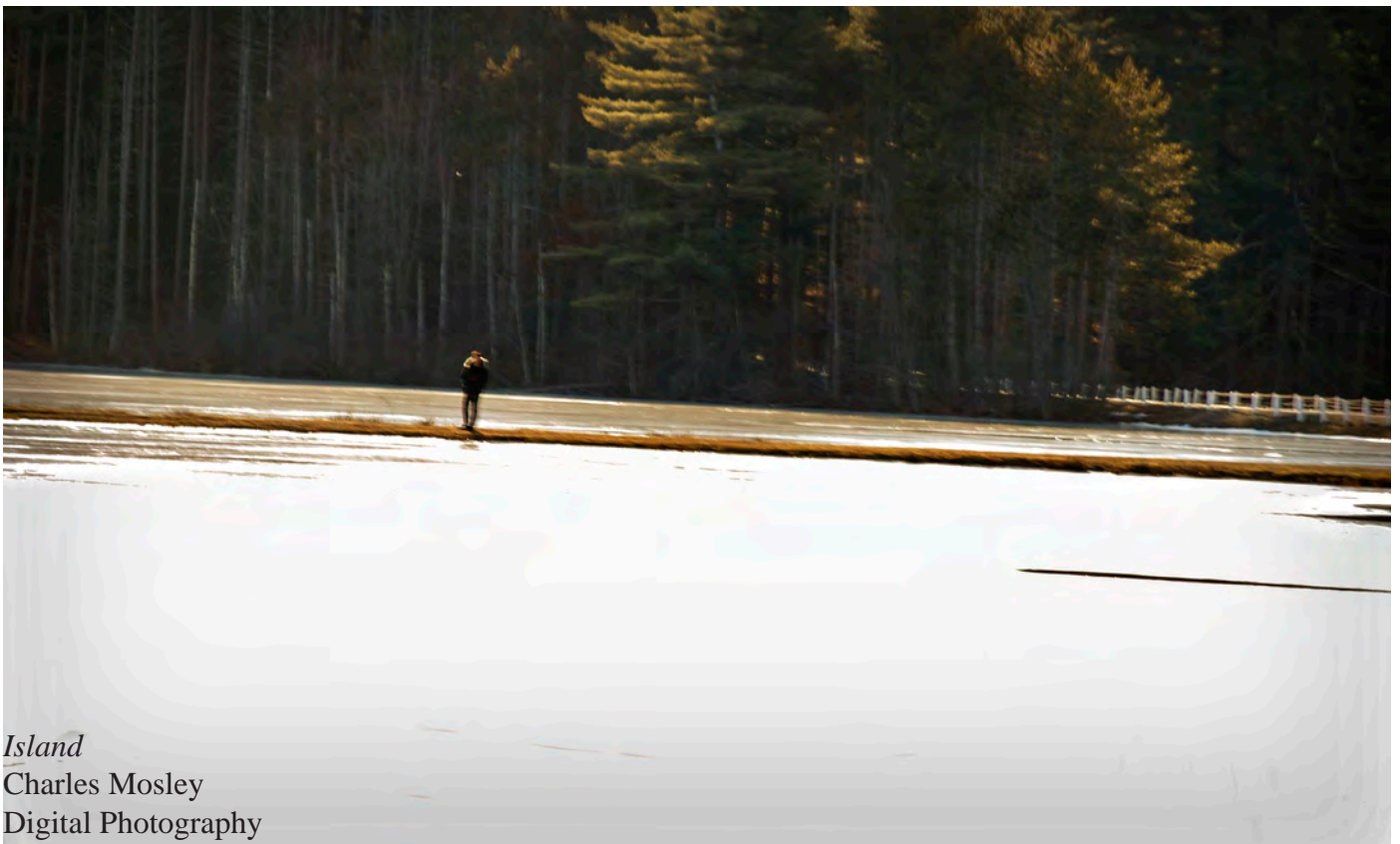
Digital Photography





*I only got this good of a shot because my friend was on the other side of the log.*

Julia Caudle  
Digital Photography



*Island*  
Charles Mosley  
Digital Photography



# An Earnest Belief: The Proliferation of the Ironic Treatment in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

Trent Babington

By Conrad's own admission, the "ironic treatment" he mentions in the author's note to *The Secret Agent* "was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that [it] alone would enable [him] to say all [he] felt [he] would have to say in scorn as well as in pity" (231). Curiously, Conrad is proud of this approach as a sign of his ability to restrain himself—to "keep at arm's length [his memories of London]"—but the result, seeping into every page of the novel, is perhaps rasher than he admits. The ironic treatment is the representation of characters as negative, but with a negativity that fails to take them seriously; they must not merely be bad, but shams. As said, this treatment forms an integral component of the text's narrative voice, attacking everyone—minor figures, such as Karl Yundt—and even those who may at first appear venerable, such as Michaelis. The result is that, though the ironic treatment indeed enables Conrad to criticize his creations with endless "scorn" and "pity," the pummeling proves so thorough that the characters flatten, become distorted fantasies of anarchists and terrorists, rather than as three-dimensional individuals who the reader can connect to, engage with, or take seriously.

The basis of the ironic method consists of locking in place the reader's perception of persons as negative, often wrapping them in several layers of unsavory traits and associations. For example, the narrator claims that Karl Yundt's abilities as an agitator cling "to him yet like the smell of a deadly drug in an old vial of poison, emptied now, useless, ready to be thrown away upon the rubbish-heap of things that had served their time" (36). Conrad casts Yundt not only as "poisonous" and "deadly," and therefore as undesirable, but also as ineffectual: he comes out and calls his abilities "useless." Elsewhere, the narrator is perhaps even less kind, referring to the man's eyes as "extinguished" (32), and his manner as "senile" (32). More obviously, there is also the implication here that the narrator is comparing Yundt to a piece of trash: his skills are "ready to be thrown away upon the rubbish heap" (32).

The depth of Conrad's criticism rises even to the symbolic level: the narrator associates Yundt with the serpent, that original and most terrible propagandist. The old man takes "the part of an insolent and venomous evoker"—the inciter of evil from behind, rather than the doer of evil deeds; as the narrator says: "the famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice" (36). The exposition of his abilities also echoes biblical verse, talking of the Eden-like "ignorance" of humankind, and of the "revolt"—reminiscent of the revolt against God—he hopes to incite. As if that statement were not enough to cause us to color our view of the "old terrorist" with a serpentine tinge, the adjective "venomous," mentioned above with the phrase "venomous evoker," is repeated in descriptions of him (his voice is a "venomous sputtering" (36), for example)—assigning Yundt the chief characteristic of a snake—poison—making his serpentine characteristics yet more pronounced.

Yet the narrator goes a step further: it is not enough to hammer home the point that a character should be seen as Satan-like—but the reader must also be made to see him as an ineffectual, over-the-hill incarnation of that figure. I refer again to the same passage: "The venomous sputtering of the terrorist without teeth was heard" (38). Under this schema of Yundt as serpent, the lack of teeth corresponds to a lack of fangs, making him unable to poison others with the seeds of revolution, unable to serve his purpose as "venomous evoker of sinister impulses" (36). The narrator emphasizes the man's inadequacy through the

alliteration “terrorist without teeth,” as well as through the additional assonance of “without,” creating an association between “terrorist” and “teeth”—between his role and the key instrument necessary to carry it out, which he lacks. That this association is drawn with the letter “t” and enriched with “th,” enhances this effect, as both sounds require teeth to pronounce. Indeed, the narrator states that Yundt, being toothless, can scarcely communicate, let alone “evoke” anyone: “his enunciation would have been almost totally unintelligible to a stranger” (32). In the earlier passage above discussed, where Yundt is first described, the merciless narrator completes the image: he strips the poor old serpent of his venom as well, the terrorist’s vile of poison being “emptied now, useless,” rendering him yet more impotent.

Such is the length to which the narrator goes to demean his characters, to coat them in such extensive layers of irony that hardly a moment passes without them being criticized. That being said, we may ask: ‘but there must be at least one or two characters Conrad portrays seriously—what about Michaelis, for example? Are we not meant to take the position of the “great old lady,” that “[he has] the temperament of a saint” and “if that’s the stuff revolutionists are made of some of us may well go on their knees to them... the poor creature” (81)?’ It is true that the “ticket-of-leave apostle” is the novel’s most benign actor, as he spends the majority of the book in the countryside, writing, of all things, a memoir; and it is also true that his background is the most sympathetic of any character, him being the victim of “an outburst of furious indignation” on part of the public for his participation in a prison-break scheme which he regrets (78); and certainly the narrator seems to side with him, calling that regret an act of “compunction”—but closer examination reveals that Michaelis, too, fails to escape ironic treatment.

Even those instances where the text appears to portray the “ticket-of-leave apostle” sincerely tend to come coupled with statements that undercut them. For example, the narrator sometimes ascribes to him the adjective “saintly”—but only in a sentence such as the following: “he was like those saintly men whose personality is lost in the contemplation of their faith” (79). For a brief interval, perhaps the uninitiated reader is held in suspense: ‘Michaelis is like one of those saintly men!’—but that moment soon collapses in a turn of wit, as that which first appears a compliment is revealed as a comment on his flabby, formless nature: “[his] personality is lost in the contemplation of [his] faith.” A similar occurrence takes place on the same page, removing any hope that Conrad will ever relent: “[Michaelis’s ideas] formed in all their contradictions and obscurities an invincible and humanitarian creed” (79). The irony here emerges in the contrast between the phrase “invincible and humanitarian creed” (seeming to dignify Michaelis), against the information which precedes it, that this “creed” is “formed [of] contradictions and obscurities”—thereby degrading it.

That Michealis is filling his memoir with these dubious beliefs debases also the main action of his character in the novel; the Professor confirms as much when recounting his visit to him in the final chapter: “I picked up a handful of his pages [of the draft] from the floor. The poverty of reasoning is astonishing” (221). This instance of irony is especially sharp because a character, not the narrator, is performing the editorializing: even the internal world of the text fails to take the apostle seriously, as if Michaelis’s ironic quality is so self-evident that an omniscient voice is not necessary. The utopian system described within these pages (to touch upon it briefly) locks in place Michaelis yet more tightly as a figure worthy of criticism. His “world planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak” (221) represents an almost stupefying misunderstanding of human nature and ignorance of (or blatant disregard for) the most basic principles of modern political thought. Who would want to live their life in a “hospital,” even a “nice” one, as the Professor characterizes it?

Michaelis is treated with the least irony during his trial, but the lightening of the treatment of one

character only comes at the expense of another: the public. Throughout the text, the public is often personified as beastlike; for example, after the bombing, Chief Inspector Heat thinks that “it seemed to him an excellent thing to have [Mr. Verloc] in hand to be thrown down to the public should it think fit to roar with any special indignation in this case” (84). Accordingly, when the Apostle repents for his sins, the narrator quips that “that sort of compunction appeared shockingly imperfect to the crammed court” (79). In Conrad’s world, Michaelis’s one admirable act (or supposed admirable act, as I will discuss shortly), must be cancelled out by a reaction equal and opposite in its worthiness of criticism: the country must fail to comprehend the nuance of the situation, deeming reality “imperfect” against their expectations of the young anarchist as a thoroughly terrible individual. The narrator refers to the public’s hypocrisy more explicitly when stating that “the death of that man [the constable] aroused through the length and breadth of a realm for whose defense, welfare, and glory men die every day as a matter of duty, an outburst of furious indignation” (78): the narrator cannot avoid chastising public opinion for its tendency to latch onto certain events while discarding others—to be swayed by the fact of the man’s “wife and three small children” (78).

However, even if Michaelis’s act of “compunction” might be well-intentioned, it nonetheless fails to redeem him, as it is not only “the death of the constable [which makes] him miserable at heart, but the failure of the plot also” (95). His confession carries with it the same commitment to questionable ideals above discussed: he is unable to simply plead guilty, but must use his moment in the courtroom to expound those ideals to “his empaneled countrymen” (78). It is, just as any other instance of irony in this novel, a moment of failure. I might concede that, if other characters are portrayed as ‘negative, but ineffectual’—are ‘bad at being bad,’ so to speak—then Michaelis is one level better: he is, at least here, bad at being good. But, as argued, that does not mean that Conrad fails to wrap him in irony, only that he is covered in one layer less than anyone else.

It is worth noting that this “ironic treatment” comes at the cost of depth. With the characters so thoroughly depicted in an unfavorable light, much of the pleasure of a three-dimensional fiction is lost because we are shown only a certain angle: never can we reach through the mediation created by the narrative voice, above explored as it applies to Karl Yundt and Michaelis, to make judgments about these characters for ourselves; we find that the author has done this for us. It is a far cry from another cast of literary revolutionaries, the “group of five” of Dostoevsky’s *Demons*, for whom one has at least a modicum of pity while watching them commit their own sins under the guidance of a far more effectual terrorist-propagandist than Yundt: the nihilist Pyotr Verkhovensky. An extended comparative analysis of the two texts is beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that the experience of reading the two novels differs markedly: in Conrad’s text, under the ironic method, the characters being so thoroughly torn apart, any hope of taking the revolutionary threat seriously is lost; but in *Demons*, one hopes constantly for the redemption of the characters and for the halting of the horrors, and sees all too clearly, if Dostoevsky’s narrator too has a tendency to mock, the potential of an antisocial force. That is what is missing in *The Secret Agent*; that is the cost of irony.

#### Works Cited

Conrad, Joseph and John Lyon. *The Secret Agent : A Simple Tale*. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2008., 2008. Oxford world’s classics. Print.

# Women of My Blood

Adara North

There is moonlight dancing off our darkened hair  
Bambuco pounding in our veins  
We are doughy arepa women  
Traveling away from the land where our ancestors died

Bambuco pounding in our veins  
Venezuela to the East  
Traveling away from the place our ancestors died  
Promised Land to the North

Venezuela to the East  
My tías are decades from each other  
To the North is our Promised Land  
The language I was born to makes my abuelita's mouth sore

My tías are decades from each other  
Latin ropes of love bind them  
The language I was born to makes my abuelita's mouth sore  
The words crunch on her teeth like rocks

Latin ropes of love bind us  
Is it enough to make solitude into a home?  
The words crunch on our teeth like rocks  
They do not like when we pronounce accents on words they cannot say

Is it enough to make solitude into a home?  
Heavy syllables are fleshed from our roots  
They do not like when we pronounce words with accents they cannot say  
So we dull our knived tongues and lower our heads

Heavy syllables are fleshed from our roots  
Time makes a liar of all of us  
We dull our knived tongues and lower our heads  
"Paso a paso" they tell me...I am theirs

Time makes a liar of us  
Where will I be when I can no longer remember them?  
"Paso a paso" they tell me  
Crushed under assimilation, they have turned to ghosts

Where will I be when I can no longer remember them?  
My doughy arepa women...  
Crushed under assimilation, we have turned to ghosts  
Who dance with moonlight in our darkened hair



# Mrs. Gorman's Nose

Lia Ashe-Simmer

When Mrs. Gorman taps her nose, and says, right after she taps it, “Nose,” it means I have to look at her nose. I hate this but I do it anyway, because I feel like I have to. I feel like I am a puppet and each time Mrs. Gorman taps her nose, she pulls an invisible string that yanks my chin up and makes me look in her eyes. It is risky to look in her eyes, because now, whatever I say must be important. I would much rather be looking down at my hands, or better yet, my shoes, because I have an appreciation for my shoes that goes beyond what they look like. I have tied and retied them many times today, so that both shoes are the same tightness, and that both sides of the knot are exactly the same length. I have memorized the feeling of my shoelaces, and if I look closely I can see how they are actually a bunch of littler strings twisted together, wrapped in plastic at the end so they won’t split. I have also made sure that my socks are pulled up just past that rounded -bone on your ankle so they won’t slide down. I often reach down and stretch the socks out, until I can see exactly where the threads of the fabric separate. Then I let them go and they fall back into their position.

Zach and I both go to see Mrs. Gorman on Mondays. I figure this is because neither of us has a mother, and kids are supposed to have mothers. Zach doesn’t have a dad either, but he has a grandmother, whose name is Sandy even though her hair is gray, not sandy-colored, which bothers me. Inside my head, her name is Sandy-Gray.

Mrs. Gorman’s room is in the basement of the school, by the kindergarten classrooms, where it is dark and smells rubbery. The first thing we do is have ramen noodles or hot chocolate. Mrs. Gorman lets us decide. Usually, I choose the blue packet of Swiss Miss that comes with the marshmallows. She has an electric kettle in her room, plugged in on the floor, and it is always filled with water, so all we have to do is press the little button down and then the blue light turns on. I like things that light up like this, because it’s a clear signal that you are doing it right and the water will boil. We have to drink the hot chocolate fast though, or else Mrs. Gorman will make us throw it away. The hot chocolate tastes sticky and sweet and stays on my lips for a long time. We drink it out of white Styrofoam cups, and I like to keep the cup afterwards, sink my nail into the side of it, and drag it along until the cup splits in two. Mrs. Gorman says next time she will bring plastic.

Mrs. Gorman’s room is small, and she doesn’t have any windows. She has a desk and a filing cabinet and two blue chairs, which is where Zach and I sit, and it is when I am sitting here that she taps her nose and says “Nose,” which means I need to look at her. Today, I tell myself it is a staring competition, this eye-looking, and that makes it easier, until my eyes start to water and I have to blink and then I want to look down at my shoes again but she will start tapping her nose again if I do. She asks me questions about the day and teachers and what I will do after school. The hot chocolate has clogged my throat up and the words are stuck. I wish she would have Capri Sun instead. I could probably talk if she had Capri Sun.

Zach tries to talk for me sometimes, because he is my friend and he likes to talk. I don’t like to talk, I like to read, which is funny because Zach hates to read. We take turns trying to save each other, Zach and I, because we are friends.

When the talking is done, it is time for the multiplication flashcards that come in a red packet. She pulls the rubber band off them and it SNAPS, and I would like to snap the rubber band around my own

wrist, but I can't. Then Zach is meant to practice his reading, so Mrs. Gorman takes out a green book holder. She puts it down in front of Zach and she puts the book in the middle of it, and the sides clamp the book into place. Then she hands him this popsicle stick with a googly eye on the end. This is his reading pointer. It has his name written on the side with blue marker, but Zach has smudged the ZA with his fingers.

This is how Zach is meant to practice his reading, and I want to save him from it, because watching Zach read is the most painful thing in the world. When I read, the letters become words without me having to think about it. When Zach reads, each letter is a puzzle in itself. He will start with a word like 'dear', and he will see the 'd' and he will think it is a 'p,' and will start saying 'puh...puh...puh.' He will say it so much that it will sound like there is a word caught in his throat. Maybe, after a while he'll get that it is a 'd,' and that the next letter is 'e,' and he'll string them both together, but after that he'll lose steam. He'll just start ringing off words that start with 'd,' as if he might by chance land on the right one. This is what he's doing today. He's flinging 'Deal, 'dad, 'do,' at Mrs. Gorman and the more words he says, the further away he gets. Soon, he'll start swinging the googly-eye pointer around the page, and then in the air, until Mrs. Gorman forces it to land on the next letter.

This is not the kind of reading I know, and I am sad that Zach does not know what reading really is. When I read, my book is not trapped inside of a book holder, and I don't have a pointer that is staring at me with a googly eye. I am reading Harry Potter in my bedroom with a night light so Dad won't see and my sister won't wake up, and the pages are flying past me.

When Zach finishes his reading practice she gives him his handwriting worksheet and it is her turn to work with me on the flashcards. I would rather listen to the sound of Zach's pencil on the paper. It sounds like a small animal clawing its way out of a hole. When he erases a letter, he does it so hard and so fast that the whole room is littered with shavings, and I would like to sweep them into my hand, throw them into the air, and watch where they land.

Instead, Mrs. Gorman starts holding up the flashcards and my brain is flailing around trying to get to the answer before she puts the flashcard down but she is staring at me and will start tapping her nose soon if I look away and I have no idea what 4x3 is and the answer is lost inside of me and the only one I can ever get is 8x8 because 8 chased 8 to the store to buy Nintendo 64 or was it 54. Instead of throwing answers out like Zach does, my mind folds away into itself and I am silent.

At the end, Zach hands in his worksheet with crooked letters somersaulting across the page. I give her back the flashcard, the rubber band SNAPS around them again, and we go back up to the fourth floor where our classroom is. And even though I don't really like Mrs. Gorman, I like that we get special hot chocolate that nobody else gets and that it is quiet there.

By the time fifth grade rolls around, the nose trick won't work on me anymore. She will see me in the hallway going to lunch, she will say, "Nose," and begin tapping her nose, but I will look at the floor instead. Or I will turn away from her, and walk defiantly in the other direction. Part of me will want to look back and see how long she stands there tap-tap-tapping her nose. Sometimes, I will imagine that even after I've turned the corner, she is still tapping, more and more furiously. The further away I get, the more desperate the tapping becomes, and she has raised her eyebrows so high that her eyes are kind of bugging out, and she won't give up until I look at her nose, and she stays there for hours until the principal has to send her home. It is not very nice, but I laugh anyway.

# entrapment

Celia Lewis

she's got swords in her stomach,  
a sabre all the way down,  
and i only just noticed.

her mouth is always  
the slightest bit agape,  
tongue flush to her cheek  
to make room.

if you were to look inside,  
to part pursed, bloodied lips,  
you'd be blinded by the rapier's  
cruel reflection, consumed by the  
sight of those scars,  
the consequences of years  
of biting down  
on hard metal.

when she smiles,  
her eyelids wrinkle,  
pain evident in the way  
they never open all the way,  
the grievous hilt sits behind  
those dark grey pupils,  
blood dripping from that  
apathetic expression.

she's got swords in her stomach,  
a collection of knives in her throat,  
and it makes it hard for her  
to speak.

when she opens her mouth,  
her voice heightens, and i can tell  
it's just trying to escape unharmed.

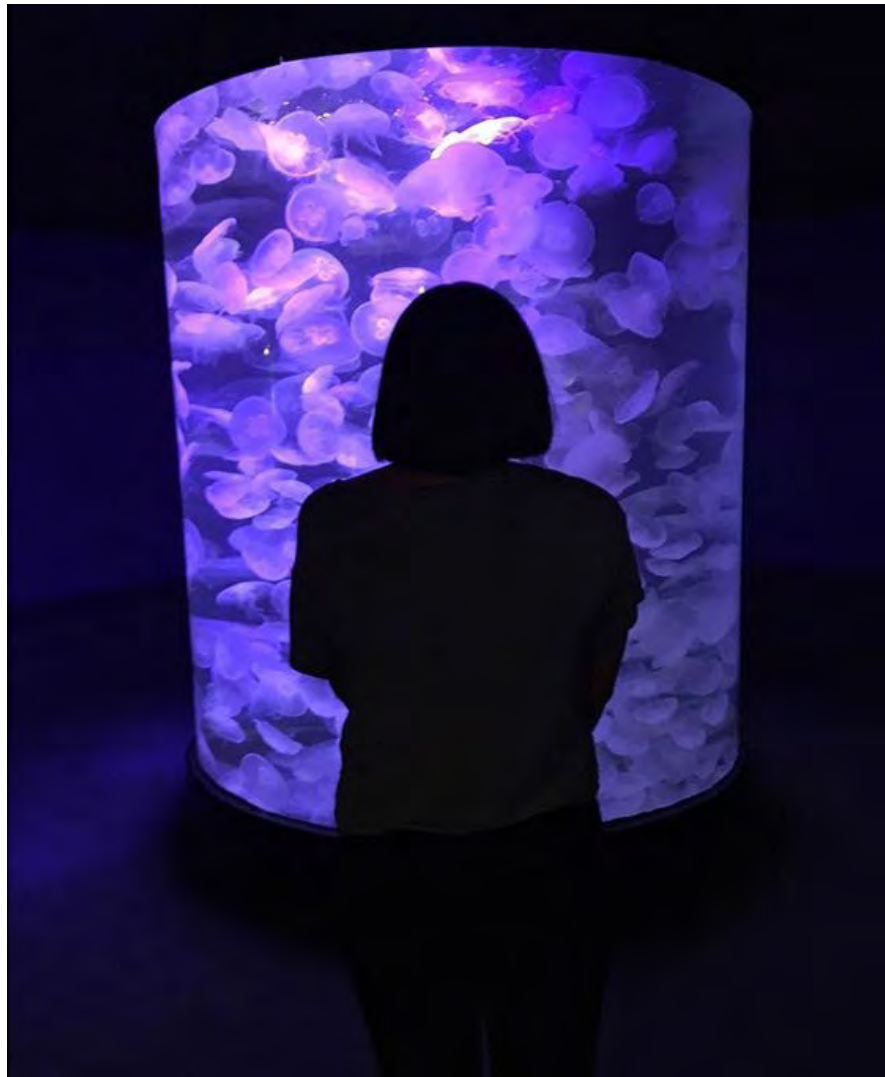
i wonder now, with new empathy,  
how it must feel to live with  
your mind's cruelest weapons,  
to swallow and spit up  
blood like it's nothing,  
like it's normal,  
to live with those unforgiving blades  
in the lining of your digestive tract.

# Cues

Michela Oster

Purple conversation flexes above and  
what seems to be slinking from your hair  
is just out of reach from the salt  
my hands have memorized the color of,  
thrown over my shoulder,  
rubbed over my teeth,  
covered the souls of my feet with.  
But this mastered pointe technique years ago.  
The truth is that fine is just one letter away  
from notice,  
or even, realize  
maybe this is why our eyelashes  
extend to opposite ends of the table

*Ethereal Silhouette*  
Alexa Porco  
Digital Photography





# En Route

Ashley McDermott

I'd like to say I'm a lucky person. I'd like to say it, but I'm not; not always at least. I'm actually the kind of unlucky that Murphy must have been when he made his laws, cursing the day that proved worse than the one before. I stand on the side of a track in the rain with a bag of ashes, struggling to gain service and barred by a gateway in a deserted train station, in a silent county, in a distant country of cattle and clovers. The sky darkens by the minute while the clock inside reminds us of our soon-to-be missed train, chugging towards us.

I stand there alone with my aunt, waiting for some sort of guidance: a ticket back through the locked gate in front of me, a comforting voice telling me where I am, a bit of sunlight peeking through the clouds. God, why'd I leave that platform? I mutter under my breath. Huffing angrily, I fix the strap to the duffle bag slung across my shoulder, its weight pressing down on me more and more by the minute. Meanwhile, I look around us, hoping to find some sign of life. Looks like it's just you and me, Irene.

...

Irene was born and raised in Boston, moving through neighborhoods with her family in tow: brothers, mother, father, cousins, all the aunts and uncles that made the trek across the sea. Their brogue rang out through open windowpanes as floral curtains pulled aside to reveal the city streets in all their immensity. They made the foreign place their home, growing in size and filling miniscule apartments with Galvins and McDermotts, claiming space on this newfound shore.

Irene was the first in the family to claim the identity, American. It sounded nice as it rolled off their tongues; though she always remembered Irish heritage as well. It's in the name, it's in the blood; inherited in the DNA folds, in the layered array of chromosomes. Throughout her life she'd insist upon it. I'm Irish. We're Irish. You're Irish. She'd say this to me, passing around blurry black and white photographs of the past, recounting tales once told to her. She taught me a thing or two about inheritance, and its complexity. It is more than money and property, but rather a host of stories and memories, a sense of belonging, and an identity. Irene inherited an Irish outlook on life that she held onto for dear life. She inherited old knit blankets and my grandmother's good china. She inherited a family that struggled with finding too much solace in a pint and who were painted pale, speckled with freckles across cheeks and collarbones.

She also inherited an Irish death. She died the same way as her mother: a sudden attack of the heart that was already damaged several times before from the cruelty of a hard life and disease. At a time when most women dread menopause and a midlife crisis, Irene's lifeline was cut short, sheared abruptly to all of our surprise. My cousin came home from work one day in early January to find her mother limp and her home colder, emptier than ever before.

A few January's later I found myself stepping foot in the land of stories that my aunt had divulged all those years before. The black and white images my eyes first encountered in still frame were alive in front of me, now in color: bright green, dull gray, vivid ocean blue. I heard the accent I knew and loved envelop the space around me. The pronunciations that were once reserved for family gatherings, I now heard everywhere I went. I became hyper aware of my own voice; harsh and high pitched, not matching the others around me. Heads turned when I spoke, not always regarding the words I said, but more often than not because of how I pronounced them: strange and foreign.

"You're American?" People would state, knowing full well the answer.

"I am."

The Irish-ness that I had been conditioned to cling to with hands clasped like Irene's began to loosen its grasp. I gained more and more of a connection to the land I traveled across, though simultaneously felt less Irish as the days wore on. I'm an American; that's all.

...

“So, I uh forgot to tell you something,” Dad’s voice erupts from the iPhone pressed against my ear, cold metal hitting skin. I sit spinning subconsciously in my desk chair, looking around at the idle surroundings that blur before me, making me dizzy, dizzy, dizzy until I stop. There’s a small unmade bed, sparse decorations along a cream colored wall, a wooden bureau, messy desk, lit candle glowing, a sink tucked away in the corner, and a vanity mirror hung above it.

“What’s up?”

“Well, we forgot something in your apartment actually. You know, we had so much trouble figuring out the trains and buses and everything... Well, I, uh, accidentally left your aunt in the apartment.”

“What do you mean?” I answer confused, confronted with the last possible thing I’d thought he’d say.

“Irene, I left her ashes under the sink.”

“You, what?” I gasp, incredulous at the thought as it spirals, circling my mind trying to sort through my bewilderment.

“I figured I’d spread some of her ashes on the family farm. She would have liked that, you know, and, well... can you meet us tomorrow in Killarney? Can you bring her?”

I pause, trying my best to metabolize everything while opening the cabinets under my sink. Nestled inside, under rusting metal pipes, surrounded by a musty wood framing, sits a black duffle bag. It bulges from something inside that seems about to burst out of its seams. Unzipping the top, I see a square box sealed tight within.

“Yeah,” I sigh, “I’ll meet you there”

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To my surprise and relief, my roommates are not angry or even disturbed by the fact that I’d, unbeknownst to myself, harbored a body in our apartment for the last week. Instead, they roll around laughing, wiping tears from their eyes in hysterics. Of all the roommate horror stories they’d dealt with in the past, this was by far the most bizarre.

“Good luck getting to Killarney Ashley,” Alex gasps between laughs, “the buses went on strike last night.” A second round of laughter erupts.

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Murphy’s law states that if anything can go wrong it will; things get worse, life is hard, etcetera, etcetera. What a nice adage. I don’t know if this Murphy fellow is from Ireland or not, but the surname suggests it and I am starting to believe it. For Irene and I, our present reality was an Irish Murphy’s law bonding experience.

We may as well have etched our own names into history. McDermott’s Law: a lesson in how things will surely go wrong as you venture via train across the Emerald Isle; one young American lass and her “dead-as-a-doornail” aunt. I had her on hand, literally, balancing in my open palm and lap as we moved across land. I can imagine her chuckling just at the sight it; her brown hair in waves frame her face, and the creases from years of smiling line her eyes.

Every passenger walking past us caused me to jump. Don’t sit there! I was afraid I’d have to say. Please don’t brush against this, don’t want anything to spill! Or even worse, someone asking me at security, can I check your bag? The notion of what would happen if I forgot her on one of the seats when I’d switch trains kept snaking its way into mind. The trains only travel en route to the larger, more populated stops, and I had several more transfers before landing at my destination. At one point, I fell asleep, only to be awoken by a lurking fear of someone sneaking up and stealing the package, scrounging for valuables. Just imagine

the shock they'd get upon looking inside.

Unsurprisingly nobody tried to approach the wide-eyed, laughing American in the third row sitting alone and looking as if she was one unprovoked-giggle away from the nut house. Rather, they muttered amongst themselves, wondering who this crazy foreigner is with nothing but a duffel bag on hand, and appearing more anxious as passengers crowd in at each stop.

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By some stroke of luck, a guard hears me in my frustration about missing the next train.

"Oy, miss, whatcha doin' over there?" He called out.

"Please, let me in. I'm running late- I have a ticket, I swear!" What I didn't mention was that I was travelling with a plus one, and had locked the two of us out of the platform on a fervent attempt to run to the bathroom. Minor details, I tell myself as he rushes over towards us.

"Well, okay then, right this way." He quickly lets me in by pressing a button on a control panel nearby. Which is how, by some stroke of luck in a mess of unlucky encounters, I got on the platform as the train slid into the station on time.

...

I'll never forget the face of my Great Uncle as we pass him my aunt's dead body; it displays nothing but surprise, as he wonders aloud in the most lovable Irish accent:

"Oh, and what's this?"

Of course my Dad, the man who forgets his sister's ashes under a sink and would forget his own head if it weren't fastened tight onto the rest of his body, failed to mention what I came to drop off.

"Oh, I meant to tell you..."

And the rest is history, or at least family lore from here on out.

...

I found myself sad to leave her there though, letting go of the package that I held her in; the one that I was so startled and unsettled to travel across a country with in the first place. I went with her through Cork, Clare, Limerick, looping all the way back to Kerry. I pretty much saw the length of a coastline with her by my side and in a strange way, felt close to my aunt again. I could almost hear her dialogue, her Boston accent raspy from years of cigarette smoke and deep-belly laughs: Look at us, we're Irish, we're in Ireland, we're home.

The voyage with her body brought me to see relatives I'd otherwise have never met. I found myself acquainted with the Killarney air my grandparents once breathed in deep for decades of their lives. I saw the mountains, the lakes, the grasslands that they too traversed; now in reverse order from the port that they'd departed from as emigrants. I was returning to the home they never had the chance to see again, and it was beautiful. Now, it's mine to see and hear and taste with an open mind, alone with the exception of Irene, sitting patient at my side while I look around in wonder.

...

Inheritance is a strange thing. I inherited freckles and a loud laugh; light blue eyes and a heart murmur. I inherited a silver necklace from my second cousin, earrings from my grandmother, and a lesson from my aunt. I now inherited something new from her too: a deep appreciation for who she was and who she helped me to be. I inherited one last adventure with her by my side, even if we proved the unluckiest bunch of Irish-ish people on the island that day. I was lucky to have known I was never alone for the ride.





*Vulnerability, Intimacy, or Lack Thereof*  
Madeleine Conover  
Wood relief, linocut, pochoir



# SMUT

Peter Duffy

Piss poor parenthetical genitals with a vulnerability for whores and boys with broad shoulders. Slinking down stairs like bleeding livers wrapped in metal wire, my mind fired and smoldering, eyes ice boulders still fat wet and sweating.

Forgetting the words to the alphabetical erection; familial bets on whether I'm bisexual, suspectual, correct, or just parenthetical—outside bits, syllables thrown from the van rolling.

Nickels landing heads in a Maxwell House can, and knuckles bleeding black heads on the back of my hands.

Ropes wrapped round rubber band necks and belts around sex, I'm a fuck pool of cess.

Scared of breasts and smelling men's chests, but oh please, I'd do either. I'm a freak that fucks anything that breathes or walks or bleeds or feeds me and I'm teasing myself. My seeds! I need a teacher, or a god and a preacher to tell me I need neither.

## March 24, 2018

Peter Duffy

silent

stoic pain

morning pledges

under stains

armed

by our ache

the children

are playing the game

# Supplicant

Samira Teixeira

This time around, winter bloomed like a fever:  
consumptive and long-time-coming,  
teasing the ache  
as a ripe plum,  
retracting and returning  
until the dull edge of the chill edged in.  
Chapped  
and bleeding lips became  
commonplace.

I observe your chipped-tooth eyes catch  
the flat light from an unhinged window.  
It leaks through,  
the opportunist,  
stretching towards our bodies as if to wake us.  
I can no longer decipher its motives or  
the glossed runes of your forehead:  
are you helping or  
hurting or simply  
burning up?

I wring the damp rag of my hands, raised  
in idolatry to the hide  
of your temples and their  
slick heat  
nearly knocks me back.

It is here  
in the wet of the bed  
I realize  
we have no cure  
for you,

not I nor I nor the naked  
elm screeching its crude branches across  
the glass of the window.

you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me baby  
you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me baby  
you can't love me if you  
don't criticize me hunny  
you can't love me if you  
don't criticize me hunny  
you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me baby  
you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me hunny  
you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me baby  
you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me hunny  
you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me baby  
you don't love me if you  
can't criticize me hunny

*true love and trust*  
from TEXTHEAD  
A.T. Halaby  
Multi-media Collage

PRESSING MATTERS PRINTING PRESS

### III. Adrestia

Tanvi Verma

“No, it was like an Indian grocery store, basically.”

“I didn’t know that they had grocery stores specific to India, I guess. It’s just... weird.

Well, not like weird weird, just-”

“It’s just to sell, like, Indian snacks and masalas and stuff. Like, the stuff you can’t just find in other grocery stores.”

A silence follows. I am, admittedly poorly, trying to mask my frustration that Chris is caught up on this specific detail, as he focuses on merging onto the highway towards the suburb where his parents live. I turn my head, too, and squint to see how far away the headlights of oncoming traffic is against the dark blue of late evening. Earlier today, I spent over an hour changing shirts and pants, trying to figure out which outfit would convey the message, “I like your son, but I don’t think I’m going to marry him,” to his parents. The “I like your son, but I don’t think I’m going to marry him” outfit ended up consisting of just a black sweater dress, tights, and black boots. So, it was definitely stronger in concept than it was in delivery, I thought as we drove silently along.

“Did you know him well, then?” asks Chris, probably trying to show that he was actually interested in the story.

But, I didn’t know him well. And it wasn’t much of a story. That morning, my mother had called. In addition to her usual inquiries about my eating habits and the condition of my hair/skin/everything and her polite but guarded questions about my White Boyfriend, my mother rarely added in stories about her own life. Today, though, to keep me, “in the loop,” she told me about how the body of the owner of our local Indian store, Pranit Uncle, had been found.

“Just terrible,” she managed through the crunching of what is likely kurkure. “He hung himself, Uncle, in the shop. Can you imagine? And his wife, Prerana Auntie? Remember? Walked in on it later in the day! Awful. She’s managing the store now. Business is not doing well. Did you know people can buy their naan and chai at Whole Foods now? Much more expensive, though.”

I quickly shook her off of the phone, not wanting to stop and think about the social implications of being a widowed Indian woman as I was preparing to meet my boyfriend’s parents. I couldn’t help but dwell, however, on the thought of how some widows in more rural areas of India literally set themselves on fire once their husbands die. I also thought of how my grandmother broke her marital bangles over our bathtub and stopped eating meat when my grandfather died.

I’m trying, now, to tell Chris this, but I needed to provide some context for why I’m thinking about it at all.

“It’s not actually that important. It’s just-”, I start.

“No, no, I’m happy that you’re sharing this part of your life with me-” “Let’s just talk about something else.”

After another silence, Chris gladly starts talking about how excited his parents were to meet me. I am the first girl he is bringing home in a while, and tonight, I am playing the role of Okay Girlfriend with a small bouquet for Chris’ mother because I am too cheap to buy wine. I feel a slight churn in my stomach as we pull into their driveway, but silence my panic quickly by reminding myself that it’s hardly as though I’m marrying Chris anyway. If his parents don’t like me, that’s fine.

“You ready?” I hear Chris ask as I get out of the car. I turn to answer him, and the nervous excitement in his eyes makes me feel momentarily awful for being so cynical. This is not the first time I have felt this way, as many of my idealistic friends often chide me for saying that I know Chris isn’t the man I want



to spend the rest of my life with (“You never know!”). The issue has never been that I am not in love with him, I am. I just don’t know how to see it through. But, I stifle my own intuition yet again and allow myself a clear mind before entering the house he grew up in.

But that was a silly mistake, as most people of color who have ever been in a new, middle-aged, white couple’s home for the first time would know. Chris’ father (“Call me Alan! Mr. Scott is my father’s name! Haha!”) takes my jacket and says, “What a beautiful name! Aastha! Like ‘pasta’! Does it mean anything?”

I actually don’t have an answer prepared for this question and am unsure how to proceed after this series of sentences. Apparently that is visible enough on my face that Mr. Scott Alan has to clarify, “Like my name, Alan. Doesn’t mean anything! Does yours? In your parents’ language?”

After another mildly awkward pause in which I think I can actually hear Chris’ pulse rising, I spit out, with a difficult smile, “Probably!”

We all laugh a nice sitcom laugh as Mrs. Scott (who I, by the grace of God, have not been instructed to call anything other than ‘Mrs. Scott’) takes the flowers from my hand, thanking me. I silently scold myself for making these people into caricatures before knowing them.

There is always a moment when walking into a new house when I wonder what it is like to come home to a place like that. As I enter my own house, I take my shoes off, walk straight into our kitchen and immediately smell the lingering aroma of the masala my mother cooks with. I imagine a younger Chris now, running ahead of us as we walk through his living room and into the kitchen, turning his head to look back at the four of us.

This house smells like Febreeze.

Mr. Scott Alan is a tall man with a slight belly and a big laugh. He works in management, and makes enough money to take his family on vacations to Cancun and Aruba every year. There are dozens of framed pictures of the three of them on beaches and in front of palm trees, with a small, burnt, but beaming Chris always in the middle of them. Mrs. Scott has a wide, comfortable smile and does yoga semi-frequently, I judged as I saw a pink yoga mat and block tucked neatly in the corner of the living room.

I take the seat indicated to me at the table, and Mrs. Scott brings out a large bowl of salad.

“Is water okay for you guys?”

I immediately wince at the phrase “you guys,” a term that my mother has always scolded me for using for its informality. But, I nod and say thank you like I’m supposed to.

I wonder, for a moment, about Pranit Uncle’s home. He manned the store all day, from eight in the morning to ten at night. I wonder about what his dinner looked like, with his son likely asleep whenever he came home and his dinner sitting alone at the table, covered by a plate to prevent fruit flies from getting to it.

I knew the business was never doing well. Whenever I went with my mother, as a child, we were the only two people there. With dusty produce and an extensive collection of pirated DVDs, the only thing drearier than the store itself was Pranit Singhania, quietly weighing the produce on a scale near the register and checking returned DVDs for scratches. Next to the register was a mounted, plastic print of the goddess Laxmi, covered in dust, with a stick of incense smoking next to it.

I wonder how long his body hung in the store before his wife found it.

“I hope you like pasta!”

I snap out of my train of thought just in time to see Mrs. Scott looming over the table with a huge bowl of red-tinted pasta.

“Yeah! Great. Love it.”

I, blissfully, can eat quietly for a while as Chris’ parents initially ask him about how his new job is going and if we’ve settled into our apartment. I usually can handle parents just fine, but my mind wanders

back to the kurkure my mother was eating when we talked on the phone, and how I wish I had a full bowl of that instead of this warm, bland mush. Eventually, the conversation turns to me and how my career is going. His parents are impressed with my unimpressive paralegal work, and nod approvingly when I talk about my goals for law school. Over a glass of wine for dessert, they tell me about their own college experience and how they settled down in Newton. When, inevitably, the topic of my parents comes up, I explain that they immigrated from India and are currently happy and healthy in Connecticut.

“Have you ever been back? To India?”

“I mean, I never lived there, so I can’t really ‘go back’, I guess,” I laugh but I can see a trace of discomfort in Mr. Scott Alan’s eyes as he looks down for a moment. Maybe I am imagining it. “But, uh, no. I haven’t ever been. My parents go sometimes, but I... I was never really too interested.”

“I’ve just always wanted to go! It’s such a beautiful culture!” chirps Mrs. Scott, who has folded her napkin and placed it stiffly on her plate. “And the food, I mean wow!”

“Yeah, the food is pretty good, I guess,” I say as I push a limp, watery tomato around my plate.

“You know, my friend, Carlene, her colleague went back to India recently and brought her back a silk sari. Beautiful. I think she should hang it up in their living room, it’s just such a nice pattern. Their whole country is just so beautiful!”

I think back to my grandmother trying to get through airport security in a sari, and how the TSA rolled their eyes at her as she struggled to bend down to take off her shoes underneath the folds of fabric. My stomach starts to hurt.

“You know, actually, it has a lot of problems as a country. Like socially, and the pollution-” I start to say, for some reason.

“Well, don’t we all?” chuckles Mr. Scott Alan. “I mean don’t we have problems socially? And with pollution?”

“Well, I think that even the people who immigrate here, like, still have a harder time adjusting and meeting expectations-”

“Yeah, sure, sure, for sure. Take the new guy at work! Alok, I think his name is, quietest guy I ever met. We took him on about a month ago, sponsoring his visa from somewhere, maybe Delhi or somewhere. And, you try- you know- you try to talk to him about how he’s doing, but he’s just ever so polite and quiet. Just ‘fine, sir,’ ‘good, sir.’ Smartest guy in the department, though, no doubt, the smartest ones always come out of India. No exception, that guy, but so quiet. Probably having a hard time, you do feel bad. Smart, though.”

I absorb this as though I am a tired, grimy mop trying to forcefully take in more grey water from a rarely cleaned floor before realizing that I am expected to reply, as Chris is looking at me nervously and Mrs. Scott expectantly.

“Yeah,” I say, hoping it’s enough before asking where the bathroom is.

I run the water in the sink, look at myself in the mirror, and eventually close my eyes. It’s really not that bad, I think, I don’t know what my problem is.

My phone vibrates:

Chris: What’s going on?

What you do mean?

Chris: You okay?

Yeah, I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Chris: You just aren’t really acting like yourself.

The ride home is silent for the most part. As Chris parks next to our building, I hear myself apologize

for not being more personable, for not, “acting like myself,” that I just didn’t feel comfortable. I know he’s disappointed that I wasn’t more excited to meet his family.

He says, “You just never give people enough credit, you know? I just feel like you go into meeting people, and you always just think you know them and that they’re terrible, and they’re just not like that. You just start out so defensive, and I really don’t get it. It’s like you didn’t want to be comfortable.”

I hear myself saying that I shouldn’t have been so quick to judge them, that I had a lot on my mind. He forgives me easily, simply, never holding onto an issue with the same bitter resentment that I bury all my sour memories in to fester over time. The light bleeds through the negative space in his silhouette as he climbs the stairs in front of me towards our apartment. As he gets into bed a few minutes later, I wash my face and take off my earrings. I step into the shower to wash off the day, but I cannot stop thinking about Prerana Auntie.

I see her in my mind’s eye, waiting in the car for her young son to get out of school because she felt too self-conscious in her old salwar to step out. I see the lunch she packs him, a paratha with some achaar spread on it, and a small bag of almonds. I can see the kids staring at his lunch, scrunching their noses at the sour smell of the achaar, and I can see him throwing the rest of his paratha away and coming home, starving. He tells her about his day in a more fluid English than Prerana Auntie can manage despite having tried her hardest for years. I can see him watching TV as his mother cooks for their family, her house smelling like mine. She scoops a portion of sabzi and rice onto a plate for her son to eat in front of the television. She scoops a larger portion of sabzi with a side of dahi and a heaping serving of rice onto a plate for her husband, covering it with another plate to protect it from bugs. She eats quietly out of tupperware in her kitchen, thinking that she has, again, over-salted the sabzi. She thinks she will ask her husband to bring back the older onions and potatoes from the store so she can make a curry tomorrow, something new.

As her son goes to bed, Prerana Auntie turns on the Indian news and watches the clock, waiting for her husband to come back. It passes ten, then half past ten, then eleven. She calls the store, and there is no answer. She calls his phone, and gets his voicemail. I see her struggle with the decision of leaving her son alone in the house to check on her husband. She struggles with this until midnight, when she can no longer sit still.

Did she get in the car and drive there then, in the dark? Did she drape a shawl around her like my mother and my grandmother before they headed out into a cool summer night? Were the lights of the store on? Was it locked?

How long did she stand there, watching him hang before she could move again?

I inhale sharply, realizing suddenly that the water has been running cold. I do not know how long I have been standing here. I struggle to turn it off before stepping out of the shower, wrapping myself in a towel, and standing over the sink, feeling suddenly sick to my stomach. In one quick motion, my body violently rejects the iceberg lettuce and pasta I had forcefully consumed earlier. I run the sink, retching a few more times, until all the evidence of how much I hated Mrs. Scott’s food is gone forever.

I turn off the light in the bathroom and check to see if any of my commotion has stirred Chris awake. Thankfully, he is still asleep, facing the window that looks out onto the street below. I quietly walked out of the room, shutting the door behind me, and turned on the television in the living room to a random channel which turns out to be nothing but static.

Wanting to hear the noise for myself, but not wanting to create more commotion, I lean in towards the television until my forehead touches the glass. I think of their son, knowing or not knowing what has happened to his father. I think of my own mother, laughed at for wearing a salwar when dropping me off at school. I think of my father, calling his relatives almost daily to hear someone who sounded more like him. I close my eyes and let the sound of the static burrow its fingers deeply into my ears until I cannot think, and I return to the bed of a man who also does not think.



*Don't Look*  
Erin Alzapiedi  
Digital Photography

*For I Know Not What I See*  
Erin Alzapiedi  
Digital Photography





# For Roland Barthes

Natalie Roll

-“Satan-  
--Oscillate(s)--  
---My metal----  
----lic----  
-----Sonatas”-----

A sinusoidal death  
Clacking on the desk  
In the dark  
Friends of fire  
Drawn to admire  
Its most curious spark

This love could be a poisonous dart Noxious oxygen  
Gasping art  
An  
Inkblot  
Forever  
Marks  
The  
Bloody  
Spot

This blackness Resonates

With the Divine . . . Puts portals in minds & mortals in the breathing brine . . . . .

# Chance and Fate

Nicholas Sargent

O Hark! The rainfall!  
On this day of elections!  
Of what is to come!

# Insomnia

Lianna Churchill

03:00

I thought I needed sleep;  
the day came when I  
was suspended in time,  
covered by darkness,  
nothing but the pale  
moon glow. There  
were hundreds nearby,  
but only three mattered:  
me, him, and the orb.  
We were crusaders of  
the night, galloping a  
soft rhythm I can't  
recreate on my knees. The  
bruises were fading  
into yellow patchwork of impact.

04:00

He ignored them, because  
I had no explanation.  
He asked me about  
cartoons and my  
favorite places and  
we reminisced on the  
days when we couldn't  
wait to grow old. Now  
it was just getting old.

05:00

He told me about the city,  
I described my fear of  
peanut butter.  
Peanut butter?  
Peanut butter.  
The scarce car lights  
reduced intrusion and  
I had succumbed to the  
way the night wrapped  
around out torsos like  
a figure-eight python.

06:00

We exchanged vows  
to never allow shitty  
people govern the ways  
we explore the four walls  
of life on a silver spoon.  
“Life’s too meaningful,”  
we nodded in synchronized  
harmony of two people who  
felt something in the  
vast nothingness.

07:00

The crevice of rays flowed  
from behind brick facades,  
highlighting the cracks.  
Ember crawled over the moon,  
which had retreated to  
another hibernation. Two  
were left, but there was  
only one watching the rebirth.  
I was fixated on the curvature  
of his left ear lobe. The new light  
beamed across friction  
and into my mind’s glass.  
Even as the birds were  
chirping, I was encapsulated  
by the unmistakable, deafening  
sound of silence.



*Year of the Woman?*

Monica Mazur

Newspaper, canvas and acrylic paint



# A Little Girl Like Me

Ocean Eversley

Delighted as can be  
I ran all the way home.  
I couldn't wait to  
Tell my parents  
That I just learned  
A special word,  
In English, made for  
A little girl like me.  
At least, that is what  
The two sisters,  
I was playing with  
Told me up the street.  
They were laughing  
When they called me it  
And taught me how  
To say it perfectly.  
It wasn't like any  
Italian or English expression  
I heard or said before.

Rushing in the room,  
I cheerfully shout  
"Mommy, Daddy,  
Guess what?  
I am a nigger, I am a nigger!!!" You should've seen my face. I was one proud  
7-year-old girl  
Beaming with elation.  
Eager to learn, more  
Special terms  
That described me  
So perfectly.  
Those were my plans,  
Until I landed on the  
Floor from my fathers Smack of disgust  
And heavy hand.  
He dragged me outside  
Next to the dog feces  
& grass that smelled  
Like guinea pig urine.  
"In America, a nigger"  
My Dad said, "Is a colored person. Whites think, they are born

to be servants, and dragged  
Through the shit  
And urine of others  
For a lifetime. They are  
Never supposed to be  
Sweet Princesses like you,  
They are never to be happy  
Or respected.  
Do you understand me?"

I just stared at my skin  
In disbelief. How could  
White America not see  
An innocent child,  
With regular skin,  
Who just wanted to play.

I looked up, at my Dad's  
Face, he stared at mine,  
But not really.

He then dragged  
Racism & me,  
Up the street headed  
Towards the white girls  
Home. My white patent  
Leather shoes & white  
Lace socks fraying  
From the cutting edges  
Of the concrete pavement,  
And a lesson I will never forget.

# Season of Another Birth

Adara North

Waiting for a glimpse of the Red Moon  
Her loneliness is so brutal

Flesh of beast, and man, the one lurking in the night, fashioning nostalgia  
A slumland of the mind; I can't tell anyone

This jewel they put inside  
The wolf, broken, and bleeding -- that was me.

Outside the makeshift hospital,  
Mother,  
Asks if she can have the rest of my cigarettes because smoking is bad for babies

I walk for days until the dead start talking  
Potency of seeds hidden in the dark womb of silence

Breathing in the last moments of the child, living  
Give me my medicines, Mommy, so I can forget

# Untitled

Edward Clifford

*-for Her*

a smell of coconut, taste of sulphur,  
yet never, ever out of sighted men.  
our worlds encountered without consequence  
as drag dressed swans sequenced into poses.  
the swanky-lit gallants allured us with boas of fancy,  
but i collapsed back into self-assured masculinity,  
a tyrannical mantis  
with glittery antennae.  
the blindness was over-and-under us now,  
yellow wool cloaked over yellow hair reaching  
yellow everywhere  
that i could not see,  
and the banana fleece that flows over her milk white skin  
retreats to an endless chamber of dreams and nightingales.

# Mojitos and Messy Conversations

Erin Alzapiedi

The June air had a bite to it that she wasn't prepared for, she hadn't even thought to pack jeans. Sweat-pants would just have to do for tonight; she dug them out of her suitcase and pulled them onto her tired legs. She knew Dad and Karen wouldn't want her to look like such a bum in front of guests, but she had nothing else warm enough to wear. She skidded down the stairs in a hurry, eager to help cook or mix drinks, anything to give off the impression that she was the perfect daughter.

"How can I help, Dad?"

"I don't know, I'm busy with the fire pit. Ask Karen."

That was his response to everything lately. Normally she would push back at this, but this time she let it slide and headed towards the kitchen. Karen put her on Mojito duty without a hint of hesitation, almost like she was expecting the help.

"Break up that mint, but not too small. And don't add too much sugar."

She mixed and measured, following Karen's recipe exactly. They never added the rum with so many kids in the house, which meant she was basically mixing up some glorified lime water. The doorbell rang and all of her stepsiblings ran for the door. The neighbors were coming for dinner by the bonfire, so all the middle school kids could hang out while the adults threw back a few drinks. She, now finishing her Freshman year of high school, was caught between childhood and the adult world. She wasn't sure what to do with herself in the commotion so she just kept stirring. Her dad came in from the fire pit and noticed her standing alone in the kitchen.

"Well aren't you gonna go say hi?"

"I will, I just didn't want to crowd them."

"Well that's kind of rude. You've stirred that enough anyway. Go see if they need help carrying dessert."

Dinner was nothing out of the ordinary; she stayed by the fire counting the times Dad and Karen ran into the kitchen for rum. The rest of the kids never noticed. She wondered if they were too young to notice or if they just weren't bright enough to pick up on their parents' drinking habits.

When the guests finally left, the younger kids went to bed and the daughter stayed behind to clean up. They brought the dishes to the sink and Dad sank into the couch as she began to wash them. Karen tried to help, but considering she was hardly stable enough to stand she just got in the way.

"Sweetie, will you help Karen up to bed? She needs some rest."

"I'm fine," Karen protested. Her voice really was like nails on a chalkboard.

"Let's go, Karen," the daughter said as she looped her shoulder under Karen's arm. She pushed Karen up the stairs, using her legs as an anchor to keep them both from tumbling down them. It took several minutes to reach the top of the single flight, as Karen repeatedly mumbled that she wasn't that drunk. The daughter ignored Karen's ramblings, rubbed some toothpaste around in her mouth and let her collapse on the unmade bed. By the time the daughter made it back downstairs to finish the dishes Dad had already managed to refill his mug.

She went to the kitchen and scrubbed the grease from the pans without saying a word. She didn't



want chatter, she just wanted to finish the dishes and get to bed.

“Alright the dishes are done. Goodnight, Dad.”

“Wait come sit with me for a while. I never get to talk to my baby girl.”

“Dad, it’s 2am.”

“It’s a Friday night!” he scoffed, “Don’t you wanna spend time with me?”

“Of course I do, but I have to leave for dance class at 7 tomorrow. I’m tired.”

“Just a few minutes.”

She sighed and made her way over to him. As she sank down into the couch, he put an arm around her and gestured his drink towards her, offering a sip.

“No, I’m good. Thanks.” When he didn’t move his outstretched arm she took the drink from his hand and placed it on the coffee table.

“You know honey, when you grow up and fall in love with someone, I want you to show them how much you love them every single day. I don’t mean by buying flowers or chocolate.” She wiggled out from under his arm, uncomfortably predicting where this conversation was headed. “You’re old enough to know what I mean right?”

“Yes, Dad,” she sputtered with a tinge of eye roll in her voice.

“I think that’s what was wrong with your mother and I. She hadn’t touched me in years. Your mother wouldn’t even hold my hand, never mind anything else. You know what I mean.”

“Hey Dad, it’s late, we should go to bed.” She heaved herself off the couch and picked up his drink before he could reach for it. “C’mon,” she said as she pulled him upright, “I’m right behind you.”

“Sweetie, I’m serious, this is important.”

“I know it is, we can talk about it after you get some rest. Go ahead, I’ll be right up.”

He stopped arguing, but lingered in the kitchen doorway. The daughter dumped the rest of his drink down the sink then nudged him towards the stairs, following closely behind. He was surprisingly stable; he usually was when he was drunk. It was always his mouth that gave him away. Once she knew he was in bed she went to the bathroom, brushed her teeth, and splashed some cold water on her face. She climbed into bed and checked the time on her phone. 3 AM. Four hours until ballet.



*What the Mania Asks For*  
A.T. Halaby  
Multi-media Collage

# Memorial Day Somewhere in Worcester

Stacey Cusson

Grandma is laughing on her deathbed.

She's never said *I'm going to die*  
but she's all macular degeneration  
all spinal stenosis  
all bone and no sinew.

Somewhere in Worcester

Grandma takes her place at the empty plot  
beside Armand and shakes her head, knowing  
the sod never seems to heal  
from Dad's knees unsettling the recovering welt  
while he tries to pick weeds from the copper grave marker  
in the wrong section.

Somewhere in Worcester Armand's heart takes him  
before the homicide on Salem Street  
put a bullet in the left breast pocket of his police uniform  
before the escalation in Vietnam did  
before he could be buried in the not yet ready plot  
with the rest of the Veterans about to expire.

Somewhere in Worcester

Grandma apologizes for taking twenty years  
for herself by promising *I will be with you soon—*  
She's never said *I'm going to die*  
in front of her son.

Somewhere in Worcester

Grandma gifts a pinwheel to the infants  
who were only a clot of blood  
before my father.

Somewhere in Worcester

Grandma gives me a hug and says  
*I suppose this is the last time I'm gonna see you.*

Somewhere in Worcester

Grandma waves goodbye,  
shuts the door and walks through it forever.



# Excoriation

Natalee Marini

i have never known  
my hands to be pretty.

hangnails like errant roots from  
cuticles erupt, peeled back  
(slivered and raw)

like dry strips of bloody earth

(feel: the sore-red ache of inflammation grown too familiar)  
(see: dead-white stalks of skin, stiff as bodies in a morgue)  
(taste: new blood, sluggish as it dries on torn-up nail-beds)  
(touch: and dredge with jagged nails gashes scabbed over)  
(think: i don't know how to stop --

and wish  
each morning  
i might grow back someone else's skin.



*Boots*  
Jessica McKeel  
charcoal on Paper





*21st Century Bonding*  
Erin Alzapiedi  
Digital Photography

*Untitled*  
Emily Bevacqua  
Digital Photography



# Disorderly Conduct

Nathaniel Pinkham

Regret only happens after birth when the little fucker won't stop tearing up the carpet. Isaac and Rebecca chalk it up to the side effects of having a child born on a bathroom floor. When symptoms didn't disappear, they blamed New Jersey. Spent the two hundred eight grand they didn't have and moved North. Isaac's Grandfather, Abraham, recently had a heart attack, so now was as good a time as any to go back home. New England air might normalize the brain.

Playgrounds were made for first broken bones. Where boys become normal boys. Isaac thought it good to break in his son and stands with the crowd of parents. Unblinking. The other children play games of "Tag" or its variant, "pelt who's it with rocks." Isaac's son creates his own game made of rules in motion. The others stop. They can leave. They don't. The boy did this.

Parents glance at the boy from corners. Isaac tugs his son by the shoulder. "Why are you like this?" Nothing more is said for the rest of the car ride.

Isaac watches his son go to school. All the other kids strain not to. An email from Mr. Williams says the boy doesn't sit well in class and refuses to do anything but stare at the cardboard frame lining the wall.

There sat some plastic blocks on the school room table with sides containing squares or triangles. The point is to match the squares with the triangles to form a randomly assigned picture, as fast as possible. One of the teachers watches over, usually Mr. Williams, uncaring. Isaac's son is told he will have to take this test every three years for the rest of his school life. They do not tell him if that means he passed.

Isaac wears down his son's smile. The real world has no place for those who don't want to fit. The Meek shall inherit the earth, so one should learn to shut up. Isaac drills math problems. No bathroom breaks. He only lets his son pause after he has vomited from stress. Only to mop it.

Isaac and Rebecca had a new daughter soon after. Maria. Named after Rebecca's mother, it was chosen a show of solidarity with the rest of the extended family. To welcome the new daughter as one of them. Rebecca came into Maria's room to find the boy, brown eyes linked his sister's, caressing her cheek with the back of his fingers. Smile on his face. Rebecca runs over and shields Maria in her arms.

"What are you doing? Your sister is not a toy or piece of the carpet. Do you ever think? Do you?"

School has become harder, but now he has a work ethic. Eyes always downcast. Pen inside book for three, four, five hours at a time. This doesn't ever stop his grades from slipping. Somehow it seems to agree with his stomach, yet still told by Isaac and Rebecca to work harder. Stay quiet. Keep the head down and learn how to provide something useful. Learn how to hold control.

Isaac's son joined the track team. Was the only non-cut sport where technique didn't matter. A place where uncontrollable energy is a positive. Waking up at 6am to the chirping of birds. Coach Slewinski's shrilling gives the team something to solidify around. If the boy keeps his mouth shut, they let him stand around. Nicknames are made of Isaac's son which never get said to his face. High-fives and shaken hands if the team catches a win. Cold stares if not. Not the worst way to pass the time.

Thanksgiving was dictated as family time. Every year's was spent in a two-hour drive to Maine. Craggy shore and rotten wood. But Isaac's son has a track meet he doesn't want to miss. Family, no matter who it is, should always support each other. Didn't the boy see how much they'd given up for him? They didn't raise an ungrateful son. The demands are met with equal stubbornness. He does not want to go and the screams of "why are you like this?" are met with a closed door.

The meet ended in a loss. Isaac's son is only met with silence.

No lights in the window when the boy gets back home. His family is still up in Maine, trying to remember what it was like before children. The boy also wishes he could back to that time again. He lies down on the floor spread eagle. Fingers swirling around the carpet. Smile on his face.

# WHO WE ARE

## BENJAMIN QUINN

is a poet, curmudgeon, and aspiring dog-dad. His passions include: the one-hit wonders of the 80's, French Presses, and Julie Andrews. When he isn't too busy dodging the question, "What are your plans after graduation?" he can probably be found either working on Jabberwocky, or watching reruns of The Joy of Painting in the dark. Jabberwocky is his child and, therefore, please be kind to it!

## MIRA KENNEDY

is an unashamed Star Wars enthusiast, Cadbury Mini Egg lover, and friend to all cats. A childhood love of fantasy novels has led to most of her life choices. Working on Jabberwocky let her practice her newly acquired skill of not-procrastinating, which she believes will serve her well, and was loads of fun besides!

## PAVITHRA DEVARAJAN

is an English major who is graduating this Spring. She may be lost, but she's making good time.

## ASHLEY McDERMOTT

is a senior English & Communications double major and PWTC droog most often found locked in the South College computer labs. She's a big fan of dogs, poetry, and cheap coffee. When not in the lab, she's most likely reminiscing about the good ol' days of youth and Bartlett Hall. You'll find her chained to its foundation on demolition day.

## A.T. HALABY

is a lizard princess, poet, and artist. Her interests are stress baking, finishing a paper a week before it's due, and hand grinding her coffee every morning. Her stack of books isn't a tall as she'd like but there's time. Talk to her about your vinyl collection.

## ERIN ALZAPIEDI

is a photographer, writer, and hopeful livsnjutare. When she isn't creating content, she can be found giving herself whiplash with a random band in a dark venue somewhere. Ideally, her future will include 80's rock music, fancy lattes, and lots of creative people to help her keep things unfamiliar. She feels honored to have been part of such an incredible Jabberwocky team.

## S.X. WONG

S.X. Wong lives in a den and spends too much time grooming her claws instead of doing homework (she attributes the lack of focus to the nail polish fumes). If you want to find her you can usually spot her dancing and bopping around somewhere. Fun fact: the emoji she would most likely get tattooed on herself is the OK hand sign 🤔